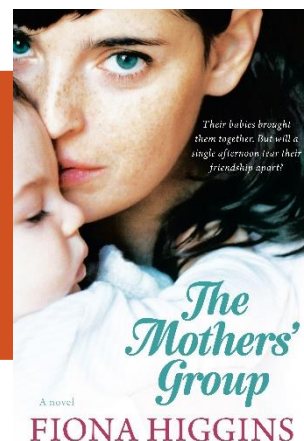


The Mother's Group

Fiona Higgins



Author Background

Fiona Higgins is an Australian author of five books who lives in Sydney with her family. Her first book, *Love in the Age of Drought*, is a memoir about falling in love with a farmer, leaving Sydney and moving to rural Queensland. Her debut novel, *The Mothers' Group* (2012) was described by The Weekend Australian as 'a top-shelf novel about contemporary Australian life'. Her novels, including *Wife on the Run*, *Fearless* and *An Unusual Boy*, have been translated internationally and sold in various territories including in the Netherlands, France, Germany, Spain and Estonia. Fiona writes predominantly about contemporary life, with a special interest in intimate relationships, families and the complexities of parenting in the age of social media - "As a wife, mother and daughter, I am fascinated by intimate relationships, families and what lies beneath the surface of the ordinary. My stories usually feature feelings and experiences that most people don't like to talk about".

Outside of writing, Fiona has tertiary qualifications in the humanities, social sciences and Indonesian Studies, and a longstanding involvement in the Australian not-for-profit sector. Over the past twenty years, she has worked with organisations specialising in philanthropy, international development, youth at risk, rural and regional issues and youth mental health.

Book Summary

'All those things no one ever tells you about motherhood. It's like secret mothers' business. Lots of my friends had babies before me, but not one of them ever told me it would be this hard...It's like a code of silence.'

The Mothers' Group tells the story of six very different women who agree to regularly meet soon after the births of their babies. Set during the first crucial year of their babies' lives, *The Mothers' Group* tracks the women's individual journeys – and the group's collective one – as they navigate birth and motherhood as well as the shifting ground of their relationships with their partners.

- GINIE, a successful lawyer in a big legal firm, returns to work a month after her baby is born.
- MADE, (pron. mar-day) is a young Balinese woman married to a much older Australian man.
- SUZIE, a single mother, is struggling to bring up her daughter on her own.
- MIRANDA, longs to bond with her sunny baby but finds herself increasingly distracted – and frustrated – by her spoilt and demanding toddler stepson.
- PIPPA, is suffering from an injury incurred during the birth of her child but is unable to talk about her problem.
- CARA, whose marriage is turned upside down after meeting a long-lost love.

Each woman struggles in her own way to become the mother she wants to be and finds herself becoming increasingly reliant on the friendship and support of the members of the mothers' group. Until one day an unthinkable shocking event changes everything, testing their bonds and revealing closely held secrets that threaten to shatter their lives.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ How does the shifting point of view shape your experience of *The Mothers' Group*? Which of the characters did you most identify with? Which of the characters most irked you?
- ❖ In his review for *The Weekend Australian*, Ed Wright says: "I was surprised by the way my sympathies were shaped and reshaped as the story progressed towards its heartbreaking climax." Did you experience this shaping and reshaping? How did the characters' points of view define your perceptions of the other characters?
- ❖ The women of *The Mothers' Group* are very different people who are thrown together to form a community. Discuss their relationships within the group. What is each character bringing to, and taking from, the group?
- ❖ How do their relationships with partners and family change after the birth of a child? How is their sense of self altered?
- ❖ The review in the *Sydney Morning Herald* says that Fiona Higgins does "an excellent job of showing an accident can happen out of nowhere". Do you agree? Did it come out of nowhere?
- ❖ The incident looks at the complexities of responsibility and blame. Discuss your reactions and your feelings to this event.
- ❖ If you were in this mothers' group, could you have supported Cara and Miranda after the tragic event?
- ❖ Made has a spiritual dimension that the other characters don't. What is her role in the novel? What does she reflect back to readers about the broadness of life, motherhood and happiness?
- ❖ What do you think *The Mothers' Group* says about contemporary Australian life and 'modern motherhood'?
- ❖ 'In the departure lounge, Cara looked out the vast window at the patchwork of runways beyond. Planes landing and taking off with routine monotony; thousands of bodies in motion, bound for foreign lands. This is life, she thought. Millions of arrivals and departures without end.' What do you think the future holds for Cara, and the other mothers?
- ❖ The final line of the novel reads: 'Not perfect, but whole'. What does this mean for the characters? What does this mean for you?

References

- ❖ Goodreads: https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/2731162.Fiona_Higgins
- ❖ Allen & Unwin Book Publishers: <https://www.allenandunwin.com/browse/books/fiction/The-Mothers-Group-Fiona-Higgins-9781743314081>
- ❖ Fiona Higgins: <https://www.fionahiggins.com.au/about-fiona/>