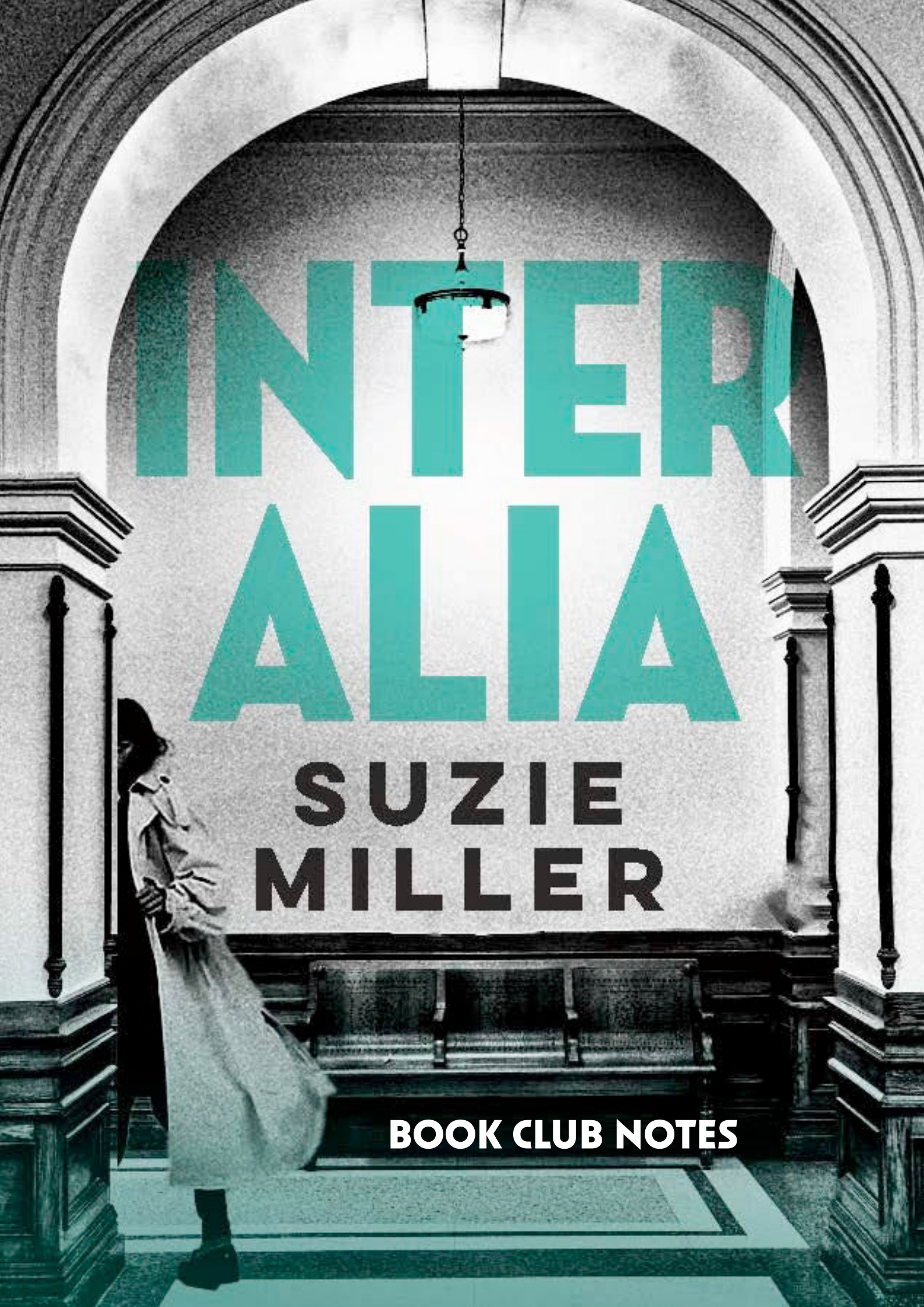




INTERALIA

**SUZIE
MILLER**

BOOK CLUB NOTES

BLURB

Justice is blind. Motherhood is not.

London Crown Court judge Jessica Parks has spent her career pushing a patriarchal legal system to believe victims of sexual violence. But her fierce commitment to justice is tested when her own teenage son is accused of rape.

Suddenly, the woman who has prosecuted countless assault cases faces the system from the most agonising vantage of all: mother of the accused.

As her professional principles collide with her fierce maternal instincts, Jessica is caught in a devastating moral quandary. How far will a champion of truth go to protect her child?

From Suzie Miller, the international award-winning creator of *Prima Facie*, *Inter Alia* is a searing, timely exploration of consent, power and the impossible choices we make for those we love.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Suzie Miller is a multi-award-winning Australian/British writer. She was educated in Science, Law and Theatre, and practised human rights and criminal justice law for fifteen years before writing fulltime. Her first novel, *Prima Facie*, has been translated into ten languages, and her plays have been produced on London's West End, Broadway NYC and on the main stages of fifty different countries, winning many awards including multiple Olivier awards and a Tony.

Miller lives between London and Sydney, and is married with two adult children. She writes international contemporary stories that explore humanity and interrogate sociopolitical constructs.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

* Please note, these questions contain spoilers *

1. The novel's title is *Inter Alia*, which is a legal term that means 'among other things'. How does this title encapsulate the different events and circumstances in this novel?
2. The novel opens with an epigraph:

Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.
Desmond Tutu

How does this quotation apply to the novel? What is the hope that Jessica can see at the novel's conclusion?

3. When Jessica calls a recess from court to phone Harry back on page 8, she thinks, *I am me again. Back to Jessica. Jessie. Jess! Right back to Mum.* It is as if the 'real' Jessica is not a judge; that being a judge is an act. How does this episode illustrate the constant juggle Jessica must perform between her roles in life?
4. Motherhood is one of the major themes of the novel. Jessica describes her feeling for her son as being like having her heart 'clutched in a fist in her chest' (page 12). At other times she discusses the guilt and worry that often arise when her career and role as a mother collide. What do you think about this? Why do you think Michael seems not to feel the same sense of responsibility?
5. Analyse the relationship between Jessica and Michael. What dynamics exist between them now that perhaps didn't in the past? What has changed, and why, in your opinion? Do you think their marriage will be able to survive Harry's conviction for the rape?
6. What bearing does the rigid and traditional setting of the courts and the legal world have on the story? What does it tell us about the law when it must deal with the messiness of reality?
7. The novel alternates between scenes in the present and scenes 'Then', when Jessica and Michael were younger and Harry still a child. What is the effect of this on how we view these characters 'now'?
8. Why might the legal profession be particularly incompatible with parenthood, in your opinion – and with motherhood especially? What might this say about women in fields like these?
9. It becomes clear that although Harry is guilty of raping Amy, if the case went to trial he would most likely be acquitted. What does this suggest about the reality of sexual assault cases generally?

10. The division of domestic labour between Jessica and Michael is clearly unequal. We see Jessica doing the lion's share of the cooking, shopping and decision-making about household matters, including with Harry. Although Jessica is aware of and rails against this inequality, why do you think she finds it so hard to change the situation?
11. Harry is eighteen when he rapes Amy, but he is also still at school and in many ways still behaves like a child. He will be tried and convicted as an adult. What does the novel suggest about this? Is he a boy who will pay the full price for making a terrible choice, or a man who knew better and committed a crime?
12. There are many small ways in which Jessica is undermined in her role as a judge in this novel, both by other members of the legal profession and her own family. What are some examples of these? In contrast, is there any evidence that things are changing for women in the legal world?
13. Do you think the legal system is able to handle sexual assault cases appropriately, given the low rates of reporting, prosecution and conviction rates? Can you think of any ways in which justice for the alleged victim can be better balanced with proving the alleged offender's guilt?
14. Jessica has never had trouble making space for the victims of sexual assault to be heard and respected – until the accused perpetrator of a rape is her own son. Then she finds herself considering the so-called 'rape myths' in relation to his case – was the victim drunk? Was she wearing revealing clothing? Was she unstable? Did she consent and then pretend she didn't? Has she made it all up? Why do you think these myths about rape are so entrenched in the impressions of sexual assault in our society?
15. Michael downplays or dismisses everything that Harry says about what happened with Amy, going so far as to pull Jess up when she tries to ask more probing questions. When things become serious, however, he panics and brings in top legal representation for Harry. When Jessica finally confronts Michael with his failure to teach Harry how to be a good man, Michael comes undone. Jessica blames herself, too, but do you think there is anything either of them could have done to prevent what happened? How much do you think the norms of our society, both now and in the past, are to blame for Harry's attitudes and actions? What do you think our society needs to do to prevent the rise of toxic masculinity as demonstrated by Harry and others?
16. On page 286, Jessica thinks: *in my failing Harry, in our failing a generation of boys by neglecting to mentor them, guide them or show them the way, we are failing a whole generation of girls*. Do you agree with this statement? Do you agree that Jessica's 'small offerings' were not enough?
17. What do you think of the ending of this novel? Do you think the outcome will be better for both perpetrator and victim this way, or should the case have gone to trial? What are the potential upsides to a straightforward plea of guilty, for both parties?

18. Is there a scenario you can imagine, one not yet catered for in the legal system, where the guilt of such an offence as rape and/or sexual assault can be acknowledged? Given the standard of proof for the crime and the likelihood that the perpetrator will avoid consequences if they deny it, is there any benefit from taking accountability?
19. Does – or will – Harry grow more as a person by pleading guilty, or will he suffer so much that it was not worth it?
20. Is there a way the legal system could provide a forum that allows for healing?
21. Given some survivors of rape might not want to enter the criminal justice system but do still want an apology and a guarantee that their perpetrator will never do this again to anyone else, is there an alternative forum for dealing with such matters? However, if an alternative forum is on offer, might it send a message that sexual assault and rape crimes are not considered as seriously as they need to be?
22. Do you think there is an alternative to cross-examination that might empower a woman to have more control in this system?
23. What is the value of the matter going before a jury?