Discussion Guide



The Many Lives of Mama Love
Lara Love Hardin

Simon & Schuster
2024
320 pages
ISBN:978-1982197667

Substance Use Disorder

Summary

New York Times bestselling author Lara Love Hardin recounts her slide from soccer mom to opioid addict to jailhouse shot caller and her unlikely comeback as a highly successful ghostwriter. Now, she's legally co-opting other people's identities and getting to meet Oprah, meditate with the Dalai Lama, and have dinner with Archbishop Desmond Tutu. But the shadow of her past follows her. Shame is a poison worse than heroin—there is no way to detox. Lara must learn how to forgive herself and others, navigate life as a felon on probation, and prove to herself that she is more good than bad, among other essential lessons.

Questions

1. The first line of *The Many Lives of Mama Love* is, "Reading was my first addiction." Later, Hardin clarifies by saying, "The truth is I've only ever had one addiction. The white whale of addictions: escape." How did the author use her various addictions to escape? What was she escaping from? Do you consider reading and books an escape?

2. "Redemption is for the good, and deep down I have always known that I am bad." Discuss the theme of redemption in the book. How does the author navigate the challenges of overcoming addiction, a criminal record, and social ostracism to find redemption in her life? When does she come to feel she's earned redemption?

3. Hardin describes jail as "a class system… There are rules I don't know. A system I can't comprehend… A power structure that is somewhere between an adolescent sleepover and being jumped into a gang." How does this depiction shed light on the dynamics of the prison system and its impact on inmates?

4. Hardin earns the name "Mama Love" in jail by looking after the women she's with, explaining things like ovulation, and performing other "motherly" gestures. How does this impact jail culture while she's there? What is the difference between "Mama Love" and the woman known as "Daddy"? Why does Daddy respect Mama Love, and how does that affect Hardin's time spent in jail?

5. Hardin uses humor throughout her memoir to balance the harrowing aspects of her story. How does humor help convey the resilience and strength of the author in the face of adversity? Was the humor helpful in reading such a complex and often dark journey?

6. "I was always a better version of me on the page… I love pretending to be someone who isn't me," Hardin writes. Discuss how ghostwriting connects to Hardin's drug addiction. How does writing others' stories help shape the author's perspective on her own life and experiences?

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7. One of the most harrowing parts of the book is Hardin's effort to navigate the confusing and conflicting requirements of three different parts of the same system once she's out of jail. How does her experience shed light on the challenges faced by female felons in our justice system? Do you think there's need for reform? What do you think should be done differently?

8. Discuss the importance of what happens when Hardin calls Child Protective Services to tell them her husband, DJ, is using drugs in their bathroom. What do you make of the line, "In jail, it's not okay to snitch, but I'm not in jail anymore"? Is this the turning point for her, or do you think that happened earlier?

9. Doug says to Hardin, "I can't work with Archbishop Tutu and not put into practice his ideas around forgiveness, redemption, and Ubuntu." The definition of "Ubuntu" is: "I am a person through other people. My humanity is tied to yours." How does this moment change Hardin's life? Would you have forgiven Hardin if you found out about her past? How does Hardin's encounters with influential figures like Oprah, the Dalai Lama, and Archbishop Tutu impact her own personal growth and journey towards self-compassion?

10. Discuss the title of the book: *The Many Lives of Mama Love.* How many lives has she lived, and how many have you lived? Do you think we all live many lives? How did this book challenge or change your perspective on addiction, motherhood, societal judgement, and second chances?

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