

## Even smart young things like to talk literature

Vancouver Sun

Saturday, February 10, 2007

Page: C9

Section: Weekend Review

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Source: Vancouver Sun

In an episode of the cultish BBC series *Absolutely Fabulous*, Edina and Patsy host a book club meeting where they (barely) discuss *OK* magazine and a super-abridged pocket edition of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It's a funny twist on the stereotypical book club, the boozy domain of cardigan-clad women weeping over *The Bridges of Madison County*.

The boozy part might still be accurate, but the city is teeming with smart, literate groups that actually read books. And members seem to be getting younger and younger, with many people forming groups in their 20s and 30s.

"Everyone is in a book club," agrees Selma Zafar, a 32-year-old human factors engineer. "It's like knitting -- it's something that's no longer for your grandmother to do."

Zafar is in her second Vancouver club, a collection of eight thirtysomething female professionals and new moms who relish having a set outing every six or eight weeks. The club recently discussed the food memoir *Julie and Julia*, by Julie Powell, and *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*, by Douglas Adams. Almost anything is up for grabs, but the club does nix titles endorsed by the big O. "I just don't think we're Oprah fans," explains Zafar. "We're not that kind of book club."

For 28-year-old planning analyst Liza Jimenez, her club is all about connections. She and a friend launched the group in November 2005 to expand their social circles. The women in their mid-to-late 20s read both fiction and non-fiction, Canadian titles, Oprah picks, new books, classic titles and top sellers, including book-club favourites *The Kite Runner*, by Khaled Hosseini, *The Time Traveler's Wife*, by Audrey Niffenegger, and Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point*.

There are appetizers and more than a few cocktails consumed. "It keeps me reading, and that's what I really like," says Jimenez.

Moving to the B.C. town of Mackenzie (about two hours north of Prince George) prompted Carla Seguin to start a book club. The 25-year-old economic development officer was browsing through a friend's shelves when she realized they had complementary taste in books. The club was born soon after and provides a great excuse for socializing during the long, frosty winters.

"Sometimes we have pretty academic discussions and sometimes it just turns into gossip and gabbing and wine," says Seguin. But no one has to feel sheepish if she hasn't finished reading the chosen book. "We made it clear that it was okay."

It's no accident that these clubs are composed exclusively of women. That detail is less about books and more about the fact that clubs provide a perfect reason for friends to meet in a relaxed, highly informal way. Women are often better at organizing these gatherings without the pretence of hockey playoffs, but that doesn't mean the guys haven't taken notice.

"Many of our male friends, boyfriends and husbands have expressed an interest in participating in their own clubs," says 32-year-old Emily Murgatroyd, owner of Vancouver-based Greenprint Events, a sustainable event-planning firm.

Murgatroyd says clubs also transform a solitary experience into a forum for learning and sharing. "Ending a book can be sad, in a way," says Murgatroyd, "because if it's really good, you've invested a lot of thought and time into it. It becomes part of your life."

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