

VIEWER'S GUIDE

THE SISTERHOOD OF NIGHT

**A FEATURE FILM ABOUT MODERN TEENAGE GIRLS,
CREATED BY SMART, CREATIVE, POWERFUL WOMEN**

EVENSTAR FILMS AND CINE MOSAIC PRESENT A CINE MOSAIC AND EVENSTAR FILMS PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH GALATA FILM

GEORGIE HENLEY KARA HAYWARD KAL PENN "THE SISTERHOOD OF NIGHT" LAURA FRASER WILLA CUTHRELL OLIVIA DE JONGE JESSICA HECHT

CASTING BY LAURA ROSENTHAL JODI ANGSTREICH MARIBETH FOX MUSIC SUPERVISOR LINDA COHEN COMPOSER THE CRYSTAL METHOD AND TOBIAS ENHUS EDITOR AARON YANES A.C.E

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ZAK MULLIGAN CO-PRODUCERS MARILYN FU CARYN WAECHTER MUHARREM GULMEZ EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS DAVID URRUTIA STEVEN TUTTLEMAN AND TAHA ALTAYLI

PRODUCED BY LYDIA DEAN PILCHER p.g.a. ELIZABETH CUTHRELL p.g.a. BASED UPON THE SHORT STORY BY STEVEN MILLHAUSER SCREENPLAY BY MARILYN FU DIRECTED BY CARYN WAECHTER

A Discussion Guide for Viewers of THE SISTERHOOD OF NIGHT

About the Film

The Sisterhood of Night is a 21st century, digital-age update of the Salem witch trials. It follows a group of teenage girls as they slip off the grid of social media into a mysterious world deep in the woods. Allegations of sexual deviancy throw their town of Kingston, New York into hysteria, but the accused uphold a vow of silence.

Sisterhood lays bare adolescent loneliness in the age of the Internet, and reminds us of the solace we find in truthful and authentic relationships.

Based on a short story by the Pulitzer Prize-winning author Steven Millhauser, the film was created by an extraordinary group of women – talented, creative, and committed to telling stories that matter with artistry and joy.

Starring cast includes Georgie Henley (*The Chronicles of Narnia*), Kal Penn (*Harold & Kumar*), Kara Hayward (*Moonrise Kingdom*), Laura Fraser (*Breaking Bad*), Willa Cuthrell (*Whatever Works*), and Olivia De Jonge (*The Visit*).



It starts with a story...

Back in 2002, Screenwriter Marilyn Fu was reading Steven Millhauser's short story collection while taking a trip home to Pennsylvania, where her mom was getting ready to sell her childhood home.

"She wanted me to come home and clean out my closet. I ended up sifting through old yearbooks and photos, notes my best friend passed me in class, mix tapes, journals. All of the longing, frustration and excitement of my teen years came back to me in a very clear way. And I was the only Taiwanese-American kid in a very white high school, so I definitely felt like an outsider then."

Marilyn's personal experience informed her take on Millhauser's 1994 story. She then turned to her friend director Caryn Waechter, whom she'd met at Columbia University film school, knowing the story would appeal to her.

"I immediately fell in love with the script's mix of satire, nostalgia, darkness and this constant urge to push everything right up to the edge. It was trying something new and, simultaneously, it felt so familiar. I was laughing in the beginning and crying by the end. I felt really connected with each of the four main girls and, personally, I come alive in the stillness of the night. I knew from the start that Marilyn and I could make fire with our combined strengths."

Caryn's background as a classically trained dancer and veteran music video director, combined with Marilyn's magazine writing and sense of style, made for a powerful pairing.

The duo met veteran producers Lydia Dean Pilcher and Elizabeth Cuthrell at an indie film networking event sponsored by the Tribeca Film Institute. As independent film producers, Lydia and Elizabeth are great role models for young women seeking creative careers behind the camera.

"One thing has remained clear: audiences get excited by this film and what it has to say, and teen girls are desperate to hear voices from their own perspective. As Millhauser says, society is 'fearful of the mystery' that happens when the teenage mind combines with the unknowingness of what daughters and sisters and neighbors are doing."

- Lydia Dean Pilcher, Producer

What this film can do...

A beautifully crafted, suspenseful and fun film that will appeal to young people, *Sisterhood* offers parents, educators, and others interacting with young people a unique way into difficult conversations about difficult issues.

The film's main themes are: **Our Digital Selves, Diverse Voices, Cyberbullying, and Girl Power.**

OUR DIGITAL SELVES

- *Sisterhood* explores the Internet's power to hurt – to amplify the voices that belittle, shame and exclude – but also its power to heal by offering connection to young people struggling with loneliness, bullying, and abuse.
- With 80% of US teens carrying cell phones, cyberbullying can be hard to escape.
- 50% of teens are exposed to cyberbullying, and 50% have participated.
- 1 in 5 teens has posted or sent sexually suggestive photos.
- Many kids suffer in silence. Only 1 in 10 victims report cyberbullying to their parents.
- Good news ... Nearly all (92%) of teen girls prefer their face-to-face friendships over social networking friendships.

“Stories of teenage power and intimidation on the Internet continue to both inspire and terrify us. The Internet is a social gathering place where girls can connect and share creatively across the world, but it can also be a place for social tension, where bullying can happen in a crueler and deeper way than ever before, driving teens into sexual shame and even suicide.

*These issues are not teen-specific—basically, every facet of the population is concerned about how ‘digital natives’ are struggling with and using social media. First and foremost they need to be safe. Then it’s about learning to balance their digital use with real life to achieve a healthy sense of community. Ultimately, *The Sisterhood of Night* shows how human connection, and the trust and love that is built on face-to-face communication, cannot be replaced by the keyboard and the screen.”*

- Elizabeth Cuthrell, Producer

Conversation Starters

- Can you imagine what aspects of the story would be the same 20 years ago, and what would be different?
- What role do blogs, social media, and texting play in the movie?
- Why do you think the *Sisterhood* chose to go off-line?
- Do you think the popularity of Emily's blog makes up for the rejection she feels when Mary doesn't invite her to join the circle? Do Emily's thousands of followers make her feel good about herself?
- After Mary quits Facebook and goes "off-line," she turns to her written diary to express her feelings. In what ways is writing in a private notebook different from sharing feelings online?
- Do "likes" define self-worth? In a word, no. And yet for teens today, the daily tally of Instagram "likes" and comments on your Facebook wall can lift your mood, or send you in to a spiral of self-doubt and shame. Think about the people in your life who mean a great deal to you. Whether they are family members, friends, teachers, or community leaders, you value them for who they are, because you can rely on them, because you trust them. Don't you think they feel the same way about you?

"We live in a world where our lives are so public. Everything is posted, tweeted, or instagrammed the moment it happens. But the Sisterhood girls are all off-line. They want to keep their inner lives to themselves and the consequences are both revelatory and tragic."

- Marilyn Fu, Screenwriter

Resources

Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives (John Palfrey and Urs Gasser)

www.borndigitalbook.com

Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other (Sherry Turkle)

www.alonetogetherbook.com

Center on Media and Child Health

www.cmch.tv

Stay Safe Online

www.staysafeonline.org

DIVERSE VOICES

- It turns out that who tells the story—and by extension, who makes the movie—matters. A lot.
- Only 30% of leading roles in feature films are women.
- Female characters are twice as likely to be in sexually revealing attire, or naked.
- Women directed less than 5% of the top 100 box office films in the last decade.
- Good news ... Women directors and producers are more likely to cast movies with women in lead roles, and less likely to depict violence against women.

Director Caryn Waechter sought to go break the glass slipper of girl fantasy films, the girls in the movie step in to a special world of their own, but it is based in reality.

"I wanted to create a film that I would have wanted to see as a teenager—to inspire me to be proud in my independence, my individuality, to fuel my confidence. Sisterhood dares to be a chick flick without having a typical 'Prince Charming' romance at the fore front. I love that this film is dark, not your usual saccharine sweet film, hence making it raw and real."

-- Caryn Waechter, Director

Just as women are not usually at the center of the story in Hollywood, people of color are often sidelined. They are rarely the protagonists (lead characters) in mainstream Hollywood movies and TV shows. When they are in movies, they are often cast in roles that promote stereotypes, or the fact of their race or ethnicity is a factor in the story. As an Asian-American woman, Marilyn was excited to write about a family whose role story is not defined by their ethnicity.

"People assume that the Taiwanese-American character I created in the script, Catherine Huang, is me, and they're right, but actually all of the girls are me and all of them are unique outsiders in their own ways."

– Marilyn Fu, Screenwriter

Conversation Starters

- When you watch TV shows and movies, do you see characters on-screen that look like you in terms of race and gender? If so, what are some examples? If not, how does this make you feel?
- What is an example of a character you would like to see on-screen that you haven't seen yet?
- Do you think a character's race and gender affects how you relate to him/her? Why or why not?
- In what ways is Catherine's character defined by being "Asian" and in what ways is she defined by being "American"?
- What do you think about the way Sisterhood portrays Asian Americans? Regardless of whether you are Asian American, do you feel it reflects your experience?
- Do the portrayals of young people in the film seem realistic? Why or why not? How does it compare to other TV shows and movies?

Did you notice?

Minority actors, writers and directors are underrepresented in top theatrical releases, leading to less overall content that reflects our diverse society.

Films with relatively diverse casts excel at the box office and in return on investment.

Television shows whose casts reflect the nation's diversity excel in ratings.

Resources

Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media
www.seejane.org

Center for Asian American Media (CAAM)
www.caamedia.org

School of Doodle
www.schoolofdoodle.com

CYBERBULLYING

- Each year bullying affects more than 13 million kids in America.
- 1 in 4 students in grades 6-12 experience bullying.
- Kids who are bullied have lower school attendance, are more likely to drop out of school, are more likely to be depressed, and less able to develop meaningful relationships.
- There is a strong correlation between bullying, cyberbullying, and suicide.
- Good news... The decline of bullying from 1998-2010 has been attributed to increased awareness and implementation of evidence-based programs in schools.

Girls and Cyberbullying: The dangers of digital velocity gossip

In *The Sisterhood of Night*, the drama unfolds when Emily Parris seeks to be included in the inner circle but is rejected by Mary Warren. Emily turns to her blog, which had very few followers, and writes some incendiary things about the *Sisterhood*. She soon gains followers, other girls who feel excluded, and her on-line popularity explodes.

In her book *Odd Girl Out*, Rachel Simmons delves into the hidden culture of aggression in girls and explains that since female bullying is often a war of words and social exclusion, it is harder for adults to see than the physical bullying—but is equally damaging.

She writes, "In girls' social universe, information is power. But gossip needs an audience, and getting one isn't easy if you lack status. Online, the social rules change. Technology levels the playing field, allowing girls with less status in real time a chance to make waves online. Both targets and aggressors show significantly lower self-esteem than peers who are not involved in cyberbullying."

Conversation Starters

- Has a photo that you did not want seen ever been shared anyway?
- Have you received images of embarrassing photos of friends or classmates?
- Have you ever bullied someone? Have you reached out to them since, to apologize and repair the relationship?
- Do you feel empowered to speak up if you see someone else being bullied online?
- Have you ever felt excluded from a group of girls, and did you find yourself retaliating online?
- Why is it easier to talk about someone behind their back online?
- Do you feel safe online, or do you worry that people might say something damaging or untrue about you?
- How do you treat your friends or classmates differently online?
- When in your life do you feel like the most confident version of yourself?

Lavinia's death is caused by an accidental overdose of sleeping pills. She is so traumatized by what has happened to her, that she just wants to go asleep and make it all go away. Some might see this as suicide, although that is not the intention of the filmmakers. But certainly the subject of suicide is important: knowing the signs, and having access to resources when you or a friend are in trouble is important.

The documentary film *Bully* helped bring the issue of bullying into the national conversation, and evolved to support a movement to end bullying.

At www.TheBullyProject.com you can find lots of resources and links to other organizations for young people and their parents and educators.

Resources

The Bully Project

www.thebullyproject.com

Love Is Louder

www.loveislouder.com

Not in Our Town / Not in Our School

www.niot.org

Family Safety Online Institute

www.fosi.org

GIRL POWER

- *Sisterhood* celebrates female friendship, and how girls together can develop self-confidence, self-acceptance, and empathy for others.
- 70% of teen girls are insecure and unhappy about their belief that they don't measure up in regards to their looks, school performance, or relationships.
- Girls with low self-esteem are 75% more likely to engage in negative activities such as bullying, smoking, drinking, or disordered eating.
- Good news ... Authentic friendships have been demonstrated to increase self-esteem.

Conversation Starters

- What does the *Sisterhood* circle provide the girls?
- Do they have authentic relationships with each other?
- Do you have authentic friendships? Do you feel safe to be yourself and say what you think?
- Will you start a circle? Who will you invite?

*"I wanted to create a film that I would have wanted to see as a teenager—to inspire me to be proud in my independence, my individuality, to fuel my confidence. *Sisterhood* dares to be a chick flick without having a typical 'Prince Charming' romance at the forefront. I love that this film is dark, not your usual saccharine sweet film, hence making it raw and real."*

– Caryn Waechter, Director

Circles: A Short History

Girls and women have congregated in circles for years. From across the globe and across the centuries, there are images of women praying, eating, and working together in circles. In the early decades of the United States, women formed sewing circles, quilting bees, and book clubs. At first the circles were about friendship, but they soon became much more. What the circles gave women was often the first chance in their lives to speak aloud in a group and have people take their thoughts and ideas seriously. For some, this sense of empowerment led to leadership roles in their towns and churches. For others, it led to joining the fight for women's right to vote, which American women won when the 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920.

During the women's movement of the 1960s, the circle took the shape of a so-called "consciousness raising group." As they had in the 19th and early 20th century, women gathered, spoke, and listened. And as before, they heard their own stories in those of many others. They came to see that many of the problems in their lives were not simply "personal," and began to recognize the larger societal forces that might be undermining their potential.

Circles (continued)

Psychiatrist Jean Baker Miller built on this history, including her own experience in consciousness raising groups, in her 1976 book *Toward a New Psychology of Women*. Miller wanted to make the world aware that “women were not men gone wrong,” but that they had issues of their own and psychologies separate from those of men. She stressed the importance of relationships for girls. Picking up on this, psychologist Carol Gilligan, who wrote another important book on girls’ development, *In a Different Voice*, emphasized that girls need “authentic relationships,” which include being able to “voice experience honestly” and receive “attentive, empathic listening.”

Recent research backs up what these women were writing in the 1970s and 1980s. In 2008, a five-year study of 183 adolescent girls investigated whether “relationship authenticity” promotes girls’ self-esteem in adolescence. In their terminology, an “authentic relationship” is where what one thinks and feels is the same as what one does and says. Their study concluded that yes, authentic relationships really do make a difference in adolescence: “girls who scored high on the measure of relationship authenticity in the 8th grade experienced greater increases over the course of adolescence than girls who scored low on relationship authenticity.” Because adolescence is the most pivotal and vulnerable time for girls, this bolster of self-esteem can make an enormous and critical difference in their lives.

In 2013, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg published *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*, which looks at the way women are held back – and the way they hold themselves back. Her book has launched an organization, and at its center is the familiar circle: small groups that meet monthly for encouragement and support. Since launching less than two years ago, there are more than 21,000 circles in 97 countries, and 75% of members credit their Circle with a positive change in their life. www.leanincircles.org/

With science proving what women have always known, that circles offer a safe space for sharing and support, the conclusion is clear: time for women and girls everywhere to make their own *Sisterhood Circle!*

Resources

Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls (Rachel Simmons)
www.rachelsimmons.com

Lean In: Women, Work and The Will to Lead (Sheryl Sandberg)
www.LeanIn.org

I Am That Girl
www.iamthatgirl.com

Resources and References

1. 121 Help.Me: www.121help.me
2. Amy Poehler's Smart Girls: www.amysmartgirls.com
3. Ashoka's Empathy Initiative: empathy.ashoka.org
4. The Bully Project: www.thebullyproject.com
5. Center for Asian American Media (CAAM): www.caamedia.org
6. Center on Media and Child Health: www.cmch.tv
7. Circle of 6: www.circleof6app.com
8. Family Online Safety Institute: www.fosi.org
9. Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media: www.seejane.org
10. Girl Be Heard: www.girlbeheard.org
11. Girls, Inc.: www.girlsinc.org
12. Girls Leadership Institute: www.girlsleadership.org
13. Girl Rising: www.girlrising.com
14. I Am That Girl: www.iamthatgirl.com
15. Love Is Louder: www.loveislouder.com
16. Not In Our Town / Not In Our School: www.niot.org
17. One Circle Foundation: www.onecirclefoundation.org
18. The Representation Project: www.therepresentationproject.org
19. School of Doodle: www.schoolofdoodle.com
20. SPARK Movement: www.sparksummit.com
21. Step Up: www.suwn.org
22. Strong Women, Strong Girls: www.swsg.org

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