

GIRLS IN AMERICA

de Lori SILVERBUSH & Michael SKOLNIK

FICHE TECHNIQUE

Titre original : On the outs

Pays : USA

Running time : 1h22

Année : 2004

Genre : Docudrama

Rating : Rated R for pervasive language, strong drug use, some violence and sexual content.

Interdit aux moins de 12 ans

Screenplay : Lori SILVERBUSH, based on actual case studies of young women who spent time in the Jersey City juvenile detention center.

Décors : Katya BLUMENBERG

Costumes : Liceika RIJFKOGEL

Montage : Martha SKOLNIK

Compositeur : Ricardo LEIGH et Brian SATZ

Production : Fader Films – Youth House Productions

Distribution : La Fabrique de Films

Cast : Anny MARIANO (Suzette Williams), Judy MARTE (Oz), Paola MENDOZA (Marisol Pagan), Dominic COLON (Chewey), Flaco NAVAJA (Jimmy Ortiz), Danny RIVERA (J. Stutter), Don PARMA (Tyrell), Earl THOMASON (Pancake), Rokafella (Evelin), Kamilah FORBES (Frances), Raven HAMILTON (Raven), Gloria ZELAYA (rosa), Autumn COLLIER (Autumn), Nikki JEAN (Malia), Julian MOHAMED (Milkman)...

Tournage : 2005

Sortie : 8 mars 2006

SYNOPSIS

This documentary-style drama draws on the real-life experiences of “at risk” teenage girls. The lives of three very different young women, all from the same crime-and drug-infested Jersey city neighbourhood, briefly intersect when they are sentenced to the same juvenile detention center and from there, their lives only get harder.

Girls in America perpétue la tradition du film social ancré dans la vie de banlieue. Jersey City, banlieue de New York, le destin croisé de trois adolescentes dans un monde sans pitié : Oz, 17 ans, dealeuse de drogue respectée de la rue, se démène pour la sauvegarde de sa famille ; Suzette, jeune fille de 15 ans sans histoire fait basculer le cours de sa vie en tombant amoureuse d'un caïd local ; enfin, Marisol, jeune mère-célibataire, doit affronter ses propres démons pour conserver la garde de son enfant.

CHARACTERS

Oz is a 17 year old drug dealer. She is very butch and really carries herself as one of the guys. She fights like the guys, dresses like the guys, talks like the guys and sells drugs on the street corner with the guys. The only person she seems to have a real emotional connection with is her mentally disabled brother. In a case of irony, Oz despises drug use and people who use drugs - despite the fact that she is a drug dealer. On top of all of that, Oz has a mother who is addicted to drugs.

Suzette is 15 years old and meets a neighborhood boy named Tyrell. He shows just a little bit of interest in Suzette and she gets hot and heavy with him real fast. The two become sexually active and Suzette becomes pregnant, much to the dismay of her hardworking single mother. After becoming pregnant Suzette runs away from home to be with Tyrell, a street drug dealer who doesn't seem to have a place to live himself. On the streets Suzette finds trouble far beyond her unplanned pregnancy.

Marisol is a young mother and a crack cocaine addict. She spends much of her time on the streets. When she is arrested following an accident she is forced to face her demons face on. While in juvenile detention her daughter is put into foster care. Marisol thinks a quick fix will help her regain custody of her daughter. She is faced with the prospect of having to stay clean and become responsible to get her daughter back.

ABOUT THE FILM

In the Summer of 2003, Lori Silverbush, Michael Skolnik and Paola Mendoza, good friends and creative collaborators, sat down to talk about an issue that was of great interest and importance to them both – the perilous lives of inner-city girls. Michael, in his documentary work had met many young people whose lives awed, saddened and inspired him. Lori's work as a screenwriter was increasingly focusing on the lives of adolescent girls. Paola, an actress and youth educator, whose own childhood background was similar to the stories they were trying to tell. All three have long felt that inner-city girls are the key to ending the tragic cycle of economic, educational and emotional neglect that define at-risk kids' lives. Incidences of violent crime and incarceration had been rising within this population, and the directors were inspired to find out why.

They began by developing an acting and writing program to bring into a juvenile detention center in Secaucus, NJ, where youthful offenders are held in custody for infractions ranging from truancy and fighting to more serious violent crimes. They visited the detention center twice a week for three months, getting to know the inmates, learning about their lives, and encouraging them to find productive means of self-expression – writing, music, acting – other than violence. Many of the girls opened up to the filmmakers and shared generously of their pasts and turbulent presents. These relationships grew deeper, and the stories the three partners heard became the foundation for the three girls lives depicted in On the Outs.

Pour préparer Girls in America, le duo de réalisateurs a développé un atelier d'écriture et de théâtre dans un centre de détention juvénile à Secaucus, dans le New Jersey, où des jeunes sont en détention préventive pour des infractions allant de l'école buissonnière aux crimes violents. Avec Paola Mendoza, actrice dans le film et éducatrice pour jeunes à la base, Lori Silverbush et Michael Skolnik ont visité le centre de détention deux fois par semaine pendant trois mois. Ils ont appris à connaître les détenues, leurs vies, et les ont encouragées à trouver des moyens d'expression – écriture, la musique, le jeu – autres que la violence. Beaucoup de jeunes filles se sont livrées aux réalisateurs et ont partagé avec eux leurs histoires. Ces relations se sont approfondies, et les histoires que les trois partenaires ont entendues ont inspiré les trois destins de Girls in America.

Juvenile facts in the USA

Young women are the fastest growing prison population in the US. Nationally, since 1980 the number of women entering prisons in the US has risen almost 400% – double the rate of men. In 2000, 25% of girls arrested were younger than 13 years old, 32% were ages 13-15 and 25% were 16-17.

La délinquance féminine en chiffres

Les jeunes femmes représentent la population carcérale qui augmente le plus rapidement aux Etats-Unis. Sur l'ensemble du territoire américain, le nombre de femmes incarcérées depuis 1980 a augmenté de près de 400%, soit deux fois plus que celui des hommes. En 2000, 25% des mineures arrêtées par la police avaient moins de 13 ans, 32% avaient entre 13 et 15 ans et 25% entre 16 et 17 ans.

Official websites

- France : <http://www.girlsinamerica-lefilm.com/>
- USA : <http://www.ontheouts.com> (watch the trailer)

Awards

- 2005 Deauville Film Festival September, 2005
* Jury Prize for Narrative Feature
- 2005 Slamdance Film Festival – US Premiere January, 2005
* Grand Jury Prize for Best Feature Film
* Audience Award for Best Feature Film

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

- Before watching the movie :
 - Brainstorming "violence in America" = vocabulary: verbal abuse, drug addiction, drug money, a weapon, a gun, a switchblade, to commit a crime, to be a victim of, a misdemeanour, a murder, the crime rate, public peace, a riot, to sack, to loot, to abide by the law, to break the law, juvenile delinquency, to run guns, to traffic in, to rob sb of smg, an armed robbery, to break into a house, to assault sb, to mug, to rape, to beat up, a street gang, to join a gang, a high crime area, gang warfare, to be in the hands of, to hold sb hostage, to threaten...
 - Working on stereotypes: what's your representation of an American law breaker? (age and sex, physical type, place of living, occupation, family...)
 - Draw hypothesis about the causes for violence in the US. (vocabulary: deviant, remorseless, insensitive, to mean ill, to direct rage at, pointless violence, to take the law into one's own hands, a problem family, a single parent, to instil a set of values, to desert one's home, a lack of parenting, a lack of role-models, to neglect, to be enclosed in, to feel rejected, the underprivileged, poverty, to be short of money, to be on welfare benefits, the growth of urbanisation, a racial issue, a minority, to be prejudiced against, a steady diet of violence, to make violence look common, to censor program content, TV's impact on, to receive a jail sentence, to go to prison, to be on probation, to go unpunished, a repeat offender, to stay out of trouble, a visiting order...)
- After watching the movie :
 1. Answer the following questions :
 - Did Suzette do the right thing by taking the rap for her man? What should her next steps be?
 - What are the best things that Marisol can do for her daughter and for herself?
 - What are Oz's true options at the end of the film?
 2. Which girl do you like best and why?
 3. Read the article (next page) and say whether you agree or not with Stephen Witty's view about the roles of women and about the weaknesses of this docudrama.
 4. What could explain this new trend of making documentaries or docudramas rather than traditional fictional movies?
 5. Groupwork: If you had to direct a documentary, what topic would you choose? Using information and facts found on the Internet, explain your project (places, people, message...).

ARTICLE

NEWARK STAR LEDGER

3 STARS – 'Ours' portrays agony of constricted hopes

BY STEPHEN WHITTY

Sometimes the situations you can inhabit as a woman are limited by the world in which you live. For the poor and uneducated, often there are only a few roles -- daughter, sister, mother -- for the way you live your life.

But the ways in which you can risk your life -- those are nearly limitless.

"On the Outs," set in the poorest parts of Jersey City, looks at three of those women, all from different families, all at different stages of their lives, all facing similar dangers from drugs, from crime, from stifled dreams.

Suzette, the daughter, is still a "good girl" -- but is currently being courted by a boy with a gun. "Oz," the sister, is already a streetwise thug -- but with a single soft spot for her retarded brother. And Marisol, a single mother, is about to face a choice between the drugs she needs and the child she adores.

Directors Lori Silverbush and Michael Skolnick developed this project through a workshop they ran with actress Paola Mendoza at the Hudson County Juvenile Detention Center. The roots in reality show. The people here make choices -- often bad ones -- and the consequences are frequently unfair. No one suddenly sees the error of his or her ways. There are no happy endings.

There are, however, some good performances. Mendoza plays Marisol, and she brings a wrenching anguish to her part, particularly as the custody of her daughter begins to slip away from her. Anny Mariano, making her debut here as Suzette, is still a little awkward and amateurish -- but that suits the part, too.

Best is Judy Marte, as the tough "Oz," so tough that at first she passes for a boy. Marte first won attention as the almond-eyed Juicy Judy of "Raising Victor Vargas"; here, she easily puts all that sleepy appeal on hold to play a devoted and -- in her own way -- dutiful sister. She has a strong presence, and although this is presented as a triptych of stories, hers is clearly the one that draws our eyes, and our sympathy.

Sympathy is not enough for these people, though, and pity less than useless.

Like many films that grow out of workshops, "On the Outs" is sometimes too unstructured for its own good, with a few scenes -- particularly those that detail Marisol's drug problems -- going on for too long. Like many indie films, too, "On the Outs" is often a little too gritty, with camerawork that doesn't feel composed so much as it feels caught on the fly.

But it has three great roles for its actresses. And some sad things to say about how limited the roles in real life often are.