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Don't take grandma on this 'Girls Trip'

Scanning box office stats to pass time while waiting for a flight, I was surprised to scroll upon a solitary low rating of the movie "Girls Trip." A male reviewer for a family-focused website assigned the film an outlier score of 0.5 out of 5. The review read like a tantalizing endorsement, describing a hilarious upbeat road trip by four 40ish college friends, the Flossy Posse, who "have one another's backs in times of need." Using "crude" seven times to describe the movie, the critique culminated in a pearl-clutching humblybrag: "[F]rankly, I don't understand any of it," the writer declared.

Yeah, right.

Face it. Filthy is fun.

"Girls Trip" is the raunchiest women's romp since "Bridesmaids." It succeeds where its early-summer bookend, the plodding sorority reunion movie "Rough Night," fell flat because of its fast pace and mega-high ratio of truly awful jokes and spit-your-drink guffaws.

Using "crude" 20 more times to describe this movie would not be overkill. But its ultimate theme of being true to oneself is hardly unfathomable.

The main characters fall squarely into the "Sex in the City" quintet of archetypes: the shy and sexually apprehensive Lisa (Jada Pinkett Smith); the ambitious career woman, Sasha (Queen Latifah); the anything goes sexpot, Dina (Tiffany Haddish); and the beauty who appears to have it all but doesn't, Ryan (Regina Hall).

The women roll into New Orleans (the soulful equivalent of Ve-



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gas) and its annual Essence Festival, to let loose and confront truths.

Ryan, who will be the keynote speaker at the festival, is a self-help guru whose lucrative book deal is contingent on her husband's well-Instagrammed and ongoing affair being kept secret. Sasha is a down-on-her-luck celebrity blogger who desperately needs the cash such an expose will provide.

Nurse Lisa's inhibitions exist for the sole purpose of being comically dismantled. She's very sweet and kind of boring, although back in the day she could finish a super-sized Slurpee filed with grain alcohol before noon. Her romantic life is so dull that when she describes it to her friends one of them cracks, "OK that story just put me into menopause."

And Dina, in a breakout role for stand-up comic and "The Carmichael Show" cast member Tiffany Haddish, is the group's cathartic id. She says aloud the

thoughts others stifle, and acts on the impulses they repress. If "Girls Trip" were "Seinfeld," Dina would be Kramer.

The movie focuses on the experience of African-American characters (although Kate Walsh is a hoot in the supporting role of Ryan's agent who can't stop spouting black colloquialisms), but their experience is universal. Everyone can relate to appreciation of old friends, public embarrassment and fear of betrayal, including self-betrayal.

Joyous and free spirited as New Orleans itself, the movie's upbeat messages of giving oneself permission to enjoy life and finding the courage to demand what one deserves are ecumenical. I'd love to see the fish-out-of-water comedic potential of similar girl groups played out in various ethnic settings.

Director Malcolm Lee is known for his buoyant, dependable comedies just as his cousin, Spike, is known for sobering message movies. The movie's writers, Kenya Barris ("black-ish") and Tracy Oliver ("Survivor's Remorse"), have day jobs on two of the funniest shows on television. The story is by Erica Rivinoja, a former producer of "South Park," so some major potty-mouthing is bound to happen, it's probably mandatory.

"Girls Trip" was made for \$20 million and grossed over \$95 million internationally in the first 10 days of its release.

Clearly somebody understands this movie. Maybe everybody does.

Just don't take grandma with you when you see it.