



The Sewing Circle: Hollywood's Greatest Secret: Female Stars Who Loved Other Women

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This is the documented story of some of the most glamorous women in the world who lived two lives - in public as larger-than-life romantic heroines of the screen, and in private as lesbians or bisexuals. From the early years of the "talkies" through the beginning of the 1950s, they were secretly known as the Sewing Circle, and this is their story. Among them were Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, Tallulah Bankhead, Katherine Cornell, Barbara Stanwyck, and Joan Crawford. Others whose secret lives are divulged for the first time: Maude Adams, Lynn Fontanne, Myrna Loy, Edith Head, Janet Gaynor, Jill Esmond, Elsa Lanchester, Isadora Duncan, Laurette Taylor, Libby Holman, Marjorie Main, Agnes Moorehead, and Dame Judith Anderson.

The Sewing Circle: Hollywood's Greatest Secret: Female Stars Who Loved Other Women Details

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From Reader Review **The Sewing Circle: Hollywood's Greatest Secret: Female Stars Who Loved Other Women for online ebook**

Jason says

Linking the hidden (or in some cases not so hidden) world of lesbians in the golden age of Hollywood, with a history of Hollywood, and a sociological/psychological look at the time period, is no small task, but is handled deftly by Axel Madsen. This great history reads easily, includes great anecdotes as well as well researched history. A great read for anyone interested in LGBTQI and/or Hollywood history.

Margret says

I bought because it was in clearance and what a mistake. This is an awful book, it's only a gossip column. This book like to trash Hollywood stars who are dead and can't defend themselves. A waste of my time and I didn't want to finish it. Terrible.

Douglas Gibson says

Fun for its gossip value, and some great quotes, but poorly written and all over the place. I was disappointed.

Deanna says

I liked it and thought it was really interesting, but I had trouble with how it jumped around so much. I felt almost like it was multiple books combined into one and downsized.

Creolecat says

This has to be taken with a grain of salt. Some of this is just plain nonsense.

Corrie says

If you are interested in Hollywood lesbians of the 20ies and 30ies, **The Sewing Circle** is a fabulous wealth of information. There's a strong resemblance with **The Girls: Sappho Goes to Hollywood** by **Diana McLellan** but as that was published in 2013, it appears that she took a very 'close look' at **The Sewing Circle** for her source material. Her book is a whopping 506 pages though.

A lot of famous names (and their stories) are in here: Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Tallulah Bankhead, Joan Crawford, Barbara Stanwyck, Mercedes De Acosta, Alla Nazimova, Eva Le Gallienne, Natacha Rambova and many, many more. I recommend it to anyone interested in the history of Hollywood and the

movies (and theater) of golden era.

Themes: so many lesbians and gays in the movie industry, this book gives your brain a bit of a work-out, so many names to keep track off, I just love Tallulah Bankhead, and found out I didn't really care much for Garbo after getting to know her better.

4 stars

Rama says

Women who loved women during 20s/30s Hollywood.

This is a highly readable book, and the author has way with words when she describes feminists of 1920s Hollywood who were redefining sexuality and relationships. This work is based on earlier publications about Hollywood lesbians, and many paragraphs and sentences look awfully similar to "The Girls: Sappho Goes to Hollywood" by Diana McLellan, which was published in 2013. It appears that this book may have been a source for many stories described by Ms. McLellan. For a quick read, I would recommend this book over McLellan's, because the latter runs to about 506 pages!

Some of the most interesting stories is probably about the ravishing ladies of golden era; Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich and Tallulah Bankhead. They were all bisexuals but had strong leanings towards women. The greatest "conqueror" of sewing circle was probably poet and playwright Mercedes De Acosta who had numerous gorgeous ladies in her count, from Europe to California. Her affairs with some of the well-known ladies like; Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Alla Nazimova, Eva Le Gallienne, Ona Munson, Natacha Rambova, Lilyan Tashman and many more "good-time Charlene(s)." Sexuality was another role for many women, and for vanity and fear of discovery some of them had lavender marriages with gay men so that they could form secret alliances. Women like Tallulah Bankhead and Patsy Kelly made no secrets of their Sapphic tendencies; in fact Bankhead was very vocal about her gender orientation. Isadora Duncan is another bisexual and a longtime lover of Mercedes de Acosta who openly expressed her joy in lesbian relationship. She wrote sensual lesbian poems about Mercedes before her untimely death in Paris in an auto accident at the age of 50. Once she waved a red scarf and bared her breast on stage in Boston, proclaiming, "This is red! So am I." Alla Nazimova was famous for organizing gay orgies at the famous "Garden of Allah," a high-priced apartment complex on Sunset strip in Los Angeles. She threw caution to the wind and spent her fortune lavishly to produce her movie, "Salome" that featured an all gay cast.

Diana Wynyard, one of the first English ladies to become a member of the sewing circle, enjoyed the warmth of ladies hugs in sunny California. There were rumors that Barbara Stanwyck tried to seduce her future rival, Bette Davis when they were filming Edna Ferber's 1932 movie "So Big." Tallulah Bankhead's wild flossy beauty attracted some of the most interesting lesbians of 1920s that included Katharine Cornell, Laurette Taylor, Sybil Thorndike, Beatrice Lillie, and Harlem's Gladys Bentley, a three pound black Mae West, to put it mildly, donned in tuxedo and known to have married a woman in New Jersey in a civil ceremony in 1920s!

Libby Holman is another lady who had passionate affairs with Du Pont heiress Louisa Carpenter and later married tobacco heir Zachary Smith Reynolds. Holman was charged with murder when her husband was found shot, but later the charges were dropped. She established a foundation for civil rights movement to the memory of her deceased son. Dr. Martin Luther King was the first to receive the grants to travel to India to study Mahatma Gandhi's path of non-violence and civil disobedience.

Paramount's costume designer Edith Head and her gay husband Fox director Wiard "Bill" Ihnen pursued their homo sexuality for decades. Joan Crawford and Barbara Stanwyck had failed marriages and gave them time to seek comfort in the tender arms of gorgeous females. Sexless Linda and Cole Porter apparently helped his career and the couple's homosexuality. Jill Esmond struggled to accept her lesbian orientation, but remained married to actor Lawrence Olivier for years. Their marriage was newer consummated. Katherine Hepburn, Janet Gaynor, Lili Damita, and Agnes Moorhead were daisy chains of deceit. Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester; Vincente Minnelli and Judy Garland were also lavender couples. Alla Nazimova's marriage with actor Charles Bryant; Mercedes De Acosta with Abram Poole; Lilyan Tashman with Edmond Lowe, and Rudolph Valentino with Jean Acker and later with Natacha Rambova are well-known examples of lavender marriages. The book is filled with lot of interesting stories, and I recommend to anyone interested in the history of Hollywood and the movies (and theater) of golden era.

Evelina says

This book is like if there had been celebrity gossip blogs in the 1930s and 1940s.

Michele says

While I love the glamor, privilege, and intrigue of old Hollywood, this book didn't quite do it for me. I understand that, due to the nature of these relationships, there wouldn't be a huge record, but there has to be more evidence than what Madsen provided. Where are the sources? I thought a book like this would be chock-full of research on interviews (even if they were told second-hand), correspondence, and interesting footers, but there was none of that. And if there weren't any sources, address why that might be. Don't just gather a bunch of rumors and call it fact.

Also, the writing style was kind of bland. This is a fascinating topic- decadent lifestyles of the rich and famous who could and did eschew American moral tradition- but the book doesn't do it justice.

R.J. says

I don't know why people cite **this** book as THE one that outs Judy Garland, Barbara Stanwyck, Crawford, Kate Hepburn and a host of other Hollywood actresses as lesbians or bisexual. The reporting is flimsy, without foundation (no actual observations by anyone just speculation based on what? Okay Stanwyck shared a hotel room with her female manager once when a hotel was full. . yeah okay THAT makes her gay). The chapters on Stanwyck and Garland are filled with fluff about other stuff. I'm not adverse to the idea of any person being one way or another, I just hate shoddy journalism--I remember reading Madsen's bio of Stanwyck years ago where his sources were the National Enquirer! ugh!

The recent bios on Hepburn (by Mann and Lessing) set much higher standards with factual details, specific accounts by people who are named and several consistent observations by lifelong friends/acquaintances, not unnamed, paid hangerons or dreamt up observations made whilst typing.

Lindsay says

I'm officially proclaiming this one unreadable and moving on. Got to page 154 of 216. I love a good name drop as much as the next pretentious twit, but this book dispenses with all else, including paragraph transitions and grammatically sensical sentence construction.

Jamie Z. says

A wonderful nonfiction that felt like fiction sometimes giving us glimpses into the lives of some of the most famous closeted stars. Sad and amazing all at once. A must-read for fans of the Old Hollywood actresses and stars like Garbo.

Teagan says

I preferred *The Girls* by Diana McLellan, but this book still has some great insights on the effects of the closet on women in the spotlight. *The Sewing Circle* was published in 1995, so even its “modern” epilogue is dated — but it did give me hope that soon women will be able to act more freely.

Jj says

I liked the idea, but the editing was terrible (“Greta” was spelled “Great” as the first word of chapter 3) and the writing style sounded like a gossip column. Too much name-dropping, unsupported allegations, and slang. I didn't finish it.

Graceann says

Terrible book - apparently it's entertaining to label actresses as lesbians (not that being gay is a bad thing, but come on) based on ridiculously flimsy evidence and innuendo. Stupid waste of time and paper.
