

Movie discussion resource

The Hunt

Engage with culture without disengaging your faith.

Genre: Drama (2012)

Rating: MA15+ for adult themes and brief sex scene

Length: 116 minutes

Starring: Mads Mikkelsen (*Best Actor Award, 2012 Cannes Film Festival*), Thomas Bo Larsen, Annika Wedderkopp

Director: Thomas Vinterberg **Writers:** Thomas Vinterberg, Tobias Lindholm

Brief synopsis

Lucas (Mads Mikkelsen) is loved by the children and his colleagues at his local kindergarten in a small rural town in Denmark. He is newly divorced, and his ex-wife and teenage son Marcus have moved away. His life is recovering with the prospects of a new girlfriend, and the re-forging of his relationship with Marcus. A young girl at the kindergarten, Klara (who has a harmless 'crush' on him), makes a statement that leads to accusations of inappropriate behaviour against Lucas. It's a simple lie that spirals out of control and the small community quickly turns against him. Distrust and presumption of guilt overtakes logic and the boundaries of civil behaviour.



** This is a film in which the very real and awful reality of child sexual abuse is taken seriously, while at the same time portraying the very real and awful reality of false allegations. The viewer is aware that the accused is innocent and witnesses the way he is treated, the way his life is torn apart. The innocent one has been failed by the system.*

*** Given the serious accusations of child abuse against Jimmy Saville and others, and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, what place does a film like this have at this time?*

Questions for discussion

This discussion resource does not attempt any particular comment on the movie itself but offers general areas for discussion. Here are some general questions for starters:

- ❖ What stood out as the main points/highlights in the movie?
- ❖ What themes are explored?
- ❖ What assumptions were embedded in the story?
- ❖ What challenged you? What questions did it raise for you?
- ❖ Are there aspects of the story that resonated with your own experience or with the experience of others in a similar situation?
- ❖ Are there biblical or theological themes or characters that come to mind?

False accusations

The world was shocked by the Boston marathon bombings (April 2013), which killed 3 people and injured 264. The Reddit website was one of the main forums for online Boston bomber sleuths and self-appointed cyber detectives, where a subreddit – a space for discussion on a particular subject – called *findbostonbombers* was used to exchange comments and images, and incorrectly linked 22 year old Mr Sunil Tripathi to the bombings, which then went viral. Sadly, he had been missing for a month and was later found dead. The website acknowledged it had been a rallying point for a wild internet "witch hunt": "Though started with noble intentions, some of the activity on Reddit fuelled online witch hunts and dangerous speculation which spiralled into very negative consequences for innocent parties. We all need to look at what happened and make sure that in the future we do everything we can to help, and not hinder, crisis situations".

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-04-26/falsely-accused-bombing-suspect-confirmed-dead/4652176> The film does raise the question, what would I do and how would I react in a similar scenario regarding accusations against a person? Comment on the propensity for witch-hunts and accusations. What other examples come to mind?

Men's relationships

In the culture of the small rural town, the transition to manhood is defined by getting a hunting license and a gun. There is great camaraderie between the men, but they move quickly to being violent aggressors. "It is a masculine and predatory environment, and the ease with which the men of the town assume the worst in Lucas suggests a dark recognition of the potential for themselves to inflict horrific crimes against the innocent. The violence against Lucas is arguably a symbolic act to rid the community of its potential for evil, even though Lucas is not the problem". (*Thomas Caldwell*) Discuss.

Rough and tumble play

Is Lucas' 'rough and tumble' a developmental activity that helps them understand the limits of their own strength, and what is acceptable, or preparation for 'manhood'? Does it serve to set up a hierarchy of stronger and weaker children, and thus determine social boundaries and relationships? What are your insights?

Leading questions and false leads

Klara's tender age and angelic face personify innocence, making her allegation all the more believable. The kindergarten director works on the basic assumption that children never tell lies, while at the same time acknowledging Klara's imagination and creativity. She handles the investigation process herself even though ill-equipped to do so. She brings in a counsellor who asks many leading questions and seems satisfied with Klara's nods to his statements that 'proves' a case against Lucas. When parents are asked to look for signs of abuse - nightmares, bedwetting - not surprisingly they find that these are present amongst their children, as they are common for this age group. Klara attempts to retract her statement, but the community has already decided Lucas is a paedophile. What in the process escalated things out of control, and served to confirm suspicions rather than arriving at the truth?

A culture of violence and abuse beneath the veneer of respectability

While Lucas is accused of child sexual abuse, there are numerous examples of physical and emotional abuse by others - Klara's parents constantly arguing while Klara is within earshot, 'losing' her; forgetting to pick her up from school; the physical abuse against Marcus and Lucas; the police taking away Lucas and ignoring the needs of Marcus who is still of high school age; the teenage boys showing Klara porn and referring to genitalia with language that Klara then appropriates unwittingly; the killing of Fanny the dog etc. Double standards operate here as in real life. Discuss.

The threat to male role models

One parent families account for 1/5 of all families in Australia, with about 87% headed by mothers. Children need good male role models, whether this is the father, relatives, teachers or other adults. But this film demonstrates how vulnerable men can be when spending time with children. Even establishing appropriate boundaries and behaviours may not provide adequate protection for men if an accusation is made. Discuss.

My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?

While Lucas may not be a particularly religious person, his experience would resonate with many of the laments in the Psalms (eg Psalm 22, 37 etc). 'My enemies surround me and pursue me'. What biblical stories resonate with Lucas' experience of being abandoned, alone in the midst of a crisis?

Thanks to Palace Nova for providing support for the Movie Discussion Resources!
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The resource is available to download for use in small group discussion.

