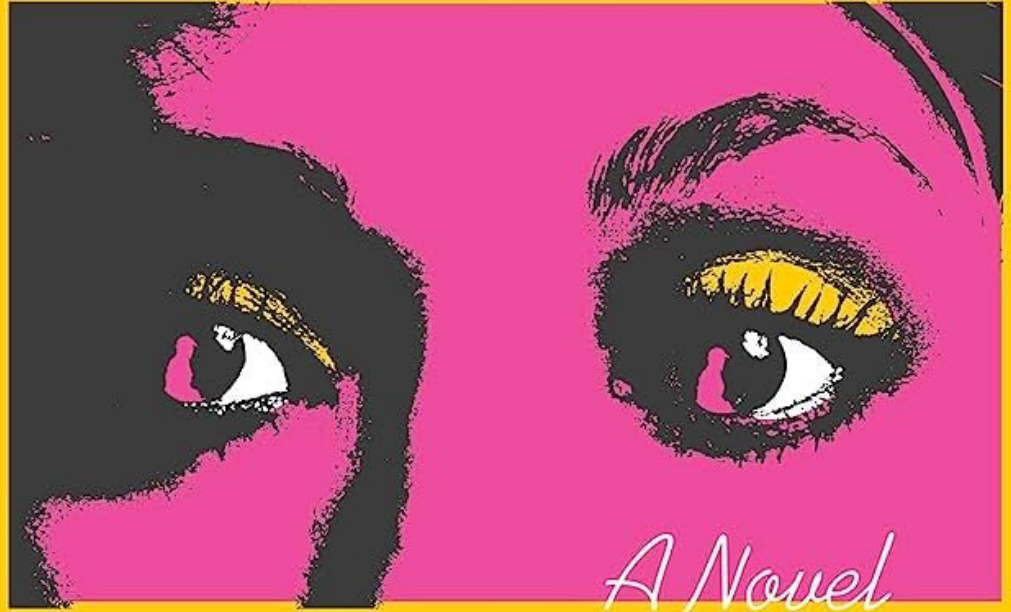




NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
LUCKIEST GIRL ALIVE
JESSICA KNOLL



BRIGHT
YOUNG
WOMEN

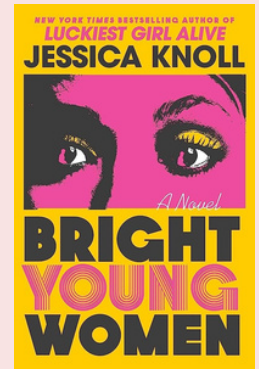
DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS

www.brunchbookclub.com

Discussion Questions

Bright Young Women

by Jessica Knoll



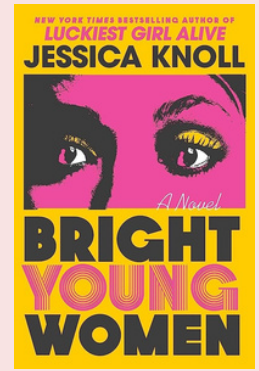
1. Do you consider yourself a fan of true crime? Why or why not? If yes, what kinds of content do you consume and what about it draws your interest? Do you share this interest with anyone else in your life?
2. The characters refer to the killer exclusively as “The Defendant” throughout the whole story, never once giving him a real name. Why do you think Jessica Knoll chose to do this? How did it impact your understanding of the novel?
3. Consider the ways in which the media and newspapers play a role throughout the novel. What kind of power do journalists or headlines have? Have you seen similar examples from this time period or from modern day? Discuss where you find news or opinions. Have you ever considered what kind of partialities are embedded in the media you consume?
4. Pamela hoped she would be “remembered as a fair and impartial leader.” How would you describe Pamela as a leader? Have you ever found yourself acting as a leader amid an extreme situation? How did it make you feel? Can you imagine how you or someone you admire would react to being in Pamela’s position?
5. Consider how gender is involved in Pamela’s recollections of being labeled “a handful.” What about Pamela’s actions or personality might lead to this kind of description? Have you ever experienced being labeled based on an assumption or expectation related to your identity?
6. Pamela notes The Defendant’s crimes were, in part, a result of “a series of national ineptitudes and a parsimonious attitude toward crimes against women” and law enforcement that “would rather we remember a dull man as brilliant than take a good hard look at the role they played.” Do you agree with this position? Does this perspective make you consider notorious criminals in a new light?
7. At the Aspen convention, Tina tells Ruth that men will never accept a woman as “one of them,” even when they’re clearly occupying space as equals. Have you ever felt a lack of acceptance in a space you knew you were qualified to occupy? Who or what made you feel that way?



Discussion Questions

Bright Young Women

by Jessica Knoll



8. Tina shares her mixed feelings about others commenting on her grief, especially the external representation of it, such as losing weight and not wearing makeup. Is there a 'right' way to grieve? What other markers do you think of as part of the grieving process, and what about them stand out to you? Have you ever felt a responsibility to portray grief or pain in a specific manner so others might better appreciate your experience?

9. Consider the lesson Ruth remembers from her father's story about the lonely man at the bar, concluding that "other people's pain mattered more than my own discomfort." How does this statement make you feel? How does this lesson play out in other areas of Ruth's life? Are there other characters in the novel who seem to embody this perspective?

10. In Ruth's first visit to the therapy group, Frances asks the women about their support systems, saying "a good support system included people who were willing to listen to you and who would not judge you for anything you were feeling, even if your feelings were provocative." Who or what is a part of your own support system? Where do you see examples of support or a lack thereof in other areas of the book?

11. *Bright Young Women* is fiction, but it was inspired by true crimes against women. Have you read any other novels that are inspired by historical events or incorporate historical events? How does Jessica Knoll take well-known events and recast them in a new light?

12. Do you agree with Pamela's characterization of The Defendant as "an ordinary misogynist"? What role does misogyny play in the characters' lives? Does misogyny only impact women?

13. In speaking to a patient, Tina says, "Anger in women is treated as a character disorder, as a problem to be solved, when oftentimes it is entirely appropriate, given the circumstances that trigger it." What do you think about the patient's response that she "[doesn't] want to be seen as an angry woman"? Do you see anger as a healthy emotion? In what circumstances is anger an appropriate response?

