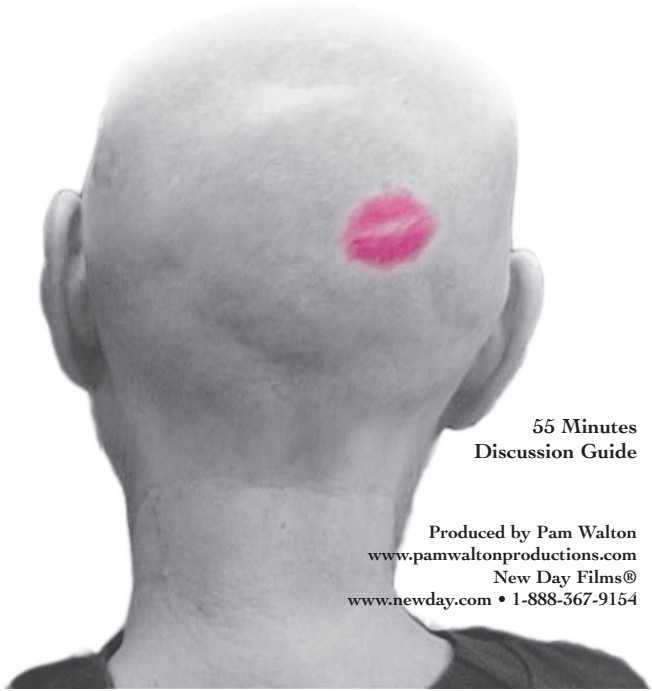
Liberty:
3 Stories about Life & Death



55 Minutes
Discussion Guide

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New Day Films®
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Recommended Courses

Death and Dying, Gay and Lesbian Studies, Women's Studies, Gerontology, Society and Illness, Grief and Loss, Medical Anthropology, Community Studies, Sociology of Illness, Hospice and Health Care Training

Getting Ready

We recommend that you take the time to show *Liberty* in a carefully planned way since emotional responses to it can be quite powerful. The approach you take will depend on how cohesive the group is; how well prepared they are for issues related to death and dying and to lesbianism; how skillful you are as a discussion leader; how much each member of the class is willing to reveal; and the average age of the group members.

Amount of Time

It will take two to three hours to do a thorough job with *Liberty*: approximately one half hour to find out how much the group feels they already know about older lesbians and terminal illness; another hour to actually show the video; fifteen minutes immediately following the tape to find out how much viewers have learned from watching; and another forty-five minutes for discussion or writing.

Before Showing the Video

Ask the group to answer the following questions in writing. If you collect their comments, allow individuals to write anonymously.

- How do you feel when homosexuality is discussed?
- What are slang words you know that apply to gay and lesbian people?
- How do gay and lesbian people usually act?
- What are your personal experiences with gay and lesbian people?
- Has anyone close to you died either unexpectedly or after a long illness? If so, write briefly about the experience.

After Showing the Video —

Before you have a formal discussion, ask the group to write again. Ask them to look back at what they wrote before they saw *Liberty* and to write about anything that's changed. Again, if you collect the comments or read them aloud, allow individuals to write anonymously.

Possible Discussion and/or Writing Questions

1. What parts of the video made the biggest impressions on you? Did you have feelings of happiness, sadness, fear, excitement, curiosity, a desire to turn away?
2. How did the people in the film interact with each other? Describe their ways of interacting around death, being sick, losing loved ones, and moving far away from friends.
3. Describe Joyce (first story), Mary Bell (second story), and Nan (third story). How are they alike? Different? Do you have questions you wished you had asked Joyce and Mary Bell before they died? What would you like to say to or ask Nan? Are there questions you would like to ask them specifically about being lesbian?
4. What are the main story lines of each section? For example, in the first story, "Death to Life," what is Joyce's illness? How is the story told? What effect does that have on the viewer? How do the people around Joyce care for her, express their feelings, communicate with her? What is Joyce's attitude toward dying? Living? Answer these questions for each of the remaining sections, "Life to Death" and "Life."
5. How are the main people in the video connected to each other?
6. How does the act of filming impact the people on the screen? The viewer?

7. Which attitudes toward death meant the most to you? What parts of the video felt hopeful? Hopeless? Share any personal stories about experiences you've had with a loved one dying.
8. How did you feel about the lesbian community and lesbian relationships portrayed in the film? How did being lesbian effect the ends of Joyce's and Mary Bell's lives?
9. Do you have any questions about gay and lesbian lifestyles?
10. Any other questions?

Resources for Both Students and Teachers

Other New Day Films® about Aging and Sexual Diversity
www.newday.com / 1-888-36-9154

Beauty Before Age, directed by Johnny Symons. 22 Minutes. Growing older in gay culture.

Bubbeh Lee & Me, directed by Andy Abrahams Wilson. 35 Minutes. Family, identity, and aging with chutzpah.

Still Doing It: The Intimate Lives of Women over 65, directed by Deidre Fishet. 54 Minutes.

One Wedding and a Revolution, directed by Debra Chasnoff. 19 Minutes. Two lesbian women, celebrating their 51st anniversary, tie the knot in San Francisco.

Print Sources Available: