

Daughter of Suicide

a film by Dempsey Rice

STUDY GUIDE

Dear Viewer:

My hope is that **Daughter of Suicide** will be used in conjunction with this study guide as a device that can help to educate survivors of suicide, family, friends, clinicians (including social workers, therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists and medical doctors), researchers, community groups, crisis centers, mental health centers/clinics, etc. about the realities of suicide and depression. The purpose of this study guide is to give you some suggestions on how you can begin conversations along certain thematic lines after screening **Daughter of Suicide**. In addition, I have tried to provide you with some helpful information about suicide and depression and I have pointed you in the direction of the experts - organizations who work in the suicide prevention and postvention communities who will be able to provide you with the professional assistance that I am not qualified to do.

I hope that **Daughter of Suicide** will provide you with some strength and a starting point for your educational efforts.

Be well and keep surviving!

- Dempsey Rice

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SYNOPSIS

Daughter of Suicide is a groundbreaking personal documentary that explores the topics of suicide and depression in an honest and eye-opening manner and from a personal point of view. It reveals the reality of one mother's life cut short by a disease called depression and the effect of this suicide on her daughter, her family and her friends.

I was 18 years old when my mother killed herself and changed my life forever. Her death, and my struggle to conquer the effects of her suicide, has informed the fabric of my life - how I see, how I behave, and most importantly, how I feel. I fight the depression that is her legacy to me, commune with others who have suffered the suicide of an important person in their lives, and look for a resolution that I may never find.

Daughter of Suicide follows me on a journey to get to know my mother and to understand her death. Throughout the film, I am driven by the desire to find closure and to learn to see her suicide as a source of power in my life rather than a monkey on my back. Shot on a combination of digital video, 16mm and Super 8 film, ***Daughter of Suicide*** tells my mother's story - and my own - through interviews, cinema verité footage and imagery that explores the thoughts, feelings, emotions and memories associated with her life and her death.

Daughter of Suicide is my journey, but it reflects the journey of many other survivors of suicide in the United States. I provide pieces to the complex puzzle that led to my mother's suicide, but in doing so I explore issues that are repeated time and time again in the lives of people who take their own lives. I, like many survivors of suicide, have realized that my connection to my mother is through friends and family and through my memories of a childhood before my mother became ill. In getting to know her through the making of this film, I have also realized just how great the loss of life to suicide is. I will never know the woman I discovered while making ***Daughter of Suicide***, but I hope that our story will help others to recognize the dangers of depression in themselves and in the people they love.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

This is by no means a comprehensive guide on how to use ***Daughter of Suicide*** but it talks about major themes seen throughout the film. Feel free to expand on these themes and to come up with some of your own - this study guide is only a starting point. Much of the information below comes from suicide education and prevention programs and organizations dedicated to researching and helping the mentally ill. Please see the resource section at the back of the study guide for information about these organizations.

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DISCUSSION TOPIC: DEPRESSION

Depression is more than just feeling 'down' for a day or two. Depressive illness affects a person's thoughts, feelings, behavior, physical health and appearance - all areas of a person's life. Clinical depression affects approximately 15 million Americans each year and is often linked to suicide. When a person's 'down' feelings persist for more than two weeks and are combined with several other warning signs of depression, doctors begin to consider clinical depression as a diagnosis; a depression that may lead to suicide.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, symptoms of clinical depression are:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed, including sex
- Decreased energy, fatigue, being "slowed down"
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight loss or overeating and weight gain
- Thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts
- Restlessness, irritability
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain

Questions:

Bonnie Rice clearly suffered from clinical depression -- do you believe that depression is a disease? A mood? How is depression seen in our society? Is it something that we closet, or that we talk about openly?

How do you view depression?

Discuss your experiences with depression whether it is your own depression, your family's or your friends'.

DISCUSSION TOPIC: SUICIDE

Suicide, the act of taking one's life, is the reason why **Daughter of Suicide** was made.

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (www.afsp.org), suicide is the eleventh leading cause of death in the United States, taking over 30,000 lives each year. One person dies by suicide every 16 minutes in the United States. 90% of people who die by suicide have a diagnosable psychiatric disorder at the time of their death.

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If each person who takes their own life leaves behind at least six people who grieve that death, the numbers of survivors of suicide increases by hundreds of thousands each year. Many suicides can be prevented by treating the mental illness that leads to suicidal thoughts with talk therapy and medication, by being aware of the warning signs of suicide/depression and by getting someone who is exhibiting signs of depression help.

The more we talk about suicide and the more we educate ourselves about suicide the more likely we are to decrease the numbers of suicide in America today.

Questions:

Discuss the various reactions to suicide that are shown in the film: anger, guilt, relief, frustration, feelings of abandonment/rejection, disappointment, confusion, shock, fear and depression.

How could someone like Bonnie, or anyone who takes their own life, with such loving family and friends, a strong career, and many interests, believe that life is not worth living?

What is your (the audience's) experience with suicide (if any)?

How does Bonnie's suicide, or the suicide of your loved one, make you feel?

DISCUSSION TOPIC: MOURNING/SURVIVING (Death/Dying/Grief/Loss)

"Survivors" of suicide are the relatives, friends and acquaintances of a suicide victim. Even under the best of circumstances, death is one of the hardest issues we deal with in our lives. All families and societies have mourning rituals they go through after the loss of a loved one, but when sudden loss is compounded by the issue of suicide, the grief process is often riddled with additional issues such as shock, disbelief, guilt, anger, shame, emptiness, depression, hopelessness, relief, loneliness, isolation, abandonment and fear.

The characters in **Daughter of Suicide** discuss these components of surviving and loss throughout the film. Each individual talks about their grief process and what the loss of Bonnie means to them. Bonnie's mother and siblings discuss how her suicide attempt was hidden from them by Bonnie and by other members of her family. Dempsey often talks about how her mother's death has left her feeling alone and unwanted.

Questions:

Discuss the various ways people mourn.

Is grief after a suicide different than grief after other types of death?

Is there any stigma or shame for survivors of suicide?

Discuss the feelings of abandonment and rejection associated with death in general and suicide specifically.

Do you think many people feel angry with an individual who has died unexpectedly? What about suicide survivors?

How do people in the film deal with their anger?

Do you have other ideas how anger at a loved one, or anger at the loss of a loved one can be dealt with?

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SUICIDE RISK

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (www.afsp.org) lists the following Warnings Signs of Suicide on their web site. If you know someone who is at risk for suicide please seek help.

Suicide can be prevented. While some suicides occur without any outward warning, most people who are suicidal do give warnings. Prevent the suicide of loved ones by learning to recognize the signs of someone at risk, taking those signs seriously and knowing how to respond to them.

Warning signs of suicide include:

- Observable signs of serious depression:
 - Unrelenting low mood
 - Pessimism
 - Hopelessness
 - Desperation
 - Anxiety, psychic pain and inner tension
 - Withdrawal
 - Sleep problems
- Increased alcohol and/or other drug use
- Recent impulsiveness and taking unnecessary risks
- Threatening suicide or expressing a strong wish to die
- Making a plan:
 - Giving away prized possessions
 - Sudden or impulsive purchase of a firearm
 - Obtaining other means of killing oneself such as poisons or medications
- Unexpected rage or anger

The emotional crises that usually precede suicide are often recognizable and treatable. Although most depressed people are not suicidal, most suicidal people are depressed. Serious depression can be manifested in obvious sadness, but often it is rather expressed as a loss of pleasure or withdrawal from activities that had been enjoyable. One can help prevent suicide through early recognition and treatment of depression and other psychiatric illnesses.

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RESOURCES

In an emergency dial 911.

Local Help:	Look under Suicide in your local yellow pages.
National Suicide Prevention Help Line:	1-800-273-TALK www.helplinecenter.org/suicide.php
Trevor Helpline: (gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth)	1-866-4-U-TREVOR www.thetrevorproject.org
AAS - American Association of Suicidology	www.suicidology.org
AFSP - American Foundation for Suicide Prevention	www.afsp.org
<i>(both AAS & AFSP provide listings of survivor of suicide support groups around the country)</i>	
SAVE - Suicide Awareness\Voices of Education	www.save.org
Center for Suicide Prevention (Canada)	www.suicideinfo.ca
SPANUSA - Suicide Prevention Action Network	www.spanusa.org
Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Project	www.yellowribbon.org
Friends for Survival	www.friendsforsurvival.org/
The Link National Center for Suicide Prevention & Aftercare	www.thelink.org
NAMI - National Alliance for the Mentally Ill	www.nami.org
NMHA - National Mental Health Association	www.nmha.org
NIMH - National Institute of Mental Health	www.nimh.nih.gov