

INTRODUCTION

Ari, Maggie, and Tishaun—three ethnically diverse teenagers from San Francisco, Montana, and Baltimore—find their lives abruptly altered by the impact of a sexual decision. How each girl subsequently deals with the consequences gives an up-close-and-personal look at teenage life: peer pressure, parents, relationships, sexuality, pregnancy, and HIV/AIDS.

“3 girls i know...” is an engaging documentary that can stand on its own as a teaching tool. The three young women profiled in the film speak from their personal experiences offering private insights and practical suggestions about navigating the perils of adolescence and becoming adults. Despite the choices made, each of the young women develops into an individual with increased self-esteem and the confidence in her ability to move forward, be independent, set goals, and help other young women know the facts to make their own informed life choices.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

This guide is targeted to educators and written to offer viewing ideas and suggestions that can work with the structure of the film. Ideally, it can be used in classrooms with youth groups, community and public health organizations, adolescent outreach and counseling/peer programs, university health organizations, freshman orientation programs and by parents who wish to view the film with their own adolescent children.

This film may be shown in its entirety or shown in chapters that are structured into the film. Although the entire film (54 minutes) follows the three girls from junior high into their late teens, each chapter is organized around

specific issues they encounter and can be used on its own. In this guide, issues and questions for discussion are presented chapter-by-chapter.

This film is designed for audiences in middle school, high school, and early college (approximate age range: 14–20 years old). The film and study guide are designed for a mixed-gender audience; however, there may be advantages to using these materials in single-gender groups, as young people often feel freer to discuss certain aspects of their experience if not in the presence of the other gender. Facilitators should consider the specifics of their particular audience and space/privacy capabilities.

OBJECTIVES

AT THE END OF THE SCREENING AND AFTER DISCUSSING THE FILM, PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

- a. Reflect on their own sexual decision-making and its consequences;
- b. Understand the role that self-esteem plays in sexual decision-making;
- c. Identify and evaluate multiple pressures on sexual decision-making, such as the mass media, peers, parents, and potential sexual partners;
- d. Understand basic statistics about HIV/AIDS, teen pregnancy, and sexual orientation;
- e. Know where to find more information about HIV/AIDS, teen pregnancy, and sexual orientation.

CHAPTER 1 "FITTING IN"



"FITTING IN," addresses issues of race and culture, immigrant family challenges, parental strictness (or the lack of it), drugs and alcohol, peer pressure, media images, clothes and fashion, and being smart.

"Oh, junior high was hell for me, to pretty much sum it up. There was so much pressure to wear the right clothes, to be thin, to be athletic, and I don't really know if the pressure came from the girls or from the boys. All I know is that there was so much competition..."
—Maggie

"Wanting to fit in and wanting to be a part of something is so important that even if you felt differently than someone else, even if you understood what the double standard was or you saw it or you felt it or some way, you wouldn't necessarily speak out about it because you are, you know, left out."—Ari

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think about your crowd, school, or neighborhood. Also, think about the mass media—TV, movies, magazines, music, and music videos. What are some of the ways young people are being pressured to fit in? How are they being pressured to be, and how is this pressure being expressed? What's your reaction to this pressure?
2. Adolescents who come from immigrant or bicultural families may experience unique pressures. What are some of these?
3. What are some negative or dangerous behaviors that young people engage in to attempt to fit in? What are some positive ways to deal with this pressure to fit in?
4. Some teens claim it's not cool to be smart. Discuss this assertion. How does this kind of pressure contribute to some teens engaging in risky behavior?

CHAPTER 2 "TALKING ABOUT SEX"

"TALKING ABOUT SEX," addresses issues such as sex in junior high vs. senior high, reputation, being "wild," double standards for men and women, peer pressure related to sex, and sex slang.



"Pigeon, chickenhead, trade..."—Tishaun

"My sister is a freshman this year and when she was in 7th grade, some of the girls she went to school with were having sex and she came home and told me and it completely blew my mind."
—Maggie

"In high school, if they had had sex already, they were jocks or hunks... And with girls it was always a double standard. If a girl was a virgin, she was a prude; what was she saving herself for? And if she had had sex already, then she was a slut, she was a prostitute, or a whore, or whatever."—Ari

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do teens discuss sex today? What do you and your friends talk about? What is some of the slang? In what situations does the topic of sex come up?
2. How are the pressures around sex different in middle school vs. high school? How does people's thinking about sex change from middle school to high school?
3. Many teens choose not to have sex in middle school and high school, but if they do, how do the risks of sex change between middle school and high school?
4. Talk about the double standard between boys/men and girls/women. How does this lead to risky behaviors and situations? What are some of the special risks for boys? What are some of the special risks for girls?
5. Where do teens get their information about sex? Where do teens get a chance to process their feelings and concerns about sex? How is it different to talk with friends vs. boyfriends/girlfriends vs. parents vs. other adults vs. medical personnel?

CHAPTER 3 “HOOKING UP”



“HOOKING UP,” addresses issues related to having sex for the first time, including insecurity about getting a boyfriend/girlfriend, the role of partying, drinking, and drugs in sexual

decision-making, sexual experimentation, how to know if you’re lesbian or gay, fear of talking about condoms, STDs, drug use, and sleeping around, wanting to be understood, wanting a more experienced partner, age differences in relationships, and homophobia.

“I wanted someone to love me. I wanted someone to give me the attention that I felt I was missing from my life. I thought I could get that through having a boyfriend. It wasn’t necessarily that I wanted a boyfriend or whatever, it’s just that I wanted something solid.”
—Ari

“As far as boys liking me, I figured that the only way they were going to like me would be to have sex with them because I was so outspoken and so domineering and most boys don’t really like that, so I never had boyfriends, I just had guy friends.”—Maggie

“I wrote a note to my best friend Monica. I was like, ‘How do you know if you’re gay?’”—Tishaun

“If you’re insecure about sex in any way, when you go to bed with the first guy you’re going to sleep with or what not, you’re not going to ask him to use a condom, you’re not going to ask him to use protection, you’re not going to ask him if he has STDs because you’re insecure with that aspect of your life.”—Maggie

“We had been at a party and I had been drinking Jack Daniels. It’s a mixture of courage and hormones and lust and it’s just ... Alcohol is definitely a mind-altering drug.”—Maggie

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your definition of hooking up? What behaviors does it include, exclude? What makes people decide to hook up for the first time?
2. How do drugs and alcohol come into play in sexual decision-making, especially with regard to the first time?
3. What are some risks that people face the first time they have sex (as opposed to later times)? How can these risks be addressed and reduced?
4. What are some ways for teens to approach talking about sexual matters, including abstinence, safer sex, contraception, STDs, and personal boundaries, with their potential sexual partners? Role play some scenarios you or people you know might face.
5. For teens who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender*, or queer**, coming out presents unique challenges. What are some of the risks for these teens? How can the community be more supportive of LGBTQ teens?
6. All of the young women in the film had to wrestle with their insecurities at the time of their life-altering sexual decision-making. How do your insecurities affect you? Can you relate how your insecurities affect your decision-making about sex or anything else?

* “Transgender” is a broad term referring to people whose gender identity is different from their biological sex (e.g., “I have the body of a woman, but I feel like a man”) or whose gender identity does not fit into conventional gender classifications (e.g., “I belong to a third gender [or mixed gender] that can’t be called female or male.”)

**“Queer” is a broad term encompassing all non-heterosexual and gender non-conformist people. Although the term used to be considered derogatory, it was “reclaimed” in the early 1990s by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning political activists, and is now considered a positive term when used by members of the group and their allies. It should be noted that not everyone who is lesbian, gay, or bisexual chooses to claim the term queer for themselves.

CHAPTER 4 “GETTING TESTED”



“GETTING TESTED,” deals with the many anxieties related to getting tested, whether for pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, or other STDs. Getting tested regularly and the issue of keeping secrets from family and friends are also addressed.

“It was scary. When I got tested and thought I had it, it was just like waiting for the test to come back saying I’m positive and just wondering what I was going to say to my parents and my family, like how I was going to explain it.”—Tishaun

"You always have this self-reassurance that, no, I don't have HIV because you don't think it can happen to you, number one, and number two, you think, no, I haven't slept with that many people. But what people don't realize is that it's not always the 17th time, it's not always the second time, it could be the first. You know, you don't know—you're pretty much playing Russian roulette."—Maggie

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some fears people might have about getting tested for pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, or other STDs?
2. How can you sound out potential partners to learn more about their sexual histories and sexual risk factors, such as HIV? What are some ways to have that conversation?

CHAPTER 5 "RESULTS"



"RESULTS," addresses various test results—being HIV-positive, HIV-negative, and pregnant. It also deals with reactions from parents and friends and the emotional and social impact of the results.

"After the shocks subsided, it was like weird, because it was kind of like an out-of-body experience. Because when your life flashes before your eyes, you don't really think about what's going on there, you don't hear anything, you don't see anything, it's like you have just kind of shut down."—Ari

"My friends abandoned me... We just lost all our common ground and we had nothing—our friendship was gone."—Maggie

"I was relieved. I got outside and went, 'Yes!' So that means I got to start protecting myself. It was like a gift from God I couldn't pass on. If not AIDS, it could've been herpes, HPV, gonorrhea, syphilis—it could've been anything and it's not, it's just another chance."—Tishaun

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you think you would react if you realized you were HIV-positive, pregnant, or lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer? Talk about your emotions, your probable actions, and what kind of support you would need from other people.
2. Do you know where to go to get the kind of tests you need—for HIV/AIDS, STDs, and pregnancy—in your community? Name some places. Also, where are the support groups for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people in your community?

CHAPTER 6 "TO TELL THE TRUTH"



"TO TELL THE TRUTH," deals primarily with being gay or lesbian, but also with the coming out process at home and at school. Other forms of coming out are also addressed, including coming out as HIV-positive or pregnant.

"When I came out, I was 15. When I knew, I was 14. When I knew, I wanted to tell."—Tishaun

"I know a couple of girls that I know they just can't... come out yet. My mother will disown me or my father will disown me and I'll have nowhere to go," so I'm like, 'I understand.'"—Tishaun

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is one goal in your life that would be affected if you realized that you were HIV-positive, pregnant, or gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender/queer?
2. How do you think the people in your life would react if you had to come out about one of the above issues? How would you handle these reactions?

CHAPTER 7 "I WANTED TO DO SOMETHING"



"I WANTED TO DO SOMETHING," deals with conquering fear, re-evaluating life, educating others (particularly peers), and learning to speak up for oneself. Also addressed are the AIDS quilt, gay-straight alliances, child sexual abuse, and dealing with others who want to take revenge.

“Some of the things that have happened is that, anything I’ve been afraid of, since I’ve been positive, I’ve just kind of conquered it. I just did. I was really afraid of speaking – that was like my number one fear.”—Ari

“Educating teens on sex, birth control, pregnancy, HIV...It all sounded really good to me. I thought it was a great idea and I thought I really wanted to do it, so I signed up. And then, the more I thought about it, it’s like ‘I can’t get up in front of these people and talk, I don’t want to get up in front of these people and talk.’ What if they think I’m stupid? And after about two weeks of rolling it through my head, I decided that I would get over it, that I was a big girl, and I could handle it.”—Maggie

“It was like just a regular prom, but I got a chance to put on a suit and tie instead of having to put on a dress. I enjoy putting on a dress, you know, sometimes – but I finally got a chance to dress up. Like, I always played dress up when I was little, like put on my mother’s boyfriend’s suits and stuff, but I finally got to do it and it looked nice, so it was fun.”—Tishaun

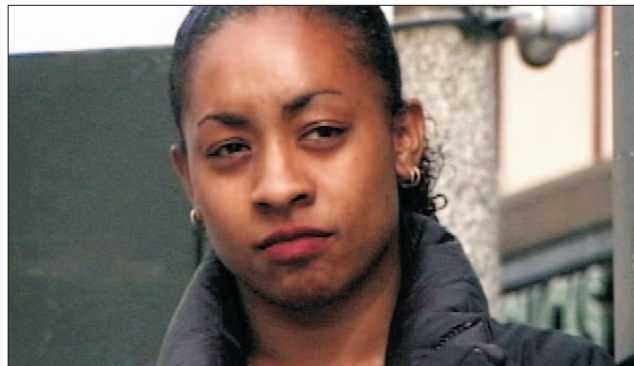
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some actions needed in your school, community, or neighborhood to help teens make positive decisions about sexuality and sexual risk reduction? What can you do to help these things come about? What help would you need and from whom?
2. What are some ways that young people can organize and/or publicize more and better information for their peers around sexuality and sexual decision making? What ideas can you gain from Ari, Maggie, and Tishaun’s activism?

OTHER IDEAS

1. Take a survey at your high school to find out about teenage HIV/AIDS, teen pregnancy and GLBT awareness, then:
2. Start your own peer education program
3. Write a newspaper article for your school paper or create a video project.
4. Work with school or local radio station to create a program about teen concerns.
5. Organize a panel of experts to come to your school to address topics of interest.

CHAPTER 8 “A FEW THINGS I KNOW...”



“A FEW THINGS I KNOW...” addresses the issues of self-love and self-esteem and their important role in not only sexual decision-making but also living well and adapting to life after consequences.

“If I had had self-love, things would have been a little easier to deal with, you know, to get by with or whatever. ... Because I didn’t have, you know, any love for myself, I just—I gave up, or I settled for this. You know, you don’t have to—it’s really your choice.”—Ari

“I’m the type of person who thinks that people can say and do what they feel—it’s their lives. So, this is my life and I’m going to live it the way I want to live it, and if you have a problem with it, you deal with it. That’s just me.”—Tishaun

“I wouldn’t even know what to tell a junior high person, because I know that the pressures were there not to have sex or drink or do drugs, but there was other pressures, you know, to be smart, to be pretty, to be thin, to be nice, and people aren’t going to listen to you when you tell them to be themselves. You just have to make them feel good about themselves. And, so, if you can build up their self-esteem, then you won’t need to tell them, ‘You don’t need to do that to be cool.’ It’s all about self-esteem—I really believe that.”—Maggie

“Love yourself. You can’t love anybody if you don’t love yourself.”—Ari

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are a few things you know? What advice would you give to others?
2. How do you promote your own and others’ self-esteem, confidence, assertiveness, and awareness? How do you make sure that your actions “in the moment” are keeping you on track for your long-term goals and how do you help others do this?
3. The young women in the film pointed out how hard it is to just be yourself. Discuss this – is it hard? Why or why not? What are some suggestions for making it easier for everybody to just be themselves?

A FEW THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW...

Facilitators may want to use the facts listed below as “jumping off points” for the specific chapter-by-chapter discussions outlined above.

TEEN PREGNANCY

In the U.S., between 800,000-900,000 teens aged 19 or younger become pregnant each year.

The U.S. has the highest teen pregnancy rate among all industrialized nations.

Within the last decade (1991-2000), teen pregnancy rates declined 30% overall and 50% for African Americans.

In 2000, there were 48.7 live births per 1000 women aged 15-19.

94% of teens believe they would stay in school if they got pregnant, but in reality only 70% end up completing high school.

(2002 Statistics courtesy of The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, www.SIECUS.org)

HIV/AIDS

“Worldwide, 42 million people are estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, 38.6 million are adults, 19.2 million are women, 3.2 million are children under 15.”

(These statistics used in the film are courtesy of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, December 2002).

United States Statistics

886,575 is the estimated number of diagnoses of AIDS

877,275 are adult and adolescent AIDS cases with 718,002 cases in males and 159,271 cases in females.

36,299 cases of AIDS were recorded in people aged 13-24.

496,354 is the estimated number of deaths of adults and adolescents with AIDS.

Although the incidence of HIV/AIDS is declining in the overall population, it is not declining in the 13-24 age group, and many young adults over 24 who are diagnosed with HIV/AIDS contracted it during their teenage years.

Among young women, heterosexual sex is the primary means of transmission.

Among young people aged 13-19, 61% of the new AIDS cases are among females, while 39% are among males.

(2002, Statistics courtesy of the Centers for Disease Control, www.cdc.gov/hiv/stats)

LGBTQ Teens

According to a number of studies asking high school students about their sexual identity, from 1.1-5.3% identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual in high school, and another 4% identify as “unsure”

A national survey of college students found that, among men, 20% knew they were gay or bisexual in junior high, while 17% knew as early as grade school, while, among women, 6% first became aware that they were lesbian or bisexual in junior high, while 11% knew as early as grade school.

Overall, 48% of the of self-identified gay, lesbian, or bisexual college students became aware of their sexual orientation in high school, while 26% became aware in college.

2 out of 5 LGBTQ youth surveyed indicated that they did not feel safe in their schools due to their sexual orientation

(2002, Statistics courtesy of The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, www.SIECUS.org)

SUGGESTED READING

Deal with It! A Whole New Approach to Your Body, Brain, and Life as a GURL, by Esther Drill, Heather McDonald, & Rebecca Odes (Pocket Books).

Surviving Teen Pregnancy: Your Choices, Dreams, and Decisions, by Penny Bergman (Morning Glory Press).

The Hip Mama Survival Guide, by Ariel Gore (Hyperion).

Free Your Mind: The Book for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Youth—and Their Allies, by Ellen Bass and Kate Thompson (Harper Perennial).

HELPFUL WEBSITES & HOTLINES

Al-Anon

800-356-9996
www.al-anon.org

For people who need to deal with family members and friends who are recovering from alcoholism. They also sponsor Alateen, a recovery program for young people.

Centers for Disease Control

800-227-8922
www.cdc.gov

The official governmental health site and clearinghouse for health statistics. Also includes health information for the consumer. Extensive information about HIV/AIDS, other STDs, and other health matters.

Freevibe

www.freevibe.com

This site is loaded with stats on teen drug and alcohol abuse. Send a “Buzz Bomb” to a friend, post messages on the boards, read true stories about teens with drug problems, and share your own stories.

The Gay and Lesbian National Hotline

888-THE-GLNH
888-843-4564
www.glnh.org

If you need information, referrals, or peer counseling and you’re gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer, this is the place for you. You can speak anonymously about your situation to someone who is trained to be an active and non-judgmental listener.

Idealist

www.idealist.org

Get a job or internship or volunteer with a non-profit organization. Search their database of over 20,000 organizations to find out where your services are needed.

Making Schools Safe

www.aclu.org/safeschools

The ACLU's Making Schools Safe project supports LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning) teens who are being harassed at school because of their sexuality. Find out how to help or fight back!

Minority Health Resource Center

800-444-6472 (en español)
www.omhrc.gov

An informative public health site which focuses on issues affecting American Indians and Alaska Natives, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, Blacks/African Americans, and Hispanics/Latinos.

National AIDS Hotline

800-342-2437
800-344-7432 (en español)
www.ashastd.org/nah/tty.html

Keep up with the latest U.S. AIDS trends. Ask your question about HIV/AIDS and read up on important things to know if you're living with HIV.

National Association of Anorexia Nervosa & Associated Disorders

847-831-3438
www.anad.org

Pick up free hotline counseling and learn about support groups for sufferers and families of people with eating disorders. You'll also find referrals to health care professionals who treat eating disorders across the U.S. and in fifteen other countries.

National Campaign against Youth Violence

www.violencepreventionweek.org

This group encourages teens to use outlets other than violence to express themselves. The site offers tips for preventing violence and information to start anti-violence projects in your community.

National Mental Health Association

800-969-6642
www.nmha.org

From anxiety disorders, to depression, to attention deficit disorder, to suicide, to substance abuse – this group, with over 300 affiliates nationwide, can give a boost to anyone who feels like they might need it.

National Sexual Violence Resource Center

877-739-3895
www.nsvrc.org

NSVRC provides information, support, and help for victims of sexual violence. It is a project of the Pennsylvania Coalition against Rape, which also has a site for teens that deals with sexual violence: www.teenpcar.com.

OutProud

www.outproud.org

A site for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning youth.

Planned Parenthood Federation of America

800-230-PLAN
www.plannedparenthood.org

Find great sexual health information about topics like birth control, emergency contraception, pregnancy and parenting, abortion, sexually transmitted infections, and political advocacy. You can also get connected with a clinic near you.

Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network

800-656-HOPE
www.rainn.org

If you have been sexually assaulted, have a friend who's been sexually assaulted, or want to know how to reduce your risk of sexual assault, RAINN is where you want to turn.

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)

www.siecus.org

Fact sheets galore and current news on all matters pertaining to sex and sexuality, plus other resources.

STD Hotline

800-227-8922
www.ashastd.org

Find answers to frequently asked questions about sexually transmitted infections and hook up with a support group in your area.

Teens & AIDS Hotline

800-440-TEEN

A hotline specifically for teens living with HIV/AIDS or teens with questions about HIV/AIDS.

Teenwire

www.teenwire.com

Nonjudgmental information about sexuality with the goal of reducing the risk of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. With anonymous "Ask the Experts" online chats, diagrams, movies, articles, and games.

The Trevor Project

866-4-U-TREVOR
www.thetrevorproject.org

The Trevor Project is a non-profit organization established to promote tolerance for queer and questioning teenagers, and to aid in suicide prevention among that group. The Trevor Project runs the Trevor Helpline (1-866-4-U-TREVOR), the country's first and only around-the-clock, toll-free suicide prevention helpline for queer and questioning teens.

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