



Raising Renee:
A Study Guide for Social Work Educators and Students

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CSWE Film Study Guide No. 2
April 2013



When referencing this study guide, please use the following citation:

Wright, M. A., & Borasky, S. (2013, April). *Raising Renee: A study guide for social work educators and students* (CSWE Film Study Guide No. 2). Alexandria, VA: Council on Social Work Education.

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1701 Duke Street, Suite 200
Alexandria, VA 22314
www.cswe.org

Printed in the United States of America

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Introduction

This guide has been developed to assist social work educators and students in using films from the CSWE film festivals in their classrooms. It is one in a series of CSWE curriculum resources designed to enhance the teaching and learning of social work concepts.

We welcome your comments as the library of these resources is refined and expanded.

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Overview: *Raising Renee*

Film Information

Title: <i>Raising Renee</i>	A Film by: Jeanne Jordan and Steven Ascher
Running Time: 81 minutes	Distributor: West City Films, westcityfilms.com

Context: Artist Beverly McIver made a promise to her mother that she would take care of her mentally disabled sister after her mother died. The film catalogs the 6-year experience of Beverly and her sister, Renee. The film illustrates a number of themes related to career advancement, family dynamics, caregiving, assisted living/independence, as well as mental disability and care.

Overall Themes:

1. Disability/Ability
2. Caregiving and Sibling Responsibilities
3. Grief
4. Identity

Time Code	Topic	Central Quote	Salient Themes
7:19–12:59	Who will take care of Renee?	“She didn’t know who was going to take care of Renee after she was gone.”	Ambivalence, disruption of life, caregiving, living will
13:00–23:56	It looks like cancer	“I’m tired of being nice.”	Grief, faith, survivorship, family planning
23:59–31:57	Transition	“My life as an artist is gone down the tubes.”	Career disruption, solitude vs. engagement
31:59–40:14	The big family secret	“Whoa! He knows the truth.”	Father-daughter relationship, marital infidelity, economic perspective
40:15–51:51	Escapism to blackface	“That history ... just doesn’t go away.”	Racial divide, socioeconomics, marginalization, “ticket out”
55:30–1:11:28	Respite	“Every once in a while I have to get away and just paint.”	Independence, separation anxiety, guilt
1:12:52–1:18:46	New transition	“It’s lonely around here without Renee.”	Community supports, transition, independence, checking-in

Topics

Who Will Take Care of Renee?

Time Code: 7:19–12:59

Central Quote: “She didn’t know who was going to take care of Renee after she was gone.”

Themes: Ambivalence, Disruption of Life, Caregiving, Living Will

Abstract: The complex relationship between Beverly and Renee is revealed. Beverly admits to the promise she made to her mother. Beverly made the promise without realizing that it may require keeping.

Learning Objectives

1. Identify some life disruptions that may occur when caregiving duties are undertaken.
2. Articulate how life disruptions may cause and different feelings in the caregiver.
3. List a number of considerations that must be made when planning to become a caregiver.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think Beverly's ambivalence is warranted? Why or why not?
2. What role (if any) did the relationship between Renee and Beverly play in Beverly's ambivalence?
3. What concerns would you have if you were asked to accept care for a sibling?

Suggested Readings

Hagen, N., Lundin, S., O’Dell, T., & Petersén, Å (2012). For better or for worse: Lifeworld, system and family caregiving for a chronic genetic disease. *Culture Unbound*, 4, 537–557. doi: 10.3384/cu.2000.1525.124537

Merrick, J., Kandel, I., & Morad, M. (2011). Parents and siblings. In D. R. Patel, D. E. Greydanus, H. A. Omar, & J. Merrick (Eds.), *Neurodevelopmental disabilities* (pp. 463–472). New York, NY: Springer Science+Business Media.

Smith, J. R. (2012). Listening to older adult parents of adult children with mental illness. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 15, 126–140. doi: 10.1080/10522158.2012.664097

It Looks Like Cancer

Time Code: 13:00–23:56

Central Quote: “I’m tired of being nice.”

Themes: Grief, Faith, Survivorship, Family Planning

Abstract: The matriarch of the family enters the hospital. Beverly is faced with the reality that her mother may not survive. She has the additional consideration that Renee will become her responsibility.

Learning Objectives

1. Explore individual, family, and community responses to grief.
2. Identify the stages of grief displayed in the film.
3. Identify the complex role of faith in grief and survivorship.

Discussion Questions

1. Compare and contrast the roles played by family, church group, and neighbors during this portion of the film. How could a social worker utilize these systems of support?
2. If you were Beverly's caseworker, what would you make important to monitor in her treatment plan?
3. What do you think Beverly meant by her comment, “I’m tired of being nice”?

Suggested Readings

Hayward, P. A. (2010). *Cancer survivorship: Understanding the issues faced by cancer survivors* (Unpublished master's thesis). Massey University, New Zealand. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10179/1759>

Washington, S. L. (2010). *Entering the griever's tunnel: Soft care ministry to the bereaved*. Los Gatos, CA: Smashwords.

Yeagley, L. (2012). *Heartache and healing: Coming to terms with grief*. Ringgold, GA: Teach Services.

Transition

Time Code: 23:59–31:57

Central Quote: “My life as an artist is gone down the tubes.”

Themes: Career Disruption, Solitude vs. Engagement

Abstract: Renee moves in with Beverly. The progress made by Beverly in her career appears to be in danger of being sidelined. Plus, another actual human now lives with her, “invading” her space.

Learning Objectives

1. Identify the concept of secondary loss in grief counseling as new responsibilities result from a death.
2. Outline the physical transitions that accompany new caregiving responsibilities.
3. List self-care ideas that Beverly could implement.

Discussion Questions

1. Think of a transition you have had to make in your own life. What actions did you take in order to maintain a sense of “normalcy”?
2. Consider the transition from living alone to living with a sibling. What challenges could you foresee?
3. Are you able to identify any benefits that may result from a sibling moving in?
4. How sympathetic are you to Beverly's sense of secondary grief at the perceived loss of her career?

Suggested Readings

Glover-Graf, N. M. (2011). Family adaptation across cultures toward a loved one who is disabled. In I. Marini, N. M. Glover-Graf, and M. J. Millington, *Psychosocial aspects of disability: Insider perspectives and strategies for counselors* (pp. 169–194). New York: Springer Publishing.

Hohler, S. E. (2011). *Caregiver's guide: Care for yourself while you care for your loved ones*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Moorhead, J. (2012). *The instant survivor: Right ways to respond when things go wrong*. Austin, TX: Greenleaf Book Group Press.

The Big Family Secret

Time Code: 31:59–40:14

Central Quote: “Whoa! He knows the truth.”

Themes: Father-Daughter Relationship, Marital Infidelity, Economic Perspective

Abstract: Further details are provided about the family story, including the “illegitimacy” of Beverly’s birth. Beverly’s father is introduced. Through him, a different view of success is presented, placed in a historical context.

Learning Objectives

1. Explore sibling relationships in the context of “half-sisterhood.”
2. Compare and contrast Baby-Boomer views of success vs. the views of their children.
3. Reflect on the relationship between a daughter and a father in a scenario where the two meet for the first time when the daughter is 16 years old.

Discussion Questions

1. What, if anything, do you feel Beverly’s parentage has to do with her relationship with Renee?
2. Describe what you believe to be the best characteristics of a father-daughter relationship. Compare and contrast Beverly’s experience.
3. What do you read into the fact that Beverly’s painting of her father is kept in his closet? What do you think is the impact, if any, on Beverly?
4. Why do you think Beverly painted her father?

Suggested Readings

Bialystok, S. (2011). *The cuckold, his wife, and her lover: A study of infidelity in the Cent nouvelles nouvelles, the Decameron, and the Libro de buen amor* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Toronto, Canada. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1807/26450>

Burke, A. S. (2010). When family matters. *Yale Law Journal*, 119, 1210–1234.

Ewan, M. (2012). *“What a girl wants, what a girl needs”: Father-daughter intimacies in therapeutic literature and teen film* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Sydney, Australia. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1807/26450>

Escapism to Blackface

Time Code: 40:15–51:51

Central Quote: “That history...just doesn’t go away.”

Themes: Racial Divide, Socioeconomics, Marginalization, “Ticket Out”

Abstract: Beverly provides a historical context for her art. She reveals her personal struggle to establish identity while attempting to fit in. Her art is shown to be an acceptance of her history and a lesson to others.

Learning Objectives

1. Explore the racial identity formation.
2. Contrast socioeconomic differences in neighborhoods.
3. Identify ways that one's socioeconomic status may support feelings of marginalization.

Discussion Questions

1. When you explore the historic context of blackface, would you take the risk of replicating the images in your artwork?
2. Compare and contrast family and neighborhoods by socioeconomic characteristics. What solutions to inequality can you list?
3. How would you propose to integrate and empower all groups in society? What do you feel are keys to social and economic justice?

Suggested Readings

Bailey, A. K., Tolnay, S. E., Beck, E. M., & Laird, J. D. (2011). Targeting lynch victims: Social marginality or status transgressions? *American Sociological Review*, 76, 412–436.
doi: 10.1177/0003122411407736

Leonard, L., & Kenny, P. (2010). *Sustainable justice and the community* (Advances in Ecopolitics, 6). Bingley, UK: Emerald.

Morning, A. (2011). *The nature of race: How scientists think and teach about human difference*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Respite

Time Code: 55:30–1:11:28

Central Quote: “Every once in a while I have to get away and just paint.”

Themes: Independence, Separation Anxiety, Guilt

Abstract: Renee stays with the other sister when Beverly attends an art retreat. Beverly’s ambivalence is made clear—she cherishes the freedom while feeling some weight of separation from Renee. In addition, Renee is Beverly’s new muse.

Learning Objectives

1. Articulate the value of respite in caregiving.
2. Define self-care as a vital habit in caregiving.
3. Explore the ambivalence felt by caregivers when they take advantage of respite opportunities.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think Beverly really missed Renee? Why or why not?
2. What do you think Renee’s time with her other sister was like?
3. Do you think you would miss Renee? Why or why not?
4. What other options could you identify for respite or self-care for caregivers?

Suggested Readings

Figley, C. R., & Beder, J. (2012). The cost of caring requires self care. In J. Beder (Ed.), *Advances in social work practice with the military* (pp. 278–286). New York: Routledge.

Glover-Graf, N. M. (2011). Family adaptation across cultures toward a loved one who is disabled. In I. Marini, N. M. Glover-Graf, and M. J. Millington, *Psychosocial aspects of disability: Insider perspectives and strategies for counselors* (pp. 169–194). New York: Springer Publishing.

Whyte, F. (2010). *The source of my strength: Triumph over tragedy*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.

New Transition

Time Code: 1:12:52–1:18:46

Central Quote: “It’s lonely around here without Renee.”

Themes: Community Supports, Transition, Independence, Checking-In

Abstract: Renee moves out and into independent living. The considerations of independent living are revealed. Beverly mourns the loss of both her cat and her sister's presence in the home.

Learning Objectives

1. Identify community supports for semi-independent living.
2. List considerations in launching a cognitively impaired individual into independent living.
3. Reflect on the challenge of transitioning to a state of less responsibility.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think Beverly is keeping her promise to her mom as Renee moves into semi-independent living? Explain your answer.
2. What would be your monitoring plan if you were Renee’s caseworker?
3. What community supports can you identify that would be helpful to Renee?
4. What supports could you recommend for Beverly?

Suggested Readings

Gone, R., Hatton, C., & Caine, A. (2012). Service provision. In E. Emerson et al. (Eds.), *Clinical psychology and people with intellectual disabilities* (2nd ed., pp. 23–50). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Goward, P., & Gething, L. (2010). Independence, reciprocity and resilience. In G. Grant, P. Ramcharan, M. Flynn, and M. Richardson (Eds.), *Learning disability: A life cycle approach to valuing people* (2nd ed., pp. 281–292). New York: McGraw Hill/Open University Press.

Wilcock, P. (2010). *Learning to let go: Making the transition into residential care*. Oxford, UK: Lion.