



The Welcoming Conversations Project

SHELBY KNOX

REDUX



Discussion Guide

For faith-based reflection about sexuality and LGBT inclusion



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SHELBY KNOX REDUX



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of
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About the Film

Shelby Knox Redux, by Marion Lipschutz and Rose Rosenblatt, profiles a high school student who, despite her deeply conservative Southern Baptist upbringing, advocates comprehensive sex education and gay rights. Five years after her controversial activities and now living on her own, she returns to Lubbock, Texas to check in with her friends, her supportive parents and a local church that “welcomes” everyone. Building from the 2005 film *The Education of Shelby Knox*, *Shelby Knox Redux* takes viewers on a journey of personal awareness, family, faith, and transformation.

How to Use this Guide

The Education of Shelby Knox originally aired on PBS’s P.O.V. in 2005. For more information about *The Education of Shelby Knox* and to access discussion materials and other resources, visit www.pbs.org/pov/pov2005/shelbyknox.

This guide is designed to help viewers process the issues raised in the film, apply it to their own lives, and engage in productive and open dialogue. It is primarily intended for Christian audiences, although most sections will be relevant for general faith-based dialogue. Depending on your needs, the film and guide can be used in the following ways:

- **Prompt reflection and dialogue** around sexuality and LGBT inclusion, particularly in faith-based settings
- **Help parents and teens** have more open and honest dialogue about sexuality and LGBT issues
- **Give voice to LGBT individuals** by using the film as a springboard for people to share their own stories
- **Make connections** between the Bible and ideologies of acceptance and inclusion
- **Foster safe and productive discussions** among people who are uncertain about their position on LGBT rights

What is LGBT?

LGBT has become the commonly used acronym to refer collectively to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. The shorthand is intended to implicitly acknowledge the diversity of sexual identities and cultures in our society.

Dialogue and Facilitation

Shelby Knox Redux raises a range of complex and controversial issues that can be leveraged toward generating productive dialogue. And, since the film represents a range of perspectives – including that of Shelby, her parents, her friends, her conservative traditionalist pastor, and the members of St. John’s United Methodist Church – it can serve as a particularly useful tool to spark dialogue among people with differing opinions. However, controversial issues can also lead to the voicing of strong, deeply held beliefs and opinions, so it’s a good idea to have an experienced facilitator present to address those comments and present them in a positive light. For groups that are interested in using the film for focused dialogue, this section offers some tips and suggestions for how to best maximize that process.

GENERAL DIALOGUE TIPS

- Establish dialogue guidelines at the outset. Encourage participants to use “I” language – “I think,” “I feel,” “I believe” – and to speak from their own experience as much as possible. Generalizations, such as “We believe this...” or “Don’t we all agree...” imply a consensus that may not be real. In faith-based settings, remind people the “I” language guideline also applies when sharing beliefs about divine intention or instruction (“I understand this Biblical verse to mean that...”). Acknowledge that you understand this may be a challenge for people who are certain about their beliefs; but explain that because we have lots of denominations, others may not share the same interpretation, so for the purposes of productive dialogue everyone will be asked to speak in the first person.
- Make sure everyone is seated in the same way. In other words, if one person is sitting in a chair, everyone should be in a chair, not on the floor or standing. Ideally, the participants would be seated in a circle so that they could see one another. The facilitator should be a part of this seated circle.
- Establish the difference between dialogue and debate. Dialogue provides an opportunity for people to share their experiences and opinions without trying to convince others that they are right. In a dialogue, participants try to understand each other and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and actively listening to each other. You might also want to give permission for those who believe they are called to save others to suspend that work, not forever, but for the purposes of this event. Because dialogue is about understanding one another, and because, in contrast, proselytizing is – by definition – about convincing others that you are right, proselytizing needs to be suspended for dialogue to happen.
- After viewing the film, give audience members a few moments to silently process their thoughts before jumping immediately into the dialogue.
- Before engaging in dialogue, establish group confidentiality rules. Groups can choose not to exercise confidentiality, or to exercise degrees of confidentiality (e.g., no one will share information at school or outside the church, but it is okay to tell a parent if an adult thinks a child has shared something that puts them in jeopardy). Whatever the group decides is okay as long as everyone in the room is clear about expectations.

FOSTERING PRODUCTIVE DIALOGUE AMONG SPECIFIC GROUPS

Consider how the film might be useful to nurture various relationships, and to engage groups in an open dialogue around sexuality and how to treat all people with dignity.

Dialogue Between Parents and Teens

TIPS FOR FACILITATION: Because there is a preexisting power dynamic in these relationships, the facilitator is especially challenged to create safe space for all parties. It is incredibly important to set ground rules before entering the content of the discussion. The facilitator might consider separating the parents and teens into two discussion groups, then returning to the larger group or mixing the smaller ones with an even number of parents and teens. When mixing teens and parents, you might want to avoid having teens in the same group as their parents and vice versa. This allows for cross-generational dialogue to take place without the unique pressures of parent-child interaction. The family conversations can take place later (or you could encourage people to continue the dialogue at home).

TIPS FOR DISCUSSION: This film thoroughly explores Shelby's relationship with her parents as she engages in her "causes," and it addresses family relationships for gay and lesbian teens who have "come out." A common theme parents and teens can discuss both separately and together is choices: the choice to be sexually active or inactive, the choice to take personal risks, a parent's choice to support her/his child even when they don't necessarily agree, etc. It is possible that some teens may use this discussion as an opportunity to talk openly about their sexual orientation for the first time. If so, the facilitator must be prepared to honor that decision and model a response for the parents: "Thank you for feeling safe enough to share that with us and your parents" (if they are present).

Dialogue with Teens

TIPS FOR FACILITATION: The same facilitation rules and guidelines apply to teens as they do to adults. If the facilitator finds that participants aren't being responsive, s/he may be required to ask more leading questions or to call on specific participants to vocalize their thoughts.

TIPS FOR DISCUSSION: This film is about teen experience. Teenagers are likely to relate to the coming of age aspects of the film. Ask teens how they relate to Shelby and the other young people in the story. Ask them what it means to be an advocate, and have them consider how they themselves may be advocates in their own lives. It is possible that some teens may use this discussion as an opportunity to "come out." If so, the facilitator must be prepared to honor that decision and model a response for the group: "Thank you for feeling safe enough to share that with the group," or "We are honored that you trusted us enough to share that with the group. Thank you for your courage."

Intergenerational Church Dialogue

TIPS FOR FACILITATION: The church can be an important place for teens to draw comfort. However, it can also be a place in which sexuality is taboo or condemned. The facilitator must be sure to create a safe space for teens to use the film to explore their own opinions about sexuality.

TIPS FOR DISCUSSION: This film offers an opportunity for intergenerational dialogue within the church. Because opinions about sexuality and LGBT inclusion often vary among generations, it might be useful for adults and teens to have their own group dialogues prior to an intergenerational conversation. The facilitator might consider a fishbowl dialogue, in which each generation dialogues among itself while others watch and listen, beginning with the oldest generation. Then, all the participants debrief together,

What does it mean to be a Welcoming congregation?

Like St. John's United Methodist Church, many congregations, campus ministries, and other faith-based entities are making public statements to work toward the full participation and inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people of faith in the life, ministry and witness of the church. Across denominations, the specific terms for "Welcoming" congregations vary; for example, Methodists and Lutherans use "Reconciling," United Churches of Christ and Disciples of Christ use "Open and Affirming," Baptists use "Welcoming and Affirming," etc. While the terms vary, the sentiments of inclusion and acceptance are generally the same in most denominations.

discussing what they heard and learned from each generation's general experiences of the film. Again, some teens may choose to "come out" during a conversation like this. If so, the facilitator must be prepared to model a response: "Thank you for feeling safe enough to share that with us."

Church Dialogue with LGBT Individuals

TIPS FOR FACILITATION: As the film shows, some LGBT people feel gravely wounded by the church. Conversations within a church's LGBT community or between a church and outside LGBT community members might evoke emotional or painful stories. The facilitator must keep an eye towards healing and be prepared to acknowledge that pain and recognize the courage of LGBT individuals without painting them as victims. It is also important to know that pain can trigger anger. In this case, that might include anger against a church that has excluded or demonized. One way to guide the discussion in a healing direction is to let the person with anger share her/his story and then ask for responses from church members. Their words may offer comfort, affirmation, or an opportunity for healing.

TIPS FOR DISCUSSION: A wide spectrum of church-related perspectives on LGBT inclusion is represented in this film: Shelby's conservative/traditionalist pastor, the folks who did not agree but chose to remain congregants at the Reconciling congregation, and the members of the Reconciling committee who shared their support for LGBT inclusion. This film offers participants an opportunity to delve deeper into those perspectives. Of course, the latter two perspectives are especially relevant to those congregations currently or recently engaged in conversations about becoming Welcoming/Open and Affirming/Reconciling. Viewers might use what they saw in the film to discuss any questions or concerns they may have about the welcoming process.

What To Do If The Conversation Gets Tense

The facilitator's role is to ensure the dialogue is safe and productive. If there are individuals who offer strong opinions or negative attitudes that prevent that dialogue from continuing, the facilitator has a few options:

- Ask the individual(s) to step back and allow others to speak. The facilitator might begin their comment with, "Part of my job is to make sure that everyone can be heard. Summarize what you are thinking in a sentence or two and let's hear what others are thinking." This option works best if the group establishes an applicable "step up/step back" ground rule at the beginning of the discussion, in which those who are more vocal agree to give space for others to speak and those who are less vocal agree to use that space.
- Reflect not the content of what was said, but rather the emotional state in which comments are made: "I hear you feel very angry/frustrated/etc. about this subject." If the person makes one short volatile statement, the facilitator might ask her/him to elaborate on why s/he feels so strongly. There's likely a story that person needs to share and from which the group would benefit. If the person has been speaking a great deal, the facilitator might ask the group to share their feelings on what's been said.
- The above suggestions are useful if you have one or a few dissenting voices, but sometimes the entire group needs to take a moment to refocus. If things get chaotic, or if the entire group breaks out in debate, the facilitator may opt to do one of the following:
 - Pause the discussion and have everyone reflect silently for a minute or two. After participants have had a moment to calm down, each person should share with the group why s/he chose to participate in the discussion in the first place. The facilitator may then return to an appropriate place to continue the dialogue.
 - Ask everyone to pause and write down a headline to describe what they are feeling. To start the discussion again, put the headlines in a hat and pick one, or do a go-round so everyone hears what everyone else is thinking and then pick a reference from the film to spur further dialogue, or gently move the dialogue to a consideration of action – what do people want to see happen?

Discussion Questions

GETTING THE CONVERSATION STARTED

- What touched you personally in this film?
- How does the Knox family resemble your own? How is it different?
- If you could ask anyone in the film one single question, who would you ask and what would you ask her/him?
- Did anything in the film surprise you? How so?
- What insights, inspiration, or new knowledge did you learn from each of the characters listed in the following section, “Walk in the Shoes of the Characters”?
- Do you think it’s important to discuss homosexuality in a faith-based context? Why or why not?
- Are either of the churches portrayed in the film similar to your own faith community? In what ways?

WALK IN THE SHOES OF THE CHARACTERS



Shelby Knox

- Consider “Shelby now” compared to “Shelby five years ago.” How has she changed? How is she the same? To what do you attribute her transformation?
- When Shelby visits with Ed Ainsworth in the first half of the film, she says to him, “Sometimes the Bible is not clear enough for me.” Have you ever felt this way? How have you dealt with your confusion? Ed responds to her by saying, “We live in America, you gotta make a choice.” Do you think Shelby was satisfied with his response? Why or why not?
- At one point in the film Shelby says, “I think that God wants you to question, and God wants you to do more than just blindly be a follower.” What does it mean to be a blind follower? Do you agree with Shelby’s statement? How does Shelby leverage her faith to push past being a blind follower?
- In supporting the inclusion of homosexuality as part of comprehensive sex education, Shelby tells the Youth Commission, “I don’t think that they [gay students] should be put more at risk just because we’re scared, or someone’s scared, or that someone’s going to get angry.” Do you find Shelby’s arguments compelling? Why or why not?
- How do you think it felt for Shelby to go back and visit Ed Ainsworth 5 years after having left Lubbock? What would you have said to him or asked him if you were Shelby?
- How has Shelby’s relationship with her parents changed since the beginning of the film?



Paula and Danny Knox, *Shelby’s mom and dad*

- While Shelby’s parents didn’t always agree with what she was doing as a teenager, they generally supported her along the way. Would you have been supportive? Would you have done anything differently?
- How do you think Paula and Danny’s faith shaped (or was reflected in) their parenting?
- Paula says that she went with Shelby to the LGBT rights protest to “protect her.” Protect her from what? How would you have supported Shelby if you were her parent?
- When Shelby begins to get more actively involved in working with the GAP (Gay and Proud) kids at her school, her father says, “Just don’t start a new cause.” Why would he say that? Do you think he would have said the same thing if her “cause” were something less controversial? Why or why not?
- When Shelby goes back to Lubbock, both her parents seem to have had a change of heart regarding LGBT issues. For example, Paula says she “doesn’t care” about gay marriage, and Danny says, “We just kind of believe you live your life and let everybody kind of live theirs.” What do you think about their statements? What factors do you think played a role in their transformation?
- Reflecting on her parents’ transformation, Shelby says, “Once people see a human side to the issue and meet real people who are really struggling, that is when you start to get allies, in people who are accepting instead of just tolerant.” What is the difference between acceptance and tolerance? How does one’s faith play a role in cultivating these values?

- When Paula discusses her position on LGBT issues with Shelby and her friend Ricky, she says, "I guess if I say I don't care, I accept it." Do you agree with her statement? Do you feel this way about any issues in your life?
- When Paula reflects on her experience at the protest five years ago, she expresses a sense of shame for feeling embarrassed to be there. Have you ever experienced anything like that? How did you deal with your shame? How do you think that experience influenced Paula's perception of herself? How do you think it influenced her perception of Shelby?



Ed Ainsworth, Local Youth Pastor

- When Shelby visits with Ed in the first half of the film, she says to him, "Sometimes the Bible is not clear enough for me." Ed responds to her by saying, "We live in America, you gotta make a choice." What do you think of his response?
- In that same scene, Ed says, "Jesus loves a homosexual as much as he loves a murderer." What does he mean by this statement? Do you agree?
- When referring to LGBT people, Ed says, "Maybe they have rights because they live in America, but my stance is that it is a sin. These people are living a contrary lifestyle." From your perspective, what does it mean to be a Christian in America? How can a pluralistic country balance Constitutional rights with sometimes conflicting religious morals?
- Ed says that he would welcome a homosexual into his church, and that he would "preach the truth, hoping that they would hear the truth and change." What do you think he means by "welcome"? What does he mean by "truth"? How is his approach different from that of St. John's, the Reconciling Church?



Ricky Waite

- At St. John's, Ricky says, "For a long time God was used as a weapon against me, and really turned me away from faith." What do you think about about Ricky's statement? How would you react if you were him?
- Ricky reflects on his decision to come out to his mother as a teenager, saying, "I remember saying to myself that the only two options I had was that I was either going to commit suicide or come out." Why do you think he only saw these two options? What does it say about Ricky that he chose to come out? What does it say about his relationship with his mother?
- Ricky, Trista, and others in the film reflect on the difficulties of being gay, especially in Lubbock. If this is the case, why do you think Ricky stayed in Lubbock? How do you think Ricky, Trista, and Becky felt about visiting the Reconciling church?



Betty Dotts, Member of St. John's Methodist

- When Ricky mentions instances when God was used against him, Betty refers to this as "bad theology." What do you think about this? What's your definition of good and bad theology?
- Betty says that with the inclusion of LGBT individuals, "the church is stronger." What does she mean by this statement? Do you agree?
- Betty refers to the members of St. John's as "family." What constitutes family? Did you get the sense that St. John's embodies this concept? How?
- When Ricky's mom discusses her acceptance of her son, Betty says, "That's religious." How do you define what's "religious"? Which behaviors in your life would you consider to be expressions of your faith?
- Did you learn anything new about Reconciling churches like St. John's? Is there anything you heard from its members that influenced your perception of the role of the church in LGBT issues?
- When St. John's became a Reconciling congregation, some congregants who disagreed with the church's stance still remained members of the church while others did not. Have you experienced a tension like that in your church, where certain members had to decide whether to stay or to leave? How does an experience like that have an impact on the church?

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Active Voice uses film, television and digital media to spark social change. Our team of strategic communications specialists works with filmmakers, funders, advocates and thought leaders to put a human face on the issues of our times. We frame and beta-test key messages, develop national and local partnerships, plan and execute outcome-oriented screenings and high profile events, repurpose digital content for web and viral distribution, produce ancillary and educational resources, and consult with industry and sector leaders. Since our inception in 2001, Active Voice has built a diverse portfolio of film-based campaigns focusing on issues including immigration, criminal justice, healthcare and sustainability.

www.activevoice.net

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Organizations that Address LGBT Issues in a Faith Context

The following organizations have programs and resources devoted to understanding LGBT issues in a faith context. Check out their web sites for more information, ideas for how to get more involved, contact information for churches and advocates in your community, and more.

California Council of Churches
www.calchurches.org
California Faith for Equality
www.cafaithforequality.org
Center for Lesbian and Gay
Studies in Religion and Ministry
www.clgs.org

GLAAD Religion,
Faith & Values Program
www.glaad.org/faith
Human Rights Campaign
Religion and Faith Program
www.hrc.org/issues/religion.asp

Institute for Welcoming Resources
www.welcomingresources.org
PFLAG Welcoming Faith
Communities Program
[http://community.pflag.org/
Page.aspx?pid=652](http://community.pflag.org/Page.aspx?pid=652)

Additional Faith-Based Resources

For a full list of suggested reading, related films, and additional organizations (including denominationally specific resources) check out Active Voice's **Welcoming Conversations Resource Guide** at www.activevoice.net/shelbyknoxredux.html.

Human Rights Campaign has developed a study guide for the documentary *For the Bible Tells Me So* that offers a wealth of biblical references and interpretations that might provide useful background, including:

- Background on Biblical references to sexual orientation
- Scriptures that may be cited against LGBT individuals
- Scriptures that may be cited in support of LGBT individuals
- Christian perspectives on Homosexuality

For more information, visit www.hrc.org.

Taking Action

Take what you learned from *Shelby Knox Redux* to consider ways that you might be able to continue the dialogue and support greater inclusiveness in your church and your community:

Initiate a conversation with your neighbors, in your church, at Sunday school, or with your classmates about the importance of inclusiveness and how you might be able to be more sensitive to your LGBT peers.

Invite an LGBT friend or family member to church with you.

Find out your church's stance on LGBT issues. If you're not already part of a Welcoming congregation, ask your pastor how you might take steps toward becoming one. If you already are, consider how your church might make that message more prominent — both internally, and in the community at large.

Join or start a book club to discuss the intersection of faith and LGBT inclusion. See Active Voice's Welcoming Conversations Resource Guide for suggestions.

Start a film series at your church or school. Check out the Welcoming Conversations Resource Guide for a list of suggested films.

Support a piece of local or national legislation around the themes raised in the film. This could be with your local school board, in your church policies, or with the state legislation around same-sex marriage.