

BETTER TO

live



Press Kit

About the Film

DIRECTOR: Linda G. Mills

GENRE: Documentary Short

RUN TIME: 19 minutes, 57 seconds

WORLD PREMIERE: Tribeca Film Festival, April 2015

TRAILER: bettertolivefilm.com/trailer

SYNOPSIS: *Better to Live* is a gritty and uplifting look at the travails of the college experience and the musical-sketch comedy performance that's saving lives. In this short documentary, drama majors tackle complex issues including rape, anxiety, cutting and suicide as they build The Reality Show for 5000 freshmen at one of America's most iconic theaters, Madison Square Garden. Raw and unscripted, young "superhero" artists remind us that it's better to live, far worse to waste it.

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Statistics

Better to Live (2015) – the film, and the theatre production it portrays (The Reality Show) – are guided by staggering statistics that highlight the vulnerability of college students. Universities should strive to reduce stigma around seeking mental health support – getting creative may mean the difference between life and death.

Note: These statistics are based on 21 million college students in the U.S.

SUICIDE

- Suicide is a leading cause of death among college and university students in the U.S.¹
- 7.1- 7.7% U.S. college students seriously considered suicide in 2012.²
- 1.1-1.2% U.S. college students attempted suicide.¹
- There are more than 1,000 suicides on U.S. college campuses each year – that is a staggering three students who die by suicide every day in the U.S.³
- Globally, among 15-29 year olds, suicide is the second leading cause of death (after traffic accidents).¹²

RISK FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SUICIDE

- Depressive disorders¹
- Anxiety disorders¹
- Eating disorders¹
- Self-injury (without intent to die)¹
- Exposure to the suicidal behaviors of others⁴
 - It has long been believed that when a suicide occurs, a suicide contagion can develop. A contagion is defined as multiple suicidal behaviors or suicides that fall within an accelerated time frame, and sometimes within a defined geographical area.⁵



RESILIENCE – SUICIDE PREVENTION

- Research shows that youth who feel connected to their school are less likely to engage in suicide-related behaviors.⁶
- Research shows that hope and optimism can moderate/weaken the relationship between rumination and suicidal ideation.⁷

MENTAL HEALTH

- 86.1% of U.S. college students felt overwhelmed by all they had to do.²
- 50.7% of college students felt overwhelming anxiety.²

BULLYING

- Studies show that youth who report being frequently bullied by others are at increased risk of suicide-related behaviors, and negative physical and mental outcomes.⁶
- Youth who report both being bullied and bullying others have the highest rates of negative mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety and thinking about suicide.⁶

LGBTQ

- Approximately 25% of lesbian, gay and bisexual students and university employees have been harassed due to their sexual orientation, as well as a third of those who identify as transgender.⁸
- Each episode of LGBT victimization, such as physical or verbal harassment or abuse, increases the likelihood of self-harming behavior by 2.5 times on average.⁹
- Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are 4 times more likely, and questioning youth are 3 times more likely, to attempt suicide as their straight peers.⁹

Statistics CONTINUED

SELF-INJURY

- 5.5% of U.S. college students intentionally harmed themselves by cutting, burning, or injuring in other ways.²

RAPE

- A comprehensive systematic study of 3,162,318 participants found an association between a history of sexual abuse and a lifetime diagnosis of anxiety, depression, eating disorders, PTSD, sleep disorders and suicide attempts.¹⁰

ANOREXIA

- Anorexia nervosa has a higher mortality rate than any other cause of death among females between the ages of 15 and 24.¹¹
- 25% of college-aged women binge and purge as a weight-management technique.¹¹
- 91% of women surveyed on a college campus had attempted to control their weight through dieting – 22% dieted “often” or “always.”¹¹



For Help

ORGANIZATIONS

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** – Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
Phone: 800.273.TALK (8255)
- **The Jed Foundation**
www.jedfoundation.org
Phone: 212.647.7544
- **Anxiety and Depression Association of America**
www.adaa.org
Phone: 240.485.1001
- **Eating for Life**
www.eatingforlife.org

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- **The Trevor Project**
www.thetrevorproject.org
Phone: 800.488.7386
- **S.A.F.E. Alternatives**
www.selfinjury.com
Phone: 800.DONOTCUT (366.8288)
- **The Alliance for Eating Disorders Awareness**
www.allianceforeatingdisorders.com
Phone: 866.662.1235



Director's Statement

Every day, millions of American college students struggle to keep afloat – emotionally. The statistics are staggering: half report overwhelming anxiety, 1 in 6 injure themselves by cutting, carving, burning or other means and 3 college students commit suicide every day in the United States. While counseling programs in American universities have grown exponentially over the past 20 years, only a few colleges have figured out how to meet students on their own terms in a way that decreases stigma and encourages them to access professional support.

Within 30 days in 2003, NYU lost two students to suicide, under remarkably similar circumstances – and then five more students quickly followed suit. Facing a contagion, as suicide can sometimes become, we needed to act quickly and decisively. A web of services was created that became the gold standard for treating vulnerable young people, including a 24-7 hotline that students could call anonymously. But that wasn't enough – we had to do something dramatic.

Drawing on the superhero powers of some of the nation's most gifted artists at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, and the formidable talent of the director, Liz Swados – a multiple Tony and Obie nominee known for bold and innovative theatre – The Reality Show was born.

In its first year, Ms. Swados, together with experts on mental health and the student cast, confronted the most challenging issues – unapologetically and irreverently. Skits and songs were written about suicide, sexual assault, sexually transmitted infections and the importance of community.

The newly added services were presented to freshmen in a funny and engaging way, making the show a cornerstone of the university's suicide prevention effort. Ten years later, the show remains a bold invitation to students to seek the help they need.



Director's Statement CONTINUED

Better to Live, filmed on the 10-year anniversary of the show's auspicious beginning, was an obvious outgrowth of the remarkable talent that I witnessed during these many years as producer of the Reality Show performance. Now 10 years in, over 50,000 students have seen the show at iconic New York venues such as Madison Square Garden, Radio City Music Hall and the Beacon Theater. It was always infectious to witness the cast's giddiness on the day of the performance, after months of hard work to create what was nothing short of magical, personal and uncompromising. Not only was it exciting, it was also terrifying – captivating an audience of 5,000 college students was no small feat. Could the show move even the most disengaged and skeptical?

All this cried out for a film.

Working closely with the Reality Show's new director Preston Martin in Summer 2014 (a cast member from earlier shows), as well as Music Director Matthew Marsh and Zoe Ragouzeos (the mental health expert responsible for suicide prevention at the university), we set out to capture the process of creating The Reality Show on film. When a surprising and highly publicized suicide happened just days before their Madison Square Garden performance, the cast drew on their "superhero" powers to overcome their sense of loss to create the most compelling Reality Show ever. *Better to Live* is about a performance that's saving lives – and so much more.

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Director's Biography



Linda G. Mills has been making films for the better part of the past decade. *Auf Wiedersehen, 'Til We Meet Again*, her first film, was an intimate portrait of her family's return to Vienna after her mother's escape from the Holocaust. Accompanied by her 10-year-old son, his irreverence and insights provide perspective into the inter-generational divides that increasingly mark this traumatic history. *Auf Wiedersehen* played at 8 film festivals across the world including Vienna and Jerusalem, receiving an audience award at the Los Angeles Jewish Film Festival, where it debuted.

Of Many, a short documentary about a rabbi and an imam's unorthodox friendship, premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2014 to sold-out audiences, and has screened at more than a dozen other film festivals around the world including Abu Dhabi. *Of Many* won two audience awards, the 2014 Grand Prize Humanitarian Award by the Best Shorts Competition and a 2015 Wilbur Award. *Of Many* has been invited to participate in the 2015 American Film Showcase.

Director's Biography CONTINUED

Mills' most recent short documentary, *Better to Live*, chronicles the story of university drama majors who tackle the travails of college life, from coming of age to coming out and from anxiety to suicide, as they build a "reality" show for 5,000 college freshmen. *Better to Live* will have its world premiere at the 2015 Tribeca Film Festival.

In addition to filmmaking, Mills serves as Vice Chancellor for Global Programs and University Life at NYU; she is also the Lisa Ellen Goldberg Professor. Her research focuses on innovations in domestic violence treatment and is funded by the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Justice. Her work has been published by Princeton University Press, Basic Books, and Cornell and Harvard Law Reviews, and in *USA Today* and the *Los Angeles Times*. She has been a blogger for *Psychology Today* and has been featured in *The New York Times Magazine*, *People*, *Harper's & Queen*, and *Glamour*. She also appeared twice on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, among other television appearances, including *The O'Reilly Factor*.

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Production Credits

DIRECTOR

Linda G. Mills

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Liz Swados

PRODUCER +

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Brock Johnson

EDITOR

Chriz Naing

COMPOSER

Matthew Marsh

FIRST AD + ASSISTANT EDITOR

Yannick Trapman O'Brien

CAMERA OPERATOR +

LIGHTING

Vera Sjunnessen

MARKETING + CREATIVE

Erin Callihan

Guido Ditto

STORY CONSULTANTS

Preston Martin

Zoe Ragouzeos

ASSISTANT LIGHTING

Rachel Pegram

ASSISTANT CAMERA

Miranda Sherman

PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS

Alice Bodon

Isabelle Galet-Leland

AUDIO POST-PRODUCTION

FACILITY

Creative Audio

IN-HOUSE PRODUCER,

POST-PRODUCTION SOUND

Holly Grace

SOUND DESIGN

Jacques Boulanger

COLOR FACILITY

Creative Video Post

COLORIST

Verne Mattson

FEATURING

Andrew Bridges

Hayes Callaway

Finn Cutler

Andre Goddard

Melanie Herrera

Delia Kempf

Angel Lin

Stephen Mark

David Merino

Dara Orland

Yianni Papadimos

Rachel Pegram

Angela Sclafani

Tatiana Wechsler

REALITY SHOW DIRECTOR

Preston Martin

REALITY SHOW AD +

CHOREOGRAPHER

Gerianne Perez

REALITY SHOW MUSICAL

DIRECTOR

Matthew Marsh

REALITY SHOW

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER

Franklin Swan

REALITY SHOW PRODUCTION

SUPERVISOR

Michael Ulrich

REALITY SHOW DRUMMER

Dillon Treacy

REALITY SHOW ASSISTANT

STAGE MANAGER

Meg Whitehurst

NYU AVP FOR STUDENT

MENTAL HEALTH + REALITY

SHOW PRODUCER

Zoe Ragouzeos



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