

Reading Group Guide

- In Maggie's youth, she is cautioned by her father against being too fat or funny. Considering the confident swagger and commercial success of such young female performers today as Lena Dunham and Amy Schumer, is it a more acceptable time for women to relax their standards on behavior and body type? Has society relaxed its standards to accommodate? If so, how? How do men feel about women who act and look in ways that are outside the "norm"?
- Do you think Maggie should have probed more into John's background before she married him? When entering a relationship, how extensively should one investigate a potential partner's history? Given that Maggie and John's encounter was before smartphones, how has today's technology altered this prospect? Are there hazards of online dating? What are they? And finally, how well do any of us know our significant others? Is complete transparency always the goal?

- What do you think of John? Should he have been honest with Maggie about having slept with men when she asked? As someone who had committed his professional life to exposing the truth about others, why do you think he steadfastly covered up the truth about himself? Do you empathize with him for not being honest about it at the time?
- Why do you think John falsely accused Maggie in the hospital? Why do you think he didn't communicate with her during his illness, when he appeared to be able to do so with others?
- Do you feel Maggie's anger at John during his illness was warranted? Was she warranted in ceasing to live and care for him full-time, during the nine months he lived after his diagnosis?
- Was Maggie's feeling of isolation due to the disease that killed her husband legitimate? Could she have done a better job of finding women like her? Do you know—or have you known—any women or mothers affected by AIDS through marriage? If so, how did they handle the situation?
- What do you consider the single biggest challenge Maggie faced during her husband's illness?
- Do you think Maggie was right in telling her children the truth of how their father died when they entered school at age five? How honest should we be, or can we be, with our children about situations in our lives that may affect them?
- After John's death, Maggie chose a partner, Dave, with the welfare of her children in mind. What are the challenges a parent faces in bringing a stepparent into the family?

- In her relationship, Maggie is uncomfortable about being the primary breadwinner while Dave serves as “Mr. Mom.” Raised by a mother who worked, Maggie takes pride in being a working mother, yet also feels embittered about having to support the man in her life—a feeling reinforced during her early morning commute, where she is surrounded by men while the wives stay home. What do you think of this feeling? Is it more applicable to another time? What factors in Maggie’s life may have exacerbated this feeling?
- While still a young mother, Maggie is expected to care for John. Eventually, on top of her job, she becomes responsible for caring for her elderly parents, as well as her older brother. Discuss the expectations of society on women today, which often include financially supporting and caring for family members of separate generations. Should more help be provided for working women by their employers or by government? Is this happening already?
- Maggie was wary of the stigma of AIDS until her children graduated from high school, some fifteen years after John died. By then, major medical strides had been made in treating and managing the disease, as well as in society’s acceptance of it. Was Maggie’s prolonged wariness of this stigma warranted?
- What do you feel had the greatest impact in allowing Maggie to release her anger and reconsider John and how he died? Was it her children’s observations at their respective college graduations? Her awakening to the changing world around her? The break she took from Dave and her suburban life to focus

on herself? When faced with the need for change in one's life, if one is unable to afford the time and expense to break away, how else might it be achieved?

- Attitudes toward homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgender lifestyles are changing in many parts of the world. Could you accept your children embracing a transgender lifestyle? How best can we communicate that situation to others?
- Increasingly, celebrities are publicly sharing their sexuality and lifestyle choices. How do you feel about this? How does it affect us—and our children?
- Maggie is compelled to reveal the truth about how John died, in part because she does not want to perpetuate a history of family secrets. Is her concern warranted? How might we be affected by secrets kept in families? Are there family secrets that might be legitimate to keep? What do we do when there's a family secret we want to reveal, but others in the family disagree?
- Maggie believes in being honest, and moreover, that there is a “right time” to be so. Do you agree? When should we keep a secret, and when is the right time to share it?
- Maggie doesn't believe she'll marry again. Do you think this is a result of the traumatic result of her marriage to John? How important is it for her to be married to Dave, now that the children are grown? In a time of newfound marriage equality, has the importance of marriage intensified in people's eyes?