



A ROOM FULL OF  
**MEN**



HEARTLAND  
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**A FILM ABOUT STOPPING VIOLENCE TOWARD WOMEN**





# A ROOM FULL OF **MEN**

Running Time: 48 Minutes

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## **DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**A FILM ABOUT STOPPING VIOLENCE TOWARD WOMEN**



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## ABOUT THE FILM

- 2 Male violence toward women is nothing new. Authority of men over women - and the rights of men to take action to enforce their authority - have been approved for centuries by civil and religious authorities world wide. In ancient Rome, a man had the legal right to kill his wife; in medieval times, the Church considered wife beating a means of "cleansing the body and soul" of a disobedient woman. Eighteenth century English law stated that a man could legally beat his wife as long as the stick he used was no thicker than an average man's thumb - the "rule of thumb". While legal and social support for male violence is less blatant that it once was, the abuse of women goes on. Linda Macleod (1980) states that one in ten women experiences violence at the hands of her partner.

*A Room Full of Men* is a film about male violence toward women and about men who are struggling to understand and change their violent behaviour. The first part of the film examines the dimensions of abuse and its roots in values and beliefs which promote and sustain the authority of men over women. The second part focuses on men who are participating in a program to help them stop their physical and verbal violence toward their wives or partners. These men are working to change the belief systems which underly their desire to control the behaviour of the women who share their lives.

## SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

- community groups concerned about violence toward women
- participants in programs for battered women and programs for men who are violent
- students in university and senior secondary classes in sociology, social work, psychology, social studies, women's studies, human justice, medicine or law
- professionals in family and community services, the health care and justice systems, and the clergy

## PREPARING TO SCREEN THE FILM

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- Be sure that you have seen the film. What are your reactions to it? What questions does it raise in your mind? How do you feel about discussing the issues raised in the film?
  - Know your audience. How much information do you expect your audience to have about male violence toward women? Why did they come to see the film? Are they likely to be sympathetic? Hostile? Defensive? What questions will they likely ask? Can you expect an open discussion of the issue? Remember that in every audience there will likely be women who are being hurt and/or men who are violent toward women.
  - Become familiar with community resources. After seeing the film, your audience may want to know what resources exist in their community to help them or about organizations or groups which they could join to help promote change. The *Resources* and *Bibliography* sections of this Discussion Guide are a beginning; you may freely copy and distribute any part of the Guide.
  - Before screening the film, you may want to ask the audience to complete the "True or False" questionnaire on page 11. This "quiz" focuses on some common myths and realities about violence toward women and may help foster discussion after the film is shown.



# THE WAY THINGS ARE

The first part of *A Room Full of Men* discusses dimensions of violence against women and attempts to place the issue of wife battering in a broader perspective.

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## THE CONTINUUM OF VIOLENCE

When wife battering occurs, we tend to see these cases as rare and extreme-something "normal people" don't become involved in. Wife battering is better seen, however, as one end of a continuum of male authority over, and violence against, women. Women experience the climate of social control in many ways: sexist language, sexist jokes, and sexual harrassment are part of the everyday experience of women's working, social and home lives. Women of all ages and every social group experience rape, sexual abuse and date rape. In the home, women may suffer verbal and psychological abuse in the form of belittling, insults and constant criticism. Their partners may withhold or monopolize financial or other resources. Physical violence ranges from pushes, slaps or punches to broken bones, knife wounds, and death.

The chart on pages 12 and 13 illustrates the range of behaviours which men use to hold the women they live with under what might well be called a "reign of terror".

## THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

In the early 1970's, psychologist Lenore Walker first described a process which she called the "Cycle of Violence". As the concept is adapted in *A Room Full of Men*, the Cycle consists of three phases, starting with the violent incident. A short period of remorse marks the transition to Phase 2 - the "Hearts and Flowers" phase. In this phase,

- 6 the man attempts through gifts, promises of change, and romance, to convince his partner that he is not really a violent person.

Once she shows evidence of believing her partner's version of himself, Phase 3 - the "Carping" phase - begins. In this phase, the man constantly criticizes her and puts her down. The purpose of "Carping" is to turn her into an object or thing, so that he can feel justified in using violence to enforce his authority over her.

The film makes five points about the Cycle of Violence:

1. The Cycle has intent - the man wishes to establish his authority over his partner.
2. The Cycle won't stop until the man stops it.
3. The Cycle increases in frequency, intensity and volume.
4. The Cycle gets so fast that the Hearts and Flowers phase may disappear.
5. Unless the man stops it, the Cycle ends in suicide, homicide or both.

# THE STRUGGLE FOR CHANGE

## PROGRAMS FOR MEN WHO ARE VIOLENT

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Like sexual harrassment and rape, violence toward women in the home results from male oppression, fear and even hatred of women. Violent men often adhere to traditional sex role attitudes, have poor communication skills and poor impulse control. A focus on "anger control" has been important in many programs for violent men.

Researchers such as Edward Gondolf argue, however, that men's programs with an anger control focus are not the complete answer to male violence in the home. They contend that many participants in anger control programs may simply learn to manipulate their partners in more "socially acceptable" ways and that anger is an excuse for violent men to deny responsibility for their violence and to blame the victim (i.e., "she made me angry; she made me do it."). Anger and violence are considered to be tools men use to maintain power in their relationships.

Programs such as *Emerge* and *Manalive* (United States) and Saskatoon's *Alternatives* program stress that the behaviour of violent men is part of a socially-accepted male-role stereotype and that, if this stereotype is not dealt with first, men's violence will not be eliminated. These programs provide opportunities for men to change their belief systems and to stop their own violence. Group members then pass this new belief system on to other men (new group members) and to the community at large by advocating a community support system that encourages and sustains the new belief system and behaviour.

Some women's groups may be wary of programs for violent men because they may take focus away from services for women, such as shelters. It is important to remember

- 8 that the purpose of both women's and men's programs is to stop violence against women. Program staff are often involved with both types of service, and stress cooperation and mutual involvement.

## AFTER THE FILM

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After viewing the film, audiences may have a number of questions about programs for men who are violent to their partners. This information may be useful in a post-screening discussion.

1. **If everyone is exposed to the attitudes and beliefs which cause wife battering, why aren't all men physically violent?**

Researchers and workers vary in their explanations, or at least in the emphasis which they give to different explanations. Some describe men who are physically violent as the "enforcers" of the belief system which supports male dominance. When some men act as an example or threat, not all men need to be physically violent to keep their partners "in line".

Some studies have identified patterns in personal characteristics and family background which influence the likelihood of an individual man choosing to be physically violent.

Despite personal history or prevailing societal attitudes, some men can and do adopt non-violent beliefs and learn non-violent behaviours. A central message of *A Room Full of Men* is that men can take responsibility for their own attitudes and behaviours, and change them.

2. **Are the men interviewed in the film typical of men who are violent? Are they typical of those who participate in men's programs?**

Men from all backgrounds and of all ages participate in programs. Some attend of their own accord, and some are referred from other sources, including the courts.

- 10    3. Do programs for men who are violent save the marriages of the participants? Do their wives usually go back to them?**

Not always - each situation is different. Some women feel that the abuse they have experienced has altered their feelings too greatly and they cannot return. The programs provide an opportunity for men to change their attitudes and behaviours so they can respect their partner's decision (either to stay or leave) and can care for and respect themselves, whether they are with their partner or not.

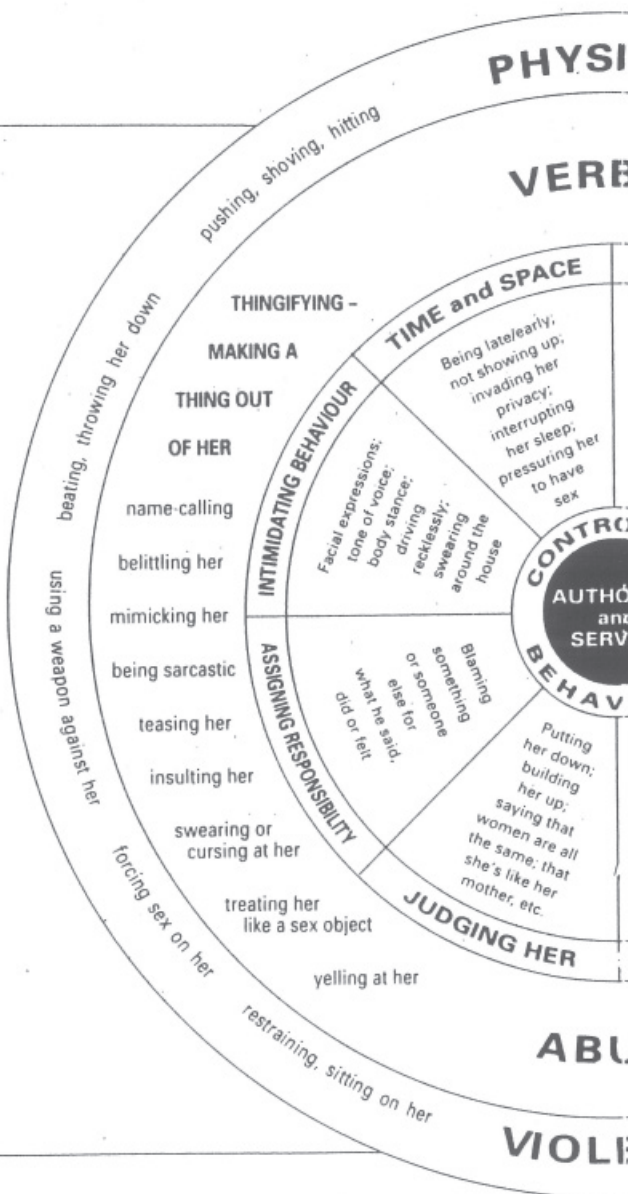
# VIOLENCE TOWARD WOMEN

## A QUIZ

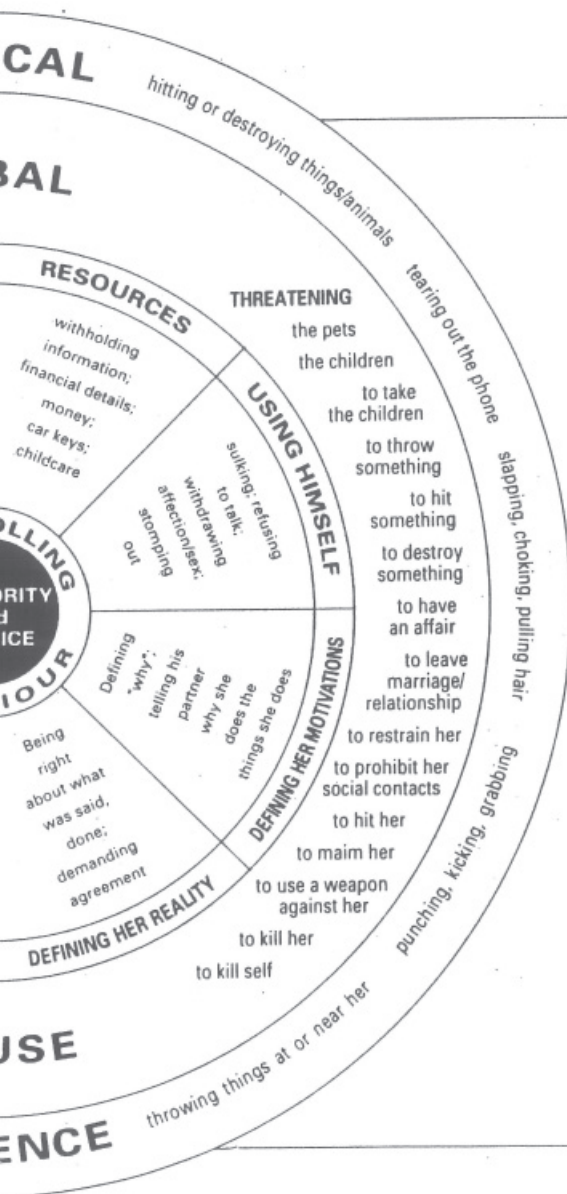
11

Are the following statements True or False?

1. Men who are violent toward women are not loving partners.
2. Giving a violent man a "taste of his own medicine" will stop his violence.
3. Men who are violent to their partners are violent to other people as well.
4. Men are not violent to their pregnant partners.
5. Alcohol and/or drugs cause men to be violent.
6. Non-physical (verbal or emotional) abuse is less harmful than physical assault.
7. Women are often violent to their partners.
8. Once a violent man, always a violent man.
9. Battering occurs in all classes of society.
10. Battering is a private matter; the sanctity of the family should be preserved.
11. Battering is not simply an urban problem.
12. Battering rarely results in severe injuries to women.







# QUIZ ANSWERS AND DISCUSSION INFORMATION

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## ANSWERS

1. False 2. False 3. False 4. False 5. False 6. False  
7. False 8. False 9. True 10. False 11. True 12. False

## MYTHS AND REALITIES

1. **Myth:** Violent men are not loving partners

**Reality:** The man may be extremely loving and affectionate at times. This behaviour often serves to keep the woman in a violent relationship.

2. **Myth:** Giving a man a "taste of his own medicine" will stop his violence.

**Reality:** Violence does not stop violence; it only generates more. However, men need to know that their behaviour is unacceptable. Arresting and prosecuting them helps in some cases to reduce repeat offences.

3. **Myth:** Men who are violent to their partners are violent to other people as well.

**Reality:** Men who see their partners as their property and who feel that have the authority to control them do not necessarily feel the same way about others, and are not necessarily violent toward others. A man may be quiet and non-violent to everyone except his partner, leading outsiders to discount the woman's assertion that he is violent to her.

4. **Myth:** Men are not violent to their pregnant partners.

**Reality:** Violence often begins or becomes more severe during pregnancy.

5. **Myth:** Drugs and alcohol cause violence.

**Reality:** Although substance abuse and violence are often associated, there is no evidence that it causes violence. Violent men may use drugs or alcohol as an excuse.

6. **Myth:** Non-physical abuse is less harmful than physical assault.

**Reality:** Although the scars of non-physical abuse may not be visible, they are present and are often longer lasting and harder to heal than physical injuries.

7. **Myth:** Women are often violent to their partners.

**Reality:** Violence by women is usually done in self-defence, often after many years of abuse by their partner.

8. **Myth:** Once a violent man, always a violent man.

**Reality:** When men recognize their violent behaviour and take full responsibility for it, they can change.

- 16 9. **Myth:** Battering occurs mostly in the "lower classes"

**Reality:** Battering occurs in all classes of society. Those who are affluent are less likely to report the violence or to use public services. In affluent families, violence is easier to hide.

10. **Myth:** Battering is a private matter.

**Reality:** Battering is assault and assault is a crime, whether it occurs inside or outside the home. When battering is treated as a private matter, others are reluctant to intervene and the problem is perpetuated.

11. **Myth:** Battering is an urban problem.

**Reality:** Battering is as common in rural areas as in cities. It is often much more difficult for rural women to get to a place of safety.

12. **Myth:** Beatings by violent spouses are rarely severe.

**Reality:** In about one-third of cases, medical treatment is required. Injuries include bruises, lacerations, fractures, dislocations, burns and scalds. Women have been attacked with fists, boots, broken bottles, knives, razors, belts and guns.

## RESOURCES

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Programs for abused women and for men who are violent are available in many communities throughout Canada and the United States. Information and help can be obtained through local crisis lines, mental health services, your department or ministry of Social Services, the police, the emergency department of your local hospital, or your minister, priest or rabbi. In Canada, information about violence against women can be obtained through:

### **National Clearinghouse on Family Violence**

**Health and Welfare Canada**

**Brooke Claxton Building, 7th Floor**

**Tunney's Pasture**

**Ottawa, Ontario**

**K1A 1B5**

Telephone: (613) 957-2938 or 1-800-267-1291 (toll-free)

In the United States, contact:

### **Clearinghouse on Family Violence**

**P.O. Box 1182**

**Washington, D.C. 20013**

Telephone: (703) 821-2086

For more information about the *Alternatives* program, write:

### **Alternatives Program**

**Saskatoon Mental Health Clinic**

**4th Floor, Birks Building**

**165-3rd Avenue South**

**Saskatoon, Saskatchewan**

**S7K 1L8**

Telephone: (306) 933-7693

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Alberta Social Services and Community Health. *Breaking the Pattern: How Alberta Communities Can Help Assaulted Women and Their Families*. Edmonton: Office for the Prevention of Family Violence, 1985.

An excellent resource for community groups.

Anglican Church of Canada. *Violence Against Women*. Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1987.

This book examines the church's perceptions about power relations and violence against women, and offers some proposals for change.

Church Council on Justice and Corrections and the Canadian Council on Social Development. *Family Violence in a Patriarchal Culture*. Ottawa, 1988.

Dobash, R.E. and R. Dobash. *Violence Against Wives*. New York: The Free Press, 1979.

The authors have done a great deal of work in this area. This book is very readable and includes interviews with women who describe their experiences.

Fortune, Marie M. *Keeping the Faith: Questions and Answers for the Abused Woman*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987.

A good (and affordable) resource for women's programs.

Kelly, L. *Surviving Sexual Violence* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988. 19

This book includes a very good discussion of the continuum of violence against women.

Langley, R. and R.C. Levy. *Wife Beating: The Silent Crisis*. New York: Dutton, 1977.

Written in a popular style and directed at a wide audience, this book provides both case histories and research information on wife battering.

MacLeod, Linda. *Wife Battering in Canada: The Vicious Cycle*. Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1980.

MacLeod, Linda. *Battered But Not Beaten... Preventing Wife Battering in Canada*, 1987.

In the second of these well-known books, MacLeod revises her estimate of women who have experienced violence from one in ten to one in eight.

Martin, D. *Battered Wives* San Francisco: Volcano Press, 1981.

Walker, L. *The Battered Woman Syndrome*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1984.

- 20 Yllo, K. and M. Bograd. *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse*. California: Sage, 1988.

This book compiles several papers on wife abuse and programs for men who are violent, all written from a feminist perspective and taking into account concerns of women's organizations.

### ON MALE-ROLE STEREOTYPES

David, D. and R. Brannon, Editors. *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority*. Massachusetts: Addison-Welsey, 1976.

Doyle, J. *The Male Experience*. Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Publishers, 1983.

Feigen-Fasteau, M. *The Male Machine*. New York: Delta, 1975.

Kaufman, Michael, Editor. *Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change*. Toronto and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987

Pleck, J. and J. Sawyer. *Men and Masculinity*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974.

All these books examine different male-role stereotypes, how men are socialized into these and how these stereotypes lead to particular forms of behaviour. The authors suggest ways that male-role stereotypes can be rejected and behaviours changed.



- Cline, S. and D. Spender. *Reflecting Men at Twice Their Natural Size*. Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd, 1987. 21

This book examine's women's emotional labour for men, including both women's and men's reactions to women who will not conform with the traditional power structure in relations between the sexes.

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- Gondolf, E. *Research on Men Who Batter*. Florida: Human Services Institute, Inc., 1988

- Roy, M. *The Abusive Partner*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1982.

These books examine the characteristics and attitudes of men who batter and the historical background of male violence against women. They suggest new approaches to the treatment of violent men.

- Gondolf, E. *Man Against Woman: What Every Woman Should Know About Violent Men*. Pennsylvania: Tab Books, 1989.

Written in a simple, straightforward style, this book explains reasons for violence and how to detect danger. Women are assured that the responsibility for violence rests with the violent man. The prospects for change in an

- 22 abusive partner are also discussed. This work contains an excellent annotated bibliography.

Gondolf, E. and D.M. Russell. *Man to Man: A Guide for Men in Abusive Relationships*. Florida: Human Services Institute, Inc., 1987

Sinclair, H. *Prospectus and Manual for Manalive Training Programs*. California, 1985.

Sinclair outlines the theory, objectives and practices of the Manalive program.

*A Room Full of Men : A Film About Stopping Violence Toward Women* 23

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MILLION PLEASURES

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## NOTES

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