

Teaching Domestic Violence

Director's Note

I've been thinking about the educational value of this film from the very beginning of the project -- the film was conceived, shot and put together with educational audiences very much in mind.

"Power and Control" has two main strands: the first, the story of a family and the second an account of how domestic violence policy has evolved over the past 30 years. The personal narrative follows Kim Mosher and her three daughters in Duluth, MN as they struggle to find a new life away from Josh, Kim's abusive husband. Our second strand introduces the visionary activists who pushed for a revolution in domestic violence policy in the early 1980s (also beginning in Duluth) and traces the development of the "Duluth Model" in the subsequent years. We take a particularly close look at DV in law enforcement and health care.

This site also offers more than 40 video interview excerpts, almost all with people who also appear in the film. The interviews and other resources on the site offer a focal point for teaching, discussion, assignment and further research.

My process in making a film seems to start with an interest in an issue, preferably a complex and controversial one. Domestic violence is a fundamental social ill, something that strongly affects family life and how children grow up, and it seemed to me that an updated, comprehensive film was really needed. Public awareness had reached a point where people don't need to be convinced that domestic violence is bad and pervasive, and I sensed that it was time to make a film that would be more objective than previous advocacy films. Unlike earlier documentaries, "Power and Control" includes interviews with batterers, and it also includes interviews with academics and others who are critical of the mainstream viewpoint of the advocacy community.

I was amazed by many of the people I met during production, and I hope you're amazed too. Kim and her three daughters made the film possible. Kim is a courageous, smart, talented woman. She's bound to prevail. Ellen Pence and Michael Paymar, co-founders of the Duluth program and co-creators of the Power and Control wheel, are the kind of heroes that make me want to make films. It's an honor to have made the film at around the same time that their work is celebrating its 30th anniversary.

The movie runs about 64 minutes. Our educational edition runs 50 minutes, and has been trimmed of a few moments of profanity and sexual content that might be inappropriate for middle school classes. I encourage you to use the whole film, and if necessary for class time considerations, show the first 30 minutes one day, the rest the next. The breakpoint come right in the middle of Kim's journey, so it's a logical stopping point.

Please feel free to contact me for any help with teaching with the film. Thanks for your support and interest.

Peter Cohn
Director/Producer
Hillcrest Films

What the film is about

In the summer of 2008, Kim Mosher, 30, packed her daughters into her PT Cruiser and left her abusive husband. She had sworn she would never do it; she would hang on to the marriage at any cost. But now that her husband was yelling at the kids and hitting them, there was no choice. So she drove away from 10 years of emotional and physical abuse in her home in Wabasha, MN and headed for Duluth.

Kim was lucky enough to find a welcoming embrace at the Safe Haven battered women's shelter, where she recovered from the difficult final weeks leading up to her escape. Her strength and inner resources were instantly apparent

Kim's stoic Minnesota grit and sense of humor carry her through. Life in the shelter isn't easy. Holding down a job at McDonalds job, shuttling her daughters to day care and searching for housing pose a daunting challenge. Yet Kim still somehow finds the time to bond with her sister domestic violence victims, forming friendships that will last beyond her stay at Safe Haven. Then Kim faces another difficult test — to go back to the house she shared with her husband, one last time. Driving three hours with her oldest daughter Dakotah in the back seat, Kim professes little fear of her husband or her in-laws, who live next door.

Twenty-four hours later, Kim pulls up in front of her new home in West Duluth, finally safe. Kim's journey is at the heart of "Power and Control." Her story serves as a powerful reminder of progress we've made — and of the major reforms still needed in policing, medical care, advocacy and in the fundamental cultural and social institutions that perpetuate the cycle.

And there's a final twist to the story. Several months after we thought we had finished filming, Kim called to report that she had gotten back with her husband. We returned to film Kim, her husband Josh and the three girls. Problems and tension had already emerged. The next step in Kim's journey is now uncertain. Her story has no clean and simple ending.

Duluth, and the influential ideas that emanated from the rugged port city are the film's second "character." In the early 1980s, social activists Ellen Pence and Michael Paymar founded the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, which this year celebrate its 30th anniversary. They became the leading innovators of domestic violence policy — successfully implementing a mandatory arrest policy, a "coordinated community response" to domestic violence and a treatment program for batterers. They also developed the "Power and Control" wheel, the graphic representation of domestic violence relationships that has been translated into 40 languages and has become the ubiquitous symbol of the battered women's movement. We interview Pence and Paymar, profiling Pence, a charismatic social activist who is still on the front line of the domestic violence movement. From this, the film's second strand emerges, a dynamic, fast paced history of the battered women's movement, an overview of the "Duluth Model," mandatory arrest as it's practiced by cops on the beat, a look at issues around domestic violence and health care providers, and a frank portrayal of batterers in a DAIP men's group.

Not surprisingly, 30 years after its inception the Duluth model faces many critics. The debate about the future of domestic violence policy forms the film's third major strand. Within the battered women's movement, provocative new questions are being asked. Founders, many still in leadership positions, question if the idea of sisterhood and the commitment to social change has been squashed by bureaucracy..

On the outside, a new "post-feminist" viewpoint challenges the movement's sacred principles. For advocates, the viewpoint represents a dangerous backlash, raising the prospect of undoing the achievements of the past decades.

Somewhere within this passionately contentious debate, there is a consensus emerging that certain new approaches may be worth trying. Within the battered women's movement, innovators are experimenting with "restorative justice" and other methods. Others are pressing for institutional change aimed at prevention — in the schools, the workplace, religious institutions and the medical system.

Domestic Violence Issues for Class Discussion

Underlying Cause of Domestic Violence: Patriarchal Culture?

In the early 1980s, Ellen Pence, Michael Paymar and other activists in Duluth, MN developed an approach to domestic violence based on the idea that it is the patriarchal values of our society that cause so many men to batter women. In their view, men batter women because men feel a sense of entitlement to power and control over women, a sense of entitlement that is inextricably connected with a range of abusive tactics ultimately derived from violence. Pence, Paymar and their colleagues based their concepts on what they heard from battered women, rather than beginning from an abstract theoretical perspective. Their "wheel of Power and Control" has become a worldwide symbol of domestic violence, a tool that can be found in any shelter anywhere in the world.

Some academics criticize the patriarchal model. They argue that cultural values don't cause men to hit women -- they emphasize the role of individual psychology and the impact of socioeconomic factors such as poverty and education. Many studies have appeared in academic journals looking at the causes of domestic violence and at the effectiveness of programs, such as batterer intervention groups. Some controversial studies have presented evidence suggesting that women tend to initiate domestic violence just as frequently as men. Men's rights groups have formed in many states, and these groups lobby against domestic violence policies and programs, particularly the Violence Against Women Act of 1994.

Key question: Is domestic violence caused by the patriarchal values of our culture, or is domestic violence caused by individual socioeconomic and/or psychological factors (*e.g.* substance abuse, mental illness, unemployment)?

Key question: Based on your personal observations, what is the difference between men's violence against women and women's violence against men? Do men initiate all or most violence in a relationship? Do women imitate violence, or do most women resort to violence only in self defense?

Criminalization of Domestic Violence -- Does Arrest Solve the Problem?

Before the 1970s, domestic violence was not considered a crime. It was considered a private family matter, largely beyond the scope of police intervention, except in the most serious cases. The Duluth founders and other battered women's activists first focused on the legal system as a way to reform society's response to domestic violence. Duluth was one of the first jurisdictions to experiment with "mandatory arrest," a policy that required police officers to make an arrest in certain predefined situations where domestic violence incidents occurred. Today mandatory arrest policies apply in most jurisdictions, and the arrest rate for domestic violence crimes has remained at much higher levels than before mandatory arrest.

Proponents of mandatory arrest claim the policies have been a great success, pointing to sharp reductions in the incident rate of domestic violence crimes over the past 30 years. Critics allege that criminalization does not address the causes of domestic violence, that it has been discriminatory against African Americans because police tend to arrest black suspects more frequently, and that mandatory arrest has the unintended consequence of deterring spouses from reporting abusive spouses. Some critics advocate alternative approaches, such as restorative justice, as an alternative to arrest and prosecution.

Key question: Should the police be required to arrest a perpetrator of domestic violence?

Kim's Choice: To Stay with Josh, or to Leave?

A surprising development at the end of the film has Kim's reconciling with Josh and Josh's moving back into the new house with his family. Although it's a sensitive topic, most domestic violence advocates would tend to encourage a survivor of battering to end an abusive relationship and move on. Critics of this advocacy position argue that it would be better help families stay together, and further argue that since most women end up staying in relationships, focusing on how to do that better would be more socially useful.

Key question: Why do you think Kim really got back together with Josh? Is she making a mistake?

The state of feminism and the battered women's movement

The battered women's movement has its roots in the social activism and feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. In the years since, the status of women has changed, with tangible changes in women's cultural, social and economic status. Is the perspective of the battered women's movement still relevant today? Is domestic violence a dated issue? Some have noted that troubling increases in teen dating violence, and changes in cultural perceptions of women, show that the world is moving away from the values and viewpoints shaped 30 years or more ago.

Key question: What is the meaning of "feminism" in today's society? Is it an outmoded concern from 30 years ago, or is the role of women still an issue requiring social and political change?

Suggested Activities

Class Debate

The core question in domestic violence studies is, of course: what causes domestic violence? It's a hugely important question, and one that connects to some of the most fundamental questions in the social sciences. In its most basic asking, the question boils down to: What shapes human behavior? Is it culture? Is it society (material conditions, social structure)? Is it psychology? Or is it all genetic? A class debate on domestic violence can cover some of these deep questions, and at the same time draw on the academic literature to offer conflicting opinions on the role of patriarchal cultural values versus sociological and psychological causation.

Assignments

Domestic violence studies offer a range of interesting topics for research papers. In the policy area, students can research the effectiveness of key domestic violence policies, including mandatory arrest, no drop prosecution and batterer intervention programs. Pros and cons exists on both sides, putting students in a position of having to decide which policies they would favor. The battered women's movement offers an excellent opportunity of historical research -- it's a social movement that has been explored far less than the civil rights movement, for example, and one where many of the key players are still available for interviews or oral histories.

Power and Control: Domestic Violence in America: Chapter Summaries

Chapter start times are in parenthesis.

Introduction (00:00)

An impressionistic overview of domestic violence in America. A woman sits on her door step reflecting on abuse. Police responding to domestics. Media reports on the Rihanna case and the OJ trial. Most domestic violence never makes the news. Introducing the title: behind domestic violence is the dynamic of power and control.

Kim (3:32)

Introduce Duluth, MN, a lakeside city. Kim Mosher has taken refuge in the Safe Haven women's shelter, along with her daughters Rebekah, Dakotah and Debra. After several years of abuse, Kim left her husband after he was violent toward the girls.

Josh (5:30)

An interview with Kim's husband, Josh. "It was hard to come back to an empty house."

Safe Haven (5:58)

An advocate speaks to a victim on the phone. Shelter director explains policy. Women stay as long as six months, even longer. Remy: wanted to come the first time she was hit, but her boyfriend convinced her not to. Vashawn: recalls being hit with a phone book. Kids go off to school on a yellow bus.

Kim's Struggle (7:33)

Kim: "I felt like I was nothing, I was worthless. It's getting better." At McDonald's where she's working. Advocate explains how hard it is for women to leave, when economic realities hit and the abuser pleads.

The Duluth Model (9:35)

Activists Ellen Pence and Michael Paymar recount how they developed the "Duluth Model" in the early 1980s. They approached the police and other officials shortly after a gruesome incident, when an abused woman shot her abuser. The police, courts and other institutions agreed to participate in an experimental domestic violence policy. Linda Mills, of NYU, observes that the impact of domestic violence activists has been "revolutionary."

Kim's Childhood (12:02)

Kim experienced abuse from a young age. Her father abused Kim and her five sisters. She doesn't want her girls to go through the same thing.

Josh on the Girls (13:17)

He says he "probably paddled the girls harder than I should have." He also was abused as a child.

Shelter Children (13:46)

Two children's advocates talk about kids in the shelter. The children are often violent and scared. "They come from a domestic violence situation and they believe that's a 'normal' way to behave."

Power and Control (15:07)

Advocate explains wheel of power and control to shelter residents. It was developed in Duluth, by victims of domestic violence. Ellen Pence and Michael Paymar talk about wheel's evolution.

Kim's Perspective (16:41)

She sees many ways in which Josh exercised power and control.

Josh and Control (18:07)

Josh says he grew up angry --- the result of sexual and physical abuse. "I had no control of everything around my life, and there was something I had control over, at home."

Ellen Pence (18:35)

Pence recalls her beginnings in the battered women's movement. "In our culture, we have it engrained very deeply, that women do not get to walk out of relationships that are abusive to them."

Police (21:17)

Duluth MN Officers intervene in a domestic dispute. Officer says "Physical domestic calls are probably one of the few kind of calls that are hard to shake off when you leave."

Duluth has unusually detailed policies and procedures. Duluth was one of the nation's first jurisdictions to implement a "mandatory arrest" policy -- a policy which has become a standard through the US and also abroad. Changes in the criminal justice system culminated in the passage of the Violence Against Women Act in 1994.

Health Care (26:08)

Kim visits a friend from the shelter who is having surgery for back injuries caused by her husband. Kim recalls that she was hospitalized to deal with the psychological impact of abuse. An overview of key health issues related to domestic violence. Interview with Jacqueline Campbell, Johns Hopkins.

Kim: Ready to Go (27:52)

Kim and her daughters look at a townhouse that will soon be their new home. Kim feels stronger after her time in the shelter, and is ready to move on with her life.

Josh: Troubled (30:25)

After Kim left, Josh thought about suicide. He was admitted to a VA hospital for psychiatric treatment.

Batterer Intervention (31:18)

An important part of the "Duluth Model" is to require batterers to attend treatment programs designed to change attitudes towards women. A group of men meet in Duluth with a man and a woman facilitator.

Kim Leaves (34:34)

[**Erratum:** The year of Kim's departure from the shelter is inaccurately stated as 2009 in a title card in this chapter. The actual year was 2008)

Kim meets with an advocate as she prepares to leave the shelter. Kim and Dakotah drive to their old home, in Wabasha, MN to pick up their furniture and other belongings. They drive back to Duluth in a U-Haul and start unpacking.

Duluth's Critics (42:33)

Opposition to the Duluth Model has emerged. Activists in the men's rights movement are particularly vocal critics. In academia, a number of researchers have challenged some of the assumptions behind Duluth. Duluth critics are interviewed, including: Murray Straus (U of New Hampshire), Donald Dutton (U. of British Columbia), Richard Gelles (U. of PA), Linda Mills (NYU), and Erin Pizzey, (founder of an early shelter in London who has become a critic of mainstream domestic violence ideas).

Unexpected Development (48:01)

We see Kim and the girls having breakfast at home. Then we see Josh, and it becomes apparent that he has moved back in with them. Kim recalls that she was sick and in the hospital. Josh came to help with the girls, and that led to a reconciliation. Kim and Josh offer

their versions of how and why they go back together. We see more of their life in the new home with the girls.

The Struggles Continue (55:14)

Ellen Pence visits the St. Paul, MN police department, where she is working with officials to create a new domestic violence initiative, The Blueprint. Her visit takes place on the same day that a local officer was shot and killed while responding to a domestic call.

Pence reflects on the past 30 years, and speaks of the progress that still needs to be made.

Advocates now in Duluth speak of how the progress so far is "just a beginning."

A Sunny Day (58:09)

Kim, Josh and the girls enjoy a visit to a local park on a sunny day. A hopeful note, with undertones of uncertainty.

Sisterhood (1:00:06)

Duluth advocates and their supporters gather along the shore of Lake Superior to commemorate women and children who have been killed in domestic violence. Pence says that what's needed now in the movement is a sense of sisterhood.

Kim concludes by urging that no one submit to abuse.

EXTRA FEATURES

Interviews and their length in minutes in parenthesis.

Kim Mosher (1:38)

Kim says her feelings about herself have changed since she entered the shelter. Reflects on an incident when her husband tried to punch her.

Josh Mosher (4:33)

Josh talks about his difficult childhood. Moving around the country, being adopted. Abuse by adults. His deteriorating condition at home with Kim and his children. His version of what happened when Kim left.

Ellen Pence (5:36)

Pence's story of how power and control wheel was devised and discussion of the ideas behind the wheel. Batterers feel entitled to power and control in a relationship, which is different than simply wanting it. Violence shapes all the other tactics on the wheel.

Michael Paymar (5:02)

Paymar offers his recollections of how the power and control wheel was devised, discusses the specific tactics of battering and remembers how battered women responded when they saw the wheel for the first time.