

Discussion and Teaching Guide for the Film/Video “RUNNING IN HIGH HEELS”

Running in High Heels is a provocative film that raises questions about women’s ambitions and women’s ability to act as a team. The film allows audiences to see the simple reality of one young woman’s run for political office and at the same time offers opposing insights on a variety of women’s subjects from veterans of different sides of the woman’s advocacy spectrum. Beginning with the information that women are the majority of the population in the United States at fifty-two percent and limiting its scope to the behaviors over which women have direct control, the film was made to provoke discussion rather staunchly advocate one thesis.

This guide is divided into sections for various group uses. There are sections for Women’s and Gender Studies programs, English classes, Film and Communications programs, and Communities and Political organizations. The discussion suggestions are meant to assist those involved in considering their own views of power and especially how truly those views are realized in terms of action. Audience members are asked to reflect on any differences between what they do and what they say in regards to achieving equality for women.

1. Discussion Setting Suggestions
2. Group Dynamics
3. Discussion Questions divided by topic as follows:
 - Film and Communications**
 - Women’s and Gender Studies**
 - Women’s Public Voices (English & Literature)**
 - Questions for Political and Community Groups**
 - Generic Questions**
 - Questions on the Deleted Scenes on the DVD**
4. Discussion Closure

Please feel free to be in touch with the director, Maryann Breschard via her assistant Monica Reilly at m.reilly@maryannbreschard.com with any questions, comments, or suggestions based on your experience for improving the suggestions and discussion questions offered in this guide. What you have to say may very well help the next group or classroom of young women have a better, more thoughtful and productive experience. You, as a discussion leader, are on the frontlines of women’s advocacy.

I. Discussion Setting Suggestions

Running in High Heels may be discussed in a variety of settings. As the film has a run time of 90 minutes, it is best suited for an intense 2+ hour event in which the film can be viewed and discussed immediately afterward. Community screenings often include a panel discussion with local female political officials and candidates. University screenings are often followed by a panel discussion with visiting faculty of appropriate expertise.

In some classroom settings, the class will watch the film on one day and then review and discuss specific clips on another.

Please also note, if your situation does not allow for a 2 hour event, the film is also available in a 50 minute version.

II. Group Dynamics

A discussion of *Running in High Heels* can be a rich learning experience and it can also be an intense experience. Women's issues including sexual harassment, physical abuse, rape, reproductive rights, and discrimination often stir strong feelings and deeply held opinions and even though these issues are not fully explored in the film, they are part and parcel of the world of women's issues and typically inform group discussions.

In addition, the film presents a wide variety of viewpoints; it is inevitable that every audience member will find at least one viewpoint or behavior in the film with which they take exception. Because the film allows us to hear a variety of viewpoints, it affords an excellent opportunity for discussion, but beware to consider the emotional dynamics of the session(s).

Be sure that the group has a clear understanding of the time frame and purpose of the discussion. Be particularly clear about whether you will be discussing the film as a construct or the issues it raises or both. If this is not clarified, and if participants come with conflicting expectations, the resulting discussion may be frustrating for some of the group, as well as for you as discussion leader.

It may be helpful in some groups to establish some ground rules for the discussion, especially if you expect significant differences of belief and opinion. Be aware that your tone and approach as discussion leader will go a long way toward setting the atmosphere of the session. Guidelines such as these, which you invite all participants to adopt, may be useful:

- Be as open as you can about your own beliefs and remain respectful toward others who may hold differing beliefs.
- Listen actively and refrain from interrupting other participants.
- Speak in terms of your own ideas, beliefs, experiences, or feelings, rather than reacting to or criticizing others.
- Consider ways to encourage participation by all members of the discussion group and to avoid domination by a few vocal members. For example:
 - With a small group, for questions on which you would like to hear from everyone, go around the circle to give each person an opportunity to speak.
 - The instructor/facilitator may simply say, "I'd like to hear from some of the persons who have not said very much so far."

III. Discussion Questions

Discussions Questions are divided into four general categories for your convenience. Feel free to use any and all questions as you see fit.

- Film and Communications
- Women's and Gender Studies
- English & Literature (on the topic of women's voice in literature and film)
- Questions for Political and Community Groups
- Generic Questions
- Questions on the Deleted Scenes

Film and Communications Studies Questions

1. What problems or challenges of the documentary form are evidenced in the film?
2. After watching the film, which do you think is more important: that a documentary explore its subject as honestly and objectively as possible or that it provide an exciting story?
3. Is it more important that a filmmaker tell its audience what to think or get them to think for themselves? Does one approach make for a more satisfying film-going experience than the other? Should entertainment requirements supercede educational requirements or vice versa?
4. Must a convincing political film use elements of propaganda such as repetition, simplicity, euphemism, or sentiment? Does *Running in High Heels* employ any of these elements? Is it convincing? Is it meant to convince you of a particular theme or idea?
5. Do you think that the filmmaker, Maryann Breschard, would have been better off finding a subject for the narrative who was prettier or smarter or older or younger?
6. Do you think that the filmmaker would have been better off finding a subject who more likely to win?
7. What were the advantages for the filmmaker in casting this particular woman as the subject of the film? What were the disadvantages?
8. Does the filmmaker like her subject Emily? As evidenced by? Does a filmmaker need to like the subject in order for the audience to like them? Does a filmmaker need to protect a subject from audiences judgment or provide an obvious pre-judgment of the subject for the audience to follow?
9. What challenges or limits of shooting Cinema Verite are evidenced in this film?
10. What is one thing you would do differently if you were making this film?

Women's and Gender Studies Questions

1. The film does not explore sexual harassment, rape or spousal abuse. Will these problems be eradicated more quickly by focusing on these individual issues while men remain the majority of the government or by focusing on getting more women into positions of power where they may create legislation that aids in prevention and more strongly punishes offenders? Where does the issue of women's leadership rank in importance to the feminist agenda?
2. The dictionary definition of feminism is the "the principle of political and economic advancement of women."
 - a. If this is the case, why do some women who are for the political and economic advancement of women come off as anti-feminist?
 - b. Why do so many women who subscribe to the principles of feminism refuse to call themselves feminist?
3. There are no women of color in the film.
 - a. Should the filmmaker have included women of color?
 - b. Is eliminating racism fundamentally related to eliminating sexism?
 - c. Do the concerns of inter-sectionality keep women from focusing on using their majority status or is it the real cause for why women as a majority are not in power?
4. The former editor-in-chief of Ladies Home Journal describes how easily the media manipulates women. Is it a form of women-on-women violence when women in the media promote beauty, fashion, or sexually explicit material by using the concept of feminism in their pitch when their products haven't anything to do with political or economic advancement?
5. Is "femcha" a valid concept?
 - a. If so, is it limited to mothers judging other mothers?
 - b. What other forms of femcha are there?
 - c. Is there an especially feminist version of femcha (in which feminists judge other women by a certain standard of feminism)? If so, how much of a problem would such a thing be for the feminist advancement?
6. Eleanor Smeal of the Feminist Majority Foundation asserts that women need to form a critical mass. However, minority groups may also make gains by lobbying and attaining the support of those in power.
 - a. For women to achieve equality, is it more important for feminists to reach out to other women who aren't typically feminist or focus their work like a special interest group? Why?
 - b. Are feminists obligated to speak for and respect the interests of the widest group of women as possible?

7. In a competitive and free market economy, why should companies make efforts to include mentorship and financial training for women? What is the incentive?
8. Heidi Hartmann asserts in the film that women are often fragmented because they discern that their gender is not the “winning team” and as result can show a discernable lack of loyalty to each other.
 - a. Should women develop greater loyalty and stronger bonds with each other? Why or why not?
 - b. If so, how can you do that in your own life?
9. Phyllis Schlafly says that the feminism depicts women as victims.
 - a. True or false?
 - b. Is it necessary to emphasize the “victimhood” of women in order to rally them or are there other ways to keep women dedicated to their advancement as a group?
 - c. What are the positive and negative effects of a emphasis on women as victims?
 - d. Have feminists inadvertently devalued the role of the homemaker or only attempted to give value to other roles? Why do some homemakers from the “right” claim to feel devalued?
10. Heidi Hartmann states that over the last thirty years women have taken more control and responsibility for their own economic security. Where does economic equality rank in importance of feminist concerns?
11. The filmmaker asserts that leadership and economic are the answer for women. Will equal access to money and power lead to the lessening of other issues like sexual harassment, rape, and abuse or will the lessening of sexual harassment, rape, and abuse lead to equal access to money and power?
12. Reproductive rights are not mentioned in *Running in High Heels*. Considering that vast majority of men holding office do not initiate legislation that benefits and protects women, much less protects their right to abortion, should women support women candidates regardless of their stance on access to abortion in order to access gains in other areas?

Women's Public Voices (English & Literature Questions)

1. How would you compare the contemporary woman's struggle to find a public voice to the struggle of earlier women like Virginia Woolf for example?
2. If the voice of the women of Virginia Woolf's time were threatened by the "woman of the hearth", what woman threatens women's voice today?
3. How do women enforce upon other women the notion that their public voice or persona be pleasing?
 - a. Is it more important that a woman's voice be powerful or pleasing?
 - b. Where does "chick lit" fit into this?
4. After seeing the film, how can women best influence public debate?
5. What constitutes a "woman's issue"?
 - a. Is there a framework to which the definition should be limited when discussing "women's issues"?
6. In what way or ways is voting a part of women's public voice?
7. Has technology strengthened or weakened women's public voice?
8. What distinguishes women's public voices from men's voices?
 - a. What role does emotion play?
 - b. Sexuality?
 - c. Vanity?

Questions for Political & Community Groups

1. Will you change the way you vote now that you've seen *Running in High Heels*? Why or why not?
2. What can you do in your own life to foster more cooperation and support with the women you know?
 - a. In business?
 - b. In politics?
3. As Emily notes at her fundraiser, it is often difficult for candidates in local elections to get the public's attention (especially in Presidential or mid-Term election years).
 - a. Since women face greater challenges at the local level via primary challenges, etc., how does this lack of attention hurt women's political progress? What can be done?
 - b. In general, what are the drawbacks of the lack of attention paid to local politics?
4. In spite of the Gender Gap, the majority of candidates (Emily included) do not make concerted efforts to campaign on women's legislative and political needs.
 - a. How is it possible that in spite of women being the majority of the electorate, courting the women's vote is not the first priority of each and every candidate?
 - a. Could women benefit more from their majority status?
5. Stephen, the campaign manager, says that women have an indirect way of communicating when it comes to money, especially negotiating for it.
 - a. True or false?
 - b. How does this hurt or help them?
6. Sherrye Henry purports that women carry internal inhibitions about voting for other women and judge them more critically than they do male candidates.
 - a. True or false?
 - b.
7. Sherrye Henry says, "women don't generally think with their pocketbooks."
 - b. What are the disadvantages in not thinking with their pocketbooks?
 - c. In contrast, what do men gain by thinking with their pocketbooks?
8. Nancy Pfotenhauer (pronounced foe-tin-how-er) says that women are not discriminated against but rather have to accept that they have to make choices and that success is about trade-offs.
 - a. True or false?
 - b. Do women have fewer, as many, or more options when it comes to making choices in regards to success?

9. Myrna Blyth maintains that women are coerced by the media and its advertisers into pursuing an excessive standard of beauty.
 - a. What is a healthy standard of beauty?
 - b. Do you think that women are more vain now than they were in your mother or grandmother's day?
 - c. In regards to maintaining standards of beauty are women better off now than in your mother or grandmother's day?
 - d. How much time should a woman spend on hair, make-up, clothes, and other grooming everyday?

10. What does it mean when Phyllis Schlafly says that women "have to become the kind of woman who will attract a man" when it is pointed out that women outnumber men?
 - a. Is it acceptable for a woman to promote a society in which women will compete for men and a certain number of women will most be left of out?

11. How important is it for women's progress that women of privilege be inclusive rather than exclusive to women who have less?

12. Emily does not seek the support of women's groups while running for office.
 - a. Would it have made a substantial difference if she had made efforts to appeal to women?
 - b. Since she is a woman, would seeking the support of women in some sense have been the "right" thing to do?
 - c. Win or lose, do women change the debate and public agenda just by running?

Generic Questions

1. Do you think Emily represents the average woman running for office in terms of the level of her strategy as depicted in the film?
2. During the film both Maryann, the narrator and Emily are shown getting their hair cut.
 - d. What is Maryann implying about the importance of appearance by showing these scenes?
 - e. If women know they are held to impossible standards of beauty but try to meet them anyway, what are they doing?
 - f. Why do women judge each other in terms of beauty when such standards hurt themselves and other women?
3. Do some women mistake sexual power for worldly power?
 - a. Does the pursuit of sexual power slow women's achievement of economic power?
 - b. Will women automatically achieve sexual equality when they achieve financial and political equality?
4. When campaigning, Emily often wears casual clothes such as baseball hat or sweat pants or a track jacket.
 - a. Should a woman running for office be wearing these clothes to campaign events?
 - b. How does a woman need to appear in order for her to be a successful candidate?
 - c. Is there a different or higher standard for female candidates compared to male candidates?
5. Betty Spence of the National Association of Female Executives purports that women need mentorship in order to advance to the top.
 - a. When women are able to find mentors, what are the advantages women receiving mentorship from men as opposed to women and vice versa?
 - b. Is one better than the other? Why?

Questions on the Deleted Scenes

1. What are the reasons a physically healthy woman would have labioplasty?
 - a. How is or isn't labioplasty not an extreme in vanity?

2. What do women get out of wearing high-heeled shoes?
 - a. Are high heels shoes a public health hazard like cigarettes?
 - b. If so, should the usage of high heels be addressed through public policy?
 - c. Whose responsibility is it to regulate their usage?
 - d. Does a product have to be lethal to regulate its usage?
 - e. If you knew that shoe manufacturers had information that pointed to high heels being unhealthy for users over time but did not release it, would you think that it was wrong?

IV. Discussion Closure

In closing the discussion(s), you may want to help the group summarize or reflect upon the themes or important points that emerged during the discussion. It will also be helpful to ask whether any individuals or if the group as a whole is moved to take further steps in regard to the issues raised by the film. The best result that can come from viewing and discussing *Running in High Heels* is that your audience be moved to become more informed, join or form a women's advocacy group, or make a commitment of time and energy to advance women economically or politically. Your closing remarks may simply be the question, "Having seen and discussed this film, what will you do next?"