



Taking Charge

Taking Charge shows teens taking the initiative to overcome the fears and vulnerabilities of growing up in an increasingly violent and rapidly changing society. Through role-playing, theatre groups, peer discussion groups and anti-violence collectives these young activists have "taken charge," educating themselves and their peers towards a deeper understanding of the effects of violence rooted in sexism, racism and homophobia.

We see through their various initiatives, as well as personal testimonies, that teens speaking and organizing against violence sends a positive message to everyone. **Taking Charge** encourages the viewer to re-examine definitions of violence, and shows how to effect change.

The defiant lyrics of the theme song match the bold and creative energy alive in these teens. Witty animation sequences add a layer of visual playfulness, but the message remains: Do something before it is too late!

Director: **Claudette Jaiko**

Producer: **Chantal Bowen**

Executive Producers: **Ginny Stikeman, Josée Beaudet**

Taking Charge was produced by Studio D and Regards de femmes in collaboration with the Federal Women's Film Program with the assistance of:

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Farm Women's Bureau, Status of Women Canada - Women's Program, Justice Canada, Human Resources Development Canada Secretariat, Status of Disabled Persons, Canadian Heritage, Health Canada, Health Promotion and Programs Branch, Family Violence Prevention Division, Health Promotion Directorate, Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drugs Division, Division of Aging and Seniors.

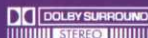
25 minutes 34 seconds

Order number: 9196 020

Disponible en français sous le titre : *On s'en occupe*



PROGRAMME FÉDÉRAL DES FEMMES
FEDERAL WOMEN'S FILM PROGRAM



IN CANADA 1-800-267-7710 IN THE U.S. 1-800-542-2164



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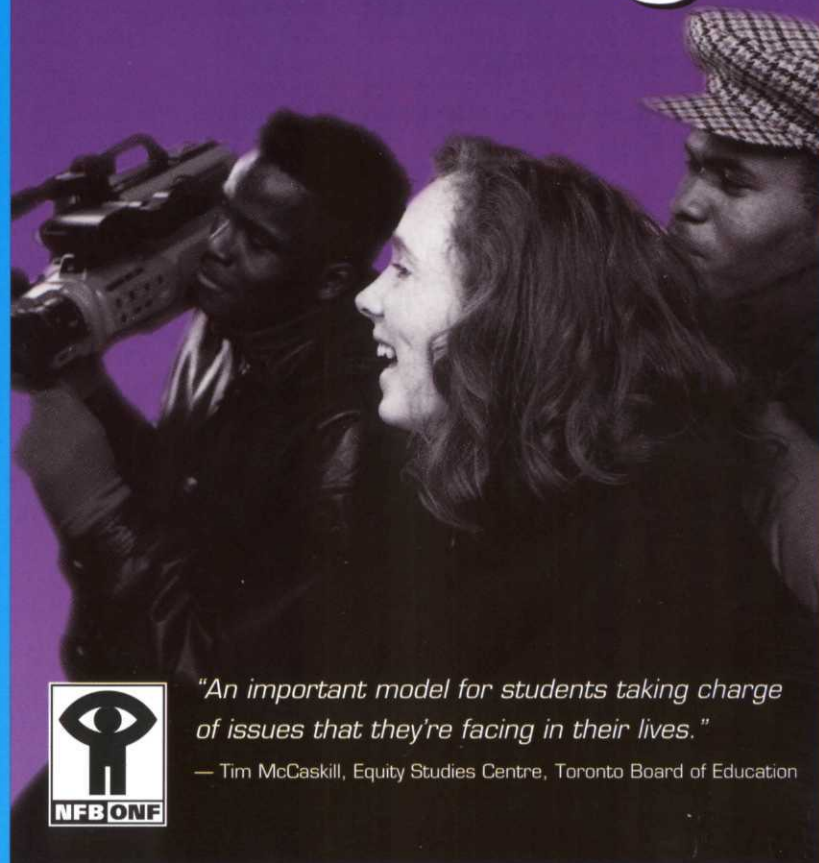
VHS

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A NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA RELEASE



Taking Charge



"An important model for students taking charge of issues that they're facing in their lives."

— Tim McCaskill, Equity Studies Centre, Toronto Board of Education

USER'S GUIDE

The information presented here is designed to assist teachers and facilitators to help inform young people about the violence that affects their lives, and how they can actively work for change. While most teenagers have an understanding of what sexual harassment is, they may not be aware of the extent of the problem and its connections to sexism, racism, homophobia and other learned oppressive behaviours. **Taking Charge** urges them to examine some of those behaviours through dialogue and peer support, develop a language that names their experiences, and to model some tools for change.

Watching this video may help viewers articulate personal experiences of sexual or racial harassment. Prior to screening, check with your school or workplace for existing policies and guidelines in order to provide appropriate advice and resources.

A FEW GROUND RULES

Abusive comments and blaming can often surface when issues of gender, race and sexual orientation are examined. But little is gained if we allow ourselves to retreat to positions of defensiveness or denial when addressing oppressive behaviour. Establishing ground rules can provide a safer environment to articulate experiences, make mistakes and learn from the process.

Respect each other. Be careful about verbally jumping on someone because of a comment they have made. Is there a less hostile way to make your point — one that will allow the person to hear you and understand your position rather than feeling attacked?

Don't make assumptions. Just because you don't THINK anyone in your class or group is lesbian, or of Native ancestry, or in an abusive relationship, doesn't make it so.

Speak from your own experience. Try not to speak for others. A good way to do this is to say "I think" or "I feel" instead of "women think" or "Black people say."

Be mindful of your own anger, fear or sadness. This discussion might not be the best place for you to express extreme emotions. Ask for time out to examine your feelings.

Ask students or group members to suggest other acceptable ground rules. Someone will probably suggest **confidentiality** and a **no laughing** or **no interrupting** agreement.

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

BEFORE THE SCREENING

- 1 What is sexism?
- 2 How do the guys treat the girls in your school? Do they treat young women differently from how they treat each other?
- 3 How is sexism similar to, or different from, racism and homophobia?
- 4 How are women portrayed in your favourite TV shows? What about Black people? Lesbians and gays?
- 5 Most of us know when we are being treated unfairly because of our gender, race, or sexual orientation, but we often behave as though it were normal. Why do you think we accept discrimination?
- 6 A lot of people believe that sexism and sexual harassment are problems that only affect women, and that racism only affects non-whites. Discuss how we are all affected by these behaviours.

AFTER THE SCREENING

- 1 Make a list of the points that arose from the video and discuss them.
- 2 Because women's feelings of self-worth in our society are often tied to men's approval of their personal appearance, some women feel flattered at the same time as they feel threatened by male comments about their looks. Does this mean that men should stop complimenting women? How do you define positive as opposed to negative comments?



Director
Claudette Jaiko

Research
Arlene Moscovitch

Assistant Director
Kirsten Scollie

Cinematographer
Martin Leclerc

Sound
Justine Pimlott

Editor
Petra Valier

Sound Editor
Gilles Quintal

Animation Script
Claudette Jaiko
Claude Cloutier
Sylvain Proteau

Animation
Sylvain Proteau

Music and Lyrics
Enough Is Enough
Claude Lebrun

Song Performed by
France D'Amour

Producer
Chantal Bowen

Executive Producers
Ginny Stikeman
Josée Beaudet

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- 3 What about leering? When does an admiring look become a leer that can make someone feel uncomfortable?
- 4 Some men are friendly and considerate as individuals but become abusive and disrespectful of others when in the company of other men. Why do you think this is so?
- 5 Is there a double standard of sexual behaviour that allows men greater freedom while limiting what is acceptable behaviour for women? What are the consequences when women ignore these unwritten rules?
- 6 Do you have to belong to a targeted group to identify oppressive behaviour against that group or individuals within it?
- 7 Have you ever been told by someone that they thought you were being racist, sexist, or homophobic? How did you react? Discuss some appropriate reactions.

INTEGRATING THE VIDEO

The following are some ideas for projects or group work that can be done as a follow-up to **Taking Charge**.

- There are laws against sexual harassment, designed to help complainants and offenders reach workable solutions (when possible) before going to court. Research the provincial and federal legislation on sexual assault and discuss the pros and cons.
- The Canadian Charter of Rights contains provisions against sexist and racist behaviour. Research the relevant chapters. How do these guidelines differ from existing laws?
- The Canadian federal government recently enacted legislation which guarantees equal rights to lesbians and gays. Research and discuss the controversy surrounding this event and its relevance to the video you have just seen.
- Some provinces have anti-hate laws. Investigate what they are, how they are enforced, and whether or not these laws are effective.
- Does your school have a Students' Rights Handbook that outlines policies on dealing with oppressive behaviour? Discuss its content and how well it works. If your school does not have written guidelines, break into small groups and devise strategies to implement a handbook and outline what policies it would contain.

A GLOSSARY OF TERMS

SEXUAL HARRASSMENT

Unwanted and unsolicited verbal or physical attention of a sexual nature.

SEXISM

Discriminatory practices and beliefs directed against people because of their gender.

MISOGYNY

The hatred of women.

HETEROSEXISM or COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY

One of the most subtle forms of coercion that gay and lesbian teens face is the pressure to be heterosexual. It is often assumed that everyone is born heterosexual, but it is actually a socialized belief that ignores the existence and validity of other sexualities.

RACISM

Discriminatory practices and beliefs directed against people because of their skin colour, culture and/or religion.

SYSTEMIC RACISM

The perpetuation of cultural norms, laws and beliefs that support and reward racism.

DOUBLE DISCRIMINATION

Experienced by those who belong to two marginalized groups; for example, those who are female and Black or gay and disabled.

ANTI-OPPRESSION

A model of behaviour and beliefs that acknowledges the interconnectedness of hatred and violence against women with racism, homophobia, and other oppressive behaviour and seeks ways to address them.

FURTHER READING

Some current books on the subject of sexual harassment and young women include:

High School Education Kit - Sexual Harassment

Women's Caucus Against Sexual Harassment, OISE

Green Dragon Press, Toronto

Sexual Harassment: High School Girls Speak Out

June Larkin

Second Story Press, Toronto

Anti-Racism, Feminism and Critical Approaches to Education

Edited by Raxana Ng et. al.

OISE Press, Toronto

Sexual Harassment and Teens: A Program for Positive Change

Susan Strauss

Free Spirit Press, New York