

HBO ORIGINAL

PHOENIX RISING



NEW TWO-PART DOCUMENTARY
NOW STREAMING

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

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PHOENIX RISING



TRIGGER WARNING:
This film features graphic imagery,
conversations about domestic violence,
rape, and sexual assault.

PHOENIX RISING is a two-part HBO documentary produced and directed by Amy Berg. The film is actress Evan Rachel Wood's journey of survival and activism after years of silence and experiencing abuse.

PHOENIX RISING Part I premiered at Sundance 2022. Both parts will premiere on March 15 & 16, 2022, respectively, on HBO and will be available to stream on HBO Max (both on March 15).

Run Time Part I: 73 minutes
Run Time Part II: 82 minutes

Hashtag: #PhoenixRising

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Introduction

PHOENIX RISING, a two-part HBO documentary produced and directed by Amy Berg follows actress and activist Evan Rachel Wood as she takes her experience as a survivor of domestic violence to pursue justice, heal generational wounds, and reclaim her story. Almost a decade after escaping a dangerous relationship, Wood co-authors and successfully lobbies for passage of The Phoenix Act, legislation that extends the statute of limitations for domestic violence cases in California. Wood courageously uses her own experience to bring visibility to the issue and to advance the legislative agenda; ultimately, in solidarity with fellow survivors.

How to use this guide

Thank you for watching **PHOENIX RISING** and sharing it with your community. This is a sensitive, important, and meaningful film and if you are comfortable and able we invite you to discuss it further and learn about what you can do to help survivors heal and prevent the culture of abuse that promotes this behavior.

This guide is designed to navigate you and your community through conversations about your thoughts, emotions, questions, and reactions to the film. It contains information about the film, resources for further learning, and discussion questions to deepen your understanding of domestic violence and sexual assault. Additionally, it offers ways to share your survivor story and help others (if relevant), to help other survivors heal, and to deepen your own engagement in this issue area and create a lasting impact.

Film overview

PHOENIX RISING, a two-part HBO documentary produced and directed by Amy Berg, delves behind familiar headlines and explores the often-misunderstood aspects of domestic abuse and sexual assault, helping to shed light on the many factors that prevent survivors like Wood from coming forward with their stories even as they deal with years of aftershocks and emotional trauma.

At the age of 18, Wood was pursued by then 37-year-old Brian Warner, known to the world as the rock icon Marilyn Manson. Their relationship spanned over four years, beginning with intensive flattery, then escalating to emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Looking back, she recognized a pattern of grooming and control tactics similar to those experienced by other survivors, who told their stories of harrowing experiences at the hands of Warner.

Connecting the dots between the progression of her relationship with Warner and phases of the clinical domestic violence cycle, Wood co-writes and lobbies for The Phoenix Act, which was signed into California State Law in 2019. It extends the statute of limitations for domestic violence felonies from three years to five years.

PHOENIX RISING charts Wood's journey from a silent victim to a vocal survivor who demanded action and achieved it, and her rise to a domestic violence advocate as she reflects on her upbringing, her experience with Warner, and current activism.

Director's statement

In 2019, Evan Rachel Wood approached me as *The Phoenix Act*, a bill she co-authored, was making its way through the California state legislature. Years after escaping a relationship marked by intimate partner violence, she had tried to file charges against her abuser and ended up changing the law in California as it pertains to the statute of limitations for domestic violence survivors. Evan had been told, upon presenting her evidence, that there was nothing she could do for her case; but if she wanted to do something to seek justice, she could try to change the law as it would apply to others who would come after her. Her heroic journey, both to empower fellow survivors and to implement actionable change is where our film journey began.

Our era is hosting the overturn of power structures, a blazing MeToo movement, and a calibrating cancel culture that's figuring out what is and isn't effective in holding transgressors accountable. Our film follows Evan at a revelatory moment, illustrating her journey to and through domestic violence at the vicious hands of Brian Warner, aka Marilyn Manson. But this is not a story about canceling Warner. This is not a story about yet another powerful man who is systematically protected and encouraged as he abuses women both privately and publicly—through those truths are laid bare. This is a story about justice, resiliency, vulnerability, and healing. It's a story about rising from the ashes and building the strength to advocate for yourself and for other survivors.

Throughout the filmmaking process, the words of the MeToo movement founder and activist Tarana Burke were in my head. She said, "the work is really about survivors talking to each other and saying, 'I see you. I support you. I get it.' When our varied privileges, resources, and identities are stripped away, there are the universal truths of existence — a core of human beings that, when violated, can result in shame, alienation, fear, and continued vulnerability."

In **PHOENIX RISING**, Evan finds newfound freedom. We find her years after her escape, but watch in real-time as she changes an outdated law that upholds an impossibly short statute of limitations. Ultimately, she takes justice into her own hands by naming Warner publicly for the first time, liberating herself from secrecy, and standing up with fellow survivors.

What is special about our film is its intimate, personal portrayal of not only Evan's life — a chronicle of how she fell down the rabbit hole and ultimately climbed her way back out — but also of the importance of community and solidarity to overcome. It is a unique tale that, in its honesty and vulnerability, hopefully, makes others feel seen and inspired. This film celebrates a justice-seeker as she finds a new path forward, reckoning a painful past with a future that forges ahead despite the odds.

-Amy Berg

Discussion questions

PERSONAL:

1. What emotions and feelings did you experience during the film? Was there a part of the film that specifically stirred those emotions or feelings?
2. What was most surprising or unsettling about this film?
3. How and where do you think courage is shown in the film?
4. What would you do if someone you know were a victim of domestic violence or sexual assault? [Please read here](#) for suggestions on what to do and how to talk with them.
5. Before watching the film, how concerned were you with the issue of domestic violence and sexual assault? Have your views changed after watching the film?

ISSUE AREA:

1. Were you aware of the concepts of grooming, isolation, or love bombing? If not, [read more here](#).
2. Wood's consequent domestic violence and sexual assault activism was rooted in her own experience and the abuse she suffered in her relationship with Warner.
 - 2.1. How has your life experience so far shaped the issues that you care about?
 - 2.2. Have you taken action or tried to improve the state of the issues you care about?
 - 2.3. Have you witnessed abusive relationships within your family, friends, or community or had one yourself?
3. 1 in 4 women in the country experiences domestic violence in their lifetimes ([source](#)). Why do you think domestic violence and sexual assault cases and issues do not get more attention, focus, and investment?
4. Domestic violence is often understood to be an issue that only affects women, although 1 in 9 men experience severe intimate partner physical violence in their lifetimes ([source](#)). What role did male allies have in Wood's life? How can we shift the cultural conversation to be inclusive of survivors of all genders?

CELEBRITY:

1. How are domestic violence and sexual assault cases different when the victim and/or perpetrator is famous, rich, or a celebrity? How do other factors like race, gender identity, and more influence how a story is covered and the attention it receives?
2. What is your view of Wood after seeing the film? Is her story relatable, heroic, or both?
3. After seeing the film, what is your view of famous men who use their position, power, and fame to abuse women?
4. What do you think of Wood's treatment by the media considering she was a teenager - calling her a homewrecker? What do you think about their relative silence towards Warner's behavior?
5. How does the media's treatment of Wood relate to the larger cultural conversation of how female celebrities are treated by the media, i.e. sexism in media, conversations around the negative impact of celebrity on mental health, etc.

COMMUNITY/OTHERS:

1. What responsibility do you think bystanders who witness or might be aware of domestic violence and sexual assault have?
2. How did you see Wood's family, friends, other survivors come to her aid and how did you see her helping them? How important is community to you?
3. BIPOC and immigrant communities face high rates of sexual assault and most cases (even more than usual) go unreported ([source](#)). Why do you think that is?
4. Activists all over the country are advocating for eliminating the statute of limitations for sexual and domestic violence crimes. In the film, we saw Wood successfully advocate for the Phoenix Act, which extends the time domestic abuse survivors have to press charges against their abuser in California from 3 to 5 years. Why do you think increasing or eliminating time limits is important for survivors of these crimes?

Actions & resources

The number of domestic violence and sexual assault cases is staggering. People all over the country are subject to abuse. On average, nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States. During one year, this equates to more than 10 million women and men ([source](#)).

1 in 4 women experience severe intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner contact sexual violence, and/or intimate partner stalking with impacts such as injury, fearfulness, post-traumatic stress disorder, contraction of sexually transmitted diseases, etc ([source](#)).

When the laws do not protect you—you change them. That was the philosophy behind the Phoenix Act efforts. Wood’s activism and participation in the documentary aim to create awareness about domestic violence and sexual assault patterns to help protect survivors.

Whether you are a student looking to increase the awareness and visibility of sexual assault on your campus or someone who wants to help change the laws in their state as Wood did - or if you’re simply ready to learn more about these issues, we have curated action and resource items to help you get started.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE FILM

PHOENIX RISING premiered on HBO Max on March 15 & 16. Visit the film’s [page](#) to learn more, watch it again, and share it with friends and family.

DEEPEN YOUR LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING

Resources from the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#):

- If you or a loved one needs support [get help here](#)
- Learn more about [understanding relationship abuse](#)
- Find out how to [start conversations](#) about abuse and help others

9 things to know about domestic violence courtesy of [Breakthrough](#)

Abuse can take many forms, including psychological/emotional, physical, economic, & sexual. Visit the [Jenesse Center](#) to learn about different types of abuse.

Learn more about [RISE](#), the country’s most successful legislative reform movement, with 40+ laws passed, and 93 million people impacted.

SEEK HELP

[National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) at [800-799-7233](#) or [800-787-3224](#).

Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a Crisis Counselor at [Crisis Text Line](#). Free 24/7 support at your fingertips.

TAKE ACTION

Take the [It's On Us Pledge](#) and learn about their Campus Organizing Programs, Educational Tools & Support Resources.

Learn and share with [The Voices & Faces Project](#).

Start your own anti-sexual assault campaign with the help of Ending Violence Against Women International ([EVAWI](#)) through their [Start By Believing](#) campaign.

Explore the resources provided by [Leda Health](#), a for survivor, by survivor organization building trauma-informed tools to help more people heal and help break cycles of sexual violence by increasing access to care and healing.