Ella Es El Matador
(She Is the Matador)
A film by Gemma Cubero and Celeste Carrasco
Dear Viewer,

Bullfighting is the quintessential symbol of masculinity and bravery in Spanish culture. As two people born and raised in Spain, we saw making this documentary about female matadors as a way of changing this symbol and shifting gender roles that have been defined for centuries. Making the film has also been a personal journey of exploring and questioning a culture. As we worked on the film for eight years, our goal was to create an intuitive, provocative and intimate film. Our intention in this, our directorial debut, is to open a window for viewers to enter into a unique world without judgment, focusing on the universal struggle of our two protagonists.

Gemma Cubero and Celeste Carrasco,
 filmmakers, *Ella Es El Matador* (She Is the Matador)
DISCUSSION GUIDE
Ella Es El Matador (She Is the Matador)

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For Spaniards — and for the world — nothing has expressed their country’s traditionally rigid gender roles more powerfully than the image of the male matador. So central was the bullfighter’s masculinity to Spanish identity that a 1908 law barred women from the sport.

Ella Es El Matador (She is the Matador), an hour-long documentary, reveals the surprising history of the women who made such a law necessary and offers fascinating profiles of two female matadors: the acclaimed Mari Paz Vega and neophyte Eva Florencia. These women are gender pioneers by necessity. Their common threads include a deep passion for bullfighting and an equally deep frustration over the entrenched culture of discrimination against women in the ring.

By looking at women, Ella Es El Matador (She is the Matador) adds another layer of controversy to the already controversial ritual that is modern bullfighting. In the process, the film can serve as an outreach tool to explore classic feminist questions: Does the courage displayed by female bullfighters, by definition, make them agents of social change? And does women’s participation in the sport challenge the essence of bullfighting as a celebration of machismo, or are women strengthening classic notions of masculinity by claiming the right to express machismo themselves? The questions provide viewers with a rich opportunity to examine their own beliefs about gender roles and what they see as appropriate boundaries in a changing world.
**POTENTIAL PARTNERS**

**Ella Es El Matador (She Is the Matador)** is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- Your local PBS station
- Groups that have discussed previous PBS and P.O.V. films relating to women in traditionally male domains, including *Chisholm '72* and *Lioness*.
- Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the Key Issues section
- High school students
- Faith-based organizations and institutions
- Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions and museums
- Civic, fraternal and community groups
- Academic departments or student groups at colleges, universities and high schools
- Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as local libraries

**USING THIS GUIDE**

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use **Ella Es El Matador (She Is the Matador)** to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address all of the prompts, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning the next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit [www.pbs.org/pov/matador](http://www.pbs.org/pov/matador).

**KEY ISSUES**

**Ella Es El Matador** is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people interested in the following topics:

- Animal rights
- Bullfighting
- Cultural expression
- Dance
- Feminism
- Gender
- Machismo
- Performance art
- Sociology
- Spain
- Women in sports
- Women’s studies
Bullfighting History

Bullfighting in its modern form has evolved over centuries, and there is no certainty as to exactly where and when it began. There is archaeological evidence of combat or competition between people and bulls in frescoes from the Minoan palace at Knossos on the island of Crete, which dates back 4,000 years.

Bulls were also the focus of various religious cults of that time in areas around the Mediterranean. Later, spectacular combat with bulls was a regular feature in Roman arenas. Researchers have cited various explanations for the development of Spanish bullfighting, from the influence of Visigothic culture to the Moorish conquest of Spain in the beginning of the eighth century.

Regardless of its origins, bullfighting had become a fixture of public life in Spain by the 18th century, when attendance and participation began to spread from the noble classes to the common people. That is also the era in which breeders began to focus on producing a special class of bulls to appear in the ring.

In the most common type of bullfighting in Spain, three matadors face two bulls apiece. Assisting are horse-mounted picadors, who use lances to bleed and weaken the bulls in the first part of the performance, and banderilleros, who place barbs in the bulls during the second part of the performance, while executing the first turns of the cape. In

Mari Paz Vega after the bullfight at Zaragoza.
Photo courtesy of Talcual Films
the third portion of the event, a matador faces a weakened bull on foot and encourages the bull to charge in order for the matador to execute stylized passes with the cape. Finally, the matador kills the bull with a sword.

While bullfighting is often seen as a sport by outsiders, aficionados prefer to think of it as a performance, akin to ballet, in which the outcome is uncertain and the ideal for the spectator is not to see the most efficient kill, but to appreciate the skill of the matador and the improvisatory nature of the affair.

Bullfighting has provoked controversy since the 16th century, when it was condemned by Pope Saint Pius V. Today, animal advocates protest that the sport is inherently cruel to the bulls. Critics point out that the goal of the confrontation is for the bull to die and note that the bull is wounded by picadors and banderilleros and loses blood for a considerable period before facing the matador. They also criticize the use of blindfolded horses on the part of the picadors; the horses are also at risk of being gored by the bulls. In 2004, the regional government of Barcelona (part of the Catalan region of Spain, where bullfighting is less popular) voted to ban bullfighting, but the ban was overturned.

Traditional bullfighting remains popular in Spain, where there are about 600 bullrings, from the 20,000-seat rings in...
Madrid and Barcelona to the many smaller rings in towns across the country. Bullfighting is also popular in Portugal – where, by law, the bull is killed outside the ring – and in parts of southern France, as well as in former Spanish colonies from Mexico to Peru. There are also non-lethal bullfighting events in parts of the United States.

**Sources:**


Women in Bullfighting

Women have always had a place in bullfighting, although their proper role has been contested, as aficionados and authorities intervened to allow or disallow women in the ring. The first record of a female matador comes from the 17th century, according to historians, and a Goya etching from the early 19th century, Valor varonil de la celebre Pajuelera en la de Zaragoza, pays homage to a female bullfighter.

In the 1930s, Juanita Cruz fought successfully in Spain, until the government banned women from fighting on foot. Cruz went on to compete in South America, where women were not banned from bullfighting.

Conchita Cintrón, the daughter of an American couple who grew up in Peru, was drawn to the bullring as a girl and became a sensation in Mexico in the 1940s. She later went to Europe, where she fought for several more years before retiring from the ring in 1949. In her career, she killed as many as 750 bulls in the ring, using a distinctive combination of Portuguese and Spanish technique. She was trained as a rejoneadora, someone who bullfights while riding a horse. According to some sources, she was arrested after her final fight in Spain, where women were not allowed to bullfight on foot, when she dismounted her horse. According to the tale, she was pardoned immediately afterward.

In 1974, Angela Hernandez went to court in Spain to overturn the ban on women, opening the door for more women to pursue bullfighting. One of her successors was Maribel Atienzar, whose career lasted until 1987.

In the 1990s, Cristina Sánchez gained international attention as the most prominent female matador. For several seasons she was very successful, but she retired in 1999, citing the enduring sexism of fans and her peers in the ring.
The most prominent female bullfighter in recent years has been Mari Paz Vega, who earned her status as a matador in 1997 — the first woman to earn that honor in a bullring in Spain. She has continued to take part in bullfighting, earning an outstanding reputation in Spain and especially in Mexico and South America, where, she says, the bullfighting world is more open to women.

Sources:
Selected People Featured in *Ella Es El Matador*

**Mari Paz Vega**

Born in Malaga, Spain, Mari Paz Vega started fighting bulls at the age of nine. Raised in a family of men who tried, but failed, to become bullfighters, she was the first woman to receive the title of “matador” in Spain, and she did so at the age of 22. More than 10 years later, after great success in Latin America, she is still fighting for a place in the top rankings in Spain. As of today, Mari Paz Vega is the only active professional female matador in the world.

**Eva Florencia**

Native Italian Eva Bianchini traveled to Spain at the age of 14 and fell in love with Spanish culture and the art of bullfighting. Against her parents’ will, she left again for Spain at the age of 16 with only one desire: to become a matador. In Spain, she became Eva Florencia. Throughout her dramatic journey, Eva discovers her own determination and the difficulties of her chosen profession. The struggle and her love for the animal eventually open her to new ways of expressing her dream.
Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. If the mood seems tense, you can pose a general question and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion. Unless you think participants are so uncomfortable that they can’t engage until they have had a break, don’t encourage people to leave the room between the film and the discussion. If you save your break for an appropriate moment during the discussion, you won’t lose the feeling of the film as you begin your dialogue.

One way to get a discussion going is to pose a general question such as:

- If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, who would it be and what would you ask him or her?
- What did you learn from this film? What insights did it provide?
- Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?
Gender Roles

• Compare the reactions of Eva Florencia's parents with Mari Paz Vega recalling, “My mother would say that if my brothers could do it, why not me, even though I was a girl.” Imagine that you have a child who announces an intention to pursue a career that is not traditional for his or her gender. What advice would you give him or her?
• World-class matador Enrique Ponce says, “A woman in the bullring is not an easy fit.” Why do you think he says this? In what ways do female competitors challenge the essence of bullfighting?
• Matador Cristina Sanchez observes, “The law no longer bans us, but there’s still an unstated prohibition. In this world controlled by men, the top matadors have all the power.” In your opinion, why aren’t male matadors eager to share a bill with a woman or allow women to participate? Can you think of other sports that have excluded women? What do these sports share with bullfighting?

• Historian Fermin Cebolla documents that there have been women bullfighters since at least the 13th century. So why does women’s participation continue to be an issue? What would it mean for the culture if women matadors were common?
• In what ways does women’s participation in bullfighting challenge machismo? In what ways might it reinforce machismo?
• Historian Fermin Cebolla notes that women have been banned from the ring during military dictatorships, but permitted to fight at other times. Do you think that banning women from bullfighting reinforces an authoritarian approach to government? Why or why not?
• Vega tries to mentor Florencia, but feels she can’t even help herself, let alone help others. What could someone like...
Vega do to help other women bullfighters? What other kinds of mentoring or support strategies exist to help women who participate in traditionally male sports or jobs?

- Do you consider women like Vega and Florencia good role models? Why or why not?

**Bullfighting**

- How did the film influence your ideas about bullfighting and female bullfighters?

- In trying to explain the attraction of bullfighting, Florencia says, “There was something beyond the cruelty people spoke of. There was a connection between man and beast.” Florencia’s father, Domenico, struggles to understand the appeal, and he is convinced that the Spaniards don’t think of bullfighting as a “blood sport.” How would you describe bullfighting?

- In response to those who see her vocation as cruel, Vega responds, “We all believe that the bull is born to die in the ring. I don’t feel bad about killing him, but it must be an honorable death. A quick, painless death.” She adds that the bull has a chance to fight for its life. Do you find her explanation satisfying? Why or why not? What do you think Vega means by “honorable death”? How does she deal with the tension between respecting, or even loving the bull and killing it?
• How does the killing that occurs in a bullring compare to the slaughter of animals for food? What kinds of moral dilemmas are raised by each activity?
• Clearly frustrated, Florencia says, “The world of bullfighting is controlled by businessmen who take advantage of those who dream of becoming bullfighters.” How is the business of bullfighting like and unlike other sports or entertainment? Beyond merit, what other factors lead competitors to succeed or fail?
• What is your reaction to this comment from Florencia: “The person who wants to be a matador is searching beyond themselves, to reach past human limitations. When you’re looking at the bull, it’s like you’re looking at yourself. Because in front of the bull, there’s no place to hide. There’s no room to fool yourself because you’re facing life and death.” What other challenges offer that kind of experience?
• It is easy to recognize Florencia’s paintings as artistic expression. Is there a way in which bullfighting is also an artistic expression? If it is performance art, why do so many people see it as a sport?
• At the end of film Florencia says, “I’ll keep fighting, but in a new way. I’ll face other bulls.” What do you think she means by “other bulls”? What insight does her declaration offer about the challenge(s) represented by bullfighting?

Mari Paz Vega’s altar.
Photo courtesy of Talcual Films
• As part of an observance of Women’s History Month (March), plan an event honoring women athletes. For ideas, visit the Women’s Sports Foundation’s Take Action section (http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/Take-Action.aspx), which provides multiple ways for people to take action to support women’s sports, honor women sport’s heroes and advocate for change.

• Convene a debate on the pros and cons of allowing women to participate in traditionally male professional sports. Include popular U.S. professional sports that exclude women and girls, such as baseball, football, hockey and boxing.

• Work with a Girl Scout troop, after school program or similar group to research and write a biography or oral history of a woman bullfighter, female athlete or a local woman in a non-traditional job. Share your biography/oral history online, in a library display, with other local youth groups or in another community venue.

• Engage borderland, Mexican immigrant communities or Portuguese American communities in dialogues about gender roles and/or the role of bullfighting in their own culture.
FILM-RELATED WEB SITES

Original Online Content on P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.’s Ella Es El Matador (She Is the Matador) companion website
www.pbs.org/pov/matador
To further enhance the broadcast, P.O.V. has produced an interactive website to enable viewers to explore the film in greater depth. The companion website to Ella Es El Matador (She Is the Matador) offers a streaming video trailer for the film; an interview with filmmakers Gemma Cubero and Celeste Carrasco; a list of related websites, organizations and books; a downloadable discussion guide; and the following special features:

FASHION PHOTO GALLERY
Browse photos of current fashion inspired by matador outfits.

ANATOMY OF A BULLFIGHT
Learn more about the tradition of bullfighting and the rules that govern the sport.

HISTORY OF FEMALE BULLFIGHTERS
Read about famous female bullfighters like Conchita Cintrón, known as the “Blonde Goddess.”

Bullfighting

BULLFIGHTING IN SPAIN
www.spain.info
On the official website for tourism in Spain, visitors can get information about bullfights and the culture of bullfighting, and they can access links to bullrings and museums associated with the tradition.

ESPN: “HAUNTED BY THE HORDERS”
http://sports.espn.go.com
This article (also available in Spanish) follows a young, prominent Mexican-American bullfighter, Alejandro Amaya, on one of his trips to perform multiple corridas throughout Mexico. The article features a short Q-and-A section about bullfighting, as well as a glossary of Spanish bullfighting terms.

THE INDEPENDENT: “BULLFIGHTING FANS IN PLEA FOR WORLD HERITAGE STATUS”
www.independent.co.uk
This article quickly summarizes the movement in Spain to try and protect bullfighting from being banned, spearheaded by the Platform for the Defence of the Fiesta Nacional, a pro-bullfighting group. (April 27, 2007)

FOR A BULLFIGHTING-FREE EUROPE
www.bullfightingfreeeurope.org/
Sponsored by many animal rights organizations, this website compiles information to support its argument against bullfighting and pushes to abolish the tradition.
SPAIN TRAVEL: BULLFIGHTING
www.justspain.org/spain/spain-bullfights.asp
This website serves as a travel guide to Spain and includes a section dedicated to the history of bullfighting that provides a detailed description of the rituals and customs of the sport.

LA VOZ WEEKLY:
“ADVENTURES OF A FEMALE ‘MATADOR’”
http://media.www.lavozdeanza.com
In a personal account, a female study-abroad student from De Anza College who had the chance to fight against a baby bull (without performing a final kill) describes her dangerous, but ultimately successful, first attempt at a corrida. (Nov. 23, 2003)

THE LADY IS A BULLFIGHTER
http://www.epcc.edu/nwlibrary/borderlands/10_the_lady_is_a_bullfighter.htm
Derived from the Borderlands Project at El Paso Community College, this article gives a brief biography of Texan female bullfighter Pat Hayes, who is still considered one of the most graceful bullfighters of her time.

THE NEW YORK TIMES: “BULLFIGHTING IS DEAD! LONG LIVE THE BULLFIGHT!”
www.nytimes.com
Following José Tomás in his bullfights across Spain, this article explores a lot of the controversy surrounding bullfighting. Both traditional and abolitionist groups are cited, and the continuing struggle between preserving tradition and perpetuating what some see as a cruel sport is examined. (June 1, 2008)

THE NEW YORK TIMES: CONCHITA CINTRÓN
www.nytimes.com
Conchita Cintrón’s obituary limns the life of a celebrated female matador who was known as the “Blonde Goddess.” (Feb. 19, 2009)

Spanish Culture

BBC NEWS COUNTRY PROFILE: SPAIN
http://news.bbc.co.uk
This overview offers general information about Spain, its history, government, culture and media.

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR: “SPAIN’S WOMEN MAKE GAINS IN WORKPLACE AND HOME”
http://www.csmonitor.com
Spanish women are in the midst of a cultural revolution, according to this article, which details the plight of women looking to break out of traditional gender roles. (June 28, 2002)

COUNTRY REPORTS: SPAIN
http://www.countryreports.org/Spain.aspx
This website has numerous in-depth sections on Spanish history, population, culture and economy.

DON QUIJOTE: SPANISH CULTURE
http://www.donquijote.org/culture/spain
Don Quijote, a language travel agency, offers a brief look at Spanish culture that touches on the artistic and musical heritage of the country.
Women in Sports

WOMEN'S SPORTS FOUNDATION  
www.womenssportsfoundation.org

Working to advance the lives of girls and women through sport and physical activity, the Women's Sports Foundation educates the public on encouraging girls to participate in physical activity.

FEMINIST MAJORITY FOUNDATION:  
EMPOWERING WOMEN IN SPORTS  
http://feminist.org/research/sports/sports2.html

This section of the foundation’s website is dedicated to the education and advocacy of women in sports careers. The website features a page that looks at the barriers women who want to pursue athletic careers may face (http://feminist.org/research/sports/sports4.html), as well as a list of resources for anyone interested in learning more (http://feminist.org/research/sports/sports11.html).

OBSERVER SPORT MONTHLY: “AGAINST THE ODDS”  
www.guardian.co.uk

This article describes three women who have excelled in sports that were once deemed unfit or too dangerous for women: Steph Davis, a rock climber, Katherine Legge, a racing driver, and Mari Paz Vega, a female bullfighter featured in Ella Es El Matador (She Is the Matador). (May 6, 2007)

HISTORY OF WOMEN IN SPORTS TIMELINE  
www.northnet.org/stlawrenceaauw/timeline.htm

Created by the American Association of University Women – St. Lawrence County Branch, this timeline provides an extensive view of women’s sports history and women’s involvement in sports from the first Olympics, held in Greece in 776 B.C., up to the present day.
To order Ella Es El Matador, go to www.talcualfilms.com/estudio/ella-es-el-matador