

5. ANALYSIS: Being a Woman Behind-the-camera in American Independent Documentary Filmmaking World

5.1. Introduction

Women are still a minority behind the camera in the commercial film industry. Assessing 250 of the top-grossing U.S. movies of 2013, only 6 % of directors were female. The statistics have fluctuated very little since 1998 (Lauzen, 2014). In contrast to corporate Hollywood, in independent filmmaking the situation is different, and the numbers are in women's favor. A recent study conducted by the Annenberg School of Communication & Journalism shows that across 11 years (2002 – 2012) of programmed U.S. feature-length films at the Sundance Film Festival 17 % of narrative movie directors were women. However, during the same 11-year period 34.5 % of documentary directors who presented their U.S. feature films were women and in 2012 women directed 41.9 % of documentary films screened at the festival. In 2013 women directed almost half of documentary movies featured in the Sundance Film Festival (Smith, Pieper & Choueiti, 2013).

Female documentary filmmakers from all around the world have been in the news recently: the surge of Arab female documentary filmmakers (“We want to tell stories from our part of the world,” said Palestinian Rana Khaled al-Khatib) (Jones, 2013) and documentaries by Indian women winning national and international awards (Anand, 2012). In 2014 the film “The Square,” by Jehane Noujaim, was nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Documentary category. In 2012, two women documentary

filmmakers were awarded the MacArthur Genius Grant (\$500,000 without any strings), which is recognition for excellence in the field and an incentive for fostering further vision. Grants were awarded to Natalia Almada (“El Velador”, 2011) from Mexico City and American Laura Poitras (trilogy of feature-length documentaries about America’s actions in a post-September 11 world) (Brooks, 2012).

This research attempts to answer the question why women are successful in documentary filmmaking and what role their gender could play in their success. The women who participated in this study were asked whether they consider their gender a curse or a blessing. The study looks into the situation only through female filmmakers’ eyes without making comparisons to male documentary film directors. As there is a lack of scholarly research in documentary films and filmmaking specifically, this research establishes a new track and provides important body of knowledge in gender and media studies as well. It also sheds new light on the field especially now when documentary films are drawing a lot of attention and gaining more and more recognition as a compelling and attractive way to tell a story.

5.2. Theoretical framework

5.2.1. What is a documentary film?

In various discussions documentary film appears in the middle between journalism and art. Filmmaker Grierson (1946) defined documentary as a “creative treatment of reality.” He argued that documentarians, as filmmakers, are artists who are concerned not only about truth-telling but also aesthetics and artistic appearance. Ruby (2005) adds to this conversation by saying “human beings construct and impose meaning

on the world. We create order. We don't discover it. We organize a reality that is meaningful for us. It is around these organizations of reality that filmmakers construct films" (p. 36). Nichols (1991), a pioneer who tried to standardize description of documentary film, agrees that it is a "construction of reality" based on multiple discourses of law, family, education, economics, politics, state, and nation (p.10). He claims that "documentary as a concept or practice occupies no fixed territory" because there is no set list of techniques, topics, forms and styles that documentary filmmakers employ (p.12).

However, expectation from the audience connects all different documentary films. According to Nichols (1991), "as viewers, we expect that what occurred in front of the camera has undergone little or no modification in order to be recorded on film and magnetic tape. We are wont to assume that what we see would have occurred in essentially the same manner if the camera and tape recorder had not been there" (p. 27). Such expectation imposes some kind of ethical standard for documentary filmmakers who are expected to rely only on the 'historical world' (Nichols, 1991) – the world that is not created but unfolds in front of filmmaker. This also leads to a clear distinction between fiction and documentary films. While a fiction film offers *a world* (fictional/imaginary), a documentary film offers *access to a world* (shared, historical construct). "The world is where, at the extreme, issues of life and death are always at hand. History kills" (p. 109). Taking into consideration distinctions between fiction and documentary films, a documentary one situates quite close to journalism or more explicitly photojournalism practice. Most importantly, documentary filmmaking and journalism have similar intentions – to educate, shed light on the situation and include

multiple sources and/or voices. Nichols (1991) said that documentary films should be based on socially responsible motives and intentions, and a viewer is offered a chance to interpret an argument that a film introduces. This differentiates documentary films from the Hollywood production – “escapist, meretricious spectacles” (p. 4), which provides a viewer with only a singular moral (p. 166).

The production of documentary films is not a short process, which includes choosing subjects, filming and editing. Thus, filmmakers’ experiences and understanding of the world could reflect in the film, and that is why the filmmaker’s presence has to be taken into account (Ruby, 2005). Different choices made during the whole documentary film creating process lead to different results. In this regard, women might bring their standpoints into the documentary films and documentary filmmaking in general.

5.2.2. Feminist standpoint

Feminist standpoint epistemology locates women’s experiences in the center of attention. Using this as a starting point leads to building knowledge. Feminist standpoint scholars (Harding, 1991; Jaggar, 1997) say that only by researching and investigating women’s lives through their experiences can we construct knowledge that would accurately represent and reflect women.

Yet the theory goes further. It suggests that gathering information through women’s experiences could help not only understand women better but society as well. Feminist standpoint scholars suggest that women have the capacity of “double consciousness” because of their gender-specific subordinate status in historical society. Within this discourse, women are said to understand both sides of the world: the one of

the “oppressed” and the one of the “oppressor.” While women take into account men’s activities and attitudes alongside their own, men, as members of a dominant group, see reality only through their eyes. Thus, double consciousness “grants them [women] a unique perspective, or lens, through which to evaluate society as a whole” (Brooks, 2007, p.65) and to understand “certain features of reality... from which others are obscured” (Jaggar, 2004, p.60). Such ‘epistemological advantageous position’ might help women in observing others’ lives and in creating documentary films.

Johnston, Friedman and Peach (2011) relied on the feminist standpoint theory in the study of women’s contributions to political blogs. The idea of women’s double consciousness allowed the researchers to claim that “women’s contributions to political blogs are an important source of political knowledge” and that “studying them provides an opportunity to cultivate a richer, even liberatory, explanation of the world.” (p. 274) This ties to the fact that studying women’s perspectives and experiences might lead to better understanding of the overall processes.

The subordination of women has not disappeared. As such, women tend to be sympathetic toward other subordinate groups as well (Brooks, 2007). If, as feminist scholars say, women’s double consciousness “can be applied to diagnose social inequalities and injustices” (Brooks, 2007, p.66), this can be an advantage for female documentary filmmakers - allowing them to get closer to the very center of the issues and understand others’ thoughts. Feminist standpoint scholars also stress that such advantageous position allows women to produce “an accurate, comprehensive and objective interpretation of social reality” (Brooks, 2007, p.66); their view of the world “is more reliable and less distorted” (Jaggar, 2004, p. 56-57). Feminist standpoint scholars

name such ability as “strong objectivity”, which corresponds directly to what documentary filmmakers are striving for – objective and authentic record of ‘historical world.’

Furthermore, findings made by feminist standpoint epistemology theorists give an important insight on women’s psychology in general. Jaggar (1997) argues women are especially skilled at expressing and reading emotions because of ongoing practice as caretakers and nurturers. She claims women have “emotional acumen” – a unique, intuitive ability to read and interpret pain and hidden emotions and understand the genesis of those emotions. This “emotional acumen” was derived from her research about women’s roles at home and family. However, Jaggar claims that “emotional acumen” could help to find new insights in other disciplines, especially in sociology, philosophy, psychiatry and political analysis (p. 192). “Emotional acumen” might be helpful and important in documentary filmmaking as well. As creating a documentary film is based on working with people and digging into their lives, being able to listen and intuitively read their emotions would help securing access to those people and getting the most out of them.

Based on such theoretical background, this research explores the extent to which gender plays a role **in documentary film production process**:

RQ1: To what degree do female documentary filmmakers consider their gender-based capabilities (“double consciousness” and “emotional acumen”) as advantages in creating documentary films?

5.3. Literature review

5.3.1. Women in journalism

Even though there is an important discussion about how to define gender – based on natural or socially constructed differences - gender is assumed to change news content. In general, female news reporters provide alternative viewpoints and diversity to news by bringing different values, interests, and priorities to the newsroom (Kima & Yoon, 2009).

Most of the studies analyzing gender roles in journalism use comparative strategies between male and female reporters' work and choose print journalism as a field for their studies. The principle difference between women's and men's products or roles in newsrooms of newspapers can be noticed by looking back to the twentieth century. In the 1950s, women were mostly covering homemaking, parenting and relationship related stories, which had low socio-cultural status (Djerf-Pierre, 2007). Men generally worked with politics, economics and world affairs. In the 1970s, while men still dominated in the same areas, women covered the environment, social issues (the schools, health and geriatric care) and consumer affairs, which all were labeled "soft news" in contrast to "hard news" that men were covering. Christmas (2007) made the distinction between "hard" and "soft" news by stating that the latter is considered favored by female journalists as they focus on people-oriented stories rather than issue-oriented stories. There is also an expression of "feminine" journalism: "female journalists often criticize the selection of newsworthy topics, claiming that topics that are relevant to women are often neglected in the press or relegated to marginal sections. The examples often

mentioned are “human interest” news, consumer news, culture, education and upbringing, and social policy” (Allan, Branston & Carter, 2002, p.35).

The notion that male and female journalists focus on different type of stories was also supported by content analysis of war stories filed for news outlets during the first 100 days of three different international conflicts (in Bosnia, Persian Gulf and Afghanistan). The study showed that female journalists were more likely than men to focus on the victims of war, abuses to human rights and on soldier profiles (Kennard & Murphy, 2005). According to Van Zoonen (1998), male journalists tend to sensationalize events more than their female counterparts, while female journalists were more interested in stories that demonstrated depth and sensitivity.

Kima and Yoon (2009) decided to look at the issue a bit differently and tried to answer the question of how male and female reporters differ in covering the same topic: South Korean women cabinet members. Through a content analysis of reporters’ products, the authors found that female reporters “used more positive tone, emphasized conflict news value less, used less stereotypical references to women and employed more gender-sensitive perspectives than did male reporters” (p. 298). The authors insist that these findings support the argument (Van Zoonen, 1998) that even though journalists strive for objectivity, subjectivity might be not avoidable. Through surveys with nearly 600 health and medical journalists, Len-Rios, Hinnant and Yeon (2012) found that “female journalists feel more strongly that they serve an important role as health advocates for their audience and are more strongly motivated to tell stories that they can humanize and cover an issue that has personally affected them.” Women said they worked on “feminine” topics such as nutrition, fitness, obesity or diabetes prevention,

while men – “masculine” topics like healthcare policy (p. 84-85).

Even though most of the relevant studies are based on comparative analysis, Schoch (2013) focused explicitly on women’s work (in a way this research is designed to). The study showed that women do not adopt customary professional norms of sports journalism. Their writing is described as “feminine” (soft news and “human” perspective) as opposed to focusing on facts and technical analysis normally employed by a large majority of male sports journalists. Furthermore, the study showed that such “feminine” writing provided women with professional satisfaction and, in their opinion, autonomy (p. 719 – 721).

Some studies of gender differences in reporting focus explicitly on the source choice. Zoch and Turk (1998) showed that gender doesn’t play a role in relying on official sources as sources for the stories, but women included more female sources. They were also more likely to quote middle management sources – of either sex – while their male counterparts quoted top managers.

Scholars interested in gender representation in journalism in general paid attention to the organizational level as well. To the contrary of what was expected, there was no significant difference in topics when women became editors and led the newsroom. The only significant difference was the popularity of feature or news feature articles in the women-led newspapers. However, the authors concluded that it was not enough to have women only as a leader. In order to notice changes the whole newsroom had to be “feminized.” (Beam & Di Cicco, 2010).

A list made by Djerf-Pierre and Lofgren-Nilsson (2004) sums up all the important aspects that could be attributed to male and female journalists' work (p. 82):

Male	Female
Hard news	Soft news
Public sphere/macro level	Private sphere/micro level
Male sources and perspectives	Female sources and perspectives
Distance/neutrality	Intimacy/empathy
Detachment	Audience orientation
News hounds	Pedagogues
Professional ethics	Personal ethics
Competition/individualism	Cooperation/collective
Hierarchical and formal organization	Horizontal and informal organization

Even though many scholars found that gender plays a role in some parts of journalism field, it is not always the case. A quantitative study in Malaysia found that gender played no difference in ethical decision-making; only professional experience in the field had significant influence (Motlagh, Hassan, Bolong & Osman, 2013). Scholars were not successful in finding significant correlations in male/women representation in Twitter as well (Armstrong & Gao, 2011).

5.3.2. Women in filmmaking

Fiction filmmaking

Gender-based studies of fiction filmmaking and films in general tend to focus more on women's representation on the screen than behind the cameras. Some research has been conducted on the historical era of silent movies. Slide (2012) did a qualitative analysis of feature film credits to debunk the belief that half of the films from that period

were written by women. He found that the number did not exceed 20 – 25 percent. There are also studies focusing on individual female directors, as the one made by Smaill (2013). However, in such works specific individual styles of working and creating visual stories are discussed without placing them into broader perspective or connecting them to gender-based research.

Another type of studies provides more input into the conversation of possible gender-based differences in filmmaking. A quantitative study (Smith & Choueiti, 2011) showed that films with one or more women working in key decision-making positions behind the camera have a higher percentage of on screen female characters (44.4 % vs. 31.7%). A similar trend was observed with the gender of writers. When compared to those films with only male screenwriters, the percentage of females on screen was significantly higher for films with one or more female screenwriters (43.7% vs. 29.4%). However, there might be two reasons: either women are advocating for on screen female characters; or studios choose women to develop female-driven storylines.

Documentary Filmmaking

There are few gender-related studies in the documentary filmmaking field as well. Most of the scholars also tend to focus on women's representation and women stories on the screen rather than women behind the camera.

Analyzing two documentary films made by women, Chiu (2012) tried to answer the question of "how documentary filmmaking opens up a space for women to intervene in contemporary debates on the question of subjectivity in Taiwan." Furthermore, scholars studying documentary films tie them into broader analysis of social activism

movements, e.g., feminism etc. Hankin (2007) studied documentary films about female filmmakers. The author claims that documentary films featuring women filmmakers inside them are a part of larger activist endeavor. However, she notices that “vox populi” used in documentary about female African filmmakers suggests that there is no unified voice with regard to the notion of a female perspective.

Based on the studies conducted in the field of journalism and filmmaking, both fiction and documentary, it could be concluded that women are more prone than men to cover ‘soft news’ and human-centered stories. Also, their reports or films tend to contain female sources or subjects. Based on numbers of female filmmakers mentioned throughout this paper, men are still dominating the fiction and documentary filmmaking industry. Consequently, two research questions arise:

R2: How do female documentary filmmakers think gender influences their choices of topics for their documentary films and approaches to the stories?

R3: To what extent do female filmmakers feel documentary filmmaking field is male-dominated?

5.4. Methodology

The qualitative research method of in-depth interviews was used to answer the research questions. Semi-structured interviews with female independent documentary directors allowed women to tell their own experience and explain their understanding about documentary films and the industry. Before conducting the interviews, the documentaries of the chosen respondents were watched and observations about chosen topics, visual and storytelling techniques were used to design several questions

specifically for every respondent. Those questions were based mostly on three parameters: chosen mode of documentary (according to classification by Nichols (1991), expository, poetic, observational, participatory, reflexive and performative), topic elaboration and filming/editing techniques (usage of wide vs. close up shots, usage of music, narrator voice, talking heads, pacing of editing etc. from Hampe, 2007). This facilitated the interviews and encouraged the filmmakers to tell more anecdotes and personal accounts from their experience in the field.

5.4.1. Choosing research subjects

The study focused on American female independent documentary directors because of the available quantitative data gathered in the U.S about them. The data provide understanding about the industry in the country and, thus, works as important contextual information for the qualitative research. The study focused only on directors because they are considered “authors” of the documentary films. The narrative part and chosen strategies are attributed to the directors. Their names stand for the whole process of the films while the roles of other people involved in the film production normally go into sidebars (Cohen, 2012).

For this study subjects were chosen based on the fact that their documentary films had screened at the Sundance Film Festival over the 5-year period from 2009 to 2013.¹ The strategy was as follows: the Sundance Film Festivals programs were used to identify

¹ The 5-year period was chosen because of approximate count of data. In the recent study (Smith, et. al. (2013) authors focused on 10 year period (2002 – 2012) and gathered 286 documentaries made by women and programmed in the Sundance Film Festival; thus, I estimated that for 5-year period I would find more than 100 documentaries directed by women, which is not too much but also enough to take into account the rejection and non-response cases while contacting directors for interviews.

documentary films screened at the festival during the chosen period. Then, films were selected based on three criteria: 1) feature-length documentary; 2) created in the U.S.A; 3) made by female directors. The movie database imdb.com, the NY Times, or other sources (i.e., online images, news articles, film or director's personal websites) were used to identify female filmmakers. Also, priority was given to those who won awards (*Grand Jury: Documentary* and *Directing Award: Documentary*) and/or had their documentaries screened at the Sundance festival more than once. Both criteria are indicators of experience and skill. In order to avoid repetitions, female filmmakers chosen for the research covered different topics in their documentary films. The contact information was found in social media (LinkedIn and Facebook) and the film or personal director's websites. The filmmakers were contacted through direct emails or through messages on social media.

Finally, the interviews with four female documentary filmmakers were arranged:

- 1) Tracy Droz Tragos: she co-directed with her cousin Andrew Droz Palermo the film "Rich Hill," which won U.S. Grand Jury Prize for Documentary at Sundance Film Festival 2014. "Rich Hill" intimately follows three teenagers from an impoverished town in Missouri.
- 2) Lana Wilson: she co-directed with Martha Shane the feature documentary film "After Tiller," which was screened at the Sundance Film Festival 2013. The film tackles the issue of third-trimester abortions after the murder of Dr. Tiller in Kansas in 2008 and follows the only four remaining doctors in the US who openly provide third-trimester abortions.

- 3) Marta Cunningham: her film “Valentine Road” was selected for the Sundance Film Festival 2013. The film investigates the brutal murder of a 15-year-old homosexual boy who was murdered by his classmate in a high school in a town outside Los Angeles, California.
- 4) Rachel Grady: she co-directed with Heidi Ewing the film “Detropia,” which won the U.S. Documentary Editing Award at Sundance Film Festival 2012. The film looks into the decline of Detroit, Michigan, and features the residents of the city that once thrived.

Two of the participants (Tracy and Rachel) have created more than one feature documentary film and are acknowledged in the industry. The other two interviewees (Lana and Marta) were new to documentary filmmaking world as they premiered their first feature documentary films in 2013.

5.4.2. Interviews

Researchers working on gender-related issues in journalism tend to use structured or unstructured in-depth interviews as one of their methods. The purpose of this qualitative research method is to learn about a phenomenon from the subject’s perspective and experiences without imposing categories or limits beforehand (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The qualitative interview resembles everyday conversation but is based on specific techniques and approaches. This research relied on semi-structured interviews, which are based on a prepared guide that focuses on specific themes and could include specific questions. This strategy allowed the interviewer to be flexible and let the directors do more talking.

Schoch (2013) used in-depth interviews in order to investigate women sport journalists' working practices. She combined interviews with observation to have broader range of data. Nwabueze (2012) used not only personal, but also group interview techniques for the study of 30 female journalists in Nigeria. The goal of the study was to understand whether there is a relationship between the lower number of female journalists and press underrepresentation of women. A study that used in-depth interviews accompanied with surveys highlighted the presence of gender inequalities in journalism in Hong Kong and pervasiveness of family-work tensions for female journalists (Tsui & Lee, 2012). Using an in-depth, semi-structured interview format, Zuiderveld (2011) interviewed 5 women on their work in media management in Zambia, Uganda, Nigeria and Ethiopia. The study was designed to explore how female media managers in a non-western setting manage both their gendered identity and their identity as media professionals.

As there was no possibility to arrange face-to-face interviews with the directors for this research, three of the interviews were conducted via Skype and one on the phone. Skype interviews were preferred because they allowed the researcher to see the interviewee. This setup most resembled a face-to-face interaction. Two interviews each lasted approximately 1 hour and other two – approximately 35 minutes each. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analyzed using grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2006). This way the researcher was able to identify any phenomena and theory that arouse from the interview data.

The categories that were addressed in the interviews:

- professional background (When did you start creating documentary films? How did you start? Who was your mentor? Whose work influences your work, style and chosen techniques?)
- topic choices (What topics are you interested in? How do you choose a topic for your film? To what extent do you think your choice of topics might be influenced by your standpoint as a woman? Do you think female documentary filmmakers tend to focus on some specific issues more than their male counterparts?)
- questions based on their documentary films (How did you decide what kind of mode of documentary to choose? How easy/difficult was to elaborate the topic? Why did you choose (specific filming or editing techniques?)
- advantages of being a female documentary director (When/in what kind of situations did you consider your gender as an advantage? To what extent, do you think, women have more empathy for subordinated and disadvantaged groups than men? To what degree, do you think, women are able to listen to others better than men? Do you think such differences help women in creating long form documentary films?)
- disadvantages of being a female documentary director (When/in what kind of situations do you consider your gender as a disadvantage? How do you deal with the challenges?)
- gender role in documentary filmmaking process (How important is gender of a filmmaker in the documentary filmmaking industry? How much freedom do you have in the post-production process? Why women are prosperous in creating documentary films? To what degree do you consider documentary filmmaking as a male-dominated field? Why is it this way?).

5.5. Findings

All respondents had different approaches and insights about the documentary filmmaking field; however, newcomers had as deep and interesting thoughts about gender's role in the field as the more experienced women. This might be connected to the fact that the newcomers were observing the field closely in order to understand how to operate in it.

Only Rachel had journalistic background, whereas the others had education in film and/or dancing. In addition to this, Tracy and Marta studied writing. Different incentives encouraged them to create documentary films. Tracy shot her first documentary film in college and said she really enjoyed it but never thought about documentary filmmaking as a potential profession until her first feature film "Be Good, Smile Pretty." Rachel decided to make documentary films after working in different journalistic positions for a few years. Then, she spent several years in production companies working with different filmmakers and, finally, in 2001, with Heidi Ewing founded a non-fiction film production company "LOKI FILMS." As a graduate from a film school, Lana had always wanted to create a film, but never had found a proper and important topic until the murder of Dr. George Tiller and discussions about third trimester abortions drew her attention. Marta was also driven to the documentary film world because of the topic – hate crime. In the beginning she wrote a narrative film script based on the murder that occurred in the classroom in California in 2008. However, soon enough, Marta decided this needed to be a documentary film.

In the time of the interview, Lana was already working on her second documentary film about Buddhist priests in Japan and expressed aspirations to establish

herself as a filmmaker. She was searching for jobs and projects (directing commercials and short documentary films etc.) that would allow her to shift to filmmaking entirely. She said the success of her first feature film “After Tiller” was the key for her in making that shift.

“I’ve proven myself and I have a track record of something that I can show to people saying that I do know what I am doing; look at this.” (Wilson, 2014)²

Unlike Lana, Marta said that she did not have ideas to establish herself as a documentary filmmaker. She insisted that everything depended on the story and if something attracted her, she would do it. If not, she would not necessarily try to create another documentary film. Marta’s response clearly showed that creating a successful documentary film, which was screened in festivals, did not mean that the director was relating his/her future with documentary filmmaking field. Apparently, a documentary film can be just a medium used to tell a particular story.

It is also important to note that Tracy and Rachel have kids. Their experience of being a mother and strong feeling of motherhood in general becomes relevant in some parts of the interviews. Also, it is important to bear in mind that Marta is an African American. While talking about gender, most of times she mentions her race as well.

The rest of the analysis is divided into three sections and subsections. Each section discusses each research question, while subsections focus on the most important concepts and ideas that emerged from the answers of the respondents.

² This and consequent quotes by Lana Wilson are extracted from personal interviews that were conducted on March 25, 2014 and April 16, 2014.

5.5.1. Empathy and feeling for injustice

The first research question addresses women's capabilities – “double consciousness” and “emotional acumen” – from the standpoint of feminist epistemology. The goal was to figure out whether female documentary filmmakers thought about such gender based capabilities and whether they considered those competences as advantages in documentary filmmaking. All participants were cautious about generalizing and made sure that their answers should have been taken as speculations rather than unquestionable statements.

The respondents considered being a woman as an advantage while dealing with subjects of documentary films. The filmmakers felt that people were more willing to trust in women and that it was easier for them to get access.

“I think it's an advantage in gaining access, having conversations with people. <...> I don't know if it's me personally, but it's less intimidating.” (Droz Tragos, 2014)³

Marta seconded that it is easier for women to enter strangers' houses and people feel more comfortable. She added that “access is the key for documentaries” (Cunningham, 2014).⁴

With the experience of working together with another woman on “After Tiller,” Lana gathered a female-only team to go to Japan to shoot her second film about Zen

³ This and consequent quotes by Tracy Droz Tragos are extracted from a personal interview that was conducted on March 24, 2014.

⁴ This and consequent quotes are extracted from a personal interview that was conducted with Marta Cunningham on April 14, 2014.

counseling sessions for people with suicidal thoughts. As the film deals with a very sensitive topic, she felt that it would be easier for a woman to convince people and get a “yes,” i.e., gain access. This is very important for Lana because she believes the best subjects for documentary films are the ones who feel reluctant to appear in front of the camera and need to be convinced. If convincing subjects is a large part of documentary filmmaking and women are better in that, then the gender plays a big role and being a woman is an inevitable advantage here.

However, there was an unexpected dissonance between Lana’s ideas and those of Rachel. Rachel, who has worked in documentary filmmaking for 15 years, said she could tell in two minutes whether a person was a good subject for a film or not. She believed she did not need to convince anyone because she did not think that people who needed to be convinced were suitable for her films. This is an interesting approach, which might be connected with the choice of topic and other possible characteristics, i.e., creating issue-based rather than character-based documentary films, or other possible reasons, such as greater amount of experience etc.

When talking about subjects possibly feeling more comfortable next to female filmmakers rather than their male counterparts, Lana told an anecdote from her experience:

“So I’m going to Japan with a female cinematographer and a female producer/translator and the female producer overheard him [the subject] talking with a friend and his friend was like: so how is this different; you did that other

documentary⁵; is this different? <...> is it different to have a crew of all women with you now? And he was... yeah, it's way better; it's much more comfortable; it's way better.” (Wilson, 2014)

This anecdote shows that the subject himself articulated the idea that female filmmakers intimidate less. Also, the fact that somebody asked the subject about this issue means that it is important and relevant.

Marta said she wanted to have a female cinematographer shooting “Valentine Road” in order to “replicate the dynamic that they [children] would be very comfortable of” (Cunningham, 2014). Talking about the dynamic, Marta meant the relationship that mothers have with children. She said that children are very different in front of a woman than in front of a man because they form stronger relationship with mothers than fathers.

While talking about her experience of filming “Rich Hill”, Tracy mentioned a “parent card” that, she believed, worked in many ways. It helped Tracy not only to gain access to children through their parents but also establish specific relationship with the teenage boys.

“I think it would have been harder for Andrew⁶ to get there with them without me cause they might have been just stuck with kind of, you know, “bro” mode. They knew that I <...> really wanted to go to a deeper place and they really wanted to go there too.” (Droz Tragos, 2014)

⁵ According to Lana, the subject was filmed by Japanese television a couple of years ago.

⁶ Andrew Droz Palermo is Tracy's cousin and co-director of the documentary film “Rich Hill.” He is younger than Tracy.

Tracy's idea of a "parent card" is less gender specific, as men are parents as well. However, it could have a relevant connection to Marta's idea of replicating the sense of mother-son/daughter relationship.

Marta also mentioned that, as her film features children who witnessed a murder she wanted the cinematographer to understand the complexities of the issue and to be as gentle and non-invasive as possible because the "camera is very invasive" (Cunningham, 2014). However, in this case, gender might have played an important role not only because of the issues mentioned above but also because of the specific situation. The perpetrator was a teenage boy while most of the subjects of the film were girls or homosexual boys. They might have felt more comfortable sharing their stories with a woman.

Similarly, according to Lana, being a woman helped while creating "After Tiller." She thought doctors were more willing to let them into their clinics because they were young women.

"<...> we wouldn't bother anyone, we wouldn't intimidate anyone or make them feel uncomfortable in a way that older man, some random older man just looking around would. <...> we could just relate to a lot of patients because we were just young women like them. I think that's why a lot of the patients agreed." (Wilson, 2014)

Rachel found herself in quite a similar situation while creating the film "12 & Delaware" (2010) about abortion rights. She was sure that a man could not have made that film because everybody was female. Women, the same as in the case of "After

Tiller,” were making difficult decisions and would have felt uncomfortable sharing their stories with men, according to Rachel.

Even if being a woman helped Rachel while filming “12 & Delaware,” she did not think that subjects felt more comfortable in front of a woman. She noted that it is not possible to generalize and that it could depend on the topic, specific situation or subject’s preferences. Filmmaker’s personality rather than gender might play an important role as well.

“Maybe other women feel more comfortable with other women. Sometimes a man feels more comfortable with a woman <...> Sometimes it’s a disadvantage. Sometimes someone wants to deal with men for whatever reason that they don’t want to deal with the woman. There is just no difference how you navigate in the world as a female.” (Grady, 2014)⁷

In such case, gaining access to a subject and making him/her feel comfortable is not an issue for Rachel because those subjects are already committed to appear in a documentary film and be followed by a cameraperson.

The other important concept that emerged during the interviews was the relationship with the subjects. Tracy takes this relationship very seriously. She mentioned several times during the interview how for her it was a big emotional commitment to have a relationship with a subject. Tracy used the word “family” to refer to her subjects and the relationships she had with them. The discussion about the emotional commitment

⁷ This and consequent quotes are extracted from a personal interview with Rachel Grady that was conducted on April 6, 2014.

evolved from her idea to create narrative films in the future. For her, a narrative film would work as a break from documenting other people's lives: "You just hire amazing actors and don't worry about real lives that are impacted" (Droz Tragos, 2014). This quote tells a lot about how Tracy feels about documentary filmmaking. She seems to appreciate people trusting in her but also understands that her work does leave a big trace in their lives.

"I approach subjects but I also try to <...> pace myself. Cause it's exhausting and intense. And I am really not up for maintaining superficial connections. I'm not for exploiting people and not telling their truth. But to get to people's truth takes a while, you know... sometimes it's hard." (Droz Tragos, 2014)

This ties well to the notion of "emotional acumen," which women have a capability of according to feminist epistemology. Tracy believes that listening and diving deep into peoples' lives and feelings is the way to go. An example of her talking with Andrew's mother ("Rich Hill") illustrates well her approach to the subjects:

"This is something that she shared to me pretty much in a very raw and emotional way. I just kind of started talking with her a bit about her past and her life and it just came out. So... it was so intense. She was so vulnerable. In those cases you don't... I think you have to respect that she is going there. In that case it was a very long interview. I knew that I wasn't going just to stand up and say "thanks for sharing it with me"; "do you wanna get up and show me Andrew's room"? Somebody has to do that, you have to be with them and, you know... go wherever that goes for a while." (Droz Tragos, 2014)

Tracy and Andrew, co-director of “Rich Hill,” came to the editing room with 450 hours of footage. This and Tracy’s earlier comment illustrate how patient and devoted she was while gathering the material for the film.

Marta mentioned that patience is one of the most important assets in documentary filmmaking. Even though she did not want to generalize, and warned again about the dangers of generalizations, she said that most men she knew or she had talked to would have not chosen to cover the story of the murder of Larry King. She said they would have moved on. It’s not entirely clear why, in her opinion, this topic is not appealing to men, but this is how she answered the question about women possibly listening better than men. Lana was also very careful about generalizing, but she was convinced that women are better listeners in general.

Feminist epistemologists claim that women are capable of understanding injustice and the challenges of peripheral groups better than men because of their historic subordinated status in society. Marta questions whether empathy could be a biological or a socially constructed feature. She said she did think that women were “raised that way, where is OK to show your sympathy and empathy and emotions” (Cunningham, 2014). And, according to her, it does not mean that men do not have empathy; it just means that they have been taught not to express it. Rachel did not want to generalize and called the fact that women are more empathetic the “conventional wisdom” (Grady, 2014). She said she personally was incredibly empathetic in her work. She went on to admit that it was “absolutely a driving force for [her] films and a point of view of [her] films” (Grady, 2014).

Marta noted she was very much against portraying everything in black and white, i.e., claiming that African American people are tied up in the criminal system or women are “limited and second class citizen” (Cunningham, 2014). She said that she did not believe in any limitations posed on her by society. Her quotes show how strongly she feels about inequality and injustice. Marta is in a slightly different position from the other female filmmakers because of her race. This factor urged her to articulate the issues of injustice even more. She mentioned her gender and race together several times during the interview, which means that for her these two things are inseparable when talking about the role of gender in her profession or environment.

Lana said she created the film “After Tiller” with a goal to spread compassion and empathy. The film was meant to be a platform for abortion providers and women to share their sides of the story. She felt that there was so much discussion about abortions in the media after the assassination of Dr. Tiller, however, as she described, it was only “abstract shouting at each other” (Wilson, 2014). Everybody was discussing about the beginning of life in philosophical ways but nobody paid attention to the practical questions women were making: “can I handle this?” (Wilson, 2014).

“I think we shaped the film that it’s specifically designed to lead the audience on the certain path. We started with the cases that were the easiest to understand and sympathize with and ended the film with the most complicated ones that are much more of a gray area; are much more difficult to <...> agree with. We definitely did that intentionally because our overall goal was to get people to be more

compassionate and less judgmental and to humanize everyone involved.” (Wilson, 2014)

The main goal of the film was to listen to all the sides of the story and encourage empathy and understanding. Lana and her co-director purposely included the perspective of the protestors into the film even if they did not agree with them and expected the audience to feel the same way for the doctors.

“Even if you disagree with them [doctors] you could at least see that they are very compassionate and are trying to do the right thing. Even anti-abortion ministers have told us that. They disagree with the doctors, but they were incredibly moved by how compassionate and dedicated they are to their patients.” (Wilson, 2014)

Tracy again pulled out a “parent card” saying that as a parent and particularly a mother you are a lot more empathetic and understanding. She talked especially about poor families from the town of Rich Hill and how it was easy for her to understand how mothers felt about not having been able to provide for their children. Tracy also said that as a filmmaker she was very interested in girls and women because she wanted to give a voice to women. Interestingly, she admitted that her collaboration with a man on “Rich Hill” might have influenced some decisions. At the center of the film there were three teenage boys. Tracy said she felt responsible to try to find a girl to include as a subject to a film.

“Had I not been in the collaboration with the man, would I have included girls more? Possibly.” (Droz Tragos, 2014)

They actually filmed one girl who did not make into the final cut. Tracy told that she was considering creating a film only about this girl, who got pregnant when she was 16, and her and her son's first five years together. She said she felt bad about all the other subjects that did not make into to the film.

5.5.2. Topic choices

The second research question addresses the choices of topics for the documentary films that female filmmakers choose. There were no obvious similarities in respondents' interest in specific topics. However, the respondents, except Rachel, agreed that their choices of topics for the specific films were influenced by the fact that they were women.

The most obvious connection was between Lana and her documentary film "After Tiller" about third semester abortions and between Marta and her film "Valentine Road" about the murder of a transsexual teenage boy. Marta went further by saying that her choice was not only influenced by her gender but also by her race and middle class status. "Cause we walk in life in one kind of shoes," Marta said (Cunningham, 2014). Tracy was sure that her choice of filming poor teenagers from rural America was also influenced by her standpoint as a woman. However, even if it might be connected with gender as well, it might be more influenced by her personal relationship with the place – the hometown of her father.

While choosing a topic for her new film, Tracy was taking into account her gender and especially the fact of her being a mother. She was interested in covering issues in semi-dangerous areas and she was not sure whether this would be the right decision at this point of her life. It seems that for Tracy, being a woman and being a

mother was always intertwined. Rachel had some kind of similar concerns. She said somebody offered her production company the chance to direct a film about child slavery in the US. She said she could not do it. This was also connected to her being a mother because she explained that she “can’t sort of absorb that kind of tragedy right now in [her] life” (Grady, 2014).

Almost all respondents pointed out that the topic needed to be the most important at that time for them. It takes so much time and effort to create a documentary film that the filmmakers felt the topic must highly motivate.

“I have to feel that the story is really worth telling. It has to be sort of that my great desire meets the world’s greatest need.” (Droz Tragos, 2014)

Lana felt strongly about the importance of the topic as well.

“A part of why I could do “After Tiller” was because I felt that it was the most important subject in the world, literally, I thought there was nothing more important. <....> The other thing to spend 3-4 years on a film to me it has to be incredibly important life and death issue that I could spend so much life on it.” (Wilson, 2014)

Both Lana and Marta expressed their interest in complex stories. Lana felt like the more complicated and difficult the topic was the more interesting it was to dig into it. Marta said she was interested in stories that had gray areas because “media has a real tendency to create black and white situations and the world doesn’t work that way” (Cunningham, 2014). For Lana, filmmakers go for “soft” topics only because they want a

guaranteed audience. Interestingly, she said she was not making films for the audience. This is an intriguing idea taking into account that films are supposed to be shown to the public.

Tracy pointed to the need to explore. For her, films were connected to her own personal experience, which was obvious in “Rich Hill,” as she and her cousin filmed in her father’s hometown. Even though they started with the idea of exploring the big concept of poverty, it was closely connected to her family. When asked about topics that interested her, Tracy said “family.” She was interested in exploring family relationships in different situations. For her, this was the springboard for broader issues.

Rachel did not have a specific answer and said that her interests were “kind of all over the map” (Grady, 2014). However, just seconds later she refined it by saying that all her films were domestic and tackled big, never-ending American issues.

“I try to find stuff that would translate to other places in the world, sort of universal ideas as well as specific. I am interested in big issues of this country that I feel like the conversations should not cease to exist: poverty, race, women’s rights.. <...> you know, the plight of the middle class.” (Grady, 2014)

Rachel said she wanted to deal with those big issues differently, mostly by using small character-driven stories. She also noted that she liked featuring kids and gave an example of her new film about young entrepreneurs. She corrected herself by saying that these were actually not kids but young adults in their 20s. This shows that she is interested in young people and their issues and struggles.

All respondents mentioned they strived for in-depth storytelling. Tracy noted she was not keen on “more newsy, more commercial and more surface,” (Droz Tragos, 2014) even though it actually could be lucrative and good for her career. She said it had to be a long form project with people in the center of it. Tracy told that she found herself at a crossroad at the time of the interview. She was trying to figure out her next career moves. This comment illuminates the life of a documentary filmmaker. Successful recognition of a movie and subsequent traveling around to film festivals is not an assurance that a filmmaker will make another film soon or that it will become his or her career.

Talking about the movies that the participants of the research recently created, all, with the exception of Marta, stressed how they wanted the movies to be observational. They saw this mode as a platform for the story to unfold in front of the viewers’ eyes.

“We wanted scenes; we wanted moments. We didn’t want it to be a bunch of talking heads. <...> So that was probably 30 percent interview and 70 percent observation when we were trying just sit back and observe.” (Droz Tragos, 2014)

Lana also explained that she wanted to be a “fly on the wall,” when doctors and patients were making extremely important decisions. As they could not film faces of the patients, they decided to push the camera extremely close to the subjects in order to create a feeling of supreme intimacy. They focused on hands, they filmed doctor’s face through the backs of the patients etc. Regarding her new film (about counseling sessions in Japan), Lana wanted to witness the precious moments when somebody who had thought about suicide changed his/her mind.

“It’s like curiosity and wanting to be a fly on the wall and witness this extraordinary real life drama. The stakes are so high <...> it’s real and it’s actually unfolding in front of you.” (Wilson, 2014)

Rachel also talked about the observational mode which, she said, was how she created all her films. The first documentary that she saw had a great impact on her. “Streetwise” (1984) does not have any narration and is told from the first person point of view. She admired how it was edited and remembered this film since the first time she saw it as a teenager. It is interesting how she relates her own style of work to the film that was made 30 years ago.

From the very beginning, Tracy and Andrew, co-directors of “Rich Hill,” made the decision to make their film look lush and cinematic. They had a professional sound designer create the music. They wanted to include meditative moments into the film to allow people to “notice these small details we put in a certain headspace” (Droz Tragos, 2014). While there is a discussion about the ethics of the usage of music in the documentary world, Tracy stressed that they were very sensitive and thoughtful during the process. She said she did not want people to think that they were “doing the violin and making them feel pity for them [the subjects]” (Droz Tragos, 2014).

Lana had a philosophical idea for a discussion about different possible styles of men and women of approaching the stories.

“<...> the saying is like men get into politics to be someone and women get into politics to do something. So I just wonder if that could work for filmmakers as well.” (Wilson, 2014)

She also gave an example of rock band movies that normally are very popular and do well, which logically leads to profit. However, Lana wanted to pay attention to the film "Dixie Chicks: Shut Up and Sing," created by Barbara Kopple and Cecilia Peck in 2006. According to Lana, the film not only showed the band touring but also involved a lot of politics. Lana said she could very well imagine a man doing just a very good "rock band documentary" from the same story.

5.5.3. Male-dominated world?

The last research question addresses the idea of whether documentary filmmaking field is dominated by men or women. It is closely related to conclusions from research about fiction filmmaking and journalism fields.

All four participants used the same expression that women were "not taken seriously." Even though it sounds negative and reinforces gender stereotypes, all the filmmakers said that it was an advantage and disadvantage, depending on the situation. Lana said she thought that being a woman would help in creating many different documentaries, not only ones about women.

"<...> they don't really think you are a professional filmmaker and they think this is not going to go anywhere. <...> so many people said to us: is this for a school project? And we say: no. I was telling our publicist that story and she said... she is a publicist for a lot of documentary filmmakers... and she said that a lot of female documentary filmmakers, even if they are in their 40s or 50s get asked that: is this for a school project?" (Wilson, 2014)

Lana's anecdote shows that women are underestimated, notwithstanding their age. This "sexist assumption" (Wilson, 2014) seems to be quite popular. However, not only Lana but other filmmakers as well admitted that in the field it worked as an advantage. Thus, female filmmakers tended to get access easier. Marta seconded by saying people tended to open more because they did not think that this would go anywhere.

However, even if it might help to get into people's houses and conduct interviews, not being taken seriously is a disadvantage after the film is done and a female filmmaker needs to sell it and/or find a job. According to the respondents, people are less scared and less intimidated by women, and this becomes a disadvantage when they have to deal with sellers and distributors. Tracy thought that men were more sought after for positions and projects in general. Her cousin Andrew, with whom she co-directed "Rich Hill," had already been approached by agencies even though it was his first feature film. Tracy has two successful feature films in store; however, she had not been approached by anybody yet at the time of the interview. She did not make any conclusions, but her intonation expressed her confusion about that. This suggests that gender might actually play a big role in the industry.

A big part of the conversation with the filmmakers circled around fundraising and handling money in general. The women reinforced the stereotypical idea that men were better in dealing with money and that they were being trusted more for such roles.

"I think it's hard for women in society to raise money. Money is kind of... I think the final barrier is money. <...> That is the invisible obstacle. Men earn more

money and have more opportunities to earn more money. If there is more money involved, people are more comfortable of giving them to a man.” (Grady, 2014)

Even though most of the participants of the research agreed that women were better represented in the documentary filmmaking world than in the fiction one, they said they were concerned by the fact that the “cream on the top” were still men. Marta explicitly said that, in her opinion, “men” was too generic because she felt that straight white men over 50 dominated the documentary filmmaking industry. Rachel agreed that the bigger budget documentaries usually ended up in male director’s hands, but she said that there were only around three such documentary films every year. She seemed not to overdramatize things by saying that men were getting paid more in society in general.

Women are still better off in documentary filmmaking than other related fields because, not taking into account those bigger budget documentary films mentioned by Rachel, stakes are lower in non-fiction filmmaking. According to most of respondents, it is much easier to get into the documentary than fiction filmmaking field. It is just more difficult for them to reach the top of the industry or to be trusted with big budgets. Subsequently, the biggest issue that women face is sustainability.

“It [documentary filmmaking] can’t be just a hobby for women having rich husband or something. There is a sideline for that. It has to be sustainable and valued.” (Droz Tragos, 2014)

“Then we get married and we drop off and then we have children and then we want to come back to workforce. While men may have children and don’t miss

the peak. I think that we have very different types of sustainability. I think it's the fall of the industry.” (Cunningham, 2014)

Lana herself experienced the difficulties of raising money. For her, the idea of doing that was always scary and restrained her from trying. She said it felt selfish to ask for money for an artistic project such as a feature film even though everybody does that all the time. She felt so much better asking for money for “After Tiller” because she felt the topic was urgent and important. Lana decided to co-direct the film with Martha Shane, who had created documentary films before. Even if Lana trusted in her own ability to make a film, she said she felt much better working with somebody who had already dealt with logistical and practical issues. In this sense, Lana considered Martha as a kind of mentor for her. She also mentioned three other women who helped a lot with logistics and gave important advice about the filmmaking process in general.

Tracy was also grateful for the advice and practical help she received from American film and television producer Chris Donahue. He showed her how to write newsletters, how to contact funders, how to get organizations involved in fundraising etc. This part seems to be confusing and scary for many new filmmakers, regardless of gender, because they do not know how to navigate the documentary film world. But, encouragingly for Lana, she found the documentary filmmaking world to be less competitive than, i.e., art world where she was working part-time at the time of the interview. More experienced female documentary filmmakers seem to encourage and support the younger women coming into the field. Rachel could fit into Lana's described category of filmmakers because she puts an effort into helping young filmmakers,

especially women. She said she wanted women to tell their stories and she believed that it helped when a woman rather than a man encouraged them. This reinforces the notion that the documentary world is an encouraging and welcoming place to be, even if women face some difficulties and their gender might be a disadvantage at times.

5.6. Discussion

The research was designed to look into gender's role in independent documentary filmmaking through the eyes of female professionals. It was not conducted with the goal of comparing the women's and men's experiences. The main idea was to research the female perspective. As there are reports analyzing the business side of filmmaking and women's role in it, this research aimed to tackle the whole documentary filmmaking process from an idea to its execution in the field and to the distribution of a film afterwards. Such a holistic approach is an important value of this paper.

American independent female filmmakers seem to consider their gender an advantage while working in the field: approaching characters, conducting interviews, following the subjects and observing them etc. The capabilities defined by feminist epistemologists – “double consciousness” and “emotional acumen” – seem to be relevant and acknowledged by female filmmakers themselves. All of the participants of the research agreed that people tended to trust more in women, felt comfortable next to them and opened up more than they would do in front of a man. However, interestingly the women related some of these situations to the fact that female filmmakers are not being taken seriously. Even though it has negative connotations, the participants were aware that it turned to an advantage in the field because nobody thought that interviews or

filming would lead to something or get any publicity. This could be another reason why people tended to be less cautious about telling things to women and were more welcoming toward them.

However, the fact that female filmmakers are not being taken seriously becomes an important disadvantage when the women come back from the field. They expressed disappointment about having difficulties selling their films, finding agents, signing contracts for projects, etc. All of the respondents agreed that the documentary filmmaking industry is male-dominated. Men are more trusted with big budget projects, which supports the stereotype of women not being able to handle money. However, documentary films being of much less stake than fiction ones allows women to be more involved in this particular field. This ties to a noteworthy issue of sustainability, which prevents some aspiring female filmmakers from achieving their goals. The respondents voiced their concern that the production of documentary films still resembles a hobby rather than a profession. At the same time men are reached by agencies and are offered projects more often.

Every female filmmaker had interest in different topics but they all agreed that their choices might be influenced by the fact that they are women, i.e., tackling abortion rights, investigating a murder of a gay boy, featuring women in their films, following teenagers etc. Moreover, even if these choices are connected with their gender, it might be also influenced by their family status, i.e., being a parent, or, for example, personal relationship with the place, as it was in the case of Tracy who went to film in the hometown of her father. The fact that respondents did not see any pattern in the specific topics that female filmmakers tackle offers an intriguing idea for future research. In this

case the audience might become an important target. Using the focus group method, the participants could be asked to guess whether a man or a woman directed a specific film and share their opinions about the role of gender as well.

In spite of the differences in topic choices, all interviewees seemed to be keen on in-depth storytelling based on long-lasting observation rather than quick conclusions. It is not clear whether the preference of in-depth storytelling could be directly connected to gender or whether it is due to individual preference of style and storytelling in general. However, most of the women stressed the importance of people being the main parts of their documentary films. It resembles the results of the studies about female reporters who focus on human-based stories while men are more prone to issues and sensational news. In addition, as documentaries are long-term projects that take several years to make, the patience and disinterest in lucrative commercial projects that women seem to share might be the force for their success in the documentary filmmaking industry as well.

All the women stressed that they felt empathy for their subjects and for people in general. This ties back to the feminist epistemology and women's ability to understand injustice and emotions better than men. In this discourse, the respondents connected their gender to being a mother and a parent in general, which also meant that they were more sensitive to issues about children and young people. They also felt the need to give a voice to voiceless and especially to women by telling their stories and even helping other female professionals in the field. All the respondents were conscious about difficulties that women face in the industry and expressed a willingness to help.

An interesting idea that appeared during the study was the discussion about gender being biological or socially constructed phenomenon. Some respondents said that sometimes they felt like patience and empathy came from the fact that they were expected and taught to be that way. The question is whether women are born with “double consciousness” and “social acumen” or whether they learn it with time. This discussion should be encouraged and elaborated in the future.

All things considered, in the view of these filmmakers, gender seems to play a big role in documentary filmmaking either by making it easier when, for example, getting access, or by making it more difficult when, for example, selling the film and being invited into other projects. However, the study is not designed to offer generalizations as unquestionable truths but rather to start the academic conversation about gender’s role in documentary filmmaking. The study offers ideas and concepts that could be used for future research. It has some limitations that should be explored as well.

The study specifically addressed only the American independent documentary filmmaking world. In this case, such decision allowed for reaching more specific conclusions about the industry of non-fiction filmmaking in the United States. However, it would be important to expand it to other countries and also to include male counterparts into the conversation so that their work and experience in documentary filmmaking could be compared to those of women. Even the discussion of the results of this study with male documentary filmmakers could bring important observations, as they could affirm or question the ideas offered by the women interviewed here.

Also, the subjects of the documentary films could be involved in the research. They could be asked about their experience and their ideas about the role that the

filmmaker's gender played in the process. Even though it is a rare situation, as happened to Lana's subject in Japan who participated in more than one documentary, interviewing the subjects who worked with women and male directors would provide excellent material. As more and more women enter the field of documentary filmmaking and as video storytelling is becoming more popular, discussion about women's success in the field based on gender differences becomes crucial.

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