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Inspiring Women: Women Make Movies

by Skylia Seamans

Incredible as it may seem, only five percent of Hollywood features are directed by female movie makers! That's one reason why Women Make Movies was formed. Women Make Movies is the world's primary distributor, producer, promoter, and exhibitor of independent films which are made by women and are all about the issues women face. The focus of each film is to present an in-depth account of today's headlines, usually in documentary format. Their catalogue currently includes five hundred films and videotapes which are used for educational purposes, community and cultural organizations, and entertainment. Many people believe Women Make Movies (WMM) actually create the films they distribute, but this is really not what they do. Instead, WMM distributes films made by women around the world who create their own films. WMM has its roots in the feminist movement and wanted to support the notion that women should be able to tell their stories and voice their own opinions on the important issues plaguing women around the world.

Women Make Movies was founded in 1972 by Ariel Dougherty and Sheila Page whose purpose was to distribute films created by women who wanted their voices heard and were trained and educated to make efficient film productions. The primary film that got WMM started was "Healthcaring from Our End of the Speculum." It was made during 1972 and 1973 and was an unbelievable film looking at the ways women were being treated by the health care profession. From there, Women Make Movies flourished, but it did face great financial difficulties because it is a non-profit organization. This is partly why the organization shifted, early on, from creating films to producing them instead. WMM's goal is not generating revenue, but having different women's influential stories and viewpoints heard.

There are many women who make WMM an accomplished organization, but one woman in particular has helped pave the way for its success. Debra Zimmerman, the executive director, has been a part of this feminist organization since 1983. During her tenure, Women Make Movies has grown into the largest distributor of media by and about women in North America. She has organized video and film exhibitions for numerous organizations including the American Film Institute and the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. She has lectured on women's media throughout the world. In the United States, she has taught workshops on the distribution and marketing of independent films and videos. Zimmerman has contributed a great deal to Women Make Movies and is greatly responsible for what it has become today. Other important women behind the scenes of WMM are Maya Montanez Smukler, director of production assistance; Vanessa Domico,



Kim Longinotto, WMM filmmaker, accepting Sundance Award for *ROUGH AUNTIES* with two of the film's subjects, Mildred Ngcobo and Thuli

director of distribution; and Mijoung Chang, distribution coordinator, as well as seven other very hardworking staff members.

When talking about the types of movies WMM produces, Debra Zimmerman states, "It is always both an ideological and business decision; we want to distribute the very best films for which we think there is a need or a market. There are times when we pick up titles we know will not sell well but which move the art form forward. For documentaries, we look for quality and perspective. We are interested in films that give voice to women—whatever those voices are."

Women Make Movies' films screen at festivals and other exhibitions throughout the world. Many are also broadcast on different television and cable stations that are available to everyone. The films distributed by WMM are very diverse. They produce anything from four-minute animated films to four-hour experimental feature films from different countries, with a special focus on documentaries. The organization works with an incredibly diverse population, everything from prisons to libraries, health organizations, government agencies, youth centers, cinemas, festivals, etc.

WMM receives about three-hundred films per year in their office. There is also a group of four or five women who actively go to festivals constantly looking for the latest work. A total of over one thousand different films are given to WMM to view and possibly distribute. After viewing all films, WMM chooses about twenty to thirty projects to complete within the year. It is very competitive, but the films chosen truly reap the benefits. WMM doesn't just look for quality and simple narratives in the works they view, but also films that truly challenge viewers and represent the way that women see the world in a truthful but imaginative way.

The greatest problem facing women's media making and distribution, according to Debra Zimmerman, is generating a large enough budget. Women still

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Chick Flicks, Bro Shows and Feminist Films

by R.J. Doughty

Mainstream films about women, and for women, are often given a derogatory name: chick-flick. The term was first uttered on-screen in the 1993 film *Sleepless in Seattle* to describe *An Affair to Remember* and has since been used to diss a wide variety of movies aimed at, or about, half of the population. Anything feminine is seen as frivolous, weak, and not valuable to our culture. Women will line up for movies about men, but what self-respecting man would want to see a film about *women*? Cultural anthropologist Melissa McEwan explains, in a recent Huffington Post article about the undervaluing of female filmmakers, that men's stories are considered universal "human stories" that anyone can relate to, but women's stories are a specialized, and therefore inferior, subset. So, we have chick-flicks, but no male equivalent. As McEwan says, "Nora Ephron makes 'chick flicks', but Michael Bay doesn't make 'dick flicks'." Films exclusively about the male experience and targeted at men are not called bro-shows. They're called blockbusters.

That said, the broad cultural distaste for Hollywood's attempts to woo women are understandable, but not because they focus on women. The problem with mainstream "chick-flicks", as a pseudo-genre, is that the characters and stories they portray often have nothing to do with actual women and their lives. Films targeted at women almost exclusively focus on gorgeous, thin, upper-and-middle-class, able-bodied, straight, white women whose sole problem is an inability to find a man. Since the Disney films of girlhood, we see it everywhere: Snow White is punished because she's so beautiful, and she gets saved by the kiss of a complete stranger. Ariel abandons her life, family, and voice to try to win over a man she met once. Mulan spends a few hours kicking butt and saving her country, but congratulations from the emperor isn't the resolution – the movie isn't over until she gets with the handsome male lead who was treating her like garbage a few scenes ago.

Even if women in most mainstream films start out happily single, you know by the end they're going to get with that guy they've been flirting/fighting with the whole time.

It's the one area in which female characters are perpetually unfulfilled.

What about women's other conflicts? As the feminist newsjournal *Off Our Backs* points out, if women in chick-flicks were realistic, they'd be struggling with "workplace discrimination, childcare, reproductive rights, racism, domestic violence, homelessness, aging, human rights, sexual assault and living-as-LGBT-issues". Even gorgeous, thin, upper-and-middle-class, able-bodied, straight, white women who have never encountered misogyny (though you would be hard-pressed to find one) have to deal with growing up, trying to be successful, making decisions about their health, making decisions about their income, raising kids, and defining their identity – all experiences that have nothing to do with hunting a husband. It can be considered activism, then, to represent the personal and political realities of women's lives on film, and to promote images of women that are conspicuously absent from the big screen.

The Professional Organization of Women in Entertainment Reaching Up (also known as POWER UP) formed in 2000 with the specific purpose of promoting gay women in entertainment and the arts. This independent non-profit studio awards filmmaking grants and serves as the studio for short films such as *Stuck*, the story of two aging lesbians who get into an accident in the desert, *Billy's Dad Is a Fudge-Packer*, a queer re-imagining of stuffy 1950s educational videos, and *D.E.B.S.*, the campy action spoof about a paramilitary troop of schoolgirls which was remade into a feature film in 2004.

POWER UP was also the company behind *Itty Bitty Titty Committee*, a feature film that's not afraid of the f-word. The film centers around a young Latina woman named Anna as she joins up with an underground feminist organization called C(I)A (Clits In Action) and falls in love with their leader, Sadie. Listen and you'll hear the riot grrl tunes of Sleater Kinney, Peaches, Heavens to Betsy and Bikini Kill, among others. Watch closely and you'll catch references to the Guerilla Girls, Naomi Wolf, Bitch and Ms. Magazines, The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, and many other writers, musicians and feminist minds. The film portrays lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth in a positive and normalizing way. Though the C(I)A engages in some over-the-top destructive activity not to be imitated by the audience, their more creative ideas – such as erecting their own statue honoring Angela Davis, publishing a zine with food for thought about beauty and body ideals, and creating a website to make connections with other feminist collectives – might drive a lucky viewer to commit acts of righteousness. Or, at the least, take a closer look at modern



The cast of *Itty Bitty Titty Committee*

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The Case Against Porn: Arguments of Anti-Porn Activists

By Brianna Vear

Pornography, as defined by the Webster-Merriam dictionary, is the depiction of erotic behavior intended to cause sexual excitement. Members of the Anti-Porn Movement have a different definition. They believe it is material that combines sex and/or the exposure of genitals with abuse or degradation in a manner that appears to endorse, condone, or encourage such behavior. They say pornography can be broken down even further into violent pornography, non-violent pornography and erotica. Violent pornography is when sexual behavior is abusive; non-violent pornography is where sexism and the dehumanization of women occurs; erotica is where sexually suggestive or arousing material is free of sexism, racism, and homophobia and is respectful of all human beings and animals portrayed. Erotica is an acceptable form of pornography in the minds of the members of the Anti-Porn Movement.

Abusive sexual behavior ranges from acts that are derogatory, demeaning, contemptuous or damaging in nature, to ones that are seen as brutal, cruel, exploitive, painful or violent. Members of the Anti-Porn Movement, like Andrea Dworkin, consider abusive sexual behaviors to include acts that are humiliating, insulting and disrespectful, such as urinating or defecating on a woman, ejaculating in her face, treating her as a slave or as an inferior, and calling her insulting names during the sexual act. These behaviors are very common in pornography.

Sexual objectification or viewing women not as real people but as sexual things, is just as common in pornography. Susan Brownmiller wrote, "[In pornography] our bodies are being stripped, exposed, and contorted for the purpose of ridicule to bolster that 'masculine esteem' which gets its kick and sense of power from viewing females as anonymous, panting playthings, adult toys, dehumanized objects to be used, abused, broken and discarded." Sexual objectification is seen most in non-violent pornography, which is also known as sexist pornography. The sexual objectification of women is not limited to porn. It is also seen on TV and in magazines, art, literature, cartoons, and other media.

Canadian psychologists Charlene Senn and Lorraine Radtke conducted an experiment where female subjects were shown slides of the three types of pornography. Erotic images had a positive effect on the moods of women, while conversely, non-violent and especially violent pornographic images had negative impacts on the moods of the subjects. This study helped show the negative effects of non-erotica pornography.

Members of the Anti-Porn Movement do not

advocate the banning of porn. They realize that banning porn will not eliminate the demand for pornographic material. Instead, the purpose of the Anti-Porn Movement is to make people aware of the harm that can, and does, come from porn. Anti-porn activists want to take out the violent, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise demeaning behavior that pornography demonstrates.

Eighty-seven percent of who that molest girls and seventy-seven percent who molest boys are users of "hard-core" porn. Pedophiles also use pornography to show their young victims what they want them to do. Say the pedophile wants a seven year old child to sexually please him. He will show the child pictures or videos so that the child knows what is expected of him or her. Critics of the Anti-Porn Movement state "what is one person's erotica is another person's porn." Members of the Anti-Porn Movement and those who are critics of it have fought over what constitutes porn, but all agree that the sexual exploitation of children is clearly pornography and should be illegal.

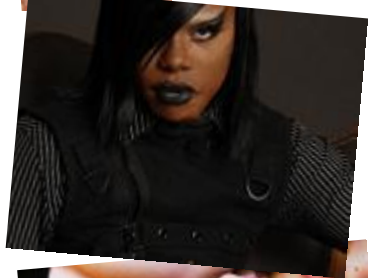
In a 2003 study, eight thousand male high school and college age students were interviewed. Ninety-one percent admitted to having looked at porn on the internet. Eighty percent had gone out and looked for the porn. Sixty percent of males interviewed said they would rape a woman if they could get away with it, and ninety seven percent of them were porn watchers. Anti-Porn activists are asked frequently why they are so against pornography when it is the woman's choice to participate. The women in porn often do not have a choice, just as women who sell themselves for money often have no choice. Well over half of the women who sell their bodies to producers of porn were sexually abused as children by their fathers, stepfathers, uncles or older brothers. The first sexual act they knew was forced upon them, and many times it was not the last sexual act that was forced upon them. "The first time I had sex, I was raped by someone close enough to my family to call my mother 'mom.' Now, I was sure what I was for. I knew that my greatest asset was my sexuality and knew how badly it was desired. I also realized that I had little control over my sexuality that it could be taken at will. It was easy to give it for profit; at least then I was in control", says Taylor Lee, a sexual abuse survivor and ex-porn star.

Young women who run from their homes because of abuse or were thrown out of their homes are faced with the need to find shelter and food. The easiest, and sometimes only, solution is to sell their bodies for money. In the U.S., as well as other countries, sex-trafficking is a big issue. Women and children are bought and sold to producers of porn as well as to pimps who exploit the women. This is to not deny that some women do make the choice to be in pornographic material, but they are much fewer than those

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Puppets of Patriarchy or Full-Frontal Feminists: Reclaiming the Pornography Industry with a Feminist Perspective

by Gloria Statwick



Annie Oakley, Reginald Lamar, and Lorelei Lee of the Sex Worker's Art Show

Pornography carries a strong connotation of violence and degradation. When most people hear the word “porn,” they think of women forced to perform sexual acts that objectify or demean them. Some critics go so far as to say that pornography is, without a doubt, sexual violence. But many “pro-sex” feminists have a different opinion.

Wendy McElroy, author of several writings in defense of pornography, states that “pornography benefits women, both personally and politically.” She challenges the typical anti-porn approach, suggesting that porn does not objectify women, but instead focuses on their sexual nature. She then asks, “Why is it degrading to focus on her sexuality?” It is merely one aspect of a woman, just like her sense of humor or intelligence.

When those assets are focused on, who complains?

Another misconception of the porn industry is that the women are forced into acting or posing, and that they have been traumatized in their early sexual life somehow. McElroy, however, has found that “not one of the dozens of women depicted in pornographic materials with whom [she] spoke reported being coerced.” If a woman enjoys exhibiting her body and sexuality, she is considered “psychologically damaged.” Her decisions do not comply with the rigidity of social expectations, thus automatically casting her out as damaged. Of course, there are women in the sex industry who were forced into it because of reasons beyond their control, such as financial downturn or sex trafficking. These situations are undeniably enraging, and pornography that is a result of the exploitation of any person should not be supported.

However, if it is a woman's choice to join the sex trade, to show off her body in a sexual way that arouses a viewer or herself, to have sex in front of a camera, it is purely her choice and she should be respected, not shunned.

Pornography allows women to learn about their sexuality in a safe way. Many women reach adulthood without knowing how to please themselves, and porn can be a source of information for them. Women can enjoy

scenes that they have fantasized about, or relish certain experiences in porn that they may not be able to act out physically. The same idea of catharsis goes for men: watching porn serves as a barrier, if you will, between acting out violent fantasies upon women in their lives, and simply watching it on a screen. For couples, watching porn together is an exciting way to gather new ideas to make sex more interesting and fun. It is a great way to start conversations about sex and what each partner wants in the relationship.

McElroy points out that both pornography and feminism share a common ideal: sexual liberation. Instead of dismissing women in porn as self-deprecating playthings for men, feminists can give their support to those women who choose pornography as an aspect of their lifestyle.

Some women, such as Annie Sprinkle and Anna Span, direct their own films and give public speeches about porn and sexuality. Their efforts help bring down the stigma that surrounds female sexuality. In a society that pretends that women don't have a lot of sex, not to mention *good* sex, there are many females in the porn industry that are working to overcome that perspective. Nina Hartley, a porn star with an extensive record in the biz (650 films!), has been working for feminism and sex-positive perspectives since the 80's. These women help others see that willing sex is safe, enjoyable, and does not have to be degrading in the least.

The Sex Worker's Art Show is a perfect example of this. Founded and directed by writer and stripper Annie Oakley, the show is a mix of visual and performance arts, music, and burlesque. It exhibits both the sexual and artistic talents of a wide array of performers, including an ex-topless dancer now professor and writer, a musician and pole dancer, and an opera singer. The cabaret-style show celebrates sex-positivity in a smart and sexy way.

Another celebration of good sex is the Feminist Porn Awards. Good For Her, a sex store in Canada, has sought out well-made and exciting porn made by women every year since 2006. On the store's website, they explain that part of their reasoning for the Awards is they strive for “porn to be held to a higher standard.” In order for a piece to be considered for an award, Good For Her lists the criteria as follows:

- “1) A woman had a hand in the production, writing, direction, etc. of the work.
- 2) It depicts genuine female pleasure.
- 3) It expands the boundaries of sexual representation on film and challenges stereotypes that are often found in mainstream porn.”

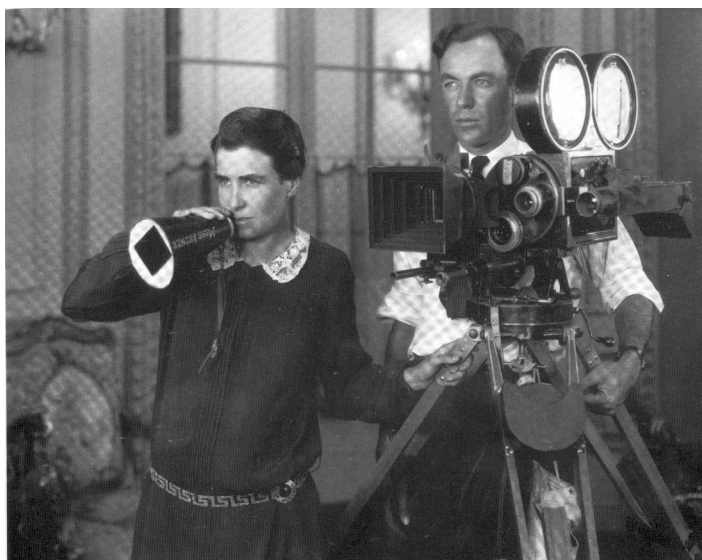
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History of Women in Film by Corinne Blake

In the year 1886 in France the first narrative (fiction) film was made. *La Fee Aux Choux* (*The Cabbage Fairy*) was short, silent, black and white, and directed by a woman. Alice Guy was one of the first film directors to hit the film industry. She was followed by a long line of successful women writers, producers, and directors. Alice Guy moved to the United States and started her own production company, and founded the first U.S. movie studio. In the early 1900s, Hollywood attracted women of all talents: writers, directors, actresses, producers, and often many women who did a little of everything. Many women started out as actresses and moved on to experience new roles in the world of film production. One of the first and most successful directors in the early years of Hollywood was Lois Weber. Weber started as an actress but quickly began to write and direct as well, and became the highest paid female director in the country. Her films portrayed controversial, and often taboo, issues such as abortion. The only person (male or female) to win an Academy Award two years in a row was Frances Marion for her original stories *The Big House* and *The Champ*. Her talents were in high demand from 1915 to the late 1930s and she was the worlds highest paid screenwriter (male or female) for two decades. One of the most promising jobs for women in Hollywood's early years was writing. Between the years of 1912 and 1925 nearly all films produced were written by women.

Unfortunately, the success of women in Hollywood did not last long. The 1920s and the 1930s did not present many opportunities for women, though this doesn't mean that no women broke through the mold. In 1936 a group of Hollywood film directors got together to form the Directors Guild of America. Two years later, Dorothy Arzner became the first woman member. Dorothy was one of the very few successful women directors in the 20s and 30s; she directed Paramount's first "talkie" and is still credited with having the most works by a woman director. Dorothy's films were "rediscovered" in the 70s with the emergence of the second wave of the women's movement and her films are very important in the study of feminist films.

Dorothy Arzner was one of the few women to succeed in Hollywood during the 20s and 30s and women have since struggled to make themselves known in Hollywood as something other than the beautiful actress. This isn't to say that Dorothy Arzner was the last successful woman in Hollywood. On the contrary, many notable woman have stood out with strong careers. One of the most



Dorothy Arzner, calling the shots.

memorable is Lucille Ball. Lucille is most well known for her role in *I Love Lucy* in the 50s (one of the most popular TV shows of all time), but most people don't know how much she did behind the camera. Not only did she star in over sixty films and perform on Broadway, she was the first woman inducted into the Television Academy's Hall of Fame, and she was the first woman to own a production company. On television, Lucille's characters were always strong and independent woman.

Many women have been successful in Hollywood, but it is a struggle for them to be recognized as such. The cliché of women in Hollywood is the beautiful actress and while actresses should certainly be recognized for their talent and contribution to the film industry, acting is not the only place women have flourished. In 1929, the first Academy Awards were given. Seventy-five years later the first American woman was nominated for best director. Sofia Coppola was nominated for Best Director for the film *Lost in Translation*. Before her two other women from other countries had been nominated: Lina Wertmüller, an Italian filmmaker for *Seven Beauties* in 1976 and Australian filmmaker Jane Champion for *The Piano* in 1993. None of them won.

Today the number of females behind the camera in the mainstream film industry is frighteningly small considering that the amount of women graduating from film schools is nearly even with the number of men. In 2002 a study of the top 100 grossing films showed that only 4% were directed by women, only 8% had female writers, only 1% had female cinematographers, and only 12% had female editors. The

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The Lady Docs: Feminist Documentaries

by Alex Nichipor

Across America, the humble documentary has pushed up its thick-rimmed glasses, adjusted its pocket protector, and elbowed aside the flashy films of Hollywood. *Supersize Me* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* played in box offices formerly reserved for formulaic narrative blockbusters. *An Inconvenient Truth* ignited public consciousness and helped make global warming a major political issue. At MCLA, students can be seen wearing clothing inspired by *Invisible Children*, a documentary about African youth who are kidnapped and enlisted as soldiers.

I am delighted at the growing popularity of documentaries, having grown up on a steady diet of them. It heartens me to think that Americans may appreciate learning about the fast-food industry or political issues more than they enjoy watching Tom Cruise blow up stuff. But there is one thing that I have noticed about all these notable and popular documentaries – all of the writers and directors are men.

Consider this: can you think of a female Steven Spielberg off the top of your head? Or a female Ken Burns? Or Michael Moore? Or any female director who wasn't a movie star first?

The effects of this unequal gender balance can easily be seen in documentaries. Think about how many docs open to a panning shot of some distant land...with a male voiceover. The frequent choice of male narrators in documentaries is notable, not only in so-called "male" subject areas like military history, but also in general history, educational, nature, and biographical documentaries. Why do this? Surely, there is no dearth of trained female voice actors.

The choice of male narrators may reflect the common conception of the deeper male voice as "authoritative" – obviously, directors of documentaries want to present this information as fact (you also see this in movie trailers, no matter what genre). But by assigning male voices to the presentation of information and relegating women's voices to chick flicks and romantic comedy, filmmakers strengthen the association between masculinity and authority. Male narrators are also supposed to be received by viewers as "gender neutral," whereas a woman's voice is noted for its femininity, and thus is thought to distract listeners from the material being read. Obvious issues aside (since when is masculinity "gender neutral"?), one questions how long it would really take for an audience to get used to a female narrator in a documentary.

Sexism can also distort the facts of a documentary, such as when human gender relations are juxtaposed onto the animal world in nature documentaries. One example that springs immediately to mind is the way some nature documentaries talk about "dominant" lions and "submissive" lionesses. In reality, lionesses form the foundation of the pride, hunting prey and rearing young. The lioness is also the party most likely to initiate sexual activity. It's the male's duty to fight off other male lions and top-tier threats like hyenas.

Oftentimes, notable women or women's issues have been left out of documentaries (though this has been changing in recent years, as fans of the History Channel may have noticed). One of the first short documentaries to focus specifically on women came out in 1944. Titled "Supervising Women Workers," it strives to be an educational guide on how to help the (male) supervisor deal with the wartime influx of women into the workforce. In the documentary, a factory worker named Joe confesses his discomfort about his new female workers (pictured above) to his boss, who proceeds to educate him about women. Joe just needs to understand that women are selfish, jealous, slow, easily confused, and ignorant about how to operate machinery. This ridiculous documentary would almost be funny, except that it was actually considered progressive for its time.

We've come a long way since then. Although sexism does still affect the world of documentary filmmaking, there is some evidence that women writers, directors, producers, and cinematographers fare better in this genre of film. Women direct around 28% of documentaries as opposed to 9% of narrative films. A study of independent film festivals (the sources of some of the best documentaries), found that two-thirds of female directors of photography worked on documentaries rather than narrative films. It also appears that women directors are more likely to hire a larger percentage of women as behind-the-scenes workers in the films they direct. However, some experts think that women are relegated to directing and working on documentaries because these films have lower budgets, and many film studios still do not trust women to work on films with larger budgets.

On a brighter note, documentaries have excellent potential for raising awareness about complex issues. Often, feminist documentaries comprise activism within activism by spotlighting the work of unsung women activists all over the world. In so doing, they bring the message of these women's work to a much wider audience.

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Inspiring Women: Women Make Movies (continued)

get smaller budgets than men and have trouble getting represented at major film festivals. There are not enough women in positions of decision-making at film festivals. When asked where WMM will be in ten years, Zimmerman states, "Hopefully, if we are able to renegotiate our lease, we'll be right where we are now—on Grand St. and Broadway in Soho! But beyond location, I hope that in 10 years we will finally be able to get our titles out to the world without having to put them in bubble-pack mailers. That's something I can hardly wait for. But I also think we will be doing the same thing: introducing audiences to the work of new and emerging talent as well as supporting and distributing the work of experimental and documentary makers who don't fit the Hollywood mold."

All of the films distributed by Women Make Movies have influenced the world in one way or another, but four of their movies have actually won top prizes. In 2002, at the Sundance Film festival, "Senorita Extraviada" won the Special Jury Prize, "Personal Velocity" won for cinematography, "Daughter from Danang" won the Documentary Grand Jury Prize, and "Blue Vinyl" won the Excellence in Cinematography Award in the Documentary category. All four films have also won numerous other prizes that can be found on the Internet Movie Database. If it wasn't for Women Make Movies, these films may not have been such a success. WMM is truly making a difference in the lives of their viewers and the women that create these films for the entire world to see. Look for new WMM releases coming out in 2010!

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Chick Flicks, Bro Shows and Feminist Films (continued)

feminism.

Other films draw the viewer's attention to feminism and feminists throughout history, which not only stirs admiration and respect, but gives activists, feminists and women a larger context in which to frame their own struggles. The 1992 film *A League of Their Own* was inspired by The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, which existed between 1943 and 1954. *Frida*, starring Salma Hayek, is a biopic of the disabled Mexican painter Frida Kahlo. *Norma Rae* adapts the real story of Crystal Lee Sutton, an employee of a textile plant who made \$2.65 an hour in intolerable conditions. She became an organizer and eventually succeeded in unionizing her factory floor. Crystal Lee Sutton passed away in September of 2009 in the midst of a different struggle: one to get her insurance company to cover treatment for her brain cancer.

Iron Jawed Angels is an HBO film featuring the acting talents of Hilary Swank, Frances O'Connor, Vera Farmiga, Anjelica Hudson, Adilah Barnes, Molly Parker and Patrick Dempsey. It tells the story of two suffragettes, Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, who created a more radical branch of the movement for women's right to vote. The film depicts their clashes with the mainstream movement, the livelihoods they put at risk or left behind, their eventual imprisonment, and the hunger strike that made their struggle headline news (the title of the film refers to the nickname the women earned for their resistance to force-feeding). This film reminds activists just how hard-won our very basic rights often are in these United States.

The personal and political realities of women's lives cross-culturally are also made accessible through film. *Whale Rider* is based on the bestselling book by Witi Ihimaera, the first published Maori novelist. It is an uplifting story of a young girl claiming the role of leader which she is born into, but denied, because of the patriarchal nature of her culture. The Iranian film *Dayereh* (or *The Circle* as it was called for American audiences) is a more somber piece of cinema. It shifts its focus between the interconnected stories of several women in Iran, beginning with a birth and ending with an arrest, all commenting on the injustice of women's low status. The film is banned in Iran.

Some U.S. films that may be considered activism have had outstanding success - *Thelma and Louise* and *G.I. Jane*, both directed by Ridley Scott, for example, are highly successful mainstream films that deal with abuse, rape, harassment and gender inequity. However, it's worthwhile for a feminist film fan to dig a little deeper. Films making the rounds at festivals are just as good, if not better, than what's at the local cinema chain. Writers, producers and directors that are

committed to a feminist perspective are usually not the same ones with the resources to get their film in every theater in the country. Although an equal number of men and women graduate from film schools, only four percent of Hollywood directors are women.

Bam-Bam and Celeste, written by and starring feminist comedian Margaret Cho and directed by Lorene Machado, is the campy tale of two best friends taking a road trip to New York seeking fame on a makeover show. Though Cho wrote the film two years before it was finished in 2005, she said "it was a challenge to [get] financing [for a] fag and fag hag road picture". On their way, the titular characters face homophobes and racists, and when they arrive, they overthrow the show's bad-body-image concept by honoring Cho's natural looks and leading the live audience in a chant of "we're all beautiful!" The movie premiered in San Francisco, sponsored by an adult shop called Good Vibrations, with all proceeds from the event going to two local organizations, Women's Community Clinic and the Center for Sex and Culture. It was later screened at the Toronto International Film Festival.

The Watermelon Woman explores the history of black women's role in the film world from the perspective of a black lesbian video store clerk and filmmaker. Writer, director and actress Cheryl Dunye plays a character by the same name who becomes obsessed with making a film about a black actress of the 1930s known only as "The Watermelon Woman". She discovers the obscure actress had an intimate relationship with a white female director, just as Cheryl is becoming involved with a white woman named Diana. The film won a Teddy Award for Best Feature Film at the 1996 Berlin International Film Festival.

Like any industry, the film world is difficult for an activist to navigate, and it's even harder for women. Progressive film lovers can improve things by engaging in activism of their own. Seeking out and supporting independent female, LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual,



Keisha Castle-Hughes as Paikea in *Whale Rider*

transgender, queer and intersex), racial and ethnic minority, disabled and activist filmmakers is critical. At the same time, demanding films that speak to real experience instead of oppressive stereotypes from mainstream Hollywood improves our collective cultural consciousness and makes the path from an activist to a theater near you a little easier.

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Alan Cumming, Margaret Cho, Bruce Daniels and Lorene Machado of *Bam Bam and Celeste*

The Case Against Porn: Arguments of Anti-Porn Activists (Continued)

with no choice.

Critics of the Anti-Porn Movement have several main arguments, one of which is that porn is just sex. Porn is not just sex. It is a medium that uses sex to distort and dismantle women and their bodies to make a product that will be bought. It violates, exploits, harms, and objectifies women which leads to harmful psychological effects on both the woman and the viewers. Their other main point is that the First Amendment protects free speech. Although they may have the freedom to be sexist and say what they wish, they also have the responsibility to treat other humans as real people. For example, the Klu Klux Klan has the right to assemble, but does not make what they do right. The same goes for dehumanizing and demoralizing women. Just because you have the freedom to do something it does not make it the right thing to do. Catherine Mackinnon, an outspoken member of the Anti-Porn Movement, says that freedom of speech is used by the strong voices to silence the weak ones. "I believe that speech can in fact silence speech and even attack one's sense of self-worth. This is the speech of the schoolyard and the street, the howling taunt, the racial epithet, and the sexual bombardment that women receive."

Catherine Mackinnon, along with Andrea Dworkin, was crucial in getting the court system to realize the problems with pornography. They drafted a civil ordinance that would allow victims of pornography to sue pornographers. The ordinance treated pornography as a violation of women's rights. It was shot down by city officials and courts who said it was a violation of the First Amendment. Minneapolis and Indianapolis were the only cities to pass the ordinance though it was later deemed unconstitutional by federal courts. Dworkin told New York's attorney general "Pornography is used in rape - to plan it, to execute it, to choreograph it, to engender the excitement to commit the act." Dworkin and Mackinnon based their arguments on the harm that comes to women, both those in the pornographic images and the victims who were not directly involved in their making.

Victims of pornography are those who were assaulted both, physically and sexually, by men who watch porn, as well as those whose marriage was affected by one partner's obsession with pornography. Many women find that they cannot have a relationship with a man who is a watcher of pornography. They feel betrayed that the man they love can enjoy watching such violent and derogatory acts against women, and can look at other women in such a way that sexually excites them while being in a relationship. Many women who are in a relationship with watchers of

"hard-core porn" are sexually, physically and verbally abused by their husbands.

Pornography is not just something that comes in magazines like *Playboy*, or on internet sites, or in the "adult" section of the movie stores. The sexual subjugation of women is all around us: strip clubs, prostitution, mainstream movies, advertisements, and magazines. Pornography is a problem that society must face and fix. It is not freedom of speech, but rather freedom to demoralize and objectify women, that critics of the Anti-Porn Movement are fighting for. Pornography has real physical and psychological consequences for those directly, and indirectly, involved making it and watching it.

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Puppets of Patriarchy or Full-Frontal Feminists (continued)

Although the majority of mainstream pornography does exhibit some pretty nasty behavior to the women involved, there is a huge wave of feminist sex workers who are making a difference in the way we watch porn. Their creativity, intelligence, and love of sex make the pornography world a positive one, instead of dwelling on its negative and violent aspects.

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History of Women in Film (continued)

feminist group Guerilla Girls stated that "The U.S. Senate is more progressive than Hollywood," pointing out that while among directors in 2001 and 2002, 4% were women, among senators, 12% were women. These statistics were posted on posters and stickers by the Guerilla Girls and a group of anonymous women directors called the Alice Locas. Together these two groups do what they can to educate people on the statistics of women and people of color in the film industry. In March 2002 they turned their focus towards the Academy Awards, presenting their "Anatomically Correct Oscar" billboard in Los Angeles. The billboard featured the Oscar looking more like the white males that usually won him. It also held statistics saying that Best Director has never been won by a woman, only 3% of acting awards have gone to people of color, and 94% of writing awards have gone to men. The Guerilla Girls and Alice Locas simply put information out there. Could this really make a difference? You tell me: that year Halle Berry became the first ever African-American woman to win Best Actress and Denzel Washington the second ever African-American man to win Best Actor.

By supporting and working with each other, The Guerilla Girls and Alice Locas embody an unofficial tradition. Throughout the history of women in this industry one thing remains the same: women stick together. All the women mentioned in this article worked closely with other women in their field to help each other along in this male-dominated industry.

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The Lady Docs: Feminist Documentaries (continued)

There are an increasing number of organizations devoted to the creation of such documentaries, as well as venues to show them to the public. The Artist Film Festival screens films devoted to social issues, seeking films that present problems in an interesting, informative, and creative light. According to its founder, "Artist is dedicated to using the power of media responsibly by providing a platform to socially conscious filmmakers and artists."

Among organizations promoting women's filmmaking endeavors, Women Make Movies is one of the most significant. Women Make Movies strives to assist female filmmakers by running production workshops and providing information on cinematic techniques. The organization also runs an internationally recognized distribution service, working with institutions such as colleges, media arts centers, and museums, and strives to create a wider audience for the films it supports. The films that Women Make Movies helps to create span a wide range of topics; one focuses on the achievements and history of female matadors in Spain; another on African activism against female genital mutilation; and one, directed by a new mother, looks at the difficulties of raising a baby in a world filled with toxic chemicals.

Feminist documentary filmmaking strives to provide a lens into unknown and neglected parts of the world, and to give a voice to the voiceless.

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Resources for Activists, Volunteers, and Those in Need...

The **Elizabeth Freeman Center's** mission statement describes the organization as "a non-profit, county-wide agency that provides counseling, advocacy, emotional, educational, vocational, and economic services, and fosters social change. We oppose violence, harassment, and discrimination, and we promote the physical and emotional safety of all people. We strive to provide a haven and a communication network for all people, regardless of gender, age, race, color, class, religion, or sexual orientation." They are always accepting volunteers. Training for their hotline to connect survivors to support, counseling, advocacy, shelter, or just someone to talk to, will occur after the first of the year.

Their free hotline is available 24 hours a day:

866-401-2425

For general information and how to volunteer, call 413-499-2425,
or visit their North Adams office at 85 Main Street.

Tapestry Health is a non-profit organization that has provided reproductive health care and HIV counseling in several locations across Western Massachusetts for over thirty years. Their nearest site to MCLA is located at 100 Wendell Avenue in Pittsfield. They have a variety of options for volunteers and interns. They are also currently campaigning against cuts to Family and HIV Funding. From their website:

"Contact the Governor's office today and urge him to not reduce the Family Planning line item (4513-1000) or the AIDS line item (4512-0103) as he contemplates 9 C cuts for the FY 2010 and as he plans for the FY 2011 budget proposal. Cuts to these line items now or in FY 2011 would result in further/significant reduction of services. Governor's contact information: 888-870-7770."

Learn more about Tapestry Health at their website:

www.tapestryhealth.org

or call:

(413)586-2016

The **Berkshire Food Project** provides free hot lunches five times a week, Monday through Friday. Contact them about donations and volunteering:

First Congregational Church

North Adams MA 01247

Phone:(413) 664-7378

www.berkfoodproj.org

The **Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition** is a state-wide organization dedicated to promoting justice and equality for people of all gender identities and gender expressions. Their website lists legal, medical, and other resources, they publish info on preventing transgender suicide, and they organize political action around transgender-inclusive rights legislation. For more info:

info@masstpc.org

617-778-0519

<http://www.masstpc.org/>

If you know of a campaign, protest, cause, volunteer opportunity, social justice organization, support group or other resource in the Berkshires (preferably in the North Adams community), let us know about it!

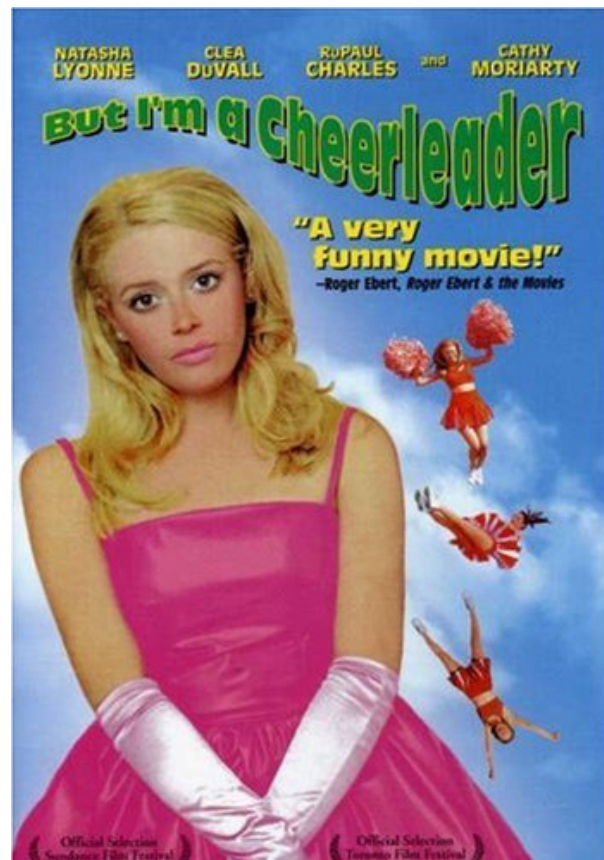
Contact us at:

womenscenter@mcla.edu or **x5497**, or visit in **Campus Center Room 322**.

The Susan B. Anthony Women's Center Presents

**Film, Food and
Conversation:**
*But I'm a
Cheerleader!*

**Thursday, Dec. 10th
7pm
Hoosac Harbor**



Megan (Natasha Lyonne) lives in a sheltered suburban paradise—she's a cheerleader, she's dating the captain of the football team, and she is the apple of her loving Christian parents' eyes. That is, until ex-gay Mike (Rupaul) is called in for an intervention—her family and friends have noticed the “warning signs” of dreaded lesbianism. Megan is shipped off to join other young men and women at True Directions , where Mike and Mary (Cathy Moriarty) try to teach these misguided youth how to

be *real* men and *real* women in the hopes of getting them back on the path of blessed heterosexuality.

Join the Women's Center for this thoughtful but campy comedy about gender roles and sexuality, and stick around for snacks and conversation!



Mail to:

Phone: 413-662-5497
E-mail: womenscenter@mcla.edu

North Adams, MA 01247
MCLA
Campus Center Room #322

Susan B. Anthony Women's Center

But Does it Pass the Bechdel Test?

The Bechdel Test was thought up by Alison Bechdel, creator of the long-running strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* and a graphic memoir, *Fun Home*. To pass the test, a movie must:

1. Have two women,
2. Who talk to each other,
3. About something besides a man.

It's not a perfect test for sexism, but a surprising number of films fail. One website, bechdel.nullium.net, has been keeping track.

- Among those that don't pass the first rule are *The Great Escape*, *Reservoir Dogs*, *Aladdin*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *Oceans Eleven*, *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, *Ice Age*, *There Will Be Blood*, *Ratatouille* and *Angels and Demons*.
- Failing the second rule is *Blade Runner*, *Ghostbusters*, *Back to the Future*, *Jurassic Park*, *Pulp Fiction*, *The Lion King*, *Interview with a Vampire*, *Gattaca*, *The Fifth Element*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, *Fight Club*, *Shrek*, two of the *Austin Powers* movies, the entire *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *Wall-E*, *The Reader*, *Milk* and *Up*.
- Failures to comply to the third rule include *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, *When Harry Met Sally*, *Home Alone*, *Braveheart*, *Trainspotting*, *The Princess Bride*, *Watchmen*, the remaining *Austin Powers* movie, and two out of three *Pirate of the Caribbean* movies.
- The happy total passes include: *The Wizard of Oz*, *Carrie*, *Alien*, *Labyrinth*, *Thelma and Louise*, *Matilda*, *Mulan*, *The Matrix*, *Girl Interrupted*, *Boys Don't Cry*, *Bend it Like Beckham*, *Persepolis*, *Juno*, *Hairspray* and *Coraline*.

