

University of Nevada, Reno

**Latina Voices Behind the Camera:
Shifting the Focus toward Latina Filmmakers**

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by

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ABSTRACT

For most of Hollywood film history, this was the ratio of male-to-female involvement in film production: mostly men and mostly white. Women were rarely a part of the picture behind the camera for most of the 20th century, except as “script girls” who worked under their more recognized male counterparts. While the landscape of film production continues to evolve into a more inclusive industry as it progresses into the 21st century, there still remains significant gaps, specifically in the inclusion of women and women of color, especially Latinas, as influencers behind the camera. Recent studies have identified a disconnect between the immense purchasing power of the Latinx community in the United States and the representation of (or lack thereof) such community members in front of the camera, let alone representation behind the camera. Through interviews of Latina filmmakers contextualized by a review of past literature, this thesis aims to analyze how the involvement of women, specifically Latinas, in influential positions in the creative process of contemporary filmmaking may affect the representation of Latinx issues and Latinx community members while simultaneously contributing to the heterogeneity of film and television narratives created by women.

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INTRODUCTION

Upon entering the Universal Studios theme park, one is greeted with a statue of three figures depicting the immediately recognizable trio of a film crew: a man sitting on an elevated platform peering through a camera, a woman holding a boom pole over her head, and another man sprawled out on the ground using his hands to frame his vision in front of him, the director. For most of Hollywood film history, this was the ratio of male-to-female involvement in film production: mostly men, and, though not explicitly indicated by the bronze statues, mostly white. Women were rarely a part of the picture behind the camera for most of the 20th century.

While the landscape of film production continues to evolve into a more inclusive industry as it progresses into the 21st century, there still remains significant gaps, specifically in the inclusion of women and women of color, especially *Latinas*, as influencers behind the camera. Arguably, such gaps are reflected on the content of motion pictures, sustained through harmful or false stereotypes of certain groups such as the Latinx community because of the lack of Latinxs behind the camera who influence the content. Hall (1997) expresses the importance of those in power who circulate certain “meanings” through control of access and opportunity, which become articulated through the representational practices of media. Despite the growing population and the significant buying power of the Latinx community in the United States media representation of the Latinx community, as well as access and opportunity for Latinx content creators, remain largely restricted and limited by large companies (Negrón-Muntaner and Abbas, 2016). While countless studies have shown the effective power of

media and what is represented on screen through actors and content in shaping the public's perceptions of groups, events, places, etc. (Hall, 1997), I will focus my research on those behind the camera, specifically Latina women of varying identities.

While the involvement of women in the creative process of content creation continues to grow and be celebrated, many renowned names in the industry remain white. The number of Latinas in positions of influence are miniscule at best (Beltrán and Rodriguez, 2016). Despite the increasing democratizing effect of technology through streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu, and video publishing sites such as YouTube and Vimeo, Latinxs continue to be among the minority as directors, producers, and writers, with even a decrease in numbers within the past decade (Negrón-Muntaner and Abbas, 2016).

My research aims to record and share the experiences of Latina content creators in hopes of contributing to the research of media representation and its importance from the perspective of those behind the camera. Through interviews of Latina women active in the field of filmmaking with questions based on a review of past literature, I will analyze how the involvement of women, specifically Latinas, in influential positions of filmmaking such as writers, directors, and producers in the creative process of video production may affect the representation of Latinx issues and Latinx community members while simultaneously contributing to the heterogeneity of film and television narratives created by women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The involvement of women in the creation of motion pictures can be traced throughout the history of Hollywood, from as early as the Silent Era near film's conception and the Golden Age of Studios in the 30s and 40s (Francke, 1994). In *Script Girls: Women Screenwriters in Hollywood* (1994), Francke recounts the history of women screenwriters and their contributions. However, women's status in the industry, especially as screenwriters, was low, and their careers were largely protected by the partnership they had with influential male figures they worked under in the field (Francke, 1994). Women were rarely able to secure recognition, let alone success, by themselves, if ever, especially with their role as screenwriters which was a position already deemed lowly in the hierarchy of film production during the Golden Age. Such dependency on their male counterparts for even a chance to work on a film (whether they were directors, producers, or studio executives) oftentimes resulted in an eclipsing of women's contributions. According to Francke (1994), they were also restricted writing "women's pictures" for a majority of the 20th century until the feminist movement infiltrated Hollywood in the 60s and 70s when women began to challenge the boundaries of this particular typecasting, though not every female screenwriter had a feminist agenda behind their work. These "women's pictures" dealt with stories about "[women's] troubles," meaning domestic concerns, problems at home about marriage, though the definition "women's pictures" changed through the 40s and 50s when women began to write a hybrid of melodrama and film noir, transitioning from "the woman's weepie" to the "woman's shocker" (Francke, 1994). Heterogeneity in films created by women slowly evolved as the decades wore on.

Today, the world of film production is more accessible to women as women in the industry become more visible than ever. Countless women have risen to acclaim in influential positions in the creative process. Among these women are directors such as Ava DuVernay (an African American woman who is known for directing and producing films such as historical drama *Selma*, documentary *13th*, and most recently, Disney's *A Wrinkle in Time*), Kathryn Bigelow (the only woman to date to win the Academy Award for Best Director for *The Hurt Locker*, a thriller war drama), and Greta Gerwig (who was the only woman to receive nomination for Best Director *after* Bigelow some 8 years later with her debut work *Lady Bird*). Additionally, cinematographer Rachel Morrison became the first female cinematographer nominated for an Academy Award for her work in *Mudbound*, a war drama. Though pieces such as *Lady Bird* and *A Wrinkle in Time* reference the historically stereotypical "women's picture" dealing with issues in home life, family, and children's fantasy, respectively, as Francke defined earlier (as art often references history), DuVernay, Bigelow, and Morrison have risen to influential positions in the creative process in film genres historically dominated by men: war, drama, action, and thriller (Francke 1994). Many of these films directed, written, and created by women are no longer constrained to the women's picture genre of domestic life, romance, and melodrama as defined by Francke (1994). Indeed, the landscape for creating motion picture is not only more open to women behind the camera but also embraces and celebrates their involvement. This creates a space for more voices to be amplified and heard.

Citron (1998) examines the involvement of women outside the world of screenwriting as outlined by Francke. In her piece, "Going Mainstream," Citron (1998)

defines the difference in the roles of “filmmakers” and “directors” who choose to go “mainstream,” which, to her, means surrendering complete control of a creative product and conforming to what is most suitable for social standards and therefore marketable. As a filmmaker herself with a background in feminist avant-garde films, Citron defines the difference between a “film-maker,” a “producer/director,” and a “director.” While a “film-maker” is the “sole controlling force behind the work,” (meaning conceptualization, funding, directing, photography, and post-production falls completely on one person), being a “producer/director” means surrendering some responsibilities of production and post-production to other members of a crew because of the sheer size of the production while continuing to maintain a majority of influence. These definitions offer the most creative freedom, especially for avant-garde filmmakers such as Citron who aim to convey women’s experiences and feelings through their films rather than conforming to expectations set by studio executives and the audience. Conversely, a “director” indicates a “shift towards a desire to associate oneself with Hollywood,” (Citron 1988), a desire to trade total control for the power and breadth of influence of a mainstream director. To Citron (1988), being a director meant that these women are working within the parameters of mainstream narrative film and succumbing to the demands of the market and popular culture in hopes of subverting its stereotypes and expectations. This also meant conforming to a certain genre, to which women were pigeonholed into writing melodramas while action and thriller continued to be a male dominated arena. Indeed, women in mainstream Hollywood film such as the aforementioned DuVernay, Bigelow, Gerwig, and Morrison may not have an explicit and inherent feminist agenda every instance they step behind the camera and take on a

project. Rather, their involvement in such an industry and the visibility of their work and achievement contribute to the heterogeneity of films created by women.

Though film has evolved over time and women seem to have a better chance in the industry than their predecessors (who have paved the way for contemporary women filmmakers), there is still plenty of room for improvement. Lacking among the big name women contributors behind the camera are Latinas (as well as Asian women, though that extends beyond the boundaries of this research). According to Beltrán and Rodriguez (2016), the percentage of Latinxs in executive positions in the creative process was non-existent at the turn of the century. However, the involvement of Latina voices specifically as decision-makers behind the camera could be an important factor in the contributing to intersectionality and how issues specific to the Latinx community and particularly Latinas is represented in the motion pictures. In “The Latino Disconnect: Latinos in the Age of Media Mergers,” a 2016 study conducted at the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race at Columbia University, filmmaker and professor Frances Negrón-Muntaner and co-author Chelsea Abbas discuss the phenomenon known as the *Latino Disconnect*. This states that although Latinos make up 17.4% of the population of the United States and control \$1.5 trillion dollars in buying power, “large companies continue to limit access, representation, and opportunity for Latino consumers, content creators, and businesses” (2016). Behind-the-camera talent in major shows, national news programs, and films are comprised of only about 7% Latinos, and stereotypes of Latinos as criminals, illegal immigrants, and communists on screen have only skyrocketed (Negrón-Muntaner, 2016). As Figure 1 from *The Latino Media Gap: The State of Latinos in U.S. Media* conducted by Negrón-Muntaner et al. shows, Latinos as a whole consist of barely

3% directors and producers in this study, and only 6% are writers. For Latinas specifically, as shown in Figure 2 from the 2016 USC Annenberg Media, Diversity, and Social Change Initiative report that analyzed 1,000 films in a span of 10 years from 2006 to 2016, there was only one Latina director recorded out of 1,000 films. These numbers show that mainstream Hollywood, for the most part, is still white and male. There is a severe lack of representation of not only Latinxs as a whole behind the camera, but more importantly, of Latinas. Writers, directors, and producers are the main influencers of a film and decide what ultimately ends up in front of the screen. Such numbers may reflect a correlation between the lack of diversity behind the camera to the prevailing stereotypes of group such as the Latinx community.

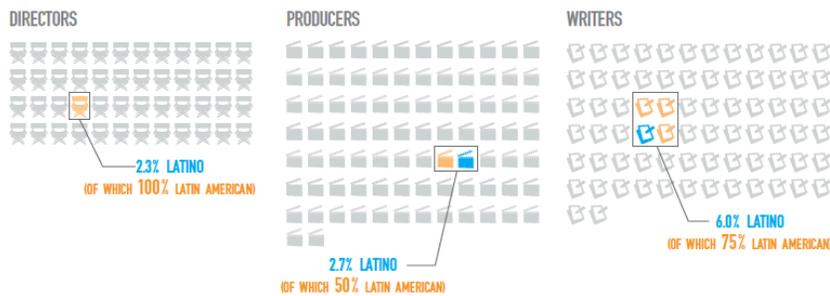


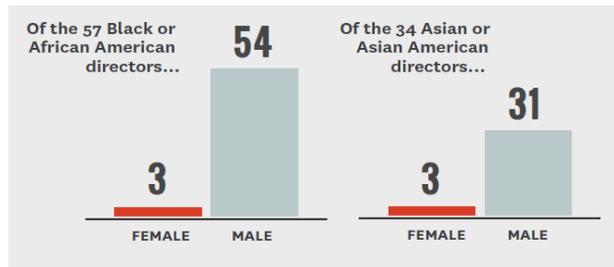
Figure 1 Source: Negrón-Muntaner, F., et al. (2014). *The Latino Media Gap: A Report on the State of Latinos in U.S. Media*. New York, NY: Columbia University.

THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR IS WHITE AND MALE

ACROSS 1,000 FILMS AND 1,114 DIRECTORS...

5.1%
OR 57 WERE BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN

3%
OR 34 WERE ASIAN OR ASIAN AMERICAN



Only one Latina worked as a director across the 1,000 top films from 2007-2016.

Figure 2 Smith, S.L., Pieper, K., Choueiti, M. (2017) *Inclusion in the director's chair? Gender, race, and age of film directors across 1,000 films from 2007-2016*. Retrieved from USC Annenberg Media, Diversity, and Social Change Initiative Website

In order to continue discussions about Latinx media, one must understand the complexities that Latinx media scholars must tackle. In this particular body of research,

“Latinx” describes a gender-neutral term in place of “Latina/o.” In *Authenticity, Appropriation, Articulation: The Cultural Logic of Latinidad*, Del Río delves into the complexities of Latinidad (2017). By definition, Latinidad assumes a pan-ethnic unity that binds a people together. In other words, one may group any person who has origins in any of the South American countries as “Latinx.” However, Latinidad *also* assumes a manifestation of heterogeneity in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, and nationality. It is in this intersection of unity and diversity of a people that Latinx media studies tackle a key challenge: under what conditions and for what purposes do cultural messages produce “Latinidad”? (Del Río, 2017).

As Negrón-Mutaner and Abbas stated, Latinxs have immense presence and purchasing power in United States economy, yet the Latino Disconnect still persists. A contributing factor may point toward the findings of a history of Latinx studies over the past decade which analyzed how, with the evolution of media such as cinema, the direction of representation of minority groups such as Latinxs was influenced by 20th century ideologies of patriarchy and overt racism (Del Río 2017). This eventually shaped general market messages that reveal the persistence of stereotypes which ultimately defined the Latinx community (Del Río, 2017) as criminals (Tamborini and Mastro 2000), as underrepresented (Mastro and Greenberg), and as immigrants (Dixon and Williams 2015). This is evident in the 2014 report by Negrón-Muntaner et al. which compared television Latino stereotypes against actual percentage of Latinos by real-life occupations. For example, on television media, 69% of represented Latinxs are maids, while only 44% have this real life occupation, as seen in Figure 1 (Negrón-Muntaner, et al., 2014). Furthermore, Latinidad often manifests in United States media as the “brown

race” (Del Río 2017), though the aforementioned definition of Latinidad rejects such an assumption due to the conglomeration of ethnicities, faiths, and nationalities associated with Latin America. Latinx members are, instead, racialized in a homogenized narrative of the “colorful, immigrant-centric, patriarchal, mostly Mexican, Catholic *mestizaje*” (Del Río, 12).

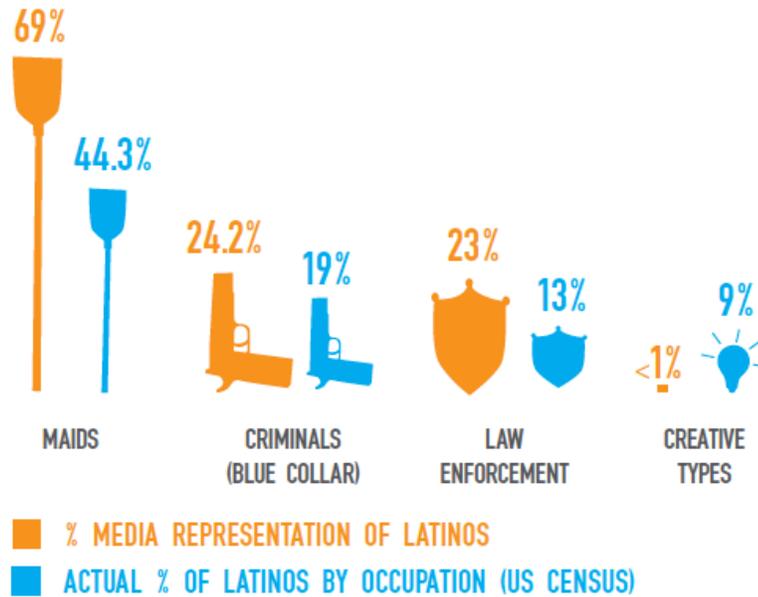


Figure 3 Source: Negrón-Muntaner, F., et al. (2014). *The Latino Media Gap: A Report on the State of Latinos in U.S. Media*. New York, NY: Columbia University.

This relates to a concept Del Río coined as the “Latina/o Problematic,” in which scholars investigate the cultural, political, and economic dynamics that parallel Latinidad rather than assume a consistent, already existing, and “measurable” identity. This scholarship is based on “national identity, citizenship, language, culture, and differences of race, class, gender, or sexuality,” due to the heterogeneous nature of Latinidad.

The role of media, and specifically in this body of research, *visual* media, in the manifestation of representation can be illustrated through cultural media theories conceptualized by Stuart Hall and Lawrence Grossberg. In his lecture series, Hall (1997) argues that “representation” is more than just reflecting something that already exists;

rather, it is constitutive and an essential part of an object or event. It refers to both the process and the product of “making signs stand for their meaning” (O’Sullivan et al., 1994). An object or a symbol does not have a meaning until it is given one, and that meaning originates from culture, society’s agreed-upon perception of the world. Meaning is then exchanged through language, and without language, meaning cannot be accessed by another (Hall, 1997). This is exemplified in Hall’s first system of representation which states that every object, person, and event is correlated with a set of concepts or mental representations in our own minds. For example, the word “tree” brings to mind a large plant with a thick, brown trunk, tall branches shooting out from that wooden base, and green leaves sprouting from those branches. However, “tree” as a word itself may not have any significance to, perhaps, a Filipino person who associates this plant with the Tagalog word “puno.” Even within the English language, the visualization of a tree can be different depending on one’s environment. A “tree” can be a maple, a pine, or a palm tree--but ultimately, they have enough similarities to be classified as “trees.” Likewise, images inherently have no fixed meanings unless it is given significance. For example, a green apple may only be a fruit to others, but it can also represent the logo of the multimedia corporation founded by the Beatles, Apple Core. Furthermore, deeper meanings can be given to the image of an apple such as in Western culture, an apple generally signifies knowledge, education, and wisdom. This exemplifies Hall’s second system of representation which acknowledges how people form perceptions of abstract and intangible concepts, such as an apple with a bite on the upper right corner signifies Apple, Inc., and the innovation, creativity, and wealth it is associated with. These systems of representation play an important role in the interpretation and association of media

products, specifically in this body of research, visual media in the form of film and television.

Complications may arise when power is exerted in an attempt to “fix” a meaning and force a “one true meaning” on any given object. According to Hall, however, nothing can be fixed permanently. Therefore, one cannot “fix” negative meanings, and likewise, it is impossible to “fix” positive meanings (Hall, 1997). The way these meanings are fixed may be caused by exerting power through the practices of media production which attempt to normalize behavior. While the exchange of information seems to be more widespread than ever with the aid of technological innovation and the rise of new media, this access seems to have also become increasingly curated by those in power who circulate a limited range of definitions for certain images, such as representation (or in some cases, stereotyping) of a group in any given media (Hall, 1997). However, the increasing accessibility of media production tools, mobile devices, and streaming media platforms make it feasible for Latinx content creators and others who have been traditionally excluded from television production to tell their stories and still reach an audience within their own groups and beyond.

Grossberg (1992), offers additional insight to the roles culture and articulation play in creating meaning through representation. Between any given “text” (or rather, any form of media—in the case of this study, visual media) and its particular audience, contemporary poststructuralist theories indicate the existence of a gap or some distance from the text and its intended audience. However, “communication is the process by which that gap is overcome, the unknown becomes known, the strange becomes familiar” (Grossberg 1992). Similar to Hall, Grossberg suggests that it is through language that

meaning is exchanged and made known. Still, according to poststructuralist theories, no object or media product inherently means anything to begin with—its meaning is given. Grossberg (1992) explains that “A text can never be said to have a singular meaning, or even a circumscribed set of meanings . . . the meaning of a text may depend upon its formal and historical relations to other texts.” The identity and experience of an audience contributes to the context in which meaning is given. In other words, one cannot guarantee how any given audience will interpret a particular text since it has no inherent meaning. Therefore, there exists an infinite possibility of meanings depending on the audience, signifying a multiplicity of disconnectedness within and between texts (or media) and audiences. Furthermore, poststructuralism argues that “culture is the process by which the difference is produced and it is only within that process that texts and audiences can be said to exist...” (Grossberg 1992). Culture, which can be said to be the identity and experience of an audience, creates this difference between audiences and text. Yet it is through the creation of these differences in identity and experience that meaning is created. Additionally, Grossberg addresses the importance of accessibility:

“A practice is a mode by which effects are produced and reality transformed....What is important in history is what practices are available, how they are deployed or taken up, and how they transform the world. It is not merely a question of what, in any instance, people do in fact do, but of the possibilities available to them: of the means available for transforming reality, as well as those actually taken up.”

While women’s involvement in film has been notable throughout film history and continues to expand in all platforms of the motion picture industry, Latina involvement behind the camera as writers, producers, and directors remains miniscule (Negrón Muntaner and Abbas, 2016). Negrón-Muntaner and Abbas (2016) and Beltrán and

Rodriguez (2016) report on the overall Latinx involvement in motion picture production, but their numbers do not specify Latina involvement particularly. Though I do not intend my research to contribute these specific numbers to the field, I will focus on Latinas already involved in motion picture production. In my thesis, I will analyze how the involvement of women, specifically Latinas, in influential positions such as writers, directors, and producers may have an effect on the representation of Latinxs and issues specific to Latinxs in contemporary motion pictures while contributing to the heterogeneity of film and television narratives created by women.

METHODS

This thesis endeavors to answer several questions about how the landscape of motion picture creation in contemporary times has evolved toward inclusion of women, especially women of color and Latinas, in a predominantly white and male field, and how Latina voices behind the camera may affect the representation of the Latinx community and issues of women of color. I aim for my research to be a form of reflection on how the creators of these images and messages decide what is to be “represented,” and what it means to “represent” in the age of ever-evolving new media. This will include the role of independent filmmaking in the access and opportunity of underrepresented voices in film and a survey of mainstream Hollywood’s slow progression into diversity.

As stated in the introduction, a bulk of my research revolved around the collection of primary source data by conducting interviews with Latina filmmakers currently active in the field of filmmaking. Many of these Latina filmmakers are members of the National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP) or members of other collectives

such as the Chicana Directors' Initiative, Women in Media, etc. These interviews were framed by the aforementioned literature review through which context and significance will be given. The questions derived from this literature and past research, as well as personal experience.

A full list of interview questions can be found in Appendix A. Questions were generally based on three major themes: Personal identity and history, professional history, and filmmaking in the #MeToo era.

Though these questions were pre-planned and organized in such manner, they were not meant to be asked verbatim. The questions were meant to be respondent interviews, which, according to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), provided a means of understanding the experience, knowledge, and worldviews of these cultural producers—or, in other words, content creators, storytellers, filmmakers. Additionally, these interviews helped “determine what influenced a person to form an opinion or to act in certain ways, to classify complex attitude patterns, and to understand the interpretations that people attribute their motivations to act” (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011). Through respondent interviewing, my interviewees only spoke for and about themselves. This way, I can discover how they express their perspectives and values, and how their worldviews are construed through their actions. This will be significant, because views and values may often affect or even determine decisions made in the creative process of a motion picture. Through this type of interviewing, I was able to collect data that helped me analyze how their responses relate to my main thesis which questions the effect of Latina women's involvement in production on the media's content. The interviews may

also serve as a survey of the current landscape of motion picture production for Latina creators.

I used methods of qualitative analysis to break down the interviews into specific codes. These codes identified instances within each interview, and ultimately across all interviews, that are repetitive, uphold or contradict past research, literature or theory, that the interviewee explicitly stated as important, and which statements that may have surprised me. Then, similar codes are categorized into themes. Many of these codes and categories describe superficial and conceptual, underlying patterns. These themes or categories are then the main result of this qualitative research.

Qualitative research such as this provides a personal narrative impact from storytellers about storytellers. This perspective is essential in this type of research to provide a first-person viewpoint of experiences that most others cannot or will never be able to experience due to cultural constraints and identity.

RESULTS

The Interview Process

As stated in the methods, I reached out to several self-identifying Latina filmmakers currently active in the field and ultimately interviewed six such filmmakers for this research through video calls via Skype. These women are currently based in New York, Los Angeles, and Florida. Five out of six interviewees work within the independent, scripted world (fiction and narrative) and one interviewee works within the independent, unscripted world (non-fiction and documentary). Each self-identified as

Mexican/Chicana, Venezuelan, Ecuadorian, El Salvadorian, Cuban, or mixed. Each had varying degrees of training in the field of filmmaking. While some pursued formal film school training, others came into filmmaking from different industries with training within such industries: theater and acting, communications, journalism, marketing, and military service. All have written, directed, and produced, and some have gravitated toward one or more of these positions over the years. In addition to writing, directing, and producing their own work, they also involve themselves in commercial and marketing commissions, and other avenues such as acting and casting.

Categories and Codes

All interviewees' answers can be grouped into three main categories:

1. Women in Contemporary Independent Filmmaking

This category describes the interviewees' experiences as a woman in a predominantly and historically male field. Some recurring comments include: pay gap, experiences (direct or indirect) of overt sexual discrimination on set, struggles of upholding or contradicting essentialist notions of femininity while balancing the demands of being on set, the common disregard or dismissal of credibility or authority due to gender by male colleagues, and observations about the aftermath of the #MeToo movement in the last five years. This category discusses how such real-life experience reflects past research surveying the contemporary field of filmmaking. It also opens discussion for how the traditions, habits, and norms of a male-dominated of this industry clash with the direction in which this industry is evolving toward which is increasingly

inclusive of its storytellers, specifically those who are not white and male such as the Latina filmmakers I interviewed, entering the field today.

2. *The Latina Experience in Filmmaking*

This category recounts commonalities in the interviewees' experiences as a Latina filmmaker. Here, some filmmakers recount their childhoods in the Latinx community and how the lack of representation of Latinas (Latinxs in general or women in general) served as inspiration or motivation. Few talk about their experience as "white-passing" and how now, in their position as director/producer, they feel pressure to represent Latinas as a whole as they usually say they are the sole Latinas in a group setting in the workplace or even in film school.

3. *Filling in the Gaps of Representation*

This category focuses on the work done by the interviewees, specifically their philosophical motivations for the stories they choose to tell as well as reasonings behind their methods. This describes their focus on representing the "real world" as they see it, deriving inspiration and ideas from life and personal experience, their emphasis on the importance of lived experience as a storyteller, as well as the importance of contributing and bringing to the forefront points of view (POV) that are not white and male. In this category, I will analyze how these particular filmmakers and their approach to contemporary storytelling either support or contradict theories presented by Hall, Grossberg, Citron, and Del Río.

Many codes within these categories intersect. For example, many instances of exclusion or bias that fall within the categories of Women in Contemporary Independent

Filmmaking also relate or connect to the category, The Latina Experience in Filmmaking. Such intersectionality reveals how gender and ethnicity is treated as a point of discrimination within the field of filmmakers.

Ultimately, the objective of this research is to survey how Latina involvement in filmmaking as directors, writers, and producers may affect an industry that is historically and predominantly white and male. Through this research, the reader may peek into the changing landscape of filmmaking that is moving toward a more inclusive and diverse industry, though much more work remains to be done.

Below is a chart detailing the codes that are grouped within each aforementioned category. These codes describe recurring patterns, themes, and similarities in each of the six interviewees' answers.

CATEGORIES	CODES
Women in Contemporary Independent Filmmaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay gap • #MeToo Movement • Feeling of high expectations and no room for error • Needing to prove oneself • Struggle of upholding or contradicting essentialist notions of femininity and masculinity while meeting demands of the workplace or duties related to position • Directing = masculine? • Women with skill and ability exist and are waiting to be hired • direct/indirect experience of overt sexual discrimination • disregard/dismission of authority and credibility due to gender • Expectation of being valued for skills and abilities not always met • Exclusion

The Latina Experience in Filmmaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The only Latina on a crew or in a room of colleagues • A feeling of pressure to represent Latinxs, and especially Latinas, and uphold a high standard • “White-passing” and privilege • Grew up in a Latinx family/community • Lack of exposure to professional possibilities when younger with opinion of importance of on-screen representation • The belief of the existence of Latin American or Latinx misrepresentation • Belief of some socio-economic gatekeeping in the industry
Filling in the Gaps of Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideas and work derive from personal and lived experience; i.e. authentic = good and preferred • A focus on creating empathy and connection • A focus on bringing new/different points of view (POV) based on the opinion that POV is important and affects the film • Empowerment through representation • Representing the “real world” and the real evolution of a story • Believe that people are allowed to tell stories apart from their own as long as there’s abundant research and empathy (in other words, it doesn’t always have to be “Latina stories written by Latinas for Latinas.”)

In this chapter, I will break down what codes are grouped within the categories stated above.

Women in Contemporary Independent Filmmaking

From the creation of Edison’s kinetoscope and the Lumiere Brothers’ *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1895), the world of cinema, according to history, was founded by men and continued to be a predominantly male field behind the camera through the Golden Age of Studios in the 1930s and 1940s and even into contemporary times.

However, as recounted by Francke in the literature review, women have left their mark in the industry as “script girls” whose status and success in the industry depended largely on the partnership with their influential male colleagues which often contributed to the eclipsing of women’s work. In the current decades, women have continually made significant strides in the film industry, achieving roles beyond writing as producers and directors as well as in positions such as cinematography, and receiving great recognition for such work in the Academy Awards.

Despite the achievements in directing and producing positions throughout the industry, there continues to exist a disconnect between expectations and reality. This category reveals a common assumption, from male colleagues as well as sometimes from the interviewees themselves, that directing and producing positions are perceived as “masculine,” and the existence of a woman in this role subverts this expectation. Women continue to be expected to act “womanly”—maternal, gentle, submissive, etc. Conflict has often emerged when this expectation from male colleagues behind the camera as well as in front clash with the demands of the roles of directing and producing and even the personalities of the interviewees.

“I think there's always that idea that you're just expected to be more maternal...so because I'm more outspoken, I think it rubs a lot of men the wrong way ... I find it's so much harder for me to express myself than it is for my male colleagues when it comes to having an opinion or wanting to get something done because I have to really kind of soften it...”

“People think directors are ...These people [who] manage a whole set, [so] it has to be very masculine. But the reality is, directing is taking human emotion and putting it onto camera. And I truly feel that being empathetic, being kind, understanding to actors, understanding human nature...those are those are all qualities that you want in a director. Because that's what's going to make a better film ... And so you know when people in the past that said, ‘Well we need a man to direct this.’ I think that's just bullshit. I think I think they don't quite understand what they want. They have never met a woman that can...that can deliver and that's...that's on them. That's not because these women aren't out there, that's because your circle is so small that you don't have any women that you can say, ‘Oh why don't we look at her.’”

Often, interviewees upheld a sense of benefit-of-the-doubt wherein they expected their colleagues and crewmates to trust their skill and ability rather than dismiss them due to their gender, even before they took their place in the director's chair. All of them have expressed their focus in honing their craft and working toward the highest possible production value in order to continue climbing in their career. Some believe that it is rather a question of upbringing, ambition, and motivation rather than discrimination due to gender or ethnicity.

However, this expectation to be respected as competent in their craft is often not met in several instances, and their authority is often dismissed. One interviewee expressed that even actors who worked for her questioned her ability to direct because

they have ‘never been directed by a woman’ and was concerned about ability to fulfill the role well.

An essentialist notion of femininity wherein women are submissive surfaces in instances such as this:

“I definitely have gotten myself into these tricky situations where I haven't been the boss in the past, and I've expressed myself and I stood up for myself or I stood up for someone else on set. And people don't really—like a lot of the times I've been told I ‘poisoned the well’ or whatever. It's hard to think, ‘Oh wow, am I making things worse by bringing up this injustice?’ But now that I am the boss, I am totally confident to be able to say like, ‘No, we need open communication, we need to all be on the same page, we need to respect each other,’ and there's a different way to go about it than, you know, just being nasty and being mean onset.”

Often, it may be a question of where one's position in a crew falls in the hierarchy of power. However, this interviewee's experiences in standing up for herself transcends positions of power, though her reluctance in the beginning may be a result of this top-down hierarchy culture within a production crew. Very often, these women, once in the seat of power on the director's chair or as a producer, attempt to correct mistreatments they experienced onset.

However, some interviewees have rarely or never experienced direct conflict onset. One interviewee believes it is because of her “strong looks” that...

“...No one’s going to come up to me and say something absurd because they know I’m going to fight back—I mean that politely. But I would say I stand for myself, I stand for everybody.”

Conversely, despite the emergence of the #MeToo Movement in the last few years, some interviewees continue to experience direct or indirect discrimination or unprofessional behavior due to gender expectations.

“[This guy] screamed at me, and he was very rude. I couldn't say anything even though I was the First AD (First Assistant Director, but I knew that I was younger. He had like more background experience, and also he was closer to the director so I couldn't really [say] anything...when he left, [my field producer who was a woman] just hugged me. We shared tears because it's tough. It's also very frustrating that sometimes you cannot say anything.”

In this instance, the interviewee holds a higher role in the hierarchy as the First Assistant Director (First AD, Firsty). Here we see that despite her higher position, because of age, closeness to the director, and many more years of experience, this person averted criticism, and the interviewee was unable to retaliate without jeopardizing herself or other crewmates. Another interviewee believes that such attitudes are unique to the scripted world as she believes it is infinitely more competitive in that industry than in the unscripted world in which she works within.

Concerning professional expectations, one interviewee believes that the standard is equal: “be on time, be professional, know what you’re doing, and don’t mess up.” Yet, she says that it is when an expectation is *not* met that people are treated differently.

“...I feel like people are easier towards men when someone messes up. And then when a female messes up, then like, *oh my gosh*, it's like the biggest problem in the world ... [And with] the pay thing too, the expectations are the same. The work hours are the same. It's the same kind of work for both male and female, but for some reason, men keep getting paid more than females on the same job. So I don't understand that.”

The salary inequality between male and female positions is a significant recurrence among all interviewees, and two interviewees believe “lack of experience” is often the excuse used for the disparity.

“It's not really an excuse if someone is doing the First AD job of a feature, at the end they are the First AD and they are the ones who have to come up with quick solutions, they have to handle everything, and manage the set.”

Again, interviewees showed an expectation to be taken seriously in their roles despite its place in the hierarchy, their gender, and their ethnicity. Ultimately, their argument rests on the fact that these positions, regardless of identity, demand the same

level of responsibility. Furthermore, another interviewee suspects that tradition within the industry affects the mentality behind salary inequality:

“I just feel, whether it's conscious or not conscious, I think that people just feel like somehow, women should be happy to have a directing job because there's so few of them. So just be happy with it and we're going to be happy with what we're offering you ... just feel lucky that we're even giving you the opportunity, you know.”

Such a mentality reveals the norms of an industry which men have dominated since its conception, and upholds the expectation that women are submissive, evident in their historical roles as script girls working under male colleagues. Truly, according to USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative *Inclusion in the Director's Chair* report (2019), women continue to be outnumbered in the director's chair, with only a 4% presence across 1,200 popular and top-grossing films measured from 2007 to 2018. Such scarcity of opportunity in the industry places pressure on women who have broken out into the field. As one interviewee stated:

“As a Latin, female director, I feel like I can't mess up. I can't have a day where, you know, I'm too tired or I'm too this, or, oh, I just need a five minute breather. I feel like I can't do that, because I'll be looked down upon, you know, like, ‘Oh, she's a woman, she needs a five minute break,’ kind of thing when, you know, all humans need a break.”

There exists a higher standard with less room for error for women already active in the field. While this may be grounds for judging value based on skill and ability, such expectations of women are unequal to that of men and is perceived as unfair.

For the most part, gender seems to play a larger role in how these interviewees have been treated within the workplace. What is interesting, however, is the percentage difference of female directors in the independent narrative film world and that of top-grossing popular films signed under studios. In narrative independent films, according to USC Annenberg (2019), 27.8% are female directors. All interviewees in this research come from the independent platform whose films often are self-produced or are released as part of the festival circuit. This points back to Citron's prior examination of women's involvement in film that defines the lines between a "filmmaker," a "producer/director" and a "mainstream director." These women are prime examples of Citron's definition of a "director/producer" wherein these women still have a majority of control in the production process, yet there is the involvement of a larger crew due to an expanded scale production while continuing to work within the independent sector of the industry.

The Latina Experience in Filmmaking

It is within this category where intersections between the experience of being a woman and simultaneously a *Latina* in the workplace onset often exist. According to USC Annenberg's 2019 report, even among female directors, 39 are caucasian, 4 are African American, 2 are Asian, and only 1 is Hispanic/Latina. While the presence of

women in the industry is already a minority, a specifically Latina presence is even more miniscule. However, there are some exceptions. A few interviewees expressed beliefs that:

“As far as being stereotypes of Latino, the thing is, I think for me, because I look American, I think I very much more experience being stereotyped because I’m a woman.”

Another said that many mistake her for being Italian and don’t realize she is Latina.

This brings this research back toward Del Río who emphasizes that *Latinidad* is not a race but is rather *racialized* in United States media. Even behind the camera and off-screen, this is evident in how colleagues interact with “white-passing” Latinas. For them, they believe they experience more prejudice due to their gender rather than their identity as Latina because colleagues already perceive them to be “American,” meaning light-skinned and perhaps of European descent.

Furthermore, for other interviewees, they often find themselves to be the sole Latinx presence in a crew (wherein Latinx describes both Latinos and Latinas in a gender neutral fashion). While there may be other women on board, there is often a lack of women of color and specifically other Latinas.

Additionally, all of the interviewees grew up within the Latinx community, some more than others.

“I grew up in Miami, Florida ... I didn't speak English until I was five years old, and you can do that in Miami. The Cuban culture was really such a big part of my upbringing and my culture, and especially because in Miami, everyone is Cuban or Latino, so you're just kind of surrounded by the culture as well. ... I felt the most Cuban when I was in Cornell because I'm, all of a sudden, the only one. [I] feel like you have to represent that culture for everybody who's there. That's when I started to think myself as a Cuban as opposed to just, you know, somebody whose family is Cuban, right?”

Additionally, it is also within some interviewees' college years where they first glimpsed the lack of diversity in the industry. For example, this next interviewee had attended the School of Film and Television at Loyola University. In her time there, she observed that she was often the only Latina in all her classes and, much like in the workplace, was among the very few women present. However, her response suggests perhaps a disparity that exists between students whose parents can afford a private school education and the amount of people of color, let alone women of color, within the film school during her time. Commentary about possible socioeconomic gatekeeping within the industry appeared in the response of another interviewee. Here, she connects representation of on-screen characters, or lack thereof, to exposure that may lead to a career in filmmaking.

“I feel when you come from specifically lower socioeconomic neighborhoods, Blacks, Latinos, indigenous populations...It feels like it's so

far away, because nobody around you is doing those things [filmmaking]. You're a product of what you do and what you see ... And so I truly feel that we are defined by the media and the images that we watch since we were kids. And that shapes who we can become. And...I think it's a big reason why you don't see a lot—you almost have to be rich to be in this industry. There's so many jobs in this industry that can be open to you if you don't know them and if it's not explained, then, you know, you can never do that.”

This response upholds Grossberg’s suggestion that, “What is important in history is what practices are available, how they are deployed or taken up, and how they transform the world. It is not merely a question of what, in any instance, people do in fact do, but of the possibilities available to them: of the means available for transforming reality, as well as those actually taken up.”

Therefore, this belief suggests a causal relationship between this interviewee’s career path and the existence of a lack of on-screen representation. This idea that their mere existence in the field, bolstered by successful projects and films distributed widely through the festival circuit and through streaming services, leads to a belief that they can enact change greatly influences many of the interviewees’ motivations for breaking into the field of filmmaking and continuing in the industry despite the hardships.

“That's the main reason why I do it, so that more Latinas, more people like me—not necessarily Latinos, but you know, more people that feel shy and quiet, like their opinion doesn't matter—feel like they have a voice.”

This also has political significance as well:

“It matters because when you have a country and a population that's made up of 40 percent of minorities and you are not representing those thoughts and ideas, you take power away from them.”

Such experiences in their upbringing, or lack thereof, seems to set the stage for motivations behind the themes present in many of the interviewees' works.

“The way I see it, I'm not here to preach Chicanoism ... this is the way I was raised, what I saw in my little microcosm of the world.”

Likewise, another interviewee describes how she sees misrepresentation of Latinxs on-screen:

“For some movies and shows, they put the Virgin Mary and a candle vigil— if you enter like a Latin room, then you have the Virgin Mary and the candle and the rosary. That's an image that people associate Mexicans for. Same thing ... if you're in Mexico, it's a drug movie. And what they'll do is, they'll put a yellow tint over Mexico to make it look like [the] desert and gross. That's not really how Mexico is. Mexico is actually very beautiful, but you're making it look very terrible right now. So people will do that.”

This response circles back to Del Río who points out that United States media tends to assume a homogenized narrative that almost always involves aesthetics of specifically Mexican culture as a catch-all representation of “Latinx.” Surely, this interviewee suggests that this misrepresentation is widespread, and perhaps even harmful. The question then arises, who is allowed to tell these stories involving Latinx community members and issues most accurately? Most interviewees responded differently to this question, and I will address those responses in the next subsection.

Filling in the Gaps of Representation

In this section, I will be discussing responses related to these filmmakers’ bodies of work and their personal philosophies or motivations behind such works. One topic I will address is how these six filmmakers approach questions of authorship over certain stories, such as which group of people can tell which stories, and how an aspiration toward authenticity influences their overall body of work. Many of their responses also revealed a motivation to fill in the gaps that exist in the representation of minority POV on-screen in U.S. media. I will also address genres these filmmakers gravitate toward and analyze how working within a particular genre sustains traditions of genre in which women were historically involved in, such as the “women’s weepie” and the “women’s shocker” (Francke 1994), or breaks away from such traditions.

For most interviewees, their upbringing within the Latinx community greatly influenced the work they create and the kind of themes most prevalent within their body of work. As stated in the previous section, one interviewee is heavily influenced by Chicana aesthetics and themes in her work with the integration of magical realism in

some of her films. Another is influenced by her father's immigration from Guatemala, the community she grew up around in her neighborhood in Chicago, and her experiences in the military. One has created films within a wide range of genres, from children's movies to horror and drama. Another is split between her love for comedy and "slice of life" dramas, with her own points of view about the unrest in her home country of Venezuela. This particular interviewee spoke about her motivations behind her stories:

"I think when you tell your story to someone that has no idea where you come from—it doesn't have to be your complete story, but a story that you have, a moment you had—sometimes you might be surprised at how unknown this world of yours is to them. So it's important. These voices are important because they tell stories that even if we think are common for us, they might not be for everyone. And it's important for these people that don't know about it, to know about it, to understand where like where we come from or what happens where we live ... [For example], I want to make a story about love but also talks about the problems that are going on over there [in Venezuela], you know, like the Venezuelan diaspora or the inflation and how food and medicines are scarce. Those are things that I want to at least mention because it's impossible to me not to say anything about that when it's affecting me that much."

This experience is specific to this filmmaker and to those who are living through these times in this particular place, Venezuela. There is a belief, then, that with themes

and topics relating to a very personal, political, and geographic experience, that those who are *within* it have a right to tell the story from their point of view. In this response, POV is important wherein it captures nuances and subtext that outsiders with a different POV may not have. Another interviewee's response supports this claim, and acknowledges the history of a white and male POV reflected in front of the camera:

“I'm not saying that white people can't do it. What I'm saying is they've had their opportunity to be able to tell as many stories as they want. And I think you have to start giving opportunities to have another view—looking at black stories, Latin stories, Asian stories, looking at Indigenous people, and hearing it from their point of view.”

“I think it's also about [letting] the ones that know about the topic talk about it. It's not that a guy like a white guy couldn't do it, it's just that why wouldn't we let the Latina filmmaker tell this story?”

This is where POV specifically becomes a point of importance for almost all the interviewees, even in genres which is often directed towards a more female audience such as chick flicks:

The fact of the matter is, right now we're only watching men's perspectives on screen for the most part. And that's with the director because when someone directs a movie, they're telling the actors—when someone's

directing it, you're putting your own opinion out there through the actors. And right now, it's like all women are brainwashed because we're only watching men's perspectives. And then now that more females are directing and putting work out there, females are like, 'oh, wait a second. We're not equal at all.' That's why this whole thing started in the first place. It drives me crazy...My role models as directors are male because I don't have like that many females, you know, that I like look up to, which is such a problem.”

Another attempt at filling in the gaps is evident in this interviewee's motivations:

Why I began writing? There just weren't enough roles for me, a Latina that looked like me or even in the audition experience, there weren't enough roles...I'm from...the murder capital of New York City. I lived in section eight housing projects. Crack was everywhere, aids, heroin. But that doesn't match *this*. And I was just sick of seeing roles that did match that, that didn't match this, you know, it matched my inside, but not my outside—I was just sick of being, you know, put into boxes by others. And I just wanted to write more dynamic roles.

This shows a desire to break out of the on-screen stereotypes of maids, drug-dealers, criminals, immigrants (Negrón-Muntaner, et. al 2014, Del Río 2017).

Another interviewee continues with this trend in responses, shifting the focus toward specifically female and *Latina*, perspectives as well as voices of women of color:

I think the reason women get mad that men are telling those stories is because we're not represented, right? ... There's so many female directors out there and we should have the opportunity to tell that story, [so] why are they getting these opportunities? ... But then, the argument always comes up on the other side: does that mean then we aren't allowed to tell male stories, you know? So it's always very complicated. And I think it's the same thing with, with, can a person of color tell a white person story? Can a white person tell a person of color's story? And I think the answer is yes. You know, because I think like if we're only bound by like, okay, I'm a Cuban woman, so I can only tell Cuban women stories...I think we're really restricting ourselves.

This dives into the question of authorship over stories. Originally, the question this interviewee is responding to refers to the notion that “only x person can tell x stories.” However, this implies that all stories can only exist by the hand of those who have first-hand experience. Historically, this has rarely ever been the case. The importance of POV, however, exists in its diversity, as this interviewee articulates:

“If we're getting the same exact point of view every single time, then we're not understanding the world in a complex way. We're only understanding it from one point of view...I love documentaries so much because we can add a layer of empathy to every single thing that we do, and we can say, ‘Hey, now you can understand this person from this point of view.’...It makes people

more complex and it makes you understand that we can't just kind of write an entire group of people off just cause we feel like it ... [once that happens] it's harder to do that.”

Here is where this interviewee shifts the conversation from a claim of authorship toward a bigger subtext behind the issue of a homogenous point of view in mainstream media: ultimately, she believes it's about connection, empathy, collaboration, and understanding, rather than superficial authorship.

What is interesting, however, is that more often than not, these filmmakers do not intentionally create media specifically *for* Latinx audiences. They are driven by story rather than a goal to “preach Chicanoism,” as one interviewee placed it.

“... First of all, I think the more specific you are in what you write, the more universal the story becomes ... I don't necessarily write *for* Latinos. I'm writing thematically something that meant something to me. My characters *happen* to be Latinos because it's who I know, but it's not *all* I know. Those aren't the *only* people I know ... You write what you know, as a writer. So I just put into play what I know ... [Some] of my characters are rich because everybody's someone that I know in a way, and they take on those personalities, and so I'm able to make that different and yet somehow all Latino ... Most of my stuff is Latino centric, right? Well, I'm always into the complex female protagonist, period. And if she could be Afro Latina, Latina,

wonderful. My next project is going to be Caucasian on purpose, by design, but also because the story really requires it, the theme requires it.”

This particular interviewee has a history as a casting director in addition to producing, and often spoke about her own efforts to bring people of color to the forefront on screen. However, story takes precedence in what she places on the script or on screen. This supports Francke’s findings in history that not every woman had a “feminist agenda” or, in this case, a “Latinx agenda,” in every body of work. While the story takes precedence, this interviewee suggests that environment, upbringing, and circumstances also influence what is placed on paper and eventually on screen. This is upheld by another response from another interviewee:

“For me specifically, my projects are not Latina/Latino based...I *am* Latina, but I don't want to make a movie with only Latinos—I don't think that's how the real world is. The real world has every ethnicity. I think that all ethnicities should be shown on screen. With my movies you will see—my main actress, she's half black, half white...all the other actors, Filipino, Latino, there are gay characters—we have everything in the movie. And that's how the world is in my eyes. ... For me, it's not just Latinos that are discriminated against ... I don't go on and say it's a Latin experience, it's a human experience. For my movies, for the most part, I consider it being American, which is everything.”

For this interviewee, she chooses to call her films “American” wherein there exists all ethnicities, races, genders, and sexualities on screen and behind the camera.

In terms of genre, many of the interviewees adhere to historically “women’s pictures.”

“I like to write mostly about like the love that sometimes cannot be...But I love those movies that are [about] people that are looking for something and maybe they don't get it...So that's what I like and what I want to also achieve...to make smaller stories, but with a...dense context.”

The ability to pursue niche stories with several layers of meaning that may not always appeal to the mass audience is a trademark of the independent film sector. It includes stories that are not supported financially by a mainstream studio for distribution or be particularly conforming to trends of popular culture (Citron 1988). This also supports another interviewee’s response:

“People want to make that big, grandiose film. I always say don't. Make that small film that you want to see that you—that hasn't been made. Make that small film that's about real people in your life...If you're going to choose a project, choose something that's close to your heart. ... Find that connection. Any film that's made without that is garbage. I can tell you that right now it's trash. It's not real. It's not true, and it's not authentic.”

Even in the unscripted world of independent film, this interviewee is mostly interested in:

“...the idea of going into these places that were untapped, places where you didn't know what's going on, and being able to show to a mass audience this one specific story. What I loved about that is the connection and the empathy that allows you to have this window into all of these worlds that you would have never had before and allow people to, to be able to understand someone else's perspective.”

Conversely, two interviewees expressed interest and experience in working on films that are historically male such as action films.

I wrote out a feature, a martial arts features, very bloodsport and like I met the producer and the first thing he says, he's like, oh, you're female. Right? And it wasn't even 'hi.' And he was just like, 'I'm so surprised you're female.' And that's the first thing he told me. He says, 'What made you want to write a martial arts movie?' That's obvious, because I like martial arts...if I was a guy he wouldn't ask me that. It's just a given. Of course [if] you like martial arts, why would you not write it? ... Of course we can shoot martial arts. Of course we can write Martial arts, of course we could have our own superheroes. And so I hired all female crew and each one of us has a credit that says, of course I can shoot and can direct martial arts. Of course I can write it, you know, and all of us, of course we can gaff it and light it and sound

and all that stuff because it's just one of those, like it's an obvious to me, but apparently not to anyone else.”

Ultimately, these filmmakers found point of view one of the most important aspects of representation.

Discussion

Perhaps the most significant connections between these categories are those responses between each interviewee’s experience as a woman in the filmmaking industry and their experiences as WOC, specifically Latinas, in this field. This intersectionality reveals how traditions and norms within this industry continue to prevail and will most likely prevail for many more years despite the slow progression away from such norms and into a more inclusive industry for minority voices and talent behind the camera.

This upholding of norms and traditions extend into the types of films created by these six filmmakers who continue to create historically “women’s pictures” (Francke, 1994), with some exceptions such as the interviewee who worked in action and martial arts and another who brings her experiences in the military and overseas into her work. Despite this adherence to tradition, I believe their work continues to contribute to the heterogeneity of films made by women regardless of genre because they bring to the table experiences told through the lens of a Latina whose upbringing in the Latinx community has greatly shaped their values, attitudes, and perspectives of certain issues such as immigration, discrimination, and prejudice. This is also significant in the current political climate in the United States that encourages the prevailing harmful stereotypes of Latinx community

members, among others. This emphasizes again these Latina filmmakers' focus on the importance and significance of a heterogeneity in POV rather than specifically making Latinx films for a Latinx audience. Many believed that an exclusively Latinx or exclusively female membership in a production is too restricting—rather, it is more important to bolster each other's participation and work within the industry, especially those considered part of minority communities such as POC and LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) individuals, based on skill and workplace compatibility regardless of gender or ethnicity.

Ultimately, these conversations with these six Latina filmmakers in the industry revealed how current experiences continue to adhere to theories of past representational research such as that of Hall and Grossberg and women's and Latinx research such as that of Francke, Citron, and Del Río. Traditions and norms prevail, and progress is slow.

CONCLUSION

This thesis ultimately aimed to survey and analyze how the current landscape of the film industry has evolved through the decades to become more inclusive of women and, more specifically, *Latina* filmmakers, in high-ranking positions such as writers, directors, and producers wherein they have the most influence in who gets to work behind the camera and what is placed in front of it. Through interviews of six Latina women active in the field of filmmaking, with questions based on review of literature from past research, I have analyzed and showed how the involvement of women, specifically Latinas, in influential positions such as writers, directors, and producers in

the creative process of video production may affect the representation of Latinx issues and Latinx community members while contributing to the heterogeneity of film and television narratives created by women.

Through this process, I have uncovered that the contemporary mainstream film industry is still very much white and male, though women are beginning to achieve significant recognition for their work in directing and other roles that have been historically male-dominated, such as producing and cinematography. In the independent sector of the film industry, there are more women in the director's chair due to the self-reliant nature of indie filmmaking. This is the world where all six of my interviewees work within.

Truly, their upbringing within the Latinx community (wherein Latinx refers to a gender-neutral term for Latino/Latina) greatly influenced if not their work, their motivations and philosophies behind the stories that they pursue and how they hire for individual projects. Each has expressed a desire to fill in the gaps in representation that they experienced growing up where on-screen personalities rarely, if ever, represented people of color, let alone Latinx members or, specifically, Latinas. They have also begun efforts to continue to change the system from within by creating initiatives to support women, and even more specifically women of color and Latinas, in the industry, such as the Chicana Directors' Initiative, while also being a part of several other groups such as the National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP).

They emphasized a focus on bringing to the forefront diverse POVs that contribute to the heterogeneity of voices that come through in the medium of film that moves away from the over-done white and male perspectives. They consider inspiration

deriving from real life and lived experience preferable and a way to achieve heterogeneity by letting those who have first-hand experience take the helm. Many of the interviewees conformed to the genres historically assigned to women: melodrama, home life, love, etc. However, such conformity is not a negative discovery, but is rather significant because of the entwining of specific lived experience dealing with Latinx issues in values, politics, and other facets. As one interviewee stated, this expression of this kind of point of view pushes viewers to view the world in a more complex way by introducing a world that may not always be familiar to others.

While these interviewees have given a great amount of insight into their specific worlds in the independent film industry, in this research, I was only able to include six interviews in a short amount of time through video calls via Skype, each conversation varying in length from an hour to almost two hours. This presents a limited sample that may apply only to the independent film sector, and not so much with the mainstream studio film sector. Issues discussed in these conversations applied not only to the independent world but also even more so in the mainstream studio world, but because these are respondent interviews, these filmmakers can only speak for themselves and the world from which they work within, which is indie film.

However, this qualitative research contributes a glimpse of a firsthand viewpoint of experiences that most others cannot or will never be able to experience due to cultural constraints and identity. Statistics presented in the literature review support much of what was discussed in the interviews, and insights provided by the interviewees revealed many of the reasons why such statistics are significant. For example, reports from USC Annenberg by Smith and Columbia University by Negrón-Muntaner reveal, in numbers,

the sheer lack of Latinx representation not only in front of the camera but even more so behind the camera. Each interviewee was able to support such claims through firsthand anecdotes that revealed how this lack of representation behind the camera specifically impacts what eventually ends up on screen because ultimately, the writers, directors, and producers decide, through their decisions and actions, who gets to work in each individual project, which stories are told, and how these stories are told in the long run.

As stated in the introduction of this thesis, this research is not meant to contribute specific statistics about how many Latina filmmakers are currently active in the field, a statistic that is often missing in reports such as that of USC Annenberg's and Columbia University's reports. Therefore, more research needs to be done to discover the prevalence of the role of independent filmmaking in providing access and opportunity to filmmakers such as these six Latina filmmakers whose stories and interests often lie outside mainstream popular culture trends and interests of big-name studios. Additionally, future research may include an intersection of other women of color directors, writers, and producers, such as female Asian filmmakers.

Ultimately, the objective of this research is to survey how Latina involvement in filmmaking as directors, writers, and producers may affect an industry that is historically and predominantly white and male. Through this research, the reader may peek into the changing landscape of filmmaking that is moving toward a more inclusive and diverse industry, though much more work remains to be done.

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APPENDIX

FULL LIST OF QUESTIONS:

1. What is your position and full title? Do you work independently or with a studio?
2. Tell me about yourself. When you're not working on a project or you're done with the day, how do you spend that time away from the set?
3. What are your current projects?
4. Tell me about your daily routine working on a project that you're writing/directing/producing for. What are your responsibilities? Can you give me a sketch of what that's like?
5. Possible follow-up: how do you juggle working on your projects while balancing being a mother/student/etc.?
6. So how did you first get involved in filmmaking? What was the first job you got to put your foot in the door? Tell me about how you got to where you are now at such an influential position in the creative process of making films.
7. Why do you make films? What motivated and pushed you toward this direction? Do you recall a specific moment?
8. Is there anyone you feel that has mentored you?
9. In your opinion, what attributes, qualities or skill sets have helped you rise through the ranks in comparison to non-Latina women? How about Latino men? Would it be easier, harder, or just the same?
10. What were some of the expectations put on you by others (coworkers, crew members, higher-ups) going into the field of filmmaking as a woman, a woman of color, (queer woman) and even more specifically a Latina? How are the expectations different for you, if at all, after taking into consideration gender, age, and identity as Latina?
11. What expectations do you put on yourself?
12. Do your coworkers or fellow crew members treat you differently because of your gender or ethnicity?
13. When you're working on a project, are you the only Latina in the room? What are your impressions if so?
14. What are some hardships and obstacles you faced to get to your position? In your opinion, did any of these hardships or resistance stem from expectations of gender? (i.e. were any of these difficulties because of your gender or ethnicity?)
15. In your experience, how have you observed the landscape for creating motion pictures change in contemporary times to accommodate more women and specifically Latinas such as yourself?
16. In the wake of the #MeToo movement, have you seen changes on set? Is there a real impact in your life specifically? Did you notice policies enacted that weren't there before, are there things that your friends, coworkers, family members talk about that weren't discussed before? How does this make you feel?
17. In your opinion, how do the identities such as gender, age, and ethnicity of those behind the camera whom you work alongside affect the content you are creating?

Does it matter to you? (i.e. how much does it matter to you to have a crew and cast consisting mostly of Latinxs?)

18. How do specifically Latina voices affect the representation of the Latinx community and issues of women of color?
19. What is the importance of creating work by Latinas for Latinas (in the same vein, by women, for women) in your opinion? Why does this matter?
20. Do you think it takes a Latina to tell the story of Latinas? Where does authenticity fall on your list of priorities? How can a non-Latina/o play the role or tell the story of a Latina/o?
21. When you work on a project, how do you take into account the consequences of contributing your own unique voice and perspective as a Latina (a woman of color/queer woman/etc.) director/writer/producer/filmmaker?
22. In your opinion, how has evolving technology such as streaming and accessibility to video production affect you, your work, and how you navigate your position in projects as writer/director/producer?
23. When I look around in my photography classes and video production class, a majority of my classmates are women. What do you think this says about the future of filmmaking? Do you think that “the future is female”?