

DO YOU WANT TO HEAR MY STORY?: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY
EXPLORING NARRATIVE, TRAUMA, AND VIDEO AT
HUMANITIES IN FOCUS

by

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the documentary film course, *Humanities in Focus (HIF)*, offered at the University of Utah. Specifically, this study addressed the relationship between the traumatic themes chosen by the participants in the class and the positive outcomes that resulted. The purpose of this research was to understand the relationship between narrative, trauma, and video. I used an ethnographic approach, including a year of participant observation at the site and in-depth interviews with 6 *HIF* filmmakers that elected to produce documentary films about a personal traumatic experience in their lives. The analysis of my participant observation and interviews suggested that the participants in this study chose to produce a personal story about a traumatic experience in their life because they wanted to help other people dealing with similar circumstances. The analysis also revealed that the participants in this study had several positive outcomes resulting from creating documentary films about their personal traumatic circumstances. These positive outcomes included feelings of empowerment and liberation, increased communication in their families, and better mental health and healing. Analysis also revealed the video format is an important component in coping with personal traumatic events. This is because the video format requires an audience to visualize and listen to the trauma narrative.

Para mi Jacquesita.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Imagine being diagnosed with terminal cancer and having to tell your children you will not be around to see them grow up. Imagine being bullied and harassed at school and feeling so isolated that inflicting pain on yourself seems oddly therapeutic. Imagine losing your job and ending up homeless and hungry, living in your car. Now, imagine living all three of these scenarios with a video camera in hand documenting every dark and painful moment along the journey in order to share it with others. It is unthinkable that someone going through such a traumatic and personal experience would want to document the trauma, let alone share it with others. Talia Castellano is one of countless people who are turning to the Internet and social media outlets to share their traumatic stories. Talia is a 13-year-old girl battling two kinds of aggressive cancers. She posts video updates about her illness and inspirational messages for others on *Youtube* and has close to 250,000 subscribers.

When a person battling a trauma of illness, like Talia, is able to articulate her story of disease as part of her identity, it can be an immense coping mechanism that can make the difference between her feeling *powerful* or *powerless*. In other words, in the process of sharing a personal story, people can

become *empowered*. This is because traumatic memory forms a central component of a person's identity (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006). Trauma is not limited to illness. In our contemporary world, we are all potentially traumatized. People living undocumented in this country are in a state of constant fear and threat. Those living in poverty have their basic needs for food and shelter threatened on a daily basis. These states render a person traumatized and ashamed for their condition. Few of us can say we are not traumatized and ashamed. As cited by Martha C. Nassbaum (2004), Erving Goffman so perfectly reminds us, "[I]n an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports" (p. 173).

In general terms, when someone has trauma (whether it is a single shock or repeated), the present gets hijacked by the past. The resulting effect is an ongoing repetition of the past, so much so that the impressions, the shocks, the fears, the reactions of trauma, make it so that one is not merely remembering events, they are being relived. However, traumatic events can be so catastrophic one cannot name, label, or story them. Even so, trauma remains a highly articulatory practice. There is "crucial importance to the capacity to reproduce memories in words and to integrate them into the totality of the experience" (van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1995, p. 167). Arthur Frank (1995), in *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, writing about the trauma of illness, argues that when a person is ill, he or she is ill in both the body and the voice. Therefore, he concludes, the wounded need to become storytellers to recover the voices that

illness and its treatments take away. More on this point, the core experience of trauma (of illness or otherwise), according to Judith Herman (1997), can be explained in two main components—disempowerment and disconnection from others. According to Herman, the recovery from trauma, then, must include recovery in *both* of these categories. Recovery from trauma cannot take place in isolation; it must take place with others. Perhaps that is why people turn to the Web to document their personal and painful stories of crisis.

I find introducing the element of video to the already complex narratives of trauma fascinating. With the power to edit, rewind, fast-forward, and delete the trauma narrative with the stroke of a key or click of a mouse, the narrators have infinite control to master their stories. While scholarship on narrative is clear that people need to be able to articulate their story of trauma in order to start to heal from the experience, most researchers tend to approach it from a clinical orientation. My academic pursuit in the field of communication lies at the meeting point among trauma, narrative, and video. While there is an overabundance of scholarship in each of these individual categories, communication studies about the intersection of these categories is sparse. The principal aim in my dissertation project is to zero in on the junction of trauma, narrative, and video in order to discover how and why some people dealing with trauma rush to story their experience. I am also interested in bringing to light features of video research to the study of trauma and narrative. What brings me to this area of scholarship is my involvement with a documentary film course (*Humanities in Focus-HIF*) where program participants are choosing to document their traumatic experiences in self-produced documentary films. In

this dissertation, I make evident this—to the extent the participants at *HIF* are putting together documentary films about their traumatic experiences, the trauma cycle is interrupted, enabling a distancing from the trauma event, and ultimately personal growth from the experience.

In what follows, I will provide a brief orientation to the documentary film course. Then, I will briefly review current literature on narrative, trauma, and video recorded narratives. The literature review will provide the context for the next section, which is a statement of the research questions that guided this study. Following the research questions, I will provide the methods and procedures for conducting my particular research study. After providing the methods, I theoretically situate myself in the literature and discuss the assumptions that govern my research agenda. After explaining the method used in the investigation, I articulate the significance of the research I present. Finally, I offer a sketch for the remaining chapters in this dissertation project.

Brief Orientation to Humanities in Focus

HIF is a course offered through the College of Humanities and is, informally, a continuation of another course offered through the Utah Humanities Council, called *The Venture Program*. *Venture*, as it is more commonly referred to, is a course in the Humanities that provides low-income adults an opportunity to start college. Or, as stated on the *Venture* website, the course is “for people of modest means who dare to dream” (utahhumanitiescouncil.org, para. 1). Students that successfully complete the year-long course are offered college credit from Westminster College in Salt Lake

City. One literature professor from *Venture*, Jeff Metcalf, thought there might be a way to offer graduates of the program a way to continue with their education and build on the skills they attained. In collaboration with a documentary filmmaker and adjunct professor at the University of Utah, Craig Wirth, *Humanities in Focus* came into being. Each year, 20 students are selected to be a part of the course. Enrollment in *HIF* is not limited to *Venture* graduates, but most students in the course tend to be so. The other students in the class are recruited by word of mouth. Students are not prompted to create documentary films about their personal lives, but most of the participants elect to create documentaries about their personal experience with traumatic events (such as, homelessness, domestic violence, racism, and drug addiction).

Literature Review

In this section, I will review some of the literature that will help to contextualize my research study of the *Humanities in Focus* program. In particular, I first review some of the functions of narrative, including the following: narratives as essential to the human experience, narrative as a healing process, narrative as an act of resistance, and narrative as creator of reality. Second, following the review of narrative, I examine critical findings and discussions of trauma as it relates to narrative study. Lastly, I turn to the literature on video that highlights the unique features of the video medium as it relates to trauma.

Narrative: Essential to the Human Experience

The act of telling stories is natural to the human experience as stories serve many roles in people's lives. Narratives are so commonplace and engrained into our human fabric, in fact, that they can be taken for granted. However, they are actually quite complex and intricate when examined more closely. To this point, Wilkens, Hughes, and Wildemuth, et al. (2006) maintain, "narrative is no mere collection of facts. Rather, it has special qualities related to cause and effect, time, and space, the combination of which is quite powerful when it comes to human comprehension" (p. 2). Narratives, then, are central to human experience. Put more precisely, people create meaning for their lived experiences through telling stories about themselves. Harter, Japp, and Beck's (2005) insight about how narratives shape our identity is on point with this contention. They argue, "[i]dentity construction inevitably is entangled in a meandering, discursive web of narrative. Through our narrative activity, we embody what we call our self and its actions, reflections, thoughts, and place in our world" (p. 10).

A number of scholars have also noted that the life story is not just for creating meaning for the self, but to create meaning about one's life in relation to others. Tuval-Mashiach et al. (2004) explain, "[o]n the one hand, the story expresses the identity of the narrator, on the other it shapes and influences the transformations of that identity. This is because it is through their stories that individuals come to know themselves or to reveal themselves to others" (p. 281). In other words, the stories we share about ourselves not only help to shape who we are, but also shape how we want others to see us as well. In this way, we can

understand the narrative identity construction process as a dialogic one. Victor Turner (1980), for example, suggests that narratives do not just represent the narrator, but rather, they represent a co-construction in a “liminal space.” Harter, Japp, and Beck (2005) sum this nicely when they explain, “[m]eaning, thus lies in the interface between stories, not in the mind or the words of any sole participant” (p. 11). Furthermore, Charlotte Linde (1993) underscores this idea. Linde argues, “Narrative is among the most important social resources for creating and maintaining personal identity. Narrative is a significant resource for creating our internal, private sense of self and is all the more a major resource for conveying that self to and negotiating that self with others” (p, 98). Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (1992) also discuss the act of telling a personal story as a social process. They contend that, “By making intricate details of one’s life accessible to others in public discourse, personal narratives bridge the dominions of public and private life” (p. 79). As such, they maintain, the sharing of a personal story is a social process that makes lived experiences “understandable and meaningful” (p. 80).

Narrative: An Act of Resistance

Narrative storytelling is a method frequently used in critical race theory (CRT) to counter deficit based narratives about people of color. These kinds of stories are called “counterstories” because they counteract existing narratives. Oppressed groups, according to Delgado (1989), “have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation” (p. 268). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) contend that “although social scientists tell stories

under the guise of ‘objective’ research, these stories actually uphold deficit, racialized notions about people of color” (p. 23). Stories, then, offer people of color the opportunity to express a lived knowledge, which, in turn, counters the majoritarian perspective that unjustifiably places blame on communities of color. CRT counterstories are about oppression and victimization, and despite critiques about how these kinds of stories might further entrench the oppression and victimization of the storyteller, research has found that these kinds of stories actually lead to “healing, liberation, and mental health” (Delgado, 1989, p. 269). In fact, storytelling and counterstorytelling provide benefits that are far more reaching than the individual storyteller. These stories can strengthen entire social, political, and cultural systems (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Narrative: Creating Reality

To understand narrative as a creator of reality, one must think of the act of storytelling as a performance. Each time a person shares a story, they are not just expressing events already occurred, they are creating an event in the process. Richard Bauman (1986) refers to this special feature of narrative as one that is doubly anchored. He explains, “narratives are keyed both to the events in which they are told and to the events that they recount, toward narrative events and narrated events” (p. 2). Since narrative is a perspective of an event, it actually creates the event in question in the world of the storyteller. While that means we must recognize that an event can create many contradictory narratives about one singular event, it is the narrative that allows us to negotiate our identity and experience, which allows for each individual to be the agent instead of being

defined through someone else's narrative or agency. Bauman reflects on this point by stating, "[narrative] may also be an instrument for obscuring, hedging, confusing, exploring, or questioning what went on, that is, for keeping the coherence or comprehensibility of narrated events open to question" (pp. 5-6). For Bauman, to understand narrative as a creator of reality is to embrace the fact that stories are always evolving, and that this fluidity allows for an infinite amount of possibilities.

Much has been written about the narrated self. Janet Varner Gunn (1982), for example, writes about the autobiographical self. In *Autobiography: Toward a Poetics of Experience* (1982), Gunn makes the distinction that autobiography is a cultural act of "reading" the self, as opposed to a private act of "writing" the self. For Gunn, autobiography is an act of presencing. To this, she writes,

What is made present is not merely a past that is past. What is presented is a reality, always new, to which the past has contributed but which stands, as it were, in front of the autobiographer. To lay claim to one's life, and thereby become 'fierce with reality', is to understand that reality as something to which one is continually trying to catch up but which one can never outstrip. Were it possible to catch up, if the 'spatio-temporal horizons could, even theoretically, be made explicit,' then 'nothing could exist; I should hover above the world, so that all times and places, far from becoming simultaneously real, would become unreal, because I should live in none of them and would be involved nowhere.' (p. 17)

William H. Epstein also writes about the impossibility to catch up with oneself in narrative. In *Recognizing Biography* (1987), Epstein's introductory chapter explores the infinitely regressive parts of himself. He argues, "Yet this little narrative... is insufficient. It lacks anecdotal and other materials...in which I have been and am situated, to the belief structures which I have been inhabiting, to all those ways...by which biography and I are mutually misrecognized" (p.12).

The work of both Gunn and Epstein help to illustrate how narrative functions as a creator of reality, not just a way to retell events already past.

Narrative: As Healing

In Erving Polster's (1987) classic text, *Every Person's Life is Worth a Novel*, writing about his experience in doing psychotherapy, he describes "how salutary it is for patients" to feel fascinated with their own lives. There is, indeed, a healing and therapeutic nature in narrating our life story. I argue, this maybe especially true with people dealing with trauma. Polster explains, "For those who are in pain, the pain is all that counts. There is a figurative swelling which forms around it, ensuring that this presently unassimilable experience will receive all the attention it has coming" (p. 17). My theorizing of narrative has also included work on narrative medicine. This is mostly due to my research interest in trauma studies where I read about people confronting some of life's most difficult aspects such as death and illness. Narrative-based approaches to health emphasize the wholeness of the individual and recenters power and agency on the wounded. A leading scholar on narrative medicine, Rita Charon (2004) explains:

More and more health care professionals and patients are recognizing the importance of the stories they tell one another of illness...[N]ot only is diagnosis encoded in the narratives patients tell of symptoms, but deep and therapeutically consequential understandings of the persons who bear symptoms are made possible in the course of hearing the narratives told of illness. (Charon, 2004, p. 862)

Narrative medicine emphasizes that a narrative approach to understanding and treating illness is key to effective medical diagnosis and treatment. As noted in Charon's (1996) *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness*, "medical educators have been paying increased attention to

narrative competence, defined as the set of skills required to recognize, absorb, interpret, and be moved by the stories one hears or reads” (Charon, 2004, p. 862). Narrative medicine, then, is an intervention to help doctors more fully understand how their patients deal with and understand illness. This field of study is a profound example of the critical role that narratives play in people’s lives and, more specifically, that narratives have significant implications for our general well-being.

I came across a deeply moving and captivating story of illness in my study of narrative medicine. In *Sacred Illness, Sacred Medicine* (2005), Michael Ortiz Hill presents a narrative of his approach to illness. He begins with, “James Baldwin wrote that to be truly alive is to make love with what you most fear. My lover has arrived in the form of a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis” (p. 6). “I’ve ceased to see MS as an enemy,” Ortiz Hill continues, “The diet behooves me to regard it as the Guest, that it be at ease. My meditation is how to be hospitable to this one who has so much to teach me” (p. 10).

The account that Ortiz Hill presents in this book is a lesson in humility and a lesson in surrender. The alternative Ortiz Hill provides, teaches to be in awe of illness and to understand and find purpose for it. He writes, “How fortunate am I that MS insinuated itself into my body at a moment of surrender and has kept such perfect faith with the teaching of surrender” (p. 7). Ortiz Hill’s narrative, which expands the understanding of narrative medicine beyond that of communication between doctors and patients, is a glorious example of how narratives can also instill a sense of agency in patients, which is necessary for a life-affirming outlook to cope with illness.

While Ortiz Hill was able to embrace his trauma, not everyone copes with traumatic wounds in the same way. Sometimes traumas haunt, threaten, and arouse long after the initial trauma event has passed. What is known is that “all these aspects need to be processed so that traumatic material can be filed away like other memories” (Schiraldi, 2000, p. 173). There is something very important to note in victims of trauma that are highly resilient. This observation is brought to light by a study conducted by James Pennebaker (1997), as cited in Schiraldi (2000). Pennebaker asked one group of students to write for 15 minutes per day, for 4 days about their inner-most thoughts and feelings about events in their lives they would otherwise not even want to share with their closest friends. He also had a control group write about mundane things, like a description of their living room. The group writing about personal circumstances identified several traumatic themes (death, witnessing domestic violence, rape, molestation, suicide attempts). The study revealed that in writing about these topics, the students did show a short decline in overall mood in the days during the study. However, Pennebaker’s (1997) study also found that those who did write about their traumas were remarkably happier and less anxious than the students in the control group.

Several specific improvements were noted. Students reported having a better understanding of their traumatic experience. Interestingly, they also showed better overall immune system function and in the months following the study, were less likely to become ill than those in the control group. Also of importance is that the most significant improvements took place with individuals that wanted to share their trauma stories but had never expressed them. The

Pennebaker study is significant for many reasons. Chief among them is that it identified a pattern among trauma survivors with resilient coping capabilities. Pennebaker found that those that are able to cope with their traumatic experience have both an outlet to share their feelings and can deal with the trauma in a way that brings closure to them.

The healing power of narrative is also evident in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD “results from exposure to an overwhelmingly stressful event or series of events, such as war, rape, or abuse. It is a normal response by normal people, to an abnormal situation” (Schiraldi, 1999, p. 3). While in many ways, PTSD is often categorized as a complete “emotional upheaval” and “shattering of the soul” (Schiraldi, p. xii), but we are learning that PTSD can also be classified as a “story of courage, determination, resilience, and the ultimate triumph of the human spirit” (Schiraldi, p. xii). There are several treatment options for people dealing with PTSD. Interestingly, some treatment options involve narrative-based approaches that emphasize the importance of expressing the traumatic event.

Expressive art therapy is one such treatment option. Schiraldi explains, “the expressive arts help unlock rigidly held memory material in ways that normal conversation or thinking might not, especially those memory aspects that are nonverbal. Once expressed, the material can be processed and healing proceeds” (p. 255). While the expressive art therapy does not include documentary per se, I argue conveying trauma in a documentary film is similar in appeal as a PTSD expressive art treatment option. People dealing with trauma can find it difficult to communicate their experiences. The documentary process,

as with other expressive arts, “shift the focus to the project. It becomes easier to describe the feelings *it* expresses...[W]e can handle art, we can gain a greater sense of control over inner states depicted by art ” (Schiraldi, 2000, p. 255-256).

In the discussion of healing from a traumatic experience, the element of shame plays a major role. From a clinical perspective, shame is considered to be a symptom of PTSD (Schiraldi, 2000) and even discussed as “post-traumatic shame” (Wilson, 2005). For victims of trauma, they often feel responsible for the trauma and blame themselves. Writing about the “posttraumatic self”, John Wilson (2004) describes this state of humiliation as “soul-death” and “soul-murder.” In this sense, trauma victims are debilitated by shame and this can stall the healing process.

There is a nuanced distinction made about shame in the literature. Shame is separate and distinct from guilt. More precisely, “Guilt is feeling bad for what you *did* (or didn’t do), while shame is feeling bad for who you *are*” (Schiraldi, 2000, p. 196). Beyond clinical research, shame is theorized philosophically. Here, shame is understood as, “a painful emotion responding to a sense of failure to attain some ideal state” (Nussbaum, 2004, p. 184). Martha C. Nussbaum (2004), in *Hiding From Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, argues in fact that all of humanity is in a constant state of confronting shame. She writes,

Most of us, most of the time, try to appear “normal,” ...but whose allure is undeniably strong in all modern democratic societies. Sometimes...our “abnormal” weaknesses are uncovered anyway, and then we blush, we cover ourselves, we turn away our eyes. Shame is the painful emotion that responds to that uncovering. It brands the face with its unmistakable signs. Because we all have weaknesses that, if known, would mark us off as in some ways “abnormal,” shame is a permanent possibility in our lives, our daily companion. (p. 173)

I introduce the concept of shame at this point in the manuscript because it is important contextually in my research at *HIF*. Taking Nussbaum's (2004) perspective, we all live in fear of being judged and shamed by others. This feeling is only exacerbated when dealing with trauma. Trauma marks a person as "other" or "abnormal" and that alienation is cause for shame. To heal from trauma is to confront these feelings of shame. In the case of the filmmakers at *HIF*, in choosing to display their stories of trauma, they are also facing, head-on, their shame—a profoundly remarkable event in their lives.

Narrative and Trauma

To understand narrative and trauma, one must first consider the concept of memory. By memory, I do not mean simply to recall events already occurred. Rather, I refer to memory as both an individuated and collective process (as in within families, or cultural groups). In the New York Times bestseller novel, *The Art of Racing in the Rain*, memory is described as "time folding back on itself. To remember is to disengage from the present" (p. 13). For people dealing with traumatic experiences, disengaging from the present takes on a different meaning. In *The Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Sourcebook: A Guide to Healing, Recovery, and Growth*, Glenn Schiraldi (2000), explains the "memory work" that is required to cope with traumatic experiences. Schiraldi maintains, "a major goal of treatment for PTSD is to integrate dissociated traumatic memory material with your associated memories" (p. 147). A crucial component in healing from trauma then is to own the traumatic memories and integrate them into the totality of your life experience. This is not always easy. Schiraldi explains, "It is

normal to wish to flee from painful memories. Yet these memories continue to pursue us, much like a little barking dog chases a person until that person stops, turns, and faces the dog...It is easier to live with a memory when all aspects are remembered and processed” (p. 147). The “memory work” then, gives the person dealing with trauma an opportunity to understand, with some degree of accuracy, the event(s) that occurred and their impact. In a way, “memory work” is like a scrapbook, as Schiraldi explains. In the process,

You will learn to view trauma like a scrapbook of an event that you can store on a shelf and take down as needed. The trauma gives you a unique experience, but you don't have to look at it everywhere you go, and you don't equate the owner of the album with the album. You are more than the traumatic event. Eventually you will see your traumatic experience in the context of your broader life experience, neither exaggerating nor underemphasizing your role or its impact. (pp. 147-148)

Now that I have introduced the concept of memory in relation to trauma, I will move on to discuss narrative and trauma specifically. The treatment of trauma is tremendously interdisciplinary. Literature on trauma can be found in the studies of medicine, feminism, history, therapy, psychology, sociology, and psychiatry, just to provide a sampling. As trauma spans many disciplines, I have borrowed from several of them in order to best inform my ethnographic dissertation work with the adult documentary film course. When referring to trauma in this manuscript, I am referring to any event in a person's life that causes emotional and/or physical distress. In this section, I highlight some of the theories and authors of trauma that pay consideration to narrative.

One of the features of trauma, and trauma studies specifically, I find most intriguing is its forgotten history. Judith Herman (1997) writes in *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*

that the study of trauma is one of “episodic amnesia” where “periods of active investigation have alternated with periods of oblivion” (p. 7). Ruth Leys (2000) underscores this in her book, *Trauma: A Genealogy*, when she discusses the episodes of generations of psychiatrists who insisted on forgetting and remembering trauma at different points in history. Leys writes, “Just as it took World War II to ‘remember’ the lessons of World War I, so it took the experience of Vietnam to ‘remember’ the lessons of World War II, including the psychiatric lessons of the Holocaust” (p. 15). There are gaps in the literature because study of trauma bears witness to horrifying events and as a result is difficult emotional work. Herman is strong on this point in her discussion of trauma’s forgotten history. She argues that the discussion of trauma, and specifically man-made trauma (i.e., not trauma as a result of natural disasters), forces the bystander to share the burden of pain. Herman states that it is “morally impossible” to remain unaffected in a traumatic conflict. The bystander to trauma is tempted to side with the role of the perpetrator because the perpetrator does not place any demands on the bystander. The victim of trauma, however, demands of the bystander to take action, engage, and remember (Herman, 1997). Put more simply, trauma is a contagion to anyone that bears witness in some capacity. Herman describes this concept as traumatic “countertransference” and provides numerous examples of how even highly trained psychotherapists receive traumatic countertransference and how difficult it is for them to bear witness to extreme grief. Similarly, Tamar Ashuri (2010) stresses that in this contemporary media landscape, we are all audiences now. Technology brings traumas to us and

it is no longer acceptable to claim as a defense “I did not know” or “I did not realize” (p. 175).

The main reason I have chosen to begin my articulation of trauma with a discussion on its forgotten history is because it serves to highlight, first, the moral imperative placed on witnesses to trauma. One cannot witness trauma and remain neutral. I find this incredibly liberating for victims of trauma. In essence, in the process of countertransference, the victims of trauma gain a level of control over the traumatic experience because they are (even if only for a brief moment) in a position to find utility for their experience. I argue that sharing the emotional burden of trauma does not alleviate it, but it is the beginning to a process of taking ownership over their experience of trauma. Further, it emphasizes the dynamic role between the victim of trauma and the bystander of trauma. This concept is particularly important to my research with the adults in the documentary film course I study, and I look forward to explicating this further throughout my dissertation manuscript.

The second tenet of trauma theory I find insightful, besides its forgotten history, is that although traumatic events can be so catastrophic, one cannot name or label them; trauma remains a highly articulatory practice. Judith Herman takes the position that traumatic events interrupt the social order and schema of the individual to such an extent that they lack verbal narrative and context. Instead, she argues, trauma is encoded in vivid images and bodily sensations, much like the memories of young children. She supports her claims by providing an example of children who have no memory of the abuse they suffered but are able to reenact the abuse to a level of complete detail in play with

dolls. Ashuri (2010) reminds us, however, that the trauma narrative is never complete. He says, testimonies are “composed of bits and pieces of memory that have been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge or assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference” (p. 178).

For Freud (and many other theorists of trauma), reenacting the trauma is an opportunity to master the trauma. Freud refers to this as ‘repetition compulsion.’ Even though it is often theorized that trauma is inherently articulatory, there is an oscillation between articulating (reliving) it and concealing it (constriction). Herman argues that this is the dialectic of trauma and that it is constantly trying to find balance between the two. The dialectic of psychological trauma is also understood as deny/proclaim (Herman, 1997).

What I find most moving about the articulatory nature of trauma in relation to my doctoral research is that it underscores a fascinating element of trauma. That is, that atrocities refuse to be buried (Frank, 1995). Narratives are always already there. I turn to Dori Laub (1992) here when he says, “Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect” (p. 69). I have often wondered why year after year so many of the participants in the film class voluntarily elect to display their traumas in their documentaries. It is because of this very reason. The film class just presents an opportunity for the atrocities to be shared. The class is a platform for these trauma stories to play out and unfold. If not in the documentary film

class, the participants would find other ways of sharing their stories. In all my reading of trauma, nothing has touched me more than understanding this tenet of trauma. I find Herman (1997) sums it best when she says, “Folk wisdom is filled with ghosts who refuse to rest in their graves until their stories are told. Murder will out. Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of the individual victims” (p. 1).

Research on the recovery from trauma offers great insight as well. The recovery of trauma is understood as both an individual and communal process. Put differently, the recovery of trauma includes effort on the part of the victims of trauma and an element of social effort as well. Herman expands this argument to include that the communal dimension to heal psychological trauma depends on the support of a larger political movement. For example, in the study of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in young men and women who return from war, in addressing their disorder, it is equally imperative to challenge why we send people to war in the first place. For Herman, challenging the social context of trauma is what brings legitimacy to the study of trauma. Another moving example is “the study of trauma in sexual and domestic life becomes legitimate only in a context that challenges the subordination of women and children” (Herman, 1997, p. 9).

In my dissertation research with film students, this last theory of trauma I have described (trauma and recovery) offers great insight. Just as I wondered why so many students elect to document their traumas in film, I also wondered what it was about the structure of the film class that seemed to enable so many

participants to start a recovery from their trauma. While I agree with Herman that the recovery from trauma is never complete, I find that the documentaries that are produced offer participants a large step in the direction of recovery. Understanding the recovery from trauma as a communal process helps me see more of the elements that are at play in the documentary film class. Inadvertently, built into the very structure of the class, there are spaces that allow for students to work through their traumas on an individual basis and in the safe surroundings of a supportive community of people.

In sum, the relationship between narrative and trauma is evident. By examining this connection, several features come to the forefront. First, the role of the trauma witness is significant, as there is a moral obligation placed on the bystander of the trauma narrative. Second, while trauma disrupts our ability to recount the trauma experience, to be able to reproduce those memories into words is paramount in the process of coming to terms and dealing with the trauma. Third, even though a trauma survivor might not want to share their trauma narrative, the stories find ways to out themselves because atrocities refuse to be buried (Frank, 1995). Last, in the relationship between narrative and trauma, there is more clarity to understand how the recovery from trauma is both an individual and communal process. There needs to be an addressable “other” in order to narrate the traumatic experience.

Trauma and Video

The literature connecting trauma and video is sparse. What does exist offers only a small glimpse into what a profound relationship occurs between the

two concepts. In *Testimony: Cries of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub contend that audio-visual testimonies of traumatic experiences are more than just successful at documenting narratives to share with others. Rather, they argue, audio-visual testimonies themselves are a vehicle in which the traumatized can recover from their traumatic experiences. Writing about the re-presentations of trauma in cinema, Tamar Ashuri (2010) emphasizes the capability of video technology to aid in the recovery of trauma. He argues that cinema plays a critical role in helping trauma survivors recover their repressed, previously incommunicable narratives. More than that, he stresses that media technologies also function as “tools by which audiences who were not present at the events (in time, space, or both) [can] connect... to the survivors’ traumatic experiences and [can] respond to the proximity created by them” (p. 175).

The video format implies an audience. The audience, or more precisely put, the witness to the trauma narrative, is significant. In fact, Ashuri (2010) argues that for a traumatic experience to be processed and comprehended, there must be an addressable other. He says, “[A] text can only be read if there is a white slate upon which to etch the dark letters” (p. 178). Ashuri also argues that the witness of a traumatic narrative is also important because the narrator is not just recounting their trauma experience to merely recount the events that occurred, but rather it is also a call to action to the potential audience to transform the trauma event. According to Ashuri, the audience’s willingness to engage in the trauma performance is what makes the trauma testimony possible and meaningful.

PTSD literature is another area making the connection between trauma and media more broadly. Writing about the treatment of PTSD, Glenn Schiraldi (2000) suggests,

Written or spoken media provide a safe place to contain strong emotions—we can control and understand what we put into words. The process of speaking or writing our own stories begins to stir our inner creative and problem-solving forces. As we examine what we have created, we become more aware and appreciative of who we are inside. We gain confidence over our emotions and a sense of competence. (p. 260)

In closing, research on narrative, trauma, and video offers great insight into how and why people suffering from a traumatic experience often turn to a video medium to share their story. The narrative literature underscores the idea that people default to sharing stories as part of what makes us and connects us as human beings. Beyond that, narrative is also used as a tool of survival to help the oppressed and marginalized. Narrative scholarship also teaches us that narratives are what shape and create reality. We also learn from narrative research that narrative has healing and transformative properties. The literature on trauma is equally as revealing to understand why people choose to document their personal stories. The literature I reviewed discussed how traumatic events create moral imperatives for witnesses of trauma. Trauma literature also emphasizes the articulatory yet fragmented nature of trauma. In addition, the literature I reviewed also touched on the recovery from trauma and how the process cannot be done in isolation; recovery from trauma is both an individual process and a communal one. Lastly, the literature on trauma and video is helpful to understand what is appealing about the video format for victims of trauma. The video technology itself is a vehicle in which to recover from a traumatic

experience. Furthermore, the video format creates an audience that is a fundamental component in the recovery from trauma.

The connections between the literature I have reviewed in this section and the study I am reporting seem to complement each other well. The videos produced at *HIF* are a way of interrupting trauma. The films are in effect, re-positioning traumatic memory. The films create a distancing from trauma—the filmmakers continue to live with the trauma but they learn to have a different relationship with it. In the documentary film process, the filmmakers confront their shame and make their subjective experience objective in a film. *HIF* provides a space for underrepresented people to share their personal stories in a video format and at the conclusion of this study, those connections and importance of such a process is articulated to a stronger degree.

Research Questions

Given that traumatic experiences interrupt our capacity to reproduce stories, and that more and more people are choosing to narrate their experience with video technology, a closer examination as to why and how that is so is warranted. As such, this study looked at the narratives of trauma constructed by students in a documentary film class (*HIF*)— a course where students produce documentaries about personal issues they have faced. To guide my study, I posed the following research questions:

RQ1: What, if any, are the overarching themes in the documentary films produced by *Humanities in Focus*?

RQ2: If overarching themes exist in the documentary films produced by *Humanities in Focus*, to what extent do they articulate traumatic themes?

RQ3: How do participant filmmakers articulate the connection/relationship between the documentary films produced at *Humanities in Focus* and dealing with traumatic experiences?

RQ4: What, if any, are the overarching themes in the interviews with the participants of this study?

RQ5: Under what condition do the women in this study find the *Humanities in Focus* program to be a positive experience?

Methods and Procedures

In this section, I provide the methods and procedures used to execute this study. First, I explain the source of data, including information about the documentary course I observed and the participants of the study. Second, I present the procedures used for conducting this study, including the data collection, data analysis, and justification for selecting my particular ethnographic method. Lastly, I describe the set of methodological assumptions that guided my research study.

Data

Humanities in Focus

In this study, I was a participant/observer at a documentary film course offered at the University of Utah, called *Humanities in Focus (HIF)*. When the two professors started *HIF* in 2007, they did not have a model for what the

course should be about. Instead, they took their combined interests (creative writing and documentary film) and decided to design a course that taught students how to produce documentary films. During the period of my research study, academic year 2011-2012, the course met Monday nights from 6-9 p.m. off-campus at the Salt Lake Community College, South City Campus, Career and Technical Center building. (Note: Since the completion of my study, the course is now offered on the University of Utah campus, in the Marriott Library's Digital Storytelling Center.) There are several classrooms in this building that are utilized to conduct the *HIF* class, including a computer lab, kitchen, and other rooms that function as vocational training rooms for Salt Lake Community College during the day. This includes a room for vocational training in barbering/cosmetology and a room used to train guide dogs that are kept in kennels during the time *HIF* is conducted.

During the course, students brainstorm in small groups about the topics about which they are interested in producing documentary films. Students then form groups based on their interest in those topics. What results from these groupings are a series of documentaries that are later shown in film screenings throughout the Salt Lake Valley. During the time of my study, the documentaries that were produced included the following: 1. *Under the Pink Cloud*, a family's story of living downwind of nuclear testing in Southern Utah; 2. *Norman's Last War*, a grandson's view of his aging grandfather and his mother's care giving role; 3. *HOPE: Childhood Cancer*, a mother discusses her plight in being an advocate during her child's cancer treatment; 4. *It's Just Me*, a compassionate story of a wife's acceptance of her husband's struggle with gender identity; 5.

Unprotected Classes, a discussion of people that have no legal protection under the law and the prejudice they must endure; 6. *A Survivor's Gift*, a daughter's gift from her father that saved her from the abuse of her husband; 7. *Que Debemos Saber: Los Niños Autistas*, how two families that have children with autism adjust their lives to help their boys; 8. *Artivism*, a local community service program gives young people an opportunity to improve their neighborhood with artwork and murals; 9. *You Are Not Alone*, the story of a young woman's struggle with anorexia; 10. *Why Don't They Just Leave*, a story of how two battered immigrant women coped and dealt with domestic violence in a new country; 11. *Undocumented Citizen*, a young man from Mexico presents his story about trying to achieve the "American dream"; 12. *Rise Ruby Rise*, the story of Ruby Chacón, a local artist and how she developed her art into activism to her family and community.

Although these were the films that were produced during my time of observation, in this study, I have also chosen to examine films produced at earlier time periods as well if they were self-referential and included traumatic narratives. By self-referential, I mean films where students referred to their own personal life experiences. By traumatic themes, I mean themes that caused substantial emotional distress in the filmmaker's life. My rationale for considering films produced outside of the period of observation is that the films are a part of the context and experience of the participants, regardless of what year they were produced. Since I have chosen a case study approach, this context is paramount in helping to understand the wholeness of the individual.

HIF is a rich site for this study because it cultivates narratives about traumatic experiences. Since my study is aimed at understanding the process by which traumatic narratives unfold, the *HIF* course is a fruitful fieldwork site. Another reason for selecting the *HIF* course as my source of data for this study is because it was easily accessible to me. That is, prior to conducting this study, I was a volunteer in the program.

Participants

The participants chosen for this study were limited to those officially enrolled in the 2011-2012 *HIF* course as well as those not enrolled but still affiliated with the class (i.e., when some students complete the *HIF* course, they continue attending in subsequent years, even though they may no longer be receiving academic credit for their work). During the time of my study, there were a total of 34 *HIF* participants that consented to be a part of the study. Unique to the year I observed *HIF* was the fact that a University of Utah Honors College Course, *Film and Diversity*, also had students participating in the course. There was also a course called *Humanities in Focus 2*, which was a course taught entirely in Spanish that ran alongside the traditional *HIF* class. For the purposes of this study, while I generally observed all of the participants at *HIF*, I focused on 6 participants for deeper case study.

My rationale for selecting the participants was based on two criteria. First, since I knew some of the participants from my time as a volunteer, my rapport with those students made them more likely to want to participate in the study. Second, and most importantly, the participants chosen for case study uniquely

exhibit the phenomena I addressed in this research, that is, people that chose to produce a documentary about a personal traumatic experience. In the sections that follow, I introduce and describe the participants chosen for case study in more detail. I also make reference to appendices for detailed film summaries. I would like to note, however, that while I attempted to provide the reader of this text with an accurate depiction of the films, they are described from my point of view. The films obviously take on different meaning and significance for the people that created them. The summaries then, are not a substitute for the actual films, but rather an easier way for me to convey just a sampling of what they present.

Lucia Chavarria

Lucia Chavarria is a woman from Juarez, Mexico, now living in the Salt Lake Valley. She graduated from the *Venture* program in (2007) and has been with *HIF* since that time. She is regarded as a leader in *HIF* and serves as a Spanish interpreter. Since joining *HIF*, Lucia has been the lead producer/director in several documentary films. In her first year at *HIF*, she produced *My Mother's Unheard Voice* (see Appendix A for a detailed summary of the film), a personal film about a traumatic circumstance in her family, she interviews estranged members of her immediate family about the feelings they have towards their mother.

Judy Fuwell

Judy Fuwell is a 59-year-old woman, born and raised in Salt Lake City. She graduated from the *Venture* program in 2006 and has been with *HIF* since its inception in 2007. Judy currently holds an adjunct faculty position with *HIF* and plays an instrumental role in the program's operation. Since her involvement with *HIF*, she has been the lead producer/director of 10 documentaries. The documentary she produced about her personal traumatic story is titled, *Family in Crisis: A Journey Through Addiction* (see Appendix B for a detailed summary of the film). In this film, Judy chronicles her daughter's (Amber) 15-year struggle with drugs. She follows Amber with a video camera as she gets high and interviews her and members of her family about the addiction and the ways they have been affected.

Maricruz Juarez

Maricruz Juarez is a 35-year-old woman from Guerrero, Mexico, now living in Kearns, Utah since 1995. She graduated from the *Venture* program in (2007) and has been involved with *HIF* since then. As a veteran member of *HIF*, she is regarded as a leader in the course. Her main responsibility at *HIF* has been that of Spanish interpreter. Maricruz has been the lead producer/director on several films at *HIF*. She has produced two films that deal with a personal traumatic issue, *Silent Victims (2008)*, and *Silent Victims II (2009)* (see Appendix C for a detailed summary of the films). In these films, Maricruz talks about the domestic abuse inflicted by her husband. She interviews her three daughters and her husband about their family's struggle with domestic violence.

Rebecca Lovato

Rebecca Lovato is a woman born and raised in Salt Lake City. Rebecca is a graduate of the *Venture* program. Upon completing *Venture*, she enrolled in *HIF* and completed one documentary film, *Rise Ruby Rise* (see Appendix D for a detailed summary of the film), about a Salt Lake City Chicana “artist,” Ruby Chacón. In this documentary, Rebecca explores her own Chicana identity and race relations in Salt Lake City, Utah. The self-referential aspect of Rebecca’s film is less evident than with the other participants in this study. Rebecca’s film is about someone other than herself; however, she created the film in response to her own identity issues and racial injustices that she faced in her life. While not directly a self-referential film, I have decided to include it and Rebecca in this study because the film still confronts her personal traumatic experience.

Natalia Solache

Natalia Solache is a woman from Mexico now living in Salt Lake City. She was recruited to be a part of *HIF* through a friend who was taking the course, Jeannette Villalta. Natalia produced a film in 2010, *The Change* (see Appendix E for a detailed summary of the film), about her violent marriage, her decision to leave her husband, and her life as an undocumented, homeless, and battered-woman with two small children.

Jeannette Villalta

Jeannette Villalta is a woman originally from Guatemala now living in the Salt Lake Valley. She, too, is a graduate from the *Venture* program and enrolled *HIF* in 2009. She has been the lead producer/director of two films. In her first film, *You Could Be Next (2010)*, Jeannette talks about the death of her friend who suffered from AIDS (see Appendix E for a detailed summary of the film).

Case Study

According to Robert E. Stake, in *The Art of Case Study Research* (1995), case study is “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). While many particularities can be studied with case method, not everything is eligible to be examined as a case. Stake relies on the interpretation of a case as expressed by Louis Smith who helped define it as “a bounded system” (p. 2). There is no bright line that dictates what can be submitted as a case, but Stake is clear that the parts of an integrated system, like people and programs, clearly qualify as cases. The definition for what constitutes a case may not even be necessary. There are times when cases emerge intrinsically. This is true of my own research. While observing at my research site, there were clearly 6 women who stood out from the rest as people that should be the focus on in my study. Since I was interested in studying trauma and self-referential videos, these women and their films aligned nicely with my research. I will be outlining the tools necessary to conduct an ethnographic study at my field site in a section that follows; however, take note now the rationale for a case study approach emerged from my nearly 3 years of observation at the documentary film class. These 6 women all embodied the

intersections of trauma and narrative that became the focus of the dissertation. In focusing on these 6 women, I am making a statement that I am interested in understanding them specifically as opposed to studying them in order to understand other cases or to learn about the documentary film class in general.

I am confident in my selection of a case study approach to understand the unrepresented groups in my research because my intrinsic interest in the particular cases helps to constrain my own special interests and leads me to focus instead on discerning and pursuing issues of importance to the individual cases (Stake, 1995). This is clearly the greatest strength of the case study approach to research with underrepresented populations. Case study helps to deflect attention away from the top-down perspective and issues the researcher finds of interest and toward the issues the individual cases find of interest themselves. When studying underrepresented populations, coming to know the issues they value and what they deem to be important offers a perspective that is critical to shattering systems of oppression that are in place to marginalize the oppressed. Put more simply, how can one truly come to understand the underrepresented if we do not take deliberate steps to hear their voices?

Case study can be an excellent choice for studying the underrepresented, but it is not without limitations. Stake (1995) reminds us that while “the real business of case study is particularization, not generalization,” the emphasis is on the interpretation of those particularities (p. 2). As such, this elevates the privilege and responsibility of case study researchers to a point where they have to make claims and assertions about the people and cases they study. The problem is not that case study researchers must draw conclusions based on a

relatively small sampling. Instead, the caution is that more credence may be given to the interpretations of the researcher instead of the people studied. This is why a strong emphasis on researcher reflexivity is critical with ethnographic research and case study research in particular. The researcher must take deliberate strides to uphold multiple realities even if they contradict and she has a different interpretation of the events that are happening (Stake 1995). This is done in order to avoid privileging the researcher's perspective over those that are being studied. This can be difficult to achieve, but Stake so poignantly reminds us that this is what good case study does.

Another weakness in case study research, and ethnography more broadly, is that it takes an incredible amount of time and resources, at the conclusion of which, there may be more questions and puzzles instead of finding answers and solutions to the phenomena being studied. I have seen this first hand with my own case study research at the adult documentary film course. I have observed the course for nearly 3 years and I am only now beginning to sense that the participants truly trust and confide in me. It has taken nearly 3 years to nurture the relationships I have with the women selected for my case study. The relationships I forged with them were paramount to the success of my study. Their willingness to share their experiences with me rests on my ability to gain their trust and respect. The women in my case study are now at the point where they can confide in me about their financial struggles, their married lives, and body image, among other personal issues. My 'data' are richer as a result of the relationships I have built with these women over the last few years, but as with any relationship (research or otherwise), it takes work to build and sustain them.

Researchers might be put off by the dedication required to cultivate these kinds of intimate relationships with research participants, but I argue that the depth of knowledge that is gained from these researcher-participant bonds outweigh any weaknesses to the case study approach.

Procedures

Once I decided to officially make *HIF* the site for my research, I sought Institutional Review Board (*IRB*) approval. I had participants sign two consent forms where I promised anonymity: one form consenting to being observed, and another for being interviewed. While writing my final study results, at the recommendation of my dissertation committee, the disclosure of the identities of the participants became an important issue. To render the participants in this study anonymous, by changing their names and masking other identifying information, is to take away from them and minimize their gains in liberation and empowerment—qualities they have gained in the course of their involvement at *HIF*. Therefore, I contacted each of the participants featured in this study and asked if they would be willing to be identified by name in this study. All of them agreed and signed an amended consent form indicated so. The documentaries produced by the participants in this study include several other people. I did not obtain consent forms from these people. My rationale was that they gave permission to be interviewed for the documentaries and understood that these documentaries would be made public. My study does not expose the people featured in the documentaries anymore than they already are.

Data Collection: Participant Observation

Participant observation is a great approach that works best when studying underrepresented populations because it helps the researcher come as close as possible to the world of the participant. Beyond what its simplistic name might suggest, participant observation is more than just “hanging out” at a field site (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Participant observation is engaged and involves a high level of systematic planning and execution. As defined by Catherine Marshall and Gretchen Rossman (2006), participation observation is as much an approach to inquiry as it is a method of gathering data. It has an epistemological component because it underscores the importance of how knowledge is created in a research study. Participant observation is also methodological because it assumes that people’s observable behavior speaks to their deeper values and belief structures. The participant observer generally enters the research site with broad research interests in mind. In my case, I came to the documentary film course with a general interest in trauma and narrative because these two concepts seemed to be a recurring theme in the documentary films the class produced. Once I spent enough time in the field observing, I was able to locate more specific patterns and relationships. Once I established these context-sensitive observations, I moved to what is known as “focused observation” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This strategy was utilized towards the end of the study to check if observations explain behavior and relationships in multiple settings or over extended periods of time.

The main reason participant observation is an ideal approach to studying underrepresented populations is that it demands a level of immersion from the researcher that allows him or her to come close to experiencing the world as the participants do (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This level of engagement, experiencing reality as closely as possible from the vantage point of the participants, offers the researcher an opportunity to be affected by the study participants. In this way, the researcher learns from his or her own experience in interacting with the social world of the people chosen for study. The kinds of personal reflections gathered from this perspective aids in discovering complex interactions in the social settings. Or, as Marshall and Rossman (2006) state, participant observation provides “opportunities to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange” (p. 100). Participant observation is also a great ethnographic approach to put alongside an in-depth interviewing approach (which I explicate in the section that follows). Besides paying attention to the responses from the interviewees, I can also make observations about their body language and mannerisms.

Field notes are the method used to document participant observation. Marshall and Rossman (2006) explain that field notes are not scribbles. Instead, field notes are a detailed observation record. They should be nonjudgmental descriptions of what the ethnographer is observing at the field site. During observation, the researcher took as many notes as possible, trying to capture the scene, as well as to pick up on as much conversation (word for word) as possible. As soon as the ethnographer could, she expanded the field notes with more detail.

While field notes help a researcher to document activity at a research site, participant observation does have shortcomings, however. To begin, as with case study, participant observation can be very time consuming. The documentary class I observed met once a week for 3 hours. Observing for 3 hours, especially when trying to keep copious field notes, is very labor intensive. I also found that as my level of involvement with the group increased, the less time I had during the documentary class to write field notes. This was often due to the fact that people in the class want to talk to me, or the instructors might ask me to lead a class discussion, interpret for the Spanish speakers in the class, or lead a workshop. This meant that beyond the 3 hours I spent observing every week, I also had to find additional time to work on my field notes. This leads to yet another shortcoming of participant observation, that the observer cannot always be present. If I am called to lead a class or help a student with a documentary, I am taken away from researcher-observer role. Even if I make observations about the class I am leading, or the student I am helping, it is a very difficult task to manage both. In terms of presence, my other obstacle was that the documentary class divided into different classrooms throughout the night. An incident worthy of my observation might have occurred in one room and I may not have even realized it was happening, as I was in the room next door. The last weakness of participant observation I would like to address is how observing can affect behavior. On this point, Alessandro Duranti (1997) coined the term "participant-observer paradox." The paradox is this—by observing people's behavior, the researcher cannot avoid changing the environment they are studying. I have the advantage that I met most of the participants first as a volunteer/person with an

interest in helping the class. However, since gaining IRB approval, I had to officially disclose to the class that I am also there as a researcher from the University. When participants know they are being observed for a study, they might behave in a different manner than if not. The documentary film class and my background in video production complicates this even further. I am often in situations where I am helping individual students with their documentaries and I wonder how much of what I say (even if only offered as a suggestion) taints their final product, which in turn, means that my voice is reflected in the very documentaries I sought to interpret and analyze, and from a researcher/observer perspective, should not be the focus of my analysis.

Data Collection: Interviewing

Interviewing also works well with studying underrepresented populations is interviewing. Qualitative interviews are more like in-depth conversations and not at all like a standard interview where the respondent addresses a series of predetermined questions. Instead, in-depth interviews are prepared by the researcher by preparing a few broad topics for conversation. Even though the researcher prepares for the interview, it really is the participant that is leading the conversation. It is the researcher's job, then, to work within the direction the participants lead him or her. These conversations are expected to shed light on the participants world view. In-depth interviewing focuses the attention on the phenomena participants place value on. In this study, I conducted the interview in the language the participant felt most comfortable speaking. Maricruz, Natalia, and Jeannette were interviewed exclusively in Spanish. Judy was interviewed

exclusively in English. Rebecca and Lucia's interviews were primarily in English, but they switched between that and Spanish within the interview.

An interview approach is an excellent ethnographic approach when coupled with the other ethnographic approach I am using, participant observation. When used in combination with this approach, interviewing adds another level of rich meaning to what the researcher is already observing. The interview might also call attention to aspects that the researcher might not have been observing at all as well. Second, interviewing corroborates what the researcher has observed in the field. Interviews can serve as confirmation that the researcher is coming to understand the research site after all. Finally, the strength of an interview approach is that it is a quick way to gather large amounts of 'data'. Interviews were particularly useful in my research for this very reason. I struggled to dedicate my time at the documentary film class to strict observation and I feel as though my field notes have suffered as a consequence. In-depth interviews helped fill in the gaps in my notes.

Weaknesses in the interviewing approach also exist. The misleading label of in-depth interviews as "informal conversations" might suggest that researchers can overlook important information. To this point, some (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) argue that interviews are often under-theorized because they are seen in this informal conversational light. Another limitation of an interview approach is that its success is dependent on the willingness of the participant to cooperate. When a researcher observes, and the participant has given consent, the researcher does not demand anything else from the participant. The participant goes about her or his natural life in the research site. In interviewing, however, a

researcher must ask the participant to make time for the interview, and often find a location off site to conduct the interview. This places a burden on the participant to make time for the researcher and his/her scholarly agenda.

In closing, the data collection procedures I used to gather data do introduced interruptive elements to the study, but it is precisely the triangulation of these methods that helped to overcome those weaknesses. Together, case study, participant observation, and *interviewing*, strengthen the reliability and validity of my research study. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) explain that when using a triangulated approach to gather data and common themes occur, “the biases of the individual methods are thought to ‘cancel out’ and validation of the claim is enhanced” (p. 240).

Data Analysis

Interpretive analysis is the technique I find best illuminates research questions related to everyday life, and empowerment. I side with scholars like Norman Denzin (1997) who insist that an interpretive approach allows for the showing not telling of what is taking place in the field site. The difference between showing and telling is key here. “Showing” in an ethnographic analysis is what its name suggests- a presentation to the reader. As the interpreter, it is my responsibility to look at my field notes, interviews, and documentaries and present them to the reader, using as many direct quotes as possible (treating them as performed texts, as Denzin argues). It is the reader that should interpret what I present, not me. Further, unlike other ethnographic styles that favor data coding and typologies, my interpretive analysis did not. I maintained what

Clifford Geertz has so insightfully explained on this very question. As cited in Denzin (1997), Geertz argues that “[l]anguage and speech do not mirror experience. They create experience and in the process of creation constantly transform and defer that which is being described” (p. 5). For Geertz, ethnography is a “thick description” of a culture. This perspective understands that participants’ behaviors and language is constantly put into motion. The documentaries, interviews, and my written accounts of what I observe are not fixed things standing ready to be analyzed and understood. They are fluid and an interpretive analysis accounts for that variability.

When working with underrepresented populations, an interpretive analysis is of paramount importance. This approach fits well with the methodological assumptions I will discuss in the next section. Interpretive analysis is a perspective that allows for the wholeness of an individual, it is informed by what the participants value and not what the researcher thinks they should value, and it refuses to categorize and label underrepresented populations who have traditionally been coded and designated in consistently negative and oppressive ways. Furthermore, I side with Clifford Christians (1998, 2002) that the genesis of any theorizing must value “the sacredness of life” of those we study. For Christians, the veneration of human life is an a priori issue that precedes any theory. Besides my personal ethical obligation to the people in this study, there were also the ethical protections mandated by the Institutional Review Board that reviews, monitors, and approved this study.

Methodological Assumptions

A Framework of Liberation

Ethnographic methods are best suited for research centered on underrepresented populations, everyday life, and empowerment because they provide a unique opportunity to understand the complex, lived experience of these groups. Ethnographic research is an attempt to understand the worldview of the studied group from their perspective—“to understand how they make meaning from their world and culture” (Walsh, 2011, p. 871). This is in stark contrast to other traditional research methods that are detached from the lived experiences of the studied participants. When research is focused on marginalized populations, understanding the world through their point of view is critical. I argue that any attempt to understand the world of the underrepresented must be understood from this perspective. Many scholars would agree with my argument. In *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000), Chela Sandoval, for example, provides the rationale for this line of thinking. Sandoval confronts scholars by designing a methodology for emancipation of the oppressed. She re-centers the individual and their experience within a postmodern context. To re-orient a theoretical framework within postmodernity and away from modernism places value on subjugated knowledge within each individual. Sandoval best articulates this when she argues that theories and methods from modernist conditions are tools of colonialism and that postmodernity confronts those systems and creates new ways of thinking of subjectivity.

Sandoval (2000) brings forward a framework of liberation that “speaks to, against, and through power” (p. xii). Her methodological framework can be viewed as an act of resistance against the hierarchies and structures that are in place to further marginalize and silence the underrepresented. Ethnography addresses this gap because it provides a space for the voices of the marginalized to surface. Scholars of ethnography like Walsh (2011) agree with this position and claim that ethnographic methods are even the *preferred* method for understanding minority populations because, again, the research approach favors understanding phenomena from the participant’s point of view. I have even found some research in ethnographies of families that suggests ethnographic studies also give a distinctive context for understanding immigrant families specifically (Kibria, 1993; Min, 1998). This is a crucial point to consider with my own research work, given the significant amount of immigrant women in the documentary film production course I observed for my dissertation.

Consistent with a framework of liberation, the ethnographic approaches and techniques I have chosen demand that I write up my final research results in the voice of the participants of my study as much as possible. Too often, underrepresented people chosen for study are spoken for, and the approach I am taking in my study aims to provide a platform for their voice and opinions to come through. I will borrow from Michael Burawoy (2009) here and state that I understand my ethnographic engagement is one that “dwells in theory” at the documentary film site. However, this dwelling should not interfere with my overall mission to understand and appreciate the documentary film class from the participants’ point of view.

What constitutes scholarship in the academy is an argument I wish to take up here. I am fully aware that the pages you will read in this dissertation are not what some would consider traditional. Many of the words that are privileged in remainder of this study do not come from academics. Rather, I have chosen to privilege voices rarely heard at institutions of higher learning. This is reminiscent of an important Latin American oral tradition, known as *testimonio*, which connects “the spoken word to social action and privileges the oral narrative of personal experience as a source of knowledge, empowerment, and political strategy for claiming rights and bringing about social change” (Benmayor, Torruellas, & Juarbe, 1997, p. 153). Privileging research that elevates those voices to the heights of academic intellectualism challenges what we know as knowledge and acceptable research practices. Using standard research practices “distorts and silences the experiences of people of color” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 29). In choosing to write the next chapters in my dissertation by emphasizing the voices of the women in my study, I am agreeing with bell hooks (1990), who says that as I work from my own marginalized position, the margin can be “more than a site of deprivation...it is also a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance” (p. 149). I am also in agreement with Gloria Anzaldúa (1990), who argues:

Theory, then, is a set of knowledges. Some of these knowledges have been kept from us—entry into some professions and academia denied us. Because we are not allowed to enter discourse, because we are often disqualified and excluded from it, because what passes for theory these days is forbidden territory for us, it is vital we occupy theorizing space, that we not allow whitemen and women solely to occupy it. By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform that theorizing space. (p. xxv)

Silencing the voices of people color serves to entrench majoritarian scholarship that advances racial and gender hierarchies that colonize and

dominate the voices of the marginalized (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Only by privileging these voices in academia can we hope to change the majoritarian narrative and have a more complete and more inclusive form of knowledge.

Reflexive Knowledge

The ethnographic approaches and interpretative analysis techniques I selected determined how I wrote my final research results. First, it is important that I was reflexive about my positionality, not only that I was a researcher in the space, but that I am a Brown, (at one time, pregnant) Mexican, Spanish speaking, married woman in that space who is well on her way to completing her doctoral degree. I cannot ignore that the final results of my study were affected by my subject position(s). I navigate towards Burawoy's (2009) explanation of reflexive knowledge. He maintains that "[r]eflexive knowledge starts out from dialogue, virtual or real, between observer and participants, embeds such dialogue with a second dialogue between local processes and extralocal forces that in turn can only be comprehended through a third, expanding dialogue of theory with itself" (p. 20). Burawoy is also helpful here in understanding that my final write up is not necessarily final. Burawoy reflects on his own ethnographic research and shares that all of the characteristics that describe him influenced the spaces he studied and, as a result, no ethnographic study can ever be replicated. Every ethnographer will bring to the field site different subjectivities and that will always yield different results.

My conceptualization of trauma and narrative entered a heightened dimension during my pregnancy. At the risk of being perceived by colleagues as

an “emotional exhibitionist,” this context is key to my understanding of the research and participants in this study (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992). Most of my foundational reading on trauma in the spring semester of 2012 coincided with the second trimester of my first and only pregnancy. Now, over a year since I delivered my baby, I am still not exactly sure I could describe with total accuracy the emotional, physical, and mental pain that I felt during my pregnancy and the months that followed. It was traumatic none the less. I was fortunate to have been taking an independent study on trauma during the worst part of the whole experience, the weeks immediately following labor and delivery. Doctors warn that it is normal to experience depression-like symptoms after delivery because the body’s hormones are readjusting to normal levels. They even have a cute name for it; “baby blues” they call it. But, I knew there was nothing “normal” (or cute) about what I was experiencing.

My first assignment in the independent study was to read and reflect on Della Pollack’s, *Telling Bodies: Performing Birth*. The book sat on my desk for weeks because I feared to open it and discover that it could possibly put together a coherent story about my frantic experience. I did not want to know that my irrational thoughts and feelings could be rationalized and bound tightly in a neat book about birth. I reluctantly read it with just enough time to meet with my professor and discuss its meaning and significance to trauma. I remember not wanting to “go there” on our first meeting. However, the more I read the book, the more I realized that my refusal to talk about my pregnancy and labor trauma was a narrative performance—just like Pollack discussed. I immediately went to task on writing a reflection to my reading of the text. My paper discusses my

refusal to talk about my pregnancy or features of my labor and delivery. I remember writing it feverishly, printing it out, and hiding it in my book bag. I did decide to share it with my professor. I handed it to him and I sat there and watched as he read it. I did not know what I needed to hear from him, but his response was fulfilling. He said, "There is nothing I could say to do this justice." After my meeting with my professor, I hid my copy at my desk and did not reread it until just a few days ago. I am in shock and awe that I could have ever written anything so beautiful. It is angry, defiant, and strong, but also demure and reserved at the same time. It is a piece of writing that does not encapsulate my birth experience, but in retrospect, it is the closest thing I have to documenting what it was that I experienced. I cried rereading it recently and gently handed my husband the copy and he wept too. We have come so far since those dark days of my depression.

I open my discussion on reflexive knowledge with this story because it demonstrates how my pregnancy gave me a heightened awareness to understand trauma in a different and more profound way. Although it was difficult, I knew I wanted to come to trauma studies from an authentic epistemological and ontological stance. If I wanted to learn about trauma, I needed to confront my own trauma(s). On that point, I can now say, I *know* what it means when Kopf (2008) says trauma needs an addressable other. I also *know* what it means when Pollack says stories are born in risk. Pollack says that,

Stories are born in risk. Not so much in the physical dangers of birth but in *narrative* risk, in the process of subjecting *knowing* to the perils of not knowing or unknowing, even undiscovering the truths and facts that science covets, in the exigencies and im/mediacies of re-membering birth. Every time a woman tells a birth story she puts her body on the line, in the secret divide between some of our most carefully guarded doubles:

nature/culture, life/death, gender/sex, public/private, inside/outside, in/visibility, in/difference, birth/story, story/silence, exquisite/dangerous silence, silence and the tender, reckless, unbearable sounds of pleasure/pain. In between, on the last lines of defense: birth/stories echo with silences that remain, still, to be heard. (Pollack, 248)

I like to think of myself as a pregnancy trauma survivor. I survived the pregnancy in a sense, because I ultimately did give birth to my daughter. However I will always bear the mark of trauma and its effects. On a corporal level, my cesarean section scar has started to fade and I am slowly getting back to my pre-pregnancy weight. Still, however, I am completely numb several inches around my entire incision and, from what I have read, I will likely never get back sensation or feeling in that part of my abdomen ever again. There are also mental remnants of my pregnancy trauma. When I think back to the worst part of my pregnancy, my biggest fear was that I would never love my child. I was so disconnected from her during my pregnancy and I feared that it would translate to after she was born. I am proud to say that she brings me a sense of joy and fulfillment beyond anything I could ever imagine. However, not a day goes by where I do not feel guilty for how I felt for her when she was in my womb. I realize that these feelings are all part of the narrative process I must endure to seek healing. I side with Arthur Frank's (1995) conclusion on the relationship between narrative and trauma; my illness *requires* stories and it is my body that *grounds* them.

Conclusion

I have been affiliated with *HIF* for the past 3 years and what I have witnessed there is nothing short of extraordinary. Seeing students that can

oftentimes barely turn on a computer learn to produce documentary films about painful experiences in their lives has been a humbling experience. It is my ultimate hope that this study will in some way give back to them after all I have learned and taken from them. To begin, I look forward to offering a glimpse into the multifaceted dimensions of some of the people that make up *HIF*. This project also offers pragmatic recommendations for interested stakeholders of the documentary film course itself. As an organization that survives year-to-year exclusively on generous donations and grants, a research study that can demonstrate tangible and quantifiable results of *HIF*'s success is crucial. An examination of 6 individual participants in the course also suggests that there is something interesting and worth observing in the documentary class. Drawing attention to the program in this study also helps it to gain legitimacy across the University. Again, this kind of consideration is important for a program of its kind that struggles to gain financial support. Besides pragmatic recommendations for the program itself, this study also makes contributions to the communication literature. The key contributions made are centered on the fact that as communication scholars, we know very little about the intersection of narrative, trauma, and video. As such, I argue that my study helps illuminate some of the unique features of that meeting point. In communication studies, we understand that we live storied lives and that a traumatic experience may complicate the way we make sense of ourselves and the world around us. What this study sheds light on, however, is how video might facilitate that process of sharing those traumatic experiences that might have been previously uncommunicable.

Outline of the Study

Chapter 1 has been an introduction to the study; a brief orientation to the *Humanities in Focus* documentary film class; a literature review on narrative, trauma, and video; the research questions that guided this study; the methods and procedures employed; the assumptions underpinning my research agenda; and the conclusion, which included an explanation of the significance of the study. The rest of this manuscript presents my results and discussion from my participant observation at *HIF and* interviewing 6 participants; (1) Judy Fuwell, (2) Rebecca Lovato, (3) Maricruz Juarez, (4) Lucia Chavarria, (5) Natalia Solache, and (6) Jeannette Villalta. More specifically, Chapter 2, *The Dented Can*, is an analysis of the positive outcomes the women in this study experienced as a result of producing a documentary film about a personal traumatic experience at *HIF*. In Chapter 3, *The Center of Life*, I discuss the family-like dynamic at *HIF*. Chapter 4, *Do You Want to Hear My Story?*, is a chapter about why the participants chose to tell the personal and painful stories they did. In Chapter 5, *Alexza, The Lone Ethnographer*, I offer details about my ethnographic journey at *HIF*. Last, in Chapter 6, I present a summary of the dissertation, conclusions, and my recommendations for the *HIF* program and for further research.

CHAPTER 2

THE DENTED CAN

A recurring theme in several of the interviews conducted was a sentiment of feeling empowered as a result of being involved with *HIF*. By empowerment, I mean “the process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals, families, and communities can take action to improve their situations” (Gutiérrez, 1994, p. 202). This expression of empowerment manifested itself differently in each of the women I interviewed. In this chapter, I present the ways in which these women discussed feelings of empowerment as a result of their involvement in the documentary film course. Some expressed feeling empowered by the academic rigor of the course and feeling a great sense of accomplishment, and others were empowered by choosing to reveal personal and private family matters in public documentaries. While all of the women I interviewed discussed empowerment in some way, I found Rebecca Lovato’s responses to be particularly insightful on the topic.

When Rebecca and I sat down to talk about *HIF*, we began with the usual pleasantries that accompany greeting someone. She told me that she was doing well.

(Rebecca) I’m busy, but well.

All of the sudden, before I had even set up my video camera to record the interview, she says,

(Rebecca) I've always just been a dented can.

I hurried to get the recording going, and said,

(Me) That's an interesting analogy to compare yourself to a dented can.

(Rebecca) Well this is how I mean it, mmmm, a dented can because...

Okay there was four sisters in front of me and four behind me. So it seemed like I was never picked to do... my mother had the four girls and I was the baby of them, she never taught me how to crochet. I always wanted to, but she never... so there was just things. And then when I was 11 years old, my mother sent us, me, because I was the oldest of the last ones, to go and take my brothers and sisters to California. And we went on a Greyhound bus. And I think um, I think that's really amazing (crying), because I couldn't send my child now at 35, I would worry. And I'm sure she did worry.

(Me) So she sent you off?

(Rebecca) I was 11 years old.

(Me) With how many kids?

(Rebecca) Four.

(Me) How old where they?

(Rebecca) One was 10, the other was nine, it just went down. I was always just afraid she wasn't going to let us come back. I wasn't afraid of where we were going. I was afraid she wasn't going to let us come back.

(Me) Why did she send you away?

(Rebecca) Because, for her to take care of us.

(Me) Who were you going with?

(Rebecca) With my aunt and my uncle. But she just put us on a Greyhound bus and said “Don’t talk to strangers,” yeah; we knew that in Sacramento we had to get off and make a change there. That’s the only thing she said, “When you get there, you have to change that bus, just ask the chauffer.” Because back in those days, they didn’t have like anybody helping you.

(Me) Right, like there wasn’t a screen that would tell. Or it’s not like you could figure it out at the age of 11.

(Rebecca) I think that I was really smart, but nobody ever told me that I was. But I just knew to ask where we were at and when they said we were in Sacramento, I knew to ask where was the next bus to San Francisco, because that’s where I had to switch off, and we made it there okay. And that’s what I mean.

(Me) You were dispensable?

(Rebecca) Yeah, nobody wanted me. You go to a grocery store and you see a dented can, you always pick the can that’s not dented, and that’s how I compared myself. I really had no self esteem.

(Me) And when did that change for you?

I asked her this question because I wanted to understand in what moments she felt empowered to know she was no longer a “dented can.” At several points in the interview, she talks about why she knows she is no longer a dented can. Before sharing how the documentary film course empowered her, she describes a moving moment in her junior high school career when one literature

teacher believed in her. In response to my question about when she no longer felt like a “dented can,” she says,

(Rebecca) Probably when I was in the 7th grade. I remember the 7th grade because I didn’t want to miss school. I was really, I really wanted to finish school. That was like the top thing, top priority for me. But my two older sisters had gotten married and they were divorced or whatever, but they had kids, and they had to go off to work; they were single parents and nobody was home to watch the kids, so I missed a lot of school just to... but I remember one of the, my literature teacher, said, “What’s the matter?” And I said, “I didn’t get my assignments done.” And he just started yelling at me. I said this is just really hard I can’t do this, if you just give me one more day, I’ll turn it in in one more day. And then I broke down and I told him what was happening and he wrote a letter to my mother. Oh my God, that was the worst thing to do. Because then she told me I couldn’t go to school. And I had to stay home with the kids. So, it was illegal for her to keep me from school, he investigated and he told her, you know, she wants to go to school, and let her just go to school. But it was so hard to watch the kids, I was only, what 14 at the time, watching all of those kids, I had like three kids to watch. One was 3 or 4 the other one was 3, the two last ones were like a year and 6 months. So I had babies to take care of and they weren’t even mine. I remember one day going to school and I was just crying. And he says, “Well, what’s the matter?” I said, “I just need time to cry.” [Crying]. He said, “Why?” He took the class somewhere else, and when he came back in he said, “How are you feeling?” And I said, “I don’t

think this will ever get better.” And he said, “You just remember that every rose needs a good rainstorm. So whenever you want to cry [crying] just cry it out. Just let it out, don’t hold it in forever.” And I think those words to me were very powerful because when I couldn’t take it, it was okay to cry. But at home if I was crying, you were a *pendeja* (idiot), you know, you were ridiculed for it, and so you weren’t strong enough. And that’s why he, he gave me a blank book, he had a project for the whole class, but he gave me mine in silence and he told me, he said, “I want you to...” He gave me a journal to start writing in it and at the first of the, at the beginning of the semester and he was like, okay we are going to start writing poetry. And just introducing different writers. And I was just like wow, that was my escape. So I could escape in poetry. And I did well in his class. And then 7th, 8th, and 9th grade, that’s when they still did that in middle school, and then I had to go to high school. But things started to change for me in a way.

(Me) In high school?

(Rebecca) No, not in high school. For my self esteem. I knew how to, I always had my poetry notebooks.

It was obvious to me at this point in the interview that poetry and literature, and more importantly, academics, played an important part in Rebecca feeling empowered. When she talks about poetry and her school work from when she was younger, there is a sense of pride. This sense of pride is also displayed when Rebecca shares what she felt like the day she graduated from high school. Rebecca got pregnant in high school and returned to complete her

high school degree 33 years later. While enrolled in the high school curriculum, she was concurrently enrolled in the *Venture* Program. The following is an excerpt from Rebecca as she remembers meeting Jeff Metcalf, a professor of the *Venture* Program and professor at *HIF*:

(Rebecca) So I told him what I was doing and he says, “You know what Rebecca, if you finish school, if you get your high school diploma, I will be at your graduation.” And I said, “Would you really come?” And, there again, it was Jeff. When I graduated, he was there. You had to go down this line to get your certificate, and I heard this “Looovaaaatooo!” And I’m thinking, who could this be? I would have never thought, I totally spaced it that Jeff would be there, and here comes Jeff, running down the aisle, he had this book with this huuuge bow on it. I remember when I took his class, I guess literature is just kind of my niche, I just like it. Well, he gave me a book of Jimmy Santiago Baca, his first poetry that he had ever written. I remember when I was first in *Venture* I said, I never knew that Chicanos existed! I thought I was the only Chicana in the world and that nobody even knew that I was going through all of this. I was going through all of this “nobody liked me” because I wasn’t White, and I wasn’t Brown and I wasn’t Mexican, when I was in Mexico, she’s not like us, she doesn’t even speak Spanish. Things just started clicking for me after that.

(Me) What did it mean for you to have Jeff there? What significance was it to have him there?

(Rebecca) [Crying] Because he cared. He was that embrace that all my life I had longed for [sobbing]. To say, “You did it” just to say, “I am proud of you.” Just to say, “You are special.”

(Me) Do you have a special relationship with him now?

(Rebecca) Yeah, I mean, everything that I say to Jeff, he makes me feel like I changed his world. And he doesn't even know what he's done to mine [crying]. Monday, I went to class again, I hadn't been, I had bronchitis, and when I went there, they were showing another professor my documentary. And I thought, why mine? And he said, “You know why, because Rebecca, when she speaks, she gives me goose bumps.” And I thought, oh my gosh, he doesn't even know what he does to mine! I mean he doesn't even know that he, turns me inside out. So I guess you could say, that yeah, that's the significance that makes a difference.

Rebecca was actually asked to speak at her high school graduation. During the interview, she shared with me what she felt during her speech.

(Rebecca) I remember I looked into that auditorium and I thought uh uh, I am going to freeze. I'm not going to be able to do this. But they told us if you feel scared, just look at the big “U” that's at the end of the auditorium. Just look at the “U”, don't even concentrate on anything and I got through it. And I think it was most important because I said to my mother what I wanted to say.

(Me) What did you say?

(Rebecca) I just wanted to thank her for all the years that she, because my mom thinks that— it wasn't her fault she made us stay home from school,

she was just trying to do our culture. You have to help the next generation out. And so, I wanted to just tell her thank you, and I did. And I promised my grandkids that when they graduate, I will be at their graduation. And that it was never too late. Because I always thought, in my speech I said, I always felt even though I was married, doing what I was supposed to, raising my son, [sigh] doing what I was supposed to be doing as a wife, and going on with my life, I felt like I cheated myself. I felt like I did not give myself fair game by not having my education. And now, I don't feel like I'm a smarty pants, but at least I know I'm not that dented can anymore...

Here, again, Rebecca emphasizes the importance that academics play in her feeling empowered. What I learn from Rebecca is that when it comes to empowerment, it is not necessarily a singular event that is transformative, but rather a process on a continuum. So, while the *HIF* course was an empowering episode in Rebecca's life, as she points out, there have been other events that have led up to where she is today. When we talked about the documentary film class specifically, and what the course made her feel about herself, Rebecca reminds me about one of the first times that she and I met at *HIF*. This story underscores an important feature of how Rebecca gained empowerment through the process of *HIF*. The following excerpt is an example of the academic rigor of the course and how hard Rebecca had to work to complete it.

(Rebecca) Remember, I did all my, I remember you said, "What?" I remember your face [laughing], and I handwrote all of my logs [transcripts] um hum, I did [laughing]. All hand written, I still have them.

Because I didn't know how to use a computer to log them. You were the one that showed me.

(Me) I did?

(Rebecca) Yeah, because I remember I said, I don't even know how to type! I don't even know how to turn the computer on! At school, they were already on, and you just push the button, and you just go right into the program. But to actually turn on a computer and say, okay, I'm going to log, I'm going to put this on the Microsoft Word, yeah! I didn't know how to do that.

(Me) So, you obviously gained some very technical skills in the class. How to write a story, cameras, lighting, computer, a script—

(Rebecca) Oh yeah, I know tons about how to write a script! [Laughing]

Although Rebecca is able to remember this moment and laugh, I want to illuminate just how remarkable it is that Rebecca was able to complete her documentary project. While the duration of the course is 1 year, Rebecca took 2 years to complete her project. Besides lacking some of the technical skills necessary to complete the documentary, as she explains in the preceding excerpt, Rebecca also lost a lot of the work she did several times, due to computer malfunctions and other issues beyond her control. When the due date for the documentaries arrived and Rebecca was not done, she simply signed up for *HIF* another year, in order to complete her project. Her documentary, 2 years in the making, is no doubt, an empowering endeavor. This is how Rebecca explains it,

(Me) When you finished it, Rebecca, what did it feel like? You, standing up to show your film, you there with your family, try to channel that moment.

(Rebecca) I felt like I wanted to shout it out from that mountain over there. I was so happy. And I was so proud. And I still tell people.

(Me) What do you say?

(Rebecca) I say finishing my documentary was the second best thing. The first best thing in my life is bringing my—giving birth and raising my son. But the second thing, is finishing that documentary—*thaaat* special.

(Me) Why is it *thaaat* special?

(Rebecca) Because that dented can will never come back. That dented can exists on a shelf somewhere and if someone that sees themselves, well, people that know me personally, my son, he walked up to me and said, mom I'm not saying this just because you are my mother, your documentary was powerful.

The “dented can” metaphor that Rebecca uses throughout the interview is such an apt description for the concept of empowerment via education. Gutiérrez (1994) explains that a key concept in the process of empowerment is that individuals develop skills in order to create resources that enable them to be “more powerful on the individual, interpersonal, and political levels” (p. 204). For Rebecca, education is a resource that she cultivated in order to gain power on some level. The other women I interviewed also expressed a need for education as a way to overcome their current situation. In my interview with Jeannette Villalta, for example, she describes why she was attracted to take the *HIF* course. For Jeannette, the fact that *HIF* is affiliated with a university and that students get academic credit through the university was very important.

(Me) For you, what is *HIF*?

(Jeannette) Well the way I see it, it's like a door. A window towards—
mmm—A window towards a better future.

(Me) How?

(Jeannette) Because of the knowledge that is acquired. What one learns is like taking one step forward. Learn something new. Something that in some way can help you in life. To create a new profession.

(Me) Are you referring to the technical aspect of the class?

(Jeannette) Yes, the technical. Exactly. In one way or another, that class stays with you. Even though we may not have the opportunity to continue onto the university, and seek out the professional degree, this is a skill that is gained that you can use.

(Me) So, you don't see this as an alternative to the university, but a step towards it?

(Jeannette) Yes, exactly.

(Me) And, when did you discover the program?

(Jeannette) From a friend who was already in the program. She had 2 years in the program but I knew her from a long time ago, but she had never told me anything. I heard she was going to have a presentation and I asked her, "Of what?" because I'm always asking questions, I'm very *preguntona* (a person that asks a lot of questions). I said, "Of what?" "Oh of a documentary that I did." "Really?!" I was excited about it, because she had never mentioned anything to me about the classes. And she said, "Yes, if you want to go." And I went. And that is how I found out that this was a class and that they were presenting their documentaries... And so at the

presentation, I heard the professor say that if anyone was interested they could sign up and that is where I was like, “Oh, this is a class.” I approached the professor at the end, Jeff, and I asked him what it was. That’s when he told me it was a class offered through the University of Utah and you get a diploma. In my case...I can’t give myself the luxury of going to a university. Even though I want to with all my soul, and I have tried to, many times, when he told me it was of the University and that they give a certificate, I loved the idea. It’s like we said in the beginning, this was a path towards—So immediately I signed up and they called me. And that’s when I started the first year and that is when I met you.

(Me) Why did you sign up for this? Did you think, they can do documentaries, why can’t I?

(Jeannette) No, I signed up for the university credits. That was my goal. Because they said they would give you a certain amount of credits.

(Me) And what significance did that have for you?

(Jeannette) Every credit that a person accumulates is so expensive. I have seen, I have tried, I have seen at the University of Utah how much each credit costs etcetera etcetera and it was so expensive. It is definitely not in my budget. So any class that they tell me about that gives college credit, I sign up for them.

(Me) What other classes have you taken?

(Jeannette) I took the leadership class through *Neighborhood Works*, they give credits too. I took the *Venture* one because they give credit too. And so, in my idea, in my dreams, I have those credits there and I know that

one day they will come in handy. I don't know when, but if I have the opportunity one day, those credits will be there. So that is what drew me to the class first, the credits.

There are a set of privileges that result in the fact that *HIF* is a course offered through the University of Utah, and Jeannette is very much aware of this. In fact, based on her comments, these privileges are the sole reason she wanted to participate in the course. Students in the course are seen as university students. They get a student identification card which gives them access to the library, gym, and any other privilege granted to students. Jeannette also discusses the importance of the certificate of completion at *HIF*. She describes it in the preceding excerpt as a diploma. While for most traditional students at the University, a diploma is the equivalent to a bachelor's degree, for Jeannette, the *HIF* certificate of completion is elevated to a similar distinguished status. It was important for Jeannette that I understand how meaningful academic credits are. I ended the interview asking if she thought there was anything important she thought I missed that we should discuss.

(Me) Is there something you think I missed?

(Jeannette) Well, talking about credits, if they never will be useful to me. There's a saying that I'm going to tell you that I tell people, a person needs to prepare themselves for when the opportunity comes because when the opportunity arrives there isn't a moment to prepare. So that is there saved. If one day, my son says you are too old to go to school. I say, you are never too old. So if I need them, they will be there. And if I don't need them, they are still there. I learned, and they are there. Nobody can take knowledge

away from you. So I didn't waste my time. To learn, you never waste your time.

(Me) I hope I didn't offend you when I said your credits might never count. I was just posing a hypothetical.

(Jeannette) No, I know it. No no no no no. I am aware of that. It is reality. But besides the personal satisfaction it gives me. One of the most important things is to teach my kids that no matter what happens, they need to keep on studying, because one of them says, I think he's going to being an entrepreneur because he likes money and selling things. But I tell him, what good is money. It won't give you knowledge. What good is money if you don't have the knowledge?

After my interview with Jeannette, I invited her to coffee. She continued our conversation about the academic credits earned by completing the *HIF* course. It was in this postinterview conversation that I finally understood the meaning behind those academic credits she longed for so much. In this conversation, I understood what she meant when she said *HIF* is like a window or door towards a better future.

Another woman I interviewed, Lucia Chavarria, experienced the process of empowerment in the documentary film course in a manner unlike the other women I interviewed who stressed the importance of education. For Lucia, the actual documentary film class did two things to empower her. First, it encouraged her to be extroverted and make her presence known in the classroom. Second, the course empowered her to speak up and confront her siblings who, for years, blamed her and their mother for ruining their lives. In the following excerpt from

our interview, Lucia opens up about her timid nature and how she got the idea to create a documentary about her estranged siblings.

(Lucia) I'll tell you what I've benefited from it (*HIF*). Okay. So when I first came to *Venture*, I would always hide in the corner, I am so serious, it was like, please don't look at me, please don't ask me anything, let me just sit back here and observe. Let me just sit back there and let me not think about anything else that is not going right in my life. So for me it was like a little safe haven I could go to. And, I remember the first time Jeff made me talk I wanted to puke [big laugh]. Please don't call on me! And the first time he made me read my poem, up in front of everybody, the podium was swaying, the floor was not where it was supposed to be.

(Me) What was it a poem about?

(Lucia) My personal life, my childhood. And I got over it and it was okay. And nobody laughed at me, and nobody criticized me. And it was okay. And when he offered *Humanities in Focus*, I thought, well, if I survived that, I shouldn't worry. So I was saying that I would hide, and please don't call me.

(Me) In the classroom, or just in general, in life?

(Lucia) In the classroom. In the classroom. In life also, but less obvious. So when we were learning about this class, I was still like, I'll carry the equipment, I'll do this, I'll do that. Anything not to be in the front. Not to be there. And I remember when I started to learn about this. Our first year we did a documentary on a subject that was not of my interest, and I could care less!

(Me) Which one? I wonder if I have seen it.

(Lucia) It's the one on medieval reenactment.

(Me) Oh yes! I have seen that! [laughing]

(Lucia) I could not stand that, and I thought well what good is that going to do in society? I said, where does that make a difference. Well then I thought, well maybe in the lives of them, because they hold it so dear and true to their hearts, yet that's still fantasy and I can't live in fantasy. Real life is so ugly and so harsh. Why would you spend your time in the past. Why not spend your time in the present and try to move forward. Wait a minute, I'm not moving forward. My mom is not moving forward.

(Me) Wow. As a result of that medieval documentary, you got that inspiration?

(Lucia) And I told my mom, look, I'm learning how to use this camera. And I said, Felipe never wants to talk to you and he's always accusing you of this, and you always cry because he never lets you speak, speak into the camera. We will send him this. And she's all like, "Okay!" And, then I would turn on the camera, and we would sit there for minutes, and nothing would come out other than crying, and this and that. She couldn't make herself say anything. She couldn't actually, she couldn't! And I was right there with her and I'd be like, oh my God, this is so hard. And it was so hard.

Lucia is explaining in the preceding excerpt two of the ways she experienced a positive outcome by participating in the *HIF* documentary process. First, she had to learn to overcome her shyness in order to assert herself. Second,

she learned that the camera was a powerful medium capable of changing the dysfunctional dynamic of her family. In my interview with Lucia, she elaborated on both of these examples.

(Lucia) Everything is her [Lucia's mom] fault, everything continues to be her fault, "I'm a bad parent because you were a bad parent, that's why I'm a bad parent." "My car is crappy because you were a bad parent and I never got an education the way I wanted to." "I'm an illegal, because you brought me to this country and I didn't have papers, so why did you bring me, and now I'm here." I mean everything ends up being her fault! How does a woman move forward, when they (Lucia's siblings) keep on dragging her down?

(Me) And so, they were expressing this to her?

(Lucia) ALL OF THEIR LIFE! And you know, and here she is, just trying to be present. Trying to be part of their lives, and them, just knocking her down. And her biggest regret was that she had to take it all and yet they never heard a single word she had to say. And this one brother in particular said, "You know what, you have ruined my life, I don't ever want to see you again." He said, "I've left you alone, just leave me alone." And she said, "But I need for him to hear me." And I said, "Well, if we record this, he will hear you. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow." I said, "One of these days, he'll hear it and she said, "What if I'm gone, what if I won't be here?" And I said, "That is no longer your choice. It is his choice. But your job right now is to make sure that some of these words, some of these

things that you want him to know, come directly from you. And not from hearsay. So can I record you, yeah?”

(Me) And, at this point you knew that this was going to turn into a documentary?

(Lucia) NEVER! NEVER!

(Me) This was a personal, family project, that you were doing.

(Lucia) It wasn't a project.

(Me) You were recording your mom.

(Lucia) I just wanted her to be able to move forward. I just wanted her to know that someday, somebody would hear her voice, from her mouth, the way she intended. And that it wouldn't be *chisme* (gossip), and that it wouldn't be *reproche* (reproach). That it wouldn't be “I told you.” And so she tried, and couldn't. It was like overwhelming every time she started to. All of her life experience would just weigh her down. It got to be so bad that we had to take her to the hospital.

(Me) During the filming?

(Lucia) During the filming, we had to—we ended up taking her to the hospital because she had a nervous breakdown. And it didn't end there. It was like bringing the dead because it was like, “I remember blah blah blah,” and it was like reliving everything.

From this excerpt, we learn that Lucia sees the role of the camera as one that can give voice to her voiceless mother. Lucia wanted her mother's voice captured regardless if there was ever going to be an audience. She emphasizes that the camera can capture her mother's words almost in a nonfiltered manner.

In other words, as Lucia explains, in the process of the video recording, her mother can say anything she wants to say without safeguards because the only audience (for the time being) is the camera that is pointed at her. This honest and pure form of communication, Lucia explains, is what can liberate her mother once and for all. If her mother would just speak to the camera, and get everything off her chest, then it does not matter if there is an audience. All that seems important to Lucia, is that her mother is able to speak freely. I was curious about how she directed and prompted her mother during the recording.

(Me) So, you were asking her about her family history?

(Lucia) I was asking her nothing. I was just letting her be. I told her, "What is the most important thing you want him (her son) to know?" And she said, "That it wasn't easy growing up in abuse. I had a step father, that every day of the week I was beaten to a pulp. Every day of the week it was my fault if someone did something. Every day of the week I had to clean, cook, take care of children that were in some occasions weeks, or days old!" She said, "While I was only 6 and 7 years old." She said, "You think that is not traumatic?" She said, "I was not allowed to own a pair of shoes because my stepfather said so. And my mom would not back me up." She says, "My mom was beaten." She says, "My mom was obligated to go to work and provide for the family and him, and his alcoholism... So, and then as she grew older, the abuse grew into psychological abuse. And I go, "Did you know that was abuse mom?" "No. That was just him being an alcoholic." And I said, "No that's mental abuse." I said, "What he was doing was this. What she was doing was that." I said, "You are such an

awesome woman to have been able to overcome that.” I said, “So don’t beat yourself up. Everybody else is doing it. You don’t need to be a participant of that.” I said, “You need to look for help to start healing.”

(Me) And so, she had never confronted this until you put a camera in front of her?

(Lucia) Well, my brother was doing all of these things, and she would always talk to me. And I would hide it, and I would carry it. And every time I would say, “You guys—*oh si si si si, protejela* (yes yes yes, protect her). *Si, como tú esto, y tú lo otro* (Yes, since you are this, and you are that. Okay, fine.” I was always the bad one.

(Me) Because you were trying to help?

(Lucia) They would always tell me, “Well, how do we know it’s true?” “Talk to her!” “Oh no no, she’s just gonna, blah blah blah.” And, when she was present, they wouldn’t let her speak her mind. So I thought, whether she wants to or not, she’s going to say what she wants to get off her chest if I put a camera in front of her. If you (Lucia’s siblings) see it, if you don’t, whatever, that will be your choice. Not hers. You won’t be able to say, “You didn’t try.” Or, “You should have tried harder.” Or, “Just like you let me down when I was a little kid, you let me down again.” No. It’s on you. The ball is in your court now. It was MY thing, that’s why I wanted to record it.

Lucia is very strong in reinforcing the idea that there was never an intended audience for her video recording of her mother. In fact, for Lucia, the intended audience does not even matter. Empowering her mother to share her story is the only intended purpose for Lucia. The problem, however, was that

although Lucia wanted to help her mom share her story, she first needed to overcome her own insecurities. In the excerpt that follows, Lucia shares how painful it was to speak up in class to ask for help and how she was able to convince her family to be interviewed.

(Lucia) I didn't know how to use the camera. I knew how to set it up, I knew how to carry the things because that's what I had done for my team, but I didn't know how to do stuff. So when I recorded certain things and I wanted to log and capture certain things, and I wanted to log and capture I was like, "How do I do this? Agh!" [sigh] I had to come out of my shell, and I had to ask somebody for help. And it was like, "Ohhhh [grunt] dear Jesus, help me. I can open my mouth. I know how to speak." But it was too, it was too... [starts crying]

(Me) To show people your film?

(Lucia) Right! [crying] *No era mi decisión si otra gente podía ver eso* (It wasn't my decision, if other people could see it). I felt like I was letting her down. So I couldn't really ask anybody for help and I would try and one day I thought I lost everything and I told Judy, [crying] "I'm so sorry to bother you, I know I am supposed to know this, but I don't." [crying] I said, "Could you come and help me when everybody is done?" And she's like, "Yeah!" And I was so mad at her for listening to what was being said. I just wanted her to show me. And I said, "Judy! You aren't supposed to listen! You are only supposed to help me, okay?" She said, "Excuse me?" And I said, "You heard me! You aren't supposed to listen." And she said, "I am so sorry." And when she said it, you should of seen the expression on

her face, like oh my gosh! And I knew I hurt her, and that hurt me. And I thought, oh my God, I'm just messing up left and right. I'm doing something I'm not supposed to over here, and I'm offending somebody over there. And I should know these things and I don't. So I took the time there and I said, "Judy, you have to promise me, that if I let you help me, you can't let anybody know what is going on." And she said okay, and as we were working on different things, she was like, "OOOOH! YOU HAVE TO LET SOMEBODY SEE THIS!!!" I said, "Judy please, I said no. And I talked to my mom, and she said no." And I told her (Lucia's mom), "Well, we are going to interview the girls (Lucia's sisters), and then you'll know what they have to say." "Really?" And I said, "Yeah." She said, "Do you think they want to do it?" I said, "I don't know. But if they say yes, what do you think?" And she said, "To get (changes her mind about saying it in English and says it in Spanish instead) *Con tal de saber algo de lo que pasa en esa mentesita de estas niñas aparte de los reproches y los gritos y todo lo demás, estaría dispuesta. No todo, por favor, no todo.* (To know something that is going on in that little head of those girls, besides their reproach and screams, and everything else, I would be willing. Not everything, please, not everything.") *Que todo mundo no supiera todo* (That the whole world not know everything). *Y le dije, "Bueno, usted tiene el control, usted me deja saber que tanto y donde.* (And I said, "Well, you have control. If you let me know how much and where.") *Y le dije, "Hasta ahorita yo pienso que yo le he respetado todo mama. Y si usted me da permiso, voy a seguir a respetar a usted y a las muchachas por que,*

quien sabe que quieran decir ellas (And, I said, “Until now, I feel like I have respected everything mom. And if you give me permission, I am going to continue to respect you and the girls, because who knows what they are going to say.”) *Le dije “Pero, si es algo que usted dice que definitivamente eso no, yo la tengo que respetar. Esta no es MI historia. No es mi carga, esta no es mi cruz.* (I said, “But, if there is something that you say definitely no, I have to respect that. This isn’t MY story. This isn’t my load. This isn’t my cross.”) *Y le dije, “Ya es tiempo que usted tenga ayuda para cargar esta cruz.* (And I told her, “It is about time that you had some helping carrying this cross.”) *Le dije, “Esta es una carga, es un pesar. Y si yo que soy su hija no le puedo ayudar, entonces quien* (I told her, “This is a load, it is a burden. And if I, who am your daughter, can’t help you, then who?”) *Dice, “Vamos hacer las otras entrevistas* (She said, “Let’s do the interviews.”) I said, “Are you sure?” *“Porque ahí todos son chismosos mami. Ahí la filosofía es, si lo sabe Dios, que lo sepa el mundo entero.* (Because, everyone there (at HIF) is a gossip mom. The philosophy there is, if God knows, the whole world should know.”) *Y le dije, “Y no sé cómo va reaccionar.”* (And, I told her, “And, I don’t know how you are going to react.”)

For Lucia, creating a documentary for the HIF course was never her intent. She simply wanted to provide her mother an opportunity to speak candidly about whatever it was that she wanted to talk about. I was interested in knowing under what circumstances the documentary film actually come to be. The year Lucia conducted these interviews with her family, she ended up putting it together as

an HIF film to be shown alongside all of the other HIF films at the film screenings. Lucia did end up producing a documentary film for the course and she featured these very interviews that she talks about in the preceding excerpts.

I asked,

(Me) When you approached them to do the film, you told them what exactly?

(Lucia) I told them, I'm doing a school project, and I'm going to be graded on this. And, I need for you guys, just to be honest. You know, there is no right or wrong answer. The topic is family. And the interpretation that each student gives is, like I said, no right or wrong answer. The topic is just family. And that's what we are talking about.

(Me) So they didn't know the audience was going to be your mom? They just thought it was, tell us about your family.

(Lucia) Yes... That's the way we approached it. Because I didn't know what to expect. I didn't want to put her in the spotlight even more. Or them to just say no. So they said, okay. And they started talking about these things. We found out some things that were old some that were new. And now this new... I don't even know how to name it... displaced anger. I don't know. So, she found out a few things. One of my sisters broke down, and she's all like, "You know, you did the best you could and now that I am a mom, I realize that hey we aren't gangbangers, we aren't drug addicts, we haven't killed anybody, we have our families, and we work hard, I guess you did okay." You know. That was like HUUUGE for my mom because she had

always been blamed for anything and everything that went wrong in their lives.

While completing the documentary film did provide some meaningful results for Lucia and her family, Lucia also said the film introduced new issues and problems. She explains,

(Lucia) Her story is still not complete. Since the documentary, it's like they are more divided. They are more divided in that other issues have come up, because we rose the dead. But my mom says, "I know I wasn't wrong. They just still haven't met me to where I am at. If it took me as an adult, as a parent, these many years to finally accept I did the best that I could when I was presented with the situation and I'm going to answer to GOD and know that I made the best choice. Whether they accept it, whether they were affected, whether they still are in denial, that is their choice, they are now adults." So it was a healing point for her.

(Me) Because she told her story?

(Lucia) Because she was able to get that off her chest. Because her kids now, whether it was good or not, she knows, whereas before, it was the dark. I still don't know. Where did I mess up? Why did I do this, why did I do that?... They've never been to any of the showings. And I thought, okay, so they are still not ready, they are still not ready. And I told my brother, "You know, my mom made a little message for you." "Oh yeah you and your stupid ideas." I said, "Oh, okay." But you know what, it wasn't about them. Not even when I turned on the camera for the first time, it wasn't about them. It was about her. It was—I needed to do something to take

some of that baggage away from her. Because it was weighing her down and all of my energy.

(Me) So even though it opened up a whole new can of worms for you, you are still happy you did the film.

(Lucia) Oh yeah! Because it helped her. And that was my intent all along. I wanted, my first thing was, here are the words, you can be at ease. I'll make 10 different copies and I'll give one to each one of them and I'll keep the original, and if anything was to ever happen, they would still have how to hear YOUR words. *Que las palabras salgan de su boca. Que no salgan de la mía* (That the words come out of your mouth. Not mine). That was my original intent. That was my only goal.

(Me) And you think that it healed her?

(Lucia) To a certain point, it served its purpose. Her words were out there. She could start healing. Mind you, she went through a nervous breakdown and now we are more divided than ever, but that was not the intent. The intent was not to gather the family and be all happy go lucky, because we know that couldn't happen. They weren't ready. No one was ready for that. The purpose of this was to ease her load. Enough of all that. You've been carrying that too long.

I appreciate Lucia's honest response about the problems the documentary film created. It is a facet of *HIF* I have rarely considered. However, when many of the participants at *HIF* choose to produce documentaries about painful memories or events in their lives, it makes sense that the documentary film process, while capable of offering positive outcomes for the participants, is also fraught with

feelings of guilt, shame, or sadness. Natalia Solache, another woman I interviewed, was very open with me about how reliving her traumatic past in the documentary film process left her feeling depressed for several months after she finished her project. In her documentary, she discusses what life was like with her abusive partner and how she ended up homeless with her two daughters after one night of severe physical abuse. She explains why reliving the abuse that happened so many years ago was still so painful.

(Natalia) You are left pretty damaged. The physical abuse, you get over that. A bruise goes away. You stop bleeding, it stops hurting. But inside, that never goes away. The sadness, the hurt, the humiliation. You lack the strength. You are left very weak emotionally. So you can't do anything. It is very strange how that functions. Mentally it's as if someone disconnected a chip or a connection. You can't do anything.

(Me) And watching the documentary over and over, and editing, and rewinding and fast forwarding, does that have the same effect?

(Natalia) Yes. Yes. It penetrates you because you get the aroma, the sounds, the memories, things you had forgotten about. Oh shoot. Do I make myself clear? It's also therapeutic because you overcome it, but at the same time, you do have to be careful when you are navigating those themes. Because a lot of us don't know how to control our emotions. And letting all of that out in the open, you don't hate, but you start to avoid certain things. There were days I didn't want to go to school (*HIF*) anymore. Why? So they can make me and watch me cry? No. so I would tell Judy, could you just help me? Or I would tell Jeff or you, please help

me with this. And for them, it was more distant. They could watch it on a technical level. For me, that was fine. I felt very supported. But I could tell it was also starting to affect them too. I got to see Judy cry there, or Tim really down, or the teachers, they would get lost in the theme and instead of correcting it, they wouldn't, because the theme draws you in.

Natalia says students have to be careful when navigating painful themes in their documentaries. On the first night of class during my participant observation, Natalia brought up this very issue. Craig, one of the instructors, had all of the students introduce themselves that night. After, he said,

(Craig) Now, does anyone have anything they want to share?

(Natalia) [Stands up and addresses the class] Be prepared emotionally. Those memories that you thought were memories, that you thought were gone, are still there like the first time.

(Craig) When you went through it again in your film, was it helpful?

(Natalia) A lot.

In my interview with Natalia, she also talks about how she was able to cope with the difficulty of reliving her abusive relationship.

(Natalia) When I started to talk about the story and when I made it about me—to remember things that happened 10 years ago 12 years ago, that I thought were forgotten and that they couldn't hurt me anymore, well they knocked me down. It was very hard. I was depressed for a long time.

(Me) Because you were making this film?

(Natalia) Yes, because I was making the film and because I was writing, collecting all of the material. I don't know if you were aware about the last

time James Olmos came. He came and was going to do a conference. That day was the last day I felt so bad. I was lying in bed, with no energy, bad. And because my documentary was such a success, people really like it, the questions ended up really hurting me. Instead of asking me, how did you get out? What encouraged you to leave that situation? All the time it was about, what did you do there? And I don't know. Did you do drugs? Or did you eat? All those things hurt me. What is the human obsession to navigate towards things that hurt? I tell you, the last day I was feeling like that, I texted Jeannette. Is there something going on? Is there something out there? Almost like, get me out of here. I was drowning in my room. I was locked in there in the dark. And she said, "there's a conference with Edward James Olmos, aren't you going?" "What? Nobody told me." And I started researching. And she said, "I think you need private passes." "What do you mean private passes? They have to let us in, we are students of the University." And it was for Hispanics, Chicanos, something like that. Something to do with we are Latinos and we are students in the area of film and, all of that matched. I satisfied all of the requirements, I had to get in. She said, "I don't think they will let us in, but if you figure out how let me know." "Okay," I said. Well, I got ready in a hurry and went to the University and Jeannette said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "Come over I'm already taking pictures with Olmos." "How?" "Yes, come on." Since that day, and the conference we gave, talking about our responsibility about what we film and our responsibility as Latinos in this country. And all of the challenges we overcome. Listening to him and

thinking that we have to gather strength from somewhere, to *seguir adelante* (forge ahead). Since then on, I felt a lot better. It was so good to have gone there.

I wondered, considering how difficult it was for Natalia to explore a part of her past she thought was over, if she could still see the value in the work that she did. I asked her,

(Me) What do you think or feel about your final product?

(Natalia) You want the truth? I think about my ex-husband and think, you idiot. The truth! Who do you think you were to destroy this person? Look at everything I could accomplish, everything I am. Everything I could do. And I look at my pictures from before and think, I wasn't ugly. I wasn't fat. Really. I see them and think what fatty? What ugly? Look at her hair, look at her eyes. That's what I see now. What a bad person. Wait till I see you [joking]. I hope I never have to see him. Really. I have never looked for him. I don't care. And I hope to never see him.

Natalia expresses the concept of empowerment in the preceding excerpt in such a powerful way. As she explains, when she looks at the film, she is no longer a victim. Rather, the documentary served as a reminder of her self-worth. Now when she looks back to her story of abuse, the documentary film is a significant part of that story because it how she learned that the abuse was not her fault. She also speaks in reference to the person in film as a once-removed relationship. Its almost as if, when watching the film, it is an out of body experience. Of all the women in this study, she is also the only one to make the editorial decision to

have re-enactment in her film. This underscores the once-removed relationship she now has with herself as she watches her film and tells her story.

Another woman I interviewed also covered the issue of domestic violence in her documentary. Maricruz Juarez produced two documentaries on her abusive relationship with her husband and how it affected their entire family. In the films, Maricruz interviews her abusive husband and 3 young daughters about the violence in their home. In my interview with her, she shared that, like Natalia, doing the documentary was an important part in her family being able to heal from the abuse. She explains,

(Me) And the day of the film screening, tell me what that feels like to showcase your film?

(Maricruz) Everyone was there, the girls too. And seeing themselves on the screen was very moving. And after we saw it, it helped us all.

(Me) How?

(Maricruz) Before, it was a taboo subject that we didn't talk about at home. It was in the past and we aren't going to talk about it anymore. But after, the girls would say "You can't talk to mommy like that because in the movie," because the documentary talks about it not being a normal situation for you to yell at me or me to yell at you or for him to hit the girls, and so they always, no no, not like that.

(Me) So it was like a reference point?

(Maricruz) Yeah.

(Me) And when you finished your documentary, that part of your marriage was in the past?

(Maricruz) Maybe that was something that existed in the past in a more severe form, but it still continued. I couldn't ask you, and I shouldn't be asking you... that I could decide. So that changed too. Even something as small as buying a piece of furniture for the house, it was for both of us. A decision for both of us. And if the girls asked for permission, it was only to him and so a lot of things changed.

(Me) Because of the film?

(Maricruz) Yes. When you listen to yourself on the big screen, it's something—when you listen to what you were doing, it's like something awakens in you and says that was not a healthy situation for me or my daughters and I don't want my daughters to go through this. And different situations, for example, if I let myself not say anything in certain situations, maybe I can do something else. Like talk more. I don't know. Like my authority can be more. Not just like the typical Mexican woman who stays in the kitchen cooking and cleaning and more than anything, respect. Okay. If you respect me I will also respect you. So it doesn't mean you are going to pick fights with your partner, but respect overall. So we change. We change a lot when we see ourselves. It gives you more ideas. When we were going to the Parents Anonymous group, we went there to get help. But then we later became Parent Leaders. So being Parent Leaders occurred to me when I was watching the documentary. Helping more, opening more groups.

For Maricruz and her family, the documentary film process was a positive experience because it gave them the communicative tools to discuss the violence.

As she explains, the topic was no longer capable of being ignored. The documentary served as reference point for the family that reminded them of better ways to cope with anger. In this way, Maricruz' relationship with her film is similar to Natalia's in that she too is once removed from it when she watches.

Although the women I interviewed expressed positive outcomes in the documentary film process in different ways, all of them agree that, while revisiting painful aspects of their personal lives, in the end, the emotionally draining work was worth it. I am reminded here again of Rebecca Lovato and her dented can metaphor that started this chapter.

(Me) What's your favorite poem?

(Rebecca) My favorite poem? Um, it would have to be E.E. Cummings, you know the one that says I carry my heart? That one, that's my favorite. My other favorite, from, Jonathan Livingston Seagull: "You must begin by knowing that you have already arrived." And so if I just tell myself that deep inside of me [soft and crying] it kind of just keeps me together.

In a way, the documentaries serve the same function as that poem for the women I interviewed. Finishing their documentary projects reminds them they have already arrived. The films end up being a reference point for a part of their lives that exists in the past. In this chapter, I hope to have made evident how the women in this study experienced positive outcomes as a result of being involved in the *HIF* film process. For Rebecca, creating her film, *Rise Ruby Rise*, gave her a sense of fulfillment only comparable to giving birth to her son. It also gave her confidence to know she is no longer like that dented can she thought to be all her life. For Jeannette, the positive outcome of creating a self-referential film about a

traumatic experience was that she was able to further her collegiate plans regardless of her economic status. In the case of Lucia, there were two positive outcomes. First, she was able to overcome her timid personality, and second, she was able to finally help her family start to heal from years of emotional baggage. For Natalia, the positive outcome that resulted from creating a film at *HIF* about her personal struggle with domestic violence and homelessness was that she was able to create a new role for herself as a survivor and not a victim. Last, for Maricruz, her film had positive outcomes for her and her family because it was the starting point for them to start healing from the violence that for many years plagued the family.

CHAPTER 3

THE CENTER OF LIFE

During my observation period at *Humanities in Focus*, one of the most intriguing dynamics I witnessed is how close the students and professors are with one another. The bonds that are formed in that class marvel me because it appears that intimate friendships form rather quickly. After interviewing the 6 women in this study, I looked for overarching themes in their responses that could help explain why so many of them refer to *HIF* as a family unit. Several of the participants used the concept of family to describe the relationships they have with people at *HIF*. In this chapter, I take a closer look at the ways in which the women in this study use the concept of family to talk about *HIF*.

To begin, Judy Fuwell's response provides a great foundation to understanding the significance of family. My interview with Judy was by far the longest interview I conducted. We got so carried away in our conversation, I did not realize two and half hours had gone by. Most of that time, Judy spent talking about her family and not her documentary specifically. While I was interested to learn more about them, I was also trying to understand why she was spending so much time talking about her family when she knew the topic I was interested in was *HIF*. I did not stop her from talking to me about her family. I knew that if I

kept listening and reflected on what she said that I would gain meaningful understanding.

Judy's documentary about her daughter's drug addiction involved the whole family. Therefore, it did make sense since I was there to discuss Judy's *HIF* film, that she would spend a great deal of time sharing with me so many behind the scene details about her daughter and family. She talked about how desperate she felt when trying to get her daughter off drugs. In the following excerpt, Judy gives me the first glimpse of the significance of family.

(Me) Has he [Judy's grandson] ever seen his mom's documentary?

(Judy) Yeah, he helped make it. He actually helped make it.

(Me) How did he help?

(Judy) Well, we interviewed him and he talked about his mom, and yeah, he's seen it, you know 'cause he was trying to get her off drugs too.

Especially because we would get phone calls saying that she was hurt somewhere and you know, and he would get upset and he would go look for her. And we couldn't find her. And it was stupid. We should have just removed him, you know cut our ties, but it's still family it's family, how do you give up your family? That was the other thing, I always felt guilty because I thought, you know, if I don't take care of her who is, and if I don't take care of her who is? And I always felt, you know, you are the mother you are supposed to make this better, but it didn't work. But then I figure you can only do so much, and if your kids don't want to do it, you can only give them what you can give them, you can only—and they have

to make their own choices. It took me making that documentary to get that...

From this excerpt, I began to understand that family, regardless of how functional or dysfunctional, needs to help one another. Judy continued to talk about her own family at length, and when we started talking about *HIF*, family continued to be an emphasized topic for her. I asked,

(Me) Have you noticed a pattern in the films?

(Judy) Well, no because they start to say—once it becomes personal and they do their personal stories it always is better. I mean, and people, you know like with Crystal's, wanted to talk in general about how she got through this and how she was helping other people, but when she put her story on it, it helped her and it helped her deal with her family and when her family got involved to be interviewed and stuff it got them talking. And in the same way like with Lucia's, with her mom, because all of those kids were divided and a lot of those kids are still divided and didn't come back, but over all that family you know they have brothers and sisters and for years they knew they had brothers and never interacted.

(Me) Are you saying that these *HIF* documentaries bring families together?

(Judy) Oh I think in a major way. And especially in the case of Lucia's family, I don't know how much it brought her family together I mean it brought her family together, but other people who have seen it, have gone out and looked for their families.

(Me) Lucia's is a specific example. Why do you think *HIF* documentaries bring families together in a general way?

(Judy) Because they can see hope. Again, family is the center of life. Your family is— everyone starts with a family. Whether it's one person or 11 people, you still, everyone in the world has a mom and dad, and everyone wants a mom and a dad and that connection, and I just think it hits the basic root of life and when people have all these problems or dysfunctional problems or they see somebody else have that same problem or a similar problem, it gives them hope. Or, a lot of people tell me they are not alone and they always feel alone, or they don't want anyone else to know they have those problems. But everyone has problems of some sort.

During my volunteer time at *HIF*, I helped produce a short promotional film about *HIF* and the students. I interviewed several participants for this, including Lucia, a woman I also interviewed for this study. She noted then the same connection about family and that Judy makes in the preceding transcript. In that film, Lucia says,

(Lucia) We are making progress and what we have to contribute to our community is something positive and that we may not realize that it is making and impact right away. But somewhere down the line, a life, a family, a community will be affected...And I think that family is where it all starts, you know my little *HIF* family, we are making a difference somewhere, although we may not see it right away!

Judy's conversation in the preceding transcript and Lucia's comment in the *HIF* film I produced illuminate why family is so important. As they explain, it

is the basic root of life and we all desire those familial connections with people. Even more, for Judy, the films produced at *HIF* provide a sense of hope for families that are struggling. Given her explanation, it is even more profound that the women I interviewed referred to *HIF* as a family. I would later learn after conducting all of my interviews that this *HIF* family really began in the *Venture* course, which I will elaborate on momentarily. Of the 6 women I interviewed, only one of them did not come from the *Venture* program, Natalia. However, even she described *HIF* as a family.

(Natalia) It's really interesting it ends up being kind of like a family. It sounds cliché, but no, really. You become friends. You learn stories of others and you think, wow, I never thought he was going through this. Or, I didn't know you were someone with so much talent. You pay more attention to people. For example, like Mike with his paintings. Jeannette with the lab, and the impression she is leaving on this community. I don't know, Corky, he films so beautifully, and I found him once at a bus stop. And it was one of those things that's like, what an insignificant person and you can't even imagine that he's a filmmaker and the quality of his videos. When I saw him, I thought, wow. Like him, and everyone else, all the qualities and everything that each person has.

(Me) Do you think all of these qualities that you are using to describe *HIF* could be replicated or is it unique?

(Natalia) I think the unique quality is the kinds of teachers we have. You can't find them anywhere else. For example Jeff, his sensibility, Judy with her dedication. It's Sunday and it's 3 a.m. and she is there cutting and

pasting— it has to do with the leadership of our group. They are our teachers. The team that Judy, Jeff, and Craig, and the people that have joined them, that is what makes it special. But I think you could transfer that and marvelous and incredible things result. You stay addicted because you want to see what's going on there.

(Me) What do you feel when you go there?

(Natalia) That I have friends, that I have company, that I can call them, that I can express my ideas. That with my experience I can teach other people. How to save time, or where to go. Abilities you didn't even know you had, you find out then.

What is fascinating to me is that Natalia was the only non-*Venture* graduate I interviewed, and yet she was still able to pick up on this family dynamic at *HIF*. Prior to conducting the interviews for this study, I was familiar with the *Venture* program through my time first spent at *HIF* as a volunteer, and also during my participant observation. What I did not realize until after interviewing the women in this study is what a significant role the *Venture* program plays in creating the culture that exists at *HIF*. The following excerpts explain in further detail the significance of the *Venture* program to the participants at *HIF*.

(Me) How did you feel in the *Venture* course?

(Maricruz) Weird. Because in my language, I can be a leader. Speaking my language, I have participated in, *ooof*, countless things. But when it comes to English, I am more shy and that bothers me. It's something that I feel I have to avoid. And so that also propelled me to do it. I thought, okay, this

is something that is not going to be in my language, I'm going to see how the classes are and I'm going to be participating with other people and in same way, this is going to help me. But, in the beginning, I was so shy and I didn't participate, I just observed and listened. But in that class, they make you participate. You can't be invisible. In that class, they all want you to be participating and that class is so different from *HIF*. Because when I left *Venture*, I felt like all of them were my family. Because maybe, I don't know, maybe there—in my case, they helped me, there was an open class where you could share, we had homework, if you didn't turn in homework, you didn't get credit and so one day, a professor read a poem, professor Jeff, and he said I need you to write a poem about what you are feeling, about what inspires you. And it was homework and you had to do it. And after you did your homework, there was another class where you read, in front of everyone. So that was another experience. We are reading, standing in front of audience, even though it's small, something so personal, and not in your language, it was like a challenge for me. Shaking and everything, but in that way, it helped me so much since then. And Professor Jeff always pushes you, yes, you can do it. He makes you feel so secure about yourself even though you are not. It's gratifying, well, Professor Jeff is a stupendous person. And after, when the program was over, I felt so comfortable there, I wanted to continue. I didn't want it to end...

(Me) So when Jeff said, I have this documentary class—but you were saying *Venture* was like a family and you didn't want to leave them and *HIF* was a lot different. How?

(Maricruz) In *Venture*, it's like a class but you—how do I explain it to you? You can participate more with everyone and everyone is listening. And during the process, we are always together. And in *HIF*, well, of course you can share, but it's an end product. Nobody is aware of the process that you are undergoing until they see your end product and that is when you can share. So the difference is that you don't get the same proximity throughout the entire course, but you do at the end. You don't know what's going on until the night of the presentation what they have been working on. It is also a really cool experience, but only on that night can you identify and feel close to someone but only that night.

(Me) But, since you already knew a lot of these people and stories from *Venture*...

(Maricruz) I already knew a lot of their situations.

(Me) Well, a lot of people say that *HIF* is a family to them. Do you feel like that too even though you said that there isn't that closeness till the end?

(Maricruz) Of course. Because of the experience I had in *Venture*. Even though I might not know the stories or situations that exist in the people that are at *HIF*, I know there is a story. And that makes me, okay, I might not know your story, but I know you have one. And in the meantime, I identify with you, in the meantime, I understand you. In the meantime,

I'm going to help you with whatever I can. So it's probably different for me, for Judy, and the others that comes from *Venture*.

(Me) They already come with that mindset.

(Maricruz) But you don't necessarily need to come from *Venture* to identify with this. Good people also understand, I don't need to know you to be nice to you.

Maricruz points out that it is really in the *Venture* program where students adopt the family mindset. Many of the students at *HIF* are recruited from *Venture* because Professor Jeff Metcalf teaches in both courses and he extends the invitation. In my interview with Rebecca, who also came from *Venture*, she elaborates on the last point Maricruz makes about the fact that people do not necessarily need to come from *Venture* to create a family atmosphere at *HIF*.

(Me) So yeah, there are very special people involved in this program, what does *HIF* mean to you?

(Rebecca) To me, it's like my family escape, because Judy, you, and Tony Sams, he always, the voice that you guys speak with, there's like so much confidence behind it, it's hard to explain, but I look forward to going to class, even if I—they were showing lighting, and I already know that, but I didn't even mind repeating that again just to be there, to see other people grow.

(Me) So when you are getting ready to go on a Monday night, what are you thinking? Like, what are you expecting to happen there?

(Rebecca) What am I expecting to happen? It's one more chance to hear someone else's story. Someone else's struggle or life, I don't know, you

kind of become a family. Because you are sharing the stories, and we want to see each other succeed. Because I remember I was struggling, do you remember when I was struggling? I lost it so many times. And I remember sitting in class—I think it's kind of like therapy. Don't you notice though, that everyone in class is that way? Like for instance, okay, it's not just Jeff that's embraced, oh you've done a really good job. I mean, I've never, I think what I was looking for the whole time was to hear Craig say to me, because the first time, I remember before you got there, I was going to give up because people didn't understand me. I guess because I'm not from Mexico, and I'm not from the United States, Craig said to me, "What do you have to do with Ruby? Well really, a whole lot of nothing, but at the same time, everything! You aren't getting it! So, it's like everybody, Judy. I can call Judy like at 12 o'clock at night. I remember, on the last day, I remember [laughing] it was 4 o'clock in the afternoon, she had to get herself to work, she had to get her son to work, and she says, I haven't even made lunch for my husband. And she says, do you mind if we just stop for a minute. She went and took those chilies that I had, she boiled them and she put them in grits and we had a grits sandwich and it was like the bomb [laughing]. I don't know how to explain it, it's something that I could have never done with one of my sisters. You know, they would have never said, you know, let's go somewhere and eat. Somebody cares. Everybody cares. Because even as mad as I got at, gosh what is her name, her last name is Marshall, Brooke! Brooke Marshall. Yeah, I thought she was maliciously doing it on purpose, losing it. And Tanya was never paying attention, and

she would come, she would only go to class if I picked her up, gosh guys, come on. But then, you know, it was just me that was having a bad time. I mean even, the guy that edits, Tim. He comes in ready to edit, and nobody's ready for him. He's just wasting his time. I'm like Tim, why are you here? But you know what? I'm glad he doesn't say, "I give up." You know, because there are people that say, they are worthless, I give up, I'm not going to do it. But they see the need I guess. I don't know.

The family-like atmosphere that is created at *HIF* is important because in many ways, it frees the students in the class to produce documentaries about very personal, and at times, very painful stories about their lives. The quality of films that are produced at *HIF* are brave and daring because they delve into topics that people might generally want to keep hidden and only talk about with family—if that. To describe *HIF* as a family is to say that these women feel comfortable in the space and that is a truly wonderful thing. This family setting is what led Judy to confront her daughter and her drug addiction. It is also what prompted Maricruz to challenge her husband and his abusive ways. It also allowed Rebecca to claim her Chicana identity and be proud of it. No doubt, the family aspect of *HIF* is key to providing space for such personal and powerful documentaries to surface. Even Jeannette, who seemed to be the most emotionally distant in her responses about *HIF* (likely due to the fact that at the time of the interview, she was not participating at *HIF* because of her hectic work schedule), mentioned the family aspect of *HIF*.

(Me) How do you feel when you go there (*HIF*)?

(Jeannette) I feel like I'm going to waste my time sometimes. Yes because—I like it. I like the class. But, I go with that sensation that I want to learn the program more. But in reality, there really isn't anybody that sits with you or explains to you, in writing, or something, how to use the programs. And so I feel like it's an auto-class. And sometimes I feel like I can do it at home, on *YouTube*, or in Google, and I think I'll learn more. But the idea of the class is good. But they need more structure to focus more.

(Me) Let me give you an example, in a cold standard university classroom, would someone be willing to expose themselves like they do in *HIF*?

(Jeannette) No. I think because of the informality of the class, there is perhaps more *confianza* (familiarity and trust) to talk about that.

(Me) How?

(Jeannette) Because it's familial. Everyone knows everyone. It's easier for a theme like that to come out. A strong theme. Like you said, if I enter a regular university classroom, I'm not going to share my story with just anyone.

(Me) The one thing that still surprises me is that everyone knows each other from long ago.

(Jeannette) Yes, for example, in *Venture*, we get to know each other, and since I had already been in *HIF*, and then people went to Leadership, and so we all keep going to—it's like we all have the same insecurities. And we pass on the tips from one class to another, and we always find ourselves in the same places.

The significance of Jeannette's response in the preceding transcript is not only that the *HIF* family setting is what cultivates the powerful and evocative films. The other important contribution that Jeannette identifies is that the same like-minded group of people that are taking the *HIF* and *Venture* courses are also taking other classes in the community. As she says, "We find ourselves in the same places." The participants at *HIF* are leaders in their communities and are active in improving their communities. The *HIF* course appears to be just one step along their journey.

In this chapter, I have discussed some of the ways the women in this study discuss the family-like aspect of *HIF*. From Judy, we understand the significance of family, and that is that it is the center of life. Family is something we all yearn for according to Judy. This is why she also says the *HIF* films are about families because it is an attempt from the filmmaker to restore something that is damaged in that unit. In this chapter, I have also provided examples of how the *Venture* program is responsible for the family-like culture at *HIF*. Judy, Maricruz, Lucia, Rebecca, and Jeannette all reference *Venture* when discussing the close-knit culture at *HIF*. However, Natalia also described her experience at *HIF* as familial even though she has never participated in *Venture*. The women in this study reported feeling supported to share their personal traumatic stories in the family-like culture at *HIF*. In the chapter that follows, I explore some of the motives and rationale the women in this study described as reasons for choosing the topics for their documentary films.

CHAPTER 4

DO YOU WANT TO HEAR MY STORY TODAY?

While the documentaries created at *HIF* treat sensitive and personal topics, the *HIF* filmmakers I interviewed in this study acknowledge a social/community dimension to the topics they choose to feature. It is social in the sense that there is a shared or communal aspect to the films they create. This recognition manifested itself in two principal ways. First, some of the women in this study acknowledged an assumed audience. Meaning, while they might not be able to specifically name an audience for their documentary films, they assume there is an audience somewhere out there in the community. Then, they produce their documentaries with that assumed audience in mind. Second, some of the women actually create a physical audience for their completed films. The *HIF* class sponsors several film screenings at different venues upon the completion of the course, but most of the women in this study also found additional settings to showcase their films. In this chapter, I present examples of how the women in this study presumed an imagined community audience, and also created physical community audiences.

(Me) For someone who does not know what *HIF* is, tell me, what's

Humanities in Focus?

(Judy) I usually just say it's a place for people to come and tell their story in a documentary film and I always like to say they are social documentaries. I like them to be with a social message to where they are helping somebody. And, they don't always come out that way, but I want them to have a happy ending [laugh] and they don't always have happy endings, so anyway, I just say come and tell your story, or if they want to come into the program, or I can say what can we use this for, like when Maricruz did her documentary on domestic violence, and that they are still together, you know, why are you still together? And there is hope and people can change. And they might not change to the degree that you want them to change, but um, but if other people see that there is hope. Whether you keep your family or let your family go, that's a different story, but anytime a family can stay together it's better. But it's not better if it's going to destroy you.

(Me) And you think the documentaries are an attempt to restore that family?

(Judy) I think they are trying to do that whether it's for themselves or for somebody else. But I think it is, uh, it's an avenue like a lot of people, like Paul [Judy's husband], he won't go to counseling, but he watched his movie, so when his drinking got to be a problem and he had to go to some court appointed counseling he wouldn't talk but he took the movie and showed them. So I think it gives people who are afraid to talk or don't know how to talk it gives them an avenue to talk. It gives people um, you know, who have a similar problem. I would like to say, like with the

domestic violent ones, there's so much domestic violence and you know we won't think about it. And it's kind of swept under the carpet. And a lot of people will say yes we'll talk about it and they have these little committees. But when it comes down to people doing something about it, they don't do anything. But if you make a movie, watch a movie, they don't have to physically say, but they have their story. Like for Maricruz, she doesn't have to say this is my story, but she can show her story and then she can talk about the movie and it kind of gives them a safe space. It's the movie, it's the movie. But that movie is going to help you. And that movie is my life. And so, you can do this and this to get to there.

Judy is the only woman I interviewed to explicitly label the films social documentaries. Judy's use of the word social suggests an imagined audience because, as she states, "I like them to be with a social message to where they are helping somebody." There are infinite possibilities to who this "somebody" can be. The imagined audience that is created is one that needs to watch this documentary in order to heal, grow, or learn. Take Judy's husband Paul as an example. While Paul is part of a physical audience, I can presume that since he was interviewed in the film that Judy intended for him to watch the film. However, what Judy did not explicitly know was that her film would be shown to Paul's counselors. I say explicitly, because she did have confidence that her film was greater than herself and that it had the potential to reach audiences beyond her imagination. I find that confidence to recognize a potential audience incredibly powerful. Judy and the other women in this study are brave to share such private matters and when I questioned their motives, the response was,

overwhelmingly, to help other people. Judy was extremely emotional during this part of the interview. She was crying as she tried to explain to me, why this documentary film class meant so much to her and why it was so important to share these personal stories.

(Me) Why do you care so much? If someone said to you *HIF* is no longer going to exist tomorrow, what would you say?

(Judy) Because it's peoples stories, its people's lives. *Humanities in Focus* just means everything to me [crying]. I don't know what I would do without it. People's stories need to be told. And I am willing to help whoever wants their story told because it helps people. If people are willing to tell their story, I'm going to help them finish their projects [crying]. Jeff and Craig tell me all the time, let them finish their stories, don't help them. But I have to; I have to help people tell their story.

In this excerpt, Judy's rationale for placing such importance in sharing people's stories is "because it helps people." She might also be referring to helping the actual documentary filmmakers, but the context of this excerpt suggests that Judy also means it helps other people when you decide to share your story. For Judy, the documentaries at *HIF* are "good" because they treat real-world issues that people in an imagined audience are afraid to talk about. For Judy, there was also an actual audience she was trying to deliberately reach with her film, and that is her daughter, Amber. In the following excerpt, she explains how she thought her film could help get her daughter off of drugs.

(Judy) Well, they knew Amber was on drugs and stuff but it wasn't, I don't think anyone knew how bad it was or what it was like, and then we started,

um, doing, but again, it was just like a general overview, if we tell everybody that if you get paraphernalia getting this, and if you do this it's gonna stop people from doing it. I don't know what I was thinking. Again, at the time when I made it, I just thought, if she could just see herself high, too, she would not want to see herself look like that. And she'll quit and she didn't care what she looked like. I mean she saw it. I mean it did make an impact in that she let me film, she let me follow her around, but I don't know if she really—she just said yes you know because I don't think it comprehended to her what we were doing. And when she was sober, by then we had interviewed her she had been in rehab several different times and then we finally got her into a different rehab to where she actually had to go in and follow a schedule and do some things to work on getting off drugs, she lasted a few days there and left and said no, I'm not going to do this, but um, but she finally did, she saw it, she watched it when she was sober one time I guess, and it kind of got to her and she uh, stayed clean for a few months and then she went back on them and then she was off and did real good and was off for like 13 months, 14 months, and then she went back on 'em again. And um, by then, we had made the documentary and she was showing it too, like when she'd go get her— that's how a lot of it got put around, because she would go to her correctional facility and say, ooh look what my mom made and this is about us, and they'd start showing it and you know and started working and somebody in that organization would say, oh, this would work for someplace. So anyway, it got it distributed, ha ha ha! But then she, when she finally got off, when

she finally got off drugs, I said, you just have to get rid of all of these people that are drug addicts. And she goes, you don't understand, you are not a drug addict and you need to have people that you can relate to. And, I said, I do understand what you are saying, but you can go to a support group or figure something else, but you cannot hang around these people, you need to find a different type of lifestyle and a different type of life. And she just thought I was, that I just didn't like her friends, and she was right, I didn't like her friends, I just didn't like what they did and she said, well I'm trying to help them get off drugs. And I said you can't. You can't help someone get off drugs unless they want to. And so you just need to step away and live your life and let them do their thing. Anyway, she kept going back, and she finally, I mean this guy she is married to, I mean it's kind of a whirlwind, but he took her and he wouldn't lock her up, but he took her to his apartment and just kept her there and then when her friends would call or come around, he would just say she wasn't there, or so he was able to shut everything off. So, then, she started to get clean again, but then she started hanging around. Just several months ago, started hanging around some of her friends again, and I said what are you doing, and um, she didn't go back on drugs but anyway something happened and then she realized yeah she can't be around those people. Because she didn't use drugs one of them got arrested or something for drugs and she kept saying they weren't good. But what I was trying to say, before I get rambling is once you look at the thing, you can't make a change, you have to do something, so I say, I made this movie and it did help her see things; it

gave me a thing where I could talk about it, and even though people disagree in my family, Paul will say it's not good what you say, but it's the truth.

(Me) Oh, so he didn't like you did the documentary?

(Judy) Well, he let me interview him. But no he didn't want me to do it either. But what ended up happening was the girl that was making it, the girl who used to be a drug addict, found it too hard, it was making her, so she just kind of dropped out because it was just not, it was leading her down the wrong path. And her job and other things, but didn't want her story told. And then the other girl, the other lady, her granddaughter, we went and interviewed her but then she decided she didn't want to be on camera. So she didn't want people to know her story, so that's how it ended. I wasn't really planning on, but I didn't have a face to the story, so, anyway, I, just kind of by hit and miss it ended up being my story. And then I was thinking so I think it made a lot of good things, and I do have people, parents who have seen it, 'cause you know they saw me in the movie and they'll say things like, my son was on drugs and he did this or I understand your feelings, or you make me feel like I'm not alone.

(Me) How does that make you feel?

(Judy) At least, it did something. It made me get to where I wasn't afraid to talk about it. And now, I can talk about drugs or stuff, or I'm not as compassionate as I used to be. I used to be oh let's get you help. Now it's like do you want help? If you don't want help, then don't bug, if you do want help, then come and talk to me. And I don't know if that's a good way

to be or not, but that's kind of where I am at. Ha ha ha. And, so I don't ask the question anymore, how can we get you help? I ask do you want help. If they say no or I don't need it, okay bye see ya. Come talk to me when...

As Judy's target audience, her daughter Amber did many things for Judy. While Amber has not stayed consistently off drugs since Judy made the documentary, as Judy notes, it has helped Amber understand her addiction. Judy mentions in the preceding transcript excerpt that there is even a sense of pride when Amber shows her film to counselors at correctional facilities. She says, "Oooh look what my mom made, and this is about us." The DVD that contains Amber's story is by no means a complete and final portrayal of Amber or her addiction. However, having it to show her counselors is at least a glimpse into understanding Amber and the complexities of her family life. The documentary serves a similar function for Judy's husband, Paul. As Judy comments, "Paul, he won't go to counseling, but he watched his movie, so when his drinking got to be a problem and he had to go to some court appointed counseling he wouldn't talk but he took the movie and showed them." In Paul's case, the documentary is a substitute for sharing his story with his counselors. While he might not have been completely comfortable that Judy decided to produce the documentary, this demonstrates he is at least willing to claim it as part of his story of alcoholism.

For Jeannette, another participant in this study, the imagined and physical audience of her film were somewhat different than Judy's. Jeannette brought her two elementary aged boys and husband to the main *HIF* film screening. This particular screening is important because it is also when the students are presented with their completion certificates. It is very ceremonial, in that each

student is called up to receive their award and they shake hands with the professors. The audience consists of about 50 people, several of whom are donors. In the following excerpt, Jeannette remembers what she felt the night of the film screening.

(Me) How did you feel when you finished?

(Jeannette) The day we worked on it at 3 in the morning, I was so tired. The day of the exhibition, my husband went, and my kids, no my kids didn't go, just my husband, oh, no they were there. My kids were there. Well, my husband went and we sat, and when they started it, after doing it for so long, I hadn't really paid attention to it in the end. That day, I sat, and was relaxed, and paid attention to it, and when I saw it and my husband crying, because that was his best friend, the one that died was his best friend, wow, I impacted myself to see what I had finished. How the story ended up being so well told, and how the message that I wanted to relay, got there, and it got me! And well in that moment, it was very impactful for me. And then, nobody applauded. I thought nobody liked it. But I thought, it's okay, I liked it. But it's because it was so impactful, they stayed quiet. Then they started to applaud, okay yes, then I felt a little better. But when they came up to me to congratulate me and tell me, I felt good, I felt proud.

(Me) Can you compare this to another moment, or is this a once in a lifetime feeling?

(Jeannette) Every accomplishment gives you a similar feeling, but at the same time is unique. Like at the time of graduation, or things like that, accomplishments in life. They are unique but at the same time similar.

(Me) Do you remember what your husband said or what your kids said?

(Jeannette) My husband? No. I only remember his crying and he told me he was proud. He said it turned out beautiful. Because I invested so much time into the documentary. Sometimes, there were nights were I worked until one in the morning, and, well, maybe he was thinking other things, where was I at night, right? But when he saw it he understood all the work that went into it and he liked it. And my kids, well, to this day, they say, my mom makes movies. Or they say my mom is a doctor. Oh my gosh.

Because I work in the HIV stuff, doing testing, they think I'm a doctor. It helps them a lot as an example. That they have to do something, they can't just stay there where they are in life. And the greatest satisfaction was when, in that exhibition, someone in the audience told me they were going to do the test that day. Because she had been in a violent relationship and after that, in the places where we have shown the film, there is always somebody that says, "I want to do the test too."

(Me) In what other places have you shown it?

(Jeannette) It is at the Utah Department of Health. And they use it sometimes when there are presentations; they sometimes go to high schools, the schools.

(Me) Have people recognized you?

(Jeannette) No. Really, no. And that's because I am. That is because I don't like—I have a friend who interviewed me in the radio, and I didn't want to talk about it. I don't know. How can I say this? I did this or I did that. I've never liked, all the things I've done, have always been behind the scenes.

(Me) But this is the exact opposite of that. I mean, doing a documentary is, not just because you interviewed yourself, but at the exhibit, they say, will the director of this film come forward.

(Jeannette) Yes, this exposes you.

(Me) And how does that make you feel?

(Jeannette) I like it a little bit. But I get more satisfaction from the impact the documentary has. The reaction from people, I like that the most.

It is interesting that Jeannette includes herself as part of the audience. She explains in this excerpt that she worked until 3 in the morning the day of the screening to finish her documentary. While she no doubt watched pieces of the documentary during the editing process, for Jeannette, and probably many other students in the class, the night of the presentation is the first time they are actually able to see it play out from start to finish in its final edited form. It is also the first time they see their work on a large projection screen and not just on a small computer screen. For Jeannette, watching her documentary in this setting was like watching it for the first time, she explains. She repeats several times in the preceding transcript how watching her film at that particular screening impacted her so much.

Jeannette also mentions that her husband was part of the physical audience at the screening. She recalls how emotional he was to watch the

documentary about his best friend's battle with AIDS. Jeannette also said that having him present at the screening validated the effort she put in to making the film. Jeannette says, "Sometimes, there were nights were I worked until one in the morning, and, well, maybe he was thinking other things, where was I at night, right? But when he saw it, he understood all the work that went into it and he liked it." Jeannette and every other filmmaker in the class have to dedicate several hours of work in order to complete their projects. While the class meets Monday evenings from 6-9 p.m., those 3 hours during the week are just not enough time to complete their documentaries. Several hours outside of the standard class time are necessary. This often means they have to meet late at night after their work shifts have ended, or on the weekends. Jeannette's husband's suspicions about her late night hours can be put to rest at this film screening because he can see with his very eyes the work that went into producing the documentary, and the accolades his wife is receiving for her work and dedication.

For Lucia, the audience was something she had to consider once she decided to make her film something besides a video for her family's personal use. What is interesting is that for Lucia, it was extremely difficult to have an audience for her film. As she worked on it, the only intention was to provide a platform for her mother to speak. The only potential audience in this scenario was Lucia's siblings. What ultimately convinced her to transform her video clips into a documentary that would be shared was to imagine a potential audience that could learn and benefit from watching Lucia's family talk about their problems. In the

excerpt that follows, Lucia explains her feelings about sharing her film with an audience.

(Me) Have you talked about the film since then?

(Lucia) Well you see, the piece wasn't a conversation piece. It really wasn't. Well we've always had good communication because I wiped the slate clean. From then on, it was my purpose in life to let her know that I had nothing to say. That my new job was to learn from her. And that somebody else should hear this message, and that it may start a conversation, in someone else's family where the doors are closed, I had to tweak it. I had to make it presentable to someone else. With enough information to say it's okay if you're dysfunctional. No one is perfect. But listen to this. Maybe this will encourage YOU to start talking.

(Me) So you decided to make it an *HIF* film for the potential to help other people?

(Lucia) Mm hmm.

(Me) Why?

(Lucia) Because I was that person in the corner, don't look at me, don't see me, don't talk to me. And if every family is like that, no one is ever going to talk [crying]. Nobody is going to hear their mother. Nobody is going to know how hard that road is unless you've traveled it. And how can you appreciate a parent if you don't know where they've been. If you don't know everything that they have sacrificed to make sure that you as that child have it better. How could you appreciate something if those words are never spoken [still crying]. I don't know. I can't say that this film has

changed lives and this and that, but I don't care. I care that it made a difference for her. And that she can start putting some of that baggage aside. And when I hear Craig and Jeff saying Lucia who wouldn't say a word, it's true. But I just keep on plucking along. I go into my comfort zone a little bit, and then I go back. But just like her, just a little at a time. Don't make me swallow too much because it might not go down. So did it make a difference? Where I meant it to, yeah. Will it make a difference in somebody else's life? I'm not sure, but I hope it starts a conversation. And if a conversation is started, whether for good or bad, it's a conversation that wasn't there before. And that's good enough for me.

Lucia emphasizes again that this film was for her mother, stating in fact, that she does not care if it changed the lives of people that watch the film. At the same time, Lucia says that if her family's sharing of their story inspires other families to start talking, to start a conversation, that is sufficient for Lucia to know that she accomplished something with her film.

For Maricruz, an audience she did not expect became an integral part of her documentary film. In the next excerpt, she discusses how her family became interested to participate in the film.

(Maricruz) Okay, stand here and we are going to interview and you don't have to say anything you don't want to. And that's what we did. I went on camera. And that's how it ended up. So when we did the first interview then it was we need another interview and another interview. And various times we came to the house for the interviews. And when my girls and husband saw what I was talking about, they were like, well I want to

participate too. I was so sure, because they were so little, they had no idea. I was so sure they didn't know. But when they decided to participate, I found out it was a family problem. They wanted to share their point of view about everything. What my husband said was, I want, I don't just want them to hear your side as a victim, but of the victimizer. So that they can see what I thought about and why I did it. And my girls said, "Well, I also remember that time period and I also want to share what I was feeling. So that kids our age can know it's not their fault because that is what we used to feel. That you guys fought because of something I did." And so that is how the first documentary came to be. Not planned, but because they wanted to do it.

Here Maricruz' daughters demonstrate an imagined audience. They tell their mom the reason they want to participate in the film is so that other children that might watch the documentary could know that it is not their fault their parents are fighting. It is also significant that her husband wants an opportunity to address the imagined audience to explain the role of the victimizer.

We continued our conversation about how her documentary came to be, and she expressed how vulnerable it makes the filmmaker feel to expose themselves on camera.

(Me) But why risk yourself on a documentary? In a poem, you read it once and that's it. You can distribute a documentary.

(Maricruz) I can speak on my behalf. I did mine to help other people. I think that this is problem that is not going to disappear easily. Because of the lifestyle that is lived in Mexico. Still, if someone sees my documentary

and knows that that is a situation that they are going through, it's about learning that that's not okay to mistreat my wife, or for the wife, I can't let others treat me this way. It's going to help someone else. Not just expose what it is I am going through but so that others can identify and for them to say we need to change, just how they did it. We need to change for the good of the whole family.

(Me) Why for other people?

(Maricruz) I think that's up to each person. I think human beings learn by experiences, personal experiences. Nobody, I can't expect that someone can learn from my experience. Maybe I can bring awareness but I don't expect—You have to go through it for you to really understand this person.

From this part of our interview, I get a sense of why the imagined audience is created. There seems to be an understanding among those that produce documentaries at *HIF*, like Maricruz, that other people in society need help and by sharing your story, you could help them. The women I interviewed also talked about this potential to help others as something that is inherent in human kind, in this case the filmmakers, wanting to express themselves. Natalia expresses this very clearly in the excerpt that follows:

(Natalia) I think we all have something in common and that is the necessity to express an idea. I think we all have that. All people want to convey their ideas. A gangster writes on a wall, why? Because he wants to convey his anger or his noncompliance, or his lack of balance through a scribble on a wall. Or he writes on your car. It's his form of expression. A musician composes a piece of beautiful music and you listen to it and he is

expressing himself through that. But if instead you give them a camera and tell them, do it like this, I think they would do a documentary.

While Natalia speaks of an imagined audience that might benefit from watching her chosen mode of expressing her story of abuse and homelessness, she has also found other physical audiences with whom to share her story. She recently was invited to be a speaker at the Utah Domestic Violence Council Annual Conference. Natalia has also submitted a version of her film to a film festival on human rights in Mexico City.

(Natalia) ...And still we are cutting it 5 minutes to enter it to a contest that I was invited to participate in, called—what's it called? This is in Mexico; the city of Mexico with, it has to do with human rights. And they launched an international convocation if you had material about abuse regarding crime, something that had to do with Mexican culture. Well, I thought if mine doesn't qualify, it at least has something. So I submitted it. It has to be 10 minutes, and mine is 15 so we are working on it. What I'm trying to say, is that I now see it different. There are still parts that when I watch, it hurts me to remember, but since I have seen the result of my video when I watch it and other people. No, this video when somebody sees it, I'm going to help someone. And that is the only thing that keeps me sane. Yes, trying to find equilibrium.

Again, Natalia is demonstrating the connection between the need to express herself and the good it could bring to other people. Rebecca also expressed this human need to express and to help others in a very natural and matter of fact way.

(Me) Why do you think people choose to tell such hurtful and painful stories?

(Rebecca) Um, it's just part of life. And I'm sure you just want to share that with someone. Because you know that someone else is there for you. Because I remember the first first time I seen *Humanities in Focus* and I saw Judy's, it was the "Darker Side of the Lake" or something like that, I think that was the name of it. And it portrayed this girl doing drugs and I had a drug problem. But not because I wanted to. My husband, controlled me that much, he would make me take drugs, yeah. And, it clicked for me that brokenness, that dented can, came back. That's where I was and it's a dark side that you don't talk to people about. But at the same time, I related to that girls drug problem. Because that wasn't me. And thank God, because I wasn't there very long, but I related to that. And when I heard her story, I knew deep down, I could never tell someone my story. It was just something, it was sad, I understood it.

(Me) If I were in the class and they said, Alexza, make a documentary, if I look to my past at my most painful moments, those are the last films I would make.

(Rebecca) Really? But it's important, it's so important to share.

(Me) But, why?

(Rebecca) I think we all want our stories told. We want to share that with people, but we don't know how to say, "Oh you know what, do you want to hear my story today?" [Says this in her Forrest Gump impersonation and laughing] That's Forrest Gump, you know.

I have to say, it was a humbling experience to listen to these 6 women reflect on why they chose to share their stories. Since first learning about *HIF*, I was mystified about what could drive someone to share something so private, personal, and painful; So mystified, I thought I would do my dissertation research on it. What I learned from these women, however, did not require doctoral level research. According to them, it is just part of our human nature to share our story and to want to help other people. Somewhere along the way, I have lost sight of that and that is what makes these women even more remarkable. These are the women who work several jobs for their families, the women that volunteer several hours in their communities, and the women that will do anything to help a person in need. There is not a better lesson that I could have learned than this.

In this chapter, I have described some of the motivation behind the stories that are shared at *HIF*. For Judy, the films are social documentaries with an implied intent to help others. In the case of her own film, she had hoped chronicling her daughter's drug addiction might help her get clean. For Jeannette, the purpose of her film was not only to tell the story of her dear friend. For Jeannette, the documentary was an activist endeavor to encourage people to get tested for HIV. Lucia's film about her family was never intended to have an audience, but as she edited it to become an *HIF* documentary, she hoped her film could lead other estranged families to start talking. For Maricruz, the purpose was to help other families dealing with domestic violence to see hope. And, for Natalia and Rebecca, the reason people in general want to share their story is because it is our natural human nature to want to do so. Now that I have

provided a sketch of this chapter on the motivation behind the stories at *HIF*, in this next and final chapter, I present some of my observations as an ethnographer at *HIF*.

CHAPTER 5

ALEXZA, THE LONE ETHNOGRAPHER

In one of my ethnographic methods courses, I was asked to read a rather unconventional book called *Shane, the Lone Ethnographer: A Beginner's Guide to Ethnography*, by Sally Campbell Galman (2007). It is a comic book with an intrepid heroine and novice ethnographer named Shane. The comic book chronicles Shane's journey to complete her first ethnographic study. The last piece of advice she gets is this: 'Well Lone Ethnographer, I'll leave you with this...Think of yourself as a storyteller. But—you have a head start with original research questions and themes to use to outline your write-up, lots of experiences from many hours of doing observation, a delightful cast of characters, and a compelling story line! So, you are all set!" (p. 98). While there are many standards in place to ensure the final write-up of an ethnography is representative of the researcher's time spent in the field, I find there are still countless vignettes, information, and people that are missing from this write-up. I acknowledge that I had to make judicious choices about what to include and what to omit based on the research questions I posed. However, I would find this ethnographic story incomplete if I did not include some of those bracketed items

that did not make it into the analysis part of my manuscript. As such, in this chapter, I seek to offer my personal reflections about my journey as a lone ethnographer which are important to gain a deeper understanding of the culture at *HIF*. About 1 year after volunteering at *HIF*, when I realized I was most likely going to do my dissertation there, I started trying to recreate some of the conversations and memories I had at *HIF*. These field note summaries and dialogues are taken from those notes.

To begin, it makes the most sense to me to start at the beginning, how I came to *HIF*. You could say I found my way to *HIF* on accident. I was a new and eager first-year doctoral student, I had grand visions for my dissertation work. I wanted to find an underrepresented group to teach the foundations of video production in order to hear their stories in their own words. I was a graduate teaching student for an introduction to Mass Communication course in the spring of 2010 and had a guest speaker, Craig Wirth, come in and talk to the class. I introduced myself afterwards and, as it turned out, we both had spent time working at NBC Network News in Burbank, California. We knew some of the same colleagues and it sparked a conversation. We got to talking about the news industry and that eventually prompted Craig to ask me why I left my most recent news position at CNN in New York to get my doctoral degree. I explained that I had grown quite contemptuous about the industry and that I thought there might be a way to continue to do what I enjoyed about it (i.e. the people, the stories), without getting caught up in all of the negative aspects (i.e. the ratings, the commodification of stories).

I continued to explain my research interests and explained that handing the means of production over to the people and having them share their stories in their words might be somewhat of a way to reconcile the sour taste the news industry had left in me. I thought, if I could teach people how to use video technology to tell their own stories in the way that they wanted, that I could still be able to do what I loved. I told him that I wanted to find a community group to teach video production to. That is when he told me about *Humanities in Focus*.

(Craig) Oh, well, I do that. I have a group called *Humanities in Focus*, and we teach them how to use video cameras and how to edit video, and they produce their own documentaries.

Needless to say, I was ecstatic. He invited me to observe one night, and I was hooked ever since. The following is taken from my field notes describing the first night I attended an *HIF* class.

I was nervous to meet the students. I can be very reserved and quiet- especially when meeting a large group of people for the first time. I didn't know what to expect, as there was really no formal agenda for my being there. However, I guess I thought that Craig might introduce me to the class. He didn't and it only made me more nervous and uncomfortable. Craig greeted me and asked me if I spoke Spanish because he wanted me to talk to one of the students about her documentary. "Jeannette is just having a hard time putting the story together," Craig said. I am a native Spanish speaker and was happy to just interact with the student about her project. Her name is Jeannette Villalta and she is working on a piece about living with HIV/AIDS.

I will never forget my first day at *HIF*, because it felt like I was supposed to be there. It felt like, regardless of whether I chose to do my doctoral research at this site, that I belonged there. I felt like I had a skill set that could be put to use, and I liked that feeling. My field notes continued,

I asked her to show me what interviews she had already done and what message she wanted to convey in her documentary. She explained that the most important message she wanted to convey was that people needed to forget about the stigma of HIV/AIDS and just get tested for the virus. Furthermore, that HIF/AIDS could happen to anyone, gay or straight, single or married. I was curious why she chose this topic for the documentary and simply asked her. She said that she had a friend who died from AIDS a few years back. It didn't seem right to her that he died alone and never received the treatment he deserved because he was afraid to tell people about his disease. We spoke in Spanish and I remember her telling me something about how she liked she could talk about her project with me in Spanish.

When I drove home that night, I remember thinking how remarkable it was that the instructors had not picked up on the main reason why Jeannette had chosen her topic. It seems obvious to me that what was missing from her documentary was her story about how she related to the topic. My field notes continue.

The subsequent times I visited HIF, I immediately ran to find Jeannette because she was the only person I knew and been introduced to. By the second visit she was already greeting me with a hug. By the third visit, it became clear to me that what was missing from her documentary was her own narrative about

having a close friend die from HIV/AIDS. I asked if she would be willing to be a part of her own documentary and she was very reluctant. She said, "What are people going to think? Look, there's Jeannette she wants to be on camera." I told Craig that I thought we should interview Jeannette so that she could incorporate that video into her documentary. By this time, Jeannette had already been in the class an entire semester and Craig was shocked to learn that she hadn't disclosed this crucial piece of information about her project. Craig helped me convince her to do the interview, and in the end, she agreed, but only if I interviewed her...

In the weeks leading up to the film presentation, Craig was worried Jeannette's documentary was not advancing fast enough in order to be included in the showing. One day, he sat at the computer Jeannette and I were working at. He took control of the computer and started making edits. Jeannette told me at the end of class that she was upset about how that editing session went. I told her that had I known Craig was going to do that, that I would have spent more time getting her own edits down before we showed our progress to him. We decided to ask Craig if he would let us borrow one of the lab computers so that we could work on the editing ourselves at home. Jeannette came over to my apartment later that same week. I set up the computer at my desk and put two chairs in front of it. I asked Jeannette, "¿Te quieres sentar aquí?" (Do you want to sit here?) Meaning, in command of the mouse and in command of the edits. "No no, tu." (No. No. You.). I started to strongly suggest edits and gave her rationale for why we should take certain things out or add other things in. At

this point I sensed her frustration and was evidenced by the fact that she simply agreed to everything that I said without challenging a single edit.

I wrote in my notes that I felt uncomfortable taking over her project like I did. My notes continue,

I feel like I took over her project and that I was acting like I would in a newsroom setting. We were on a deadline, and that the only thing that mattered.

As my dissertation research comes to an end, I am happy to come upon this section in my field notes. For a long time, I did not know my role or place at *HIF*. Some nights, I was asked to lead the class on some aspect of video production; other times, I just sat there waiting to find an opportunity to help a student. Since my role was never really defined there, I did not know how to help Jeannette. I did not know what was acceptable. When I saw Craig just sit and take over her project and make changes to it, I was taken back. I thought it was important that Jeannette have control over every single last detail of her project. What I have since learned is that Craig was simply moving her project along. It is not an easy task to get students with zero knowledge of video production to do a film presentation in one academic year. I think now that Craig was just being pragmatic about things. In the end, Jeannette seems content with the way her story turned out as I shared in several of the preceding chapters. The following is taken from notes the night Jeannette presented her film at the *HIF* film screening.

I got here early and asked Craig and Jeff if they need help setting anything up. They asked me to greet guests in the lobby and to point them to

where our event was taking place. I am eager to see Jeannette. I haven't seen her since we edited at my house, and I am excited to see the final edits. She said she was bringing her two kids and husband, and I'm excited to meet them too. When Jeannette got to the lobby she had a big smile on her face as she introduced me to her family. She also handed me a small gift bag and thanked me for helping her finish the documentary. It was a little ceramic angel.

When I interviewed Jeannette 2 years later for this dissertation, she had little to no recollection of my involvement in her project. In fact, she thought it was Jeff that first prompted her to share her story. I am happy she does not attribute that to me because it means that my worry or fear about controlling her project can be put to rest. I think this example offers a good understanding of how the personal *HIF* documentaries come to be. These students are being guided along the way by the instructors and volunteers, but at the same time, the filmmakers have the ultimate control over their final product.

I continued volunteering at *HIF* the following academic year and during the first semester, I arrived early and participated in the meal part of the class. The class begins at 6 p.m. but students can arrive at 5:30 in a kitchen lounge near the *HIF* classrooms and eat a meal prepared by Judy. This service is no longer a part of *HIF* because the class has moved to a new location. However, during the time of my official observation period, the meal seemed to be a very important part of the class. In fact, in a field summary of my time spent focusing on the meal time, my notes state,

I also learned that the meal component is just as valuable if not more, than the actual filmmaking itself. Perhaps no one said it better than Jeff, when

he said, "Sharing a meal is the most human thing we can do together." While the participants choose to produce very raw and personal documentaries about drug addiction, homelessness, mental illness, domestic violence, and various other topics, the meal they share is their common denominator.

I began to see two general themes and patterns emerge that are of cultural significance to *HIF* participants. First is the design of the meal, and second was the affiliation of each participant to the rest of the *HIF* group. My field summary that follows explores both of these patterns.

In the last three months at HIF, the mealtime menu has included a variety of meals, but the most prominent by far has been soup. In an unstructured interview with Judy, the woman that prepares the meals for HIF, she explains the evolution of the meal component of the class. "We have always had some homeless students, people needed the meal, not so much anymore." While according to Judy the amount of people that participate in the meal component has decreased since the beginning of the program, my observations show that it still holds strong cultural relevance to the group. Judy spoke to this when she said, "Even though not as many students need the mealtime anymore, when we have talked about getting rid of it, students always say they like the dinners."

During this time, I also did interviews with Judy and Jeff about mealtime at *HIF*.

Judy gets a big corner piece of cake with all the frosting and sits next to me. Because my notepad is there, I feel compelled to tell her what I am doing. So I say, "I'm observing the HIF mealtime and taking notes." She just starts talking

about the mealtime without any prompting from me. “We have always had a mealtime. This class copied Venture. They had a mealtime and childcare. We have always had some homeless students, people needed the meal, not so much anymore. People would come and eat and talk. It broke the ice. People would talk over the meal more than they would in the class... Jeff used to make it. He used to bring expensive stuff, shrimp, something different.” “Brushetta” Rebecca says with her best Italian accent and laughs. She sat next to Judy and overheard our conversation... “I started doing this because I was a service learning scholar and I needed hours. I went to Food For Less, Smiths, Einstein Bagels, the LDS food bank, week by week and asked for donations—Never talked about it, just kept doing it. It was just left as is. There wasn’t an arrangement for me keep doing this, I just did.”

This section in my notes is such a great reference point to start to understand Judy’s selfless personality. Throughout my interviews and pages of notes, there are countless comments about Judy’s work ethic. One instance that I will never forget about Judy and her work ethic is depicted in my notes.

I was struck by the silence in the building where HIF class and mealtime is conducted. When I made my way to the room where the meal is served, I was surprised to only find 5 people sitting there and none of them were eating. Every meal thus far, has been a homemade meal. Today it is boxes of Little Caesar’s Pizza. I left the kitchen and went to the room where class is conducted. I asked Craig, “Why isn’t anybody here?” He said, “Well, Judy is not going to stay today. She just brought the pizzas and left. She picked up her daughter from jail yesterday and I guess she is in need of some medical attention. She is

taking her daughter to the hospital right now. That poor woman, she's a saint." The greasy boxes of pizza that no one was eating served to signify to a larger extent the emergency Judy had to tend to. In the midst of her emergency, she still had to plan a meal and pizza was likely the cheapest and most convenient thing for her to prepare... Judy's preparation and dedication to HIF begins well before mealtime starts at 5:30 p.m. on Monday. By the time Monday rolls around, Judy has spent an entire week scouring local restaurants and grocery stores asking for donations so that she can prepare Monday's meal... Not even a family emergency like pick up her daughter from jail, was going to deter her from her responsibility to prepare the meal.

Prior to observing the mealtime, I saw what an integral part of *HIF* Judy was. She literally works on each and every documentary that is produced at *HIF* in one way or another. She either helps a student film interviews, or she stays late after class to help students that need help editing, or she conducts sessions throughout the week or on weekends. In one Sunday before class, Jeff forwarded me and other volunteers and workers at *HIF*, an email from Judy.

Folks: I'm going to share what Judy sent me in an email. Here is where I think we are for Monday night. (From Judy) For Monday people who were there on Saturday are bringing food for Valentine's Day. I don't believe we are going to have scripts ready. Corky is on his way and Maricruz has something. Lucia and Jeannette are working on one. Barbara and her children are coming on Monday to do their interviews...Rebecca brought her in her stuff from Tony's but it would not capture to our hard drive. Michael is going to have the same problem. I put it into Final Cut and made a Quick Time out of it. It took seven

hours. I am going to go back to the school today and make sure every thing worked ok. I need to schedule Saturday's time differently. It is time that people get one on one. So, I think instead of just saying come on Saturday's from 8-2. I will assign individuals blocks of time for just them. Then those who can work on their own can come by if they want to. Naty's project: We went and shot some b roll and she says she has a script but I have not seen it. But it is ready to put together. This is the report from the Saturday class. I did get more tapes- Do you have an extra hard drive? I did bring mine from home also, Have a great day-Judy.

For me, this email correspondence is significant because it provides an example of how Judy is involved in so much of the work at *HIF*. She begins her email with a comment about contributing food for Valentine's Day. Yet, she also goes into detail about how she would like to continue helping students on Saturdays. Since Judy is the one working directly with the students, she is also the one that has the best sense of how each student is advancing on each film. This email sent to Jeff is essentially a status update on all of the films she is helping with.

Judy's compassion for others is widespread, from wanting to do something special on Valentine's Day, to re-arranging her work schedule to accommodate students who need help on their projects. I was also once the recipient of her generosity and detailed it in my ethnographic notes.

I interviewed Judy about mealtime today. She said, "No matter what's in your fridge, I can make a soup out of it, Give me anything and I can make a

soup...I mostly make soup. I love soup. The pozole I made for you, the ingredients were donated by Super Savers..."

My first meeting with the leadership of *HIF*, Jeff, Craig, Judy, Maricruz, Lucia, was over dinner at Jeff's house in the summer before the next *HIF* session started. We were gathered over the kitchen island waiting for everyone to arrive and started talking about our favorite meals. I asked, "If you had to pick your last meal, what would it be?" I chimed in that hands down, my last meal would be a Mexican pozole soup. Judy remembered this apparently, because at the next *HIF* class, she made pozole for me. As a new member to the group, her gesture signified to me that I was welcome and embraced there.

Sometimes, when I was strictly observing mealtime at *HIF*, I would park my car with a view to the building where the class met. I would get there early, and write my observations about who got there first, who had a ride, who drove a car, things of that nature. During this time, I noticed that Judy was the one with keys to open and close the building. The following is taken from my field notes:

It's 4:30 p.m. and the much anticipated winter storm has finally touched down in Salt Lake City. I wonder how many students will show up today for dinner. There are gusting winds and snow showers. It is 35 degrees outside and I'm sitting inside my car with a cup of coffee to keep me warm...Observations: The doors stay locked until Judy opens them. I just saw one volunteer (Mary) try to get in at 5:07 p.m. and could not, so she ran into the next building. The storm has really picked up now. I presume she ran inside to stay out of the weather...The first student (Corky) arrives at 5:15 p.m. He is dropped off and also finds the door closed. He is putting his hood on while he waits to get inside.

Someone from inside (not from HIF) sees him standing there and opens the door. It is 5:15 and still no sign of Judy. 5:21 p.m. Mary the volunteer is back to check the door and Corky gets it for her. He must have been waiting in the lobby for Judy, and saw Mary standing outside...Now it is 5:30 and still no sign of Judy. The weather has slowed down and stopped snowing. Where is everyone? 5:34 Judy is here with her husband. He parks the car illegally in a red zone in front of the building to help Judy unload the food. Once inside, Mary and Corky (and myself) help Judy carry everything from the lobby to the dining room. Her husband just unloaded things into the lobby, but he did not go back to the dining room...I learned today that Brooke is a homeless woman that Judy lets sleep in her basement. So, when someone says about Judy, "That poor woman, she is a saint" (Craig), they are really getting to the cultural relevance she holds for HIF. Perhaps it is fitting then, that Judy is the sole bearer of the keys to the facility. Having control over the keys is a symbol of the power she holds at HIF.

Judy is, without a doubt, an instrumental part of *HIF*. I once asked her what she would do if *HIF* ceased to exist, because we were talking about how much she loved being there and how happy it made her to be at *HIF*. She said she would figure out a way to conduct the classes in her own living room. I believe she would. As wonderful as Judy is, *HIF* seems to attract very like-minded individuals as students or volunteers at the program. This dissertation would not be complete without discussing all of the different people that make up *HIF*.

First, there are different kinds of participants at *HIF* and interestingly, all of them intersect at the mealtime. In other words, at any given meal time, you can find all of the different kinds of *HIF* participants. This is not true of any other

element of the class (i.e. staff meetings, childcare, documentary class). In those parts, there is a limited kind of participant that attends. For example, childcare staff does not attend documentary staff meetings. And, *HIF* students do not attend the childcare portion of *HIF*. The fact the meal is an inclusive space for all of the different kinds of *HIF* participants, elevates the importance of this part of the class. Table 1 is a demonstration of the different kinds of affiliations participants have with *HIF*.

Table 1. Domain Analysis of the kinds of participants at *HIF*

<i>HIF</i> participant	Kind of affiliation
Student	Veteran New Returning Mentor Interpreter Staff
Volunteer	Helper Mealtime
Friend of <i>HIF</i>	Friend of <i>HIF</i> student
Teacher	Founder Director of Documentary Studies
Staff	Documentary Instructor Interpreter Childcare Volunteer Editor
Paid Staff	Instructor Interpreter Childcare

It is important to note that most *HIF* participants hold various affiliations within the group. For example, Maricruz is a student producing a documentary, but she is also a 6-year veteran, mentor, and paid Spanish interpreter for the class. While most participants belong to different *HIF* affiliations, no one does so to a higher degree than Judy. Judy is a student at *HIF*, a 6-year veteran, mentor, mealtime volunteer, paid *HIF* instructor, volunteer camerawoman, and is also the designated staff member to open and close the facility *HIF* uses to conduct class. My observations these last few years at *HIF* of the many roles Judy fills are truly astonishing.

My role at *HIF* was also one with varying affiliations. I was a volunteer, a Spanish interpreter, an instructor, and a researcher in that space. I admit, at times, it was difficult to understand the roles I served. What I mean is, serving many functions at *HIF* was complicated for me because I always doubted when or if I should intervene or insert my opinion unless directly asked to do so. One of my most rewarding experiences, however, was when all of my different *HIF* affiliations came to a meeting point. Jeff asked me if I would be able to lead the class one Monday on interviewing. I had just had my baby 2 months prior and my babysitting plans fell through at the last second. I sent Jeff a text that read, *FYI, Jackie may need to come with me tonight, is that okay?* He responded with, *You know you don't need to ask. I'm delighted to see her.* When I sent him the message, I knew he was going to be accepting of me bringing my newborn. But, a part of me wanted to acknowledge that I knew how unprofessional it would be of me to lead the class in a lecture on interviewing while I held my baby.

I prepared a one-page document, in English, with my interviewing tips based on my experience interviewing people for news stories at CNN and NBC. I was hoping that in the minutes before class started, I could get Jackie, my baby, to fall asleep so that I could place her in her car seat near me while I lectured. Instead, I held her during the entire hour and half lecture, shushing her and rocking her while I spoke. What I remember most about this moment is how incredible I felt for the first time since dealing with my pre-and postnatal depression. When I was going through my depression, simple tasks like taking a shower and getting ready for the day seemed very overwhelming to me. That night, because I was lecturing, I made sure to dress professionally in a black suit jacket and I took the time to do my hair and make-up. While preparing my lecture, I felt confident that I could speak from a position of authority on interviewing, and that I had something to offer the students at *HIF*.

I went through each point I had prepared with my baby in my arms. Unlike most newborns, she did not normally like to be held. At home, this made me question my maternal instincts to comfort her. During this lecture, was the longest I ever held her in my arms. To add to the spectacle that was my lecture, was the fact that I simultaneously gave the lecture in Spanish for those students in the class that had a difficult time with English. At times, I started with English, and then provided the Spanish interpretation. At others, I started in Spanish, and finished with the English interpretation. It was difficult to keep track of which language I had already communicated the information. However, I knew I was doing a good job because the students were very engaged during my lecture and they asked insightful questions.

This moment was so gratifying because all of my *HIF* affiliations, in addition to my own personal identifications (woman, new mom, news professional, Mexican), all came together in that one scene. Not only did they come together though, they mixed and converged and created for me, for the first time in a long time, a feeling of empowerment. This was the first moment I felt that, although I was suffering with depression, I was going to be alright.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS

In an effort to understand the Navajo culture more completely, researchers Sol Worth and John Adair (1972) handed them video cameras so that they could depict themselves and their culture from their own point of view. Worth and Adair's groundbreaking research is chronicled in the book, *Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration in Film Communication and Anthropology*. To gain access to the Navajo people, Worth and Adair first met with one of the Navajo elders, Yazzie. Yazzie asked two questions to the researchers, "Will making movies do the sheep any harm?" And, "Will making movies do the sheep any good?" These are important questions of any research study and I find them to be of particular importance here because of their topicality to this study about narrative, video, and trauma. Worth and Adair answered that there was almost no chance the movies could harm the sheep. As for making movies to do the sheep good, the researchers did not have an answer. In this chapter, I bring to a close the study I have worked on for nearly 3 years. It is by no means complete. However, it is my hope that it brings some resolve to the question that Worth and Adair were not able to respond to directly. I firmly believe that making documentary films about their traumatic experiences did so much good for the

women in this study and I will explore those dimensions in this chapter. First, I will summarize what I have already presented in this manuscript. Second, I present concluding remarks about the implications of this study. Last, I offer recommendations for the *HIF* program and for future research.

Summary

I began this dissertation by describing the year-long *Humanities in Focus* documentary film course offered through the University of Utah under the leadership of Professors Jeff Metcalf and Craig Wirth. I explained that although it is a stand-alone course, it is informally considered for many *HIF* students, to be a continuation of another program offered through the Utah Humanities Council, called *The Venture Program*. Students are mostly recruited by word of mouth and in the course, they learn to produce documentary films. Most of them, if not all, have no prior knowledge to documentary filmmaking. I also explained that although the students are not prompted to produce films on specific topics, most end up producing very personal stories about traumatic circumstances in their lives. The women I interviewed for this study, for example, produced films about Chicana identity struggles, domestic violence, drug addiction, homelessness, and HIV/AIDS. The woman featured in this study include Lucia Chavarria, Judy Fuwell, Maricruz Juarez, Rebecca Lovato, Natalia Solache, and Jeannette Villalta.

After providing a brief description of the course, I proceeded with a literature review. This surveyed the literature on narrative, including an explanation of how narratives are essential to the human experience, how narratives can be an act of resistance, how narratives can shape reality, and how

narratives can be part of a healing process, especially in the treatment of PTSD. After reviewing the literature on narrative, I reviewed literature on trauma. This section included a discussion of memory and its relation to trauma. Finally, I turned to academic scholarship on video as it related to trauma where I highlighted how the video format provides a safe place to share traumatic experiences

After surveying the literature pertinent to my study, I offered a set of research questions that helped guide me in the research process. These questions included, RQ1: What, if any, are the overarching themes in the documentary films produced by *Humanities in Focus*?; RQ2: If overarching themes exist in the documentary films produced by *Humanities in Focus*, to what extent do they articulate traumatic themes?; RQ3: How do participant filmmakers articulate the connection/relationship between the documentary films produced at *Humanities in Focus* and dealing with traumatic experiences?; RQ4: What, if any, are the overarching themes in the interviews with the participants of this study?; RQ5: Under what condition do the women in this study find the *Humanities in Focus* program to be a positive experience?

A reader of this manuscript might find the internal structure as not directly responsive to the research questions I presented. I realized that rather than go back to my original questions and change them to make this manuscript easier to follow that I could learn through the research question activity. This is another way of signaling what I have learned from this research process. It is too linear to go back to the first chapter and simply change my questions so that the reader has no idea I ever considered asking a different set of questions. However,

my research paradigm does not operate in a straight line between two points. It is messy and fragmented.

At this concluding juncture, I realize that RQ1, RQ2, and RQ4 are implicit in analyzing qualitative research narratives. I elect to disassociate from these original set of questions. Instead, a better question might have been, Are there commonalities in the way trauma is experienced? This research question would have led me to ask more nuanced questions about trauma to the participants in this study. I would have also been able to make stronger connections between their responses and preexisting PTSD literature.

In response to RQ3: How do participant filmmakers articulate the connection/relationship between the documentary films produced at *Humanities in Focus* and dealing with traumatic experiences (which is not implicit in analyzing qualitative research), the answer was expressed in numerous ways. The participants in this study respond to the relationship between their trauma and their films as empowering, therapeutic, healing, and liberating. Examples of these are found throughout the transcripts I have presented in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5.

In response to RQ5: Under what condition do the women in this study find the *Humanities in Focus* program to be a positive experience?, I feel a stronger question might have been, What are the conditions at *Humanities in Focus* that enable stories of trauma to be produced? As RQ5 was originally posed, the response is similar to the response for RQ3. Rephrasing the question to focus on the particulars of the *HIF* program could have led me to ask better questions about the process these women undertook in order to be willing to share their

stories. This would have given me better insight about how people can prepare to deal with a traumatic experience. I do feel, even though I would rewrite the question, that Chapter 3, *The Center of Life* is responsive to the question. This chapter emphasizes the safe place that was created at *HIF* that made them feel secure to share their stories.

After providing the research questions, I moved on to describe the methods and procedures for this study. I began this section by describing the source of data for this study and providing more details about the participants. Next, I outlined the procedures used to execute this study. This section included information about how I collected the data and my explanation for choosing an ethnographic methodology. Next, I described the methodological assumptions that guided my work. Last, I provided an outline for the rest of the dissertation.

Chapter 2, titled, *The Dented Can*, is a chapter describing the positive outcomes that the women in this study attributed to completing an *HIF* documentary about a personal traumatic experience. The women in this study expressed positive outcomes in different ways. Rebecca Lovato used the metaphor of a dented can to describe how low her self-confidence and self-esteem were at several points in her life. She described how dented cans get rejected at grocery stores in favor of nicer, new, undamaged ones. She described feeling empowered, and no longer like a dented can, through a series of academic pursuits, including returning to complete her high school degree 33 years later, completing the *Venture Program*, and ultimately finishing her *HIF* documentary. Other participants in this study, such as Jeannette Villalta, also expressed a positive outcome resulting from creating an *HIF* documentary about a traumatic

experience in her life. Unlike, Rebecca, however, Jeannette reported to have taken the *HIF* course exclusively for the academic credits. She described the *HIF* course as a doorway to other opportunities. Maricruz Juarez also reported taking the *HIF* course to accumulate university credits because it is in her long-term plans to attend a university. Producing a film about her personal family issue resulted in a positive outcome for Lucia Chavarria also. First, she reported that the *HIF* environment forced her to speak up and demand to be noticed in the classroom. Second, it empowered her to confront her estranged siblings that for years blamed her and her mother for ruining their lives. For Natalia Solache, creating a documentary film about her abusive marital relationship and living on the streets with her two young daughters to escape the violence was a positive experience because she says it allowed her to see that she was no longer a victim and that the abuse was not her fault. For Maricruz Juarez, her two documentaries on domestic violence were a positive experience because she and her family used them to begin to heal from the abuse.

In Chapter 3, *The Center of Life*, I focused my analysis on the family-like bonds that are formed with the professors and participants at *HIF*. From Judy Fuwell, we learn the significance of family is that it is the “center of life” and that *HIF* films about families give people hope. I learned that the family-like structure at *HIF* is really due in large part to inheriting graduates from the *Venture* Program that are trained to talk about sensitive issues and to respect people from all walks of life.

Chapter 4, *Do You Want to Hear My Story?*, is an analysis of the social/community dimension of the *HIF* class. Although it is known to students

that there will be film screenings at the end of the year with their films, some of the women in this study also addressed their documentaries to an imagined audience. The other revealing trend in this chapter is that many of the women in this study also found venues to showcase their films outside of those already sponsored by *HIF*. The greatest lesson I learned in this chapter is that most of the women in this study chose to do a documentary about a personal traumatic experience in hopes to help others dealing with similar situations.

In Chapter 5, *Alexza, The Lone Ethnographer*, I offered my personal reflections as a participant observer at *HIF*, including excerpts from my ethnographic field notes and conversations with *HIF* participants. I described how I first learned about the class, and my fears about tainting the filmmaker's stories with my own point of view. I also provided my observations about the mealtime, which at the time of my participant observation preceded every *HIF* class. In this section, I concluded that mealtime is an integral part of the *HIF* documentary class. I also discuss the different kinds of participants at *HIF*, including students, volunteers, friends, teachers, and staff in addition to my own affiliations in the program.

Conclusion

I began this manuscript by sharing the story of Talia Castellano, a 13-year-old girl battling two aggressive forms of cancer who documents her experience on her popular *YouTube* channel. During the course of writing this dissertation, I learned that my own 20-year-old cousin has developed a cancerous brain tumor and the prognosis for a successful surgery looks bleak. I found out about his

illness through the social media application, *Instagram*. My cousin has been posting pictures about his visits to the hospital and uses *Instagram* as a journal to capture his journey with cancer. He writes about his fears, his dreams, and his hopes. He writes messages to his dad and writes about how strong he is going to be when he beats his cancer. As I have learned by reading the academic literature and by the women I interviewed for this study, it is simply in our human nature to want to story our lives, even when confronted with some of life's most difficult situations, perhaps even especially when confronting these circumstances.

What is most remarkable about sharing a story of trauma is that it emerges from dark, private, and shameful places. To get to the point where the women in this dissertation have gotten, that is to produce a documentary about a painful experience in their life, an incredible amount of personal acceptance and growth had to occur. This is not to say the stigma of their trauma disappears once they produce a film about it. Indeed, they are still working through their traumas the night of the film presentations and beyond. However, in the process of sharing their story of trauma, they work through and confront the guilt, shame, and disgust that so often accompanies trauma. What is so extraordinary about the women in this study is that they learned to love themselves unconditionally. They learned their traumas do not encapsulate all that they are and who they shall become—a valuable lesson I am still trying to accept.

From its inception, I wanted to approach this research on trauma from an honest place. I knew that would mean I would have to eventually confront my own traumas in the process. As I read and wrote I hoped that by the time I got to the conclusion, I would be willing to be more open about my depression. Alas, I

am here, and I am still not ready. What am I afraid of? What do I have to lose? I am ashamed that my depression clouds the story of my daughter's birth. I feel guilty that I was too prideful to seek professional help when I know I desperately needed it. I am embarrassed for family and friends, curious about my doctoral research, to read this because I will be exposed and rendered vulnerable. I am afraid that permanently etching the word "depression" in this dissertation confirms that I indeed was depressed. My pregnancy trauma is something I would much rather have disappear than have documented in this bound book. I am scared to (re)member and in effect, (re)live that miserable part of my life. Although I still do not know the place that depression has in my life, I do glean some powerful insights about my inability to come out about my depression more fully. In this concluding subsection, I will address three main insights this study makes. First, the contribution and importance of this work to communication scholarship. Second, the significance this study has to the women that participated. And, third, the contribution this study makes on a macro level to society in general.

In regards to adding to communication scholarship, I believe this study makes two especially noteworthy contributions. First, this study provides documented evidence that the video format can be a liberating and empowering medium when dealing with trauma. Some of the women (Lucia, Judy, and Maricruz) said that the documentaries helped them to communicate previously incommunicable, yet significant parts of their lives. It was through the video medium that they were finally able to confront the particular traumas in their lives that weighed heavily on them. Nowhere is that more evident than in the case

of Lucia's documentary about her mother. She expressly states that the video camera was the tool that was finally able to help her family, and in particular her mother, start to heal from years and years of family problems. Lucia's story is by no means complete. I maintain, instead, that Lucia's documentary is a snapshot of a particular moment in time and space. The significance of capturing this moment in time and space on video, however, is that there is now a physical manifestation of her family's story. The documentary film Lucia created serves as a tangible record and a starting place for dialogue. The creation and showing of the documentary films aids in the participants feeling like they have control over their trauma because they are able to articulate their narrative in a controlled environment. For Judy, the physical video DVD is even an extension of her family's story. Judy's husband, Paul, and daughter, Amber, literally carry the DVD with them to stand-in as conversation about their addictions.

Additionally, the video format taps into different dimensions of the human experience. Video is much more multisensory than other mediated forms of communication. If *HIF* were a writing workshop or produced radio documentaries, instead of video, the experience would be much different. For documentary films, filmmakers must videotape footage. One woman in this study, Naty, even decided to do a reenactment of her life on the streets. What is Naty thinking as she instructs her crew to film her "acting" homeless? What is she (and the other women in this study) feeling when they return to class, night after night, to edit, rewind, replay their stories? The filmmakers at *HIF* are literally chopping up their trauma and are coming to control the experience in the documentary process. What is more, the video editing work creates a distancing

from the original trauma event(s). The space (and it need not be much) that is created is enough of a gap to allow them to retrospectively talk about their traumatic experiences. It is the cutting up of the film, the editing, the back and forth, the exchanges with classmates about their work, that allows for the distancing. This is an enormous contribution.

There is also something else special to the video medium that I have learned to appreciate and understand more fully in this research process. The video cameras are obtrusive pieces of equipment. There is nothing discrete about the filming process, as it can be with writing or radio for example. There are also heavy and large lighting kits that students must set up at each shoot. These factors indicate that video is, for lack of a better phrase, a big deal. Coming from a television news background, I take for granted the feelings people get when they are around a video camera, microphone, and lights for the first time. It is such a production to set up all of the equipment for an interview. The logic follows then, the person being interviewed must be important and worthy of all of this attention. The obtrusiveness of the equipment also creates a spectacle for others not immediately involved. Passersby are curious about “what the fuss is all about.” Maricruz mentions that her daughters asked to be interviewed in her film because they saw the production happening in their home. They wanted to be involved. Not to mention the television in which the films are played. The film screenings also feature large screens that project the documentaries, again, signaling something important and worth watching is on the screen. Related to the “grandness” that video evokes, is the use of a professional editor to finalize the documentaries. Several of the women I interviewed made reference to

Tim Philips, a professional editor that helped them complete their projects. The women elevate his status as a professional and consider getting his attention on their stories important. The expertise he brings to *HIF* is not to be undervalued. Not only does he make each documentary film technically sound, Tim's presence at *HIF* helps the participants feel important about the work they are doing. In all of these ways, it is evident the video medium (and all of its accompaniments) is a powerful tool for communication.

The video format is also important when confronting issues of trauma because it provides a space for others to respond to the traumatic event (Ashuri, 2010). This study is consistent with Tamar Ashuri's (2010) research that the audience matters because it is the audience's willingness to engage the traumatic story that makes the narrative meaningful. I found this to be true in the case of all 6 women I interviewed. They each emphasized the importance of having their story heard beyond the film screenings hosted by *HIF*. Several of them even found additional venues to share their documentaries.

The second contribution this study makes to the discipline of communication is that it proves that narrative as a communication strategy helps to deal with trauma. Telling your story is such a great coping mechanism for dealing with traumatic experiences because trauma changes your sense of self. You lose sight of who you are when you are dealing with a traumatic experience and being able to articulate a story about the trauma in relation to yourself is a huge step in starting to overcome that. The traumatic event punctuates your life in such a way; the trauma becomes a significant part of a person's awareness of who they are (Bernsten and Rubin, 2006). However, in the *HIF* process,

participants are able to distance themselves from their traumatic experience, which allows them to form a new relationship with the trauma. In other words, “The story has more malleability than the originally frozen events. Since one is no longer bound by the old perceptual limits, one can see unexpected possibilities” (Polster, 1987, p. 40). These “unexpected possibilities” are what foster growth from the trauma.

Story(ing) trauma also makes sense if we consider Judith Herman’s (1997) observation that the recovery from trauma involves both feeling empowered and connecting with others. These (empowerment and connection with others) are the very things that traumatic events damage. This is why *HIF* is so incredibly powerful. By sharing a personal experience with trauma in their documentary films, the participants at *HIF* are gaining both a sense of empowerment and they are connecting with others in the process of sharing their documentaries. This two-step recovery from trauma is inherent in the way *HIF* functions.

The experience the women in this study had with sharing their narrative proved to be an effective strategy to confront their traumas. All of the women in this study reported that creating a documentary about a personal traumatic experience had positive outcomes for them as well as for their families. This is consistent with preexisting literature on narrative that suggests sharing narratives can lead to healing, feeling liberated, and mental stability (Delgado, 1989). The women in this study reported varying degrees of each of these three categories. This was true in this study, even when the women reported other negative outcomes of producing a film about their past traumas. For example, Natalia reported feeling depressed when creating her documentary film because

she had to relive the physical violence she endured from her husband. At the same time, however, Natalia comments that it was in the process of creating the film that she realized her self-worth and that the abuse was not her fault. This is the power of narrative. What a profound thing it is to be asked to share your story. Few people ever get the opportunity. It is a rarity for any of us to be asked to tell our story. We live hurried lives and never take the time to tell or listen to stories. At *HIF*, the participants are not only telling a story to other people, they are also telling the story to themselves. Schiraldi (2000) reminds us, “In telling your story and recalling memories you will have the opportunity to break the secrecy that maintains dissociation, and correct misinterpretations and unrealistic expectations...As a rule, the more aspects of a memory that can be processed the more effective the integration will be” (p. 148).

This study also makes significant therapeutic contributions. From what I have read in PTSD scholarship, nothing speaks of video as a component of therapy. As I have discussed in Chapter 1, video can also be considered a form of expressive art therapy. This study demonstrates that creating documentary films about a personal traumatic experience can enable people dealing with trauma to learn to deal with and heal from the event(s). The distancing that is created in expressive art therapies is precisely what is happening in the documentary film process. People are learning to understand and relate to their trauma in a healthier way. This is where this study makes the most significant contribution. This study breaks new ground by bringing together narrative, trauma, and video. No other research brings these three elements together in the way that this study

has done. Therefore, this study and its significance and findings should be of importance to those who treat trauma and PTSD.

Besides making contributions to the academic study of communication and trauma, this study is also meaningful scholarship more generally. I argue that this study reinforces the notion that narratives are an integral part of academic knowledge. Inserting the narratives of Lucia, Judy, Maricruz, Rebecca, Natalia, and Jeannette in their voice, alongside the other academic authors I have chosen to refer to in this study, signifies to a larger extent that I honor their voice as much as I do any other author in this dissertation.

Related to inserting their narratives into the academic realm is the importance several of them placed on accessing the university. Maricruz told me in the interview and at other times during my participant observation that while she would like to attend the university now she has to put her goals aside until she gets her daughters their first. The academy is a space currently denied and not accessible to several of the people I chose to write about in this study. By being included in this dissertation, they are participating and contributing to conversations in academia.

The other way this scholarship is meaningful is to the participants directly. The women in this study have improved self-esteem in the process of creating their films. Self-esteem is important because, “[I] protect[s] people from anxiety and stress, and self-esteem is a most important predictor of happiness and life-satisfaction” (Schiraldi, 2000, p. 274). In the process of sharing her story of abuse and homelessness, Natalia creates a new story about empowerment and success. This is because the stories that are shared in the documentaries not only

document an event already occurred, they also create a new narrative in the process (Bauman, 1980). All of the women in this study created new stories for themselves in the process of creating their films. Rebecca's story about racism and identity issues transformed into a story about empowerment and cultural pride. Judy's story about her daughter's methamphetamine addiction turned into a story about learning to let go and accept that her daughter will change in her own time. Maricruz' story about domestic violence turned into a story about hope and new beginnings for her and her family. Natalia's story about abuse turned into a story of hope and courage. Lucia's story about her dysfunctional family turned into a new story about a mother's sacrifice. Finally, Jeannette's story about her best friend and his battle with HIV turned into a story about courage and determination to save people's lives. Furthermore, my retelling of their stories is yet one more opportunity for them to master and control the trauma narrative. As I have argued in this study, this creates agency within these individuals to have governing authority over their traumatic events, which is pivotal in the process of healing from trauma.

The third reason I will discuss regarding the significance of this study is in relation to its impact beyond contribution to the field of communication and for the participants in this study. That is the larger societal impact. In this study, I have demonstrated several positive outcomes that resulted from producing personal traumatic documentaries at *HIF*. The *HIF* stories with positive outcomes emphasize the need for programs like this to exist. Just as the *HIF* documentary film process helped the women in this study deal with their traumatic experiences, it can also help many more individuals. When

departments look to make financial decisions about which programs to fund, it seems this study underscores their legitimacy.

The second societal impact of this research study is that it allows for the social action messages the women in this study advocate to be heard with an entirely different audience. All of the women in this study emphasized that sharing their stories was important because it could help others in similar situations. Jeanette, for example, hopes that each time her documentary film is shown, at least one more person will decide to get test for HIV. This study takes their call to action to the academic realm and reaches other audiences.

Recommendations

One of my favorite aspects about *HIF* can best be summed up by something Jeff Metcalf said when I interviewed him for the short film I created about *HIF*. He says, “There is a hunger of the human spirit that can’t be banished by bacon and beans, and somehow we are lucky to tap into that.” Having participated and observed *HIF* for some time now, I know it is much more than mere luck that attributes to the success of the program. While *HIF* was created “on accident,” as the story is often told, there are a consistent set of values and principles that create the “magic” that *HIF* participants repeatedly talk about. In my field notes, I have a quote from Craig speaking about this very issue. He says, “It just works, so we don’t ask why, we just go with it.” This thought cannot escape me and so it is with hesitation and reservation that I propose a set of recommendations for *HIF*. Consistent with my methodological design to preserve the kind of academic scholarship that is not prescriptive, I hope my

recommendations can be taken as humble suggestions that support the mission of *HIF*. Based on my research and participation with the *HIF* program for the last 3 years, I offer three recommendations. First, I suggest *HIF* reinstate the mealtime as they have offered in other years. Second, I recommend that *HIF* continue to recruit from the *Venture* program. Third, I suggest *HIF* set up a support system for students that choose to produce documentaries dealing with traumatic experiences. I will now explain these recommendations in further detail.

My first recommendation is to reinstate the meal at *HIF*. As I have explained in other sections of this manuscript, the *HIF* meal, while seemingly insignificant, is actually embodied with deep cultural importance to the group. I believe this is due to two primary reasons. First, I strongly believe the *HIF* meal is key to create the familial-like bonds many of the women in this study reported to have directly attributed to feeling comfortable, safe, and emotionally supported in the class.

Jeff once noted that “sharing a meal is the most human thing we can do.” When thinking of recommendations for *HIF*, it seems the meal is an integral building block in the formula to create a family-like atmosphere. Unlike during my observation at *HIF*, currently, the *HIF* class is meeting at the University of Utah Marriot Library’s Digital Scholarship Lab. While that is a great space to conduct the class, and great for increasing visibility of the *HIF* program on the University campus, it does pose some limitations, one of which is the forgoing of the meal. As noted in other parts of this dissertation, mealtime is the one place where all the varying *HIF* affiliations meet in one place.

Second, the meal is significant at *HIF* because although some of the participants might not openly admit it, there still seems to be a need to provide food. Judy remarks in one conversation about the meal time that students in past *HIF* classes have needed the meal because they were homeless. In my observation, some of the students, while perhaps not homeless, are still struggling financially to the point where a free weekly meal is likely to be highly valued and appreciated.

When I went to interview one of the women in this study, whom I prefer not to identify here, I was given obvious evidence that food was scarce in her home. As a token of my appreciation for letting me conduct interviews with the women in this study, I came to each interview with a small box of cookies, or in other cases, bags of produce from the food co-op in which I participate. In this case, I knew there were children in the home, so I brought a box of pumpkin chocolate chip cookies. When I got there, the woman I interviewed thanked me for the cookies and said that her child had been asking for cookies for several weeks at each grocery visit but that she did not have enough money to pay for anything deemed “extra.” She said she had been promising her child “next time” and “the next pay check” for several weeks, only to come up short each time. When she pointed to the cookies and told her child, “Look what Alexza brought,” the child’s eyes grew big with excitement. During the interview, my back was to the cookies that were placed on the counter behind me. I could hear the child sneak over there during the interview and take cookies back to the bedroom.

When I left their apartment, the child came out of the bedroom to say good bye, as they closed the door, I heard a small voice say, “thank you for the

cookies.” When I got in the car to return to my husband and baby, I was so overcome with emotion, I cried the rest of my trip home. While I am on a graduate student budget, my small offering of cookies seemed to be a largely appreciated and meaningful gift. I realize cookies are not a necessity in a child’s diet. But, I could not imagine promising my child something at the “next pay check” only to always have to look at her in the eyes and say, “maybe next time.”

This was not the only demonstrated financial need that suggests reinstating the meal at *HIF* is a necessity. In fact, out of the 6 women I interviewed, at least 5 of them shared with me intimate details about their financial situation. Again, I do not find it appropriate to identify them in this manuscript, their stories are very moving and they serve to illustrate the on-going need to provide a meal at *HIF*.

Another woman I interviewed described a series of health complications that landed her and other members of her family in the hospital, in need of several surgeries, and over \$80,000 in debt. This same woman, during our interview said about her place of employment, “It’s only 9 dollars an hour, 9 dollars and 40 cents, and try to live off of that.” Someone else I interviewed for this dissertation indicated to me that she was living in her car while she was a student at *HIF*, unbeknown to anyone else at *HIF*. This person is also currently unemployed, looking for a job, and still attending *HIF*. Another woman in this study revealed to me in a personal conversation, at one of the meal times I attended actually, that the reason she had not been attending *HIF*, even though she was enrolled in the class, was because she could not afford to pay for gas. I am certain they would like to remain nameless and I will honor that, but when I

mentioned this to a few people out of concern that she was not going to be able to drive home safe that night, they opened their wallets and found a discrete way to give her a few extra dollars. Finally, another woman I interviewed for this study said to me one day before *HIF* that she had been saving for months, setting some money aside to be able to purchase basic school supplies for her child. Clearly, for all of these reasons, there is a great financial burden with most of the women in this study. Providing them with a free meal once a week, I am sure, would be a great relief and welcomed gesture.

My second recommendation for *HIF* is to continue to attract students from *Venture* to the program. My research indicates that *Venture* is a large part of the reason why students at *HIF* are willing to share their personal stories in documentary films. While there is no prompt at *HIF* requiring students to produce documentaries about traumatic experiences in their lives, former *Venture* students seem to continue to share the same themes they disclosed in *Venture*. While my study did not look at the *Venture* program, the responses in the interviews I conducted and my experience as a participant observer at *HIF* indicate the culture at *Venture* is carried over to *HIF*.

I would suggest that *HIF* not only continue to recruit graduates of the *Venture* program, but also set up a formal recruiting system. I do not think non-*Venture* graduates should be turned away from participating at *HIF*; in fact, several of the women in this study noted that non-*Venture* students can also have the appropriate mindset to thrive at *HIF*. However, an emphasis on attracting more *Venture* students should be prioritized. Currently, *HIF* participants are mostly recruited by word of mouth. This system has been a great recruiting tool

thus far, but to formalize recruitment might help maintain some of the features that are most appreciated about *HIF* and the films created there.

My third recommendation for *HIF* is to set up a formal support system for the students at *HIF* that choose to create personal documentaries about a traumatic life experience. In the family-friendly atmosphere that is created at *HIF*, there is no shortage of people willing to help and even offer shoulder to lean on when producing the documentaries gets emotionally burdensome. However, based on my research, it seems *HIF* might benefit from having a more formal system of emotional support. As a few of the participants in this study noted, creating a documentary about personal traumatic experiences not only opens up wounds, it actually gives those past experiences new life. Natalia, remembering how she felt creating the documentary about her abusive husband, remarked, “It penetrates you because you get the aroma, the sounds, the memories, things you had forgotten about.” Reliving these painful moments requires special attention and being able to direct *HIF* students to appropriate resources that could help them in the process of reliving trauma is extremely important. One of the ways this can be achieved is by inviting the University of Utah Counseling Center to train *HIF* staff and volunteers with their consultation and outreach programs that help organizations on campus explore specific concerns. The Center also offers individual counseling sessions at a reasonable cost to students. It seems forging an alliance with the Counseling Center would provide *HIF* participants with a direct option for counseling services.

Besides these three recommendations specific for the *HIF* program, I also have suggestions for future research. One of the literature areas I found most

inadequate to address the issues I have outlined in this study is how video aids in the recovery from trauma. With trends in media, especially social media, indicating that more and more people are sharing their stories of trauma, more attention to the video medium as a healing tool is warranted. For my particular study, one possible direction to explore is a focus on the *Venture Program* in order to identify specific attributes that contribute to creating a family like culture at *HIF*. I would also be interested in analyzing a gendered experience of participants at *HIF*. While my study focused on 6 women participants, I would like my research to expand to include male participants that chose to produce documentary films about a personal traumatic experience in their lives.

In closing, as for why the participants at *HIF* are willing to share their stories, the answer is quite simple. Narratives are essential to the human experience. We all want our stories heard; *HIF* is just another venue for those stories to be told. Perhaps nobody said it better than Natalia Solache, as I quoted earlier in this dissertation. Natalia says everyone has a need to be heard, “A gangster writes on a wall, why? Because he wants to convey his anger or his non-compliance, or his lack of balance through a scribble on a wall. Or he writes on your car... A musician composes a piece of beautiful music and you listen to it and he is expressing himself through that. But if instead you give them a camera and tell them, do it like this, I think they would do a documentary.”

I am fortunate enough to not have gone through life threatening experiences like Talia and my cousin, or violence and homeless like a few of the women in my study. Where I can relate with them is in dealing with my own traumatic experience that was pre- and postnatal depression. I cannot underscore

enough how valuable it was to approach this dissertation study from a perspective that drew from my experience with depression. Throughout the interviews I conducted and my participant observation, I always asked myself this: would I ever do a documentary about my depression? My answer was always no, of course not. I am ashamed that I was depressed during what should have been one of the happiest moments in my life. Exposing my story on film would etch it permanently onto the world, and I quite frankly, am just not ready for that part of my life to be a part of my story.

I feel indebted to the women that took the time and emotional care to share with me their stories of trauma. When I think of the ways I can thank them, I think the best way to honor them and their stories is to be able to share my own. This reciprocity is the only thing that sounds like a fair exchange. While I am not ready today to move forward with sharing my story in a documentary film, I hope they find this dissertation to be one step closer to being able to do that. I sincerely hope that in some near future I will be able to create a film about my illness at *HIF*.

APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF FILM DIRECTED BY LUCIA CHAVARRIA

My Mother's Unheard Story is a documentary film produced by Lucia Chavarria. It is a film about Lucia's mother Aurelia and the consequences of the decisions she made in raising some of her children in Mexico and sending some of her other children to live in California with her mother-in-law.

In this film, Lucia interviews her mother, Aurelia, and two of her sisters, Ines, and Carmen. Lucia is also in the documentary. She appears sitting in front of a computer screen and reflects on her experience in interviewing her family members.

Aurelia describes her rationale for sending some of her kids away and deciding to keep others. She says that the biggest reason for sending her son Bernardo to California was because he needed heart surgery and she wanted him to live. She also says she wanted to keep her kids away from their dying father.

Lucia appears on camera crying and reflecting on her mom's comments. She says, "When I look back at our life, I think she made a very good decision. I often wonder if they will ever appreciate that."

She asks both her sisters, Carmen and Ines, to comment on the decision their mother made. They both had opposing answers. Carmen said, if in her

mother's place, she would much rather have all her children together. Even if they were hungry, at least they were together. To this point, Carmen says, "I can't imagine handing over a part of me. It wouldn't be worth it." Lucia's other sister, Ines says that now that she is a mother she can understand and appreciate the sacrifice Aurelia made to send some of her children away.

On screen, Lucia describes how difficult it was to watch her mother share her painful story. She says, "I had to stop the camera to stop the crying and stop the pain because that's what it looked like to me, that it was painful."

Lucia also shares that in the process of interviewing her family members, she learned that there were a lot of hidden feelings and memories that started surfacing. She says, "Things I thought I was over, really weren't, they were just in the back burner."

The film ends with a moving scene. Lucia has sat her mother and sister Ines next to each other on a couch. Ines is teary and speaking directly to her mother Aurelia and tells her for the first time that she understands her and that she loves her.

APPENDIX B

SUMMARY OF FILM DIRECTED BY JUDY FUWELL

A Family in Crisis is a documentary film produced by Judy Fuwell. The film is about Judy's daughter, Amber, who struggles with a methamphetamine addiction. In this film, Judy interviews Amber, Judy's husband, Paul, and Amber's son, Michael.

Judy begins the film with statistics about drug use. She runs text on the screen that reads, "This is not about a number, this is about my family." She continues by describing her family and explains that she has a "yours mine and ours" kind of family where there are kids and step kids involved. Amber is Judy's stepdaughter that she has raised since Amber was 2 years old.

Amber appears on screen next. She does not appear to be under the influence of drugs at the time of the interview. She says she is 29 years old and says that her relationship with Judy is a very loving one. She states that her biological mother has never been in her life and that she is cocaine and alcohol addict. Amber also admits that she introduced her mother to meth.

During Paul's interview, he explains his decade's long battle with alcohol. He says he quite drinking in 1981, but that in the last few years, he has started drinking again. He also shares details about the family dynamic. He says that because there were step-children involved it caused tension between Judy and

Paul. He explains there were two sets of rules in the house and that they often disagreed on how to discipline the children.

Amber appears on camera again and explains that she started smoking marijuana at the age of 12, and, at this time, she started getting into serious trouble at school.

Paul explains that everyone has addiction problems. For some its eating, for example. However, in his family, it is alcohol and crystal meth.

On camera, Judy explains that she first found out about Amber's drug problem when she started finding needles, condoms, and cigarettes in Amber's laundry. She explains that Amber's drug addiction has left her homeless at times and that currently, she is staying with friends. The current living situation involves drugs and abuse, says Judy.

The next few scenes depict a different view of Amber than in the first interview. In these scenes she appears obviously intoxicated. She is high and has large sores on her face.

Judy explains how easy it is for anyone to purchase drug paraphernalia like an item called a "Love Buddy" which is used as a glass pipe. Judy has a member of her filming crew walk into a convenience store and purchase a "Love Buddy."

The next scene is titled, "Innocent Victim." It is a scene with Amber's son Michael raking leaves in the yard and playing video games. Michael's case worker is interviewed for this section of the film. She talks about Michael's anxiety and anger about his mom. Michael is also interviewed for the film about his mom. He says, "I want her to be not on drugs, be nice, and be a happy family."

The last section of the film is titled, "My Recovery." It is the part of the film where Judy talks about her new understanding that she needs to take care of herself in this process too. She says she went back to school and that she is no longer afraid to talk about drug addiction.

APPENDIX C

SUMMARY OF FILMS DIRECTED BY MARICRUZ JUAREZ

Silent Victims is a film produced by Maricruz Juarez. It is a film featuring two separate families and their struggles with domestic violence. The children in these families are the “silent victims” of the abuse.

The first family featured is the Velarde family. Sheila Velarde, a young high school-aged girl talks about growing up in a home with domestic violence. Shila’s mom, Krystal, is also interviewed. She talks about what it was like to be in a relationship with an abusive man. She explains that he was very controlling of her life. During fights, Krystal would often hold Sheila so that her husband would be more hesitant to hit her.

Sheila says that she loved her dad so much and the same time was so afraid of him. She says she remembers her dad would pick fights with her mom over “stupid stuff” and she would cry when they fought. She also remembers not wanting to leave her mother alone with her dad.

Krystal explains that when she learned her husband was cheating on her and had another child, he could not handle the stress associated with the discovery and committed suicide. Krystal says, had it not been for his suicide, she would likely still be with him today.

The second family featured is Maricruz' family. She interviews her 12-year old twin daughters, Stephany and Monserat.

This part of the documentary opens with one of her daughters playing the violin. Maricruz narrates and says that her family's story is a story of hope. On camera, Maricruz talks about how she is strong now and knows she can make it through anything. She says she no longer allows people to disrespect and mistreat her. She also says "women should aim for the best and never settle for anything less."

Maricruz' husband Jorge is also interviewed. He explains that it is difficult to be a Mexican man. He says things were not easy in their marriage and that there was a lot of violence. He says he is not going to justify the violence because "violence is violence."

Maricruz describes the abuse as physical, mental, and psychological. Both she and Jorge talk about a parent support group called "Parents Anonymous" that helped them learn to deal with violence in their home.

Monserat and Stephany say they want to be a doctor and first Latina woman president, respectively. They say they have their parents as role models because they learned to change their behavior.

Maricruz ends with explaining that domestic violence is a battle that does not have an ending. However, she says, "as long as we communicate and resolve our issues in a healthy way, I believe one day there will be an ending."

Silent Victims 2 is also a documentary film produced by Maricruz Juarez. It is a follow-up film to *Silent Victims*.

In this film, Maricruz appears first on camera saying that there have been a lot of people asking if domestic violence can really be overcome. She says there are clues to when violence may occur and that she and her daughters know they should walk away. Maricruz explains that she has to be extremely patient in this process because she wants to keep her family together. However, she admits there are times she does not want to continue dealing with it.

Both Stephany and Monserat are interviewed again in this film. This time, they are in high school and they discuss how they deal with their own anger issues.

Maricruz' youngest daughter, Kenya, is 7 years old and is interviewed in this film as well. Kenya says, "My mom is a strong woman and she's not going to give up on my dad because she knows what she's doing." Kenya also says that she knows her mom is trying to keep her family together and happy. Speaking of her dad, Jorge, Kenya says, "My dad is the best dad ever. He's always nice to me and always funny, always plays with me. He's always just nice."

Maricruz explains that she and her husband continue to seek support from the Parents Anonymous group. She also says that change is not going to happen overnight, but that they are trying. Maricruz also acknowledges that she is exposing her family in this documentary but that the reasoning behind it is so that the violence in her family can stop.

APPENDIX D

SUMMARY OF FILM DIRECTED BY REBECCA LOVATO

Rise Ruby Rise is a documentary film produced and directed by Rebecca Lovato. The film is about Salt Lake City artist and activist, Ruby Chacón. The person to appear first on screen is Rebecca. She opens with a brief introduction to Chicanos and says that the story of Ruby is the story of all Chicanos.

In this film, Rebecca interviews Ruby, Ruby's sister, Melody, and Ruby's mother, Virginia. She also interviews David Martinez and David Chavez, assistant principals at the *Horizonte Instruction and Training Center* (an alternative school in Salt Lake City) where several of Ruby's murals are displayed.

Assistant principal, David Chavez, describes Ruby as a world famous muralist and discusses the way Ruby has injected her Chicana identity into the murals she creates. For example, Ruby's mural of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* depicts her crying for the Chicano people. Throughout her murals, Ruby also paints people from her own family.

Ruby remarks that the typical portrayal of Chicanos in the media is that of a criminal, someone to be feared, or someone's servant. She says she wanted to know more about her own Chicano history so she talked to her grandfather instead of relying on media depictions to describe to her what it meant to be

Chicano. The stories her grandfather told her are the same people she depicts in her paintings. She also learned that her family did not come from Mexico, where people often assumed her to be from, but rather, New Mexico. Ruby also addresses a need to be accountable with public spaces, which is where some of her murals are displaced.

Rebecca's narration says that "Ruby is the golden thread that being a Chicano is all about." She also says that one particular painting of a woman making tortillas is just like her own mom.

Rebecca ends her documentary by sharing that her grandsons accompanied her when she went to interview Ruby. They said to her that they were so happy to have met someone so important like Ruby. When Rebecca asked them why, they said, "Because she's an artist and she's a Chicana just like us." Rebecca closes with this in response, "And that made me really proud."

APPENDIX E

SUMMARY OF FILM DIRECTED BY NATALIA SOLACHE

The Change is a documentary film produced by Natalia Solache. It is a film about her 8-year marriage to an abusive man and what she did to overcome her situation. The film is in English and has Spanish subtitles.

The film is mostly Natalia in different scenes narrating and recalling her story. In the opening scene, she is in the kitchen cooking with her eldest daughter. She describes her traditional childhood and her upbringing.

She continues narrating her story while driving on the freeway. Her two daughters are in the backseat. During this scene, she shares that her ex-husband became very violent and aggressive in their marriage. She also introduced both of her daughters.

In another scene, Natalia is seen sitting on the floor folding clothes. She describes a vivid moment when her ex-husband nearly killed her. She says he was choking her in front of her daughters. That is when she decided to leave the house. She says, "I escaped."

The next scenes are reenactments of her looking for vacancies at homeless shelters. Her daughters are walking along side her.

Natalia says that she was not able to find shelter the first few days after leaving her husband. Instead, she ended up sleeping on the streets.

The film ends with Natalia sharing that she overcame her situation. With help from a social worker, she began to piece her life back together without her husband. She stresses that regardless of what situation we may find ourselves in, it is important that we help others.

APPENDIX F

SUMMARY OF FILM DIRECTED BY JEANNETTE VILLALTA

You Could Be Next is a documentary film produced by Jeannette Villalta. It is a documentary about Jeannette's friend, Guillermo, who died from HIV/AIDS. She interviews several people in her film, including Rebecca Fronberg from the Utah Department of Health, a man identified as Larry, and a woman named Brenda Chambers, both of whom currently have AIDS.

Jeannette also appears on screen. She begins by describing the death of her friend Guillermo and says that he was turned away from hospitals for fear that his disease was contagious. She appears teary on camera and says the reason she wanted to get involved with the Health Department was to figure out what the "big deal" with AIDS is.

In her interview with Larry, he discusses how there is no stereotype for a person living with AIDS. He says the disease does not discriminate based on gender, race, income, or education. He stresses that anyone could be carrying the disease and not even know it.

In Jeannette's interview with Brenda Chambers, Brenda talks about the virus and how it can and cannot be transmitted. She underscores that everyone should get tested for the virus.

Jeannette appears on camera throughout the documentary and conveys the message that everyone needs to be tested because you never know who can be carrying the virus. There are scenes from a night club where Jeannette volunteers to test people for the virus. She says she likes to volunteer at the clubs because people are there are considered high risk carriers because of the added element of impaired judgment due to alcohol.

During Jeannette's last time on screen, she says that she hopes, "Maybe I can save one person." She also dedicates her film to her late friend, Guillermo, at the end of the film.

APPENDIX G

IRB AMENDED INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this research is to understand the role that documentary filmmaking might have in the lives of the filmmakers in the class. My name is Mariana Alexza Clark, and I am a graduate student at the University of Utah in the Department of Communication. I am doing this study to understand the role of the documentary film process in the lives of Humanities in Focus (HIF) participants. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can agree and then quit at any time. There is no compensation for participation, but please know that observing this work is very valuable. Please take your time to decide if you are willing to participate, and please let me know if you have any questions.

STUDY PROCEDURE

Your participation will take up to an hour, depending how much information you wish to share. During the interview I will ask several questions, and you can reply any way you choose, or decide not to reply to any and all questions.

My questions will address several topics, including: (1) your description of HIF; (2) examples or stories about your experience with HIF (3) why you chose the topic you did for your documentary. The interview will be “moderately structured,” meaning that there will be questions that are common to all of the

interviews, but I may ask a follow-up question to clarify something you have said, or you may want to address a different topic or ask me a question. If you approve, the interview will be audio recorded so I can quote your responses accurately.

RISKS

There are minimal risks to participating in this research. You may feel upset that I am observing you and others. If you feel upset from this experience, you can stop at any time, or if you feel uncomfortable later, I will tell you about resources available to help.

Your name and the names of people you discuss will be in my personal transcripts. Only me and my faculty advisor, Dr. Robert K. Avery, will have access to recordings and unaltered transcripts. Information you share may be identifiable to others. To mitigate any concern you have about being identified, I plan to share the research information with you so you can choose to read your responses and my analysis and have a conversation with me if you feel you have been inaccurately represented.

BENEFITS

There are no direct benefits to you for taking part in this study. You will not be compensated for your time. However, the information you share may help HIF and will also provide great insight to the role of documentary filmmaking as a cathartic process.

CONFIDENTIALITY

My notes will be kept confidential. Data and records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet or on a password protected computer located in my work space.

Only my faculty advisor, Dr. Robert K. Avery, and I will have access to this information.

PERSON TO CONTACT

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints or if you feel you have been harmed by this research please contact me, Mariana Alexza Clark, at any time by phone (801-996-3097) or email (a.clark@kute.utah.edu).

You can also contact the Faculty Sponsor of this study, Dr. Robert K. Avery, Mondays through Fridays between 8am-5pm by phone (801-581-5343) or email (rka@utah.edu).

Institutional Review Board: Contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) if you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant. Also, contact the IRB if you have questions, complaints or concerns which you do not feel you can discuss with the investigator. The University of Utah IRB may be reached by phone at (801) 581-3655 or by e-mail at irb@hsc.utah.edu.

Research Participant Advocate: You may also contact the Research Participant Advocate (RPA) by phone at (801) 581-3803 or by email at participant.advocate@hsc.utah.edu.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

It is up to you to decide whether to take part in this study. Refusal to participate or the decision to withdraw from this research will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. This will not affect your relationship with the investigator or HIF.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION TO PARTICIPANTS

There are no costs for participation, and participants will not be compensated for participation.

CONSENT

By signing this consent form, I confirm I have read the information in this consent form and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I will be given a signed copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant, Date

Signature of Researcher or Staff, Date

APPENDIX H

IRB AMENDED PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION CONSENT FORM

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this research is to understand the role that documentary filmmaking might have in the lives of the filmmakers in the class. My name is Mariana Alexza Clark, and I am a graduate student at the University of Utah in the Department of Communication. I am doing this study to understand the role of the documentary film process in the lives of Humanities in Focus (HIF) participants. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can agree and then quit at any time. There is no compensation for participation, but please know that observing this work is very valuable. Please take your time to decide if you are willing to participate, and please let me know if you have any questions.

STUDY PROCEDURE

Upon consent, I will be observing you and others in your work and discussions. I will be listening and taking some field notes. I am interested in the ways that you talk about the documentary film you are producing— for example, why is it that you chose the topic that you did? Notes that I take are for research purposes only, and will never be used in any type of performance review or employee evaluation or affect any other type of membership that you have with HIF. If my note taking

or presence causes you any discomfort, please let me know immediately as your participation is entirely voluntary.

RISKS

There are minimal risks to participating in this research. You may feel upset that I am observing you and others. If you feel upset from this experience, you can stop at any time, or if you feel uncomfortable later, I will tell you about resources available to help.

Your name and the names of people you discuss will be in my personal transcripts. Your name will not be changed in presentations and publications based upon the research. Information you share may be identifiable to others. To mitigate any concern you have about being identified, I plan to share the research information with you so you can choose to read your responses and my analysis and have a conversation with me if you feel you have been inaccurately represented.

BENEFITS

There are no direct benefits to you for taking part in this study. You will not be compensated for your time. However, the information you share may help HIF and will also provide great insight to the role of documentary filmmaking as a cathartic process.

CONFIDENTIALITY

My notes will be kept confidential. Data and records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet or on a password protected computer located in my work space.

Only my faculty advisor, Dr. Robert K. Avery, and I will have access to this information.

PERSON TO CONTACT

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints or if you feel you have been harmed by this research please contact me, Mariana Alexza Clark, at any time by phone (801-996-3097) or email (a.clark@kute.utah.edu).

You can also contact the Faculty Sponsor of this study, Dr. Robert K. Avery, Mondays through Fridays between 8am-5pm by phone (801-581-5343) or email (rka@utah.edu).

Institutional Review Board: Contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) if you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant. Also, contact the IRB if you have questions, complaints or concerns which you do not feel you can discuss with the investigator. The University of Utah IRB may be reached by phone at (801) 581-3655 or by e-mail at irb@hsc.utah.edu.

Research Participant Advocate: You may also contact the Research Participant Advocate (RPA) by phone at (801) 581-3803 or by email at participant.advocate@hsc.utah.edu.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

It is up to you to decide whether to take part in this study. Refusal to participate or the decision to withdraw from this research will involve no penalty or loss of

benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. This will not affect your relationship with the investigator or HIF.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION TO PARTICIPANTS

There are no costs for participation, and participants will not be compensated for participation.

CONSENT

By signing this consent form, I confirm I have read the information in this consent form and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I will be given a signed copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant, Date

Signature of Researcher or Staff, Date

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