Fighting the Good Fight: Transforming Expectations of Women in Front of and Behind the Camera

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FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT:
TRANSFORMING EXPECTATIONS OF WOMEN IN FRONT OF AND BEHIND THE CAMERA

A Capstone Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Bachelor of Film with Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By
Victoria G. Mills
December 2018

*****

CE/T Committee:
Professor Sara Corkern Thomason, Chair
Dr. Ted Hovet
Dr. Christopher Keller
I dedicate this thesis to my mom, Ginny, who has always been unwavering in her support of my filmmaking endeavors.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to recognize that the film “Come Up for Air” (formerly “The Good Fight”) would not have been possible without the dedicated creative insight of my above-the-line crew, Joel Priegnitz, Haley Meyers, Erin Taylor, and Ashlea Taylor Moses. I am very grateful to Professor Sara Corkern Thomason for her advisement during the development, pre-production, production, and post-production stages of this film, especially considering the emotional nature of a story so personal to me. In addition to this, I am thankful to both Professor Thomason and Dr. Ted Hovet for their guidance during the making of my reflective video essay “Resolution,” as well as all the other aspects of thesis project after the making of “Come Up for Air.”

I would like to thank the Mahurin Honors College for cultivating such a supportive community for students of the arts. I would also like to thank our Kickstarter backers, who collectively provided $1,800 for the making of this film. Finally, I would like to express my full gratitude to the entirety of the Film department. My experience in the program has been wonderful and incredibly insightful, and it has given me hope for my future in the world of filmmaking.
ABSTRACT

The film industry is a male dominated field. This is not new information. Directing, cinematography, and musical composition are the most heavily male governed above-the-line crew positions, with women only making up 12% of directors as of 2018 (Quick, “The data…”). There is an unfortunate hesitation in support for female filmmakers from the part of studios. Melissa Silverstein of “Women and Hollywood” writes that there are quite specific visual expectations of a director to be a “white male with greying hair,” as this is what people are used to (Smith, “Female trouble…”). To go along with this, only 35% of speaking roles in film are given to women, and that decreases further to 24% in terms of actual leading protagonist roles (Quick, “The data…”).

One of the larger contributions to this is the disparity of language between men and women, and how such differences can affect perceptions of strength. Women are more likely to use apologetic language, or tones of hesitancy (Zhukovsky, “Speaking Up…”). While one’s use of language does not negate the credibility of their ideas, an apologetic approach is not normally associated with expectations of a strong director. Women in filmmaking ventures can use language to their advantage, but those with a tendency to sound apologetic are usually less likely to be taken seriously as an authoritative figure.

While it differs from its original intention, the short film “Come Up for Air” displays weakness in both males and females, as it follows a young female protagonist that does little to change her situation outside of lashing out in bouts of selfishness. When faced with the same unapologetic selfishness from her father, however, she finds the strength to forgo her pride and go to her sister as a form of her own apology. In this way, the
protagonist recognizes her own flaws through seeing the same flaw in someone else, yet she chooses to overcome it, showing growth and strength.

After reflection upon the making of this film, as the film itself became a product of weakness in its direction, this project endeavors to show how the realization of weakness can work to transform it into that of strength.
VITA

EDUCATION

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Honors Capstone: Fighting the Good Fight: Transforming Expectations of Women in Front of and Behind the Camera

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Mills, Victoria. “Resolution: Reflections on the Making of ‘Come Up for Air.’” WKU Fall 2018 Film 201 Screening and Q&A with Alumni, December 2018, Bowling Green, KY.
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INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

My thesis short film “Come Up for Air,” originally titled “The Good Fight,” was an idea that I pitched to the film faculty as a story inspired by my own life. My father died from lung cancer when I was sixteen years old. During his sickness, I remembered feeling frustration and anger at him, as I viewed him as responsible for his own death through his weakness for an addiction that he knew was hurting him. I had yet to see a film that I felt truly captured these negative feelings that come with dealing with cancer; nothing really ever illustrates the cancer patient as the bad guy, save for maybe a dramatized anti-hero like Walter White in *Breaking Bad*.

My first inspiration to make a film about such a personal story came from a screening series that took place on campus during my first semester as a film student. On the first night of the WKU 2015 Tournées Festival, Chantal Akerman’s experimental documentary *One Day Pina Asked* screened. Dr. Hovet, who presented the film, mentioned that her films very often came from a personal place. Indeed, almost all of her films either originated from an aspect of her real life, or actually featured her as one of the lead characters. Her film *News from Home*, for instance, featured Akerman’s own narration as she read letters from her mother in Belgium.

I also had a wish to create a film that depicted young girls in a fist fight in an empowering way, which made up the second aspect of my pitch. I had seen this done in some of my personal favorite films, Andrea Arnold’s *Fish Tank* (2009), and Céline Sciamma’s *Girlhood* (2014). *Fish Tank* follows an aspiring teenage hip-hop dancer as she navigates her sexuality. When she encounters a group of girls in bright, feminine clothing practicing a provocative dance routine, she insults their ‘leader’ at being bad at dancing,
then head-butts her when they insult her back. Similarly, *Girlhood* follows a teenager as she discovers a new identity with a local girl gang. She engages in a fight with a rival girl gang as a rematch for the pride of her gang’s leader, ultimately proving successful and winning the respect of her peers. Both of the protagonists in these films experience entrapment within impoverished, single-parent families, and wish to explore their femininity through nontraditional means as a way of escape.

![Figure 1. Still of fight scene from *Fish Tank* (2009)](image1)

![Figure 2. Still of fight scene from *Girlhood* (2014)](image2)
Using these two aspects, the original intent for the short film “The Good Fight” was to create a work that added to the cinematic conversation by portraying women in times of tragedy in a transformative way. The film would depict a young female protagonist dealing with her father’s terminal illness by getting into fist fights at school, an activity one might associate as traditionally masculine. This young female would be surrounded by the women in her family as they performed duties outside traditional expectations of their gender due to this time of duress, such as her mother taking on the role of sole provider of the household, and her older sister taking on the role of family caretaker. By placing each female in the film in such roles, the film would illustrate their strength through their ability to adapt to traumatic situations.

Through the processes of developing and producing “The Good Fight,” the film itself transformed into a project beyond these intentions, going so far as to even require the title change “Come Up for Air.” It now presents a glimpse into a day in the life of a young girl, Katie, who is oblivious to her own selfish intentions until faced with the same selfishness from her father, as he chooses to continue to smoke despite the harmful effects it has on himself and his family. The aspect of the ‘girl fight’ shrank in comparison to the rest of the film as it became less about different presentations of strength, and more about that of weakness.
Figure 3. Katie starts a fight with a girl at school.

Figure 4. Katie learns her father’s decision to continue smoking.

Figure 5. Katie approaches her sister to apologize.
Most importantly, though, the project catalyzed a personal reanalysis of what it means to be a director, particularly a female director telling a personal story. Expectations of directors often involve images of strength, confidence, and a willingness to do ‘whatever it takes.’ Through my experiences in creating this film, and in my post-production research of other female filmmakers, there is often an unfortunate tendency for women in film to resort to apology, or feelings of inconvenience. When researching video clips and images of powerful female directors to include in my reflective video essay, I encountered a quick panel discussion with Andrea Arnold at the Cannes premiere of *Fish Tank*; however, I was dismayed to watch as an offscreen male interrupts one of Arnold’s comments about the introduction of the women in the panel, to which she begins to visibly retract and apologize, despite the unfinished comment holding potential for an interesting insight (“Cannes 2012…”).

In my own experience, these feelings caused numerous problems in my assertion of authority and my ability to communicate during the production process. However, through my reflection on my shortcomings, I began to see more of a significance in how such shortcomings perhaps provided more meaning to the changes the film had undergone than I had previously realized. Based on the experience of making this film, this project demonstrates how the conflict between intent and the ensuing results can be more transformative than if the project had gone according to its original goals. Much like the film itself, the process of realizing my place as a female director has become more about taking ownership of weakness, and embracing it for a new sense of strength.
DIRECTING “THE GOOD FIGHT”

When I began “The Good Fight,” I had the idea that because it was a story I was so emotionally invested in, I would be able to tune into my emotions to help me better communicate what I wanted from my actors, and in turn recognize when their performance was to my satisfaction. I had also had the advantage of taking the Directing course with Professor Luke Pennington, in which I had the opportunity to direct a script with similar content for an exercise; the exercise script dealt with two siblings, Susan and Todd, that had recently lost both of their parents. Using the techniques that we learned in the class over the course of three rehearsals, I felt strong about the performances of the two actors in this exercise.

While directing the two actors in rehearsal, there were three rules in particular that we had learned in class I made sure to constantly abide by:

1. The character’s goal or intention must be visual
2. We must be able to see, and therefore know, when the character has achieved or lost their goal
3. The character’s goal or intention should be selfish. For the purposes of the scene we were working, my actors and I would discuss and attempt different goals to see what felt best for their characters.

Ultimately, we came to a collaborative conclusion that Susan’s goal was for Todd to leave her so that she may continue packing up their childhood belongings to sell their house, whereas Todd’s goal was for Susan to come back to bed to possibly rethink selling their house. The success of either character’s goal would be shown visually with whoever was left in the room at the end of the scene. If Susan was left alone, she achieved her goal.
Likewise, if Susan left the room with Todd, the room would be empty, showing that Todd achieved his goal. The idea that their house might possibly be placed on the market to sell was not written or established at any point in the script, it was an idea that my actors and I had decided that would give the scene the necessary context to ‘color’ the performance.
Figure 6. Director’s prep notes for exercise scene “Let’s Go Home.”
Having established this basic framework, on the day of filming the scene, I gave both actors different intentions than we had previously rehearsed with. Susan’s ultimate goal was to make Todd leave, and Todd’s ultimate goal was to bring Susan with him. With these goals in mind, I had been rehearsing with them so that Susan would ‘deflect’ Todd, and Todd would ‘coerce’ Susan. While this had been working well during rehearsals, when it came to production, I could feel that something was not right with the performances. Before the last take, Professor Pennington suggested that I give them a new verb, and that they be the opposite of whatever I had been telling the actors before. I then directed Todd to ‘blame’ Susan. This connected well with the actors, garnering fresh, complex performances from both.

The exercise had given me numerous techniques with which to approach directing “The Good Fight.” However, I found myself struggling with directing a good performance during the first weekend of production. This was partially due to complications with the lead actress, Katie Hubbard, and partially due to my lack of preparation. In contrast to the open and collaborative relationship I had with the two actors of my directing exercise, Katie seemed disinterested and distracted. During one of the takes on the first day of production for Scene 4, when we had reversed the camera setup to get coverage of the characters facing her, I had to cut the take early because she was on her cell phone and had missed her line cue. I also found that I had not kept in mind the three rules I had learned from my class while doing the necessary paperwork to prepare for the scenes we shot the first weekend. I had made note of dramatic beats and places where the character Katie would seek connection and be denied it, but I had not made her goals and intentions visual enough.
Figure 7 Director’s preparatory notes for Scene 4.
MATTHEW
My brother just got one for his birthday, you keep them in really small bowls and they don’t care.

Katies pipes in.

KATIE
Are you talking about Betta fish?

Matthew looks over at Katie, surprised that she’s talking.

MATTHEW
Yeah.

KATIE
You actually shouldn’t keep them in those small bowls, they actually need at least a gallon tank.

Matthew looks slightly disinterested. A girl across the table, ROBIN (10-11), clears her throat, widening her eyes to the other kids.

ROBIN
Matthew, I’ll trade my chips for your cookies.

MATTHEW
No way!

The kids go back to chattering amongst themselves. Katie’s face falls, but she hides it by going back to her magazine.

The kids from the edge of the room make more noise. Katie looks up to see TEACHER 1 splitting them up and scolding them.

TEACHER 1
Tyler, if I have to call home one more time--!

Katie raises an eyebrow.

EXT. SCHOOL/PLAYGROUND

Katie sits on top of the jungle gym by herself, surveying the playground. Her expression is nervous, and she keeps clenching and unclenching her fists.

Finally, she picks her target. Off by the swings, Robin and the group of friends from lunch stand and talk to each other. Katie swallows and climbs down from the jungle gym.

Figure 7.1 Director’s preparatory notes for Scene 4 (cont.)
Rather than take control of the situation and find a way to motivate Katie, I recall resorting to an idea of simply persevering through the rest of the shoot, regardless of the quality. After the cell phone incident, there were numerous times where I wanted to circle the take and continue, despite obvious production flaws that the rest of my crew would point out. I openly disagreed with my cinematographer, Haley Meyers, over whether to do another take of the final shot of the fight sequence, as she insisted that it was out of focus. I wanted to continue to the next shot, not because I was satisfied with Katie’s performance, but because I could tell that she was tired, and I did not know how to motivate her to go for another stunt-intensive shot. We did go for another take, which proved to be the right call on Haley’s part, as the others were indeed out of focus.

Another instance in which I felt particularly weak about my directing took place while blocking Scene 2. This scene took place on the second weekend of production, and the week between production weekends had allowed me to prepare more in terms of visual goals and intentions. In this scene, the character Katie wanted her father to have breakfast with her, instead of him laying on the couch alone. Visually, Katie would achieve her goal if Marvin came with her into the kitchen; she would not achieve her goal if he stayed on the couch. Breaking this scene down to its visual elements helped with discussing it with the actors, Katie and John Wes Lewis. When showing the blocking of the scene, I was actually happy with Katie and John’s performance, but I found that I was overcome with emotion and began to cry in front of my crew as I relayed the coverage. This was a moment of weakness, and because of it, Katie and John’s performance were not the same afterwards when we went for picture. I found that I had to keep working with Katie on her direction,
and I neglected to give John anything new after the first direction, resulting in wildly
different performances from Katie and somewhat stagnant performance from John.
INT. HOUSE/KATIE’S ROOM - DAY

KATIE (10 years), lays in bed with the covers pulled over most of her face, covering her ears.

HARSH COUGHING echoes through the house, breaking the morning silence.

Katie scrunches her face up, eyes still closed, and pulls the covers up over her head. Her fists tighten around its edge, her fingernails each alternate blue and green.

Underneath her covers, a light hits Katie’s face. She opens her eyes to see a couple National Geographic magazines and a flashlight that’s still on. She sits up from under her quilt and turns off her flashlight.

INT. HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Katie walks in with her magazines in hand.

MARVIN (40s-50s) lays on the couch watching TV. An oxygen mask covers most of his face as he breathes in and out painfully. An oxygen tank stands beside him.

Katie plops down on the floor next to him, her eyes bright.

KATIE
I think we need a koi fish pond.

Marvin’s eyes wrinkle as he smiles underneath his mask. He raises an eyebrow and lifts the mask up slightly to speak.

MARVIN
Really?

Katie nods matter-of-factly, with a slight grin.

KATIE
It adds aesthetic appeal. And we can sell koi, they’re the most in-demand at fish shows.

Marvin smiles and gives a half-laugh, half-cough.

MARVIN
I didn’t know they had shows for fish.

Katie giggles and holds open one of her magazines to him.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

SIMPLE VISUAL GEAR OF L: TOGETHER/OPPOSITE.

WIN: KATIE LEAVES W/ MARVIN IN ROOM. KATIE LEAVES ALONE.

KATIE
I’ve done the research.

From another room, Katie’s mom, LILY, calls to her.

LILY
Breakfast!

Katie closes her magazine and stuffs them under her arm. She stands up and grabs Marvin’s oxygen tank to wheel it in to the kitchen.

KATIE
I can help.

Marvin lifts his mask up again to give her a smile, although this one doesn’t reach his eyes.

MARVIN
I need to lay down right now, kiddo.

Katie’s eyes drop for a second. She walks out of the living room, leaving Marvin on the couch.

INT. HOUSE/KITCHEN – DAY

Katie sits at the kitchen table, ignoring the plate of eggs in front of her. She meticulously clips out images of koi from the paper and tapes them to a piece of scrapbook paper, collage-style.

Her sister ERIN (16-18) french braids Katie’s hair out of her face. Lily puts together lunches for the girls as she talks on the phone.

LILY
Yes...yes, we can do that...

Katie chatters as she cuts up pictures.

KATIE
They’re also really easy to make, we just need to dig a hole that’s three feet deep, and then we can line it with sand and newspaper, or we can buy a kit that has a special tub--

(Continued)
While I ultimately did not feel strong about my direction over the project as a whole, there were two instances in which I felt that I had procured a strong performance from my actors. The first instance took place while filming Scene 9. We had rehearsed the scene before with John and Katie, where John’s performance had been appropriate. However, while rehearsing on the day of production, I found his performance to be too happy and comforting towards Katie. This was the point in the script where the epitome of Katie’s selfishness would be met with the epitome of her father’s. It was not something to be taken lightly.

While the grip and lighting team took over the set, I took the opportunity to take John away and talk to him one on one. I decided to use what Professor Pennington had called the ‘emotional preparation’ technique. This technique is based on a concept of renown acting teacher Constantin Stanislavski, in which the actor would be encouraged to connect the character’s experience with that of a real memory or feeling from the actor’s life, or their ‘emotion memory.’ Their emotion memory would be the means by which the actor would combine action, imagination, and tasks into “the image of a character in performance,” (Darvas, 90). The way Professor Pennington told my class to approach this technique was to take the actor aside and ask two alternating questions:

1. What would it look like if ____ happened?

2. Why would that matter?

Before I began these questions, I informed John that I wanted to use this technique with him, which would require that he connect his emotional memory to the character’s experience in the scene. He had shared with me during his audition that he had once been a smoker himself, but had quit years before. I began with “What would it look like if you
had never stopped smoking?” On his answer, I immediately responded with “Why would that matter?” After doing this for several moments, I realized we had come to the end of the exercise when John finally responded with “I guess, I don’t matter.” Within this headspace, I told him that his daughter in the scene, Katie, was a reminder of this fact, and that she wanted him to reckon with the fact that his existence did not matter. From that, I gave him the simple intention to ‘blame’ her. When it was time to film, his performance was emotionally true to the nature of the scene.

The other instance where I had been proud of my performance as a director came with working with Katie in the same scene. I was having more trouble getting her in the appropriate headspace. When I tried to use the same technique with her, I could tell the answers that she was giving me were shallow and disingenuous. I resorted to establishing with her the visual goal for her character; in this moment, all the character Katie wanted to do was show her father the detention note she received for starting a fight at school. We discussed what this meant for the character, that this was her chance at finally gaining his attention again. However, when we went for picture, I found that she was having trouble with hitting her mark and performing her corresponding action.

What I did not realize was happening until two takes in was that, because Katie’s hair was blocking the light from hitting her face, Haley Meyers and my production designer, Erin Taylor, had told her to push her hair behind her ear when she hit her mark, which conflicted with my direction of showing the note to her dad when she hit her mark. I expressed frustration at this and asked that Katie’s hair be pinned back instead. Erin and Haley disagreed with me on this action, and continued to tell Katie to just push her hair back herself after I would give Katie her direction, which was confusing her. It also speaks
to who Katie perceived authority from, as perhaps if I had been more strong in my vision, she would have listened to only me and not to Erin and Haley. We did this take a total of eight times, none of which that I felt had a convincing performance. Eventually, I decided that it was time to move on, as I could tell that Katie’s performance was becoming less and less energetic with each take.

We moved on to the coverage of the note. Even though the camera only showed Katie’s hands, I had Katie and John run the entire scene to assure that their motions would be continuous with the rest of the coverage, including dialogue. When it was time for Katie to say her line, she spoke in such a somber, subdued way, I recall looking up immediately to see that she was actually giving the performance that I had been looking for. I realized that when the camera was not on her face, she must not have been thinking about her performance, which was causing it to come more naturally. To capture this, I told Katie that the insert had been out of focus, and that we would have to go again. I then told Haley and Alina Verenich, first assistant camera, to tilt up from the note in Katie’s hand so that the camera could see her face. This was the performance pictured in the final version of the film.
EVALUATION

For the purposes of the class, we were required to evaluate our crewmembers both weekends so that our personal performances might improve. My classmates’ evaluations of my performance as a director were largely unsatisfactory, and while I found them difficult to read, I did agree. The majority of criticism centered around my lack of confidence, and the problems that ensued because of it. It was through the peer evaluations that I discovered that I had been prematurely rushing production.

The comments that were the most challenging were the ones that referenced my tendency to apologize. The comment that particularly addressed it stated:

“…She needs to not psych the crew out because she’s worried. During one new deal she apologized in advance (which she needs to not do so much) and said the blocking was complicated, I was scared for one second but then I saw that it was only a car moving forward 5 feet and a girl running out of it.”

This comment was ultimately very enlightening. I had not previously considered that my apologies would create uneasiness within my crew, I had believed it to be just a form of politeness. However, this idea that my constant apologizing was adding so much to the image of me as a weak director explained why I had trouble communicating effectively with my actors and crew, and why some of them had not been listening to me.
### Figure 9. Peer evaluation for the first weekend of the production.

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<td>Very good, wasn’t rude or too stressed, kept a calm and collected demeanor. I feel like I am directing in all result direction. Tori did very well. I could tell her whole heart wasn’t in it though, and that was maybe her anxieties that were holding her back. I felt she did a good job provoking emotions from her actresses, and that’s what is important. However, she rushed a lot. I think she was overly worried that we were running out of time, but that is not something as a director she should be worrying about at all. As a 1st AD, that is Emily’s job to worry about. There were a few times that she wanted to glaze over or ignore an issue with focus or sound or a continuity flaw and just move on. When suggestions were made to adjust something or alter a moment in some way, she was agitated or reluctant. Overall, I would say she definitely wanted to best out of this weekend and she did her best. She just needs to remember we’re all in this together, but we look up to the director the most. Her demeanor needs to be most in check and confident to make the whole crew feel in check and confident.</td>
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Tori you need have better confidence in yourself and your team. You're good at spotting problems, but could improve on positively confronting them. I think you work well with Katie and the crew just remember to believe in yourself and your vision.

Director is a really hard job and I think you are close to being a great one. You have a great vision, but I would suggest thinking about the age of your actor. I don't think Katie was as tired as you thought, but bored. Yes, she's working, but she would get energized whenever she was able to talk to the crew and act goofy. I think she needs a place to be silly or watch youtube videos or something when she's not working on her lines. She seems to be getting the lines correct and giving what you're asking for which reflects your work with her. I would also work on listening to what the crew needs. If a certain department didn't like something in the frame, we seem to be having more time at the end of the day that we could have used to give to that department. I think that problem can be helped with not only you, but your 1st AD can help delegate that time and decision making if you're not sure. Overall, I think you have a solid film and this crew will get your film looking great.

I think Tori needs to work on building up her self confidence before she tries to direct something again. On set she would get nervous and kind of snap at people which made the whole crew feel like things were going bad. As a director she is one of the leaders and her personality matters so much. She needs to not psych the crew out because she's worried. During one new deal she apologized in advance (which she needs to stop doing so much) and said the blocking was complicated, I was scared for one second but then I saw that is was only a car moving forward 5 feet and a girl running out of it. I also think she worries too much about trivial things but doesn't listen to when the other departments think something actually matters. She seemed to make snide remarks about how people always tell her we need to go again for some reason even though she was satisfied with the performance, but it will be because the take she just liked was out of focus or the boom got in, we want her to have a good film and we're not just suggesting to go again for shits and giggles. She's at this weird place where sometimes she does need to hear out others more while still trying to be more authoritative and confident in herself.

Figure 9.1 Peer evaluation for the first weekend of the production (cont.)
For the second weekend of production, I made a few personal goals based on this feedback in an attempt to improve my projected confidence. My first goal was to stop ‘snapping’ at my team when they had concerns over flaws in general production; I felt that it would be unfair to ask for respect without giving it in return. My second goal was to spend more time with my actors off set, as I had the feeling that being in a separate, private space with the actors would allow me to better communicate my ideas.

The second round of evaluations seemed displayed an improvement in approval from my peers, as many commented that my overall demeanor was calmer and that I seemed more open to the ideas of others. There was still a lingering critique on my inclination to apologize, which was frustrating, of course, but I understood that I could not dispel all of my flaws within the span of one week. These critiques lent themselves to the idea that I had performed much better as a director during the second weekend than the first.

While, overall, I agreed that my personal performance had improved, I had trouble agreeing with some particular standards for why I had improved. Film is a collaborative medium and it is important to take all creative insights of the above-the-line crew in order to create the strongest work. However, I found it odd that so much of my feedback from the first weekend had been concerned with my own confidence, while the feedback indicating that I had improved for the second weekend was more concerned with my willingness to listen to what others were suggesting that I do. One comment in particular focused on how working with me had become ‘easier’: “Working with you was very very nice because I think we collaborated more and made scenes work/read a lot
easier. It means that you trusted my input for scenes and it was very easy to communicate with you.”

I could not help but recall the disagreement between Haley, Erin, and I in which they simply did not listen to me about an aspect of the scene, which would have cost us Katie’s performance had I not noticed how she was acting without the camera on her face. In this instance, I felt that had I been stronger and more assertive in my vision, and less focused on making sure everyone else felt heard, we perhaps would have been able to get the correct performance much sooner. This is not to say that I wish I had not listened to my crewmembers, because it would be foolish to believe that I was the only one on set with the ‘correct’ approach. I did, however, find it disturbing that others had perceived me to become a better director because working with me had been ‘nice.’
Great job on this! It is really clear that you were more than prepared and passionate about this project. It really helped the cast and crew to want to put a lot of effort into their roles as well- and become a collaborative unit that was dedicated to making your story great. The only thing I'm going to say, and this isn't really a criticism and it will give me away, but there were several moments over this weekend were I wanted to say this to you: You are very good at this. You communicate with the actors really well in my opinion and I always thought you were very clear with them. There were times when I would accidentally overhear you on the LAV (I promise I wasn't snooping intentionally) and it hurt my heart to hear you be so apologetic and talk down on yourself.

Skills as a director sometimes! I know how you feel, completely! BUT I think you should know you are already very good at this, and will surely only get better. I just almost wondered at times if you would have projected yourself with a little more confidence with Katie, she would have been more attentive and easier to keep on track. I'm sure it's difficult to direct someone that young, I've never done it! And I know you have to be very complimentary with your actors and you want to make a good impression- this was just something I (accidentally) observed and I wondered at times if it was maybe hurting more than helping! I also think at this stage of where we are in our education, we need any little moment we can find to feel like we're doing something RIGHT, for once! I know I do, anyway! Well done! I think this is going to be great!! - Jordan

Figure 10. Peer evaluation for the second weekend of the production.

Working with you was very very nice because I think that we collaborated more and made scenes work/ read a lot easier. It means a lot that you trusted my input for scenes and it was very easy to communicate them with you. Even though the last day was emotionally exhausting for you, you persevered and didn't give up. An improve I have is to be more efficient when creating shot lists example: getting the same shot just punched in a little more (changed lens).

Figure 10.1 Peer evaluation for the second weekend of the production (cont.)
STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS

It was not until creating “Resolution: A Reflection on the Making of “Come Up for Air”” that I was able to endeavor in an effective way to find resolution in my lack of confidence and my constant apologies on set. I was not satisfied with my performance as a director as a whole. I felt that I had allowed my feelings of insecurity to consume me, and to overtake my language as I tried to assert my authority, resulting at first in an inclination to retract and to retort. When I tried to correct these tendencies, my peers found me easier to work with. However, I allowed my direction to be trampled upon, almost at the cost of a crucial scene. I felt that I had failed, and that I would never become a great director.

As I was accumulating videos for my reflective video essay, I encountered two video clips that particularly spoke to my feelings of regret. One was the aforementioned panel discussion with Andrea Arnold at the 2012 Cannes Festival (“Cannes 2012…”). While it was disheartening to see Arnold—someone that I personally look up to—stumble over her own words, it made me feel that at least I was not alone. It was a reminder that there is still a need to fight for vision and voice. This moment of weakness did not make Arnold a weak director, but rather it is a provocation for women to work harder to be heard.

The second video clip that provoked my personal revelation was the ending exit interview of Pina Bausch in Akerman’s One Day Pina Asked. Akerman asks Bausch how she sees her future. Bausch hesitates, and bows her head as she ponders this. She first responds without any answer, stating how with all the problems in the world, it is difficult for her to wish for anything for herself. It is interesting that she chooses to answer initially in this way, taking the more feminine approach to deflect an opportunity to assert, and
rather passively project humility. But, quickly after this thought, Bausch continues with the answer of “strength” (Akerman). Akerman chooses to frame Bausch in a way that she is center of the frame, and does not cut away to any other shot during this hesitation. It is as if Akerman is prompting Bausch to take a stand for herself, while forcing the audience to watch and not look away. Through this, Bausch transcends a path of weaker language into that of a strength.

This idea of forming strength from weakness appears in “Come Up for Air” through Katie’s interactions with her father and her sister. The character, Katie, spends the entire duration of the film attempting to break from the entrapment of her family. She does this through the selfish tactic of starting a fight at school. When confronted with her father’s own selfishness and refusal to apologize, Katie realizes the error of her ways, and attempts to do better. It is an act of submission when Katie does this, as she is sacrificing her own desires for the cause of the ‘greater good’ of the household. This can be seen as a weakness. However, it is important that she does not apologize to her father. Instead, she goes to her sister as an unspoken form of apology. This shows a moment of unity between the two main females of the film, in spite of the overbearing circumstances around them. It is a moment of strength in spite of the surrounding weakness.

While I may not have been particularly proud of my performance as a director for this film, I would only be a weak director if I decided not to continue. Despite the more difficult surrounding circumstances, such as Katie’s uncooperative attitude, disagreement with my crew, or even the internal struggle of an inclination to apologize, there are still instances of which I am proud of a performance I helped accomplish. Perhaps, then, this is the path for women in film to rise, both in numbers and visibility. We can approach
directing and any other aspect of filmmaking as a way to find and assert our strength out of what others may perceive as weakness. This is not to say that we should stop improving the way we speak, but perhaps that we can stop feeling insecure about it. Women have much to say both in front of and behind the camera. We should proclaim it in our own way.
REFERENCES

“Cannes 2012: Andrea Arnold I’d hate my film to be chosen because I was a woman.” *YouTube*, uploaded by The Telegraph, 12 May 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZ-KQwOQKUo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZ-KQwOQKUo).


*WKU Tournées Film Festival 2015*, Bowling Green, KY.


APPENDIX: SCRIPTS FOR REFERENCE

For purposes of clarity, these are scripts of importance to this project as a whole, some of which are referenced by scene number throughout this paper.

“The Good Fight”

This first draft of the film featured a dramatically different storyline. While it allowed for a more believable growth in character due to the extended time frame, it was mostly unclear in intentions and audience takeaway.

“The Good Fight” – One Day

This version of the script was the working draft for the majority of the film’s pre-production stage. By containing the narrative to one day as opposed to three, this version of the film allowed for a deeper exploration of each character as opposed to a longer timeframe. This version of the script was used for director’s preparatory notes.

“The Good Fight” – Shooting Script

This is the version of the script used for production. There were slight changes in location made due to weather, as well as a rethinking of the necessity of scenes 8-10 from the previous draft.

“Let’s Go Home”

This script, written by Elizabeth West, was selected for my Directing lab exercise. Due to the fact that I was taking the Film Capstone class simultaneously, my actors and I were only required to rehearse and film the second scene.