

Paper Title:

The Latest Evolution of BIPOC Auto-Ethnographic Documentaries: Filmmakers in front of and behind the camera in *Minding the Gap* (2018) and *Time* (2020)

Abstract:

This paper largely focuses on textual analysis, reception, and the production histories along with various academic works on intersectionality and auto-ethnographic documentaries to argue that *Minding the Gap* (2018) and *Time* (2020) have demonstrated the possibilities that are now open to BIPOC when making a first-person film in terms of both form and content. From early examples such as *Fieldwork* (1928) and *Joyce at 34* (1972) to the seminal *Sherman's March* (1985), auto-ethnography has slowly evolved over the history of documentary filmmaking. American auto-ethnographic documentaries exploded in popularity with mainstream audiences in the 1980s with the rise of Michael Moore and continued to gain momentum through the early 2000s with films such as *Super Size Me* (2004). However, it was not until the streaming era (the 2010s and beyond) that American auto-ethnographic documentaries featured BIPOC both in front of and behind the camera – which came about as an effort by companies like Amazon Prime and Hulu to produce more diverse content for a wider array of viewers than most traditional film studios. In addition to allowing a more inclusive and comprehensive examination of the filmmakers in auto-ethnographic documentaries, films made in this style in the last few years have also take a distinctly intersectional approach when addressing the everyday experience of BIPOC Americans through exploring how class, race, gender, and sexuality all contribute to the formation one's identity and lifestyle. The two films being examined include the use of first-person voiceover mixed with the on-screen presence of the filmmakers in interviews and observational footage of their daily lives to showcase the struggles of being BIPOC in America today from the first-person perspective. *Minding the Gap* focuses on a working-class community of Rockford, Illinois and explores how poverty led three friends from three different racial backgrounds (including the filmmaker Bing Liu – a Chinese immigrant) to all suffer from some form of domestic abuse. Similarly, *Time* intimately explores the struggles of one working class black family over the course of twenty years after the father (Rob G. Rich) is given a unduly harsh prison sentence for armed robbery. The film is primarily shot by the mother (Fox Rich) and chronicles her struggles as a single-parent and an advocate for civil rights in the fight against systemic racism by the police and judicial system that led to her husband's unjust sentence. All that being said, the central argument of this paper is that we have reached a new era in auto-ethnographic documentaries with the release of these two films – one that does not limit the filmmaker to either being in front of or behind the camera. This is important to recognize as previous auto-ethnographic documentaries were more limited and less complex in terms of how they explored the formation and expression of identity and the lives of BIPOC on screen.

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Author Bio:

Stephanie Oliver is a doctoral candidate in Visual and Performing Arts at The University of Texas at Dallas. Her research interests include the representation of gender and sexuality in contemporary American films and television (cultural studies), feminist film theory, genre studies (specifically the erotic thriller, film noir, neo-noir, and melodrama), star studies, auteur theory, cultural studies, and documentary studies. Her work has been published in *Senses of Cinema* and *Film Criticism*. Her dissertation examines the Hollywood erotic thriller through a feminist film theory lens to argue that the genre is by, for, and about women.