

Anna, Ahana and *The Yellow Wallpaper*: A Sociological Reflection on Fictional Filmmaking

By

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Abstract

The Yellow Wallpaper (Gilman 1892) is based on a story of isolation and part horror experienced by an unnamed female protagonist. My takeaway from this story, written almost 130 years ago, was its contemporary relevance and application to domestic violence among the South Asian diaspora in the United States. I named my 30-minute cinematic adaptation “*Anna and Ahana*.” In this paper I discuss the premise of the original work, the adaptation through Gilman’s sociology, and its current application to domestic violence among immigrant communities in the United States. I also note on the importance of Visual Sociology in the field while making a case for including fictional filmmaking as a new method of visual learning. In summarizing my notes, I take the roles of both *insider* and *outsider*, based on aspects of the work. In the process, I highlight six important themes which include my reflections on the following: 1. introducing Gilman to the world outside sociology; 2. presenting the immigrant context of violence to non-South Asians; 3. reaching out to South Asians in the United States and in the country of origin; 4. focusing on the malleability of Gilman’s work to include intersectional experiences; 5. arguing for fictional filmmaking as a credible form within those recognized in Visual Sociology; 6. striving towards industry standards; and 7. the dilemmas associated with being a first time (female) filmmaker.

Keywords: fictional filmmaking, visual sociology, domestic violence in immigrant communities in the United States, sociologist as writer, director, and producer of a film

Introduction

My journey in making *Anna and Ahana* was quite the unplanned one—an adventure that contrasts with our thought-through academic research processes. I did not grow up in the United States. Thus, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Gilman 1892), the basis of my fictional adaptation, which was a fairly common text among American high school students, was less common to me. The temporal and cultural specificity of Gilman’s sociology helped me to develop the unique perspective of an outsider looking in (Adler and Adler 1994). Likely, because of this perspective, as an immigrant in the current context, and as a non-white woman, the original text presented itself with a rich possibility.

The Yellow Wallpaper is based on a story of isolation and part horror experienced by the main protagonist

who was not named in the text. Given the protagonist’s mental health, her husband takes her to a country home to get both respite and a “cure.” What follows is an imaginary camaraderie the protagonist develops with a character who she believes lives in the walls. My takeaway from the story was its contemporary relevance and application to domestic violence among the South Asian diaspora in the United States. Derived from my sociological ancestor, I named this adaptation “*Anna and Ahana*”.

In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, I saw the possibility of a short film with a niche. Previously, the work had been adapted into short and long forms, for film, television, and radio. I thought about extending the context to a background where I was an insider: The South Asian diaspora. I wanted to focus on the less spoken aspects of domestic violence that women might undergo post

marriage, upon arrival in the United States.

In this newly developed narrative, Ahana, a young woman from Kolkata, India is married to a well-to-do doctor and settles with him in the United States. Upon her arrival in the U. S., she feels that the way of life she used to know as a professional journalist in India has been substituted with a coerced form of assimilation: she is expected to let go of the lifestyle she had in India, and seamlessly adjust to the role of a homemaker in the new setting.

Ahana, does not adjust well to the stay at home life. Thus, her husband brings her to a country home similar to the one in the original text. Ahana imagines that a woman lives in the walls of her new home and, in reality, had lived in the house many moons ago. Ahana also discovers excerpts of the original text of *The Yellow Wallpaper* and eventually bonds with the woman in the wall: “Anna!”

Developing My Cinematic Adaptation of “*Anna and Ahana*”

Between March and September, 2019, I began a unique process of conceptualization, application of a grant, writing a 25-page screenplay, pre-production, production and post- production of the first rough cut of *Anna and Ahana*. My cinematic adaptation premiered at my academic institution during a South Asian film festival.

The film defined a unique moment in my academic journey and lead to a very interesting and eventful year that included a premiere in Kolkata, India and subsequent press coverage.

CLASSICAL THEORY: GILMAN IN THE CLASSROOM

I want to summarize here my theoretical passage to Gilman and my film. The context of how the subject of a film is dwelt upon is often unpredictable. In my case it was through teaching sociology in the classroom.

In the textbook I used, the authors, Desfor, Edles and Applerouth (2007) introduce students to a number of theorists, including Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Mead, Simmel, Du Bois and Gilman. The authors discussed Gilman fifth in the sequence of theoreticians and included her very phenomenal life story. They wrote about her out-of-the-box thinking and Gilman’s persistent discursive questions on the established gender status quo of that time. These thought processes were prevalent in both her theoretical inclination and

her life choices (Gagnon 2020)

Thomas and Kukulan (2004) discussed the lack of inclusion of the female-centric point of view in classical sociology and elaborated how only recently had the sociological contributions of Harriet Martineau, Ida B. Wells, and Jane Addams made it into some introductory and theoretical textbooks. The trend continues into recent times with digital repositories including Wikipedia (Luo, Adams and Brueckner, 2018), which for many is the first stop as a knowledge hub. The under representation of female sociological thinkers continues into the current era of digital knowledge production since resources like Wikipedia often rely on the original sources that were limited to begin with (Luo et al. 2018).

As far as sociological ideas are concerned, Gilman’s theory embraces both Marxism and Symbolic Interactionism. Several of her ideas were discussed in class. These included Gilman’s integration of labor economics in the household with corresponding gendered hierarchy. Because of women’s complete dependence on men as bread winners, women’s independence and authority in the household are limited. Gilman explains the sources of these limitations: Both patriliney¹ and because women’s relationship to their husbands in the household economy defines women as the property of their husbands (Desfor et al. 2007; Gilman 1898). Gilman (1898) also discusses the impact of socialization on upbringing, and how human beings grow up to be gendered from their formative years. Based on how economics disadvantages women to think of themselves in relation to finding a viable partner to sustain a family, women invest their energies in making themselves more likable on those lines rather than by developing other personal and intellectual faculties. (Gilman 1898).

Unfortunately, some of Gilman’s ideas have serious limitations. She propagated the superiority of the white race and generalized about gender without adequately acknowledging or exploring intersectionality. Much of what she wrote also reexamined eugenics and social Darwinism, including “the necessity to separate races according to their relative historical development” (Hausman 1998:499). While she advocated for the overall superiority of women over men, Gilman’s monolithic frame of reference is evident when, in alluding to the human race, she was, in fact, only referring to the universe of White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (Valverde 1992). In consecutive texts, including *Herland* (Gilman 1915) and *With Her in Ourland* (Gilman 1916),

¹This term is defined as the practice of tracing descent in a family through the father’s line.

Gilman's female protagonist, Ellador, while criticizing the practice of slavery also mentions the mistake of bringing "a mass of people unready for democracy into a democratic state" (Gilman 1916:156).

The Yellow Wallpaper and 30 years of Gilman

Regardless of its significant limitations, Gilman's sociology provided a window of opportunity to me. Her narrative on *The Yellow Wallpaper* is an extension of her original conversation on gender, socialization as well as domestic division of labor. First, Gilman articulated a very strong narrative that summarized experience of isolation, subjugation and domestic violence among the privileged, in a context where it might even be hard to decipher (Gilman 1892). Following this trend in recent times, this particular narrative takes place in a household where all the members are educated, economically endowed, and privileged members of society. This context makes violence even harder to detect and, given the situation of immigrant families, further shielded from scrutiny.

Second, Gilman's text offered me an opportunity to explore the concept of household economics and immigration. Gilman's original text was written at a time when it was less likely for women to work for pay outside their homes, which provides the basis of much of Gilman's gender-based reflections. The context of the film is contemporary, and these trends have changed a lot. Yet the situation of many immigrant women can be one of involuntary compliance to the stay-a-home model (Balgamwalla 2014). Laws and restrictions on work permits, visas or green cards might also restrict the spouses of working immigrants from entering the job market (Balgamwalla 2014; Banerjee 2019).

This context has been used in the screenplay for the protagonist Ahana who, back in India, had a thriving although stressful career in journalism. While she was quite adequately self-sufficient in her country of origin, in the U. S. she finds herself dependent on her husband and an integral part of the homemaker-breadwinner household economy. Much of her worth is determined by fertility dynamics: whether and when Ahana is able to have a child. This represents a bizarre predicament since, in arranged marriages, women know that for a certain period of time after they immigrate to the U. S., economic self-sufficiency is not an option even for the most qualified immigrant women. Regardless of long-term aspirations, the immediate economic implications can be very limiting on their personal sense of freedom. This mental crisis is reflected in Ahana's internal

struggle in the duality between her awareness of the life she chose and actually coming to terms with it.

The third important aspect of Gilman's work for the film relates to gendered socialization. Ahana represents a different sense of being—that is, she exhibits a certain level of internalized emancipation even with her restricted, changed circumstances. The female protagonist is educated, urban, smart, confident former media professional. This is in striking contrast to two other female protagonists: her sister-in-law, Srishti, and her friend, Riya. Although Srishti immigrated to the United States and lived away from her country of origin for many years, she has held onto many conventional values that could have been a part of her very specific sociocultural origin or the time she spent in India (a few decades earlier than when Ahana left the nation). Riya, in comparison, is apparently content with her homemaker lifestyle. She is on a spouse visa, married to someone working in the United States. In a way, Ahana provides a very different intersectional experience that can be associated with her urban, upper-class, Indian upbringing. Yet given that her husband confines her to a home and a lifestyle that echoes patriarchal and traditional expectations, her struggles begin. Ahana's growth (or decline) in the narrative demonstrates the gradual replacement of her confidence with an overwhelming sense of inner conflict.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: THE BROADER AND NARROWER CONTEXTS

One of the main premises of *Anna and Ahana* is domestic violence experienced among immigrant communities. According to the National Organization of Women, one in four women and one in four men are impacted by domestic violence in their lifetimes. It is one of the most common types of distress calls received by U. S. law enforcement: 20,000 calls *daily* from domestic violence hotlines (National Statistics 2020). Domestic violence accounts for 15% of violent crimes in the U. S. and very frequently involves use of a weapon. (National Statistics 2020).

Furthermore, physical manifestations of abuse are only one of the many types. The others include financial, emotional, sexual, threats to/abuse of the woman's children, and homophobia (Gelles 1979; National Statistics 2020; Types of Abuse 2020). Although it is easier to decipher physical abuse, the less manifest mental abuse often comes in the form of name calling, shifting blame, isolation, and intimidation. In addition, broader narratives of sexual violence, besides marital

rape, include other kinds of unwanted coercion like forcing a partner to have sex without protection leading to unwanted pregnancies (Types of Abuse 2020). Examples of financial and technological abuse are retaining control over income or monitoring activities of the partner on social media (Types of Abuse 2020). Domestic violence is also correlated with mental health issues including depression and suicide (National Statistics 2020).

Price and Sokoloff (2004) detail the context of domestic violence among immigrants when they relocate to a different culture. Their double impediment in the western world could include their subservient status in a patriarchal context (both in the country of origin and the host society), and being a minority in the west in relation to the white majority. The factsheet published by Domestic & Sexual Violence in South Asian Communities (2017), explains the extent of domestic violence in greater Boston, Houston and San Francisco bay area. Additional research also details the degree of violence with compounding complexities emerging from the intersections of race, class, gender, personal, institutional, and cultural impediments (Adam and Schewe 2008; Dasgupta 2000). These vulnerabilities are augmented by the fact that many abused women are dependent on their spouses as legal sponsors of their immigration status, have little information on available resources, or might have linguistic barriers that prevent them from getting help (Abraham 1999; 2000; Chaudhuri, Morash, and Yingling 2014; Dasgupta 2000; Kapur, Zajicek and Gaber, 2017; Narayan 1995; Raj and Silverman, 2002). Many “hiccups” in a marriage might not be construed by outsiders as grave enough (and hyped as sacrifice). Family values are insisted upon and women’s interests are considered only in relation to the family’s interest (Ho 1990; Kapur et al. 2017; Kibria 1990; Tran and Des Jardins 2000).

In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, I saw strong elements of domestic abuse which called for an adapted screenplay. In *Anna and Ahana* the female protagonist -- a South Asian immigrant woman Ahana, who is quite fed up with the limitations of a city life in an urban context, with a very busy husband and bored with overtime on the social media, is brought to an isolated location in the countryside for “therapy”. Both contexts signify social isolation.

Additionally, the current adaptation addresses some of these broader implications of domestic violence. It refers to the less blatant types including emotional abuse, neglect or financial abuse (Ahana not having access to the internet or her passport for instance). The

film explains the context of isolation and immigration that while not completely fresh, might be less known to both host and original cultures. The female protagonists used to be in control of her own life back home, and in the United States finds herself to be quite the misfit. Lacking friends and family, her vulnerabilities augment. But at the same time, she is not the traditional non English speaking immigrant in a foreign context susceptible to coercion. The idea that among the South Asian diaspora domestic violence can be prevalent amongst the privileged, empowered and educated --- was to an extent a niche I wanted to explore.

VISUAL SOCIOLOGY AND THE (NON) FICTIONAL FORM

A Note on Using Films in the Classroom

I created my film, *Anna and Ahana*, for a pedagogical purpose. Although it is a fictional narrative, I wanted to see whether the fictional form of audio-visual storytelling can be methodologically validated.

The traditional use of films in the classroom is broader than the context of Visual Sociology as a methodology. Sutherland and Fetley (2013) discuss sociology through films where social reality on gender, race, social class etc. are taught in the classroom through films. In addition to analyzing identity, institutions, interactions and inequality implied in the storyline, in order to read a film sociologically, Sutherland and Fetley (2013) developing a sociological toolkit (multiple viewing, outlining themes, examining hegemonic versus critical reading of the films).

Films have explored qualitative techniques or used as the basis for content analysis (Messinger 2012; Saldana 2009; Tolich 1992). Video production has led to effective teaching strategies that generates an opportunity for active teaching that has a lasting effect beyond the classroom (Mangada and Florez-Morris 2007, Tetloff et al. 2014). Other scholars have offered film genres as a critical unit of analysis (Getz, 2016; Rubinson and Mueller 2016), and reiterated the importance of social construction of identities or ideological reflections in these works (Getz 2016)

Visual Sociology: Traditional Usage

Visual Sociology as a medium has become very popular in recent decades. Harper (1996) advocated for ‘Seeing Sociology’— a visual way of representing knowledge, different from words and numbers. Different

types of visual sociology projects include ethnography, documentary photography, photo elicitation, photovoice, etc. The International Visual Sociology Association works with sociologists, anthropologists, journalist, filmmakers among others committed to the same vision. As a medium, Visual Sociology dates back to the 1974 American Sociological Association's annual meetings where the possibilities of photography and sociology were explored. The subsequent formation of the association happened in 1980, and the formation of the journal, *Visual Studies*, after that. The Visual Sociology approach is interdisciplinary and in many ways novel (Harper 1996).

Harper (2012) considers Visual Sociology to be a compelling method to communicate human conditions. According to Harper (2012), the world that a visual narrative communicates is a different form than that which is communicated by words and language. Harper (2012) talks about an epistemological shift from the traditional focus of the sociology being based on words and numbers to also include images. Techniques like photo elicitation, photovoice, visual ethnography, and documentaries have evolved within the field.

Harper (2012) divides the domain of Visual Sociology into two types. In the first type, sociologists used photographs "data" or, rather, the unit of analyses. This approach involves data gathering and deductive logic in proving, disproving or modifying a theory. In the second approach, photographs generated from a cultural point of view, are analyzed for their manifest and latent assumptions. From a pedagogical perspective, Visual Sociology also encourages students to learn about documentary filmmaking by introducing them to the works of film makers from within and outside sociology, and then encourages them to make a film of their own (Tabachnick 2011).

I have traveled this path before by making three different documentaries in my roles as a graduate student and a teacher. However, I have not ventured into the fictional form until now. The evolution of Visual Sociology creates new parameters for exploring societies around us; but, at the same time, there are limits to this process. The creation and usage of a staged narrative to communicate the understanding of social groups is less common. Given some of the parameters of how Visual Sociology has been construed, can fictional films, with a deeply entrenched sociological motive and pedagogical agenda be treated as a Visual Sociology product? I do not think this is an easy question to answer.

A Note on About Anna and Ahana-- The Film

My film does not fit the convention of Visual Sociology for several reasons. First, it is a work of fiction rather than actual lived experiences or life histories. Second, in my film there is neither a direct research subject involved and nor their reflections. Instead, I explain the film's context to actors in my role as a creative director who first addressed domestic violence, and then its specific application to the immigrant community. Thus, the human agents in the film were actors who, now cognizant of the context, interpreted their characters accordingly on screen. Such theatrical interpretations and reflections also have implications for the classroom because students grasp the nuances in which domestic violence operates. Third, the reflective account comes from me as a teacher; but, in this case, it is not an original work, rather my adaptation of a century-old short story.

Yet there seems to be one aspect where fictional forms *can be* methodologically integrated—this is where reflexivity comes in. If we want to address reflexivity within the context of social science, then we focus on the researcher's consideration of data interpretations and the research process. However, at the philosophical level, reflexivity also suggests self-awareness (Reflexivity 2020).

The original text of *The Yellow Wallpaper* made me think about the broader applications of reflexivity. It also made me aware of my multiple roles as sociologist, teacher and immigrant, which rendered into the content of my screenplay. Thus, I extended the context and implications of the original text to the present and developed consequent characterizations. The active agents were also actors who, based on their internalized understanding of the characters, brought them to life. This was a form of commentary by South Asian actors about a social context and life they were partially aware of immigrants, and now got to reflect upon and interpret (while it might be harder to recognize nuanced form of domestic violence and seclusion, but most immigrants feel isolated moving to a new country). At the same time, they also dwelt upon and interpreted contexts and concepts of which they were less aware. I interpreted what they did as transmissible reflexivity which was part acquired and part original.

MY AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT: THE INSIDER-OUTSIDER PERSPECTIVE ON FILMMAKING²

The Insider Looking Out: Introducing Gilman to the World Outside Sociology

Although Charlotte Perkins Gilman might not be as popular as Charles Dickens, the work of female theoreticians has been harder to recognize within the discipline of sociology. The task for me was twofold: 1. introducing a female theoretician who lived 100+ years ago; and 2. establishing the circumstances of her narrative. For my first task, I introduced Gilman's work in the beginning of my film in the title credits. I also made a short documentary exploring the context of Gilman's work and used it as a teaser for a social media page about my film. For the second task, I used a set of the slides, towards the end of the film, to introduce the audience to the huge impact of domestic violence in the United States.

Introducing Gilman and her vision from 100 years back could/was leading to important questions including: "Really, this can happen?" "Can this happen now?" "Does it just happen to them?" "Can this happen to us?" These four hypothetical, but related, questions refer to queries on the existence and extent of domestic violence as so nuanced and deep, wondering if it can really happen in contemporary times, is even possible in South Asian communities (from South Asian point of view) or is something that just happens to South Asian communities (from the western perspective).

I based my observations on audience feedback, informal conversations with collaborators, and from showcasing the work to my students. Many acknowledge domestic violence; but, for a nonacademic audience, this seems to be a major digression from the context of family and marriage into which individuals are socialized. Given when Perkins wrote, others might not see the contemporary relevance of her work. In most cultures across the globe, where patriarchy is celebrated and a stigma exists against dissolution of a marriage, acknowledging domestic abuse is not spontaneous (although it varies contextually and cannot be generalized). Similarly, non-South Asian audiences must be educated in not limiting or associating certain "kinds" of domestic violence as prevalent only among "other" (non-western) cultures.

Presenting the Immigrant Context of Domestic Violence to Non-South Asians

Gilman's text was written for a white, homogeneous audience. I adapted the story for a contemporary immigrant context. Doing this comes with initial challenges. Even prior to writing the screenplay and producing the work for an engaged audience, my academic endeavor started with writing a grant that had a regional focus. I had to validate how befitting a culturally-driven media artifact might be for this geographical locale. Doing this necessitated supporting the broader social implications of a largely shifting socioeconomic space which, in addition to being a host for established immigrant communities over the years (Portuguese, Italian and Cape Verdean in historic context, Latin American in more recent times), also experienced a steady increase in South Asian immigration. Although it was still not sizable, the influx of South Asians grew with upswings in banking and information technology; thus, validating this geographical space as socially volatile for South Asians, I rationalized Anna and Ahana as a film that might also be relevant to the experiences of other immigrant communities. I think my film worked in this regard.

When I explained the context of *The Yellow Wallpaper* and then *Anna and Ahana* to my students, I stated a very careful disclaimer: Domestic violence is universal and impacts women in every culture. Given the context of my screenplay and focus on Asians, the phenomenon of domestic violence should not be construed as an occurrence only among "others" —i.e., people whose lives are different /peripheral to the mainstream. My effort was not that straightforward. Through the screenplay, I introduced an urban, educated woman and explained that her underlying constraint might not strike somebody as obvious. At the same time, one woman's vulnerabilities, if extended to many others, might lead to stereotyping which I tried very hard to avoid. However, there is a limit to which avoiding stereotypes can be achieved through visual storytelling (unless questions are raised after each screening, the unspoken assumptions cannot be immediately debunked).

Introducing the Immigrant Context of Domestic Violence among South Asians in the U. S. and in Their Country of Origin

There are dual opportunities for this kind of work. One is the possibility of introducing my work to South Asians in the United States. The other is showing my film to South Asians in South Asia. In the first, I am

²The content of my autoethnographic account is in script font to distinguish it from the other sections of this paper and to render it journal-like in appearance.

referring to a huge diaspora of those who come from India, Bangladesh or Pakistan. As I mentioned earlier, and as also documented in literature (Ho 1990; Kapur et al. 2017; Kibria 1990; Fran and Des Jardins 2000), given the cultural assumptions associated with marriage, family, sacrifice, value systems, etc., the narrative of Anna and Ahana is more likely to be seen as an exception in family life, rather than the rule. While the screenings followed by the producer's Q&A facilitate explaining the theme in greater detail, not all venues or sessions would provide adequate opportunities for such reflection. Thus, some ideas might be lost in translation.

Audience receptivity can also vary. For example, while showcasing my film in a regular film festival where different kinds of content are presented, sometimes a somber theme might not resonate well. Although showing my film in an academic setting might work better, time limits of classes and conference presentations can be a hindrance. The third avenue is to target communities and partner with organizations that work with domestic violence survivors. This endeavor is in progress.

The second possibility comprises of showcasing the work in South Asia. In my effort of doing at least one press show--what I have seen is the local media is more interested to see whether any known stars are associated with the cast, the possibility of music release, or any other set news hook. While the fact that nonresident Indians are making films on South Asia diaspora and returning to their countries of origin for screening might be a news seller, the horrors of immigration that can impact young women aspiring to come to the United States through marriage-- might not be the journalistic focus of a formal screening.

The Outsider Looking In: Are The Yellow Wallpaper and Anna and Ahana Malleable to a South Asian Context?

It is important to remember that Charlotte Perkins Gilman was not writing about me or where I come from. She was predominantly writing about a homogeneous context (thus the context of immigrant communities from a 100 years later is literally seven degrees of separation). Given the very western origination of the text what is my luck that this adaptation will actually resonate with fellow academicians, fellow film makers? I embarked on this uncertainty of whether this would ever be seen as a very legitimate adaptation of the work or even an accurate one--am I trying to include narratives of peripheral existence within a monolithic frame of understanding? Will Anna and Ahana be evaluated

as a credible adaptation? Will it even be construed as a unique treatment specifically when so many different adaptations existed?

An Emergent Visual Form?

I am trying to introduce a new form of Visual Sociology through fictional storytelling. This is not a kind that has been explored before-- as I mentioned earlier while documentaries, visual ethnographies are more organic and integral to Visual Sociology, looking at reflexivity of screen writers, directors, producers and actors associated with the fictional form is a less utilized method.

So how about creating a happy middle ground based on the know-how of using films in the classroom as an effective pedagogical medium, and making a film based on some of the fundamental assumptions of Visual Sociology? What I propose includes a method based on an important assumption of Visual Sociology -- reflexivity. The film Anna and Ahana is definitely based on a process of self-awareness which prompted me to dwell on a work which is 100 years old. Second, when presented with the script and the original context, every actor thought through the process and brought their own interpretation to the work. All of them were non-sociologists who combined their zeal for acting with a liking for the subject. Furthermore, in traditional Visual Sociology as well as in using films in the classroom-- the implications of film making does not just end with the production and a premiere--it extends beyond the classroom and fulfils the active learning criterion which authors (Mangada and Florez-Morris 2007; Fetloff et al 2014) iterate. The work was created for pedagogical purposes and can also be summarized as what Sutherland and Fetley (2013) would describe as sociology through films--in this context, it includes understanding nuanced implications of immigration and domestic violence from a minority perspective.

So the question remains: Will Anna and Ahana, although based on a fictional story, be seen as a legitimate method to be explored further. I can envision two possible outcomes. First, aside the formal context of Visual Sociology, Anna and Ahana might be recognized as a pedagogical product that can be introduced in the classroom along with traditional films. The second, more optimistic, possibility is finding a niche in Visual Sociology for making and using fictional films. Just imagine the stories future filmmaking sociologists can create when thinking about penning accounts of different cultures and contexts.

Standards for Laurels

In terms of filmmaking-- the production had several limitations (including budget, recruiting local actors, and utilizing accessible locations). I believe that everybody associated with the production and post-production team tried to do their best. However, in the end, it is not earnestness that is rewarded but the quality of a product, the standards of which are set already. Screening and evaluation is subjective and a largely divided world--where to market your film in terms of festivals did not appear crystal clear (more so because a pandemic right after postproduction would make networking in festivals even harder). The pandemic delayed my entry into the grid of existing or emergent film makers. I considered submitting the film in festivals in the American and South Asian parlance as well as spaces outside of these two contexts. Receptivity of this kind of work is driven by content and technology. Can it also be driven by culture? (although the world of global filmmaking and virtual submission over the years has shrunk the universe of films and the standards upheld).

Madam Producer: Filmmaking and the Fictional Form

This domain of discussion is one of the important pieces of my discourse. First, as in many other professions, the world of filmmaking is a male-dominated enterprise where the visibility of women as filmmakers or their struggles are manifold (Hankin 2007; Slide 2014; Smith, Pieper and Choueiti 2013). There are many fewer female directors than male directors. The existence of glass ceiling is not new (Hankin 2007; Slide 2014; Smith, Pieper and Choueiti 2013). For me, in a broader context, this means working as a female minority filmmaker within a host culture in which I have not grown up. My intersectional experiences consist of gender, race, ethnicity as well as my immigrant status.

For this film I wrote the screenplay, was its creative director and the producer, the person who assembled the funds. In the more immediate context of making the film, my particular status, or perhaps limitation, is that I have not directed a fictional film before, had no collaborators beyond whom I had reached out to at that point, and I came to the project with very little film-making experience. Thus, began my painful process of personal separation from the screenplay I wrote and developing trust in the execution process of the collaborators. This caused me moments of anxiety, loss, and a sense of

perceived helplessness. The good news is that my fears lessened when I saw the film actualize.

Most of the work I did was in the field of documentaries. The whole project--applying for a grant, writing a screenplay, recruiting the team, getting the production started, completed, then taking it to places--seemed like an ambitious plan. Such mammoth task and its partial realization also come with its own peculiarities. Overall, the producer since not an actor, director or cinematographer somewhat to me seemed to be an outsider in the shooting process. This is ironic, given the overall ownership that producers have with products that come out of their portfolios, beginning long before the production process and continuing well beyond the completion of post productions.

My initial take was that, since I have conceived the project and was executing it, access seemed inevitable. Much to my surprise that was not the case. There were different protocols of the shooting process that I had to learn. Furthermore, because of budget constraints, I could only pay the passionate, talented, hard-working community actors, director and other production personnel a very modest honorarium that was very little in comparison to industry standards. In reality, I was more of a figurative producer without the conventional financial might. Therefore, I am very thankful for the help I received without which the film would not have been completed. In exchange, I tried to take care of everyone through nurturing and caregiving. During this engagement in the production process, the distinction associated with writing the screenplay, the sociologist's endeavors loses its partial essence (until the screenings and film festival selections, when the hard work of creative personnel finally gets its recognition).

CONCLUSION

In the end, I think I did justice to Gilman's original work—not by virtue of the fact that I am claiming to have made a stellar film with my associates. I think audiovisual content seems to be having its own moment of recognition irrespective of size or stature of the work (through questions asked, discussions that follow or modest accolades/recognition). I also sense that my classroom explanation of domestic violence among immigrant communities will be even more impactful when I show established films like *Provoked* (Internet Movie Data Base 2020) and now the locally shot *Anna and Ahana*.

This experienced a unique process of self-realization through which I discovered the satisfaction of writing

and executing screenplays. This helped me realize that raising funds and seeking to actualize one's work, as well as directing it, were realistic goals that I could pursue. This process also made me hungry for more knowledge and wanting to hunt for timeless works that are waiting to be told *or* told in a different way.

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