

## *A so-called free woman*

***Do women from Pakistan, India, Romania and Russian have anything in common with Western women, that choose themselves whom to have sex with and whether to postpone the question of motherhood until they are standing at the threshold of menopause? Jennifer Fox poses these questions to women, among them herself, from 17 different countries in a six hour long autobiographical documentary that will be shown on Danish television from tomorrow.***

If Jennifer Fox could have chosen for herself when she was a child, she would have been a boy. Her pilot father was the role model she most admired. Her mother's task as child rearer to five children completely disinterested her.

"Until I was in my forties I was fixated on men as role models despite the fact that I had many more female friends. I could not appreciate them as highly as I did men, even though I was aware that my female friends were more important to me than the men in my life. This paradox that was the impetus for making this film".

Six years and 1600 hours of film from 17 different countries later, Jennifer Fox's film is finished. She would have liked the series/film to be 10 or 15 segments long, but instead, it is "only" six, which DR 2 will be sending in the coming week. These are six hours where Jennifer Fox is the autobiographical protagonist, but where she also hands the camera to women (as well as to a few men) of all ages and from many different countries to go in-depth about what it really means to be a woman in this day and age. There is no one answer to this question. The film titled "Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman" is quite complex and poses just as many questions as it answers. Jennifer Fox would have liked to have seen it become even more cohesive.

"Depth is what interests me. I am not interested in superficial explanations. The film is a narrative on the complexity of our lives as women. A story about the different issues women battle with. I think it is a pretty controversial point of view, but for me what is most important is that there exists a common thread/bond between women that live under more difficult conditions and we women who live so-called free lives. Women in Pakistan possess less freedom than us, but we do share a common thread/bond. This is an important political message for me. Viewers may not experience the film as political, at least not in the first few segments, but a political consciousness develops as the story does.

*Can you elaborate on what that common thread/bond encompasses?*

Throughout our lives, both in this day and age and historically, it all comes down to sexual control. Period. Only fairly recently have Western women gained some power over their own bodies. Historically, one did not engage in women's rights until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Before that time women were the property of men, who used our bodies to produce children for them. In many countries women still struggle with the fact that men control and exploit their sexuality. We still have to struggle in our culture, just not to the same degree as in some other cultures. We are still afraid to freely walk around as women. Some girls are still raised to believe that sexual pleasure is forbidden. Sexual violence and coercion occur in all cultures, also the more liberal.

*Do you believe it is still thought of as strange if a woman opts out of motherhood?*

“Yes, my personal journey throughout this film is among other things about coming to terms with the fact that if I don’t become a mother, I can still enjoy being a woman. It took me the whole journey to see that my life is good enough, and to accept my mother as a role model.”

### ***Late adulthood***

‘Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman’ has by some American critics been called a real life answer to “Sex and the City” because of the films/series tone, and because of the role Jennifer plays in it. There is crying, laughter, yelling, love and regret going on for full force, and Jennifer Fox is not afraid to show her embarrassing moments of loosing face.

At the start of the film she has two boyfriends, one who’s face is not revealed: This man is already married in his native country of South Africa. Jennifer Fox is his lover, something her other boyfriend, Patrick from Switzerland is quite aware of, and is smart enough to accept so that she does not leave him.

Confused? That is exactly the diagnosis one could give Jennifer Fox, as well as many other western women. At the start of the film the instructor at 42 years of age discovers that she actually might want to have a child. Something she has not previously given serious consideration. At the same time her circle of girlfriends is confronted with serious illnesses such as cervical cancer and a brain tumor. Jennifer can see her menopause ahead, but she still, in many ways, lives as though she were 22. For years she has been putting off becoming a mature woman.

One might think the now 47 year old, curly black haired Jennifer Fox with her impulsive gesticulations, petite figure and intense dark brown gaze is at least ten years younger. But don’t mention it to her, such easy flattery has no affect.

“I have put off many things that women in their twenties make up their minds about. I am emotionally immature! That’s why a lot of women in their twenties identify with the film. Should I stay in a relationship? Should I become a mother? These are questions you are expected to ask yourself in your twenties. However, many contemporary women wait a long time to ask themselves these questions.”

*So we need to live to about 170 years old to have time to learn from our experiences?*

“Ha! I don’t want to live that long. But that will probably become necessary.”

*What is your reaction to critics’ comparing your film to a soap opera?*

“Each episode ends with a cliff hanger, and the opening of each episode has taken its structure from soap operas. Like in a soap, there are many characters in my film. So I am fine with that. As a film director I am very interested in art, but I am also very interested in an audience. I don’t want to make movies for an audience of five people, I want to make movies for five million. I also want my political message to be widely understood. I want to tell stories that cross over cultural boundaries, and make films that possess a universal language.

*But at the same time it is important for you that they have depth, and are not superficial?*

“My films are all very different. With this film I knew that if we stayed too much with the problems and the dark moods, we would lose too many viewers. My editor, Niels, was also very aware of this, so we created a balance between lightness and solemnity in the film. This took place mainly in the editing phase with Niels. My tendency is to have a dark disposition. Depressive. We had to move away from that. We needed to create a lighter articulation. Because, even though the film is autobiographical, I am at the same time a vehicle representing women’s contemporary lives. If you get tired of looking at me, the film does not work. It works precisely because there are so many characters in it. It would make me sick if I were to watch an hour long film of myself. When all the stories are woven together, each person becomes a symbol of a greater story.

### ***Rather leave than be left***

There were many fights among the adults in Jennifer Fox’s childhood. She had to save herself in many ways from being hurt badly both physically and psychologically. When she talks about it she turns her face upwards to avoid letting a tear fall.

Her current vulnerability is also tied to something else. Some people have a hard time getting to work. Jennifer Fox is the opposite; she has a hard time letting go of work. As the evenings, weekends, and vacations pass by, she is either making films, talking about films, teaching film, or updating her website. It is a work pattern her boyfriend is dissatisfied with: “Not because he is against my working, and he is not trying to be controlling. He knows, and I know that it has gotten out of hand. I really need a break. My body needs it. What is difficult about this is that due to my past, I always have one foot out the door when I am quarreling with a partner. It’s not something I am proud of”.

*In contrast to myself, you have no children, but do you still have the contemporary woman’s bad conscience about neither looking after your work or your relationship to your satisfaction?*

“Always. And right now the problem is that I agree with him. I am 48 years old and I am more aware of my age than I have been before: I notice my body says stop earlier than it used to. There are so many things I would like to do, and what have I managed to accomplish so far?

*Like when I am saddened by the thought that I did not become a gardener?*

“Yes! I love nature and horses, and I have always dreamed of living on a farm. But will I ever lay my eyes on another horse ever again? I live in Manhattan, and travel from airport to airport, and the rest of the time I spend in an editing room.”

*But you are still very ambitious about your work. Some people have a tendency to become a little lazy with age?*

“I think it is a form of self defense on my part. If I am not ambitious I feel I am going to die. In fact, as I get older, I feel the demands become greater to attain the feeling of being alive. I have it only when I am doing something I haven’t done before. I have to be a little on the leading edge of everything, so I will always be interested in the newest technologies and new cultural phenomenon. If I don’t change along with our culture, I will become an elephant dying in a closet. Some artists are the opposite. They have a form they repeat. They are well known and respected for that precise form. That is not my way of working”

*Has anyone ever told you that your life would be easier if you did not worry so much?*

Jennifer laughs loudly, and says:

“Yes, All the time”.

**Blue Book: Jennifer Fox**

**Born:** 1960

**American Film director**, cinematographer, producer and teacher with 25 years of experience making documentary films.

**Has received** several awards for her films including Best Documentary at the Sundance Film Festival for 'Beirut: The Last Home Movie' and a television award for the show 'An American Love Story'.

**Her current** film 'Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman' was received enthusiastically by many American critics when it had its premiere in New York a month ago.

**Owner** of the production company Zohe Film Productions.