



# Flying

*confessions  
of a free woman*

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

**FLYING: CONFESSIONS OF FREE WOMAN** is a six-part series that takes a personal experimental approach to female life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The series narratively and visually interweaves aspects of filmmaker Jennifer Fox's own life over three years – from 42 to 45 - with the lives of diverse and courageous women from around the globe. In ways that are both humorous and profound, the film searches for new models of femaleness, examining changing gender roles and the efforts of women everywhere to comprehend and define for themselves what it means to be a woman in these times. What are the struggles of women in this era of new sexual and economic freedoms, shifting gender relations, a rise in religious fundamentalism, and AIDS? What have been their journeys to self-definition and self-expression? Are they winning or losing in their own eyes? Have things really changed between men and women? And is there a new model of the female that we can now begin to define?

Never before in our collective human history have so many women had such freedom to construct a life of their own creation. Yet old structures and realities still haunt us; many women are looking for new role models, but finding them difficult to identify for lack of precedent and because even today women so often remain the invisible, silent class. While social constructs isolate us into subgroups, many women of all ages, classes, and cultures around the world express surprisingly similar concerns and struggles. From South Africa to California, from Sweden to India, the film creates a cross-cultural story about common experiences of modern female life on issues such as love, socialization, marriage, work, childrearing, aging, violence, spirituality, death, politics.

The series takes as a hypothesis that owning and controlling one's own sexuality is the center of a woman's power and self. It also hypothesizes that the inverse is true: if a woman does not control the emotional and sexual life of her own body, she cannot be fully empowered. With all the advances that women have made for themselves, patriarchal systems still exist across the globe. Rarely is a woman fully in control of her own body or her own fate. Often and in some cultures, the subjugation is overt—female genital mutilation, the veil, lack of access to abortion, dowry, and rape as a tool of warfare. Just as often it is insidious—social condemnation of women who take joy in their sexuality, harassment defended as “harmless” flirtation, legislation prohibiting sexual education in schools and the consequences of the



subsequent lack of knowledge, the equation of “female” or “feminine” with weak, incompetent or emotionally volatile.

The reality is that the dangers and obstacles women face in their journey to womanhood transcend most boundaries. For women from European capitals to Saharan villages-- regardless of socio-economic status, class, race, nationality or religion--claiming one's sexuality and pleasure is a hard-fought, silent battle from childhood into old age. It requires confronting the internal and external mores placed on our pleasure by nearly every religious, societal and family system that exists. It also requires dealing with the constant threat and reality of physical violence, including domestic violence, sexual abuse and sexual disease. The ownership of one's own sexuality is rarely discussed in the home, in public forums or in the media, leaving women and girls with little information and few choices. How can girls and women safely find their way?

The filmmaker postulates that much of what makes up the lives of modern women often goes unnamed, unacknowledged, and unspoken. There is a secret world women move in. Wherever they go, there is a code that we speak, a membership we belong to by mere existence. Silently, effortlessly, and when no one is looking we slip into "woman-speak," the language of the marginalized, encoded since our birth. This film will attempt to enter into this secret world of women's language, relationships, survival techniques and lives, in the hopes of charting a truer picture of modern female life and sharing that with women and men across the globe. To examine these complex threads of female life requires a new filmmaking methodology that will make visible the hidden and mirror some of the new dynamics women are creating in their lives.

**FLYING** takes an experimental narrative approach, employing new innovative techniques that reflect the interactions unique to women. Subjects explore a new way of expression by “**passing the camera**” between the so-called filmmaker and the so-called film subject during the filmed conversations. This methodology directly addresses the imbalance of power that so many documentarians struggle with, as famously posited by Susan Sontag in *On Photography*: “To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge -- and, therefore, like power.” By passing the camera, the traditional idea of the interview is dropped as roles are rotated at all times to mirror the relationship that women have with each other and our unique, circular way of figuring out our lives through sharing and dialogue. The camera becomes a tool that deepens conversation and intimacy between filmmaker and subject – rather than a tool of separation, objectification and power. Boundaries are broken; the subject becomes both participant and creator.

This new technique is employed around the world in search of the meaning of modern female life. The camera is “passed” with other women (and men) while in motion on planes, trains, cars; inside their homes, in intimate environments such as bedrooms or kitchens; or in public, in places such as bars or restaurants or in the park. These conversations are married to scenes of



the selected women in the spaces where they feel they "put their lives together" and make themselves whole. Spaces such as their workplace – midwife, teacher, designer, doctor, manager, waitress, musician, cleaner, writer, therapist, filmmaker; or in their hobbies, such as dance, sculpting, running, or listening to music; or in their relationships with their partners, their children, or their dogs. Often conversations take place around food – preparing food, and eating food – where the best talks usually take place.

While it is impossible to be comprehensive in the representation of women, Fox has interviewed and built relationships with women representing a diverse range of class, race, nationality, religion, orientation, and age. Fox has invested the time necessary to build trust, and the intimacy the film captures reflects carefully nurtured relationships. She has been traveling widely, returning multiple times to countries to be with women as their stories unfold, as a true confidante. For example, during the past three years, Fox has made countless trips to South Africa, where she has created lifelong friendships with women who were strangers before the start of this production. Fox has visited diverse parts of the USA, Britain, France, Finland, Lapland, Bosnia, India, Russia, Argentina, Pakistan, Venezuela, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, South Africa, and Cambodia.

Fox's travels have taken her around the world and into the lives of women who, with no map or known destination, are testing boundaries and forging new spaces for themselves. Fox is on her own personal journey to figure out how she fits into the world as a single, working, sexual, childless woman. Along the way, she is also trying to figure out whether she wants children, confronting the possibility that she has waited too long to conceive, and grappling with whether to adopt. Hidden behind her white, middle class American background, Fox shares many of the struggles of women around the world that allow her to connect with the women she meets: she has had to work hard to overcome the traditional values with which she grew up and to navigate the social mores imposed on all women. She herself was sexually abused as a young teenager, was almost raped later in life. Her quest will provide a narrative thread through the stories of other women she meets.

All of the women have been filmed in an attempt to answer the intense narrative question: What does it mean to be free? How are we contesting the prescriptions of the status quo, consciously or unconsciously, out of necessity or out of desire? How are we reinventing both ourselves and the very idea of being a woman? The series circles back and forth between the filmmaker's story and the stories of other women. This theme of "passing back and forth" and its circular metaphor will permeate the film and the images. The series is a combination of hand-held roving images, intense conversations, visual food orgies, intimate group conversations, and changing landscapes as the filmmaker roams the world and meets up with various women. Together, filmmaker and participants will discuss and share the struggles and stories of modern life in pursuit of some definition of this strange new world.



By examining the myriad paths available to women today, the obstacles that still exist, and the consequences of our choices, viewers are challenged to reexamine their own paths and choices. This experimental and experiential drama will be a collective search to make sense of being a woman in the modern world.