

<b>Institution: University of Gloucestershire</b>		
<b>Unit of Assessment: 34</b>		
<b>Title of case study: Interrogating Structural Inequalities in Documentary Film Production</b>		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 1/2/2017 to 31/12/2020</b>		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Lindsey Dryden	Lecturer in Film Production	1/2/17 to date
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2018-2020</b>		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N</b>		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>This case study focuses on the societal and professional impacts of <i>Trans in America</i>, an Emmy-winning documentary series produced by Lindsey Dryden in 2018 for the <i>American Civil Liberties Union</i>. Dryden used this project to continue her development of film production methodologies that interrogate structural inequalities in documentary and attempt to facilitate and advocate equitable, powerful activist filmmaking. <i>Trans in America</i> won an Emmy in 2019 and has achieved over 4 million views to date. It also acted as an effective platform for activism by and in support of trans communities. The series also facilitated further activist and advocacy projects by participants and members of the production team alike.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Dryden's research focuses on structural inequalities in the film production process, on methodologies for engendering more inclusive representation on-screen and behind the camera, and on embodiment, sexuality, and the so-called 'deviant body' in visual culture. She explores how society treats people with rebellious and non-conforming bodily experiences, and how we might be active in representing ourselves. With <i>Trans in America</i> [R1], she used her role as producer to develop a representational production process model, which strove to reflect and respect the participants' identities and lived experience as queer, LGBTQ+, trans people and/or black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC).</p> <p>Dryden is an acclaimed producer and director with both professional and research interests in filmmaking led by women, LGBTQ+ people and people with unconventional experiences of the body. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) commissioned her to produce <i>Trans in America</i> [R1].</p> <p>Structural inequalities in the film and TV industry mean that many identities are not represented at senior editorial decision-making levels. As an experienced queer and disabled filmmaker, Dryden has chosen to focus her work on amplifying and nurturing emerging directors who are typically women and/or non-binary and/or LGBTQ+ and/or D/deaf or disabled and/or BIPOC. Dryden strives to create production models that challenge and redress structural inequalities. With <i>Trans in America</i>, this involved the following elements:</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing an active mentoring role to new directors and other team members. This required a deep engagement with two of the three commissioned film directors on narrative development, documentary production strategies and shoot prep.</li> </ul>		

- Hiring LGBTQ+, trans and BIPOC directors, and hiring team members for both above and below the line roles who were primarily LGBTQ+ and/or BIPOC. Consequently, the majority of the team brought lived experience of the film's topics and environments, and were directly affected by the series' storylines.
- Hiring an Advisory Board for each film comprising transgender artists, advocates, parents and storytellers who were empowered to discuss, challenge and change any problematic aspects of the films, and consulted on issues of particular sensitivity to their community. The board was empowered by meaningful editorial sign-off on the films, while the ACLU retained final cut.
- Developing a bespoke contract for the three main contributors and directors, which assigned them a share of any future monies won at film awards etc. Dryden collaborated with Cardozo's Indie Film Clinic on this contracting, which directly challenged received wisdom regarding the ethics of payment to documentary participants. It was important not to expect already-marginalised film contributors to donate their time freely while all other team members were paid.

The historic misrepresentation of trans stories in media, and the prevalence of trans stories inaccurately told by cisgender filmmakers, meant that the ACLU's transgender Executive Producer and the representative Advisory Board were crucial to the editorial decision-making process of *Trans in America*, and to ensuring that accurate and sensitive representation was ensured at each stage of the process. Some examples follow:

- Kai's family used her 'deadname' during filming when discussing her childhood before transition (*Texas Strong*). The use of deadnames by cisgender parents of trans children is discouraged by trans communities and, as a 7-year old child, Kai was not able to give fully informed consent. The Advisory Board recommended excluding Kai's deadname from the film; the film team followed that advice, which was supported by Kai's family.
- Historically broadcasters have prohibited payment to documentary participants, arguing that it influences the 'truth' of their contribution. Dryden and the ACLU leadership agreed that challenging that received wisdom was an important equity practice when filmmaking with marginalised communities (not least because they are often made economically vulnerable by discrimination) and after the films were completed, the ACLU paid honoraria to the three film participants.
- In *Chicago Love*, the Advisory Board advised on how to sensitively edit for language, in a scene in which the film participant's family discussed how she was attacked and defended herself, and cis-normative language was used. The scene was then edited accordingly to both retain its reality and convey sensitivity.
- For *Texas Strong* in a scene about a child wanting to host a sleepover, the Advisory Board offered guidance on how to balance the feelings of shame that it brought up (particularly for trans viewers) with the reality of this debate for the families of trans children; it was edited accordingly.

The research process is evident in the films themselves and was further disseminated at film festival panels including SXSW 2019 [R2] and Sheffield Doc/Fest 2020 [R3].

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[R1] *Trans in America*, ACLU, 2018 (<https://www.aclu.org/issues/lgbt-rights/transgender-rights/trans-america>)

[R2] SXSW 2019 panel, *Trans In America: An Indie and Advocacy Partnership*' Speakers: Cary Cronenwett, Daresha Kyi, Molly Kaplan and Lindsey Dryden. (4/3/2019) <https://schedule.sxsw.com/2019/events/PP93062> and <https://schedule.sxsw.com/2019/films/2010294>

[R3] Sheffield Doc/Fest 2020 virtual panel, *Keeping it Real: Towards a Nonfiction Film Policy for the UK* (26/6/2020) <https://realscreen.com/2020/07/08/sheffield-20-making-radical-changes-to-the-uk-doc-sector/>

#### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

*Trans in America* was released in October 2018 and reached a large global audience, achieved critical acclaim, prompted widespread public debate across the US (especially in environments traditionally hostile to trans rights) and facilitated further film production/industry projects that develop the same representative and inclusive principles.

##### Reach of Trans in America

*Texas Strong* alone received over 3.9 million views via Conde Nast Entertainment platform, 'them,' and You Tube. 'them' has 170,000 subscribers and the series has additionally attracted 35,000 comments from viewers on YouTube from viewers and over 4 million views in total. [a]

The critical reception [b] of *Trans in America* included:

- Winning News and Documentary Emmy Award in 2019 for *Texas Strong* for 'Outstanding Short Documentary'
- Winning 'Best Video Documentary: Longform' and the 'People's Voice' winner in the same category, in the 23rd Annual Webby Awards in 2019.

The Supervising Producer of *Trans in America* for Conde Naste Entertainment states:

'These films were some of the most powerful parts of our programming that year, because in a world where viral digital content is typically favored over narrative and substance, this project managed to find the audience sweet spot, delivering virality with heart and an important educational moment for most. To date, 'Trans In America: Texas Strong' is the second most-viewed film on Conde Naste's 'them' platform. The films enabled us to continue down the path of meaningful content creation, and them was the only brand company-wide that won an Emmy in 2018, due to this partnership.' [c]

##### Contributions to Public Debate and Activism on Trans Rights

*Trans in America* represented the lived experiences and sensitivities of trans communities accurately whilst appealing to viewers with limited experience and understanding. As the Multimedia Director of the American Civil Liberties Union stated in January 2021:

'As we geared up to make the series, we had the awareness that impact filmmaking relies on storytelling to drive social change. But what if we went one step further? What if driving that change and upending injustices started with the filmmaking process? With "Trans in America," the series was directed by LGBTQ+ filmmakers, produced by a majority-LGBTQ+ production team in consultation with an advisory panel of trans rights experts, and funded by the ACLU.

'These films were one of the most powerful parts of our work in 2018 / 2019 because they were a documented case where people reported questioning previously held beliefs about transgender people. People reported in comments and in subsequent campaigns of support for people in the films that they has been unaware of the daily struggles faced by trans people, or supportive of anti-trans legislation, until seeing the films.

'These films helped us to develop a road map for how to do future productions and measure their success.' [d]

A particularly valuable outcome was the level of positive media comment in the US in support trans rights that the themes of *Trans in America* generated, including family-oriented lifestyle magazines such as Good Housekeeping Magazine as well as local media that serves a wide community, particularly across Texas and within Chicago [e]. Two of the participants, Kai Shappley (*Texas Strong*) and Eisha Love (*Chicago Love*) have also used the series to support their own activist activities.

Kai and her mother Kimberley developed a national profile as respected voices in debates, appearing equally at LGBTQ+ events and in settings that do not normally welcome diversity. On 9/4/2019, Kai and Kimberly testified in US Congress on behalf of the Equality Act, a federal bill updating the Civil Rights Act (1964) to grant LGBTQ+ people protections [g]. During the visit they achieved an unscheduled meeting with Republican whip and Congressman for their district, Pete Olson, who is an active campaigner *against* trans rights. As a report in *Tribeza* magazine recounts:

‘Kai was running through the halls and caught the attention of Texas Representative Pete Olson, who was against the bill. “He saw her and was like, “Hey, pretty girl. Where are you from?”” says Kimberly. “Kai said Texas. And he goes, ‘Oh, my gosh, my constituents! Come on in my office.’ He didn’t know who we were, but his staffers did. They were trying to make him stop. But he didn’t pick up on it. He was playing and taking selfies with Kai.’ (*Tribeza*, December 2019) [e]

Eisha Love (*Chicago Love*) became prominent in debates about the treatment of incarcerated transgender people and those with a criminal conviction. For example, in 2019 she participated in a lawsuit against the State of Illinois with seven other trans women from the Chicago area, receiving high profile media coverage, including:

‘In a telephone interview, she (Eisha Love) said her government-issued identification bears the male name given to her at birth, and she often feels unsafe when presenting it at public places like nightclubs because it singles her out as transgender. She also has faced discrimination on numerous occasions after it was discovered she was transgender, including once when a public transportation employee allegedly denied her disability transit benefits, according to the lawsuit.

“As trans women, this is something we face on a daily basis,” Love said, adding that a legal name change would be the final step in her...transition. “This is going to complete my whole life. I can be Eisha Love and feel confident in my skin. I feel like I can’t be Eisha Love until I can be her legally.” (*Chicago Tribune*, 1/5/2019) [e]

### **Inclusive film production and industry initiatives**

Dryden’s contribution to the development of inclusive film production techniques through *Trans in America* had further impact on the career trajectories of the LGBTQ+ production team.

Three notable examples follow:

- Daresha Kyi, director of *Texas Strong*, is making a feature length documentary about trans children rejected by their families (*Mama Bears*). [h]
- Kai Shappley made her acting debut in Netflix series, *Babysitter’s Club*, available from July 2020 [i]
- Cary Cronenwett, director of *Chicago Love*, is making a feature length documentary about Eisha Love and her journey as a plaintiff in a lawsuit against the State of Illinois that bans felons from changing their names.

Dryden’s own advocacy work continues as a founder member of FWD-Doc, which works to increase the visibility of, support for, and direct access to opportunities, networks, and employment for D/deaf and disabled filmmakers. Dryden’s appearance at the Sheffield Doc/Fest inclusivity panel (June 2020) is one example of her work in this context [R3].

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[a] *Viewing figures on You Tube and subscriber numbers for them:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=culkLNsRtas>

[b] Links to awards:

News & Documentary Emmy Awards 2019, Winner - Short Documentary: Texas Strong

<https://www.them.us/story/trans-in-america-texas-strong>

The Webby Awards 2019, Webby Winner and People's Voice Winner, Documentary – Longform: Texas Strong

<https://winners.webbyawards.com/2019/video/general-video/documentary-longform/79073/trans-in-america-texas-strong>

[c] Testimonial from Christopher Klimovski, the Supervising Producer of Trans in America for *them* (January 2021)

[d] Testimonial from Molly Kaplan, Multimedia Director the Multimedia Director, ACLU (January 2021)

[e] Selected media coverage for Trans in America and its participants

[f] Glen Maxley activism award <https://www.equalitytexas.org/for-immediate-release-equality-texas-celebrates-our-30th-anniversary-by-honoring-our-strongest-advocates-and-legislative-champions-and-celebrating-30-years-of-protecting-lgbtq-texans/>

[g] Kai and Kimberley Shappeley - testimony to US congress (9/4/2019)

<https://edlabor.house.gov/imo/media/doc/ShappeleyTestimony040919.pdf>

[h] Mama Bears <https://www.dareshakyi.com/mamabears>

[i] Babysitter's Club, Netflix (July 2020)

<https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/81005407>

<https://preview.houstonchronicle.com/movies-tv/trans-girl-kai-shappeley-from-pearland-stars-in-15394207>