

ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTARIES THAT REACH ACROSS THE AISLE:
PROPOSED METHODS ON HOW TO DEMONSTRATE DIVERSE
VALUES IN DOCUMENTARY FILM IN ORDER TO ENGAGE A
WIDER AUDIENCE

by

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ABSTRACT

Documentary film has achieved an acclaimed status as an effective form of communication, one that can serve as an advocate for environmental issues. Documentaries intending to engage wider audiences and break down polarized issues can employ specific strategies that have proven to create subsequent positive impact. Comparing *Before The Flood*, *Gasland*, and *Last Call for The Bayou*, I analyze strategies in each film that were either effective or ineffective in helping to resolve environmental issues and polarization. The Cultural Cognition Project suggests audiences are more willing to incorporate differing views when perspectives are presented in a way that allows them to grow identity rather than challenging and demonizing firmly held values. I apply the identified techniques to shape my creative process of constructing my film, “The Gilded Trap,” with the goal of presenting issues pertaining to climate change from a new angle, thus engaging a wider audience, and increasing cultural cognition regarding the negative impacts of climate change in New England.

INTRODUCTION

Documentary film is a tool often used in attempts to raise awareness about a host of environmental issues, from illegal animal trafficking to coral bleaching to agricultural practices. The form challenges the audience to explore “what they know, how they know it, and what more they want to learn” (Bernard 3). Documentaries about climate change in particular have become increasingly popular since 2006 when *An Inconvenient Truth*, arguably the first climate-change-centered documentary was released. Political and public action to address climate change, however, has not grown in parallel with the scientific consensus and concern (Bieniek-Tobasco 1-18). Thus, with a growing number of environmental documentaries being released, this begs the question of whether the methods employed in environmental documentaries are best suited for engaging the public in concern and taking action over climate change and environmental issues.

Environmental documentaries such as *Gasland* that cast individuals that do not conform to traditional environmentalist stereotypes and demonstrate that the values, as reflected in lifestyle choices, of said individuals are threatened by environmental issues can be more successful in evoking interest about environmental issues from a wider audience than environmental documentaries that employ celebrity figures and/or individuals that conform to environmentalists stereotypes to deliver messages concerning environmental issues. Furthermore, if documentary films are able to demonstrate how individuals that do not conform to traditional environmentalist stereotypes can contribute to solving environmental issues, then the film has even more potential to evoke interest about environmental issues from a wider audience. Therefore, if documentary films aim

to succeed in generating more concern and involvement from a wider audience about environmental issues, the method of casting nontraditional environmentalists and their values that are threatened by environmental issues should be employed to increase the reach of conservation filmmaking.

I analyze *Before The Flood*, *Gasland*, and *Last Call for the Bayou* based on the casting of their main characters, the values of those characters as demonstrated by their lifestyles, and the said character's ability to contribute to science and/or environmental issues through their lifestyle and/or profession. I will then demonstrate that in so choosing to profile these particular people, filmmakers are breaking stereotypes of the conservation film genre and are allowing for a more broad viewing base by including non-traditional environmentalist characters, while also letting the conservation-minded viewer get to know someone "across the aisle."

CULTURAL COGNITION PROJECT VS. CELEBRITY PERSUASION

“Cultural cognition,” a term coined by Professor Dan Kahan of Yale University, refers to the perceived tendency that individuals will conform their beliefs and perceptions of risk about controversial issues to values that define their cultural identities (Kahan 181). The Cultural Cognition Project suggests that audiences are more willing to accept differing viewpoints when perspectives are presented in a way that allows them to identify with and relate to differing views rather than when they are presented in a way that challenge and demonize firmly held beliefs (Kahan 190). Research from UC Santa Barbara suggests, “There is mounting evidence that environmental attitudes are firmly rooted in humans’ moral intuitions. As a result, successfully informing citizens about the consequences of climate change and calling for action will require activists and policy makers to frame their messages according to their audiences’ moral sensitivities” (Tasoff 1). Knowing this, environmental films might do well to not only positively demonstrate the values of nontraditional environmentalists but avoid shaming individuals for the activities they partake in, especially when these activities support their livelihood.

Additionally, Kahan suggests cultural cognition shapes reception to scientific consensus and ultimately informs specific populations’ decision-making (Kahan 189). This idea is important for those documentary films that are challenging their audiences to make ideological shifts by absorbing new information that might modify their view of a disputed or controversial issue, such as climate change or evolution (Kahan 185). Kahan suggests that there are audiences that are not reached by science documentaries and that science documentary producers might be able to dramatically expand the audience for

science documentaries by identifying and ameliorating the antagonistic cultural meanings that now discourage engagement with these programs by particular segments of the U.S. population, i.e. groups inhibited from enjoying documentaries by collateral social meanings uncongenial to their cultural identities (Kahan 182). In other words, climate-friendly concern and actions need to be made to feel important and attractive in terms that make sense to specific cultures. Doing so means working within the cultural norms, value systems and communication contexts that are meaningful to large sections of the population (Ereaut and Segnit 27). For communications to be effective, it must be targeted at groups bound by shared values, behaviors and communications literacy rather than by demographics (Ereaut and Segnit 27). Climate change communication needs to work with the idea that people understand their behavior as shaped from within their own cultural values and attitudes. Therefore, making desired behaviors attractive and compelling to ordinary people means using metaphor as well as more rationalistic approaches to enable them to emotionally engage with the desired action rather than disengage with the problem through fear-inducing tactics (Ereaut and Segnit 9).

One method commonly used to increase and/or mobilize audiences that otherwise would not find interest in or ability to relate to climate change mitigation or adaptation is the use of celebrities or politicians as the spokespeople of specific environmental issues (Boykoff and Goodman 400). This method, however, results in conveying a message of conspicuous celebrity redemption as a solution for environmental issues (Boykoff and Goodman 396). This method has the danger of further distracting audiences from conceptualizing the discourses that call for systemic and large-scale political, economic,

social and cultural shifts that will likely be necessary to address the multifarious problems and difficult choices associated with modern global climate change (Boykoff and Goodman 404). The celebrity spokesperson method also has the potential to reduce the politics of climate change to the domain of fickle pop culture and fad, rather than long-term political and public involvement (Boykoff and Goodman 403). Finally, this method may displace non-celebrity audiences from the climate change narrative, alienating the majority of the population from real climate change related issues, thus creating apathy from the majority of the population, whose actions will be necessary in addressing climate change.

Additionally, people increasingly trust other people (even those they do not know) more so than governments, businesses and other institutions (Ereaut and Segnit 9). Therefore, climate change communications that emanate from authority sources and that continue to instruct are likely to be less successful than those that work with this emerging dynamic of relatability (Ereaut and Segnit 28).

CASE STUDIES FILMS

Before The Flood

A study conducted by the University of Exeter, titled, “Global Environmental Change: On the use of imagery for climate change engagement,” suggests that images of politicians and celebrities strongly undermine saliency and undermine self-efficacy (O’Neill et al. 420). One example of a film that undermines self-efficacy rather than creating saliency from wider audiences is *Before The Flood* (2016). The film lacks interviews with everyday individuals that are directly impacted by the issues pertaining to climate change. Instead, the film stars Leonardo DiCaprio, a famous movie star that is well known for excessive partying, escorting models, and extreme wealth. Furthermore, Leonard DiCaprio makes it excessively difficult for an average person to identify with him on his journey around the world as a liberal figure acting as the voice of climate change. Within the first few minutes of the film, DiCaprio announces the stars and artists he grew up amongst, such as his father’s roommate and famous musician, Lou Reed. Shortly after this the first shot of DiCaprio is seen, wearing a suit at a United Nations conference, where he is introduced as the “newly appointed messenger of peace.” Within just several minutes, *Before the Flood* has successfully separated DiCaprio from an everyday person.

Furthermore, DiCaprio states, “try to have a conversation about climate change with anyone and they tune out,” implying that he is the only one in the world concerned with this issue. Not only is his statement false and exaggerated, it is an affront and

discredit to all the scientists, activists, and concerned individuals that are not only willing to talk about climate change but have dedicated their entire lives to the issue.

The film proceeds to showcase DiCaprio flying in helicopters in the arctic and diving in submarines in the tropics, experiences that are intangible to the average person, nonetheless easy to identify with. Likewise, DiCaprio's film describes his meeting with Al Gore, interview with Bill Clinton, the Mayor of Miami, and several National Geographic Explorers.

The film takes on an alarmist approach. DiCaprio states, "We're knowingly doing this," as crowded city streets with individuals on their various pursuits are shown from an aerial view, as if DiCaprio has an elevated seat that observes society's apathy. DiCaprio continues, "I just want to know how far we've gone and if there's anything that can be done." The words are spoken as if DiCaprio is pioneering the idea of stopping the negative impacts of climate change, as if no one cares for the environment or is making an effort to change the course of pollution and CO2 emissions.

Additionally, The Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation, through which DiCaprio conducts his environmental work, is accused of being partially funded by the world's largest embezzlement case in which \$3 billion have been siphoned from a Malaysian sovereign wealth fund called 1MDB (Baum). Jho Low, a friend of DiCaprio's and Malaysian businessman connected to the embezzlement scandal supposedly used money from the 1MDB fund to purchase artwork for \$1.1 million at a fundraiser benefitting the DiCaprio Foundation (Baum). The irony of an environmental foundation accepting money embezzled from a country that faces issues such as extreme deforestation and

pollution has tainted the integrity of *Before The Flood*, even for viewers that already consider climate change an important issue. This is not to say that celebrities are not able to successfully support noble causes. For example, Jon Stewart used his celebrity status and *The Daily Show* to draw attention to the health care of September 11th first responders with health issues (Gold). By addressing lawmakers with outrage on Capitol Hill, interviewing first responders from September 11th on his show, and by expressing his continued concern over the health of September 11th first responders, Stewart has successfully helped reauthorize the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund. The bill provides medical care and financial aid to emergency personnel, volunteers and survivors who inhaled toxic dust, smoke and fumes at on the site of the September 11th attack (Gold). Jon Stewart's ongoing advocacy for first responders is personal (Stewart is a lifelong New Yorker), successful, and highly respected and acclaimed.

Conversely, when wealthy celebrity figures cast themselves as the voice of a topic as controversial as climate change, especially when they are so far removed from the front lines and negative impacts of climate change, they invite intense scrutiny and the fundamental issue at hand is likely to be lost within the controversy and contradictions that ensue.

“In the film DiCaprio sounds the alarm about global warming, something that could not possibly have escaped anyone's attention in recent years and is at this point probably beyond discussion: Either you think climate change is real or you don't, and the battle lines aren't likely to be shifted by an earnest movie star,” (Genzlinger). Thus,

Leonardo DiCaprio's approach fails at engaging a wider audience with climate change.

The film, at best, preaches to the choir.

DiCaprio's *Before the Flood*, aside from having the admittedly solid attraction of having his face in nearly every frame, does little to ignite, let alone sway the discussion in any pertinent direction.... It is structured more like an education documentary than a piece of moving cinema, either as a warning or a reminder of exactly when it all went wrong. It aims to impart knowledge, and not, as should ideally have been the case, evoke emotion (Naahar).

The film's failure in reaching new audiences via emotional engagement or reframing the issue of climate change may best be exemplified by the fact that just several months after the film's release and DiCaprio announcing to the world that climate change is "the most important issue of our time," President of the United States Donald Trump was elected into office. Not only does Trump not prioritize climate change action but several months after taking office he proceeded to withdraw from The Paris Agreement. DiCaprio made his call to action speech, featured in *Before the Flood*, at the United Nations 2016 Paris Agreement Signing Ceremony. DiCaprio's call to action speech stressed the necessity of leaving fossil fuels in the ground and the need for delegates that are proactive in addressing the challenges of climate change. Additional actions Trump has made since taking office include approving harmful environmental legislature, such as rolling back regulations on offshore drilling that were put in place to prevent environmentally detrimental oil spills, rolling back restrictions on greenhouse gas emission from coal power plants, and approving the first offshore oil wells in the federally controlled waters of the U.S. arctic (Greshko).

Negative results have been produced by similar films such as *An Inconvenient Truth*, which used Al Gore as a spokesperson for climate change. Gore is a politician who lost a highly contested presidential election shortly before the time of the film's release. Al Gore is an extremely polarizing individual and therefore it is not surprising that some people denied the science simply because he presented it. A thirty-year study conducted by the University of Michigan indicated that the issue of climate change was less polarized in the two decades before *An Inconvenient Truth* was released as articles and news sources pertaining to climate change referenced scientists more than politicians (Wadley). In the early 2000s, however, when *An Inconvenient Truth* was released, the climate change issue became dominated by partisan voices, rather than scientists (Wadley). University of Michigan researchers suggest the political divide around climate change has generated more news coverage of the views of politicians, which has likely contributed to polarizing public opinion even further, as language associated with mentions of Republicans and Democrats has become more distinct over time (Wadley). The effect of the documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, formally attached climate science to a Democratic political view and allowed the audience to use its political views to shape their understanding of climate change (Patel 9).

Similar to how it is difficult for a viewer to separate Al Gore from the election that preceded *An Inconvenient Truth*, it is hard for a viewer to separate DiCaprio from the elitist lifestyle he portrays in *Before the Flood* and outside of the film, including the annual fundraiser gala held for the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation, for which tickets are

over \$11,000 and attendees include Bono, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Robert De Niro (Baum).

Perhaps the only celebrity voices that can successfully become the voice of environmental issues are those that gained their celebrity status from their environmental activism. Greta Thunberg, at just 16-years-old, has become the world's leading voice for climate change advocacy, after starting her "School Strike for Climate" campaign less than two years ago. In this short amount of time, Thunberg has mobilized four million people around the world to protest climate change apathy demonstrated by world leaders, was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, and received Time Magazine's 2019 Person of The Year Award. Unlike DiCaprio, Thunberg had no recognition before commencing her climate change advocacy journey. Greta Thunberg's campaign centers around the fact that she values her future and that her future is at risk because of climate change. Thus, Thunberg's cause is relatable and appealing to every normal child around the world that wants to be afforded a fair future and fulfilling experiences. DiCaprio's life as a famous actor has afforded him rich experiences that many will never have and a lifestyle that is arguable a very desirable one. His personal losses from climate change will likely be minimal to none, whereas Thunberg still has something to lose (her whole future) and therefore is much easier to identify with and support. Additionally, unlike DiCaprio, Greta Thunberg succeeds in going the extra mile of staying true to her cause. For example, in order to reduce her carbon footprint, Thunberg refuses to travel by plane. Instead, Greta Thunberg admirably travels by train or even finds her way as a passenger on sailboats to climate conferences. DiCaprio, on the other hand, has been unable to

remove private jets from his routine, for which he has received criticism, as transportation is the largest producer of greenhouse gasses. Thunberg's non-celebrity background and relatability were highlighted in Time Magazine's 2019 Person of the Year award.

Thunberg is not a leader of any political party or advocacy group. She is neither the first to sound the alarm about the climate crisis nor the most qualified to fix it. She is not a scientist or a politician. She has no access to traditional levers of influence: she's not a billionaire or a princess, a pop star or even an adult. She is an ordinary teenage girl who, in summoning the courage to speak truth to power, became the icon of a generation. By clarifying an abstract danger with piercing outrage, Thunberg became the most compelling voice on the most important issue facing the planet (Alter).

For these reasons of relatability, Thunberg and voices like hers are likely to take the stage as the main character of climate change documentaries in the near future. Already the BBC Studio's Science Unit has partnered with Thunberg on a documentary series scheduled to be released in 2020 (Thorne). The series will focus on climate change as "the most important issue of our time" but also Thunberg's coming of age story (Thorne). Additionally, Hulu plans to release a feature length documentary, *Greta* depicting her entire campaign in 2020 (Thorne). Emerging Greta Thunberg-centered documentaries represent a shift in thinking about how contemporary environmental films will present information about environmental issues to the public; that is, by casting normal, relatable individuals as the central characters.

Gasland

Gasland succeeded in making a previously abstract environmental issue tangible to an array of people by filming individuals across America that had been directly affected by fracking. The communications advisor of Cuadrilla, the first company to explore fracking in the UK, said “*Gasland* really changed everything, before that, shale gas was not seen as routinely controversial” (Britdoc 5). The film was nominated for an Academy Award and an Oscar. *Gasland* is credited with achieving a national movement against fracking practices, sparking hundreds of anti-fracking groups, obtaining 100,000 signatures on petitions and letters against fracking for local organizations directed at politicians and other national leaders, and creating hydro-fracking bans and legislative victories against fracking in the United States and South Africa (Britdoc 6).

In *Gasland*, after being offered \$100,000 from the natural gas company for his family’s land in Pennsylvania, Josh Fox travels around the country interviewing individuals that have gone through with selling their land to the natural gas company and discovers the environmental and health concerns they have since faced. Fox uses two tactics that differ from films that employ an all-knowing environmentalist authority: a) he self-proclaims himself and his family as “hippies that built their house in the woods,” and b) he proactively recognizes and presents the documentary as an impractical or crazy idea -“What was I going to do, go on the road and become a fracking detective? I guess.” By phrasing his investigation this way, he invites the viewer along for a process of discovery

rather than claiming an authoritative or expert voice, as demonstrated by Al Gore in *An Inconvenient Truth* or Leonardo DiCaprio in *Before the Flood*. Instead, Fox becomes a medium for people across the nation with traditionally conservative qualities to have a voice about an environmental issue.

For example, seven of the eight counties Fox conducts his interviews in are conservative and/or voted republican. One of the individuals Fox interviews is a 3rd-generation rancher in Wyoming, whose land has been extirpated by the natural gas company. The rancher emotionally states, “My father and grandfather were old-time cowboys; this is my way of life. This is my family heritage, and this is my wife’s family farm.” Through the rancher, Fox demonstrates that traditionally conservative cultures, such as family ranchlands, are being threatened by fracking practices. In this sense, Fox has reached across the aisle from his family ethics that are being threatened by fracking to entirely different sectors of the population, whose family ethics are under siege from the same threat. Fox compiles many interviews from small, rural towns or on farms that have had fracking conducted on their land. Most interviewees display hints of conservative attributes or values, referencing church, family, or shooting guns together, seemingly for fun, making them easily relatable for conservative individuals or families. All the interviewees express concern, anger or fear of the issues fracking has had on their land and health, thus expanding the population that carries concern over fracking and the natural gas industry.

Fox also consistently pushes unification of America rather than polarization throughout the film. He may start the film as a self-proclaimed hippy, concerned over a

stream in his backyard, “There’s a stream that connects the Delaware river, I’ve been learning more and more how water is all connected.” The inclusion, however, of so many individuals’ stories allows the identity of those targeted by fracking to expand as Fox drives across America. At the end of the film he returns to his home that ignited his quest and states,

One thing I’ve found, deep inside is a love for this whole country. There are pieces of my backyard, Divide Creek in Colorado, in Pavilion, Wyoming, in the streets of Fort Worth, in the cemeteries and school yards of New Mexico. My backyard wasn’t my backyard anymore. It belonged to everybody else too. It’s possible that Gasland might stretch a little bit further from my backyard, into yours.

Fox goes a step further in reaching across the isle by including an interview with Weston Wilson, an EPA employee of 20 years who states, “Even if they (the fracking damage claims) weren’t true, they deserve an investigation. They’re citizens of the United States, and they certainly don’t deserve to be exposed to secret chemicals; it’s not America.” Fox did not need to include this portion of the interview, but in doing so makes an appeal in his environmental documentary to conservative audience members and everyday Americans. By including this interview, Fox indicates that fracking is not sympathetic to any American values, conservative or otherwise. Finally, Fox portrays the individuals he interviews as a growing force and an active one that has informed concern with tools to fight back. Throughout the film many of the individuals supply Fox with samples of their water to be tested for pollutants, which Fox eventually brings to the EPA.

Fox’s method of demonstrating that specific conservative individuals across the country are victims of this industry and that they are capable of fighting back, paired with

his constant allusion that fracking is a threat to American values encourages any American to take opposition to the natural gas industry. John Armstrong, coordinator for the anti-drilling group Frack Action credits the anti-fracking movement with the support it received from the diverse number of people that were negatively impacted by fracking.

The anti-fracking movement grew out of the grassroots—it wasn't led by any national NGO but stemmed from regular working people who have never been activists before. It is born out of children who have become ill, farms that have been ruined, aquifers and wells that have been contaminated, and air that has been poisoned (Rabeler).

As a result, the film created a platform for a vast and successful anti-fracking movement, which has prevented fracking in Colorado, New York State, and in regions along the Delaware River (Spear). A sharp and steady rise in Google searches for information about fracking and the film occurred after *Gasland's* release, indicating the strong interest in fracking that the film generated (Rabeler). Other countries concerned about fracking are now looking to the United States' campaign for direction (Spear). Senior global issues analyst at Control Risk (the natural gas industry's global risk and consulting firm), Jonathon Wood, credits *Gasland* with providing the [anti-fracking] movement with a shared point of reference, and claims that the movement would not have gone global without the documentary's scenes of flaming water pouring from people's faucets (Rabeler). Furthermore, even the natural gas industry has credited the American anti-fracking campaign with changes such a truce between anti-fracking groups in Appalachia and four major gas companies: Shell, Basin, Chevron, CONSOL Energy, and EQT Corporation, in which the companies will monitor the 15 environmental standards for fracking determined in the truce (Spear).

Last Call For The Bayou

Last Call For the Bayou, a 2019 Smithsonian Channel docuseries (five episodes, each 10-minutes long) is designed in small parts that come together as a whole, non-fiction environmentally based project. Therefore, the series leaves the same impression as a feature length documentary that interviews multiple characters. The docuseries is a strong example of recent documentary work that employs similar tactics as used in *Gasland* and theories from the Cultural Cognition Project. In *Last Call For the Bayou*, director Dominic Gill depicts the environmental issues surrounding the Mississippi Delta's disappearing wetlands.

Similar to how Fox interviews multiple people to demonstrate the extent of fracking's damage, Gill constructs 10-minute shorts, each telling the story of a different individual that works closely with or has been negatively impacted by the deteriorating wetlands. The characters are diverse, ranging from scientists to duck hunters, and each episode demonstrates not only how their values have been negatively impacted by the rising waters but also their critical role in creating scientific understanding and solutions for the issue.

The first episode profiles a photographer that has steered his dedication toward documenting the disappearing barrier islands of Louisiana, photographing the wetlands from a paramotor in the hopes that scientists can use his photographs to help better understand the landscape and the impact of the rising seawater (*Last Call For the Bayou*).

The second episode profiles a native American family that is watching their tribe's land disappear to the rising waters. It is no longer possible for the tribe to access some of their historical hunting and fishing grounds due to seawater rise. Saltwater intrusion has dramatically altered the vegetation on which they have historically relied (*Last Call For the Bayou*). An elder of the tribe recounts an area that used to be full of oak trees that is now inundated with water. "It's like feeling death around you already because it's going to be taken away from you. Just want to stay where you know this is your land, this your people." The culture of some native tribes is largely defined by where they live; therefore, the loss of the land will inevitably lead to the loss of the tribe's culture as they are forced to relocate further inland and their traditions and values are jeopardized (*Last Call For the Bayou*). Kasha, a college student from the tribe, studying sociology is contributing to a research study by the National Academy of Science by documenting oral histories of the elders in the area that are able to describe and help document the changing landscape.

The values and livelihood of a multi-generational shrimper are also at stake, as demonstrated in the 4th episode. The levees and disappearing wetlands have changed the salinity of the water and, therefore, the fishery. The areas where small watercraft are able to conduct shrimp fishing (sheltered by the wetlands) are also diminishing. "I don't want bad for my kids, from what I see today, no I wouldn't want them shrimping, but in my heart for what it gave to me, yes, I want them in it. I want them in nothing else.

In the final episode, a woman that lives for duck hunting reveals that as the wetlands disappear and the fisheries in the delta change, the ducks also change their

migration patterns. She exhibits a map of her father's orange grove that was on the Mississippi River before the levees were put in place: "The river would come up on his crop. That man hardly had to put fertilizer on those orange trees, it [the soil] was so nice."

The characters range from liberal scientists to religious conservatives, and Gill makes sure to demonstrate that their specific freedoms and interests are tied to environmental stewardship. The duck hunter states, "God and Mother Nature aren't the same but they are working hand in hand together, they got to.... If we don't have Louisiana wetland we're not going to have people, commerce, ships coming up the river... it's important for storm surge, hauling gas, everything. The wetlands are vital to the nation."

Overall, the series suggests that environmental issues need and value the knowledge gained from those dealing with the issues on the frontlines and from diversity. Gill achieves this by featuring a coastal ecologist as the character in one of the five episodes. Therefore, Gill gives a scientist a voice that is equally valued to the other four featured characters. Thus, Gill indicates that environmental issues benefit from the knowledge acquired from passions such as photography, duck hunting, and fishing as well as the knowledge from a coastal ecologist's soil research and of that of family tradition and deep culture. In other words, putting formal knowledge, such as soil science, on equal footing with the local and cultural knowledge of duck hunting and tribal heritage suggests that no one character is given any authority over another. All characters and their fields of knowledge are woven together as experts on the effects of climate change as it alters all of their lifestyles along the bayou. The series' financial supporters

consist of Restore The Mississippi River Delta, The Redford Center, and SITKA. These supporters, which range from hunting gear companies to artist support organizations, are one indication that the films have potential to engage wider and more diverse audiences.

GILDED TRAP

Background on Issue

“The Gilded Trap’s” observational approach profiles a young lobster fisherman, Jamien Hallowell, on Maine’s coastline, as well as a marine biologist, Dr. Richard Wahle, who is studying the changing lobster population within the Gulf of Maine. The film depicts the shallow and sheltered Gulf of Maine as a biodiverse “geographical indicator (microcosm)” of climate change, as it is experiencing an array of ecological changes, such as ocean water warming three times faster than the rest of the Atlantic. These changes are causing endangered North Atlantic right whales to change their migration course and quite literally collide with the lobster industry in Maine. The lobster industry is comprised of individuals who take on the profession for “the freedom” it entails (“The Gilded Trap”). Therefore, this story is a unique example of how climate change is directly impacting the traditionally conservative industry that is tied to the ecological health of the area. The film poses an opportunity to effectively reach across the isle and engage a wider audience in climate change issues.

Coastal ecosystems support an incredible amount of biodiversity and 40% of the global human population. While these ecosystems are resilient they are also extremely susceptible to and threatened by climate change. Environmental threats have not only had detrimental effects on biodiversity and natural resources but also have the potential to erase the multitude of environmentally harmonious cultures that have developed around

these coastal natural resources. Therefore, this film profiles one individual, whose way of life is supported by and deeply bound to their surrounding coastal resources.

The Film

The methods used to reach across the aisle or, as stated by the Cultural Cognition Project, to “grow identity,” are similar to those employed by *Gasland*. Jamien is depicted as an individual that has worked in the small town he was born in since he was 10 years old. Similar to how Josh Fox’s family backyard is threatened by fracking, it is clear that the resource Jamien depends on for his livelihood and interacts with every day (lobster) is being threatened by climate change. By demonstrating that this one individual lobster fisherman’s livelihood is being threatened by climate change, all lobster fishermen and New England fishermen in general are able to identify with being threatened by climate change. Thus, the film’s methods engage a traditionally conservative audience’s values and livelihood in the climate change issues.

Additionally, the values tied to the lobster industry are demonstrated in the film in order to produce emotional engagement. These values are considered under threat because the resource that supports the profession is threatened. Emotional engagement is particularly relevant for narrative communications such as documentary film because of its critical role for decreasing counter-arguing and increasing involvement with a given narrative (Bieniek-Tobasco 3). The values mentioned within “The Gilded Trap” are “freedom” and “the ability to be your own boss.” Much like the third-generation rancher in *Gasland* that expresses concern over losing his family’s ranchland, the values Jamien mentions throughout “The Gilded Trap” are not stereotypical concerns of

environmentalists, such as biodiversity or protected lands. By changing the scope of the values at stake from climate change, and suggesting environmental threats are, in fact, a threat to sovereignty, new groups are invited to engage in concern over climate change issues.

Finally, Jamien's connection to scientific fisheries research and his ability to support the science behind lobster population research are demonstrated in the film. Climate change communications and survey research suggest that weak efficacy beliefs are a continued barrier to engagement with climate change (Bieniek-Tobasco 3). By showcasing that Jamien supports the scientist's research by providing lobster samples and other information, fishermen are able to identify with science and recognize their value in contributing to it. Fishermen then become a crucial role in gathering information and working toward solutions; their involvement is encouraged in science, rather than demonizing them and the rest of society by grimly suggesting "We know we're doing this," as done in *Before the Flood*. Furthermore, Jamien is an everyday person from a small town in Maine. Similar to Greta Thunberg, Jamien is not widely recognized and to many people (especially fishermen or individuals following their parent's profession) he is very relatable.

CONCLUSION

Film is a medium consumed by viewers from all sides of the political spectrum and has great potential to reach across the aisle in order to engage audiences that do not traditionally engage with environmental or conservation topics or viewpoints. There are, however, certain tactics that are more effective in achieving this than others. The challenge is to make climate-posed issues and climate-friendly behaviors feel normal, natural, and right to large numbers of people who are currently unengaged and not emotionally affected (Ereaut and Segnit 28). The answer is not to try to change their emotional interests or values but to change the climate change issue, so it becomes something that, in their own terms, has tangible implications on their emotional interests and values (Ereaut and Segnit 28).

First, environmental documentaries intended to change perspectives should not be carried by the voice of an individual that is already heavily polarized, heavily recognized as “separate” from everyday people (i.e. famous) or recognized for carrying specific viewpoints and agendas. The message becomes too explicit and the audience shuts out whatever pertinent message or information is being delivered. Instead, voices of characters that have been directly impacted by environmental issues, that are also easy for everyday people to relate to, can be cast in primary roles more often in order to have a greater impact on audience members that may need require a different way to relate to environmental issues.

Secondly, in order for “the other” to care about polarized issues, the values of the other should be tied to the issues at hand in order to help the other establish identity and connection with the issue.

Finally, individuals whose values are tied to the issues at hand should be cast as the main character in these stories, where there is no separation between the environment and the people. By casting individuals, their livelihoods, and the direct impact environmental issues have on their livelihoods, such as the impact warming waters in Maine have on Jamien’s lobstering business and the efficacy of “the other” pertaining to environmental issues, science can be demonstrated and encouraged in environmental documentaries. These methods motivate a wider audience to build connections with the scientific world and work toward environmental solutions, rather than shaming individuals for their practices or livelihoods. Documentaries that show this rather than asking individuals to change their values are likely to be more successful in reaching across the aisle and expanding audiences.

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