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# LOOKING FOR LEIA DOCUMENTARY FINDS COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION IN OUR DIFFERENCES



Contributed by



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## Annalise Ophelian is making a movie.

It's about community, family, passion, the things that bring us together and the things that set us apart.

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It's about fandom.

It's about women.

#### It's about *Star Wars*.

"I can easily populate a feature film -- I can populate several feature films -- just with the different bullhorns of fandom that you see in *Star Wars*," said Ophelian during an interview with Syfy Wire. "I think it was the diversity of that fandom, the robustness of it, the fact that we're coming up on 40 years of fans engaging with this fandom in really productive, generative ways, that made focusing on *Star Wars* really appealing to me."

In addition to being a documentary filmmaker and a practicing psychotherapist, Ophelian is a longtime *Star Wars* fan. Very long. She considers herself a member of the class of '77, having seen the original film in theaters when she was a young child, and it's the passion and love she felt for the movie -- specifically for the character of Princess Leia -- that has inspired her latest work.

It's called *Looking for Leia*, and it attempts to tell the story of fandom, and of the experience of women in fandom, all through the far-reaching lens of a galaxy far, far away.

"I definitely remember resonating with the character, because even at a young age I was what would be categorized as a bossy girl," recalls Ophelian, noting that "bossy" is how young girls are meant to see themselves when they are assertive and headstrong. "There's so many things about Leia that, as a child, seeing this assertive, bossy, wise-cracking woman who is very take-charge and take-control. I think there's something about being able to project myself into this person who is not a kind of Barbie doll, blond-haired, tall, hourglass-figured, traditional sex-symbol woman. ... I think there was a way to project myself into her and felt very validated by that character."

Of course, while she loves Leia, Ophelian is also quick to point out that the princess-turned-senator-turned-general isn't the only character she loves. She's also a big fan of Han Solo.

"One of the things I find really interesting among fandom," she explains, "is I think the strong female characters invite women to the fandom, but I think that female fans show tremendous enthusiasm and affection for all kinds of characters, not just the women. I love that."

It's that varied enthusiasm and love for *Star Wars* that Ophelian is trying to capture in her documentary. She began speaking to women about *Star Wars* and their experience with the property and the fandom two years ago at Star Wars Celebration in Anaheim during the first big unveiling for *The Force Awakens*, the first in a new series of *Star Wars* films and the first to put a woman at the front of the story. She says that while she had been to comic book conventions before, she was struck by just how many women were at this particular event, and how different and unique their individual backgrounds and stories were, so she decided to tell the very broad story of what it means to be a fan through the very personal stories of what it means to be a woman who loves *Star Wars*.

Says Ophelian, "I think we learn more about ourselves and each other when we are invited to sit down and listen to



really specific stories."

But it's not just about women, it's about all types of women and about capturing a spectrum of experience. After all, no two people are alike, and neither are their individual entry points into fandom and to the world. So she's set out with a mission to redefine how we think about not just fans, but women, to reframe our default view of "woman" away from, as she puts it, "white, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied woman under 35."

"I'm interested in talking with women of color, because I want to know what's been their experience of fandom," Ophelian explains. "And that's going to mean not limited to white women, limited to cis women. Not limited to women 18-35, or able-bodied. Not limited to women in the United States. That's a really narrow group, and I've got to have a broader lens, because I think you actually get a much truer representation of what we mean by women, which is actually a hugely diverse category. Which is not a monolith for a homogeneous category in the least."

But talking about and celebrating women also comes with its

downsides. To celebrate our accomplishments, you must place them next to the failures. In the case of women in fandom (and in many other arenas), those failures are not necessarily of our own making, but a result of sexism and misogyny.

During an interview with **The Verge**, Ophelian said: "The perception of male dominance in fandom is, I think, accurate, and a reflection of how sexism functions in the world." When asked to expand on that thought, she explained, "I think that sexism shows up in really consistent ways. And so this is not to create a special category for the way sexism works in geekdom or fandom, but to say that sexism works in geekdom and fandom exactly the way it works in people's workplaces, in grocery stores, in access to public services."



For a long time, Leia was one of very few women who even appeared in the *Star Wars* universe, and the only one with any kind of development. Then came the books, the comics and the most recent addition, the animated universe, and now the galaxy is brimming with female characters for fans to find and love and celebrate and attach themselves to. *Star Wars* is expanding, and so are the opportunities it presents

to fans.

"I think what these stories are often about is navigating the margins, being on the outside of a thing," says Ophelian. "That's a survival skill. We find creative ways of surviving and getting by. And when that creativity connects with something like a fantasy franchise like *Star Wars*, suddenly the ways that we find validation and mirroring and connection, I think just get operatic."

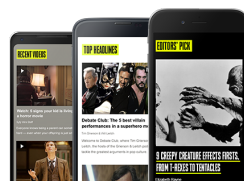
Ophelian is currently working to fund the film through a **Kickstarter campaign** and hopes to release the completed project sometime in the summer of 2018. You can find out more about Ophelian and the film on the **official *Looking for Leia* website**.

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