

Interview with a National Geographic Filmmaker

By [Marie DeFreitas](#) • SCAD Contributor October 28, 2017 at 11:39pm



Gabriella Garcia Pardo, a former SCAD film student, and freelance documentary filmmaker whose worked with National Geographic, gives us a glimpse into the world of being a woman on the documentary film scene. She has ‘produced award-winning short form documentaries at National Geographic, and filmed over 150 musicians on NPR’s music team’. From Icelandic herds to guided horseback riding treks in Chile, she never fails to capture her subjects in a genuine light.

Earlier this quarter Gabriella came back to SCAD Savannah to inspire us with her story and work at the annual Wordcast event. There’s definitely a lot we can learn from her. I asked her some questions about what she has gone through and learned as she has moved forward in her career. One of the things that stood out to me was when she said someone told her she needed to be less feminine if she wanted to make it as a filmmaker. That she should “be one of the guys” so she wouldn’t be a “distraction”. Because apparently a shirt with flowers on it would be overkill. She says: “It wasn’t just a question of the clothes, it was the whole aspect of being a woman in the field”. Like any aspiring artist, we want to do what it takes to make it in our field. She goes on, “I was so eager to do whatever was necessary to become a successful filmmaker, that I actually listened”.

But this bump in the road does have a happy ending, and something she was able to learn from. “It wasn’t until years later when I landed my job at National Geographic that I learned I didn’t have to subdue myself to achieve my goals. What I would tell myself then is not to allow anyone to let me question who I am. (...)what matters is work ethic and the quality of what you produce, not what gender you identify with or what you’re wearing when you do it”.

Being a woman in the work field doesn’t mean you have to tone down your femininity, “but there is a difference between dressing appropriately for the job and dressing femininely(.)”

How we dress, regardless of gender, will have an impact on how we are perceived. In Gabriella’s case-

“you need to wear what is practical to do the work. I’m not going to show up to a shoot that requires 10 miles of hiking while carrying gear wearing a dress and high heels. But there’s nothing wrong with wearing that dress or heels to an edit day in the office. “(And) if you’re traveling internationally, you should respect the culture or customs of the location you are working in”.

If you’re a woman doing anything that even remotely down and dirty in your work, there’s probably, unfortunately gonna be someone there to do some patronizing. Gabriella said that while most of her experiences with the subjects she’s interviewed have been positive, there always one or two that leave you a little shocked or insulted by things they say.

“There have also been many instances in which I’ve been asked if I’m an intern or student strictly based on my appearance as a young woman.”

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She’s faced all the weird, rude and inappropriate questions:

Got it!

“...if I find a certain characteristic in a man attractive, if I've ever had an orgy, what my husband thinks of my traveling alone, etc. One subject went so far as to question whether I was truly on staff at National Geographic because I am not a tall, bearded man. Another gave the patronizing complement of "you're the best woman our team has worked with."

It's hard to not immediately want to tell this person off when faced with these weird questions and comments, but Gabriella has had the patience to brush it off and the courage to “make it clear the sentiment is inappropriate” whenever it went too far.

She said: “but otherwise, I'm typically able to resolve the situation through competence to do the job”.

Besides this, being a young women in the field does have one particular advantage over male-counterparts. “As far as the advantages, I'm not typically perceived as threatening. That's something that helps people open up in interview situations and allows me to fly under the radar a bit more when I need to travel with a low profile”.

Gabriella has certainly shown her determination and perseverance as she's done her work. She credits this to “... (a simple) mixture of grit with a true love for and belief in the value of documentary film”.

In a closing word of advice, she encourages other young women to “Trust that you have what it takes to pursue your passion and let that be your focus. Work hard, keep learning, and find good people to collaborate with. You don't need anyone's permission to create and improve your art.”

Check out Gabriella's amazing film work here! :<http://www.gabriellagarciapardo.com/>

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Currently in her third year at the Savannah College of Art & Design, Marie is pursuing a double major in Illustration and Writing, as well as a minor in Photography. She loves Stephen King, snacking on croutons and impulse buying in thrift shops.

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