
ANNUAL REPORT 2011

VOICES OF WOMEN MEDIA

July 2012

voices
of women
media

voices
of women
media

COLOFON

Texts:

All employees of VOW Media

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ABOUT VOICES OF WOMEN MEDIA

MISSION STATEMENT

Through the lens of a video camera, the stillness of a photo, the strength in a single voice - women from peripheral communities create, in cooperation with Voices of Women (VOW) Media, multimedia self-portraits, offering a glimpse into their personal life experiences. VOW Media encourages women and girls to take control of their own image by teaching them how to use different forms of media as a means of expression.

VOW Media is an organization for women by women. We work with refugees, asylum seekers, teenage girls, victims of human trafficking, sex workers, economic migrants, trans-women, and more generally women from marginalized communities. We want to educate them in how to employ different types of media. By technically and artistically challenging the women we want them to not only be empowered but also to make others aware of their situation. VOW Media hopes to give its participants a voice to accurately present themselves against stereotypes and misrepresentation in the mainstream media.

ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

VOW Media is an emerging organization that aims to provide a way for women from marginalized communities to express themselves through different forms of media. We provide educational workshops, the main goal of which is to have women participate in a skills training in order to offer an alternative outlet of expression and to give them a chance to have a voice, express themselves and share an insight on their lives in a creative way.

The vision of VOW Media is to contribute to the advancement of women in society by fostering the creation of a positive self-image and a stronger sense of identity through the use of art, media, and education. VOW Media believes that personalizing women's individual experiences can have a positive and long lasting effect on women's rights and positions worldwide. VOW Media aims to contribute to the advancement of women in society by giving them the means to make media. Through using media and skill training, we want to further their abilities to empower themselves and let their own voices be heard.

TWO PROJECTS

In 2011, VOW Media proudly launched two projects. Our first project ran from September until December 2011. Displaced Daughters focused on young girls who grew up in the Netherlands and are daughters to immigrant parents. During the workshops, the girls learnt media skills to give an accurate representation of themselves against stereotypes and misrepresentations in the mainstream media. Together with VOW Media, the girls discussed current issues that affect them such as the hijab ban. The girls were stimulated to incorporate their views on such issues into their work.

The second project was a follow-up project of the successful A Day In Her Life, which took place for the first time in 2010. In this second edition of A Day in Her Life, VOW Media worked once again with women whose lives are in some way connected to Amsterdam's Red Light District.

A more comprehensive explanation of the projects can be found under the heading "Activities of 2011" and "Project Description".

SCREENINGS

The first edition of A Day In Her Life was screened internationally, most prominently in festivals in the United States. A more detailed description can be found under heading "Screenings".

BURGLARY

Sadly, VOW Media office fell victim to burglary. In order to recover from this burglary, research-assistant Maria Serban-Temisan organized a benefit event in October at Joe's Garage. During the event, we screened the first edition of A Day In Her Life, followed up by a discussion session. The guests could enjoy a vegan meal prepared by supporters of VOW Media. Overall, we recovered well thanks to the benefit and donations of computers from other organizations

NEW OFFICE

As the organization has grown, VOW Media moved to a new office at Wibautstraat 150, in the old Volkskrant building. As a result of the expansion of space, VOW Media could grow in number of employees and has hired a Production Manager, as well as research interns.

RESEARCH

VOW Media has been busy doing research for a new projects. The project Breaking the Spell will work together with a group of girls and young women who fell victim to "Loveboys". This is an unfortunate phenomenon of usually older men who prey on insecure teenage girls and coercing them into prostitution.

For VOW Media, it is crucial for these young women to create their own media to not only accurately present themselves against stereotypes, but also to help them rebuild their sense of confidence and self-esteem. These young women find themselves in a very vulnerable position at this point in their lives. We will try to show them that they can be empowered through telling their own story, which can eventually help them take agency over their own lives.

For all of our projects, VOW researches options to cooperate with other organizations who work with the groups of women VOW Media desires to work with too. For the first project, Displaced Daughters, VOW has cooperated with Studio West in the Amsterdam neighborhood Osdorp. They offered us space and introduced us to some of the participants.

The second project is the continuation of the A Day in Her Life project, working with women whose lives are in some way connected to the sex industry. As the title already indicates, the project aims to offer a glimpse into a regular day in the life of our participants. For this project, VOW cooperated with P&G292, a Dutch organization that focuses on sex work and health. P&G292 has offered us workshop space.



RESULTS

VOW Media strongly believes in providing girls and women the means to create their own media so that they can represent and express themselves, by teaching them the skills and providing them with the tools to do so. We are very satisfied with the results of 2011, in which we have developed and completed these two projects that resulted in a total of 17 videos and 2 photography booklets. In both of these projects, we saw the participants grow, gaining self-esteem, as they realized that they were capable of creating their own forms of multimedia, their own body of artistic works. For us, it is particularly important to make a difference in the lives of these women. We want to challenge them artistically and hope they realize that they can achieve so much in their lives.

We particularly value the intimate interaction with participants during our workshop period. It helps us to gain new insights into lives of women who find themselves in a peripheral position in society, and whose story is not always told in the right way. By showing a more humane and multi-faceted picture of the lives of these women, based on their everyday experiences, we hope to make other people understand that there is no such thing as a unilateral experience.

The role of VOW Media is to serve as facilitator to motivate our participants to gain the necessary skills and creativity into being directors of their projects. Our priority is the process. During the workshops, VOW Media and all the participants work together as a team. Each participant works towards her own portfolio complete with photographs, a radio show, and self-directed video portrait. The women learn from each other, actively work together, help each other out where necessary and give each other feedback. During this intimate process, they also learn to trust each other with their life stories and experiences. Upon evaluation, we realized that precisely this process was considered a positive aspect of the workshop.



"Right now, I am on the radio and a lot of people are listening to what I am saying and what I am thinking."

"I liked doing the radio show, in which I learned more about my colleagues, their experiences and their culture"

"It's very often, that many places that you go and you say, I'm from Bulgaria and a lot of people they don't even want to make the effort to go any further to look at your skills and your personality or know you more as a person."

RESULTS

In A Day In Her Life, we worked together with women whose lives are in some way connected to the Amsterdam sex industry. We tried to capture their experiences, hopes and dreams to find out what moves them, to get to know their experiences. We learnt that their motivations are all very personal and all different.

"I like my job. I try to do it as good as I can. I'm professional."

"After partying it up, I go to my job. That is why I end up being a Señora de Madrugada (Lady of the Dawn)."

"I started this job to save some money, to be able to start my own productive business, to be able to make a living. But it was not like this at all. On this side of the window, many things are just dreams and fantasies, lights and camouflage. But the reality is different outside these famous windows."



By showing the whole spectrum of experiences, people deciding on the future of these women - such as politicians and policy makers - will realize that there is not one unilateral vision of this industry, and that therefore no generalization can be made. We believe that every narrative, every story, tells us something about the society we are living in. All stories are relevant.

In the long run, we hope to make a difference in society, by showing that complexities of the lives of these women. Hopefully this will change the way in which these groups of women are perceived.

Projects	Activities in 2011	Target group	Desired results
A Day In Her Life, First edition	Continuation on the 2010 project	Female & transgender sex workers, victims of human trafficking. Screenings for members of the Dutch society and abroad.	Promotion of our participants' videos and photography. This material has already been screened at numerous occasions in 2010, and proved subject to incredible interest and triggered many discussions. We promote public screening in network organizations and festivals worldwide, in order to stimulate debate and increase awareness of the situation of sex workers. This leads to discussion concerning protection of the rights of sex workers. We hope that future political and cultural debates will include our media entries to provide a personal and human perspective to the discussion at large.
Displaced Daughters	September – December 2011	Second-generation female immigrant youth born and/or raised in the Netherlands.	During the workshops, we wanted to encourage our participants to share their perspectives on questions concerning belonging in and to the Netherlands. We stimulated debates to find out how the current political situation and laws influence the way in which these girls construct their identity. During the workshops, we discussed topics such as the effects of the hijab ban and experiences in which the girls were confronted with cultural clashes, and how those events shape their personalities and the way in which they construct their identity. We aim to empower these young girls to grow into strong and independent women with a creative and technical grasp on how media functions as a tool for self-expression. We hope to inspire activism and encourage our participants to stand up to change laws and create a movement against the negative portrayal of youth in the Netherlands and in Europe.

Projects	Activities in 2011	Target group	Desired results
A Day In Her Life, Second edition	November – December 2011, continuation in 2012	Women whose lives are in some way connected to the sex industry.	After a very successful first edition of A Day In Her Life, and because of popular demand we decided to do a second and slightly more intensive version of the project. We hope to show that the work in the sex industry is not always linked to criminality or victims of human trafficking. It is especially important to let these women express themselves, given the current political debate on the sex industry.
Breaking the Spell	Develop project concept. Outreach, research and fundraising.	Victims of "loverboys" in the Netherlands.	Media attention has been given to the so-called loverboys; boys who force their girlfriends into sex work. However, victim blaming and doubting are unfortunately not uncommon phenomena. Victims might experience a 'double stigma', as they both suffered from a situation that might be hard to understand for outsiders, and because the truthfulness of their story might be questioned. Young women in particular are vulnerable to (negative) representation. We hope to give them the possibility to express themselves, by making technology accessible to them, as well as training them on the use of it. We hope this changes not only these girls, but also the communities around them – their families who have also suffered, their friends, and also other potential victims.



PROJECT DESCRIPTION - DISPLACED DAUGHTERS

For ten weeks, young girls who are born and/or raised in the Netherlands, and are daughters to immigrant parents, participated in a project in which they were educated in the making of different forms of media. They were encouraged to share experiences about their own lives. They created photographic self-portraits, an online radio show, and individual and personal videos. VOW Media wanted to hear voices of these second-generation immigrant youth expressed in order to explore how they construct their own identity.

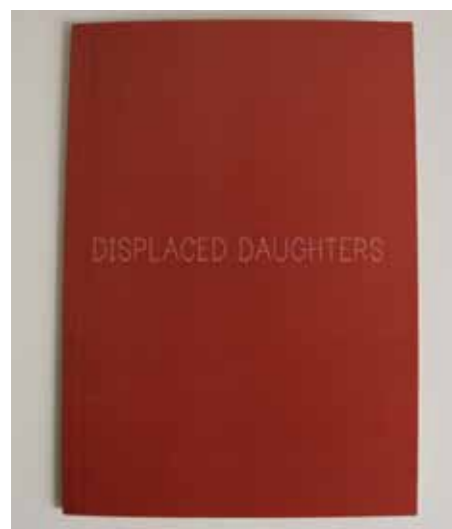


During the workshops, we discussed how media could work as a tool for self-expression. Each participant was challenged to create her individual and personal portfolio, with her own artistic work.

The intelligence and creativity of these young girls is emphasized, which positively affects their self-esteem. We noticed that the girls figured out that they could take agency over their own circumstances. As a result of the created media - teachers, lawmakers, and members of their own community will perhaps start to understand some of the issues these young women growing up at this moment are confronted with daily.

Furthermore, VOW Media encourages the girls to continue the process of media-making in the future.

The purpose of the project was to encourage these young girls to share their own perspectives on belonging here in the Netherlands. We presented a variety of questions to the girls, such as: Do laws concerning the hijab ban encourage you to embrace or perhaps reject your cultural identity? Do you feel a sense of belonging or patriotism to this country? Do you experience clashes of culture, and if so, how do these clashes shape your personality and character? Where do you feel at home? By means of posing such questions, we try to figure out how these girls experience growing up in a society different from the country of origin of their parents, as well as how they integrate the two cultures that are presented to them into their lives.



PROJECT DESCRIPTION - A DAY IN HER LIFE

A Day In Her Life is an exploration of the daily lives of women whose lives are connected to Amsterdam's Red Light District. For three months, starting in November 2011, participants created a body of personal work. Nine women completed the photography and radio workshops, whereas six of them finished the entire project with a video. They were challenged to employ different types of multimedia: self-portrait photography, radio with anonymous interviews and a video combining these newly acquired skills. The participants discussed their challenges, hopes, and dreams with an emphasis on why they left their homelands in search of opportunity. This was done to concretize and document a life that may otherwise not be acknowledged.



A Day In Her Life aspires to create a humane and multi-faceted picture of the sex industry. VOW Media's goal is to show that this industry is a complex fabric, composed both of women workers who are entitled to demand their rights as well as women who did not enter the industry voluntarily. We feel that people looking from the outside in tend to have quite a polarized view, in which they see these women either as victims or as strong, independent women making their own choices. But as in all other areas of life, there are often grey zones in-between these polar opposites. VOW Media hopes to portray a spectrum of experiences of different women in their own voices and images.



In 2011, VOW Media started research for a new project: Breaking the Spell. This project will focus on young girls who have been victims of "loverboys": young men who coerce their girlfriends, usually teenagers, into sex work. Media attention has not been very positive. Victim blaming and doubting are unfortunately not uncommon experiences and victims find themselves in a stigmatized situation.

Many organizations have been formed to help rescue young girls from the clutches of their loverboys, often having to resort to sending these girls abroad in order to be safe. The healing process they go through is often long and arduous. In many of these cases, the loverboys are these women's first loves. The feelings they hold for the loverboys can cloud their judgment and reasoning. It is rare that these men are prosecuted or brought to justice, leaving the victims behind with the difficult task of closure of this period in their lives.

Young girls are particularly vulnerable to negative portrayal in the media. It influences the way they view and value themselves and thereby it affects their sense of self-worth. We believe that it is important for women to learn and understand how media is created, in order to make them aware of how it can be manipulated. We want them to utilize media as a means of self-expression, to create change in their lives, and positively affect their self-image and self-esteem. Additionally, we use media as a tool for empowerment and social change. VOW Media thinks it is necessary to give young women a voice, and to teach them to express themselves, as their voices have often been silenced. The simple process of giving voices to women who are silenced can create positive change, not only in their lives but also in the lives in the communities around them – their families who have also suffered, their friends, and also potential victims.



2011 has been an eventful year for us. The first public screening of the year took place on 7th of February, in the Center for Sex and Culture in San Francisco in the USA, in which A Day In Her Life was presented to the public. Near the end of May, the same project was shown in two other venues. At Intersections: Stories through Art by Sex Workers of Color! and also at the 7th "Biennial San Francisco Sex Worker Film and Arts Festival". In August, A Day In Her Life was screened at the Chicago Sex Worker Film Festival.

In October, VOW Media organized a benefit dinner in Amsterdam, in which several past projects were screened. This event took place in Joe's Garage. In this same venue, VOW Media showed A Day In Her Life on December 8 during the Reclaim the Screens Festival.



At the Makers Festival 2011: Nieuwe makers sleutelen aan de samenleving, VOW Media exhibited a photography and video installation in the venue Garage Notweg in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. During the festival, the Co-Directors of VOW Media gave a presentation about the organization to a varied audience of community members, designers, and fellow media makers.

During the last month of 2011, VOW Media started to prepare for the screenings of Displaced Daughters. The project shall be screened on the 26th of January 2012, with the participants and members of the community in Amsterdam Osdorp at Studio West.





VOW Media believes the Internet and social media are important for the promotion of the organization and networking with like-minded organizations. We update our website <http://voicesofwomenmedia.org/> constantly. This website provides information about screenings and other events organized by VOW Media. Furthermore, some photographs of the projects, as well as information about the projects are shared on the website. VOW Media has an online video account on Vimeo to share videos (<http://vimeo.com/vowmedia/videos>).

VOW Media has her own Facebook page (Voices of Women Media). On this page, we regularly share information. Facebook users who 'like' us receive updates in their newsfeed. VOW Media provides regular photo updates, as well as information about screenings and projects. Facebook has also been used as a tool to connect to similar-minded women's organizations.

Currently, VOW Media is looking for a good means to create a network that connects all past participants and staff members of VOW Media. Through this network, participants will be able to give each other updates, share their new multimedia projects and give feedback on their (newly created) products. A wider and more long-term goal of VOW Media is to create an influential effect by using this network

Voices of Women Media is made possible with support of:



Mama Cash – this organization supports women's rights organizations worldwide by funding them. Next to that, they try to connect organizations with each other in networks. Mama Cash has been an important sponsor of VOW Media since 2007.



P&G292 – Prostitution & Health Centre. This organization provides social, mental, and health benefits to sex workers in Amsterdam's Red Light District. They want to improve the health and well being of sex workers. In addition to that, they hope to empower sex workers by making them aware of their own labor rights. Lastly, they hope to signal and prevent violence and sexual exploitation. P&G292 offered a workshop space and advice based on their knowledge for A Day In Her Life.



STEIM – studio for electro instrumental music is a centre for research and development of new musical instruments, located in Amsterdam. STEIM has been a longtime supporter of VOW Media, donating studio space for shoots, sound studios for audio recording and computers after our burglary.



Skanfonds – this organization focuses on including everyone into our society. They focus specifically on social cohesion, caring for vulnerable groups of people in our society and on preservation of religious heritage. Skanfonds was very enthusiastic regarding A Day In her Life, especially because the community demanded it.

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Studio West – a public space for teenagers to learn music, dance, theatre, and media, located in Osdorp a neighborhood in Amsterdam West. Studio West offered a workshop venue, editing computers and equipment during our Displaced Daughters project. In addition, they publicized our project and conducted outreach for participants in the neighborhood.



Cultural Center Mezrab is located in Amsterdam. It offers a space for exhibition that focus on photography and telling unheard voices. Mezrab served as the venue for the official public premiere of A Day In Her Life. Our participants were served a homemade dinner from the organizers and answered a Q&A session after the screening.



The Sandberg Institute is the postgraduate masters program of the Amsterdam Art Academy Rietveld. They also host The One Minutes Foundation that has supported VOW Media by donating equipment to their first project in 2007, Disillusionment. One minute videos were made from this workshop and featured in The One Minutes festivals and DVDs.

Staff & Volunteers

Voices of Women Media is co-directed by Vivian Wenli Lin and Pooja Pant. Minouk Konstapel began as a volunteer in May and is now officially working as our Production Manager since September. Ana A. Fernández is the organization's designer. Furthermore, two research assistants work for VOW Media, Maria Serban-Temisan and Cassandra Warren.

VOW Media is assisted by an Advisory Board, consisting of Ellen Ambags, Annegriet Wietsma, and Doris Yeung.

The Office

VOW Media is based in Amsterdam. This year, the organization switched to a larger office and is situated on the 4th floor of the Volkskrantgebouw, Wibautstraat 150. The office aims to operate as more than merely a work spot for staff members. It functions a media centre, in which participants of workshops feel free to work on their projects. Staff members and participants work together in one room, which allows them to receive direct feedback and explanation when necessary.

Workshop Space

The workshops take place outside of the office. The exact location depends on the project. Displaced Daughters took place in Amsterdam Osdorp, in Studio West. A Day In Her Life used the P&G292 space for the workshop.

Participants do not only work on their own individual projects - all participants work together during the workshop. The women exchange ideas and provide on-the-spot feedback on projects of other participants. They are encouraged to create a network, in which their work functions as continuing learning experiences, in which self-development is stimulated. VOW Media directors can provide direct conceptual and technical advice.



Development of Fundraising Strategies

VOW Media’s Production Manager, Minouk Konstapel, continuously works on the development of new fundraising strategies. As many funding bodies wish to merely provide support for activities, and not for the organizational structure, we have been working on the development of more financially sustainable funding strategies. First of all, we have tried to diversify our funding options and not only rely on a single income stream. In order to fulfill this demand, we have reached out to a variety of grants and funds according to the project and target group. We apply both to the larger, more established funders as well as to smaller charitable trusts and foundations. In addition, we are exploring private fundraising possibilities from private businesses or through sponsorship.

Furthermore, we generate our own income through DVD and photography sales, by hosting fundraising events, and by organizing local benefits. We have been focusing on outreach and publicity that will garner more public support through possibilities of crowd funding for any deficient budgets for our various projects.

We utilize the diverse skills and knowledge within our organization to access different possible income sources. By exploring the field and by being open to new approaches, our funding plans remain realistic yet optimistic.



In January 2012, the screening of Displaced Daughters will take place in Studio-West in Amsterdam. We hope that the family members and other relatives of the participants will be present at the screening, as well as other people close to the participants. By promoting the event online, we hope to attract a wider audience of interested viewers as well.



In the first quarter of next year, we will complete the second A Day in her Life project. After the final workshop sessions, the editing process will start. A booklet and a DVD will be published and we will organize a screening.



VOW Media’s co-director Vivian Wenli Lin will work on the opening of a second workspace in Hong Kong as of September 2012. At the same time, the office in Amsterdam will expand, mostly by trying to attract more volunteers and interns.



We will focus our attention on raising funds for our new project: Breaking the Spell. We will contact organizations to cooperate with. The project will be initiated halfway the new year.



Overall, we will try to bring our work to the broader public, both in the Netherlands and abroad. We want to highlight the intelligence and creativity of our participants and we want the general public to hear their voices. Hopefully, teachers, lawmakers, and members of our general community gain a deeper understanding of the issues of that these girls and women confront daily.

For example, for the Displaced Daughters project, we hope to show that the girls who participated in our projects deal not only with identity issues but are also confronted with racism, xenophobia, claustrophobic traditions, duality from their external environment. In a few years from now, we would like to see these young women represented positively in the mainstream media. VOW Media wants to make it possible for second-generation immigrant youth to be able to watch and identify with these videos and relate to the shared experience.