TOOL
04 Metadata and Controlled Vocabularies

Problem: Amateur filmmakers, particularly women who are home movie makers, tend not to adopt traditional filmmaking roles and often use non-traditional methods of filmmaking. As such, typical metadata standards are not necessarily built to capture amateur film information effectively.

This problem occurs in two ways: 1) existing fields may encourage misattribution or misidentification; 2) existing fields may not be expansive enough to capture subject headings and keywords that reflect amateur filmmaking practice. This means that vital information about a film or filmmaker might not appear in the records at all.

Strategies to Adopt:

1. Existing fields and misattribution:

   a. Collection titles: Most archives have their own internal method for generating collection titles; amateur film collection titles can present an opportunity to recognise women filmmakers. Where possible, name the filmmaker in the collection title or have a multi-author collection title. In the case of a collection of home movies titled the 'John Smith Collection' (after the main family filmmaker), if your acquisition questionnaire and film viewing reveal that more than one family member contributed to filmmaking, you could title the collection the 'Smith Family Collection'.

   b. Director/producer fields: Although many metadata standards (e.g., Library of Congress) promote use of 'director' and 'producer' fields (even containing subject headings for women's professional filmmaking), these are not always suitable for amateur films. Home movie makers, for example, often do not identify themselves as directors or producers. In order to accurately represent and attribute authorship, we suggest avoiding use of these fields and instead including a stock statement in a free text field like summary or description. This makes it clear that these films were made by a particular individual. If your metadata template utilises a 'creator' field, that may be a useful option as well.

2. Capturing amateur film practice in keywords and subject headings:

   a. Keywords: One easy way of increasing the visibility of women in your CMS is to adopt the keyword 'women filmmakers'. You can apply this to any films in your collections that you know to have been made by women, or that women contributed to. It can also be deployed alongside keywords like 'non-professional' to identify women's amateur filmmaking.

   b. Subject Headings: We suggest broadening the scope of subject headings beyond what is typically used for home movies and travelogues (e.g. 'children,' 'travel,' 'holiday,' 'tourism' and names of locales). When processing these films, try not to neglect aspects of the film's subject matter beyond domestic or place-based headings. For example, consider applying industry, object, or craft related headings where applicable. At the time of writing, the Library of Congress also recommends the use of 'amateur films' rather than 'home movies' (LCSH 44, H-220), which we find useful in terms of production type or genre fields, as well.

Metadata and controlled vocabularies on the Amateur Movie Database, which has adopted our suggested 'women filmmakers' keyword as a tag. Image courtesy Amateur Movie Database Project (www.amateurcinema.org).

04 | CASE STUDY

Existing fields and misattribution

One collection we worked on comprised about 40 amateur films created by two sisters, where it was often difficult to determine which sister was filming. Perhaps as a result, neither sister had been named as a film's creator anywhere in the existing records. As the films were uncredited home movies, it would not be appropriate to list both or either sister as 'director' since we had no basis on which to call them this. There were also no keywords used to suggest the filmmakers were women and the collection title was a generic '(Last Name) Collection'. Even though we could demonstrate that the films were shot by women, we couldn't see this in the records or in the collection title. Here, a short statement, such as 'This film is part of the Smith Family Collection which was shot by Jane and Janet Smith,' could be added to each summary and used to indicate the full names of the sisters and the fact that they are the filmmakers. Such a statement could also appear across other fields such as a 'notes' field. The location of such a statement matters less than its consistent inclusion in the records.

Capturing amateur film practice in keywords and subject headings

In the case of another woman filmmaker who worked both alone and as part of a filmmaking group, her work was found to sit across a number of collections. In this instance, existing records made it difficult to identify her work or to identify these collections as containing work by a woman unless she was already known to the archive user. In this case, the addition of a keyword such as 'female filmmaker', 'women filmmakers', or another related controlled vocabulary term, and its consistent application to related records, would aid in the identification of these films as having been made by a woman. While utilising keywords in this manner may seem obvious, it is particularly effective in helping to identify women filmmakers. All the collections discussed throughout our toolkit also benefitted from a re-examination of subject headings. Particularly in the case of collections containing home movies, expanded subject headings allowed for better identification of topics, activities and places featured in the films.

Filmmaker Sister Maureen MacMahon appearing briefly in *No Straight Lines* (1970), which she also created as part of The Black Raven Film Group. Image provided courtesy of the Irish Film Institute.

Holiday (c1928, Mabel Basham, East Anglian Film Archive)