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WOMEN
IN ENTERTAINMENT
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Special Issue

FILM

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IN ENTERTAINMENT

WOMEN OF INDEPENDENT MEANS

Female filmmakers are putting their thoughts, feelings and experiences on the screen.

BY JEAN OPPENHEIMER

Writer-director Tamara Jenkins ("The Slums of Beverly Hills") can remember the exact moment it happened. "I was in film school and we were in the process of making our short films," she says. "They were showing us all of these films from around the world, and most of them were made by men. I remember being really blocked about what I wanted to write about when a professor brought in some shorts by (New Zealand director) Jane Campion. I felt like I was seeing something I had never seen before. One film especially, 'A Girl's Own Story,' had all of this strange ritual stuff with girls playing jump rope. One of the themes running through it was girls on the verge of sexuality and how the world becomes a sort of predatory place. It was an entirely female point of view, and it just kind of unlocked my psyche."

Women filmmakers are putting their thoughts, feelings and experiences on-screen in ever-increasing numbers these days. While still a minority — and still working primarily in the independent arena — they are more visible now than ever before.

"My films (two shorts and a feature) deal with daughterhood," says Jenkins. "They are about surviving parents — not outliving them," she explains, "but surviving their influences. I have female characters who don't really know how to be female and are looking for advice and information. The protagonist in 'The Slums of Beverly Hills' wakes up and has breasts and is trying to contend with her new body. She is trying to deal with this equipment she doesn't have an operating manual for."

Jenkins is one of the few independents —



RISEING STARS: Female filmmaker Julie Davis (above), working on "I Love You, Don't Touch Me," and Tamara Jenkins, the writer/director of "The Slums of Beverly Hills."

male or female — who didn't have to struggle to raise financing for a first feature. Lindsay Law, then-president of American Playhouse, saw her half-hour short "Family Remains," which had won a prize at Sundance, and offered to finance her feature debut. When American Playhouse folded and Law moved to Fox Searchlight, he took the project with him.

It's hardly surprising that female filmmakers, especially those making their first pictures, would place women at the center of their stories. "The guys have had their say, the Ed Burnses and the Spike Lees, but we don't see young women's stories very much on-screen," complains Julie Davis, whose feature debut, the romantic comedy "I Love You, Don't Touch Me," deals with a young woman in her early 20s "finding herself and being available for love." Davis describes her second film, the recently wrapped "Why Love Doesn't Work," as "dealing with the same themes as 'I Love You' but like the next step,



the more mature, older version of it."

Despite feeling that there aren't enough "female-driven stories with real female voices," Davis resists the notion that all women share the same sensibilities simply because they are the same gender. "Every human being has a different perspective of the world. My

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