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Fall '22 Senior Project

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Black Anxiety

Sitting in the back seat with fallen ashes from hell constantly hitting my face as if god himself wanted to be entertained and decided to send comets to earth, repeatedly landing on a blind innocent orphan; that's how I imagined my drives with my mother. I thought to myself, why must I anger her? Why am I always the one fucking up? Smoke ashes didn't give me time to catch my breath; I asked myself, does my mother even remember I have asthma? I hated myself for being a burden, and I wanted to disappear. But as a 6 year old, I didn't know what suicide was. I wasn't even sure of my existence and what it meant. Like always, I took it in and kept silent. After a while, her phone rang. I often wonder when was the first time I began to fear being in a car with someone smoking and driving while on the phone. That experience turned into a fear of learning how to drive. Watching her and feeling the fear I felt in the car made me never want to learn how to fucking drive. This was one of the stories I told my therapist. Within a couple of years, the sad but realistic story of a silent boy that sees all but tells no one changed into one where the boy could speak, one where I could talk. When spilling out words, I couldn't help but doubt subconsciously, wondering if I should even talk about the truth; so instead, I gave simple vague descriptions that always made the back of my throat itch. Never have I been asked to speak, vent, elaborate, share, and explain. I was confused but, for the most part, upset.

The documentary relates to my life because all the situations I was put in reflect the person I am today. Unconsciously influencing my opinions on the world, I felt unheard and unseen, so I often took my emotions and pushed them down. I didn't overthink how I felt or what the world was throwing at me, it was more just a process of putting one foot in front of the other, and eventually, I would get there. The film was made to show what people of color go through and what they feel about their anxiety. The artistic style was to have the beginning playing Meek Mill, the new national anthem; the song brought the crowd in and came from a similar place of struggle. In the song "Dreams and Nightmares," Meek Mill talks about the battle of one's environment and being the underdog. The idea is that anyone who suffers from challenging life experiences can still make it and achieve something more significant. This resonates with the community because it comes down to relatability and what my people would say is "Facts," opening up the film that was to stir that same passion, that same relatability, and parallel those feelings with mental health. It's meant to be an inspirational song and what makes it stand out so much is that he isn't talking about money or fame but rather his childhood dreams and what he faced to get where he is; he created a song where you want to see him the victor. It was not what was expected with a conversation on anxiety, and I wanted to juxtapose those two feelings into one opening.

Most know me as the one to make jokes to make everyone laugh or, from my viewpoint, comfortable. That's all it is that I'm attempting to do; I know what it is like to feel alone and, for the most part, isolated to the point someone feels unnoticed by the world; their impact, though brief, is their unique sense of comedic timing, that's how they stand out, that's how they have lived, and they have done that for years. The more I explained, the more it seemed unfair; what

did I do wrong, and what purpose was I born to fulfill? Anger swelled as the more I let out, the more I realized I was dealt a bad hand and that it didn't matter because life went on; I didn't have time to stop; I just had to keep going.

Before I dive deeper, I would like to let the reader know this is not going to be a prequel to the story I've told you; instead, this video is creating a space where people could have what I didn't. Learning the challenges, I faced making the film, I would like to expand later down the line with better quality for both audio and visuals. In a sense, you can say that this project was the pilot of a series I would like to direct, given the time and funding. I didn't want people's voices not to be heard like mine, so creating this space to allow others to be themselves and speak their truth played an essential part in the motivation for making the film. I wanted to develop a way to show others that it's okay to say, it's okay to talk, but also it's okay to listen. Multiple interviews I had were held in a private setting about a topic that most of my peers and I never discussed. This wasn't about the newest video games coming out or what rapper dropped an album; this was about life. Asking the interview questions and noticing people I've known for years shrink down within themselves and answer as quickly as possible surprised me. In my video, that was an essential key factor I wanted to keep. We all have nervous ticks or things we do to fight the urge to feel uncomfortable; mine is a lack of eye contact. For some reason, sometimes I can't look anyone in the eye while I talk to them. Confronting people's anxiety like that made me very uncomfortable since I needed to decide whether to end the interview quickly or to keep asking questions I knew they weren't entirely comfortable answering. Creating this video was a learning process. Would I be a hypocrite if I said I didn't care what others had to say while being interviewed? Seeing what triggered their anxiety, whether it was their parents not

giving them a game or being nervous about walking into a new setting like a job or school and wondering what others would think of them, left me feeling cold. For me, it's hard to acknowledge people's interpretation of struggle when so much has been taken away from me.

When I was younger, I always called my aunt when something happened to me; in our conversations, she drilled into me that life could always be worse and that I should be happy that I made it this far, to the point where it became my thoughts. Now, I can't help but think about how I feel, or is it my aunt's words taking over me? I remember when things were terrible for me mentally, and I didn't have anyone to speak to; I would call my aunt to tell her about my experiences, asking for her advice since I didn't know what to do. Although I love her, I remember calling her to vent my frustrations and getting a response I didn't expect. To tell you the truth, I didn't know what to expect but to tell me, "I should be thankful I'm not in jail or retarded", wasn't it. This was the intelligent aunt I could communicate with, but our conversation ended up being the same, just like my mother. If anyone has never told you this, let me be the first to say generational trauma sucks.

With my project being a documentary, I was the one in charge of making sure the interviewees' voices were being heard and that their message was being conveyed; I had all the control. I'm talking about some challenges I face with being controlled. It was an exciting process to be able to cut and edit the answers I was receiving. Even though editing out the ums and likes was tedious, I noticed myself leaving a lot more to the viewer. We could be better, and sometimes we say the wrong words during explanations or even stutter, and that's more than satisfactory. Some of these people I'm close to, and to edit out their mannerisms, would be to

create an entirely different narrative where I'm interviewing the perfect person that doesn't exist. Anxiety is the opposite of comfort, so this was alongside a research project. Usually, people listen to a friend or family member but instead, I'm sitting down, taking notes, analyzing what they're saying, and constantly relistening to it for the project. I began to create a system that streamlined the answer that was given but also allowed each person's personality to show when they spoke. There are different ways to watch the videos and to put them together; the more I watched them, the more I noticed and heard. This video has a lot of symbolism because even though I am interviewing other people, I'm also incorporating the things that give me anxiety. I'm trying to parallel the people opening up and being vulnerable to me doing the same because they didn't have to agree to get interviewed. As some of them told me their stories, I realized that although some everyday experiences didn't seem necessary or that big of a deal to me, for those people, it was something that brought discomfort to them. Just Like me, they had to live with it too.

Doing this project was enlightening and insightful. I've recently discovered that I have an anxiety disorder. This discovery made the experiences within my life start to make sense. Going to therapy was the first step to coming closer to understanding myself. It took time and discipline to relearn the things that – at a younger age – I would just hold back and repress. Now coming into adulthood, I'm learning all the emotions such as anger, fear, resentment, and overall things I wasn't capable of accepting within myself all seem to be coming front and center. I think reflection was a massive part of my life in which I didn't need to remain the same, especially after knowing and accepting what happened in my past wasn't my fault. Throughout college, some projects challenged me to take a creative approach and what I've learned through my work

is my self-reflection seeps into my creativity. Focusing on that gave me the inspiration and encouragement to involve mental health in my project and create a space where people can talk freely in sharing their journey but also send a message to help others. We are all facing something, and sometimes, we need to acknowledge it as a community to further our development.

The premise of the project was to provide a platform in which people of color were able to speak their truth without the bias of the media controlling the narrative. The documentary was based on one-on-one interviews in which I asked a series of questions to each individual and took down notes on their responses. I think many people in my generation are starting to understand themselves more. There's something called high-functioning anxiety; sometimes, you won't even notice you have it. You're so used to the day-to-day rituals that sometimes you can't even stop to see; you might, for the most part, need a break to relax, cry or simply receive a hug. I realize we are all in the same boat, and no one's struggles are more important than another. This project was tough to do because I felt as though I was taking on a lot of energy and unresolved traumas that, up until now, some have never said out loud. The realization that we live with this is just pushed to the side as if it were a simple toothache. That toothache can become a cavity, which, when left untreated, can infect a person's organs and cause them to get seriously sick, just like how anxiety can affect someone's quality of life. Just imagine someone having to experience anxiety while being so overwhelmed that knowing they have no choice but to keep things in motion and worry about it later. I wanted to use my documentary to create a space where people of color could talk about their anxiety and know someone was listening on the other side.

Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/782036161>