

SOME FORM OF FREEDOM

Queer Art and Collaborative Non-Fiction

Storytelling in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

The individual experiences of Queer people around the world are as unique as they are special; however, societal acceptance and visibility of these identities remains limited, particularly when referring to non-cisgender Queer identities. This research examined the ways that showcasing Queer identities through documentary imagery and giving subjects a high amount of control over the editing process, impacted their feelings of self-worth in relation to their identity. This process involved two separate rounds of photo elicitation interviews with two subjects, and these subject's reactions, thoughts, and feelings about the photographs in turn impacted further photographic production and the final editing process. Two separate theoretical bodies were used to guide this research, Social Information Processing Theory and Queer Theory.

SUMMARY OF PROFESSIONAL SKILLS COMPONENT

Some Form of Freedom is an online photodocumentary project about two Queer individuals during a highly transitional phase of their lives. In the face of this tumultuous time, the project documents their resilience and triumph through artistic expression. This documentary showcases the relationship the subjects have with each other and highlights the importance and impact that community has on the Queer community. It exhibits Queer identities in an often-inhospitable world living unabashedly as themselves.

Key words: *documentary, Queer theory, transgender, drag performance, non-cisgender, identity, affirmation, representation, online*

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my friends, Ezra and Artemis.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

One of my earliest and fondest memories of childhood is from my older cousin Anna's sixth birthday party. Although I say cousin, she was more like a sister. My immediate family lived directly across the street from my cousins, and we grew up acting as one unit. Gatherings were frequent, and whether it was an exuberant celebration or a quiet dinner, my grandfather, four parents, and five siblings have always acted as one. Anna's birthday party was no different. She invited several of her friends over for an afternoon of dress up and Disney movies, and I was eager to participate. We raided the Weber's costume closet, cosplaying as Disney princesses, donning cheap makeup and drinking 'tea,' or plastic teacups full of Sprite. Frilly dresses of red and blue, sequined lace and two-inch heels were passed between us, and I vividly remember sitting in front of a pink plastic makeup mirror while Anna applied electric blue mascara to my face, laughing joyfully. It was a beautiful moment that I haven't since forgotten.

I knew then that my gender was not as cut and dry as the label assigned at birth. Even at that age, my family didn't scoff or discourage us from dressing or acting how we wanted. Though they may have laughed at our dresses and campy makeup, it was not to discourage us, but rather was a show of acceptance that who we were and how we acted was perfect, as long as it was authentically us. As I grew older and began to experience life outside of my family bubble, I learned a harsh truth that not everyone was as accepting of the 'other' as my family had been. Throughout middle school and the beginning of high school, I repressed my identity for the benefit of others, and it wasn't until I was accidentally outed by a friend when I was 16 that I began to live (timidly at first) as a Queer person.

As with most insecure Queer teens coming of age in the 2010's, I turned to the internet for support. My generation was the first with virtually limitless access to a democratized online world, and as such a large portion of my childhood was lived simultaneously through physical and online spaces. Though I had a few other Queer friends that I could relate to in real life, Tumblr, Instagram, Snapchat, and a host of other online platforms became primary avenues of connecting and learning about the Queer community in a safe and inviting way. By the time I'd graduated from high school, with the help of my friends both real and 'internet,' I was becoming more comfortable living outwardly as myself. After moving to Columbia to attend the University of Missouri, I encountered something I'd never had before – a large, supportive group of accepting and loving friends, many of whom were Queer themselves. This support system was unlike anything I'd experienced outside of my family, and it allowed me to think critically about the labels I was using to describe my identity. As I grew as a person, I also grew in my understanding of Queerness as whole.

This maturation coincided perfectly as I began to take classes at the Murray Center for Documentary Journalism. The program, headed by Stacey Woelfel and Robert Greene, pushed me and my classmates to critically analyze the documentary form as a means of truthfully interpreting everyday life, demonstrating to us how storytelling could be used as a conduit for generating a greater sense of empathy and understanding through storytelling. Exposing students to historically important non-fiction films, as well as newer, more experimental projects of a highly collaborative and often-experimental nature, we were encouraged to think about documentary storytelling as an ever-evolving exercise. As someone who spent years doubting and repressing their identity for the benefit of others that couldn't or wouldn't understand it, the greater mission of the Murray Center resonated with me. During the two years I spent in

undergraduate study at the program, however, I quickly realized that while documentaries can expose people to dazzling, horrifying, or otherwise impactful stories, the influence of consuming a documentary very rarely affects substantial change in the wider world.

While not potentially world altering, my exercises in non-fiction storytelling at the Murray Center did make one thing very clear: that documentaries are inherently an exercise in auto-analysis, for both subject and documentarian. As such, non-fiction storytelling has substantive potential to impact the people who participate in them, though I quickly understood that this phenomenon was one that could be either positive or negative. With these thoughts, I began to approach my documentary work from a highly participatory perspective, and to decrease the potential for predation through this work, I attempted to emphasize both my and the subject's experience as equally valuable and important. As a storyteller at heart, my own perspective could obviously be felt in the final production, but centering the documentary participants as an integral part of the process opened the doors for a much deeper understanding of the form itself. Though maybe not 'journalistic' in the traditional sense, this pivot towards collaboration as a central tenant was one that completely changed my outlook on storytelling.

These revelations came to me just as the pandemic ground our world to a halt. While incredibly difficult at times, the time spent alone at home allowed space for deeper and more critical self-introspection. As my desire to understand and expand upon non-fiction storytelling evolved throughout those first months, so too did my desire to understand myself and my Queerness more deeply. It was during this time that I finally came to terms with my gender identity, specifically because I was able to connect with other Queer, non-cisgender people online. Isolated with my family at home, the internet provided an outlet to explore and connect with other like-minded people and was something I hadn't needed to rely on since my teenage

years. This time was as strange and horrible as it was new and beautiful, and left me with a desire to tell more impactful stories that were close to my own experiences.

As I returned to Columbia for my senior year with a deeper understanding of myself and the type of non-fiction work I wanted to conduct, I recognized immediately that the only documentaries I wanted to make were ones in which the subjects had just as much say in the process as I did. My first opportunity to practice this was with my Murray Center capstone. Collaborating with my close friend Galen as both subject and producer, we created a film that explored the motivations and desires of young journalists in an incredibly volatile period. While far from perfect, this first project, made with an emphasis on collaboration, provided ample opportunities to practice this type of non-fiction storytelling. After graduation, I continued to develop my storytelling ability within the photojournalism graduate curriculum at the University of Missouri, all the while knowing that I wanted to continue making highly collaborative non-fiction stories. In addition to this, I knew that my next in-depth documentary project would be centered around Queer identities, due to my introspective months of the pandemic. As someone who's first 'coming out' was inadvertent and out of my control, I also recognized that allowing the subjects of the project an immense amount of control over their own narratives was of paramount importance.

My background as a documentarian, born into the age of the Internet's maturation, with a continuous desire to explore Queerness as an ever-evolving concept were the main catalysts for the creation of *Some Form of Freedom* and the subsequent analysis in this paper. This project was born out of a desire to generate empathy for Queer identities, and further, to explore how and why allowing these identities substantial control over their stories is so important. In the final project, the subject's own voices are intentionally included, captured from both natural

observation and photo elicitation interviews, and are paired with photographs that they selected as the most impactful from months of shooting. As such, the publication of this documentary could only be in an online format, which is poetic and fitting considering the internet's role as an incubator for Queer identities. These steps were taken to ensure that not only was the final product affirming for the subjects, but so that the subjects could quite literally tell their own stories. At each step in this project's progress, the subject's experiences and feelings were of the utmost importance. This project was simultaneously an exercise in online representation, a reverent example of Queer pride, and an analysis into how the documentary form affects its participants.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Backgrounding Transgender Identity Development

To begin with a discussion on transgender identity formation, we must first examine the possible intrinsic processes that any non-cisgender person can experience, and the ways this identity is discovered, explored, developed, and fully realized. Devor's analysis into the potential stages of transgender development provides some structure, positing that there are 14 possible stages for trans identity development. Beginning with anxiety and confusion about one's gender identity, this eventually leads a person to the discovery of their transgender identity. From here, Devor theorizes that people may experience internal conflict, and inevitably begin to compare their previous gender identity and their new identity, finally coming to tentatively accept this new identity (Devor, 2004). This study concludes its proposed model with the process of transition, acceptance, and ultimately pride in their new gender identity. While useful as a guide, the author acknowledges that these stages are not set-in stone, and that experiences may drastically vary between person to person.

Further scholarship has examined the ways transgender people explore their identities by moving past the internal, and focusing more on external, social practices that are permissive to divergent identity exploration. Contemporary scholars have documented in depth the way young transgender individuals navigate social interactions, drawing connections between gender affirming care and socialization to solidify and reaffirm transgender identity (Sansfaçon et al., 2020). The study emphasized that building identity through and amongst other trans people was of the utmost importance and is directly related to Bradford & Syed's study on the ways trans people's identities, though unique to each individual, are unified as an alternative to

‘cismnormativity’ (Bradford & Syed, 2019). This concept, suggesting that the ‘normal’ or ‘accepted’ genders are either male or female, is directly juxtaposed to trans identities, and in creating communities with other transgender individuals, Transgender or Non-Binary people (herein referred to as TGNB) can form a counter-narrative (dubbed ‘transnormativity’) to provide empathetic spaces to explore gender-diverse identities that would be othered in a homogenous society.

Gender-diverse individuals, often ostracized and outcast, seek out these empathetic spaces for guidance, support, and community. Prior to the development of the internet, these spaces were few and far between; however, with the rapid rise of technology in the 21st century, the channels with which people were able to practice socialization changed forever. With new and innovative ways to communicate with others, TGNB individuals have sought to occupy virtual spaces to find belonging, and as documented by Sloop in *21st Century Communication*, these spaces have become fundamental in finding communal support for queer identities (Sloop, 2009). Sloop’s analysis, linking queer identities to other socio-political movements like the Civil Rights and Feminist movements, asserts the importance that socialization plays for LGBTQIA+ individuals in building community, exploring identities, and finding belonging. To further solidify this link, Zimmerman draws parallels between the fourth wave of the Feminist movement and the transgender community in its inclusion of transgender identities as a principal example of the significant and impactful ways online social liberation groups can interact, grow, and support each other (Zimmerman, 2017). Emphasizing online communities in particular, this literature draws on the unique ways that the Fourth Wave of Feminism relies on the globalizing effect of the internet and encourages the dissolution of borders (and genders) to radically reconceptualize traditional notions of sex and gender online. These links, while distinctly

different from one another, provide further evidence of the ways online communities can be vital for developing and fostering diverse gender identities.

The (Troubling) Relationship Between Traditional Media and the Transgender Community

After exploring the ways gender-diverse people build self-identity and cultivate accepting communities in both physical and virtual spaces, it is necessary to examine the way trans people are perceived by wider society. More precisely, by analyzing the larger socio-cultural themes that are presented and explored by mainstream media outlets when reporting on transgender people, we can paint a broader picture into how the transgender community is viewed by those not a part of it.

First, in examining the sourcing practices used by reporters, Capuzza's research serves as an example of the way the transgender community is underrepresented – and often misrepresented – in the mainstream media. Using mixed research methods to link society's construction of gender and sexuality (as well as the persistence of cisnormativity) to this group's struggle, Capuzza analyzes sourcing practices by U.S. journalists to determine conclusively how sourcing effects these communications. Capuzza's research concludes that where there is coverage, it is mainly focused on soft-news topics, neglecting to examine the larger issues that plague this community (ie. high rates of suicidal ideation, domestic violence, assault), rendering the little coverage that exists less valuable for issue salience (Capuzza, 2014). This article provides further evidence of the problematic ways that mainstream media has been used to other TGNC people, and the effects this othering has had on identity development and community belonging.

Further exploring this relationship, Billard examines the differences between societal perception of sexually queer people (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Asexual, etc.) and gender queer people (Transgender, non-Binary, gender queer, etc.). Billard discovered that, while public acceptance of some members of the LGBTQIA+ community has increased (notably those who identify as Gay and Lesbian), rampant transphobia is still pervasive (Billard, 2016). Some forms of this transphobia are more subtle (like misgendering, misnaming, other various microaggressions) but these issues also present themselves in topical analysis; that is, the coverage that does exist is limited, often focused specifically on violence committed against a trans person rather than the space they otherwise occupy.

While this prior research paints a bleak picture for the representation of transgender people, it is important to recognize that more contemporary work has begun to observe a notable shift in the flawed public image of transgender people in mainstream media. In *Struggling for Ordinary* (Cavalcante, 2018), the author highlights the ways that society's once flawed view of the trans community has shifted, particularly with a focus on television. Using society's progression on trans visibility as a benchmark, Cavalcante asserts that this positive turn can be a powerful catalyst in identity formation and self-acceptance among TGNC people. This highlights the effect that shifting societal perception has had on both media consumption for trans folks, as well as on those who produce it. The centerpiece of the book's argument is grounded in the everyday, ordinary experiences of transgender individuals, and in the way they use media to form their own identity – and while things could be better, Cavalcante documents this positive trend as a foundational step forward.

Gendering Online Spaces

Moving past physical spaces, we can now turn our emphasis towards the ways that online communities are structured, ranging from social hierarchies, all the way down to the individual coding used to construct these spaces. Further, we must examine how these structures can act as barriers for gender-diverse individuals, and how they adapt and overcome them. Beginning with an analysis of a specific type of technology sometimes used by social media platforms called Automatic Gender Recognition (AGR) software, we can immediately uncover troubling signs for trans people online. This software, rooted in the field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), is meant to automatically ascertain the gender of a particular user based on their user profile (Keyes, 2018). Keyes' content analysis of the extensive ways this technology is used determines that it is inherently exclusive and harmful to trans identities, and solidifies that technology, particularly social media, is constructed without divergent gender identities in mind, documenting the ways it misclassifies, misgenders, and (at best) ignores these identities. While this perception may be beginning to shift, it does not justify the harm that TGNC users may have experienced because of it.

Giesecking further examines the ways that online dating platforms and social media are coded to reflect traditional gender and sexuality binaries. Drawing on foundational study on the importance of code to the everyday infrastructure of society, and consequently the effect society has on this code, this article further extends their argument on the hegemonic nature of coding in perpetuating traditional gender and sex roles online (Giesecking, 2017; Kitchin & Dodge, 2011). Race, sexuality, and gender expression are fundamental aspects of online meaning-making for individual users, baked into the coded infrastructure of online spaces, and this article explores the ways this perpetuated hegemony is harmful to anyone ‘other’ than the perceived normal. While focusing specifically on dating applications and websites, Bivens broadens this analysis to

include the history of gender programming on a social media giant: Facebook. Emphasizing the coding of gender as an inherently social act, the article analyzes the quantitative and historical reasoning that Facebook expanded user gender preference from two to sixty, and the effects, though somewhat limited, this choice had on user experiences for TGNC individuals. Of note are analyses into the ways that this affected relationships between the social media app and the users, providing further historical context into the complex ways social media has been engrained in hegemonic perceptions of gender identity (Bivens, 2017). Before Facebook implemented this change, users who identified outside of the gender binary were forced to either leave the section blank or misgender themselves publicly, presenting a structural hurdle and moral dilemma. However, this example of Facebook changing their coding to reflect more gender-diverse options is a primary example of the ways that the transgender community faced, overcame, and ultimately changed the foundations of an online space to be more welcoming and inclusive for other members of the community to come.

Before we can more fully explore the ways transgender people use online spaces to explore identities, we must examine the implications that overcoming the structural barriers documented above have on trans people. Doan's study examines the implications that gendered spaces have for those who exist outside the gender binary, arguing its effects are "tyrannical" for their purposeful exclusion of "othered" groups (Doan, 2010). While not focusing explicitly on online spaces, this article helps further articulate the ways that society has been made to exclude TGNC people, and the effects that this "othering" has. By focusing on physical spaces, rather than virtual ones, this article emphasizes the hole that exists in the literature when examining how TGNC people have been neglected, and the compromises they must make to explore and form these othered identities online. Shifting focus to exclusively online spaces, Dhoest & Szulc

examine this issue, exploring the ways that LGBTQIA+ individuals use online spaces, asking how social, cultural, and material contexts effect how these individuals navigate online social media presence (Dhoest & Szulc, 2016). This study explored key aspects that makes social media perfect for identity exploration: namely, its ability to provide anonymity for users. They can explore these identities without the added pressures of being outed in their day-to-day life, and so are more willing to explore traditionally “deviant” sexual and gender identities. While this concept of anonymous identity exploration may seem counter to gender identity development, it provides a concrete example of only one of the multitude of ways transgender, non-binary, and gender-diverse people overcome structural barriers, and regardless of the challenges or fears associated therein, use and shape online spaces to develop identity and community.

Rethinking Spatial Identity: the Virtual Becomes the Physical

Virtual spaces conducive to queer identity exploration have been well documented and are explored further in Scheuerman et al.’s study. Unpacking the ways that transgender and non-binary individuals navigate technology to find, create, and maintain safe spaces welcoming of their identities, the study assert that the internet was key for the identity formation of several of the study’s participants, even noting at one point, “How could you be trans before the internet?” (Scheuerman et al., 2018). Transgender individuals from the study cited that the internet provided views of transgender and non-binary identity that, before the web, could only be found in medical textbooks, pornographic magazines, or diagnostic texts. The benefits of the internet for individuals in the study cannot be understated – however, an even more important aspect of this article is in its articulation of the dangers and harm that can come with online spaces for TGNC users. Participants noted that because of the anonymous, globalizing effect of the internet, ‘abusers’ and ‘outsiders’ sometimes infiltrated trans-positive spaces and attacked or targeted

TGNB individuals because of their identities. Concluding the article, the researchers note that while the internet can be a valuable tool for TGNB people and their identities, it can also be a place where harm is done to them. In noting both experiences, this article gives validation to the internet as a powerful tool that can be both used and abused. Transgender users often reported being targeted online and experiencing harmful incidents; and so, while there is evidence that online spaces can be key in identity formation and community development, this article provides the perspective that the online world remains an incredibly volatile space for marginalized groups.

Now that we've examined the background, relationship with traditional media, structural barriers, and online risk factors associated with the transgender community, we can more completely investigate the online communities where identity development occurs and document the pervasive and constructive ways these spaces are used. Beginning with an extension of the anonymous identity exploration above, Austin et al. restate the importance of online spaces for TGNB youth. Their findings suggest that the internet provides not just important, but infrastructural spaces for trans youth seeking community, belonging, and guidance. Further, the article asserts that the reasoning behind a reliance on online communities for these youth lies in their lack of ability or reluctance to explore these identities in their physical lives, for fear of ostracization or retribution (Austin et al., 2020). By emphasizing online spaces as almost more important than physical ones (at least in initial identity formation), we are able to analyze to what degree these spaces play a role in their individual identity formation. Maintaining focus on young trans people, Jenzen explores the way that young TGNB people who've grown up in the age of social media utilize online platforms. The article's findings contend that, in the face of gendered coding paradigms and rampant transphobia, young queer people respond effectively

and creatively to subvert these challenges and overcome them (Jenzen, 2017). From here, a link between navigating transphobic spaces and maintaining anonymity can be drawn, and the affordances that young queer people must make online can be better crystallized. These affordances, as noted by Hanckel et al. can be understood by analyzing how young queer people's social media usage reflects their desires to explore their identities while also managing risks. In particular, the findings emphasized the ability of queer youth to define what was and was not "for them", concluding that their ability to navigate and contribute to online queer-discourse was foundational for their self-worth and well-being (Hanckel et al., 2019).

While anonymity and risk management can be of paramount importance in online identity development, the locus of this literature review rests in examining the ways that online gender exploration can have a visceral impact on physical gender expression. One study documents this phenomenon precisely. Rooke focused on the ways that spaces become gendered by documenting the lived experiences of 18 TGNB youth (between the ages of 14-22) as they participated in a year-long artistic exploration. These youth created art, all the while discussing the way that gender expression and sexuality are baked into the sociological makeup of their day to day lives, and the difficult task navigating these spaces sometimes are. A key finding from this article is in this articulation: "Existing research shows how transgender identities are often formed in physical isolation from other trans people through virtual encounters in cyberspace," (Rooke, 2010, pp. 17). This study establishes a concrete link between online self-discovery and physical gender expression and identity. In establishing a physical space free of the confines of a gender binary, the participants were able to explore their individual gender identity in a safe and healthy way. This runs parallel to TGNB use of spaces online (even if those spaces are coded to

be exclusive to their identities), and as this article shows, the transgender physical self can – and is – influenced by the virtual self.

Examining another example of online communities, Moon documented the support that transgender individuals found online at “GenderQueerConfessions.com”. This article critically examines the social enforcement surrounding the gender binary and illuminates the harm that inherently cis-gendering trans people has. Noting these often-traumatic experiences, Moon examines the dilemma this presents in a qualitative analysis of TGNC people’s entries to this online forum, pulling posts from this site to discuss the ways trans people disorient their assigned birth gender and renegotiate their gender identity. By highlighting the often-disorienting process that comes with re-gendering, the artist provides examples of the ways that these individuals can leverage liminal spaces to form otherwise divergent identities, as well as rely on the support of online communities (Moon, 2018). In doing so, Moon documents another example of online communities playing a role in identity development offline.

To conclude in our pointed analysis into transgender communities online, we must acknowledge the ways that these spaces cannot only be used for community building, but also in shaping discourse and engaging in activism. It is impossible to mention contemporary uses of social media by TGNC people without first acknowledging the prior work that Black people, specifically Black women, have done. Jackson et. al’s study provides the context perfectly, substantiating the ways transgender people, particularly BIPOC, continue to carve out spaces for themselves and for others like them on contemporary social networking sites. Focusing on the hashtag #GirlsLikeUs on Twitter and Tumblr (created by Janel Mock in 2012), the authors analyze the use of these spaces in both community building, as well as in raising awareness of the disproportionate violence that effects Black transwomen daily. By obstructing

heteronormative practices and ideologies through network building online, and by reclaiming issues-based narrative surrounding BIPOC trans-people, the article further establishes the fundamental role social media plays for trans people (Jackson et. al, 2018).

Conclusions

The importance of this prior literature into my own exploration of transgender identity development online is foundational. However compelling, the previous literature does leave holes in the scholarship surrounding gender-diverse identity development online. This study will attempt to begin to fill some of these gaps, and address the following questions: to what degree does social media provide young people the space to explore and develop gender-diverse identities online? What effect does online identity exploration have on real-life gender expression and identity formation? To what degree does the virtual influence the physical? Do online spaces primarily provide transgender people room to explore their identities and connect with others like them, or are they complicit in further gendering society and ‘othering’ those who don’t fit within this normative binary? These tertiary explorations lead to my two main research questions, as stated below:

RQ1: How do non-cisgender people feel about their representation online?

RQ2: How does being involved in a photo-documentary project impact a participant’s feelings of self-worth?

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS

Queerness is a vast social construction of overlapping identities, and any attempt to manufacture a concrete definition that is all-encompassing is a gargantuan, impossible task; and therein lies the beauty of Queerness. It is a common recognition that, regardless of sexuality or gender identity, what makes you different is what makes you... you. This belief, unfortunately, is not universal as there are many who do not see Queerness as something of value. Therefore, accurate and empathetic representation of Queer identities – particularly visual representation – is essential. In doing this, people within the community have the chance to see identities like their own presented with dignity and pride. Further, showcasing Queer identities to those outside of the community can foster greater understanding and respect.

To complete this task, I asked two Queer drag performers – Artemis Grey and Ezra Prince – to participate in a collaborative photodocumentary. The goals of this project were to create a collection of images that accurately portrayed the subject's lives, empowered their identities, and to determine whether the process positively impacted their self-worth. To achieve this, I conducted two rounds of photo elicitation interviews individually with each character. The first interview was conducted with a series of images created between Nov. 2021, and Feb. 2022, and was meant to establish a baseline of whether the images I was creating were affirming.

The second interview was conducted with a series of images created between Feb. 2022, and April 2022, with the intention of determining which images the subjects felt best showcased their identities. Most of these images were created with the subject's direction from the first interview in mind. In the end, both characters reflected that, in addition to affirming their

individual identities and being positively representative, the documentary process provided them with unique opportunities to reflect and grow in their Queer identities.

The Importance of Queer Representation

The first elicitation interview was based on the subjects' perceptions of the initial documentary images created for this project. These 15 images were almost entirely observational moments, and as such did not account for the subject's individual ideas about what they wanted to be included in the documentary. The images that the subject's responded to the most, however, were not the ones I originally anticipated.

The first photograph that yielded this response was a photograph of Ezra inside his studio space shot through a window, displaying a sign advertising a workshop he was holding (Figure 1). I did not originally think much of this photograph and included it in the elicitation simply to provide variety; however, both Ezra and Artemis commented that this image was one of the strongest, as it resonated with their desire to provide comprehensive education and programming about



(Figure 1)

Queer identities for young people. When I asked Artemis what was impactful about this shot, they stated, "Teaching younger people about Queer existence and Queer history is extremely important for creating a safe world for Queer people to grow up in. I think it's important to expose young Queer people to Queer things so that they feel safe in the world that they live in."

In addition, Artemis also reflected that this photo was important because it reminded them that discrimination towards Queer people is still something that happens regularly in society. “Like with [Florida’s] ‘Don’t Say Gay’ Bill,” they said, “For me, that’s a terrifying reality to even think about living in. Whether you’re talking about it or not, Queer people still exist... So I’m extremely adamant about creating a network or environment where Queer kids can understand themselves better.”

Both subjects also reacted positively to photographs that displayed them as drag performers, particularly as their art related to their own Queer identities. The two images that both Ezra and Artemis responded to the most were an image of Artemis’ pre-show makeup routine (Figure 2) and a photograph taken of Ezra during one of his performances (Figure 3).

In the photograph of Artemis applying makeup to their face, Ezra noted that it encapsulated Artemis’ identity fully. “With Artemis,” he said, “She is an in your face, larger than life individual, both in and out of drag, and this shows the beauty of her. In this photo she’s in



(Figure 2)

the center of the frame, and takes most of it, and that’s exactly the type of person she is.” Artemis echoed this sentiment, going further in their analysis of the image’s perceived deeper meaning. “In my opinion, when you’re dealing with things like gender identity, or finding your sexuality, or even just

where you stand in the world, you find yourself looking in the mirror, whether that’s literally or figuratively. In this photo, you’re showing me looking in a mirror on my journey to looking like

someone who's not me, and I feel like there's something very artistic and expressive about it. People who understand it will understand it fully, and people who don't will still want to talk about it."

The other image related to artistic sentiment that resonated with both subjects showed Ezra while he was performing. In the photograph, we see Ezra from behind, in full drag, wearing a custom head piece that he created specifically for Artemis but was borrowing for that number. While Ezra's response to this image was positive, Artemis felt that this was the strongest image. "This to me is the pinnacle, so far, of what you've captured," they said. "It drives the



(Figure 3)

purpose of the project home. If this whole project is based on our identity, then this picture captures our art as expression of who the individual is as a human being. They say a photo is worth a thousand words; to me, this photo says one million."

An Emphasis on Closure

Another unexpected outcome of the first interview was in the subject's desire for closure in the final edit. While it wasn't apparent immediately during the interviews, upon transcription, it was revealed that both subjects made individual, unrelated comments about the images they resonated with most, and began to reference them in a sequential narrative with an emphasis on the completion of their processes.

Referencing all the images that they selected during the first elicitation interview, Artemis commented that they had incidentally picked the four frames that, in their eyes, showed their drag process in its entirety. After I asked Artemis to reflect on one of the images they



(Figure 4)

selected of themself during a performance (Figure 4), they took it one step further, analyzing all four frames they selected as a sequence. “This feels like a full circle story,” Artemis said. “You have the first picture of me getting ready, and then when you pair [that one

and this one] together, this is the person I’m seeing – but no one else sees that until I’ve got the wig on and the lights come up. I think this picture is full circle, and with those pictures of me getting ready, this is like the finale.”

Ezra made a similar remark about the images he selected. While reflecting on the image of himself during his performance (Figure 3), he stated “This sums up the process. I didn’t realize this until a second ago, but the four photos that I picked are literally from the start to the finish of a show. I feel like [Figure 3] encompasses the aspect that you’re in front of others, but you’re really just there to entertain and be there in front of the crowd.” While these sentiments aren’t necessarily related to the subject’s previous thoughts on representation and artistic affirmation, they were notably the first instances of each subject expressing their desire to help shape the direction of the project.

What Was Missing

At the end of each interview, I asked both subjects what more they believed I could shoot to better document their identities and experiences. While they both agreed that I'd done a good job so far at getting observational moments, both had specific ideas on what other images I could make to better achieve the documentary's goal in affirming their identities.

Artemis suggested I could make images of their expressive fashion. They voiced that fashion was one of (if not the) biggest ways they express who they are as a Queer person, "I would say that a large element of what I find affirming for myself is fashion. So even if it's like a staged photo shoot, or as simple as me picking out the stuff I'm going to pack for a show, or even what I plan for my day-to-day life, fashion is a huge thing for me."

Ezra, on the other hand, stated his desire to continue showcasing Drag Kings and non-binary drag performers, as these groups often face discrimination from even those within the Queer community for being different from the more traditionally accepted Drag Queens. With each subject's thoughts on the project in mind, I had a concrete path forward. These first interviews provided me with a roadmap of what I still needed to shoot, with insight into the types of images that resonated with the subjects, and this allowed me to continue the project with vigor and excitement.

Completing the Process, Closing the Circle

After several more weeks of shooting based on the subjects' directions, I assembled 15 more images to conduct the second round of photo elicitations interviews. These images were made based on the subjects' suggestions during the first elicitation interviews, and they

contained the subjects in a variety of settings, including observational moments, studio portraits, details, and exterior shots of buildings and environments. The primary purpose of this second round was to determine whether the images were in fact representative of each of the subject's identities. Additionally, at the end of the second round of interviews, I asked the participants to reflect on the documentary process and to critically analyze whether the experience was affirming. There were several things that both subjects had discussed after the first interviews that continued to appear during the second interviews; however, there were also surprising new thoughts and comments.

Community and Artistic Collaboration

After seeing the 15 selected images, each subject talked the most about the images that showed community collaboration. The first such image was one taken during a studio session. In the image, we see Ezra assisting Artemis with a piece of their wardrobe (Figure 5) before the session. Ezra stated, "Performers are always helping other [performers] out. There's always that one performer in a show who's a congeniality genius that's like, 'Oh, do you need help with this?' I know that, for kings, I've met a few performers that are like that in the dress



room, where they'll say 'Hey, I saw your tape is coming undone in the back, let me help you.' I like this picture specifically, because even without people knowing that Artemis and I are such good friends, you still see that Kings

(Figure 5)

and Queens are helping each other out. Even though there's discrimination towards kings, and often Queens get it better than kings, there's still that performer-to-performer community here."

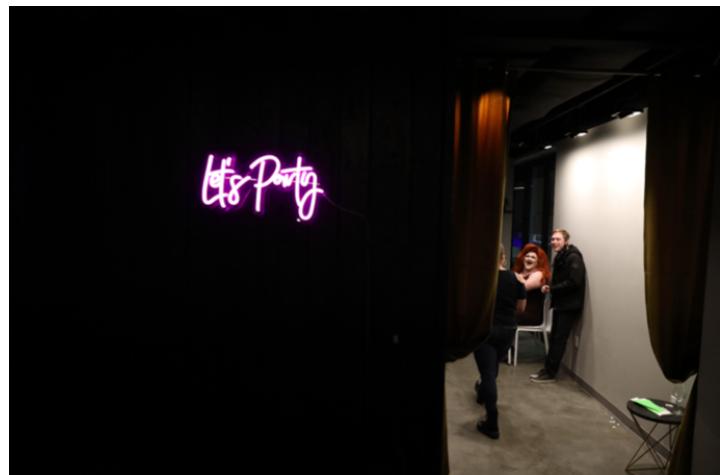
Expanding on this sentiment, Artemis talked about another image that was taken in the studio of the two of them standing in front of a plain white background (Figure 6). "First and foremost, I actually really enjoy the fact that you can see the [studio background]," Artemis said. "This is like if you're watching a movie and you can see the production stage. Like you can see that there were a lot of different things that went into making this, so that's the first thing. Secondly,



(Figure 6)

I've never done a photo shoot with another person. So, I'm in a photo shoot, expressing myself, doing my art with my best friend who's also an artist, and the end result was a beautiful picture." This was gratifying to hear, as the entire purpose of the studio shoot was to provide a controlled space where both subjects could showcase their art and identities unabashedly.

In contrast to this photograph in a controlled environment, Artemis appreciated another image from a performance in which they and a staff member laugh as they welcome someone to the show (Figure 7). They stated, "To me, drag performance is all



(Figure 7)

about the experience that you're creating for someone else. I think, in this photo, with the sign and you not knowing what's happening in the other room, you can see just a glimpse, but for the person walking in, there's already an experience being created for them. You don't have to know anything prior to know that this person is about to walk into an experience that they're never going to forget." This comment stood out because I knew from previous conversations that their Drag performance was something highly personal and affirming.

When asked to expand on this thought, Artemis stated, "First and foremost, drag as an art from should always be for oneself – and this is how I feel about any art. It should originally, at its core, stem from your own happiness. However, drag performance, to me, is something that us in the Queer community have stopped making about ourselves, and started making it about inviting others into the community, and into our lives and our minds." This elucidation perfectly emphasized the duality of drag performance as an art – something that is simultaneously for themselves and their community.

Online Representation

After discussing their thoughts on the photographs included in the second elicitation interview, I steered each of the subjects to reflect on the documentary process as a whole. The guiding questions upon beginning this project were to examine how and why the accurate representation of Queer people online is important, and to gauge how Queer people felt about that representation. As such, I asked each of the participants to reflect not only on how they felt about the documentary process, but also to reflect on its release online. Both subject's responses were positive, but there were some differences in their answers.

Ezra's thoughts were centered primarily around his previous experiences connecting with others online: "Having the documentary online excites me, because that means it'll be very accessible to people," he said. "I think that's important, because just in the year and half that I've been doing Drag, I've had a lot of instances where I don't know about 70% of the people who interact with me, but they all know me through Ezra Prince [online]. I've talked to people, whether it's at shows or online, and they'll say 'Hey I just want to thank you for being you, because you've helped me discover who I am,' or 'You've shown me that it's ok to express yourself like this,' and that means a lot. Like, I'm doing this because I want to express myself like that, and because art is everything to me, which is why I fell in love with drag so much."

Further, Ezra's response highlighted a similar sentiment to one that Artemis had stated about Drag performance as a simultaneously singular and communal act. "For other people to see that passion that I have, and see themselves in it, has allowed me to discover myself more. There's one individual who messaged me after doing a pride show at a festival last year that said they were able to come out to their partner about their gender identity after seeing me perform. So the fact that this will be online and accessible to people [globally], that means the world to me."

Artemis, similarly, was glad that their exercise in documentary affirmation would be published in an accessible online place. Drawing on their past experiences as a young Queer person from an extremely small, rural town, Artemis' expressed their excitement at the online accessibility of the project, "I'm excited because putting it in an online space means that it can be reached by more people," Artemis said. "More people like me who came from an environment where they didn't know who they were, and they didn't know how to find out who they were,

they're going to have something to look at. They're going to have somewhere to go and be like, ‘Well that person gets it, and this person gets it, so I can learn from this.’”

While they felt positively about the online aspect of the documentary, they did have some reservations, stating, “But it’s also like, more people are going to see this, more people are going to know who I am, more people are going to hear what I have to say, so it strikes a little bit of fear that I’m going to get a little bit full of myself, and a secondary fear that I’m going to create an image to uphold.” Artemis’ words resonated heavily with me. While I have no control over how the subjects feel about themselves and their identity, the last thing I want is for the documentary to have a negative impact on anyone.

Documentary as an Affirmative and Explorative Practice

My primary goal with this documentary was to create something that was affirming to each participant. Using the subject’s input in what to shoot, how to shoot it, and what to include in the final edit was one thing; however, there was no way to control how each participant would feel about the images after they’d been made. Thus, it was a welcome surprise that when asked about the documentary process itself, the subjects stated they felt affirmed by the images and that the project propelled them towards deeper understandings of their own Queerness.

When asked whether they believed the process to be affirming with respect to their identity, Artemis said, “I’m someone who exists on all sides of the gender spectrum, and what I’ve seen so far from the project has been getting shots of every aspect of my life. Showing whoever’s going to see it that what I do as an individual is complex. You’ve showed all the way from my most feminine and glamorous, to times where I look not so glamorous and am

experiencing real emotions that are very big. You're showing the full range of what I can do and who I am as an individual."

More than just accuracy and empowerment, Artemis stated that this project reignited the belief in their own self-importance. "Throughout this process, I've started to see myself in images and, for the first time in a long time, not be like, 'Oh god I hope nobody sees that,'" they said. In reference to one of the images from the studio shoot (Figure 8), they stated, "This [photo], because there's so much being told, I don't care that I'm the focus. It makes me feel good because it's expressive, and expressive in the most minimalistic way, and that's what makes it perfect to me. I feel like I have a lot more of a story to tell than I ever gave myself credit for. I feel like I have stuff to say that people would be interested in [hearing]."

Ezra echoed this sentiment in his analysis of the images, "[The process] has been affirming because you get a lot of pictures of my everyday life that I wouldn't think would be meaningful, and then we sit down and I'm like 'Oh wow, there's actually a lot going on there,' but because it's everyday life it's not something I'd usually ever think about." More than just a recognition on the importance of his everyday life, Ezra extended upon this point, positing that throughout the course of this documentary, his understanding of his own identity has not only



(Figure 8)

been affirmed but expanded upon. “From a gender standpoint,” Ezra said, “I’ve become more and more in tune with the non-binary side of me. A lot of that was just breaking the mold of what society and the Queer-community specifically identifies as being a trans man, and through this process and the questions you’ve thrown at me, it’s been affirming in the sense that it’s allowed me to get more comfortable with who I am as a person.”

Both subject’s feelings about the documentary process were well-received and affirming to my own identity. The basis of this project was substantiated on the power of Queerness, individually and communally, and the inherent power of showcasing Queer identities. Therefore, hearing that the people I photographed got as much out of the experience as I did felt a fitting end to the entire experience.

Conclusion

The photo elicitation methodology is well-suited for collaborative non-fiction storytelling and was an essential part in the creation of this documentary. It required me to constantly check in with the subjects about the images that were being created, and further, gave them the opportunity to discuss the types of images that they wanted to be created. In requiring me to continuously assess the participant’s opinions on the project, I began to understand their viewpoints more deeply. In this way, the subject’s own perspectives about the project were centered throughout, and highly integral to its success. Without this communication between the participants and myself, the project would lack intimacy, focus, and buy-in. Overall, the photo elicitation process fostered greater understanding between me and the subjects and helped immensely in creating a final product that was affirming and accurate.

CHAPTER FOUR: PROFESSIONAL WORK PRODUCT

Please refer to the website SomeFormOfFreedom.art to view the final edit of the photodocumentary.

CHAPTER FIVE: EVALUATION

While the image-making process for this project began over seven months ago, I had a slew of preconceptions about the exercise of documentary and its impact on all parties involved before I'd even started. Now, at the end of it all, many of my original presumptions have proved true, but not necessarily in the ways I'd anticipated. Many of the things I'd assumed about documentary on the part of the characters involved were proven true. However, the biggest surprise by far was the impact that this type of participatory documentary practice had on the relationships between myself and the subjects.

While the final iteration of this project is focused on two central characters, the process to get to this point was a long one. As stated in my original proposal, I wanted to create three separate stories of three Queer characters, compiled together to create a catalogue of vignette-like documentary stories. My intention was to showcase the wide variety of Queer experiences. Scheduling photo shoots with each of these subjects went well, but I quickly realized that trying to weave three completely unrelated subjects into one coherent project was going to be difficult; more so, creating a unified narrative from these three characters' lives, especially considering the collaborative aspect of the photo project, would have proved very difficult. After meeting with my project supervisor in early January, we came to a decision that refocusing the project towards one, more unified story would better serve the intention of the project while simultaneously making it easier to weave a more coherent narrative structure.

My first-time shooting photographs with Ezra was in October of 2021 for my Picture Story and Photographic Essay class, and I continued working with him through the end of the year. He was one of the original characters I proposed collaborating with, and as such was the

first real character that I made images of for this project. Throughout the initial photography process in late 2021, I felt drawn to his story and to his warm and inviting energy. In mid-December, I went to a drag show that Ezra and his roommate Artemis were hosting, and there I also met Sarah, Ezra's fiancé. Throughout the evening, I talked to these three about their lives, Queer identities, and relationships to one another. After deciding to shift the focus of my project towards one more unified story in January 2022, these three characters seemed to fit perfectly.

During the first few weeks of February, I was able to conduct one additional shoot with Ezra and Artemis in their home but ran into scheduling complications Sarah. Though I made several attempts to schedule shoots with Ezra and Sarah at their home in Kansas City, various conflicts arose (cancelled shows, inclement weather, and a car accident to boot). These issues required me to re-adjust my original schedule by several weeks.

Photographs and Elicitation Interview

Luckily, because of the shoots in late 2021, I had enough images to conduct my initial photo elicitation interviews. These interviews were a refreshing and reinvigorating process, as each subject had a unique perspective on the images that had been created up until that point and offered insight into what they were looking for out of the project. More importantly, each subject had ideas about what types of images I hadn't taken yet that they believed would help make the documentary more complete. The biggest surprise from this process were the images that the subjects selected – there were several photographs that I included solely to provide visual variety that, instead, resonated heavily with the subjects. This realization reminded me that while I was the documentarian, I was not constantly considering the viewpoints of the other people involved.

This realization further strengthened my view that giving the subjects as much control as possible over the final product was essential for its success.

Overall, the initial elicitation interview re-invigorated the image making process and served to reconnect me with each of the subjects. After transcribing key sections of their interviews, I was able to create a roadmap of what I had left to shoot with each subject and felt, for the first time in a long time, that I had a concrete path to completing the project on time. Being able to jump back into making images was certainly reinvigorating – however, trying to schedule shoots between the three subjects continued to prove difficult, specifically with Sarah. It was quickly apparent that Sarah was stressed, and because one of the primary purposes of the project was to be an exercise in affirmation, the last thing I wanted to do was to add more stress to her life. So, after several rescheduled shoots, we made the difficult decision to pivot once more, electing now to focus on the relationship between the two roommates: Ezra and Artemis.

While this decision took some of the workload away, I had feelings of immense disappointment and betrayal, as if I'd abandoned Sarah entirely. Though I was making more progress than I ever had on the documentary, these feelings persisted. While there are still images of her included in the final edit, it was incredibly frustrating to know that her story was not one of primary focus in the final product. Coming to terms with this was one of the biggest challenges of this entire project, but in retrospect, I believe it was necessary for its overall success.

Using the subject's direct input as a roadmap for the final round of image creation, I was able to shoot several more times with both Artemis and Ezra. As such, the final photo elicitation interviews provided the project (as well as the subjects and me) necessary closure. Each interview was conducted individually and was recorded with audio equipment to ensure that their

thoughts and feelings could be documented in high fidelity and incorporated onto the final web design.

The elicitation interviews as a whole were immensely rewarding and dramatically influenced my process as a documentary storyteller throughout the project. As I previously stated, there were initially images that the participants reacted to positively that I hadn't expected. However, after hearing them explain why they reacted as they did, I was able to better gauge what types of images they wanted to see made, and to understand why. From these conversations, I began to see their lives and experiences as they saw them, internalizing their perspectives as equally important to my own in the creation of the project. Because I could never literally see through their eyes, the photo elicitation interviews provided ample opportunities to gauge my progress from their perspective and was immensely helpful in getting as close to this pursuit as possible.

After completing each of the final photo elicitation interviews individually, I uploaded around 200 images to Google Drive. The two subjects were asked to go this folder and sort the images based on two criteria. The "USE" folder indicated they wanted the image to be included in the final edit, while the "DON'T USE" folder indicated they wanted the image to be left out of the final edit. The subjects were instructed to drop the images into either folder – any images they felt indifferent about they were instructed to leave in their original position. After they sorted the images, I pulled images from the "USE" folder as much as possible and embedded them onto a dedicated website with pertinent audio clips captured throughout the process, as well as some basic expository text. The images that the subjects felt indifferent about were used sparingly – no images from the "DON'T USE" folder were included in the project.

Because the photo elicitation process helped me more deeply understand the subject's perspectives as the project progressed, when I looked at both of the "USE" folders, most of the images they selected were ones that I would have chosen to include in the final edit anyways.

There were not many images sorted into the "DON'T USE" folder, and most that were had obvious aesthetic disadvantages (ie. someone was blinking, making a strange face, or had their body oriented strangely). There were not any images in the "DON'T USE" folder that I would have chosen to use for the project anyways, and so designing the page from the images the subjects selected was straightforward after the fact.

In all, the process was incredibly taxing but utterly rewarding. My desire to give the subjects as much control as possible over their own stories made the editing process tedious, but ultimately made the final production highly collaborative, while also attempting to remove as much of the predatory nature of documentary as possible. My biggest regrets from the process come simply from having to change plans as many times as I did. – I feel that if I'd come up with this simpler narrative thread from the beginning, I could have had an even more in-depth and intimate product than I do now. This is not to say I'm dissatisfied, however; on the contrary, the final edit of this documentary is something I'm incredibly proud of, and the friendships I've made with Ezra and Artemis are surely ones that will last the rest of my life.

Finally, the decisions to utilize the photo elicitation method and a highly collaborative editing process paid dividends in the long run. Hearing the subject's input about the images and giving them a high level of control over the final product ensured that the documentary was not only representative of their identities but affirming to them as well. This collaborative methodology is one that I will bring with me moving forward in my future work, and was ultimately integral to this project's success.

APPENDIX

FIELD NOTES

Memo #1 - 1/21/22

Hi all:

Hope all your breaks were relaxing and that you returned well rested and healthy. I wanted to shoot out my first committee memo with some updates to my project that Jackie and I talked through earlier this week.

Most of my project will remain the same, but Jackie and I did discuss moving away from the two other characters (Ari and Noura) in favor of focusing completely on Ezra. I had some concerns that doing three separate, unrelated photo docs would be difficult to manage time-wise, and could potentially lead to one or two of them being underdeveloped.

This will obviously change how I'm going to do my photo elicitations (but not by too much). I now plan to do elicitations with Ezra, his roommate Artemis, and his fiancé Sarah. All three by themselves would make for compelling documentaries, all three are queer, and all three have strong friendships and relationships with one another. Focusing specifically on their lives, and doing elicitations with each of them, will maintain the original proposed structure while also making a more unified narrative overall.

Let me know if these changes give any of y'all concerns, or if you have any questions. I've got a shoot with Ezra and Sarah on Monday, so hopefully I'll have some new images to show Jackie next week.

Best,

-Hunter

Memo #2 - 1/28/22

Hello committee!

Not a lot to report this week. Ezra and I met up to discuss scheduling out this semester and planned a few shoots for the next few weeks. We also decided which dates to do the photo elicitations.

I'm going to head to Kansas City (where he is living half of the time) next week to do a shoot with him and his fiancé Sara. Let me know if you've got any questions/concerns. Have a good weekend!

-Hunter

Memo #3 - 2/4/22

Hello committee!

Wish I had more to update you on, but the snow threw a wrench in the proposed shoot with Ezra. We rescheduled to two shoots on Monday and Thursday of next week.

Other than rescheduling, I worked on formatting my analysis this week, writing my introduction/dedication/acknowledgment/abstract and getting everything in the proper order on paper (now I've just got to do the work!) I plan on starting elicitations the week after next.

I think that's all I've got this week - let me know if you've got any questions or concerns.
Have a good weekend!

-Hunter

Memo #4 - 2/13/22

Hello Fearless Committee Members!

Sorry for the late memo - this week, Ezra, Artemis (Ezra's roommate) and I did a shoot at their apartment. I shot a decent amount of observational stuff and am planning on doing a shoot next Saturday at one of their Drag Shows and then on Sunday with Ezra and his fiancé at their house in Kansas City.

The original plan was to start photo elicitations this week, but I'm going to shift it back a week so I can include all the frames from this upcoming weekend. This will change my schedule slightly, but I feel confident I'll be able to make up for lost time fairly easily in the coming weeks.

That's all I've got to report. As always, if anyone has any comments/concerns please feel free to let me know!

Best,

Hunter

Memo #5 – 2/20/22

Hello Committee Members!

Got a decent amount to update you on this week - unfortunately, not all of it is good. To start with the good stuff, I've created a Google Drive folder ([here is the link](#)) where I'll be uploading all memos/current drafts of my analysis/shoots. Everything should be up there and current by tonight.

Now for the not-so-good... the two shoots I was planning on doing this weekend had to be canceled, as Sarah (Ezra's fiance) was in a car accident late last week. While their car is totaled, luckily she's not hurt. Both her and Ezra are taking the upcoming week to rest and recuperate.

This presents a few challenges for me, as I now have two more shoots to do before my first elicitations, the elicitations themselves, a second round of shoots, the second round of elicitations,

and then writing everything up... so I'm feeling a little stressed out. However, I've gamed out a potential schedule that should keep me on track to finish in time.

I've been talking with Ezra, and we agreed to spend all of March 1st together in Kansas City to make up for this weekend. During the day, I'll hang out with him and Sarah at home, and that evening I'll follow Ezra as he prepares for a show at Missy B's (a drag bar downtown).

I'll schedule the first round of elicitations for later that week (Thursday 3/3 or Friday 3/4) and spend the weekend writing up my findings and making a plan for the second round of shoots. In the following weeks (up until March 19th), I'll schedule 3-4 more shoots with Ezra, Artemis and Sarah, and hopefully that means I should have all the images created before Spring Break. During Spring Break I'll conduct the second and final round of photo elicitations, and then spend the subsequent two weeks writing up my analysis/finishing the website.

This schedule is definitely not ideal, nor is it finalized. Thanks again for bearing with me - as always, I'd love to hear y'all's thoughts/questions/comments/guidance.

-Hunter

Memo #6 - 2/28/22

Hi all:

Good news and bad news again this week – Ezra has unfortunately asked to reschedule our shoots again. While frustrating, Jackie and I talked through several options yesterday, and decided that it would be best to go ahead with a preliminary round of photo elicitations this week to establish a baseline.

So good news! I'm starting elicitations this week. I've created a blog and uploaded both my memos as well as the 15 images I'll be using for the elicitations. Let me know if you've got any questions/concerns.

Best,

-Hunter

BLOG LINK: gold-hibiscus-x6gb.squarespace.com

Memo #7 – 3/7/22

Hello Committee!

For the first time in a few weeks, I've got great news! I conducted my first round of elicitation interviews this past week, and they went wonderfully. I got a lot of great feedback from the three characters. In addition to that, they were able to give me really pointed direction as to what they thought I still needed to capture for the documentary.

This week, I've scheduled two shoots - one with Artemis on Thursday, and one with Ezra on Friday. With Artemis, I'll be photographing them as they pick out their costumes/makeup, as they mentioned that fashion and physical expression is one of the best ways that they showcase their identity. With Ezra, I'll be making images of them during a freelancing consultation. I will be scheduling at least two shoots for next week, one of which will be in Kansas City with Sarah, Ezra, and her three kids.

Tomorrow, I plan on typing up my first elicitation findings and beginning to transcribe them. I'm definitely feeling better about where I'm at, but know there's a lot of work to be done. As always, let me know if you've got any comments/concerns.

Best,

Hunter

Memo #8 – 3/13/22

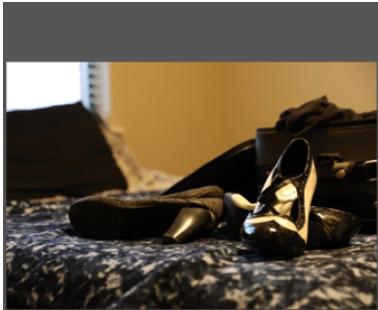
Hi Committee!

More updates this week - I began working on individual portions of the analysis section, and was able to get two shoots done, one with Artemis on Thursday and one with Ezra on Sunday. The shoot with Artemis was focused on his use of fashion and drag performance as a conduit for self-expression, and the shoot with Ezra was focused on his spirituality (plus a few images of him dying his hair in anticipation of a show this upcoming week). I've included contact sheets of both of the shoots with the selects.

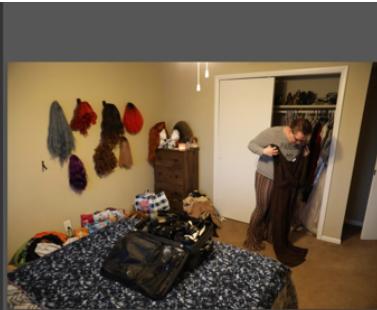
This upcoming week, I'll be shooting with Ezra, Sarah and her two kids in Kansas City (and hopefully doing one more with Artemis as well).

As always, let me know if you've got any questions.

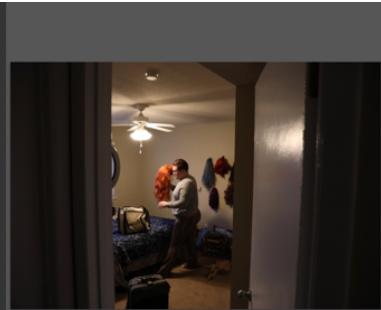
-Hunter



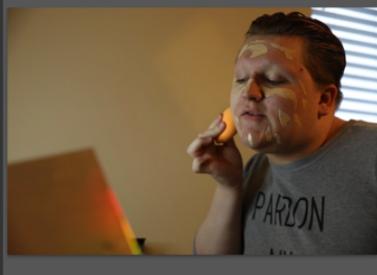
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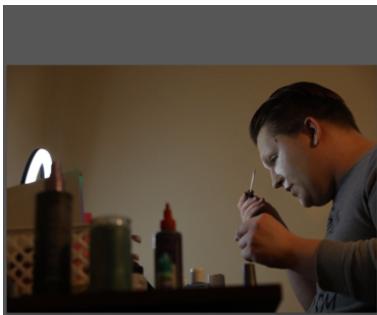


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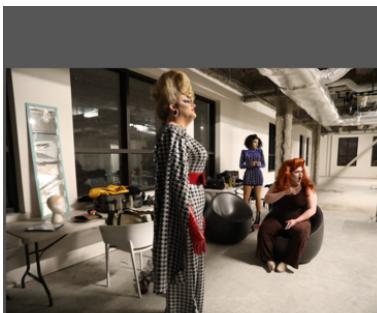
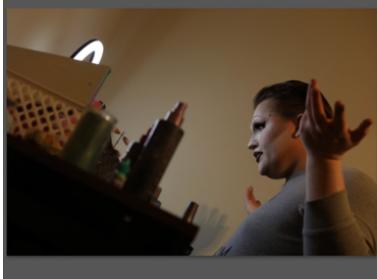
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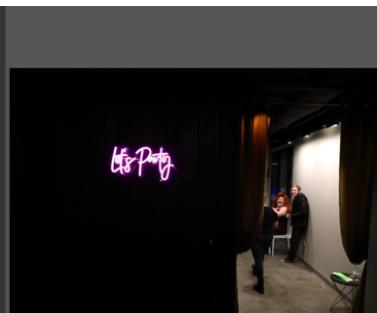
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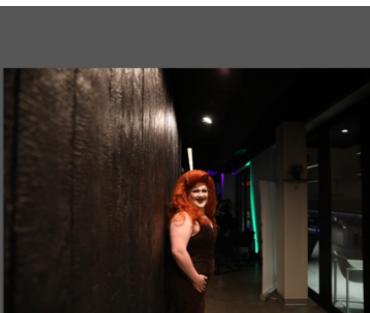
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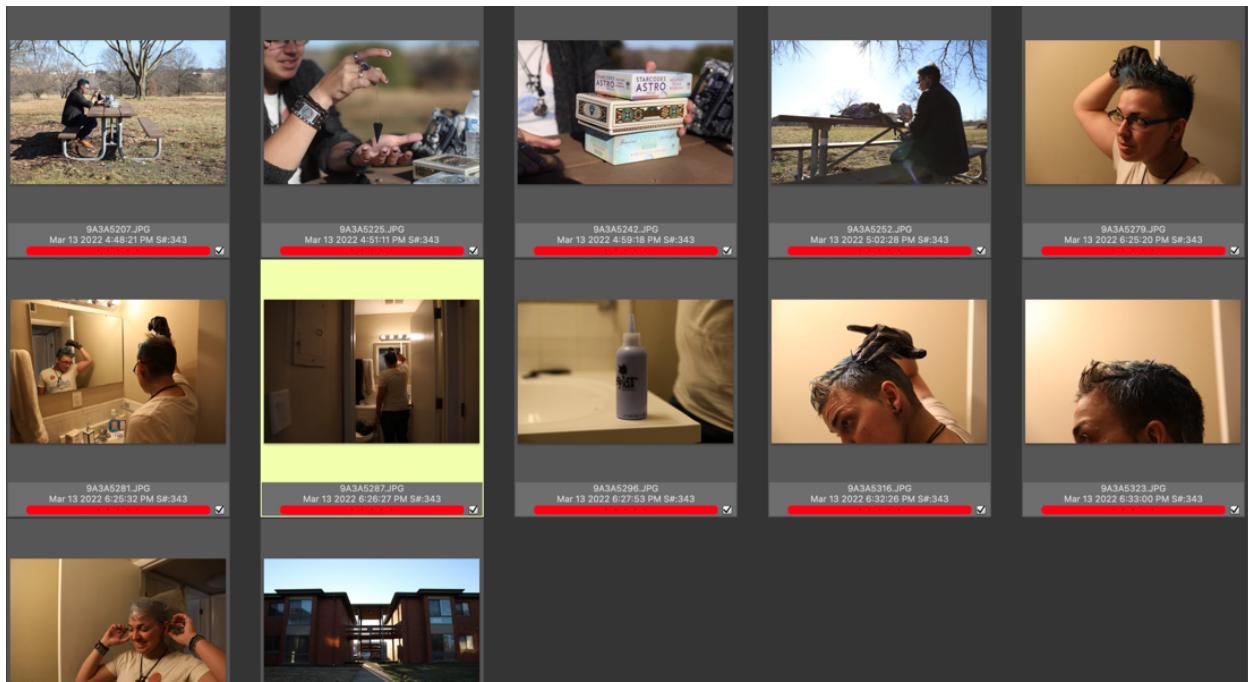
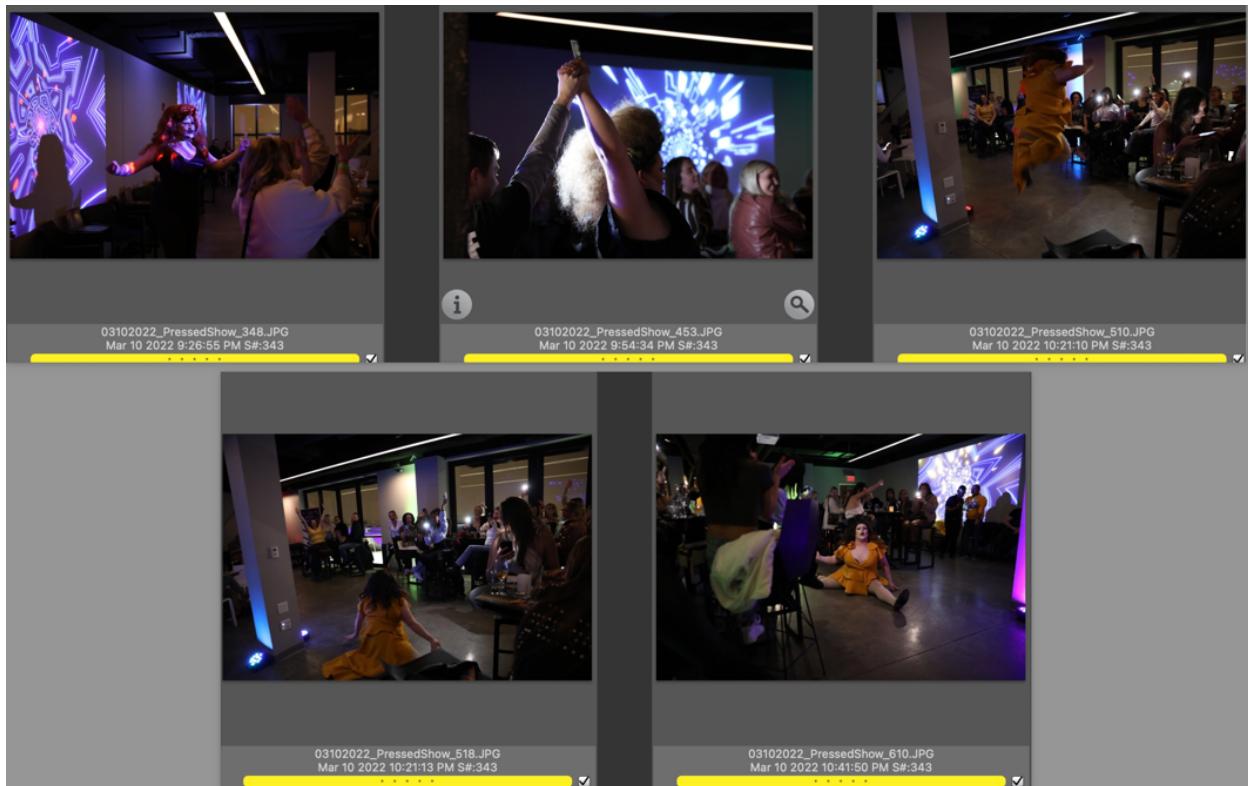


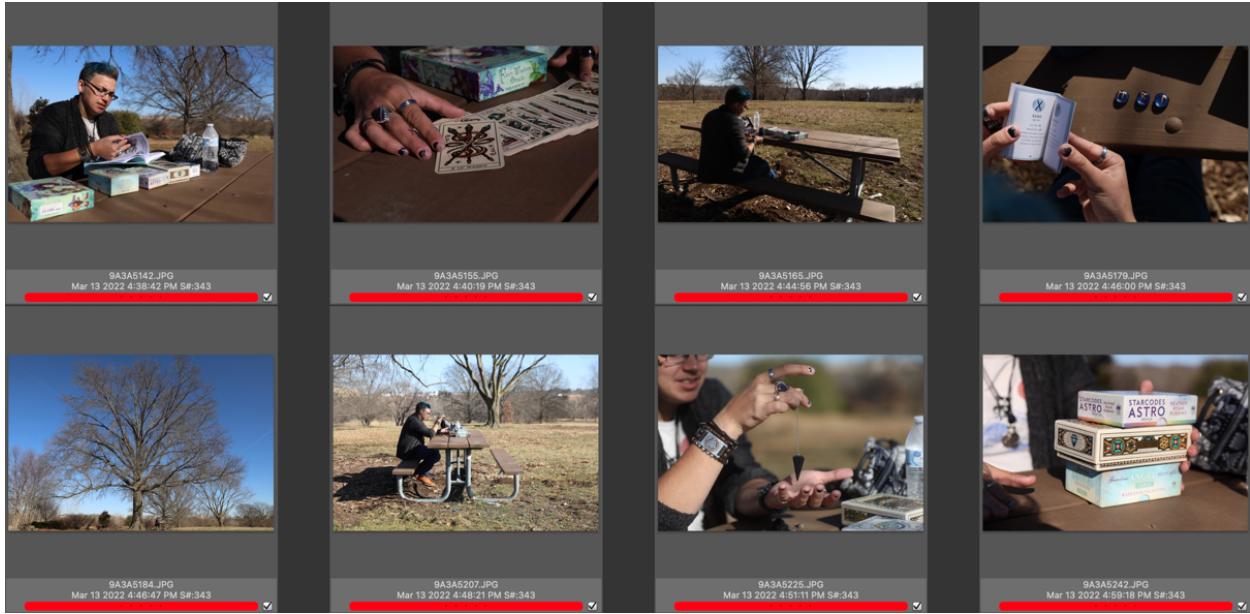
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Memo #9 – 3/26/22

Hello Fearless Committee!

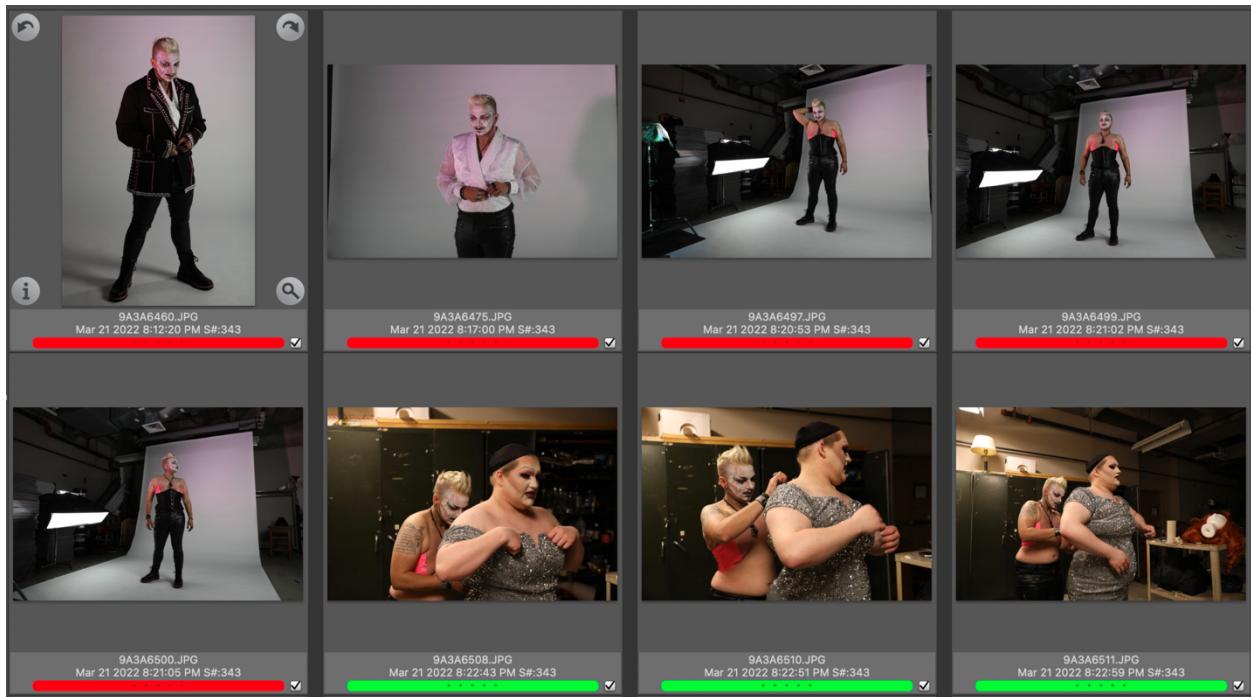
Sorry for the late update. Some more big updates this week – I've attached two contact sheets for two different shoots I completed (one was a studio shoot with both Ezra and Artemis, one driving with Ezra and talking with Artemis about his feelings towards Ezra moving out). In addition, I made some progress on the outline of my website ([Here is the link](#)). Obviously the images and text are just filler for now, and will be edited to reflect the project over the coming days.

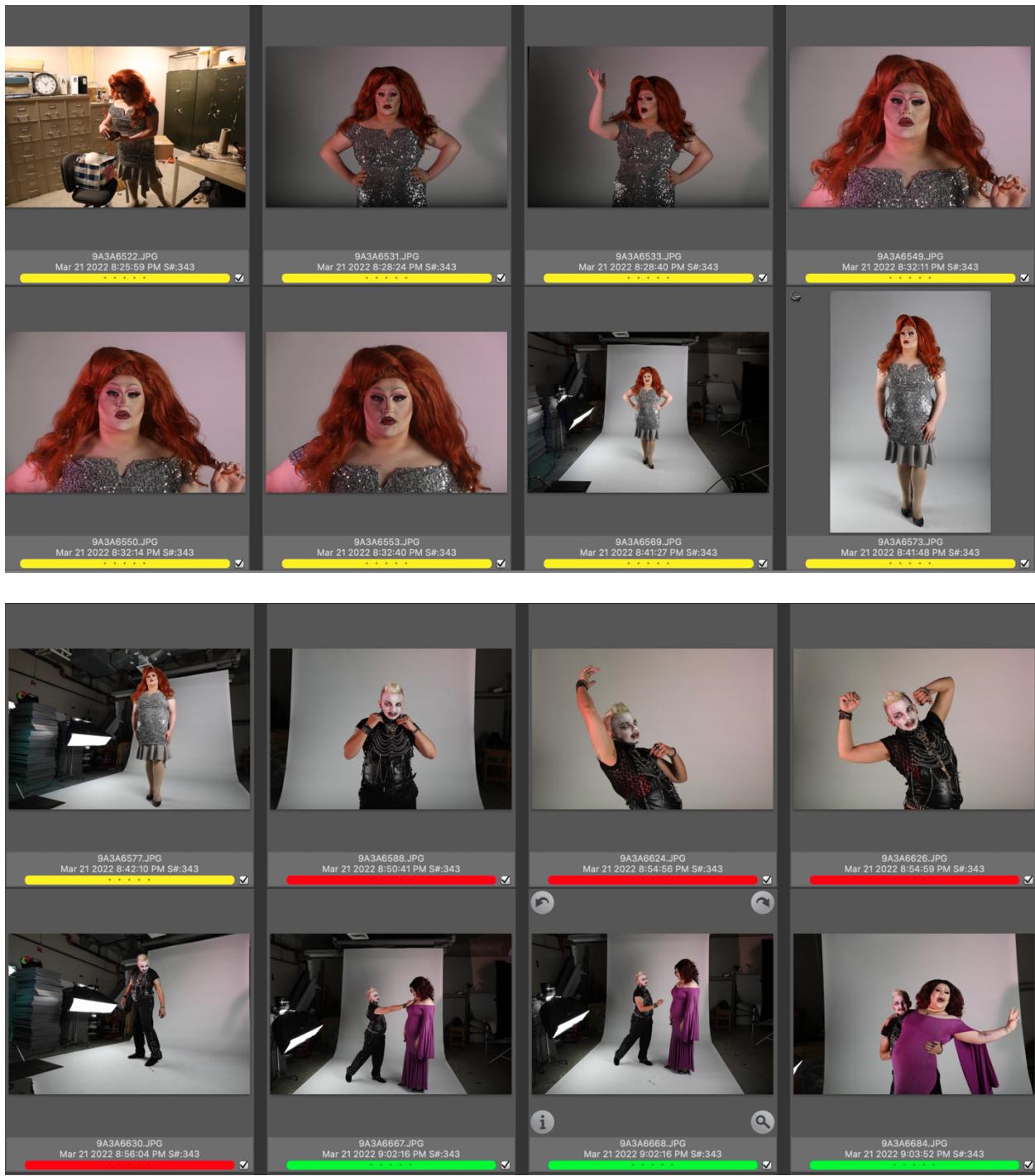
I met with Jackie on Monday to discuss another change – after talking with Ezra and Sarah, we collectively decided not to continue with Sarah one of the main characters of the documentary. She's been having a very difficult time dealing with the insurance company and medical bills after her car accident last month, and doesn't think she'll be able to dedicate any more time, and I definitely don't want to add any more stress.

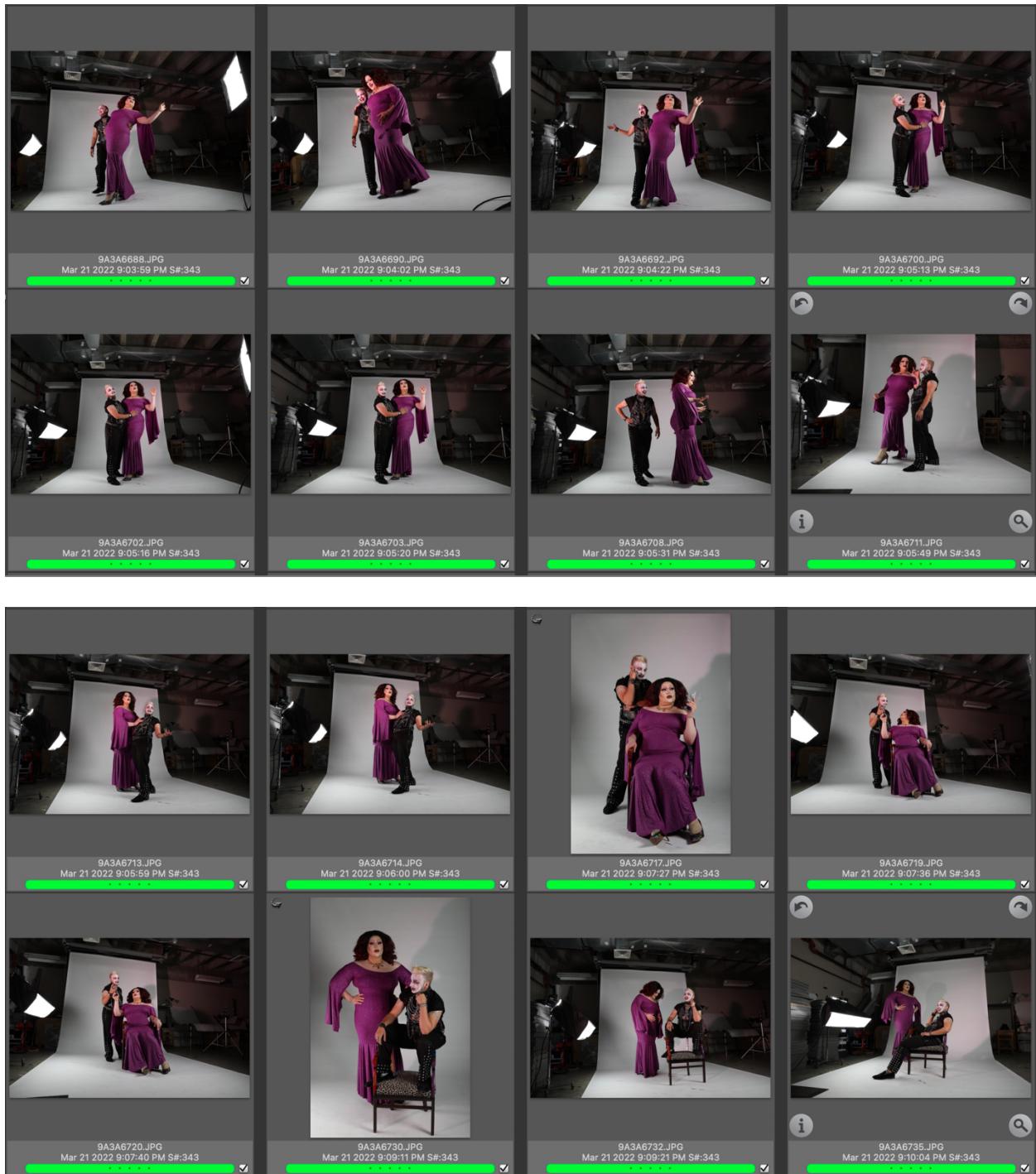
With this in mind, I've scheduled another two shoots with both Artemis and Ezra on the Thursday and Friday of spring break, and one final shoot with the two of them together. The narrative structure of the documentary will focus on their relationship (as friends, roommates, and creative collaborators) and the impact that moving away from each will have. If you've got any questions, comments, or concerns, I'd love to talk about them.

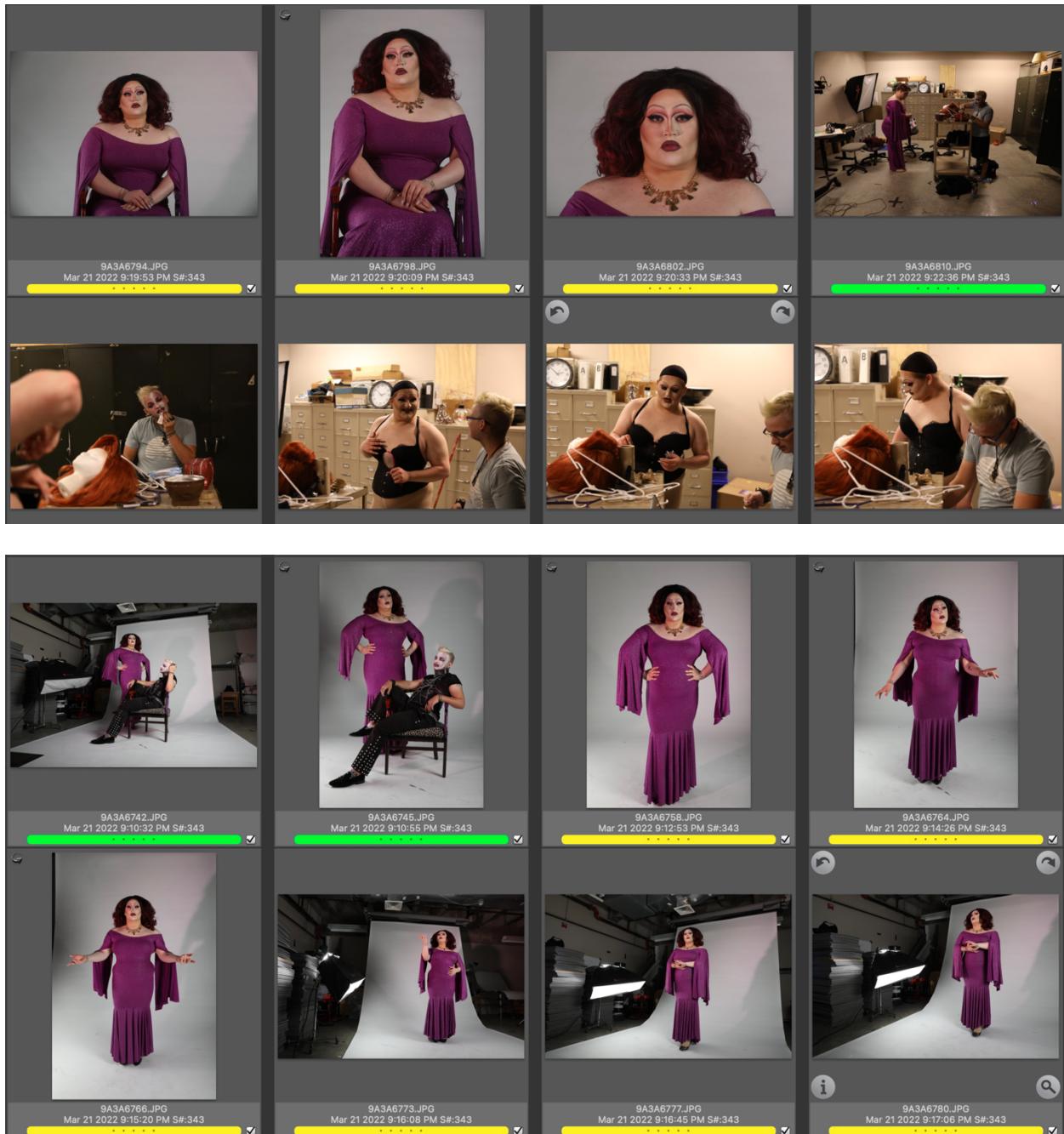
Best,

Hunter









Memo #10 – 4/3/22

Hello Committee!

Hope your break is going well – I've got a few updates to share.

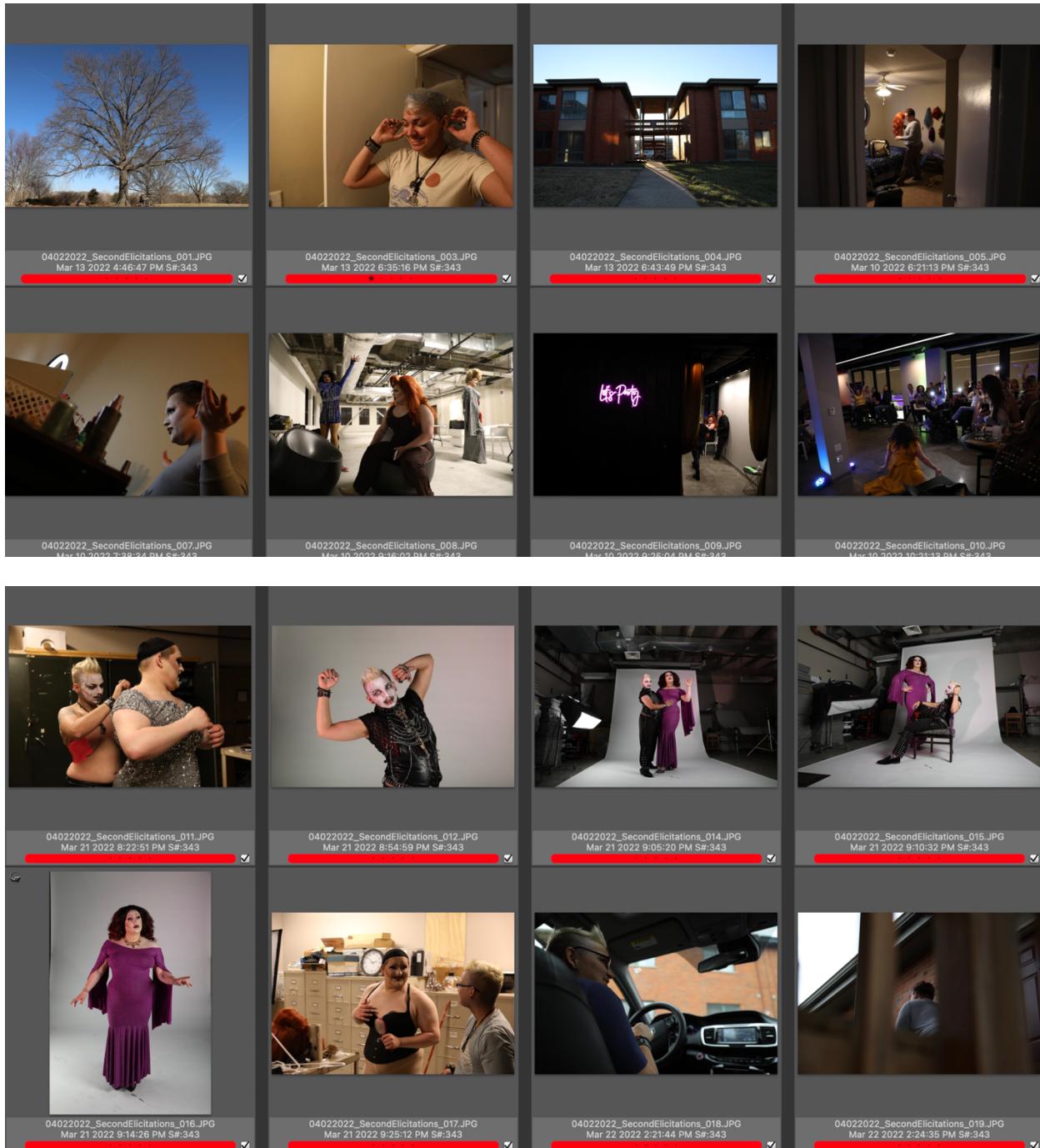
I plan on conducting a full day shoot tomorrow. Artemis and I are going to meet up around noon and I'll be following them throughout their day to get mostly observational photographs. Then, at the end of the night, Artemis and Ezra will be making dinner (which I'll be photographing to get more images showcasing their relationship).

In addition to this, I'll be conducting the second elicitation interviews with both tomorrow before dinner. I've attached a contact sheet of the 16 images I was planning to use but would love some feedback from y'all if you have any.

Hopefully, having both rounds of elicitations done will allow me to have a real first draft of the Analysis section of my project report later this week, and get a draft to Jackie before Friday. Speaking of the project reports, I've started sending specific sections to Jackie for revisions, and should have a full first draft done this week.

Things are slowly coming together! Look out for an email from me later this week gauging availability for my defense in a few weeks. I look forward to talking to you all!

-Hunter



Memo #11 – 4/11/22

Hi everyone!

Some big updates! This past week I've been working on getting as much of the project report done as possible – as of right now, Jackie and I have gotten drafts of everything but the evaluation and analysis close to finalized.

In addition, I did a few shoots – one with Ezra and Artemis at their house after the photo elicitations, and another at a show with Ezra in Kansas City. I've attached the two contact sheets below.

I've also got a first draft of the website done! Right now, the images that you'll see on there are not toned, and are subject to change (you'll also notice I haven't added captions yet – those will be coming over the next few days). I'm also still trying to figure out how exactly I want the audio to embedded – you'll see right now that they're just linked as Soundcloud players, but I've got a few ideas of how I can work around that.

I'll hopefully have everything done over the next couple of days – be on the lookout late this week and early next for the final report and project! I'll reach back out then about scheduling my final defense.

Thanks again for all your support! As always, feel free to let me know if you've got questions, comments, or concerns.

-Hunter

WEBSITE LINK: <http://someformoffreedom.tilda.ws>

