

**IN SEARCH OF MY IDENTITY:
A MULTI-CULTURAL UPBRINGING**

Honors Thesis

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Bachelor of Science in Media and Communication**

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By

Shannon Adam

Professor Mary Melilli
Faculty Advisor
Department of Media and Communication

Commonwealth Honors Program
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Abstract

The documentary film I created as part of my honors thesis project examines the identity struggle I experienced with growing up in both Germany and the United States. In addition to video segments of an autobiography nature, the almost 14-minute film includes interviews with four other college-age women from multi-cultural backgrounds who discuss their views on their identity journeys. Themes such as the feeling of belonging, language barriers, living between two cultures, and fitting in with peers are also addressed. Each of the women who shared their stories in the film has a different country of origin, namely the Dominican Republic, France, Ghana, and Mexico. Concluding the documentary, I reflect on what I have learned from listening to their perspectives.

The paper I wrote as an accompaniment to my documentary explores the process of creating the film. From coming up with the topic to choosing what interview clips to use, it details the lesser-known but crucial aspects of filming and editing. It explains the decisions I made regarding interview locations and camera equipment. I also discuss what I learned as a multi-cultural person and a filmmaker while creating this thesis.

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Introduction

My path to finding my topic had several twists and turns. I switched my topic two times before finally settling on the exploration of my identity. The first topic I wanted to research was how television shows utilized social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter. Then, a few months later, it pivoted to female broadcast journalists specifically focusing on anchors. While the two previous topics sparked my interest, they were not strong enough to carry me through almost two years of working on this thesis. I also realized these topics were extremely broad and I would have to greatly narrow them down.

It was when I took a Media and Communication class titled “Longform Journalism” that I found my thesis subject. The assignment was to write a feature length article about a topic of our choosing, and I decided to write about my identity struggles growing up in two countries. In addition to talking about my own identity, I chose to interview other people who had similar experiences with multi-cultural upbringings to include multiple perspectives other than just my own.

In the beginning of my senior year, I decided to expand on this topic in the form of a short documentary. I wanted to more thoroughly examine the issue of living in the middle of two worlds and being unable to fit into either one of them. In my article, I interviewed friends in my own age range and older adults who grew up in different countries and moved to the United States 50 to 60 years ago. However, for my thesis, I specifically wanted to focus on the identity struggle of college-age adults who are in the process of finding themselves and having to deal with the conflict of identifying with two countries. I made the choice to use a documentary format, because I had always been

interested in this visual storytelling medium. Electing to make my thesis so personal made it both easier and harder at the same time. It meant that I was passionate about it, but also that I would have to examine my own conflicting feelings about my identity in more depth than I had previously done. Additionally, while I had created videos before, their average length was about 3-5 minutes, and I knew this thesis was going to be longer than that. This made me quite nervous about starting the entire process and was a main reason why I did not begin filming until relatively late into my senior year.

Filming Process

Before officially filming, I did a lot of prep work. First, I collected all the camera and audio equipment my family had acquired over the years to see what I was working with. After testing all the equipment, I ended up with an Osmo Pocket 2, a Canon EOS 5 Mark II camera, a Canon Vixia Hf R800 camera and a Bluetooth microphone that connected to the Osmo Pocket 2. I was able to borrow two film lights from my film class professor which enabled me to have solid lighting. Then, I rewrote and added some additional questions for my interviewees and sent revised list of questions to them in advance, so they would have a chance to look them over and think about their answers. I wanted them to be as comfortable and relaxed as possible and I knew that it would be slightly awkward to sit in front of multiple cameras and lights.

Filming the sit-down interviews took a total of three weeks from late February to mid March with a few additional days spent filming some extra B-roll footage. The first challenge was to find a variety of filming locations as I did not want to shoot all the interviews in the same spot. Talking to my interviewees, I realized that the most convenient location for everyone would be on campus. This brought with it the challenge

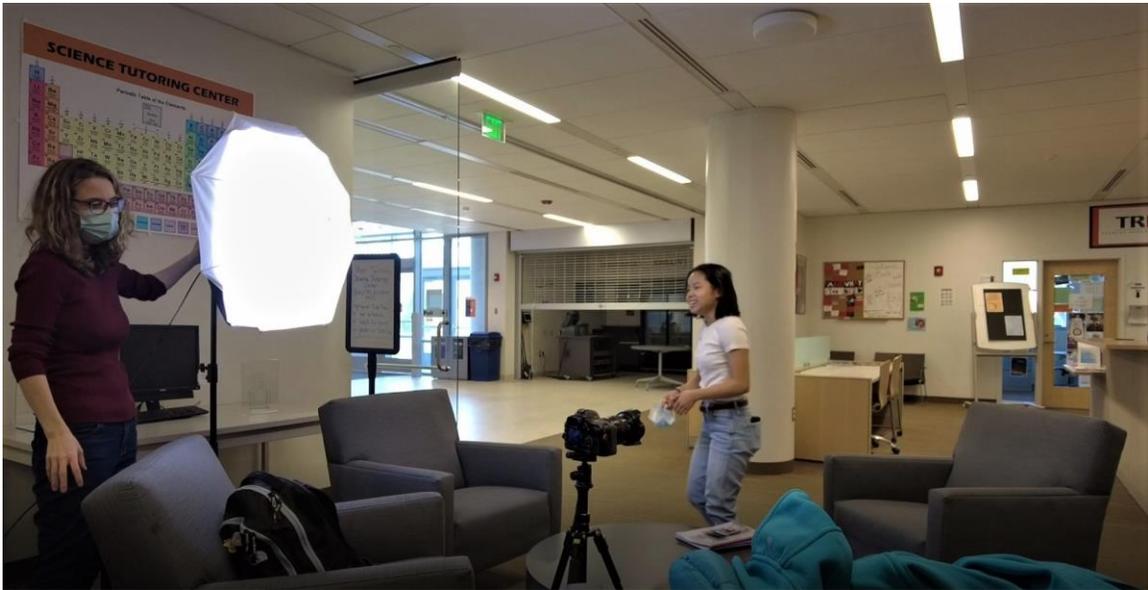
of finding a place where it was quiet, but normal-level talking was still allowed. I ended up filming Julieris and Irune's interviews in the Honors Program lounge after official hours, so we had the room to ourselves. Ellen and Kelly's interviews took place in the Salem State library over spring break and President's Day respectively when there were not a lot of people on campus, so the library was very quiet.



Behind-the-scenes of filming Irune's interview

An issue I encountered while filming was setting up the film lights. I had no prior experience in lighting an interview and just tried out various positions to make sure the interviewee's face was lit, but at the same time did not blind them. As I only had film lights and not softboxes, I created my own by putting a shoot through umbrella over the lights thus avoiding the harsh light. While I was using the Canon EOS 5 Mark II camera as my main camera, my Osmo Pocket 2 served as my 2nd angle camera as well as my audio source. The Bluetooth microphone that connected to the Osmo Pocket 2 camera was far better than the microphone attached to the Canon EOS 5 Mark II. In order to make my life easier in the editing process and synch up the two files, I had each interview

clap their hands together as a make-shift film flap. I also filmed myself during the interview with a Canon Vixia Hf R800 camera, in case I wanted to use that footage in the documentary. To ensure I not only had interview footage, I decided to shoot some B-roll of my interviewees walking around campus. While filming those clips was slightly awkward, it added more depth to the final piece.



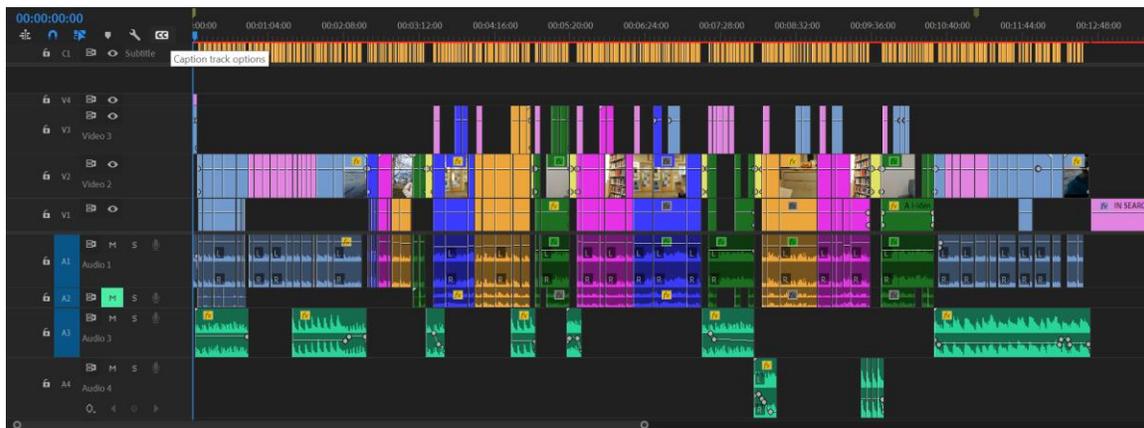
Behind-the-scenes of setting up Kelly's interview

Editing Process

After I completed the filming stage, I focused on the editing process. For the editing software, I used Adobe Premiere Pro which I had access to through Salem State. From each interview I had about 45 minutes of interview footage with 15 minutes of B-roll. To assist me in picking the best clips from the interviews, I used the transcription website, Otter. This way I could skim the transcript for stand-out quotes instead of having to watch every clip. After I decided on which portions of the interviews to use, I had to align the files so the audio-to-video synchronization would be on point. The clap that I had all my interviewees do, helped tremendously. It was then that I realized that during

Ellen and Julieris' interviews the Bluetooth microphone was not properly connected to the Osmo Pocket 2. This resulted in the audio not being as clear and crisp as with the other two. To make up for this problem, I utilized several of the audio effects in Premiere Pro to create a more polished sound.

To help me keep track of which clips belonged to which interview on the timeline, I assigned a different color to every interviewee. This way, I could easily tell them apart and it helped me get an overall sense that everyone would be represented equally. To add to the emotional depth of the film, I decided to add music. To ensure I did not infringe on any copyrights, I exclusively used music from Epidemic Sound.



Screenshot of timeline in Adobe Premiere Pro

As occasional reference during the editing process, I would watch *The Hollywood Reporter's* "Magic Hour" series. I studied when they cut to a different interview angle and transitioned from one topic to the next. I also took notes on how they interspersed B-roll footage or at times included music and then translated it to my own film. I decided to add my monologue at the beginning and end of the documentary to not interfere with my four interviewees, but also to provide some sort of opener and closer for it all. I also decided not to include the footage I had shot of myself during the interview process, because the video quality was subpar, and it did not add anything to the story. When I

was recording my narration, I spent an hour sitting in my closet, because the acoustics were a lot better than the rest of the house. Lastly, I added subtitles to make the video more accessible to anyone who needs or prefers subtitles while watching videos.

Conclusion

I can honestly say that creating this documentary was the most challenging assignment of my college career. Which, I suppose, was the point. I was nervous about not being able to do the stories of my interviewees and my own story justice. There are aspects I would change, starting with not having filmed Irune's interview in front of the shades. They looked nice in the beginning, but as the sun went down, they turned into a white wall. Additionally, I would make sure that my Bluetooth microphone was 100% connected to the camera, so I could get the best audio recording. If I were to extend this documentary, I would include older people who have lived here for 20, 30, or 40 years. I know I will look back in a few years and probably find numerous aspects that I would change, but I am proud of the work I have achieved with my current knowledge. So far, I have presented versions of this thesis on two platforms - the Northeast Regional Honors Council Conference in Philadelphia and the Undergraduate Research Day at Salem State University. After both presentations, I have received positive feedback with people complimenting the cinematography as well as the content.

I learned so much about myself during this process. Not only as a filmmaker, but also as a multi-cultural person. It is invaluable to know that I am not alone in my confusion about where I fit in. Irune hit the nail on the head when she talked about the constant back and forth of feeling more Mexican one day and more American another day. Ellen's appreciation for both her cultures made me realize that rather than trying to

somehow fit into two separate boxes at the same time, I could just embrace the parts I loved about each one. Kelly and I bonded over our language salad conversations where we start a sentence in one language and then finish in a different one. And Julieris summed up the experience of all multi-cultural people who have lived in numerous countries and always have to add a “but” when asked about their identity. Of course, we did not all have the same experiences. Some of us were further in our journeys of embracing our multitudes of cultures. Others still struggled with the snap judgements strangers made as well as the judgements we placed on ourselves. My hope is that my documentary will help people with a similar background on their journey to find their multi-cultural identity and learn to embrace it.

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