An Exploration of Narrative Filmmaking

Through the Creation of a Short Film

by

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List of Terms

Action: The text in a screenplay that describes the actions of the characters.

Cast: The actors in a film production that portray the characters in the film.

Casting: The process of finding actors for the film during the pre-production phase.

Cut: A transition from one shot to another in film editing.

Editing: The process of digitally putting footage from the production phase together in editing software to create the film.

Exposure/Exposed: The amount of light captured by the camera, which changes how the image looks in the captured footage.

Non-diegetic: Noise or events that occur outside the world of the film.

Shot: A frame or series of frames in a film that play in real time to show action. Shots vary in size depending on the camera's position and the type of lens used.

Shoot: The process capturing a scene with a camera. Also known as record or film.

Shot list: A list of shots put together by the director to be shot during production.

Storyboard: A series of images that represent the shots in a film visually.

Takes: Each take is a filmed version of a shot. Often multiple takes will be filmed in order to have variation in the editing process.

Treatment: A document, usually one page in length, that describes the story of a film.

Abstract

The process of creating a narrative short film from the formation of an idea through the completion of the project involves many steps. This exploration serves as an explanation of the processes I undertook to create my narrative short film *Empowered*. As I discuss my experiences, I present the reasoning behind my decisions and thought processes that went into the creation of this film. The research for this project expanded my knowledge about the technical and creative processes of narrative craft and film production, which allowed me to apply unique, impactful, and stylistic details into the medium of a short film.

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Introduction

Throughout my life I have grown up watching films of all genres. Films have the ability to make dreams a reality and inspire creators like myself to turn their passions into a career. I love telling stories, and for many years I have been inspired to create films of my own. In my proposal for this project, I aspired to create a narrative film to explore the intricacies and techniques that go into developing a short film. Throughout these past months I have gone through the processes of pre-production, production, and post-production in order to bring this project to completion. While my primary goal was to create a short film, I needed to give the film a purpose. As a result, I decided to challenge the idea of wanting to be a superhero, which is a result of the success of Marvel Studio's recent surge in superhero films. In short, while the film was made to challenge this idea, my goal for this project was to create a narrative short film and learn from my experiences along the way.

I am a Video and Film Production major with a minor in Writing, and I am actively engaging in my education so I can reach my goal of becoming a professional director in the film industry. I decided to take on this thesis project in the Fall semester of 2018 when I discovered that the Honors program had creative projects for the honors theses. Armed with that knowledge, I decided to investigate creating a short film for my thesis. With the combination of my major and minor, I decided that creating a short film would be a good opportunity to exercise what I have learned during my time attending Middle Tennessee State University, (MTSU).

The film I have created for this project is titled *Empowered*. I chose this title for two reasons. The first is that the superhero type characters in the film are labeled as empowered. The second is that the word itself has generally positive meanings, and the film takes those meanings and turns them on their head for a subversion of expectations. Once the film begins the relevance of the title becomes clear to the viewer, which is why this title fits the film.

For this project I had several goals I wanted to accomplish. My primary goal was to write, direct, produce, and edit a narrative short film. Additionally, I wanted to create a short film that challenged the idea of wanting to be a hero. However, I wanted to challenge that idea by showing instead of telling. So, my goal with this project was to write and film in such a way that I could plant the seed of this idea and allow the audience to take the idea and form their own opinions.

The process of making a short film is a long one. It is full of challenges and technical processes that need to be overcome in order to bring the film to completion. Throughout the remainder of this paper I discuss the Methodology of the project, including the three main phases of the filmmaking process: Pre-Production, Production, and Post-Production. In each phase I discuss in detail the steps and issues I faced while creating the short film from the conception of the idea to the completion of the project.

Film Treatment

Soft piano music plays. The sun sets and the lights are off. Dust falls through beams of light. A woman plays a piano in a living room. A man reads at a nearby table. The music stops and the woman coughs blood onto the piano keys. The man runs to her aid. These two are Nathan and Evelyn Lance, siblings in their early twenties.

Nathan is a young man who has super-human abilities. However, his abilities come at a price. Every time he uses his abilities, his sister's life force is drained, causing her health to deteriorate. Their goal is to find a cure so Evelyn can be healthy, and they can live their lives without worrying about the burdens the powers cause them.

They meet Doctor Withers, a doctor with a private practice in his early fifties, for a meeting. tells them he has a cure for Nathan's powers and entices them to come to his office for a meeting. The three meet, Doctor Withers tells them he can remove Nathan's powers, and they set up an appointment to do so. Nathan and Evelyn return home, excited at the possibility of a cure. However, things turn south during the operation. As Nathan's powers are removed, Evelyn suffers an extraordinary amount of pain. Doctor Withers urges them to continue but Nathan forcefully stops the operation.

Back at the apartment, Evelyn's health is worse than when they began. She gives up hope. Nathan is frustrated and angry at Evelyn's worsened health, so he returns to Withers' office. Doctor Withers wants to forcefully extract the remainder of Nathan's powers. Nathan knows this would result in Evelyn's death. Nathan runs away from Doctor Withers. Doctor Withers overpowers Nathan and holds him down to extract the last of his powers, but suddenly Evelyn appears with powers of her own. She stops

Doctor Withers from taking Nathan's powers. However, Doctor Withers overpowers Evelyn while Nate is still down. He begins to extract her powers. Nathan comes from behind Doctor Withers and stops him as the extraction device becomes full. Doctor Withers is defeated. Evelyn is on the floor. Nathan scrambles to her side. She doesn't move.

Nathan stands alone in a graveyard. He stares blankly at a tombstone. Piano music begins to play in the background. Evelyn walks from behind him with a bouquet of flowers. She sets the flowers at the foot of the tombstone and they walk away from the grave together.

Pre-Production

Before any actors are hired, any crew members are recruited, or any filming has begun, each film begins with an idea. Only once an idea has been formed can the pre-production phase begin. The pre-production phase of film production is the phase where all of the planning, recruitment, and scheduling for the film happens. In this phase, the idea is refined, the script is written, locations are found, crew members are hired, and plenty more. I personally find this phase to be the most important, because it involves most, if not all, of the planning for the film. If enough time was spent in pre-production, then hopefully the rest of any project's production will go smoothly. In this section, I will go into detail about what I did in my film's pre-production phase, step by step, and discuss the successes and issues I encountered.

As stated previously, each project begins with an idea. In June of 2019 I began brainstorming ideas for the project I wanted to create. At first, I struggled with finding an idea, as I wanted it to be something more than a form of entertainment. In August of the same year, I had thought up a collection of ideas, but I hadn't decided on one I wanted to move forward with. In August I sat down with my advisor Professor Chilsen, we discussed the ideas that would provide quality through narrative and academic means. However, the first idea I settled on was only vaguely reminiscent of the finished idea that *Empowered* came to be.

The beginning of the idea for this short film came from the success Disney and Marvel Studios have achieved over the past decade with their Marvel Cinematic Universe. As I watched their recent films, I wondered what it would be like if someone

was gifted with super-human abilities but didn't want the responsibility or burden that came with those abilities. I gravitated to this idea because I thought it would be interesting to take such a popular, emergent genre and turn it on its head to provide a different perspective. In the modern atmosphere of entertainment, people watch these Marvel films and dress up as their characters for events such as Halloween. So many people want to be superheroes, but without any of the downsides.

With this short film, I intended to challenge this part of society that wants superpowers. So, unlike most genre-based pieces, I wanted this film to be driven by the complexity of the characters. I wanted to show the ways the characters deal with the obstacles in front of them, rather than letting the story be driven by the superpowers of a character like many of today's superhero films. To do that, I had to create a scenario that would show the consequences the characters would experience if they had these abilities in a scenario that gave them an unprecedented ultimatum.

While my original idea was based on challenging the idea of wanting to be a hero, it challenged that idea much differently in the beginning of the project. As I attempted to move that idea forward, I realized that the original idea wasn't good enough to pursue and fulfill my goals. As a result, I decided to spend some time thinking about and changing my idea to transform it into a workable template for the film to take off from. After careful deliberation I came up with the idea for what became the present form of *Empowered.*

Empowered isn't just another superhero film. It is a film about a brother and sister trying to protect each other, and a doctor trying to save his own life. The characters are not concerned with the greater good like Marvel's representations of superheroes are.

These characters are selfish, and they just want to improve their own lives. Nate is trying to remove his abilities because whenever he uses them his sister is harmed. The doctor gives a speech about saving the world only to hide his true intentions, which are to cure his own terminal illness. The sister is trying to ease the burden of her brother while hiding her secret, but during the final confrontation she decides to use her abilities to prevent the doctor from harming her brother. Each character has their own goals, and by the end of the film they must come to terms with the consequences of their actions, despite getting an ending where their abilities have been removed.

Once I had the idea, I was ready to write a treatment. A treatment is a useful one-page document that allows readers to get a sense of the story. I wrote one of these up for my advisor so we could talk about story details and improve them before taking the time and effort to write a script. In order to write the treatment, I needed to figure out the path that my story would take. To do this I began researching story and character development so I could flesh out my ideas. One source I used to develop my story-building was an online article from StudioBinder discussing Dan Harmon's Story Circle (StudioBinder). Dan Harmon is a producer, writer, and actor in the film industry (IMDb). Harmon developed a process with eight steps that helps writers develop better narratives. I used this story circle to outline my story and develop the intricacies surrounding my narrative. I found the story circle quite effective, and I used the techniques I learned from this article to guide my writing to produce a completed treatment.

After discussing the story with my advisor and making a few revisions, I set to work writing the script. The main difference between a script and a treatment is that the treatment is a brief summary of the story while the script is written to describe everything

the audience will see in the film. The script includes every character, every action, every scene, and every prop that will be included in the film. As a result, the script needs to be completed before any other parts of pre-production can begin. A few books I found useful were *Making a Good Script Great,* by Linda Seger, *The Emotional Craft of Fiction,* by Donald Maass, and *G M C: Goal, Motivation, and Conflict: the Building Blocks of Good Fiction,* by Debra Dixon. These three books were valuable sources when I was writing the script. In *Making a Good Script Great*, specifically Part Two: Idea Development and Part Three: Character Development, I gained a better understanding of writing complex characters and character arcs.

When crafting scenes, I used *The Emotional Craft of Fiction* to try and give each scene some purpose through giving the characters an emotional goal related to their overall goal in the film (Maass, pg. 115). Each of these emotional goals gave the characters depth and a reason to be in the scene. Otherwise, I would simply have a collection of scenes and not a complete story. I used *Goal, Motivation, and Conflict* as another source for narrative craft because it covers the three fundamental elements of each scene, portrayed in the title of the book, and it allowed me to create a chart to use as a guideline for each scene (Dixon, pg. 92).

However, one of the main issues I came across when writing the script was an overabundance of perspectives. Between trying to make the project academic, consulting with my advisor, getting opinions from my other professors, and trying to input my own perspective into the project, I found it difficult to work with and around these perspectives because each group had different ideas and requirements. Whenever I tried to please all parties, I wrote the first draft of the script, which was nearly thirty pages

long, far too long for a short film. It turned out to be that lengthy because there were extra scenes and ideas that weren't viable for what I was trying to accomplish.

At this point in the project I decided I needed to present the first rough draft to my Movie-Making class with Professor Bowen and my peers in order to help me revise the script. After we read through and discussed the script, I had enough feedback to fix the issues present in the first script. Furthermore, I made the decision to make the project what I wanted it to be without worrying too much about all the different perspectives. With this in mind, I wrote the second version of the script, which was refined to seventeen pages and became much less complicated. Once that draft was done, I sent it to my advisor. He helped me make a few adjustments to the dialogue and action of the script to make it ready to be filmed.

With the script in the final stages of completion I decided to start recruiting crew members. The first place I went was to one of my friends whom I had worked with in the past. This friend has been a good friend of mine and she was happy to help be on my crew and bring the project into existence. Next, I went to my Movie-Making class and gave a short presentation to ask them for their help. Unfortunately, out of the class size of 20 I only had three volunteers. That was a less than enthusiastic response, but an understandable one because in that class there were several other projects that my classmates were working on. As a result of having so few people, I looked to other friends and got a couple recruits there. Finally, I asked some of my current crew at the time to ask a few people they knew, and they recruited some enthusiastic Freshman who wanted experience. By the end of the recruitment process I had ten crew members total, which I was very grateful for. Despite how many crew members I had, it still wasn't

enough to fill every position. As a result, some of the crew members and I had to take on more than one position to make it manageable.

With the crew recruited for the most part, I decided to move to the next phase and begin casting the actors for the film. At this point I had five individual roles I needed to fill. To conduct casting, I decided to make a casting call flyer. I posted this flyer on the Nashville Film Crew Facebook page in order to get the word to actual actors. One I had actors who were interested I sent them little excerpts from the script, and I asked them to record their auditions and post them as unlisted videos on YouTube. This method allowed them to audition in their own homes before sending the auditions to me. With this process I could review them and make my decisions on my own schedule. Once the audition period was complete, I found I had only cast two of the five roles. This was a result of receiving several submissions for two of the roles, but none for the rest of the characters. Luckily, the actress I cast for the role of Evelyn knew two actors who were willing to fill the roles of Nathan and Doctor Withers and I felt fit the parts quite well. This left me to fill one last small role in the film, and I luckily had one crew member who was willing to volunteer.

After recruiting crew members and casting actors I had to deal with one of the biggest parts of the production phase. This part was communication. When I was trying to figure out means for communicating with the members of this project, I decided on separating communication into two main groups. For the crew members, I set up a group chat on the mobile application GroupMe. GroupMe is a free group messaging app that allows you to create your own group between people you know and send out information

easily. GroupMe made it easy for me to give quick updates to my crew members and it gave them all one place to reach me if they had questions.

On the other hand, I communicated to my actors strictly through e-mail. I did this to maintain professional standards when I talked to them, and the e-mail system allowed them to have archives of all conversations for when I sent them shoot information and call sheets. This separation also allowed me to keep all information I sent out relevant to its respective party. However, these methods of communication were only so reliable when disseminating information. There were a few times when crew members weren't reading the updates in the GroupMe and I had to provide last minute information to them. This was very inconvenient, and it forced me to search for these members' contact information so I could give them the information that was pertinent to the upcoming shoots. After a few short discussions with these crew members they agreed to pay more attention to the news updates I sent to the GroupMe.

The next phase of pre-production I set upon was finding locations where I could film. For this project I needed four locations for filming: an apartment, a doctor's office, a sound studio, and a cemetery. This part of the project was very important because I needed to ensure I had the locations that fit each setting, most notably a cemetery and a doctor's office, and I needed to ensure that I would be allowed to film there. After some research I learned that filming in a cemetery would be allowed and wouldn't need special permission as long as it was a public cemetery. Then I did some more research and chose Evergreen Cemetery as the location for the cemetery scene.

When searching for an apartment scene, one of the crew members offered her apartment as a location which made searching for that location incredibly easy. This

experience provided an example of the usefulness of networking in the film industry. The studio location was also easy because I had access to Studio 1 in the Media and Entertainment building on campus after sending a few e-mails and receiving permission to film in there. Finally, I had to find a location for the doctor's office. After doing some research, my chances of using a doctor's office seemed slim. For a long time, I searched for a doctor's office, or a location that would pass as one, until I remembered that one of the friends of my family is a doctor. I gave that friend a call and she graciously said we could use the office for filming. With all the locations confirmed, I moved onto the next part of pre-production.

That next part of pre-production was scheduling, which turned out to be difficult. With four locations to manage and fifteen individual schedules to work around, I had to contact every person and try to find dates that would fit everyone's schedules. After talking to everyone I determined that weekends would work best, but we would have to shift the original plan by one week and move one shoot to one of the fallback dates I had set in the schedule plan. However, once I managed to schedule all the dates for filming, I was able to move onto the next part of pre-production that required my attention.

Next, I sat down and drew up shot lists. Normally filmmakers also draw up storyboards as part of this stage of pre-production, but I have no drawing ability. I could not have drawn storyboards in enough detail to be useful to my crew members. Since that was the case, I made a shooting script instead which provided useful information about camera operation instructions for each scene.

Once I had those documents completed, it was time to figure out a budget. One thing I made clear to everyone at the beginning and everyone agreed to was that this short

film would be unpaid. Both the crew and cast agreed to this and it saved me a large amount of money in the long run. Since everyone was thankfully volunteering their time, my main items to consider for the budget were food and props. To determine props, I looked over the script and highlighted every item I wrote in the script that I would need to purchase. Then when determining food costs, I looked at how many days I would be filming, and I provided room for the event I had to shoot an extra day to fix mistakes. I also planned meals for each day, which involved contacting each member of the project and asking them if they had any food allergies or restrictions. Once I was done and knew no one had any allergies or anything of the sort, I decided the best option would be an assortment of sandwich meats. By the end of my calculations I set a budget of $300. Once I determined the budget, I ordered props and gathered food for the first two shoots.

When talking about props, one part of pre-production involved creating a prop. In the script I needed a power extraction device. After planning with my crew, we decided that the cheapest and easiest way to develop that type of prop for this project would be to create the device out of a blood pressure cuff and plastic vials. The prop had to be made for function rather than purely for appearances because one of the shots in the film relied upon the illusion of the prop working. So, I worked for several hours one day with one of my crew members until we figured out a way to make the prop function and transmit a blue fluid, made from water and food coloring, into a clear tube. During this prop session we also figured out a way to create fake blood for the replicated nosebleeds that would occur during the film.

In the penultimate part of pre-production, I looked at the schedule and the script to determine if there would be anything that would be potentially unsafe. Safety was a

very high priority for my project because I wanted to make sure that everyone who was graciously donating their time and effort would be taken care of. After looking at all variables of the production, there were only two factors that I considered unsafe. The first factor arose when I was looking at the prop list. From the list of props, I had gathered, I knew we were going to have real syringes on set. In order to make sure those syringes wouldn't harm anyone, I made sure that they remained in a box, which would be kept in my possession until they were needed for a scene. I also made sure everyone on set was aware that these were real syringes and I held a safety meeting to inform my crew members of how I wanted them to treat them.

The second worrying safety factor was a result of filming in a real doctor's office. Since it was an authentic office there was a high likelihood that there could be lingering bacteria and diseases on the surfaces. As a result, I got bottles of hand sanitizer for everyone to use and made sure we filmed in areas that wouldn't have sickness as much as possible. Apart from these two measures, I took standard safety precautions in terms of proper equipment handling and other procedures to ensure everyone was going to be safe. Thankfully everyone remained healthy and safe throughout the project.

Finally, at the last stage of pre-production I made the call sheets. In short, call sheets are documents that provide the cast and crew with important information about the upcoming shoot. Before the call sheets were ready to send, I had to fill out the document with the expected arrival times of all members of the project. To make this simple for everyone involved, I scheduled everything so that the crew members all arrived at one time and the cast members all arrived an hour later since we would need time to set up our equipment. I also had to fill in information about the nearest hospitals to each set as

an added safety measure. Once the call sheets were filled out, I sent them to everyone via e-mail in advance of each shoot day. With all of these steps of pre-production complete I was able to move onto the production phase.

Production

The production phase is where the magic happens. In this phase the equipment is gathered, the film is recorded, and everything planned in pre-production comes into use. This is also the phase of the filmmaking process where I would see if the planning and preparation I did in the pre-production phase was ample enough for the success of the project as a whole. The production phase for me is both one of the most fun and one of the most nerve-racking parts of the creation process. This is because this phase lets me exercise my directing abilities, which I find enjoyable and want to do in the future. However, this phase is the hardest for me because it requires the most precision in order to ensure the final product comes out the way I hoped.

To begin in this phase I asked the people in charge of the camera, audio, and lighting departments of my crew to assemble their required equipment lists. I left these lists mostly up to my department heads so they could have the equipment they felt comfortable working with. However, I did give certain departments requests for some equipment to best fit the type of look I was aiming for. Once I had the equipment list for the first weekend of shooting, we were ready for the work ahead.

In terms of research I did for this phase, I looked at movies that inspired me to become a filmmaker. The most notable is *Inception,* by Christopher Nolan. *Inception* is my favorite movie, and I wanted to achieve something that was reminiscent of the style in this movie. While *Empowered* is a fundamentally different type of film, this didn't change the serious tone I was aiming for. I found watching an interview from Christopher Nolan about writing and directing very helpful in this process because it was a real-world

example of the type of filmmaking I was striving to achieve (BAFTA Guru). Additionally, in my research I looked to the lessons from David Sandberg about filmmaking and the experiences he has gone through in his career (Light).

While I was learning from these directors and taking their lessons to heart, I decided to get a copy of *Video Production Handbook* by Jim Owen. This handbook is full of information about how the production phase works including a section that talks about working with actors (Owen, pg. 215-228). I decided it would be a helpful resource for me to use for this project because even though I have worked on a few productions in the past, I knew there was much more to learn. This handbook was able to teach me useful tricks that I may not have been able to learn up to this point and helped settle my nerves along the way.

In addition to learning about the technical side of production, I wanted to make sure my own directing skills were going to be up for the job. To improve my skills, I read *Leadership: Theory and Practice* and *Strengths Based Leadership: Great Leaders, Teams, and Why People Follow*. I read these books about leadership since a director is the leader of the set, and I wanted to be prepared properly to lead my crew through production. A lot of what I took in from the books was techniques about working effectively with people. While the job of a director involves an extensive amount of technical knowledge, I have found in the past that the job on set requires a lot of people skills. I studied these skills because I wanted to be prepared when dealing with the largest crew I have worked with so far. I was initially nervous about working with new people and experienced actors, but once I did this research my nerves were soothed, and I found myself prepared to begin filming the project.

The first day of filming took place on November 2019 at the doctor's office that we were graciously allowed to film in by the friend of my family. We started early and set up all the equipment in one location to function as a base camp. This way we knew where all of our equipment was, and we could keep it out of the camera's sight. I make it a practice to do this on every shoot to keep everything organized. It took us a while to get everything set up since it was early, and we hadn't had any experience working with each other. After we all warmed up to each other the process went smoothly. Soon enough the actors arrived, and we had everything ready for the first shot of the day.

The way production works, each scene in a film is made up of different shots and takes at one location. Each shot has to be set up for the camera, the microphone, the lighting, and the actors. For example, our first shot in the doctor's office took place in the waiting room. To begin, I needed to decide which part of the scene to film first. The special thing about modern filmmaking is that you don't have to film the project in scene or narrative order. This is reflected in us starting our filming process in the doctor's office while the first scene of the film takes place in the apartment. However, when I film a scene, I make an effort to film in the order of the script so the cast and crew aren't confused.

So, when I was setting up the first shot of the waiting scene, I decided to place the actors first. Once I knew where they were going to stand, I was able to tell my crew where to put the camera, the lights, and the microphone. In this particular shot, I placed the actors at a reception desk. Then I set the camera behind the desk so I could get a clear view of them. Next, I instructed the lighting people to make sure the actors would be properly exposed. Once those two elements were set, I told the audio person to place the

microphone in a place that wouldn't be seen on camera and wouldn't be casting shadows from being in front of the lights. Once the equipment was set up, I had my scene design crew member decorate what would be seen in camera to give the scene some variety. This variety is important because it makes the scene feel as if it takes place in a real setting, even if that setting is within the world of the film.

Once the shot is set up, we were able to begin filming. I made it a practice to rehearse each scene at least once before the camera begins recording so I can work with the actors and give them feedback on their performances through direction. This is necessary because all they had to work with before we began filming was the script, and sometimes written words can't properly express what my vision is for the project. Once the rehearsal was done, we began to film the portion of the scene. Since in film production a major factor of the film's success falls to proper editing, I always try to get at least three good takes before I move onto the next shot. In between each take I also have the opportunity to give the actors more direction to improve their performance and increase the quality of the film. This way, I have multiple options when I edit, and I am not stuck with one performance.

One thing to note is that getting three good takes for every shot can often slow down the production process, so during the filming process for this project I had to decide between the times I would get three good takes and the times I had to be satisfied with the number of takes we had managed to record. I used this method for the production process throughout the rest of the production process. Each scene shot required a new setup and there were several shots required for each scene. Sometimes there would be unique

requirements for a shot and we would have to adapt on the day to meet those requirements.

Next, I will give a brief summary of the events that occurred during each day of production. The first day of production was the doctor's office scenes. I had planned five scenes to be filmed that day, which was quite a lot for one full day of production. We began with the waiting room scene and would progress through to the final confrontation scene in the office. The waiting room took roughly two hours longer than I had planned. I believe this was due to what I mentioned earlier, since the crew was new to working with each other. This set us back and we needed to pick up the pace. Next, we filmed in one of the offices of the building. This space was small, so it required more work on the setups. This scene was longer, and I had to give more direction in this scene specifically in order to speed up and give clarity. Overall, this scene went well and efficiently.

After filming the office scene, we broke for lunch. During lunch I was talking to the friend of my family who was supervising us as we filmed, and I learned about the first major issue of production. As I was talking to her I asked if I could use the office for a second day of production. I hadn't specified this in our previous conversations, so she thought we were only filming for one day. After I asked her, she said she would be more comfortable if we only filmed on the day we were there. Since we only had one day, I had to reconfigure the schedule in order to get everything we could. After I thought it over, I decided to remove the lab scene from our schedule for that day and to focus on getting the scenes that we couldn't film anywhere else.

Once lunch was finished and I had refigured the production schedule, we moved onto the procedure scene. This scene was very complicated, and we could only use one

camera for each shot. Thankfully one of my crew members had a Steadicam. A Steadicam is a piece of equipment that allows the camera to be mobile while keeping all of the shots stable if balanced and operated properly. We used the Steadicam for every shot in this scene and we were able to capture the action professionally. This was also the scene we used our extraction device prop in, so we had to figure out a way to keep continuity through the different shots. To do this, we prepared five vials with varying amounts of liquid and interchanged them on the device to add this subtle detail to the film. After filming this scene, it had become late in the day and we decided to have a dinner break so everyone could have a rest and be ready for the final scene.

The final scene to film in the doctor's office was the confrontation scene. Unfortunately, due to how long the rest of the scenes took we were already over our planned end time and we were pressed for time. We had to hurry through this scene. As a result, we had fewer takes which gave me fewer scenes to edit between. At the end of this scene it was nearly 10:00 pm and we were all tired from working all day. After we were done, I released the actors and worked with the crew to pack everything up quickly and efficiently. When looking back on this scene, I realize I should have configured the day's schedule to give this scene more production time. This scene was the most complicated in the film and one of the most important. Since I was trying to film in script order, I hadn't considered these factors. As a result, this scene turned out worse than I had hoped which reduced the overall quality of the film.

After this day of filming was complete everyone went home. I had time on the drive back to reflect on the day and analyze what happened. My main takeaways for this day was that I need to communicate with the person in charge of locations and explain

clearer what the filming process entails. I also learned that I shouldn't schedule more than three scenes per day. This will allow me to give each scene proper time in the future for the best quality results. Finally, I learned that I need more people on set because having several people do multiple jobs isn't the best way to run a set. However, the day as a whole was successful, and we managed to get four scenes completed. The first three scenes turned out really well and I am proud of the work we did in the time we had.

The next day of production was the following day at the apartment. This day went a lot smoother. I got donuts for everyone as an apology for going over the predicted time on the previous day, and thankfully most everyone understood that in the real world of production the days can and sometimes do go long. Once we set the first scene up, we got right into filming. We filmed in scene order based on the script again, but this time I was conscious about my time management. The opening scene went well for the most part, but we encountered one of the two issues we would have throughout the entirety of the day. This issue came about because there was a fridge in the apartment that we couldn't turn off, and it was a loud fridge. This meant that we would have to take breaks every twenty to thirty minutes because the fridge would turn on and ruin the quality of our audio recordings. This became a major issue when we were trying to film the apartment argument scene later that day.

One major change that I made on the day of production was the decision to remove the bathroom scenes from the beginning of the script. While we were filming the first scene, I decided that the bathroom prep scenes would only delay the progress of the film. As a result of this change, we didn't have to do as much work, and we had more time to focus on the vital scenes of the film. Once we had finished filming the first scene

of the film we broke for lunch. After lunch had finished, we moved onto the argument scene, which as I stated before, we had to deal with the fridge's interruptions. These interruptions were harmful to our progress because we were losing time, which meant we were losing natural light in the room we were filming in. Thankfully, we were able to get enough coverage that I could cut it together in editing to make a coherent scene.

The final scene of the day was the bedroom scene. The room we were filming in was quite small, so we didn't have room for much variety, but we made do with what we had. While filming this scene went smoothly overall, we had some equipment issues while we were setting up. These issues came from the lights we were using. For some reason, we couldn't get them to stay on even when they were plugged directly into the wall for their power source. We managed to find a way around this issue and could continue filming, but it was annoying having to deal with our equipment. Overall, the shoot went very well and by the end of the day we had only experienced one hour of a delay from the fridge interruptions.

Later that week, near the end of November 2019, I filmed the newscaster sequence. This was a quick shoot since there wasn't a lot to film. I took three crew members to Studio 1 in the Bragg Media and Entertainment building on campus. The shoot itself lasted about an hour and we got plenty of footage for what I needed. However, during this time I found it to be a good test of my directing skills. The actress who volunteered for this scene had practiced delivering her lines very slowly. This became an issue because it contradicted the pace I had in mind for this film. Thankfully, she was very welcoming to my feedback, and we were able to film the scene to represent my vision in a much better way.

The final shoot that was scheduled during pre-production was the cemetery scene. This shoot was scheduled on the first Sunday of December 2019. We arrived early and got everything prepared as usual. At the beginning of the shoot I was told that the camera operator would have to leave two hours earlier than when we had planned to end. This wrench in the plan was unfortunate because it caused us to rush which caused problems through the shoot. Even though we only had one scene to film, we needed to make sure we had enough coverage to make the scene look as good as I wanted it to be. However, near the end of the scene there was a walking portion. With the little time we had left, we weren't able to film the walking portion correctly and the footage we had recorded was unusable. This meant I had to schedule a reshoot at a further date. It was unfortunate, but a reshoot was necessary for the success of the film's ending.

Before I could schedule dates to film the reshoots and the remaining lab scene, my life took an unexpected turn. While I tried to plan for everything I could account for, there are always events that can't be foreseen. A few days after the cemetery shoot, I received news that my grandmother had been diagnosed with stage four cancer. Since MTSU's winter break was coming up soon I decided to take the time I had away from my classes to travel to Michigan. This meant I could spend time with her while I had it and I could help her through her chemotherapy treatments. In the time up there, I spent some time on post-production, but it wasn't as much as I would have hoped. Overall, this event set my plans back by a month and I had to plan a way to make up for lost time.

I finally returned to the project in late January 2020 when classes began again. During this time, I had to regroup with all the members of my project. I explained why I had to be away, and they completely understood. We quickly agreed to get back to work

and I began scheduling. I scheduled the cemetery reshoot first, but we didn't get to it until late in February 2020 because of how everyone's schedules lined up. For the cemetery reshoot, I picked up more equipment for the shoot. Among the additional equipment was a dolly, which is a cart-like device that can have a camera set on it along with a camera operator. The dolly allows for easier moving shots and would be perfect for the walking portion of the scene that I needed to film properly.

On the day of the shoot we set up our base camp as usual and we prepared to get the shots we needed. Our shooting plan was to get new establishing shots, which are shots that set up the location of a scene, and to also the walking portion of the scene. The establishing shots went well as expected, but when we got to the walking shots, we encountered another issue. While I had checked out a dolly to make filming this shot easier, the dolly had a squeaky wheel. We didn't have enough time to run to the store and grab anything to fix it, so we had to improvise.

One of my crew members had the idea to use my SUV to film the scene. I thought the idea was brilliant, and we decided to try it immediately. We filmed the walking scene by placing the camera operator and audio recordist in the back of the SUV while the boom operator walked alongside it. I had two people pushing the SUV since we couldn't turn on the engine for audio purposes. I sat in the driver's seat and controlled where the vehicle would turn. We made sure the entire filming process was completely safe and every time we needed to reset the shot, I had everyone leave the vehicle while I reversed it. I was very pleased with the outcome of the cemetery reshoots and I believe they made the end of the film very successful.

The next scene I had to film was the lab scene. In order to do this, I set one of my crew members to find a location. Unfortunately, this crew member didn't search for the location like I had asked them to. This led to me scrambling one week before the scheduled date of the lab scene to find somewhere to film. I consulted with my advisor and he pointed me to Mrs. Irma Melton from the College of Media and Entertainment. She was kind enough to send out various emails to people at the Science building on campus to reserve a room I could film in. Within a day I had a location and was ready to film. I was very grateful to Mrs. Irma for her help and thanked her for her assistance. We filmed on the Friday before the 2020 Spring Break with a small crew. That scene only took three hours to film but it was successful overall.

The final scene I wanted to reshoot was the confrontation scene. I wasn't happy with the results of that scene and I knew we could do it better. However, before that scene could be reshot the Coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, spread across the world. When the World Health Organization declared it to be a global pandemic, several governments put social distancing measures into place. Out of respect for these measures, as well as all the people working on my project, I decided to end the production phase early. This was another unavoidable and unforeseeable event that interrupted my filming, but I decided I would rather keep everyone healthy than to risk them getting the virus. With the production phase concluded, I believe that overall, it was a massive success. Not only did I get everything that was necessary for my film, but I had quite a few valuable learning experiences.

In my final thoughts on the production phase, I believe there are a few things that I could do better in the future. I think I can improve my communication abilities, so I

don't have any further misconceptions for how long I want to use locations. Second, I realized later in this phase that I was trying to do things that were outside the capabilities of my crew members. I sometimes forgot that most of my crew was comprised of students like myself, and we were limited in what we could do. We managed to make this film at the level of quality it was even if we were understaffed and without much budget. Additionally, I know to be careful when dedicating tasks to people in the future, so I'm not left scrambling at the last minute ever again. Finally, I learned that I do not want to be a producer in the future. I thought trying my hand at this job was a good learning experience, but I didn't find it to be as enjoyable as writing or directing.

Post-Production

  The final phase of the filmmaking process is post-production. This phase is where the scenes that were recorded in the production phase are put together in editing software. It is here that the film is transformed into what is scene on the theater screen. In this phase the film goes through several different stages: video editing, sound editing, color correction, and visual effects. For this project I used applications from the Adobe creative suite for all my editing needs.

  The beginning of post-production started with picture editing. This is the stage where I assembled the scenes recorded during production and put them together in order. I used Adobe Premiere Pro for this stage of the process since it is the program, I have the most experience with. While I know this program and how to operate it, I decided to get Adobe *Premiere Pro CC 2017 Release* just in case I needed to do something for this project that I didn't have the knowledge to do. I also referred to the sections on editing in the *Video Production Handbook* for a wider range of information.

  I started the picture editing while I was still in the production phase. This allowed me to look through all the footage and assembled all the scenes. When making a picture edit, I looked through all of the takes for each shot. This process took me several hours, but it was worth it because I was able to select the best take of each shot so I could assemble them. If I couldn't make a scene successful with what I had, I wrote it down to schedule it for a reshoot. Thankfully, as stated in the **Production** section I determined that only two of the scenes needed to be reshot. Since I needed to film the lab scene and reshoot two other scenes, I left those scenes out of the assembly edit.

Once the assembly edit was complete, I decided to get it reviewed by my advisor. After watching it through we had a meeting and he gave me constructive feedback. Once I had that feedback, I was able to apply the changes to the edit. Since I was editing in the final part of the production phase, I was able to make the changes while filming the rest of the footage that I needed. I wanted the rest of the footage before sending another rough cut to my advisor to review. However, as stated in the **Production** section the Coronavirus threw another wrench in making the film. Since I could no longer film the last reshoot, I put the film together with what I had.

Unfortunately, the Coronavirus also caused disruptions in the Post-production phase that weren't related to filming reshoots. In the middle of MTSU's 2020 spring break the university decided to switch to remote instruction. As a result, my advisor had to devote his time to translating his classes into an online format. This unprecedented transition took his attention and rightly so. However, in the meantime I decided to continue working on the post-production phase in order to continue refining the film.

The next stage of editing I went through was color correction. For this stage I continued to use Adobe Premiere Pro and the Lumetri color correction tools inside the program. In this stage I focused on going from shot to shot and correcting the colors to make the characters skin tones look normal. Additionally, when I went through the scenes, I used color correction to adjust the colors in the film to give the film an added tone. Tone in this case involves making the film look and feel similar through the elements of color. In film, the colors of the light are often referred to in terms of temperature. If a light is bluer, like sunlight, then the temperature is referred to as cool. If a light is more orange, like a tungsten light, then the temperature is referred to as warm.

For most of the film I attempted to color correct the film to have a cooler tone to it. I believe this adds to the drama of the story which helps tie together the stakes of the situation. However, at the end of the film I decided to make the color warmer. This not only adds another feel to the film, but the change adds to the different circumstances represented at the end of the film.

While I was in the color correction stage, I recruited one of my crew members to work on the visual effects. I did this because they had more experience with Adobe After Effects which is the software needed to do the visual effects. This also allowed me to spend more time on the rest of the stages of editing which each needed an extensive period of time to pay attention to the details of each stage. I did give the visual effects person instructions for what I was looking for in each shot that required effects and gave them feedback during the creation process. When the visual effects were complete, I was able to insert the new files into my video editing timeline with ease.

The next stage of editing I worked on was sound editing. When we filmed the project in the production phase, we used a microphone to get better quality sound for each scene. In the beginning of the audio stage I went through each shot and replaced the audio from the cameras with the audio from the microphone. Once I had the replaced audio, I went through the film and applied sound effects to certain areas. These sound effects included slight static effects to add to the scenes with visual effects. By adding sound effects, it adds to the illusion that the abilities could be happening in this world's reality. I also added sound effects to the cemetery scene in the form of bird and wind noises. These added to the soundscape of the scene which is important when creating an emotional atmosphere.

Another important element in creating an emotional atmosphere is the use of music in a film. Near the beginning of the post-production process I assigned the task of finding music to one of my crew members. I did this so that I could have a selection of music to work with by the time I got to this stage. Out of the selection they provided me from the YouTube Audio Library, I used three of the songs in my film (YouTube). I asked them to retrieve music from the YouTube Audio Library because there are several songs on this website that are free to use in my videos. One of those three songs I used for my first scene, and I edited the video cuts to match the measures of the song. Not only does this provide a balanced pace in editing, but it ties the non-diegetic music to the world of the film. After I inserted the music I received from my crew member, I went to the YouTube Audio Library on my own to find more songs that would match the version of the film I had edited up to this point. I wanted to find music that fit the genre and tone of the film, so I combed through the YouTube Audio Library's collection until I found an assortment of music that worked appropriately with the film.

With the film edited into an advanced rough cut, I decided to send it to my advisor for a final review of my progress through Dropbox. I sent it to him through Dropbox as a way for him to receive the film while still respecting the social distancing measures put into place by the government. Since he was still devoting his time to making the transition to online classes easier for his students it took him some time before we could discuss the advanced rough cut. When we did find a day to discuss, he gave me helpful feedback about the film.

In short, he gave me suggestions for a few areas to fix in color correction and sound editing, but his major points were about my pacing. He believed there were a few

places where the film could be sped up to retain the audience's attention. After our meeting I spent time fixing these mistakes and then I went through the film and decided to adjust some cuts where I felt they could be improved. To do this I decided to use a technique in film editing where an editor mutes the audio of the film and watches it from beginning to end. This technique was useful because it allowed me to see the film as a visual art form rather than a storytelling experience. When I watched it without audio I could see where the visual cuts needed to be adjusted, and I noted the timecodes for each area I wanted to adjust. These pacing adjustments took me several hours to complete, but I believe it was a worthwhile endeavor in the end.

Finally, I had a completed cut and I was ready to export the film. When the film is exported, each frame of video and audio is rendered. This is a lengthy process that ensures the video will play as smoothly as possible for the audience. I was also able to choose which file format I would export the video in. The different file formats change how compressed the video is which affects the quality. Since I wanted this film to look as good as possible, I decided to export the file in a format that wouldn't compress the final result. However, I also exported the film in a smaller size in case I need to upload it to the internet in the future. After exporting stage was done, I was easily able to transfer the file to both a DVD and a flash drive so that viewers can easily watch the film on a DVD player or computer.

Overall, I believe the post-production phase went smoothly. I encountered very few issues related to the editing process and I rarely found myself in a situation where I didn't know what to do. The only major issue that impacted my project as a whole was the situation surrounding the Coronavirus, which affected the entire world. It prevented

me from reshooting the confrontation scene, which held the film back from being as good as it could have been. However, despite not having that scene reshot, I was able to accomplish a coherent scene with the footage I had. The virus also created complications when trying to receive feedback, but with some discussion and technological workarounds we were able to review the film without much issue.

Conclusion

      With the post-production phase complete, I had finished the eight-month creation process of making *Empowered*. Hundreds of hours went into the making of this film, and despite all the issues encountered along the way, the film was a finished product. At the beginning of this project I had set out to create a narrative short film to improve my knowledge and learn from the experience of doing so. Now that I have gone through the filmmaking process, I believe I have accomplished my goal.

      However, while I completed my overall goal of creating a short film, the film itself did not turn out like I expected. I had a vision for this film and, while everyone involved did their best to realize this vision, there were factors that prevented us from doing so. The first and most obvious reason was simply everyone's skill level. Many of us are students and we didn't have the ability to achieve everything I had hoped. Another factor that prevented us from making this film better was difficulty in communication. The combination of some crew members not reading my news updates, and my own failings to explain all the details when securing the doctor's office location, led to some issues that could have been avoided with proper planning.

      In addition to communication and skill level, there were also issues that couldn't have been avoided. The first unavoidable issue was my grandmother's cancer diagnosis, which set my production timeline back by one month. However, I stand by my decision that my family was more important than my project, and I knew I could work around this delay. The other delay, as I mentioned in the **Production** and **Post-Production** sections above, was the Coronavirus. This pandemic was a major hinderance to the refinement of

this project and prevented me from scheduling the reshoots I needed. Unfortunately, this virus is an unprecedented event that struck the world by storm and there was nothing that I could have done to avoid it.

Nonetheless, even these issues contributed to the learning process. With these experiences under my belt I am better prepared to handle situations that may occur in the future of my career. As I learn and my skills improve, I will be better equipped to create more professional products. Now that I have experienced these communication issues, I know what to do in the future in order to improve what I can control. Concerning the virus especially, it has been an unprecedented learning experience worldwide. If an event like this occurs again, and hopefully it doesn't, the world and myself will be prepared to handle it. So, when looking at the project in terms of it being a learning experience, it was also a success.

When considering the results of the project's ability to challenge the idea of wanting to be a superhero, I believe the film was partly successful. I say this because often the themes of films need to be pondered by the audience. Filmmakers don't directly tell the audience their themes, so it was up to me to make the themes evident enough through narrative filmmaking. However, since I created the film, I am unable to look at it like an audience member. Despite this, I believe that the different narrative elements I crafted together through this project's development speak for themselves. My only hope is that when audiences view this film, they can think about this underlying idea and form their own perspectives on the topic.

In conclusion, I successfully created a narrative short film in the form of *Empowered* from the conception of an idea through the execution of the creative vision

through writing, directing, filming, and editing techniques. Through the creation of the film, I told a compelling narrative with underlying themes that tell their own story. Additionally, I learned valuable lessons from the project that I can take into my future endeavors. Overall, this was a valuable learning experience that I am proud to have created and accomplished with a talented group of crew members and actors who volunteered their time and efforts to realize my vision.

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