

NO LABELS:
MUSIC VIDEOS AS A PLATFORM FOR ADVOCATING SOCIAL AWARENESS AND
CHANGE

A CREATIVE PROJECT
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Introduction

We're a society of overworked, stressed and hurried individuals. This fast-paced lifestyle provides little time for lengthy pursuits and relaxation. We often gravitate toward the stark, instantly gratifying consumption of news and current events. The inclination for a sound bite style of media consumption often spills over into our preferred methods of entertainment. Music videos provide a practical opportunity to satisfy the desire to be entertained in our instant gratification world. Whether through traditional television networks or online computer-based television, music videos have become common place in our day to day life. As a condensed and easily understood platform, music videos have the ability to expose viewers to new ideas and shifts in societies' constantly changing climate.

When MTV (Music Television) was introduced in 1981, people were drawn to the format because it combined music with enticing visual productions. Fans and admirers could glimpse deeper into the hearts and minds of artists they admired. This established a more intimate connection between fans and entertainers. As this vehicle for entertainment began to evolve, the content creators of music videos began to use their art as vehicles for empowerment of women, minorities and marginalized sections of society. Examples of this empowerment today can be seen in currently popular music videos such as, Donald Glover's *This is America* (Glover, 2018), Beyoncé's *Run the World (Girls)* (Beyoncé, 2011), and FYKE's *Get Myself* (FYKE, 2019). These types of music videos are still a new and vastly underused and underappreciated method of social commentary, communication and change.

To explore the role that music videos play in empowering traditionally marginalized members of our culture, I produced my own music video with the main goal to continue already relevant social discussions, prompt new discussions and provide both education and information

via the entertainment-based platform of music videos. With my music video, *No Labels*, I expressed my own personal views on discrimination, prejudice and the need for accurate racial and gender representation.

As humans, we rely on the strength of being a part of a social group or community. Within that community, information is given and received through various methods of communication. Two of the most powerful forms of communication are based on visual and audible exchanges. Through verbal teachings and visual examples made by parents, teachers and peers, people are educated as to what their world is about and what is expected of them. They are given the basic building blocks of what their society believes in and holds as its values, ethics, morals and expectations which allow them to fit into their social order. As people get older, they either accept the core values and beliefs of their community or they begin looking for other social groups that mirror their personal beliefs or truths. This often occurs with individuals who feel misunderstood, marginalized, persecuted or who find themselves on the outermost edges of their own social group. Examples of this might include individuals who are dealing with their own gender expectations, racial identity, or sexual attractions. They find themselves outcasts from their initial social group and often embark upon a search for a community that will provide them with inclusion, acceptance and equality. Humans appear to have a basic need for accurate representation and shared experiences. It becomes a social issue when large groups of people feel alienated by current social norms, opinions and limitations through labeling.

Music videos are a natural format for deep symbolism and semiotics is a valuable tool to explore these messages. The theory of semiotics is widely applied in my music video. This theory is “how representation, in the broad sense (language, images, objects) generates meanings or the processes by which we comprehend or attribute meaning” (Curtin, 1970, p. 51). As

defined further on in the paper, the use of semiotics, as a vehicle to challenge preconceived ideas, will be discussed in detail. I drew on symbolism that stems from my own cultural heritage as a Chinese American woman in a way that will be both familiar and relatable to viewers. This will help to create a connection of “us-ness” between myself and the viewer. Symbolism was utilized in nearly every aspect of my video, from color choices to camera angles, filming style, character design, set location and set dressing.

Music videos are at their core a verbal communication, elevated and enhanced by the addition of images and music. My original song contains lyrics that were written as the audible component to the story. I had enlisted a musician to compose original music to my lyrics and a vocalist to perform the song for the video. As will be noted later in this paper, that concept did not come to fruition. Music is a time-honored method of communication and as an artist I wanted to be a part of that conversation.

My primary goal or objective with this music video project was to give a voice and platform to issues that I have personally experienced but to which I believe a large number of others have also fallen victim. These issues consist of but are not limited to racial stereotyping, gender limiting ideas and beliefs, and of strength and weakness. I believe, we as a society need to stop limiting a person’s abilities by accepting stereotypical beliefs. When we limit members of our society, we limit society itself.

My technical goals for this project were to expand and enhance my camera, lighting, editing and special effects skills. I wanted to concentrate on producing an all-around professional quality project. Each of my previous projects have allowed me to grow creatively. I wanted to take everything I had learned about digital storytelling and use it to produce a music video. This video not only speaks to my desire for social change, but also presents that need for change in a

way that people find interesting, entertaining, compelling and thought provoking. My narrative goal was to speak my personal truths through the video's song lyrics and with the use of visual images that reflect those truths.

Literature Review

Music itself can be seen as an active and inclusive component within society. No matter their background, race, sex, gender, or ability; people need to be a part of a society that accepts who they are, what they feel and their core beliefs. Music is no longer just music; it has become a bridge that joins together many cultures and social groups. In the 2010 Journal article, *What is Sociological about Music?*, Bill Roy and Timothy Dowd state that, “the two-way relationship can also occur in a deliberate and sudden fashion, as when groups come to see particular music as signifying both their ‘us-ness’ and their plight” (p. 17). Different cultures have adopted forms of music that were once considered to be the product of a particular ethnic group or society. This adopting and assimilating of music from other cultures is possible because at its core the message in the music is both relatable and shared. This shared experience creates a bond that joins us as a larger society. According to Roy and Dowd (2010), what is considered music and what is not is just another social construct and with that being the case, music then, is so widely accepted that its “socio-cultural underpinnings can oftentimes become invisible” (p. 5).

The social impact of music videos and their content as an economic influence is also well documented. Social change is not immune to the driving force of marketing and profit. MTV, although socially groundbreaking is, at its core, a business and such enterprises need to make money. One of the things MTV did right was understanding that a more inclusive artist base would attract a wider audience demographic. With this business decision came the inclusion of new music genres such as Hip Hop. These new genres opened doors for racial and ethnic inclusivity. This gave artists that previously had only a following within a specific community, a platform that provided them exposure to larger and more diverse audiences. MTV was groundbreaking because it began “influencing more than just artistic expression, but the way

society embraced attitudes and appearances represented in the videos” (Zepeda, 2018, p. 14). *Changing the Business: Music Videos in Society*, written by Rebeca Zepeda, looks to this inclusive behavior as a business decision that prompted social change. “Having black artist in regular rotation also broke the cycle of discrimination in popular music, emphasizing the importance of equal representation in the music industry” (Zepeda, 2018, p. 13).

Pat Aufderheide’s article, *Music Videos: The Look of Sound*, continues to connect music videos to for-profit businesses. “Advertisers have been quick to take a cue from music video’s appeal, just as the videos have built on a stylistic base created by commercials” (Aufderheide, 1986, p. 62). Aufderheide (1986) also states that, “music video is rooted in the mass marketing of popular songs, not only as populist entertainment but as a talisman of subcultural autonomy and rebellion in successive generations of American youth” (p. 59). Although this may at first seem like a negative association, it actually shows the power of an artist's vision or voice to become a recognizable component in current pop culture. Their personal view has come in from the fringes of social awareness and acceptance and is now being embraced as a mainstream belief or truth. Aufderheide believes that music videos are not a fad but are an inspiration for other forms of media and commerce.

As the decades passed from the creation of MTV, more music video-based channels emerged, and the reach of artists’ productions touched larger and more diverse demographics. This media art form took a giant leap forward with the launch of YouTube in 2005. Within less than a decade, this platform has become one of the largest launching sites for both professional and amateur video content. In *How it Feels to be Viral Me: Affective Labor and Asian American YouTube* by Christine Bacareza Balance, she quotes popular Korean American rapper/musician and YouTuber Dumbfoundead (Jonathan Park) as saying, “with “no third party, no money-

sucking managers, or closed-minded Hollywood executives,” Asian Americans do not simply leverage but actually dominate YouTube's top ten-channel lists, designating them as celebrities on the video-sharing site” (Balance, 2012, p. 562). This topic of authentic representation falls heavily within the idea of music videos being a platform for social change. The ability of people to see themselves represented in the world allows them to feel valued and included. When someone comes from a background that did not provide them with this feeling of inclusion, they begin searching for a portion of society that speaks to their needs and desires. Media, at its very best, challenges our thinking, calls into question our beliefs and generates a conversation that perpetuates understanding. Massive numbers of people on a global scale can be exposed to socially relevant causes and views through platforms like YouTube. YouTube has also provided amateur creators with the opportunity to have their voices heard. By adding a visual aspect to music lyrics or written content, video is able to establish what is considered a more genuine and authentic presentation of an artist's feelings, opinions or social causes. “YouTube video's ‘going viral’ hinges precisely on the qualities of authenticity and earnestness” (Balance, 2012, p. 563).

Music videos have become a platform for artists to begin socially relevant conversations and demand broad and relevant changes in old and antiquated beliefs and opinions. Examples of this can be seen in currently popular music videos such as, Donald Glover's *This is America* (Glover, 2018), Taylor Swift's *You Need to Calm Down* (Swift, 2019), and Eugene Yang's *I'm Gay* (Yang, 2019). H. Lavar Pope provides a specific example in their article, *Protest into Pop: Hip-Hop's Devolution into Mainstream Pop Music and the Underground Resistance*, which defines hip-hop artists and how their songs and audiences differ from those of mass appeal music. Pope believes that certain musical genres and their artists are often afforded a wider and more controversial voice simply because it is more acceptable within their social group. Pope talks

about how it's more acceptable for hip-hop artists to make "politically controversial" music as they are not held to the same social constraints and limitations as mainstream artists. The author describes how this sub-culture allows these artists to gain a large audience while remaining radical as well as progressive. Pope believes it is important that the artists themselves take initiative when creating music and music videos. This initiative should add to the social conversation in a way that is creative and meaningful, not simply a collection of random lyrics and strobe lit images. Music videos can afford even passive listeners the opportunity to absorb content. It really is a provocative way to expose people to content they might ordinarily dismiss.

Performers and their artistic communities have been quick to realize that music videos provided them an effective way of drawing attention to and giving voice to personal truths and beliefs. In addition, artists are able to shine a bright and often disturbing light on where they came from and the world that they live in. As is often the case with art, music videos, their artists and content creators, have become the subject of backlash from religious groups, educators, and parents. These artists are accused of glamorizing violence, promoting the objectification of women and undermining values, religion and education. Although these arguments have some merit on their surface, many of these claims refuse to look beyond their personal opinions. We often see examples of a narrow focus and opinion being used to make an argument that is short sighted and slanted toward sensationalism. In this 2010 literature study, Jasmine Alfonseca talks about the views of sex and gender in music videos and how those views relate to women. She wrote that music video audiences perceive negative and disparaging images of women as true and accurate. She supports the view that music videos "examines how the highly sexual suggestiveness and objectification of women's bodies influences viewers' opinions on sex and

the function of women's bodies (Alfonseca, 2010, p. 2)." She states that the problem is completely obvious in that these videos are shown throughout all different genres of music and are slanted towards male ideologies of sexuality and women. Alfonseca believes that even though lyrics, genres, and audiences may vary, music videos' display only one-dimensional sexual content that solely appeals to an antiquated male viewpoint. Although this may in part be true, it certainly seems to paint all male musicians in a negative and unrealistic context. In addition, it completely negates the presence of women in the music industry. Music videos are a powerful platform for women to represent themselves, their personal truths and their sexuality. This form of female representation and empowerment within the music industry is neither small nor insignificant. In 2019, the top ten grossing solo female performers earned a staggering combined income of over \$645 million. None of these performers shy away from sexual content or felt the need to hide their sexuality. When we lump all women into the categories of saints or sinners, we perpetuate the idea that women cannot be sexy without being degraded or asking to become victims of sexual violence.

Too often people perceive music videos as socially and morally reprehensible, negatively influential and intellectually destructive. Some critics have even gone so far as to haphazardly correlate and inaccurately label and document random results in an attempt to show an association between violence, substance abuse and music videos. In one such thesis, *Images of Aggression and Substance Abuse in Music Videos: A Content Analysis*, author Monica Escobedo haphazardly interchanges the words 'use' and 'abuse.' Obviously, these words are not interchangeable and using them as such leaves her conclusions in question. Escobedo documented that images from over one hundred popular music videos released between 1990 to 1995 and 2000 to 2005 found that aggressive behavior and substance related images were shown

to have increased in the videos between 2000 and 2005. Her thesis title leads the reader to believe that she is concerned with the abuse of substances but in reality, her paper only speaks to substance use in music videos. Escobedo (2009) states that “the music video provides suggestive musical and behavior preferences that can influence new lifestyles” (p. 5). She proceeds to simply document the instances of substance use, without defining the context of said use or even what substance is being used. Escobedo states the following:

Since the advent of music television (MTV), music videos have become a successful outlet in capturing young audience's attention while making music popular. But these adolescents are also beginning to engage in risky behaviors. New behaviors include aggression and using substances such as cigarettes and alcohol. This thesis hypothesizes that there is a relationship between music videos and these behaviors. (p. 1)

Nowhere does Escobedo provide hard facts, accurately documented study information or relevant links to support her conclusion. Atkin and Abelman's study, *Assessing Social Concerns Over the Impact of Popular Music and Music Video: A Review of Scholarly Research*, which covers empirical works that look into the effects of violence in rock music and music videos, conclude that much of the reported negative impact of music videos is insignificant at best. “Virtually all studies reviewed reveal antisocial themes which are linked, albeit weakly, with negative social outcomes” (Atkins & Abelman, 2009, p. 47). Art is not always comfortable or pleasant to look at, it is often disturbing, provocative and harsh. When we view certain content and denounce it as having no merit, we effectively say that the realities reflected within the video have no merit or truth. This minimization of personal truths and realities is very apparent when

reading studies and opinions about the topic of music videos influence on people and society. This phenomenon is addressed in a 2014 article, *Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism and Media Studies* by Douglas Kellner. He believes that much of the research studies currently available are written with a slant toward the researchers' field of study or interest. This leaves out a wide range of information that can and does change the subject matter in a negative and incomplete way. He states that this is due to the fact that, "earlier mainstream academic approaches to culture tended to be primarily literary and elitist, dismissing media culture as banal, trashy, and not worthy of serious attention" (Kellner, 2014, p.7). Kellner (2014) continues to address the less than thorough research and states we need to, "examine and critically scrutinize the whole range of culture without prior prejudices toward one or another sort of cultural text, institution, or practice" (p. 7). Even as women began making real strides towards inclusion within the music video industry, there were still plenty of scholarly papers that refused to see their presence on that platform as positive and empowering. This view was often coupled with narrow and absurd categorizations, elitist thinking, veiled misogyny, and flagrant ageism. This is blatantly obvious in Sven E Carlsson *Audiovisual Poetry or Commercial Salad of Images? - Perspective on Music Video Analysis* paper when he talks about the 1998 music video by Cher, titled "Believe." Instead of viewing the video as a positive message to women that there is life after love and that lessons that were learned earlier in life make us stronger as we get older, he concludes "she scavenges on feelings of teenage unhappiness, using these feelings as a commercial commodity. Cher aims to evoke the charisma of stardom and sexuality. Older now, she takes advertising help from the images of young healthy bodies. Thus, she can be also seen as commercial exhibitionist" (Carlsson, 1999).

Musicians, artists and videographers have become a driving force for social change, conversation and awareness. They create visual similes that represent cultures, beliefs and personal experiences in a way that is both relatable and important. When art, in this case is the form of music videos, introduces a relatable or familiar form of symbolism, the viewer immediately feels a part of and identifies with the story. Even though the subject depicted in the video may be foreign to the viewer, it is still relatable and therefore inclusive because the viewer has established a connection or emotion to what is happening in the video. Symbolism seeks to establish an underlying bridge that allows subject matter to resonate with the viewer. When art is shared and experienced on such a massive scale, it becomes a truth that transcends class, gender, and culture to form a widespread social consciousness. Once that consciousness of society is established, it is able to continue to spread its impact across the globe. Subject matter that once appeared foreign and unrelatable is now personalized and relatable.

Artists often implement the use of symbolism in their videos as a way of making subjects and topics relatable and familiar to their audience. Many of the visuals seen within the videos are acting as similes and metaphors to the artist's vision or story. In order to understand the use of specific imagery in my music video project, this paper looks at semiotic theory and how it is used to draw upon commonalities of culture and experience through imagery. Semiotics is often thought to be the study of symbolism. It is actually defined as "how representation, in the broad sense (language, images, objects) generates meanings or the processes by which we comprehend or attribute meaning" (Curtin, 1970, p. 51). In his article, *Semiotics and Visual Representation*, Brian Curtin addresses the importance of understanding that visual imagery is not a one-way street, but a complex set of roads unique to each individual. Each person viewing an image colors and alters that image in their own mind based on their unique past experiences, culture,

education and upbringing. It is this shared yet individually unique viewing experience that makes music videos such an interesting medium for messages and social causes. The marriage of images, sounds and words are much more powerful in their subject matter than they would be if they were dissected into the components from which they are comprised. This concept is echoed in the journal article, *Press pause: critically contextualizing music video in visual culture and art education. Studies in Art Education*, author Pamela Taylor talks about how the images in music videos are driven by the lyrics. They serve to “represent the story associated with the sound” (Taylor, 2007, p. 235). She also states that, “the music video extends the song to be and demands a different and more informed response. The video adds a visual dimension to the music and lyrics that often suggests different connotations and contextual associations than one would interpret from the music and lyrics alone” (Taylor, 2007, p. 235). It is often assumed that music videos reflect popular beliefs, societal values and current opinions, when in fact, they are often the catalyst or driving force for new truths, ethics and ideas. As these new truths emerge, they spark the interest of a wider audience and give way to a greater social awareness.

In a 2011 article, *Music Alters Visual Perception*, authors Jacob Jolij and Maaïke Meurs state that, “visual perception is not a passive process” (Jolij & Meurs, 2011). The brain interprets input from visual stimuli and separates it into a top-down information process. It uses contextual information to create an understanding of what is being seen from previous encounters or past knowledge. The way music videos use imagery to communicate with an audience strengthens the artists message. Audiences that enjoy a particular video tend to watch it repeatedly, helping to solidify any social opinions or views contained within the video. Because the dynamics of music videos and their creators are changing, so are society’s views about power, privilege, gender and sexuality. This opinion becomes muddled when research appears to assume

that such negative effects on society is based on an individual's propensity to follow the herd. People can certainly be influenced by any information they are exposed to, however in the case of the 2017 thesis, *The Status Is Not Quo: Unraveling Music Videos* by Gary T. Hanby, he adopts the herd mentality and then offers his personal educational style and teaching as a way to combat that mentality in his students. The vast amount of music videos and media that people consume over their lifetime does help shape their identity, but it is important to remember that individuals are not mindless automatons. They are not created solely by what is being input into their minds without any independent thought, core values, morality or reasoning as suggested by Hanby (2017) when he states, “my response to the problem of students integrating negative character traits from media was to create a curriculum that will give my students the knowledge and ability to avoid the pitfalls of passively assimilating the norms being taught in visual media and more specifically music videos” (p.3).

This project provided me with a platform that gives voice to my own personal experience and truths. I am a passionate advocate for equality and diversity. This includes but is not limited to racial, ethnic and gender stereotyping. As an Asian American woman, I believe that all people should be depicted in a true and accurate manner as it relates to their race, ethnicity, gender, sex and sexuality. The use of stereotyping is far too prevalent in today's media driven world. We deny a large percentage of the population the right to see their own truths and views reflected in popular entertainment. This lack of accurate representation is addressed in the article, *Gender, Race, and Media Representation*, Dwight Brooks and Lisa Hébert. It discusses how media is used to construct social realities through imagery and symbols. That imagery is then used to construct social identities; the imagery being shown is already segmented by social constructs of race and gender. Their research concludes that media perpetuates only one uniform idea about race and

gender because stereotypical ideas of these topics are a generalized idea of a gender or race that are repeatedly used over multiple platforms. Although there is some truth to this, I don't believe research is digging deep enough or taking into account the changing and evolving dynamics of music videos.

When we limit a portion of society's visibility, we limit all of our abilities to learn, grow and become exposed to new ideas and experiences. We are not simply boxes to be checked against society's limited definitions. I believe that music, and more specifically music videos, are a useful and powerful means for advocating social change. My music video includes an original song that, through its lyrics and music, identifies issues related to equality and diversity. This specific music video is highlighted by powerful visual imagery, symbolism and modern aesthetics.

One of the things I have found so frustrating about the scholarly research as it relates to music videos and their influence on society is the lack of thought, understanding and quantifiably accurate conclusions made by some researchers. We need to stop looking at surface level opinions and start searching for more accurate conclusions as to how music videos reflect the truths of the artists and performers that are releasing them.

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Methods

The medium I employed in my project is a music video-type format. The way I approached using this medium for this project is unusual because music videos are most often created with a pre-existing song or musical selection in mind. My project was created on the foundation of a concept. Specifically, the concept was to make a music video that addressed the need for social awareness and change that utilized the popular music video platform. All the images, both virtual and those created in a studio, were chosen to address my concept in a visual manner. I composed original lyrics and used short snippets of music I accessed through my paid subscription to Storyblocks. My video uses no raw audio and was mixed using spoken words as if they were a part of the music. The lyrics are my original property. The musical portion of the song was composed specifically to reflect the flow, pacing and feeling of both the lyrics of the song and the visual imagery. The lyrics also help express the emotional journey of the video's content/concept. I took these snippets of music and combined them to create an original score. It should be noted that Storyblocks is a paid access site for royalty free sound, still images and short video snippets. (See APPENDIX F for a copy of my personal license agreement which encompasses right to use for personal, commercial or educational projects.) The song itself is unusual as it uses a song format but consists of only spoken words. It straddles the line between a music video and a short informational film. My strategy was to provide relevant social information within a format that is highly popular, a familiar part of current culture, presented in an artistic and interesting manner and also designed to be visually and audibly appealing.

In looking at my project as it relates to industry standards and normal approaches to a music video, I believe that I both conformed to and challenged what people perceive as a music video. It was important to me to produce a final product that was not only entertaining but that

was atypical and thought provoking. Industry practices and standards are often pushed or even disregarded in the music video genre. This pushing of boundaries is why I chose the format in the first place as it provided me a perfect platform for a project that I believe to be unexpected and different. The project was shot entirely with one camera, a Canon EOS SLR2, in both a stationary and handheld capacity. This allowed me to get the desired movement I required between the specific scenes of the video. The video itself has a predominant feeling of constant motion, distortion, evolution and transition and I felt this filming style lent itself to the underlying theme of the video. One hundred percent of my music video was shot with the three characters against a green screen. The green screen filming was then applied to virtually designed and computer manipulated sets. This project consisted of several hundred hours of editing and virtual set creation. Nowhere in the project was a stock offering used simply as is, all the virtually designed sets included but were not limited to layers of additional lighting, visual additions to dress the set, such as trash bags, blowing litter and water movement. Original artwork which I created was also used as a layer in the opening alleyway scene. This allowed for the application of derogatory words to be placed on the stock graffiti wall. Through creative editing, image layering and image manipulation I was able to take a one-dimensional picture of something and create what appears to be a three-dimensional set. An example of this can be seen in the opening scene where a graffiti wall has been transformed and manipulated into an alleyway that has both direction and perceived dimensions. There are twelve main sets in the video; each of these sets contains many layers to achieve the final look. The number of visual layers per scene are as follows: The Opening Alleyway (259 layers) , The Seasons (38 layers) , The Glass Staircase (34 layers), The Glass Ceiling (25 layers), The Glass Cavern (70 layers), Chorus #1(325 layers), *Dragon's Lake* (273 layers), Green Temple (48 layers), *Figure's Space*

(30 layers), The Three Panels (140 layers), Chorus#2 (112 layers) , Ending Alleyway (144 layers). Audio added additional layers including 40 voice layers and 83 layers of sound and music. This bring the total of both visual and audio layers needed to construct this project to nearly 1800 layers. Virtual set layering was also a large part of my project's lighting design. Constructing a virtual set with manipulated virtual lighting required that all lighting, as it related to the three characters, be created in such a way as to mimic the lighting constructed within the virtual sets. This became a complicated and lengthy process. In the end, it was worth the time it took to get a nearly seamless merging of real and virtual character and set lighting. This two-prong style of lighting also allowed me to highlight not only characters and scene events but was also used to punctuate lyrics and ideas within the video.

I used my Canon EOS SL2 DSLR with my 18-55mm and 70-300mm lenses for all filming. I utilized my MOZA AirCross 3-Axis Gimbal Stabilizer when I needed to shoot footage that required me to move and change locations while filming. Because my project was special effects driven, both portable and stationary green screens played a prominent role in all of my filming. All sound recorded for my video was recorded using my Takstar SGC-598 Shotgun Microphone or was taken from royalty free sounds through Storyblocks. My Neewer 2-Pack Dimmable Bi-Color 660 LED Video lights with Barndoors, KT-750 Lighting Kit, and Raleno Photography Umbrella Lighting kit were used to light interior sets and to supplement natural light. In addition, I used small LED flashlights and puck lights to light and shadow small detailed objects. I also used a selection of my personal filters and 43" Collapsible Multi-Disc Light Reflector. For special effects filming, I used two stationary green screens, one that is 6 x 9 feet and one that is 9 x 15 feet. I also used a portable collapsible green screen that is 5x7 foot. As it relates to editing, both sound and visual I used my personal iMac 27-inch computer with Retina

5K display. Editing software that I used includes Adobe Creative Cloud including Premiere Pro CC 2018/2019, Photoshop, After Effects, Procreate and Logic Pro X sound editor/mixer. I also set up a small studio in a spare room of my house which allowed me to set up special effects and utilize green screen filming.

As much of the imagery in the video is symbolic or alludes to currently relevant topics, I wanted to use images that felt familiar to people even if the topics themselves might be foreign to the person watching. I also applied semiotics theory, as previously defined in the literature review, to my imagery as a way to challenge the viewers thoughts and ideas on what is perceived as conventional symbolism. Viewers can see the three characters challenging gender norms and racial stereotypes through their costumes, hair, makeup and actions. The sets challenge ingrained symbolism as it relates to affirmative action, art, and what is considered to be natural. This was achieved by unusual editing techniques as the characters merge, distort and go through a process of metamorphosis. I also utilized sets and effects that are nature or element inspired. This was intentional and was designed to help the viewer see that the characters are not “unnatural” or inferior in any way. Like nature and the elements, we are all simply who we are.

I applied the theory of semiotics to the three characters seen in the production. Society labels people by two distinct gender categories: male and female. And when one reads, sees or hears the words male or female, specific symbols and images are associated to each gender and this is perceived normal and natural. When a person who identifies as female or male fail to fall into the category of these specific gender norms, some people have strong negative reactions varying from mild disgust or dislike to strong and violent hatred. For example, in society, people often associate certain adjectives as being tied to a specific gender. What would be a compliment to a woman might be perceived as an insult to a man. Words such as beautiful, pretty, sweet or

demure tend to be a compliment when directed towards a female. These same words however are thought to be an insult when applied to a male. To take this thought further, when applying adjectives commonly used to refer to a female's outward appearance and direct them towards a male, the male often feels those words carry an underlying meaning of weakness and inferiority. This often translates to derogatory views and opinions within a patriarchal society. Men want to be referred to with the use of adjectives that denote strength and power such as handsome, rugged, and good-looking, a man's man. When a society falls into this manner of thinking, it automatically allows for the viewing of women as lesser or inferior to men. In my music video, I challenge this notion of hard ingrained meaning of signs and their objects using semiotics as a production of meaning. Even though I have a male and a female character, they are designed to have equal feminine and masculine traits that allow the audience to see the masculine as beautiful and the feminine as strong. In challenging what society's gender norms are, I hope to change the semiosis (the relationship of a sign, and object and its meaning) of what people perceive to be, look, and feel to be masculine, feminine and the spectrum in between to be thought of as normal. Because as a society, we communicate with words and these words tend to draw upon specific visuals within the mind, I believe it's important that we challenge that automatic visual connection.

The interaction of the characters in the virtual sets are also using semiosis. By choosing scenes of nature, I am showing that these characters, as they represent society as a whole, are always changing and change is a natural evolution in a human's life. For some people, these changes will be related to their gender, sexuality and how they identify with ethnicity. If someone identifies as a heterosexual white Irish male, no one bats an eye if they fit society's traditional expectation for that definition. Society sees this type of identification as natural and

understandable. However, if a person identifies as a pansexual, Korean, non-gendered specific person, many in society view this person as unnatural, mentally ill, or an abomination in the eyes of their God. Because of this narrow-minded view, many people who are challenging society's traditional definitions find themselves persecuted, misunderstood, or alienated simply for their desire to be identified in a way that speaks to how they feel on the inside or look on the outside. The sets in my video show nature/natural environments and put the characters within those environments so as to associate different ideas of gender and sexuality as natural. Instead of using words as the signs, I am using the concept of gender, sexuality and identity with ethnicity and changing their production of meaning.

I also applied a principal known as "visual music" by Julie Watkins who is a senior lecturer at the University of Greenwich. The use of synchronicity in all aspects of the product was of primary importance to me. Although synchronicity is a common part of digital media, the desire to utilize that concept as a basis for how the video is both filmed and edited is uncommon. My project is based heavily on multi-layered synchronization between visual images, the musical score/song and unique lighting. I could find no literature or scholarly works on this concept, so it is something I have begun calling "digital image choreography". This was perhaps my greatest revelation in this project's editing process. I discovered there appears to be a way to choreograph images to maximize their appeal by using the actual or perceived musicality of a song, sounds or spoken words to enhance the overall synchronicity and flow of the video.

One of the ideas that I wanted to place front and center in my video is that humans are made up of many different layers and facets. We are all at our core human beings, but our humanity is neither static nor one dimensional. I chose to illustrate this by having the same actress play all three of the characters seen in the video. This idea of an actor playing more than

one character in a production is not new and often serves to either connect characters in a unique way or highlight the multiple natures of a specific character. I utilize this to illustrate how ideas of gender, sexuality, stereotypes and abilities are, like humans, not something that is always easily defined or perceived.

In order to have my video match the vision of my story, I chose to create an entirely virtual world in which to place my characters. I utilized Adobe Creative Cloud programs including, Premiere Pro CC 2019, After Effects CC 2018, Photoshop CC 2019, ProCreate, and Storyblocks. By doing this, I allow the audience a view into a world that I could manipulate in a way that best expressed my desire to use music videos as a platform for social awareness and change. From the color choices within the virtually designed sets to the costuming of each of the characters, I strove to construct an aesthetically pleasing and visually interesting project. In many ways, I believe my music video challenges the current notions and ideas of what a music video is and how it challenges conventional thinking. This music video is also unusual in the respect that the song itself is entirely spoken word and the background music was constructed using parts of many open source music selections. The music score was used to establish mood and convey emotions.

The project goal and objective were to shine a light on current social issues that are important to me. These issues included equal rights, inclusivity and stereotyping. I approached these goals and objectives with the desire to not only shine a light on these issues but to also educate and inform my audience in an easily accessible and entertaining manner. A music video is a format that makes sense given the ideas and emotions I wanted to express. I accomplished my goals and objectives through the use of symbolism, the theory of semiotics, the application of specific sounds and colors and ideas as they relate to gender/androgyny. Most importantly, I

wanted to address the fact that people need to be depicted as multi-faceted human beings, not one-dimensional characters who have no basis in reality. The lyrics I composed to be used in conjunction with the videos score were designed to reinforce the visuals and social commentary within the video. Music videos as a platform for social change and education is a method of entertainment that is culturally popular, easily accessible, visually appealing and thought provoking.

Discussion

Characters

The video's storyline was visually represented by three characters: *Figure*, *Phoenix* and *Dragon*. The video's three characters were used to visually, through both overt and covert symbolism and stereotypes, drive home the story/lyrics of the video's song.

Figure is a character that represents race, androgyny, fluidity and the LGBTQ community. *Figure's* costume is a black outfit that covers the body completely. *Figure* displays no cues as to gender. There is a mask on *Figure's* face. The mask is divided into 5 equal parts that are painted to depict skin tones as they relate to human races. These sections of the mask being white, black, brown, yellow and red are painted in such a way as to show they are not a perfect surface, but one that is cracked and weathered. This is meant to depict that no race is pure or untouched by time and genetics. Atop *Figure's* head is a headdress. It consists of silver threads interwoven through jewel toned tulle fabric. This fabric is a loose representation of the colors in the LGBTQ flag. The fabric then flows from the headdress, down *Figure's* back where it merges with a cape made of the same colors and material.

Character number two is *Phoenix*. She represents not only the feminine side of all people, but also changes, new beginnings and female empowerment. As her character relates to the seasons, she is spring and autumn and the elements of fire and earth. *Phoenix*, like her more masculine counterpart *Dragon*, borrows from many forms of lore and symbolism. I also nodded specifically to Chinese symbolism in that a phoenix is a representation of female power. Her costume consists of a long red and black dress that is layered in black fabric and adorned with circular faux gems and a black and red feathered cowl. She also has a silver colored filigree claw on one hand and the other hand displays long red pointed nails. Her wrists and shoulders are

wrapped in black and red feathers. *Phoenix* has a pale face, with prominently made-up eyes, brows and lips. Her face is both beautiful and mask like, making her seem like both a geisha and a kabuki character. She wears chunky heeled, black, combat boots. This character wears a fire colored wig and a black metal filigree mask.

The third character is *Dragon*. He represents the masculine side of all people as well as the seasons of winter and summer and the elements/powers of wind, water, lightening and cold. Like *Phoenix*, he also borrows heavily from many forms of lore and symbolism. Because of my personal heritage, *Dragon* draws on the Chinese symbolism that a dragon is a representation of male power. His costume consists of a black, knee-length overcoat that has a standard lapel design on one side and dragon scales on the other side and down the back of his collar. The character's costume colors consist of blue, purple, silver and white highlights against a black cowl shirt, black pants and combat boots. He has two very distinct accessories. The first is a black top hat with lace trim. The front of the hat has a partial dragon's head on its front that is painted in shades of blue, purple and silver. The second is a lower face mask with prominent sharp teeth, and a jaw that has also been painted blue, purple and silver. *Dragon* has short white hair and has metal tips on each finger. A small baby dragon, also in shades of blue, purple and silver sits upon his shoulder. Unlike his counterpart *Phoenix*, *Dragon's* make-up is minimal consisting only of black outlined eyes.

Video Scenes

The video starts with a black screen and the title, "NO LABELS" displayed in stark white lettering. This title screen fades into the first scene which shows a dark, dirty alleyway. The walls are made of brick and covered in layers of graffiti. Although the words painted on the wall are incomplete or partially covered in other things, the audiences' mind will make the connection

that they are words of hatred, prejudice, and bigotry. The audience hears the sounds of a heartbeat. The heartbeat is mixed with sounds of a large metropolitan city which builds as the scene progresses. In this portion of the video, derogatory and racist wording is utilized to mirror a racist tangent. The car horn sound was chosen to be a loud interruption of this tirade and a symbolic way of stopping that rhetoric. The sound of the horn was also used to show the viewer that this type of prejudice must stop. The effect of the car horn jerks the listener out of the racial tirade and acts as a period, as well.

As the viewer looks at the graffitied wall, parts of the wall suddenly appear to begin moving. Something is trying to push its way out from inside the wall. *Figure* pushes from within the wall stretching and straining to break free. *Figure* breaks through the wall; a black silhouette remains where *Figure* was once trapped. The silhouette represents the idea that where we come from always leave a mark on ourselves and the world. In this case, *Figure* steps from the negatively graffitied wall as if the character was created from the hatred and prejudice in the world. It was intentional to have the black silhouette remain as it proceeded out of the wall. This portion of the video illustrates, through *Figure's* reactions, how words can be brutal, mentally damaging, and destructive to one's self-esteem. The sounds of a big city continue to be heard in the background. The lyrics of the song appear to register as actual physical blows that beat *Figure* to the ground in the alley; it is left shaking and defeated. The colored tulle of *Figure's* costume suddenly piles atop the character. This depicts the weight that many people feel about their race, ethnicity, gender or sexuality. The pile of fabric suddenly catches fire and as the flames rise, the audience sees a woman emerge from the fire. The character *Phoenix* turns around to face the audience and states in a commanding tone, "Fuck that nonsense!" She snaps her fingers, and on the snap, there is a jump cut and the viewer sees the character *Dragon*. This

begins the scene where the characters of *Dragon* and *Phoenix* alternate between the seasons. This is designed to link them to nature, to see them as natural beings.

During the first verse, the audience sees *Dragon* in a close up shot. *Dragon* immediately goes against stereotype and is seen gently patting the small baby dragon which sits upon his shoulder. This is the reversal of standard stereotyping by making the male the caregiver for its offspring. The camera pulls back and *Dragon* is seen walking on a path through a snowy Winter forest. As *Dragon* walks closer, he transforms into *Phoenix*. The setting changes with *Phoenix*'s appearance; she is walking in a beautiful forest in the Autumn. In the background, a small portal still shows a glimpse of the Winter scene. As *Phoenix* approaches, the setting changes again. *Phoenix* becomes *Dragon* and he is walking on a path through a forest in Summer; the distant portal now shows the seasons of Autumn and Winter. As *Dragon* approaches, he transforms back into *Phoenix* and she is walking in a Spring forest, the portal to Summer, Autumn, and Winter are still visible in the background. These changes of season show that all people are made up of their own changing seasons and that no matter one's sexuality, identity, or genetic makeup they should never be considered unnatural. People are who they are and in that, there is perfection. I intentionally sped up Autumn and Summer as the music and lyrics sped up. I synchronized the images to the music. This illustrates the technique I coined as "digital image choreography". I also wanted to show that in nature, seasons have varying lengths and do not keep to a set time limit.

Phoenix steps out of Spring and into a space with a tall spiraling staircase. She moves up the staircase showing how long of a process it takes to rise above prejudice and gender expectation. As she gets to the top of the staircase, the ceiling starts to lower and appears to almost crush her. She looks up towards the ceiling and punches the ceiling as it closes in. The

ceiling shatters and the viewer sees *Phoenix* fall down through shattering glass and land on her feet in a glass cavern. This imagery is intended to illustrate the struggle for women, races, and members of the LGBTQ community to climb the ladder of success and shatter the preverbal glass ceiling. *Phoenix* lands in a dark cavern; the shards of glass cover the ground beneath her feet. She leans down and picks up a large shard of glass and holds it in front of her face. Within the shard of glass, the audience can see an upside-down distortion of *Phoenix* and her surroundings. One reason for the distortion is that people often have distorted images of themselves. As the camera rotates, the audience sees *Dragon's* reflection instead of *Phoenix's* reflection in the glass. The camera pulls through the glass shard and *Dragon* is now standing there holding the glass shard in front of his face. There is a distorted upside-down version of *Dragon* and his surroundings within the glass shard. Another reason for the character's distortion in the glass shard is that society often has a distorted view of people who they consider outside their perceived norms or desired race.

When the chorus begins, there is a camera rotation and the audience sees *Figure's* reflection instead of *Dragon's* reflection in the glass. The camera pulls through the glass shard and *Figure* is then standing there holding the glass shard in front of its face. There is no reflection of *Figure* in its glass shard. This lack of reflection represents the struggle that many people feel because society often labels them in a way that doesn't accurately represent who they are as a person. It also draws attention to the fact that people often struggle to have a clear vision in their mind as to who they are and how they wish to be seen. There is a camera rotation and the audience sees *Figure, Dragon and Phoenix's* reflection instead of *Figure's* reflection in the glass. The camera pulls through the glass shard once more and all three characters share the screen. The lyrics and pace of the song increase rapidly, at which point the characters' faces are

divided into thirds and interchange with one another in a pattern that mimics the musicality of the song. The chorus is all about how a person is multi-faceted and those facets, when joined, become the totality of an individual. The musicality changes and the three characters once again become their own unique identities. This portion of the chorus draws the audience's eyes to the shards of glass which, once again, depicts the distorted images of *Dragon*, *Phoenix* and the empty shard being held by *Figure*. This particular sequence with the glass shard was very challenging to produce. Problems arose with filming clear glass on a green screen. When the green screen was keyed out, it removed much of the desired characters reflections and the patterns of light play. To resolve this problem, it was necessary to make a separate layer consisting of the glass shard and to manipulate it in such a way as to try and reproduce the original reflections and light play. This was especially problematic as the glass shard layer has to track with the original shard throughout the scenes. There are some pixilation issues and artifacts that I was never able to completely resolve within the allotted time frame of this project.

The view tightens in on *Figure*'s glass shard and a cloud of smoke begins to form within the shard. This smoke expands and encompasses the entire screen. This is used as a transition to the scene with *Dragon* by a lake. It is a dark, storm-filled, night and *Dragon* is on the banks of the lake. He touches the water and it turns to ice, allowing him to walk out on the frozen water. The actions by *Dragon* mimic the actions described in the song lyrics. This scene is important as it was designed to again associate *Dragon* with specific natural elements and powers including wind and storms, lightening and energy.

The set changes again and the viewer finds *Phoenix* in a tropical outdoor green temple. Sparks of fire can be seen emanating around her feet as she walks. Inside the green temple, large Fu dogs tower over her. In Chinese culture, these dogs symbolize male and female as well as

mother and father. They support stereotypical views as the female dog has her paw on an infant dog, while the male, or father, dog has his paw resting on or conquering the world beneath his feet. The video alternates two more times between *Dragon's* lake and *Phoenix's* green temple.

In the next scene, the viewer finds themselves within a space that is occupied by *Figure*. This character's movements are jerky which is played up by adding additional layers of the character, all moving in an unsynchronized way to one another, but actually synchronized with the music/lyrics. The background imagery and foreground lighting are designed to give the viewer the impression that *Figure* is surrounded by a galaxy or nebula. This set then brings in a layered effect of the two scenes shown previously as two panels on either side of *Figure* and introduces *Dragon* and *Phoenix* within the two panels. *Dragon* is still in his lake set and *Phoenix* is still in the green temple. The two background panels disappear leaving all three characters in *Figure's* space. *Dragon* retains his power over lightening and *Phoenix* still has her fire ability. This galaxy or nebula set is meant to reflect the fact that all life and therefore all people originate from the same place and have a cosmic and shared beginning. The scene also starts the process that will start the combining of all three characters into a single and final character.

One of the highlights of this three-panel scene is that the audience gets its first look at a more grownup version of baby dragon as he flies through the foreground of the scene. The scene then changes back to just *Figure* in its space and it momentarily sees a reflection of itself, *Phoenix* and *Dragon* in the shard of glass it is holding in its hand. *Figure's* reflection then disappears.

With the beginning of the second chorus, the basic foundation is the same as the first chorus, except that it plays in reverse and when the characters rotate and pass through the glass shard, they take on a facet of the previous character. The merging of characters is represented by

a portion of the previous character's costume transferring to the next character in the rotation. After the rotation of *Figure* and *Dragon*, the audience momentarily sees *Phoenix* reflected in the glass shard. As the camera pulls through the glass shard, however, a new character is introduced. This final character is a perfect combination of *Dragon*, *Phoenix* and *Figure*. She is holding the glass shard in front of her masked face where the reflection is only seen as briefly distorted before she intentionally lets go of the glass shard and all it symbolized. Once the shard is dropped, it is natural for her to discard the mask that was in front of her face. She now feels whole, complete, confident and accepted. With this new confidence, she no longer accepts the labels and limitations attached to the mask and moves it away from her face. As she smiles at the camera, the background set changes, and the final character can be seen standing back in the alleyway. The graffitied wall no longer displays derogatory words and it opens to show the seasons represented at the start of the video. The final character lets the mask she is holding fall to the ground where, as a nod to *Phoenix*, she causes it to catch fire, burn and disappear. As a nod to the part of her that is *Dragon*, she tips her hat as a parting gesture to the audience and a lightning bolt can be seen behind her. She raises her hand, which calls to the nearly full-grown dragon that flies into the scene from the foreground. She turns toward the opening in the wall, shudders in a way that nods to the jerky movement associated with *Figure*. She and the adult dragon then proceed into the world that exists beyond the graffitied wall. The final character is meant to illustrate that we, as humans are multidimensional, complicated and not easily pigeonholed or categorized. I chose the final character to be female as she is in part a representation of my own personal experiences.

Problem Space

I believe my project fills the gap or problem space within the music video genre by addressing socially relevant issues in a positive, modern, and culturally appealing aesthetic. The problem space related to music videos as a platform for social awareness and change is that assumptions are being made by not only researchers, but lay persons, that music videos present a quantifiable threat to young people in particular and society in general. Many of these opinions appear to want to put all music videos into a category of something that is socially irrelevant, culturally damaging, ultra-violent, and inherently stereotypical and shallow.

One thing that should be noted is that the original preproduced storyboard had to be changed slightly due to the inability to produce the original commissioned song. Less than two months before the project was due, I was advised that the original music for the video was not finished, which should have gotten to me two months prior as per date requested, nor would it be finished in time to be utilized in this project. This constituted having to rethink both the lyrics and score for the video. I made the executive decision to completely change the lyrics (See APPENDIX B & B.1) and used to them in a spoken word format within the video. The musical score was composed using multiple pieces of music from my paid subscription of royalty free content through Storyblocks. Because of these fundamental changes, scenes depicted in the original storyboard had to be altered to reflect the change in the actual music video song. Those changes are seen in the actual product and not in the preproduced storyboard or script (See APPENDIX A & C).

Conclusion

My primary interest in the field of digital storytelling is music videos/short films. This style of digital storytelling appeals to me because it is a method of communication that is fast paced, creatively satisfying, informative, and appeals to society's current desire for sound bite style education and entertainment. This type of digital storytelling provides a wide variety of options that include anything from a short biographical film to traditional music videos, public service announcements and advertising as it relates to commercials.

Should more research be conducted and added to this topic then the following actions should be taken. As it relates to music videos, one should have a musical score/song completed prior to production of the video. My filming process was difficult as scenes had to be designed and created first during pre-production that would have benefitted by having the song/score completed/ready at the start of the project.

Art is not always pretty or palatable, it is often in your face, highly emotional, confrontational and politically charged. Social change is never driven by apathy or ignorance. It is fueled by accurate representation and visuals of society's ugly truths.

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Appendix A: SCRIPT

Scene 1. EXT. Alley Way with Brick Wall covered in graffiti - Night

FADE FROM BLACK

FIGURE pushes against the graffitied wall from the back side.

FIGURE breaks out of the wall and lands face down on the ground. Trying to break away from the wall completely, it is buried under layers of tulle. The tulle begins burning and goes up in flame.

PHOENIX emerges from the flames of the burning tulle. She walks out of frame.

Scene 2. EXT.

DRAGON walks through winter scene.

PHOENIX begins to walk through the same scene, but the season has changed to autumn.

DRAGON cuts back into the scene; the season is summer.

PHOENIX finally walks closer and it is now spring.

Scene 3. INT.

PHOENIX walks out of spring into a black room with a set of glass stairs off in the distance. The staircase jumps closer to PHOENIX and she ascends the stairs until she reaches a glass platform. She looks up and can see a glass ceiling. She throws a punch into the ceiling cracks and shatters; glass shards fall down around PHOENIX.

PHOENIX stands tall and looks toward the ground and picks up a big piece of glass. Staring back at her, is DRAGON.

FIGURE now stands holding the shard of glass.

SCENE 4.

FIGURE, PHOENIX, and DRAGON rotate around in a galaxy setting.

FIGURE steps out of frame and into the next scene.

Scene 5. EXT. - Day

FIGURE steps into frame, covered in a dense smoke. FIGURE takes a deep breath and the smoke begins to stir around FIGURE until [they] is no longer visible.

SCENE 6. EXT.

DRAGON walks out of the smoke and appears on a watery landscape and begins to walk across, turning the water to ice with each step.

DRAGON suddenly falls through the water and disappears.

SCENE 7. EXT.

PHOENIX drops into the next scene of two Fu Dog statues in a green temple, she walks between the Fu dogs and looks down into a puddle to see FIGURE. She bursts in to flame and disappears.

SCENE 8.

FIGURE, PHOENIX, and DRAGON rotate around in a galaxy setting.

SCENE 9.

The characters continue to flow around each other, at times overlapping and merging. (BRIDGE)

SCENE 10. EXT. Alley Way with Brick Wall covered in graffiti - Night

FIGURE merges into DRAGON, and then DARAGON merges with PHOENIX to become one person as the camera rotates around them finishing with the FINAL character facing toward the wall.

The new character emerges and takes off the mask that was a part of FIGURE and throws it onto the ground. The mask is burning away in as snow falls by the brick wall from the beginning.

The FINAL character walks away.

Appendix B: LYRICS

I'm not lost I'm on my way
 so many paths before me lay
 I wander roads in the lonely hour
 there is time for my thoughts to devour
 No glass ceiling is going to hold me down
 shards beneath my feet upon the ground
 The master of my destiny
 Look at me and you will see

I'm not a color
 I'm not a gender
 I'm the hard that protects the tender
 I'm not a number
 I'm not an excuse
 I'm a uproar about to let loose
 I'm not X, Y or Z
 You can't put a label on me

Every breath becomes a storm
 I am me and I won't conform
 Don't walk on water but I could learn
 you can't expect me to just crash and burn
 Did you really just ask me what I am
 Baby I'm a lion not some lamb
 I am the wind that drives the rain
 we all can be so arcane

I'm not a color
 I'm not a gender
 I'm the hard that protects the tender
 I'm not a number
 I'm not an excuse
 I'm a uproar about to let loose
 I'm not X, Y, or Z
 You can't put a label on me

I'm not a color
 I'm not a gender
 I'm the hard that protects the tender
 I'm not a number
 I'm not an excuse
 I'm a uproar about to let loose
 I'm not X, Y, or Z
 You can't put a label on me

Appendix B.1: REVISED LYRICS

Useless, stupid, loser, faggot, chink, wet back, nigg... (car horn)
 You are weak, you're such a pussy, go back to where you came from, what the hell are you...
 wrong with you. Be a man, you're so butch, you crazy dyke, oh calm down, stop getting so
 emotional, women belong barefoot and in the kitchen, make me a sandwich, bitch, why can't
 you be more feminine?, I kissed a boy, a girl, an idea, a dream, it's not you, it's me. Get your
 ugly tranny ass out of here. Why can't you wear a dress? You look prettier when you smile.
 Don't cry, be a man. Suck it up. Boys don't wear makeup...but boys will be boys. Marriage is
 between a man and a women , Adam and Eve, there is no Adam and Steve. You must be gay,
 you like rainbows. Shut up!!! Your shoulders, breasts, ass are showing, don't distract the boys.
 You only got this job because it's an affirmative action promise ring, Grow some balls! You
 won't amount to anything...Fuck that nonsense!

*There are so many paths that lay before me,
 I look out and I dream, I conceive, I create my reality.
 I am not lost, I am on my way but why you don't see....the we that makes me
 I wander desolate roads in the lonely hours where...
 My thoughts devour your **limitations, expectations, retaliations.**
Your archaic glass ceiling will not repress me, not address me nor express me.
I walk on the shards of your preconceived notions, emotions, bombs of poison potions
*Only I have the key... I am the master... of my own destiny
 Take a real look at me... and you will see... variety.**

*I am me and me is we (no labels) gender doesn't dictate my reality
 Race is part of who I am (no labels) but it is hardly my totality*
**They are all counting numbers ... living like privileged recluses , spewing words like
 swaying nooses , caught up in hollow excuses**
**Misogynistic white men ... screaming their own personal lies , fueling hatred as our hope
 cries, backs turned as another child dies**
*People are not objects (no labels) for your narrow judgements and morality
 You have no business inside (no labels) my bedroom, closet or sexuality*

*Within me... Every breath becomes a storm
 I am a hurricane... you can't stop me and I will not conform
 Don't walk on water but I could learn you can't expect me to just crash and burn
 Don't ask me what I am... I'm a lion not some lamb
 I'm not an ocean, can't pollute, I'm resolute, always astute, never mute*
No Gales of negativity about masculine and femininity
You took God's word from your religion and filled it with hell fire, snake, rat and pigeon
*I shine a light that mirrors ... the shards and facets... of everyone's tears
 The looking glass pulls us in... there is no sin... pause and begin*

*I am me and me is we (no labels) gender doesn't dictate my reality
 Race is part of who I am (no labels) but it is hardly my totality*





Don't stand for hypocrisy ... other side of mouth excuses, knife in hand turncoat abuses, truth can only be what truth is.

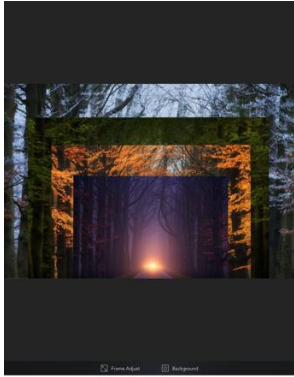
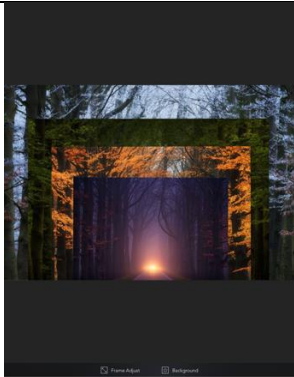

United humanity... no hate we only celebrate... love is love gay, bi or straight..... race transcends its labeled crate.



People are not objects (no labels) for your narrow judgements and morality


You have no business inside (no labels) my bedroom, closet or sexuality


Appendix C: STORYBOARD

Shot	Scene 1	Lyrics	Photo	Production Notes
1.1	WS	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound begins on a black screen cut to cage – • Music/Sound - heartbeat
1.2	CU	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hands and face of Figure push through the wall
1.3	MS	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pan to floor where Figure climbs out from the wall
1.4	WS	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Figure burns until the tulle is ashes
1.5	WS			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phoenix emerges out from the burning tulle


Shot	Scene 2	Lyrics	Photo	Production Notes
2.1	WS	I'm not lost I'm on my way		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phoenix and Dragon interchanging, walking towards camera/on z-axis toward camera through various seasons
2.2	MS	so many paths before me lay		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phoenix and Dragon interchanging, walking towards camera/on z-axis toward camera through various seasons
2.3		I wander roads in the lonely hour		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phoenix walks into (intersection of various paths and directions)
2.4		there is time for my thoughts to devour		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> End of shot rotate around Phoenix to show her going up a staircase.

Shot	Scene	Lyrics	Photo	Production Notes
3.1	WS POV	No glass ceiling is gonna to hold me down		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phoenix is climbing set of stairs on a long staircase. She looks up from the stairs to the glass ceiling She throws a punch to break the glass Glass shatters
3.2	CU	shards beneath my feet upon the ground		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phoenix stands tall and looks down, to the camera and picks up a shard

3.3	OTS	The master of my destiny		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She sees Dragon in her reflection.
3.4	OTS	Look at me and you will see		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dragon then sees Figure in the reflection of the mirror.
3.5	CU MS			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Figure is holding the mirror

Shot	Scene 4	Lyrics	Photo	Production Notes
4.1	MS	Chorus		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Figure, Phoenix, and Dragon stand on a platform the camera rotates around as slight things change in their costumes.

Shot	Scene 5	Lyrics	Photo	Production Notes
5.1		Every breath becomes a storm		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Figure
5.2		I am me and I won't conform		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Figure




Shot	Scene 6	Lyrics	Photo	Production Notes
6.1		Don't walk on water but I could learn		
6.2		you can't expect me to just crash and burn		

Shot	Scene 7	Lyrics	Photo	Production Notes
7.1		Did you really just ask me what I am		
7.2		Baby I'm a lion not some lamb		

Shot	Scene 8	Lyrics	Photo	Production Notes
8.1		I am the wind that drives the rain		
8.2		we all can be so arcane		

Shot	Scene 9	Lyrics	Photo	Production Notes
9.1	MS	Chorus		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Figure, Phoenix, and Dragon stand on a platform the camera rotates around as their

				costumes are altered halfway.
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Shot	Scene 10	Lyrics	Photo	Production Notes
10.1	MS	Chorus		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Figure, Phoenix, and Dragon stand on a platform the camera rotates around as their costumes are a total mix of one another's.
10.2	WS			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Figure, Phoenix, and Dragon merge into one character
10.3	MS			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See the mask drop into frame and land on the ground, split and burst into flames dancing in the wind on water that ripples from the mask landing. Fade to black~

Appendix D: SHOT LIST

Shot #	Scene #	Short Description	Framing	Angle	Perspective	Action
1	1	Graffiti Wall	Wide shot	Front	Camera	Truck in
2	1	FIGURE strains (its) hands and face against the wall	Close up	Front	Camera	Static
3	1	FIGURE breaks out of wall and falls to the ground	Medium Shot	Side	Camera	Pan down
4	1	FIGURE lands face down on the ground and raises (its) head up, revealing (it) is still attached to the wall by the tulle	Extreme Close Up	Front	Camera	Truck out
5	1	FIGURE struggles to break away from the wall and rips the fabric	Medium shot	Side	Camera	Static
6	1	Ripping Fabric	Extreme Close Up	Side	Camera	Static
7	1	FIGURE turns toward the wall, grabs the colored fabric and pull it atop (it)self and disappears underneath	MS - WS	Front	Camera	Truck out
8	1	The fabric bursts into flames as the outline of PHOENIX becomes visible	WS	Front	Camera	Static
9	1	PHOENIX walks out of the burning tulle, and walks out of frame	MS	Front	Camera	Truck out

Shot #	Scene #	Short Description	Framing	Angle	Perspective	Action
1	2	DRAGON enters Winter and Summer	WS - MS	Front	Camera	Static
2	2	PHOENIX enters Autumn and Spring and walks out of frame in Spring	WS – MS	Front	Camera	Static

Shot #	Scene #	Short Description	Framing	Angle	Perspective	Action
1	3	PHOENIX steps out of Spring into a dark space; a staircase is visible in the distance	WS	Side	Camera	Static
2	3	The staircase jumps closer to PHOENIX and she looks up the stairs to see a glass ceiling	MS	Over the shoulder	Camera	Pan up
3	3	PHOENIX runs up the staircase	MS - WS	Slanted Back/Side	Camera	Static
4	3	PHOENIX comes to the platform at the top of the glass staircase and punches through the glass ceiling	MS - CU	Side	Camera	Static
5	3	PHOENIX punches through the	ECU	Side	Camera	Static

		ceiling				
6	3	PHOENIX stands as broken glass falls around her and onto the floor	MS	Front	Camera	Static
7	3	PHOENIX walks forward a few steps and picks up a large shard of glass	MS	Side	Camera	Static
8	3	PHOENIX holds up the shard of glass in front of her and see DRAGON	MS	Front - OTS	Camera	Rotate
9	3	DRAGON's reflection is seen in the shard of glass	CU	OTS	Camera	Zoom in
10	3	FIGURE now stands holding the shard of glass	CU - MS	Front	Camera	Zoom Out

Shot #	Scene #	Short Description	Framing	Angle	Perspective	Action
1	4	FIGURE, PHOENIX, and DRAGON rotate around each other, appearing, disappearing, and reappearing within the arc of the rotation	MS	Front	Camera	Rotate

Shot #	Scene #	Short Description	Framing	Angle	Perspective	Action
1	5	FIGURE steps into frame, surrounded in a dense smoke	MS	Front	Camera	Static
2	5	It takes a deep breath in and the smoke begins to stir	CU	Front or Side	Camera	Static
3	5	FIGURE disappears into the smoke	CU	Front	Camera	Static

Shot #	Scene #	Short Description	Framing	Angle	Perspective	Action
1	6	DRAGON walks out from the smoke	MS	Front	Camera	Static
2	6	He steps out on to a watery landscape and starts walks across	WS	Side	Camera	Static
3	6	Walking on water, turning the water to ice with each step	CU	Side	Camera	Track
4	6	DRAGON suddenly falls through the water and disappears	WS	Front	Camera	Static/ Track

Shot #	Scene #	Short Description	Framing	Angle	Perspective	Action
1	7	PHOENIX drops into the setting of a green temple with a pair of Fu dogs guarding the entrance	WS	Front	Camera	Static
2	7	She walks in between the two dogs and looks down into a puddle	WS	Front	Camera	Static
3	7	In the puddle, she sees FIGURE as the	CU	OTS	Camera	Zoom

		reflection instead of her own				in
4	7	FIGURE stands holding the shard of glass from before	CU - MS	Front	Camera	Zoom out

Shot #	Scene #	Short Description	Framing	Angle	Perspective	Action
1	8	FIGURE, PHOENIX, and DRAGON rotate around each other, appearing, disappearing, and reappearing within the arc of the rotation	MS	Front	Camera	Rotate

Shot #	Scene #	Short Description	Framing	Angle	Perspective	Action
1	9	FIGURE, PHOENIX, and DRAGON fade in and out of frame, layered on top of one another	CU, MS, WS	Front	Camera	Static

Shot #	Scene #	Short Description	Framing	Angle	Perspective	Action
1	10	As all three characters are rotating, FIGURE merges into DRAGON , and then DRAGON merges with PHOENIX to become the FINAL character who is facing with their back to the camera	MS	Front	Camera	Rotate
2	10	The FINAL character stands looking at the wall with the new message/graffiti words	WS	Front	Camera	Static
3	10	The FINAL character takes off the mask (that was FIGURE 's)	MS	Side	Camera	Static
4	10	The FINAL character throws the mask onto the ground	CU	Front	Camera	Track
5	10	Slow motion of the mask falling/lighting on fire	CU	Front	Camera	Static
6	10	The mask lands on the ground and burns away as snow falls by the wall from the start	CU	Front	Camera	Static
7	10	The FINAL character walks away	WS	Front	Camera	Static

Appendix E: CHARACTER DESIGN

Figure is a character that represents race, androgyny, fluidity and the LGBTQ community. Figure's costume will be a black outfit that covers the body completely. Figure will display no cues as to gender. There will be a mask on Figure's face. The mask will be divided into 5 equal parts that will be painted to depict skin tones as they relate to human races. These sections of the mask being white, black, brown, yellow and red and will be painted in such a way as to show they are not a perfect surface, but one that is cracked and weathered. This is meant to depict that no race is pure or untouched by time and genetics. Atop Figure's head will be a headdress. It will consist of gem like circles and spikes that are wrapped in jewel tone fabric, a loose representation of the LGBTQ flag. The fabric will then flow from the headdress, down Figure's back and trail onto the floor.



Character number two is Phoenix. She will represent not only the feminine side of all people, but also changes, new beginnings and female empowerment. As her character relates to the seasons, she will be spring and fall and the elements of fire and earth. Phoenix, like her more masculine counterpart Dragon, will borrow from many forms of lore and symbolism. I will also be nodding specifically to Chinese symbolism in that a phoenix is a representation of female power. Her costume will consist of a long red dress that is layered in black fabric and will be

adorned with circular faux gems and a black and red feathered cowl. She will also have silver colored filigree claws on the ends of her fingers and her wrists will also be wrapped black and red feathers. Phoenix will have a pale face, with prominently made-up eyes, brows and lips. Her face should be both beautiful and mask like, making her seem like both a geisha and a kabuki character. Under her costume she will be wearing black leggings and chunky heeled combat boots. This character will wear a combination wig/headress. There will be red and black hair in a high wrapped warrior style ponytail with twists and other adornments that run along the side of her head.



The third and final character is Dragon. He represents the masculine side of all people as well as the seasons of winter and summer and the elements/powers of wind, water, lightning and cold. Like Phoenix, he will also borrow heavily from many forms of lore and symbolism. Because of my personal heritage, Dragon will draw on the Chinese symbolism that a dragon is a representation of male power. His costume will consist of a black tailed overcoat, a black cowl shirt, black pants and combat boots. He has two very distinct accessories. The first is a black top hat with lace trim. The front of the hat has a partial dragons head on its front that is painted in shades of blue and silver. The second is a lower face mask with prominent sharp teeth, and a jaw

that has also been painted blue and silver. Dragon has short white hair and has metal tips on each finger. A small dragon, also in shades of blue and silver sits upon his shoulder. Like his counterpart Phoenix, Dragon also has pale skin with prominent black eyebrows and dark black lined eyes.





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