

Individual Project - Going 'till Failure

A short film by Jesus Quintana

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Introduction

I want to fail. Failing gives me an excuse to not try again. Failing gives me a reason to not come back here again. Failing helps me feel nice and safe in my comfort zone. That might be what you sound like. Or at least that might be what you subconsciously want to tell yourself. Regardless, there's this intense intuition of ours that despises discomfort. One of the biggest sources of this discomfort is the concept of failing. It's very easy to talk ourselves into not trying something new or something risky simply because of how overwhelming it feels to completely fall face flat. As a result, many individuals would rather stay protected somewhere familiar and predictable: the comfort zone. This project will look into the psychology of this phenomenon and find a way to answer the tough question: how do we overcome failure? It will explore this idea through the production of a short film centered around a protagonist tackling his anxiety toward failure through a metaphorical comparison with his exercise routine. It will utilize this visual medium to not only tell his story but also visually show the intricacies of how he manages to cope with his anxiety through this metaphor.

Literature Review

Looking at human history, it has been proven that many of humanity's successes were nothing short of repeated failures leading to a triumphant victory. This implies that perhaps, failure is rather a prerequisite for success. In a study published by Nature Communications, different groups were applying for grants based on their career history. It was then observed that "we find near misses outperformed narrow wins significantly," meaning that applicants whose careers had early setbacks had a much higher chance of performing well in the future, therefore implying how perceived "failure" was a necessary step into better career paths. If failure is inevitable for success, fear of this unavoidable roadblock is detrimental and can seriously hold back potential. Reading stories from the NEA Arts magazine gives further context into the consequences of artists taking risks. In the issue named *The Art of Failure*, George Lucas describes the high-risk high-reward scenario one must face when creating something. "...without taking risk and pushing boundaries, art would remain stagnant, and the creative spirit would be wasted on our own fears." This rhetoric is crucial to overcoming the anxiety failure may bring, a rhetoric this project will pull from and expand upon. In a way, failure in this regard can be seen as part of the art itself. Susana Martins writes about this artistry in her historical analysis *Failure as Art and Art History as Failure* by citing multiple "failed" artists in history and re-contextualizing their failures as lost gems rejected by the status quo of the time. Martins states, "...the concepts of

innovation and progress...manifest in art historical discourses, as they frequently emphasize major artists who broke with the past and with academic traditions, and thus launched the future paths to modern art,” furthermore pushing the idea that not all failures are dead ends, but rather they are different point of views compared to what tradition deems “the right way” of looking at the world.

Project Description and Significance

I will be creating a 10-15 minute short film that tells the story of a male protagonist and how he copes with his anxiety of failure through a comparison with his fitness goals. There will be a voiceover narrator who will act as a look into the protagonist’s psyche as he attempts to go on daily runs throughout the week. These daily runs, however, will act as a metaphor for the fears that the protagonist tries to “run” from as well as avoid, providing necessary conflict toward his fitness goals. The film will be shot using techniques from Vince Gilligan’s *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul* where color schemes and camera angles aid in visually telling my protagonist’s story. The significance of this short film will be its message about failure and overcoming it. It will inspire people to not be afraid to challenge themselves even if they are anxious about the thought of not achieving success right away. It’s a lesson I’ve been wanting to improve on and something that I’ve been wanting to express for myself so the visual representation of this theme through film will allow me and my audience to find comfort in a relatable situation. It is meant to allow troubled individuals to be okay with the thought of failing.

Audience and Impact

This project is for a young adult audience that relates to the hardships of being a fresh adult coming out of adolescence as I believe most adolescents develop these anxieties during their early youth development. As they grow older, many of their anxieties, such as failure anxiety, don’t become resolved in time for when they reach adulthood, leading to a mental crisis that causes them to seriously doubt themselves and their capabilities. As the National Society of High School Scholars puts it, “Many students allow their fear to overcome their ability to complete essential tasks that will help them succeed academically.” This is an audience I can relate to immensely which is why I chose to speak to them and offer my take on how to overcome failure. I also believe that this project will not exclude anyone else as I also believe anxiety as a whole is a universal struggle that anyone can relate to. My intended goal is to inspire my audience to have hope in themselves again if they’ve been losing it. I want them to feel like they are enough even if they keep telling themselves they aren’t, in return offering me a new perspective on the whole theme of failure. This project will incorporate the lessons taught in Arts Scholars about how to tell a compelling story that projects an overarching theme. As an engineer, I will also be looking at ways to shoot scenes using innovative filming techniques to add some more creativity.

Methods

As mentioned before, I will be utilizing techniques used by other filmmakers and experts such as Vince Gilligan's use of color and the many camera angles he uses that coincide with Matrix Education's list of popular film techniques. Some of these techniques that I'll be using include storyboarding and the use of a dolly. Storyboarding will aid me in planning out the shooting of my film as I can have a physical plan of how to shoot the story I'm telling. Metaphorically, I'm also preparing myself for the chance that I fail at getting my message across, in which case I have a foundation to return to and revise my steps. A dolly is a wheeled cart that the film camera is placed on to be able to capture moving shots. This is something I want to incorporate in my film as I believe it's an engineering problem I am capable of solving, all for the worthy end goal of elevating the visual storytelling I am trying to accomplish. To better understand these techniques, I've brought it upon myself to go through archival research or in other words, watch a ton of movies and shows, to learn from other filmmakers who've been actively using and perfecting the craft of for example moving shots with a dolly, or color schemes. As AUS Media puts it in context with Gilligan's *Breaking Bad*, "These colors not only depict the emotions of the characters but also make sense relationship-wise." Along with these methods, I also need to research the psychology of failure and why it's historically been frowned upon instead of embraced in an attempt to find a possible solution that I can express with my message.

Skills

I've had experience with video editing before as I've filmed and edited YouTube videos before. Another skill I possess is scriptwriting, as I've taken an entire class on this subject. Scriptwriting should allow me to improve on my storyboarding for this project as I will not only need the written screenplay but also a visual outline for how I will turn the written screenplay into the film I want to create. The main learning curve for me here is the cinematography aspect of this project which I can work on by watching films to take inspiration from. If time permits, it would be great if I could add original music to the film as I also possess skills in music production.

Budget

Item	Cost
Item #1 Phone for filming	0 (already have one)
Item #2 Music production software	\$7.99 a month (possibly for 3 months)
Total	~\$24

Note: Most other materials required for filming can be accessed through the university (woodshop, IDEA factory, etc)

Project Goals and Workplan

Filming a short film takes a lot of time and effort. The main thing I need to dedicate plenty of time to is shooting scenes as I plan to use multiple settings, setups for the camera, and the use of background characters. To start, though, I will be using most of winter break to write a first draft and final draft of the script. Using an electric scooter, I will also take this time to construct a usable dolly for when I return in the Spring to shoot scenes. I can also actively study how to storyboard during this time as well as the basics of cinematography. When I'm back, the first thing I will do is create a storyboard where I'll outline the locations, characters, and shots I will use for when I start to film. After that's done, the main thing to do for the next couple of weeks is shoot scenes. Weekends will be taken full advantage of as that's the time when I have the most free time. Post-production (ie. editing, finalizing, and possible music additions) will take place for the last remaining weeks.

Goal Chart

<i>Main Objective:</i>	<i>Produce a compelling short film that offers insight to students and young adults struggling with failure anxiety</i>
<i>Sub Goal 1:</i>	<i>Write a script that tells the story in an effective yet interesting manner</i>
<i>Sub Goal 2:</i>	<i>Gather/construct materials for production that will aid in visually projecting the theme</i>
<i>Sub Goal 3:</i>	<i>Learn how to shoot and direct a film using techniques learned as well as how to emphasize your theme</i>
<i>Sub Goal 4:</i>	<i>Film scenes with heartfelt acting and sincerity</i>
<i>Sub Goal 5:</i>	<i>Post-production (editing, music production, etc) -> Curate film into a cohesive visual experience that leaves a long-lasting impact on the audience with its message of hope</i>

Workplan

Week	Project Goals
Winter Break (you may break this section down into further increments if desired)	Write Script, gather/construct materials, study cinematography and filming techniques

Week 1	Storyboarding → figure out where to shoot scenes at exact locations and times; gather backup cast members for the following shoots
Week 2	Record scenes → intro scene
Week 3	Record scenes → Rising conflict scenes
Week 4	Record scenes → climax scenes
Week 5	Record scenes → falling action scenes
Week 6	Record scenes → resolution scene
Week 7	Post Production → compiling footage
Week 8	SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS Post Production → editing footage to curate it into the visual experience I want to present
Week 9	Post Production → visual effects added
Week 10	Post Production → if time allows, music production and overlaying custom music with film
Week 11	Final Touches → final tweaks which include audio mastering, final edits, etc
Week 12	Final Touches
Week 13	Final Exhibit/Performance Preparations
Friday	Arts Fest exhibition and display set up (4pm-6pm) and Opening Night (7:30pm-9pm). All students expected to attend Opening
Saturday	Arts Festival @ Adele H. Stamp Student Union. All students expected to participate throughout the day.

Annotated Bibliography

1. AUS. "How the Colors in Breaking Bad Painted a Story - AUS - Medium." Medium, Medium, 22 Feb. 2021, thenetwork-aus.medium.com/how-the-colors-in-breaking-bad-painted-a-story-5501e2942722. Accessed 2 Dec. 2023.
 - This source breaks down the color schemes Vince Gilligan uses throughout the run of his hit TV series *Breaking Bad*. The main point it drives through the reader's head is that color schemes can depict the emotions and psyche of characters. This relates to other sources because it allows for me to take what I've learned about the psychology of failure and visually represent it with my film and its characters. I can definitely study this film technique with other films to better understand how to incorporate it in my film, as this article inspired me to look at color in cinematography as an effective tool for telling my story.
2. Condliffe, Patrick. "The Ultimate Film Techniques Toolkit [2022 UPDATE]." Matrix Education, Matrix Education, 5 Sept. 2018, www.matrix.edu.au/essential-guide-english-techniques/ultimate-film-techniques-list/. Accessed 27 Nov. 2023.
 - This source goes over famous and well known filming techniques that changed the cinematography scene with their significance in popular media throughout the decades. This source teaches me the skills and tools I need to produce a visually compelling film and will definitely use this as a guide and aid to create impactful cinematography. It's allowed me to view cinematography as a very technical art that I've been able to appreciate more when watching films and analyzing their shots.
3. "Lil Yachty – :(Failure(: Genius, 2023, genius.com/Lil-yachty-failure-lyrics. Accessed 2 Dec. 2023.
 - This is simply a breakdown of Lil Yachty's interlude *:(failure(:* which allowed me to better understand his message in this song. It claims that the spoken word style song is the introspective side of Yachty and how he deals with the idea of failing by minimizing its effect it has on his mental health. It is a song that inspired me to look at failure not as "defeat" but as a way to "try again; ...try even harder," which I can cite as an inspiration to what my message will be at the end of the film.
4. Martins, Susana. Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Culture "Failure as Art and Art History as Failure." Aug. 2015, http://www.thirdtext.org/domains/thirdtext.com/local/media/images/medium/SSMartins_website_format_1.pdf. Accessed 20 Nov. 2023
 - The main argument of this source is that most of history's artistic "failures" are just misunderstood, abandoned new perspectives on the world by these lost artists. It relates to my other sources as it gives me historical context on the upbringing of modern art and

how failure evolves into modern art as well. I can cite this information as inspiration for how to overcome failure in my story since it provides compelling insight into why artists may give up on their projects. My perspective on modern art is much more aware now since I know that risky artists successfully pushed boundaries in art to make room for a new generation.

5. “Overcoming Fear of Academic Failure: Reasons Why Students Fail vs. Thrive.” Nshss.org, 2023,
www.nshss.org/resources/blog/blog-posts/overcoming-fear-of-academic-failure-reasons-why-students-fail-vs-thrive/. Accessed 19 Nov. 2023.
 - The main argument of this source is that the reason why students fail is mainly the fear of not making it, or in other words, failure. This adds on the point I’m trying to prove along with the other sources I have compiled, therefore giving valuable insight into not only the psyche of failure but ways to cope with it. It’s information I can implement in the writing of my story.
6. Tate. “The Art of Failure | Tate.” Tate, 2018,
www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/lubaina-himid-cbe-ra-2356/art-failure. Accessed 1 Dec. 2023.
 - This podcast goes over the stories of different artists and their ways of dealing with failure. In the end, they all proclaim that failure is actually just a different form of success that makes an individual unique in their craft. The source changed my view of my theme through a good example of a dancer who was deemed a failure because they aren’t as flexible as the average dancer. However, he took this flaw of his and used it to excel in speedy movements, creating the illusion of flexibility and also turning his failure into his unique strength. It’s a rhetoric that I can use to craft a message of hope in those who might be in a similar situation.
7. Team, NFI. “Storyboard - Everything You Need to Know - NFI.” NFI, 18 Dec. 2021,
www.nfi.edu/storyboard/. Accessed 27 Nov. 2023.
 - This source goes over the whats and hows of storyboarding, offering a compelling case as to why you’d want to use this technique of storytelling. This relates with all my other sources since it’s going to be the foundation for how I plan out this production – how I tell the story, how my themes get incorporated, and where everything goes so it’s curated in an interesting film. I’ve never been open to this method as I think it takes too much time, but after reading into this source made by experts, the time invested is worth it in the end. I will use this for creating the foundation of my film.
8. “The Art of Failure: The Importance of Risk and Experimentation.” National Endowment for the Arts, 2014,
www.arts.gov/stories/magazine/2014/4/art-failure-importance-risk-and-experimentation. Accessed 1 Dec. 2023.

- This magazine issue goes over the stories of artists who have been close to failure and have taken plenty of risks, including famous filmmaker George Lucas, creator of *Star Wars*. The main takeaway is that failure is a part of the artistic process since it allows artists to revise what isn't working and how to improve in certain aspects of their craft. It's a rhetoric that connects all the research I've done on the psychology of this topic so i can cite this as real-world applicable cases where treating failure as such works in the favor of artists/people in general.\

9. Wang, Yan, et al. "Early-Career Setback and Future Career Impact." *Nature Communications*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1 Oct. 2019, www.nature.com/articles/s41467-019-12189-3, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-019-12189-3>. Accessed 19 Nov. 2023.

- This case study looks into the effects of early career setbacks by looking at individuals' future endeavors such as applying for grants. The study makes the case that careers with early setbacks had a much higher chance of performing well in the future, therefore implying how perceived failure was a necessary step into better career paths. This is a study that directly contributes to the argument I am making in my exploration of the theme. I can cite this as proof towards my idea of failure being a prerequisite for success.