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by

Sophie Mariah Francey

2022

*DEAREST RHIA*

by

Sophie Mariah Francey, B.A.

MASTER'S PROJECT

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*DEAREST RHIA*

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## ABSTRACT

### *DEAREST RHIA*

Sophie Mariah Francey  
University of Houston-Clear Lake, 2022

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Co-Chair: Dr. Anna Klyueva

*Dearest Rhia* is an autoethnographic documentary film that explores whether humans have psychic abilities. It places the researcher (myself) as the subject of this autoethnographic documentary, defined as a type of self-narrative that situates the self in a social framework (Narayan, 2006). The multidisciplinary character of this investigation focuses on the topic of spiritual awakening of psychic abilities. Researchers use the autoethnographic study approach to examine subjectiveness and personal experiences, seeing the self as “another” while highlighting concerns (Strang, 2019).

The uniqueness of this project is expressed through the choice of topic (spiritual awakening of psychic abilities) and method of distribution (TikTok miniseries). The social media application TikTok has brought virality to many topics, including spirituality. With the increased awareness of spirituality and bringing like-minded individuals together, many TikTok influencers believe the theory that all humans have psychic abilities. These spiritual influencers will share this theory with their followers via

TikTok videos. As the researcher, I was interested in learning if I, myself, had psychic abilities because I had been told in previous psychic readings that I have these abilities, or was I influenced by the TikTok algorithm to believe I have psychic abilities? The purpose of *Dearest Rhia* is to explore and self-reflect if I, Sophie Mariah Francey, have psychic abilities, or am I only being highly influenced by media (and the media's influencers) promoting the theory that humans have psychic abilities? This autoethnographic documentary uses storytelling, graphics, research, training courses, experimentation, and expert interviews to accomplish its task.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This project represents a unique attempt to create an autoethnographic documentary for TikTok to explore my spiritual awakening of psychic abilities. Autoethnography is a type of qualitative study in which a researcher explores a topic with subjectiveness and direct experience via self-reflection and narrative. This autobiographical experience correlates to larger societal, political, and societal meanings and understandings (Narayan, 2006). In my research of previous findings via academic studies and other spiritual documentaries, it was evident that researchers rarely placed themselves into the experiment. This discovery only affirmed the importance and need for a documentary film like *Dearest Rhia*.

I had begun my spiritual journey in 2018 after my mother passed away unexpectedly. Before attending graduate school, I enjoyed going to psychic fairs once a month. I found it brought me healing and connection to my late mother. Three weeks after my mother's passing, my mother spoke via a psychic medium (a person who can speak to those who have passed) and told me that I had psychic abilities during this mediumship reading. This message from my mother was an abstract idea because I had no natural psychic spiritual gifts. I was recommended the Zero to Psychic course by Dr. Chuck Murphy by the medium to learn about my own spiritual gifts. The interaction with the psychic medium had ingrained in my memory, and when the TikTok algorithm started showing psychic content, I felt a calling to explore my psychic abilities more. The most important message the medium had provided from my mother was that tapping into my psychic abilities would ultimately help heal others just like it had helped heal me. All psychics that I have personally met on my spiritual journey or subscribe to on social media have the universal belief that all humans can access their spiritual gifts of being a

psychic. It is crucial to establish that the word “psychic” will be used in this paper as an overarching generic category term for the different types of spiritual gifts.

In addition, I had been studying astrological placements for approximately four years. The astrological birth chart is a person's astrological placements in the sky when that person is born (Malcolmson, 1979). A birth chart tells a person their personality traits and life experiences (Malcolmson, 1979). After studying my astrological placement, I learned that I have an Aquarius moon (the astrological placement of internal self), indicating high logical thinking. Anna Stone's (2016) study reported that those with psychic abilities who lean more towards intuitive thinking are not as logical. As a person who is not a native intuitive person, I felt that, as the subject, I could relate to the viewer, who is most likely not an intuitive person as well. To address if the average person using TikTok daily, such as myself, has psychic abilities or is being heavily influenced by the algorithm to believe they do, I created a TikTok docuseries called *Dearest Rhia*.

Users of the TikTok platform often purchase products that creators (also known as influencers) recommend (Araujo et al., 2022). When influencers recommend products in a video on TikTok, the video usually gets high engagement via likes and comments. The TikTok algorithm will promote videos with high engagement to users with the same interests. Most TikTok users downloaded the application in March 2020 with “115.2 million installs, which represented a 98.4 percent increase from March 2019” (Sensor Tower, 2022, p. 1), and it continues to gain more users.

Working at PepsiCo as a full-time social media strategist, I feel the need to be on the TikTok application every day for approximately three to five hours to learn the trends (additionally because I enjoy the application). The user's interests cultivate the user's TikTok algorithm FYP (“For You Page,” which is the user's search timeline), so I had a mix of trends and other things like activism, humanitarianism, fashion, music, food, and

spirituality. However, spirituality was one of the largest categories on my FYP. As I spend approximately 35 hours or more a week on the TikTok application, I wonder if my “calling” was heavily influenced by the media that I consumed the most every day.

### **Contributions**

My project provides several practical and academic contributions. First, this is, to my knowledge, the first autoethnographic documentary created specifically for TikTok. Through this process, I have mastered documentary production on a new platform and learned how to create a docuseries with multiple episodes. Via this project, others can learn about the process, time, funding, and effort needed to create a TikTok docuseries. My learnings in documentary production for new social media sites and docuseries will help future students with their documentary research and filmmaking.

My theoretical contributions center around a blend of research approaches (autoethnographic documentary) and creative exploration (TikTok docuseries) studying an unconventional topic (psychometrics). Future researchers can apply this framework to other topics that focus on self-reflection and self-analysis. Another contribution of this project focuses on the creative application of the cultivation theory to provide context and explanations to the phenomenon of self-discovery of psychometric abilities and what role TikTok’s algorithm may have played.

## CHAPTER II:

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews two different sources of materials: academic literature and contemporary documentaries on the topic of spiritual awakening. The project used cultivation theory as a framework, reviewed previous psychometric studies, and analyzed spiritual documentaries to guide autoethnographic experience.

#### **Cultivation Theory**

The cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1994) was created to test the effect of violent television consumption on consumers. According to the cultivation theory, long-term exposure to media influences how media users experience the world. The cultivation hypothesis was that the more individuals watch television, the more likely they have a sense of reality similar to what is portrayed on television (Gerbner et al., 1994). As established in Morgan et al.'s (2014) study, it is essential to continue to apply the cultivation theory to modern-day media like TikTok due to the evolution of the internet. Montag et al.'s (2021) study stated that the reason people use TikTok is because of its artificial intelligence (AI) advanced algorithm that cultivates a perfect "For You Page" (FYP) of different 15-seconds to 3-minute videos for the user. It creates a perfect video FYP page with a variety of interests that the user wants to consume. Most users do not feel the need to leave the application once they have begun scrolling the content on TikTok. The variety of content comes from the one billion active users as of 2021 (The Social Shepherd, 2021). With TikTok becoming one of the top consumed media options, it can bring instant fame to the application's users/creators/influencers. Even genres deemed "unconventional" like spirituality can cultivate influencers with one million followers or more. Spirituality users can become influencers because the algorithm shows their spiritual content to their ideal target audience. Shrum's (2017) online processing

model of cultivation effects argues that the effects of cultivation can spontaneously and instantaneously influence a person's opinion. This project highlights this observation and explores how TikTok's AI algorithm can effectively influence a person's beliefs after only one video (Shrum, 2017).

### **Previous Psychometric Research**

Many people experience a spiritual awakening during a significant emotional event like a tragic death, relationship ending, suicide attempts, etc. When a person experiences grief and depression, spirituality is a journey that brings healing and an understanding of the life journey. Lisa Miller's (2013) study suggests that depression and spiritual development are intertwined. With this insight from Miller's 2013 study, one could assume that the COVID-19 pandemic made many people experience grief and depression at a historical rate, and an uprise in the popularity of spirituality during the two years of the COVID-19 pandemic could be linked.

The creator of psychometry was Joseph Rodes Buchanan (1842), and his original definition for psychometry was "soul-measuring" (Buchanan, 1842, as cited in Strang, 2019). The modern-day definition used by psychics today is the touching of inanimate things related to an event or person to give you the capacity to learn facts about this person or event. Buchanan (1842) found that women could tap into their intuition more quickly than men because they were emotionally intelligent (Buchanan, 1842, as cited in Strang, 2019).

Wiseman and Watt (2006) found that previous researchers stated that those who believe in psychics might have worse cognitive capacities than those who do not believe in psychics, making them less able to distinguish the validity of psychic experiences. O'Keefe and Wiseman (2005) found that mediums and psychics have not proven to be "real," and because of this, those who do claim to be psychic should be studied by

psychologists for psychological illnesses. However, Mark and Touloupoulou's (2015) study found that not enough research has been conducted, and there is not an established scale to test the validity of psychometric experiences. Their findings also revealed several dubious internal reliability reporting procedures in the present literature. Despite the abundance of studies, the relevance of psychometric features is still undervalued in the academic sector (Mark & Touloupoulou, 2015). Mark and Touloupoulou (2015) recommended a two-pronged approach. Firstly, they recommended that studies train researchers to be more psychometrically competent. For researchers to achieve this, Mark and Touloupoulou (2015) urged for a greater emphasis on psychometric qualities and suitable reporting mechanisms in undergraduate and graduate programs. Secondly, they highlighted that more psychometric reviews and meta-analytic research should be published in experimental and clinical psychology publications to raise reader knowledge of the relevance of psychometrics (Mark & Touloupoulou, 2015).

The study of psychometry transformed science by arguing that study should be based on compassion and subjectivity rather than remoteness and impartiality (Strang, 2019). Male experimenters traditionally presented themselves as detached observers, documenting the data produced by female instruments while striving to show psychometry's lack of efficiency (Strang, 2019). Notwithstanding, advocating for scientific change, male psychometric experimenters' techniques and rhetoric weakened their field's critical arguments about connectivity and subjective emotion, reinforcing the impression that remoteness and impartiality were required for valid research. Objectivity's detractors may demonstrate how deeply it has controlled scientific literature and research (Strang, 2019). These findings informed the formation of this project as I felt that I needed to create a docuseries from a personal, compassionate, and subjective researcher point of view.

## Spiritual Documentaries

To better understand how *Dearest Rhia* could play the most optimal role in the genre of spiritual documentaries, a review of similar films was conducted. BBC Scotland's Conor Reilly (2021) created a YouTube documentary called *Delving Into The World Of Psychic Mediums / Who Believes In Psychics?* In this documentary, a male documentarian Reilly (2021), pursues learning more about the psychic world as a self-proclaimed skeptic. Reilly (2021) interviews two different psychics and shadows them throughout their day. He is moved by his experience with the psychics but notices that they are not always accurate. To give a fair review of the psychic world, he interviews another skeptic who is a professional illusionist. The illusionist demonstrates how psychics can make another person believe in their psychic abilities with psychological tactics.

Another documentary, and more closely related to *Dearest Rhia*, is a TikTok page called "Sky Life." Sky Life is also the influencer's name who started a YouTube channel three years ago as a spiritual explorer. Sky Life creates YouTube series that she hosts discovering different aspects of spirituality. In 2020, Sky Life began sharing her series on TikTok in segmented parts or episodes. Her topics include interviewing individuals that feel they are spiritual beings called "starseeds," interviewing brujas from Mexico's witchcraft city, Catemaco in Veracruz, and experiencing readings from different spiritualists.

Reflecting on these documentaries, *Dearest Rhia* takes a one-of-a-kind approach to a unique subject matter. While these documentaries educate viewers on the spiritual world, neither documentarian explores whether humans have psychic abilities. Furthermore, neither documentarian seek to discover their own psychic abilities. Unlike previous documentaries where Reilly was a male and Sky Life was a female surrounded

by spiritual people, *Dearest Rhia* is from the perspective of a woman who is an intellectual and not naturally spiritually inclined like the average person. *Dearest Rhia* shares the spiritual journey of self-discovery of the author's spiritual and psychic abilities.

### **Autoethnographic Documentary**

For this project, I chose an autoethnographic documentary as my overarching approach. Autoethnography is “a research method that uses personal experience (‘auto’) to describe and interpret (‘graphy’) cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices (‘ethno’)” (Adams et al. 2017, p. 4). Through self-reflection, narrative, and personal experience, autoethnographers explore the subjective side of research to educate others (Adams, 2017). Previous psychometric researchers' insight was objective and detached (Strang, 2019), which only strengthens the need for an autoethnographic project like *Dearest Rhia*. I documented this process of self-reflection of my personal experiences concerning the spiritual awakening of psychic abilities through videography, scripting, and narrating my story for TikTok.

Via showing my own spiritual journey of discovering my psychic abilities and learning whether or not I am possibly being influenced by a viral social media application, *Dearest Rhia* provides a unique and innovative way to engage in self-reflection and educates viewers about the spiritual journey.



### CHAPTER III: PRODUCTION NARRATIVE

#### **Audience**

The target audiences for *Dearest Rhia* are Generation Z and millennials on their spiritual journey. With this in mind, *Dearest Rhia* is a TikTok docuseries that integrates spiritual terms, references, and trends. Well-performing content on TikTok is typically not polished, shot not with a high-end DSLR camera and graphics but rather iPhones. The nature of TikTok requires vertical shooting, which was a new learning opportunity for me as a filmmaker as I am accustomed to shooting horizontally. Additionally, an important way to connect with the target audience was to interview and feature popular spiritual influencers on TikTok. Another way to resonate with these audiences was to use popular songs on TikTok.

The style and approach of the docuseries were also essential for the TikTok audience because they like creators to be authentic and relatable. These audiences want to watch content and experience the journey the way I experienced it. It was essential to find the balance of finding structure and humility in an abstract topic.

#### **Dissemination Strategies**

*Dearest Rhia* was explicitly created for TikTok, but the limitation/challenge of TikTok is that the videos can only be three minutes long. With this limitation in mind, the content needed to be terse for users to stay engaged. The interviews with the popular TikTok influencers were 60 to 90 minutes long each, so a substantial amount of video was not used in the docuseries. I wanted to share the entire video interviews as well, as the information from the influencer interviewees was valuable.

The dissemination strategy included releasing on TikTok via creating a brand new TikTok page, then using YouTube to showcase the video of the interviews that were not

used in the series via a brand-new channel, cross-promotion on Instagram Reels so influencers could repost and share to film festivals. The above distribution networks should be sufficient to reach a large audience.

The benefit of TikTok is that the content has the potential to go viral with the number of users on the platform. The keyword is “potential” because the TikTok algorithm will not boost your content without an established following to engage. TikTok’s virality is heavily reliant upon engagement. The obstacle with launching a docuseries on a brand new TikTok page is that the creator/user is starting with zero followers with very little engagement. For *Dearest Rhia* to cultivate any views, the TikTok videos would need to be “boosted” (spending money to create an organic social media advertisement). Unfortunately, creators cannot boost select popular songs on the videos, so I strategically had to remove popular songs on select videos.

The five spiritual influencer interviews were 60 to 90 minutes long and recorded over the video application “Zoom” due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, with the time restraints of TikTok 3-minute maximum length, most of the influencers' interviews could not be included. Another way to help promote the film was to create a brand-new YouTube page with each of the influencers' full interviews. Within each video description, the TikTok page of the docuseries was linked for users to click and view.

*Dearest Rhia* was also posted on a brand-new Instagram channel to cross-promote the docuseries. The TikTok influencers who have an Instagram page also shared the docuseries from the *Dearest Rhia* Instagram page to their Instagram channels.

*Dearest Rhia* will also be shared on FilmFreeway.com, a film website that helps filmmakers apply to festivals around the world easily in one place. I will submit this film to the Austin Film Festival, Sundance Film Festival, Spiritual Vibe Film Festival, and Conscious Good’s Spirit Film Festival via FilmFreeway.com.

## **Courses**

As I began my journey with the docuseries, it was recommended for me to take a mentorship psychic course, a crucial experience before reviewing the film's overall production. While filming the series in parallel, I took a psychic training course called Zero to Psychic with Dr. Chuck Murphy. While filming the interviews and readings from the influencers to ask if I had psychic abilities, I took one two-hour course a week for twelve weeks between August 22, 2021, to December 22, 2021, with Dr. Murphy learning different skills and techniques to test my psychic abilities.

## **Structure**

*Dearest Rhia* is a seven-episode docuseries with select episodes separated into multiple parts totaling to 13 TikTok videos. The decision to do a docuseries instead of a documentary was (1) due to the nature of the TikTok platform and (2) to cover various topics in the spiritual sector. The total length of the *Dearest Rhia*'s 13 TikTok videos was approximately 32 minutes. The structure of the docuseries episodes is as follows:

- Episode One: Opening Episode with Sophie Francey and William Knight
- Episode Two: Spiritual Mentor with Salia Marie
- Episode Three: Witchcraft with Shelley
- Episode Four: Astrology with BP
- Episode Five: Tarot with HeyJune
- Episode Six: Mediumship with Jazmine
- Finale: Interview with Mentor Dr. Chuck Murphy + Test via Psychic Readings
- Afternote: Thank You + Explanation of Name “*Dearest Rhia*”

The structure of the docuseries begins in episode one, featuring a famous TikTok spiritual influencer that went viral in the summer of 2021. The virality of this spiritual

TikTok video that the influencer William Knight created reached famous rapper Cardi B on social media. Cardi B used an image of the influencer from the viral video as her Twitter profile photo for one month. The humor of this famous TikTok video is the intensity and seriousness of the spiritual influencer speaking straight into the camera that it feels intimidating. In the video, the influencer is on a jogging trail in the woods, and as he is recording, a woman jogger passes by him and apologizes for interrupting his video. When the spiritual influencer looks at the woman jogger passing by with his intensity, the jogger screams in fear. I reached out to the influencer to confirm if he approved being in the film to avoid any copyright issues. The influencer, William Knight, agreed to be featured in *Dearest Rhia*. Artistically, this scene was used to set up the tone of the series by (1) using famous spiritual TikTok influencer and spiritual TikTok references and (2) the humorous tone of how intimidating the spiritual influencer was speaking about spirituality.

After the opening scene with the infamous spiritual TikTok moment, I continued the film by introducing myself. I interjected a whole new scene-setting approximately 30 seconds into the first episode. I was in the same position and area in the previous scene, but I was wearing new clothes. This abruptly interjected scene indicated that the originally filmed episode one no longer fit the established series upon going through a spiritual journey. Episode one established the style framework of using TikTok references, trends, popular songs, animated graphics, and a humble, humorous, and educational tone.

In episode two, I met with a spiritual mentor to establish the next steps I should take on this spiritual journey. The influencer, Salia Marie, suggested that I should get a mentor if that felt right to me and explore the spiritual psychic topics that most piqued my interests. I signed up for the Zero To Psychic twelve-week course with Dr. Chuck

Murphy. During the first class, Dr. Murphy established via a psychic reading that I was most interested in witchcraft, claircognizance, tarot, working with astrology, and mediumship.

This conversation with Dr. Murphy and the advice from Salia Marie established the structure for the next five episodes of the docuseries: witchcraft, astrology, tarot, the “clairs,” and mediumship. Within each of these subjects, I wanted to do two things: (1) to educate viewers about one specific topic from popular influencers in the genre and (2) to get “spiritual readings” from each of these spiritual psychic influencers (except the witchcraft influencer) to ask if I was psychic. For the tarot interview, I also received a tarot reading where I asked the question if I was psychic; for the astrology influencer, I requested a birth chart reading to see if the astrologer noticed any psychic astrology placements; lastly, for the mediumship reading, I asked my spirit guides and late mother if I had psychic abilities.

For the finale of the series, I wanted to feature my mentor after the twelve-week course concluded and gave four psychic readings to four different people to test all the things I had learned in the course with Dr. Murphy.

I also felt that it was important to thank the 17 people who had participated in the film and to explain the film's title, so I created another episode after the finale called the *Afternote*.

### **Style**

The docuseries framework represents a two-fold approach: (1) being an educational film about different spiritual sectors and (2) my personal spiritual journey to discover my psychic abilities. Using traditional documentary film techniques and TikTok style framing makes *Dearest Rhia* a unique docuseries to watch. The tone established in the film is educational, humorous, and humble. The docuseries used a mix of traditionally

shot film, stock images, stock film, and animated graphics for b-roll to keep users engaged on TikTok. Each episode opened with a voiceover and title frame for consistency and professionalism and ended with a recap graphic to set up the following episode. Ironically enough, the docuseries' different topics intertwined beautifully, creating a consistent underlying storyline between each episode. The storyline established by the interviews and readings by the interviewees created tension in the docuseries. The irony of the readings being interconnected provided excitement and suspense to the viewer to see what happens next in *Dearest Rhia*.

The story arc created in *Dearest Rhia* is Episode 1 and Episode 2 as the exposition, Episodes 3-6 as the rising action, and the finale is the climax and resolution.

### **Imagery**

Not including the Zoom interviews or graphics, the film was shot on an iPhone 13, not a DSLR camera, due to the casual, less polished nature of TikTok. The lifestyle filming was shot as a 9:16 1080 x 1920 vertical frame, unlike the traditional 1920 x 1080 horizontal framing, for optimal viewing on TikTok. Unlike the traditional rules of thirds, I broke the fourth wall and looked into the camera when I was filming myself. This style is due to the style of TikTok that indicates most viewers feel as though they are speaking directly to the creator. Breaking the fourth wall can be seen in episode one and the afternote part one. A sample of this framework style can be seen below in Figure 1.

Due to the pandemic and location, all interviews were conducted via the Zoom video conference application. The Zoom application allows the users to record their video teleconference meetings, similar to a screen capture. The Zoom recording interviews' style also broke the fourth wall to fit the frame, but it also invoked a feeling of modern-day interviewing during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews include the following: the influencers, the people I conducted a psychometric reading for in the finale, and

mentor Dr. Murphy. Examples of these recorded Zoom interviews can be seen below in Figure 2.

Lifestyle film was also used for a small portion of the b-roll shot by myself or stock film from Canva.com. B-roll was also created using images or videos from the influencer's TikTok pages. Old images of my mother were also used to create b-roll that referred to my mother. Examples of lifestyle film b-roll, both shots by the filmmaker and stock film from Canva.com, can be seen below in Figure 3.

*Figure 1*

Dearest Rhia Episode 1 (Left) and Afternote Part 1 (Right) TikTok 9:16 Style Frame



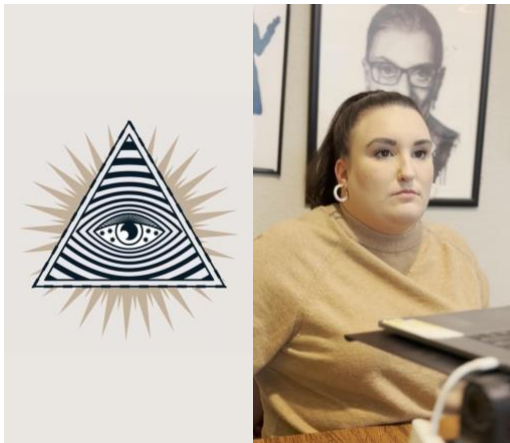
*Figure 2*

Dearest Rhia Zoom Recorded Interviews



*Figure 3*

Dearest Rhia B-Roll Canva.com Stock Film (Left) and self-shot by filmmaker (Right)



Colorfully animated and still graphics were created to (1) reduce monotony and (2) engage younger consumers. A total of 224 animated and still graphics were created for *Dearest Rhia*. The typography used for the graphics included Beth Ellen, Times New Roman, Porcelain, and League Spartan. Beth Ellen was used on the opening frame and notable spiritual frames as it is identical to my mother's handwriting. Times New Roman was used for formal definition frames to emphasize the professional nature. Porcelain



was used on all recaps and casual spiritual definitions to continue the pop art feel. League Spartan was used on select informative frames to provide a bold, modern look. The graphics also created the opening title frame for each episode.

The main color palette for the graphics included these HEX colors: #DBCAE9, #5E17EB, #D3F3FF, #8B5699, and #FBB9AB. This palette was used to establish a consistent branded tone and invoke a mystical feeling for the viewer with purple and blue. The highest spiritual color and aura associated with the seventh chakra (the crown chakra, which is the connection to the spirit realm) is the purple color of violet. Another important aspect of the color palette was creating a pop-art feel that is my signature style. These graphics were created using Canva.com. Examples of these pop-art graphics used for b-roll throughout the entire film can be seen below in Figure 4.

*Figure 4*

Dearest Rhia Broll Still and Animated Graphics Created on Canva.com. B-Roll (left) and Title Frame (Right)



This emergence of traditional lifestyle film and pop-art graphics can be seen in popular teen movies like *Juno*, *Dash & Lily*, and *Nick & Norah's Playlist*. It is a modern

style derived from traditional narrative filmmaking and animated films. This style gives the film a casual and humorous tone that appeals to millennials and Generation Z.

### **Audio**

Four distinctive types of audio were used in the production of *Dearest Rhia*. These four audio types are Zoom interview segments, fourth wall interviews with microphones, popular music, and voiceover.

The Zoom interviews' audio was used with interview scenes and as b-roll. Interviews are standard practice in documentary filmmaking and provide the viewer with the feeling of interviewing the influencer themselves. The goal of interviews in *Dearest Rhia* was to show credibility, authenticity, and a unique viewer tension with the psychic readings. The audio from my fourth wall interview scenes was used with interview scenes and as b-roll. The fourth wall style interview holding a microphone in hand is most native to the style of TikTok.

Popular songs on TikTok were added as background music of the videos to set the pace and create a flow between talking points. Popular songs also help boost video views on TikTok. The popular songs used in each episode are as follows: episode one featured "High" by DJ Snake, episode two featured "I Am Woman" by Emmy Meli, episode three featured "Season of the Witch" by Lana Del Rey, episode four featured "Nobody" but Renao, episode five featured "Hands In The Dirt" by Sequoyah, episode six featured "Haunt Me" by Teen Suicide, the finale featured "I Drink Wine" by Adele and the afternote episode featured "Cherry Wine" by Grent Perez. All songs featured on each video were credited to the original artist.

The voiceover was used because it is one of the most popular native ways to use audio on TikTok. Voiceover helps the flow of the series episodes by setting up the episode at the beginning of the video and outset with a recap at the end of each episode.

The voiceovers were also used as transition tools between the different topic questions. Artistically, voiceover deepens the relationship between the narrator (me) and the viewer, and it feels as though the viewer can hear the subject's thoughts.

The mix of these components provided the viewer with variety and intrigue while watching *Dearest Rhia*.

### **Funding**

Sophie Mariah Francey (me) provided all funding for this project. Instead of using a DSLR camera, I needed to upgrade my phone for a better mobile phone camera which cost \$489. The membership for Canva Pro to create graphics and stock imagery/video was \$60 for one year. Zoom's recording membership for all interviews costs \$150. Using Premiere, Audition, and After Effects, I needed an account renewal for Adobe CC Suite, which cost \$400. The twelve-week spiritual course to learn and test psychic abilities was \$300. All five spiritual influencers were paid \$250-\$500 for one hour of their time plus readings and their likeness to be featured in the film. I needed to pay advertising dollars to TikTok to reach more people between three episodes, which cost \$500. The total cost of *Dearest Rhia* was approximately \$3,549 plus a graduate project course fee of \$3,716.

### **Production**

The storyboard for *Dearest Rhia* was created using Miro Whiteboard, and all scripts were created with Google Documents. All files created were shared on a Google Folder that was available for access to my graduate committee members at any time. Due to the Delta and Omnicron COVID-19 variants and the locations of the interviewees, all production was executed from my home. All interviews and readings were conducted on Zoom and were recorded via Zoom. All scriptwriting and voiceover recording work was conducted in the closet of my home with an iPhone and microphone. The spiritual course taken for this docuseries was also virtually taken from my home on Zoom. All video b-

roll of my interview subjects was taken from my home with a ring light, iPhone tripod, and iPhone attached microphone.

### **Editing**

Adobe Premiere, After Effects, Audition, and Canva Pro were used for editing *Dearest Rhia*. Only minor lighting adjustments were applied to select interview videos to keep a natural look and feel. The 224 graphics' fonts, coloring, and animations were created and edited using Canva Pro tools. Adobe After Effects was used to apply editing to the old photos of my mother. Adobe Audition was used to edit the background noise on select Zoom interviews and readings.

## CHAPTER IV:

### DISCUSSION

The creation of *Dearest Rhia* was an intellectual and spiritual process that was deeply needed for my evolution in my craft. *Dearest Rhia* was my first time as the subject and producer of a film on an unknown topic, which created a different point of view as a storyteller. I needed to be objective and subjective, objective enough to decide where the story truly lies and subjective enough to be vulnerable. Through this process, I explored psychic abilities and placed myself on the journey to tell the story authentically. Two other significant lessons were learned in this process: (1) I learned how to develop a multi-episode documentary (docuseries) on a platform (TikTok) that I had never created content for previously, and (2) I learned to create content with a three-minute time constraint for each episode. I investigated the psychic spiritual journey as the subject via the medium of cinema in the same manner that a student would write a formal essay or thesis.

Creating a longer film with many episodes on a new platform is time-consuming and needs a strict process to execute. Artists and filmmakers tend to be less structured, but there are many different moving parts of the story converging in parallel in a docuseries that require filmmakers to be more organized.

A missed opportunity when creating *Dearest Rhia* was not featuring me as much as my interviewees. The journey was more about my journey, and I should have shown more vulnerability to my experience and shared more day-to-day experiences along the journey.

The “how” of storytelling was also a significant lesson in the creation of *Dearest Rhia*. Filmmakers tend not to be the subject of their films, so it was important to learn how to tell the most authentic story to me as the subject and filmmaker. A lesson of

storytelling for *Dearest Rhia* was the topic itself. Spirituality has a stigma of being something abstract or unacceptable, and this docuseries was shared on a mainstream platform. The challenge was to bridge the gap of this abstract topic with the general population of mainstream culture. It is my belief that through the viral TikTok trend references, using popular influencers, pop culture songs, and the vulnerability of my journey, filling the gap between the abstract concept and the mainstream was achieved.

Further self-reflection includes asking if I would have done this project had I not been a graduate student. I do not believe I would have done this autoethnographic TikTok docuseries because of the funding, time, and career limitations. I do not believe I would have invested \$3,500 into a personal project on my time. With experience in my current field, I do not think my career work hours would have allowed me to create this docuseries.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Through this journey, I gained vast knowledge of creating a film via interviews, readings, influencers, mentors, editing, and producing during a pandemic. An important lesson learned throughout my graduate collegiate journey is the importance of content creation and the ever-evolving nature of learning new ways to produce content. Since producing *Dearest Rhia*, my compassion and patience for learning new ways of producing and planning skills have vastly improved. The knowledge gained of how much work goes into producing a docuseries compared to a documentary is also incredibly valuable for my career and future filmmakers.

As of March 19, 2022, *Dearest Rhia* has received over 55,600 views, and 23,780 engagements on TikTok and continues to grow.

Based on the learnings and skills I had learned over twelve weeks in my psychic course, my final test was to perform psychic readings for the finale episode; I performed eight accurate psychometric readings. (Only four readings were included in the film due to time constraints). Subjectively, my experience supports the psychometric assertion that humans have psychic abilities and does not support the cultivation theory assertion of me being influenced by the TikTok algorithm.

I will continue my career path in content storytelling and share my newly found psychic skills upon graduation. To view *Dearest Rhia*, follow the link in Appendix B.

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## APPENDIX A:

### LIST OF SPIRITUAL DOCUMENTARIES FILMS REVIEWED:

All films can be viewed through [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

- *Delving Into The World Of Psychic Mediums / Who Believes In Psychics?* (2021)
- *Sky Life* (2019)

## APPENDIX B:

Dearest Rhia entire film can be viewed through [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

- [\*Episode One: Opening Episode with Sophie Francey and William Knight\*](#)
- [\*Episode Two: Spiritual Mentor with Salia Marie\*](#)
- [\*Episode Three: Witchcraft with Shelley\*](#)
- [\*Episode Four: Astrology with BP\*](#)
- [\*Episode Five Part 1: Tarot with HeyJune\*](#)
- [\*Episode Five Part 2: Tarot Reading with HeyJune\*](#)
- [\*Episode Six Part 1: Mediumship with Jazmine\*](#)
- [\*Episode Six Part 2: Mediumship Reading with Jazmine\*](#)
- [\*Finale Part 1: Interview with Mentor Dr. Chuck Murphy\*](#)
- [\*Finale Part 2: Test via Psychometric Readings\*](#)
- [\*Finale Part 3: Test via Tarot Readings\*](#)
- [\*Afternote Part 1: Thank You\*](#)
- [\*Afternote Part 2: Explanation of Name “Dearest Rhia”\*](#)