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### Excuse Me, Everybody

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Claremont McKenna College

*Excuse Me, Everybody*

submitted to  
Professor James Morrison

by  
Noah Gabriel Battaglia

for  
Senior Thesis  
Spring 2023  
April 24, 2023

## ***Excuse Me, Everybody: Thesis Overview***

For my senior thesis I planned to write, produce, and direct a short-form, narrative film, entitled *Excuse Me, Everybody*. The original plot of the film is about a 19-year-old college student named Jacob who feels that his life is turned upside down after taking lewd photos of a fellow female student. While meeting with his psychotherapist, he refuses to reveal to him the true nature of his distress. He ultimately comes to terms with his crime by experiencing a hallucination where an imaginary being named Ego appears to him and forces Jacob to recollect the past events and explain his inner thoughts. As his conversation with Ego proceeds, Jacob wonders if he can ever redeem himself, or if he will continue to fall into a deeper, downward spiral.

As explained in my original thesis synopsis, I was inspired to produce this film by some of television journalist Chris Hansen's work, namely, *To Catch a Predator* and *Hansen Vs. Predator*. In these TV shows, Hansen would lure potential child predators into a sting operation by deploying human decoys online and disguising them as underage boys and girls. After being discovered, the predators undergo interviews with Hansen, where they discuss their chat logs with the decoys, and are forced to reveal their inner thoughts. When the conversations are finished, Hansen introduces himself to the predator and lets them know that they are part of an investigation on adults who "meet kids online for sex." There are also other "predator catching" channels on YouTube that I watched for research and inspiration, such as *Predator Poachers* and *Dads Against Predators*. In these cases, instead of luring the predators into a "sting house," they

would meet them at their home, a more public space, or even at their job, and the conversations would proceed from there.

What I found interesting about these TV shows and videos was how the predators react at the moment of being caught. They start to change their emotions, begging and crying, and complaining that their lives and reputation are about to be ruined. Obviously, I don't have much sympathy for these predators; however, from their perspective, it seems like an absolutely terrifying situation to experience. So, with *Excuse Me Everybody*, I wanted to delve into the psychology of a deviant person at the moment they realize they have been discovered and their entire life is ruined by their unscrupulous actions. I wanted the film to explore the familiar theme of "character downfall," but in a novel way. Often in films and TV series, we see a slower developing version of this idea, such as in *Breaking Bad*, *Goodfellas*, or *Requiem for a Dream*. For my film, I thought it would be interesting to condense the psychological trauma experienced by the perpetrator into a single, intense moment. I developed the original screenplay based on this concept and a copy of that script is included with my thesis submission. I also created storyboards based on this screenplay. The original intent was to produce a film that blended elements of psychological horror with dark comedy.

Unfortunately, towards the end of the project, I ran into some major production issues with the original script, which forced me to significantly alter the premise and plot of the film. Throughout the semester, I was a bit hesitant trying to pitch the film to others, due to the intense and controversial subject matter it included. As it turned out, when I finally mustered up the courage to explain the project to my peers, they were actually more intrigued with it than put off.

However, I needed to make some adjustments to how I described and introduced the film, including adding a “content warning” at the beginning of it. Unfortunately, my early hesitancy sharing the project details with others ultimately led to less time for casting and production based around the original film concept.

I intended to get a first draft of the script done by mid-February but ended up making less progress than planned during that period, partly due to some extenuating circumstances. During this semester, my Screenwriting class, LIT 36, helped me a great deal in terms of writing my script. However, it was a very busy class, and there were occasions where the workload for that class disrupted writing the script for this project. Some of my other classes, such as CSCI 36: Foundations of Data Science, also took a lot more time than I anticipated, which was unfortunate because I mainly took that class just for fun and general knowledge. It was probably my busiest class this semester.

I had originally planned to use weekends as the main time periods to make progress on my thesis project. However, I am a Track and Field athlete, and my Saturdays were often filled with meet activities that lasted most of the day. I ultimately had to make a difficult decision to withdraw from one of the meets in order to focus on my thesis. Furthermore, a good amount of my time this semester was spent on job applications and career-related opportunities. The week of April 10-14 was especially stressful for me. It was that week that I finally made the decision to send out a casting call. I view all these situations as “lessons learned” that will help me in the future to better plan my next project.

The response to the original casting call was actually rather positive. I reached out to the theatrical department at Pomona and used networking opportunities within the 5x5 and Studio 47 on-campus film clubs. Due to the film's disturbing subject matter, I actually wasn't sure anyone would respond, but within just 12 hours, I had four candidate actors express their interest in participating. So, I immediately casted them and invited them to a read through of the script based on the original concept. We were all set and ready to shoot the weekend of April 15-16.

On the Thursday evening before the planned weekend shoot, one of the cast members dropped out after the script read through, due to creative differences related to one of the more intense scenes. This one controversial scene, involving a character with ties to Jacob's past, ultimately led me to reconsider how best to complete the project given the circumstances and limited time remaining. Then, within the next 24 hours, two other cast members, including my lead actor, dropped out, although I was able to replace one of them. Sadly, this meant I could not move forward with the originally intended script and premise. It would have taken too much time to recast and get all the new actors comfortable with the original script. Fortunately, I was able to come up with a new idea that I believed would still work great and I still had two actors willing to work on the revised concept. The new premise of my film, *Excuse Me, Everybody*, is now about an anxious screenwriter named Kent, who is trying to make a film based on the screenplay of the same name. However, he runs into numerous obstacles and enters a psychological downward spiral. As a result of his increasing stress, he ultimately immerses himself into the movie's script during the end of the film. The last scene in the revised film is actually the first scene in the original script, set at the therapist's office. It is also revealed during that scene that Kent's full name is actually Jacob Kent, the same name as the main character in the original

script. With the revised concept in hand and the remaining cast members committed, I quickly reworked the dialogue, and we shot the film over the weekend of April 15-16 and into the following week.

Thankfully, my advisor allowed me to use his office as a set, so we were still able to shoot some of the scenes we needed from the original script in the therapist's office. During this initial shooting, I was a bit remorseful that the original plan didn't work out, since I thought the clips we shot were very solid. Over the period of April 15-20, I obtained additional footage from the Mudd Conference Room at the Honnold Library, Linde Field, Burns Track, and my dorm. A majority of the additional footage consisted of improvised dialogue detailing how a fictionalized version of myself might have planned the production of *Excuse Me, Everybody*, including reactions to the real-life events during the timeline that took place from April 10-14. I also added narration of the sequence of events that occurred during that week via voiceover. I decided to protect the identities of the individuals that permanently dropped out of the project by either censoring or changing their names if an email or text message appears in the film, or have them exit the project off-screen, without mentioning their name. On a positive note, my lead actor who initially dropped out of the project was willing to come back to do some voiceover work. So, on Thursday, 4/20, I filmed a phone call with him pretending to exit the project as he portrayed a fictionalized version of himself. I actually had already filmed a backup scene as a contingency, where I instead reacted to the initial text message he sent in a group chat. However, I was thankful that the lead actor was willing to do the voiceover and that actually worked out better.

Although we were making progress, the first few days of filming were nonetheless stressful. I felt like I was not shooting enough footage, even though the quality was very good. I was also initially worried that I was going to have trouble editing the clips together. However, with each subsequent shoot, I envisioned a roadmap of how I was going to piece it all together, so I became more confident as filming progressed. I was able to get most of the remaining footage I needed on the evening of 4/19, since it was all based in my dorm room. I completed the last of the filming on 4/20 as I had to return the camera and other equipment that evening.

I shot this movie with the Canon EOS Rebel T5i camera, which I rented from the Studio 47 equipment room. The Zoom H4n Handy Recorder, which I also rented from Studio47, turned out to be an extremely valuable piece of equipment, as I used it to record voiceover narration and even for enhanced sound for a lot of the video footage. This made it easier to piece many of the clips together into final scenes. The knowledge and experience I received from the various production courses I took during my four years at the Claremont Colleges proved invaluable in teaching me how to use this equipment effectively. Another thing that worked out well was editing the beginning and ending scenes first so I had more time to focus on the middle scenes later. As the filming and audio recording concluded, everything started to come together the way I wanted, even though the process was sometimes slow and tedious. As I finish writing this thesis overview, it is now Sunday, April 23, and I am also completing the final edits to the film.

In the end, there were a lot of lessons learned and things that I can do better next time. I probably should have planned out and scheduled everything better during the beginning of the semester. Finalizing the screenplay, getting the cast and crew together, scouting locations,



researching equipment options, developing a budget, and applying for funds, etc. all take more time than you realize, and you must build in contingencies for when things don't work out as originally planned. It also takes time to get others to buy into your ideas and so it's important to communicate the project early on to allow for collaboration and adjustments. In hindsight, maybe I should have taken one fewer class this semester, as I already had extra credits for graduation from cinema classes I took at San Francisco State University during my summers. I technically could have taken only two classes this semester instead of three, which would have significantly reduced my non-thesis course work and allowed me more time to focus on this project. Lastly, since I needed to recruit an all-volunteer cast and crew, I probably should have chosen a less controversial subject matter for the film.

Nonetheless, I was proud to have taken some risk in producing this film and am appreciative of the advice, support, and encouragement I received from my advisor, peers, cast, and crew members to pursue my vision throughout the project. Even the actors that eventually dropped out provided important insights into what works and what doesn't in producing a film, so I'm thankful for them as well. I also recognize the importance of flexibility, in myself and others, as we had to pivot at the last minute to bring the project to a workable conclusion. In any case, all this experience will help me immensely as I pursue future projects in my filmmaking career. For these reasons, I consider this thesis project to be a great success.

EXCUSE ME, EVERYBODY

Written by

Noah Battaglia

Inspired by a majority of Chris Hansen's work

Content warning: Sexual assault

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INT. MR. BENSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Jacob anxiously sits at a desk. The clock reads 3:31pm. Jacob taps his leg repeatedly. MR. BENSON, 37, stares at Jacob awkwardly as he dips his teabag into his mug. Jacob moves his fingers toward his mouth.

MR. BENSON

You seem a little erratic today,  
Jacob. You want to talk about  
what's going through your head  
right now?

EXT. COFFEE STAND - DAY - FLASHBACK

A coffee stand sits right in front of an dirty industry building. There is a decent wait to the line. Jacob notices VANESSA, 22, a Latino with glasses in a nice yellow, flower-petaled dress and checkered Vans. Jacob becomes aroused by her and his heartbeat races. He quivers for a few seconds than proceeds to pull out his phone. Another woman walks by the line, stunning Jacob, causing him to accidentally turn off Silent Mode on his phone.

INT. MR. BENSON'S OFFICE - DAY

JACOB

No... I can't.

MR. BENSON

Jacob, you know you can talk to me.  
This is a safe space.

JACOB

No, it isn't!

MR. BENSON

Jacob...

JACOB

Please! You see, what I did was  
really bad, and not even you can  
help me out with this.

MR. BENSON

I'm pretty sure we can work  
something out here.

JACOB

No! Fuck you!

MR. BENSON

I can't help you out if you're going to keep acting this way.

JACOB

FUCK... YOU!

Everything turns silent. A few seconds pass, and someone knocks on the door. EGO, a supernatural entity resembling a 30-year-old man, walks into the office with a cavalier attitude. He has a Chris Hansen type personality and wears a nice suit.

EGO

Am I late?

Jacob retreats from his stressed position and stares at the man in confusion.

EGO (CONT'D)

Y'know, I almost got lost trying to find this place, but, here I am.

JACOB

I'm sorry, do I know you?

EGO

(interrupting)

You see, the world out there can be sick sometimes.

Jacob looks across the desk to see Mr. Benson completely frozen. Shocked, he looks at the clock to see it's frozen as well.

JACOB

(panicking)

Huh? What's happening?! Who are you?!

Ego walks over toward the window, leans his left elbow on it, and looks outside.

EGO

\*scoffs\* Y'know, I think the bigger question is: Who are YOU?

He walks towards Jacob and leans over him, bringing his finger towards Jacob's forehead.

EGO (CONT'D)

I mean, I know who you are, but I'm looking for the person hiding in that thick skull of yours.

JACOB

Don't touch me!

Jacob grabs Ego's arm but in response, Ego grabs Jacob by the throat.

EGO

I wanted to do this lightly but, guess not.

He throws Jacob against the wall. Jacob slides down the wall and is rattled.

EGO (CONT'D)

Now we can have a nice, simple conversation or I will put matters into my own hands.

Jacob gulps.

JACOB

What do you mean by the second part?

EGO

I can reveal your secret to the world, what you really are. But it doesn't have to be that way.

EGO gets up in Jacob's face in a very sexual manner.

EGO (CONT'D)

You just need to comply.

JACOB

Wha... who are you?

EGO

The name's Ego.

He straightens out Jacob and pats his hands on his shoulder twice.

EGO (CONT'D)

Let's talk a walk shall we?

Jacob is confused, as Ego just stands there.

JACOB  
Uh, do I follow you or something?

EGO  
\*scoffs\* No idiot, you lead the  
way!

Ego taps Jacob's forehead with his middle finger twice,  
causing Jacob to arch backward.

EXT. COFFEE STAND - DAY

Jacob and Ego appear at the coffee stand from Jacob's  
flashback. Jacob is shocked once he realizes where he is.

JACOB  
(stuttering)  
I... I know this place.

Ego points out in the distance.

EGO  
Hey, that guy over there looks  
familiar.

Jacob panics as he realizes he sees himself, in the  
flashback, with Vanessa.

FLASHBACK:

Jacob has his phone pulled out. Suddenly, he reaches his arm  
forward. A snapshot is heard off screen.

VISION:

Jacob is shuddered, Ego raises his eyebrows in awe.

FLASHBACK:

Jacob looks up in fright. Vanessa turns around and is  
offended. Jacob cowers, and Vanessa slaps him in the face.

VISION:

EGO (CONT'D)  
\*scoffs\* Damn, you really blew it  
out of the park with that one.

Jacob falls to his knees and begins to cry. Ego bends down in  
front of Jacob.

EGO (CONT'D)

Jacob, you need to understand, this is all part of the ordeal.

JACOB

(exacerbated)

What ordeal?!

EGO

The ordeal people like you need to go through.

EXT. BLACK VOID

The coffee stand disappears and everything turns into a black void.

JACOB

No fuck this! I'm not taking part in your sick game!

EGO

Well, where are you going to go?

JACOB

I don't know, just take me back!

EGO

I'm sorry, that can't happen right now.

JACOB

(aggravated)

The fuck you mean you can't?!

EGO

Jacob, you don't want to use that tone with me.

JACOB

(panicking)

Why?! You just made me relive the moment that could possibly ruin my entire life.

EGO

Well, not yet, unless I do this.

Ego looks over his right shoulder.

EGO (CONT'D)

Excuse me everybody! This man up here took up-skirt shots of a young girl.

Jacob squats down and puts his arms over his head.

JACOB

Jesus, what the fuck?!

EGO

Don't worry, no one can hear us.

JACOB

So why are you fucking keeping me in this void?

EGO

Cause I need to know what's going on in that head of yours.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK

Jacob turns on a sink and smothers his face in the running water. He looks up at the mirror contemplating his life decisions. Suddenly, Ego walks up from behind, and joins Jacob at the mirror.

EGO (O.S.)

Jacob, why don't you take a seat?

EXT. PORTAL

Jacob zooms through a multi-dimensional layered transit zone.

INT. MR. BENSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Jacob ends up back in his seat. Ego sits on the other side.

EGO

So what happened back there?

Jacob shakes his head.

JACOB

(quietly)

No, no, n--

EGO

(quietly)

Jacob, please.



Jacob mumbles for a bit, but finally let's out a statement.

JACOB

I... I feel like I couldn't control myself. I was like I was haunted by... this one incident from... two, three weeks ago?

EGO

It was a date, right?

JACOB

Wha-, uh, yes. Yes it was.

EGO

You two were at a park.

JACOB

\*sighs\* Mhm.

EGO

And well, things were going well, until...

JACOB

(devastated)

Yeah, I know.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Jacob and AMBER, 20, a potential date, talk at a table at a nearby park. Amber wears a North Face jacket, jeans, and black Converse.

AMBER

So you come here around often?

JACOB

Not really, I just thought this was a more peaceful scenery.

AMBER

So how many times have you done this?

JACOB

Oh, twice, maybe? But those two didn't work out quite well.

AMBER

Hmm, wonder why.

JACOB

I don't know, I just feel like there was always, something off about me. Like I always just felt awkward in life. Maybe it's hereditary, I don't know. That could just be a reach.

AMBER

Wowwwwwww, some origin story you got there.

JACOB

Ha ha, maybe.

Awkward silence for a few seconds.

AMBER

Soooooo, what do you like?

JACOB

What do you mean?

Amber puts her foot up on the edge of Jacob's seat, her sole nearly touching Jacob's crotch.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Oh, uh, who do you want me to do?

AMBER

Feel it.

As Jacob proceeds to fondle Amber's shoe, Amber bites her lower lip and smiles.

AMBER (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Just breathe, in and out.

Amber proceeds to press her foot on Jacob's crotch repeatedly, getting faster with each time. Jacob is feeling euphoric.

AMBER (CONT'D)

(calmly)

Breathe in. Breathe out.

Jacob rolls his neck backwards. His eyes roll to the back of his skull, and his heart rate increases.

AMBER (CONT'D)

(quietly)

Release.

Suddenly, we hear a squirting sound. Jacob gets out of his dream-like state and stares down at his crotch. A large wet spot stains the center of Jacob's jeans. Amber moves her foot away and leans over to see what Jacob is looking at. She puts her hand on her mouth, trying to hold back her laughter.

AMBER (CONT'D)  
 (hysterically)  
 Are... are you serious?

Jacob's face starts to turn red in embarrassment.

AMBER (CONT'D)  
 Is that what makes you orgasm?

JACOB  
 (mumbling)  
 No, no, I swear!

AMBER  
 (unimpressed)  
 Oh, that's fucking pathetic. No wonder you can't get with anyone, loser.

Amber gets out of her chair and leaves Jacob. Jacob keeps his head down.

INT. MR. BENSON'S OFFICE - DAY

EGO  
 So that's what did it, huh? Just because you couldn't get laid, just go for a cheap hit?

JACOB  
 No, no, it's not like that!

Ego points his finger to the side.

EGO  
 Now, how old was the other girl?

JACOB  
 I don't know?

EGO  
 Was she 14?

JACOB  
 (offended)  
 Wha-, do you really think I'm some sort of pedophile?!

EGO  
Just answer my question.

JACOB  
No! She was in my grade! I see her  
in my Physics class all the time!  
There's no way she can be underage,  
let alone 14!

EGO  
Does that make it right?

JACOB  
What?

EGO  
Even if she wasn't underage, what  
you still did was assault.

JACOB  
I know, I'm sorry. Just, I had  
enough of this. Could you please  
let me go?

Ego appears offended and point's at Jacob's face.

EGO  
You're not able to face the  
consequences. Well, hate to break  
it to you, but you're going to end  
up on a sex offenders list. Your  
entire college education will go to  
waste.

EXT. BURGER KING - DAY

Jacob appears to be working as a cashier at a Burger King,  
based on his uniform.

EGO (V.O.)  
You're going to have a difficult  
time finding a job. And once you DO  
find one, people will treat you  
like a fucking rodent.

STRANGER #1 (O.S.)  
Hey! That's the guy that took up-  
skirt photos of that one girl!

STRANGER #2 (O.S.)  
Oh yeah, that's him. Take this you  
piece of shit!

Grape soda splashes all over Jacob's face, his Burger King vest stained purple.

EXT. BLACK VOID

Jacob sits down at a blank space.

JACOB  
Please, tell me what I can do now.

EGO  
Call your mom.

JACOB  
Oh god, please no no no--

EGO  
(demanding)  
Call your fucking mother you slimy  
piece of shit.

He scrolls through the contacts on his phone and comes across, "Mom." He brings the phone to his ear and the call commences.

JACOB  
Mother, I've done some things,  
terrible things.

JACOB'S MOTHER (O.S.)  
Oh, what did you do this time?

He sighs, putting his hand on his forehead.

JACOB  
I...I took up-skirt shots of a  
fellow student.

JACOB'S MOTHER (O.S.)  
Oh sweetie, that's wonderful!

JACOB  
(confused)  
What?

JACOB'S MOTHER (O.S.)  
Was she a hottie?

JACOB  
Mom, what are you talking about?

JACOB'S MOTHER (O.S.)  
 Did you grab her ass and give it a  
 nice juicy squeeze?

JACOB  
 What the fuck is wrong with you?

JACOB'S MOTHER (O.S.)  
 I mean those are the only times you  
 are ever going to get action!

JACOB  
 Oh really?! Thanks mom! Glad to  
 know that I was such a fucking  
 waste of a son to you!

He hangs up. Ego smiles and sarcastically claps his hands  
 slowly.

EGO  
 Wow. Guess we figured out the root  
 of the cause.

Jacob sits there in shell shock.

EGO (CONT'D)  
 Welp, my time with you is done.

JACOB  
 Wait... does that mean I can leave?

EGO  
 \*scoffs\* Who said YOU were off the  
 hook?

Ego snaps his fingers.

EXT. COFFEE STAND - DAY

JACOB  
 No, please!

EGO  
 Excuse me everybody! This man took  
 up-skirt shots of a fellow student!

JACOB  
 Oh you motherfucker!

Jacob runs away. A nearby crowd runs after him.

EGO (O.S.)  
(distant)  
Excuse me everybody! This man took  
up-skirt shots of a fellow student!

JACOB  
Fuck you! Fuck all of you!

EGO (O.S.)  
(even more distant)  
This man took up-skirt shots of a  
fellow student!

JACOB  
Asshole!

INT. MR. BENSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Jacob appears back in Mr. Benson's office.

MR. BENSON (O.S.)  
(muffled)  
Jacob, are you still with me?  
Jacob? Jacob!

JACOB  
(unfazed)  
Sorry.

MR. BENSON  
You want to talk about what's going  
through your head right now?

Jacob looks at the clock. It reads 3:32pm. He realizes  
everything he went through was in his head.

JACOB  
(calmly)  
No. Thank you though.

He pats Mr. Benson on the shoulder and walks out of the room.

INT. CAR - DAY

Jacob rides in the passenger seat of an Uber, signaling the  
driver.

JACOB  
Just right off to the side.

UBER DRIVER (O.S.)  
This is where you want to go?

JACOB

Yes.

UBER DRIVER (O.S.)

Alrighty then.

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Jacob gets out of the Uber and stares at the sign at the top of the entrance to the police station: "MONTCLAIR POLICE STATION". He looks forward, and walks in.

CUT TO BLACK: