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Element 1 - Development

Proposal for VNRBL

Introduction - Who is VNRBL?

VNRBL is the artist name for my term three portfolio project and is a concept I have been working on since early on in term one last year. Having spent much of my time as an artist creating personas that were varying versions of myself I felt that this time round, I really wanted to share my true self, (As hippy as that sounds) and finally come to the place where I become 'vulnerable' with my own story, personality, struggles and such. This is something that has been a challenge for me. I didn't want to be the girl with the tough story. I wanted to be perfect, happy and from a perfectly stable, loving and nurturing family environment. That just wasn't the case and now I'm at a point in my journey where I feel I can share about that more openly and be more real about the things I struggle with on a day to day basis. Also being much more healed and whole with it all means I can come from a position of strength and not weakness. I came to the conclusion within myself a couple of years back that, 'faking it till you make it,' is all well and good but completely exhausting and there does seem to come a point where you don't have the energy to fake it and then you crash and ruin it all anyway and the facade is destroyed, leaving you out in the open where you really should have been anyway, vulnerable. Except you weren't ready for it, because you didn't prepare. So that's it really. I've prepared myself now to be vulnerable and that means and looks like many different things for me personally. It might be a low moment, it could be expressing anger or another negative emotion. Perhaps sharing a success and cutting myself a break now and then. It could mean being sexually explicit and sensually charged if I feel like it. It could mean rage, or being sorry, or as it so happens in the latest song I've written, not being sorry. Basically, I in no way want to tie this concept down or box this idea. I don't want it to be 'one thing.' It's simply not just all about me sharing my melancholy shit and saddest feelings all over social media. It's about being real and true to myself and accepting my feelings in the moment. Accepting myself and then having the courage to share that self with the world in the hopes that it might just inspire and be a light in the dark for someone else.

The Concept of Vulnerability in Society

‘Maybe you’re one of those people who cringes when they hear the word “vulnerability.” Maybe the very thought of being more vulnerable nauseates you, conjuring up images of holding hands around the campfire while you cry over how your best friend doesn’t love you like you love him, or whatever.’ (Manson, 2018)

A lot of people actually have a negative view about the idea of vulnerability as seen by Mark Mansons quote above but actually, there has been a strong movement in the public eye and in the media in regard to this concept of the power of vulnerability in recent years. This has been largely led by media personalities like Brene’ Brown, Mark Manson and even more currently from a musical perspective, artists like Billy Eilish. You might be put off by Billy crying all over instagram but her millions of fans are clearly lapping it up like there’s no tomorrow. Perhaps this is a refreshing movement that the mainstream music industry is begging for.

Once again though, looking to the past, our parents were largely *not* raised to be vulnerable. There was a clear understanding in society that you kept your dirty laundry at home and arguments behind closed doors, presenting a perfect front in the public eye. Television sitcoms around in the last decade such as, Desperate Housewives, execute this point exceptionally well and make fun of the way we all pretend the way we do and seem to have such an incessant need to keep up with the Joneses. This seems however, to have led to a large suppression of emotion and in conjunction with the ‘power of positivity’ movement, seems to have put society in a place where we feel guilty to share even a hint of negative emotion.

In their book, *The Power Of Negative Emotion*, acclaimed psychologists Dr Todd Feeney and Dr Robert Biswas-Diener explain why positivity and mindfulness can only take us so far. To live life to the full, we need to cultivate ‘emotional agility’ – the ability to access our full range of emotions (not just the ‘good’ ones). (Robert Biswas-Diener, 2020)

They present the argument that actually;

- Anger fuels creativity
- Guilt sparks improvement
- Self-doubt enhances performance
- Selfishness increases courage

There is also medical research that suggests suppressing negative emotions leads to illness and conditions such as; Chronic Fatigue, Fibro Myalgia and other anti immune disorders.

The ways in which humans manage their emotions has become one of the most important but least examined concerns in medicine today. Emotions are physiological phenomena . When poorly managed or regulated, they can lead to negative health and psychological consequences. (Patel and Patel, 2020)

Music Therapy For Emotional Regulation

Another angle for the power of being vulnerable within a musical spectrum is that it is thought to be very therapeutic to use music as a form of therapy and means of emotional regulation. There have been countless studies done concerning this over the years and I conclude from my research that not only is it beneficial for one to listen to music as a form of therapy but also to express one's emotions and state through the platform of music, be that in the form of an instrument, lyric or poetry writing or performance. Results from research conducted in 2013 stated in the following citation. 'Results indicated there are certain music characteristics and experiences that produce desired and undesired neural activation patterns implicated in ER. Desired activation patterns occurred when listening to preferred and familiar music, when singing, and (in musicians) when improvising; undesired activation patterns arose when introducing complexity, dissonance, and unexpected musical events. Furthermore, the connection between music-influenced changes in attention.' (Moore, 2020)

Brene' Brown talks in her Ted Talk in 'The Power of Vulnerability' that many of us have a deep sense of unworthiness and that this keeps us from connecting with others and from whole hearted, healthy relationships. She also discusses the idea that telling your story with your whole heart and having the courage to be 'imperfect' and treat ourselves with compassion, leads to authenticity. People who are willing to let go of, 'who they feel they should be,' and are able to embrace who they are, seem to have an understanding of the concept that what makes them vulnerable, makes them beautiful. Not to try and suggest here that vulnerability is in any way comfortable but rather, that it is necessary to live a fulfilled life. Whilst many of us fear it, vulnerability is a place for creativity, personal progress and ultimately success.

A Discussion of the Strengths and Weaknesses Relative to Vulnerability in the Market Place

As an artist it can be good to have a certain air of mystique to you and your performances and life in general so one does have to ask, does being open, vulnerable and authentic lessen that? Does it basically make you boring and mundane because now there's no mystery. No ethereal concept left to wonder about. Well, that's something I struggle with but once again, Billy Eilish seems to have cornered a pretty good balancing act. She is very publicly vulnerable and emotionally open if not unstable, yet still manages to cultivate an almost, otherworldly type air. So my thought is; it can be done, but maybe with some cultivated intention, but then again, does that make it inauthentic because vulnerability simply becomes another brand? It's a tough one. I think in some senses for the purposes of marketability that it has to. 'I sometimes get the feeling people

think musicians are invincible... We engage in a highly complex, technical and artistic activity which requires huge physical and mental agility and concentration. When we perform, our meticulous preparation enables us to make everything we do look effortless, synthesised and beautiful. In the moments of performing, we offer the music to the audience as a cultural gift to be shared between us in the wondrous experience that is live performance. On stage we dissemble, we act, to maintain a veneer of confidence and poise. Because no one can know how many goddam hours you put in the practice room or that your journey to the venue was delayed, how tired you are feeling from working all week without a break, or how much that recurrent shoulder problem has been troubling you. To publicly admit to these vulnerabilities would quickly destroy the mystique of the performer.' (Wilson, 2018.)

So as stated in his article above, Frances Wilson agrees that sharing all one's weaknesses can quickly destroy the mystique of the performer. I do agree with this and once again think it's about finding a balance between mystery and authenticity. A person might approach that by seeming to be 'unpredictable' and this is something I've tried in the past on my social media platforms, but it can lead to being thought to be emotionally unstable and a counter intuitive approach to authenticity. People are likely to misunderstand or fear you and opportunities could be lost if an artist is thought to be inconsistent and cannot be trusted to maintain a congruent approach to the brand.

From the other perspective, being open and vulnerable with your audience can be very empowering for them as they have the opportunity to feel a genuine sense of closeness and relationship to you as an artist and normal person. It can give strength to your fans as they see that you are indeed human and battle the same daily battles that they do. Showing them that sometimes you fail, fall, cry and feel alone and wonder what the hell this life is all about and how the fuck did you get to this point? I'm honestly still working all this out as I'm writing this and can really only think that it is quite unique to the kind of branding you are going with and choosing the right moments to share and being a little more discreet in others. I'm sure that's a lot easier to type out in black and white than to actually execute but I'm sure it's achievable.

Conclusion

I'll begin the conclusion of this proposal with this Brene' Brown quote. "You either walk inside your story and own it or you stand outside it and hustle for your own worthiness." I feel like I've been doing that for as long as I can remember and actually, I think it's held me back as an artist and maybe in life in general. Carrying around a sense of shame because you're continually trying to be everything *but you*. means that you end up crashing and burning a lot of the time. It's basically unsustainable. Even those who are considered to be 'The great's' have been unable to carry through an inhuman and picture perfect persona. Lady Gaga is a great example. She spent

over a decade shrouding herself in a mythical and ethereal artist persona that took a massive toll on her physical and mental health and personal relationships. It was, even for her, an impossible feat, which has become clear in recent interviews where she has spoken openly about her struggles and also led her to create the album 'Joanne' which was all about her literally, being her. It seems that in all of us there is an overpowering desire to be loved, known and accepted just for being us? When did music become a big act anyway? When did we start losing ourselves as artists and turn into pure entertainers or method actors? I believe that there is a strong movement back towards vulnerability, realness and authenticity in the music industry right now. Once again, I mention Billy Eilish but there are many other artists like, The Weekend, Tove Lo, Rihanna and Beyonce who bared it all in her album Lemonade which was released with absolutely no warning or promotion. For me personally I think my greatest challenge with this project is to get the product to a radio release standard and my opinion is that this will come down to mostly the mix and the vocals. I will need to be well practiced, have the lyrics learnt to get the standard to a level where people might actually want to listen to what I'm saying when I put it out. Currently I have the first two songs written for VNRBL. 'What I Can't Have and Sorry I'm Not Sorry.' There are seven more in conceptualisation and I'll be embarking on the writing and producing of those this week with the aim to have a very strong and well branded package to present to record labels and or, publishers at the end of the MA, coupled with a clear idea of where I am going and what I want to achieve with my brand and concept as an artist whilst maintaining edge, mystique, authenticity and yep you guessed it, vulnerability.

References

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