

Section 1: Identity Reflection

- **Glasses Wearer:** Although this part of my identity might seem small, it is actually something that affects me daily. My eyesight is terrible. I often think about what it would have been like to live before the time of corrective lenses or what it might be like in a zombie apocalypse. I would be doomed. Effectively, I would be blind. Without corrective lenses (glasses or contacts) the world would be a blur. I don't remember the exact date I qualified for glasses, but I know I was in elementary school. Since then, I have had to utilize glasses or contacts every single day of my life. In this sense, being a glasses wearer has profoundly affected my life – both in the day to day use of them and in my ability to live my life. Wearing corrective lenses has made my life possible, so I am proud to identify myself as someone who uses them. Often, the chance to discuss this part of me only really arises when I interact with other corrective lens wearers; in these moments, we often bond over our shared terror at the blurriness of the world or over the style and use of our contacts or glasses.
- **Married:** As a long time single person, I wasn't sure I would ever find someone. I met my husband on an online dating site (right before they got really dark and Tinder turned dating into a swiping game). We met in 2011 and have been by each others' sides ever since. We consider our marriage a partnership – we share in all of the house, work, and life responsibilities. We support one another in all endeavors. We argue. We laugh. We sit and watch Netflix. We go out to the brewery for a beer. We play string games with the cats. We go to weddings and funerals and graduations and family events together. The ring that we both wear, an identical band, symbolizes that while we are individual human beings, we are committed to building our lives together. That band tangibly marks this part of my identity, as does the home we share, and our shared kitty family. This part of who I am is so important to me because my husband is my best friend. He is part of every single day of my life.
- **Athlete:** I have been an athlete since I was about five years old, playing soccer for the local rec league. My dad got suckered into coaching us children (and did a fine job through many years of travel soccer), and my mom became an admin for the rec league itself. In that sense, it was a real family affair. My playing sports stayed in the family as I became older and started playing travel softball, a serious endeavor that had us traveling every summer weekend across the country. Sports were such an important part of my life that I continued in college, playing D1 softball and field hockey at Lehigh and then going on to coach field hockey at the high school and college levels. Athletics have been such a profound element of my identity. Through high school, people associated me with sports. In college, almost all of my friends played sports. My college teammates are my family. Being an athlete taught me innumerable lessons that have shaped other parts of who I am. I learned teamwork; perseverance; how to fail and get up again; how to appreciate different kinds of people; how to support others; how to lead by example; how to motivate others; how to manage my time; how to follow through on my commitments;

how to stand up for myself; how to compete. I continue to claim this identity in my daily health and fitness. Working out each day connects me to this part of myself.

- **Persistence:** This trait is a big part of who I am and who I want to continue to be. I learned this quality from my parents and from being an athlete. My parents grew up poor and were torn down by the people in their lives. They never had the opportunity to pursue college but managed to own and operate their own businesses. Their sheer force of will taught me about persistence, about what it takes to rise up out of a difficult situation and make something of yourself. I also learned this same lesson through athletics. Failure and loss are an integral and inevitable part of playing sports, but it cannot prevent you from coming back to play another day. I think that persistence, in part because of its ties to my past, is one of my best qualities. Being persistent is about being dedicated, it is about follow through, it is about sheer will and a determination to continue pushing past my limits. One thing that has served me well, and one thing I think we have not done a great job teaching this next generation, is how to fail and get back up. That is what persistence is all about. Life is full of failures big and small – we have to be able to deal with them, learn from them, and continue to live and grow and thrive. I credit my success as a student, an academic, a teacher, a coach, an athlete, a partner, and a friend to my persistence.
- **Woodworker's Daughter:** Some of my earliest memories involve the smell of sawdust and the buzz of table-saws as I hung out in my father's woodshop. After a childhood of misery and abandonment, and a series of jobs always taken out of need rather than passion, my father worked his way up to owning his own custom furniture business. Although I lack his skill, I have always retained his admiration of beautiful wooden furniture. My home is filled with his creations, reminding me of where I come from – a humble home with two parents who did their level best to give me every chance to succeed. It isn't just this reminder though that taps into who I am, it is the style of his creations that I feel are deeply engrained in my identity. His furniture is sturdy and solid, reliable, no frills in its beautiful, straightforward simplicity. I work to embody these kinds of traits and to live a life that makes my parents' struggle and hard work worth it. I also like that the pieces take on different qualities from afar and close up. When you look closely, you can see the imperfections, the nicks and grooves, the scratches from years of use, the knots in the wood. My dad never shied away from using wood with knots in it, he found the imperfections beautiful. His pieces remind me that I am imperfect, but that perfection is not the goal. I would rather be steady and reliable and straightforward.

Section 2: Technique Choices Explanation

Image 1: “Blurred Precision” – POV Shot – Glasses Wearer

In this image, I wanted to demonstrate the contrast between how I see the world with and without corrective lenses. So often, people ask what it looks like when I don't have glasses on. The blurred aspect of the image represents the world as I see it without glasses. However, the part of the image seen through the glasses lenses is much clearer and more precise. I chose the POV (and coupled it with a close up shot of the glasses) in order to demonstrate this specific perspective. In framing the image in this way (me about to put on my glasses), I wanted the viewer to be “in my shoes,” to see the world through my perspective, which is exactly what this type of shot is utilized for. In framing this image, I wanted the viewer to see the stark contrast between the blur and the precision. The image perfectly encapsulates my very literal point of view both with (precise and clear) and without (blurry) glasses. The title demonstrates this contrast – blurriness and precision. We see both in this image and both mark the way I feel about my own sight – the lenses allow precision in an otherwise blurry and sometimes terrifying world.

Image 2: “Commitment” – Symbolism (Objects/Setting) – Married

This image features several elements of symbolism including the rings, the hard concrete, the soft grass, and the sun vs. shadows. All of these symbols work together to demonstrate the idea of marriage and the way I feel about my own marriage. The rings of course are a classic symbol of marriage and commitment – the never ending circle a symbol of unity and togetherness. In this image, I placed the rings deliberately on the ground between hard and soft, light and shadow because I wanted to reflect the constant push and pull of marriage and the way that we (marked by the rings and our commitment) weather different situations together. Sometimes life is gritty, hard, unyielding like concrete. Sometimes it is easier to navigate, filled with color and light. The rings are surrounded by both environments in the image to demonstrate that our commitment to build a life together is something that weathers all situations. I choose to shoot this shot as a close up in order to emphasize the ideas above – zooming in cuts everything else out of the shot. In essence, it is me and my husband, together in the larger world, making our way.

Image 3: “Concrete” – Leading Lines – Athlete

I took this image as a POV; however, the main technique I employed was the idea of leading lines. The lines of the workout mat (both on the mat and the edge of the mat and its shadow) draw the viewer's eye up and down the image creating a kind of motion that hints at the physical movements to come. Also, in taking the shot in this POV format, I created other sets of lines that create movement and contrast within the image. The legs and sneakers/feet and the lines on the sneakers establish different sets of lines, adding to the idea of movement. I also wanted to create contrast (in both color and texture) between the mat and the concrete of our basement floor where I do my workouts, drawing attention to the gritty, hard concrete, which alludes to my own toughness. That idea of toughness, both my own and a physical challenge both align with my identity as an athlete. Even though I can no longer compete, I use this space to challenge myself and to reconnect with the part of me that is unbreakable and gritty. I chose the title “Concrete” in part for its simplicity – that simplicity is reflected in the image. Additionally, concrete is unyielding. Fitness is simple really – it is me, refusing to yield to the discomfort and to the urge to give up.

Image 4: “Golden Paper Clips” – Focus on the Background – Persistence

In this image, I played with the idea of background. The focus of the image is the binder in the foreground. The other binders are out of focus, serving as background. Although typically with a focus on the background shot, the setting is of paramount importance, I wanted this image to be slightly different in that the binders almost become the setting themselves. In shooting the front binder while level with it on the ground (on my stomach), it had the effect of being shot from slightly below, given weight and importance to the binders and papers contained therein as they start to rise above eye level. By combining these techniques, I wanted to demonstrate the sheer amount of work contained within. These binders all come from my work as a Ph.D student in my graduate classes at Temple. In presenting this massive amount of work, I wanted to also demonstrate the persistence it took to complete this degree. The title reflects the many gold paper clips in the front most binder. I like to use gold paper clips because, as a boss turned colleague told me, they reflect the excellence of your work. It took excellence to achieve my degree, but it also took persistence – the ability to slog through reading after reading, to write paper after paper, to attend 3-hour class after 3-hour class. These binders are symbolic of the journey I took and of my persistence.

Image 5: “Imperfection” – Extreme Close Up – Woodworker’s Daughter

I chose an extreme close up for this image because I wanted to emphasize the pattern in the wood and I wanted this image to fill the entire frame. This is one of my favorites of my dad’s pieces. I have loved it since I was a kid. The color and the pattern just fit in my mind and I always loved the crackle finish. The finish goes in every direction in imperfect loops and lines. It is small and scaly in some places, wide and flat in others, jagged unfinished lines snaking out across the pattern. In the image, the lines of the doors and drawers create contrast and movement, the straighter lines playing off of the jagged ones. I wanted the viewer to feel as if they are right in the middle of this piece, as if it isn’t just a piece of furniture, but something much grander, wider, larger, bigger, all consuming. I feel that grandness in this piece and can feel my legacy bound up within it – my imperfections snaking through the crackled paint, turned into something beautiful. I also wanted the extreme close up to capture the feeling of sturdiness and solidness of both the piece and the photographer.

Section 3: Intended Messages

When looking at this series of images as a whole, it is clear that I used repeated close ups. Close ups are shots that provide a level of detail and focus that are pleasing to me (and always have been) and that also reflect who I am as a person. I am detail oriented and get zoned in when I work on something that I am passionate about. A close up allows me to focus on the simplistic beauty of an object; it allows me to take something all in without distraction. At first, the repeated choice of close ups was unintentional, but as I started looking through my images to select the ones I wanted to use, I noticed the pattern and realized how often I take and seek out closeups. My inclination is always to press in rather than pull back when taking a picture. I realized that this kind of shot is closely connected to who I am and how I break down the world and objects and people in it. I also wanted these images, individually and combined, to reflect the way I see the world and the way I try to live my life. I have vision and clarity even when things get blurry. I am a partner who is reliable in good times and difficult ones. I am and always will be an athlete, a competitor, focused and tough. I am the daughter of parents who taught me the value of hard work and who helped to teach me the importance of persistence. I am all of these things separately and together. My hope is that when people look at these images, they will not only see parts of me, but also parts of themselves.