

Resonance

A journey of self-discovery and questioning oneself in the world

by

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My senior project was originally going to be about hands. Hands in photographs were so appealing to me. I thought it was because of my background from being a dancer and a lot of the focus was on how your arms and hands looked. I kept attempting to understand the source of my curiosity about them but couldn't uncover it no matter what.

One photographer that inspired me was Alfred Stieglitz. He did a project where he photographed his wife, Georgia O'Keeffe. Georgia O'Keeffe became a main subject of Stieglitz, who took nearly 300 photographs of her from every angle. In many images, her hands form hypnotic and dancing movements. Stieglitz combined macro images, focused on the details of her skin, with the wide frame looks of O'Keeffe. These photographs inspired me and just looked so surreal, and I wanted to do the same with my photographs.



A change needed to be made with my project. I wanted to do another theme that was important and meaningful to me but also include the hands in some way. My project switched to how I've never had confidence in myself and how my family has sometimes been the reason why.

From my earliest memories, self-consciousness was very present. Even as a child, it felt like my friends would judge my appearance. The impact of this self-consciousness on my daily life was significant. If I wore too much makeup, family members commented. Sweatpants drew remarks. Neglecting my hair led to comments. Skipping makeup prompted comments. Even a bad breakout warranted comments. It felt like constant criticism for no reason. I considered

changing my project to address this. I wanted to show others, especially women, that they're not alone in facing such situations. We all navigate these challenges in some form.

One factor why I struggle so much with confidence is because of Covid. Being isolated and only being in my home for a long period of time with my family really made things worse in a way. We were all stuck with each other with nowhere to go and I felt like I was constantly getting looked at.

During quarantine, I gained a significant amount of weight. Previously, I would spend 6-8 hours per week dancing. During the pandemic, there was no exercise routine. With boredom at home, eating increased significantly. What else is there to do when you're bored in your house than to eat? By the time the summer of 2020 rolled around, I did not want to put on any of my summer clothes. Trying on shorts from the previous summer led to a breakdown when they would not button. This weight gain was unexpected. It led to embarrassment and a decision to avoid eating in front of family. It came to a weight I was never at before.

Confidence took a hit during COVID due to acne struggles. Before 2020, acne was manageable with occasional breakouts. However, by fall 2020, severe cystic acne emerged without an apparent reason. The painful and noticeable acne made me avoid being seen. Even fearing family breakfasts where I would hide under a hoodie. This struggle still exists today.

Studies have shown that the social isolation of the pandemic has taken a toll on the mental health of many Americans. In a New York Times article from November 2020, it talks about how the impact has been especially severe on teenagers. "Since the start of the pandemic, the National Alliance on Mental Illness has heard from many young adults experiencing anxiety and depression, which the organization attributes partly to social isolation." Being isolated and separated from so many people I love made me even more sad. I felt so bored and like I had no

one. And back then you couldn't even go near anyone. “Last week researchers at the University of Amsterdam and Emma Children’s Hospital released a study on the mental health of adolescents in the Netherlands, which found that young people reported a significant increase in severe anxiety and sleeping problems during the country’s lockdown period.” I now noticed how much I was staying in bed during quarantine after reading this quote. I was constantly staying up to ungodly hours of the night and sleeping until midday. There was no motivation.

Reading this article further fueled my decision to change my project focus. COVID-19 has not only affected my mental health but also that of many other teenagers. It was eye-opening to realize that I wasn't alone in attributing my struggles to the pandemic. This article prompted me to explore beyond the physical health implications. It made me delve into the broader psychological effects it has had on individuals like me.

A big part of quarantine was being on social media all the time. It was the only way to communicate with people at the time. Social media overall has made me view myself differently. With TikTok coming to fame during the pandemic I was on the app a large amount of the time.

In a New York Times article from March 2022, there was a survey done to teenage students asking how social media affects their body image. I really related to a student named Nikita who took the survey. “In my case, social media has affected the way I feel about myself and my body, due to the many unrealistic standards that are set on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. Users on these platforms usually post at times they feel and look their best, often neglecting their usual day-to-day appearances. Social media has caused me to feel as if I must look a certain way at all times of the day, even though it is clear that 15-second TikTok clips of gorgeous users show just that: only 15 seconds of their day.” I find it hard to believe influencers on social media nowadays. They are always lying to their viewers by saying they just woke up

while they have a full face of makeup on. It is hard to believe that everyone looks perfect all the time. I was one of those people to fall for that.

The similarities between my own experiences with social media and the broader issue of confidence struggles became a foundation of my practice. This personal connection sparked a desire to explore this topic further.

My senior project consists of mostly self-portraits, a practice dating back to the 1830's. Self-portraiture, now commonly known as "the selfie" in photography circles, has become widespread. It serves as an accessible starting point for beginners in photography, allowing them to experiment with capturing their own images more effectively than those of others. Additionally, it's a practice that is inclusive and open to all. People engage in self-portraiture to express themselves and present their identity to the world.

Francesca Woodman stands out as one of the most influential self-portrait photographers, and her work deeply resonated with me. What captivated me about her photography was her ability to create narratives through her images. Like Woodman, I aimed to engage viewers with my project by telling stories through photography. Her exploration of gender and self-representation, particularly in relation to the body and its interaction with the environment, struck a chord with me. As I looked more into her work, I couldn't help but notice parallels between her approach and mine: both using black and white imagery, and both focusing on the portrayal of the body.

Woodman committed suicide at the age of only twenty-two, leaving behind a body of work which shows us the kind of honesty that catches your eye and kindles your thoughts on another level. Viewing Francesca Woodman's photographs, especially knowing of



her tragic death, is very painful. Her images portray a journey of looking for herself, even though her family said she was always fun to be around. Her self-portraits serve as windows into her soul, revealing a deeply personal, captivating, and imaginative exploration of the self.



Lee Friedlander, another renowned photographer renowned for his self-portraits, greatly influenced my approach to self-portraiture. What struck me about his work was his innovative use of reflections and shadows, avoiding direct depiction of his face. This technique intrigued me because it allowed for self-expression while maintaining an element of mystery. Inspired by Friedlander's

approach, I aimed to incorporate similar techniques in portraying my parents in my project. I wanted to utilize reflections and shadows to evoke a sense of depth and complexity in their portrayal.

Since the start of his career, Friedlander has consistently directed his lens towards himself. He has used his body or his shadow as an element of visual compositions, made himself a main subject, or acted as an interference to other figures, combining his professional, personal, and creative life in his images. Throughout more than 60 years of self-portraits, Friedlander has created a unique version for self-imaging.

Completing my senior project feels like a tremendous relief. It feels as though I have a sense of freedom. There is no more pressure on me; the weight has been lifted off my shoulders. Despite encountering some challenges during the senior show, I'm grateful to have continued. Sharing my work with others brought me immense joy and seeing everything displayed on the wall was a moment of reassurance. Regarding my project, I consider it finished. Now, I'm eager to explore different themes as I progress in life.





































