

Artist Statement on most current project, *Define: Book*

Define: Book is a collection of photography and writing that centers around my lived experience of being a sibling to Scott, my brother on the autism spectrum. The writing is organized in a dictionary format with word and corresponding definition. This structure is inspired by Scott. Within him, I can imagine, there is a dictionary always there for referencing. His word choice is like a script, almost to the point where I can guess what he's about to say before the words leave his mouth. Words and phrases when repeated regularly begin to feel empty. Through my prose, I explore the depths I see in Scott, a person who you could easily look at and label as "surface level."

With each passing page, the literary and visual vocabularies unfold and build upon each other. The writing is persistent at wanting to reach an understanding, a definition that gets at the core of it. There is a relentless push and pull of getting closer to and further away from answers.

While the words are fixed to definitions, the images give a break to this long held structure. Readers touch into my many layers of meaning, some are sweet with sibling love, and others painful, salt touching deep-seated wounds. Where memory fails me, I reach under the bed for the plastic bin that snaps closed my adolescence. I sift through old art projects, writing assignments, and other youthful artifacts scattered about on the carpet. Some of them I decide will come out of hiding. They find their new place in the book.

The images I include are taken from my archives of the last seven years. While many are digital images or film scans, others are hand printed and manipulated. In the darkroom, my enlarger workstation is scattered with fidget toys, Dollar Tree bubbles and cutouts of a WWF (World Wildlife Fund) calendar, all objects that are significant in my relationship to Scott. By feel and intuition, I place and/or move objects around over-top the silver gelatin paper. It leaves a visible mark behind forever altering the original. This intentional covering up or "masking" results in certain areas of the photograph getting less light and therefore a different exposure, imprinting onto the existing image. Notably, the term "masking" is a meeting of multiple definitions- masking, a technique in the darkroom, and in life, to blend and blur the lines between neurodiverse and neurotypical.

Define: Book is an important addition to the limited literature available about the sibling perspective to someone with a disability. Siblings like me are often overlooked and undervalued within the family system, along with our neurodiversity which may be present but present differently. *Define: Book* puts us at center stage, giving visibility back to all those (siblings) who are gone unseen.

Adapted from/in reference to her project, *Define: Scott*, created in her sophomore Honors course while at Lesley University.

An excerpt from the original statement is also included.

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“This series is a mix of written and visual pieces that speak to an interpersonal dialogue about my brother, Scott. There is a running “dictionary” of all the terms I feel define my brother as a 23-year-old adult... I purposefully do not show his face because that image makes Scott accessible and even as his sister who has shared 20 years of my life with him, he still feels inaccessible... Dictionaries, though clearly read, can be difficult to comprehend. In no world, is Scott easily understood... This project made me question and consider how I relate and have related to him...This dictionary acts as a placeholder. Definitions will be added, though the term (of endearment), Scott, will remain the same...” -Jenna Tessler, 2019