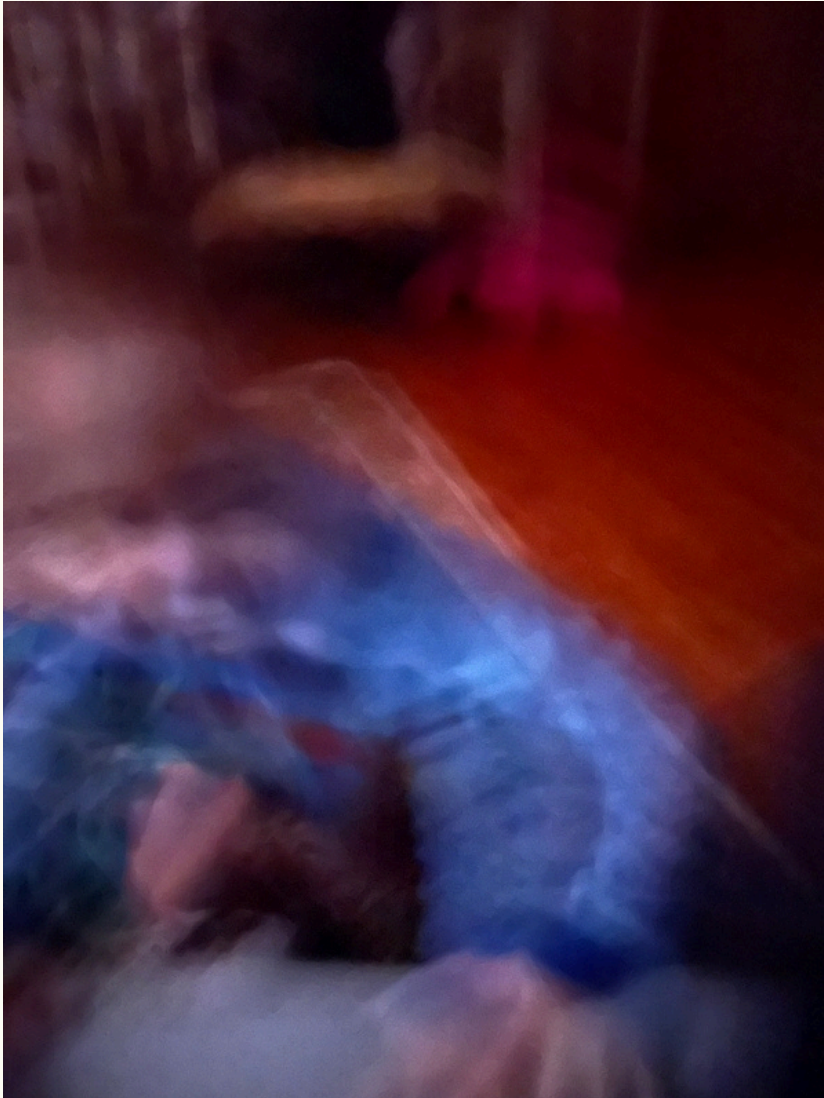


Women in midlife, most with little or no photography experience, were invited to respond to a reflective prompt about a personal challenge. Using that prompt, they created photographs and short written captions or reflections to turn that challenge into a place of resilience. The images and words in this exhibition are part of that process and show how women used creativity to notice, name, and gently reframe their experiences.



Bedtime with her father is easy and smooth, 15 minutes maybe. But with me, it can drag on for an hour. She runs around the room, tells stories, sings songs, dances - it's a Mommy and me party. I took this on the first night of our challenge as I started to reflect on the chaos of my life as a new, "geriatric" mom.

MEG, 42



"Oontz Oontz: A baby rave"

She makes the oontz oontz of the dance beat like she's at the club when she's in the tub, with glow sticks and baby bubbles. Her foam letters float on the surface as she grabs for her letter, the one that starts her name, the first letter of the alphabet.

I can make art from this moment. From so many of these moments. I think my creativity is not dead, maybe not even dormant. I just need to look through a different lens (literally as well as figuratively). I won't always have time to set up my camera, but I can use my phone in the moment.



Hanging on. There's beauty in the in between.

The baby finally slept, but I missed the full night's sleep because I had to take the dog to the emergency vet and was there until 3:30am, worried out of my mind. The next day, I took this photo as I walked the dog, a poop inspector to make sure the meds were working. Rainy day, lack of sleep, but wow, isn't this still little moment beautiful? Maybe I'm just hanging on some days too, but there's beauty in the transitional moments.

Reflection

I wanted to address the chaotic, exhausting postpartum time as a first time mom in her 40s. They said you'll feel like yourself after two years, but I still feel like I'm in the trenches. I enjoy every minute while simultaneously feeling exhausted and a little lost. I was talking to a mom who had her daughter when she was in her twenties, and she said that now that she's 40, she's finally figuring out who she is independently since her formative decade was spent raising a child.

Reflection (cont.)

I am on the opposite end of the spectrum – I created an entire identity before my daughter was born. And because we struggled so much with getting pregnant, and tried for years to successfully have a baby, I threw myself into work and into other pursuits. I was busy with a career, an ongoing education, writing, art, and creating. I couldn't create a baby so I tried to create in other ways. But that meant that when I did have a child, my life that had been so full with those other forms of creation was now full with the creation of a new life and the development of a whole new person.

Reflection (cont.)

I went into this project with the idea of reclaiming a little bit of my own personal creation and creativity; and I found that I'm intrinsically linked to my daughter in all the best ways possible. It was surprisingly easy – at first I overthought it, and I wanted to take photos with my digital camera instead of my phone, but I could never get to my camera in the moments as things were happening. I realized it was more about the journey than anything, and just let go and started photographing when something struck me.

Reflection (cont.)

I came to the realization that my creativity can thrive from my daughter's existence and her existence opens new doors to my creativity, and that I'll learn and grow into my new form as she learns and grows into hers.



The blender blades slathered with
viscous liquid feel like my insides
currently. Something is not right.
Sharp, messy. Dangerous and
unidentified.

MARY, 55



The unplugged space heater is
unable to fulfill its purpose,
remaining cold and lifeless--much
like me in my present, liminal state
of waiting.

MARY, 55



The osprey nest feels like my future--empty at the moment, but waiting for life to return. Will the osprey be back? Only time will tell.

MARY, 55

Reflection

My current challenge is facing unidentified health issues.

I'm accustomed to expressing myself in words, so it surprised me how deeply I felt drawn to certain images to represent my journey. By identifying with certain pictures, and spending time framing them and reviewing them later, I gained compassion for my current sense of unease and an acceptance of my liminal state that I did not expect. I would like to continue exploring visual media for this purpose, just for myself, to see what else I can learn about myself.



The bare limbs of this tree during winter represent vulnerability. Moving through intense grief demands vulnerability. You lose your leaves and feel exposed to the world, to the cold.

COURTNEY, 47



This trail represents a focus on the present, what is directly in my path, without wondering too much about what is out of view. Most of the anxiety that I experience is rooted worry about things that have not happened (around the corner) or things that already happened (behind me). I try to focus on the here and now and what is within my control.

COURTNEY, 47



Reflection allows us to make sense of things in the past, sometimes to learn from or find (or perhaps create) meaning in what has happened. Some things just don't make sense. If I look hard enough, I can usually find the sun peeking through the clouds.

Reflection

I am someone who enjoys taking photos, so I expected to enjoy this project and thought I would find it to be fairly easy. Deciding what to photograph, and then how to caption each picture, required a bit more introspection than I anticipated. Winter nature photography seemed like a good fit for talking about grief, so I chose to focus on that. January in New York is cold, mostly colorless, cloudy gray skies with snowy and icy landscapes and bare tree limbs.

Reflection (cont.)

I experienced what I refer to as a “season of grief” that lasted about two years with multiple losses, but my mom’s death was (and still is) the toughest for me. Nothing could have prepared me for how hard it is to lose parents. My connection with nature is an important part of my wellness and self-care, and has certainly been an important part of my healing journey. This project has made me consider ways to incorporate my photography with journaling.



A shadow of myself over a picture
of my youngest daughter hanging
by the staircase.

CARRIE, 48



A portrait I painted. I had never painted a portrait before this process, and I particularly like the detail of her eye. While I was working on this, my daughter mentioned to a friend that I was in my "flow state," which was a meaningful moment for me.

CARRIE, 48



This image represents the interplay of shadow and light, reflecting the life that happens within a home.

CARRIE, 48

Reflection

This collection represents the quiet ways meaning unfolds within daily life. Shadows appear throughout the images as a symbol of my own ongoing self-observation—how I move through motherhood, creativity, and home, sometimes visible, sometimes internally. The shadows remind me that light and dark coexist, shaping not only physical spaces but also inner landscapes.

Reflection (cont.)

Creating a portrait marked a moment of deep creative immersion; being seen by her as “in my flow state” affirmed the power of making as both personal and relational. Poetry has become another vessel for this expression, helping me articulate what often lives between moments. Scenes of sunsets, morning light, and ordinary corners of the house reflect pauses where awareness settles in.

Reflection (cont.)

Images of my dog, Buddy, and the grace extended to him as his time grows shorter serve as a gentle reminder to soften rules and savor what is fleeting. Walks to the lake, shared warmth from the sun, and the simple rhythm of letting the day begin reinforce the importance of slowing down and inhabiting the present. Together, these photographs document the interplay of light and shadow, structure and tenderness, revealing how life, creativity, and connection quietly shape one another within the small, sacred moments of home.



A map I created of my childhood world as I remember it now. A magical, rural setting where I found safety and friendship with my animals among the trees and by the water. Not shown: the clouds full of longing for my parents. They were alive, just absent.

BEX, 62



The chunks of aqua colored slag glass now reside in my landscape. The story I tell includes me beside my mom in the factory field gathering the scrap glass pieces that day when the company allowed the public to pick for free. In reality, I wasn't invited to share the experience. Every visit to my mother's home I admired the "rocks" of glass in her yard. One year she gave me one and I was thrilled to have a piece of something she loved. After she passed, I told her friends who were cleaning out her house the fictional memory to justify my hauling the heavy chunks of slag to my car. Back to my home. Jagged, prismatic, discarded, but glorious glass.

A perfect representation of our relationship.



I find joy when creating. Drawing and painting what I notice in nature. Cotton paper within leather bound journals. Imperfectly perfect. The greater the forgiveness, the freer I find my pen, paint brush, and lens. "Forgiveness is giving up all hope of ever having a better past." —Lily Tomlin

Reflection

I rather enjoyed doing something with the thing that's been haunting me instead of just going to sleep with it and waking up with it, resigned to live with it indefinitely. I was surprised to notice as an observer the photos I took and what I thought about them. The reflections and setting sun. How the sharp edges of resentment have softened toward my mom and our chaotic relationship. It seems to get more difficult to wrestle anger and bitterness the older I get. It did my soul and psyche a favorable turn to participate in this experience.

Why this matters

Her Voice In Photos exists to honor women's lived experiences in midlife and to bring greater visibility, compassion, and voice to women's mental and emotional health.

the future

This reflective photography model is designed to be adapted in women's mental health and wellness spaces, community settings, and organizations. The hope is to continue expanding opportunities for women to benefit therapeutically from this model and to share their stories safely and creatively, bringing visibility to their voices.



Thank you for
witnessing.

Learn more:

hervoiceinphotos.com

dwallach@syr.edu

