

I walk into the front entrance of Fayetteville High School. I head down the L shaped hallway to my lockers. Once at my double stacked lockers, I open the top locker, and grab my algebra textbook that is 11X17 inches. I pull all seven volumes out. My hands are so full. I shove the locker door shut with my shoulder. I bend down and plop all seven volumes on the floor. I open the bottom locker and grab my math and English binder along with three volumes of my English textbook. I shut my locker door and shove my binders in my backpack. I gather all ten volumes of textbooks in my arms-almost not able to grab them all. I head two classrooms down where I find my cart. I place all my books on the bottom of the cart as the top of the cart is occupied with a box tv. The partially functioning tv is sitting on a stand with a tray that is bolted to the cart. This machine enlarges things to help me see. I make sure the tray is empty, the machine is unplugged, and now I am ready to head to class for the morning. This was my lived experience each and every morning of ninth grade.

As a child and into my young adult life I grew up with a visual impairment that I let control me. In situations where others focused on me and my vision, I felt embarrassed. I put on a persona pretending not to be blind when I could and joking about it when I couldn't hide it. But the reality only dug myself deeper into a hole of not being confident and trusting my own ability.

As I got older, I started dropping my persona. If my vision showed, I tried embracing it instead of feeling shame from it. Sometimes, it was difficult showing this side of me, but over time I felt a sense of empowerment. I learned how to no longer let my vision control me, but how to control my vision. This new sense of self and confidence enabled me to learn what it truly meant to own my blindness.

My practice is a reflection of my new positionality in life. I create interactive spaces where participants are forced to encounter their own perception of the space and confront the way they choose to engage with their surroundings. By being immersed with a mostly non-visual experience, participants are asked to relearn. Information is gathered in a variety of ways to help stimulate participants' visual memory and build a clear mental picture. By continually creating a detailed mental image, they are able to more accurately recall locations of objects within space, thus feeling safer and more comfortable.

As I sit here hearing the faucet drip, the rough carpet underfoot, the cold air currents in the room, having an awareness of an enclosed space around me, and tasting peppermint in my mouth, I start to form a picture. We are surrounded by many sensory clues every day that can help us understand our environment if we allow them too. Approximately 80% of the information we receive is through our vision. By manipulating how the viewer is asked to understand the space, their perspective changes. Because of the normative we put in place, people in the beginning may feel less confident about using their other senses but over time a trust and confidence is formed.

"Blind" is just another descriptor to me and not a negative one that I need to hide or reject. Many people try to understand and connect with me but do not have experience with blindness. Increasing participants' awareness through interaction increases their understanding. We all project a certain face to the world and we all have different identities we take on through life. These influence our most essential core traits. Through social interactions we internalize and develop a dominant characteristic of what blindness is. In my work viewers are empowered to problem solve solutions. Viewers begin to understand *where to begin* outside their own experience and generate an informed choice on my lived experience. I am not my blindness just as a sighted individual is not their vision.