

**HOW TO EXPRESS YOURSELF THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY**  
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# HOW TO EXPRESS YOURSELF THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY

Dear friend,

One of the best joys in photography is having the opportunity to express yourself.

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## Self-expression

In Zen and Buddhism, we are often told to 'kill the ego.' But I think if we are wise enough, **we can turn our ego into our slave, rather than be the slave of our ego.**

What that means is this:

*Use your ego in a positive way.*

## What is an 'ego' anyways?

To me, I would define 'ego' as your concept of yourself. It is a combination of your memories, who you think you are, your preferences, your life experiences, and your personal life philosophy.

**Self-expression is, and must be egotistical.**

Yet, modern society tells us:

*To be egotistical and self-centered is evil.*

But-- at the same time, we are told to "express our feelings" and that self-expression shouldn't be repressed.

We are getting mixed signals from society. How can we express ourselves and our feelings, if we are told that being egotistical is evil?

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## **Why Express Ourselves?**

Let's tackle an interesting question:

*Why express ourselves?*

This is my theory:

1. You must express yourself, because you have valuable opinions and perspectives about the world.
2. You can help empower others by expressing yourself, and sharing your positive thoughts with others.
3. By having the bravery and confidence to express yourself, you will give others the confidence to also express themselves.

In short, by expressing yourself, you help society. You help society by sharing your positive views to change the world for the better, and you also help society by helping empower individuals -- giving them confidence in themselves.

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## **HOW TO EXPRESS YOURSELF THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY**

Practical ideas:

### **1. Don't censor yourself**

If you see a photograph that you find interesting, shoot it, and share it. Don't censor yourself, by being worried: "What will others think?"

Often we become the slave of fear-- we fear what others will think of us, and this prevents us from expressing ourselves.

But the truth is,

*We are all weird.*

We are all weird, strange, and that is exactly what makes us unique and valuable.

Society and the ecology thrives on diversity. If you didn't have a divergent and diverse range of thoughts, opinions, and ideas-- you would just be another vanilla clone in society.

Fortunately you are not just another cloned stormtrooper. You are a Jedi Knight-- don't fear what others will think of you.

## **2. Make fun of yourself**

A stoic technique I employ:

*I predict the criticisms I will receive, and I won't defend myself.*

Some of the best ways to "defend" yourself is to just not defend yourself. Or just make fun of yourself.

For example, I will say:

*"Yeah, that ERIC KIM guy is pretty crazy, and doesn't know what he is talking about."*

This will allow you to express yourself to the fullest, without worrying about how others will criticize you.

## **3. Don't become paralyzed by perfectionism**

One of the worst diseases that we suffer from is perfectionism. I know a lot of people who suffer from depression, because they have this notion that everything they do must be 'perfect.' This paralyzes them-- because they are too afraid of failure.

Of course conversely -- you can be a perfectionist in a positive way, if you use your perfectionist tendencies to make the best possible product for your audience/user. But, **don't become paralyzed by perfectionism.**

Steve Jobs once said, "Real artists ship [publish]." In computer technology, to 'ship' a product is to produce it and sell it. For us as photographers, to 'ship' a photograph is to publish it. To publish a photograph means to share it on social media, to print it, or to make a book of it, to make a slideshow of your photos, or to just send your photos to your friends and family via email.

I'm most inspired by children-- they are the best artists. No child is a 'perfectionist'. They make art for fun, and when they are bored or finished, they move onto the next one, or just decide to go outside and play at the park.

Even if we consider this philosophically-- none of us are perfect. Therefore, it is okay to publish and share imperfect photos.

And if we think about a philosophy of aesthetics, **slight imperfections makes something or someone more beautiful.** The Japanese call this 'wabi-sabi'-- the wear and tear of something makes patina beautiful.

For example, I find the wrinkles in older women beautiful. I think women are the most beautiful when they proudly let their silver hair flow, instead of being so paranoid about always dyeing their hair. Or I find extreme beauty in people who proudly show their scars on their faces -- kind of like 'Kintsugi' (the Japanese art of repairing broken pots with golden glue, which highlights the 'imperfection' and shows it as beautiful).

#### **4. Honor thy selfie**

I think selfie photography is probably one of the best ways of self-expression. To make a selfie of yourself is being very honest with yourself-- embracing your self-image, and also self-empowering yourself to shoot yourself how *you* want to shoot yourself. You can control the camera angles, the background, and the perspective. You can also shoot however many selfies you want to before you are satisfied with the final image.

I often make selfies to reflect my mental state. When I'm feeling depressed and gloomy, I will often shoot selfies, looking down, or away from the camera. When I'm feeling happy and elated, I smile a lot in my selfies. When I'm feeling artsy or in the zone, I will often obscure my eyes in my selfie, and make my selfies more open-ended.

However you feel emotionally-- make selfies of yourself, and examine how you feel, how you look, and what you want to communicate to your viewer with your selfie.

And remember with selfies: **you don't need to publish/share them.** You can just keep them for yourself.

## 5. Make social commentary

You probably have opinions on economics, politics, and social issues. Don't hide your opinions-- share your perspectives through your photography.

Use your photography to be selective, to make social commentary/critique.

For example, in my "Suits" series, I showed men in suits looking mostly miserable. It was a reflection of my perspective of feeling empathy for people trapped in corporate jobs that they hate. And of course, this is just my perspective-- a lot of people who wear suits to work are actually very happy with their jobs. But this isn't about presenting a perspective that fits the worldview of everyone-- **it is about presenting my own personal perspective with the rest of the world with my photos.**

Therefore don't seek to make photos that please everyone. Be open to bifurcating your audience-- to make people either really love or really hate you. Once again, don't censor yourself-- be brutally honest through your photos, about how you view society.

Photography can change the world, if you are able to make your viewer feel emotions and empathize with the subjects of your photos, to change their worldview and perspective.

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## **Conclusion**

The more I philosophize about photography -- I realize more and more that photography is less about making photos and images. I think photography is more about self-expression, about finding joy in everyday living, and also using the tool as a way to make social critique.

To me this is exciting-- photography as a tool is much more powerful than we think it is.

So friend, let us go beyond Instagram, social media, and trying to get a bunch of likes in photography. "How many likes is enough?" I know for myself, enough is never enough-- in terms of seeking external validation from others.

Become more self-focused, and more centered in your photography. Treat photography as zen-meditation, treat photography as self-therapy, and use photography as a way to cleanse your mind and for your mental hygiene.

Always smile, and shoot with a grateful heart. Eric