

RAW PORTRAITS COURSE
BY MITZI STARKWEATHER

Transcript

Table of Contents

- 1: INTRODUCTION 3**
- 2. KEYNOTE 6**
- 3: LIGHTING AND GEAR..... 29**
- 4. PRICING AND PRODUCTS 33**
- 5. MARKETING AND CLIENT PREP..... 39**
- 6. DIRECTIVE/PROMPTS..... 45**
- 7. LIVE FULL SHOOT..... 52**
- 8. INSTANT REVEAL..... 69**
- 9. CONCLUSION 90**

1: INTRODUCTION

Hi, I'm Mitzi Starkweather. And thank you so much for joining me for my Raw Portraits course. I've been doing these AS I AM sessions all year, done almost 50 of them at this point. And I am so excited to share my blueprint with you and show you how to hold space for people in a truly amazing transformative way. Now throughout this course, we're going to talk about pricing and products. We're going to talk about marketing, client preparation. We're going to talk about how to make sure your client's ready for this experience, but also not load them up with a bunch of limitations or rules. And then you're also going to get to watch an entire photo shoot and reveal with an actual client, see the whole process in real time.

And I'm so excited for you to watch it because the session with Elijah is amazing. Also, for this session, I purposely chose someone who identifies as non-binary because this shoot is not limited to gender. It's not limited to a certain age group or ability or anything. This shoot is for any human being. And I'm excited to show you examples in the PDF guide of several different groups of people I've kind of focused on. Especially after the summer, I got some pushback from some photographers saying, well, guys wouldn't want to do this. They do. I just didn't decide that they didn't. So there's so much we're going to talk about in this course. That's not just about this exact type of raw portrait session, but it's about your creative journey as a photographer, as someone who got into this because you think people are beautiful and you want to document them and you want to help show them and you love when people light up because they see themselves through a lens of love.

I like to think of it as sushi versus sashimi. So in my portrait studio that I've had for about 10 years, I have been mainly specializing until this year in glamorous, luxurious photo shoots with hair and makeup and gowns and a whole team and five outfits per shoot. And then pristinely retouched final images. I still do it. It's still great. There's a time and place for that as well. But if that's like a fancy sushi roll, then this raw portrait session is like sashimi.

It's like a carefully crafted piece of raw fish of excellent quality by someone who's trained for a very long time in crafting it. It's not tilapia that you brought home from the grocery store and just forgot to cook. You understand the difference, right? It's also like the full band versus the acoustic set. There's a time and a place for both. They're both valuable. And in fact, if you do glamor and luxury type portraits in your studio already, this is another great session offering that you can use to get your awesome clients back in your studio for a completely different experience. So I'm going to talk more about that in the course. And one of the things that I've found through this is that I didn't anticipate it, but my lighting got a lot better because I do all of these shoots in black and white, my lighting skills across the board improved.

Also my client connection improved and my posing improved even just with the way I'm able to better connect with my professional headshot clients when they come in quickly. And all these different areas have improved in all of my portrait photography because I dove into this raw

portraits process. And every time I came up against a barrier, every time I came up against something that made me feel uncomfortable, I just looked at it. I did what I tell my clients to do.

I shone a light on the shame.

I put a big fat spotlight on everything that made me uncomfortable. And then I was like, hmm, that's not so bad.

And then my brain was like, what was I so afraid of?

It's usually what happens. Our brains tend to just get really afraid of things that are unfamiliar.

When, once we can contextualize it, once we can see it, especially once someone sits next to us and goes, that's amazing. And then our brains are like, oh, is it?

I never used to sit next to people at image reveals who said, oh, my crow's feet. I love that. It looks like my dad.

It's because I didn't reach across the screen first and be like, don't worry, I'll Photoshop out your crow's feet.

The beliefs that you have around human beings, around who's worthy of what, around what we should be apologizing for, around everything.

Those will all become a mirror that you hold up to your client. It's really incredible that the more you, the photographer, heal through this, the more that you as the photographer becomes less and less afraid to look at your own self, the more your clients will be brave.

That all starts with you. Shine a light on your shame.

Just start by looking at it.

If you think, oh, I could never photograph a woman to look bigger. Aren't we supposed to photograph them to make them look smaller?

Try it. Break the rules. We always say, learn the rules and then you can break them. But I think it's more like, we need to learn the rules so that we understand then why we break them. Because breaking rules on purpose is one of my favorite things to do, especially when something doesn't really make sense to me anymore. And the way you photograph people, the way, just like the gear and the lighting styles you love, and the ways you love to photograph people kind of grow and change the ways that you show up as an artist in different aspects of your life, the ways you create and what lights you up. All those things just shift and change over time. So embrace this process. And when the discomfort pops up, because it will, it should, if you're really being honest, just get curious about it.

I love that Terry Hofford says there's no judgment and curiosity. So just get curious. So if you hate your acne, you hate your thighs, or you hate your tummy or whatever, go take a self-portrait that highlights that.

Shine a light on your shame.

I'll tell you as someone who's been doing this for a year, it's been one of the most profound experiences of healing that I have ever, ever had.

And I see it reflected in the world around me.

And the more I'm willing to look at myself, the more I'm willing to show up and do this work in a loving, tender, caring way, the more my clients are too. So I'm really, really excited that you have chosen to work through this course, to challenge yourself, and to try something a little bit different. Because if you're just willing to try, that says a lot about you. And I'm very excited to see what you make.

2. KEYNOTE

You look at my work around this room and you're like, oh you're gonna teach a raw unretouched portrait session? It's not exactly like the work you see around here, but I'm also not saying I'm just moving over to this, the retouch stylized stuff is bad, this is good, not at all. I have created a new portrait offering and a new system around it that has been really, really valuable especially for my existing clients. Many of them have come back. When I talk about creating connection through the raw unretouched portrait session, the way I've been calling this and doing this for the last few months is called an AS I AM session. So it's different from what I've been doing for seven or eight years, the Luxe session, which is like hair and makeup and this whole celebrity experience. The AS I AM session, which I have a sample of right here, is about showing up as you are. And the idea is not so much the absence of hair and makeup or certain type of clothes, but that there's nothing you have to change about yourself in order to be worthy of being photographed.

So I've been calling it the AS I AM session and this is basically the bullet points I tell people. No new clothes, no pro hair or makeup, no posing, no Photoshop. Now I say Photoshop because most people don't know what retouching means. Like we photographers understand retouching means going in and smoothing skin and eliminating blemishes and, you know, pushing in arms and, you know, different things like that. So I just say no Photoshop, even though every once in a while, you know, there's like a backdrop wrinkle and I kind of fix it if I want to. But I'm not changing anything on skin, I'm not changing hair, I'm not worried about clothes or any bulges of anything. It just stays exactly as it is. And when I say no posing, I don't mean no direction, all right?

I'm never gonna have someone come into my studio and then just be like, all right, act natural, do your thing. Because that's like the worst thing ever and people are just like frozen. So it's still very well directed, it's just not, okay, now copy me. And I compare it to this. It's like I'm leading someone in a waltz, I'm not teaching them choreography. Does that make sense? It's like, here, just come along with me on this and I just guide and direct and then before they know it, the shoot's over.

So it's like sashimi. It's not like fish you forgot to cook, okay? You see the difference? When I talk about these like raw, unretouched portrait sessions, it's not like you went to Walmart and bought tilapia and then like forgot to cook it. It's like sashimi. It's raw, it's intentional, and it's just as valuable as sushi.

So first I want you to do a little exercise on your paper. I want you to make a list of your top three retouching priorities.

So let's say you pull up an image of a client. Also, if you pull up a self-portrait, what are like three of the things you look at first and you go to retouch?

And then I want you to make a list of your top three flattering posing or wardrobe tips.

So what are some things you're consistently saying to clients so that they look more flattering to the camera when it comes to posing, when it comes to advising them on their clothing? And then I want you to list three do's and don'ts for posing men versus posing women.

We all know what those are. I want you to list like three of the ones that come into your head.

And don't be ashamed of anything you've written down.

Nothing's good or bad about it. It just is what it is, but it's valuable information for you moving forward. When you think about if I'm going to offer something that's unretouched, what do I need to look at?

And you just revealed what you believe.

You just revealed what you believe needs to be changed in order for a portrait to be right or good or valuable.

And like I mentioned before, these types of shoots are like sushi versus sashimi. It's like a mocha latte with whip versus an espresso shot or a full band versus an acoustic set. There's a time and a place for both.

But we tend to talk about, when it comes to portraits anyway, one like it's more valuable than the other. And I don't think that's true.

So I want to tell you a little story. A few months ago, I was doing some self-portraits. And I'm going to talk a little bit about this throughout the talk because it weaves so well in with the entire reason I started doing AS I AM in the first place. But I was doing this self-portrait session one day, and I was just really dissatisfied with the images I was getting. I was trying to just express myself. I was trying to move some energy through. And I just didn't like the photos. I felt like I looked stiff. And I was just like looking at the back of the camera. I was like, ugh. And then I just took a step back. And I remembered something that a little girl said when I worked at the organization called Art Feeds several years ago. And she said, she's like in second grade, when you get stuck on something you're making, she said, flip it upside down. Turn it around.

And I, it's always stuck with me. So in that moment, for some reason, I thought of that comment. And I said, okay, I'm gonna sit on the stool wrong. Okay, I can't do it right, apparently, for my satisfaction. So I'm just gonna do it wrong. And you can kind of see what happened. I kind of probably pulled a muscle in that second row, middle one. And there was one time, too, when I jumped at the end, like I did a hop over it and like almost just completely bit it. But by the end, I was laughing. By the end, I had seen something a totally different way. My frustration was gone. And I was like, I just had fun. I got my brain out of that tunnel vision, you know? Like sometimes you're like, I want to make this thing. I want to make it. And then you're just trying and trying. I

can't make it. And then you just get so focused. Like when you get to that point, just start over. Flip it upside down. Do it wrong.

So when the rules don't work for you anymore, just break them. I'm giving you permission right now. Rules serve, they serve a purpose. Okay, there's a time and a place. When you start out learning portrait photography, there's a lot of rules you have to learn. That's just the reality. It's cool. We learn them. Like what are like the really sexist ones? Like don't broad light abroad, right? Broad light, body in the light. Because why? You look big. Women need to look small, right? We have all these different rules that we're taught as portrait photographers, but we don't have to follow them. And it starts with you. So when it comes to like self-portrait practice and you showing up in front of the camera, I want you to start breaking the rules. If you're not comfortable doing it with clients, start doing it with yourself. Or have your best friend come in or a family member or someone who you could just be yourself around and shoot with them. Just start breaking rules and do things wrong on purpose.

And last year I had to do this with my portrait work.

I wanted to do it for a couple years prior, but I've been doing this highly stylized, highly retouched style portraiture for going on seven, eight years. And while I thoroughly enjoyed it and still do, it wasn't lighting me up in the same way.

And I started to kind of shudder when a client would be looking through their gallery of beautiful portraits and they'd be like, oh that one? No, no. I mean they'd still pick at least like 20. They'd still you know spend good money on it and hug me at the end and say thank you and it was great. But it was starting to get disheartening to me when I realized I was showing up in a space and just almost setting the expectation for people to pick themselves apart.

After a while it just didn't really sit right with me anymore. And that's when I knew it was time to take a look at it and change.

And last year I went through a big change in my own body. And here's the reality. If you're a portrait photographer, you photograph bodies. So your belief about bodies, especially your own, is going to come through in your work. It's just a mirror.

And that's a really powerful thing. And if you think to yourself right now like, oh shit, like don't worry. It's a journey. You only have to be willing to look at it.

I want to teach you how to create a space, a safe space for your clients so that they can see and accept themselves and so they can experience freedom through love.

It's love and fear, right?

Like you can create something out of love. You can't truly create out of fear, right? Fear is like lack and scarcity and competition and all these negative feelings. True creation is in love.

And so when you're creating something with yourself or you're creating it for your client, you are still in that creation. You understand that, right? You are the portrait artist. And so all the work that you can do to love yourself more is only gonna help your clients love themselves more.

And you're a portrait photographer. You wouldn't be doing this if you didn't already see the beauty in others. You wouldn't be doing this if you weren't already like emotional and sappy about sunsets and like beautiful things and you know like I'm one of those people who like I can get in my really depressed and melancholic moods. Like absolutely. And I love like horror movies. I love dark stuff. But at the end of the day, I cannot give up hope. No matter how bad things get, I always find the silver lining. I always find the reason to keep going. And I think that's what creators do. That's who we are. And we're so quick to see it in other people. But I think oftentimes we won't see it in ourselves until we really have to look.

One of my clients, her name is Heather. I have her images up here and I have her nine up down here. She said, life without a filter is liberating.

I first photographed her five years ago.

She came to me for a boudoir session. It was really fun. She brought her red bottom heels. She brought thousands of dollars worth of lingerie. She did this big shoot. She bought the top package. She loved it. It was great. She was a great client.

But this shoot, she came in for an AS I AM session. We were together a total of 90 minutes.

Okay, the time it usually takes just for hair and makeup, right, during a stylized shoot.

90 minutes. Three outfit photo shoot. Instant image reveal. Placed her portrait order. Bye.

And we had a beautiful conversation because in between the time I photographed her last and then a couple months ago for this, she'd gotten divorced, gotten remarried, and survived cancer.

You know how fast that situation got very real? It was the best. I love it. I can't bullshit with people. I can't do small talk. It just absolutely kills me. So when people walk in for these sessions, even if they're nervous, no matter how they feel, it's amazing because within like a few minutes, we are just, I mean, the vulnerability is there. It's like if you're showing up for something like this, you're not gonna be fake about it. You just can't. And so it was so powerful and so beautiful to just watch her look at these portraits of herself and celebrate herself and feel really amazing.

She gave me the words. I photographed 25 AS I AM sessions so far this year, since I started this project.

And when I started doing it, it was really interesting for me because I'm a very type A person traditionally. I'm very much like, okay, I need to know what's the end goal. What are the steps I'm gonna take to get there? Risk assessment, all of that. With this, with AS I AM, that was not the case. I just knew I have this idea. I have this pull. I have this thing in my heart that I have to do and I'll know the next step when the time comes. And I did. And at first I didn't have words for these sessions. So I gathered them from everyone I photographed. I asked them to tell me about their experience and I picked out words and I heard words like liberating, free, therapeutic, transformative.

And it showed me the power of this. It also showed me that for many years I've underestimated my clients.

For many years I have assumed people are going to pick themselves apart and hate certain things about themselves. Because you know what? Now when people show up, even when people show up for the stylized portrait sessions with retouching, I've noticed a change in that work too. There's a lot more acceptance.

And you know why? Because that started with me.

The problems you think will keep your clients from loving and then buying their photos are the areas where you hold shame.

Shame is always yours. Always belongs to you. It's always a mirror.

And I think it's easy to get into this fear mentality, especially when you're a portrait photographer and this is your job and your livelihood and you're like I got to sell these photos. It's easy to get spiral into that mentality and think oh god look skinny, they gotta look young, they gotta look blah blah blah blah.

What if we set a different precedent as the portrait photographers? As the people who have the studio and the space that people show up into? What if we showed up with a different expectation? I'll tell you right now, I've done this now for five months and it's blown my mind.

So for me it was acne and my arms. That was, couldn't get over that in photos. I did a self-portrait in March of 2020 and when I look at this photo I almost don't recognize this person. I hold great love and grace for her. But when I tell you I spent an hour photoshopping out my acne and acne scars in this photo, like painstakingly, like the really targeted kind of editing where it's like people can't tell it was edited, right? Not the big gloss over but just like the really pinpointed retouching. I made my hair bigger and I made my arms smaller like liquify. I did that all the time in photos of myself because I always hated my arms and I held a lot of shame around how they looked and around my acne.

The other thing that's interesting, the reason I took this self-portrait, because I was like, well I just found out I'm pregnant and so once I have a baby I'm going to be just disgusting and ugly

forever so I better document how my body looks now. Apparently I believe that and that's also why I wore a corset. I thought I'd never get to wear that again. Yeah, I went to the studio and did my hair and makeup, you know, because this was like a week after lockdown started and like two weeks after I found out I was pregnant and our livelihood had to shut down. So I was like not a great place. I had to stop drinking alcohol, had to stop, you know, working, all this stuff. So it was it was a really tumultuous time but I'm so glad I made this portrait because I have this visual representation and that's what we have as portrait photographers, right? We have this amazing skill, okay? We are alchemists. We take feelings and ideas and put them into visuals for people.

You realize that power you have. So I'm glad I have these photos. I'm glad I have this record and I'm gonna show you a few throughout this presentation because going back and pulling them to put in this keynote I was like whoa that's what that says and at the time I didn't even plan for it to say that. It's just it's just there.

But the reality is nothing about a human body is inherently good or bad.

You know there's like entire billion-dollar industries built around making us hate ourselves, right? It's a really good business model. When you create products and things for people that will never satisfy them. Because even if you did all the best skincare and you got the perfect body, guess what? As time goes on you're gonna get older. It's gonna happen, right? What's that saying? It's like when you finally get skinny enough you're not young enough. You're never going to be enough for all of these outside standards and so the example I love to use as a portrait photographer who primarily does boudoir photography for like 10 years now is my butt looks big, okay? My butt looks big. My butt looks big.

Are they over 45 or under 45? That's how they say it. Gen X, they want their butt to look small and boomers they want their butts look small. Millennials, they want their butt to look big.

Guess what? It's the same butt. It's all about how you think about it and that's something that I always go back to time and time again because in these last 10 years of doing full-time portrait photography it's been like a field study in body image, right? It's been like I sit across from people primarily women who are coming to get photos done for a variety of different reasons and it's so interesting that so many people say the same stuff.

Everyone warns me that I'm gonna be the first client that was too unphotogenic to like any of their photos. Everybody warns me that I have cellulite. Like I have never seen a human body over the age of 25 that doesn't have cellulite. Like I just haven't seen it and we all think like we're the only ones who have this stuff. We think like oh I'm so hideous like you have to fix me and it's not the case and the more I've seen it the more I can just call bullshit on that stuff. I'm like no you just have a human body. It's all the magazines and beauty companies that and diet industry that convinced you it was wrong. There's nothing wrong about you. So it all had to start with the mind shift for me. It's just so wonderful.

It's like you look at this and you're like man I want to be friends with her. You know you're like she seems so cool because she is.

Okay before you can create an accepting space for others you have to first accept yourself.

Just like before you can create an empowering space for others you have to empower yourself. It all starts with you.

You have to shine a light on your shame.

I'm a very literal person. Take things very literally. When I create portraits I just use the first thing that pops into my head visually for the words someone gives me or the idea I have.

And then people like ooh explain the meaning behind that. I'm like it's just that's just what it is. Like just take oh what is that? Oh there it is the end. The photo is the meaning just I'm not talking about it. But what's really cool about shining a light on your shame as a self-portrait practice. What do photographers use? What's our paint?

Light. Light. So literally shine a light on the things you are ashamed of. It's an important practice just for everyday life. And I remember my therapist said this to me like a few years ago. She said shame thrives in the dark. Shame loves the darkness.

But you flip that light on it's like my parents house in Houston. You go down for a midnight snack. You go down and you flip the kitchen lights on those pine beetles. They all scatter. They're huge. You can hear them.

They're gone. That's how your shame is too.

So when there's a part of you that you don't want to look at, shine a light on it.

And when it's a part of your body and you the portrait photographer the alchemist of light and the human experience who has the tools and the capabilities and the skills to just create magic into like a form like a visual form that people can look at and relate to.

Just make it. Just look at it. You don't have to show people your self-portraits. Lord knows I didn't for years. There's many still that I have never seen the light of day. Sometimes I just needed to shoot it just to shoot it and it's sat on a hard drive ever since and that's fine. Maybe I'll go back to it. But self-portrait practice for me was very personal especially at first. It's still usually pretty personal. I mean it definitely involves like a little Prosecco and I like listen to Enya really loud for a long time and I just like end up taking all my clothes off and dancing around and it's really fun. And a lot of those photos I don't need to show anyone because that was for me. That was my process. But this photo stands out to me when I look at it. Because at the time I felt so vulnerable creating this portrait. But this was right when I went back to work after maternity leave.

After maternity leave I had a really hard time accepting the way my body looked.

Turns out having a baby didn't ruin me forever. I don't know. I believed some lie about that. But I hated, wait for the irony, my breasts.

I hated how they looked. They shrunk. They were lopsided and I hated them. I made them the butt of all my jokes. I didn't want to wear certain clothing. I acted like my appearance just disqualified me as like a valuable human being. What's interesting about this photo? You cannot see anything on the front part of my body and there's a reason for that. But I still showed up and I still did the self-portrait. And I remember when I shared it I posted the Walt Whitman poem, Song of Myself. It's like I celebrate myself and sing myself for what I assume you shall assume that everything belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I remember one girl commented she was like wow what a cool quote. And I was like quote? That's a poem. That's Walt Whitman. You haven't heard that. But that's what he talks about. He talks about celebrating the self for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

So when you see that good in other people that's because it's in you first. Just like when you see the shame in other people. It's yours. It works for the good stuff and the bad stuff. And that's why when people reach out to you and look at your work and they it's because they see themselves in it. It's because you created something they connected with. That's also why people are usually reaching out to you when you post your creative work. Not your paid work. Because that's the stuff that's coming from your heart and they're looking and they're seeing a little piece of their story in that. And that's why they're gonna show up and trust you to photograph them.

But if you feel like something disqualifies you from having something you really want then you don't accept it. Right? Like just like if you criticize it in other people or you try to change it in other people you don't accept it. If you won't look at something you do not accept it.

I went flat after breast cancer last year and I posted a TikTok about getting tattoos. It ended up kind of blowing up and I was afraid to look at comments for a while because I was like oh no people are gonna be dumb. But everyone was like really nice and encouraging and it was cool. But I remember one woman said I had my surgery 11 years ago and I still haven't looked at it.

11 years. And in that moment I wanted to scoff at her and be like seriously? Like how do you not? But there's been things like on the inside of me that I haven't looked at for 11 years.

There's been areas I don't want to look at. Things I don't want to face. Wounds that I still carry that I don't want to heal.

I've done it too. We all have them. But love is acceptance and if you want to love yourself more you have to accept all of it.

It's hard but the more you do it the easier it gets. And if you believe that if this thing about you changed, whether it's physical or your circumstances or your relationship or something like that, if you believe that if that thing changed you would be happy then you don't accept it.

And you have to accept something before you can change it, right? But if you can't change it you have to accept it.

That's just life.

And loving yourself is accepting yourself as you are.

We talk about unconditional love a lot, right?

Unconditional love doesn't say I'll love you when this changes.

That's the opposite of unconditional love. That is conditional.

So think about it when you look at yourself. What conditions are you placing on it, on yourself?

Release the burden of judging or trying to change other people. You can't do it. If you see it in them it's because it's in you. Always. It's always a mirror. You see it in someone else, it's in you. It bugs you about them a little bit, it's in you a little bit. Pisses you off about them, you have it. It's in you a lot.

And I use the word judging a lot because you know what makes me more mad than anything in the world? Judgmental people.

Cannot stand it. It's because I'm judgmental and I'm the harshest judge on myself. I'm trying to let go of that though. I'm becoming less judgmental.

It took me two years to offer these raw and retouched portrait sessions from when I wanted to do it.

I knew what I wanted to do. I had a client reach out to me. It was two, over two years ago. A return client, one of my first clients like seven years ago when I started offering like hair and makeup and you know glamorous retouched photo shoots. She did that with me. She reaches out a few years later. This was like two years ago. She's like, hey Mitzi, I really want you to photograph me again. I'm turning 50 but I normally don't wear all the hair and makeup and I would just love like a really simple shoot that's black and white of just me AS I AM. Those are the words she said. I was like, oh I would love to do that. So because of the pandemic and stuff it got postponed a few months but she ended up coming in and we did this session and it absolutely lit me up. She loved the photos. It was great and that stayed in my brain. I want to offer this. So over those next two years I did more self-portraits. I literally would shine a light on

my shame. I retouched less. I photographed more body types and I stopped hiding and fixing people so much.

I stopped disqualifying certain body types from being, from directing them into certain poses and I dropped the gender rules for posing and I started posing people for how they wanted to feel because traditional portrait posing rules say women need to look small. Well guess what? Over the years the women who come to me for portraits they don't want to look small. I remember the first time I said it out loud to my client. I was directing her into a pose and I said take up space and that was one of the first times I allowed that and I just saw her lit up like light up just her whole body and I lit up. I remember that moment and I thought how many things have I unintentionally been doing? Like how many ways have I been directing my clients that I don't believe is even a visual representation of who they are or why they're here?

This self-portrait of me right here was five months after the last one. Okay so the last one my back is to the camera. For this one I remember I set aside time to do self-portraits that day. Blocked out a chunk of time, had a newborn baby at home, like was working full-time trying to juggle all this life stuff and lack of sleep and everything but I knew I was like I need a self-portrait session. I need to make this happen. So I set aside some time in an afternoon to do it. I came to the studio. I got ready. I did my hair and makeup. I even like put these fake press-on nails on that like you know if I were to like pick up my phone they'd probably like come off but I did all this different stuff and when I was ready to start shooting I realized all my lights were packed up at home because I had been shooting my final girls project on location at various places so all my gear was packed up so literally here at the studio I didn't even have light stands.

I had one like \$60 speed light that I just had as like a spare for like a hundred years you know and I had like a little honeycomb grid that like went on top to make it like a little spotlight. So no modeling light or anything and I just set it on top of my prop ladder here in the studio and I aimed it at the backdrop and I was like well hope this is close to where I'm sitting and I posed on the stool and took some shots moved it a couple times but I got that photo and I remember for this one I thought how interesting that the only light available to me was a spotlight and for this portrait session I said I hate my boobs.

I'm gonna take a photo that highlights them. I'm gonna wear a really low-cut dress and I'm just gonna look at it, and I will never forget the moment I came back after the timer went off ten times and I looked at the camera and I looked at myself and I went oh I don't hate that. Like that's not terrible and ugly and disgusting and deformed like all these things I had told myself in my head. That's just how I look, but I was having such a hard time accepting it. You guys know how this is you have clients who come in like people they especially like my samples around the studio and they'll say comments like, oh well she's definitely not insecure, like well she's gorgeous so of course she took a photo like that. I'm like no no no no we are all brainwashed and predisposed into hating ourselves especially women, right especially women, in this day and age the stuff that's going on in your head about yourself physically, emotionally, mentally, all of it. Once you

become aware of it and you just look at it, I know it feels kind of icky it's a little uncomfortable you just have to look at it, and then I promise you'll just go oh all right I don't know what I was making such a big deal about and later.

I ended up taking a photo during that same session of myself. I think I took all my clothes off I don't usually do at some point and I like had my hand across my chest, and it's so interesting because less than a year later that was the exact spot that I found a lump in my breast. Your body tells you so much do you realize this every day your body is communicating with you and we're taught to push through to take medicine that shuts it up a lot of medicine helps there's nothing wrong with medicine but we are taught to just push through and push through and ignore what our body is always clearly communicating to us. And I will tell you right now I never would have found the lump in my breast if I hadn't repaired the relationship with my body. Because you don't touch your body if you hate it. Terry Hofford, she's a body image expert and one of my photography mentors, she does this exercise like touching your tummy and rubbing your tummy she does with her clients a lot, too, because so many of us don't breathe right. Because we're just taught to suck in a full belly breath though is how you really breathe but so many of us literally change our breathing to look skinnier because we don't like this part of our body. It's so fascinating and it's something that I've noticed so many clients comment on.

This practice, this self-portrait practice, is something I am always going to talk about because it saved my life. This body image work, it's not just like wow I feel so empowered, I'm just a boss babe and I feel good about myself. No, no, this has taught me how to reconnect with my body and myself in a way that meant I caught my cancer before it spread to the rest of my body.

And then I went flat after breast cancer, this portraits kind of hard to look at. I remember I called it horror decor which means body horror in French. I felt disfigured, deformed, I felt like cancer had ruined me because of my hormone therapy and my cancer medication I also can't have more children so that was something that was kind of a silent part of the process. And because of that I realized all these things that I decided were my value and hadn't even realized those things if cancer ruined me because of those things that apparently my value as a woman was the way my boobs looked the fact that I could bear children and my youth because I'm 32 but my hormones are kind of like 50 right now it was really really hard to wrestle with. And I remember I did this self-portrait series and it wasn't until I put this photo in the keynote yesterday that I realized look how the backdrops look and look how it's black and white it looks like my AS I AM sessions doesn't it? And I hadn't even planned to set it up that way, I just made these portraits straight from my heart and I wanted to look right that I don't know the words it's that but the reality was after my body went through this big change, I really hated myself and I wouldn't have said that to you, I wouldn't have said like hey guys just got back from my cancer treatment and back to work I'm healing and I hate myself. Wouldn't have said that. Self-hate is a lot sneakier than that, it shows up in the ways you treat yourself it showed up in the way I didn't value myself, it showed up in the way that even when I was back to work and

bringing an income again, I didn't turn my payroll back on for myself because I was still so far in scarcity brain I was like I still have to scrimp by because I'm still afraid that you know everything's going to come crashing down again. Like there were all these different things I was doing, and it came through and how I wouldn't accept love from other people and how I automatically disqualified myself from different opportunities or from feeling like I was valuable and I realized all these areas of my life where I had taken validation from sources outside of me because all of those things were gone. You don't realize where you get your validation from until it gets cut off and I realized that for me my physical appearance as a woman and what that meant and what that could mean and what the value of that was to me, I never realized what a big deal it was to me until it was gone, and then I was like well I'm worthless now. That just revealed all the beliefs you understand you can say you believe anything you can say I believe this I don't believe this but what you do and where your brain goes when these things happen reveal what you believe.

But then I went to the self-value workshop in November my mentor Sue Bryce, she's mentored photographers for over 10 years, she started to specialize in just self-value because that was kind of the backbone of her photography education and I remember went to that conference and I told everyone there that the day after my mastectomy I felt like I fell down a well. I literally had that vision I remember I came back from the hospital because you come home from the hospital the day after a mastectomy and my leg I had ruptured my Achilles and had surgery on it so I couldn't put weight on my right leg and I remember I was at home in this armchair where I had to sleep for a couple days and I had imagined like I had this kind of like vision that I had fallen down a well I was like kind of in and out of sleep you know like nauseous sleep-deprived my vision I had fallen down this well and only I could only move my left foot because I couldn't lift my arms or use my leg right and I remember looking up at the top of the well and all my family and friends looked over at me and they were throwing eggs down at me but like not mean but because it was like I think I was really hungry and I needed protein or something so imagine they were like I was just down there like I couldn't move but I realized in November that mentally I stayed down in that well and it took this amazing community I have especially mainly a community of photographers to pull me out because as much as it is all up to you and you are responsible for how you see yourself and how you show up in the world the people you surround yourself with oh don't underestimate that so I had to become aware of how I really felt and then I had to just choose to accept myself because I was like this self-hate thing it sucks it's pretty miserable I'm gonna choose acceptance and see what that what happens I'm gonna choose to look in the mirror and say I like I like me it's different it's not bad and I chose to get tattoos because I

thought that sounds like something that's gonna make me feel better about myself and it did, and I and I just took these steps and I confronted the biggest block I had had around AS I AM and I cannot stress this part to you enough because it's the number one questions photographers ask

me about it and it's the number one thing that kept me from launching this style of portraiture for years it was what do I charge for that and the reality is that question reveals the belief if you say well then what do you charge for that though because it's less valuable right that's the assumption there is it less valuable just because

it's not retouched and it's not highly stylized and you didn't pose someone to look the skinniest they've ever looked is that less valuable I used to believe it was I don't anymore so I had to confront that block and I remember again another shout out to my therapist I said this to her and I remember I cried when I said it out loud I said well I want to price it as less because you know without all that extra stuff this is my work isn't as valuable and I started crying she goes say that again but then she saw I was crying and she was like okay you don't have to say it again you got it and I was like but actually

isn't this just as valuable she was like yeah so I had to confront that block right don't charge less for newborn photography just because they're smaller humans we're creating magic for people that's what people pay us to do so I launched AS I AM in January and I started by launching it to a group of people who I'd photographed before I listed them out all the people I'd photographed before and wanted to photograph again I wrote their names out and I sent them an invitation and I said hey I want to try this new project it's super close to my heart and I want to invite you to be a part of it here's

what it costs here's how the dates I have available love to see you in the studio and I booked six that day and then between February and June I did 25 sessions with a \$3,300 sales average now for my highly stylized retouch portrait work my sales average is \$3,600 but this the cost is lower and the time is like a third so this is more profitable too the value is in the experience it's just something different and I want to be transparent about that because I think it's easy for us as creatives to get so caught up in like giving them everything in the kitchen sink and then like throwing in a

back massage and then like barely charging enough to survive like that's we're really good at that as creatives but we need to value what we do because this is an incredibly valuable experience and I had a client it was so interesting she said to me I just spent \$3,000 on photos with you photos that one of them by the way she picked to highlight a muscle in her neck that she used to get Botox all the time she's like so and she doesn't anymore she's like I just paid \$3,000 for this muscle that I would spend about \$3,000 over three years getting Botox in the past and I spent that on photos showing off that muscle because I wanted to accept it about myself it's so interesting like the shift in self-perception is so so interesting but the reality is I couldn't hold space for others until I could do it for myself and I had to let this process unfold and

as you get into more soulful portraits whatever that is if you as you get into trying to offer something different trying to offer something that doesn't say hey client I'm gonna fix you and make you look right which there's still value in that that's still fine some people won't show up in front of the camera unless there is retouching and hair and makeup and all that at all and there's

absolutely a time and place for it but if you want to offer something different and something for those clients to come back to later and have a whole new experience with you just start just start with what lights you up and let that process.

unfold that's exactly what I did look like my sister in that one so I always think me a year ago would never have posted these photos on the internet oh my god would have been like for the ones on the right that was the most recent time that I was photographed like my own AS I AM and my sister and I we were celebrating 420 pretty intensely and I was just we came to the studio and I had picked out this outfit because I was like hey the next place I got a shine a light on is my thighs I hate my cellulite I don't like them and I need to like accentuate them

in a photo so I visually accentuated them so they were bright I was just like dancing with my flowy sleeves and I think time after time by Cyndi Lauper came on and I was just like dancing and after that I was like I can do anything like I looked at these photos of myself and I didn't hate anything and I didn't care and I wasn't I didn't look at anything like oh god I was just like oh that's me she's great the antonym to shame is honor and when you show up for something and you immortalize something in photographic form you honor it okay so I'm gonna tell you a little bit about how

I structure the AS I AM session and this isn't gonna be every last detail that would take that'd be a half-day workshop just to talk about all the lighting techniques and all that kind of stuff this is more the theory behind how I built it because I would hope that every portrait photographer would have their own raw unretouched AS I AM style photo session that they offer that lights them up I found mine I know it's gonna sound silly but I followed my heart it's how I found it it's heart led I listen to my body I listen when you're with a client in a photo shoot and you just can't help but dance you know like things are going well right you're both just having fun and being silly and letting your guard down you just go toward that right and that's what I did with these sessions so it's in three parts there's the client

preparation the shoot in three sections and then the instant reveal what I did not anticipate was what an extraordinarily powerful part of the process this is I think as portrait photographers we can think that the reveal part like the ordering session as like the afterthought like okay now I got to get to take this business you know get this business taken care of but like what if that was part of the experience because for AS I AM it was and you know what inspired the way I did this doing photo shoots with my sister so we've done photo shoots together since we were little like in our basement we would put on these fashion shows and do glamour photo shoots and make movies and all these different things and then what was the what would you do after that did you guys ever do that with your friends then you like put them on the computer and then you go look at them you're like oh my gosh you just can't wait to look at them right and you look at all of them

it's different it's different from these type of shoots for these my client leaves the studio bye thanks so much see you next week I look at all the photos I cull them down I take out the sneezes and the blinks and the double chins and on you know all those photos and then I polish

up the ones I want to show them and then I present those to them and say what no they're barely photoshopped at all haha even though you know I've spent hours photoshopping them this experience is so different and the reason for the shoot that I have these three sections I also want to say the movement expression and body that

also just kind of came to be like that just kind of happened that way and it wasn't until I was writing this out that I was like oh it always is this structure huh interesting so I'm gonna talk about those and the first one is client preparation this photo shoot experience is not a \$99 portrait special kind of situation like therapists don't do like therapies half-price this month come on in like this is something where you say here's the offering and you put it out there and you talk about it and then the people who want to be photographed for this come to you when they're ready there are some very important and

special people in my life who I would love to photograph in this style and they know I would they're not ready yet and I respect that because this is a very vulnerable experience so I'm never gonna push anyone into this and I'm certainly not gonna try to get them in based on a discount you need to outline the experience so when someone says hey I'm interested in doing one of your raw and retouched photo sessions like okay you send them an email that outlines what to expect you need to be transparent about your prices I I shouldn't say that or I shouldn't have to say that but I feel like that's something we need

to say in our industry especially for something like this if you feel like you're hiding your prices from people who you need to bring that shame into the light like that's a whole different discussion tell them what it costs and then have a link to a calendar for easy booking so they can just oh oh yeah that date works for me and if they decide to book they just do it and make sure they have to pay something to book with you always because then you don't get no-shows it's amazing the more I raise my session fee the more people never like stand me up they're gonna show up they paid people get

nervous and that's something you have to understand people get nervous before any type of photo shoot people tend to see getting their photo taken as like going to the dentist I mean sometimes it's like a fun luxurious dentist but like still they're usually not a hundred percent like excited they usually still have a little bit of doubt so you need to prepare them as much as possible so they know what to expect going in because the fewer unknowns means like the less anxiety on their part and you need to include a pep talk I always have that in there and one of the coolest things about this type of session is you say hey

guess what all you have to do is exist all you have to do is show up so don't worry about it don't overthink it I'm so excited to celebrate you I'm so excited to guide you through this experience just show up I don't do phone consultations for these I don't do in-person consultations for these they get an email that's enough they show up the shoot day I've communicated what they need to bring and what they need to expect and it's great so when it comes to what to wear I have the no new clothes rule because immediately when people go to get photographed they think well what do I need to borrow from

a friend or what do I need to go buy for my shoot no this is the opposite way of looking at it so I say no new clothes go look in your closet and when they show up to the shoot they're gonna have several options I tell people to bring three I say something light something dark and show some skin and I also explain to them that showing skin is different for everybody and it's more about the visual representation of vulnerability and what that means to them but you need to pay attention when they show up to the shoot okay again bodies their body doesn't lie just like your body doesn't lie their body

language and the things they reach for first do not lie so the first thing they pull out of their bag you better photograph them in that there's a reason they pulled that out first example Melissa right here she showed up to her shoot and she pulls out this beautiful glittering swimsuit cover-up with like all these like gemstones and pearls on it she's like Mitzi you know what's funny I've actually never worn this but one of the things that people have always told me is I'm too much and so I bought this swimsuit cover-up but I won't wear it because I think people will think I'm too much so like I thought

I should probably bring it for the shoot right and I was like yes like you understand the point and we did that as her show some skin outfit and she bought by far the most photos from that outfit like she just was like spinning around in it and feeling amazing and it was so great but then you also need to pay attention to what they don't show you like what's the thing that stays in their bag the thing that they still sweat it over and thought about at home and still packed and then they got to your studio and they didn't pull it out to show you be very interested in what that is

for instance Jess and Carly they came for their session and we do the shoot two different like a dark outfit and a light outfit we do the photos they're going to change I'm like okay we're gonna put the images on my computer and then we're gonna look through them I'm so excited did was this like easier or harder than you guys thought or like what are your feelings about it and Jess on the right she goes well it's a lot easier than I thought because I thought we were gonna have to strip down I was like you brought stuff for that she was like well yeah we brought like Calvin Klein like bra and

underwear but I said you didn't show me that when you got here she goes that's because I was in the bathroom Carly didn't want to show you because they don't want to wear it and so I so we all laughed about it and Carly was like yeah and I was like we'll go put it on so they did and I like you know set up my last setup again and turn my light back on and stuff and then we got some of like both of our favorite photos from the whole shoot and they ended up like putting that one right there on their wall in their bedroom so pay attention to what they show

you first pay attention to what they don't show you and if they bring like ten options be like okay this or this what do you like better and just make them decide between two things it's easier than ten and then do that until you have it narrowed down and your job as the portrait photographer is also to convert this outfit into black and white because if they bring a pink outfit and a sage green outfit and you photograph both they're going to look the same tone in black

and white understand so you just want to photograph them in things that look different or will accentuate different parts of their body or whatever I also

love stripes in black and white I think they look cool or pay attention to textures stuff like that because when you narrow it down to three outfits you want those to be distinct so for the shoot here's the most important thing about this type of shoot okay let me tell you right now you prepare for this shoot by loving yourself you prepare for this type of shoot by taking such damn good care of yourself that you can hold space for whatever they bring through that door you don't need anything from them you don't need to be heard you don't need to be seen you don't need to be validated you simply say I'm so

glad you're here today show me your clothes oh yeah that's great all right come over here shoot sit on the floor how do I sit on the floor however you sit on the floor when you sit on the floor how do you sit like that okay great you play the music and you just start shooting and you just lead them through this dance and you're not gonna spend more than like five six seven minutes on one outfit why do you need to if you do you're gonna have like 4,000 images to look through with them and that's miserable for everybody so just keep it quick and intentional so first outfit we're gonna do

movement and I love to start people seated because standing is really awkward especially when you don't have props and stuff so when people are sitting on the floor they're automatically going to let their guard down so like this photo and like this photo right here that was right at the beginning of the shoot and for that I like to blast 80s music because no one can take themselves too seriously when you know like I said before time after time by Cyndi Lauper comes on I love it cuz we'll be swaying and I'll be like okay now just like give yourself a hug like pretend you're just like at 80s prom with yourself right and

just be just cheese it up just have fun with it just move and some people are gonna dance like this they're gonna be like and then later when they post about their photos they're gonna be like I dance like no one was watching you're just like great that's that was big for you like love it and then other people are just out there like breaking into a whole dance routine that they know and it's great so it's really important that you are the silliest one in the room and again for me this has been unlearning that I'm wrong because for so long like I would like I'd wear like a full-fitted blazer to

a photo shoot to try to like be taken more seriously or look more professional even though like it's very hard to like adjust light stands and stuff in like professional clothing or you know try to talk a certain way or whatever now I'm like the more myself I am with my clients the more they're themselves with me they're not you're not their attorney all right like you're not their vet they're not trying to come in for like a business casual experience with like small talk and what that doesn't do anyone any good if you're saying hey you're gonna come to this space and I'm just gonna accept you as you are then like

accept yourself as you are and show up as you so for outfit two I call this one expressions it's like this it's like some of those up there use this posing table right here and I love this part of the shoot because as soon as we've done like the first we've done like a song or two and we've been like dancing and they're moving and they're just laughing and they've told me stories and I've asked them questions and I'm just shot we spent a lot of time usually on the floor and then I'm like okay let's go to your next outfit so then they go and for the expressions outfit I either have them

keep that first one on or they go into their next one I just think about how is it gonna photograph just like head and shoulders right cuz some things like are better photograph better full body it shows the piece off better but I'm just like ooh what do I think it's just gonna look really nice and really sharp as black and white close-up so I haven't wear that and I love this part it's inspired by my son's favorite bedtime book which is I remember in my heart I think it's called it's like in my heart a book of feelings so I just started rattling off the feelings from that book since I read

it a thousand times and I was like shy scared happy sad and I throw other ones in like surprised and I tell people give me this expression a hundred and ten percent and use your arms to use your hands you can use this whole upper body and they're seated there they've got that posing table like nestled in and they're they'll just go for it and my favorite part about it is this it's all the giggles in between the expressions it's the hand movements that go up another thing I have people do during this one is I ask them to tell me their most embarrassing story and then I usually tell them mine and mine's

like way worse so then they usually laugh at me too and it's great because it helps people let their guard down you get to really know someone by like what they think is the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to them sometimes people tell me a story and I'm just like oh yeah like that's not bad at all like but it's just really interesting to hear that from someone and then they will use all of their most organic hand gestures and facial expressions when they tell you that story they will not even be aware of it and it's so interesting because people always keep those photos they will always pick them and buy

them because they're like oh that is how I look when I'm telling a story or the you know this or like oh I put my hand up like that when I'm talking that's how my dad always did that right and part of the reason that this series in the AS I AM session is so important to me is because I think these photos are of expressions that normally don't get photographed in people they normally don't get documented these are normally outtakes right and yet I had a client and she she's in her 50s had never done a photo shoot by herself before it was very out of her comfort zone she was really like

I could tell she's like talking herself into it like as we're doing it but as we looked through the photos she picked all these ones of her different like nuanced expressions and stuff she goes I just think about my grandfather what I wouldn't give to have a book of photos of him like this we're all gonna die someday that's just the reality and if you face cancer you've like face that in a different way like what are you gonna leave behind what are you gonna tell people they should

leave behind what's worthwhile yeah photos like this awesome beautiful love it her mother made her that gown stunning but like what about her confused face

that's just as valuable so we run through the expressions and then if they're like really into it or they're a very dancey person I'll usually have them get up from the posing table and like do some more like full body dancing movement and then it's body time outfit three so I call this show some skin I'll talk more about it in a minute but your goal is just to hold space for people as you lead them in this stance you're open you're judgment-free have you heard of the process versus product paradox so fascinating I'm gonna give you the quick version it's the idea that when you focus on the product and you focus

on the product and you're worried that the product isn't going to be the perfect product and you're so worried oh it don't can't mess it up because then the product won't be right you miss the process and inevitably have an unsatisfactory product but when you focus on the process and just the next step in front of you the product is and it's the best product it can be because you focused on the process what process of portraits would light you up what portrait process would just literally make you dance when it's over because you can't contain it in your body and bring you joy and fill you up what does that process look like

because I think it's different for all of us the creative process is as unique as each one of us is yeah we just talk and dance the whole time that's what I tell people for these sessions that is true I have a very it's very structured it really is I'm not just gonna like because we've got a time limit we can't let this linger too long I'm not gonna take 5,000 photos that's miserable to go through so I do have a process but then within the process we just are show some skin is not boudoir and I want to be really clear about that because in our society we tend to

think that if a woman takes any of her clothes off it is completely for the male gaze that is not true women can take their clothes off for many reasons people can have art created of them and their bodies for many reasons other than like sexy photos for him for his eyes only right and there's nothing wrong with that that's fine I've done that for many people for many years and it's great but limiting portrait photography especially of women to that is very it makes me very sad but also you're missing out on a whole market you know how many single women come to me even for like my fully stylized retouch boudoir

shoots all the time it's 2023 right we can have credit cards and own our houses now like we can also just be like oh I want to look at my look good and just like celebrate that right so don't limit people to this and whenever she came for her AS I AM she was like I want to do some like fine art nude and she was she's the only person so far who signed a release for her fine art nude that I could show to the world so thank you for that but she told me this she's never felt more beautiful in any photo in her whole life than that one like that's freedom

to me how much bandwidth do you think in her head every day is taken up by like hating herself or trying to change herself not very much less all the time I love boudoir it's just not what this is and so it's important to explain that to your clients because people will assume that's what it is

oh I'm taking some clothes off its sexy photos right it's not necessarily the case for some people it means I'm buttoning a little more of their shirt than they normally would and for others that means fine art nude and that's exactly what I tell them in their in their preparation guide so they understand this can be so many different things and people really surprise me by what they bring like Kristen she brought overalls you'll see that in a second I have one client she brought a white sheet it's interesting I love the white sheet in my studio I do it all the time with my retouched work but she's like I brought this white sheet from home and I was like great let's use it

so these are all a few different people's interpretation of show some skin the one on the end there she wanted to do like a spooky virgin she got a 30 inch wall portrait of that it's awesome she's wearing overalls she's wearing a swimsuit cover-up but she just liked the material in the fabric and she wanted to bring something that was light colored like her hair oh man this one gets me I photographed the same client a year ago the way she reacted to her photos though again she did get my top package she said thank you so much I love these photos but when we were looking through them a year ago okay

she did like a fully retouched stylized session there were so many photos where she go oh no not that oh no oh no no no no no like skip I was like okay okay when she did this shoot with me that didn't happen once and this photo in particular she got choked up and she said to me she was saying it in the context of like me seeing her this way through my camera okay this is true love and in that moment I was like no Nikki you're seeing yourself that way yes it started with me because I was willing to look at myself and love myself exactly AS I AM but you chose

to see true love in this photo because you chose it the instant reveal is so powerful because it's like oh my god we just shot all these photos let's just look at all of them and what I tell people is again I keep leading the dance with them I'm still leading them through but I hand them the laptop and I say you see this button with the squiggle on it this is a flag I want you to flag every photo you have a reaction to I don't say you like I don't say the good ones I say when you have an emotional reaction to a photo I want you to flag it and I hand over the reins to them that was scary to do at first most in-person sales classes will tell you not to do that you don't give the control over to the client but in this moment it's collaborative and I do and

I've done it 25 times now and it blows me away every time and it's one of the biggest things that people tell me they love about the session so I say okay flag it you have a reaction flag so when we're looking through them together we'll just be like oh my god we'll be like laughing or if they're like oh that looks like my dad or they're like oh my god that's so funny or like oh that's my nose crinkle or if I'm sitting there and I'm like oh my god I can hear your laugh in that one when either of us speaks up they just they flag the photo and they always flag

about a quarter of them it's always about 25% every time so interesting because I shoot between 300 and 400 photos usually sometimes a little more if I'm get a little trigger-happy but I try to keep it to three to four hundred and they pretty much always flag like a quarter or a third of the photos and remember you're setting the stage for this just like back when I was doing these

types of sessions with a different mindset I'd be like okay so let's talk retouching what do you want me to fix about your photos essentially like just like I set the tone there for this I'm like oh my god this is

like my one of my top ten of this whole session you have to get that one it's so good I speak up and I say that and I speak their uniqueness and I say oh my gosh this one this shows your strength oh this one is so funny this one just cracks me up or I just speak the descriptive words and I just say the things I'm already seeing these beautiful wonderful people I just speak up and say it and they go really I'm like yes okay they just needed someone else to give them permission to accept themselves and this is the biggest thing that surprised me through this whole process they purposely choose

the outtakes they purposely if especially if they're trying to narrow between like two kind of similar photos right if one's kind of more like this and one like oh just caught off guard and the other one's a little bit more like a blank they'll choose like the blank one because they understand that that's the point of this is to get those really unique really sincere moments so your job is just to listen and hold space when they start crying or open up to you about something in that moment just listen you don't have to give them advice not to tell them anything about it you're not their therapist hold that space you know

how rare it is in this day and age to like have someone just hold space for you and listen to you say thanks for sharing that with me I love these photos that you chose of yourself I love the reason you just told me you chose that that's amazing that inspires me because it does and go through the photos again so if you flag like a hundred be like okay go through them a second time and then you tell them the five-star the ones that really stand out to them and then when they five-star em you sit back and say okay this is how much that costs and then you shut up

the number one question I get is how do you price this and like I mentioned before if you believe that the no retouching and styling and fixing makes this portrait less valuable this belief is where you start go journal about that say wow why do I believe that the value of this experience so heavily relies on these factors just look at it get curious reflect on it deconstruct the old belief and then heal and then just build a new way in love I think we forget sometimes as creatives that like we get to do things however we want like we call the shots we're the weirdos you get that right like we're the ones like all the people out there who just want to consume there's plenty of people who like they're consumers we're creators we're putting the imagery out into the world that makes people determine what's valuable and what's not and what's worthy and what's not and how bodies are allowed to look and how they're not like

we are the curators and the teachers we are the ones who are saying this is what is worthy and we get to decide whatever that is what you hope to heal in others heal it in you first I think many of us who are portrait photographers we are like I just really see the beauty the beauty and other people and I want to show it to them and that's true it's a cliché for a reason we want to show people that they're beautiful and they're worthy and they can be proud of photos of themselves and they can be proud of who they are that's why we got into this right it's not because like

being self-employed is just super easy and fun and being a creative is like just so easy and you're just always really sure of yourself and the money just comes to you like what right that's not the case at all we do this work because we care about it and because we're trying to heal things and other people but what we have to do is like turn the mirror back on us and realize it starts with us first when you're free you can hold space for others to experience freedom I've ever talked to someone that you just met and they just like I don't know for me it's like when they say like

not just self-deprecating humor but when someone is like clearly not trying to be impressive you know what I mean about those people those are the people you like want to hang out with at parties because they're just like who they are this kick their feet up talk about whatever hold space for you listen to what you have to say it's really quite easy and I think we overthink it when we're trying to get our validation from our clients like I'm a very successful creative I have a really good process that I'm very important and look at all these medals I have and look how I'm the best at this at creating and all

this so and it's like it's easy to get wrapped up and all of that but the reality is like if you're just free and you let yourself be who you are then like other people feel like they can be free with you too this is my most recent self-portrait I made it a few weeks ago again hilarious when you think about the one I talked about earlier all my lighting gear was packed up again I didn't even travel that much in the last few years but I it hit me the mood struck I wanted to make this before I left for work for the day and then I was going on a trip

but I was going on trip and all my lighting gear was like packed up and carry-ons very carefully at home so I was like oh dang it and I wanted to shoot it actually in that that false corner wall like back there and so I said all right how many gonna shoot this portrait and then I remembered my son and I had been playing with reflections that morning because he found a top of a candle and it was gold and he was like the sunrise was hitting it a certain ways and he was shining it all over the ceiling the walls like wow and so we played with that for like two hours and I remember in the morning being like wow this is so amazing and I'm like sitting there drinking my coffee it's like 7 a.m.

and I'm just like so tired but it was really inspiring and cute so then at 4 p.m. oh my god I don't have my lights and I was like but I have a giant gold reflector and I never use it so got out my big old reflector and I set it down below that middle window right there right as the afternoon Sun was hitting it and it threw the light all the way across the room and then I popped on these gloves I ordered them a few weeks before because I saw them in a movie and I thought they were cool and I was like oh I don't want to use gloves in

something sometime so I ordered them so I had him at the studio then I threw a piece of fabric around my waist and I took the photo within 20 minutes I'd taken a few shots picked my favorite one made it black and white and then when I saw it the word popped into my head whole because this is what alchemy is when you are a creator we pick up all these visuals and these

different pieces of meaning throughout our life and then we store them in our brain and then we kind of digest them and make them our own and then we put them back out into something new and for me language is how I make sense of everything but all of my feelings and my thoughts come to me in images first and so the self-portrait process and then how I photograph other people the portraiture process for me is sacred because in that moment I looked at the photo and I said whole my

imperfections are not something I have to hide or fix because they make me who I am and I believed it now the world needs photographers who embrace imperfection and break the rules and hold space for people to just be who they are if we don't do it who's gonna do it it starts with us but first it starts with you sit on the stool wrong.

3: LIGHTING AND GEAR

When I talk about lighting and camera settings and lens focal length and details like that, I'm going to tell you what I do, and you're welcome to try it as a starting off point. But if you just copy what I do and say that this type of raw session is yours, you're really going to limit yourself, and I'll tell you why. Why? When it comes to the tools we photographers use and why we use them, it takes some trial and error. It takes learning the different tools and what they do so you have them all in your tool belt, and then you can just pull those out as needed for the situation, for the result you want to have. Lighting style is no different.

I know in the portrait photography world, we tend to talk about lighting like just studio lighting and strobes versus natural light. Every lighting style is light, and photograph means painting with light. So what we want to do is find the lighting style that conveys the mood and the feeling that we want the image to communicate.

Just like when a client comes to you and says, I want a professional photo, well, the images come to mind for that, don't they? The clothing style, something business-y, right? The pose, the lighting, all of that. We've all done enough headshots to know this type of thing communicates professional.

So when you're doing a raw portrait series, what's the type of lighting that's going to work for you as the photographer leading the person through this? What's the lighting style that's going to not get in the way of you connecting with your client? What's the lens focal length that is going to make the most sense for the size of studio you shoot in? For me, for instance, I use a 50 millimeter lens and that's mainly what I've shot on for years despite having lots of other lenses in my bag. Because for me as a portrait photographer, I need the 50 millimeter focal length for two reasons. One, it doesn't distort. It's the same focal length your eyes see with.

But the second reason is because I can talk. At a low volume like this and I can shoot without going, now move your chin down and yell at them across the room. I can say eyes down, take a deep breath and when you're ready, just look right back up at me just in that tone. That's why I use this lens.

So you're going to have the reasons why you use the lenses you use. You're going to have the reasons why you use the lighting you use. For me, I use one light for my raw portrait sessions. This is a 60 inch Octabox on one strobe. I have my remote on my camera and I usually have it at around like one over 64 power.

Why is that? Well, I tried to adjust my other settings around that so that my battery lasts as long as possible. And I try not to have to blast a ton of light if I don't have to, because I don't want to blow my gear in all the time. Okay. These are the reasons. I have very silly reasons for many of the technical decisions I make, and it's because I'm just not a gear head. It's not who I am.

That's not why I got into this and half the time when someone asks me, Oh, what camera are you shooting on? I have to like turn and look at the front again. By the way, this is a Nikon D850

and this is a Sigma 50 millimeter 1.4 art lens. I love it. It's been on my camera nonstop for several years. So when it comes to lighting and why I make certain decisions when it comes to light, I want to talk a little bit more about how my lighting setup for this type of shoot changes between each of the three sections and the why behind how I got there. Because the first time I did a session like this, I didn't light it this way. I didn't direct it in this way. I kind of did like 10% of what I now do because I was still evolving the process and creating it. But from the beginning I said, you know what, I'm going to use one light. I really only started to learn and get good at studio lighting in the past couple of years, despite owning a business for 10 years.

And I had to learn studio lighting in a way that made sense to me. And that was very feeling oriented because nothing takes me out of a beautiful connective moment with like another human being in this space than math. Okay. It's not how my brain works. And if you're someone who's like, I want to do raw emotive portrait sessions, it's probably not how your brain works either. What I started to do was just use one light. I went back to one light. I had gotten really good and comfortable with shooting with like two, then three, then four lights. I could get to the point where I could see it and I could imagine it. And I could say, Ooh, here's how I'm going to craft this light to get this feeling.

I'd done it enough to get there. And then for this type of shoot, I was like, Oh, I'm scaling it back to one. And I had several reasons why. The first reason is I wanted it to set up in a spot that would create contrast. I knew this was going to be black and white, and I wanted light and I wanted very obvious shadow. So for pretty much all of these shoots, I'm using not just my light, but also a black V flat for negative fill, because it creates more shadows on the opposite side of the face. I messed with some split light a few times. I messed with some really short lighting and some more dramatic and I've varied it depending on the client and the shoot as I felt like it. But for the most part, I'm using this and I'm just doing loop lighting, just a basic portrait style and I'm broad lighting pretty much everybody besides that. I really just want the contrast and I want to focus on the face. I want to light up my backdrop, especially for my movement portion. I want to be able, the whole body to be lit up, but I want eyes to go to the face first. So that's kind of my focal point with this light. And it's obviously going to light up the backdrop too.

So boom. That's why I like my movement portion like that.

Now the second part, expressions, that's where I move it off of the textured backdrop. And I go to just a neutral backdrop and here, you know what I used to do? I used to sit on the opposite end of the room. I had a seamless white backdrop all set up and then I wasn't doing full body over there anyway. I was just really focusing close in like head and shoulders on the posing table. And so then one day I was like, I have a white wall right there. Why aren't I just using that as the background? So I just started lighting it like that and it looks the same and it's a lot less work. So a white wall, black posing table, have them at least six or seven feet away from the wall. And then again, black V flats on either side. Because when I'm lighting expressions, I take that same one light, bring it higher up and I light it more like a butterfly. This is also so great when your clients have glasses, because for this type of shoot, many people want to leave their glasses on.

So when you have that light more above them, you don't have to worry about glasses glare, even though they're going to be moving their head all around and up and down and laughing and having their hands and everything. You're not going to have just a big reflection of a light blowing their eye out for the third part of the shoot, the body and skin portion, that one just evolved very naturally because for that, I didn't want your attention to just go to the face first. I wanted it to go across the whole body. And I think about light like water. That's how I can really visualize it. So if this was like a giant shower head, I want you to think about where the water would hit.

And so when I light for the movement portion of the shoot, I bring that light I direct it away from the client and pass them. It's called feathering the light. You might be familiar, but it's essentially the idea that like, you're not aiming this water source at your client, you're putting it just past them. Like they might just get a little bit of like the spray from the side. you're just having them get some of that residual light. So usually the only camera setting that I need to change by that portion of the shoot is I bump my ISO up a little bit, or I bump my aperture a little bit more open, right? Because my light's less direct, so it's going to be a little darker. The other cool effect that that has in the final images, which, um, I'll compare two for you, one from the first set, movement, and one from the third set, body and skin, is that the amount of light hitting the backdrop significantly changes. So I shoot those two parts of this, the shot on the same neutral textured backdrops. But when I've moved the light that second time, a lot less of it hits the backdrop. It goes past the backdrop. So it looks like a completely different setup. It's black and white. One of the cool things about black and white is that depending how much you like the backdrop can change the mood of the photo completely. The word mood is really interesting too, because that's what my clients keep using when they see the photos from the body portion of the shoot, with the light that just kind of washes past them. They'll say, oh, that's a whole mood. Oh, that's so moody.

It's just really even, and I'm not making the face brighter than any of the rest of them.

So the reason I did that was again, because I thought I want my light to serve the viewer in the way that it just brings the attention to the whole body as one cohesive thing and not just the expression first, which again is the opposite of the expression part, which is close up blast the face with light, dark posing table underneath, dark V flats on either side, maximum contrast.

So as you play with these different things, look at the why and look at what makes you excited. Look at the light that makes you go, ah, just like if you were styling someone in a gown for a beautiful, luxurious photo shoot you'd be like oh that gold satin gown is just perfect on you. Find the light that does that same feeling for people depending on what the goal is and play with different lighting styles so you can find what works for you. When it comes to directing and posing this shoot one question I got recently is, well what do you do when you get stuck, and I said oh like during the

shoot like while you're directing and moving through it and she said, yeah what do you do when you're just stuck and it's not working you don't know what to do next. I said that means it's time to move on, that means it's time to change. It's easy to think that oh when i get to a point where i'm not sure how to pose them next or maybe the shirt isn't photographing in the way that I was hoping it would or this thing is happening it's easy to want to just kind of keep refining that direction you're going and like get in this tunnel vision of like I gotta make it work gotta make it work. When the best thing you can do from the start is just go, oh, this doesn't feel great. I'm gonna try something totally different so that's when it's time to switch up the lighting, switch the outfit, change the music, change something in a big way. Look at it from a completely different angle. You're standing up, get on the floor. If you're sitting, stand up. If you're across the room, get up close. If you're up close, go across the room and get a beautiful dirty frame shot showing the whole situation and then pay attention to where your eye goes first and go there. There's so many different things you can do in that moment. So what I'm going to encourage you to do is to fight the urge to just force this one idea in your head to happen because what you're probably doing in this moment is focusing on the product when you should be focused on the process. Process versus product paradox. When we walk along the process and we just pay attention to the next thing in front of us, we end up with a product that's essentially the best product it can be for that process but if we get so concerned about what the final product is we end up not focusing on the process and we're usually a lot worse off. So just focus on the process and trust it there's going to be some outfits where you take a hundred photos in that outfit and there's going to be others where you take 20 because you were done at that point so learn the cues in your body. De Ron Vera spoke at the portrait masters conference in 2019 and I will never forget him up there on the stage speaking doing this beautiful live shoot and this photo came up at one point that he had just shot live for everybody and he said when the photo makes you feel happy and big inside.

And those words have stuck with me ever since.

So when it makes you feel happy and big pay attention to when you're shooting. When you shoot a photo and you go AAAAHHH...keep going that direction. When you shoot a photo and then you feel smaller pay attention to that get out of that space move toward the thing that lights you up. This is true for lighting styles. This is true for directing. This is true for the environment of your studio. This is true for what tools you end up using in your tool belt. Because all the thing you know about this machine right here, and all the things you know about this. All the knowledge you have about these different things and how you can manipulate them and use them to create a final product. They're like a rolodex in your brain. And so when you feel a certain way and go, oh, I feel like this and this lighting style that I've done in the past, oh, that one, it feels like that. I'm going to light it like that.

You know when you feel it. So start paying attention to how you feel about these things because raw portrait sessions are all about feelings.

4. PRICING AND PRODUCTS

So, when it comes to your pricing and your products, which is one of the biggest questions I've been getting from photographers about these raw portrait sessions, is I want you to think about it the same way you price all of your shoots. This is not any less valuable. And the number one question I keep getting is, I want to offer this type of session, Mitzi, but like, how do you price it? And that was one of my big blocks for a really long time. And then I just had to realize it's because I was treating this session as less valuable just because I didn't have as much cost involved. I wasn't hiring a hair and makeup artist, not hiring a retoucher, or if you do your own spending hours and hours retouching. So it's easy to think, well, I need to charge less, but you don't. And what's really amazing is that my studios had a \$3,600 sales average for several years in my small town, but that's for my luxurious, highly styled photo shoots with hair and makeup and full wardrobe and a big, long experience and a separate reveal a week later and all of that. That's a \$3,600 sales average. But for my raw portrait sessions, I'm maintaining a \$3,300 sales average. And I do this entire session and reveal in slightly longer amount of time than it takes someone to just go through hair and makeup. It's like an hour and a half to two hours total. That's the whole raw portrait session shoot, the reveal, and then just processing the black and white photos and delivering them. So these are more profitable. These can be incredibly profitable. And one of the cool things about it is if you have, you know, a working portrait studio where you're already offering a certain type of genre that you're specializing in, or you've kind of got your flow down, you can add this to your offering at relatively no cost to you and a very small time investment because yeah, your first few shoots, you're going to have to invite people. You're going to have to go out and seek out people and invite them into this experience. And so we talk about that in the marketing video, but when it comes to the pricing of products, you have to understand that it's all connected. It's all connected and it's all part of one experience. So you've probably heard the old mantra. You can't sell what you don't love.

So as long as you love the products you're offering, you will sell them.

I've seen this in my own studio, especially with wall portraits. I used to offer wall portraits in a style that was popular several years ago, but like I didn't really resonate with. And then about four years ago, I started to offer a fine art piece with a frame that I really liked and this buttery paper and guess what? I sell it almost every time and it's because I love it. So as long as you love your products, you're going to sell them. So see what's out there. And that's a benefit of looking online, ordering catalogs, watching videos, um, and going to conferences and trade shows. Just walk around and see what you walk up to and pick up and go, Ooh, I want that. Cause if it's something you want, your clients will want it too. So the products I'm going to talk about today are two that I get from Graffi studio in Italy. They are phenomenal to work with just as a business, as human beings and their product quality is unmatched. I have worked with so many labs in the last decade. Graffi continues to be just phenomenal, um, and their customer service is amazing too. So the first product I'm going to talk about is the storybook.

So leather bound it's hand-stitched in Italy on this gorgeous buttery Amalfi paper. If you've ever experienced the paper, you know what I'm talking about. It's so beautiful, like torn edge and black and white looks so gorgeous in it. So I was drawn to this product, and I started offering it and I put, AS I AM on it. And this was my, when I started out just my limited edition Bra portrait sessions product. Now it's become one of my main products and it's really popular. Um, so this book is suited really well for this type of shoot because it's a minimum of 16 pages and a maximum of 44. And so I'll come back to that in a minute, but the quantity is a really important part of this shoot when I'm doing the highly stylized glamour, you know, and branding and stuff like that.

People often walk out with 10 to 20 images. That's a pretty good variety. You're going more for like individuality of each image more than quantity. In this type of shoot, the quantity is more important because you're telling a story. So my, like I said, my, uh, more glamorous, highly stylized shoots, the packages are like 10, 15, 20 images. For this it's 20, 30 and 44 at a slightly higher price point, but certainly not double, even though the images are more, cause it just makes sense for this. And it makes sense to me. And then I've got this beautiful nine up again, a product that I loved and, but I never offered until I started these raw portrait sessions. And this exact client had a really cool experience with this product because she did her session with me. She ordered the storybook cause she was like the sixth or seventh person I photographed for my raw portrait session. So she ordered this book, the biggest one.

And in the meantime, I noticed this product. And so I ordered a sample from Grafi. I was like, let's just see how it is. You know, I think it would work well. So I ordered it with some of my favorite images from her shoot. It happened to ship to my studio the day she came to pick up her storybook. So it's like three weeks after her shoot and on her way over to the studio, she had texted me, Hey Mitzi, um, do you have a few minutes to chat when I get there? Because there's actually another product I want to talk to you about ordering. I was like, yeah, for sure. Just come on up. So she comes up to the studio to pick up her storybook. And I had just unwrapped this sample with her photos in it. And she's like, Hey, so you know that, and she looks over and she's like that I want that.

And right in that moment, I was like, Oh, like, yeah, this is a sample I just got. Do you just want to buy this one? She was like, yes. And just hands me her credit card. She didn't even ask how much it cost. Didn't even ask.

It's like, what did I, I think I said, I was like, sure. \$2,200. I just said that. She was like, Oh, that's perfect. Just right there. We boxed it back up, took it home. I ordered another sample for my studio. Like what she told me was my husband loves these photos so much. And he couldn't pick one to put up in his office. And he asked me to get something where there were multiple photos together.

There you go. So this product is amazing. A lot of people added on to their order. And when you price this at like a couple thousand dollars, and then this starts at a couple thousand, I mean, you're just almost doubling your sale right there. You got two products that go really well

together. And I've had one person buy just this and then they added some digitals on. But most people get the storybook and then they add either just like a single wall portrait or something like this. Now, this is priced a little higher than just my individual wall portraits, just because they get nine digital files with it, too. Same with my book. Okay. I do print and digital in tandem because one of the things I tell my clients is digital is a supplement, not a substitution.

So I don't say like, no, you can't just buy digital. People can. I just kind of price it almost the same. So they're like, Oh, well, why don't I just get the product too? Because I want them to have this product. And I actually got to see a client in Phoenix this week who I photographed her raw portrait session in May. And she said that she keeps this storybook next to her bed and she sees it every day. She sees it at night before she goes to sleep. She sees it when she wakes up every morning and it reminds her to show up as she is. So that's a really powerful, um, tool. And honestly, like a perpetual marketing piece that you're keeping in people's homes and people's lives when you print your work and you're proud of it and you get something people, something that they want to display.

They're always thinking about you. They're thinking about that experience. So they're going to continue to call you. They're going to continue to refer their friends. All right. So I know you're wondering, okay, Mitzi, how much do you charge for this? So I was at a point with my portrait studio for, like I said, my luxurious, glamorous photo shoots. I was charging \$650 for a session fee that would include hair and makeup, um, a fully guided photo shoot with five outfits. And then there was no credit toward portraits in that. So when I started offering my raw portrait sessions, I said, okay, well, I have no cost involved. So I'm just going to tell people it's \$650. And then that is completely applied toward their portrait purchase. And portraits start at \$300 each or collections start at 1800. Again, same as for my stylized shoots. But then I said, my limited edition product that is absolutely perfect for this type of shoot is the storybook. And it starts at \$2,600 for 20 images.

So you see the collection started at \$1,800 for 10 photos or \$2,600 for 20, because it's this, and it just made sense to everyone. And so by the time they came in for their shoot, they'd already paid the \$650 to book it. They knew they were getting that completely toward their portrait purchase. So when they saw that for \$2,600, they're like, well, so that's 1950. And also 1950 sounds like a lot less than 2000 to people. Like it's starts with a one, not a two feels less. So they're like, okay, 1950. And people would put that, or they put that 650 toward a bigger book or a bigger one. And it was just a really, it was just a really organic sale. It just happened because it's so aligned.

It makes sense. And like I said, I love it and I'm excited about it. And this is a one-of-a-kind product. And when I hand this to people and I'm like, this is hand-bound, hand-stitched leather made in Italy on Amalfi paper, this type, this style of book has been around for like 300 years. Like this is going to outlive you. When you have the respect for these types of products, I mean, your clients can't help, but respect them too. And one of my clients, I remember she came in for her shoot. She was someone actually at the beginning who I had never photographed before at

all. Didn't know her. She just saw someone social media and booked me, had never done photos for herself in her life. She's retired, you know, empty nester, whatever.

And she was like, she saw this book and she had just chosen all of her images to go in it. And she started to cry, and she said, what I wouldn't give to have a book like this of images of my dad.

But now he's, he's passed on.

And I just thought these type of photos, like this emotion, like these are what we want to archive forever. Because when you open up a book and there's someone you love in that book and you can hear their laugh and you can see their, the way they do this, you could see their hand gestures. You could see all these different faces. It just transports you back into that person's presence. So yeah, it's powerful for your client, but it's powerful for everyone who loves them. And so understanding the point of this and the why behind it, just again, it just helps the sale happen. So naturally you're just guiding them towards the best way to cherish their portraits. So that being said, prices should never be a surprise ever. Needs to be in your initial booking before someone books with you.

They better know exactly what the expectations are. They need to know exactly what everything's going to cost. And the more upfront you are about that at the beginning, the better everything goes. So the other part of that is you never know who is going to spend money with you. And the moment several years ago that I stopped judging people like, oh, they'll probably only spend this much or, Oh, they have this career. So they'll probably just, the moment I just stopped doing that, the moment my sales increased because I, I don't pretend to assume what anyone's going to spend. You just don't know. And maybe they think they're going to come in and shoot with you and only buy one.

Maybe that's just because every other experience they had with a photographer, they only liked one photo, but your job is to give them such a great experience that they love lots of photos and they're excited to purchase them because it's just an exchange of value. You give a valuable product and service. The value comes back to you. And in our society and time and place, it is in American dollars probably. Or if you're in Europe, it's in pounds or whatever euros. If you're in the UK, it's pounds. Like that's the number is just the number. And if saying to someone collections start at \$2,000 freaks you out or makes you uncomfortable, start saying it out loud and realize that money is neutral. All of this is neutral. Just like bodies are neutral. We put the meaning on it. We put the good or the bad or the big or the small or whatever. So it just is what it is. And I want you to price your work at a point where you not only can just pay yourself a good wage, but so that you can have the life that you want. Can I crank out five of these sessions, five days a week, 365?

No, I don't have the energy or capacity for that as a creative, there's no way. So I don't price them as if I can do that. I price them as this is how much money I want to make in a year. This is how many sessions I can do and serve people well.

And then I'll just do the math and I'm like, okay, well, this needs to be my average. So whatever your average needs to be, I want that to be your middle package.

So like Sue Bryce has always taught through the portrait system and all that education, you want to do three packages, small, medium, and large. So that's what I did for this small, medium, large. And you want to add the most value to your top package. So if people get the 44 image storybook with me, which is \$4,600, they get a thousand dollars of portrait, uh, wall portrait credit with that. So that's enough for one 20 inch wall portrait, or they can put it toward this, which is 1750, or they can put it toward one huge, like 60 inch portrait if they want. I mean, they get a thousand dollars of wall portrait credit. So it's just a way to like upsell to the wall portrait and add value. The other thing I offer is, especially at the beginning of these shoots, I also said, Hey, if you get the top book collection with 44 images, you can have all 120 or whatever of your favorites digitally, because I'm not retouching them. I'm literally for each of my three lighting setups, I'm doing, I'm custom black and white toning one image, making sure the contrast and exposure and everything's right. And I'm just copying and pasting that settings to the rest of that chunk.

So I just do that export all of them. So exporting 120 images versus 44, it only takes like a few more minutes. So that can be a value add to, if you're like, yeah, you can get all your favorite digital files, boom, whatever, like whatever feels good to you, whatever feels in alignment with what you want to offer and whatever serves your client. Well, offer that in the moment to close that sale. And one of the things that I want to really stress as far as the marketing part of this pricing, that is really helpful. And again, that'll be in the marketing video is that when you are offering a new type of session and you want to price it the same as your other stuff, market it to the people who have already worked with you.

They already know your prices. They've, you probably have their credit card information still saved in your computer. You can just say, Oh yeah, the session is \$650. Oh yeah, of course it is. I paid that last time. They know what to expect. They know the price point. So you can throw in whatever bonuses you want. If you want to, to give them an incentive to book with you, but just that helps right there. You don't have to reeducate anyone. The pricing and products is like I said, small, medium and large, keep it simple, keep it something that feels good to you, but do not undervalue this type of session because it's just as valuable as anything else. So structured in a way that makes you excited.

Think about what would you want to buy from a shoot like this? How would you want to enjoy the images and offer that to other people. Design your dream and then invite other people to come along with it. Because if you're just constantly like putting on your Instagram story, do you guys like albums better or these prints better? Or do you like this? And like just trying to have the masses, like give you feed- people don't know what they want. It's your job to tell them what they want and to say, stand up in your power confidently and say, this is what I want to offer you. So know your pricing, know your products, know the experience you want to offer. And that way, when you're sitting there, like I was recently with a client who just went through his images and

narrowed it down to 44 favorites, you can just look and go, Oh 44. That's my top storybook collection. It's \$4,600.

And then shut up, wait for him to say something.

And in that moment, he turned to me and he was like, well, I love these. I can't narrow any more down. Okay. And handed me his credit card. And I just invited him to come do a shoot so I could build up my portfolio with straight dudes for this project.

I told him the prices ahead of time. I even told him there was no session fee just for him. And then he loved the experience. He loved the products. Boom top package. It's really that simple. So craft your pricing guide. Take a look at my guide PDF. I have all my prices in there and then use that as a blueprint for something that makes sense to you. And next we're going to talk about marketing.

5. MARKETING AND CLIENT PREP

All right. So now we're going to talk about marketing and client prep. Other big questions I get asked is, well, how do you market this? How do you get people to come in and be open to something like this? And then what do you tell them before they get here? So it's really simple. I let their images really speak for themselves. When it comes to posting and sharing these images once you start doing some of these shoots, they will naturally get a lot of interaction because they're saying something bigger. They're saying this person isn't being retouched. This is all black and white. This is a motive. It's connected, right? So naturally when you're posting on places where that visual medium is the thing, you can make reels of this.

You can make reels of still photos. You can make a TikTok videos of just a little behind the scenes or even a little time-lapse and then throw some photos on it. Don't overthink it. Just put these photos out there wherever you can. Now, if you're like, okay, but how do I get the photos to do the marketing? That's where you got to ask people. That's how I started my, um, highly stylized glamorous shoots. I gave out vouchers, just like Sue Bryce taught us to do. I gave out vouchers that said, Hey, this is the dollar amount this is worth, but I want to invite you to come do a photo shoot with me. If you don't like any photos, don't buy them.

But I need you to sign a release so that I can use your photos in my portfolio. People were like, yeah, this is really no different. You just talk about it a little differently. So I bet right now, or once you finish this course, once you go through it, you feel connected to this. If you feel like this is something you want to offer, I want you to sit down and I want you to write a list. Just like if you were having a really special birthday party and I want you to sit down and write out all the people who you want to come to this party.

What I did was I sat down with my pen and paper and I started to just write a list of client names that I had worked with in the previous nine, 10 years, who I wanted to work with again, or who I thought, Ooh, I bet she'd be really into this. Ooh, I bet they'd be like, they'd be willing to go for something like this. And then I filled up a piece of paper really fast, like two columns, like way more than I thought I would. And then I went, Oh yeah, I have like a client database on my computer, like in my QuickBooks. So I'm just going to go through it alphabetically. And every time I read a name, if I get this feeling like, Oh, I would invite them to my party versus, Oh, maybe I should invite them like out of obligation. You know, the difference when I felt that excitement, I was like, Ooh, I wrote their name down. And it's not that I don't like some of my clients. It's just for especially starting out with this very vulnerable and new type of photo shoot. I really wanted the first people who came into, came into my studio and into this space to be people I already had some type of connection with.

And now I know without a doubt, I could do this kind of shoot for anyone, even if I never met him before, because I've done that now, but at the beginning it was a little more tender. So don't overthink it. Like I asked my sister, I asked my best friend, cause we do photo shoots all the

time. And I asked one of my hair and makeup artists to come. I asked, uh, just different people who I was like, you need to come do this shoot.

And it was really amazing because even if I had photographed them before, they had a completely different experience with me here. And then later, even when some people walked in for their, AS I AM raw portrait shoot based off of an online booking, and we hadn't even talked on the phone and they showed up for the shoot still instant connection, because I was willing to hold that space and just meet them where they were. When you're marketing this, write your list. Who do you want to photograph in this way? Who do you want to see? Like through this lens of love, when that lights you up, boom, that's most of it done right there. So write that list of people. It could be five. It could be 50. My first list was 85 people. I was surprised by how many that was. So I sat down and I wrote a letter. Okay. So first you write your list and you write a letter, like an invitation. And you say, Hey, I want to start offering a new type of session.

And even if, even if you just starting out on your portrait photography journey and you haven't done much professional work, send this out to your friends. Doesn't matter either way. This is a new type of session for you. So tell them, I don't know a lot about it yet. I know the format I want to have, I don't have a big portfolio to show you yet. And that's why I want you to be a part of it. I am hand selecting you because I think you would love this. And I want to create this with you. Like who doesn't want to hear that if you opened up an email one day and it was a photographer who maybe photographed your wedding eight years ago, and you guys still follow each other on social media and they reach out and we're like, Hey, like I'm doing this new type of shoot. I think it would be really great for you. Do you want to come try it out?

Like that feels really special with people because it is a genuine invitation. And so when I did this, I said, here's the deal. It, again, these were all past clients. They knew my pricing. Okay. That was another thing that I didn't have to really worry about. But I said, at the end of this, if you want to learn more, click, get started. And I did this through HoneyBook. So I sent out an email, said, get started at the bottom. And then it took them to a booking form online that had my calendar. It had the time slots laid out. It had the pricing. It had, Hey, this is what the shoot is. You know, it's three different outfits and we're just going to showcase you as you are. And we're not going to do retouching or whatever. And I was, I didn't even give a really detailed map about what it was. I just said, Hey, this is what it is. Not necessarily every step of how it goes. I just focused on the what, not the how.

And I communicated that. And then I made a clear link to book. And I said, it's \$650 like my usual session fee, but for all of you who I'm inviting for this first time, you're going to get that entire amount towards your portrait order. And they start at 300 each. So right then the client goes, Oh, so if I book this now, I get to shoot with Mitzi, get to be a part of this special project. And I at least get two portraits out of it, even if I don't want to spend any more money. Now I only had one person do that. She, but it was so special because she was someone who I photographed her senior portraits. I photographed her wedding engagement and wedding and boudoir a few years ago.

And then at the time I was doing this project, she happened to be nine months pregnant. So when she came in for her shoot, like we've got these beautiful maternity photos and she was like, Mitzi, I don't have the budget to spend a bunch of money right now, but I'm really glad I could do this with you. And I was like, yeah, great. And we got these really special, amazing images. And so I also told them, you got to sign a model release. You got to sign a release that any of the photos that you pick from the shoot that you like I can use in my portfolio. Now I do have a caveat when it comes to like nude photos.

If people say, Hey Mitzi, you can show any of them except like these really more intimate ones or more bare ones because of my job or because I'm like, yeah, I just, I run a business in a small Midwest town where like everyone kind of knows everyone. So I'm used to people being like, yeah, you can show these, but not these. And I'm fine with it because really I just want to show some from each one of them. And I'm not trying to show 50 images per client anyway. So when they do the culling for you, it's nice. That's basically what it was. It was, I want to invite you to be a part of something. I want to invite you to be a part of this project.

And then I did a post for every single person I photographed. I put a testimonial with it that I asked them for. And then I use that testimonial in my marketing and I let my clients give me all of the marketing words that I now use for these sessions. I just paid attention to what they said, paid attention to what they wrote me. And there was a day in May when I had photographed about 20 of these people that I read through their testimonials again. And I had like a, my white seamless backdrop, I had to kind of refresh it. So I like chopped it with an exacto knife and I was going to roll a fresh one. And that big piece of paper was on the floor. So I took a Sharpie and I began to just write out the words that I was seeing in the testimonials.

And I just stepped back and looked at them for a little while.

And people said things like free. And they said, I saw myself through a lens of love. They said it was a balm for the soul. They said this was the most therapeutic experience I've ever had. And anytime I get too lost in the details or the business or the self doubt or whatever in this process, I go back to those words because they gave me those words.

And guess what? When I tell people about the shoot, I describe it with those words.

So pay attention to what people say. They're going to give you all your, they're going to tell you what you're good at. They're going to tell you your superpowers and they're going to tell you what they value about this experience. So when it comes to marketing, when it comes to preparing people for this, understand that you can do a lot of preparation in your marketing because you're showing people what to expect. Yeah. You're not giving them every last step of everything you're going to do that just overwhelms people and I don't advise doing it, but tell them how they're going to feel. Tell them how you're going to serve them. Tell them that they're going to experience something really amazing.

People will show up for that. The people who that appeals to will show up and especially people who are on some type of journey to personal growth. They will love this. The people who say things like, you know, Mitzi, this is outside of my comfort zone, but I've begun to learn that the best things happen when I go out of my comfort zone. Do you know how many clients have said that to me? That sentence, regardless of the genre of photo I'm doing for them, I've noticed that's a common thing my clients say.

So I use that in my marketing, and I talk to those people. The more you can get the idea of the person you're talking to and inviting into your head, the more that when that person out there in the world reads it, they'll be like, God, it's like you're talking straight to me because you are. So get that focus, gather the words that they give you and just start by photographing five people maybe in a month, maybe in two months, maybe in a week. I don't care. I started out not knowing if this was going to be profitable or not. Just knowing I needed to do it for my soul to stay alive. So I said, all right, I can book six of these two hour time slots into one month around all my other regular work, just in case this makes me like no profit. And I did. And then I was like, oh, this is very profitable. And, uh, now I can just do more of this and spend more time doing the stuff I want to create and less time behind the camera, behind the computer and doing consultations. So that leads me to the client prep. I do not do an in-person or phone consultation for the raw portrait session. I don't think it's necessary.

They get the invitation. So same thing. If someone messaged me on Facebook, Mitzi, I saw your thing about the, AS I AM session, that looks cool. I'm like, yeah, give me your email. I'll send you all the info. I send them that same invitation then boom. And then they get the booking info. They can click on the date they want. And then once they're booked and in the booking info, the price guides there, then once they're booked, then they get the prep guide. The prep guide says, I'm so excited to give you an amazing experience. All you have to do is show up.

Remember, this is about authenticity. This is about you don't overthink it. And then it says, bring something light, bring something dark and something that shows some skin.

And there's caveats like, Hey, don't worry. Showing skin for some people is fine art nude for other people. It's unbuttoning a couple extra buttons on their shirt. It's totally up to you. We'll figure it out during the shoot. And we do it last because usually people are way more bold and confident and comfortable by the end of the shoot than they are when they're, you know, sitting, just reading your guide. They haven't met you. They haven't been in your studio. They haven't done this shoot, whatever they're, they're going to probably pick something more vulnerable once they're here doing it. So that's it. Three things. Don't say something white. I used to say something white and something black. You know, many people show up sweating to the shoot. They're like Mitzi, I don't have anything white in my closet. It's like, it just showed me like people are so...

They assume they're going to do it wrong. So it's so important for you to just be clear, but also be like pep talking them the whole time. Like, but don't worry about it. As long as you show up, if you forget all your stuff, okay, that's fine. It's AS I AM. You forgot all your stuff that day. You show up and your shirt's wrinkled. Okay. Well, it's AS I AM that boom.

It's fine. Like all of that stress melts away and people are just like, you can just see the relief. And then the other thing is in the prep guide, it's not about the omission of certain things. It's not about, you cannot wear makeup to this. A lot of people, especially photographers think that like people aren't allowed to wear makeup. That's not the case. I say, show up as you do on a normal day.

Some people wear makeup every day. Some people don't. Some people wear a little bit. Some people just do a black cat eye. It's whatever. So you just say, it's a regular day. How do you show up? There's nothing you need to change about your everyday self to be worthy of this photo shoot.

And you can steal that sentence right there. Please do. Because that is the premise. There's nothing you have to change about your everyday self to be worthy of being in front of the camera. So when it comes to the testimonials, I want you to be super proactive about that. I have posted a client testimonial with every single raw portrait session that I have shared. So there was one case where one client said, actually, I'd like you to keep my whole session private. And she paid full price for it. And I was like, Oh yeah, that's fine. I don't make you sign a release if you don't want to, but in every other case, whenever people were saying all this stuff to me at the end of their session, like they're sitting at their reveal.

They're saying these things. I would say, Hey, I'm going to follow up with you in a couple of days. But once you get your photos and you've kind of reflected on this experience a little bit, would you just send me like a couple sentence testimonial? I was like, it could be one sentence. It could be a paragraph, whatever. I just would love to know what this meant to you. Maybe what surprised you or what you took away from it or what urged you to do in the first place. And they're always like, Oh yeah, for sure. And then nine times out of 10, they leave the studio. Even when they get their digitals that they bought, whatever, I don't hear back. And so don't let that defeat you. People are busy.

How many times have you had a fantastic experience at a restaurant? And you're like, I'm going to leave them a five-star Google review. And then you leave the restaurant and like, never think about it again. Like me every time, um, people just get busy. So just remind them. So I just ask. And if it's a particularly great one, then I say, Hey, if you have two minutes to copy and paste this as a five-star Google review, that is absolute gold to me. And I usually say that to the clients who are thanking me profusely and saying like Mitzi, you have no idea how much this meant. Like you can tell they like almost feel indebted to you in a way when there's someone who's talking to you like that.

Like they just had this amazing experience, and they want to tell the whole world. You just say, Hey, as a small business owner, a five-star Google review is better than gold to me. They're like, yeah, and they do it. So if they text you a few minutes after the shoot or a few days after some people do that and they say, this is what this shoot meant to me. Or they email to you. All you have to do shoot back. Hey, thank you so much for sharing this with me. Do you

mind if I share this as a testimonial? Everyone I've talked to has said, yes, everyone. And if they happen to share something like for instance, one time I had a client, she said, this really helped me reclaim my body after experiencing like sexual assault.

I just kind of paraphrase that. I don't put that in there. If there's sharing something deeply personal with you, that may be like their whole Instagram following. Like they might not want to tell everyone in the whole world on Facebook. That made me just like cut that part out. You can paraphrase it, but just ask for it. And most people I ask three times. So just don't treat your, your workflow for the shoot as finished until you have those words from them. Some people will give you one sentence. Some people are going to write you a novel and you're gonna have to sit down and just cut the good chunks out because you're like, no, one's going to read this whole thing on Facebook. And that's fine. But get those words from them.

Because again, those give you direction for the words to then put in your future marketing, the testimonials themselves. When you just have quotes around something, that's great marketing. And as you gather these testimonials, I want you to put them in your invitation, like shoot booking guide. So when someone, you send someone that invitation that tells them about the shoot and gives them the option to where to book, throw a few testimonials on there. Cause I don't know about you, but when I'm shopping on Amazon, I go and look at the reviews before I buy something. So these testimonials are very powerful, and I want you to be super intentional about using them in your marketing because you can tell people until you're blue in the face, you don't need to be retouched in order to be worthy of being photographed. Because if you're offering this type of session, a part of you believes that you can say that all day long. But when someone says, Hey, I did that AS I AM session with Mitzi and like it, it changed the way I see myself. Or when they say, I saw myself through a lens of love.

That's what Elijah said.

And I think about that all the time. I think about those words, and I put them around me so that even on the dark days or the days when I really doubt myself or the days I'm like, is anyone actually gonna keep paying me to do this? Which, yeah, I have regularly, right. We're artists. We, we have these crises, you know, every Tuesday, but like when you are faced with those moments of self-doubt, you will go back to those words and hold onto them.

So get the testimonials and use them in all those different ways I just talked about. And that's the prep guide. Look at the PDF, look at everything that we've talked about in there, and then look at the formula and then use your own language, plug your own words in. You could start with mine, but make it light you up, make it resonate with you, play with a few of these shoots, see how it goes, and then see what makes you really excited. And you can change your prep guide. You can change the style of this shoot. You can change the format, however you want. It just has to resonate with you to be real. So start with my blueprint and then change it up, set those clear expectations, but overall, just show people that the point of this is to just show up exactly as they are. And they can't do it wrong.

6. DIRECTIVE/PROMPTS

So now that we've talked about some other aspects of the shoot, I think it's really important that I give you like a quick reference guide to the different ways I direct my clients. I'm calling it posing for the sake of familiarity, but it's really not posing. So I'll compare it like this. If in a highly stylized or even like a headshot session, I am coaching my client exactly how to pose and move the different parts of their body. If that was like me teaching them the choreography to a dance, then for my raw portrait sessions, I'm actually kind of leading them in a waltz. I tell my clients, don't worry, I'm going to tell you exactly what to do. I'm going to guide you through the whole experience.

I'm never going to leave anyone hanging. I'm never going to be like, okay, now hop in front of that backdrop and act natural. That's the worst thing you can say to anyone. No one wants to be told that. While the posing for the traditional photo shoots is very hands-on and very precise, uh, the directing for the, AS I AM, or the raw photo shoot is definitely just as intentional. It's just totally different. So you're just going to kind of lead someone in a dance per se. You're going to direct them. You're going to use your voice and your presence to override all the negative and fearful thoughts that are going through their brain at a hundred miles an hour. Cause really that's what it comes down to.

It comes down to your client, no matter what type of portrait you're doing, unless they're a professionally trained model is standing there terrified that they're going to mess it up or that they don't know what they're doing, or they're awkward. All of these insecurities will come up when they get in front of your camera. So it's your job to take control of the situation, to be calm, to breathe, and to be present with them. And then to just constantly tell them they're doing a great job, constantly give those affirmations. So there's a couple things before I get into the specifics of these different specific directives I give, uh, that I want to talk about. The first one is I want you to keep it positive. I have watched photographers photograph other people in various settings.

And one of the things that always stands out to me is when the photographer is directing the pose and they say, no, no, no, not like that. Like this. No, no, no, no. Don't put your chin down like that. Put it down like this. I want you to not use the word no. And don't, I don't want you to speak in the negative. I want you to speak in the positive. So if you tell them to do something and they do it very different from what you were picturing, just say, okay, great. And then actually move your chin this way some more, or, okay, now let's try this. Or if a pose isn't working, don't be like, oh God, that'll, oh no, that's not working. Let's move on.

Unless it's like a close friend. Like you want to just keep it positive. Like they're doing a great job. And it's the same with like outfits. It's the same with just all the different details of a shoot. If something's just not working, it's your job to just like scratch that and move on, but do it in a positive way so that they don't feel like they messed it up. Because nine times out of 10, they're going to blame themselves if they feel like something's going wrong. Right? How many people

say, oh, I want to book a session with you, but like, I'm not photogenic. Cause like the last photo shoots I did with other photographers turned out terrible. So I'm just really bad in front of the camera. Like, that's what they always say. They assume it's them. They don't assume it's the photographer's fault. So your job is to keep it positive. The second thing I want you to do throughout the whole shoot, actually from the moment they walk in your door is pay attention to them.

How does their body move? When they get kind of nervous, do they do this with their hair? Are they constantly tugging at the sleeves of their shirt? Do they cross their hands like this?

Are they moving a lot? Are they someone who really can't sit still and is always in motion? They need to be in motion when you photograph them. Are they someone who has really, really straight posture naturally pay attention to that? Are they normally more hunched over? Pay attention to that. Are they someone who naturally likes to up a lot of space and has a commanding presence? Pay attention to that. There's so many little things that once you take stock of in your mind, it'll help you direct them in the shoot in a way that actually feels good to their body. Because when you look at the images together later, they're going to say things like, Oh, that pose. It's fine. That's just not me. Or they're going to be like, Oh, it looks like me.

And it's because you pose them in a way that their body wants to move in. I keep this in mind. The whole shoot, I keep in mind the way that their body naturally moves. I keep in mind when they use their hand gestures, when they get really excited about something, I keep in mind the things that they're naturally doing as we're interacting, because then I'm going to call those things out more. The other thing to consider is that if they've done a photo shoot with you before, or if they're a photographer, or just someone who's used to being on camera, they're going to fix themselves a lot. And I want you to unfix them again. Here's an example, I was photographing a photographer for her raw portrait session recently. And while I was going over to switch the music or switch my lens or something, she was standing like this, just kind of like swaying to the music, standing in front of the backdrop like this. As soon as I walked over to her and lifted up the camera, she instantly went...she fixed the pose. And I said, no, no, no, go back to how you were take up space, just stand like this. And she did. She was like, Oh, I didn't even realize I did it. So when people fix themselves because they become camera aware, just unfix them again.

I also photographed someone recently who I can tell she lifts her chin a lot. It's a, it's a very confident body language to lift your chin. And I would notice as soon as I start, she would like pull it down and forward. She's been told to do that before. And I was like, no, no, no. Put your chin back up because that's how her body moves. And she loved those photos. So this is an opportunity to like show people that they weren't wrong. The way they exist is not wrong because they can exist that way on camera. And there are certain body language things, certain movements, certain nervous tics people have that if you show them a photo of that and give them the opportunity to embrace it, they will. I had another client recently. She gets, um, just big tears very easily. She has had this for years and years. It's just happened. And it's something she has been insecure about. During her shoot though, there was a moment where I was, I was

photographing her and she stopped reaching for the Kleenex to, to dab the little tears off her face.

And I, I took a photo of her. And when we were looking in the reveal, I hadn't even noticed like the water droplets on her face. She was just like, wow. I love how those, like the droplets are just like lighting up my cheeks. That's so beautiful. I've, I've always been insecure about that, but now I see it in this photo and I love it. That's just me.

I just let, I just let it happen. I just didn't stop it from happening. I just didn't tell her it was wrong. And by doing that, I created the space for her to see it in a whole new way. I had a client recently want an image that showed her C-section scar, like showed it off, even though that part of her body is the part she's having the hardest time loving and accepting right now.

And we took beautiful photos of it and she loves them.

That's all in how you look at it. And what's really surprising to me is that she asked me to specifically focus on that. And if I hadn't been already offering and posting and sharing about these raw portrait sessions, I don't know that she would have felt safe to come to me and say, Hey, this is a portrait I want.

So just open the store, open your mind, open your heart, show people they can be silly and do it wrong. And it has to start with you. I have a toddler and one of the greatest things he's taught me is that it's really great to be silly and it's really fun.

So just be silly with people. Just let your hair down.

I'm one of those people who by nature is quite socially awkward. On my Clifton strengths, for instance, win over others. Like woo is my lowest one. It is my greatest weakness winning over other people. So if I can do this and find the way that I can show up, I know you can too. So the directives need to come from you. They need to be things that make sense to you and they need to be silly and unthreatening.

And you need to do them first. You have to be the silliest one in the room. If you want them to shake their ass, you better shake yours. If you want them to laugh, you better laugh. If you want them to breathe, you better breathe.

Every time I do that with a client, it returns me. It grounds me again, too.

So every time you get too much in your head, come back to your body. So I'm going to get out my list and I'm going to show you some of the directives that I do for my clients during their raw portrait sessions. So the very first thing I tell people when we start their raw portrait session is have a seat on the floor, the way you sit on the floor. And they'll be like, how should I sit? And then I'll have to say again, the way you sit on the floor. Now, some people aren't able to sit on the floor. So make accommodations for them, have a couple Apple boxes, something they can

prop up on maybe a stool to help them get up or down, but in some way, shape or form, have them seated somehow to start.

I start every photo shoot this way, regardless of genre, because just standing there with nothing to hold onto, nothing to interact with is really difficult for people at first, just have them sit. So sit on the floor, the way you want to sit on the floor. And then I just sit opposite them, and I start talking to them and I say, yeah, so I'm just going to test my light. Don't worry about anything. All right. That's a good one. Um, and then ask them questions. What was the first question they asked you when they got to your shoot? Did they ask if you have kids, they value family and children, ask them about their family. Did they comment on your shirt or ask you what movie you'd seen lately? Or did they talk about their job?

Whatever they started talking to you about, take note of that and then ask them questions about that because it means they value it. Find a connection point too. So they go, oh, yeah, they're talking. Clearly their kids are their highest value. If you don't have children, find a connection point. Oh my God, my nephew. I'm just, he's so funny. How old are your kids? Just find some type of connection point with them, with whatever they're excited about and ask them questions about it. Cause here's the thing that happens.

It almost seems like the opposite of how it should be, but people trust you the more they talk to you. So just listen.

Find the connection points, have conversation. Another thing you can do is ask them about their tattoos, if they have tattoos on their body. And I just did a session last week and she, I noticed one on her arm and I asked her about it. And so like her first photo and the first one in her storybook that she picked is her like pointing to the tattoo of her cat and telling me about it. She's like this. So ask them about things. Comment on, Oh, I really like those glasses, where'd you get the, the frames? Cause people who wear their glasses in a photo shoot and keep them on, they love their glasses. So talk about these things with them. Talk about the music.

Another note about music is that I have playlists ready to go that light me up and make me feel awesome and make me want to just dance and have fun. But for your clients, some people are going to make a playlist. The cool thing about those people is you don't have to tell anyone to make a playlist because the person who wants to make a playlist just will, and they'll bring it and they'll tell you about it. I don't put, make a playlist for your raw portrait session in my prep guide, because that'll just like people who don't want to, that'll just stress them out. So you set the tone with your music or you play theirs and talk to them about it. Oh my God, I haven't heard the song in like 20 years. It's so good. Just, just talk about it.

Interact with people, find that common point so that they can just let their guard down with you. And the sooner they do that, the better. So the next thing I'm going to kind of rapid fire these off now. Stand in line. Okay. It's like, you're standing in line, waiting to buy a movie ticket. How do you stand? People will cross their arms. They'll put their hand in their pocket. It's a great way to get someone to just stand the way they stand. This is my favorite one that I do for the

expression series. Either usually after I go through and list a bunch of emotions is all right. Tell me your most embarrassing story. It's one of my favorites because it automatically gets rid of any barriers between the two of you.

It's an icebreaker. And then you have the opportunity to tell them your most embarrassing story, which I highly recommend doing. And then taking photos while they laugh and are like, Oh my God. And you know, empathize with you in that moment and show all of those facial expressions. It's one of my favorite things to do. I also tell people to shampoo their hair. Okay. So shampoo. Cause that way, cause if you just say, put your hand in your hair, people are like this or like, it's weird. So shampoo your hair. Yeah. I'm like, yeah, get a good lather. Okay. Shampoo it, smell your hair. Like you just got a really good smelling new shampoo and you're just like, smell it. I had someone recently and she just went like this for that.

So it's really funny. I like these prompts that can elicit different responses in people, depending on who they are. Like they're not, they're specific enough, but not like super specific. So the other thing is, especially if they have short hair or maybe they don't have hair at all, you can say I'm like sexy headache. This works kind of well for anyone like, Oh, I need some excedrin, sexy headache. Um, there's also like sexy neck ache. Okay. That gets people to touch like their neck and their shoulders in a way that they actually would. Not just like my hand is making contact with my neck. So I try to tease people too. If they're really being like really weird about it, I'm like, okay, touch it. Like you're actually like you're putting lotion on or something.

Not like you're just making contact. Another one is like, especially if they're sitting on the ground, like you just shaved your legs and they're so smooth and soft touch like this. Um, if they have clothing that they can interact with, this is a great way to prompt, like for me, like how my actual sleeves keep falling down and I keep messing with them. This is a great thing to do for photos, especially for men, like messing with the collar of their shirt like this, you know, women like buttons. Really for anybody, there's so many different ways you can get them to interact with their clothing. And again, watch how they've been interacting with it the whole time they walked out of the dressing room and in front of your camera and just coach them to do that more.

Smell your armpits. This is what I say instead of dance. And these are usually people's favorite dancing images. So you get a good song on that. They like, and then you're like, okay, now I want you to be like, Ooh, okay. Just shift your weight back and forth from hip to hip. There you go. Okay. Just back and forth. And then arms up, kind of throw your head around. Like you're like trying to decide if this natural deodorant is actually working, smell your armpits, and then they'll just crack up. And that's how you get these great, like dancing photos without telling people to just dance. Give yourself a hug. Oh, that's one of my favorites. Now just give yourself a hug. Usually this is on like the second outfit or maybe the third. It's just like, thank yourself for showing up today.

You're also telling them things that are mirroring, like the reason why they're here, like self-acceptance being silly, letting your hair down literally and figuratively. And I also like to tell them, especially when it comes to like the body section, like sit like a mermaid perched on a

rock. Everyone knows that everyone knows how to do that. It's proud. It's tall. Usually for your more masculine clients, you might want to do more of like sit like a mountain. That's what I tell them. Like sit kind of on your hip, prop yourself up and then rest your arm up on your knee. And, and even for, for all of my clients, I really like to play on like what are usually very gendered types of posing rules, because traditionally in posing, we're told to make women look small and to make men look big.

Like, like they want to look like an upside down Dorito, like shoulders broader than waistline. Okay. That's usually what we're taught. So play with that. Change it up. Maybe you have a very feminine client who comes in, but you know, they want to look, they want to take up space and taking up space is one of my favorite things to tell people. I'm like, yeah, sit there, spread out, take up space. And I do it too. Like kind sitting across from them and they just will. It's so cool to watch because their whole countenance just kind of shifts and they lift their chin proudly. Besides that we want to do emotions. So when you're doing like a closeup emotive type series of portraits, just rattle them off.

I got inspired by this because my toddler has a book about feelings, all the feeling words. And during one of my first AS I AM shoots, I had this idea and I just was like, I read that book to him like a thousand times. So I just started listing off the emotions as they were in that book just really fast. And I kept shooting in between the other ones. You always want to keep shooting because those end of that thought moments, the end of that laugh, the little funny comment you make in response to them, like keep shooting through all of that, because that's when you're going to get their most natural and raw and truly candid expressions.

That's what we love to see, isn't it?

Like when you think about the photos of the people you love, it's the one where you can hear their laugh or see their confused face. It's all those in-between photos that like we never really take of ourselves.

Just shoot all of those.

Just don't stop shooting.

And that's another reason why it's really important that as you direct, you keep this moving fast for my shoots in each of the outfits and setups I'm shooting for less than one song length usually, because I don't want to show them 8,000 photos. That's too many. I want to keep it to like two to three hundred.

Sometimes it gets up to 400, but I really just try to keep it under a hundred photos and outfit or else it's too many to go through. So just keep that timing intentional, pick a direction, go with it. If it's not working, it's time to do something else. Don't force it. It's not going to work. It's going to waste both your time and it'll make you frustrated. So those are the prompts. And what I want

you to do going forward, as you build your own session is to pay attention to certain things you can say that can get people to do that thing that just works really well on camera.

So one day I literally said it was in a boudoir shoot, like years ago, I said like, okay, like you have a headache, but a sexy headache. And we all just started cracking up. And now I say sexy headache all the time. So you can make up your own, you can use mine, but just kind of like, keep these as tools in your tool belt, as you kind of find them and just keep them silly, keep them familiar, keep them as gender neutral as you can and just keep them unintimidating. Cause again, you just want people to have fun. So it starts with you and then you just guide them through it.

7. LIVE FULL SHOOT

All right, welcome to the live shoot and reveal portion of the course. I am so excited. I have an amazing friend here today that I'm going to photograph. We're going to show you the entire shoot process from start to finish. Um, but first I want to talk about limitations. Now, this is something that I've realized and I've learned time and time again in the last few months is that any barrier I've ever put on my clients, uh, on what I think that they're going to expect out of the experience, what I think they're going to bring, what I think they're going to want any barrier I've put on it has come from me. It hasn't come from them.

And so what I've learned time and time again, is that being open and open-minded is the very best space I can hold for my clients. There's a couple things, uh, I want to touch on really quick before we get into this shoot. One of the first ones is, uh, when I did my live keynote a couple of months ago, that's a video that you probably just watched. I had some really interesting questions after that. And one of them was, well, what about men? What about guys? They're not going to want to do a shoot like this. And I mean, they're definitely not going to want to show skin.

And I thought about it at the time, and I was like, I don't know if that's true. So I ended up focusing for a whole month on photographing, just straight dudes for my AS I AM project. A lot of people associate my brand with women, um, queer folks and, you know, people who like to kind of dress up and have flair and have the drama, but not just like dads. And I'm here in the Midwest, I'm in Missouri. And this was a really, really, really cool, challenging and eye opening experience for me. When I focused on, Hey, I'm just going to photograph some guys. And so I gave them the same blueprint I gave everyone else. I said, I want you to show up to your shoot with something light, something dark.

And then I want you to show some skin. And what I told them was that can look like whatever you want it to look like. Just like I tell the women, just like I tell everybody. I say, showing skin is just a representation of vulnerability. So it's whatever that means to you. I love that. I didn't limit these guys when I had them come in because they all surprised me. I had one guy, just like this big beefy guy who owns a gym, looks like he could be a bouncer, and he brought his favorite satin Savage by Fenty pajama pants that he loves to wear like all the time around the house. And it was really cool. And I could tell you felt really amazing in them. Um, I didn't limit him in that.

I had some other guys just say, I'm just going to take my shirt off and just wear my jeans. One guy said like David Beckham. And I was like, got it. Totally got it. And so it was really interesting to see what they showed up in when I didn't put any limitations when I didn't decide, Oh, guys won't want to do that. So it's a really important lesson. And here's another thing in the other live shoot with Nicole, some feedback I got from some photographers was I'd love to see you do a live shoot with someone who's not a photographer, you know, just like a normal person. I thought that was interesting because for Nicole,

it almost seemed like it was harder for her to do this shoot than it is for my quote unquote, normal everyday clients. And I found that really interesting. She hadn't let anyone photograph her since her wedding 20 years ago. So the fact that she showed up and let me photograph her and film it was huge. She was just as nervous as everyone else. And during her reveal, yes, she knows how to use Lightroom. And some people said, I'd like to see the reveal with someone who doesn't know how to use Lightroom, but really for her, her reveal just took a few less minutes than my other reveals. That's all it was. She was just a little faster at it, but the whole process was the same.

So with my client today, their name is Elijah and they're actually my hairstylist and dear friend, and they're not a photographer. They have not had the full AS I AM shoot experience before they have not used Lightroom. And I'm going to show you how they move through the experience. Also because they are non-binary and I'm really excited to be able to hold this space and show that this shoot is for everyone by showing you with someone who's non-binary because these shoots are not limited by age, body type, or gender.

They're not. You can do an AS I AM or raw portrait session for anyone. So I'm really excited to show you that. But before I do, I want to talk a little bit more about my gear. See this setup right here. I set it back up this way the other day.

And what I told myself was this feels like home to me. When I do this setup with my two backdrops and my big five-foot octabox right here, this feels like home to me. I could photograph any human in the entire world who walked in here, no matter how old, young, different from me, famous, not whatever. If they came into this space, I could hold this magic space for them. So you'll notice that my backdrops are kind of like a taupe and then a greenish gray.

Um. But in black and white, they basically translate to the same thing. So you can do your entire raw portrait session with even one backdrop.

You could do it not showing the full body, or you could just have the ground here. You could have a rug. It doesn't matter. You don't have to have two hand-painted backdrops. These are from Gravity Backdrops, by the way. They're my favorite company to work with because they do a beautiful job. But two backdrops, easy. And for the next outfit, I'm going to show you a setup that I have right here. And it is just a cream-colored seamless backdrop. But like I mentioned in previous videos, you can do those images against a white wall. So really, as long as you have one neutral or white wall and one backdrop, you could do this whole shoot. And I'm going to show you how I light it.

I'm going to talk a little bit about where I have my light and why, and then you're going to get to see it in the reveal in the images, kind of how it shows up that way. But I'm using my three setup formula, one light per setup, just like I always do. And I'm going to go into a little more detail today. So another thing I love to have for this is a V-flat. This is a black and white V-flat from V-flat World. They make these, they fold up. If you can tell, I put white gaff tape on the inside,

and then I put black gaff tape on the outside. That way, no, it doesn't fold up, but I don't really need to fit it in my car. But it just helps keep it together a little bit better. And when I use it as a backdrop, sometimes it helps it be easier to Photoshop those out. So I'm just going to move this right over here. I like to use the black side to absorb light. And then obviously the white side will reflect light. But for these black and white portraits, I love the contrast. I want the contrast. So I'm going to move it right next to where my subject's going to be.

And that's just going to kind of deepen the shadow on this side of the face.

No, it happened in Nicole's shoot too.

Well, that really happens all the time. It falls over. Really, the tape helps it fall over a lot less. But as you can see, these are well loved. So this will help deepen the shadows on this side of my subject since the light will be here. So if I wanted less contrast, I'd have the white side here. And since I want more contrast, I'm going to have the dark side here and then my light here. So it's just going to carve out really beautiful shadows along this side of the face and body.

Then with my camera, I've got my usual. I have my Nikon D850. I'm not a gear person, but I love this camera body. Love it, love, love. And then I love this lens. This is the Sigma 50mm 1.4 Art Lens. I used a 50mm 1.4, just the basic Nikon one that was like 400 bucks for years. And it was great. Again, I love 50mm because it's the same focal length that your eyes see with. So you don't really get distortion. You don't really get the zoom-y stuff, but you don't really need that. And then I have my Godox trigger right here, and that is connected to my light. So I do all of these shoots with one light.

I use, this is a 60-inch softbox right here, and this is just a Godox or Flashpoint, same company, strobe. I usually have the strobe at about 1 over 32 because that's just kind of like a nice in-between medium. And then for my camera settings, I usually am keeping my ISO around like 400-ish, just so I don't have a lot of grain. And then my shutter speed, I like to keep at like an 80th of a second because that will give a little bit of motion blur where my subjects in movement. And then I have my f-stop usually around like 6, 7-ish. Right now it's at 7.1, but that's also because I'm doing something slightly unusual, which is I'm shooting with overhead lighting.

And so I want this light to overpower the overhead lighting, so it looks like how I normally shoot it. And here's the last thing I do. I'm shooting in monochrome on my camera. This is a really cool thing that I didn't anticipate when I started doing these raw portrait sessions, was that my lighting skills would get so much better, so much more intentional. And now, honestly, I shoot monochrome at the start of any photo shoot, even when it's a full color, you know, highly stylized or headshot shoot or whatever, because when I see the monochrome version of the photo on the back of the camera, I know what I need to change about my lighting. So I shoot in a monochrome, and don't worry when you're shooting in raw and in monochrome, your camera is keeping the color information. So even when you pull the images into Lightroom, you can change them to color if you want. So you're not losing anything by switching to monochrome.

All right, so I'm going to go get my subject, and we're going to get started. Hello. Hello. Hello. It's so good to see you. Okay, this is Elijah. This is who I'm going to be photographing today. And you're always taller than me, but especially in heels. In heels. Yes, yes. Those are amazing.

Okay, so for the shoot today, we're going to start in the darker outfit. So remember, I tell everyone something dark, something light, and then something where we show a little skin. So Elijah brought some great clothes. Seriously, give people your trust on this. They will bring good stuff. And here's what I learned. Don't say something black and something white, because people will show up to the shoot sweating, being like, I don't have anything white in my closet, Mitzi. So I brought, and I'm like, oh, that's fine. Just light, dark. Okay, so I'm going to have you go stand right there into the middle, and I want you to just sit right in the center on the ground, however you like to sit. Cool.

Perfect. So I always start my subjects seated because just standing there is just hard for everybody. It's more comfortable and it's just more of how you would normally have a conversation with someone. So when someone is, hello, that's a great pose. That is just how you sit, so. Yes. Love it. So here's the thing with this light. Okay. Right now it's kind of in a position for someone to let's see, push it like this. Yeah. So the light might seem a little bit high to you, but when I'm shooting these raw portrait sessions, again, because of the amount of contrast, I like to get, I'm usually shooting with the bottom of my soft box about at the top of their head. Okay. So I'm going to bring this down just a little bit.

And here's the other thing. When you have a big light like this, the further it is to the side, the more that other side of the face is going to be in the shadow, right? So just keep that in mind for who you're photographing. Um, the more you photograph different body types, different ages, um, just people with different, um, backgrounds, just genetically, the more you're going to start learning what light works best. For instance, with people with like smaller eyes or people with broader cheekbones or people with deeper set eyes, you're going to start paying attention to that and know what works best for them. So don't stress too much about it. Here's my, here's my advice for this is I just want you to start with your light kind of at like this corner point of the backdrop. Kind of coming in at this angle. So some light is going to go past, but also on them.

So if my client's sitting, I'm usually sitting just like if my client's dancing, I'm dancing. If my client is talking, I'm talking, but usually I'm just here to chat with them, make a connection and move through it pretty easily. And the other note I'm going to make is about music.

You notice there's no music right now. Usually it is bumping in here. It is music really loud. One thing I've noticed, which is really funny. I don't know if I told you all my clients who are Gen X females, they bring in the raunchiest, like hip hop you have ever heard. Like all of them, they like bring their own playlist. It's so funny. And we're just over here. It's a vibe. Like just, they're just over like grind into something. And I'm like, Oh my God, if your teenage daughters saw you right now, they would die. So great. But the playlist people will bring a playlist. You don't need to tell people to do it because the people who don't want to make a playlist, you're going to stress

them out. So you don't talk about music, but the people who are like, I actually need a playlist for this. You're like, great.

What's your Spotify? Like you just look it up, play it. If not, you need to have a playlist that makes you feel awesome and have the energy you want. And you need to play that during the shoot. One of the reasons going back to the limitations I talked about earlier, why I had a big block around shooting a live full session with audio was, well, we can't have the music blasting. So the photo shoot won't work. And then guess what? A few weeks ago, the local news came and did a story on me. and the anchor, I photographed him. I did a raw portrait session with him. And the cameraman was like, Oh yeah, we have to shut this music off or like, you know, for copyright reasons. And I was like, okay. And so we did the shoot, and it went great. So that was even a barrier I had put up. So you don't have to have music, but yes, when I'm not shooting this for an educational video, I always have music blaring very loud and it's really fun. Okay. We have music in our hearts. Oh yes. Always. Yes. She lives in here.

Oh my gosh. Okay. So for this first one, again, I like to sit on the floor opposite and the whole shoot, I am usually rotating my camera between vertical and horizontal for every kind of setup that they're in. So Elijah just popped right into this pose. It's amazing. It's confident. I love it. Very reflect- Oh, okay. Just first photo of the day. Like, are you kidding me? And when something happens and they start cracking up, one big thing that I struggled with for a long time was just wanting to laugh with them and be like, ah, that's so funny. And then get my camera. But now I just keep that camera up and I just keep shooting. That's so great. So what's like an album that you, uh, are really into these days that you've been listening to? Oh, that's a good question. Um, okay. I would say Ashnikko. She just came out with a new album called We Kill Her. It's so good. It's intense, but it's really good. That's so good. Okay. I was talking to someone like this weekend who said they just went to see Ashnikko. Oh, I'm jealous. And I wanted to go so bad. That's who my friend, Elijah, told me about.

She was in Kansas City. I wanted to go so bad. Her music just makes me feel so confident. Yes. Just like got that bad bitch energy. Yes. I love that. We love that. Okay. So now what I want you to do is, um, I love this like big pose you're doing right here. I just want you to have a moment, like with your hair and stuff and just kind of look off and, you know, kind of just shampoo your hair a little bit. Oh, I love that. I'm good at that. You sure are.

That's so great. Just have a little moment. Oh, I love that.

Okay. Now I want you to just sit, turn and face me. I don't really care how, but kind of move forward. Like we're just having a little chat. There you go. Oh my gosh. That looks amazing, dude. I love this. Oh, perfect.

So right now my light is really gorgeous. I'm just getting, and you'll see it soon, but I'm just getting this beautiful, like modified kind of loop lighting where this whole side of their face and kind of underneath is just in this beautiful shadow. And then the rest is illuminated also with my light pointing toward the subject means it's lighting up my backdrop. That's going to come in

later. Cause I'm going to do their third outfit in front of this same backdrop, but with a different lighting style. So in black and white, it's going to look completely different.

Okay. Let's see. Can you just move the ring over just a little bit? It was just kind of like perfect, which is fine, but not the focus on gender we wanted. Right.

Oh my gosh. Okay. Also, anytime there's something kind of potentially awkward like that, that happens in a shoot. Let me tell you right now, you just need to point it out and laugh about it because I used to be so shy that nine or 10 years ago, when I had just first started my business, I did an engagement session for a couple and the guys fly was down the whole time. And I was too shy and nervous to say something about it. I just posed and like did all their shots so that you couldn't tell the whole shoot. And now I would be like, Hey dude, you're fly. And then I was just like, you know, you're just kind of chuckle about it. Right.

XYZ. Easy peasy. So yeah, just point that shit out, like whatever.

Um, and it's the same with like, if you see, I don't know if you just talk about stuff and, um, first of all, don't assume someone doesn't want, like, it's the bra showing thing that happens a lot. Don't assume that like, just cause someone's bra showing, you have to go over and fix it. You can just be like, Hey, I can see your bra strap right now. If that's cool with you. Great. If it's not, you know, the mirror's right there if you want to fix it or whatever, like there's always ways to kind of point that out and address it and give people options just so you're not like limiting them. Um, because remember your client who comes in here, they were already predisposed to think that they're going to do everything wrong. So do your best to just encourage them the whole time and just be like, Oh, do you want this or this?

Not like, Oh, don't do that. Like, cause then that's negative. We want to speak in the positive. Okay. So now I want you to take a little scooch back just a little bit. Perfect. And then I want, um, for this next one, we're just going to get a little movement in here. So yes, also Elijah really likes to dance. I know that's not everyone. So I'm still not going to use the word dance directive with them. Um, because most people are not comfortable with that and it freaks them out. So what I want you to kind of do is like, as if you're just rolling each shoulder back, like when you, after you get a massage and you're like, Oh, you go just kind of, yep. Roll those shoulders. There you go. Get a Ashnikko song in your head.

I've been listening to all like spooky, like Halloween music this month. Cause it's October, we got to get in the spirit. I know. I got like the crypt keepers laugh in the back of my head all the time. It's great. Okay. So now what I want you to do is, um, I want you to sit forward. Okay. Just like really look intense. Yeah. Oh, we love that. It looks amazing.

About half an inch, Beautiful.

Oh, that looks incredible. Okay. Pop up. We're going to do some standing ones. So

when your subject stands up, don't do what I do 90% of the time and forget to raise the light. Cause usually I'll get them in the pose while I get in the moment. And then I take a shot and I'm like, Oh, just a second.

Move the light up.

So again, I want this to be like kind of at their chin height.

Now you have low ceilings, which I know, uh, is the reality for a lot of photographers. You don't have like 12 foot ceilings. That's okay. You can also do different light modifiers. So one way you can get it higher is like, if you're using a smaller light or even a beauty dish, you can get that pretty high up against the ceiling, angle it down, and you can still get some really good contrast. You can also just try to get more contrast from the side, move the light a little more to the side. I just like to do it from above. Cause that's the look that I like, but you can do this type of shoot anywhere. I feel fully confident that if someone was like, Hey Mitzi, I need an AS I AM shoot. Let's just do it in like a hotel suite where I only could bring one backdrop and one light. I could do it. Mmhmm. Mmhmm.

All right. So now what I'm going to have you do, Oh, that's really great. So pay attention to how your subject is standing, pay attention to where their body already moves to, and just go based on that. A lot of times they're going to be standing a certain way. And as soon as you kind of get your camera, they're going to change it or fix it. Just say, no, go back to how you were because a lot of, a lot of this is just showing people that they already know what to do. They just think they know.

I love that. Thank you.

You're usually my cheerleader. You should teach a class. You know, you really should. You should totally teach like a whole course. You know, maybe I should. Oh, hello there. That's great. Okay. Now what I want you to do is just sway back and forth. Yep. Hips. And you can kind of get into it if you want with hands, whatever. Yeah. It's beautiful. Oh, I love it. Perfect. Now take a couple of steps backwards.

Oh, this is so awesome.

Oh, great. I love it. Okay. And now what I want you to do is I want you to stand just really big. So either arms crossed or hips or whatever, just stand in a way that makes you feel really big and confident.

Beautiful.

One thing I noticed about my son lately, he's almost three is every time you get a camera out or your phone, you're going to take a picture of him. He automatically poses. He'll be like this. He

poses as bigger than he is not smaller. And I love that because kids, they don't.. like him. He's not insecure. You know, he's just like, I'm here. And he'll like, yes.

He needs a haircut. I'm going to make that appointment with you.

Oh, this is amazing. Okay. Now I just want you to turn away from you just a little bit and then look back over your shoulders. So however you want to do that. Oh, amazing. Love that. Now, relax your arm down to your side.

Beautiful.

This is amazing. Perfect. Now turn and face me one more time. And yeah. Oh, just like, Oh, hello. I didn't hear you come in.

Oh yes.

So, so, so, so great. I love this. And now just like, look over at my foot and laugh.

Oh my God. Look back at me and turn this way. I'd be like, Oh, Hey Mitzi. I didn't see you there. Yeah.

Perfect. You're doing amazing. All right. Next outfit. Killed it.

That was probably even a little longer than I normally do one outfit for these shoots because I was explaining it. I was like making some notes. I keep this really quick, really quick, really intentional because it gives people less time to start second guessing everything they're doing and what's going on. It kind of keeps everything moving because as soon as it gets stagnant or like, then that's when insecurities and stuff like that really come out. So it's your job to just lead them in this dance, get them into the spot, start them seated, then move them to standing. And obviously if your clients are differently abled you take that into account, I worked with someone recently who I told, I asked her to sit on the floor and she's like, Oh, I really can't.

And so I just pulled a couple of apple boxes over and I kind of situated them and just, you know, let her grab my arm while she kind of eased down onto one and propped herself up on the other. It looked great. So it was a good way to add variety to her session when she couldn't sit on the floor. Now, a lot of these poses and, or should I say directions really do work for everyone. They work for every gender, every age group. And when you are holding space for someone, you're going to know what to say. You're going to know what to do. So trust yourself, make a connection with someone and just talk to them about stuff.

Some people get really in depth when they do these types of portraits, there can be really in depth, like portrait interviews that talk about your inner child and like all this past stuff, which is really cool and really amazing. I don't go that way with these shoots. I purposely keep it pretty chill. If they want to go into something heavier, or maybe if I like know them pretty well, or I had a client who since the last time I photographed her, she like got divorced, got remarried and

went through cancer. So yeah, that conversation got pretty real pretty quick. That's usually not the case. So again, it's your job to just take good care of yourself, show up to the shoot open with an open heart and an open mind and just do your thing.

Keep it moving. All right, next we're going to do the setup where we go through the expressions. And so this one you'll see it in just a second. I'm shooting this on a cream colored seamless backdrop, but you could use a white wall.

All right. So right now we have just moved to the other opposite wall in the same room. All I did with this light was pull it from that corner and turn it. And then as you can probably notice, I angled it down. I angled it down, like as far as it can go that way, this light is going to be, it's still like a loop lighting, but it's going to be also a little bit butterfly just causing the shadows under the nose and under the chin.

I also brought two V flats over because I really want this to absorb all the light because that is what's going to really carve out the cheekbones. It gives us really gorgeous high contrasty look. And so that photo that I have of the nine up with my sample that I've shown in this series that was done on this setup. So I've got a black posing table. I think I just got this one on Amazon. People warned me they're going to be like \$300. I think I paid 80 or 90 for mine. It's really not bad. And it's great because you can adjust the height for every person and then they can kind of just hug it in toward them. And it's nice too, they kind of have something to hold on to.

And then with my light, if Elijah had glasses on, what I would do is I would make this light go further above and not so much toward them. Does that make sense? Because when someone has glasses and you want to avoid glasses glare, if you bring the light higher, you're not going to get the glasses glare.

Okay.

Let me just do a test shot first. Love that.

Yeah, that's perfect. Okay. We're done. Just kidding. So now we're going to do our expression series. So I love to just take a few test shots as I'm chatting with them at first, because I want to see like how they're naturally going to sit at this table, and everyone does something different. So Elijah just put their hands out front like this. So when I'm shooting, I have like kind of my center focal point is a right around the neck area. So that way I can get the bottom of the frame is cutting off here and the top is a little bit above the head. All right. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to just list off some emotions and I want you to just give me those like at 150%, just go for it. You can even use your arms, like your whole, your whole upper body can get in the mix. Um, if you lean forward, lean back, lean sideways, that's fine. I'm going to stay pretty stationary and I'm just going to shout words at you and you just do your thing. Okay. Perfect. Got it. All right. So the first one, let's just start with happy.

Oh, cute. Um, upset,

shy, now shy, bring your hands and make it really shy. Like you're like, I'm not shy. I know I'm like, I'm not shy.

So right there, did you see that the laugh in between is the best laugh I think you can capture in any photo of any person because they don't know what's coming. It's right after they did something silly, or you made a silly comment and they don't even know what happened. And they're going to favorite so many of those photos. Spoiler. Really.

Oh, I like how your hands were just up. Bring them back up. That really looks like you. Okay. Now angry, now shocked, horrified, now surprised. Like it's a surprise party. That was great. And now you've got it. I love it. Okay. And now, um, I want you to just like do, do like a little happy dance. Like someone just brought you your favorite cupcake and you're like, yeah, what's your favorite cupcake. Oh, that's a good question. Um, oh, that's a good question. I like the ones that are like vanilla with the strawberry center. Oh, I'm all about it. I love a filling. Oh my God. Yeah. Like salted caramel. You have to separate it, put the bottom on the top, make a sandwich. Perfect consistency.

Every time I learned that cupcake trick like three or four years ago, it changed my life. It's like, how do we not all do that? Yes. Okay. So another note, I love to ask people, uh, about like favorite movies, favorite foods, uh, favorite music, especially if I know that they already have an interest in some of these things. So for instance, if I didn't know Elijah before the shoot, which is the case for most clients, I noticed that they're wearing a Matrix shirt. I love that movie. I would totally talk about that movie with them. It's already a point of connection. So you can talk about things like that. You can just talk about, oh my gosh, we're both, we both love black boots.

Like just anything that kind of gives some point of relatability with the person is automatically just going to make the conversation flow really easily. Um, and you can tell pretty quickly if someone's like a movie person or a food person or a sports person or whatever. And recently, um, I mentioned him before, but I photographed my friend, Matt, and he, and I don't have a lot in common. Um, he owns gyms. He loves to listen to country music, but we started talking about parenthood because he has two kids that are older than mine. And it was really cool. Cause we, we could connect on things, and he talked to, especially when he was sitting right here, he talked about, you know, being a dad and like the relationship with your kids and stuff. And we had a really long conversation about it. I didn't anticipate. Um, so you can always find something to talk about that you have in common with any person sitting across from you. Okay.

Do you think, um, wait, what? Okay. Which ones did I already say?

Anger, surprise, make a list and refer to it. Um, I got this idea because my son has the book in My Heart, a Book of Feelings. It's a great children's book. And they talk about all these different feelings. So I just list off the feelings from that book. Oh, I love that. I know he calls it the heart book. That's so cute. I know. Um, so let's do sad. Oh, damn, that broke my heart. Okay. Now let's do, um, ecstatic.

Yes. Perfect. And now I want you to do just like a little, just like a little shimmy kind of like you're dancing, but you're also trying to see if your natural deodorant's working. Okay.

Just like, give me a little dip. Yes. Yes. Go for it. Oh, just really subtle. Yeah.

So great. That's perfect. Okay. Now lean in toward me. Just like, we're just out of sleep over and you're like, Oh my God, girl, just tell me, tell me all the drama.

I like, doesn't really have that much drama. I just like to pretend it does. Sometimes it's kind of fun that way, you know?

Oh, I love that. Oh, look at that. Oh my gosh. I love. Oh, I love that.

Cause you just do that all the time. You bring your hands. Yes. I know. I'm, I'm like, uh, I like to keep my hands here. Yes. And chill out. Well, did you know that, um, like body language wise, um, they've done like, uh, different studies and stuff and apparently having your hands in your profile photo or like your LinkedIn photo is good because we as humans, when we can, the reason we shake hands, when you can see someone's hands, you know, they're not a threat. Yeah. It's supposed to be like better. I love that. I know, but I don't like putting my hands in my profile.

I like to be cold and distant, I guess.

Okay. So now what I want you to do is I want you to kind of grab your arms like this and lean forward a little bit. There you go. Yeah. Like kind of like bored, but just like cute bored, you know, there you go. Yes. I love telling people to act bored. They all do it really well. And it's a really great way to kind of like switch their whole facial expression without them realizing it. There we go. Perfect. And I want you to come forward and just like, yes. Oh, that's so great. Give me a couple of little hair flips.

Yes.

When people have hair, I love to have them interact with their hair. It's just a great thing that people already naturally do. Um, if you have a client who has kind of a nervous thing of like twirling their hair, every time they do it, be like, Oh, keep twirling your hair and get some photos of it because they do that. I love it. Okay. Um, now I just want you to look really serious. Okay. There you go.

Beautiful. Now you can crack up. I can tell it's there.

So great. I swear the best laughing photos are like a millisecond after you're like, yes. You're like holding it in. Oh my God. Amazing. Oh, I love that. Okay. So now hop up. We're going to do a few more over in this setup.

Okay. So sometimes I do more careful. There's a cord behind you. Sometimes I do more in this lighting setup. Sometimes I just do the table ones. It just kind of depends what they're wearing. It depends, um, how much I feel like I got from this part of the session. Cause again, I'm not going to shoot more than like 300 photos. Cause I will regret it if I do. Um, so I'm just going to show you a couple just for the sake of, you know, teaching this, but what I'm going to have you do, Elijah is just have a seat. Okay.

So this is really interesting. I actually had a guy I was photographing a few weeks ago and he brought these cowboy boots. He was super proud of. So when I did this setup, he was wearing the boots. So I made sure to do a couple shots like this so we could at least see them a little bit. Um, yeah, it was great. So, and then for the show, some skin, he wore his Mario pajama pants. It was great. Okay. So I want you to kind of have a seat right here. Iconic behavior. I know.

Okay.

I'm going to have to put one foot up here.

Oh, that's great. Angle this leg in just a little bit. Yeah. And so kind of step forward. I just want you to feel like I'm sit like a mountain, just tall, proud.

Oh, I love that. Yeah.

So again, rather than posing someone down to every last limb, I tell them do it like this or do it big or do it small or whatever. And then I just, I'll just go with that.

So the other thing we're going to do is pull my light back just a tad because I feel like it. Mmhmm.

Oh, wow. This is beautiful.

You just look like proud of who you are. And I love that. Thank you.

Now I just want you to lean forward on that arm a little bit and look at me. Yes. You can touch your hair if you want. There you go. Excellent.

Perfect. Now just swing your body, turn and face me and cross one leg over the other. However you like to cross your leg. I don't care how. There we go.

Yeah, that's great. However you do. Some people do like more open legs. Some people cross it close leg. It's just whatever feels good.

Also, if you've been in this portrait photography business longer than like five minutes, you know that a lot of times you will explain a pose to a client like down to the detail and they'll go over

there and do something that is like nothing you've said when you're doing a shoot like this- I wish I would have. That's fine. When you're doing a shoot like this, that's great because you didn't just give some like vague something, see what they do and then just go with it. Or if you want to change it, completely change it. But like, it's cool. Cause everyone's going to move in a different way and people's bodies are going to do what they're going to do. And half the time I kind of walk back to get where I'm going and I turn around and however they are, I'm like, that's not there. Great. Okay.

Oh, that's great.

Oh, I love that. Perfect. Now lean toward me just a little bit. Lean in. I'll bring this, this hand up. Oh, excellent.

Oh, love, love, love that.

You just a little more, I'll just look down that way and just kind of like mess with your hair a little bit and laugh at the floor. It's such a funny floor. Oh my God.

Laugh at the floor. Oh, I'm the funniest floor in all of downtown Joplin. Now look at me like, Mitzi. Oh, I love it.

That's so perfect.

Gorgeous. All right. Next outfit. Killed it. Yes.

Okay. So we're going to do the next outfit and this is going to be the showing some skin portion. Now I did have one client one time, actually, I think I had like a male and a female client, like at separate times be like, no. And I'm like, okay, if they don't want to do that, that's fine. We just do like a third look. That's whatever they want to do. And by this point in the shoot, you're going to kind of know how to guide them in that because you've already photographed them in two outfits and you've talked to them for a little while. So with the showing the skin we're going to go back over to that first setup. I'm just going to light it a little differently. So I'll show you that and then we'll shoot.

All right. So Elijah is going to come over here for their final outfit. Come have a seat. So for the showing some skin, they opted to wear something just really cozy. So just like boxers and, uh, favorite t-shirt and socks. And I love this look. I think this is so great. Cozy. So relaxed and yeah, you're just like cozy. Yeah. So what I want you to do for this first one is let's see here. Can you have a seat right where you are? I usually start this one seated. I also do, I basically do modified boudoir poses. So like boudoir poses that are not sexual for this. That's kind of where I went with when I started doing the, uh, prompts.

And also I really want to go from, uh, more of that, like artistic standpoint of like just showing the human body. So like when you go to an art museum, there's people who are uncovered. There's

people who aren't wearing much, but it's not like sexy. It's just a celebration of the body. And that's really what this part of the shoot is. Um, that's something that I make really clear in the prep guide. And it's something that the best way I've found that connects with people is when I say it's not about being sexy. It's about a physical representation of vulnerability. So sometimes people too, they're going to do the shoot with you and they're going to end up wearing something that's a little less covering than they told you when they got here.

Cause sometimes they're like, they anticipate like being really nervous. But by the time you get to that output, they're actually like, actually, can I do it without the pants on or something? I'm like, hell yeah. Like do it. It's the same reason why, like, I always joke that a lot of my clients who come in for headshots end up just like in a white sheet by the end, because you know, it's just, you're here. It's comfortable. And honestly, if you feel yes, comfort, if you feel that comfortable in a space with someone, you are more comfortable showing more of your body and it's just really powerful. So, Oh, okay. Do you see how they're just seated right there? That's just how they naturally sat. Perfect. Don't change it. That's beautiful. Um, I am going to mess with my light for just a second. I usually say that even if I know my lights exactly where I want it, because people really let their guard down when you're like, Oh, I'm just testing my light. And then, but right now I am really testing my light. Cause I don't know if I'm going to like it.

Oh, Oh, that is so beautiful. Okay. So it's just a tad darker than I would like it to be. So I am going to just slow down my shutter speed a little bit and bump my ISO up a little bit. Cause I feel like that. Perfect.

Oh, and that was exactly, exactly what I needed to do. Oh, this is remarkable. All right. So right now, so if you ever want to direct them from what they're doing, just mirror what they're already doing. Okay. And then it's just really obvious. Um, can you bring, I just want a hand, I just want a hand, like, ah, like whether it's just sitting on your hair or whatever. And I just want you to sway back and forth really gently. Just kind of sway. Yes.

Beautiful.

And especially in this setup, I love to really back way up. You guys will lose me for a second, but I love to back way up for a couple and get some really beautiful, like dirty frame images. Elijah, would you take half scooch this way? So I'm just going to center them up a little bit so I can just like, love that. Yeah. There you go.

Just feel cozy. You know. Like literally if my client had said, I want to wear something really cozy and comfortable. And I knew they loved Beyonce. I would be playing the song cozy by Beyonce right now. That's literally what I'm have in my head right now. There you go. Perfect. Yes.

Oh, this is so beautiful. Oh, I just have to like, oh my goodness. So if there's a photo that just really, you're like, oh, and you're so excited, just run over and show them, especially if it's the beginning. It's so nice. Yes. It keeps it like interest. Like, you know what I mean? It's interesting, but it keeps it exciting. As you're going, you kind of can get little snippets of what things look

like. And I feel like it's reassuring because you, it's like, they see it. They're like, oh, like I don't look terrible. Yes. Cause like, that's usually the assumption that they come in.

So yeah, like I'm just kind of curious, like as this being, I feel like, is this kind of your first official photo shoot? Like since you came out as non-binary? Yeah. Like first official. Yes. Yeah. Wow. So like, how did that influence, tell me a little about how that influenced like your preparation for it? Oh gosh. I don't know. I think the moment I decided or figured out that that's what I, that's who I was. I, there's just this certain level of alignment that I didn't realize that I hadn't necessarily had before. Even though I felt very fulfilled in a lot of ways, I, there was just that last final little piece. And so I think once you have, and you've kind of achieved that sense of alignment with yourself, there's a certain amount of confidence and surety that comes with it. Yes. And so I think yeah, I think that's the best way it prepared me was just that kind of knowing more who I am. Also, I have to say the binary is limiting for everybody. And so for me, it was like, oh my gosh, like I don't have to worry about something being too feminine for me or too masculine for me. I'm literally, I have no rules. I can literally just be comfortable. I can exist like AS I AM. That's actually, that's kind of funny that that just came up.

I didn't even mean that, but um, no, I can really just exist and just celebrate the things that make me excited and make me happy and make me feel like I'm expressing who I am on the inside. So it just makes that process easier in general. Yeah. And I love that. I mean, who would not love that? So yeah. Did it, do you feel like it kind of like helped you when it came to picking outfits and 100% it gave me like permission, which I didn't need it to begin with. No matter who you are, you can wear whatever you want, but it did kind of give me. You didn't second guess yourself. Yeah. Yeah. I didn't have to second guess or think too hard. It's like, oh, well that doesn't apply to me because I wear what I want. I love that.

So I'm like underwear and a t-shirt or heels. We love that. I love that so much. I would just like celebrating both parts, you know? Yes. Oh, I love these so much. Um, and even when they just started talking a little bit, um, even if you don't have something like the gender binary to talk about, ask someone what the best meal was they ever ate. That's a good question. Or if they like to travel, ask them the favorite place they ever visited, just get someone talking about something they care about and just sit there and take photos of them. Because all of the, this that Elijah does all the time that came out like five times during when you were talking just different, right. You don't even know. And it's like all of their mannerisms and the things that they do will come out in those photos and like you just document it. I love that. Okay. So, um, what I'm going to have you do next, go ahead and hop up and stand there for just a second. Cause I'm going to move some apple boxes. So one look that I love to do, I'm going to say this first of all, when I have a guy and he has his shirt off, um, he's comfortable enough to take his shirt off. That means he wants photos of his upper body. So usually what I'll do is I'll take a couple apple boxes, or you could even use a posing table or any type of table and just kind of lean him over the front like this and light him kind of move the light anywhere on this line. Just play with that and show that off. That's not really the direction that Elijah wants to go, so I'm not going to photograph them like that.

But, I did also have a, uh, a client recently, a guy who, yeah, Zach, he wore for his showings. I love Zach. He's a barista. And so he did some with his boxers and his barista apron. . It was so sick. So great. And so I loved that one. And so I am going to pose you kind of the same way that I posed Zach for that. And it's the same way. It's the same way I posed Tamra when she did fine art nude for us. Like it's all, it's all the same because all the rules are made up. Exactly. Um, and so when I'm going to have you do, let's see here. Okay. So I'm going to have you, you're going to have a seat on this kind of like on your hip.

So when people are doing what I call like the mermaid pose, you tell them to sit on their hip or else they're going to go, we're going to be like this, which feels weird. So I'm going to sit on their hip, kind of bring your feet forward. They also will usually do this, even though that's like so uncomfortable, most people will start to say top leg in front, say that prop yourself up here and kind of lean. And it's kind of like a, you know, like a mermaid lounging on a big rock. Oh, I love that. Yeah. If you say mermaid to anyone, they know what you mean. And they always do the post right. Mmhmm. Uh huh.

Did you know when I was little, I wanted to be a mermaid so bad. I would like have dreams that I was, I'd wake up crying because I wasn't, I know. You felt deeply. I know. And now I'm like scared of the ocean. So I don't know, something. Same.

I used to pull my socks off, like until there was just a little bit left on my foot and I'd pretend it was a flipper. My cousin and I would do that. Oh yeah. That's dedication. Oh yeah. We'd have like Little Mermaid marathons. It was great.

That's the best. Yeah. That was definitely one of my faves.

She was probably one of the more progressive-ish ones. I don't know.

Okay.

That's great. So naturally Elijah just kind of like cross their legs a little bit, just however that is comfortable to you, but I love the leaning on the arm. Perfect. Oh, beautiful.

Oh, I love this. Now what I'm, all I'm going to have you change is just take a deep breath out.

And then I want you to raise your chin ever so slightly. So when you do a chin raise, that is automatically confidence. So if you feel like someone feels confident in this, just they'll usually just do it, but you can also just kind of coach them to raise their chin a little bit. Um, and then now I want you, let's see here.

Hop up for a second, I'm going to have you do a similar one, basically the same pose, just on the ground. And I want you to just kind of like splay your legs a little bit, a little bit more, but keep them bent. There you go.

And let's put the top one in the front. The only reason I do the, guys, pay attention to this too, when you're photographing people in black and white, please make sure that whenever they've got, you know, light tone skin showing that the parts that you want to show aren't falling off into shadow because move your foot back again. If they were doing that in the photo, it would literally look like their leg ends here and that's not accurate. So bring that one forward.

So smart. Thanks. I've done this like a couple of times.

I've also photographed people to make them look like they're missing limbs. And that's how I learned. Oh God. Yeah. Okay. So now just deep breath.

Beautiful. Oh, I love that. Perfect.

Oh, I love that so much. And now I just want you to like, however you would do it.

I want you to be really a really cozy, cozy, cozy pose. Yes, okay. However you would do that. Beautiful. Oh, I love that.

Oh, look at your little pointed dancer feet. Oh, are they pointing? Yes, I love it. I can't help it that's so funny.

Do you do ballet or something? Oh, I love that so much. Okay. And now I just want you to sit facing me and just sway back and forth and flip your hair back a little bit and just, just have a moment with you feeling good about who you are. I love that. Oh, don't give yourself a hug.

Oh, that's a good one. You got your knees into that one. Oh yeah. I love it. Now lean forward to me one more time.

Wow.

Perfect.

All right, we're done. Killed it. Oh, look at us go.

Okay. Now I'm going to dump these on my computer and we're going to do your instant reveal. Okay. Sounds good. Yay.

8. INSTANT REVEAL

Are you ready? I am so ready. I'm so excited. I can already see one and I'm losing my mind. Okay, so what we're gonna do, I have Lightroom open right now and basically what I do is since I shoot them all in black and white, I just dump them all on my computer, pull up that whole folder of images in Lightroom. We ended up with like 340, so pretty good. We kept it, I try not to go over 350. We kept it pretty good. So what we're gonna do is I'm gonna hand the controls over to you. Okay. Now this is someone who does not use Lightroom and this process, I've done it dozens of times now. It works, everyone can do it. All you need to worry about is you're going to, just your first pose, like hello.

Oh we love. What you're gonna do is you're going to flag all the photos that you have a reaction to. Okay, so if you like it, if you think it's hilarious, if you're like, oh my god, I look like my mom or you know whatever, like if you have some type of reaction and also if I have a big reaction, just hit the flag and that is just this little squiggle button. Perfect. Okay, so if you press it once, it says flag as pic. If you're like, oh I actually didn't mean to, just hit it again. It'll go away. Okay, awesome. The other thing you need to do is just arrow keys back and forth. So just go to the next photo like this. Okay. Your little smile. Okay, so this first time through, we're only going to look at them one photo at a time and I don't want you to stress about how many. You can flag like all but two. It doesn't matter, but like this is really just so you get a chance to see all of the photos and I'm seeing them for the first time too. Okay. Oh, this is fun. I'm so excited. Okay.

All right. All right. Go with your heart. All right. Unless I just tell you. Oh, I love it. Oh my gosh. Oh, I love the actual smile.

Oh, that's so cute.

I love that. See, I never get photos of me like actually just chilling, smiling. I tend to take photos a little too serious sometimes, like even if I'm just taking selfies or, you know, whatever. So it's nice to have something like a selfie of your own natural smile. Yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely. It's so much easier. Oh, I love that. Oh, that's actually kind of bombastic side eye right there. We love that. I look so sassy, right? Oh, I love that. I'm obsessed. I love that. I love that. My gosh, you got so many good ones. Dude, we're like, we're like 30 seconds into the shoot right now too. I'm like already like, okay, this is great. Okay. Oh, cute. I know.

That little hair grab. Oh my God. Yes. The boot. I, you know, it, I'm glad I picked that. I'm glad, I'm glad we went with that. She's the main character. Oh my gosh, I love this photo.

I really, really like that. How do you feel in that? Oh, I don't know. It's just like effortless and graceful and chill and comfortable. It looks comfortable. I love that.

Oh, I love that. Okay. The jawline. Okay.

Oh, I love. So this gives me dancer vibes and I like that. Okay. It got better. Oh, wow. Oh, we love that. We love, we love.

Oh, that's so sweet. Your little hair swoosh.

Yes. My hair's long enough now. Can I actually get tossed? Oh my God. I love all, how am I supposed to pick? Like, I'm just like, I want to pick them all.

Oh my gosh. These are so cute.

I love that. Oh, that nose crinkle. Oh, we love the lighting. Honestly. I was hearing you talking about it. I was trying to like picture it and that's perfect. Oh, I'm glad you like it. Oh, that's good too.

How fun.

I hope it's okay if I just like flagged a lot of them. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Because all the ones that you like, just find them. Yeah. Okay. Perfect. Love that. Because after this, we're going to go through them again and we're going to look at similar ones and you can pick, you know, cool. That reminds me of when I was little. I love that. You look so hopeful. That gives me like, yes, yes.

Oh, these are great. I told you you killed it. Oh, so did you look at us go?

Just, oh my gosh. Yes.

Oh, I love that. Oh, I love, oh my goodness. Look at you dancing with no music. Yes. Amazing.

Oh my God. That one's very like caught off guard. Yes.

Cute. Yep. I love that. Mmhmm.

Oh, I love that one too. I like the shoulders. Dude. I'm just like, oh my gosh, these are all so good. I cannot. Beautiful.

Okay.

Like this is just your presence too. Like you can't fake that. Bless. That's just how you're showing up. Oh, I love that so much.

Oh, the little one. I remember you saying that. Chin up. Yep. Chin tilt. Oh, that made a world of difference. That's amazing. So beautiful. Oh, here we are. Cute.

Like, I, I genuinely like all of them. Oh my God. I love that. I love it. We're giving dancer hands in that last one. That one. Yeah. Remarkable. Oh, thank you. Did I flag this one already? Yes, I did. I can tell that white, right? Yeah. Okay. Perfect. It's fine.

This is easy. All they're doing right now is flag and arrow key. That's it. Literally so simple. Everyone can do it. I have clients in their sixties, seventies. No problem. Yeah. Everyone figures it out. It's just super simple and, um. Ideal honestly. Since we're screen recording right now, it didn't let me completely full screen these photos. We're just looking at them as big as you can for each one in Lightroom. But normally I'm just, we just, I hit F for full screen and they just scroll through the first time. Oh my gosh.

A moment of silence. Sorry. Amazing. Amazing. Oh, I love that one even more. Here's the other thing. I used to use a projector for these. I didn't since I've been doing raw por- Oh God. That's so good. I love the smile. Um, but when it's on a laptop screen, I find people don't like pick themselves apart so much. They're just like, they just see the whole photo. Yeah. Cause it's like, you know, you're not really used to seeing yourself like 80 inches, you know, wide on like a whole... excuse me. I said, you should get that one an 80 inch.

MmmHm. Look at the, Oh, the tattoo. I know your tattoos look phenomenal. Just that over the shoulder. Like, Oh, Oh my goshUH.

Oh, we're so good, dude. You're so good, dude. You just, that's just, this is just, Oh, I love this so much. It really, it just, it's like, it's me. 100%. I feel like this is the me that all of my loved ones get to see. Yes, absolutely.

Oh, I love that. And this is you when you love you. Oh, you know what? We love that too.

Okay. Yeah. Oh, the connection. Yeah.

100%. That's amazing. Your eyes are just like piercing. Oh, and then the giggle. Oh, I like that too.

Fun. I like all the smiling ones. I love that. Hair flip. Yes. Oh, I love that one. It's beautiful. Yes. Okay. Yes. Cute. So glad you brought that matrix shirt. Thank you. I was like, do I want to wear the matrix? I was like, yes, I do. I wear this a lot. I love this shirt. It looks so cool in black and white too. I love that.

Cute. My little Chrissy cross fingers. MmHm

Yes.

I love the contrast too, of your like dark hair with the, with the white shirt. Yeah. It shows off the length of the hair, honestly. And that right now we're, you know, since we're looking at the expression series, that's something where I will guide them on their outfit for that very

intentionally because Elijah has like dark, like black hair and then the table is black. It's like a nice mirror. Whereas when I have someone's really light colored hair doing that one, I'll usually dress them in something dark. So there's more of a contrast between them and the background. I love that. Oh, I love that one.

The mustache really like amplifies the pout. I love that so much. Honestly, that's what I love it. I love that. Cute. Yep. Love it. Yep.

I feel like I've given people this look before. Oh, you have.

Cute.

Oh my gosh. That's sweet.

Oh, I love that too. Oh my gosh. Your hands. Yes. You use your hands so much. I'm very expressive with my hands. I like my mom's the same way. Yeah. I think I get that from her probably.

That's an ornery smile.

Oh, cute. I like that one. Yeah, I like that a lot. Oh, yep. Yep. Yep. Love, love, love that. That's so good.

Oh, that one's good too. That's like, they kind of get refined as it's so nice.

Yeah. That one's like, I can look so grumpy, especially with the mustache. You can. I look like I'm like washing your eyebrows. Oh my gosh. That's so my, again, the hands.

Oh, that's so cute. And that's why I always tell people when they're doing these versions, I'm like, use your whole upper body because people, they will. I love that photo. That's so fun. I love every, I call it in my head. I call it the rollercoaster photo when people are like gripping the table and they're going like, everyone does it. I don't know. It looks like you're just like, that's exactly what it looks like. On a rollercoaster. Oh my gosh. I like a little bit of the smile. Yes. Yes. Oh, that's fun. That also reminds me of being a kid. I used to make faces like that a lot.

Oh yes. Hands up. Raise the roof. Yep. I love that.

Moment of contemplation. So I do the, I say the deodorant prompt to people who like really would get freaked out if I told them to dance. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Smart. Honestly, that was really smart because then it forces them to kind of like get their hands up a little bit. Yeah. Oh, I love that. Oh yeah. You're telling a story. I am. I totally am. I have to, yeah, I have to flag that. I don't know who you were talking about, but.

Cute. Oh, that's so cute. I love that. These look so good. I love this so much. You look so happy. Oh. Oh my gosh. I love the prompts because I would never, ever, ever, ever make these faces. Right. You wouldn't just sit there if I was like, okay, act natural. You wouldn't be like. I would literally never go anywhere near this room. I would keep it, knowing me, I'd keep it very serious. So it's so fun and cool to see me in like the, like in expressions that I'm not used to seeing myself in. I love that. Oh, that's so peaceful. Yes. I love that.

You look so, I can look at you sad. So pouty. I love it.

Oh, you look like you just got your ice cream. I look really sad, straight up.

Oh, and there's that. Now we're good. Now we're good. Yeah. Oh, okay. That one's good. Shut up. That's so great. I really, really like that one. I'm like, oh, I want to, I want to print that one out. Shoot, that one's actually really cool. I like that. It's nice and slow. Yeah, I like that too. I like that. Love that.

Cute. I'm still telling some kind of story, I'm sure.

Oh my gosh. See, again, this reminds me when I was little, I haven't, it's weird. I say that, I think it's because I haven't seen these faces in a photo since then. Yeah. To be honest, which is so cool. I just, I love that. Because when we grow up, we learn how to perform, you know? Yes. A little, yeah. Oh, oh, I saw this quote the other day and it was, I meant to share it with you. It said like, gender is a performance and I'm gonna get booed off the stage. Mmmhmm. I was like, hell yeah. Oh yes. That's the goal. They're not throwing tomatoes by the time I'm done. Something's wrong. Oh, I like the, see, I like those little, like the wrinkles are like a crow's feet. Cause they remind me of my dad.

Did you hear that? I like the crow's feet. Crow's feet are cute. Listen. Hey, that's the thing. Like these, these images, you create this space for people and they will say stuff like that all the time because I'm not going, don't worry, I'll Photoshop out your crow's feet. Yeah.

Oh, that's so sweet. I love that. That is a very hopeful.

So confident. We're grooving. That's me checking the deodorant right there.

That's you being like, nope. Nope. Time to try a new one. Time to get a new deodorant. That one too. Dude, have I told you how many natural deodorants I've tried in the last year? Oh, I love that. That's so sweet. These are all so good. I'm like, holy cow. So many consecutive. Yep. So good. Even the ones that are kind of like that in between motion. I really like those.

People end up using, like picking those a lot. Oh, that's sweet.

Oh, these are so awesome. We love that. Okay. Yes. Yes.

Oh, that's sweet. I love how lean forward.

Yeah, me too. I love that. I like the lighting in that a lot.

Oh, I like that one even more.

You got intense. I love it. I did.

Wow.

These are, I know I keep saying that. These are so good. I literally, I don't know if I've stopped smiling a single time. Oh, I love that. It's wonderful.

Oh my gosh, I love.

Oh, see, that's when I look at my friends when they're telling me a bunch of like bullshit. I'm like. I'm like, let's be real.

Okay. Oh, cute.

Oh, I love those.

I love how much I'm smiling in these. That's so awesome.

I love that. That's the bored one. Yep.

Actually kind of like that too, honestly.

Oh, that one's really good.

I love that.

Cute, contemplative bored. Oh, that's so cute.

Oh, I love. I also like something really smiley up against tattoos. I think that's what it's really. Yes. It doesn't always have to be harsh, you know.

Oh man, my hair's gotten long. Yeah, it really has.

Wow. I love the contrast against the white shirt with your hair. Me too. I really, I also like that it has my wedding band in it. That's so sweet.

Oh, I love all of those. Those are, I was kind of like, I'm not going to lie. These always make me a little nervous, but I love that. Because you're afraid you're going to be like. Yeah, yeah. But I love how that, I love how that looks. That's like so cute.

Oh, I love them all.

You've made this so difficult. Like I'm like, how on earth am I? Don't worry, I will help you pick. Oh, that hair flip. Yes. Hello.

Yes, yes, yes.

Oh, I love that. Oh, that one. I really, really, really, really love that one. With your jawline, your profile. Hello. I love, love that one. That one's really, really good. I think some of my favorite photos are always the ones where it's like, I couldn't have posed you like that if I wanted to. Right. Well, that's like a lot of these. Well, it has to just happen from you. Seriously. I actually really like that one. Yeah, I do too.

Oh, that's cute.

Yes. I'm telling you. I use my hands so much. That's so funny. I never noticed.

We love a studios. Oh, I like that one more. I'm going to go back and select that one. Amazing. Love that one. I actually like the eyes closed. Oh, that's when you said be super serious. Okay. Yeah. Oh, I love that. So great. This is honestly super chill. I love this. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Love her. Oh, the boot. Boot.

We see the first thing. Mm hmm.

Yeah. So for this setup, sometimes I pull the seamless backdrop all the way down to the floor. Sometimes though, I like my black floors. And so because Elijah has black hair and it mirrors it with the black boots, I kept it like that. Oh, I love that.

Yep. I love all just taking up space. Oh, that's so cool. Oh, I love that. Oh, that's so sick.

That's so sick. Oh, my gosh. I love all of that. That is so good. That's sick. That is so sick. I love that too.

I feel bad because I know I'm like flagging all of them. I just genuinely cannot help it. It's almost people do. I gotta be real. Like, they're all really good. I really, really love that.

And then you post your little it just made it perfect. It really did. That made it so perfect. Oh, my God.

Better work, girl. Okay. That one's probably my favorite out of all of those, though. That's amazing.

Gosh, they're so good. Look at that little hand.

I love it. I love it. I'm getting excited. Oh, my God. What? Hmm. Oh, I love that. I'm like slap your arm. Oh, I love that so much. Oh, that's cute. I really like that.

Yes. Feeling myself in my Matrix shirt. Mmhmm. Mhmm.

Yep. I get the hair toss.

Cute.

Oh, I love that one.

Yes. Like, oh, hello. Oh, hello. It's me. Yes.

Oh, stop. I'm going to stop you right there.

I like stop and pause because like I'm seeing different like people in my oh. So that one was the one that was a little dark. It's like moody. Open it up a little bit after that. There we go. Right there.

Yep. You're a wizard. See how it's like so evenly like just from your forehead to your legs. Yes. Oh, I love that. And the backdrop looks much darker. It's so chill and cozy.

Oh, my God. I love this. Oh, I love that.

Oh, I love that hair flip in motion. Yep. Yep. Yep. Oh, my gosh. Also, my cheekbones.

Come on now. Come on now. That's so pretty.

Oh, I love that so much. Oh, that too. I keep saying the same thing over and over again. I really just can't help myself. That's fine.

Oh, that's beautiful. Oh, my gosh.

I can die. I just like fall on the floor.

That's so pretty. Oh, I love. Oh, and they just keep getting better. I don't understand.

They're all so good. That's so good.

Love that.

Yes.

Oh, yeah. This is when I was talking. That's perfect.

I really like the talking ones. Yep. This is when. Yeah, you were telling me. Oh, I love that. Mm hmm. Yeah. Mm hmm.

Is it? It's like the meme. Is this a butterfly? But it's like, sorry.

Oh, I like I really like the ones you take while I was talking. I really like it's like, just like I'm just. Yeah.

It's like, you know what you're doing, Mitzi. Hey, thanks.

No, you obviously do. These are absolutely incredible. Oh my gosh.

I really like how vibey these are. This is so chill. So me.

And I love the socks. I love that you did socks. I did socks because that's what I do. I don't ever go like barefoot in my house. Yeah. I love socks. Me too. I've been investing in some bougie socks lately, and it's worth it. I love that. I really, really love that. Bougie socks, though. You're right. Oh, I. One thing I'm taking away from this. One of the things is that I talk with my hands a lot. And I love that. It's like handography. Yes. It's just everyday life. We love her. Oh, there's one. These are some of my like all time faves. You do. That's a lot when you talk.

Yeah, this. Yeah, we definitely. Like the reel it in. Yep.

Oh, my gosh. I love that. I love it.

Oh, that looks like little. That does. It does. Well, my little dimples like they don't come out very often, but when they do.

Fun. Oh, I love that so much. I love that. I do. That is awesome. Mm hmm. Yep. Mm hmm.

Oh, my gosh.

Mm hmm. I like that a lot. I'm explaining my vision. Yes. In a boardroom in my undies.

Yeah, exactly.

Listen up. Oh, there we go.

Oh, I like that.

That's so good. I love that smile.

Yes. And you gradually, as you talked, became less posed. Do you see that? Like, yeah, you started to kind of just relax into what you had kind of started with and just kind of. Yeah. Oh, that one. Go back. That is that hand. That's it. Yes. You're right. That is so. Oh, I love it. Uh huh.

Everyone who knows you is going to be like, yep. Yes. Yes.

Oh, cool.

I love that. Apple boxes are so useful. Mm hmm.

Yeah, I love all of these. Like, I know I'm going to love all of these.

Oh, my gosh. Yes.

In ballet, we call that wings when your foot's angled out. Oh, wings? So we love to see that.

Oh, my gosh.

It looks so good.

And the chin raises coming up. That's great, though. Mm hmm. Oh, I love.

Oh, I love these. I love these.

Again with. Oh, my gosh. Yeah. Your lil toe.

Oh, that's funny. I love it. I put my toes off. I put my feet constantly now. I'm like chilling. Really? Yep. It's a.

It's a thing. Oh, I know that one's so sweet. The next one that.

So joyful. Yes.

I like that because it's like, oh. Mmhmm. Aww.

These are I love that one. I don't know why, but that one's like I feel more settled in that one. Mm hmm. Oh, oh, that's so sweet. That is so cute. Oh, my God. I love that so much. I love that one, too. Yes.

Oh, I love that. These are so cool.

Weirdly, I'm going to say this out loud. It's it's I'm someone who tends to be a little bit hard on myself, like ninety nine percent of the time. Very interesting seeing myself like a visible like view of showing myself love. Very interesting. Oh, of showing yourself. Yeah. Give yourself a hug. Isn't that interesting? Like, that's like what I'm getting out of it. I love that. It makes me feel very happy.

You like combined a little hair flip in there. Yes. So it's amazing.

Mm hmm. I love all of these. Oh, my gosh. All so good. Cute.

I love that one.

Mm hmm. So peaceful yet confident. Yes. These are it. Yeah. Mm hmm.

Oh, my gosh. I love this.

You know. Mm hmm. Oh, we, you nailed it. I see you nailed it, dude. Oh, my gosh. I am like so. So now what I'm going to do is I'm going to go over here and I'm just going to pull up the ,uh, flagged photos. OK, so that's great. You flagged all but like 50. So that's awesome. What we're going to do now is you're going to look at them, but like a few at a time so we can look at them like, you know, this. Most people like to look at three at a time. Does that sound kind of good? OK. That's perfect. And if we need to do two at a time or make them a little bigger, we totally can. So at this point, I kind of take over controls because people can get kind overwhelmed and they're like, OK, now you help me. Like because I like so many. And then this is your job. This is when it's your job as the guide and the professional who's used to culling and all that stuff.

Like we're used to culling images. Our average client is not used to that. So it's our job to help them be like, don't worry, I'll help you pick. Bless. OK. So we're going to look at three at a time. And what I'm going to do is I'm going to mark with five stars the ones that you're like, oh, I really like that one. Yeah. OK. Yep. Yep. Yep. So tell me, say like all three are left or right or middle or whatever. OK. Go with your gut once again. Yep. So now your client has seen them all once. So it's like you can look at them a couple at a time now. Right.

Yes. Oh, my God. Oh, that's hard. Definitely the right one and the middle one.

Yeah.

Oh, that one left for sure. Yeah. And if there's one I'm really excited about, I'll just be like that one's making it to the final round. Yes.

OK. Either of these. The ring.

In the center. Yeah. You see what I was saying? I forgot about it until just now. And I was like, OK, yeah, we'll skip over that. Oh, that one.

That was a good catch, though. OK, that's hard. I really like the right. Oh, I really like that because it's like up here we got the cracking up. Yeah. It's like the smile. Yes. Oh, man. OK. I love that middle one. Yeah, for sure. Yeah. A big thing that I look for when I'm calling is like I like to pick photos that say different things. So if there's two photos that say the same thing, that's like I agree. Agreed. Pick one, you know. Perfect.

Oh, man. OK. I really like the, well, I like the right one, but I also like the left one. Yeah.

OK.

I like the middle one. I love that one. It's so it's so different from like all the others. Yes, it is. You're right. OK, I'm going to say left. I feel like that one has like a can we do the right to as well? Of course, you can favorite as many as you want. Oh, beautiful. Oh, good. OK. Um, oh, I'm going to say that the head tilt because that that really just yeah. Yeah.

Definitely that one. And the right one.

Please I like the right one for sure. It's a cool shape you're making. Thank you. I like that one.

OK.

The center.

And I kind of like that one, too, honestly, like the movement. It's very free. OK. Yeah, definitely. Yeah, that's when I like.

And let's do that too.

How about this? Let's compare them. Yeah. Yeah.

So your chin's a little higher. Yeah, I'm going to say. I think. What do you think? I think the higher chin probably looks more confident. I like the higher chin one. That's what I'm more drawn to. Yep. OK, me too. And they kind of they say the same thing so let's just pick one. Yes. OK, definitely far right. Oh, for sure. Hands down. Absolutely. We love that far right again. Just oh, wait. Oh, yeah. No, I love that one. Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Far left and far right there. Yes.

Oh, I like the middle. I like where my arm is, weirdly. Yep. Well, you just did that. So.

OK, definitely that one.

And I like that one. Yeah, I love that one. We're thinking the same. Oh, yep. Like that one. And the right one. Yeah, I was like that. You're on it. You're getting the right one. Yeah. Yes. Oh, I don't know. This one. OK, perfect. So great. Yeah, that one's hard because I couldn't tell.

OK, I like that one. Very happy.

Yeah. OK.

I like the first one. There's something very just chill about that.

I like the right one. Yes. Yep.

I like that one. I know that's weird. The pouty one? I like the pouty one. Looking straight at the camera with you.

That one's cool. I like that.

OK, let's see. Yep. At all. Yep. Yep. You're right.

All right. Yep. Mm hmm. Iconic.

Oh, I like the right one. It's giving a new face. Mm hmm. I like the middle one. Yeah, for sure.

I love that.

Yes. I don't know which one, because they're like different levels of severity. OK, perfect. That's the one I'm drawn to. Yes.

I'm going to say the left.

I like that one.

Very cute.

Yeah. If you're if you're looking at a row of photos and you're like, oh, I don't know which one to pick, like the one where your eyes go back to. Yes. That one. Yep.

Yes, for sure.

I oh, I'm torn. I like this one and this one. Well, they're so different. Yeah. Very different.

I like the sad one. It's fun.

I'm going to say I keep going back to this one because I think it's different. Which one do you think?

I'm torn.

Between which ones? All three.

This one and this one. OK, perfect.

I like that one. Oh, I like the middle one, too. Just different enough. Yeah. I love at least one good blank.

OK, let's see.

I keep going back to this one, honestly.

I love that. Yeah, we got to do that. I made a bird sound, that means I like it. I feel like we have a couple that are very similar in the earlier. Yeah.

OK, definitely.

Yeah.

Yes. It's so pure. It is. I know. I love it. Oh, I like that. And the right one, actually.

Oh, OK. This is hard because I love, love, love, love, love, love all these. I feel like this. Yeah. Plus this. Yes. Yes. Yes. Perfect.

I'm going to see what's next. Yeah.

OK, I'm going to say, yep, I'm going to just.

Oh, so in Lightroom, if you select like four or something and then hit N, it will bring up just the ones you select. That is so nice. OK.

OK, yep mmhmm. I was going to say I really like that one and I think I like the first one. Yeah. First and third. First, yeah. Those are where I go to.

I just went.

Oh, yeah, yeah, for sure. Yep. The second one. Yeah.

Yeah, I like the bored one.

I whatever just being filmed for a photo shoot. Yeah, I like that middle one. That's great.

OK, first one for sure. Or second one, I'm sorry. OK, I was going to say I was like the second one. Yeah, second one for sure. And then I'd say that first one.

Perfect. And then, oh, the hair flip.

And then the right one. Yeah. Like if you get a storybook, like these two photos next to each other would just be like like a mirror image. I love that.

Um, I'm going to say I kind of.

It's between these two for me. What do you think? Second. OK, cool.

Yeah, I got to get the thing I like because I'm telling a very intense story. Meatballs. OK. OK, so I'm going to do the second one. Or last, what do you think? First or second? Oh, third. Yeah. OK. Like just the tiniest difference, but that would just. I love that one. It cracks me up. I love that one. And I love that one. Yeah. Oh, my God. This I think this next one, too. Yeah. Oh, that. Yes. OK.

I'm going to say that first one. Yeah. Iconic. I like that last one. Yeah.

I like that one. And yeah. Well, I mean, to be honest, I like this one. Yeah. I like that a lot. And then these are going to be hard for me. I really like that.

And since they're all very similar, I'm going to pick that one. Yeah. Yeah. And then I love this one. I'm going to say the last one. There's a little more smiley in my face. Yeah.

It's so good. It's so good.

Mm hmm mmhmm mhmm.

Yeah, I like that one. I like the middle.

The far right, I'd say. Yes.

Oh, that's tough. I like that one. Yeah. I love your laugh. Thank you. Me, too. I'm very happy. This one's turned out pretty dark. I'm going to the next.

Oh, definitely. Oh, gosh. Definitely the last two. For sure.

Oh, dude. OK. I'm going to say the first two. Yeah. This is the one we both like cried about. Oh, yeah. Amazing. Mm hmm. I like that one. And since they're like two and three, I'm going to do two at a time. These are kind of full body or further away.

Yep. That one definitely. So dreamy. Definitely that one. I like both of those, though. Yeah, I do love both of those.

I like the right one. Yeah. I love how in sync we are. This is great. I like the I like this one. These just feel more cozy. They feel so like chill. They all feel chill, but like, yeah, love the right one for sure.

I love the left one and the right one, but I think I'm going to do the left.

Yeah.

I like both of those a lot.

Yeah.

The right one. Palm up.

Love that.

The right one. Yeah, definitely. I love that. That's such a good looking off.

I like the left one. The pointing. Yes. You need a good like. Yes.

OK, let's do. Yeah, let's. What do you think? Let's see what's next.

Yeah, because we have a couple that are like this. I love this. Yeah. The little dimples. Mm hmm. I love that. I do. I really, really like that one. That's great.

Yeah, I like these to really show off the integrity of the style of shoot. Mm hmm.

That are so honest. Yes. Yes. I like that one. Oh, yeah, for sure. Mm hmm. I like that one. Wow, that one's like very majestic.

Cute. OK, so this is when I yeah, this is when I got cozy. Yeah, yeah. This one. Mm hmm. So great. OK. Oh, OK.

Come on. Yeah. C'mon. Yes.

Pick up on the apple box. Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Yeah. So you said to chin up.

I would say the second one, for some reason, I just.

Yeah.

Yep. Mm hmm.

Mm hmm. The wings. Wings. Mm hmm. Mm hmm. That's hard. I like the chin up a little more like kind of a wave. My eyes are a little more chill, too. Oh, I love that. I like the eyes closed. Me, too. Looks cozier.

I like the right. Oh, yes, I love that one.

The left one.

Yep. Yep. Agreed. Mm hmm.

Oh, I like the right one.

Yeah.

Oh, I love the right one. Yes, for sure.

Right one. Mm hmm.

Oh, three at a time. I love that. OK, so I'm going to say the middle for sure. It just seems like really fun. And she'll end the left one. And a left.

Mm hmm. And then I want. Yeah. Yeah. One of those over your hairs.

That's cute. I like the left one.

Oh, my goodness. I love both of those. Yes. Mm hmm.

Oh, my goodness. OK, some of the chins a little higher. Yeah. Yeah. It's down.

Oh. I like the chin higher. Yeah, I think that was a good call. And that one last one. Yeah. Yes. OK, that was a such a smart way to, like, help narrow it down because I am so we just narrowed it down by over half.

Look at us go.

Oh, my gosh. I am so stoked. Amazing. So now at this point in the reveal, what we do is I take a break and talk about products. So Elijah's already familiar.

But we've got the AS I AM storybook. We've got our folios. We've got our wall portraits and all of that. So at this point in the reveal, really, the point of this was to show you the process and like how we narrow it down. So right now we have still one hundred and twenty eight images left. So

if this was like a client shoot, I would know at this point, like, OK, we're going to because I've had people walk out of here with like one hundred and twenty photos like easily. And so there's several ways you can do that. Obviously, you can't fit that many in one book. Can you? No. But what you can do is in your top package, if you want, you could say it includes all the digital files.

I did that for the first like twenty five people I photographed for this because it was kind of like a promotion. I was like, OK, if you get my biggest storybook at 44 portraits, then you get all your favorite digital files. And I would tell them that basically at this point in the reveal. And so they'd be like, oh, wait. So because they've already seen them and they're like, well, I know if you see that you have one hundred and twenty eight photos and then you're like, OK, well, I'm going to have to get the 44 portrait books. I can't narrow these down like down by two thirds. Yeah, there's absolutely no way. There's no way. And so that's one of the ways that you can build value in.

But however, if you want to say you get the 44 portrait book. So let's pick your very favorites at this point, what I do. So I start with flagging the photos. The first go through the second time I write the photos and then I mark them by color. So then we mark them red. So what we would do if we were really narrowing this down right now, um, the rest of the way is we would just go back through and I'd be like, I could even tell my client to do it or I could do it. The keyboard shortcut is a six for marking it red. So you just click on the photo and then mark red all your favorites. And the client will do that. And then you can just go sort by color red.

OK, you marked a hundred red or whatever or you marked. And I even had a client like it was my, uh, my client, Josh. And he came in. He was like the first you know, when I just focused on like, I was like, OK, I'm just going to photograph some straight dude. See how this goes. He came in because I photographed his wife for the project. So he was familiar. So he came in, did a shoot and I like didn't charge him. I was just kind of like, OK, if you want to come do it for my portfolio. Great. He ended up going through them. He favored it a bunch and then he went through again. And when he got down to his very favorites, he goes, OK, how many are there?

And I was like, 44. And I was like, that's the exact number of my largest book. And he's like, OK, well, I can't narrow anymore down. So I'll do that. And I was like, great. The end. So don't overcomplicate this. They will invest in this experience because it goes so much deeper than that. Like you heard all the things that Elijah just said so far that the things that they've been saying are what like all my clients have said along the same lines, like, wow, I didn't think I would love that one of me laughing or they'll pick the photo of the like the blank or in the middle of talking or something like that. And there's silly hand gestures or whatever. And it's like, it's just your job to hold that space for them and just show them how amazing they are. Like, that's all you're doing. I just didn't put any barriers up. Exactly. And so like, that is what makes this so powerful. And that's why people invest in it, because when they walk away with this book, that's like. Of physical visual representation of their journey towards self-love, like you cannot put a price on that.

It's so immensely valuable. So then you pick the photos and then you're like, okay, this is what it'll cost. The end. I've already talked about products. I've already talked about the prices, and I'm going to give you a copy of my price list so you can see what it is. If you want to copy it to start out, go for it. If you want to do something as similar structure and change the number, go for it, but you need to find a system that works for you and feels good to you. Because if you don't believe the reason I can sell my largest storybook of 44 portraits for \$4,600, it's because I absolutely believe it's worth that. Absolutely. I know that this is an equal exchange that's happening.

So as long as you believe that about it, great. If you don't believe that \$4,600 is a price point that you want to be at for a product, well, do shoots like this, work up your confidence, own it, start to do the experience more for people, see their reactions to it, see their process, feel that value and get more confident in it. And then you will be able to get your prices to a point where you want them to be. But yeah, so they picked the photos and then, um, all I do after they leave. So let's say we narrowed down. I was like, let's say I offered that. I said, okay, so you love 128 of your photos. And if Elijah was like, okay, I want to get the largest storybook.

And then I want, and I say, yep. And you can get the digital files of all your favorites. Usually when I ask then, so do you want to pick the 44 that go in your storybook out of all your favorites? Or do you want me to pick every single client that said, I want you to pick. Yup, like, I'm going to trust you with that. So I'll pick. And then they'll get the digital files of all of them. And you're going to get your digital files like by tomorrow, because all I have to do for all of these photos is all I do then is I just process them. So these have not been processed at all when we're looking at them in the reveal, which is shocking because they look incredible, so.

And the black and white helps a ton with that because black and white just gets rid of so many distractions. So I will custom kind of tone them in black and white just a little bit just to make sure the contrast and everything is exactly how I want it. And usually when I do that, I'll just adjust the first photo in a set and then just sync up that whole set of edits. Then I do the next set, the next lighting setup, adjust that boom, boom, boom crop. And then I export them and then boom, that's it. That is all I do. That's incredible.

And, um, yeah, cause it's an AS I AM. And what I used to do, I used to fix up the backdrops a little bit. I used to fix, um, like one time I used a posing table. I was borrowing a photographer's studio and there was like a coffee mug stain on the posing table. And I told my client, Oh, I'll take that out. And she was like, no, I love it. Like AS I AM like, that's how it was. That's what the posing table is. I was like, okay, you're right. We love. Full commitment. Like, yeah, there's nothing to fix. It's all great. And you loved it and I love it. So the end, so don't overcomplicate it. Um, and then you just say, you write it down and then you say, how would you like to pay for that?

And then they tell you, and then you just accept the payment. Yes. Um, a note about payment plans. I do accept them. I don't talk about them. Um, because sometimes that can just get people kind of in the wrong head space. However, when I see a client who's like, at the

beginning of this, of the reveal, they're like, yeah, I'm really probably going to get the 20 photo storybook. And I'm like, okay, so that's telling me that this is the budget they've kind of thought about. Cause they've seen all these prices ahead of time. I'm not surprising anyone with them. But then whenever the time comes for them to be like, Oh, I need the 44 storybook. One thing I'll offer if they are kind of sweating it is I'll be like, well, if you want to split that into like a couple payments, I'm happy to do that.

Boom. And you nine times out of 10, they're like, Oh yeah. Could I do like one, this half this month and half next month? I'm like, for sure. So as long as they, they put down half the money, I will go ahead and just order their products. Since you know, this ships in from Italy, it usually takes three to four weeks anyway. So I'm like, yeah, as long as they put in that investment, I'll go ahead and order their product. And then they do their second payment and then we're good. So again, just feel that out, just help people narrow down their photos. Just help them. If you're like, Oh no, these two say the same thing. Just pick your favorite, just be on their side. You are their guide, and the sale should just happen organically because they've already bought into the experience because when they booked it, this is just tying up loose ends and finalizing how they're going to want to enjoy their photos. So is there anything else you want to add?

Oh yes. Um.

I don't know. I think for me, it's really difficult sometimes to come into a space getting ready. I mean, specifically, I will say to be on camera, to get my photo taken and not instantly all day. I mean today, like all day, I've just been thinking of like, Oh, I want this to look good. And I want that to look great. And I want this to, you know, I get really controlling over how I'm perceived. And I think that something I've had to consistently remind myself, thanks to Mitzi, like, you know, kind of giving me that precursor before was just like, no, wait, no, that's not what this is about. This isn't about perfection. This is about authenticity. So I think for me and my experience, um, kind of being encouraged to have that mindset before walking in the door really was helpful for me because I was able to kind of meditate on that throughout the day and correct those like thoughts that I didn't even realize were there as often as they are. Made you aware of them.

So, yes. And so, yes, that aspect of it is really freeing and really fun and just less, so much less pressure. Um, but then getting to see the result of that is very healing and very, uh, eye opening and kind of shocking in the best way, like in the best way. I love that. I, yeah, so yeah, that's, that's, that's what I will say on this. It's just such a beautiful thing. I love it so much that I get to see parts of my younger self in my face and in my expression. I think as we get older, we kind of tend to feel like that person or that version of us is like so far buried or so far in the back. It's like, Oh, I was such a different person then.

And really when you're looking at yourself, you're like, wait a second, there are parts of me like that, that are still there. Yeah. So I don't know. Yeah. Really, really beautiful experience. Yeah. Thank you so much. Thank you for being willing to do this on camera and like absolutely just showing up a hundred percent. I am honored, truly. And it was, it was amazing. I just, I just feel like your presence for this particular like educational video is just immensely powerful in so

many ways because you've overcome so many barriers. And like, I feel like the more barriers we as photographers can overcome, the more we can encourage people to just be who they are. Oh, absolutely. You do a fabulous job of that. Absolutely. Incredible. Thanks, dude. Love you friend. Love you too. All right. Thank you.

9. CONCLUSION

So now it's time to kind of sum everything up and don't worry, I have a little pep talk for you too. I hope you enjoyed the videos. I hope you enjoyed seeing that full shoot, the full reveal. I hope that the marketing tips were helpful. The how to promote this, how to communicate to your clients, how to get them ready, all of that. I wonder if the pricing and the products resonated with you. And if you felt any pushback during that part of the course, dive into why. If you thought, Oh, well, I could never charge that much. Why?

Or, Oh, I love those products. She's showing her like, Oh, I don't like that at all. Pay attention to that. Cause you can offer whatever you want. You just need to love it. You can offer whatever experience you want. You just need to love it.

You have to believe in it.

Teaching this course has been one of the surprisingly easiest things I've ever done. Yeah. The production stuff, the writing it, the details, all that stuff, stuff I had to learn, but when it came to the content and the fact that it connects with people, it's just because it connects with me.

That's why y'all care. That's why you're here watching this. That's why you watch the whole course.

If it wasn't real or honest, you would have tuned out a long time ago. So what makes this real to you? What's your why for doing this? Write about it, reflect on that. And again, it's like I tell my clients at the reveal, I want you to hit this little flag button. Every time an image makes you feel something, even if it's EGGH, or, Oh God, or that's so funny. Doesn't necessarily have to be that you like it.

And throughout this course, if there were parts that you kind of find yourself coming up against or challenging, like, well, I don't think that's going to work. Or I know it's not true. In fact, this summer I took a month just to focus on photographing men for this project. Specifically, just like I'm in the Midwest, just like straight dudes, just dads who normally do not have pictures taken, who normally aren't even thrilled about family photos. And they came and did these shoots by themselves.

And I didn't tell them, Oh, well for the women, I do some show, so show some skin. But since you're a man, I don't want to go. I didn't do that. I just did the same blueprint. And they all surprised me. They all connected with it. I had some beautiful conversations with them. And yet I had a student earlier this summer when I did the keynote say like, yeah, well, I don't think guys are going to want to do this.

So whatever is coming up in you as you watch, I've had to do this too.

Those barriers and limitations I talked about at the beginning of Elijah shoot, like think about, take note of those as you're going through this, as you're applying this to your life and to your studio and how you want to offer the shoots. It's all just information. You don't have to judge it. It's just information. And if the idea of posing a, especially a woman in a way that doesn't make her physically smaller, really, really feels uncomfortable to you, dive into that, start doing it.

Our brains are really dramatic sometimes because they think that just because something is going to be done the way we haven't always done it, or we don't quite understand why yet that it's like bad or wrong or scary. And a lot of times it's just unfamiliar. So just get familiar with it.

So what we're doing when we show up in front of the camera, as we are, we're getting familiar with seeing our bodies as they are without filters and without Photoshop and without, you know, nice clothes or whatever.

All of that stuff's just a smokescreen, anyway

I had a really interesting experience a couple of years ago.

I went to the Grafi studio workshop in Italy with Sue Bryce, Cara Marie and Terry Hofford. It was amazing.

And when I got there, I found myself riddled with self-doubt.

I had been so excited for this trip. First time out of the country since, you know, the pandemic. And I had had a baby a year and a half before. I was like kind of getting back out there into life. And I was so excited to go to this workshop and just create and have these amazing mentors pour into me and make new friends and all the stuff. And yet as we're driving up to the castle on that first day, I just have this sinking feeling like, Oh my God, I don't belong here. I'm weird.

I'm so awkward in front of new people, especially like a crowd of 60 people. And Oh, people are going to, you know, you guys know.

And what I didn't realize was in that moment, I was telling myself all these really negative things simply because there was no information telling me otherwise there was an absence of any one saying the opposite.

So my brain went to the negative, right?

I think we can all relate to that.

And then when I sat down in the first class, we split into a few groups and I was in a group of 20. I'm a front row sitter. So I was sitting in the front and that specific mentor walked over to me and she was talking about how she connects with clients and how that's her greatest strength as a portrait photographer. And she said, you know, one of the things I do is like, I'm just, it's really

easy for me to meet someone and then just like speak truth to them about them. Cause I can just tell the truth about everyone. I can see right through it. And she walks over to me in that moment and she says something along the lines of like with you.

And she looked me right in the eyes and she said, you have a calm, peaceful presence and I instantly feel comfortable with you.

And then she got back up and started teaching.

Now I don't need to ask you if you think that made an impact on me because I'm quoting it verbatim a couple of years later. All it took in that moment of me being unsure in a new experience, in a new place, not knowing where I fit or how I was going to do. And I decided I was unworthy of it.

That's what your clients are doing when they show up at your studio. Whether you've photographed them before or not.

Every time I get photographed, which I try to do, you know, pretty regularly by a different photographer to remind myself of the client experience. I can't sleep the night before it's crazy. It's still surprises me every time how nervous I get. It's because I'm a human. It's fine. You can do things scared. You can do things nervous.

You don't have to let the fear stop you if it's what you want to do.

But that story will always stay with me because it reminds me that every time there's someone who wants me to photograph them every time someone steps in front of my camera, they're in an unfamiliar situation and their brain is most likely telling them why they're going to fail or why they're not going to measure up or why they're not going to be worthy.

Careful. I might break your camera. You ever hear people say that? They make jokes about it.

It's, it's a joke. It's a way we talk about it for a reason because it's a vulnerable place to be.

And so you have an opportunity in that moment as the portrait photographer to look at someone and say, wow, tell me about why you brought that outfit. That's it's amazing. I love this detail about it. Or Whoa, the fringe on that jacket. I just love how it moves when you like move your body and shake around, you know, whatever.

You have the opportunity to honor who they are in that moment. You have the opportunity to say, Oh, there's your real smile. Oh my gosh. It's just infectious. Like I, your smile makes me smile.

You're just pointing out what you see. Just like that mentor did for me.

You're just looking at someone and saying like, you're beautiful. And that's why we got into this portrait photography thing. Isn't it?

Yeah. There's some people who are like, Oh, I can make a really profitable business model and I can do blah, blah, blah. And that's why I'm just, yeah, there are people like that, but they're probably not watching this course right now. Probably not.

You probably got into this because you just cannot help, but find the best in everyone and communicate that back to them.

You already do it through your images. Do it through your words too. Because in that moment, their fears are going to be there. They're self doubt. It's going to be there.

So it's your job to be louder.

It's your job to put the good things in their mind.

The light that you see in them already.

I have yet to ever be disappointed by how someone who walks into my studio.

In fact, one of the biggest thoughts I have about most people who walk into my studio, if I haven't met him in person yet is like, Oh, like it may be if I've only seen their profile picture online every single time, I'm like, Oh wow. Like they're even more beautiful than I thought they were going to be because I'm seeing them as a whole human being in their presence.

And in that moment, we have the opportunity to just speak the truth that we see in people. That could be your best friend. It could be someone you've never met. Doesn't matter.

The way you connect with people, connect with them in that way.

Just point out what you see in them. And if nothing else be like, Hey, you showed up for yourself today and did something out of your comfort zone. High five. That's awesome. In my experience, every time I've done that, things have gone pretty well for me right after it's been a time of growth.

One of my clients, Matt, that's what he said. He said, I challenged myself to grow. And with Mitzi's help, I grew.

And I love how he said that because I'm not a therapist. It's not my job to change people's lives. If you put that pressure on yourself, Oh, Lordy. Like I used to do that. It's, it doesn't work out well for anyone. But when you just say, it's my job to hold space for people to have whatever transformative experience they want to have.

That opens it up to infinite possibility. People will surprise you time and time again.

And you'll learn that a lot of the barriers and limitations in your own mind, they come from you.

The space between my camera and my client is so sacred to me.

I used to prepare for photo shoots by running around my studio, making sure I have this designer candle lit and it smells like this. And this lighting is perfect. And this temperature.

Now I'm just kind of always grooming my space, my creative space in my studio. It's almost like a garden and I just tend to it every day. And then when someone comes to visit, I'm like, welcome.

It's my space. Even if I'm meeting someone in a hotel room for a shoot, doesn't matter. If I'm borrowing a photographer's studio in another city, doesn't matter. In that moment, I make that my space and I use the light that lights me up. I have the lens that I love to use, which for me, again, is a 50 millimeter. Cause I can talk to people at this volume. I don't have to scream at them. And I have music playing that either they've brought in really excitedly, or I'm just playing because it makes me feel excited. And I have this environment set up and I just meet them, and I take really good care of myself now. So that way, no matter who walks in the door with what I'm just able to hold that space. I don't need anything from them.

It's amazing.

It's such a different energy than the way I used to like hustle for lack of a better word. And if the way your business is going at any point, no longer aligns with you as a human, you can change it. In fact, it probably will grow and change. I've been doing this full time for 10 years, but I've been a photographer since I could pick up a camera and the seasons of my life. I mean, this craft has shifted for me. It has helped me. It's been an outlet. It's been a way to bring income into my life, which has brought me a lot of freedom, which supports my family, which, you know, has given me more options. And it's helped me stand up for things I want to stand up for and elevate and amplify the voices of people and stories that I think are important. And it's just helped me do all these things. It's just a tool.

And it's a tool for you too. All of these are tools, the little things in the back of your mind of how to direct people for authentic connection, the lighting setups that you like, the gear that you want to use the backdrop or backdrops that you like or whatever, they're all just tools in your tool belt. And in different seasons, what you want to accomplish will change. So let it grow and change because you're a human being.

And I remember when I did my AS I AM session in April of this year. So it's three months after I started these raw portrait sessions, I started to see how my clients were healing through them. And they started to encourage me. So I started showing up more and more in front of the camera.

And I remember I did a set of photos in April of this year to highlight my stretch marks on my legs, because at that point, that was the shame I needed to shine a light on. So I purposely wore like high black socks, right? It's black and white and I'm the skin tone of a vampire. So I knew that the contrast would be there. I had a black bodysuit on with long sleeves. So that my face, my hands, and then like my thighs were what were really showing up.

And I just shine a light on my shame.

I've never, I had at that point, never printed a large wall portrait of myself at 30 inch, which is the most popular size I sell to my client. I'd never printed one of myself before, but I printed one of those. And you bet you can see every dimple and stretch mark.

And I'm not afraid of it anymore.

Because when you shine a light on shame, it just scatters.

That's what we're doing for people.

We're showing them, hey, yeah, I know a lot of this culture has taught you to believe that these things about you are wrong, but what if they're not?

If you don't like it, you don't buy them.

I tell people that all the time. Has that ever happened? No. In my entire career, it's happened like three times.

Okay, whatever. It's going to happen every once in a while.

Most of the time, they're like, how am I going to narrow these down? And that's when I know I'm like, you did it. And I usually turn to them and say, Hey, remember when you told me, I hope I like one of these. Isn't this a good problem to have to have like 60 photos of yourself that you love? What does that say?

It's really beautiful.

So you have this opportunity to hold space for people. You have this opportunity to use this craft, this skill, this amazing alchemy that you are capable of as a visual artist to take stories and feelings and all these things that we just float around in the air invisibly and make them into an image. You have the ability to do that. You have the talent, you have the gear, you don't even need much. You have all the stuff to make this. People tell us feelings and we make it into images for them.

People tell us stories and we make it into images for them. It's remarkable what we're able to do. And when you're doing that in a way that lights you up and feels like, Oh yeah, this is why I do what I do.

You're unstoppable.

You don't have to know the end goal. When I started doing these shoots earlier this year, I did not plan within one year to have written, produced, made, and then remade and a whole course around it and stepped into my role as an educator that I'd wanted for so long. Like I, I didn't plan on any of that.

I just said, what's the next step that's going to light me up? And I did that.

And if I would have tried to have planned it from the beginning, I would have drastically limited myself because I didn't know what was possible.

The same is true for you.

I can't wait to see what you make. I can't wait to see your self portraits. I can't wait to see the portraits you let other photographers take of you. Could be me, could be someone else. I'd love to photograph you because I have finally found the type of shoot and the style of photography that I can absolutely say with every fiber of my being, that I would do for every human being on this earth.

Happily. I wouldn't have to speak their same language. I don't have to have met them like, Nope, that's fine. I could do it because that's how connected it is to me. And I was talking to a past client just this week. I told her that in this type of shoot, she's not a photographer, but I was talking like about photographers. Like we hold space for people. And she said, yeah, but you also hold up a mirror.

And that's why I'm telling you, you got to do this stuff first.

And I also just have to recommend Self-Value Workshop by Sue Bryce to you. It's an online community. It's an in-person workshop. There's lots of different ways you can connect with it. There's an amazing podcast. Um, I think I'm the second episode. If you want to look it up and learn a little more about that and how that tied into how I ended up creating this, but your work and you intentionally showing up for yourself completely aligns with this.

It's amazing. It's life-changing, but in the most peaceful and beautiful way you can imagine.

I can't wait to see what you create of other people.

I can't wait to look at my feed. At this barren wasteland of a machine that I hold in my hand for hours every day and start to see more real human connection and love and acceptance. Cause

there's a lot of people who make a lot of money off of us hating ourselves and never being satisfied.

But what if we just could be.

I really, really truly believe that this raw portraits movement will shift culture. It will change the world because it's going to bring about love and it has to start with each of us.

So when you start holding space for other people to feel that get ready, things are going to get really, really, really amazing. So go create, go do it wrong, go have fun.

And I can't wait to see what you make.

Thank you.