Using Self-Portrait Photographs During Therapy Sessions to
Help People Improve Their Lives[1]

by

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Introduction:

As one of the early pioneers of the therapeutic uses of personal photographs ("PhotoTherapy" techniques[3]), I found myself facing a very serious dilemma: Since I have long been considered the "world authority" about how ordinary informal photos (especially of people) can evoke previously-unconscious feelings, thoughts, memories, and related stories, I should be well-experienced by now in understanding the criteria a person might use when selecting the one photo that could best represent themselves to a stranger (or even to a friend).

But this time I was in a situation I had never faced before in over 30 years of providing education, publications, and training about these techniques: I now had to make an extremely important decision: "Which picture of myself should I upload to be the only picture of me to appear on my primary FaceBook page?" -- because it was just not acceptable for the "expert" in the emotional meanings embedded under the surface of people's

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[1] Some portions of this Chapter have been adapted from material previously published in the Author's book, "PhotoTherapy Techniques: Exploring the Secrets of Personal Snapshots and Family Albums" (1999) and in her Journal article "PhotoTherapy techniques in counseling and therapy: Using ordinary snapshots and photo-interactions to help clients heal their lives" (2004), which was also later translated to: "Tecniche di FotoTerapia nel Counseling e nella Terapia" (2006) -- full citations for these can be found in Publications List at the end of this Chapter

[2] To learn more about this Author, see: www.phototherapy-centre.com/biography.htm

[3] A good introduction to these can be found at: www.phototherapy-centre.com

ordinary personal photographs, to remain "faceless" there. This decision was further compounded by the fact that only one photograph of a person is permitted to appear on their FaceBook "home" page, although a different one can be substituted as often as desired. So each photograph must try to contain everything a person wants viewers to instantly know about them, when seeing it there...

Therefore, for each picture of myself that I was considering, I had to consider questions such as: What would viewers think, feel, presume, or imagine when looking at it (me)? Would the related associations or memories it triggered in them, then "filter" the meaning they thought they were getting from my photo? Would they look at it and wonder why I chose that particular picture, or perhaps wonder what "image" of myself I was hoping to communicate to the world by using that one?

Then there were further, and more serious, considerations: Could I possibly find a photo of myself which is professional enough for the "work world" to view, yet not too formal for friends and family? Do I dare show the slightly playful (but more attractive) one, knowing that future employers would also be able to see it? And even more complexities to ponder: Do I even have the ability to shape or predict other people's reactions to a photograph of me? and what if they don't see what I see when they look at it?

I became intrigued that one simple image which so innocently caught the light and then time-traveled along into an online reality (which is not actually real), had become so very important that I had spent more than an hour making my decision (regardless of the fact that I knew I could always change it later!)...

I did finally select two photos that <u>almost</u> satisfied all my expectations. They were similar in many ways, yet different in others; perhaps I was the only person who could even notice those differences.   There were certainly various parts of each picture that I would change if I could, things missing from each that would have made each better (more "complete" somehow). And then, of course, the final dreaded decision: which of my two "final choices" should be the first to be put online on that page -- and when, if ever, should I choose to switch to the other one?....

Overall, the process was not only exhausting but also brought up deeper issues, such as: What would my long-dead Mother have thought of this photo of me?   Am I happy with the way my body looks in it?   If it could suddenly speak, what might it say? Would it reveal any secrets I had not realized it held?? What questions might it want to ask me?   Is there anything I would want it to know, since it was going to be representing me to the entire world soon??

All of this process, done initially in a casual manner until it became more serious than I had ever anticipated, actually reflects my entire life-long fascination with what I call the "why" of photographs -- and how to use such less-conscious aspects secretly embedded in <u>all</u> photographs, for helping people get a better understanding of their lives).

There are reasons for the existence of <u>every</u> photograph that is taken, posed for, kept, shared, put into albums, later discussed, or even simply remembered or imagined -- and my interest, as both a therapist and an educator, lies in making this awareness more conscious in those who have interactions with photographs (whether as a personal hobby, art passion,

educator -- or just to stay in touch with family and friends -- or those who involve these more deeply and actively as a means of helping themselves or others).

I believe that, if people are able to become more aware of the reasons underlying decisions they make, then they will be less "emotionally re-active" (acting without thinking) and instead do things based on being able to <u>think</u> first about why they are having certain reactions and what might be the consequences of certain actions they might decide to do.

And I believe it is equally relevant to probe the underlying meanings communicated by photographs taken for commercial reasons, by people such as professional and/or advertising photographers, documentary photographers, those doing landscape or portrait photography -- or even photographic art educators -- because <u>a camera's lens not only focuses outward to the subject but also simultaneously inward into the photographer making the choices</u>...

And finally, exploring how photographs are able to visually/nonverbally tell the stories that they tell -- and share the secrets that they hold -- has importance also for more general related fields such as visual arts and communication, cultural anthropology, visual sociology, publication/communication, media arts and Web 2.0 technology, digital media and its effects on society, and even also revealing for those ethnic or cross-cultural differences that are silently and invisibly encoded in <u>all</u> photographic communications, by photographers themselves, without them realizing this at all...   And ALL this has import for using photographs, especially self-portrait photos, in therapy practice -- which is the topic of this Chapter...

Of course, the "what" and the "how" of photography are technically and artistically important -- entire careers have been built around these topics (or educating others about them). But after over thirty years[4] of helping people explore what their own ordinary "daily-life" snapshots (including digital ones) are about emotionally -- in addition to what these images might incidentally also be of, visually -- the "art" parts of photographs have proven much less interesting to me, than what people share with me about the reasons that certain ones are so special to them (and their explanations regarding how they know this to be true!).

I am interested in the reasons why people choose to take the photos they take, why they expect others will have certain reactions to them (including those taken for marketing or artistic purposes), why they get certain meanings from photos even when these might not match what the photographer intended them to see there, why they keep some but not others (or prefer certain ones while disliking others). I am interested in why certain photos produce such strong (and often unexpected) emotional responses from deep inside people's hearts and memories -- responses that viewers themselves frequently were often previously unaware of...

But regardless of what these answers might be, one thing has become very clear to me as a clinical psychologist and art therapist who has used photographs for several decades as tools for helping people (or for showing them how to help themselves): these special aspects of ordinary personal and family photographs let them serve as:

"...footprints of our minds, mirrors of our lives, reflections from

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[4] For more about these experiences see: www.phototherapy-centre.com/biography.htm

our hearts, frozen memories we can hold in silent stillness in our hands, forever if we wish. They document not only where we may have been [emotionally as well as physically], but also point the way to where we might perhaps be going, whether we know it yet or not."[5]

So while it is very important for me to think about what kind of image of me that I want people to "meet" the first time they see my FaceBook homepage, the more important questions deal with my expectations about which thoughts and feelings I want them to have in reaction to seeing it. ("Will they see what I see?", "Will they see the "me" that I want them to see?", "What will they think I'm trying to convey with this image I have selected to represent my life?", and so forth). And these kinds of processes, while not always conscious in the mind of the person selecting the photo, appearing in it, or even viewing it later, will always happen anyway, regardless of the photographer's (or subject's) intention for that image. And while we cannot control these reactions very well, we can at least try to understand them better, by exploring (to paraphrase photographer Minor White): "not only what a photo is about, but also what else it is about"...

And that is my purpose for writing this Chapter: to try to explain the "what, how, and why" of using "Self Portraits" photographs to help therapy and psychotherapy clients resolve emotional problems, while also suggesting ways that non-therapists can adapt these for use in situations where a therapist is not needed (whether for individuals or groups who "make art to make sense" -- in order to increase personal insight and improve their lives -- or for "larger" purposes such as building community, social activism,

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[5] Weiser, J. (1999), p. 1

improving visual/emotional literacy, assisting in qualitative research methodologies, dealing with issues of social justice, and so forth).

The stories my psychotherapy clients share about photos they have taken, participated in, chosen to keep, display, or share with others (or even just dreamed of or fantasized about), arise spontaneously as they begin to tell me about the people, places, and things appearing in the visual details on the surface of the photograph. They are usually unaware that it held so much more in its depths, until they began to interact with it at a deeper level, guided by my probing questions.

And as both a therapist and educator, I try to make this kind of awareness more conscious in those who interact with photos (whether as work or passion, career or hobby -- but especially those for those who just simply like to take pictures and share these with others. I hope that, by the end of this Chapter, readers will agree that, in the hands of therapists who has been specially trained[6] to use simple ordinary snapshots as part of their "repertoire of helping skills", each image is worth <u>far</u> more than the proverbial "thousand words"...

"PhotoTherapy" and "Therapeutic Photography":

The structured viewing, creating, sharing, and discussing of ordinary non-art ("personal") photographs makes them powerful agents of change and emotional exploration, whether used to inform and enhance communication during formal psychotherapy sessions conducted by trained therapists

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[6] For more about training in PhotoTherapy, see: www.phototherapy-centre.com/training.htm

("PhotoTherapy"[7]), or used by people themselves, whether individually or together with others, in situations where the skills of a trained therapist or counselor are not needed ("Therapeutic Photography"[8]).

Neither practice is about the art or technology of photography itself; rather they are about how stories and secrets are visually (and usually unconsciously) embedded in any photos that people involve in their lives. Therefore any of these techniques can be used with any kind of photographic imagery, including digital/electronic photo formats, cell phone pictures, videos, DVDs, films -- as well as technologies yet to be invented...

In PhotoTherapy sessions, clients not only view and discuss existing photos with their therapist, but might also be asked to take, pose for, actively reconstruct, visually sculpt or create new ones, as well as describe those they remember or imagine -- but always doing this only under the guidance of a mental health professional who has received special training in how to do this safely, so that the process does not become overwhelming.

PhotoTherapy and Therapeutic Photography are not "opposites" -- instead the two should be thought of as being the end-points of one long "continuum of photo-based healing practices", with PhotoTherapy (using-photographs-during-therapy) at one end, and "Therapeutic Photography" (using-photographs-as-therapy) at the other. They are simply two contrasting ways of using emotional information that is unconsciously embedded in people's personal photographs: PhotoTherapy (being a therapy practice) requires the skills of professionally-trained therapist or counselor to guide

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[7] Explained more fully in the next Section of this Chapter

[8] A brief expansion of the definitions for "PhotoTherapy" and "Therapeutic Photography" can be found at: www.phototherapy-centre.com

what happens, while Therapeutic Photography (being a photography practice) does not. But both are based on photos being a much safer way to explore feelings than words alone could ever provide.

Since readers can find more thorough discussions of this comparison elsewhere[9], I will now focus the remainder of this Chapter on only PhotoTherapy practices, since that is my particular specialty field as a therapist and educator.

The Five Techniques of PhotoTherapy[10]:

Most people keep photographs around, without ever pausing to really think about why. But, because personal snapshots permanently record important daily moments (and the associated emotions unconsciously embedded within these), all snapshots are, in many ways, also "self-reflective" -- even if the person does not actually appear in them directly.

Therefore, in therapy these "ordinary snapshots" also can serve as valuable tangible symbolic self-constructs and metaphoric transitional objects that silently offer inner "in-sight" in ways that words alone cannot as fully represent or deconstruct. Such information is latent in all personal photos, but when used to focus and precipitate therapeutic dialogue, a more direct and less censored connection with the unconscious will usually result.

During PhotoTherapy-based sessions, photos are not just passively reflected upon in silent contemplation, but also actively created, posed for,

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[9] For a more detailed explanation about the similarities and differences of these two systems of techniques, see: www.phototherapy-centre.com/comparisons.htm -- as well as Weiser, (2001, 2004, and 2009).

[10] The definitions in this section have appeared before in many of Weiser's articles, chapters, and especially detailed in her book (1999) -- and can also be found in summary at: www.phototherapy-centre.com/five_techniques.htm

talked with, listened to, reconstructed, revised to form or illustrate new narratives, collected on assignment, re-visualized in memory or imagination, integrated into art therapy creative expressions, or even set into animated dialogue with other photos. This allows clients to more easily access, understand, and express parts of themselves in ways that were previously either extremely difficult or even not possible.

All of the early major PhotoTherapy pioneers[11] (myself included) independently conceived of a five-technique model for PhotoTherapy practice, based upon the various relationships possible between person and camera (or, person and photograph) -- although in practice these categories often naturally overlap. These techniques are briefly summarized below[12], after which the "Self-Portrait PhotoTherapy technique" will be discussed and case-illustrated in more detail, for the remainder of this Chapter (since self-portrait photographs are the focus of this book).

However it is also very important to recognize that, since all these techniques are actually interrelated and interdependent -- much like the five fingers of a hand (and similarly inseparable from it) -- they work best when synergistically and interactively combined[13]:

1) **Photos which have been taken or created <u>by</u> the client**, whether actually using a camera to make the picture, or "taking"

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[11] Most importantly: Americans Dr. David Krauss and Dr. Douglas Stewart, and Canadian Dr. Joel Walker; numerous significant publications by all three can be found at:
www.phototherapy-centre.com/recommended_readings.htm

[12] For a more detailed explanation and illustration of these techniques "in action", please see Weiser (1999), as well as her other publications listed at the end of this Chapter. For a more brief summary, see: www.phototherapy-centre.com/five_techniques.htm

[13] This Section is excerpted from: www.phototherapy-centre.com/five_techniques.htm

(appropriating) other people's images through collecting photos found in magazines, postcards, Internet imagery, digital manipulation, and so forth;

2) **Photos which have been taken <u>of</u> the client by other people**, whether posed on purpose or taken spontaneously while the person was unaware of being photographed -- but where people <u>other</u> than the client made all the decisions about timing, content, location, and so forth;

3) **Self-portraits, which means any kind of photos that clients have made of themselves**, either literally or metaphorically -- but where in all cases they <u>themselves</u> had total control and power over <u>all</u> aspects of the image's creation;

4) **Family album and other photo-biographical collections**, whether of birth family or "family of choice"; whether formally kept in albums or more "loosely" combined into narratives by placement on walls or refrigerator doors, inside wallets or frames, into computer screens or family websites, and so forth -- which were put together for the purpose of documenting the personal narrative of the client's life and the background from which they developed. Such albums have a "life" apart from -- and far beyond -- the individual images which comprise them;

5) The final technique, "**Photo-Projectives**" is based on the fact that the meaning of any photograph is primarily created by its viewer <u>during</u> their process of viewing it or taking it (or even just planning it), and thus <u>any</u> photograph that draws interest from client or therapist has

potential value for the therapy or counseling setting.

This final technique actually underlies <u>all</u> interactions between people and snapshots, and deals with the ways and reasons that a person gets any meaning from <u>any</u> photograph in the first place. It is called "Projectives", in that meaning is <u>always</u> projected onto the photographic artifact when any viewer encounters it, rather than it somehow universally triggering the <u>same</u> objective meaning for all viewers who see it.

Therefore, the "Photo-Projective" technique is located not in a particular kind of photograph, but rather in the less-tangible interface <u>between</u> a photo and its viewer (or maker), that "place" inside each person where they form their <u>own</u> unique responses to what they see. Thus this technique is more an integral part of the other four than it is independent onto itself -- yet it must be discussed separately (and preferably taught <u>first</u> when training therapists to use it).

Like so many holistic approaches, PhotoTherapy suffers somewhat from having to be taken apart for studying in any step-by-step order, when in fact each technique is partially formed by, and overlaps, several of the others. Therefore, the most effective application of these techniques will occur when they are creatively combined[14] -- because they comprise an integrally interconnected system that is far more useful as a holistic system, than in any linear summation of its parts.

This also explains why, although I now focus solely on "Self-Portraits" for

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[14] Numerous examples of such technique combinations used in actual practice can be found throughout all the Author's publications listed at the end of this Chapter.

the remainder of this Chapter, I wish to remind readers again, that <u>all</u> the other four kinds of photos are actually <u>also</u> "self-reflective", even if only metaphorically. It is also important to recognize that all five techniques arise out of projective interactions with the images triggering these; i.e., even when looking at a self-portrait or other kinds of photos in which they appear, the client is still, nevertheless, <u>projecting</u> the meaning of what they think they are seeing there on the surface of the photo, but in truth they are contributing a lot of that meaning from inside their own background "filters" through which they are viewing that image's story. For this reason, I claim that every snapshot a person takes or keeps is also a type of self-portrait, a kind of "mirror with memory" reflecting back moments and people that **are** special enough to freeze them in time forever.

PhotoTherapy Practice[15]:

Each therapist using PhotoTherapy techniques will do this a bit differently, depending upon that person's own professional training and theoretical preferences, as well as each client's particular situational needs and related therapy goals. Thus, there <u>isn't</u> one single fixed or correct way to use these techniques (as long as the client is treated ethically!), nor are there any requirements about applying them in any particular sequence or combination. There is not even any need for special skill or training in photography itself -- because these techniques are about using photos as <u>communications</u>, rather than as "art".

PhotoTherapy is not about interpreting people's photos <u>for</u> them; instead,

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[15] Parts of this Section are adapted from:
    www.phototherapycentre.com/five_techniques.htm

the input should always come from the client, guided by their therapist's photo-stimulated questions, while both explore the image (and its emotional impact) together, for therapeutic purposes. The perceptions and associated feelings each photo triggers in the client (or therapist![16]) will be personally unique, and since there is therefore no inherently wrong way to interpret a particular photo's meaning, no external interpretive criteria can ever be used to "objectively" evaluate or measure a client's perception of it.

Similarly, a person's reaction to a photo cannot, on its own, indicate any specific diagnostic problem or definite mental condition -- and thus no assumptions or assessments should ever be generalized from singular responses alone. Instead, therapists who have been trained in PhotoTherapy techniques are taught to look for underlying <u>patterns</u> of responses, for <u>repeated</u> themes and imagery, for <u>consistencies</u> through time (and often generations), for unusual or symbolic content, and most of all, for emotional reactions indicating inner feelings which the clients may or may not be consciously aware of at the time of encountering the photo-catalyst.

Making the photos, or bringing them along to the therapy session, is just the start. Once a photo is viewed, the next step is to activate all that it brings to mind (exploring its visual messages, entering into conversations with it, asking it questions, considering the results of imagined changes or different

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[16] Since the meaning of a photo is always simply a projection of meaning onto its surface, this of course also happens when therapists view images themselves; therefore they are reminded to be careful regarding possible complications resulting from transference or counter-transference issues that clients' photos might precipitate in themselves. While it could be helpful for them to compare their perceptions of a photograph with those of the client, the "truth" of the image, for the purposes of the therapy session, must <u>always</u> remain the client's version (though it can sometimes be useful to also explore any reason why they might perhaps both had different interpretations of a particular photo.

viewpoints, and so forth). Therefore, what for photographers is usually an end-point (the finished photo) is, for PhotoTherapy purposes, just the beginning...

Thus, it is not just the visual contents of the photographs themselves that are so therapeutically important, but also everything that happens <u>while</u> the client is interacting with them. Memories, feelings and thoughts that emerge during the photographic dialogue, almost as "by-products" to the process, often provide additional useful information.

As clients discuss the layers of meanings contained within their photographs, they also reveal a lot about themselves: their inner value system, beliefs, attitudes and expectations that inseparably accompany their words. These nonverbal codes hold important clues about how people make sense of their world (and their place within it). Asking questions about the photograph, and <u>to</u> it -- as if it was alive and could speak for itself -- further enhances the therapeutic possibilities.

Using PhotoTherapy techniques, the therapist's primary role is to encourage and support clients' <u>own</u> personal discoveries while exploring and interacting with the ordinary personal and family snapshots they view, make, pose for, collect, remember, or even only imagine.

<u>Using Self Portraits Photographs in Therapy</u>[17]:

Usually "self-portraits" are defined very narrowly as pictures that people make of themselves, which they have created by themselves (without having any of the related decisions made by other people). However, when photos are used during therapy or self-investigation as "starting points" for helping

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[17] Some portions of this Section have been adapted from Weiser, 1999.

explore people's lives, it is easy to understand how, actually, any photograph that a person uses to represent themselves to other people (or even to themselves) is inherently self-descriptive and reflective of themselves -- even if only showing them metaphorically -- because when they decided to show or look at a particular photo it automatically became self-reflective simply due to their selecting that one to help explain themselves, rather than some other picture.

Every photograph a client shares with a therapist (or looks at in private and then later discusses with a therapist) is a powerful communication from deep inside where words don't usually reach. It can reveal a lot about the person who made it or is discussing it, if asked the right kinds of questions by someone who has been properly trained in not only how to do this, but also how to safely contain the emotions that arise when such questions are asked...

And so for this reason, I have often written that "all photographs that a person takes, remembers, imagines, or even just decides to keep or show someone, are all "self-portraits", even if no person appears in them directly" -- because the simple act of selecting that particular image to pay attention to, also says a lot about the person who is making that choice.

Thus, while the more narrow definition of "self-portrait" is used for the purposes of this Chapter (and book), I feel it is important to remind readers one more time that "working with self-portraits" can actually be defined more broadly into "working with any pictures that reflect people to themselves and others, even if there are no people appearing in that photograph".

Whether or not therapists are involved, people can confront their own

image photographically and learn about themselves in the process ("Therapeutic Photography"). However, when such picture-posing/taking is actually done in response to requests by a therapists for certain goals ("PhotoTherapy"), the results can yield additional relevance when discussed and interacted with later during active therapy process, as the following illustrates:

Seeing themselves as others see them is an important first step for my clients to begin to understand why those other people are reacting to them in certain ways. But, who that client is in addition to the many selves defined by the reflections of others, is the "self" of them in which I am most therapeutically interested. Usually my clients come to me because they want to change something in their lives, but feel powerless to do so. Self-portrait PhotoTherapy work is one of the best ways I know of, to help them become active agents of change for their own lives (and thus not need the help of a therapist the next time they have a problem!).

The way people feel about themselves (their sense of self-worth, their value) seem to me to underlie most of the reasons they seek out a therapist for help with personal or interpersonal problems. I believe that people must first be able to positively and confidently regard themselves, accept their "self" and love it unconditionally, before they can ever risk trusting others to do so. So many times people do things simply because that is the way they have always done them -- rather than stopping to consider why this pattern or "script" exists, or whether there is still any reason why it must continue to exist (especially those "scripts" or roles they learned in order to survive childhood, but which as adults they now perhaps no longer need to use).

Self-portrait PhotoTherapy techniques can help clients get a better picture (quite literally!) of both who they are as a solitary individual, as well as who they are (where they are located or belong) within several inter-connecting contexts that construct or narrate their personal history, life activities, relationships and connections, and so forth). Self-portraits are a way to transfer consciousness from the self of the mind ("inside" oneself) to that self that exists "outside" as viewable externally <u>by</u> the mind and thus perhaps making that self a bit more knowable through this (literal) raising of consciousness into the light.

Thus one of my main goals for self-portrait therapy applications is to help each client become more autonomous while at the same time becoming more comfortable with their inseparable social, family, cultural, and other underlying contexts and interconnections with others. Success in this aspect of therapy means to me that the client has become better able to be more self-directed, rather than being only situationally spontaneously reactive to forces around them -- and therefore also better able to accept responsibility for the consequences engendered by such independent actions.

Most self-portrait PhotoTherapy techniques involve discussing and exploring what happens when clients plan and then pose for a snapshot of themselves (along with further interactive de-briefing of that actual image with their therapist). Sometimes the most intense therapy process actually takes place in the earliest stages of just thinking about what a considered photograph would look like, or would need to look like, if it were to really be made. Sometimes these imagined or fantasized images, which are quite real and viewable inside the client's mind, are quite sufficient for hours of resulting

therapeutic process; for example, the long discussion a client precipitated when simply trying to decide whether or not to smile in her photo ("If I smile, it's for other people to see; smiling covers up the real me!").

Other times, the live process of making such images is where the most insightful or cathartic work happens. Yet in other instances, the most valuable component of the client's progress takes part in looking at the self-portrait image <u>after</u> it was made and responding to it through the catalyst of the therapist asking questions about it, while it serves as a type of bridge or transitional object for the client's self.

One of the biggest additional benefits of using photographs in therapy work is that clients can view themselves in ways not possible without a camera (and if preferred, without any "outside interference"). There is simply <u>no</u> other way for humans to see ourselves as others see us, except through examining frozen moments of time that were captured photographically, because even mirrors "reverse" us from how we actually look to others. <u>The only thing in the entire world, that people are not able to see directly, is themselves!</u>....

Using photos of themselves (whether true "self-portraits" or photos of them taken by others that they feel represent them in some way), my clients can see how they actually physically appear to others and view parts of themselves not usually available for self-observation (for example, their profile or back, what they look like while asleep or caught in mid-motion, and so forth). They get to see themselves "in context" (while being a member of larger groups like family, friends, or co-workers), as well as when alone. And since photographic representations of themselves are fixed in time and space

by a supposedly-objective "mechanical" device, clients instinctively presume that such photos are somehow more truthful in the "reality" of what they depict than would be possible if only viewing artists' more subjectively-drawn portraits[18].

I have found self-portrait photographs to be the most intense of all the PhotoTherapy techniques, probably because issues of self-esteem and self-awareness lie at the heart of most of the psychotherapy process work we do. At the core of a lot of therapy issues is the basic existential question "Who am I?", which therapists trained in PhotoTherapy techniques often address by asking the client to look at photographs of themselves taken by other people in their life, whether posed for, or taken unaware (for example, "Who am I as part of this family, culture, group?"), in comparison with viewing "self-portrait" photos that they themselves have created of themselves without any "outside input" from other people (for example, "who am I when I am alone?", "who am I when I myself create these definitions?").

Especially with those who are feeling disempowered (or youth who often truly have no power to define their own identities), having the right to create one's image for oneself, can be a first step into differentiating that self from others around them, beginning the journey to feeling better about that self, and being able to incorporate its own multiple facets (and faces that represent them) into a more integrated identity (as the photo below illustrates, showing a teenage girl joining together multiple self-portraits made a year earlier in an

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18 With the arrival of the digital age, photo-manipulation software, and similar tools that permit reality to be seamlessly altered without leaving any traces, this 20th-century concept has now experienced a very significant "paradigm shift": no longer can people trust that "if there is a photo of it, then it must have existed. In this century, photos can no longer be used for presenting factual evidence; the world has now changed, likely forever....

earlier therapy session, into a "collage" of images that singularly represents her to herself):

Therapeutic conversations based on these differences or similarities can be very informative to a client trying to clarify their identity as distinct from their multiple contexts and social/family/cultural matrix. It is also very important to explore not just the image created, but also the reasons why it was made ("Why this photo?", "Why now?", "Who was it made for?, "Why did the photographer take it?") as well as what will be done with it later ("Who will you show it to?, and why?", "Who will you refuse to let see it, and why?", "Will you keep it or not, and why?") -- as well as related questions such as, "Would you still make it if you knew no-one would ever see it?"

In PhotoTherapy process, photos of the client taken by others can suffice as substitutes for self-portraits, as long as the client feels these are truly representative. However, usually the influence and selective needs or expectations of the photographer -- and the quality of their relationship with the person being photographed -- can affect the image greatly, especially if such snapshots are posed rather than being candid ones.

Those photos taken of us for which we have posed under the photographer's direction might paradoxically be those we are more willing to accept as being more realistic, due to our belief that our conscious act of constructing the pose has somehow contributed more of ourselves because

we were <u>aware</u> it was happening -- whereas the more spontaneous photos that catch us totally unaware (and thus actually more naturally), often end up being less resonant with our inner picture of ourselves, so we may more easily reject them as being only someone else's accident of time.

In self-portrait PhotoTherapy process, I may initially use as our focus something as simple as a client's photo-identification picture (such as found on a driver's license, library card, passport, FaceBook profile, or similar), and have them tell me their reactions to it (what they would have preferred to see there, if they could have controlled its creation). We might then discuss more metaphorical self-portraits of them or their photo-album images, or I may have them proceed through very structured assignments and exercises which have very specifically-focused components for very definite reasons, based upon what that client and I are working on at a given moment of therapeutic process. In all of these steps, I try to focus the dialogue -- and the choice of what kinds of photos to use or assign -- directly upon our larger therapy goals and thus how I expect their interactions with these can inform and assist the therapy process itself. I now provide some examples, to illustrate such process (and outcomes):

• <u>Self-portraits made in my office during 'live' therapy session</u>:

If people have grown up with only conditional approval or love, their sense of self has usually become defined primarily through their internalizing other people's versions of themselves. Thus an important early goal of therapy is to help them find out who they are when none of these other people are around. Self-portrait PhotoTherapy can be used to help clarify self-image and to raise self-esteem and self-confidence by improving internal feelings

about self through more positive reactions to viewing and accepting one's self image, and assisting the client to accept such feelings as valid perceptions of themselves.

For example, I asked one adult client to pose for me for two "instant"[19] photos while we were talking about her current difficulties with her parents. I asked her to pose as her Father's "ideal little girl" and then as her Mother's. I wanted to help her bring to better conscious awareness some of the more hidden "scripts" that she still, at the age of twenty-two, seemed to be perpetuating from childhood messages about how she should behave.

The photo results for her father's ideal, seemed to me to show her as being "cute", with a coy smile and her face resting upon her two hands resting on a table. In those showing her mother's ideal, she appeared to me to be less animated, with her arms drooping passively at her side. However, these were only my own perceptions, so the first step was to ask her for hers (after which we could compare and discuss any reasons for any differences we found in how we perceived these images).

Since we had already discussed that her family had definite standards of behavior based on rules conditional on gender expectations, I wondered if she might still be feeling trapped by these even as an adult? Was she perhaps still feeling afraid for some reason to assert her independence, and if so, then why? Had she avoided her preferred career for fear of **what** her parents would say or do if they found out?

I could not know until we explored this, but I began that exploration by

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[19] These were done with a Polaroid camera, for which film no longer exists. Now, in therapy sessions, such immediate-feedback photos can instead be done using digital cameras or cell photos and instant printing/viewing

having her pose first as being her <u>own</u> version of "the perfect little girl", and then pose as her adult version of that same little girl -- followed next by two other assignments: the little girl she had been all along inside herself (even if not known to her parents), and then the adult self who she was keeping secret from her family.

The different body language and posing behaviors she then observed when viewing her own finished results, communicated to her much more than she could explain to me in words. She told me that it wasn't until she saw all these photos all laid out at once together on the table in front of her, showing all those different selves she was busily trying to maintain inside herself all the time, did she realize how much they conflicted amongst themselves -- and how they made excessive demand on her store of psychic energy.   As she phrased it, "No wonder I was so tired and felt so powerless -- I was trying to be too many versions of me at the same time." I then instructed her to begin working on a self-portrait she could create, that would be able to include <u>all</u> of these "selves" in one photo all together (a visible and tangible metaphor for synthesis...).

One client in a high-stress career was feeling so anxious that he continually referred to his office as a "jungle" in which he had to fight and conquer unexpected enemies all the time, just to make it through each day. In trying to reframe his situation into one where he had more ability to make choices and assert some personal rights, I asked him to try to show me what he was feeling. The photo below (even with its requested disguised identity) communicates his perceptions of himself being threatened by impossible odds and trying to survive it all and fight back.

Using only the simple props available in my office, such as my potted plants and using my ruler for his sword, he created an image where he explained that he wasn't clear whether he or the jungle was "winning the battle". This particular double-possibility in his pose became a foundation for later images of himself wherein he slowly (and visibly) began to conquer the jungle and fight back to protect himself.

I have also asked clients to photograph how they are feeling "at this particular moment", and contrast this with how they usually feel, or with how they think they will look when therapy has finished (successfully) and their problems are solved. Other possibilities could be comparing the person they are now in contrast with the person they would like to be in the future (and/or in contrast with the person that their mother or father wanted them to be), how they see themselves as compared with how they think others see them, their inner secret self 'versus' their outer public self, the self that no one knows, the parts of themselves which they don't like or want to change (sometimes in conjunction with photos also of those they do like or want to keep), how they see themselves and how they would instead like to see themselves, and on a more affirmative and empowering note (which can be a very positive goal-forming image), their self in a location where they would most like to be (or most like to be seen), with things and people around them they would most like to have, and so forth. If useful to the therapy process at hand, they can

even be asked to make pictures of themselves "when I'm dead", "at my funeral", "when I'm in heaven", "me when all these problems are over", "when I get my revenge", and numerous other possibilities.

Not only are these sorts of self-imaginings useful on their own or in combination with each other, but as dualistic expressions, they can then be further used as the two end-points between which can be photographed additional steps "in-between" for the purposes setting realistic and achievable goals, as clients can literally picture themselves accomplishing each stage along the given progression. A good example is the assignment I gave one client who was also a therapist herself, to photograph her professional self and then her personal self, and try to join these together on one page by making photographs which fit between the two as metaphoric communication to herself about of possible movement she could consider (and choose to begin) to start having more control over her life.

All the above examples are those from self-portrait photographs made while the client attended therapy sessions in my office. The next set of examples illustrate the kinds of photo-creating (or self-reflective photo-finding) assignments, based on the problem or issue that is our current therapeutic focus, that I might ask them to do while away from my office, and then bring to their next session for us to explore the thoughts, feelings, memories, and so forth, that arise as a result viewing and discussing these.

While the intention in all of these is clearly "self-portrait", these might at times require the assistance of another person (to push the shutter, to aid with setting up, and so forth), but these are not the same as "photos of the client taken by other people", because the resulting photo-image is not due to them

being the object of someone else's construction of them. These are indeed self-portraits (even if others are involved) because in these, the client is both planner/director and participant/animator of the entire process and its results.

As such, the "self" that appears in the photo is truly who they are, and they cannot "blame" someone else if they do not like how they look in it (a first step in beginning to take responsibility for one's own life, and moving from a therapeutic position of passivity, to a more pro-active position of taking ownership of the need and ability to make changes**)**. In "self-talk", this can be seen as the simple difference between "I can't make changes in my life; my problems are caused by other people, so there is nothing I can do to fix them" -- and "I <u>can</u> make changes, but I <u>won't</u>!".

This "shift" from blaming others to realizing one's one role in shared responsibility for problems is extremely valuable in activating clients' internal process to begin taking responsibility for starting make the changes **that** they <u>can</u> make (helping them realize that change must begin from inside themselves first, rather than waiting for others to change <u>before</u> any solution can begin -- and that previous excuses of blaming others for why they cannot change, has also been providing them with a great excuse for doing nothing about the parts that they could have been doing something about!).

• <u>Self-portraits made away from my office as 'homework assignments'</u>:

As previously explained, self-portrait PhotoTherapy assignments can also help clients learn more about who their "self" is -- what comprises it apart from the constructions of others, and metaphorically where it is located (where its boundaries are, where it leaves off and others begin). Most such assignments are given not only for the purpose of having the client view the

image-results, but also for them to go through the entire experience of actively planning and creating such photos -- especially in those instances where making it might require some personal emotional risk-taking to achieve the pose or final print.

Self-portrait PhotoTherapy assignments require clients to spend a lot of time alone with themselves addressing their own inner concerns, and take the time to go somewhere new or be somehow different than usual, in order to create the self-portrait. Such assignments are sometimes the first occasion such clients have ever had to take the time to reflect upon their private lives in any detail, indulge their own needs instead of others', or even acknowledge that they have their own internal feelings apart from what others have told them they should be feeling.

An example of this is the assignment I gave a client who was trying to differentiate from his parents' strong demands for his attention and involvement in their lives and their expectations that, even though he was in his late twenties and having an increasingly-serious relationship with a woman, that he should not be having a life of his own because their needs for his time should be first in his life. I requested him to go photograph himself with them (which pleased them) and then the following week I told him to spend twice as much film photographing who he was when he was not busy being their son (including photos of himself and his girlfriend having fun together).

With very mixed emotions (and ambiguous messages from his parents, with whom he shared these instructions so as to have their "permission" to go do something that they could not be part of), he tried very hard to find things

about himself to photograph. It was a slow journey into his own identity, but it did progress. In order for him to begin to form an external image of such possibilities for himself, he initially needed his parents' permission to do this. Since he phrased this to his parents as "his psychologist's homework requirement" he <u>must</u> complete, they cooperated by supporting his involvement in the activity of doing something that required him to spend time without them.

For him to begin to separate himself from them into being a distinct person, we had to find ways for him to see that this could actually be possible, initially without risking his parents' disapproval until he was strong enough to do it even if they disapproved. For him to even consider these possibilities of individuation that would begin to liberate him from their control and authority, without rejecting the love and caring that was clearly also there, he had to see for himself that a life of his own could be seen and acknowledged by others (and thus himself and eventually, hopefully, his parents). A major step in this long process was when his parents saw the photos (the "proof") of their son and his girlfriend enjoying time together, without them also being there; it was their first step of inner recognition of differentiation of him as a separate individual.

Self-portrait work does not always have to take place within a therapy session as a literal photo-of-the-self. It can also happen through "accidental" components of album-review work where one imagines, remembers, or recreates one's own self-image in private (as a later example illustrates below) -- or in photos one has created of oneself for fun or social activity, which later prove to have additional significance embedded under their visual

surface, that the person was not aware of at the time of playfully creating them (for example, this photo a man took of himself on his 60th birthday -- which we then used as the basis for several discussions about aging and loss):

Self-portrait PhotoTherapy work can also happen as part of photo-taking assignments where the client has been asked to bring to the next session, photos taken in response to the therapist's assignment to go photograph a particular topic or issue, or to select a particular personal issue they think is important to explore, as the following illustrates:

The photo below was made by a young woman who put herself into the picture[20] as means of "publicly witnessing" her rage about having been evicted from her rental apartment so that developers could tear it down for constructing high-rise condominiums.

Her feelings about having to move out of her much-loved home

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[20] The camera's cable release visible in her left hand connects with her camera across the room

became for her almost an obsession of concentrated anger and unresolved emotional conflicts. She fought the eviction notice but still eventually had to move out of the home she had occupied for several years and then watch it be repeatedly vandalized once abandoned. Recognizing how much effect the experience was having on her life, she chose to deal with these issues photographically in order to explore them deeper and have a means to bear witness to what was soon to exist only as a memory.

Her comments explained why she was feeling so angry: "Other places I've lived in before, I left by choice, willingly. This is the first time that my home rejected me".

She expressed personal feelings of powerlessness: "What do I do with my rage? So far I took pictures and talked to lots of people, but this has not been enough". This sense of finally having created what she wanted only to have it taken away by 'enemy' forces who left her powerless, all were psychological issues that she needed and wanted to explore -- and she had brought these photos along to her therapy session to help her begin to better express, and then better understand her frustrated feelings.

The following anecdote and photo illustrates how of how self-portraits made with the assistance of another person, are still nevertheless truly self-reflective, as long as the client has all the control over its creation, setting, timing, and so forth:

Lee had been HIV-positive for over seven years when he carefully arranged himself for this photograph.

He had a friend take it, but only to push the camera's shutter, as it did not have a self-timer or cable-release option. For over a half-hour, he carefully arranged various poses and then told her each time when he wanted her to hit the shutter on the pre-positioned camera. Once the film was developed, he had his favorite image printed large, and framed it to keep beside his bed. Apart from that friend, Lee never showed those self-portraits to anyone other than his therapist, who he began seeing for counseling when he realized the time had arrived to begin coming to terms with his approaching death (which has since occurred).

He explained, "When I was a baby, life was good. I was kept clean, warm, and fed. I got unconditional love from my parents. Life was safe and kind. When I first found out that I had been infected by HIV, it was in those very early days of the plague when nobody knew what it was yet, much less how to prevent getting it. So I didn't even know I had been putting myself at risk. When they told me that I would soon get extremely sick from AIDS and then die a terrible death, it put a cold shock right through my body. My heart froze up in fear. I felt like I'd been raped. It was a bunch of really awful feelings. And it just wasn't fair -- because I didn't know [about all this] or I would have protected myself.

"What's this picture about? Well, when I first got diagnosed, I really felt like a little boy crying out, "I want my Mommy"! Seriously, that's the first thing that came to my mind. But she had been dead a long time [by then], so I had nobody to go "home" to, nobody's lap to crawl into. My lover had already died and [the rest of] my family mainly disowned me when they found out I was homosexual. They don't even know I have AIDS, and I won't let them have the pleasure of finding out so they can tell me it is God's punishment. My friends are understanding, but they aren't coping very well with my dying -- and neither am I! I'm not ready yet -- not sure if I'll ever be.

"Every time I start thinking about it, I get more scared and really need to find a place that is safe so I can catch my breath, and push AIDS away for a little while. I go relax at a friend's cottage, but that's

just for a short time. So when I was at this motel attending a conference, and there was this crib in the room, it really brought back memories of being so little that I fit into one. So when I saw that crib, I just decided on the spur of the moment to climb in. didn't think about it much -- just climbed in. And you know what? I felt so safe in there...

"So the next day I asked my friend to come up to my room with her camera and I did it again, so that I could remember that there used to be this place once where I was happy and had no worries, when my life was clean and pure -- and where I had no concept of death. Every once in a while I take out this picture again and remember what it must be like to have no fears. It really makes me feel better for a while..."

Self-portrait work can even be part of working "projectively" with other images, where clients might simply be asked to review numerous "general" (non-personal) photos taken by others or found in magazines or postcards or websites, and find some which seem to them to reflect themselves or be a metaphoric self-image, as the following example illustrates:

One woman picked this photo of the side of an old building as being her self-portrait "equivalent", saying "This building is definitely me!


My outsides are tattered and my paint's peeling. Some of my windows are broken so I'm not so protected from the wind and rain. What you see when you look at me is my outsides, the boards and glass that are my shell. The windows that you're supposed to look into to see me only end up as reflections of who's looking. The real me

inside isn't visible until the glass is broken, and even then it's in deep dark shadows. It's really painful to have that glass shatter."

Self-portrait work can also be combined in a more active manner, when working "projectively" with images taken by others (including strangers), which clients find strongly catch their attention (somehow pulls them to look at in more detail), even when not trying to find self-representational ones, as the following example (of this "Photo-Projective" PhotoTherapy dialogue) illustrates:

"A particular photograph "called" to me and so I picked it up.
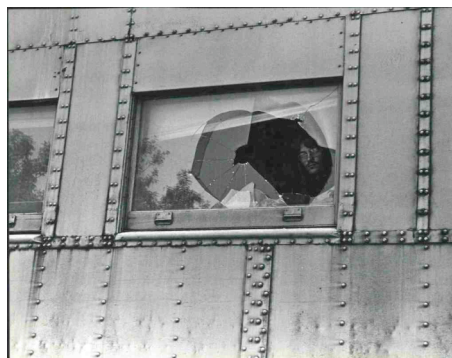
"It is a photo of someone looking out of a broken window. In the reflection of the window is trees. The walls that the window is attached to are steel with rivets in them. My reflections: Is it a train? A building? A prison? It made me in some ways think of the men I worked with in the prison environment. They were far away from home and even though there were trees around them (it was a Native justice system using traditional healing environments and methods), they were none-the-less in prison.

"Those are aside thoughts. I knew that I chose the photo because it said something about me and not about someone else. I just wasn't sure what it said. I had to sit with it for quite a while to try to understand what it meant.

"The face in the window looked tired, and that was how I feel. I have been in school for ten years now, and I am just tired. Tired of the constant struggle for money, time, and sanity. Tired of having to

constantly fight for what I believe in. And... well... just tired. I have not had any sort of vacation in 7 years.

"Why the broken window? And where is the person? I felt the person was on a train that was like a prison. They are going somewhere but they can't get off the train until it stops (like my school experience). The only connection they have to the outside world is through the broken window (my occasional glimpses at life ... walking in the park, going for coffee with friends, visiting people).

"The person is not miserable. Just tired. They know that they have to stay on the train, and they won't get off until they get to the end of the ride, which may be years and years away. That's how I feel.

"I had no plans of staying in school this long. I'm not an academic at heart. I wanted to get an art degree, get more skills and maybe write children's books. Here I am ten years later sitting on the same train.

"I have almost forgotten what it is like to live in a world that is not full of so many isolating feelings and tasks like writing (the academic kind, not the creative kind), marks (grades totally perplex and freeze me), the coldness of certain professors (if people keep you at a distance they can keep the hierarchy in place), and the lack of extended periods of being in a relaxing and natural setting to just let my thoughts go.

"As I look back on the image, I could say that I feel somewhat suffocated and constrained. I can see the trees, but I can't touch them. I can see outside of this train-prison, but I can't get off until the ride is over.

"I could get off if I wanted to, but then I wouldn't be where I need to be. I need to get off in the right place, so I have to suffer this isolating ride. I found this quite enlightening and sad at the same time. Because after all, the train ride goes on for some time still."

Self-Portrait PhotoTherapy work also can be done using photos of the client taken long ago, pictures that they might not have created themselves, but in which time was "stopped forever", without anyone knowing such a

simple picture would later prove very important. Even photos where clients were captured spontaneously rather than knowingly posing, have potential value when re-viewed later through the "filter" of therapeutic questioning.

The following example shows how such things that interconnect unconsciously often lay "dormant" until a later encounter unexpectedly provides information which suddenly gives one's current life behaviors a deeper "history" regarding their causes:

A woman in her fifties showed me the photo below, which had been taken at a family gathering when she was eleven years old. She had been the final child in a family with many children, and pointed to herself close to the edge of grouping of adults, siblings, and nephews and nieces, some of whom were older than herself (she is second from right, in back row):

She observed her face and body in the photo and defined this for me as herself "Just barely managing to be seen, struggling massively to not to be left out of the picture completely". She then suddenly realized this feeling seemed very familiar and told me she now realized that it had continued throughout her entire adult life, explaining that throughout all her past several decades of work in the professional field of health-education, she had chosen work that made her highly visible in pubic media. She added that she much preferred photos taken of herself alone at professional events, to those taken of her in groupings with colleagues or friends.

The example below demonstrates the strong influence that even consciously-posed childhood photographs of themselves can unconsciously have over clients' current life (and self image or behaviours):

The woman in this photo below happily posed for this photo spontaneously taken by her husband, at her 60th birthday party on a boat.

When she saw the results she described feeling very happy with who she was in this picture: "This is the real "me" -- enjoying my life to the fullest, not caring whether I looked proper for a woman of my age, feeling very strong and good about myself". She said that, when she tried to figure out why this one photo was so powerful (as compared with others taken that same day), she kept finding herself looking at her hat and also at how her own left elbow was bent, fist on hip -- which position she described as being "both defiant and assertive".

When asked, "if the hat were not on your head and/or the elbow not bent that way, would this photo still have such a strong effect on you?", she replied, "No! If the hat was gone, or the arm was straight, I think this would then be just another random photo of me on that day"...

A few weeks later, she happened to view a photo of herself at about age 4, dressed as a "cowboy" (below):

She described it as a photo which her mother had always laughed about as being the "perfect image" of her daughter being "her usual

stubborn self". When she realized how similar was the child's pose and posture with that of her own pose on her birthday, something "clicked" inside her about having carried this childhood image of herself inside her heart all these years, almost as an icon of "I can be anybody I want to be", and only then did she realize the depths of what she thought was an innocent spontaneous self-portrait...

All versions of self-portrait PhotoTherapy techniques are extremely important in their ability to provide the client a means of self-validation far superior to any internalized evaluations based only on the opinions reflected back through others' perceptions of them, especially since these people often have different conscious or unconscious purposes for giving the client such feedback.

Therefore, while photographic self-confrontation can also be done with photos of the client taken by others, and sometimes even with other photos taken by clients that are "self-reflective" even if not showing them directly, I believe, that clients gain the most from interacting with direct and unfiltered perceptions of themselves derived from viewing and interacting with "true" self-portraits created of themselves, by themselves, alone. Since these kinds of photographs are usually the most confrontational, provocative, evocative, and challenging, they will be the most therapeutically effective photos to use for therapeutic purposes.

Conclusion:

Seeing yourself as others regularly see you, seeing yourself as no one has ever seen you, seeing yourself as only you can dream yourself to be, seeing yourself as you think you may never be able to be, seeing yourself as you know your past to be, seeing yourself as you have never before seen

yourself, in contrast with others' photographic representations of these 'selves' -- all these can be a very power steps along the path to healing emotional pain, increasing self-knowledge and personal insight, as well as improving relationships with others -- and with life in general.

"Seeing the self differently" becomes also "a different way of seeing that same self". Self becomes a more deeply informed self and thus becomes a changed self because of different self-perceptions. As the images of self begin to present newer versions of self, self can itself transform to a newer identity as actually "proven" by increasing numbers of different images self is willing to accept ad "true" -- and can greatly assist such goals of changing the self because of altering the very perceptions of self.

In a true self-portrait, if there is anything positive being seen by you, it is indisputably there only because you <u>yourself</u> put it there (by virtue of it being already a part of you, or else the camera could simply not have documented it in a true self-portrait).   What better tool could there be, then, for helping a person take back their own life and begin to move it forward as <u>they</u> wish to see it change??

Hopefully this Chapter has demonstrated how powerful "Self-Portrait PhotoTherapy techniques" can be in assisting clients to become more aware of these usually-hidden layers of themselves and bring them more to light for further exploration and understanding.

Self-portraits are perhaps the most powerful and valuable photos for clients to work with therapeutically, because the healthy differentiation of a mature and aware self, along with exploring and confronting self-perceptions, are the most important "first steps" to desired personal change and healing.

The key to using self-portrait photographs to assist therapy process lies in learning how to ask questions based on photograph-as-stimulus, photograph-as-a-beginning, photograph-as-self-narrative, that will lead to the inner therapeutic explorations desired, and the knowledge of what to ask when (and how), in order to assist clients in discovering more about themselves.

In photographs, time literally stops and external spatial reality in some ways ceases to exist[21]. Each snapshot is simultaneously a moment removed from all moments and yet still part of them all. Observer and observed become part of the same thread of life, which is itself unobservable, yet we humans attempt to stop it all with the click of a shutter. This is what PhotoTherapy is all about: when a person interacts with the snapshot, even just by looking at it or pressing the shutter to create it spontaneously, he or she "changes the picture" altogether.

PhotoTherapy techniques can be used to help bring information that people have forgotten, buried, or defended themselves against, into the realm of the knowable and recognizable, especially the information they hold without words (and cannot tell completely in words). They reconnect people with details of their lives that were originally recorded as sensory impressions and with remembered information whose relevance may not be recognized until a visual stimulus helps make the association become conscious.

I think that what is most important to realize, is that people everywhere are *already* using photography for the purposes of improving their own

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[21] This paragraph and the one after it have previously appeared in the author's book (Weiser, 1999).

communication and healing process -- whether for themselves ("Therapeutic Photography") or for their therapy clients ("PhotoTherapy"), even if they may not have heard of the actual word "PhotoTherapy" yet .

This Chapter has been about re-thinking photography (and especially self-portrait photographs) as being "emotional communication", whether or not they also happen to be "art" -- and reminding people to take the time to consider how photographs communicate their meaning nonverbally, unconsciously, and differently to each viewer, even when that viewer is looking at photographs they themselves appear in.

In this Chapter, I have tried to explain and illustrate how people not only use photographs to help tell the story of their own lives, and reflect themselves to self and others, but also how self-portraits can be used to help people by increasing awareness of the power of photographs to emotionally communicate beyond any capacity of words to convey. I encourage readers to now go explore themselves photographically!

Author Bio:

Judy Weiser, R.Psych., A.T.R., is the Director of the PhotoTherapy Centre, which she founded in 1982 in Vancouver, Canada, to serve as the world's networking base and extensive resource library for the fields of PhotoTherapy, Therapeutic Photography, VideoTherapy, and Photo Art Therapy.

One of the earliest pioneers of PhotoTherapy techniques ((using people's own personal and family photographs, and pictures taken by others, to help them connect with feelings, thoughts, beliefs, information, and memories during their therapy and counseling

sessions, in ways not possible using verbal dialogue alone), first article, 1975), she is a clinical psychologist, art therapist, consultant, trainer, author, and private scholar who has used these techniques for over thirty years of specializing in the "why" of ordinary personal and family photographs through her psychotherapy, consulting, educating, training, and mentoring of students and others.

Former Editor of the Journal PhotoTherapy, and on the current Editorial Board of the Canadian Art Therapy Journal, Judy authored the 1993 classic text, "PhotoTherapy Techniques: Exploring the Secrets of Personal Snapshots and Family Albums" (now in third printing and reviewed in more than a dozen professional journals), as well as many other professional articles (her first in 1975), several book chapters, and numerous other publications.

She also created and manages the informational "PhotoTherapy Techniques in Counseling and Therapy" website explaining both fields, as well as its related "PhotoTherapy and Therapeutic Photography Internet Discussion Group". She has also produced a video of collected interviews and examples of her work.

Long considered the "world authority" in the field, Judy was the invited "Opening Plenary Speaker" for the 2008 International Conference on PhotoTherapy and Therapeutic Photography in Finland (and has also presented at all the past International PhotoTherapy Symposiums), and has given over 300 plenary and keynote addresses, presentations, workshops and comprehensive training intensives in over ten countries over the past 25 years, teaching therapists and counselors how to use PhotoTherapy techniques to help their psychotherapy clients (and also showing others how to use Therapeutic Photography activities in non-therapy applications to encourage insight, activate social change, strengthen communities, improve family and other interpersonal communication or for enhancing qualitative research methodologies).

She is also founder and Executive Director of the Judy Weiser PhotoTherapy and Therapeutic Photography Educational Society

(founded in 2008), a nonprofit society whose goal is to create a formal archive of these fields and continue education and research related to them.

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Selected Publications by Judy Weiser

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Home page: www.phototherapy-centre.com/home.htm

Techniques of PhotoTherapy page: www.phototherapy-centre.com/five_techniques.htm

Comparisons: PhotoTherapy and Therapeutic Photography page:
www.phototherapy-centre.com/comparisons.htm

"Who is Doing What, Where" page: www.phototherapy-centre.com/widww.htm

Recommended Readings page: www.phototherapy-centre.com/recommended_readings.htm

Judy Weiser Biography & Publications page: www.phototherapy-centre.com/biography.htm