

PHOTOTHERAPY (AND THERAPEUTIC PHOTOGRAPHY) AROUND THE WORLD: ILLUSTRATED REVIEW OF PASSIONS AND PRACTICES

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"PhotoTherapy" (photography-in-therapy) and "Therapeutic Photography" (photography-as-therapy) are two ends of one exciting continuum of photo-based healing practices. They are not opposites, nor "enemies", but rather two different ways of making use of the emotional-communication qualities of photographs (and people's interactions with them) to communicate things that words alone cannot do as well (Weiser, 1999, 2001a, 2001b). What photos are emotionally about, is far more important than what they are visually of -- and it's important that Art (and other) Therapists realize the benefits they provide to therapy process.

"PhotoTherapy" is an interrelated system of therapy techniques that use clients' personal snapshots and family photos as bridges into feelings, memories, thoughts, and other emotional information, during the therapy process (Krauss & Fryrear, 1983; Weiser, 2002a, 2002b). When words alone are not enough, the client can use photos they take, photos taken of them, self-portraits, family photos, photos from magazines or those only remembered or imagined -- as well as their interactions with these -- to assist them to better reach, understand, express, and communicate about such deep (and usually unconscious) things.

In contrast, Therapeutic Photography uses the "naturally therapeutic" healing qualities of photo-interactions, but not during any formal counseling process. Therapeutic Photography are self-initiated activities (not "therapy"), and are usually self-directed or done as part of a creative class or group, for the purpose of self-exploration and personal growth (Martin & Spence, 1987, 1988; Spence, 1986a, 1986b). These are similar to the comparison of Art Therapy and Therapeutic Art: the first done while helping others and the second done for oneself, usually by oneself.

As PhotoTherapy and all its many practitioners have become better known, this "framework" has become the standard world-wide for siting and discussing these two practices with respect to one another (except for in the U.K. the two fields have unfortunately often been given the same name when they are truly two different things...).

Currently, there are now dozens of people around the world whose practices, writings, and teaching involve both -- and this Presentation will provide information about them. The Presenter is one of PhotoTherapy's original pioneers, who is in contact with most of this large network and she will first provide a review of the range and numerous varieties of many different kinds of work, teaching, and writing being done world-wide (a sort of "who is currently doing what, where" kind of survey), illustrated with slides and brief discussions). She will show how the "passion" for these techniques has grown exponentially over the past thirty years, with the result being that there are also now online courses, graduate credit courses, and even new Associations (such as the recently-started "Finnish PhotoTherapy Association!) and an internet Discussion Group with contributions from over eleven countries in two short years -- and provide contact information so that those attending can access this network and their writings.

PhotoTherapy and Therapeutic Photography are both particularly relevant in Art Therapy theory and practice, and their mutual creative "fires" have even more significance for all therapists, now that the "digital age" has made photography an even more popular common language of the heart (Weiser, 2000). This presenter believes that, to be fully educated, all Art Therapists need to know not only how to use photos in therapy work and this Presentation hopes to give enough examples of "why" and "how" to create that spark.

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Abstract/Description for Program:

"PhotoTherapy" (photography-in-therapy) and "Therapeutic Photography" (photography-as-therapy) will be compared and contrasted, as relevant for Art Therapy practice and teaching. Then a slide-illustrated presentation will provide numerous examples of the wide range and exciting variety of people, practices, and programs currently in use world-wide re: both kinds of techniques above.

Presentation Objectives:

Presentation attendees will exit, being able to:

- 1) Understand and compare "PhotoTherapy" and "Therapeutic Photography" and explain their theoretical and practical differences.
- 2) Know how Art (and other)Therapists around the world are currently using and teaching both kinds of techniques.
- 3) Know how to access further information about this network, including PhotoTherapy training programs, associations, theses/dissertations and publications by people outside North America.

Presentation Outline:

Presenter will give theoretical overview, contrasting and comparing "PhotoTherapy" and "Therapeutic Photography", and explain where these fit within Art Therapy paradigms. She will then discuss the range and variety of practices of numerous other practitioners world-wide (in both fields), showing slide illustrations from most of these. She will then conclude with a comprehensive summary to tie all these many passions together into one framework that will be useful to Art Therapists in their own work, and will provide many handouts to assist further networking, reading, and exploring.

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