

CHAPTER 12

Phototherapy

Using Snapshots and Photo-Interactions in Therapy with Youth

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INTRODUCTION

The power of ordinary snapshots to convey emotional meaning, to secure relationships across time and distance, and to symbolize personal metaphors, is the focus of this chapter. Phototherapy, an innovative use of a 150-year-old technology, uses people's personal photos and their interactions with these images as powerful adjunctive tools for counselors and therapists who wish to move beyond the constraints of traditional verbal-only therapy when helping people with their emotional or family problems.

Most of us keep snapshots around—without ever pausing to really think about why. The power of these “mirrors with memory,” as Oliver Wendell Holmes called them (Akeret, 1973, p. 4), is so strong that they become treasured (or sometimes hated) parts of our lives, yet we rarely take the time to explore them in any great depth. Phototherapy involves not only taking time to examine the contents of those photographic images that we decide to take, pose for, hold onto, or respond to, but also noting what occurs in the process of interacting with them (as well as considering others' responses). Probing our photos to reveal what they mean to us, how they make us feel, what memories they stimulate, and how these answers reflect our personal makeup and underlying values can help us understand our particular uniqueness in how we know what we know, and better appreciate the importance of this knowledge for understanding ourselves and others.

How people respond to a photograph, or what and how they choose to record (or pose for), can reveal a tremendous amount about them; this is in addition to the information in the image itself. Each response to a photo is individually unique, based on people's particular constellations of past experi-

All photos in this chapter, with the exception of Figure 12.4, were taken by Judy Weiser.

ences blended with their psychological configuration and personality; their values, attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and expectations; and their family and cultural background, training, and traditions. Each photo is thus, at least in some ways, a self-portrait. The process of interacting with these insights-from-the-inside can be intimately revealing of people's feelings and personal realities.

Although this process of exploring the secret lives of photographs can be used by anyone on an individual path of personal discovery, these techniques can be of great benefit for counselors and therapists working with young people (or people of any age) to improve their ability to attend to their clients' emotional (and sometimes unconscious, or at least nonverbalized) needs using ordinary photographs as the medium of dialogue.

The following pages will show how using photos (i.e., self-portraits, pictures of clients or taken by them, their family snapshots, albums, and personal photo displays or collections) as therapy tools for exploring feelings and memories can greatly aid in therapy with children and adolescents. Using these phototherapy techniques permits us, to paraphrase T.S. Eliot, to return to the places that are our physical and emotional sources and to be able to know them, again, for the first time.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To study the history of phototherapy, one must begin with the history of photography itself, as it was not long after people learned how to freeze time forever (the first daguerreotype appeared in the 1830's) and capture visual material onto film, that they began having emotional relationships with these artifacts. At first, only the rich could afford such special portraits; soon, however, the process became more affordable, and anyone who wanted to could find a way to have a photo taken. Large numbers of people became photographers or their subjects; some believed the resulting photos reflected the world the way it really was for them, while others were quite offended when their captured image was not at all what their imagination had embellished.

Some professionals who worked with disturbed people made particular use of the emotional contents of photography, such as British psychiatrist Dr. Hugh Diamond, who, in 1856, wrote what is probably the earliest formal documentation of photography used as therapy, and Dr. Thomas Barnardo, who published similar findings in 1870 (Gilman, 1976); such uses, usually with hospitalized psychiatric patients, continued erratically but with increasing frequency through the remainder of the past century and into our own. With the advent of smaller and simpler cameras in the early 1900s, the snapshot released people from the need for previously planned formality—and a universal hobby was launched. It is this casual and yet emotionally-filled nature of these artifacts that led such sensitive photographers as Minor White (1966), Gassan (1983), and Ralph Hattersley (1971) to use photographs as much more than

simple documents, and that later led mental health professionals to begin to work with them as chosen tools.

Phototherapy itself as a formal field has evolved predominantly within the past decade or two. It is generally agreed that interest in the field was precipitated by a brief notice in *Psychology Today* (Zakem, 1977), in which Zakem and Stewart noted their Ravenswood Hospital Photo Therapy Project and asked for feedback. The response led to the first major International Symposium in Illinois in 1979. Other conferences and meetings have ensued; there is now an International Phototherapy Association, a journal, and an active network of therapists and researchers.

Despite its catchy name, phototherapy is not a therapy unto itself or a particular modality or school of thought; rather, it is a comprehensive system of techniques that has been found to work successfully—often in cases where nothing else has—using photography as a medium for communication, expression, and reflection. But everyone's particular conceptual and theoretical models are not necessarily the same; I do not want readers to assume that there is some consistent set of assumptions about therapy imbedded within the set of techniques called phototherapy. These tools can be used quite successfully regardless of personal preference of therapeutic modality (Adlerian, psychoanalytic, behavioral, Gestalt, Freudian, developmental, existential, phenomenological, systems, Rogerian, rational-emotive, Jungian, communications models, etc.), or client population/setting/restrictions. The next section is a condensation of some existential/phenomenological principles that I have found helpful in understanding therapeutic applications of photographic communication.

EXISTENTIAL AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL COMMUNICATION

Some basic concepts underlying my approach to phototherapy are conceptually housed within the domains of existential and phenomenological philosophy and psychology. Detailed analysis of how we perceive, create, and store meaning, and how this relates to photographic communication is beyond the scope of this chapter (see, for example, Weiser, 1975, 1983, 1985, 1987 in press; and Krauss, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1983a), but it is clear from studying these subjects that any act of perceiving filters and creates meaning in addition to, and sometimes different from, the physical or symbolic properties of the incoming stimulus. We contribute to (and thus change) the meaning perceived by our very process of perceiving it; others do the same with the verbal and nonverbal messages we send, no matter how clear we try to be. These selective filters have a personal-cultural base in which family can be seen as a type of subculture, and are always within situational contexts; as Bandler and Grinder (1975) have conceptualized it, the personally created map of reality being responded to is not the actual context-free territory itself, but is rather at least

partially created by the perceiver as attention is paid only to what is noticed—in or out of our conscious awareness. In an example from visual perception, it is the difference between all the total input physically reaching the retina (*visual field*) and that portion of this information that is actually consciously or unconsciously seen (*visual world*) as the world that we know and recognize (Hall, 1969).

It is the nature of most human beings to try to make sense out of what we encounter; our senses are bombarded with input; and we try to figure things out as we take in vast fields of sensory data, selectively code it in such a way as to record and hopefully understand its meaning for us, store this meaning internally for future use, and sometimes attempt to reconstitute parts of it to create communications to others (and ourselves) that can somehow convey what we mean. If the message received is close to the one we intended, then we can claim to have communicated; using a mutually agreed upon set of codes and semiotics that make up our spoken language, we strive to take internal concepts and translate these into words that will manage to give another person a way to see what we mean, to understand in the same way we do. Often this succeeds; often again, especially in more stressful situations, it does not (or else we think we've communicated, but do not know for sure how to know for sure). Most usually the lack of congruency underlying this possible dissonance lies in the other-than-verbal domains, and trying to get a sharper picture of people's nonverbal messages and cognitive/comprehending processes becomes a major goal in attempts to better understand and communicate with them. If people could only become more comfortable with the idea that theirs is not the only way to see things (but that it is just as valid as any other), and feel secure in this enlarged conceptual ideology, then interpersonal communication on a small or large scale could be so much easier facilitated.

Perception deals with differences that make a difference; as we describe things, we bring into existence those things that we later accept as real. These concepts borrowed from existential philosophy have serious implications for therapy, where children, families, couples, or individuals may be operating in separate (sometimes invisibly different) perceptual/cultural systems and not even know it, and then become frustrated when natural assumptions are not automatically shared as one would expect. There really is no right or wrong existing independently in this world; there is only "different"—we, through our personal, societal, and cultural applications, add the values that label, in both verbal and nonverbal form. Each of us, inevitably, by our very own nature, impose our own personal/cultural map; we are our own selective filters. A grave error is made if we think that what we perceive is that reality itself, forgetting the effect of each person's unique process of perceiving, symbolizing, and taking meaning. This error is much too frequently made when working with youth of any age, in assuming they must always bend to fit our expectations, rules, values, and labels.

We create meaning through personal and cultural filters and interact with others who do the same. Our memories are coded, stored, and accessed non-

verbally. Most of what we know of our own lives we know in an area where words do not go. We think, remember, and feel not in words, but in symbolized meanings that are more culturally universal, or part of the collective unconscious perhaps, but still cognitively structured by selective perception of reality and cultural/subcultural differences. Therapists who can internalize and incorporate these concepts into their operational style usually find their clients responding in a more spontaneous and intuitive manner, revealing from behind their verbal defenses and protective rationalizations information that they may have been unaware of at a conscious level. This aids clients in finding an enriched appreciation for their own personal uniqueness and backgrounds, a better understanding of their particular communication process and values (and therefore those of others), learning more about who they are, where they are, and, I hope, why they are: "By broadening his conception of the forces that make up and control his life, the average person can never again be completely caught in the grip of patterned behavior of which he has no awareness" (Hall, 1973, p. 187).

To study any techniques of counseling and therapy requires an exploration into the depths not only of perception, but also of communication itself, especially its predominantly nonverbal components. Whatever the reasons for referral for treatment, youths certainly exemplify a more narrow-band, selectively organized, and perceived reality, with many memories and feelings from earlier years still stored at the preverbal level they originally occurred within, and often not yet brought up to any level of conscious awareness, much less understanding, catharsis, and/or resolution. It is necessary, therefore, to appreciate the relatively more significant value of the other-than-verbal components of their communications and internalized meanings, their symbolic and metaphorical language, in order to more fully aid them.

Spoken/written language is frequently only an approximation in communicating what is really inside us; words can never completely convey the totality of what is intended or comprehended, nor can they give us back any true assurance that the person received our full communication as we wished. Most of our senses receive and transmit information unfiltered by intermediary symbolic linguistic interpretation; as our eyes take in the vast majority of all the knowledge we absorb, we can be certain that for most people the world is perceived and evaluated through a visual literacy far more complex than words could ever fully define or represent. I believe that most humans think, feel, and recall memories not in direct words, but in iconic imagery, thought-pictures (sometimes accompanied by kinesthetic or other cues), and visual concepts that comprise the cognitive maps that we try to encompass in our spoken or written representations, but that our words can never fully describe.

In order to get inside our heads, to really know how we think, how we know what we know, our values and beliefs, our reasons and traditions as we know them, there must be a way to tap into all this predominantly visual information in some nonverbal manner that is less directly intrusive than verbal or written enquiry. To more directly connect with the insides of people's

minds and feelings, one must have additional tools that complement linear verbal methodologies, tools that somehow can manage to do this exploration of nonverbal terrain in a nonverbal manner providing a less intrusive or disruptive view of the person under observation. The moment we observe a behavior, we have changed it in that process of observation; the moment we label or define, we are imposing our own values and perceptions onto the meaning perceived. Any interpretive process automatically alters and limits; it is important to remember that such a process usually occurs naturally: spontaneously, unconsciously, and often totally out of our (or our client's) conscious awareness or self-reflective ability.

Communication is predominantly nonverbal, people's actions quite literally speak louder than their words. At its most simple and basic it deals with "the emission of information and its perception by humans and animals" (Poyatos, 1983, p. xvi). But all students of communication quickly realize that the majority of our messages are based heavily on nonverbal (and predominantly visual) components that we may not be all that conscious of, and these cues are by no means universal across cultures or generations, or even families or individuals. Difficulties can arise if the same reality produces different meanings or messages to people, especially if they don't realize this is happening, and proceed to act upon what they believe to be mutual agreement; this could be simply a statement of cross-cultural differences, or of more serious consequence if in the context of individual psychotherapy and reality testing. Basically, communication is based on shared understandings; if there is agreement that the message received and responded to is indeed the one that was intended when sent, then there is hope—but not a certainty—that we communicated successfully.

This, a more functional working definition, is the assumption I will use throughout this chapter, as discussion of most communication rests not on the more obvious spoken or written message, but rather on all the accompanying other-than-verbal cues, contexts, and out-of-conscious-awareness components; communication truly occurs only when both parties agree (consciously or subconsciously) that it has. "The term communication can almost never represent an absolute concept" (Poyatos, 1983, p. 13), nor a discrete event. Any attempt to freeze a slice of time in order to examine the communication process at that moment would fail to completely encompass the full dynamics of what was going on, although a photograph would certainly stimulate more recall than a verbal-only memory. In examining psychotherapeutic contexts, it is clear that this functional definition is the only one useful in the realities of the counseling setting, as successful communication is always so situationally defined.

It therefore becomes clear that we must enlarge our awareness (and our clients') to include appreciating the dimensions of nonverbal communication, as it affects so much of what is dealt with in therapy through cultural and familial contextual revelations. These beliefs, value systems, feelings, and so on, are coded nonverbally, not translatable solely through words.

I have found that most people arrive in my office confused and in some sort of emotional pain. They are not seeing things the way they think they should (or the way someone else is demanding); how they have been conducting their life is not succeeding well enough according to their expectations; their very being is felt to be unacceptable or dysfunctional, often being labelled such by a referring person. They often feel personally threatened, their "feelers are all curled in" (as one client described it) to protect themselves, and their defenses are well-entrenched. Under these circumstances, where change is needed, it is clear that it must be initiated from within to be trusted. Usually their nonverbal messages and expressions of emotional affect are targets for work in improving communication and interaction, on the level both of self and with others. People can usually use feedback on how others see them, especially in finding out what is perceived above and beyond the message they think they are sending when they act and talk. (These areas apply equally well to the therapist's affect and effect on the client, as well as the reverse.)

Psychologists may think our field deals only with the treatment of individuals, but in practice these are not isolated interchangeable digits that exist apart from the process of time, family, and culture that has produced them. To help individuals in therapy, one must get into their nonverbal communications and cultural mandates; to do otherwise would be to sabotage the therapy's long-range effects by suggesting context-free change (which cannot possibly occur without consequences to their family and cultural lives).

Phototherapy techniques, I believe, can help clients begin and proceed along the path of learning from trained therapists how to examine their own nonverbal visual messages through looking at the photo-artifacts that stop and still these communications so that they can be held and examined for exploring what they say about them, what values and feelings they reflect and express, how it is that they know these things to be true (and thus how they are evaluating the messages of others as well as having expectations of them), and how to appreciate these differences between themselves and others without feeling threatened or perceiving any necessity to demand or enforce change.

In working with youth in therapeutic settings, when the broader general goals are to enable children and adolescents to become more flexible in dealing with issues they encounter, improving their problem solving abilities and self-image by better understanding the underlying values being communicated, "to be able to re-frame their problems (and lives) by having an improved and more conscious cognitive perspective along with an increased ability to tap into it for clarification" (Ostiguy, 1986, personal communication) I would suggest that these nonverbal concepts and communications are best worked with through nonverbal tools. Photographs and the process of taking and interacting with the prints are increasingly being used to give youth "a better picture" of themselves and to bring their lives "into sharper focus." Since "seeing is believing," and "a picture is worth a thousand words," "seeing for yourself" can be a powerful tool when input from others is not relevant or accepted.

Phototherapy skills, when used by a competent professional helper, can well make use of our commonly accepted substitution of the phrase "I see" to mean "I understand."

PHOTOGRAPHY AS THE MEDIUM OF CHOICE

Why use photography as the therapeutic medium? What is it about photographs and the process of interacting with them that make this choice so special? Since the only way people can take in any information from their environment at all is through their sensory organs (roughly 85 percent of which is visual input), our understandings and memories evolve from processes that are not verbally-contexted, that have a predominantly visual component inexorably bonded to each moment experienced or remembered. As people need to better comprehend their nonverbal knowledge and values, we must somehow be prepared to guide them toward better understanding of this visual, and usually unconscious, language and its metaphoric and symbolic representations.

Since so much of our perception and communication with the world and people around us is uniquely and personally filtered, mental health professionals can increase the range of their possibilities of helping by making use of the unique advantages (and somewhat paradoxical interaction with reality) provided by photography as a tangible yet personal organization of experience. The following points summarize the implications photography provides as relevant for therapeutic interventions:

1. Photography and its products are nearly universally encountered, socially acceptable, and personally relatively nonthreatening. Most people have had contact with photographic imagery—although perhaps not all have encountered cameras, most have seen snapshots or magazine or billboard visuals. Most people keep snapshots around them of past events, places, people, even of themselves; these are usually accepted as commonplace items, very natural parts of one's life, items that are usually safe for mutual discussion, even with nonfamily members, as they can be found in the personal environments of almost everyone, nearly everywhere, even if just through calendars, magazines, advertisements, and so on.

2. Photos are tangible documents of actual times and events that have really happened in front of the camera and thus can be discussed as the equivalent of (or stand in for, or symbol of) that actuality. Most people know that photos are supposed to represent (literally, re-present) the real-life moment that was actually taking place in front of the camera at the very second of the picture-taking; after all, if it wasn't there in the first place, we couldn't have captured it on film. We frequently use such photo documents to prove that something did indeed once really occur: "Look! The snow that year was so

bad it covered the house," "See, your father did once have a full head of hair," or to stress the truth of things that are usually biased by personal interpretation, political agenda, or other standard manipulations (i.e., "Your facial scars really don't show to others; look at this photo and see for yourself," or for a more global example, how the recent famine in Africa became real and personally horrifying once photographic images of its effects on children were brought directly into our minds). We often use photos as unarguable proof of the reality of a fact or event in space or time; if there is a photo of it, then it must certainly and indisputably have happened (i.e., the camera cannot lie).

3. Not only do people see photos as a way to prove a given reality or actuality, but in most spontaneous encounters with snapshots, we see them as that very reality itself. By this, I mean that immediate, unconscious, cognitive-perceptual leap our brain provides us when we encounter a photograph face-to-face: in viewing a photo, most of us unconsciously perceive ourselves being there at that very moment the camera documented the scene, our eyes jumping into the scene at the location of behind-the-camera as if we were really there in person at that very time. In our minds, we are integrally and inseparably part of it, at the very moment it was frozen in time; we are there at that time, even if it occurred generations ago, and we experience its moment as now, the associated feelings and contexts as present ones. We are usually not consciously aware that we are viewing a piece of paper with stuff smeared on it in patterns existing only in two dimensions; instead, we see the image as if it was a real, three-dimensional slice of life, and as if we were actually part of that scene (either in it, standing next to the photographer looking at it, or somehow behind or inside the lens itself). The fact that a mechanical device was used to place the scene onto lifeless flat paper is usually unconsciously overlooked (and therapeutically irrelevant), as we visually and emotionally connect with the image's actual contents (and our perceptions of their meanings) as if they were still alive and in process in the present. What the camera sees, the eye sees, and thus we see.

4. Most people take and keep photo-artifacts that have the most intense emotional meaning to them (i.e., memories of places, people, or times that have strong feelings associated with them). Conversely, most people will not keep photos around them that they strongly dislike or feel ambivalent or uneasy about. People very rarely will photograph things that do not matter to them, and in later viewing photos that they have taken, they will usually not keep the ones that have no personal meanings connected. Snapshots that do not matter rarely matter enough to be kept or given to others.

5. People take and keep photographs for very uniquely personal reasons; what they see when viewing a photo (theirs or someone else's) is a perception based not only on the stimulus image's content itself, but also (and far more so), based on the sum of what they are bringing to that moment of perception: a blend of their background experiences, personality, family system and history, cultural and societal values, and so on; that is, the totality of everything

that has happened to them right up to the very moment of interacting with that frozen moment of time that they or someone else decided to keep forever. A snapshot represents a selective and personally symbolized reality—in some ways a metaphor of ourselves; egocentric and ethnocentric values, perceptions, and expectations inseparably filtering what is chosen to be photographed, when, and how. And all photos do represent an actual choice (though not necessarily a conscious one): what is selected, how it is composed and mentally/visually organized, which photos are kept, which photos make it into albums or are discarded or given as gifts. Although the camera does document what is in front of it, it is the person who decides when the right moment is and what or who to include, as well as whether it is worth keeping. The resulting photo in and of itself has no meaning—in our perceptions or imaginings we actively participate in the meaning created.

6. When taking a photo, people usually have a goal in mind, though not always a conscious or verbalizable one; during this process—and after, when viewing the photo—they usually have a strong idea of what they were hoping to have captured, and how well they succeeded. They may be pleased by finding they got what they wanted (or better than they expected) and can explain where in the image this success is visible; or if not, they can often be helped to bring to conscious awareness what the facet is that is felt to be missing, that should have been there but was not, that would be needed to really make the photo complete. This can easily lead to exploring what would have to change in the image for the originally-desired portion or message to be there after all, answers describing the visual message (and accompanying meanings) the person perceived to be lacking. These visual expectations are directly connected to underlying values and personal sense-making systems.

Thus, in considering all the above truths about photographs and the act of photographing, a curious blend occurs, a combination of documentary proof at the same time as a presentation of a personal selective reality, often presented in a symbolically represented language, that then conceptually returns upon itself full circle to again be a more real proof; a mutually dependent relationship of seeing and believing. This somewhat paradoxical identity gives rather ordinary snapshots the power to allow complex examination of a frozen slice of time fixed forever onto film as fact, and yet at the very same time permits the appreciation of the varieties of realities possible from a single stimulus, demonstrating to people the power of personal metaphors and meanings as they interact with it or attempt to explain it to others using, not word-associations, but photo-related ones. When viewing several photos selected for reflecting upon, or taken by, a person, what we are really seeing is their own self-portrait in a more abstract form, that is, those things that they have noticed, attended to, and given special interest. When considering one or two snapshots offered for examination, we can certainly learn a bit about people; when we have the opportunity to see dozens and dozens, we can begin to notice

for ourselves what we perceive to be repeating patterns and reoccurring themes.

Although one definitely should not make assumptions about a person by viewing only a few selected snapshots, questions could certainly be asked and responses noted for holding in reserve until more are seen and repetitions and patterns begin to emerge. If photos are posed, then what we see in viewing the later snapshots is the photographer's selectively organized world; however, if a collection of photos are all candid, then we are seeing the random moments that were actually going on that someone chose for special reasons for remembering. Indeed, if the person is selecting the image contents, and doing so repeatedly and consistently over time, then we are being shown a symbolic representation of their state of mind (and their perceived reality) at those times, and can use this to enquire of them about how they feel this represents their very personality; sometimes the recurrences and deeper patterns point out to photographers themes and issues and feelings that they may not have even been aware of at the time of photographing. Photographs are not only footprints of our minds in terms of where we may have been, but also perhaps of where we might be heading, though not necessarily realizing it yet.

PHOTOTHERAPY LITERATURE REVIEW

Rigorous research in the field has, unfortunately, been sparse and usually more phenomenological or hermeneutic in orientation; true evaluations depending upon reliability and validity are difficult to design when working with nonverbal domains of selectively perceived and presented realities.

Fryrear (1980, 1983) has attempted the most comprehensive review to date on phototherapy literature. Citing previous less formal attempts to systematize the various research, writings, and smaller reviews on phototherapy by Stewart (1979a,b; 1980), Zakem (1978), Loellbach (1978), Levinson (1979), and others from past *Phototherapy* journal articles, Fryrear proposed a framework for organizing the phototherapy territory into 11 broad encompassing areas (and then provided many article and book citations within each category): evocation of emotional states, elicitation of verbal behavior, modeling, mastery of a skill, facilitation of socialization, creativity/expression, diagnostic adjunct to verbal therapies, a form of nonverbal communication between client and therapist, documentation of change, prolongation of certain experiences, and self-confrontation. For a more thorough literature review, readers can consult his first chapter in *Phototherapy and Mental Health* (Krauss & Fryrear, 1983), where he enlarges on these citations. I would recommend a few additions to his list: awareness of one's system of personal symbology and metaphors, establishing one's place within one's family system and sibling constellation, study of archetypes, awareness of cultural and historical roots, and several others. As this list is really only a starting point, and makes no assumptions

about being complete, we can use it more as a springboard for appreciating the diverse applications possible using photographs as therapeutic tools.

The abundant literature in the field, however, clearly points out the many beneficial results these techniques have satisfactorily provided those conducting the projects. There have been numerous articles and several books published, most on applications of a specific technique with a particular age group or environmental setting.

THE TECHNIQUE IN GENERAL

Photography can be approached actively (i.e., taking photos, collecting them, or completing assignments) or more passively (i.e., viewing, re-viewing, reflecting, musing, or imagining upon our own snaps or those taken by others—even years later). Photography has for too long been a passive form on another level: letting people see photos, but not demanding any involvement or feedback from them, as if they were simply interchangeable viewing units; this has often been obvious in more formal gallery exhibits, where photography as an art was exhibited.

Photography, however, is more than just art alone. There has been a change in its usage by people other than artists: using photography as communication as well as art, conceptualizing photography as a verb, as well as a noun—an active process that is itself at least equally important as its product, the photograph itself. If probed with the right kinds of questions, a photograph can reveal much more than its image contents, not only about what is photographed, but also about the photographer or photo-keeper or photo-responder; not only the contents, but also the process; not only what is kept or documented, but also why and how.

As photographs are representations of how we see the world, and how we choose to interpret it to others and ourselves, they convey nonverbally how we perceive and create meaning. They are very real to people (as one client told me, “My photos *are* me”), and they take on a real living quality at times (as when we remove the snapshot of an ex-friend or lover from our albums or wallet, when we grieve the photos if lost in a house fire or if a purse or wallet is stolen); that is, they take on a prescience beyond their simple paper/chemical existence. As mentioned above, when we re-view a photo, the moment is now; this re-creation in present time and emotions allows us to get back in touch with the feelings as if they, too, were happening this very moment; thus, we can work with them in an immediate sense. This very immediate intensity that allows such deep therapeutic investigation is balanced by the facet of the photo being at arm’s length; because they are so commonplace and somewhat less threatening than direct confrontation, they allow a distancing and objectifying of oneself and others that somehow allows a bit of safety or protection into the process, and this in turn allows probing into deeper levels than usually allowed verbally. By putting a frame around things, photos assist in simplify-

ing and partializing, thus stilling the process of life into more manageable and comprehensible units of meaning, which we can study more privately or hear others’ responses about without losing the identity and safety of our own perceptions.

This use of photographs as stimuli, as catalysts, to reconnect one with a visual memory and its associated feelings that were bonded to the actual experience of that moment (though stored at an unconscious level)—this is photography as communication; when used by professionals in the mental health fields as a way to help people when words are not enough—this is called phototherapy. The techniques involved are based on using photographs (and the process of taking or imagining photographs) as beginnings, as ways into people’s other-than-verbal emotional spaces; there is not, however, any independently existing simple list of rules of how to proceed, but instead an increased awareness of how to ask the kinds of questions that use people’s ordinary snapshots for the power that they contain and an enhanced sensitivity in noticing the full depth of their responses. Phototherapy basically requires that one learn to listen to what else goes by while the client is answering with supposedly factual information, a way not to read photographs *for* the person, but rather to somehow see between the lines, making therapeutic use of what they share, both verbally and nonverbally, consciously and unconsciously, based on photo-explorations.

A photograph should not mean, but rather suggest or guide; for therapeutic goals, one does not aim for some kind of rigid code of external objective interpretation, but rather an awareness of the open-ended explorations allowed by using photos as our tools to help us better achieve our goals. The client should not be photographing or selecting in order to meet outside expectations, either stated or implied. Photographs should be very sparingly analyzed, and not defined in any absolute terms; we must be careful when establishing a methodology of photographic therapy not to try to establish a fixed language. Very simply, when asking questions using phototherapeutic techniques as a stimulus (as discussed below), most therapists discover client progress in areas where, in the past, verbal-only techniques have run into walls of defenses, rationalizations, and excuses. In the last century, photography has developed into a very powerful medium not only of art, but of communication; in the hands of therapists who are trained in how to best make use of what Van Vliet so poetically calls this “stopping to respond to what the eye discovers” (Fryrear, 1980, p. 9), they can become valuable tools for helping people get a sharper focus of what is going on inside themselves and in their interactions with others.

A photograph is much more than just the individual parts of its image; the whole is so much more than just the sum of its parts. Phototherapy begins with this foundation, and then proceeds to utilize both symbolism and projection as the basic techniques or tools for treatment. Photographs taken by clients concretely and symbolically portray objects that are directly related to their mental state and to their own personal-cultural map of reality, showing actual objects as well as symbolically presenting equivalents of that person in visual

representation. Photographs taken by a client or drawn from the family album offer examples of the ways the world is defined, represented, and remembered by the individual. "Photographs not only record a point of view; they also encourage the maintenance of that point of view in memory and imply a mindset. . . . Photographs indicate parameters, rules, norms, and values; they allow clinicians to see who is where, with whom, and what they are doing. Photos show a system [or family or cultural context] operating with a hierarchy and rules" (Krauss, 1980, p. 10). Since the gap between our own perceptions and the perceptions of others plays such a major role in many counseling situations (and problem definitions), "such a reality check could have broad uses in therapy" (Stewart, 1980, p. 17); examining differences in our own perceptions as they change over time, as well as how they compare with those of others, could provide great psychological benefit.

The term "expressive" or "arts" therapies is used to describe those ways of working with people in their more visual, emotional, metaphorical, nonverbal, holistic, and right-brain domains. Using such therapies usually results in clients responding in more spontaneous/intuitive and less protected or defended manners. In general, all people—even those without problems—could use these same tools to explore themselves on their own and to find an enriched appreciation for their own personal uniqueness, a better understanding of their particular communication processes, and possibly that of their family, friends, and neighbors; photo-communication is not the sole domain of mental health professionals, but rather a universal language with which they can tailor special use.

As with all of the various expressive therapies, phototherapy shares in the conceptual framework the implication that our creative expressions are actually projections from our inner selves, that we are individually unique, and that we perceive, code, store, retrieve, and put forth information in ways that reflect our personal makeup. People wishing to understand and help us would do well to look at our creative output and perceptions in order to have a fuller picture of who we are inside. Phototherapy should thus be viewed as a set or system of creative techniques, rather than a conceptual model of therapy, an interweavable collection of tools that can be used individually or collectively, not in isolation, but as adjuncts to verbal therapy to provide the therapist with additional flexible alternatives that can be used in conjunction with any theoretical methodologies therapists might choose as their preferred modalities.

It will be seen from the following section elaborating on and illustrating each specific technique of phototherapy, that as people discuss the layers of unfolding meaning around a simple photographic image, they are actually dialoguing with themselves, bringing to light their perceptions, expectations, values, and personal symbols; as they share information about themselves, and perceptions of others doing the same, they can usually communicate more fully. The innovation lies in using photography (process and product) to guide our self-exploration and discovery, our communications with ourselves and

others, that will, I hope, lead to the reduction of barriers and prejudices, expectations and judgments of ourselves and others that so often get in the way of our mutual understanding and acceptance.

SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES, WITH CASE ILLUSTRATIONS

Just as I described photography above, phototherapy tools can themselves be used passively (reflecting upon an image; studying the contents and reactions to those photo-stimuli; researching other lives and worlds whether from visual artifacts, family albums and films, or constructed documentation), as well as actively (actually photographing, either spontaneously or toward some goal; using the photo as a starting point for interactions, dialogues, constructions, and confrontations with self or others). Phototherapy can be seen as both passive and active, and occasionally both at the same time.

When clients take photos, or respond to pictures they have selected to look at, or explore how they wish to be photographed, they can provide insight into their own values, emotions, expectations, and cognitive styles; as they become more aware of feelings, and less verbally protected or guarded, they become more flexible and adaptive in their interactions. With photography and visual literacy so permeating our society, and with the keeping and valuing of snapshots so nearly universally commonplace, working a selection of photographs with a client can be a much less threatening way of opening blocked areas, as it stays somewhat one step removed from the person inside.

As with so many techniques based conceptually on holistic or systems orientations, these tools suffer a bit from having to be taken apart for analyzing each section as disjointed separate entities; phototherapy is so much more than just examining each technique on its own and then adding them all together. Most practitioners use these techniques in various combinations, intersections, and overlays, in tangible or even abstract forms, as they really are components of an integrally related system.

Projectives

When we look at photos, ours or other people's, we respond to them; and regardless of any intentions we might have to the contrary we nonverbally interact with them as well; thus, we actively take part in the meaning we perceive (based on our own personal and cultural filters for interpretation), and we subconsciously take the meanings we need at that time emotionally. Besides what we think the photographer intended us to get from the photo, we cannot help but be affected by our own unique background experiences and values. Viewing photos usually results in some sort of response—feelings, memories recalled, thoughts about the subject content. We can place ourselves in the photo, to explore alternative possibilities, consider options in the role of photographer, project emotions and scripts onto the image coming from our own

life, create themes, stories, or larger contexts if wished. Responses to photo viewing, taking, or gathering assignments reflect our cognitive structuring and valuing of our world, and can thus increase our tolerance and appreciation for the differences and differentness we might encounter in others.

The following examples will illustrate a few of the numerous possibilities:

In telling me about the seated child in Figure 12.1, surrounded by grown-up bodies, various clients have responded: "He's scared; he's been bad, and they're making him sit there till his parents come to get him and then he's going to be punished," and "She's a runaway and just got caught stealing a sandwich, and they're gonna take her to jail and beat her up!" These two were further probed for how they imagined the child got into the situation in the first place; what will happen to the child next ("What will the next photo in the story show?"); what they thought the child was thinking, feeling, hoping, expecting, and so on; what they would tell that child; what they thought that child would say or do if able to speak or move; and so on.

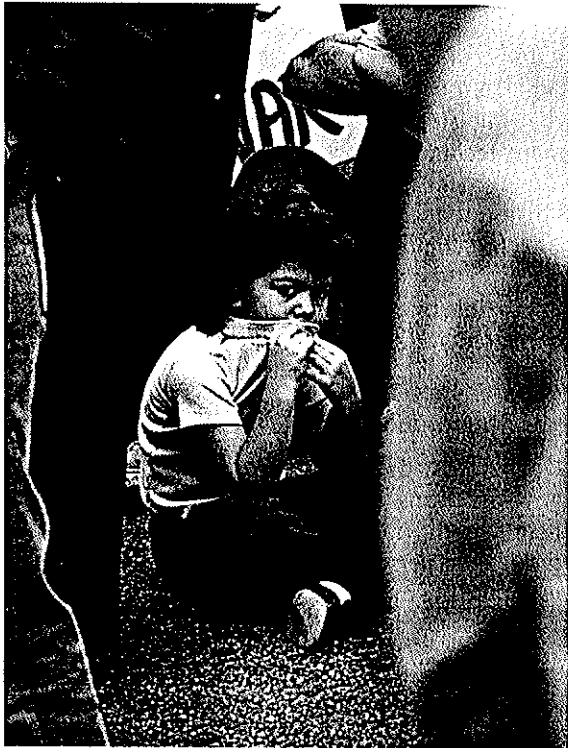


Figure 12.1.

In the answers to the questions I asked about the child, I was able to hear them respond not only for the subject in the photo, but also in some ways what they themselves would do under similar circumstances. Therefore, if the therapy relationship were trusting enough, I could also ask more direct questions, such as: "Could this photo have been of you at some point in your life?" or, "If that were you, what would you be feeling or thinking; what would you do; how did you get into this situation?" and thus probe that youth's 'inner spaces' more directly, while at a safer arms-length distance.

For example, with this same image, one nine-year-old girl responded to this photo by saying the little girl was lonely, and she was worried, because her Daddy had gone off and left her, and she was afraid he wasn't ever coming back to find her. This interpretation bears greater import when understanding that this child was in therapy trying to resolve her feelings about her parents' recent separation as well as her father's subsequent lengthy hospitalization. Asking questions such as, "What would she say if she could speak?" or, "If her Daddy could hear her and know how she was feeling, what do you think she'd tell him?" can lead to further depth of how she was making sense of it all. Similarly, to probe her expectations and feelings, I asked, "If you had a magic wand, and could make everything right again for this little girl, what would you do? How would that photo look?"; not surprisingly she answered, "I'd have the whole family together in the other photo, everybody all there, all of them hugging her, so she'd know it was all okay again!" We then worked with the notion of collage as a metaphor for blended/separated families still retaining an integral identity.

Any snapshot, my own, theirs, or even pages torn from magazines, visually aids the imagining or projecting by taking it out of the realm of the totally abstract, and enabling the therapist, if desired, to continue on in a first-person probe. This projective process works equally well should there be no problem to probe, simply as a means to make contact, share a moment of time and place, and allow the client to realize that the therapist is willing to pretend, play, and take part in fantasy (which usually produces therapeutic information eventually).

For another example, still using the same photo-projective stimulus discussed above, a teenager once responded, "These people are all lined up for a rock concert to start; they've been standing there for hours, and this little guy is pooped. He trusts that it will be worth the wait, 'cause he trusts his older brothers who are keeping people from stepping on him, but he doesn't really know what a rock concert is in the first place, and he's beginning to pout!"

Our further discussion led to his own personal family role of having to take care of his 10-year-old brother after school, and how they have a great relationship, which he actually enjoys (although he'd never admit this to his buddies). Should I have wished to enquire further, I could have led with such

questions as, "What do you think your brother would say about this photo himself, and what do you think he would think about your version?" or, "If you could change anything in this photo, what would that be?" or, "What do you think that child would rather be doing?" Each answer would be full of information, and each could possibly trigger a long discussion, depending on which of the branching paths I might have wanted to explore.

Differences in values or backgrounds can surface, as when parents, siblings, and youthful clients all examine selected photos and give their individual and equally correct responses.

In an example of this, a family I was seeing seemed to be having difficulty realizing their own interrelated roles and shared responsibilities in the pattern of events that precipitated the emotional breakdown and recent suicide attempt of the 16-year-old son. I wanted them to realize how each of them was coming from differing values and expectations and how this presented an inconsistent reality and conflicting messages to their son/brother. I believed that until I could get them to respect the validity of each other's position and realize that shared communication was still necessary and possible, I wasn't going to be able to get them to depolarize enough to make any progress. I had them each write responses to five photos, and then share these with each other; when it was clear that no one could be wrong (as an absolute term), they began to question how it was that they each saw the same thing differently, and began to explore the underlying feelings represented by each answer, and what would have to change for each to also perceive what another saw.

As one of the five photos, the one of the brick wall (Figure 12.2) produced a range of perceptions and responses: "Looks like somebody forgot to set the brakes," the father laughed. "It's obviously a brick wall tumbling down, a breaking of a wall, a destruction, possibly an accident—but it's a collapse that's in perfect order somehow, almost looking like it was etched out and looks and feels quite comfortable." Mother saw it as, "a high mountain valley of stone, a thin river cutting through and down; if it were to mean a person, then I'd find it sort of vulnerable, a breaking out of something private, not meant to be seen, but sort of an awkward 'oops' feeling that wasn't supposed to happen."

The daughter said it felt like her stabbed ears after being subjected to her brother's incessant loud stereo music, but softly added, "It was *too* quiet when he was away in the hospital." The son, the original focus of the therapy, described the image: "It's like a wall of frozen anger . . . and you have to take it apart slowly, brick by brick by brick . . . starting to trust people again, starting to believe what they say. It's the wall between me and other people, the wall I've built myself, by choice. I was aware I'd put it there, to keep people at a safe distance, and that way nobody could hurt me again 'cause they couldn't get close enough . . . wonder how many more bricks there are to go . . . how high it really is . . ."

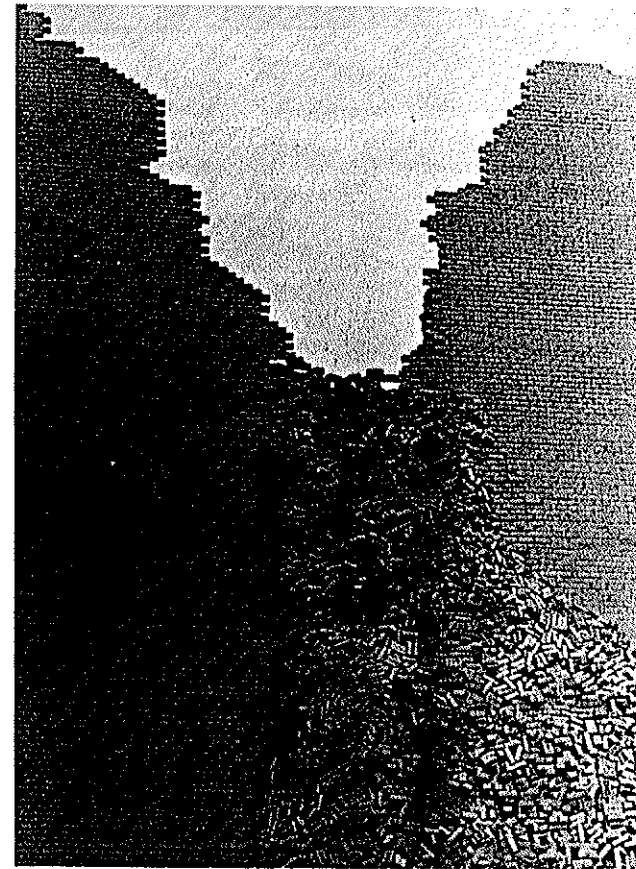


Figure 12.2.

There is never any way to predict ahead of time exactly what the responses might be to a given snapshot. I am no longer surprised when an image that I originally took in a humorous or tender frame of mind produces in a client an emotional response that is far from what I might have expected:

One day at the local zoo, I photographed a scene (Figure 12.3) that I wanted to save, as it symbolized to me the joys of childhood play, imagination, and make-believe pleasure that I as an adult too rarely encounter. When first placing it on the wall of photos in my office waiting area, I expected responses reflecting this, and did, indeed, hear several comments such as: "Oh, the innocence of childhood fun"; "They're in never-never land with Peter Pan, or with some pirate ship exploring some desert island somewhere"; and, "They're off on some adventure a million miles away; time is standing still, and they have absolutely no awareness that there's anyone else around."



Figure 12.3.

When one almost-teenager paused to look at this image, I asked him for his response. "It's like they've adopted that elf right into their family like a brother," he smiled. "What would you do if that elf came alive?" I innocently asked back. "Well, I'd take him away from there, and treat him to lunch at MacDonald's; I'd feed him green food and ask him if he knew E.T. [from the movie of that name]; then I'd take him home to show my Mom." Easy answers so far, I thought, and so I continued, "What would she think of all this? What would the elf say? What would happen?"

His choice of where to go in answering, quickly resulted in my becoming a much more serious listener: "Mom would think it was great, but then she and me would have to find a big enough hiding place for him before Dad got home, cause there might be trouble." "Why?" I gently queried. "Because if Dad was drunk like he usually is, and saw this elf thing in his way, he'd kick him and beat him up. Better if I hid him under the bed with me and my little brother till I can tell for sure if we're gonna get hit or not." Needless to say, a lengthy counseling process ensued with this family as it dealt with admitting out loud that there were previously-denied problems and abusive situations, and then beginning to do something about it.

Painful and abusive situations are the ones most usually guarded and protected by the family system and one's psyche; children are cautioned not to

tell anyone what goes on at home, and if not dealt with therapeutically, such memories of distorted truth and the confused feelings associated with them can lie dormant and out of control, surfacing only when one's unconscious is suddenly triggered, where one sometimes finds oneself wondering if such things actually happened in one's past or not, whether they are true memories of actual events and valid feelings, or did one for some reason only imagine them, or assume one's own guilt in precipitating them. Such memories and feelings that are not consciously stored or verbally accessible often remain out of conscious awareness altogether, surfacing only when a sensory stimulus like a smell or a visual input brings them forth spontaneously and intuitively, without the usual defensive safeguards and verbal rationalizations that so often cloak their deep pain and power. To release such material for working with, one must bypass those usual verbal channels, and sneak inside somewhat sideways in an immediate process that touches the feelings before the conscious mind can cover or deny them with words. It is often much safer to talk about the people in the photographs, even including oneself in such images, than about oneself directly, where such information may prove too threatening to a vulnerable or insecure identity. Photo-projectives can provide such a catalyst, touching below awareness, and yet manageable because of their tangible distancing and symbols.

I might also add that in most child and adolescent work I have usually found my particular clients to be in a general position of self-perceived powerlessness, victims of the treatment of protective system in terms of self-assertion or self-confidence. Using projectives is one way to give back a bit of that power, as the client's perception and interpretation is, by definition, unable to be a wrong one, and in being viewed as equally valid, a bit of relaxing and giving up of extreme positions can occur as they allow others the right to have their particular viewpoint as long as their own is not threatened. This can be a beginning step toward therapeutic goals.

This type of projecting upon a photo-stimulus is really what goes on with all the various phototherapy techniques; the moment one views any image (e.g., on paper, in a viewfinder, in an album, or even on a magazine page), one is partially creating the information perceived; the moment one takes a picture, one is projecting uniquely personal (and cultural) frames and selective filters. Even imagining or remembering photos not in one's hands is a form of projection; meaning is so idiosyncratic and individual that photos take on a life of their own almost apart from our process of visual perception. Photos can sometimes provide a given meaning at one particular time, and a completely different message or feeling upon another viewing later—which can often be a great shock, or even yield a sense of betrayal—compared to the original meaning we took at first glance:

One young lady, Elaine, brought me a photo (Figure 12.4) she selected from her personal family album, as an example of her childhood and its events. "This particular photo has a lot of meaning for me for many reasons," she explained. "I value the closeness of it, the physical placement of the three



Figure 12.4. (Private collection, E.M.)

females (myself at age five, my sister at age eight, and my mother). The picture was taken a year before my parents broke up, and it is the only document I have of a real family outing. I also see a lot of affection in my mother's eyes for the photographer (my father), which I have rarely seen in other photos. The three of us (or rather the four of us) appear to be a very close family (which is rather a false view, but still one I really cherished for its idealism)."

We explored the image, discussing each person, the setting, the feelings, and the memories recalled. While I attended most to these major facets, and didn't really notice smaller details such as a shoe or a tuft of grass in the scene, Elaine suddenly stopped to stare angrily at the folded pages of what she identified as a newspaper on a rock at the far left edge of the image. "My rosy view of this scene really changed just now, as I became aware of the newspaper that is sitting beside my mother on the rocks. And the more I begin thinking about the symbolic significance of that newspaper, the more it really bothers me—that my mother may well have not really been there with us at the outing as I had originally perceived; generally she preferred to read than to do things with us. This speaks to my desire for a mother who would put her parenting before her intellectual life, as my mother did not. It also speaks to my unarticulated desire for a mother that really loved my father. So my anger was really directed at the newspaper for destroying my perception of the occasion as a happy, intimate family outing."

When asked what would happen if the offending newspaper were not there, were somehow cropped out of the photo, she replied, "It wouldn't be right to crop it out as it represented an honest view of the situation." However, a few months later, when Elaine was making a collage of old photos for her mother's birthday gift, she debated for quite some time as to whether to cut the newspaper out, which she ended up doing, "partly due to the space restrictions of the

collage itself, but mostly because I decided to honor my vision, realistic or not."

Ideally, I would have liked to have been able to let Elaine share her perceptions with her mother, who now lives far away, and have a mutual discussion occur about what those times were really like (and similarly share with her father as well); as demonstrated later in album work, finding others' memories and attached feelings belonging with an image from one's personal past may also shed light on their versions of what was going on at that time, allowing one an altogether different perception than one may be invested in maintaining. It would probably be enlightening to discover her mother's, sister's, and father's versions of "how" that photo means to them.

A different form of projective technique can be in studying selection criteria, such as in having a person examine a grouping of several photos of persons or places in collage, at one time. People can make comparative judgments and give verbal answers based on nonverbal knowledge when asked about what they are seeing in front of their eyes (and very often revealing what is behind their eyes as well). When asked to examine a group of several portraits, and try to state which of them is, for example, a schoolteacher, a homosexual, a drug dealer, an ex-prisoner, or a nice person, that is, whatever one would wish to concentrate on for therapeutic reasons, most people, if comfortable with the setting and questioner, will risk guessing a response or two; if working with a particular population group, such as youth, the images and questions certainly could be arranged and organized to reflect this more specialized focus (refer to example in the addendum at the end of this chapter), thus finding out how clients are making their decisions, based on nonverbal reasons. This somewhat of a parlor-game procedure takes on serious import in therapeutic settings, as people are probed, not for their direct choice answered (it matters little if their guess is actually correct or not), but more for how it was that they knew their answer, what do they think would have to change for them to have responded differently, where did they conceptually go inside their minds, and how did they scan those nonverbal photo-inputs for the nonverbally noted information cues on which they based their responses.

I have found that the best way to probe such areas is to ask not only for direct answers (such as who is X, or which is Y) but to immediately ask such companion questions as, "Why do you think you chose that answer?"; "Where do you think you got the information from in the photo (your visual reasons and what perhaps these represent) that you based your answer upon?"; "How do you think you knew that?"; "If I changed this or that in the photo [to partialize different facets of the image], do you think your answer would still be the same? If not, why not?"; "How do you think your friend's (mother's, father's, sister's, brother's, or psychologist's) response might be different? Why might that be?" and so on.

Using this procedure, all sorts of clues to values, prejudices, and evaluating systems can reveal themselves; answers appear spontaneously, naturally (as if

obvious to everyone), often casually as contexts for responses (but with great therapeutic weight), such as: "He can't be the homosexual—he looks so rugged and outdoorsy," "I didn't pick that girl as the one who might be the paralyzed person because she looks so happy," or, "The boy with the turban is the thief, *of course*" (italics added to reproduce vocal stressing), "That girl couldn't be an Indian—she's dressed too nice and doesn't look poor enough," or, "That guy couldn't be my friend—he's wearing an earring!" All of these comments have, unfortunately, actually been made to me, by either clients of mine, or participants in my workshops, in response to projecting upon photo stimuli, stated as if the answers would be equally obvious to everyone. No matter how these responses may make us cringe, they are the true, gut-level, real feelings behind the mask of people's public politeness, and if we are ever to change how humans really feel about one another, we must get into those places beyond their words to see how they mean what they say, to help them separate out differences from perceptions of threat or forced change. Cameras don't take pictures; people do: Their reactions upon examining these visual metaphors (their own or other people's) are what we need to work with and share with them in order to produce real change that will go beyond surface levels, changing people who have been long stuck in roles into live, flexible, personally unique and treasured individuals.

Examining the use of photographs as active and passive projectives in some ways sums up the whole of phototherapy, as no matter the form they take (self-portrait, family album recollections, pictures taken by or of a person, videos, etc.) the therapeutic concept is to use them all as discussed above, to project upon, think about, respond to, and interact with actively and passively as well. In some ways, describing phototherapy techniques could be succinctly defined with the above section; however, although the others may have the same conceptual base, there are some differences and additional benefits in considering how to weave the projective approach with other formats. Therefore, I will continue with the following descriptions of how phototherapy works with photos taken by the client, photo-assignments, photos of the client by others, self-portraits, and historical/album/photo-biographical, and other more minor types.

Photos Taken By (or Collected By) the Client/Assignments

When we decide to snap a picture, the decision process (our hopes, goals, desired outcomes, and how we arrive at that particular choice in order to fit all our criteria) can indicate what is important in our unique value and belief system. If it did not work out as we expected, what went wrong and what it would take for it to become a successful photo, can be equally revealing. A well-trained probing of the chosen moments of time we ourselves personally select to record can provide information, consistent themes, interests, personal metaphors, and symbols (that we possibly might have been completely or partially unaware of at the time of shooting). Even those casual, candid, "me-

at" shots ("me at the beach," "me at school," etc.) can reveal personal and family information, just by paying attention not only to what is in them, but also to the relationships and qualities that provide those nonverbal meanings. There are reasons why we choose to look at or take a particular photo, and although we should not overdo any interpretations from a single image, from a split second taken from life, and make too much of just that one moment, there are ways that our photos speak to us from deep inside, especially if we find particular ones consistently attracting our attention.

One warning, however, tied to the earlier warning about not trying to interpret a whole lot just from one given image: If a therapist is viewing a particular image taken by a client, or even a picture of that person, one should be very careful making any assumptions about what one is looking at, until finding out whether the photo was posed by the photographer or the subjects, or whether it indeed represents a spontaneously captured, truly unposed candid moment in time.

I was quite surprised one day to find in a boy's family album a very recent snapshot of his two usually hostile parents sitting arm-in-arm on their front porch. Recalling that he had stated that they hated each other, and had hardly spoken in two years of separation, I was about to challenge his view of their reality, because, after all, there was the photo "proving" to me their "obvious" closeness. He introduced the photo to me as, "This is my parents; you asked me to bring in photos of them, and I had none at all of both of them together at the same time, so last week, when Dad was dropping me off at Mom's, I bribed them each with their favorite candy bar to let me take just one photo of the two of them together (I told them my psychologist wanted it, and that helped convince them, but that was just my excuse). Anyway, I took it outside, so that the neighbors could also maybe see that there was still hope." His dream was clearly demonstrated in that pose.

Conversely, finding repeated occurrences of images in past albums can provide cause for re-examination of what might be distortions of actual events or feelings.

When a 15-year-old client, who had been adopted at birth and was now conducting a major search for her birth mother, told me she had been adopted by a couple who actually haven't ever really loved her, I suspended disbelief, and worked initially with her as if that personal reality were possible (though, having seen her adoptive parents interacting with her, I found her claims hard to believe). When she brought in several albums containing early childhood photos of her with this family, I saw image after image of hugs, cuddles, joy, and comforting—what to me seemed a very loving home for her and her siblings.

When I confronted her with my perceptions (owning them as my own, as she certainly had a right to her own very different view), she began to cry, and admitted that she'd lied about the past mistreatment. "I guess I just couldn't

accept how much it hurts them for me to be looking for my real Mom; I think I made it all up inside my heart without my mind really knowing I was doing this, because I had to have some reason inside me to explain why it was so important to me to find her and ask her why she gave me up. No, they aren't cruel to me; they love me, and really, I love them, too—it's just that how can it be that if all that is true, why am I hurting them with my search? I just don't understand." With this information now at a conscious level, it provided a breakthrough in communication with her adoptive parents who decided to help her with her investigations, as they were less threatened by them and could accept her feelings.

A creative therapist can give various photo-taking assignments to pair with certain desired goals, to tighter define certain concern areas; more open-ended creative projects can yield personal insights as well. Clients can be asked to simply, "Go out and use up a complete roll of film, and bring me the prints next time we meet"; these prints can be a rich source for finding out what is important to that person. They will photograph what has seemed important to them to document; with no structured assignment ("No, I don't care what you shoot, just bring me the prints when you're done") a person simply makes nonverbal personal choices, as well as more subtly reflecting how they handle tolerance of ambiguity. Discovering how and why they took the pictures that they did gives clues to their inner (and possibly un verbalized) priorities, needs, and interests; even finding out any differences between what they actually got, compared with what they thought they would get, can be beneficial.

If used later along in a therapy process, a tighter structuring of assignments along more specific themes or issues can be focused upon, such as working on a relationship by assigning the two people to photograph each other (building trust, and trusting risk), or asking a third person to get some shots of the two of them together to find nonverbal discussion occurring as interactions about how, where, and who to be for the photo, feelings about sharing a common visual space, becoming in the togetherness a unit, an entity, with some common definition, as well as possibly realigning a power structure as the photo-taker has relatively more control in directing, if allowed to. Also, certain topics can be assigned ("Go photograph things that make you angry," "things you would like to change in your world," "the you nobody knows," "who you'd like to be in 10 or 20 years," or "who you were when you were little," etc.); the topic assigned can thus mirror and complement the work that is going on in therapy, as clients learn to see better the makeup of their perceptual and evaluating systems. When the photos are discussed with the therapist (who can nonjudgmentally share his or her own and sometimes differing perceptions, or guide the conversation toward specific targets), clients can begin to understand how values and expectations color and influence what is seen and perceived, and appreciate how their photos can speak to them from inside themselves in ways their conscious awareness cannot, or, perhaps, will not.

Actually, even an imaginary list of what one would shoot if given a certain

assignment can reveal information about how people view their world. Instructions such as, "What photos would you want to take for showing your parents what your group or foster home now is like?" or, "If you were in charge of the rules at home, and you photographed those changes you made, what kinds of differences would I see; what would such photos show me?" Just the imagined lists of visual fantasies can be therapeutically useful.

Photos of the Client Taken by Others

In examining how other people see us, we get some idea of how we present ourselves to the world; in dialogue with others (or with their photos of us) we gain valuable clues as to the identity we convey, our public face. This is often a safer channel for interpersonal feedback, as different interpretations of the same photo can be compared (because, of course, it is the photo under scrutiny, not the person). In realizing that each person photographs us differently, we can begin to appreciate the flexibility of our identity and our possibilities, as well as recognizing the limitations and dangers of labeling others.

When we view pictures of us taken by others, we sometimes see parts of ourselves that we were not aware of ("I really do look different from my twin," "I do look grumpy in this picture; I knew I was upset, but I didn't realize it made me look mad," "I look older or more competent than I expected I would," etc.). In asking photographers to tell us why they photographed what they did, or why they picked this particular one from the whole roll of possibilities to have enlarged and presented to us, we learn how each values different parts of our identities. One boy was extremely pleased to receive a snapshot taken of him catching a fly ball at his class's recent baseball game; he exclaimed, "Boy that's the first picture I've ever got that proves I finally did something right for a change!"

If people cannot be comfortable allowing their photo to be taken, perhaps we should examine the deeper layer of the relationship being tested. If there's no emotional closeness or trust, people will probably not be willing or able to spontaneously share the frame of film. People often use photos of themselves to speak to others for them, to explain who or how they are, choosing the ones that best present the facets of themselves that they want communicated. One mother, who was in charge of her family's album, brought me her selection that showed examples of her children only when she was in the photograph with them, hoping to show me with photos "that cannot lie" what she could not fully express verbally to her satisfaction: that she was a good mother. Thus, how one makes a selection out of many snapshots of themselves for a particular theme or reason can reveal the underlying values at work in making those choices. To then title that collection, or to state its theme, or to ask those photos to talk for themselves, can uncover that nonverbally stored information that is so essential to the communication being hoped for. Even exploring who clients might want to give a photo of themselves to, or perhaps, more valuable, who they would not want to have their image (and thus power over

them, in terms of unfinished business) can also be quite potent an investigation.

Thus, helping clients explore their photo-posing behavior can reflect both their individuality and their familial contexts and backgrounds, as they demonstrate how they hope to be seen and remembered. How we pose reflects our view to (and stance for) the world, our public or private selves metaphorically represented in our bodies, faces, and surrounding artifacts. Asking us how we wish to be photographed (and thus preserve our image permanently), when, with whom, where (whether in formal portrait sittings, or in quick spontaneous snapshots), by whom, and so on, can shed light on our inner perceptions of ourselves and our relationships with those around us. It is also helpful to consider for whom a photo is being taken: each of us would probably pose very differently for a portrait intended as a gift to our mother or father as contrasted to one for a friend, driver's license, job application, school graduation, or lover's wallet. Who we are to the people in our lives is reflected in the guidelines we use for how to dress, pose, show expression for them to later see in the snapshot, and is also communicated by our reasons for including various props, decorations, settings, and so on. Candid captures life, unposed, as it is really being lived and freeze this forever; thus, they catch whatever was actually going on at that very moment, with all its surrounding details. With enough photos to suggest patterns or generalizations across specific situations, people, or times, they can demonstrate one's usual or typical behavior or affect in those given kinds of moment or situations, whether posed or unposed, and thus assist the study of the entire family system.

Self-Portraits

At the core of most therapeutic work with children and adolescents, probably more so than with any other age group, lie the concepts of self-image, self-esteem, self-acceptance, and self-confidence. Self-portraits allow for powerful accessing of these concepts, and thus people often find them the most threatening and risky kinds of photos to encounter. Carefully guided while at perhaps their emotionally most vulnerable moments, clients can explore, confront, and dialogue with themselves, while documenting for themselves any changes that are occurring—whether with still photo self-portraits, video therapy self-confrontation, or photos by others that are perceived as unfiltered; these are the most intense and powerful of all photo-imagery, as one is usually most invested with one's own image.

The strictest definition of a self-portrait is one that is taken solely by oneself, where the presence of another person remains totally irrelevant to the process. In phototherapy, one can be a bit more tolerant about such a tight definition; any photo that one takes of oneself, through any means, is accepted as a self-portrait; this could include situations using delayed timed-release shutters, cable releases that allow self-triggering, mirror shots, or even one person telling another the desired moment for getting them right, as they

want. Any photo that is of a person, where that person has had total control of the setting, moment of shutter-release, and other such affecting details, is an acceptable definition for therapy purposes; this can even include stand-ins, visual metaphors, equivalents, or symbols for the self (i.e., masks, environmental objects, collages, etc.) As this is, therefore, a combination of projecting, with photos of the client by the client, the illustrations and discussions in the above three sections can effectively be applied to self-portrait techniques.

Certainly, when finding that one's clients choose to present themselves in what appears to the therapist to be a self-destructive pose, one should not hesitate to immediately explore further until one is ethically reassured or initiates further treatment. Generalizations about not taking too much meaning from only one given photograph should, in this kind of situation, be treated on a par with the client's vaguely offered suicide threats, wherein ethically no such threat should be totally ignored, and one should probe until one is certain no dire consequences are going to happen due to not taking someone seriously enough.

Figure 12.5 is one such example, where I was at a treatment center's group home, having several children pose for self-portraits to be sent to their families as a Christmas greeting. The others posed in friendly or clowning manner; this boy, who had been playing alone as a cowboy, took his time and carefully posed for my camera as shown. Needless to say, after finishing all the photos, and sending the others out to play, I sat down with him for a while to check



Figure 12.5.

things out. This photo may have been totally innocent, perhaps mocking an earlier-viewed television program, or something he had private reasons for choosing, but until I probed his feelings and discussed further what may have prompted this pose, I could not just leave and assume that all was well. (It wasn't; he was very depressed.)

Self-portraits deal with reflections of self-image, and when one's inner picture is poor or distorted, it is very hard to receive positive feedback.

Debbie, a Deaf Native Canadian Indian girl with whom I have worked comprehensively over the past decade (Weiser, 1975, 1981, 1983, 1987), brought me her package of high school graduation photos, taken a few weeks earlier, to help her decide which ones to keep and which ones to send up-coast to her family, as she had not personally visited them in several years. I had been trying throughout these years to help her improve her feelings about herself; we had worked a great deal with her self-portraits as well as with my photos of her, trying to explore her feelings about herself through her reactions to her self-image. She had usually responded to her photographed self very critically or neutrally; never in all those years had I found her response to be one I perceived to be accepting, pleased, or in any way positive: if she didn't frown at it, or put herself down in some way when describing the image, she simply had nothing at all to say about it, expressed little interest in seeing it, and consistently barely tolerated discussing it.

On the particular day that she brought in the school photos, we were also videotaping the session; Figure 12.6 is taken directly from that tape, Debbie holding the snapshots in front of her for me to see, with me pointing to one



Figure 12.6.

particular image. When I began to express my personal pleasure at how many of them seemed to turn out so nicely, she interrupted me to say (in sign), "Aren't they pretty?" Somewhat in shock, after having waited so many years to eventually hear this evident leap in self-esteem, I replied, "Yes, I agree they are! What did you think when you opened up the envelope?"

She mimed a face indicating pleased astonishment, and replied, "I saw them; it really was me, and I felt, Oh my God!—I'm beautiful!; I want to send them to my Mom; she doesn't know I'm pretty; now I can show her and she can see for herself!" Since we were taping, I have been able to occasionally reinforce this spontaneously made self-perception in replay to Debbie and to her family, and because it is visual and speaks for itself, she doesn't have to feign any embarrassment or invent any defensive explanations. She believed herself to be pretty; we have proof that even she cannot deny, no matter how depressed she might be feeling.

Such a luckily videotaped vignette demonstrates the immense power of direct self-perception unfiltered by the well-intentioned contributions offered by others, to let a client see for themselves what perhaps the whole world can see, but they cannot yet accept hearing: that they are acceptable in some way, not just to others, but by whatever standards they have been judging themselves; they have indeed met their very own (and highest) expectations. It is a momentous occasion for therapist and client alike and, at least in the above case, one that neither will likely ever forget.

Historical/Album/Photo-Biographical

Family photos, home movies, and now family videos offer proof of that group's existence over time, documenting permanence as well as change over time, continuity, roots, traditions, values, and degree of freedom for the individual within it all. These snapshots can give insights to the full system of several generations, relationships, and networks—to see ourselves and our contexts and thus to better appreciate current situations and feelings, and perhaps to recognize where expectations are coming from. As long buried and well-defended emotions will respond less guardedly to a visual stimulus, photos can be used to reconnect us with memories and feelings around past events, people, places, and times, allowing us to respond as if that moment was right now again, no matter how long ago it actually occurred.

Photo-biographical information can be tapped for not only factual and historical information, but it can also be examined for the patterns and relationships demonstrated or suggested in the prints. As with all the other techniques mentioned above, working with family photos really involves all the other techniques as well. In family album work, loosely defined as the book(s), collections, boxes, drawers, bags, or whatever that people keep their family photos in, one also finds a less-than-formal definition of family, more reflective of the full support network and system of relatives and sometimes friends that

comprise it. As one of my clients so eloquently put it, "My family? My family is everyone who's in my family album, including my dog." Therapists trained in family systems work often use a family tree or a map of several generations (called a genogram) as a focus for inquiry; this process can often be aided by pairing the names and dates with photo-examples from clients' albums, to give the names faces and the people personal, rather than just role, identities. Those interested in any of the family systems approaches to therapy will find a wealth of potential information about triangles, power alignments, differentiation/fusion, alternating generations, sibling constellations, and other such dynamics suggested by and available for further probing from family photo-stimuli.

Usually when working with a family, rather than with an individual model, what is sought are those patterns of interactions among the various members, patterns that have existed and sometimes still exist across time and generations, mirroring and repeating; it is no wonder that album snaps are so helpful in this search, as they are candidly documenting whatever was going on at that time. Who regularly stands next to whom can point out power structures, alignments, and alliances; distances between people that repeat photo after photo can demonstrate emotional closeness or separation; discoveries such as these must, however, be tempered with such warnings as those given previously, that one cannot interpret anyone's album for that person, but must use the repeated observances as foundations for guiding the line of questioning, blending the quest for factual data with more open-ended emotion-tapping kinds. For example: "I notice that in all these photos, your Mom is always standing with or touching or close to your brother, whereas you are always standing apart, with there often being quite a space separating you from the others. Would you tell me a bit about the relationship you have with your family, and does my comment have any meaning for you in light of this?"

In their ability to freeze action, photos can be used to still the dynamics of the family system and allow them to be scrutinized. Not only does one learn of the past, and changes over time and place and persons, but in re-experiencing the photos while looking at them, current feelings and behaviors can be better understood and appreciated, and the therapist can gain the ability to reconnect clients with previously blocked and buried material. Memories are sometimes dressed up, remembered differently than they really happened. Looking back at photos from those times can do a lot to help correct psychologically limiting distortions and misrepresentations, clarifying hazy details. They are an undeniable record of the past and of change, that no amount of verbal filtering can completely cover up.

Two years before finishing high school, and terribly bored with it all, Alan wanted to drop out: He had a sensible-sounding plan though it needed his parents' approval. He had already secretly been accepted for the shipbuilding apprenticeship program, and had contacted the local night school about finishing his degree through their work-study arrangement. Feeling very proud of

his untypically thorough planning, he approached his parents for permission, and was devastated to find his father surprisingly furious and upset with the idea. He had anticipated their agreement, as they had discussed his school problems recently, and were hoping for some redeeming plan.

In our next family session, he again brought up the idea, as he was very upset. As the family had also brought along their generation-old collection of photos at my earlier request, I decided to find out what Alan's father had been like at the same age (hoping for at least some defusing of polarities and an attempt to step into each other's shoes for enough time to explore what was really going on in this particular crisis).

As Father began to show Alan what his own teenage years had been like, the photos of the old farm, the desolate environment, the long walk to school, the one-room schoolhouse, and as he shared the many feelings now brought back from those days, he looked rather taken aback, and told Alan, "I guess I was angry with you because to me, school was my only chance out of that awful place, and when my own Dad died, and they pulled me out of school at age 15, I thought my world and any chance I'd had for escaping it had ended forever. I swore then that any kids I ever fathered would never have to leave school, that they'd never have to suffer what I had. I guess all this got in my way when I heard you say you wanted to drop out; angry bells started ringing in my head, and it's only now that I finally realize why. Tell me again what you're planning and this time I'll really listen to you; maybe we can work something out." With tears in their eyes, they hugged silently and began talking.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In summary, therefore, I suggest that the goal for improved communicating for our clients, and also for ourselves as well, is to examine what we know, to discover more about the parts we might not yet be so aware of, to learn more about how we know these things (and thus ourselves) internally, to find out how (and where) we uniquely perceive, code, and store information, and to bring all this to a more conscious level—and in doing so, to learn more about the rich complexities of our fellow humans and how to better relate and communicate with them as well as with ourselves. It is suggested that one way to begin is to pay closer attention to what is being sought out to photograph, to pose for, to keep, to visually respond to, and to converse about both internally and with others, sharing and comparing responses. If clients can learn how all this happens internally, and realize that the same thing is going on inside everyone else; if they can begin to appreciate how much more is going on than just the verbal parts of their interactions and how much power resides in the nonverbal, emotional, and often out-of-awareness facets of everyone, then we are well on the way to their improved mental health.

I would like to add a slight caution, however; although these techniques

appear to be simple, and perhaps, universally applicable, more intensive training must be provided for therapists who wish to appropriately use them to their full potential. Anyone attempting to employ these tools in the research or understanding of others must have used them first for their own personal self-discovery and exploration, in order to know not only how each technique works in action, but also how each actually feels, to fully appreciate their power to tap deeply stored emotions and memories.

To implement phototherapy, no special skill in the craft of photography is required, either for the therapist or for the client. As long as the intended user understands what a photograph is and represents, and has a self-image that will not be shattered by intense self-examination, these techniques can be useful with almost any age or type of client. It is crucial, however, that the therapist's training be especially thorough in achieving fluency with working in those more abstract, nonverbal, and/or metaphoric domains that the photographic catalyst stimulates.

It is not terribly complex to integrate phototherapy techniques into one's repertoire of helping skills; it simply requires training, practice, an understanding of the ethical components involved, and, most importantly, an open and curious mind, combined with a firm commitment to work within the value system of the client rather than interpreting, and thus defining, meaning for that client (as well as trying as best as possible to keep one's own personal agenda out of it all). One must learn and then practice the concept that there really is no right and wrong in this business of psychotherapy; there is only "different," and that the therapist as well as the client can learn to expect, understand, and appreciate these differences as a model of healthy interactions.

In counseling children and youth, I would offer the suggestion that rather than being able to walk in their shoes for a day in order to really experience the world as they do, let us instead ask to step behind the lens of their cameras in order to see what (and how) they see; to pose for them under their direction of how we should be (or pose) for the camera; to reflect with them upon the meanings, feelings, memories, and thoughts stimulated by a photo-catalyst (and nonthreateningly share our differences); to explore albums or photo-taking assignments with them as they explain why they took a picture in a particular way, and what, if anything, was missing that should have been there; to get a view into their family and its values represented in their photo collections, albums, and personal displays by discovering what they deemed important enough to be permanently kept or chosen to share with us; to sensitize ourselves to the nuances and messages of their nonverbal behavior as they pose for a self-portrait as they want it to be; and, finally, to ask them for their reactions to our own photos that we think we know so well ourselves, and thus discover how different and unique each human mind and its perceptions can be. Far more than the proverbial thousand words is reflected in those tiny lenses when a person (not a camera) takes a picture; photographs are a power-

ful visual frame of reference quite unlike any other available for our use in helping people.

ADDENDUM: HOW TO DO PHOTOTHERAPY

As I have stressed throughout this chapter, there can be no formal list of instructions on how to do phototherapy; regardless of the techniques selected, the purpose of use, the audience, or the setting, users of these various means of photo-exploring must realize that where one goes depends upon why one would want to be going there in the first place. Like all good tools, these techniques are only brought to life through the hands of the users. At its most basic level of operation, phototherapy consists of asking questions, questions that are open-ended and able to draw out feelings as well as thoughts, nonverbal feelings and memories as well as standard verbal response clichés. The skill is in not only learning how to ask the right questions, but also in knowing how and when to use which combinations of techniques in order to reach particular goals with each client.

As the concept of projecting underlies all the techniques, and the image content of all photos is really only a starting point, a stimulus or catalyst bringing forth personal memories, thoughts, and feelings; perhaps readers would like to experience photo-projecting for themselves, to get a clearer picture of how it all happens. If so, please consider what responses you have to the questions accompanying the photographs that follow, which have been selected to appeal to child and adolescent clients.

The very first moment you are aware you have an answer, try to introspect how it was that you knew that, why you think that answer came to your mind, what facet of the photo gave you that knowledge, and what would have to change in the image for you to uncover a different response.

Try sharing your reflections and comments in dialogue with significant others in your life, or with your clients.¹ Examine the group of informal portraits that follows; reflect upon these people portrayed and try answering (and sharing your answer in discussions with others) the following questions for each one:

Who is this person? What are they doing? Where were they when this photo was made? How do you think they were feeling at the time the snap was taken? When you look at this photo, what thoughts and feelings come to mind? How would you title this photo? What do you think was going on in the photo and

¹I would be interested in receiving readers' responses, reactions, comments, feedback, anecdotes, and so on. Please address all correspondence to this author c/o:

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Figure 12.7.

what do you think happened next, after the photo was snapped? Do they remind you of anyone you know?

What is each person's background; what is their home like, and their family (and how did you decide that)? Would you think any of them shy, friendly, hard to get to know, a television star, a prize student, handicapped, in any kind of trouble, orphans, delinquents, owners of pets, and so on (one could get endlessly creative here, depending upon which areas were to be worked); if so, why—what in the photo made you think that? What is their favorite food, movie, thing to do, relative, animal, place to go, and so on.

If they (this photo) could speak, what would they (it) say? Which ones (if any) would you like to meet, or have as friends or neighbors; why do you think you picked those choices? If you could say something to any of these people, what would you like to say to whom? Why? If you met any of them, where do you think they would want to take you (and would you go)?

Why do you think the photographer took any of these snapshots? If you could rephotograph them, how do you think your photo might end up different? Are there any other questions you feel like answering? (*Note:* I have arbitrarily chosen to demonstrate questions in reference to photos of people; however, the same procedures could also be used with scenics, still-lives, family group photos, pets, houses, and so on; i.e., whatever would be of use to the client to respond to or interact with.)

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