



Education and Culture DG

'Youth in Action' Programme



Finding your Identity

Phototherapy Training Course

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www.phototherapy-europe.com

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What is Phototherapy?

Phototherapy is a discipline within mental health which uses photography to help clients coming to terms with any problems they might have. In its lighter version it's a tool for self exploration and self-discovery. With Phototherapy a person can explore different parts of their personality and bring them up to the surface if they are not normally visible in their everyday life.

There are many different techniques, and whilst some of them make full use of the discipline of photography (ie. client and therapist engage in photographic sessions together), others merely use photographs as a finished product. *“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”.* (J. Weiser in: C.E. Schaefer: 1988)

The term *Phototherapy* is generally understood to indicate **the use of photography in a therapeutic context** where there is a qualified therapist and one or more clients. Conversely, the term *Therapeutic Photography* generally indicates the use of photographs as healing tools in a therapeutic/healing context where there are no qualified therapists (in co-counselling, for instance, or in personal growth, and mostly in social work settings such as work with youth/disabled subjects etc.). In the extensive website Phototherapy-centre.com, Judy Weiser reinforces this difference by using the following definitions: **Phototherapy** = Photography DURING therapy, **Therapeutic Photography** = Photography AS therapy. (Weiser:2011)

However these definitions, though widely accepted, are not written in stone. One of the best known Phototherapy practitioner, the late British photographer Jo Spence, worked therapeutically with her photography and used the term Phototherapy to describe her practice in the 1980s together with fellow photographer Rosy Martin, who still describes herself as a phototherapist.

Another well known photographer who now works as a Phototherapy practitioner, Ellen Fisher-Turk, writes on her website: *“I am not licensed nor do I currently practice as a psychotherapist. I photograph and practice Phototherapy, asking you, as you choose, to process your insights with your therapist”.* (Fisher-Turk:2011/a)

I personally don't accept the strict division outlined by Judy Weiser (and it seems I am not alone!), given that 'Phototherapy' is also the scientific term used to indicate skin treatments with light, and I will use the term *Phototherapy* throughout this text to indicate the use of photography and photographs as healing tools, **regardless** of the presence of a licensed therapist.

How it works, in practice:

There are many different Phototherapy techniques and the theories behind them can sometimes go against each other; I will nevertheless try and summarize the various techniques I have encountered in my studies of Phototherapy and my own practice. For clarity, I will always refer to the people involved as 'the Phototherapist' and 'the client'. Inevitably, my explanations will appear schematic and reductive, as this is just an attempt to summarize what happens during a session, detailing at the same time every type of Phototherapy known to me.

Re-enactment Phototherapy: Jo Spence and Rosy Martin

Jo Spence and Rosy Martin were two British photographers operating in London in the 1980s. Starting from 1983, they developed a practice they initially defined **'Re-enactment Phototherapy'**. At the base of this was a new look at the family album, such as could be found in their households. On examining the visual representations of their lives as shown by their albums, Spence and Martin became aware of the structured absences which were quite noticeable within them. **On close inspection the family album appeared to be most revealing in its showing of absences, rather than presences.** Absences not only of people (who is taking the photograph? Who has been excluded from this particular family group photo?) but also of **the multitude of identities** which had been left out in favour of a single, elected, iconic image.

By creating images that explored the **multiplicity** of their identities, Spence and Martin began their task of reconstructing. *"Exploring the self as fictions, as a web of interrelated stories told to us, about us, and by us, we used therapeutic techniques to look behind the 'screen memories', the simplifications and myths of others, too long accepted as our histories. **We began to tell and explore ways of making visible the complexity and contradictions of our own stories, from our own points of view.**"* (Martin:1996)

By analysing whether the photographic portrait represents one's self, the whole notion of the self is looked at so that the therapeutic part of Phototherapy makes no assumptions, and aims to 'start afresh' by analyzing the client's perception of themselves and questioning any construction or assumption which might have been put upon the client in their vision of themselves.

A close look at the family album then brings up the issue of construction of identity, and who the creator of this construction, the creator of meaning is. Once this is identified, therapist and client go on to explore the client's history from the client's point of view. **The narrative changes from clients 'reading' the family album as a story of their lives, to them creating the narrative, and telling their own story.**

What happens during a session:

As one of the practitioners explains in her website, client and therapist (or a therapist and different clients in a group session) use photography to re-stage and re-enact past experiences or current issues they might have. Clients and therapist use props and clothes, and take photographs while this re-enactment takes place.

Issues linked to memories unearthed and explored through counselling would be made visual with the use of carefully selected clothes and props. Scenarios are staged with the client as protagonist in a variety of power situations—for example mother-daughter. (In some situations models might be used.) The Phototherapist offers reassurance, support, and reflection. The goal is to enable the client to re-experience a previously repressed trauma in a secure setting, re-examine his or her perceptions and feelings, and achieve a degree of cathartic release.

The photographs produced during the sessions make visible aspects and parts of the selves that remain hidden in the 'everyday'; they will create new narratives, new outcomes and transformations. (R. Martin/R. Lenman:2011)

The 'work' itself is about *process* rather than product, about **using photography to explore personal issues and to begin to tell one's own story, from one's own point of view.** Each

session, each block of time, also has a definite sense of closure. Time is allocated for validations and sharing in the group, and for grounding: for leaving behind any distressful feelings or painful memories which may have been brought up in doing the work.

In her workshops, Rosy Martin uses techniques for opening up memories and trust exercises to create a sense of safety. Time is spent on group processing, since group dynamics are an important aspect of these workshops.

The re-enactment Phototherapy workshops are divided into two parts - Part one: the explanation of Phototherapy and experience of opening up memory in pairs and sharing with the group and for exploring how to make the feelings and issues visible, including searching for props and clothes. Part two (which takes place on a different day): the practical re-enactment Phototherapy and processing the images - both the chemical processing - and talking through in pairs and a therapeutic exploration led by the Phototherapist within the group as a safe and containing place for the emotions that arise, to make new meanings and integrate the work done emotionally. (Martin: 2011)

As well as the re-enactment Phototherapy, another technique used by Spence and Martin is exploring the family album. Clients bring to the session some photographs from their own family album which are particularly significant for them, and these are used, amongst other things, to bring back long-forgotten or buried memories. expanding the possible readings.

The use of found photographs as fictions introduces participants to the notions of **using images as a route to unconscious processes.**

In a group session/workshop, clients work with their chosen existing family album photographs to open up the absences and silences hidden by nostalgia. Working in pairs, with their own photos, participants begin to open up old, hidden feelings, submerged memories and explore their personal identities. (R. Martin:2011)

Around 1980 Jo Spence was diagnosed as having breast cancer. She responded to her disease and treatment through photography, channelling her feelings about breast cancer and orthodox medicine into a series of Phototherapy sessions, which later became an exhibition, 'A Picture of Health?'

Her Phototherapy work dealing with her illness raises several important issues based on her experience of cancer treatment, offering a unique insight of a patient's perspective for those in the medical profession. She was particularly interested in the power dynamics of the doctor/patient relationship and **the role of the healthcare institution in the infantilization of patients.** Jo Spence responded to this by deciding to document what was happening to her through photographic records, thereby becoming the **active subject** of her own investigation, rather than the **object** of the doctors' medical discourse.

*"She used Phototherapy to tackle the emotional crisis which suffering from cancer created for her. Through Phototherapy she explained how she felt about her powerlessness as a patient, her relationship to doctors and nurses and her infantilization whilst being managed and processed by a state institution. **Through Phototherapy she tried to regain the individuality that the cancer treatment had robbed her of.** This work included photos of her dressed as an infant, and to some extent echo her feelings about the class struggle, and her fight to stand as an individual, on an equal footing with those who hold power in our society".* (C.Hagen: 1991)

In 1986 Jo Spence wrote a book called *"Putting myself in the picture: A political personal and photographic autobiography"* which is almost like a Phototherapy manual, showing her journey of discovery through the use of Photography in a healing context.

Jo Spence died in 1992, but Rosy Martin continues to run Phototherapy workshops and give lectures on the subject.

Creating a positive body image: Ellen Fisher Turk

New York based photographer Ellen Fisher Turk helps women overcome the poor body image that springs from eating disorders and sexual abuse. She has also worked with cancer patients. The idea is that by showing women suffering with anorexia, bulimia, and over-eating difficulties some well made images of themselves, she can help them accept their bodies. *"Even if there are just a few frames that a woman likes,"* says Turk, *"she will think that there must be something lovely about her."* (E.Fisher-Turk:2011/a)

New York Post journalist Amy Worden, who wrote an article on the subject in 1998, explains that it's part of a therapeutic treatment process called *The Fisher Turk Method* that Turk developed with her partner, massage therapist Lisa Berkley. Apparently the idea originated when Berkley, a rape victim, approached her friend asking to pose naked. She hoped that seeing her body in a new light might improve her self-image; that a nurturing photo session would erase negative feelings she had about her body having been violently "captured" years before. Fisher-Turk says: *"As we worked, I looked for what was unique and authentic about her - the real-ness of who she was. I found that in her lines and her form, the way light hit her face, the angles of her body. When I saw these things, I captured them. **It soon became apparent that how I saw her was different from how she saw herself.** Gradually she started describing herself the way I would."*

It worked, and gradually the camera changed the way Berkley saw herself. Ellen Fisher Turk has since used the same technique with more than 100 women. The New York photographer is now helping other women confront their problems and develop a more positive image through photography and journal keeping; in some cases, this method appears to be succeeding where traditional therapy has failed. (A. Worden:1998)

"I call my work Phototherapy" writes Fisher-Turk in *The International Journal of Healing and Caring* – *"Phototherapy combines black and white photography and journal writing as tools for changing women's negative self-image. I ask women to keep a journal when they decide to be photographed through six weeks afterward. Women start the photographing clothed and disrobe during the session. Everywhere we look, in magazines, on television, the images are retouched. They look perfect. How should we feel? **Phototherapy is about how women take back the appraisal of what is beauty.**"*

Phototherapy uses a woman's multiple images to shift her negative self-perceptions. By being seen and not judged, by being photographed nude and seeing what they're most afraid of seeing, women have had the opportunity to reconstruct how they see themselves.

I photograph all women. Some suffer from eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia. Others are overweight. Some have negative feelings about their bodies caused by rape, incest, sexual abuse, or surgery. The rest are, perhaps, like you and me – ordinary women who have been spared trauma, but not the reality of aging or having expectations of being more perfect.

*During the past ten years, I have worked with over 100 women and **have seen my use of photography transform their self-image and the way they perceive their bodies.** It has also empowered their lives. I've seen them change their way of dressing, their friends, their partners, their jobs. The photography seems to jump start their lives.*

I photograph women as works of art. I see ordinary women as divinely inspired. They choose where they'll be photographed and in what position. Many of them are nude. That vulnerability makes their sessions more powerful. They're given contact sheets with 36 pictures on a page and are asked to keep journals of the experience of being photographed, of looking at their photographs, and their thoughts about these experiences. Through this process, they are able - many for the very first time in their lives - to experience their beauty as well as a sense of their potential, strength, individuality, and uniqueness. The 'gaze' is now used by the 'Object' Instead of comparing themselves with the cultural standard, **they see themselves, their uniqueness.** They are now the one doing the gazing. They are now the source of what's beautiful. None of these women are movie stars. All are ordinary women, photographed as works of art. **We are what we believe we are.** (E.Fisher-Turk:2011/b)

What happens during a session:

Ellen Fisher Turk's brand of Phototherapy works by using women's multiple images to change their negative perceptions about themselves and their bodies. By being seen and not judged, by being photographed nude and seeing what they're most afraid of seeing, women have had the opportunity to reconstruct how they see themselves. (E.Fisher-Turk: 2011/b)

Fisher Turk has done a lot of work on young women suffering from eating disorders. Dr Ira Sacker, internationally known expert in the field of eating disorders and author of 'Regaining Your Self' and 'Dying to be Thin', has referred many patients to her with great success. Dr Sacker says while these photo-sessions do not cure eating disorders **they can help shift entrenched negative perceptions.** "For more than 70 per cent of patients I've referred, it's been effective." However, he warns that it's important to be in therapy at the same time because you need an eating disorders expert with whom to process the experience. "This isn't something you play with. You need to understand what you're dealing with". Turk agrees: "Don't try this yourself. People might take terrible pictures and make things worse. It could feel like a confirmation of 'lousy me.'"(E.Fisher-Turk: 2011/a)

Ellen Fisher Turk's practice doesn't stop at eating disorders though: her most poignant work is conducted with women who have suffered from sexual abuse of any kind. In her website some of her clients share the 'journals' that Turk asks them to keep, where they write about their own reaction to the photographs of their bodies.

"I wonder what my parents will say..." says a woman in her Incest Journal "I haven't confronted them with the sexual abuse memories I've been having. Well a funny thing happened when I saw myself in those pictures. I saw a beautiful, sad, complicated, courageous woman. I realized the worst was really not so bad. There was nothing wrong with me. I didn't look like a "Playboy" centerfold but I didn't care. **For the first time I had sympathy for this somewhat tragic girl staring at me in all her naked vulnerable beauty.** I finally started to see me as a person, not as this thing. The pictures helped me see it! They were tangible! **I could hold myself in my own hands** and see me in black and white, so that I couldn't explain it away, blame my feelings on my body, how fat I thought I was, or how small my breasts were. **It was the start of a new relationship with my body.**" (E.Fisher-Turk:2011/a)

Ellen Fisher Turk also runs "Make peace with your body" workshops, teaching therapists, photographers and college students her Phototherapy techniques.

The five techniques: Judy Weiser

Judy Weiser is the author of a best-selling Phototherapy manual called *“Phototherapy Techniques – Exploring the Secrets of Personal Snapshots and Family Albums”*. Weiser is based in Canada, and she is the founder and Director of The Phototherapy Centre in Vancouver. She has done more to spread information about Phototherapy than anybody else on the planet, devoting her time to teaching seminars, helping students who are interested in the subject worldwide and creating tools (such as the Phototherapy Centre’s website, www.Phototherapy-centre.com and more recently a Phototherapy page on Facebook) to help practitioners from around the world meet and share experiences about their work. Initially a Phototherapy practitioner, she is now devoting her whole time to lectures and conferences on the subject.

Weiser started life as qualified mental health therapist and began incorporating photographs in her practice quite by chance at the beginning of her career, whilst training to be a counsellor, when some of her photographs taken as a ‘hobby photographer’ were being exhibited in a local coffee-shop gallery. On engaging in conversation with some people who were discussing her photographs, and realising that they didn’t know she was the author of them, Weiser started asking questions about the pictures: *“I started asking them about which picture they liked and why they liked them, what they thought that people would say if they could speak, which one they’d like to bring home and why and which one made them laugh... I was so amazed by how differently they saw my pictures that I got more and more intrigued”*. (L. Granato: 1998)

In most of Judy Weiser’s Phototherapy techniques **the printed photographs are used as external objects to help the (qualified) therapist bring out the client’s internalised reality.**

As she herself has explained, *“ Each person encountering an image responds to both explicit and implicit messages, (...) embedded in its contents. (...) A person searching for the meaning of a given photograph will never be able to find the truth it holds for anyone else. In this supposed limitation lies the power of snapshots as therapeutic tools for accessing unconscious feelings, thought, memories, personal values, and deeply held beliefs.”* (Weiser:1993)

Weiser’s techniques are based on the very strong reactions that clients often have when confronted with images. Most of her techniques are based on client and therapist looking at photographs together and talking about them, but sometimes in her practice some photographs are taken, mostly self-portraits of the client. Self-portraiture is not just used literally: the client might be asked to take pictures of objects or ‘things’ which represent them, or – in the projective technique where therapist and client look at many pictures together – the client might be asked to pick a photograph which they feel really depicts them, from a pile of pictures on the therapist’s desk.

What happens during a session:

The five techniques delineated in her book are: 1) The Projective Process, 2) Working with Self-portraits, 3) Working with Photos of Clients Taken by Other People, 4) Working with Photos Taken or Collected by Clients and 5) Working with Family Album and other Autobiographical Photos.

The Projective process is based on the observation that a lot of what we normally see in a picture actually comes from within us. You could show the same photograph to a thousand people and you would get a thousand different reactions. *“The projective technique uses photographic images to elicit emotional responses, whether or not accompanied by verbal description.”* explains Weiser *“Any type of photo can be used, including the client’s personal*

snapshots or someone else's, or pictures found on magazine pages, postcards, calendars, album covers, greeting cards.”(Weiser:1993)

As said before, the printed photographs are used as external objects to help the therapist bring out the client's internal reality. Weiser uses photographic images as cathalysts: this helps the client 'opening up' in ways that verbal communication cannot do, because it allows therapist and client to focus together on an image which is external to the client's defence structure. As a result, even intrusive questioning will be far more tolerable than if the client had been directly questioned or challenged. (Weiser:1993)

In her work with **self-portraits**, Weiser challenges the problem that many people have, of not having a strong sense of self. Very often clients need to clarify to themselves who they really are, as opposed to who they are in relationship to other people in their lives.

*“If people have grown up with only conditional approval or love, their sense of self becomes primarily other-defined. Such clients need to find out who they are when none of the definers are around. **Self-portrait Phototherapy work can help clients clarify their self images and raise their self-esteem and self-confidence through making, viewing and accepting images of themselves and owning their positive perceptions.**”* (Weiser:1993)

During a session in which Weiser might be using the **Working with Photos of Clients Taken by Other People** technique, clients are asked, as an assignment, to bring in some photos of themselves taken by others. The therapist might ask the client to bring in some photographs of themselves that could best explain to who they are, or tell their life story to someone who doesn't know them, or to bring some photographs of themselves that they like and some they dislike. *“(...) Once the client has brought in snapshots others have taken of them, the second stage can begin: reviewing the photographs, discussing the meanings embedded in their visual contents and in the interactive process of having them taken”.* (Weiser:1993) In this case the photographs are again the starting point for verbal, traditional therapy, where the therapist asks the client some probing questions about themselves. Only in this case it's far easier for the client to talk, because the subject of the discussion is perceived as being an external object.

When things aren't going quite right or when life isn't flowing as ordinarily expected, people instinctively construct stories to explain to themselves (or others) why things aren't proceeding as they were supposed to. In trying to make sense of it all, people tend to try to 'normalize' what has interrupted their natural process of living in order to reduce its degree of strangeness and enhance their position with regard to the threat. People's attempts to make life more comprehensible place them in the role of outside observer of their own life. (...)(Weiser:1993)

In **Working with Photos Taken or Collected by Clients** *“The client takes the time in a safe setting to tell their story to a stranger and, in doing so, often gets a better understanding of it. In naming, labeling, and otherwise trying to explain what is going on, people gain insight and acquire understanding and control over what may have previously escaped their conscious grasp.(...) the therapeutic advantage to asking clients to take pictures (...) is that constructing and presenting a visual story of what is going on in their lives can help them to understand it more fully”* (Weiser:1993)

*“(...) after viewing a **family's album pages and collected photographs**, a therapist can begin to formulate questions based on patterns that seem to be presenting themselves. Bearing in mind that the therapist is as far outside the secrets the snapshots hold as any other nonfamily viewer, the therapist can be trained to observe recurring positionings, relationships, alignments, nonverbal messages, and emotional expressions (or lack thereof) that signal questions that need to be explored with the client or the family”.* (Weiser:1993)

Meeting the past: Lietta Granato

I first discovered Phototherapy when I was studying for my Degree in Photography and Multimedia at Westminster University in London. A professor had told me a little bit about it, and he had mentioned Jo Spence's name as she was also from London.

What I did at that point was a little bit adventurous and a lot arrogant (I was young then!). As I had a few problems from my past which I wanted to come to terms with, I decided to work on them by using Phototherapy, but BEFORE reading Jo Spence's book (*Putting myself in the picture: A political personal and photographic autobiography*. London: Camden Press 1983), and before knowing exactly how Phototherapy works. I didn't want to be influenced by her work, so I went ahead and formed my own version of Phototherapy, which ended up by helping me a lot with some very personal issues. The amazing thing is that after exhibiting my work, once I finally read Jo Spence's book, I discovered that I had come to exactly the same conclusions, and that the Phototherapeutic work I had done on myself was almost exactly the same as the work Jo Spence and Rosy Martin had done before me.

After that I became totally engrossed with the subject, and I wrote my final dissertation on Phototherapy. By then I had discovered Judy Weiser's book (*Phototherapy Techniques – Exploring the secrets of Personal Snapshots and Family Albums*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1993) and a wealth of practitioners using Phototherapy all around the world.

In the work I did on myself, I used clothes and props to impersonate every member of my family, and the final piece was a family photograph in which I had impersonated all of my family. I also did other pieces where I told a difficult truth about myself in the form of a comic strip: In my photographic studio I built a cartoon-like set and dressed up in vivid colours with a green wig, and shot a series of pictures which I then printed and put together on a gigantic white board that resembled a comic book page but was in fact made out of many photographs. What I had done was restaging a difficult moment in my family's past, and taken photographs (self-portraits) of me restaging these moments.

Just like in Jo Spence and Rosy Martin's Phototherapy practice, **by restaging a difficult situation we have lived in the past, the trauma of our memories lessens and the power of these memories to influence us in the present is very much defused.** It also helps to be reminded of the context in which the restaging happens: a photographic session in a studio. This helps because one can, at will, step back and forth between restaging/emotional involvement, and photographing/intellectual detachment. **The most important aspect of restaging a family portrait is being totally in control from start to finish.** In this respect, **Phototherapy, even when practiced in a group, is closer to self-portraiture than to portrait photography.** In Phototherapy client and therapist work together to explore the identity of the sitter who is in front of the camera. The usual power dynamics between photographer and sitter are subverted, and creativity is no longer credited only to the photographer, but the product of a joint effort.

During a Phototherapy session of the type I practice, client's past experiences can be restaged and re-photographed with the client's choice of clothing, props and facial expressions. Also, **photographs from the family album are often restaged and recreated,** with the difference that **this time it is the client's point of view which is taken into account,** and not the original photographer's. This allows for a shift in self-perception, as by restaging images of the client as a child, for instance, **the client feels more empowered and able to tell his/her story.**

This restaging of one's past experiences – and these are often cathartic moments from the client's point of view, and not what is usually deemed important, such as weddings, births etc. – has a double impact on the client. First, **as the moment is restaged it is also re-lived emotionally: this functions as a powerful catalyst for any strong feelings which might not previously have been acknowledged by the client.** Secondly, the restaging of events from the past often involves the client – literally – stepping into someone else's shoes: it is not uncommon during a Phototherapy session for the client to impersonate their father/mother/significant person from their lives. This 'embodiment' of someone else close to us, simplistic as this may sound, makes it easier for the client to experience things from the other person's point of view.

The type of Phototherapy I practice in my workshops is very similar to the one developed by Jo Spence and Rosy Martin. However, the strongest difference I perceive between Spence and Martin's initial work and mine, is their specific desire to **demistify the notion of photographs as art objects.** In their own form of Phototherapy, Spence and Martin seem to make a distinct effort not to use artistic techniques in therapy, perhaps believing this to be a 'filter' which defuses the power of the 'real' picture.

On the other hand, during the Phototherapy sessions I hold with my clients, I make sure there's always plenty of art materials and clothes, accessories, props etc. etc. I personally think the sessions should be self-explorative and tackle something which we perceive as a problem, but also take place in a 'light' atmosphere with a strong element of play which can help us in 'letting go' and reveal ourselves to the camera.

What happens during a session:

During a Phototherapy session a client would like solve a personal problem. For example, they might say *'I'm too jealous and I would like to come to terms with my jealousy'*. The client talks to the Phototherapist about this problem and how it affects them, and why they want to get rid of it or at least come to terms with it. This type of session can be one-to-one or happen in a group setting: one Phototherapist and a group of clients. In a group setting (and this is exactly the work we are going to be doing this week) all clients and the Phototherapist sit in a circle, often on the floor, and each person in turn talks about the problem they brought into the session, and how it affects them.

After that, PhotoTherapist and client/s together decide the best way to represent this problem (in this case: jealousy) using photography. The client might paint their face green, or dress like 'jealousy' for instance, making use of clothes and props that are always available during the sessions. The main ideas will come from the client: the Phototherapist is there simply as a facilitator: he or she will make *suggestions* on how to represent the client's problem, but it's the client's idea that counts.

Once a representation of the client's problem has been decided on, with the use of make-up, clothes, props, backgrounds and different camera angles, the clients in their own time let themselves be photographed and try to evoke feelings of jealousy while their photo is being taken. **It is important to stress how this is almost a self-portrait, and the Phototherapist is just a facilitator, a helper.**

After the photographic session the picture is printed as soon as possible, and the client is then confronted with a printed photograph of their problem. They can now do what they want with it. They can use it in artwork (the client will have coloured card, scissors and art materials available during the session), or they can even decide to destroy it.

The last part of the Phototherapy session is again sitting down, and each client explains what they have done during the session and what they have done with their picture afterwards, and why. They then talk about how they feel now, compared to how they felt before the Phototherapy session. This type of session can be useful, as I said, to come to terms with a problem one might have ('I'm always late' 'I don't trust people' 'I get angry for silly reasons') or even to get to know oneself better by exploring a side of one's personality which is usually hidden.

What actually happens:

Sitting around in a circle and sharing one's problems with others can be very liberating; half the time we carry a burden with us that can be made lighter by just talking about it with someone. It's like the old British saying: *'A problem shared is a problem halved'*.

Listening to other people opening up about their own problems and their own insecurities generally makes us feel better because we understand that we are not alone when it comes to having problems. A group setting can be a wonderful tool where clients help each other see their problems from a different perspective.

When we decide to act on our problem and start making decisions about how to best represent it in a photograph, we become more empowered. No matter what happened to us in the past, this time around **we are in charge**. Impersonating a part of our personality which is difficult to deal with, for example, can be a very cathartic moment. On the one hand we decide exactly how to represent something, so we feel less like victims. On the other, the moment we dress up and impersonate that difficult thing/problem/hidden aspect of our personality we want to explore, we start feeling something, we are 'unkocking' the problem, getting it free from our inner self, and bringing it up to the surface. When we act *as* our jealousy, for instance, when we give it a voice by representing it in a photograph, we have (in a way) 'met our enemy'. We now feel we know our problem a bit better. We have brought it out into the open, brought it to light, and this is certainly the first step to handle a problem of any kind.

In the last part of the session, once our photograph has been printed, what happens is that we now have a physical representation of our problem. We are holding it in our hands, so to speak, and we now feel we can do whatever we want with it.

Having a problem that affects us and holding it inside, is very different from feeling that we are holding that same problem in our hands. In this second scenario we feel very powerful: **the thing we wanted to change is now literally in our hands, and we can do what we want with it**. We feel strong, empowered, and much better equipped in dealing with it.

People generally find that at this stage of their Phototherapy session that problem/hidden aspect of their personality no longer feels so scary or difficult to deal with. It is at this point that they feel lighter, less burdened, and they start making artwork with their photograph. I have seen some clients make a greeting card out of their 'scary jealousy', for instance... Some other clients prefer to keep the photograph which resulted from their session as a reminder not to act a certain way, or as a reminder of something negative which used to hold them back, and no longer has the power to do so.

The final group talk when clients explain what they have done with their photograph and why, gives everybody a sense of 'closure'. Clients really feel that they have managed to come to terms with whatever issue they were talking; that they have managed to handle it directly without ignoring it.

Phototherapy and Youth Work

Phototherapy and photography in general can and should be used in youth work to pursue two different avenues. On the one hand, Phototherapy can help young people express themselves and get to know the hidden, not obvious aspects of their personality at a time (adolescence) when the **formation of identity is a core problem**. On the other hand, Phototherapy and photography can also be used as an empowering tool for youth to tell their own story, to communicate without words and show their life, their environment and their relationships by taking pictures of them. This is sometimes called **Participatory Photography**: a creative modality that asks participants to represent and analyze themselves using photography.

Many of the youth projects shown below do just that: they teach young people how to use a camera, and then they ask them to go and photograph what really matters to them, what surrounds them, what defines them. As the AYA Project's website explains, **“visual arts-based programming helps youth build cultural literacy and discuss social tension in a non-threatening manner, in a way that encourages reflective thinking and understanding about oneself and others.”** (ajaproject.org:2011) All information on the following projects comes directly from the single organizations' websites, and is copyrighted by them.

Ph15, Argentina

The name of this project, Ph15, comes from Ph= photography and 15, the name designated to identify the slum "Ciudad Oculta", or Hidden City, located at the edge of Buenos Aires. Ph15 is a space where a group of kids and adolescents are encouraged to express their personal views through the use of photography. In this art workshop, they explore who they are and what they feel.

Ph15 is formed by a group of photographers that believe in education through visual arts and the use of art as a means to promote social inclusion. It offers workshops that possess a completely innovative character, from the didactic nature of the classes to their role as **a space where underserved youth can develop their identity and artistic expression**.

The project started in August of 2000 at the initiative of a group of adolescents from the "Ciudad Oculta", or Hidden City, who wanted to learn photography.

The workshop activities aim to spread photographic creativity. Through learning how to look at and depict the different realities of their lives, both as individuals and in a group, the students learn to explore everything that surrounds them and to express themselves through their personal views, and with a new perspective. Without ever leaving aside the search for artistic quality, **ph15 generates a space where adolescents can develop their identities, and subsequently, improve their social and cultural conditions**. Ph15 uses the creative power of photography to open an alternative route for students that transmits values and cultural understanding that belong to them and are not imposed by others.

Ph15 helps the students to take full ownership of the neighborhood in which they live, to discover new spaces through field trips organized by the Foundation, and to better interact with their surroundings. Through Ph15 activities, the students not only leave the neighborhood, but also learn how to move around the city and know places where they usually don't go or do not have access. Ph15 students are aged 11 to 26. (ph15:2011)

You can find out more about this project at: www.ph15.org.ar

The In-sight Photography Project, Vermont (USA)

Michelle Rubino, a Children's Advocate writes: *"The chance to learn and become skilled at a form of self-expression such as photography, under the guidance of caring and sensitive adults, offers children a very significant healing experience, increasing their self-awareness, their ability to vent their feelings in positive and constructive ways, and their sense of their own potential and worth."*

The In-Sight Photography Project offers students a creative voice and outlet, an opportunity to experience success, tools for self-awareness and self-worth, and **encourages them to become actively engaged in their communities**. In-Sight teaches photography to youth ages 11-18 throughout Southern Vermont, regardless of their ability to pay.

The Project was founded by Bill Ledger and John Willis when they were distracted by a large number of teenagers hanging around aimlessly in downtown Brattleboro and by the police who were moving them along for loitering. This scene was so distressing that they decided to teach a free course for these youths. Encouraged by an outpouring of community support, John and Bill built a darkroom and teaching facility.

Exposures, one of In-Sight's newest programs works with groups and educators in partnering locations to offer Exchange programming **designed to create meaningful, creative conversation among youth from distinct geographic and cultural regions**. Youth in Exposures Exchange programs learn photography skills to document their experiences, cultures, and communities and collaborate with youth in participating locations through an online gallery and forum in which they share and respond to one another's creative works. Exposures is a cross-cultural exchange program that establishes the arts as a common language among youth from diverse communities. Programming is based in artistic collaboration and exchange, and is intended to **facilitate creative cross-cultural dialogue and experiences that lead to a better understanding of our diverse communities and cultures**.

Exposures youth participants, facilitators and program staff have come from southern Vermont, Chicago, the Navajo Nation in Arizona, the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, and New York City. (insight photography:2011)

You can find out more about this project at: www.insight-photography.org

Arte Crescita, Italy

Adolescence, a time of transformation, physical and psychological change, can be a very difficult, overwhelming time. ArteCrescita aims to support young individuals who are experiencing difficulties by offering individual or group sessions, or an activity which uses photography as a facilitating tool for the youth's communication with a therapist.

"Phototherapy": the use of photography in the therapist's relationship with the adolescent.

ArteCrescita utilizes techniques developed by Judy Weiser, director of The Phototherapy Centre in Vancouver and a pioneer in the use of photography in clinical psychology, to offer teenagers a self-awareness path through the use of photographs. Using images brought in by the client, self-portraits and family photos as well as images of other people, objects and places taken by them, we can work on the meaning of these images and on the emotions evoked by them within an individual psychological consultation. This is something accessible even to individuals who don't have a previous knowledge of photography. (studioartecrescita:2011)

You can find out more about this project at: www.studioartecrescita.com

Literacy Through Photography, North Carolina (USA)

In 1989 the Center for Documentary Studies (CDS) invited photographer Wendy Ewald to Durham, North Carolina, to offer a two-week workshop for local schoolchildren. A year later, with encouragement from Durham school administrators and support from CDS, Ewald started the Literacy Through Photography (LTP) program, working in the Durham Public Schools to make photographs the basis for a variety of learning experiences across the curriculum. Since then, LTP has worked with numerous elementary- and middle-school teachers and with hundreds of children of varying ages and backgrounds.

At its core, Literacy Through Photography **encourages children to explore their world as they photograph scenes from their own lives, and then to use their images as catalysts for verbal and written expression.** Framed around four thematic explorations — self-portrait, community, family, and dreams — LTP provides children and teachers with the expressive and investigative tools of photography and writing for use in the classroom.

In connecting picture making with writing and critical thinking, LTP promotes an expansive use of photography across different curricula and disciplines, building on the information that students naturally possess. LTP also provides a valuable opportunity for students to bring their home and community lives into the classroom. Photographs can give teachers a glimpse into their students' lives and, in increasingly diverse classrooms, give students a way to understand each other's experiences.

Who Am I? A Decade of Literacy Through Photography in Durham, 1990–2000 is a teacher-curated exhibition of photography and writing by Durham schoolchildren, demonstrating the power and importance of respectful collaborations between teachers and students, parents and children, community workers and their constituents, artists and schools, and schools and art organizations.

Since 1992 the Center for Documentary Studies has offered weeklong Literacy Through Photography workshops in Durham, attended by artists, photographers, and educators from across the United States and other countries. These hands-on workshops train participants in Literacy Through Photography's methods for combining photography and creative writing, while also providing a technical understanding of photography. Over the course of the week, participants design individual plans for their own LTP-based projects. In recent years, LTP staff members increasingly have taken these workshops to other settings, broadening opportunities for participation.

Ewald and her staff also teach a seminar at Duke University in which students collaborate with a local public school teacher and classroom in devising and carrying out an LTP project. Students read and discuss materials on teaching, photography, and contemporary social issues relevant to Durham.

With support from Duke University's Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, LTP has archived work made by more than one thousand Durham students. This archive, with more than seven hundred contact sheets and written pieces, is a resource for researchers and the general public. (Literacy Through Photography:2011)

You can find out more about this project at: <http://cds.aas.duke.edu/exhibits/past>

AYA, Youth and Photography transformation, California (USA)

The AjA Project provides photography-based educational programming to youth affected by war and displacement; students think critically about their identities, develop leadership skills, and become agents of personal and social transformation.

The AjA Project, founded in 2000, is an acronym for the phrase, “Autosuficiencia Juntada con Apoyo” (supporting self-sufficiency).

In July of 2002, AjA launched Journey, a photography-based after-school program in San Diego, California. The Journey program utilizes the process of participatory photography to **help refugee youth reflect upon and process their experiences of displacement, migration and resettlement, as well as to help them think critically about their cultural identities and communities.**

A 2006-2008 program evaluation indicated that AjA plays a significant role in alleviating despair, loss, and alienation among refugee youth acculturating to life in America. The AjA Project has two international sister organizations -- Record of Truth in Burma and Disparando Camaras (para la Paz) in Colombia – and is currently looking into further national and international expansion opportunities.

The AjA Project is a nonprofit organization headquartered in San Diego, California. Utilizing participatory photography methods and an assets-based model, AjA’s after-school and in-school programs transform the lives of displaced youth.

In 2007, AjA was invited to speak at **Visible Rights: Photography for and by Youth, a conference hosted by Harvard University.**

The participatory photography process is the underpinning for all of AjA’s programs. **Participatory photography is a creative modality that asks participants to represent and analyze themselves using photography.** The process validates the participant’s voice and provides a venue for self-guided reflection, reconciliation, and growth. The method has begun to be utilized as a collaborative intervention tool with marginalized populations, who are often represented as the silent subjects and rarely given an opportunity to control their own representation.

In 2010, AjA implemented its newest arts-based initiative – the **Social Justice Program**, for the purpose of **increasing youths’ self-efficacy**, reducing bullying, and creating more inclusive school environments. Building on the Journey and Cultural Literacy Programs, the Social Justice Program **uses photography as an alternative tool for teaching at-risk youth about identity and social issues.** The program offered students an innovative and visual approach for exploring how their race, class and gender intersected with current social issues.

Visual arts-based programming helps youth build cultural literacy and discuss social tension in a non-threatening manner, in a way that encourages reflective thinking and understanding about oneself and others. It also helps students to embrace art as a powerful tool for creating change in their communities. (aja project:2011)

You can find out more about this project at: www.ajaproject.org

PhotoVoice, England

PhotoVoice's mission is to bring about positive social change for marginalised communities through providing them with photographic training with which they can advocate, express themselves and generate income. PhotoVoice's vision is for a world in which no one is denied the opportunity to speak out and be heard. PhotoVoice's mission is to **build skills within disadvantaged and marginalised communities using innovative participatory photography** and digital storytelling methods so that they have the opportunity to represent themselves and create tools for advocacy and communications to achieve positive social change.

Working in partnerships with other charities, NGOs and community organisations PhotoVoice designs and delivers tailor-made participatory photography, digital storytelling and self-advocacy projects for socially excluded groups. Their pioneering approach brings together the arts, media, development and social change agendas to work with hard-to-reach groups on projects that give voice, build skills, provide platforms for advocacy and work towards sustainable change. Since 1999 PhotoVoice has pioneered the use of participatory photography as a tool for communication, self expression and advocacy. They have worked in the UK and across the globe with marginalised and vulnerable communities whose human rights are being undermined. Organisational partners have included Amnesty International, World Vision, UNICEF, Save the Children, The International HIV/AIDS Alliance and United Response.

In August 2011 PhotoVoice completed a course of photography workshops with a group of eight young people living in supported housing in Homerton, and another set of workshops is underway with a second group in Walhamstow, due to finish in late 2011. The groups have been supported to explore the issues of gang culture and knife crime through photography, in order to produce captioned photos that convey their experiences and perspectives to peers and the general public. **Too often the media representation of these issues is confused with a general representation of young people**, without recognition that young people are more often the victims of these issues than adults, and the perpetrators are only a limited cross section of young people in Britain.

The young people that took part will help guide the direction and target audience of a booklet that will showcase their work and be disseminated to young people, parents and youth workers later in 2011. The booklet, and the exhibitions showcasing the work that will take place around its launch, will aim to **promote a more three dimensional view of young people in London**, and to stimulate discussion of the role that young people can play in tackling these issues positively.

These issues are particularly pertinent given the controversial statements from members of the coalition government in the aftermath of the riots [*Between 6 and 10 August 2011, several London boroughs and districts of cities and towns across England suffered widespread rioting, looting and arson*], and the nature of the media coverage of these events. The role that 'young people' played in the violence and disorder has been the focus of much media coverage, distracting from the fact that social problems entirely unconnected with age were largely to blame. This kind of reactionary reportage contributes to an ongoing alienation of youth whose social background and where they live places them automatically and unfairly in the firing line for negative stereotyping and assumptions of criminal behaviour and anti-social attitudes. (PhotoVoice :2011)

You can find out more about this project at: **www.photovoice.org**

Phototherapy and disability

In her paper *“Pictures of Health, Pictures of Illness”*, Meredith Kooi examines the relationship between the subject and the photographer when the subject is a disabled person. This relationship, she writes, is particularly complex when you ask yourself how the photographer can represent a disabled subject without exploiting metaphors of illness or adversity, especially in the face of the long history of medical illustration, where the subject of a photograph is not a person, an individual, but merely a ‘case’. This is the same de-humanization which plagued Jo Spence when she was hospitalized and ‘handled’ by the doctors during her cancer treatment.

This problem for photography, says Kooi, may lie within the power structure of the portrait, between the photographer and the subject. As Craig Owens claims, *“despite his or her benevolence in representing those who have been denied access to the means of representation, the photographer inevitably functions as an agent of the system of power that silenced these people in the first place.”* (Owens:1983)

The issue of representation and of the multiplicity of selves brought up by Spence and Martin becomes even more important in this case. In my own Phototherapy practice, a young woman who was disabled once asked me to photograph her with purple hair. She had dyed her hair purple on purpose, and was going to keep it that way. *“I don’t want people referring to me as ‘that girl in the wheelchair’”* she told me *“So now they can say ‘that girl with purple hair’”*.

Kooi also explains how the re-enactment of old family photographs can be helpful in the case of disabled subjects. First, she says, they find a photograph of themselves from the past. Then they re-create the scene from the photograph they had found, using props and accessories.

This practice can be effective in the exploration of the disabled subject’s personal narrative. It is similar to the work of Ellen Fisher Turk: it’s another way of getting to like yourself, your body, and seeing it in a new light. Spence and Martin firmly believed that this Phototherapy practice is initially about changing the images in our heads and hearts, but also represents the first step for us as individuals towards broader social and economic change. To them, photography is an important tool in the creation of identity, including bodily identity. (M. Kooi:2011)

A view from a wheelchair: Shaun’s story

Just last week an article in the online magazine *Digital Photography School* talked about the story of a man, Shaun, who was involved in a serious road accident and as a result of it is now in a wheelchair and unable to use his left arm. About six months ago, on the suggestion of his therapist, he started using a digital camera to take ‘creative’ photographs.

“Over the last 6 months my life has changed a lot. Physically I’m improving a little – although still live life in a wheelchair and am very restricted in my movement – but emotionally I’m a different guy and much of it is a result of photography.” he writes. *“Despite the challenges photography has made me feel alive again. It has become a very therapeutic thing. It gives me something to think about that is not related to my pain or injuries. It gives me motivation to get well again. It takes me out of sitting alone in my apartment. It has given me dreams for the future. It has given me a social interaction with other photographers (online and in real life). My photos are not as technically brilliant as [other] authors – but that’s not what photography is about for me. For me it is a part of getting well and celebrating life, something I never thought I’d do again.”* (Digital Photography School:2011)

Almost Phototherapy

Moira Ricci, Italy

Moira Ricci is an Italian photographer based in Tuscany. In her series titled “20.12.53 - 10.08.04”

she explores family relationships by ‘putting herself in the picture’ quite literally, using some old snapshots of her family and her prematurely deceased mother. With the aid of digital processing the artist manages to appear in a series of old family photographs beside her mother, and observe her while remaining an extraneous figure, a sort of ubiquitous ghost hovering on the edges of the images and events. The photographer seems to follow the tracks of her mother, whose dates of birth and death provide the series with its title and indicate the time span covered by the images. In all pictures the photographer’s gaze is directed toward this woman, whom she clearly misses. This is a way of building a new relationship with her deceased parent; to ‘feel closer’ to her. Her images are very delicate and deeply moving, especially the one in which she looks as if she is going to kiss her mother’s neck.

*“(…) It is not, however, in response to retrospective needs that Ricci addresses these photographs of the past. She looks at reality in an attempt to overcome its spatiotemporal dimension by meeting her mother virtually in various moments of her life before her sudden death. Digital image manipulation serves the artist to eliminate temporal distance and use the photographs of her “family chronicles” to consider her mother’s past and her own present and origins at the same time. Moira Ricci takes the intimate, family photographs lodged in the memory of every individual as the subject of her work. As the social psychologist Harald Welzer points out in his *Theorie der Erinnerung* (Theory of Memory), while these shots can sometimes come to replace our memories of situations we actually experienced, others taken in our absence remain alive and fixed in our memory as though we had really been present on the occasion shown.”* (strozzina.org/manipulatingreality/e_ricci:2011)

Julia Fullerton-Batten, Great Britain

Julia Fullerton-Batten is a British/German photographer operating in the UK. Her work focuses on images of adolescents, whom she photographs making them look gigantic against a series of miniature settings. The awkwardness, that sense of ‘sticking out’ we all felt as adolescents is the subject of her photographs. The sense of isolation, of feeling ‘different from everyone else’ is expressed by the fact that the girls portrayed are often photographed on their own, like giant Gullivers exploring the land.

In an interview on Q&A Fullerton-Batten, who uses real adolescent girls, and not models, explains her work: *‘I used to approach unknown people on the streets in London and ask them to take part in my photo shoots. There are so many fascinating faces accompanied with wonderful personalities around. The freshness that street casted models have has also benefited my work immeasurably. (...) There is no manipulation of these images. The girls are standing in a real location, one of several model villages dotted throughout Europe. The idea behind this idea was to put teenage girls in an environment in which they had the feeling of power that they so much wished to have at that insecure stage in their development to womanhood. They dwarf their environment, but through their poses and demeanour still show their teenage insecurity’.* (Zavos: 2009)

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Useful websites

<http://www.Phototherapy-centre.com>

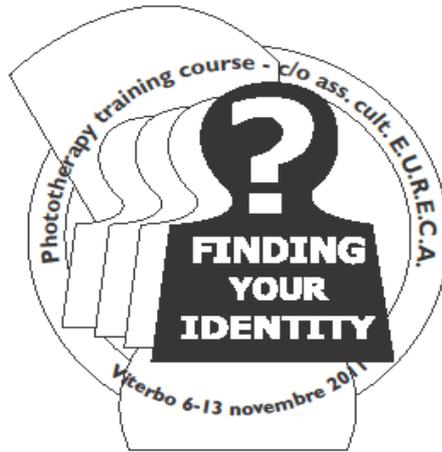
<http://missrepresentation.org/>

<http://www.rachelleleesmith.com/PridePage.html>

<http://www.photographicsocialvision.org/puntdevista/index.htm> (Barcelona-based organization using photography as an instrument of expression and social integration).

Finding your Identity

Phototherapy Training Course



Participants quotes

Anna, Bulgaria



“I released my emotions during the Phototherapy session. First I felt happy, then sad, and after the session I started thinking about Phototherapy a lot. I know now that with these techniques I can help young people express themselves”.

Anna, Bulgaria

Sergio, Spain



“Last year my art teacher offered me the chance to be a model, but I refused. I was too self-conscious about my body and hated being in front of the camera. When I return home from this course my answer will be YES! I now feel more comfortable with myself”.

Sergio, Spain

Alessia, Italy



“This kind of experience gave me the strength to smile with my soul”.
Alessia, Italy

Petya, Bulgaria



“We have a disability centre near my hometown, and I think it will be a very good experience to practice Phototherapy with the children there”.
Petya, Bulgaria

Elena, Italy



“I think Phototherapy is the perfect instrument to be used with youth who are experiencing difficulties. It can help them reach a certain emotional awareness”.
Elena, Italy

Dimitris, Greece



“In working with young people, I will try to take pictures of the subjects as they would like to be, as opposed to who they are now. These strong pictures hopefully will inspire them to change and actually become what they really want to be..”
Dimitris, Greece

Roxana, Romania



“My knowledge and feelings about other european cultures has changed after this course. Communicating with people from different backgrounds was really interesting and it changed my view of certain people and Countries”.

Roxana, Romania

Mireia, Spain



“When I saw my final picture I felt really good about myself. The whole experience changed my body image. Before taking this course, I was always a bit self-conscious and very critical of myself. But now, when I saw that everyone liked my pictures, and I had a lot of positive feedback, I feel a lot more confident”.

Mireia, Spain

Chrysanthi, Greece



“I will definitely try to organize something like this in Athens, hopefully with your assistance!”
Chrysanthi, Greece

Daniela, Romania



“I think I will use Phototherapy in my work with young people, once I finish this course. I am thinking of organizing a Phototherapy project in some high schools in Bucharest”.
Daniela, Romania