



Abstract

This presentation will address the use of PhotoTherapy techniques in experiential **Death Education (DeEd)**, focusing on the issue of **Continuing Bonds (CBs)** with a deceased person. According to **Weiser**, PhotoTherapy represents a form of intervention which, through the medium of photography, allows a person to **project his/her inner world in the pictures**, thus reaching a higher self-knowledge and exploring aspects that would otherwise remain hidden. Because of this, PhotoTherapy can be used successfully in DeEd to help people **express their feelings concerning death and loss**. It can also help bereaved people **manage ongoing relationships or attachments to the deceased (CBs)**, allowing them to explore their nature, which could be either physiological in grief elaboration or maladaptive, depending on whether they manage to restore meaning in life or not.



Competencies to be achieved

At the conclusion of this module, participants will be able to...



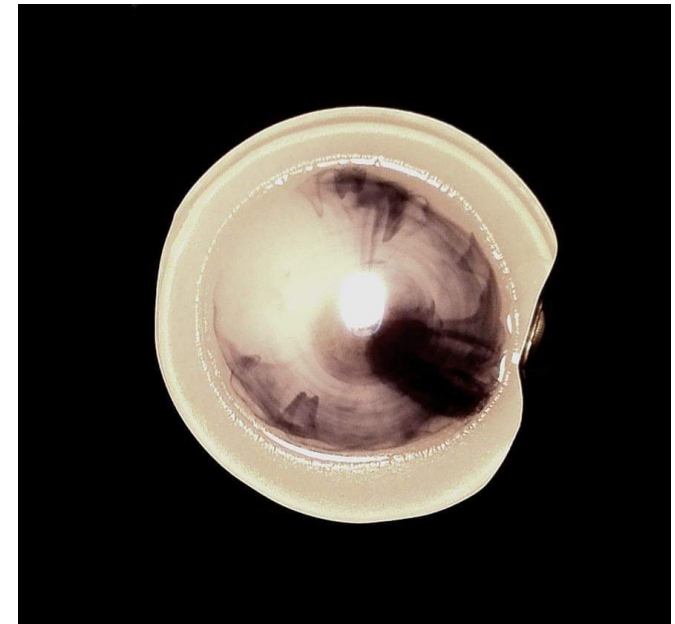
- Understand and explain the **basic principles** of PhotoTherapy
- Understand and apply the **five main PhotoTherapy techniques** as described by Judy Weiser
- Explain what **CBs** are and understand the fundamental **difference between adaptive and maladaptive** ones
- Contextualize the **use of PhotoTherapy in the area of DeEd** to help a bereaved person elaborate the loss and explore with him/her the possible presence and nature of Continuing Bonds, promoting an adaptive process of grief elaboration

PhotoTherapy

PhotoTherapy: psychotherapeutic intervention with photograph, helps a patient to reach a higher self-knowledge and explore thoughts, desires and intimate perceptions that would otherwise remain hidden.

The use of photograph may help people overcome their cognitive and emotional boundaries and bring out their interiority, even when exploring some of the most distressing themes.

The **therapist's primary role** is to **encourage** and **support clients' own personal discoveries** while exploring and interacting with the ordinary personal and family snapshots they view, make, collect, actively reconstruct, or even only imagine (Weiser, 2014).



PhotoTherapy

Alternative strategy to **explore the unconscious**.

Photographs → **visual metaphors** for an actual moment of “living experience”:
verbalization and recognition of feelings
a storehouse of imagination and creative potential.

The ability **to transport** people **in time** and to let them consider **alternative realities**,
even if neither of these is possible in real life.



Process Oriented Approach:

In **PhotoTherapy** the final print can be an important element, however, the choices made by the client while taking a picture are meaningful as well, thus they need to be explored in order to promote well-being

Five PhotoTherapy Techniques

Judy Weiser (1999, 2010) **five basic techniques** related to the various possible relationships between person and camera/photograph:

- **Photos which have been taken or created by the client;**
- **Photos of the client which have been taken by other people:** whether posed on purpose or taken spontaneously;
- **Self-portraits:** any kind of photos that clients have made of themselves;
- **Family album and other photo-biographical collections;**
- **“Photo-Projectives”:** every person can project his/her inner world in basically any picture.



This presentation will focus on the last 2 techniques that are the most structured, used and useful for DeEd and elaboration of the mourning.

The contribution of PhotoTherapy techniques



To confront strong topics and emotions:
illness and dying with a protective distance
(Weiser, 1999).

To explore discomfort but also positive aspects,
therapeutic process towards **wellbeing** (Weiser,
1990).

These techniques have been successfully
applied in a variety of situations:

- with HIV-positive people (Weiser, 1999)
- In the psychosocial field: facilitating integration and contrasting the marginalization of specific social groups (Musacchi, 2016).

The contribution of PhotoTherapy techniques

Efficacious with young people: **manage** issues inherent in **illness and death** (Testoni et al., 2018), help them face future crucial moments (Bell et al., 2009).

Seriously ill young people → make sense of their sickness and improve their wellbeing (Jones, 2012; Sawyer et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2013).

Terminally ill patient → confront the significant issues of his/her life

Help **bereaved people** to manage ongoing relationships or attachments to the deceased → elaboration of death and loss



Continuing Bonds

Continuing Bonds (CBs): ongoing relationships a person experiences to the deceased

Normal in early phase of the grieving process BUT:
some researchers suggest that CBs are **not**
universally adaptive (Field, 2006).

CBs are comforting to the bereaved BUT they can
create distortions in relationships → maladaptive CBs
(Klass, 2006)

Maladaptive CBs: the sensation of perceiving the
physical presence of the departed (Keen et al., 2013).

Simply a **healthy grieving process:** preservation of an
intense symbolic bond with the deceased → help the
bereaved adapt to the loss (Neimeyer, 2001).



Continuing Bonds

Two opposite interpretations (Hall, 2014):

CBs as a symptom of
unresolved mourning

CBs as a method that can help
to manage loss and resolve
mourning



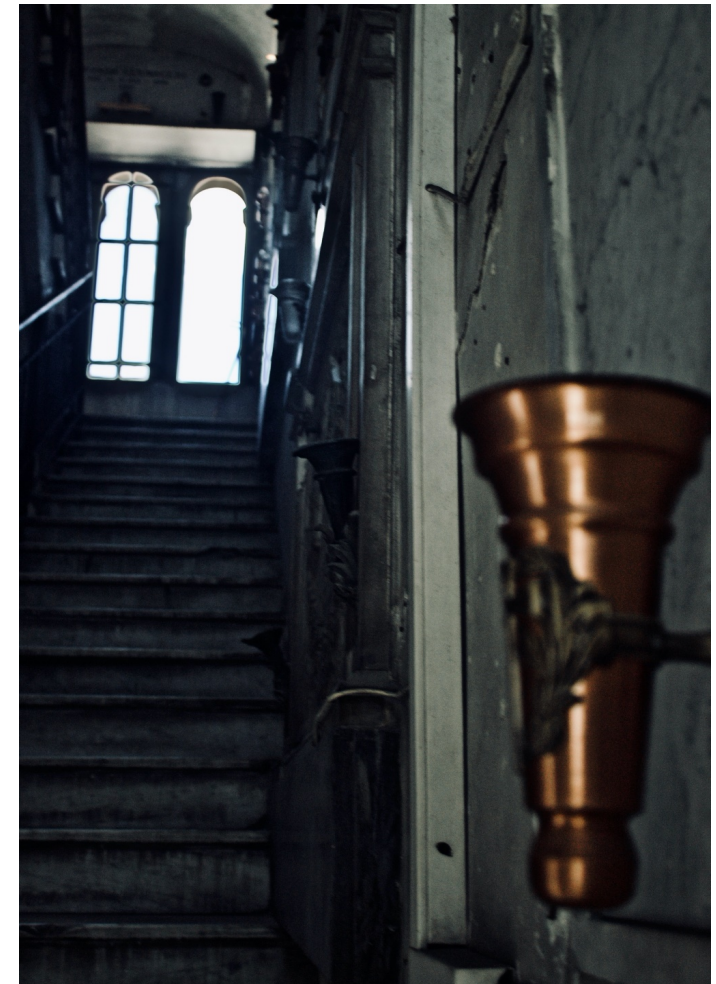
Both the interpretations are correct: early phases of grief, natural reaction → search for **physical proximity** (Fuchs, 2018). Then: internalization of the deceased as an extension of the self → **psychological proximity** (Field, 2006; Testoni, 2016).

PhotoTherapy: a therapeutic tool → if the CBs appear pathological it helps the person to move towards their internalization.

Non-pathological Continuing Bonds

Klass (2001) four "non-pathological" conditions with the deceased persons through their internalization:

- 1) "Sensing the presence" of a deceased loved one;
- 2) Talking to a loved one who has disappeared;
- 3) Seeing the deceased person as a moral guide:
 - role model
 - guide in specific circumstances
 - clarification of values
 - memories development
- 4) Speaking about a deceased person



Family album in DeEd and Loss

Family photos document the **permanence** and **change**, **continuity** and **existence** over time of a person's life, giving insights into the full system of relationships through **photobiographical material**.

Useful in the **recollection of past situations and experiences**, when the exploration of the client's feelings towards his/her family is needed.

In particular **to explore the bonds** with the deceased family members through the photobiographical material

Activity: Therapist asks patients to look for some photographs of the deceased person, in order to retrace his/her life with the creation of an album. It also allows to investigate the relationship between the deceased person and the patient



Photo-Projectives in DeEd and Loss



“**Photo-Projectives**” technique: the meaning of any photo is created **during** the process of viewing/acquisition/planning

Any photograph that draws interest from client or therapist has potential use in the **counselling setting**.
Images → **metaphors** of the **individual’s internal world**.

Activity: Therapist asks patients **how they interpret** the images → thoughts, feelings and memories that emerge as regards the **deceased person**.

People **spontaneously** express their inner meanings, photos → a mirror that reflects their most significant personal experiences and feelings.

A person’s responses and associated feelings are uniquely personal.

There is no wrong way to perceive a photograph.

Conclusions



Phototherapy: techniques that make use of snapshots as “**openers**” to access feelings, thoughts, and memories that are often not easily available to solely-verbal methods (Weiser, 1999).

Therapist: explore not only patients’ discomfort but also positive aspects, moving the therapeutic process towards wellbeing (Weiser, 1990).

Personal photos: “**bridges**” for accessing, exploring, and communicating about feelings and memories, as well as related issues these evoke (Weiser, 2014).

Useful to **explore possible CBs** of a person and to **help elaborate the mourning** stimulating his/her resilience and the reorganization of his/her inner world after the loss.

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