



Using Photography to Increase Savoring

Savoring

 Exercise

 1-10 min

 Client

 Yes

“Taking pictures is savoring life intensely, every hundredth of a second.” – Marc Riboud

The above-mentioned quote suggests that photography may increase savoring. Taking a photograph requires a certain amount of focused attention and appraisal of one's direct environment. Typically, a photographer scans the environment for beauty, meaning, or value. In so doing, he/she may see and notice unique and positive features of his/her daily life that are normally left unseen.

This idea was tested in a study by Kurtz (2015) in which three conditions were created. Participants were asked to either (1) take photographs in a mindful, creative way; (2) take photographs in a neutral, factual way; or (3) perform a count-your-blessings writing exercise. The results showed that participants in the mindful photography condition were, on average, in a significantly better mood and were significantly more appreciative and motivated compared to those taking neutral photographs. No significant differences were observed between the mindful photography condition and the writing activity. These findings support the idea that photography can be used to improve mood and appreciate everyday life.



Goal

This exercise aims to help clients become aware of the positive aspects of their daily lives in a playful way.



Advice

- The study by Kurtz (2015) showed that it is important to not just take pictures but to take pictures in a mindful and personal way. The results revealed that those who were taking photographs while looking for meaning and beauty (“Try to make your pictures creative, beautiful, and meaningful to you” (p.355)) experienced the activity as more pleasant and absorbing, and they reported significantly better mood and higher levels of appreciation and motivation compared to those who were asked to take more neutral photographs (“Try to make your pictures accurate, neutral, and informative” (p.355)). In other words, the way a client engages in photography seems especially important.

- While some clients may like to take photos, others may be less enthusiastic. Try to ensure that this exercise does not feel like a chore to your client. Discuss a preferred minimum or a maximum number of photos to be taken by the client.
- This version of the tool was designed to focus on positive emotions and experiences. However, the instructions can easily be modified. For instance, clients can take pictures of people or objects for which they are grateful or pictures related to their goals or identity.
- Although this version of the exercise was developed for individual use, it can be used successfully with groups. If used in a group, every group member can be asked to present one or two of their favorite photographs to the group, briefly explaining what the photograph means to him/her. Because of the personal nature of this assignment, it can enhance group cohesion and relatedness.



References

- Kurtz, J. L. (2015). Seeing through new eyes: An experimental investigation of the benefits of photography. *Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences*, 11, 354-358.
- Speer, M. E., Bhanji, J. P., & Delgado, M. R. (2014). Savoring the past: Positive memories evoke value representations in the striatum. *Neuron*, 84, 847-856.



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Instructions

1. Invite your client to take photographs of everyday life, focusing mainly on whatever promotes positive feelings:

This week, try to take photographs of your everyday life. More specifically, take pictures of things that are positive. Examples include simple pleasures of life, like a cup of coffee, a beautiful sky, or a nice conversation. Try to make your pictures beautiful, creative, and meaningful to you. Do not rush through this exercise. Try to take everything in and take the best pictures that you can.

2. Negotiate a comfortable number of photographs to be taken daily. This activity should elicit an eye for beauty in everyday life, not demand excessive strain or become a dreaded chore.

3. Ask the client to bring his/her favorite photographs to the next session and discuss what the photograph means to him/her. The following questions can be addressed:

- How was it to do this exercise?
- How did finding suitable photo moments go (e.g., difficult, easy, convenient/inconvenient)?
- What did you feel/experience when taking the photographs?
- Let's take a look at your photos. What do you experience when looking at these photos?
- Is it possible to discover an underlying general theme in your photos that seems to positively contribute to your well-being?
- Did you share the photos with others? If so, how was it? How did others react?
- What can you learn from this experience?