

Howard Zucker Self-Image Photography

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To some the phrase “everyone loves to have their picture taken” is the exact antithesis of their feelings. Photographer Howard Zucker hopes that he will be able to change the fear of being photographed into joy, and cause people to have greater self-confidence in the process.

Zucker works with therapists to improve the self-image of their patients, therefore his work is an extension of the healing process. His business is called—quite simply—Self-Image Photography and his goal is to move clients forward to “increase self-esteem and boost self-confidence.”

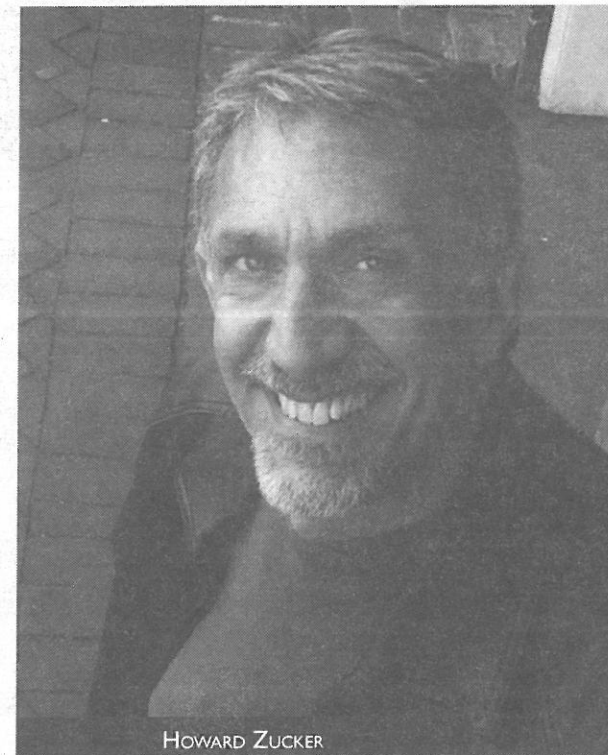
“In conjunction with therapy, the photos become more powerful. As massage relieves certain tensions and stress so do the photos,” says Zucker. “It’s exercising another modality.”

The people that come to Zucker may suffer from physical ailments or fear the camera due to misgivings about themselves. In either case, these are not “glamour shots” intended as a novelty. This is a serious exploration into identity and image.

“People come to me with scars from major accidents, or other physical damage. It’s a very difficult thing for them to do, initially,” Zucker’s clients frequently wait nervously in their cars before entering the studio. “But after the process, it is very much a healing experience for them.”

In addition to people struggling with their appearance because of physical damage Zucker knows gay men often grow up learning a lot of negative things about themselves as children. Bullies, religion and parents often condition people to see their reflections in a negative way.

Men might even feel negatively about themselves after past relationships go sour and end in angry remarks related to physical appearance. Coming out can also be a traumatic experience, as friends, peers, and



loved ones could abandon you. Conversely, if you do not “fit in” with other gays you might feel alone and rejected, hating the “man in the mirror.”

“Self-Image Photography offers an opportunity to not look in the mirror. This allows you to see yourself objectively, to recognize the beauty inside,” adds Zucker, as the mirror’s reflection can carry extra baggage.

Dr. Arlen Leight, PhD, LLC, is one of the therapists who sends patients to Howard to further a better self-image.

“We are offering a group for gay men who wish to take the work of self-discovery and growth to a new level using photography as a fresh approach to personal empowerment. Howard is an amazing photographer with years of experience helping men see themselves with fresh eyes through his lens.”

Leight’s workshop helps participants change self-perception and body image. Many of the people photographed by Zucker change their minds about plastic surgery. He photographed men at the Gay

Men’s Health Summit last year and plans to do so again for their 2010 conference.

For local Larry Whitt, Zucker’s portraits of him saved him from becoming a recluse in his home. Whitt suffers from facial wasting, a symptom of HIV.

“I had been hiding in my apartment, leaving only to go to work or to the store. Once I got on disability I rarely left the sofa,” said Whitt. “Then my partner talked me into letting Howard take some photos.” Even though Whitt had undergone treatments for the facial wasting he was still nervous about entering the studio. “I was not sure the camera would be kind to me at all, much less Howard. He was very easy to talk to and handled me with kid gloves.”

After the photos were taken Whitt’s self-image and self-confidence were restored. He soon after joined the Gold Coast Chapter of American Veterans for Equal Rights (AVER) and – to his surprise – was appointed color guard coordinator. Whitt and his partner manned the AVER booth at South Florida Pride this past March, and

their picture ended up on the front cover of our Pride Issue. Clearly he no longer hides from the camera and is an active member of the community as well.

Clinical Social Worker Ted Williams, LCSW, has sent 8 clients to Zucker’s studio. He reports nothing but positive results from those he recommended.

“Before sending the first client for Howard’s services I experienced the amazing process of Self-Image Photography myself and therefore have first-hand knowledge of what my clients reported. [Howard] is patient and supportive.”

Williams also believes that Howard’s services are an invaluable tool, and should be further explored. He cites the photographic therapy potential as “very beneficial for other mental healthcare professionals and their clients to experience this process in order to understand and appreciate the positive potential of Self-Image Photography.”

Another client of Zucker’s, Barry Reinitz, who is in his 50s, had not had a photo taken since high school.


“I restarted my therapy after relocating to South Florida, and wanted to achieve immediate results so I agreed to the new type of photographic therapy suggested by my therapist. It allowed me to address 2 of my larger issues—low self-image and having my picture taken. Plus it allowed me a new avenue to discuss my issues with my new therapist.”

Reinitz went on to say he was amazed at how at ease he felt, and how comfortable the process of getting his picture taken was with Zucker behind the lens.

“I would highly recommend it to anyone looking for a novel approach to their therapy.”

Zucker hopes—as do Williams and Leight—that this article will draw more therapists and clients to seek out his services.

“Ideally what I would like to see are more therapists giving real, psychological input about the effects the photos have on people. The 5 guys in the workshop had amazing transformations about how they view themselves in the world. If it can do just that it’s a wonderful thing.”

Howard’s website also highlights 3 videos via youtube.com with testimonials by Gary, Marc and Al, which further emphasizes the importance of Zucker’s work. 

For more information on Self-Image Photography please visit momentumz.com