

# Analysis of the relationship between the feelings towards fellow residents and the number of photos taken

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More activities using digital cameras have been introduced to nursing homes. The author has conducted such activities with elderly people for five years. Among them are Ms. A and Mr. B who take a fewer number of photos of fellow residents and make somewhat unfriendly comments on the photos they took. However, in the wake of the diseases they experienced and the losses of their family members, changes in their feelings towards fellow residents were observed. This paper discusses the psychological changes they underwent by sorting out and analyze the photos they took over the past two years.

## 1. Introduction

According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, in 2011, average Japanese men live to be 79.44 years old and average Japanese women live to be 85.90 years old. While the number of healthy housebound seniors is increasing, those who have moved into nursing homes are forced to live in a totally different environment than before. Once in a nursing home, they tend to weaken in physical and economic strength and experience more separation from friends and family members by death or other reasons. For such seniors living separately from their families, one of the motivations in life is to socialize with friends and enjoy learning things based on their interests.

I have been working with seniors for 15 years and have realized that the key to understand them is to keep myself neutral and fair. As digital cameras have been gaining more and more popularity, I have been using them for the photo-taking activity with seniors since July X year. This is an easily enjoyable activity thanks to the user-friendliness and economic efficiency of this new digital tool. In this activity, I noticed that Ms. A and Mr. B were not getting along with other home members and that they were often ridiculed or got into an argument. Both of them had once worked as a public servant, were financially secure and had a family who visited them regularly. They were both born in 1928 and in their early eighties with healthy cognitive function.

The attitude commonly observed in Ms. A and Mr. B is that they both saw themselves as different from and superior to others. They hardly listened to others but said everything they wanted to say about them. Over time, however, I also observed that their attitude towards fellow residents changed after they experienced being sick and losing close family members. This paper aims to show an objective understanding of changes in the psychology of Ms. A and Mr. B by analyzing the contents of photos that Ms. A and Mr. B took and the photos that they chose to print out.

## 2. Method

### 2.1

First, photos that Ms. A and Mr. B took were examined to see if they showed any kind of tendency. Out of the four-year period in which the photo-taking activity occurred, I chose the two years from X+1 year to X+3 year during which Ms. A showed a noticeable change in attitude towards her friends. In the same period of time, Mr. B was diagnosed with cancer, admitted in and

discharged from a hospital. Currently, he is in a stable condition. I recorded the content and number of photos they asked me to print out and calculated their percentage to the total number of photos that they had taken. Mr. B started asking for all of his photos to be printed out at some point, so I excluded the photos that he took after that point from this study.

### 2.2

Second, the number of photos that each of the two took was compared with that of other residents. The comparison was made for photos taken during the three months around the middle of the four-year photo-taking activity, during which Ms. A and Mr. B were both healthy and frequently joined the activity. Among the fellow residents, four of them (two men and women with an average age of 76.8) were selected for the comparison, for they were voluntary photographers and participated in the activity on the same days that Ms. A and Mr. B did.

### 2.3

Ms. A made albums of her photos with some comments on them. Her psychological changes for the study period of two years were examined based on those photos and comments.

Mr. B started asking for all his photos to be printed out and he posted them on the walls of his room. Because he stopped adding comments on them, only the contents of his photos were subject to this study.

## 3. Results

### 3.1

Figure 1 compares the number of photos that Ms. A and Mr. B took by subject. Mr. B took many photos of nursing home staff and event guests while many of Ms. A's photos are about fellow residents and distant views.

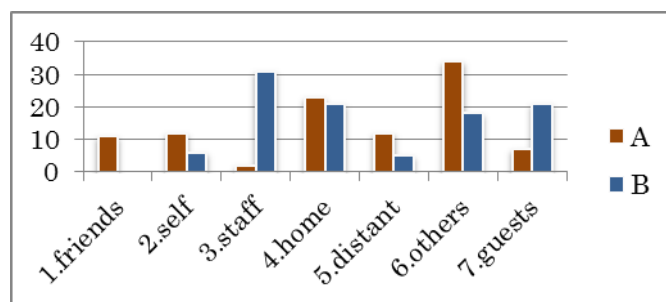


Figure 1 Comparison of the number of photos taken by Ms. A and Mr. B by subject

3.2

The number of photos that Ms. A and Mr. B each took for the selected three months was not extremely less than the other four residents.

Table 1  
Percentage of photos of friends taken by each resident to the total number of his/her photos.

Participants	A	B	C	D	E	F
%	6	2	16	2	0	8

Table 2 compares the contents of the photos taken by Ms. A, Mr. B and the other four residents. Ms. C took more photos of friends and home staff than the other residents. However, her preference does not suggest her interest in these subjects; rather, her main intention of doing this was to print them out and give them away as her own unique communication tool.(Photos examined were those saved in SD cards.)

Table 2  
Comparison of photos taken by six residents by subject (1:friends,2:self,3:staff,4:home,5:distant,6:others,7:guests)

P.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	total
A	1	0	0	15	2	0	0	18
B	6	26	16	84	5	105	67	309
C	24	4	14	45	3	61	0	151
D	2	4	0	0	2	0	90	98
E	0	0	0	65	0	0	100	165
F	8	0	0	3	5	90	0	106

3.3

1) Ms. A took significantly less photos every year than other residents participating in the activity (Nagata, 2012), and made comments expressing her gratitude evidently less frequently. She was interested in how she looked and made an album of photos of herself taken by the staff on her birthday.



a: X-1 year



b: X+2 year

Figure 2 Ms. A's birthday photos

Ms. A's psychological changes are clearly noticeable in the changes in her comments on photos of her friends, such as Photo c, which was taken from a slight distance on December 16, X year, and Photo d, which was taken on January 22 X+3 year. She commented on Photo c in a traditional poem style of Japan, which goes, "All day; Hanging out with friends before TV; Feeling happy?; My aging friends." Her comment on Photo d was: "Putting everyone's strength together, 300 towels are folded up every day. I feel lonely passing a day idly while doing nothing." As Photo d shows, she took this photo of her friends folding towels from a closer distance.



c : X year



d : X+3 year

Figure 3 photos of her friends

2) At first, for quite a while, more than half of the photos taken by Mr. B were of female staff working at the nursing home. Out of 1,449 photos, he only took 27 photos of friends (0.02%), which is extremely few. (Two other residents who were participating in the photo-taking activity on other days were very clear about their favorite photo subjects and showed no interest in taking photos of friends. Compared with them, there may be no significant difference in the number of friend photos between Mr. B and those two.)

However, the number of female-staff photos taken by Mr. B decreased over the time from 114 in the first period, to 53 in the second period, and to 27 in the third period while that of friend photos increased slightly. In the last meeting of the activity, he took seven photos of his friends and gave one to a male friend. He had never done that until then, which suggested changes in his psychology, as is also indicated in changes in the number of photos of female staff and friends.

4. Discussion

Ms. A commented that they seemed to be living an empty life while looking at the photo of her friends that she took from a distance in December X year (Nagata et al., 2012). After that, she lost three family members in a short period of time; her husband, brother and her daughter's father in law. This experience made her think that her three brothers were always protective of her and because of them her life was a happy one. With this realization, she told me that she was finally able to recover from a mood disorder. In January X+3 year, she took photos of her friends working at a closer distance and made a comment saying, "putting everyone's strength together." In addition, lining up several birthday photos of herself, she said to me, "I look calmer and more cheerful, don't I?"

When Mr. B first joined the photo-taking activity, I thought that he often looked intimidating. For a while, he was mainly taking photos of young female staff, and because of that, the busy staff were not always nice to him. When the number of such photos decreased to about half, he was diagnosed with cancer and repeatedly hospitalized for various tests. At present, he is in a stable condition and enjoying taking photos again. Whenever there is an event at the nursing home, he takes photos to remember it and seems to be having a good time with staff and other residents. He posts all photos on the walls of his room and admires them. He sometimes asks me to print out as many as 70 photos a day, with an average number of 40.

Ms. A and Mr. B both used to have trouble building a good relationship with fellow residents because they were not able to behave with consideration of the feelings of others as well as her/himself. However, through the long-term participation in this photo-taking activity, they gradually adjusted the gap in their cognitive function and became able to have stable control over their feelings and thinking.

In this respect, photos are effective data for me to make such judgment. Photos are considered as objective data reflecting the reality and offer opportunities for people to learn about inaccurate recognition and certain thought patterns in a more objective way. Knowing the reality can lead people as well as those who help them to more appropriate ways of handling the situation.

The case of Ms. A is a typical example. Comparing several photos of herself and her appearance, they gave Ms. A and me clues to understanding her that are open and reliable. Those photos showed the changes in her countenance of which she was not aware in a way that "Things show very clearly in photos" in her own words

## 5. Conclusion

Photos are a useful communication tool and also a tool for self-expression that allow people to photograph whatever they are interested in. Research says that Alzheimer's disease does not cause damage to the entire brain of the patient; it hardly affects the visual, motor and sensory cortexes. Photo-taking is considered capable of activating neurons but has not been used for that purpose up to today. However, it can be an effective rehabilitation tool if used in creative ways. (Sakai et al., 2011)

Ms. A and Mr. B experienced changes in their thought patterns that led to improvement in the relationships with other residents from X year to X+3 year. Ms. A had an operation and also went through a series of family members' deaths. Mr. B found that he had cancer. Both of them had to face the geriatric issues of preparation for and acceptance of coming death more frequently. As a result, they gradually became able to build a positive, close relationship with people in their age group, which will help them to live healthier, more adaptable lives. Photo-taking activity helped them to adjust the gap in their cognitive function.

With Japan shifting to a super-aged society, people may be forced to live alone for an increasingly longer period of time, and the ability to develop friendly relationships with others will become more important than ever before.

Since the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, many people have chosen to start a new life in a new place. In the coming era, a wide range of support needs to be provided for people who no longer have territorial or blood relations to depend on. It will be important even for seniors to develop interpersonal skills to use not only with those who are close to them but also with various support networks.

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