

About Me

My name is Jiwoo Han, and I am a rising fourth-year student at Amherst College. I have spent the last two years researching at a cognitive psychology lab on campus, where I learned more about how individuals' memories work. I also love photography, which I was able to combine with psychology to learn and write about the psychological benefits of photography. This past summer, I worked at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital to investigate how young cancer survivors use photography and sharing images online to help them make meaning from and process their illness experiences. I listened in on a cancer survivor's experiences with how taking photographs allowed him to stay connected with his community during treatment. It was during this interview that I felt truly encouraged and empowered to use photography to help other populations.

After learning that the community of Amherst is currently housing more than 300 individuals who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's or related dementias, and that it has been working on establishing the Age & Dementia Friendly Community Project, I became very interested in joining in on the effort to improve their outcomes and experiences. More specifically, I strongly believe that **integrating photography into this Project will allow for cognitive and social benefits among individuals with dementia and their caregivers.**

Project Proposal

This project aims to integrate photography into the development of Memory Café to facilitate conversation and meaning-making among those with dementia in the town of Amherst. In the future, the collection of photographs produced can also be exhibited at the Town Hall's exhibits or the Town of Amherst website, giving the whole community of Amherst an opportunity to learn about the experiences of people living with dementia and their caregivers.

Executive Summary

Disposable or other point-and-shoot cameras, along with easy read instructions on how to use the camera, can be given out to people with dementia and their caregivers who visit the Memory

Café, and who are interested. Upon bringing back their camera on their next visit, the photographs they produced can be used to allow for open discussion with other community members with dementia and their caregivers. Volunteers can be recruited to facilitate this conversation. Moreover, the photographs can later be displayed on the photo gallery on the Town of Amherst website, or exhibited at the Amherst Public Art Commission's bi-monthly exhibits at the Town Hall.

Objectives

- Empower people with dementia with the **creative freedom** by providing them with the opportunity to take photographs, ultimately increasing their self-confidence
- Encourage people with dementia to **explore more of the town of Amherst** with the goal of taking photographs of their environment
- **Facilitate conversations among people with dementia and caregivers** in the Memory Café with the photographs serving as topics of discussion
- Allow for **self-reflection and meaning-making** through taking and sharing photographs
- Give the **community of Amherst to learn more about the experiences of people living with dementia and their caregivers** through viewing the photographs

Project background

- Massachusetts Association of Councils on Aging (MCOA)'s [Massachusetts Memory Café Toolkit](#) comments that a well-designed cafe contains “Conversation prompts on the tables to help guests and volunteers mingle” such as photographs.
- A paper published in 2016 ([“Photographic Engagement With People With Dementia”](#)) used photography and storytelling methods to support the voices of people with dementia to be heard.
 - Provided students with early-stage dementia attending an adult school with cameras to take photos of their school and home life
 - Photographs were used as prompts and discussion points during four weekly sessions

- Photographs facilitated memories of current and past activities providing people with dementia greater description and depth of their experiences
- Photographs encouraged interest in others' stories and **generated conversations** between the participants prompting shared experiences and complimentary stories
- Process of taking and discussing photographs was **enjoyable, empowering, and increased self-confidence**
- Found that photography can be used to capture the meaning making and mental construction of events and experiences of people with dementia
- A paper published in 2020 ([“Everyday experiences of post-diagnosis life with dementia: A co-produced photography study”](#)) was a photography project co-produced between two academics from the University of Bristol and three researchers with dementia. The project promoted participants of a memory cafe to take photographs and discuss their photographs with the rest of the group.
 - Photography was a **stimulus for social engagement**
 - Those with dementia reflected on what they had gained through the photography project:
 - The opportunity to branch out, to get on with their lives
 - Helped them **understand more about each other** that they were different but still the same in some ways
 - **Gave a reason to go out and do something**
 - These photographs **brought out their emotions**
 - Gave them the opportunity to speak about things
- [The Photobook Project](#) is a project that started in England and aims to give people living with dementia “the power to document, share and celebrate their own experience and perspectives.” It is backed by evidence of the **neurological, social and emotional benefits** that art can provide for people with dementia (for instance, art is thought to promote neuroplasticity, and slow down neurodegeneration).
 - The Project allows people with dementia and their wider communities to document their experiences through the use of a single-use camera. The participants are given the freedom to select the themes to document.

- Participants are gifted one of many photobooks composed of the sent in photographs and artwork.

Given the evidence-based findings that photography benefits individuals with dementia, their caregivers, and the community as a whole, I hope that this preliminary proposal can be considered while establishing the Memory Café and other recreational activities for the Age & Dementia Friendly Community Project. I am very interested in continuing to help integrate this, and am more than willing to come up with a more detailed plan (with the budget and specific timeline). Thank you for your taking the time to read this.