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"through My Eyes", A New Narrative Model Using Memories As Self And Intergenerational Discovery

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Abstract

What keeps us happy and healthy as we go through life? According to psychiatrist Robert Waldinger, the director of a 75-year-old study on adult development, a good life isn't about wealth or fame. Instead, effective social interactions keep us, especially older adults, happier and healthier.

Narrative projects like the oral history and collective memory are widely employed to invite older adults to share their memories about historical significant events. Although there were modest benefits in reducing participants' social isolation (Bornat 16), the approaches of these projects are limited to narrative analysis, rather than narrative itself. The tension between older adults' knowledge of historical events and their untold life stories, remained largely unexplored.

Based on the systematic literature review and three research probes, this study explores the difference between task-oriented talking and meaningful communication; and reveals older adults' real needs in the process of aging: sharing life stories with loved ones. In considering the appropriate role for narrative in reshaping older adults' self-image and rebuilding their family relationship, the purpose of this paper is to develop a new narrative model, which includes both verbal and visual narrative, to provide a better interactive experience to older participants.

As the final design, the project "through my eyes", which includes three chapters as recollection, revelation, and reflection, will be presented, and elaborated by an illustrative case study.

"THROUGH MY EYES", A NEW NARRATIVE MODEL USING MEMORIES AS

SELF AND INTERGENERATIONAL DISCOVERY

by

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"In their remembering are their truths."

- Studs Terkel, Hard Times

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Collaborative Process
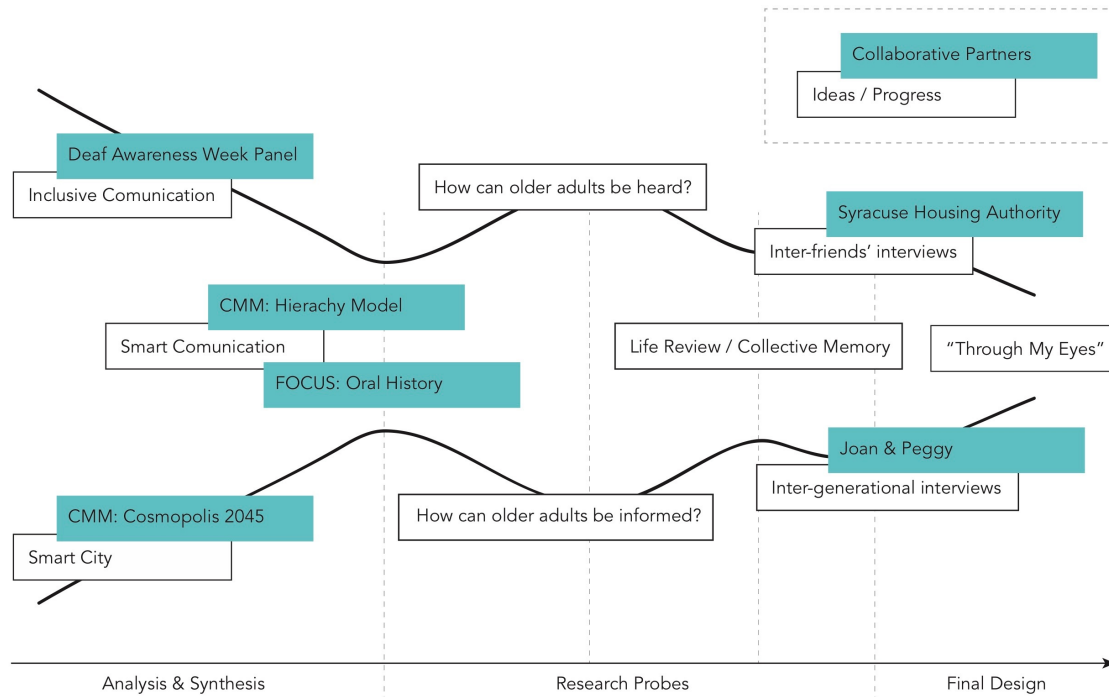
Fig. 1. Chronological collaborative process.

On September 2015, Professor Rebecca Garden hosted a Deaf Awareness Week Panel: Communication and Healthcare, Preventing Disparities. Within the intense discussion between representatives of monitory groups and healthcare providers, several problems were unfolded through these following speeches:

> "Minority are too easily simplified. The outside world usually uses labels like useless or vulnerable to define us." (Chhetri)

> "Communication is the biggest problem in our daily lives. It's hard to express yourself when almost no-one takes you seriously." (Schwartz)

Although this panel was primarily focused on the Deaf community, it cannot be denied that older adults, as well another minority group that are often labeled as fragile and unproductive, find themselves in the similar dilemma (Barnett 18).

Responses to this topic, a doctor that works in St. Joseph gave a convincing answer, "The reason why we did not offer the help you (deaf patients) need is not because we discriminate you, but because we don't know you, we don't know your culture, we don't know your needs. And now, we are trying to do better. In medical school, we are having people from different cultural backgrounds come to our class and talk about their experiences in healthcare. The more we heard, the better we understand… Yes, familiarity breeds comfort." (Chou)

In the last two years inquiring the connection between communication and better aging, this was an important moment that pushed this study to a deeper level: if narrative itself can be an effective tool to connect older adults and outside world, how can their voices be heard?

In the same semester, I was also fascinated by the concept of Smart City that "uses digital technology and information and communication technologies (ICT) to better quality and performance this engage more effectively and actively with its citizen." (Kumar)

And then, another project Cosmopolis 2045 helped me connect the dots between the ideas of "Inclusive Communication" and "Smart City". Cosmopolis 2045 is a multi-year project, which will create a virtual social community in 2045 in which "residents of the community have adopted a communication-centric view of how their own and other

social worlds function" (Sostrin). From this perspective, smart city, or ICT, can be used as an effective tool to create and maintain the communication between citizens and service providers. That led me to the idea of "Smart Communication", which could be a service system analyzing the high-volume data from the older adults, extracting the different layers from their daily communication, and finally finding or creating the best fit service for them.

During the stage of research, by collaborating with "F.O.C.U.S.", "CMM", "Syracuse Housing Authority" and two senior residents, I developed three research probes to explore older adults' real needs from the perspective of communication. More details about these stakeholders will be elaborated in the chapter of "Research Probes".

1.2   Statement of the problem

Joan[1] is an 89-year old widow. She described aging-in-place as driving alone on a road trip: in both circumstances, she has all the autonomy to do what she wants, when she wants and for how long she wants to do it. The journey itself creates a mental cocoon where she can relax from grasping to a habit of incessant thinking and give rise to a spontaneous sense of freedom. However, while affording Joan the freedom, driving solo, as well as living alone within the community, also brings her loneliness if there are certain recollections she wants to share with certain people. "I feel upset", she said,

> "when a little smiley girl coming cross the street reminds her of her youngest daughter; when a painting of a yacht hanging on the wall in Olive Garden Restaurant evokes her memory of the first time sailing on the sea; when the box near the front door refreshes her remembrance of

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[1] Name changed to protect participant's privacy

the old milk box that was used years ago when milk was delivered…"

(Draper)

Asked how she is adjusting to living alone, Joan responded: "The saddest thing is there was nothing I can do about it." We will return to Joan towards the following sections of this paper.

The need of older adults to share life stories is also exemplified by other studies.

Last spring, we (as part of our design studio class) conducted a series of face-to-face interviews with older adults in Syracuse and tried to understand their lifestyle preferences. Among all the inputs, social isolation had become the major concern in their daily lives. Most of them expressed their depression frankly: "I live alone, you know, I don't have much chance talking to others." Although social activity programs like reading club and bingo are available to senior residents, they still want to have more meaningful interactions with their families.

With the lack of communication also comes misunderstanding across generations. For example, Mary[2] claimed her sadness stems from the fact that her grandchildren were not willing to visit her more often because they did not understand her culture (Kline, Koenig).

1.3   Focus of the study

Targeted audiences

With the process of aging, the loss of friends and spouse, the decreased of mobility dramatically affects older adults' wellness (Stephen 135-152). And compared to those who are living in assisted facilities and have considerable social activities with other

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[2] Name changed to protect participant's privacy

residents, elders who live alone within the community have relatively less social interaction with the outside world (Silverstein). Furthermore, almost all the first-hand I gathered from face-to-face interviews with senior citizens have told us a truth that they want meaningful communication with loved ones. Hence, this study will focus on those older adults who live alone in their own homes and long to have a deep-level conversation with their children.

Focus of the research fields

From the perspective of communication, this article will probe into the relationship between older adults who live alone and the outside world, especially their families. And then explore how to improve the social connection between them within a narrative project.

Themes that emerged from the literature review included 1) exploring elders' needs of sharing life stories; 2) using narrative as a tool to correct ageism, stereotype and discrimination; and 3) an overview of existing projects and narrative theories.

Focus of the design field

Turning reflection and systematic analysis to a practical project, four aspects will be considered and designed in this paper: 1) who can be the interviewer, 2) what are the right questions to ask, 3) how to continue interaction after one interview, 4) how can the public have access to these life stories?

1.4   Significance of the study

> "The older adult population (those over age 65) will experience a surge in growth during the period from 2000 to 2030, doubling from 35 million to 74 million. Within this population, more than 10 million Americans over

age 65 live alone in community rather than in independent retirement communities, assisted living, nursing facilities, or in the same household with younger family members. (Ortman, Velkoff, and Hogan 11). The Administration on Aging reported that about 29% of all non-institutionalized older persons in 2010 live alone, as the percentage of older adults increases over the next few decades, particularly those that live alone, social isolation and loneliness are likely to increase." (Coyle and Dugan 1347)

These facts and data all proved the targeted audiences of this paper is the necessary community in aging studies.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Exploring elders' needs of sharing life stories

Narrative can help older adults enhance their self-cognition. To support this statement, Roberts (264) said:

> "narrative, without restrictive rules, can be used to refer to a version of life at a particular moment as expressing the given stories as consistent and sequencing experience as lived, and even, if only momentarily either the self as a consistent surface expression or an inner constant entity".

Hence, the action of telling life stories becomes an opportunity to inspect life experience and find self-definition. Also supporting this point of view, Bruner and Weisser (136) claimed that, "it is only by textualization that one can 'know' one's life". This "act of autobiography", they say, "turns life into text, however implicit or explicit the text may be". That is, sharing life stories creates the sense of being. It is worth

emphasizing that the "subjectivity", which means the individuals' perspectives in stories, is crucial to keep narrative alive and give interviewees personal growth. This will be elaborated in later section.

Simultaneously, when people "recast, revise, and retell their own life stories, the past is seen as giving birth to the present and the future, so that beginning, middle, and ending make sense in tweets of each other" (McAdams 131-148). In other words, the act of autobiography can raise our awareness of the novelty of our lives (Randall and Kenyon 334).

As the embodiment of these rationales, Turner et al. (205) also proposed the social identity approach (SIA) combines both the social identity theory and self-categorization theory. Now, SIA has become a well-established theory which can provide a variety of benefits for older adults, including enhancing social and psychological functioning, satisfying the needs of support, influence, meaning and belongingness. Although SIA has been introduced to assisted facilities practice (Haslam et al. 157), there is no evidence showing that it has been used in programs targeted at senior residents who live alone in a community.

Considering elders who live alone in their own homes also have the natural desire to share their life experience; and loneliness and depression, the main problems haunt those older adults, can be interpreted as conditions that result from the lack of these social identity resources (Cruwys et al. 139), a revolutionary design is needed to provide a platform for older adults to speak up, to share, to be heard.

2.2   Using narrative as a tool to correct ageism, stereotype and discrimination

In the class Process of Aging, professor Silverstein interpreted these three terms as below: ageism is defined as any prejudice or discrimination against or in favor of an age group; stereotypes refer to ideas and beliefs attributed to a group of people and may or may not have basis in reality; discrimination occurs when members of that group are subjected to differential treatment. At the same time, according to social identity theory that predicts certain behaviors based not on a sense of self as an individual but as a member of a social group (Theurer et al. 205-206), the stereotype toward older adults derives from the lack of public understanding of the social group.

Taking portrayals of age groups in mass media as the example, it was found that older adults are underrepresented. People who hold ageist attitudes tend to overestimate similarities among a widely diverse group of people and adopt the dominant group's negative image and to behave in ways that conform to that negative image. That is, ageism often categorizes older people as senile, rigid in thought and manner, old fashioned in morality and skills. What's more, in healthcare, elders may be misdiagnosed or denied medical treatment because they are seen as "old and, therefore, incurable; in the workplace, elders are also frequently denied employment or promotion opportunities because they are "old" and less productive. Discrimination is also seen on the social policy level where older adults are blamed for having medical problems and consuming public resources (Harrington et al. 13-24). This is the distance that stretches between generations; makes elders feel exclusion; and also need to be faced seriously.

But how? According to Social Identity Approach (Theurer et al. 205), in order to help the general public have a better understanding of what aging really is, empathy must be created. Much like character identification often invites empathy, even when the

fictional character and reader differ from one another in all sorts of practical and obvious ways, narrative of feeling states can evoke empathy (Keen 214). Therefore, listening to older adults' life stories, engaging in conversation with them, even struggling with them over their actions can encourage outsiders to have a more comprehensive knowledge of the aging population.

2.3   Existing projects and narrative theories

Several projects have been done about knowing people through their stories. This section will focus on the Oral History Project and the Collective Memory Project, review their accomplishment. I explore their theory basis, and compare the differences between them.

Oral History Projects

Oral history is "the systematic collection of living people's testimony about their own experiences." (Moyer) What is important to stress is that oral history projects listen to everyday people, not just the rich and famous and historically important. Indeed, if those memories are not collected and preserved, then one day they will disappear forever.

Not only interviewers, but also historians can learn a great deal from oral history, and it also has brought senior interviewees enjoyment. Paul Thompson, as the lead researcher for the project Voice of Past, points out, "The importance of the interview in the life of an older person and the responsibility of the historian to understand the empathize with strong emotions which an interview may evoke." (Thompson 159) To be specific, Thompson exemplifies one retired worker "who thanked him for asking her questions about heydays as a young factory worker". There is no denying that oral

history, as a shared experience between interviewers and interviewees, can be "enjoyable and exciting on both sides of the microphone." (Bornat 16-24)

However, what oral history really cares about is not the interviewees themselves but the historical events. The oral history step-by-step guide (Moyer) emphasizes that "oral history is not folklore, gossip, hearsay, or rumor. Oral historians attempt to verify their findings, analyze them, and place them in an accurate historical context. Oral historians are also concerned with storage of their findings for use by later scholars. In oral history projects, an interviewee recalls an event for an interviewer who records the recollections and creates a historical record." Specifically, the questions asked in the interviews are more likely to be "What do you remember about the Sit-in Movement of the 1960s?" or "What happened the day after 9-11?" While images of these big events, some forgotten and some only partially remembered, become more and more clear, oral history interviews give us opportunities to learn interviewees' memories and traditions that grow out of firsthand knowledge; stories and experience that shaped in community life. Hence, to reinforce oral history's intent that ordinary people became their own historians and biographers, my thesis will focus on older adults' personal life stories, including their happiness, sadness, and the proudest moments in their lives (Bornat 16-24).

Collective Memory Projects

Collective memory is another umbrella name for those projects are designed to enhance both the historical and archival record. It even has a well-established theory system to support its rationality. However, much like oral history, collective memory's

foothold is not all-inclusive that only "cultural memory", big events in absolute past, relates to collective self-image (Assmann 125-126).

It is undeniable that the theory of collective memory has far-reaching impact. In 1920s, Warburg and Halbwachs, started to interpret collective knowledge from the perspective of a cultural framework instead of a biological framework. Their study shows that "the specific character that a person derives from belonging to a distinct society and culture is not seen to maintain itself for generations as a result of phylogenetic evolution, but rather as a result of socialization." Furthermore, they divide "collective memory" into "communicative memory", which is characterized by a high degree of non-specialization, reciprocity of roles, thematic instability, and disorganization"; and "cultural memory", which is "exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic and stable forms" (Assmann 125-133).

Based on this theory, an interview aimed at finding older adults' cultural identity, should only be concerned with the cultural memory. For example, memories of 9/11, because its horizon does not change with the passing of time, and directs behavior and experience in the interactive framework of a society. Yet, as the name implies, everyday communication happens every day, so how can an interviewee tell a whole story without it? Additionally, expression equality will be broken if stories tellers are only allowed to share their memories about specific topics, not to mention that these topics are not about themselves. Hence, communicative memory is a big part of older adults' self-image, and it is not realistic to set a clear boundary between it and cultural memory. Professor Arthur Jensen (2016) strongly agrees with this thinking, especially that the boundary between communicative and cultural memory seems not only blurred, but that it's probably false.

He questions how people would make a distinction between the two, since "culture" is a communicative accomplishment? The only distinction would appeal to be one of emphasis, not of kind.

Another argument against oral history and collective memory where Dr. Jensen and I both agree is: subjectivity, instead of the objectivity is the highlight in collecting stories. This is the most fascinating part of an interview of one's life. Self-image can only be discovered when not getting caught up in the differences between subjectivity and objectivity. Just focus on any aspect of people's story that they believe to be important.

Life Review Interviews

Life review is the tendency of older people towards self-reflection (Butler 35). Butler explained:

> "The normal life review process is brought about by the realization of one's approaching dissolution and death. It is characterized by the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences, the resurgence of unresolved conflicts that can be looked at again and reintegrated, reflection on the significance and meaning to one's life, and the preparation for death which can help mitigate fear and anxiety."

Different from collective memory and oral history projects, life review interviews are mainly about older adults' memories of themselves and how they organize these memories. It also engages the younger generation into the interviews. For example, college or high school students can be a part of this practice as interviewers instructed by university professors or high school teachers; and family members can be the recorders (Myerhoff and Tufte, 541-543).

By reviewing three different life review interview manuals from Deborah Merrill (2-3), Kimberly Sharp, and Legacy Project, three main topics in their question lists emerged: life events, identity, and life lessons. Here are some selected sample questions, which are included in manual.

1) Life events:

"Where were you born?"

"Tell me about your career. What were you doing in your 30's, 40's, and 50's?"

"When did you get married? How old were you? Where did you get married? What was your wedding like?"

2) Identity:

"What's your favorite book and why? What's your favorite movie and why?"

"What's the most memorable phone call you've ever received?"

"What do you feel have been the important successes in your life?"

3) Life lessons:

"How do you feel now about growing old? What's the hardest thing about growing older? The best thing?"

"What have you liked best about your life so far? What's your happiest or proudest moment?"

"How do you see yourself?"

2.4   Synthesis

First of all, it has been established that most of older adults want to age in place, even though they may face loneliness. In this case, narrative gerontology is an ever-

growing field that can be a powerful approach for older adults to make meaningful social interaction and raise self-recognition.

On the other hand, to defeat ageism, it is necessary for the general public to know the words "old" and "aging" and the impact they have on others. One of the most effective ways to accomplish this by using older adults' life stories to create empathy.

Looking back to the existing projects that I've reviewed, although oral history and collective memory projects have already made a great achievements. By collecting stories, they fail to probe into older adults' everyday communication, which is also an important factor in shaping one's life.

Life review interviews have done a better job in personal narratives and started inviting the younger generation to join the interviews. However, what can be improved is that 1) the question list can be shorter and not that exhaustive; 2) the role of family members in each interview can be more specified. Based on these three existing projects, and combining with communicative theories in Coordinated Management of Meaning, a new narrative model will be developed and elaborated in next chapter.

All in all, by synthesizing various theories and situations to realize these purposes, this project is designed to invite older adults to share their voices and then open the general public's curiosity about their lives.

3   METHODOLOGY

3.1   The Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM)

CMM is a communication theory which focuses on the patterns of communication. It looks "at" the conversation instead of look "through" it. (Jensen)

"It attempts to describe them (communication), explain how they are co-constructed, and intervene to create "better" patterns of communication. Most specifically, it is about the process (and thus only secondarily about the "products") by which we make the events and objects of our social worlds - selves, relationships, organizations, cultures, episodes, etc." (B. Pearce 10)

In this paper, CMM is used as a tool to firstly analyze the research data; and secondly help in design process.

Using Hierarchies of Meaning to Research

Hierarchies of meaning is one key theory of CMM. The term "hierarchy" refers to multiple layers of context, in which each layer is included within others as a box within boxes. We rarely if ever respond to the events and objects of the social world as such. Human beings treat messages as if they were wrapped in layers of meaning. The hierarchy model (see fig. 2) is a tool to help identify the interpretive wrappings with which communicators surround the messages that they exchange (B. Pearce 35).

Culture

Self

Relationship

Episode

Message
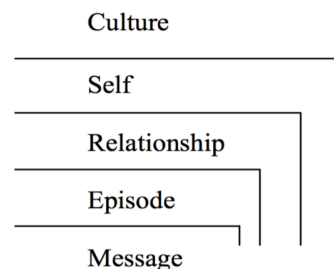
Fig. 2. CMM's hierarchy model. Pearce, Barnett. "Using CMM." Pearce Associates. January 7, 2004. Web. 1 May 2016.

In this paper, this model is applied to unfold the data gathered from the first probe layer by layer.

Using CMM to design interview experience

Appreciative Inquiry. One mistake most existing programs have made is that treating older adults in medical model which negatively impacts their social identity (Ferrand et al. 104-111) So applying appreciative inquiry, instead of superficial surveys, would be particularly important to reject "the pervasive influence of this deeply entrenched biomedical model" (Theurer et al. 202).

Appreciative inquiry is an interview principal which primarily focuses on "what is the story?" rather than "what is the problem?" By transpositional reasoning, it also provides a methodology to transfer abstract concepts to concrete questions. For example, it is hard to respond to the question "what are your values?" But it is easier to answer "Think back your life and think of a person for whom you had a great deal of respect. What made it possible for you to maintain respect for that person?" (Hammond 23-58)

Hence, in the following design process, appreciative inquiry is used as a mindset to design interview questions.

Keep mystery as the highest context. CMM is not only a theory that boxed in those models. It is also a spiritual practice. "Those things that we hold most dear, that we want to protect and preserve, will not be the highest level of context. As a spiritual practice, our deepest fears, our highest hopes, and everything in between is in the context of mystery, of ineffability, of surprise, or grace…. Making this shift may often require the move from acting out of a contextual force, into an implicative force." (K. Pearce 17-22)

To conduct an effective interview between parent and child, "in a spirit of openness" has become to a special tip to remind them that "there will be always some stories you've never heard".

3.2   A new interview format: peer interview

Looking through the studies have already done about oral history and collective

memory projects, almost all aspects are covered: timing, frequency, questions, and et al.

However, one element, which can affect the narrative directly, was overlooked: the

interviewer.

By whom is the conversation cultivated? Different from all the projects that have

been done before, this design will be the first one that uses peer interview as the

interview format to engage older adults.

Because it can provide a sense of shared identity and mutual reliance, peer support

had been proved that it is a productive way to enhance participants' mental wellness

(Theurer et al. 204)

Hence, peer interview is a scheme that invites two participants who share or shared

the common life experiences to interact with each other. "Peer" is a broad concept here,

which can be a pair of friends or the parent and child.

3.3   Recruitment and Procedures

The first two participants are a mother (whom we shall call Joan) and a daughter

(whom we shall call Peggy[3]). Peggy is a friend of mine. She found this thesis topic

interesting, so invited her mother to be volunteers together. Joan and Peggy were

informed of the purpose of the interview and gave verbal consent.

Other potential participants were recruited by Nick Napolitano, the Property

Manager of two elderly high-rises at Syracuse Housing Authority, Vinette Towers and

Fahey Court.

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[3] Name changed to protect participant's privacy

3.4   Research Probes

The first research probe is designed to find out what is the reason caused the disconnection between older adults and the outside world. And then, based on the first-hand information and literature review, two other probes are conducted to test what is the best approach to build the special experience for older adults.

Probe One: In the process of communication, which part caused the problem?

Communication is a dual carriageway, a good communication includes "be heard" and "be informed". So in this probe, I subdivided the thesis question into two parts: "How can older adults' voices be heard better" and "How can older adults be better informed?"

In order to gather the related information, I created a template (see fig. 3) as below to lead interviewees to point out their memorable and disappointed places in Syracuse, and tell their stories through twitter. As the results, a city heat map was generated that displays where are the most popular and unattractive places in Syracuse; a continuous flow of information was produced in twitter that shows what stories happened in each spot.
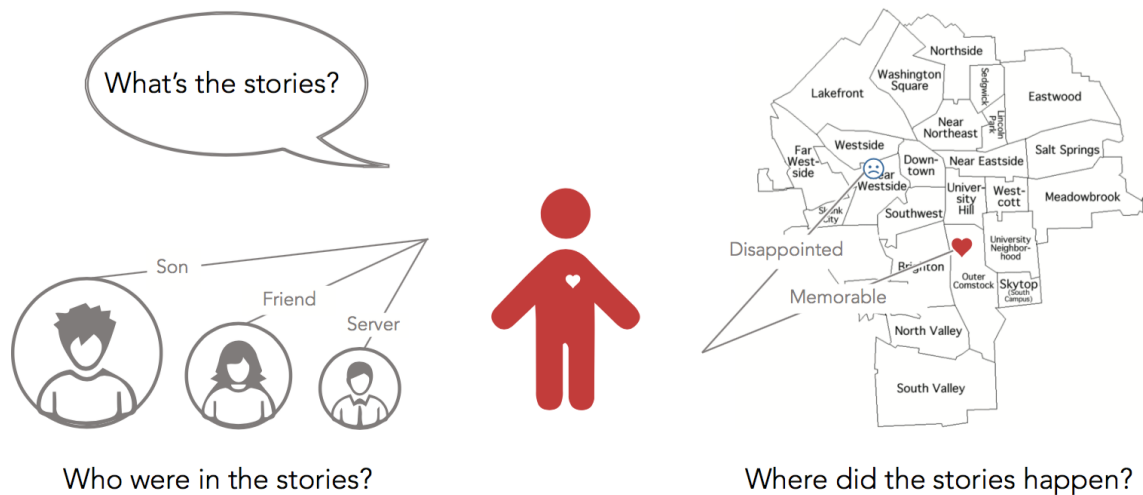
Fig. 3. The probe template that help participants to tell their stories from the aspects of "who", "what", "when", and "where".

As the result, this research probe successfully narrowed down the target market. Not all the older adults, but the oldest older adults over age 85. And especially these elders who live alone. One fact that was learned from this activity is that Baby Boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964 are relatively active. Even after retirement, boomers still have significant social influence. On the other hand, due to loss of spouse and friends, it is the oldest of older adults who are living alone that desire to share their stories and to gain more attention.

Since the aging population is increasing, their needs for a range of services increases each year at an ever greater rate. Therefore I assumed that service providers failed to react to their ever-growing needs. However, this study shows that some services have already realized the situation and made corresponding adjustments. Therefore the quantity of new services have been created to respond to market demands. For example, in Syracuse, "Forging Our Community's United Strength," F.O.C.U.S. Greater Syracuse

is a non-profit organization that is trying to promote an all-inclusive, age-friendly city; 211 CNY brings together organizations in the community to better serve the residents of Central New York. Although the city of Syracuse may be currently not that "smart", more and more services and agencies have started to use ICT to engage citizens, especially senior citizens, in communities.

Thanks to these services mentioned above, older adults are actually well informed. However, due to CMM's hierarchy theory, what deserves more investigation are the reason why some older adults still feel lonely, even though they know that numerous social activities are available to them.
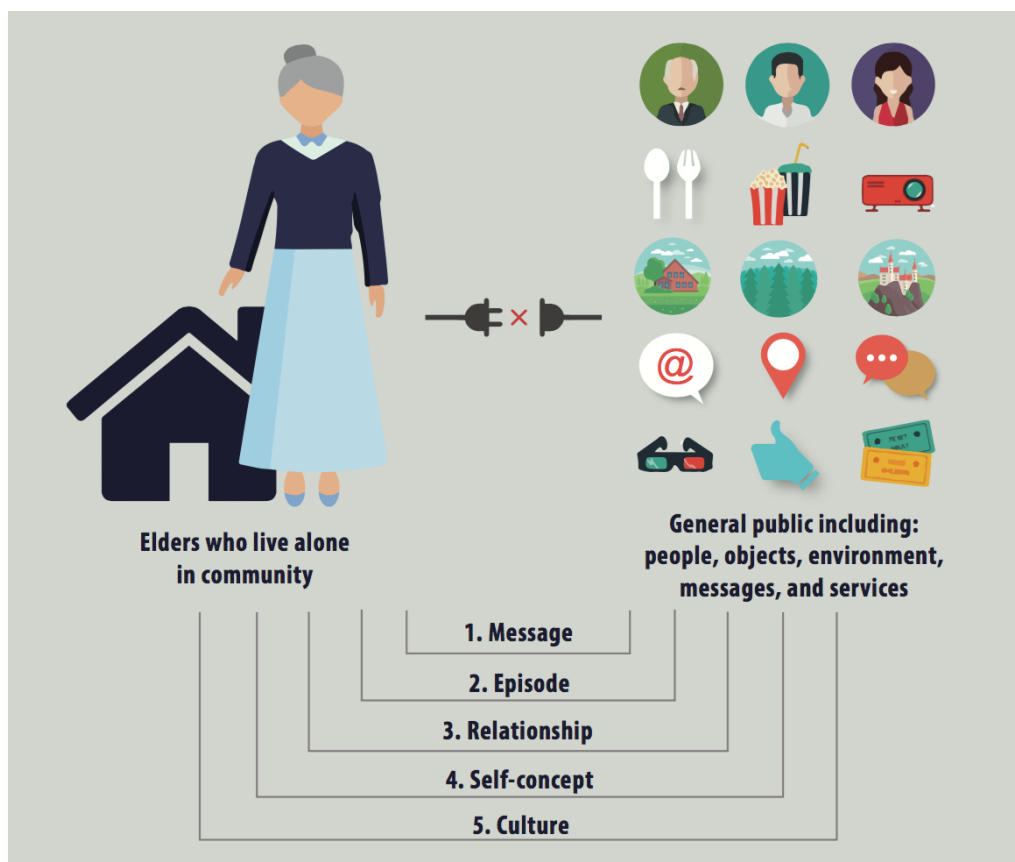
Fig. 4. Analysis based on "hierarchy model".

Using hierarchy theory as a practical model (see fig. 4) to unfold information as different layers of meaning in order to discover the real needs of participants. Concrete analysis of this is as follows:

Messages: older adults are well informed about available activities.

Episode/Relationship: older adults have no deep emotional bond with these available social activities.

Self-concept: existing services or social interactions cannot provide sense of purpose to older adults.

Culture: it has become a pattern among older adults that they rather staying home than going out.

The pattern of stories told through twitter explains the reason: compared to the services and other social activities, a stronger preference from ELAC is sharing their real feelings with the persons they care the most.

In that way, another reflection is that a better channel than twitter should have been chosen, after all only 140 words cannot tell a detailed story.

In conclusion, although envisioning a Smart City is an attractive concept, what is needed is a platform for older adults to share their stories with their close friends or family members. Based on the facts revealed by the first probe and the theories of peer interview studied in literature review, the next two probes were designed to discover which kind of peer interview will lead to the best results.

Probe Two: An inter-generational interview

The second probe is an inter-generational interview between "the parent" Joan and "the kid" Peggy.

Peggy and Joan are living in quite neighborhoods in DeWitt, Syracuse. The first interview was conducted in Joan's home, because it made Joan feel more comfortable. The night before the interview, I asked "the kid" Peggy whether she has questions she wants to ask her mother. She came up with twenty topics, including "Describe what was most important to you 50 years ago."; "What is something you regret or would change if you could?"; "How would you like to be remembered?" and etc. Based on narrative theories from literatures and integrated with these topics Peggy had, a question list was generated (see Table 1). The question list was designed to introduce less invasive questions in the beginning and potentially more difficult or personally challenging questions in later interviews.

Table 1

Question List for the Second Research Probe

_____

1. What is your favorite song? Can you sing it?

2. Describe a time or act that made you proud of yourself?

3. How would you describe "home"? Describe your feeling of living here.

4. Describe the first time you felt "Oh my god! I'm old!". What made you feel that way?

5. How has your age affected your role as a mother?

6. How would you like to be remembered?

7. How do you feel after responding my questions?

_____

Before the interview started, I found Peggy to be a little reserved about being an interviewer, so I gave her a couple of tips: 1) cultivate the conversation, encourage your

interviewee to talk more details; 2) see your mom as a stranger instead of a person you know for your whole life. Afterwards, when we talked about this exercise, Peggy told me that these two tips were simple but very important. She suggested to me that I should write down the tips and then share when conducting future interviews.

When designing the interview, my intent was to create a light-hearted atmosphere that would encourage Joan to think back to her happy memories and to share with Peggy, so the length of the meeting was planned to be thirty minutes. Short and sweet. However, the process went way beyond my imagination. Things were getting serious. After first few simple questions, Peggy started to ask her own questions, including "Who is your favorite kid?" and "How do you remember dad?" An interesting observation was Peggy still pretended looking at the question card I gave to her. That means, this interview form gave Peggy an opportunity to ask the unasked and even "unaskable" questions that she was always curious about but never had chance to ask.

Joan were cautious at first too. But once started recollecting memories from her whole life, she forgot about me and the camera. What's more, when answering Peggy's "hard" questions, Joan narrated some of the untold stories. From the reactions of Peggy, it could be said that this was the first time she heard these stories too.

This is just an impressive experience and a realization of all the narrative theories. So, more details about this interview will be included as an illustrative case study in the following sections.

Probe Three: Two inter-friends' interviews

The third research probe was designed to test what would happen in an interview between two friends. Collaborating with Syracuse Housing Authority, four senior residents live in Vinette Towers volunteered to participate (Merrihew et al.).

This time, based on feedback from last two probes, I designed a better interview guide (see table 2) and was equipped with a more professional camera. Yet, it did not develop as what was planned.

Table 2

Interview Guide

_____

Question list:

1. What is your favorite song? Can you sing it?

2. How would you describe "home"? Describe your feeling of living here.

3. Describe a time or act that made you proud of yourself?

4. Describe the first time you felt "Oh my god! I'm old!" What made you feel that way? How do you deal with aging anxiety? Or you never feel it that way?

5. How has your age affected your role as a mother/friend?

6. How would you like to be remembered?

7. Is there anything you feel regret in your life?

8. What makes you happy now?

9. The question you want to ask:

10. Do you consider yourself be successful aging, which means healthy and productive aging? If so, what tips or tricks made you feel that way? If not, what do you want to learn about aging?

Interview Tips:

When you are the interviewees:

1. Do not try to persuade others

2. Are there any untold stories behind your answers?

When you are the interviewer:

1. Be a listener. Listen carefully, and do not interrupt.

2. Cultivate the conversation when you think it is necessary.

_____

Compared to the last probe, three main issues were noticed.

Firstly, location and environment is so important that it can totally change the participants' states of mind. Considering the security requirement, we were only allowed to do the interviews in a public game room on the first floor. Common spaces are too neutral to share something personal. Each interaction stopped immediately after only a small amount of progress. Especially when three other residents came in and started playing board games, Eleanor[4] complained in low voice: "I don't know what they are doing here at this time."

What's more, as participants said, an interview like this is nothing more than a small talk between two close friends every day. Compared to the other "peer" interview between Joan and Peggy, since friends are more familiar with each other than cross-generational family members, they do not need another insightful discussion in front of a strange person to explore their mental worlds. In other words, they don't need a designed question list to be an "insider". And this sense of "insider" keeps the interviewee from

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[4] Name changed to protect participant's privacy

telling more details. For example, when Merrihew[5] talked about her marriage and how she feels about it, Eleanor cut in and said "yes, you told me that last week, you remember?"

The positive feedback learned from this interview was that sharing is still a positive experience for them. One of the four participants secretly told me, "You made my day." That is encouraging to know that sharing is a human nature, and it can be an intuitive motivation for older adults to join the project.

3.5   Synthesis and Discussion

First of all, from the comparison between the inter-generational and the inter-friends' interviews, it is obvious that a conversation between "the parent" and "the kid" could bring participants more insights than the other. Based on this fact, the thesis will focus on the inter-generational interview.

It is encouraging to see how strong the memories can be. All participants wanted to continue with this activity. Most of them even asked if they could switch roles for next interview. The design opportunity here is that can this project be designed to have more layers: participants can continue interacting with each other after the interview? If so, in addition to verbal narrative, is there another way to do storytelling? For instance, visual narrative. Can the next step following the peer interview be a photo sharing meeting?

Another important observation was that after interviews, most of participants sent email or text to me and expressed their emotional transformation. That preserved my thinking about this that can this experience become another chapter as a closure, and also an extension of this project.

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[5] Name changed to protect participant's privacy

Based on these observations, to include both verbal and visual narrative, this whole project will be a trilogy that includes an inter-generational interview to open up the conversation; a photo-journal to continue interaction between participants; and another inter-generational interview to give participants a chance to reflect on their emotional transformation.

As the final deliverable, another task is to show the meaningful and sharable information to the public. By taking advantage of social media, the intent is to create a group blog where content can be submitted by both participants. At the present time, I believe that Tumblr is the best choice in that various kinds of content (photos, videos, and quotations) are welcome.

4   THE FINAL DESIGN: THROUGH MY EYES PROJECT

"I remember my relatives talking and talking, and yet as a kid, I didn't listen. I'd love to go back now and listen." -Wayne Dionne, Alexandria, Virginia

4.1   Project Introduction and Description

The project through my eyes is an experimental platform for "deeper understanding" and "interpersonal discovery" that keeps elders and their children closer. There are three underlying tenants to the platform:

Recollection: an inter-generational interview process that explores elders' (untold) life stories.

In this chapter, "the kid" will interview "the parent" with an interview guide (see table 3).

Table 3

Interview Guide

_____

Question list:

1. What's your favorite song? Can you sing it?

2. Describe a time or act that made you proud of yourself.

3. How would you describe happiness? Think back over your life and describe a time when you were happy.

4. Describe the first time you felt "OMG! I'm old!" What made you feel that way?

5. Are you afraid to live alone? What other fears do you have? How have you dealt with it?

6. Describe what was most important to you 50 years ago. Is it still important to you?

7. How has your age affected her role as a father/mother?

8. How would you like to be remembered? How do you think you will be remembered?

9. What is something you regret or would change if you could?

10. If you had three wishes what would they be?

Interview Tips for "the kid"

Keep mystery as the highest level of context. Don't see your parent as a person you know for a whole life, but a myth that needs you to embrace all the richness, complexity, and contradictions in him/her.

_____

Revelation: a one-week photo-journal that allows elders to document their daily lives and then talk about the photographs they've taken.

In this chapter, it will be a one-week photo-journal that invites elders to document themselves. Using the POEMS template and some examples (see fig. 5) as a guide, the

goal is to capture the people, objects, environments, messages, and services that are a part of their daily lives. This includes, but is not limited to, chatting with friends, walking down the street, reading books at home...

Fig. 5. POEMS template and some examples.

Also, participants will be told "don't worry about artistic quality, just press the shutter when you want to."

One week later, another meeting will be scheduled to review these photographs.

Refection: a follow-up inter-generational interview that invites "the kid" to talk about their emotional transformation.

This time, "the parent" will be the interviewer with the following question list (see table 4).

Table 4

Question List

_____

1. Do you think you know me better?

2. How do you see me differently from you used to be?

3. How will you remember me?

_____

As a final step, contents will be collected, curated, and shareable on as a blog.

4.2   Branding and Visual Materials

By exploring the concept of eyes being windows to the soul, the branding of *through my eyes* (see fig. 6) is simple but strong.

Fig. 6. Logo and branding.

Based on this branding, handouts of project brief (see fig. 7) was designed.

Fig. 7. Project brief with branding.

By using Tumblr, a group blog (see fig. 8 and fig. 9) was created with the new branding. Participants can upload photos, videos, and quotations anywhere or anytime. Once uploaded, researchers can access this blog as a channel for knowing their clients better.
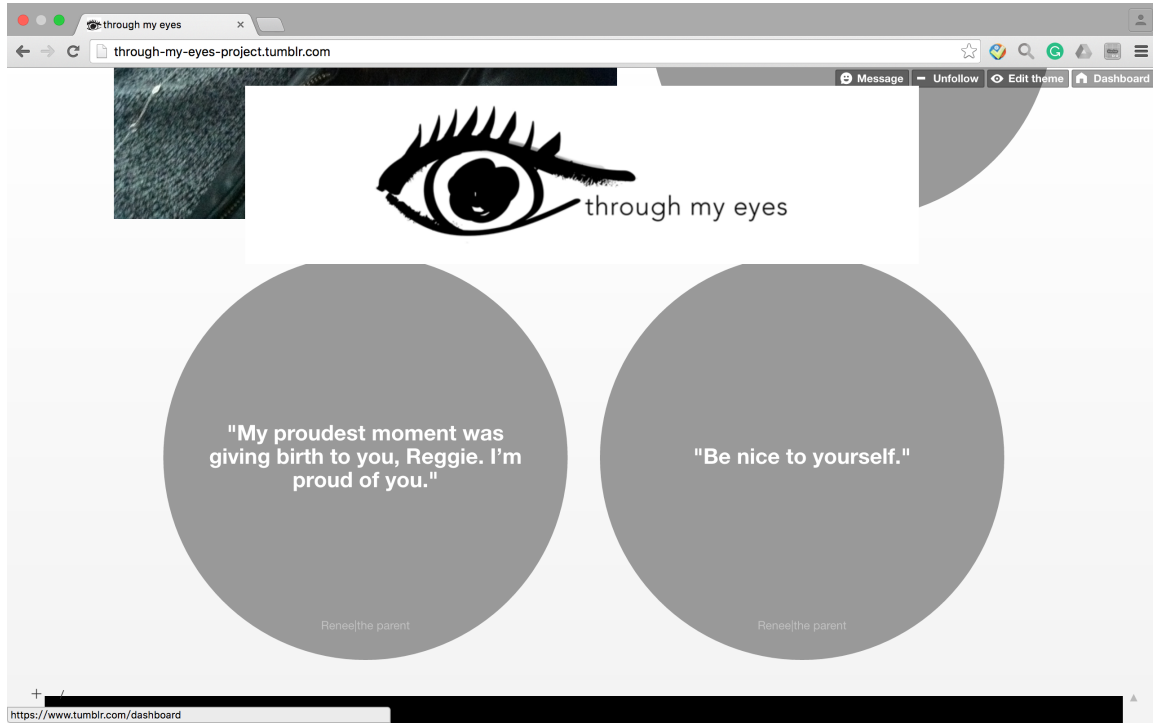
Fig. 8. Tumblr group blog: through my eyes. Quotation uploaded by participants.

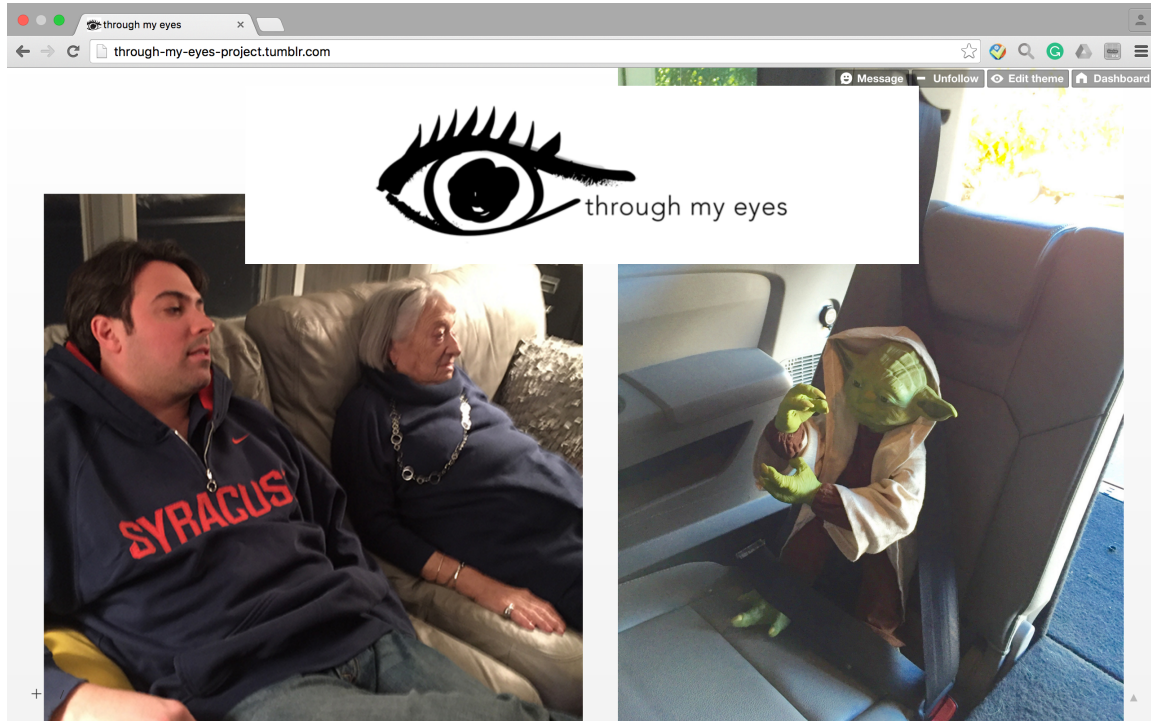<http://through-my-eyes-project.tumblr.com/>

Fig. 9. Tumblr group blog: through my eyes. Photos uploaded by participants. <http://through-my-eyes-project.tumblr.com/>

4.3   Illustrative Case Example: Joan and Peggy

To elaborative further how *through my eyes* project works and enhances participants' mental health within the trilogy: recollection, revelation, and reflection, an illustrative case example of Joan and Peggy is included.

Joan is an eighty-six-year old mother of four children who had been widowed for more than five years. Peggy is her oldest child, sixty-seven-year old. They are both White Jewish women living in upscale neighborhoods which are not far away from each other. Before this project, Peggy had told me, "Normally I am the one person she yells at and hangs up on, then she tells my sister Jessica, who calls my sister Randi, who calls me."

It is important to mention that the following three chapters do not follow Through My Eyes project guide. Rather, the case study is based on how participants unfolded their

untold stories, interacted with each other, and expressed how the relationship between them was affected. Finally, the potential room for improvement with this information of the design will be identified.

Recollection

This is the interview that was mentioned as the second research probe above. By drawing lessons from Kimberly Pearce's approach of presenting the communication patterns that he and his father made (K. Pearce 11-16), to extendedly explore the charm of the narrative on deeper level, "12-Turn" conversation is used to unfold the episodes that happened between Peggy and Joan.

Turn #1: Episode framing. Peggy and I arrive at her mother's house in the same time. Before coming into Joan house, she tells me secretly that her mom is the most negative person in the world and she is not her favorite child. I introduce the peer interview that she, instead of me, will be the interviewer today, Peggy looks surprised and hesitates a little bit. After Joan and I encourage her constantly, she finally accept it and says "okay, let's do it". It is a little surprised to me too when Peggy refuses to interview her mother, especially she has already had a bunch of questions that she was curious about Joan.

Turn #2: Participants start the conversation by answering simple questions. In the beginning, they engage in small talk about some news in the family and what magazines are interesting. Then they briefly discuss the first question: music. Peggy reads straight from the question list: "What is your favorite song? Can you sing it?" "Starters. But I don't remember how to sing it." Joan responses immediately.

Turn #3: Joan says her proudest act is "gave birth to Peggy", but Peggy does not believe it. "That's your proudest moment? …In your whole life?" Joan replies: "Yeah. Not everybody can do that." They both laugh and Peggy still has her doubts: "So your proudest moment is had a baby."

Turn #4: Peggy starts to ask her own questions. When describing "home", Joan talks about her hobbies like playing tennis and fishing. Peggy follows up: "Did you go fishing with my dad?" Joan answers: "No."

Turn #5: Joan says the moment she felt herself old is the day when Peggy came home and told her she wants to get married. And they both repeat the word "old" profoundly, twice.

Turn #6: Peggy asks her own question again: "If you have to choose the worst one of your kids, who will you pick?" They talk a lot about Joan's kids (Peggy's siblings), and what they said emerges more discussion between them.

Turn #7: Joan talks more about Peggy's father. Especially when answering the question "how would you like to be remembered?" Joan starts describing how she remembers her husband: "he was very easy-going…as long as you did not break his routine."

Turn #8: Peggy asks: "How would you remember me? What would you say if I won't be here tomorrow?" "She was lady." Joan answers.

Turn #9: Peggy: "Do you think we (the kids) don't like you?" Joan: "I really don't know…I didn't take motherhood 101, so I did the best of I know how. That's all I can say. If it was good, wonderful; if it's bad, I'm sorry."

Turn #10: Peggy finishes the seven questions but apparently she wants to continue the conversation. She asks: "Is there anything you feel regret in your life?" "Yes" after a moment's silence Joan wipes away her tears and says, "your father was dying alone." Peggy is getting emotional but also refraining. They keep digging in further about Peggy's father. As an audience, I can see this is a sensitive, a untellable topic they may be reluctant to mention.

Turn #11: After a long heavy conversation about death and family relationship, Peggy changes the subject: "Are you enjoying this moment?" Joan says: "Yes, because I can talk to you," then she smiles to me, "and your friend here."

At the end of the interview, I hugged them and expressed my gratitude.

Turn #12: Later in the day, Peggy texts to me: "Thank you for this opportunity. I am normally the one person she yells at and hangs up on because she refuses to face the truth… (but today) I am so surprised because my mother was truthful. I think I understand my mother better, I just hope I can remember enough to relate to my sister."; and "Spoke to my mother again and she really enjoyed the time she spent with you. She even agreed to do it again with just me. That is a first! Thank you. You made an 86-year old, grumpy woman very happy."

It is encouraging to be proved that sharing can easily made Joan happy. It is also surprised to see how many insights an interview can unfold. The memories Joan and Peggy were recollecting are so strong and touching that can make every audience laugh with them, cry with them. This activity actually provides a channel for a pair of parent and kid to listen to each other's real voice from deep inside.

Revelation

Smartphones and tablets make this part very handy. Joan used her iPad, Peggy used her iPhone to take photos and sent them through text to me and checked were they doing it right. After two days, it is obvious that they felt more free to record everything they want to more than just following the P.O.E.M.S. template.
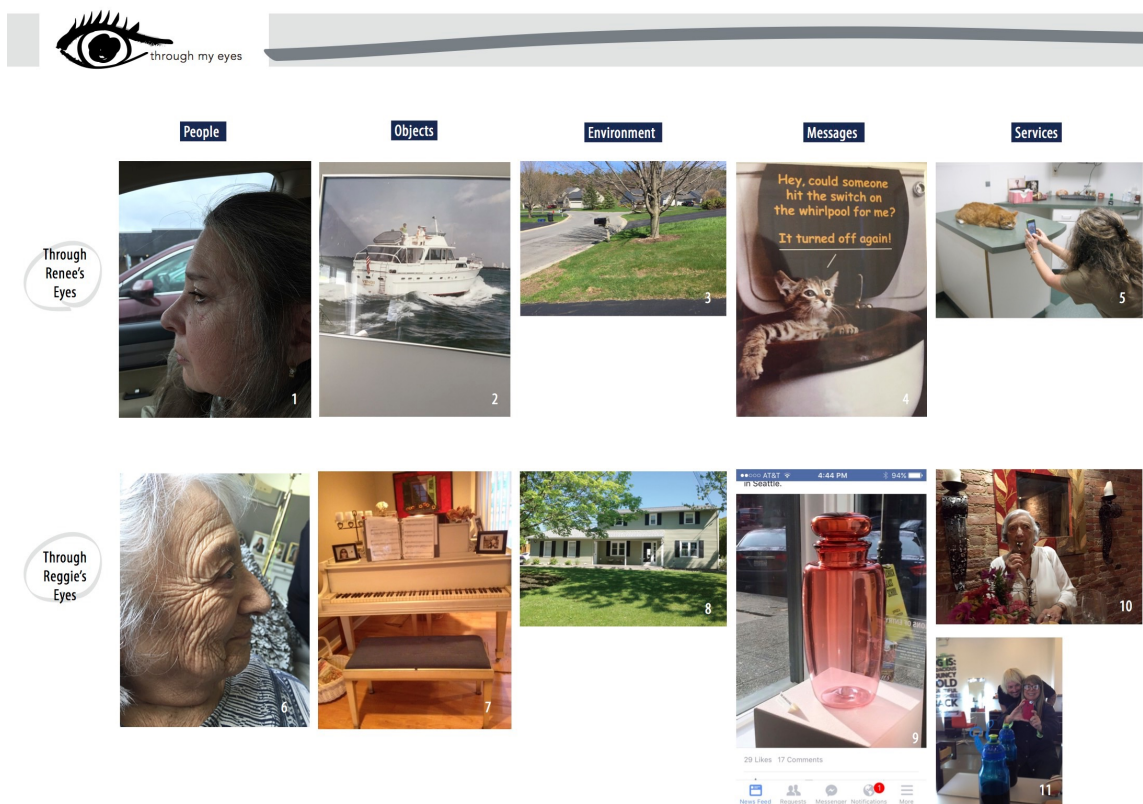

Fig. 10. Selected examples of photos that were taken by Joan and Peggy.

Analysis are concluded based on several examples (see fig. 10): photo number 1 to 5 are from Joan, 6 to 11 are from Peggy. Below are their descriptions of each photo (See table 4):

Table 4

Joan and Peggy's descriptions of each photos

_____

1. Peggy's side face

2. This is my favorite picture of the boat we drove down to Fort Lauderdale Florida from Alexandria Bay for the winters. Then the returned to Alex Bay for the summer. I can see my husband on that boat now that he has died. Happy memories.

3. I live in The Hamlett. I tried to capture a picture of three deer and a turkey in the trees in my back yard. The picture of the box near the front door is the old milk box that was used years ago when milk was delivered.

4. Just a funny picture

5. Peggy and Stanley

6. My mom is resting watching television. She told me she was not happy but there was nothing she can do about it. She feels sad.

7. My parents bought this piano for me when I was five. Sixty years later and I still can't play one song.

8. Just hanging around

9. My daughter, Deborah's work in a gallery.

10. My mother at a restaurant licking chocolate off her spoon.

11. Got my hair trimmed and that is Matt who cut it.

_____

This chapter enriched the whole experience by both visual and narrative communication, and became an extension of the recollection. This one-week photo-journal has given participants a glimpse of how each other's daily lives look like.

As a former social worker, Peggy showed her appreciation to this activity:

"All social workers goal is to understand the clients 'bio-psycho-social-environment'. And this photo exchange practice can really help outsiders to gain empathy."

Reflection

This is the second inter-generational interview, however the difference from the first interview is: Joan became the interviewer to ask Peggy questions. This part totally went beyond the question list. And they just chatted with each other and exchanged their feelings.

This conversation started by Peggy saying:

"I'm so surprised because you (Joan) were truthful… Many of the question you actually seemed to be truthful. You always say, 'I did not take Mom 101!' (both laugh) … I think every family would benefit from this exercise. I think I understand you better. I just hope I can remember enough to relate it to Randi (Peggy's sister, Joan's another daughter)."

Asked how she responded to the whole experience, Joan said:

"I have gained a sense of purpose with the interviews. You know, at my age, I had an opportunity to talk about myself which I like to do. That gave me life meaning before it's too late. When you live a life that had many challenges and take pride in what you have done, it is an honor to be heard." (Draper and Draper, 15 Apr 2016)

At the night of this interview, Peggy texted to the author, "Spoke to my mother again and she really enjoyed the time she spent with you. She even agreed to do it again with just me. That is a first! Thank you."

5   ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1   Feedbacks

Feedbacks from participants

Feedbacks from participants are primarily positive. Two days after *reflection*, the second inter-generational interview, the author met with each participant asked about their feedbacks.

Joan affirmed the importance of this project:

"…I've done things in my life time and nobody knows about it. It's nobody's business of what I did. They would say she was a good person, but they don't know why. Because it's nobody's business… It is really good to have the chance talking about me, my stories."

Peggy developed a higher understanding of the communication across generations:

"Elderly people were someone's child. They are not a child anymore, but they have the same needs, fears and care as children require. It is important to see each person as someone's child. This is the most important attitude you need to understand. Most elderly fear not death but that they will be forgotten. They regret not doing anything memorable or have contributed to the world. It is important to let the person know that even at their age, they still have a purpose in life. If you stress your understanding of why people think they are special because you have learned so much from them." (Draper and Draper, 17 Apr 2016)

Feedbacks from the stakeholder

Holstein, the executive director of F.O.C.U.S. Greater Syracuse gave this comment:

"Your project is based on only one family and one interview. It would

enhance your report if you were to interview more families and families of

different ethnicities. You also might find some differences depending

upon age cohort i.e. 65-75 years old; 75-85 years old; and older. The

children who interview their parent(s) will also be different ages and

generations and this would enrich your study and provide a stronger

platform. The photographing of a week's activity is unique and could lead

to a wonderful video or Power Point, especially if you have more

interviews."

5.2   Discussion

The trilogy of recollection, revelation, and reflection has been well received among

the participants. There are definitely more strengths than weakness having this shared

experience between generations.

As a model, the inter-generational interview represents a unique and promising re-

conceptualization of narrative among older adults. The focus of participants themselves is

different from (traditional) narrative projects and provided a sense of fulfillment to older

participants during and at the end of the project.

As a platform for exchange, the group blog extends the interaction to the deeper

level; and reveals the potential of being a high volume database for aging studies.

The next step in developing this approach to interpersonal discovery will be, as

Holstein suggested, to test this model amongst a larger pool comparison of a diverse age

spectrum and ethnic make up. Ultimately, the goal is to support the broader targeted

audiences of the *through my eyes project* and thereby capture a vast array of interpersonal stories.

6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Appendixes

Figure. 1. Photo of Joan (right) and Peggy (left)

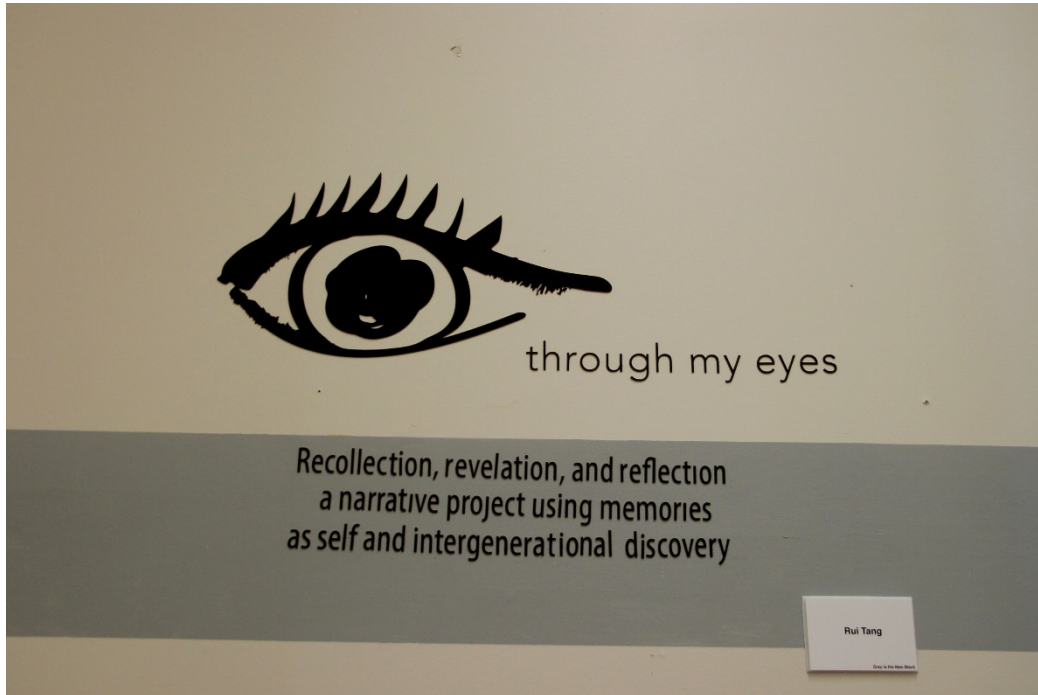Figure. 2. Presentation Poster of Research Process

Figure. 3. Thesis Show Part 1: Through My Eyes

Figure. 4. Thesis Show Part 2: Photo of Rui Tang, Joan, and Peggy

Figure. 5. Thesis Show Part 3: Branding

Figure. 6. Thesis Show Part 4: Audiences interacting with items on display

Figure. 7. Thesis Show Part 5: Joan and Peggy interacting with items on display

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Vita

Design Research Qualifications

- Experienced utilizing design research methods to gain empathy for users, including user needs analysis, synthesis, human factors, usability, and interaction design

- Systematic knowledge of holistic design to form structured thinking from unstructured conditions by collecting, analyzing and visualizing qualitative and quantitative data

- Experienced in information visualization including journey maps, storyboards, wire-frames, flow diagrams, visual style guides, and agile software methodologies for graphic design and modeling softwares

- Evidence of team building and collaborating across disciplines to achieve project outcomes

- Strong presentation skills and able to interact with clients, stakeholders, team members, and others

Design Research Projects and Outcomes

Initiator and Designer | *Adaptive Design Seminar*   Oct 2015

- Hosted a three-day long seminar, bringing together nationally known industry experts, practitioners, and end-users, focused on building empathy, collecting data, and ideating solutions for children with disabilities

- This event has been nominated for 2016 Chancellor's Award for Public Engagement and Scholarship (CAPES)

Research Strategist Intern | *F.O.C.U.S. Greater Syracuse*   Oct 2015

- Worked closely with this organization set on building an age-friendly community for senior citizens in Syracuse

- Identified issues in previous research methods, and created new method to interview older adults, separate with their family, with a newly designed interview routine

Redesign of Volunteer Management System | *Access CNY*   Oct-Dec 2015

- Research unfolded existing problems in the organization, and identified the most urgent issue: the volunteers

- Redesigned the volunteer system from three aspects of recruitment, screening, and training

Lifelong Learning Program Improvements | *Syracuse University College*   Mar-Apr 2015

• Revealed business opportunities by identifying elders' needs of learning, assessing non-age-friendly environment in the university, and determining the improvement like flexible schedules, international travel, and tuition reimbursement

• Synthesized an executive summary and Presented findings to major stakeholders

CoolBox | *Food Bank of CNY*   Sep-Dec 2014

• Integrated client's problem statement about end-point capacity in hunger relief distribution including unmatched delivery schedules, storage inadequacies, and budget concerns

• Created a better stakeholder relationship by upgraded delivery system and unified branding

"shared": an App to improve reading experience | *Design Studio*   Jan-May 2014

• Assessed design opportunities for improving older adults' wellness by non-assumption interview methodology

• By using wireframe and prototype tools, designed a reading app for the elders from the results of qualitative and quantitative data

Instructional Associate | *Department of Design Office*   Aug 2014 - May 2015

• Supported Dean and office coordinator to manage visual materials and communications, assist job searching

• Lead communication design for annual SU Design Week

Marketing Strategist | *Beijing Edu&Sun Education Technology Co.*   May-Aug 2011

• Collaboratively developed an online education product to universities in Beijing through "College Road" community

Education

Collaborative Design, Master of Fine Arts | *Syracuse University*   May 2016

Venice Biennale Intensive | *SU Abroad Program*   May 2015

Packaging Engineering, Bachelor of Engineering | *Beijing Forestry University* June 2014