



The Delicate Ecology of Delusion: A Cross-Cultural Case Study

on the Inner Landscape of Elderly with Dementia

A Research Proposal

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Dementia has been categorized by the medical profession as a disease defined as a matrix of psychological and physical symptoms, primarily identified by cognitive impairment and memory loss. While research reveals that elders with dementia do experience cognitive decline, we wonder when an elder's rational mind is "gone" what is retained? We wonder whether other ways of knowing revealed through the senses, the emotions and within relationship may not only remain, but actually flourish. We wonder what can be revealed about dementia when in relationship with our elders by validating the messages encoded within their symptoms, and relating from a realm of respect for the deeper meaning of their aging and unfolding.

This research takes an alternative perspective towards reaching out to residents with dementia. Rather than focusing on cognitive deficit, the researchers tap the underutilized capacities of the senses as a doorway to drop into the internal world of dementia. By developing relationships with residents who live in these various states of consciousness that we have yet to truly understand, we wish to discover the rich and meaningful inner landscape of thoughts, feelings and fantasies of individuals with dementia, often dismissed as "delusional."

We hope this research would contribute to developing deeper relationships with elders with dementia. We imagine achieving this intention through generating findings on dementia's altered states that foster awareness, sensitivity and understanding on the part of family members and professionals, as well as contribute to compassionate and effective policies, services and care to address the special needs of these frail elders.

Aim of the Research

Utilizing sensory approaches within a cross-cultural study, the researchers' intend to gain access and understanding of the lived experiences of two culturally different elderly residents living with progressive, middle stage dementia at two residential care facilities: Laguna Grove in San Francisco, California; and Apex Harmony Lodge in Singapore.

This experiential research employs sensory approaches of interaction as a method in which to connect with residents with dementia. As sensory explorations do not rely primarily on the linear cognitive mind, inherent within this sensory mode of communication is the possibility of opening other channels of expression, perhaps to reveal messages from the unconscious and often denied aspects of one's experience.

Research in Progress-