Who is that Stranger in the Mirror? A Discussion of Mirrors for those with Dementia

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Objectives

- Examine one case study of a woman with Alzheimer’s who saw “a stranger in the mirror”.
- Assess the “evidence”.
- Review Lawton’s theory of environmental gerontology and a phenomenology of the mirror experience.
- Discuss implications for research.
What are your chances?
Dementia/Alzheimer’s Statistics

- Adults 65 and older + Baby boomers will reach 115 million by 2050.

- Accounts for 20% of U.S. population.

- Projected increase to 71% by 2050.

- Sixth leading cause of death

- Caregivers accounts 15.2 million (friends/families).

- Every 68 seconds someone develops AD
Alzheimer’s statistics
Problem?

- Societal impact
  - Increase healthcare cost
  - From 200 Billion to 1.1 trillion (2050)
  - 500 percent increase Medicaid/Medicare combined

- Personal final strain
  - 400 percent out of pocket cost

- Caregiver’s burden
Inspiration for this Project

Personal

- Diagnosis dementia / Alzheimer’s
  - Mom
  - Aunt
- Trial and error/management of mirror experience.
Rose
Rose’s Experience

- Diagnosed with Parkinson at 76 y/o
- Diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease (AD) at 80 y/o.
- Delightful

Active life style

- Independent
- Meticulous homemaker
- Gardner
- Farmer
Rose

- Raised several grandchildren, great grandchildren.

- Active member of her church.

- Performed community services.
Rose

Memory loss

- Insidious forgetfulness
- Frustration
- Agitation
- Depression
- Hallucination
- Delusion
- Paranoia
Morning routing care was challenging.
- Mirror experience
- Who’s that stranger

Rose gentle moved away from mirror.
Rose

Observation

- No agitation during oral care – looking into half-length mirror in bathroom.
Google

- Google appears to provide the most information (antidotal accounts) of mirrors and dementia.

- In addition, advice (often confusing and vague) is offered regarding what to do with the mirrors for those with dementia.
Google Stories

- I suddenly heard a shriek coming from mom's room. Then a crash! "Mom, what's wrong?" I cried as I entered, seeing her jewelry box laying on the floor, fallen open, with her staring at the mirror looking terrified. She shrieked again and pointed at the mirror. Looking at the reflection, she put her hands on her face and then threw a hairbrush at the mirror.

Article Source: http://EzineArticles.com/6193754
Google Stories

- A couple of months ago, I noticed dad talking to himself in the mirror. Sometimes he slips into his happy little world of talking to himself and he goes on and on with conversations.
“Most of us are familiar with the phenomenon whereby the Alzheimer patients do not recognize their own reflection any more, either in a mirror or in a car window”.

Question: How do we become familiar with this phenomenon?

http://www.caregiver.com/channels/alz/articles/altered_perceptions.htm
Google Advice

- I read recently that some Alzheimer’s patients get confused when they look in the mirror and see themselves. Well, obviously they don’t see themselves, they see a stranger. If that happens, it would be a good idea to cover all the mirrors.

Google Advice

- Mayo Clinic:
  - Reduce the number of mirrors. People with Alzheimer's may find images in mirrors confusing or frightening.

- Question: Which mirrors should one reduce?
Observational “Study”

- In 1996, nurses placed several mirrors of all sizes on a dementia unit.

- 71% positive responses of laughter, enjoyment and an apparent increase in self-awareness.

- One man displayed anger and despair, followed by calmness.

- Limitations: No IRB, no control, etc.
Dr. Freysteinson’s Inspiration for this project

- 1960’s Grandma Fannie
- 1970’s Miss Peace
- 1974 Bed bath Lab
- 1990 Dean says No
Inspiration for a Survey Study of Mirrors in Long-Term Care (LTC)

- In a study of women viewing self in the mirror, one woman living in a nursing home had not seen her body from the waist down in eight years.
- Her greatest concern was she could not see if her catheter bag was showing (Freysteinson, 1994).
Survey Study of Mirrors in Long-term care (LTC)

- Mirrors in an empty, single resident room in ten LTCs were measured.
- Mirrors for the bedbound, wheelchair bound and full body view were examined.
Results

- One LTC had a mirror for the bedbound resident.

- Mirrors appropriate for a resident in a wheelchair were available in only 7/10 LTCs.
View of the Whole Body

- 10% of LTCs had one full length mirror in which one could view the full body. This mirror was in a public front foyer.
What I could not publish...
The Mirror Dilemma

- At first, simply getting rid of the mirrors for someone with dementia/Alzheimer’s sounds like a relatively simple solution.

- However, using Lawton’s theory of environmental gerontology…let’s focus on the value of mirrors.
Lawton’s Theory of Environmental Gerontology

Maintain

Stimulate

Therapeutic Environment

Support

Three Functions of the Residential Environment
Lawton, 1989
Maintain

- The maintaining function of the environment is to create an environment which *feels like home.*
Maintain One’s Appearance

- Mirrors within a home-like environment allow one to continue to maintain one’s physical appearance.
Support

- A supportive environment works to support reduced or lost cognitive abilities.
- Belgium researchers suggested 11/51 patients in a post-comatose state tracked self in a mirror but did not track anything else (Vanhaudenhuyse et al, 2008).
- Nurses in Israel found 100 elders with dementia had increased self-recognition and a desire to care for their own appearance when mirrors were added to the nursing unit (Tabak et al, 1996).
Stimulate

- Stimulating environments enhance well-being and social interaction.
- Mirrors provide a novel array of stimuli.
Questions

- Are mirrors which simply help to make an environment feel like home appropriate in homes (including LTC homes) where a person with dementia may live?
Phenomenology of Mirror-ing

- Two studies (Freysteinson 1994 and 2011) uncovered the phenomenology of the experience of mirror-ing for individuals who do not have dementia.
Phenomenological Interpretation

- Four key meaning moments emerged in the interpretation of viewing self in the mirror:
  - I am
  - I decide
  - I see
  - I consent
I Am

- Genetics, life experiences and environment help to create a unique way of being-in-the-world.

I am self-conscious.
I am wise.
I am very blessed.
I am Scandinavian.
I Decide

• Curiosity

*I think it is just a natural curiosity to look and see what’s happening to you.*

• Medical Care

*I thought that (bathroom) was the most logical place (to change the dressing).*

• Keeping up Appearances

*You make your self look better (with the mirror) by using prosthesis or whatever means there are for beauty.*
I See: With my Mind’s Eye

- **Apprehension**

  *I was going to have a mastectomy so I used to see myself in the mirror, and try to imagine how I would look.*

- **Expectation**

  *This scar is uglier than I thought it would be. I thought it would be a little bit prettier.*

- **Hope**

  *I used to imagine before I went to the mirror that my breast would still be there, that this has all been a dream.*
I See: With my Eyes

*It depends on how your eyes are I guess because my eyes aren’t good either.*

Also I’ve got macular degeneration and I’ve already had glaucoma …One side (of the mirror) is magnified and the other one isn’t. So I really can get a good look.
I See the Meaning: Understanding

- All women understood part of their body to be unattractive, unsightly or repulsive.

- Many emotions accompanied this understanding: shock, surprise, disgust, unworthiness, anger/frustration, fear, sadness, relief & happiness.
(I was) looking in the mirror constantly. ... *It* was gross, *it* was so disgusting. I couldn’t hardly face myself or look at *it* because *it* was so disgusting.

But I was so ecstatic that *it* (mastectomy incision) was closed! See the attitude change? I’m like look at this, *it’s* stitched closed!
I See the Meaning: Understanding

- Distanciation

  You’re seeing **that** every time you stand in front of the mirror.

  *It looks real ugly.*

- Appropriation

  *My scar is beginning to fade.*
I See the Meaning: Explanation

• Medical

I don’t know how to explain what I am talking about. It is like they (doctors) took a lot of flesh off of me.

• Theological

You know that’s the devil in there.

• Societal

You’d be surprised what men say about this, this surgery. They can’t cope with it.
I Consent

• **Suffer**

  You have your days where you could sit there and have a pity party.

• **Acceptance/Acquiesce**

  I still do look in the mirror and wish I had more you know up there but may have to learn to accept it, the way it is.

• **Thrust Forward into the Future**

  I sure hope they can fix the bruises on my face so that I do not look bad in the coffin.
Questions

- In offering or having mirrors available in LTCs do nurses provide an enhanced opportunity for residents to recognize self, enhance well-being, and social interaction?
Questions

- One can find antidotal information in Google that the “strangers” an individual with Alzheimer's sees in the mirror may:
  - Be a sign of early Alzheimer's
  - Occur in Mid-stage Alzheimer's
  - Occur Late-stage Alzheimer's

- How do we best determine at what stage “mirror confusion” may occur in this population?
Questions

• How do we explore the experience of the mirror for those with dementia/Alzheimer’s?

• Is mirror distress a sudden symptom or is there a mirror distress trajectory pathway from better to worse?

• How do we develop a tool to measure mirror distress?
Questions

- Do persons with dementia see “strangers” in some mirrors more than other mirrors?

- Large mirrors? Mid-size mirrors? Small handheld mirrors?
Questions

- Does lighting effect the mirror experience?

- Are mirrors commonly used for ADL’s less likely to cause mirror distress as compared to mirrors that a person with dementia does not commonly look in?
Questions

- If a person sees a “friend” or a delusion of an earlier self in the mirror, should we remove the mirrors? How do we best assess this for this experience?
Questions

- Does the addition of accessible mirrors enhance the ability of a person with dementia to perform activities of daily living?

- Does the person with dementia who has access to mirrors have a greater chance of self-recognition?
Questions

- How do we objectively determine the number and kinds of mirrors for this population?
Questions

- How can loved ones and other caregivers in the home determine how to balance the potentially positive value of mirrors with the potential mirror distress?
Discussion

- What and how do we begin to research this phenomenon in this fragile population?

- What should this research trajectory look like?
Rose

- Wife
- Mother
- Grandmother
- Sister
- Aunt

...was my beloved mother.

Rose died on May 13, 2001 at the age of 86.
Rose’s Family
Discussion

- Need for research in this area.

- Research regarding the use of mirrors in the dementia/Alzheimer’s population group will uncover a broad spectrum of knowledge.

- Nursing and caregiver implications must be addressed.

- Rose may have benefited from such knowledge.
In Conclusion

- Evidence in this field appears to be an essentially unexplored field.

- Currently we do not know how many questions there are and what those questions may be.
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- References available on request.