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Publisher: Routledge

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## Journal of Housing For the Elderly

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wjhe20>

### Environmental Gerontology for the Future: Community-Based Living for the Third Age

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Published online: 15 Jun 2012.

To cite this article: Lyn Geboy, Keith Diaz Moore & Erin Kate Smith (2012) Environmental Gerontology for the Future: Community-Based Living for the Third Age, *Journal of Housing For the Elderly*, 26:1-3, 44-61, DOI: [10.1080/02763893.2012.651375](https://doi.org/10.1080/02763893.2012.651375)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02763893.2012.651375>

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## **Environmental Gerontology for the Future: Community-Based Living for the Third Age**

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*The viability of the field of environmental gerontology depends upon whether it can make itself practically relevant by helping to resolve some of the urgent, real-world problems facing older adults. Many of the problems relate to which and how residential environments might best forward the goals and aspirations of an aging population. More attention should be directed toward improving the environments of choice of older adults, which are not institutional settings, but rather their own homes located in neighborhoods and communities. To help direct attention, this article begins by linking the concept of the Third Age with theories of environmental gerontology and summarizes key empirical understandings of autonomy and security at the community level because these are the essential environmental attributes for the Third Age. Taking into account contextual issues for community-based living for aging suggests that relocation in the pursuit of residential normalcy ought to produce a diversity of environmental responses. We then sketch out the different ways in which three models of community-based living in the Third Age—the leisure-oriented retirement community, the naturally occurring retirement community, and the villages model—reflect contextual issues as they relate to residential environments for the Third Age.*

**KEYWORDS** *aging in place, community based-living, relocation, residential normalcy*

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## INTRODUCTION

Unprecedented growth in the elderly population is washing across the globe. The Population Division of the United Nations projects that by 2050 the world's population will have more people 60 years of age or older than those younger than 15 years of age for the first time in human history (United Nations, 2002). A century of advancements in health and economic prosperity has paved the way for the "longevity dividend" of extended healthy living and delayed aging (Olshansky, Perry, Miller, & Butler, 2006). Enhanced longevity raises profound questions regarding the societal implications of this extraordinary extension in lifespan. What is the role of the older person within the socio-cultural milieu? How might these role expectations affect the built environment? What sorts of environmental design solutions will support the various lifestyle options the older adult cohort is sure to demand? Phenomena related to aging and the manner in which societies respond to aging issues will affect everyone's quality of life. Creating an environmental context that supports successful aging will be a major challenge facing world societies in the coming decades.

The viability of the field of environmental gerontology depends on whether it can make itself practically relevant by helping to resolve some of the urgent, real-world problems of the aging population. Given that 84% of adults age 50 and older want to remain in their own homes while aging (American Association of Retired Persons, 2005), environmental gerontologists' attention should be reapportioned from a focus on institutional environments toward improving the environments of choice of older adults, specifically their own homes located in neighborhoods and communities. To help direct attention, this article begins by linking the concept of the Third Age with theories of environmental gerontology and summarizes key empirical understandings of autonomy and security at the community level because they are the essential environmental attributes for the Third Age. Taking into account contextual issues for community-based living for aging suggests that relocation in the pursuit of residential normalcy ought to produce a diversity of environmental responses. We then sketch out the different ways in which three models of community-based living in the Third Age—the leisure-oriented retirement community (LORC), the naturally occurring retirement community (NORC), and the Village model—reflect contextual issues as they relate to residential environments for the Third Age.

## THE THIRD AGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL GERONTOLOGY

Gerontological research, including environmental gerontology, has made important contributions in illustrating the heterogeneity of the aging population. The field has helped to establish that chronological age is only one dimension

of aging; lifestyle and life course have emerged as crucial variables in understanding the aging experience. For example, this broader approach is reflected in the concept of the Third Age (Laslett, 1989). In Laslett's four-part conceptualization of the life course, "first comes an era of dependence, socialization, immaturity, and education; second an era of independence, maturity, and responsibility, of earning and of saving; third an era of personal fulfillment; and fourth an era of final dependence, decrepitude and death" (p. 4). The Third Age is the period in the life course when "there is no longer employment and childraising to commandeer time, and before morbidity enters to limit activity" (Weiss & Bass, 2002, p. 3). The Third Age is a time of comparative independence: "freedom from the demands of earlier life, freedom from the need to earn a living, freedom from responsibilities for others" (Weiss & Bass, 2002, p. 4). Paradoxically, it is the responsibilities of family, work, and community that are major determinants of self-identity.

Identity is also shaped by place via place attachment (Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992). Place attachment is a key concept in environmental gerontology, wherein individual identity and identity of the collective are in perpetual dialogue:

The fulcrum of the model is identity; life experience, shaped by specific circumstances and personal interpretations, is the single most proximate contributor to sense of place. At the same time, one's position on the collectively defined life course shapes personal experiences, and the meanings one assigns those experiences are, at least in part, derived from and evaluated within the larger socio-cultural context." (Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992, p. 148)

Yet, juxtapose the place attachment conceptualization of later life and all the richness it entails with the description proffered by Weiss and Bass (2002), in which the Third Age is a phase in human development slotted between one's "life's work" and dependence followed by death. It is not surprising then that the definition for this phase of the life course is ambiguous (Rubinstein, 2002) and invites deliberation regarding which and how residential environments might best forward the goals and aspirations of the Third Age.

Our deliberations will be usefully framed by a recent theoretical contribution that brings a life course perspective to environmental gerontology: Wahl and Lang's (2003) social-physical place over time (SPOT). This model distills the aging adult-environment relationship to two-goal dimensions: agency and belonging. According to the model, these two dimensions are more or less relevant (important) over the life course—with increasing age, belonging becomes more relevant than agency (Table 1). In Early Age/Young Old, the dimensions of agency and belonging are equivalent. The theory's "central assumption is that 'negotiating' SPOT reveals quite different

**TABLE 1** Subjective Relevance of Socio-Physical Agency and Belonging over Adulthood and Old Age

Stage of Aging	Relevance of Socio-Physical Agency	Relevance of Socio-Physical Belonging
Middle adulthood	+++	+
Early age/young-old	++	++
Old-old/oldest old	+	+++

*Source.* Reproduced from Wahl and Lang (2003). Used with permission of Springer Publishing Company, Inc. Permission conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.

dynamics across the adult lifespan that are highly relevant for the course and outcomes of aging” (Wahl & Lang, 2003, p. 18).

In linking the SPOT model with the Third Age, two observations are made. First, where Wahl and Lang (2003) defined the transitions in life according to chronological age (e.g., Young-Old and Old-Old), the Third Age perspective moves beyond chronological age and organizes human development according to life stage. Second, regarding goals, Wahl and Lang (2003) adopted language from the field of human development, specifically, the terms agency and belonging. Fortunately, we see undeniable parallels between Wahl and Lang’s (2003) terms agency and belonging (which stem from Lang’s work on social motivation) and Parmelee and Lawton’s (1990) terms autonomy and security, two attributes that are fundamental in the relationship between the older adult and the environment. To wit, where Wahl and Lang (2003) specifically cite autonomy as a correlate concept of agency (p. 18), Parmelee and Lawton (1990) equate autonomy with agency.

The conceptual correspondence extends to the attribute of security, which is, for Parmelee and Lawton (1990), “a state in which pursuit of life goals is linked to, limited by, and aided by dependable physical, social, and interpersonal resources” (p. 465) and means more than physical safety, “but also the communality rather than separateness of the person” (p. 465). Comparably, Wahl and Lang (2003) suggested that belonging involves goal–resource compensation with a focus on the social or communal: “As people experience resource loss, seeking to belong to one’s social world (e.g., helping other people or experiencing positive social contact) is expected to obtain greater priority” (p. 18). Extending these ideas specifically to residential environments for those in the Third Age, the interdependence of agency/autonomy and belonging/security is central to the older adult–environment relationship. Furthermore, building on the position of Wahl and Lang (2003), we believe that over time, as agency degenerates with aging, the salience of security intensifies in matters related to the physical environment. We suggest that autonomy is more salient in the Second Age, the Third Age will seek balance between autonomy and security, and

**TABLE 2** Subjective Relevance of Autonomy and Security during Life Phases

Life Stage	Relevance of Autonomy	Relevance of Security
Second Age	+++	+
Third Age	++	++
Fourth Age	+	+++

the Fourth Age will be willing to accept sacrifices in autonomy for greater security (Table 2).

### AUTONOMY AND SECURITY IN THE THIRD AGE

In considering the array of environmental needs of those in the Third Age, we see the principal issues as relating to those person–environment transactions that produce the place attributes of autonomy and security. This section summarizes key empirical understandings on autonomy and security at the community level of analysis.

#### Autonomy

At the community level of environment, accessibility (physical distance and mobility) has considerable influence over personal autonomy. For example, the presence of amenities or services, such as pharmacies and grocery stores, plays a role in location selection for older adults (Golant, 2002; Hunt, 2001; Kahana, Lovegreen, Kahana, & Kahana, 2003). Hunt and Ross (1990) found that older residents indicated proximity to grocery stores was an important element in the attractiveness of a location; those stores located within a half-mile facilitated residents' walking to use the amenities and services. Given that many amenities and services may not be located within a half mile of a residence, transportation becomes a related factor in accessing basic amenities and services. Hoehner, Brennan Ramirez, Elliott, Handy, and Brownson (2005) discovered that the proximity and availability of public transportation were positively associated with use, although Walters (2002) cautioned that the proximity of public transportation and libraries only influences use by those who require those services.

The presence of certain social and physical characteristics in a community has a beneficial effect on the health of older residents (Masotti, Fick, Johnson-Masotti, & MacLeod, 2006). This work recognizes that older people are at higher risk for inactivity-associated health problems, and thus promotion of physical activity should be an imperative (AHRQ, 2002). For example, a study by King et al. (2003) suggested that “women who lived within walking distance to a biking or walking trail; department, discount,

or hardware store; or park had significantly higher pedometer readings than women who did not" (p. 78). Research in this area should serve to broaden our understanding of the importance of neighborhood-based resources.

With the declines in competency (e.g., physical, cognitive) that accompany aging, the salience of the environment increases (Lawton & Simon, 1968). Thus, when an individual is of marginal competence, access to "neighborhood-based supportive services may make the difference between a positive and a negative outcome" (Lawton, 1980, p. 51). Indeed, Oswald, Schilling, Wahl, and Gäng (2002) found that 43% of relocation motives arose from concerns about the physical environment, not due solely to either personal or social reasons; the researchers conclude that maintenance of autonomy is one of the primary reasons for relocation. When the goal is autonomy maintenance, the older adult may look for ways to compensate for losses or barriers (the selection-optimization-compensation model [Baltes, 1996]). According to Haas and Serow (1993), efforts to compensate may arise from push and pull factors embedded in the relocation decision. For Bekhet, Zauszniewski, and Nakhla (2009), push factors related to relocation include the loss of autonomy in maintaining one's home, and pull factors include proximity to family, services, or amenities that may compensate for perceived losses. In a study of relocations to a continuing care retirement community, Krout, Moen, Holmes, Oggins, and Bowen (2002) detected access to needed services as a pull factor, and not being a burden on family as a push factor. The discrepancy between push and pull factors has been found to negatively affect psychological well-being (Ryff & Essex, 1992). Furthermore, the effect of this discrepancy may be exacerbated when relocations are involuntary (Lawton, 1980).

### Security

The topic of the personal safety of community-dwelling older adults is effectively summed up in Lawton's (1980) statement that "the many types of vulnerability associated with aging undoubtedly potentiate the growth of fear" (p. 46). Neighborhood satisfaction is strongly influenced by perceived safety in general (Nasar & Fisher, 1993), especially among elderly residents (Christensen & Carp, 1987). Neighborhood characteristics linked with perceived safety include neighborhood deterioration (Krause, 1998), unattended dogs (King et al., 2000), police inadequacy (Lawton & Hoover, 1979), familiarity with neighborhood social structure (Merry, 1976), and exhibited mobilization behaviors (e.g., bars on windows) (Sundeen & Mathieu, 1976). A perceived sense of safety is a key pull factor in residential decisions of the elderly (Bekhet et al., 2009; Krout et al., 2002).

Variations in perceived safety may relate to differences in place attachment, defined as "a set of feelings about a geographic location that emotionally binds a person to that place as a function of its role as a

setting for experience” (Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992, p. 139). According to Brown and Perkins (1992), place attachment involves a sense of belonging, the expression of self, and feelings of psychological security. Years of social exchanges produced over the course of long-time residency give rise to a strong orientation toward the expectations of a place and a support system of mutual reciprocity (McHugh & Mings, 1996; Rowles & Ravdal, 2002). With respect to rural settings in particular, Norris-Baker and Scheidt (2005) observed that “community culture (or that of an identifiable subgroup within the community) can provide a milieu, including aspects of the physical and social environment, in which late-life developmental changes can be experienced safely and in a psychologically healthy way, supporting needs for community, security, and self continuity” (p. 283).

The need for security (and its correlate territoriality—which promotes security through predictability, order, and stability [Brown, 1987])—is a main factor underlying the desire to age in place (Rowles & Ravdal, 2002). As Lawton (1990) stated, aging in place is “a transaction between an aging individual and his or her residential environment that is characterized by changes in both person and environment over time, with the physical location of the person being the only constant” (p. 288). Thus, although the proximate setting is static, the contextual environment may change over time, and often does. Recognition of the dynamic, multidimensional, and transactional nature of aging-in-place is at the core of much of the critique of the fixed definition of aging in place often referenced in public policy discussions (Golant, 2008).

## CONTEXTUAL ISSUES IN COMMUNITY-BASED LIVING FOR THE THIRD AGE

Although the previous section reviewed the key empirical understandings of autonomy and security for the elderly in the community, in everyday life people engage in various strategies to navigate the autonomy–security dialectic. These strategies are shaped not only by the activities that occur in places, but also by the cognitive–emotional meaning that one constructs in relation to the place (Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992).

### Residential Normalcy

This activities-and-meanings notion is central to Golant’s (2011) concept of residential normalcy, with its dual interdependent constructs of older adults’ experiences of the residential environment: the zone of comfort and the zone of mastery. An individual is thought to be in the zone of comfort when the general experience of the environment is pleasurable, hassle-free, and



memorable, and to be in the zone of mastery when one feels competent and in control. When the elderly find themselves out of their comfort or mastery zones, they initiate accommodative (mental management of expectations) strategies or assimilative (action management) strategies for coping to restore residential normalcy. The resources they draw on to enact the necessary strategies are idiosyncratic and predicated on life experience (e.g., an individual may want to move but not have the physical competency or the economic resources to do so).

## Relocation

One of the more dramatic assimilative strategies is relocation. Researchers have distinguished the relocations of older adults in terms of first, second, and third moves (Haas & Serow, 1993; Litwak & Longino, 1987). First moves are typically made by younger, healthier, wealthier older adults seeking specific amenities; second moves are motivated by desires to be in a more urban area or closer to family due to increased needs for assistance; and third moves refer to relocation to institutional settings, usually as the result of declining physical or mental health (Litwak & Longino, 1987). Note that first moves reflect agency in seeking personal fulfillment, the goal of the Third Age, whereas second and third moves reflect the increased dependence indicative of the Fourth Age. Because the focus of this article relates to community-based living options for the Third Age, the remainder of this article will concentrate on environmental choices related to first moves, which Bradley and Longino (2009) have recently described as moves that occur “in early retirement . . . driven by lifestyle considerations” (p. 325).

As it happens, most community-based living options for older adults come to be recognized have primarily for the retirement aspect of the relocation, and thus are usually referred to as retirement communities. Retirement communities are characterized by four qualities: a retirement element (i.e., the majority of the population is actively retired); a community element (i.e., a geographically bounded area in which the group of residents is of the same age); a collective spirit (i.e., the group acts together with respect to activities, interests, and within the same facilities); and support of residents' desires to remain autonomous but secure (Phillips, Bernard, Biggs, & Kingston, 2001). Note the dialectic portrayal of autonomy and security in the fourth quality of retirement communities—the essential attributes of the older adult–environment relationship described by Parmelee and Lawton (1990) and referred to by Wahl and Lang (2003) as agency and belonging.

## Diversity in Third Age Residential Environments

Given the possible range of life experiences of older adults, we can assume that the diversity of residential environments for individuals in the Third Age

will be as heterogeneous as that of the Second Age. By merging our life stage adaptation of the SPOT theory (Table 2) with the aforementioned definition of retirement community (Phillips et al., 2001), we can anticipate that Third Age individuals pursue a balance between autonomy and security issues compared with the agency-directed Second Age and the belonging-directed Fourth Age. Mixing the life stage-adapted SPOT theory with the concept of residential normalcy, we can hypothesize that as Third Agers seek balance in autonomy and security, the strategies they use to achieve that balance in their residential environments will vary considerably.

Furthermore, our thinking follows Rubinstein and Parmelee's (1992) suggestion that place experience is shaped by an individual's position in their life course relative to the larger sociocultural context. Thus, although we see a general trend among Third Agers' searches for residential balance between autonomy and security, we envisage diversity—some individuals will be pulled toward retaining autonomy whereas others will feel compelled to seek greater security. As such, we would expect to see a range of options that demonstrate the interdependence of autonomy and security, which in turn reflects Third Agers' efforts to maintain residential normalcy. The following section focuses on three existing models of community-based living that illustrate this diversity.

### THREE MODELS OF COMMUNITY-BASED LIVING FOR THE THIRD AGE

Community-based living options for the Third Age can be initially classified in terms of their intentional natures: planned and unplanned. Although many variations exist, we will limit our review to three exemplar models that reflect this continuum. Among planned communities is the LORC model. Among the unplanned, the most common model is the NORC. The Village model, a hybrid, has emerged in more recent times.

#### Leisure-Oriented Retirement Communities

As the label implies, leisure activities are the main focus of planned LORCs (Folts & Muir, 2002; Folts & Streib, 1994; Streib, Folts, & Peacock, 2007). First appearing in the early 1960s, the LORC concept came to be epitomized by mega-developments such as Sun City and Leisure World (Strevey, 1989). LORCs appeal to older adults interested in an active lifestyle in an age-restricted, secure environment; these features are marketed heavily to this audience by their project developers, regions, or municipalities. Although many residents of LORCs elect to move on the basis of amenities (Blakely & Snyder, 1997) such as shops, services, sport facilities (golf courses, swimming

pools), and communal buildings (i.e., club houses), supportive personal and health care services are generally not part of the LORC proposition (Folts & Streib, 1994). Security is often manifest in the gated community form, in which the perimeter of the community area is bounded by walls or fences with controlled entrances for motorized traffic, bicycles, and pedestrians. Residents of LORCs indicate the gated community feature provides a sense of security (McHugh & Larson-Keagy, 2005).

### Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities

NORCs are “housing developments that are not planned or designed for older people but that attract a preponderance (over 50 percent) of residents at least 60 years or older” (Hunt & Gunter-Hunt, 1985; Hunt & Ross, 1990, p. 667). NORCs are located in rural and urban environments (Golant, 2003; Lawton, 1980) and in warm and cool climates, although they appear to be more prevalent in warm climates (Longino & Bradley, 2006). NORCs are formed through residential continuity (i.e., an initially pre-elderly population remaining in their homes beyond age 60 and aging in place) or the immigration of older adults in search of more convenient locations or amenity-oriented lifestyles (but not specifically planned or designed for an older population) (Golant, 1992).

In contrast to purpose-built residential communities such as LORCs, NORCs are not specifically designed for older people; they are age-integrated, often located in single buildings of fewer than 500 residents, and are not marketed as communities for older adults (Hunt & Ross, 1990). For NORC residents, the three most important aspects of their community are proximity to services, access to social groups, and “the surrounding neighborhood and its characteristics” (Hunt & Gunter-Hunt, 1985, p. 13).

### The Village Model

The Village is a hybrid model of planned and unplanned in that older adults remain in their homes in the community, and pay to become a member of an organization that coordinates and delivers programs and services (health and wellness care, home repair, groceries, transportation, social events), which helps members maintain their independence (Beacon Hill Village, 2011; Thomas & Blanchard, 2009). The model was developed in 2001 by a group of older adults residing in the Beacon Hill neighborhood of Boston (McWhinney-Morse, 2009) as an alternative to having to move to retirement or assisted living communities (Beacon Hill Village, 2011). To create a “virtual retirement community” for members, Beacon Hill Village founders focused on three areas for older adults: community building, support services, and

healthcare (Boston Channel, 2002; McWhinney-Morse, 2009). The goal of Beacon Hill Village is to “offer programs and services [via reliable vendors] that address not only medical and housing needs but social, physical, emotional, and intellectual needs as well” (McWhinney-Morse, 2009, p. 85).

### Comparison of Models of Community-Based Living Across Contextual Issues

The three models of community-based living for the Third Age differ in terms of their characteristics with respect to the key contextual issues summarized earlier (Table 3).

#### RELOCATION

The LORC model presumes relocation. Third Agers must have the financial means to relocate to support their leisure interests. They must have the physical and mental health competencies that allow them to participate in their leisure interests to their personal levels of satisfaction. Those Third Agers who lack the financial, physical, or mental means to support relocation are unlikely to choose the LORC model as their environmental context for aging. The NORC model does not demand relocation for the mode of residential continuity, but it does require relocation for the in-migration mode. The Village model presumes residential continuity, which precludes relocation. Indeed, the model was purposely developed to help older adults avoid relocation from their own homes in the community.

#### AUTONOMY

LORCs offer autonomy via the lifestyle and recreational amenities that facilitate social and physical activities. However, LORCs restrict residents' autonomy to the degree that the environment is secure. NORCs offer autonomy via community-based living. Indeed, autonomy is a defining characteristic of living in community. The Village model offers autonomy via community-based living that is supplemented by lump-sum membership and fee-for-service programs and services that help to sustain independence.

#### SECURITY

Security in the LORC model is literal, manifest in real and hidden barriers such as eligibility requirements, controlled gate entries, walls, and fences that separate the community from the surrounding area. The security of a NORC is literal and perceptual. Literally, physical security is provided via community-

**TABLE 3** Contextual Characteristics of Community-Based Living Models for the Third Age

Model	Relocation	Autonomy	Security	Residential Normalcy (Coping Strategies)
LORC	Requires relocation that is presumed to be voluntary, as residents are assumed to be making a conscious choice to reside in the LORC	Via leisure amenities that facilitate social and physical activities	In a literal way, via eligibility requirements, physical barriers such as controlled gate entries, walls, and fences	Relocation to the LORC is a demonstration of an assimilative strategy to achieve residential congruence
NORC	In residential continuity mode, does not require relocation In in-migration mode, requires relocation	Via community-based living	Literally, physical security is provided via community-based resources such as police and through individual measures to ensure home security. Perceptual security is facilitated via familiarity with the community (residential continuity) and as evidenced by selection (in-migration)	NORC residency via residential continuity likely entails accommodative coping in order to reconcile loss of residential mastery over the environment with preference for residential comfort In-migration to a NORC is a demonstration of an assimilative strategy to achieve residential congruence
Village	Presumes residential continuity, thus precluding relocation	Via community-based living that is supplemented by lump-sum membership and fee-for-service programs and services that sustain independence	Literally, physical security is provided via community-based resources such as police and through individual measures to ensure home security. Perceptually, via the membership fees that entitle members to become part of an organized community whose sole purpose is to provide programs and services that support the range of needs of aging adults	Election to join the organization demonstrates an assimilative strategy in order to maintain residential congruence

*Note.* LORC = leisure-oriented retirement community; NORC = the naturally occurring retirement community.

based resources, such as police, and through individual measures to ensure home security. Perceptual security of the NORC is facilitated via familiarity with the community (in the case of residential continuity) and as evidenced by selection (in the case of in-migration). The security of the Village model stems from the support received from the programs and services offered to its paying members.

#### RESIDENTIAL NORMALCY

Relocation to a LORC is a demonstration of an assimilative strategy to achieve residential congruence. NORC residency via residential continuity likely entails accommodative coping to reconcile loss of residential mastery over the environment with preference for residential comfort. NORC in-migration is a demonstration of an assimilative strategy to achieve residential congruence. In the Village model, election to join the member organization demonstrates an assimilative strategy to maintain residential congruence.

#### CONCLUSION

In this article, we have outlined some of the essential details of our position—that in order for the field of environmental gerontology to succeed in the future, environmental gerontologists must redirect their attention toward the residential environments of choice of older adults, which are not institutional settings, but rather their own homes located in neighborhoods and communities. In the future, environmental gerontologists must approach residential environments for aging with a nuanced awareness of the Third Age experience. Apropos is Rubinstein's (2002) observation that the Third Age is still understood as a post period (e.g., post child-rearing, post wage-earning). Whether this post condition is viewed as loss or freedom establishes a rhetorical frame for the choices and adaptations the older adult makes and the assessments of quality of life that follow. If the Third Age is viewed as an age of loss, we must be able to ascertain how uncertainty in the various domains of life might lead to increased needs or desires for security and belonging in the person's relationship with the environment, a reflection of what Lawton (1989) refers to as the maintenance function of the environment. Conversely, if the Third Age is perceived as an age of freedom, environmental support for autonomy and provision of stimulation may be particularly salient. In this regard, we would do well to note Rubinstein's (2002) reflection that from a developmental perspective, freedom may foster narcissism or generativity, each orientation involving different sets of sociophysical relationships as determined by dissimilar goals.

Where the variety in Third Age goal orientation is undeniably shaped by the life stages that preceded, so will the Third Age be tied to the Fourth. In her socio-emotional selectivity theory, Carstensen (1995) suggested that the elderly, having shrinking time horizons, become increasingly selective in placing their energy and resources, focusing on emotionally meaningful goals and related activities. For the Third Age, selectivity reflects the negotiation between one's sequential development through First and Second Ages and the inevitability of the shrinking time horizon in the Fourth Age.

The theoretical ambiguity of the Third Age at both the individual and collective levels of analysis introduces intriguing prospects for environmental gerontology research. We believe our examination posits four likely conclusions for the next phase of research in environmental gerontology:

1. There will be increasing innovation in the community-based living models that serve the diverse Third Age demographic. As described in this article, three models of community-based living for the Third Age—the LORC, the NORC, and the Village—show promise as exemplary options for community-based living for older adults. Further innovations should be driven by robust, theory-based research.
2. We believe the dialectic between residential continuity and relocation is fundamentally driven by the complementary needs of autonomy and security in conjunction with the individual's ability to achieve and maintain residential normalcy. These are the critical dimensions of environmental concern for the Third Age.
3. Future research on existing and emerging models of community-based living should draw on the many relevant theoretical approaches from environmental gerontology, including the competence-press model found in the Ecological Model of Aging (Lawton & Nahemow, 1973), approaches to the concept of place (Weisman, Chadhury, & Diaz Moore, 2000), and the effects of change over time on the relationship between the person and environment (Wahl & Lang, 2003). Given the ambiguity regarding the Third Age, lateral connections to developmental theories such as the socio-emotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1995) should be considered (the SPOT model is an excellent example in this regard).
4. A caveat—although place experience is individualistic, we recognize that places must be designed for groups of people. As such, analysis of place at the consensual level of understanding is essential to inform better environmental design (Weisman et al., 2000).

The unprecedented global aging arc has set the stage for environmental gerontology to become a force in understanding and creating residential environments for aging. Environmental gerontologists would do well to shift the historical focus from institutional settings and the needs of the Fourth Age to community-based living options for the Third Age. Rest assured that our

value position is unwavering; as Lawton (1980) stated, “the right to a decent environment is an inalienable right and requires no empirical justification” (p. 160). We proffer these suggestions not only to enhance the viability of the field of environmental gerontology, but also with the goal of enhancing environments for the elderly in this emergent, exciting period of the life course we refer to here as the Third Age.

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