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THIRD PLACE CHARACTERISTICS IN PLANNED RETIREMENT COMMUNITY SOCIAL SPACES

Nichole M. Campbell

Social interaction is an essential part of achieving life satisfaction, and it has many health and wellness benefits, particularly in late life. However, physical changes that commonly affect elders, such as reductions in mobility, hearing, and sight, can lead to more time spent in or near the home. The result is often greater isolation. Research has shown that the less able an individual is, the greater the built environment's influence on his or her behavior is (Lawton, 1974). While the built environment is not the only influencing factor, it can play a crucial role. Oldenburg's (1999) study of "third places" (a person's social home away from home) provided some information on designing social spaces that host quality social interaction for the general population. Building on this knowledge, studying social spaces in retirement communities is an excellent opportunity to understand the problem of designing interior social spaces that support social interaction for older adults. The present study found that third places existed in a continuing care retirement community, and the social spaces that possessed third place characteristics were better liked and used more than the spaces that did not exhibit such characteristics. Consequently, incorporating third place characteristics into the design of social spaces in a retirement community may support an active social scene in the community, which in turn would promote the health and well-being of residents and the community's success.

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BACKGROUND

Research has repeatedly shown that social interaction is a means of supporting physical and mental health (Glass, *et al.*, 2006; Krause, 2006; MacNeil and Teague, 1987; Ybarra, *et al.*, 2008). Often, these studies demonstrate a connection between social interaction and the specific health and wellness advantages of that social interaction. For instance, Kondo and Yamashita (1990) found the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease was lower for socially active individuals. In addition, decreases in depression were reported for elderly who engaged in healthy levels of social interaction, and Glass, *et al.* (2006) reported increased longevity for elderly with healthy levels of social interaction. These studies help underline the broad importance of social interaction in promoting health and well-being among the elderly. However, they only tell us why social interaction is important, not how to enable older adults to have more quality opportunities for interaction.

While social interaction is an essential and universal human need, it is of particular interest in the context of the elderly. Often, retirement offers the chance for individuals to choose where, with whom, and how to spend the majority of their hours each day, but advancing age and changes in health tend to alter this dynamic over time. Older adults frequently experience changes in physical ability, such as decreased mobility and reductions in vision and hearing quality. These changes can alter behavior patterns and often lead to elderly individuals spending more time near or in their homes. Also, this is a life stage in which traditional social networks are shifting. For instance, while many adults receive a portion of their social interaction in the workplace, elderly adults have generally left the workforce, along with the social connections it provides. As a result, retirement communities offer a unique opportunity in the study, development, and planning of social spaces. The term "retirement community" can apply to any planned or unplanned community in which the majority of the residents housed there are over the age of 65. This study focuses on service-oriented, planned retirement communities, specifically one continuing care retirement community (CCRC). In service-oriented communities, "unmarried persons (typically widows) make up the majority of residents," and CCRCs in particular often "offer a wide selection of social and recreational activities and health care services" (Campbell, 2008:337, 339).

Quality social interaction is important, but the people with whom residents interact is also key in producing positive outcomes. "Interaction with friends tends to bolster feelings of self-worth, but interaction with family members fails to have a similar effect" (Krause, 2006:189). In a study of social interaction in assisted living facilities for older adults, Street, *et al.* (2007:S133) found that "contact with family and friends outside the facility did not significantly impact life satisfaction, but positive internal social relationships were associated with significantly higher life satisfaction." Since it is becoming more common for independent living residents to age in place rather than move to assisted living facilities, we might expect similar results if this study was conducted in an independent living environment. This strongly implies that there is a need for active social spaces, or "third places" in Oldenburg's (1999) terminology, in retirement communities. Nevertheless, little research has been done on supporting social needs, especially in independent living facilities.

Moreover, a healthy social scene has been shown to attract new residents to retirement housing. This could be a crucial facet for the marketability and success of retirement communities — a matter of importance to CCRC management. For instance, research on naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs), a type of unplanned retirement community that is found internationally, has provided insight into the importance of an active social scene in retirement housing (Hunt, 2012). According to Hunt (2001), a lively social scene is one of the main ways to attract new residents and promote resident satisfaction, prompting the word-of-mouth recommendations that NORC research has shown are the main way older residents find NORC housing options. While for-profit retirement communities feel the sting of wasted space when additional square footage is built for residents' social use and then goes unused, this problem is particularly difficult for not-for-profit facilities. It is important to note that 81% of CCRCs in the United States are nonprofit organizations

(Ziegler Capital Markets, 2009). For these reasons, developing a better understanding of how to design successful social spaces will likely be very valuable to both older adult residents and retirement community organizations.

Throughout history, people have actively gathered in social spaces. Some societies are even known for the success of certain types of social spaces, such as cafés and pubs in Europe. These vital social hubs offer a place where people can come alone or in groups to gather for conversation. Long after these spaces found their place in societies, Oldenburg (1999) named and explained this social phenomenon, calling these active social spaces "third places" (the "first place" being home, and the "second place" being work). Third places host rich social interaction and can enhance the sense of community. However, the current literature has not yet explored how designers create third places in the context of retirement communities.

Oldenburg (1999) argued that the rise of the American suburb helped lead to the demise of adequate social opportunities. One of the keys of the third place is its convenient and walkable location, for which Oldenburg argued the scale of American suburbs is all wrong. In American suburbs, residents tend to drive to work or school and then drive right back home at the end of the day. Since there are few, if any, pubs or cafés to walk to in the evening, most suburban Americans spend the evening in front of the TV (or now the computer) rather than engaging in public life (*ibid.*).

Oldenburg's (1999) research on third places built a strong case for the advantages of appropriate amounts of social interaction and, consequently, the importance of third places. However, he stopped short of looking at how social interaction, in general, and third places, specifically, support health and well-being for more vulnerable populations in institutional and semi-institutional places, like retirement communities. By examining third places in the independent living portion of a CCRC, the research presented in this paper bridges the gap between social interaction research and therapeutic design research. Generally implemented in hospitals, therapeutic design is an area of expertise that utilizes the built environment to improve patient health and well-being. According to Smith and Watkins (2008), "A healthcare environment is therapeutic when it does *all* of the following:

- Supports clinical excellence in the treatment of the physical body
- Supports the psycho-social and spiritual needs of the patient, family, and staff
- Produces measurable positive effects on patients' clinical outcomes and staff effectiveness."

Therapeutic design research has shown that environmental characteristics may support healing and well-being for various vulnerable groups, such as hospital patients and individuals with Alzheimer's (see, *e.g.*, Burton and Sheehan, 2010). For example, Ulrich (1984) found that views of nature and even artwork depicting scenes of nature (especially scenes of water and trees) could be used therapeutically to positively affect patient outcomes in an acute-care setting by reducing blood pressure, anxiety, and the use of pain medication. This finding exemplifies the evolution of understanding environmental design as a tool to not only provide safety and comfort but also promote healing.

This bridge between therapeutic design research and social interaction research is accomplished through investigating environmental characteristics that are not just therapeutic to the unwell but that may also be used to support the continued wellness of healthy older adults. In other words, with an understanding of the environmental attributes that are related to maintaining health and well-being, designers can begin to use design preventively, rather than waiting until someone is ill and using it therapeutically.

Like many CCRCs, the retirement community in this study is organized like a town, offering cafés, doctors' offices, a grocery store, a pharmacy, community recreation spaces, and many other amen-

ities. One key difference between planned retirement communities and American suburbs is that community life in the retirement communities is just a short walk away. In other words, retirement communities are intentionally scaled to be walkable for the residents. Because of this, CCRCs have the potential to provide third places for residents. However, this potential has not yet been examined in the research.

While many of the commercial spaces in CCRCs are used by residents as outlets for informal interaction, CCRCs also provide communal social spaces (the equivalent of community-wide recreation or family rooms) in which residents can interact casually, engaging in anything from conversation to card games. In addition to the planned social spaces, residents also socialize in other places, such as interacting while retrieving mail in the mailbox area. However, this study will focus on the spaces intended for informal social use by retirement community residents.

Beyond the informal component of residents' social lives, CCRCs also offer residents planned and organized social activities, ranging from art classes to dances. As a result, the social lives of retirement community residents include this formal programming in addition to the more personal, informal interactions.

It is important to note here that CCRCs are evolving greatly today. The clear-cut, three-step model (independent living, assisted living, and nursing care) that once defined them is no longer so simple. Today, elderly in retirement communities are often offered in-home support services within independent living facilities that were previously only offered in assisted living environments. Liebrock (2000:11) elaborated on this evolution in in-home care: "Health care is now portable; many interventions can easily be brought to patients and their families with advancements in home health care." Mike Magee (2007:2), Senior Fellow in Health Policy at the Center for Aging Services Technologies in Washington, DC, explained that his vision of the future of elderly care is one in which "the majority of prevention, behavioral modification, monitoring, and treatment of chronic diseases … takes place at home." In other words, the future of caring for the elderly centers on the home, with elderly and their families being more empowered and proactive in the elder's care, as opposed to the earlier model of progressing through the organization-centered levels of care. This change will be crucial to note in the development of future retirement communities. As the abilities of users decrease through age or accident, the built environment plays an increasingly important role in users' environmental competence (Lawton, 1974). While architecture and design alone cannot make a space socially alive or devoid of visitors, the design of the built environment can play a crucial role. How, then, do we design retirement community social spaces that enhance quality of life and promote the healthy social scene that contributes to the success of retirement-housing options?

Suggesting the need for third places should not be interpreted as sticking a Starbucks in a retirement community and calling it a third place. In their study on coffee shops and consumers' (anti-corporate) experiences of globalization, Thompson and Arsel (2004:639) misguidedly claimed that the opposing point of view to Oldenburg's praise of cafés as third places is that modern-day cafés are places of consumerism instead of places of community engagement, as they once were: "Contemporary cafés are little more than postmodern simulations of a by-gone communal ethos that emerged in the formative period of modernity when individuals were citizens rather than consumers and when communities functioned as loci of political and civic engagement rather than lifestyle enclaves." This, however, is not the opposing viewpoint to Oldenburg's. Oldenburg did not deny that modern consumerism created these types of places; rather, he made the case for establishing social places such as cafés that were injected with the lively, welcoming, inclusive spirit of third places so that the human social needs third places fill can be met. In other words, Oldenburg was not saying, "Yes, bring on Starbucks! That will solve our collective loneliness!" but, rather, that these social places need to offer the "spirit" of third places, which is a genuineness and warmth. "In" places, Oldenburg (1999:37) contended, will result in people being "inhibited by shyness; others will succumb to pretention [and] commercialism will reign." In contrast, he envisioned third

places as having the feel of a pub: "They are intimate, even cozy settings, designed more for an immediate neighborhood than a horde of transients and sometime visitors" (Oldenburg, 1999:125).

Oldenburg's research showed that successful third places have a welcoming, friendly, and informal atmosphere. When he studied third places, he found them to be relaxed, unpretentious places where conversation is the main activity. Oldenburg (1999:42) explained the character inherent in third places "is marked by a playful mood, which contrasts with people's more serious involvement in other spheres. Though a radically different kind of setting from the home, the third place is remarkably similar to a good home in the psychological comfort and support that it extends."

This concept of a third place being similar psychologically to a home has been explored further in more recent research. In a study on the role of third places in consumers' lives, Rosenbaum (2006) described places as serving one of three roles, labeled as place-as-practical, place-as-gathering, and place-as-home. "Place-as-practical" describes spaces that serve only a basic consumer need for users. "Place-as-gathering" describes spaces that not only serve a practical or consumer need for users but also serve as a place in which to interact with other people, thereby satisfying companionship needs as well. "Place-as-home" describes spaces that users associate with the ability to satisfy consumer, companionship, and personal/emotional-support needs. Customer loyalty to these three types of places increases as the place plays an increasing role in satisfying companionship and personal/emotional-support needs.

In the context of a retirement community, this could mean that how well retirement community residents use and like spaces corresponds to the level of fulfillment they enjoy in these spaces. If only their basic consumer needs are being met in a space (*e.g.*, it is only a place to sit and wait), then that space will not build the same attachment as a place in which users' emotional needs are also met (*e.g.*, friendship with a clerk in a space may provide companionship or even personal or emotional support). It stands to reason that the more emotional value individuals find in a particular place, the more likely they are to enjoy and use that space. A better understanding of the possible role of third places in retirement communities could be used to inform the design of retirement community social spaces. In turn, this would help meet the emotional health and wellness needs of residents, as well as the goals of retirement community management to only build spaces that are liked and used by residents and to create a lively, appealing social scene in the community. We do not currently know whether the social spaces in retirement communities have the characteristics of third places.

In his book *The Great Good Place*, Oldenburg (1999) described the characteristics of the atmospheres of third places as lively, playful, and welcoming and the decor as casual and homelike. However, though Oldenburg found these various characteristics in third places, they have not been researched to assess their relative impact on the success of a social space. Moreover, what constitutes "success" for a social space? Is it that a social space is well liked? While being liked is important, it may not be a sufficient quality to generate usage of the space. For example, while a person may like one coffee shop in town best, he or she may visit a different coffee shop more often and spend more time there because it is close to his or her office. Thus, while retirement community social spaces may have third place characteristics, we do not know whether or how the atmosphere and decor characteristics of third places are related to how well liked and used the spaces are.

A welcoming, friendly, and informal atmosphere can be created in part through programmatic aspects (*e.g.*, providing helpful and friendly staff), but it can be supported further through the designed environment. Moreover, it is not sufficient for the decor of a social space to simply be homey and informal; it must also communicate this ambiance to the resident group it is serving. For instance, a welcoming space might include warm colors, comfortable seating, and stone fireplaces. Scott's (1993) research on users' preferences for interior space attributes established that "relaxing," "warm," and "comfortable seating" were preferred attributes of social spaces. Additionally, in special nursing care units for Alzheimer's residents, Zeisel, *et al.* (2003:709) found that "the envi-

ronmental features associated with both reduced aggressive and agitated behavior and fewer psychological problems include … residential character." While Zeisel, *et al.*'s research focused on facilities for more vulnerable residents, the trend for aging in place in independent living means their research may also be applicable to independent living settings for healthier individuals. Moreover, both of these studies provide further support for Oldenburg's contention that social spaces should have a casual, homelike design aesthetic.

The study that is the focus of this article was part of a larger research study on social spaces in independent living settings. The larger study sought to understand the social lives of retirement community residents by examining third places and their applicability in CCRCs. The present study focuses on the relationship between third place characteristics and how well CCRC social spaces are liked and used. To better understand social spaces in retirement communities, this paper asks the following research question: to the extent that retirement community social spaces have third place atmosphere (lively, playful, and welcoming) and decor (casual and homelike) characteristics, as defined by Oldenburg (1999), are these characteristics related to how well used and liked the social spaces are?

The following section explores the methods used in this study to investigate third places in a CCRC and how third place characteristics impact how well these social spaces are liked and used. This is followed by a discussion of the findings from the resident survey data collected for this study and a discussion of the relationship between these new findings and previous research.

METHOD

Participants

The author collected the data for this case study by surveying independent living residents (n = 303) of Oakwood Village Retirement Community, a service-oriented CCRC located in the midwestern region of the U.S. Although this CCRC offers independent living, assisted living, skilled nursing care, and Alzheimer's care, independent living residents were the sole source of the data. The retirement community housed 422 independent living residents at the time of the data collection. It was assumed that the survey respondents were mentally capable of providing accurate responses to the survey.

Measures

The author conducted a survey to gather insight from the independent living residents of Oakwood Village Retirement Community. The survey included two sections: one covering residents' demographic information and social preferences and one containing questions about the selected social places. The first section solicited information on age, mobility, and how much the resident liked to interact socially. This portion of the survey was presented in multiple-choice format. The second section of the survey asked participants to respond to questions about six selected social spaces and third place characteristics as they pertained to those spaces. Respondents were asked to respond to these questions using a five-point bipolar Likert scale, ranging from one (the most negative response) to five (the most positive response). Additionally, there was a "no answer" option for respondents who did not use or were unfamiliar with the space. Figure 1 provides an example of the questions regarding third place characteristics of the spaces.

In the resident survey, Oakwood residents were asked to assess the three atmosphere characteristics (lively, playful, and welcoming) and the two decor characteristics (casual and homelike) of third places that Oldenburg identified. These variables were examined to see whether they were correlated with the two outcome variables: (1) satisfaction with the selected social spaces ("How well do you like each space?") and (2) informal usage of the social spaces ("For reasons other than to

25. How would you characterize the atmosphere of the spaces according to the following?						
	Subdued				Lively	No Answer
A. 2nd Floor Lounge in Heritage.....	1	2	3	4	5	☐
B. Meeting Place by Bridge (Tower).....	1	2	3	4	5	☐
C. 2nd Floor N. End of Hall (Tower).....	1	2	3	4	5	☐
D. Heritage Lobby.....	1	2	3	4	5	☐
E. Oaks Community Room.....	1	2	3	4	5	☐
F. Tower Lobby.....	1	2	3	4	5	☐

FIGURE 1. Sample question regarding third place characteristics of the spaces from the resident survey.

participate in Oakwood staff scheduled activities, how much do you visit each space?" and "During casual visits [not including visits to attend Oakwood staff scheduled activities], how would you characterize the amount of time you usually spend in each space during your visits?"). For the question regarding the likability of the space, the Likert-scale answer choices ranged from "don't like it" (1) to "love it" (5). For the questions regarding the frequency and length of use of the space, the answer choices ranged from "never" (1) to "very often" (5) and from "none" (1) to "very much" (5) respectively. Additionally, black-and-white photographs of the six social spaces from the CCRC were included in the survey to ensure that respondents were answering questions about the appropriate corresponding spaces. The author created six separate versions of the survey, in which the six social spaces were randomly listed in a different order so that the order would not unfairly influence the results.

Since the survey treatment was newly developed for this study, its construct validity was addressed in a few ways. The survey treatment was initially created based on the existing social space literature. Then, the survey was scrutinized by two academic environment and behavior experts in the design field. Based on that review, the survey was revised to reflect the experts' comments until there was consensus that the survey measured what it was intended to measure. To further maintain construct validity, the survey was pilot tested to help ensure question clarity.

Procedure

The author collected the data for this study as part of a larger research study. Initially, six social spaces in the CCRC were chosen by consensus of a focus group of CCRC residents and staff. These included the three social spaces the focus group believed were the most successful and the three social spaces they believed were the least successful. "Successful spaces" were defined as spaces that were both well liked and well used by residents for informal social interaction. The chosen spaces were located throughout the independent living buildings of the retirement community (see Figure 2).

Next, the author conducted the self-report resident survey described in the previous section. Though the CCRC housed 422 independent living residents, the six residents who participated in the focus group were not considered eligible to participate in the survey. The remaining potentially eligible survey sample included 416 predominantly white, upper-middle-class and middle-class residents. The surveys were delivered by mail, and respondents returned the completed surveys to survey return boxes (which looked like ballot boxes) located in lobby spaces in the CCRC. Of the 416 possible survey respondents, 303 residents returned their surveys, a 73% response rate. The 303 participating respondents were mostly women (213 women and 90 men). Their ages ranged from 60 to 99, though more than half (187 residents) were between 80 and 89 years old.

Data Analysis

The first layer of data analysis included descriptive statistical analysis. The second layer involved multiple regression analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software

Successful Social Spaces		Unsuccessful Social Spaces	
	Heritage Lobby	Oaks Community Room	
Located on this CCRC's campus-wide interior "Main Street," this lobby space is found in the newest independent living building, which was built in 2006. Adjacent to the resident mailbox area as well as a main entrance, this space is staffed by a daytime receptionist.		Found within one of the newer buildings on campus, built in 2002, this lobby space is adjacent to the building entrance, elevators, public restrooms, and the building residents' mailbox room. While not located on the Main Street, the space hosts several amenities, such as a fireplace, a kitchenette, and a wall-mounted television.	
	Tower Lobby	Heritage 2nd Floor Lounge	
Located in the oldest independent living building on campus, built in the mid-1970s, this lobby space is adjacent to a main facility entrance and is staffed by a daytime receptionist. The space is near many of the CCRC's commercial facilities and the building residents' mailbox space, though these are not visible from within the space.		Located in the Heritage Oaks building directly above the Heritage Lobby and the facility's Main Street, this space is adjacent to the intersection of a residential hallway, several staff offices, and a main staircase.	
	Tower Bridge	Tower 2nd Floor Sitting Nook	
Occupying an intersection along the campus's interior Main Street, this space bridges the Tower building to the main independent living and dining room and the campus auditorium. In addition to seating, this space hosts activity schedules and sign-up sheets.		This space is located at the far end of a lengthy double-loaded corridor on the Tower building's second floor, one floor below the Main Street, which traverses the third floor in this building. The space is near resident apartments, a couple staff offices, and the fire stairs.	

FIGURE 2. The six social spaces selected by the resident and staff focus group as being the most and least successful, which were the focus of this study.

version 19.0. Missing data were managed using multiple imputation. No outcomes were imputed. In the imputation of the other missing values, SPSS utilized all data to predict what the missing data were likely to be. Multiple imputation was chosen because the number of variables and resulting opportunities for missing data made a simpler method, such as listwise deletion, insufficient. Within the first layer of data analysis, the atmosphere variables were grouped together, and the decor variables were grouped together. From there, each variable group was assessed for average correlations with the outcome variables.

In the second layer of data analysis, the third place variables (atmosphere and decor) were analyzed individually in multiple regression analyses. All multiple regression analyses were done twice, once for each dependent variable. The multiple regression analyses were used to discover which third place variables predicted the outcome variables, and beta weights were examined. In order to place the variables on equal footing, simultaneous multiple regression was used in the analyses that examined the individual decor and atmosphere variables. In the multiple regression analyses, the variables were tested while controlling for the age, gender, and home range (daily path of travel) of respondents, as well as how much they enjoyed social interaction.

Type I error rate was controlled for using the Holm (1979) method. With this method, 12 tests of each independent variable were conducted (two dependent variables, each across six different spaces). This resulted in the most significant of the 12 *p*-values being tested at an alpha value of .05 / 12 = .0042. The next most significant *p*-value was then tested at an alpha value of .05 / 11 = .0045 (11 is the remaining comparison number). Each subsequent comparison was similarly tested until one was not statistically significant; it was then determined that the remaining comparisons were not statistically significant.

RESULTS

This section reports the initial analysis, which examined the ratings from the section of the resident survey concerning third place characteristics of the six social spaces in terms of the relationship between the third place characteristics present in the six spaces and how well the spaces were liked and used. Then, it reports on the multiple regression analyses of the third place variables to uncover which were the best predictors of how well the spaces were liked and used.

The atmosphere variables (lively, playful, and welcoming) were correlated with both of the outcome variables (likability and usage). The average correlation of the atmosphere variables with the likability of the space was $r = .404$; their average correlation with the usage of the space was $r = .382$. The decor variables (casual and homelike) were also correlated with both of the outcome variables. The average correlation of the decor variables with the likability of the space was $r = .330$; their average correlation with the usage of the space was $r = .206$. In short, these results indicated that the more highly used and well liked social spaces within Oakwood were more likely to possess third place characteristics than the spaces that were less well liked and used.

A second layer of data came from the multiple regression analyses, which controlled for the age, gender, and home range of respondents, as well as how much they enjoyed social interaction. Table 1 summarizes the regression results. The findings indicated that some of the atmosphere and decor variables were better predictors of likability and usage than others, but as a group, the atmosphere variables were better predictors of likability and usage than the decor variables. Individually, the subdued versus lively atmosphere variable was the best overall predictor. The data showed this variable was a significant predictor of usage for five of the six selected social spaces and of likability for three of the six selected social spaces. Thus, if residents perceived a social space as lively, then it was better liked and used, even when controlling for other variables.

TABLE 1. Multiple regression analyses: third place characteristics predicting the likability and usage of a space (controlling for the age, gender, and home range of respondents, as well as how much they enjoyed social interaction).

Social Space	Outcome Variable	*p*-value for Third Place Variable				
		Atmosphere			Decor	
		Subdued/ Lively	Serious/ Playful	Unfriendly/ Welcoming	Formal/ Casual	Institutional/ Homelike
Heritage Lobby (Successful)	Likability	---	< .001	< .001	---	.004
	Usage	.008	< .001	---	---	.004
Tower Lobby (Successful)	Likability	.012	< .001	< .001	---	.006
	Usage	< .001	---	---	---	---
Tower Bridge (Successful)	Likability	.004	---	.001	---	< .001
	Usage	.003	---	---	---	---
Oaks Community Room (Unsuccessful)	Likability	.006	---	< .001	---	< .001
	Usage	.011	---	---	---	.002
Heritage 2nd Floor Lounge (Unsuccessful)	Likability	---	---	---	---	---
	Usage	---	---	---	---	---
Tower 2nd Floor Sitting Nook (Unsuccessful)	Likability	---	---	< .001	---	.003
	Usage	.003	---	---	---	---

Note. Listed *p*-values were significant at .05 when the Type I error rate was controlled for using the Holm (1979) method.

DISCUSSION

Third places are social spaces that become a home away from home for users. They also address emotional needs and host rich social interaction. The third place concept can potentially be used to enhance the sense of community and the quality of healthy social engagement in a retirement community.

This study examined third places in the context of independent living in a CCRC. Because retirement community residents are often limited in terms of racial diversity, fall into a narrow range of socioeconomic statuses, and have other group-specific qualities, studies done in retirement community contexts are not generalizable to the U.S. older adult population as a whole. However, these findings may be generalizable to other CCRCs with resident populations that are similar to the one in the CCRC used in this study. Because this is a case study, this study needs to be replicated in other CCRCs to confirm its findings.

This study found that, generally, the features that characterize the atmosphere in a third place (being more lively than subdued, more playful than serious, and more welcoming than unfriendly) were correlated overall with how well a social space in the CCRC was liked and used. In other words, the social spaces in the CCRC that had a third place atmosphere were more successful than the spaces that were not characterized by third place atmosphere qualities.

Additionally, this study's findings showed support for Oldenburg's (1999) contention about the nature of third place decor. In particular, the homelike variable was confirmed as an important third place decor characteristic, as it was a significant predictor of how well the social spaces were liked and used. This lends additional weight to Scott's (1993) findings, which identified "warm" and

"relaxing" as preferable social space attributes. "Warm" and "relaxing" are both descriptors of homelike social space decor. Moreover, these findings seem to support Zeisel, *et al.*'s (2003) research, which found homelike settings were related to better health outcomes in specialized nursing care settings for Alzheimer's residents, indicating such research may have some applicability in an independent living setting. Although being casual and homelike were both positively associated with how well social spaces in the CCRC were liked and used, only the homelike variable served as a significant predictor.

While the decor variables were positively associated with how well spaces were liked and used, this variable group was not as highly correlated with the outcome variables as the atmosphere variables, which were better predictors overall of likability and usage. This implies that focusing on findings from environment and behavior research to support social interaction is likely to have a greater influence than focusing on design aesthetics. Nevertheless, the relationship between the decor variables and the likability and usage of the social spaces suggests it is important to create a design aesthetic that serves as a second layer of support in creating more successful social spaces.

Given that third place characteristics were positively associated with how well used and liked the CCRC social spaces were, this study suggests that including these features in retirement community social spaces is an important design strategy for supporting and enhancing the social life of retirement communities, which is important for several reasons. Earlier research on NORCs (Hunt and Ross, 1990) established a lively social scene as a factor that increases a retirement community's desirability as a housing option. Additionally, a lively social scene can support resident satisfaction with a retirement community itself. In addition to supporting the health and well-being of residents, which has been shown in previous research (see, *e.g.*, Glass, *et al.*, 2006; Kondo and Yamashita, 1990), these are further incentives for retirement community organizations to take third place characteristics into consideration when incorporating social spaces into their facilities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH ADVANCEMENT

By addressing third places in an independent living setting in a CCRC, this research starts to fill a gap in the literature, but there are many opportunities for further study on this topic. Since this was a case study, future studies of third places in other retirement community independent living settings are needed to confirm these findings. Additionally, this topic could be investigated in a larger-scale setting, where there is more variability in the environmental characteristics. Moreover, to see if this research is applicable in other housing contexts, mixed methods research on third places in other housing options would be beneficial.

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Additional information may be obtained by writing directly to the author at University of Florida, 344 Arch, PO Box 115705, Gainesville, FL 32611, USA; email: nmcampbell@ufl.edu.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Nichole M. Campbell (PhD, LEED-Green Associate) is an assistant professor in the Department of Interior Design at the University of Florida. Her area of research is design and building that optimizes health and wellness, with a particular emphasis on elderly inhabitants and supporting social interaction through the built environment.

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