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Chapter 2

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Introduction

The meaning of home in later life provides a perfect example of how strongly "objective" contextual factors and "subjective" representations are linked as people age. Although a considerable body of research has been published on the meaning of home among elders, the literature is still plagued by pronounced conceptual and empirical diversity. This makes it difficult for a broader audience to appreciate what has already been achieved by researchers in this field and hinders an understanding of what "aging in place" is all about. With this in mind, the first aim of this chapter is to clarify basic issues, namely: the relationship of house and home, and the need to understand the meaning of home within a life-span developmental context. The second aim is to review and synthesize major conceptualizations of meaning of home in old age which have been suggested in environmental psychology and environmental gerontology. The third aim is to present a selection of our own empirical findings concerned with the meaning of home in old age.

Setting the Stage

House and Home

A dwelling can generally be characterized as a physical unit, a defined space for its residents providing shelter and protection for domestic activities and concealment, and an entity separating private from public domains (Flade, 1993; Lawrence, 1987; Rapoport, 1995). Although the home has been a topic of scientific interest for decades in

several disciplines (for overviews see, for example, Després, 1991; Moore, 2000; Saup, 1993; Sommerville, 1997), the key question, “What makes a house a home?” has not yet been answered (Lawrence, 1987, 2002). It is widely acknowledged that the home is "physically, psychologically, and socially constructed in both 'real' and 'ideal' forms (...)" (Sommerville, 1997, p. 226). The home has also been described as an "extension of the self through places" (Fuhrer & Kaiser, 1992, p. 105), or as "that spatially localized, temporally defined (...) physical frame and conceptual system for the ordering, transformation and interpretation of the physical and abstract aspects of domestic daily life (...)" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 158). Addressing the meaning of home focuses attention on the relationship between the objective socio-physical setting and subjective evaluations, goals, values, emotions and observable or potential behaviors that people pursue. Thus, the meaning of home on the most general level links the person with his or her environment. There are many meaning-related terms to be found in the literature, such as "at-homeness," "placefulness," or "place / community / settlement identity" (Feldman, 1990, 1996; Lalli, 1992; Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff, 1983; Relph, 1976; Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992; Tuan, 1980). To bring more order into the complexity of place-related meaning systems, Rapoport suggests a differentiation of high-level, middle-level, and lower-level meanings of the built environment (1988, 1995). Whereas high-level meanings involve global world-views and philosophical systems, middle-level meanings emphasize latent functions of the environment such as identity, status, wealth, and power. Lower-level meanings cover detailed functions such as privacy, accessibility, movement, and seating arrangements (Coolen, 2002; Rapoport, 1988, 1995). In this chapter we focus on middle and lower-level meanings.

Setting the Meaning of Home in Later Life in a Lifespan Context

From a lifespan perspective, development is a process from birth to death and is closely related to the socio-physical context in every life phase (Baltes, 1987). From birth on, persons interact with their social and physical environment, leading to a meaningful representation of the self within the environment (Oswald & Wahl, 2003). Within his "Ecology of Human Development," Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1999) defines development primarily as the ongoing interaction between persons and their environment over time. Development becomes especially critical during ecological transitions, such as moving from family life to peer-group life, from school to the world of work, or from the labor force to retirement (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). It is assumed that the transaction between person and socio-physical environment becomes increasingly complex from childhood to adulthood. This driving force toward increasing complexity brings with it a challenge to each developing individual: he or she must find a balance between basic needs for a secure, safe, and stable base on the one hand and higher-order needs for exploration, stimulation, and environmental mastery on the other hand. Complexity also arises from an increasing action range (e.g., the individual's progressive ability to crawl, walk, leave home, ride a bus alone, and later, drive or even fly to different parts of the globe). Hence, the individual is given the opportunity to exploit newly "conquered" segments of the environment with the home in its center. Different theorists, working from the same general person-environment transaction view of human development, have emphasized different aspects of the meaning of home throughout the lifespan. Among them are the exploratory behaviors inherent to childhood play (Muchow & Muchow, 1935), territoriality such as occupation and ownership in adulthood (Altman, 1975), and age-

related types of bonding in later life, such as autobiographical insideness (Rowles, 1983). Interestingly, the meaning of home is associated with ambiguous feelings throughout life. A child's home environment can be secure, supportive, and self-affirming, yet at the same time disruptive, frustrating or frightening. This is especially true in later life: an elder's home might be a comforting, familiar place despite the fact that it is becoming burdensome to maintain and unsafe (and therefore a source of anxiety).

Developmental Dynamics in Late Adulthood and the Meaning of Home

As people age, the immediate home environment becomes more important for many reasons. Three of these are addressed below. Acknowledging the growing importance of the home is critical for understanding its role and variety of meanings in the later years.

Socio-structural Antecedents of the Meaning of Home in Old Age

The vast majority of older adults in western countries live independently in the community and not in institutions. For example, in the U.S. and Germany, about 95% of people aged 65 years and older live in private households (Bundesministerium für Familie Senioren Frauen und Jugend [Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth], 2001; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996). Although the likelihood of living in a nursing home increases with age and the number of alternative purpose-built homes is on the rise in modern societies, the vast majority of older adults live in ordinary dwellings. Most either live alone or with their partner. To consider these typical types of household composition is important with respect to understanding social aspects of the meaning of home. Elders are relatively adept at staying put in one place, and the share of single persons 85 years and over living alone has increased over the last

few decades (Bundesministerium für Familie Senioren Frauen und Jugend [Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth], 2001; Himes, 2001). Time spent living in a certain place of residence might have an impact on the meaning of home. For instance, German data from a national survey of about 4,000 persons showed that participants aged 70-85 years had lived an average of 31.6 years in the same apartment and 50.3 years in the same town (Motel, Künemund & Bode, 2000). Placing emphasis on the socio-structural givens for community-dwelling elders should not entail neglecting the meaning of home in institutions for elders; however, this is not the focus of this chapter.

Everyday Life Dynamics as Antecedents of the Meaning of Home in Old Age

The immediate home environment is the primary living space in old age, both in terms of the time older people spend in this space and its locale as the place where many activities occur. It is a well-documented finding that aging coincides with a reduction in action range, especially during very old age (M. Baltes, Maas, Wilms & Borchelt, 1999; Moss & Lawton, 1982). Older people spend more time at home than do younger people. Indeed, recent data suggest that elders (65 years and older) spend on average 80% of their daytime at home (M. Baltes et al., 1999; Küster, 1998). Observational data have also shown an age-related tendency for environmental centralization even inside the house, especially around the most favored places at home. These places, which can be found among both healthy and impaired elders, typically are “set up” to be comfortable, afford a good view outside, and are located close to many necessary and preferred items used in daily life. Such places become "control centers" or "living centers" within the residence and probably serve adaptive functions such as maintaining and enhancing control and

comfort over the immediate environment (Lawton, 1985; Oswald, 1996; Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992).

Health- and Environment-related Antecedents of the Meaning of Home in Old Age

The home acquires new meaning in old age because it serves to compensate for the reduced functional capacity of the aging individual, especially in very old age. To maintain autonomy and to avoid institutionalization, either environmental changes or behavioral adaptations must generally occur. Research based on the "environmental docility" hypothesis (Lawton & Simon, 1968; Lawton & Nahemow, 1973; Lawton, 1987) has shown a strong correlation between reduced environmental competence, such as vision loss or mobility impairment, and objective living arrangements (Wahl, Oswald & Zimprich, 1999; Wahl, Schilling, Oswald & Heyl, 1999). Consequently, research and application often reduce questions regarding the meaning of home to whether or not the home environment is accessible or usable (Steinfeld & Danford, 1999). The relationship between loss of competence and the meaning of home in a broader sense, however, has received comparatively little attention. For example, the stimulation provided by the home environment and its relationship to "environmental proactivity" should be considered (Lawton, 1989 a, b). Thus, the individual's meaning of home may reflect behavioral adaptations and modifications of the home environment to stay independent as well as the cognitive representation of a lifestyle, developed over years (Lehr, 2000; Thomae, 1988). Different patterns in the meaning of home possibly also reflect differences in coping processes in the face of environment-related impairments (Carp & Carp, 1984; Oswald & Wahl, 2001; Wahl, Oswald & Zimprich, 1999).

Finally, the meaning of home plays an important role as an element in the process of relocation to another place of residence; it may reflect the outcome of coping processes in the face of environmental changes. Relocation in old age covers moving from home to home, from home into assisted living facilities or into institutions. This may occur both when the individual is in good health and when he or she is facing competence losses. The meaning assigned to a home influences the decision to move and moving into a new home initiates a process of reestablishing meaning in the new place through living there (Rowles & Ravdal, 2001; Rowles & Watkins, 2003). To consider the manifold meanings inherent in a move, it is useful to focus on the increasing proportion of older adults moving voluntarily. Many of these elders do not move merely to fulfill basic needs for continuing independence; rather, they strive to fulfill preferences and wishes and thus actively seek new and meaningful options in the years of life remaining (Carp & Carp, 1984; Oswald, Schilling, Wahl & Gäng, 2002). A large number of persons relocated from one dwelling to another in Eastern Germany after reunification in 1989. Most of these people improved their living conditions. Little is known about the meaning these elders were able to invest in their new homes after these transitions, and how their meaning of home compared to that of elders in western Germany who remained in relatively stable environmental conditions (see results later in the chapter). Another modern reality is that many elders have different homes for different seasons, sometimes maintaining dual residence over decades. Living in such a "circle of migration" (McHugh & Mings, 1996) affects the structure and temporal dynamics of the meaning of home.

Theoretical Perspectives on the Meaning of Home

Although a number of disciplines have contributed to our understanding of the meaning of home (Després, 1991; Miller, 2001; Moore, 2000; Sommerville, 1997), the concept has been largely developed by concentrated theoretical and empirical studies in environmental psychology and environmental gerontology. Although environmental psychology does not usually address aging issues, it nevertheless provides important insights that are relevant for a diversity of ages. The boundaries of each field are not distinct, and many studies could be assigned to either discipline.

Environmental Psychology Perspectives

An early effort to understand the variety of meanings assigned to the home was provided by Hayward (1975). According to Hayward, the meaning of home may embrace home as a physical structure, as a territory, as a locus in space, as self and self-identity, and as a social and cultural unit. Later attempts to define the meaning of home built on broader theoretical models, such as the theory of place (Canter, 1977), place identity theory (Proshansky, 1978), or place attachment theory (Schumaker & Taylor, 1983). Several studies in environmental psychology emphasize identity-related aspects of place (Altman & Low, 1992; Després, 1991; Howell, 1983; Neisser, 1988). Based on data from persons between childhood and late adulthood, Markus (1995) was able to extract three main functions of home: (1) gaining cognitive and behavioral control over space; (2) manipulating, molding, or decorating space in order to create a setting of physical comfort and well-being; and (3) perceiving continuity with significant places and people of the past. Using a more complex rubric, Zingmark and colleagues, in a study with participants aged two to 102 years, focused on the meaning of home throughout the life span. Key themes identified included safety, rootedness, joy, privacy, togetherness,

recognition, and control (Zingmark, Norberg, & Sandman, 1995). Feldman (1996) analyzed the development of relationships between residential mobility and the meaning of home on a larger scale, at the level of an entire settlement. She empirically evaluated frequencies of indicators of bonding to different types of settlements among adult residents 25 to 65 years of age. These indicators included: emotional aspects, like "embeddedness" or "(...) a sense of belonging in, being part of, and feeling at home (...)." The indicators also included cognitive aspects of bonding, like "unity of identities," or "a joining of the identity of self (...) to the physical setting of the past, present, and future residential environs." Finally, indicators of bonding included behavioral aspects of bonding like "centeredness," "home place as a focal point of one's experiential space, a point of departure and return" and bonding related to the physical and social environment itself, reflected in a sense of "community," or "a sense of being involved with and tied to a geographical based social group" (Feldman, 1996, p. 426). The majority of participants indicated a desire to remain in a comparable type of locale in the future. Feldman's work suggests that the meaning of home is an enduring phenomenon with a number of relatively stable dimensions.

In another study, Harris, Brown and Werner (1996) empirically analyzed the relationship between privacy regulation and the meaning of home in a group of persons aged 19-69 years of age. Components of home-based meaning included emotional dimensions such as "positive evaluations" or "global feelings of attachment to (...) the home," cognitive dimensions conveying "identity," behavioral dimensions, such as "activity", and social and physical dimensions of home, such as "connection" (Harris et al., 1996, p. 289).

Beyond examining key concepts of home, recently there has been a tendency toward a context-sensitive focus on the meaning of home in different cultures (Miller, 2001), among sub-groups such as homeless people, and among different age cohorts such as older adults. These studies tend to address also darker tensions within the essence of the experience of home (Moore, 2002). Such tensions include incarceration in a prison, house arrest, or when a person is unable to leave the house due to severe mobility impairment or other manifestations of loss of competence.

Major conclusions that can be drawn from environmental psychology are that individuals experience the meaning of home in a variety of domains and that the meaning of home involves a transactional relationship between persons and their environment that evolves over over time leading to behavioral, emotional and cognitive bonding within a meaningful physical and social setting.

Environmental Gerontology Perspectives

Judith Sixsmith empirically reduced a broad collection of meaning of home related statements into three different modes of everyday home experience; the physical home, the social home, and the personal home (Sixsmith, 1986). The physical home mainly involves household facilities, everyday modern conveniences, style of architecture, and living accommodations that afford opportunities for activities. The social home mainly consists of relationships with others within a shared space. The personal home can be viewed as an extension of oneself, of one's own desires, feelings, hopes and actions. Thus, home is "a central emotional and sometimes physical reference point in a person's life (...)" (Sixsmith, 1986, p. 290).

Lawton emphasizes three basic environmental functions with relevance for understanding the meaning of home in later life: maintenance, stimulation and support

(Lawton, 1989b). Maintenance covers a "series of repetitive, well-practiced behaviors in relation to the environment" (Lawton, 1989b, p. 36), of which the subject may be unaware and that may be taken-for-granted. Stimulation represents "a departure from the usual, a novel array of stimuli, a problem to solve" which requires the person to respond emotionally, cognitively, or behaviorally (p. 37). Finally, support is characterized "by relative lack of variation and (...) by easy availability of the resources necessary to maintain life" (p. 38).

Rowles applied Relph's concept of insideness (1976) to the meaning of home in old age. Based on in-depth interviews, he suggests that the notion of an elder's sense of insideness within a place is central to understanding what home means for older people (Rowles, 1983; Rowles & Ravdal, 2001). There are three elements to insideness.

Physical insideness or intimacy is characterized by familiarity and habitual routines of habitation within the home setting that enable the individual "to wear the setting like a glove" (Rowles, 1983, p. 114). Social insideness or immersion arises from everyday social exchanges and the creation and maintenance of social roles within a neighborhood over a long period of time. A third aspect of insideness in old age is autobiographical insideness. This "...stems from the temporal legacy of having lived one's life in the environment. (...) Place becomes a landscape of memories, providing a sense of identity (...)."

Anthropologist Robert Rubinstein (1989) proposed a similar tri-partite model of psychological processes linking person to place and subsequent outcomes although he uses a somewhat different terminology. The social-centered process includes social norms and relationships to other persons, the person-centered process concerns the

expression of one's life course in features of the environment, and the body-centered-process includes the "ongoing relationship of the body to the environmental features that surround it," often culminating in environmental centralization (Rubinstein, 1989, p. 47). Within the person-centered processes, bonding can be increasingly strong, culminating in personalization, and embodiment, i.e., the subjective merging of the individual and environmental features in which boundaries are blurred.

Environmental psychology and gerontology have not produced major differences in defining the meaning of home. Both fields suggest that the meaning of home among older adults is related to aspects of physical, social and personal bonding, on behavioral, cognitive and emotional levels. Since older adults have often lived a long period of time within the same residence, cognitive and emotional aspects of the meaning of home are often strongly linked to biography. Such links may be manifest through processes of reflecting on a past symbolically represented in certain places and cherished objects within the home. The same can be true for behavioral aspects of meaning, where familiarity and routines have been developed over time. The effect of environment-related competence losses or the need to cope with objective environmental changes may lead the individual to develop an idiosyncratic meaning of home.

Synthesizing Major Approaches to Understanding the Meaning of Home in Old Age

Using theoretical insights gleaned from environmental psychology and gerontology, we present a categorization of the domains of meaning of home including types of physical, social and personal bonding (Figure 1). Reasons for providing this categorization are: (1) to incorporate well-replicated empirical findings in environmental psychology and gerontology with respect to the meaning of home in old age, (2) to

reduce existing conceptual diversity to a useful minimum, (3) to differentiate among psychologically relevant kinds of meaning, especially in terms of personal, i.e. behavioral, cognitive and emotional bonding, (4), to provide a set of distinct evidence-based categories with the intent to stimulate comparative and explanatory research, (5) to explicitly emphasize interrelations among the different domains, and (6) to encourage empirical replications that might confirm this heuristic framework. In the following section, empirical findings on the meaning of home are presented, emphasizing the impact of competence losses and environmental change.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Findings From Research on the Meaning of Home in Old Age

Several scales and questionnaires have been developed to measure the meaning of home. These include the "Urban Identity Scale" (Lalli, 1992), the "Attachment Scale" (Twigger, 1995; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996), the "Neighbourhood Attachment Scale" (Bonnes, Bonaiuto, Aiello, Perugini & Ercolani, 1997), and the "Rootedness Scale" (McAndrew, 1998). Our own research program on the meaning of home aims to empirically contribute to the theoretical traditions synthesized in Figure 1 by means of replication and extension using a qualitative (semi-structured, explorative) method. First, we consider group comparisons among elders to illustrate the impact of personal (health, gender) differences. In a second study we focus on environmental differences in the meaning of home by comparing elders from East and West Germany. In addition to

describing group differences, our findings reflect coping processes as part of person-environmental transactions in old age.

Variation in the Meanings of Home in Old Age: The Role of Health and Gender

In the first study (Study 1), we focused on data from community dwelling older adults living at home in comparable living arrangements but suffering from significant competence losses that limited their access to the external environment. One hundred and twenty-six elders between the ages of 61 and 92 took part in the study. One third of the participants were in good health, one third suffered from severe mobility impairment, and one third was blind (Oswald & Wahl, 2001). Data are based on in-depth interviews that were tape-recorded and transcribed. During a multi-phase coding procedure, different meaning categories were established. Each statement was coded into categories with satisfying reliability (Cohen's Kappa: 0.77 - 0.83). We expected to confirm the validity of the meaning-of-home constructs presented in Figure 1. However, the initial hierarchical model with three domains of meaning was adapted into a set of five equal categories all on the same level of abstraction. This was necessary because descriptions of meaning of home in the category "personal bonding" were made on the level of behavioral, cognitive and emotional aspects but not on the global level. We were able to empirically confirm 13 detailed and five global categories (see below) based on 1,804 statements. Beyond replication, a second research aim was to assess whether patterns of meaning of home would differ among healthy and impaired older adults. Five global meaning categories similar to the ones suggested in major conceptual models (Figure 1) were empirically confirmed. These categories were: (1) "Physical," focusing on the experience of housing conditions such as experience of the residential area, access and furnishing; (2)

"Behavioral," related to the everyday behavior of the person at home and to proactive ways of manipulating or rearranging items in the home; (3) "Cognitive," representing statements of cognitive, especially biographical bonding to the home, such as the experience of familiarity and insiderness; (4) "Emotional," expressing emotional bonding including the experience of privacy, safety, pleasure, and stimulation; and (5) "Social," consisting of statements expressing relationships with fellow-lodgers, neighbors, or visitors. Comparison among participants showed different patterns of meanings among healthy, mobility impaired and blind participants (Figure 2).

Insert Figure 2 about here

The frequency with which physical aspects were named was significantly lower among the mobility impaired compared to the healthy, and lowest among the blind. Healthy participants were more appreciative of the location, access and amenity aspects of the home. Cognitive aspects were reported significantly more often among the mobility impaired compared to the healthy participants, but were most frequent among the blind. Mobility impaired participants emphasized the cognitive and biographical significance of the home. As far as behavioral and social aspects were concerned, no significant differences between healthy and mobility impaired elders were found, but the blind had lower frequencies in the behavioral domain and higher frequencies in the social domain compared to the mobility impaired group. About the same share of statements were made with regard to emotional themes in all three groups.

How might these results be interpreted? Beyond confirmation of the variety of meaning of home domains, differences among the subgroups may be attributed to adaptive mechanisms. Following Carp and Carps' (1984) differentiation of environmental functions, the distinction between a complementary and a congruent style of environmental coping is useful. Whereas in the complementary style the environment acts by some means or other prosthetically on failing personal competencies, in the congruent style environmental attributes that enhance the match between environmental resources and personal needs are serving best. In detail, for some needs, "favorable outcomes are associated with environmental functions that complement existing skills when they begin to decline. The environment adds to or acts prosthetically on failing personal competencies (Lawton, 1998, p.7)." Other needs "are best served by environmental attributes that enhance the match between environmental resources and personal needs. Congruence thus heightens the possibility of growth, enrichment, and positive satisfaction emerging from person-environmental transactions (Lawton, 1998, p.7)." In this study different patterns of meanings might reflect ways of coping with loss of competence at home in a complementary style (Carp & Carp, 1984). Different meaning patterns may serve to accommodate different kinds of competence loss by emphasizing those aspects of the home that are still accessible. Visually impaired participants, for example, concentrated on their social and cognitive sphere and ignored behavioral and physical aspects of the home, while the meaning patterns of the mobility impaired participants included behavioral aspects of meaning to a much greater extent. This was possibly due to the fact, that visually impaired elders were more affected in maintaining everyday life indoors compared to mobility impaired and healthy elders.

Gender differences were also observed. Although men and women were comparable in their physical, social, and cognitive bonding with home, differences were observed in the behavioral and the emotional domains. Women more often mentioned behavioral domains compared to men regardless of their health, whereas men (especially healthy ones) more often mentioned emotional domains compared to women. These patterns may reflect historically-based gender roles in these cohorts of older adults, where women, for the most part, stayed at home and men went out to work. Consequently, old women, in contrast to their spouses, would have become familiar with the territory via everyday behavior and less in terms of feelings of privacy and retreat.

Meaning of Home and Societal Transformation

Reunification of East and West Germany provided the opportunity to use a "natural experiment" to compare groups of older adults with different experiences in housing and with different levels of perceived changes in their housing conditions. In East Germany, the quality of housing improved rapidly after 1989. As a result, the focus of a second study (Study 2) was on community dwelling older adults living at home, all relatively healthy and of the same age but living in different environmental settings (East versus West Germany). A salient distinction between the regions concerns the prevalence of relocation (West Germany 5% versus East Germany 25%) and reconstruction (West Germany 23% versus East Germany 56%) (Oswald, 2003). As hypothesized earlier, it was anticipated that environmental changes would be social-structural antecedents of changes in the meaning of home. We expected to confirm the validity of the meaning-of-home constructs identified previously and to observe different patterns of meaning of home among elders in East and West Germany. Findings were based on in-depth

interviews of a total of 227 highly competent elders drawn from the birth cohort 1930-32 (66-69 years old at the time of the research) (Oswald, 2003). Half of this sample was drawn from the former East Germany and half from the former West Germany. Fifty percent of the respondents were women. Again, statements were coded into categories with satisfying reliability (congruence in relative frequencies: 89.3%). Group differences were calculated using MANOVA and ANOVA procedures. Comparison between participants from East and West Germany show differences in the domains of physical, behavioral and emotional dimensions of the meaning of home (see Table1).

Insert Table 1 about here

Within the domain of physical aspects of the meaning of home, "amenities and furnishing" were far more frequently mentioned in East Germany than in West Germany. Those who experienced recent environmental change more often also mentioned physical dimensions of meaning more frequently. Mention of behavioral dimensions of the meaning of home, especially "everyday indoor activities" was more prevalent among participants from West Germany than East Germany. Those who experienced residential stability, i.e., the West Germans, more often mentioned everyday indoor behavior. Within the emotional domain, there was differentiation between more inward-oriented themes of "privacy, safety, retreat" and more outward-oriented themes of "stimulation, pleasure, excitement." Privacy and retreat were more relevant in West Germany, whereas stimulation and excitement were more important in East Germany. The importance of

cognitive and social aspects of the meaning of home did not differ between the two regions.

These results again confirm the variety of meanings of home. Differences between the two groups in patterns of meanings may also reflect ways of coping with environmental stress at home in a congruent style, emphasizing environmental attributes that enhance the match between changed environmental resources and personal needs (Carp & Carp, 1984). Considering an essential difference between East and West Germany, specifically the tremendous amount of environmental change experienced in the former region, interesting differences appear. Each group emphasized those aspects of the meaning of home that conformed most closely to their current housing situation. Those who perceived many objective changes in their housing conditions showed a need to adapt within the new physical setting but they were also more stimulated and excited by it. Those who perceived more environmental stability did not need to cope with housing and thus focused on indoor behavior and the experience of privacy and retreat. In more general terms, the German natural experiment of reunification supports the argument that gross societal transformations may be echoed in quite a detailed manner in person-environment transactions in the context of home. Meaning of home analyses have the potential to mirror such macro dynamics on the individual micro level. However, although perceived stability of the home could be regarded as indicator for objective environmental stability, it should not be misunderstood as a synonym for immobility or inflexibility in later life in general. Housing in a broader sense may thus cover stable living conditions and various activities as well as dimensions of experience.

Future Perspectives on the Role of Meaning of Home

The aim of this chapter was to clarify the concept of the meaning of home and the dynamics of person-environment relationships in old age, to develop a conceptualization of the meaning of home in old age based on existing data in the field, and to elucidate this conceptualization with empirical data from our own research program. Specifically, we sought to illustrate the complexity of the meaning of home in the context of personal (i.e. declining health and reduced competence) and environmental (i.e. changing housing conditions or relocation) challenges. We have tried to sketch the social-structural, everyday-life and health-related antecedents of the meaning of home, such as the typical household composition of community dwelling elders, their proclivity to live in their homes for a long period of time, the reduction of their action range, and their need for supportive environments in the case of reductions in competence. Each of these themes has been considered in the housing literature; however, the subjective meanings attached to these developmental patterns and changing circumstances has been largely neglected, even though such meanings may be important triggers of adaptive and proactive behavior.

A global categorization of meaning domains was presented based on theoretical assumptions and empirical studies from environmental psychology and environmental gerontology. Replicated findings suggest a content-oriented set of categories, emphasizing physical, social and personal, i.e. behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects of the meaning of home. Data from two empirical studies validated the conceptualization and showed differences among elders facing competence losses (e.g., vision loss) and elders facing environmental changes (e.g., relocation). In the first study, elders with different levels of loss of competence emphasized those aspects of meaning

that still had personal relevance. Elders in the second study emphasized those aspects of meaning that corresponded to changes in their housing situation. Comparative results on different patterns of meanings among subgroups could be interpreted in terms of different adaptive mechanisms, either a complementary (Study 1) or a congruent (Study 2) coping style (Carp & Carp, 1984).

Both the research and applied aspects of this topic are likely to be challenged by evolving societal circumstances. We anticipate an ever changing role of home environments in old age as a result of new mobility patterns and the emergence of different housing styles. It can be anticipated that meaning of home issues will affect future aging differently for relatively healthy elders in their "third age" in comparison with those who are increasingly vulnerable in their "fourth" age (Baltes & Smith, 1999). Among elders in their "third" age (in general, persons younger than 80 years of age), because of increased levels of mobility, links between indoor and outdoor environments have a much greater significance than in the past. Consequently, consideration of meaningful bonding to the environment must embrace an empirical linking of meanings for an array of spaces radiating away from the dwelling: from favorite objects, to favorite places at home, to the home itself, to specific outdoor settings in the immediate neighborhood, and to large scale settings including the community and region. This will become increasingly important given new types of indoor and outdoor person-environmental interactions (e.g., the Internet), advances in technology, the increasing mobility of older adults, and the larger impact of the environment on the life of elders in general (Wahl, 2001).

New patterns of the meaning of home could be considered by planners and architects in a two-fold manner: to foster positive bonding with home and to reduce dysfunctional attachment whenever it may appear. For elders in their "fourth" age (in general, persons who are 80 years of age or older) findings on the meaning of home may contribute to everyday problem solving and enhancing or maintaining quality of life. There is a need to examine the role of the meaning of home in the lives of the very old who face an accumulation of environmental difficulties, such as reduced action range, losses of environmental competence and the proliferation of environmental barriers. Knowledge about the potential of the home environment to generate meanings that enhance autonomy becomes increasingly relevant given the increasing numbers of older persons living alone in the community (Himes, 2001). Analysis of factors which might mediate or moderate the meaning of home, such as housing-related control beliefs, will become more important in this regard (Oswald, Wahl, Martin, & Mollenkopf, 2003). Future meaning of home research in very old age might profitably focus also on special groups of elders, for example, individuals with dementia and their relatives, to analyze the link between coping styles and patterns of meaning that may be harnessed in order to further enhance autonomy (Gitlin, Corcoran, Winter, Boyce, & Hauck, 2001). Finally, from a methodological point of view, studies with a longitudinal focus are needed to clarify the time-related dynamics of adaptive mechanisms linking the meaning of home to well-being. In sum, meaning of home research has the potential not only to further gerontology research on changing person-environment relations as people age but also to directly improve the quality of life of aging individuals through the employment of emerging findings in the field of practice.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1:

Heuristic framework on domains of meaning of home in old age

Figure 2:

Relative frequencies of meaning of home domains for healthy, mobility impaired, and blind older adults

Table 1:

Relative frequencies of meaning of home domains for older adults in East and West Germany

Figure 1

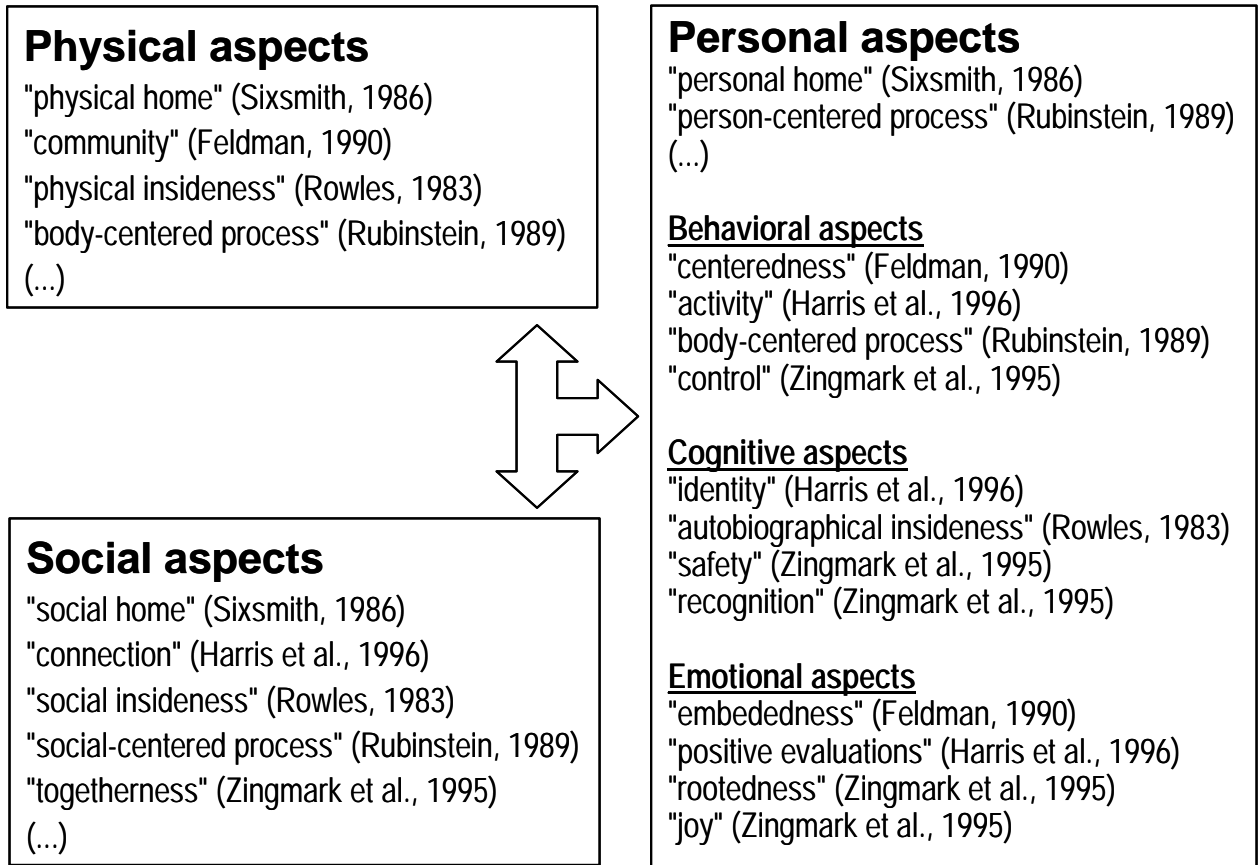
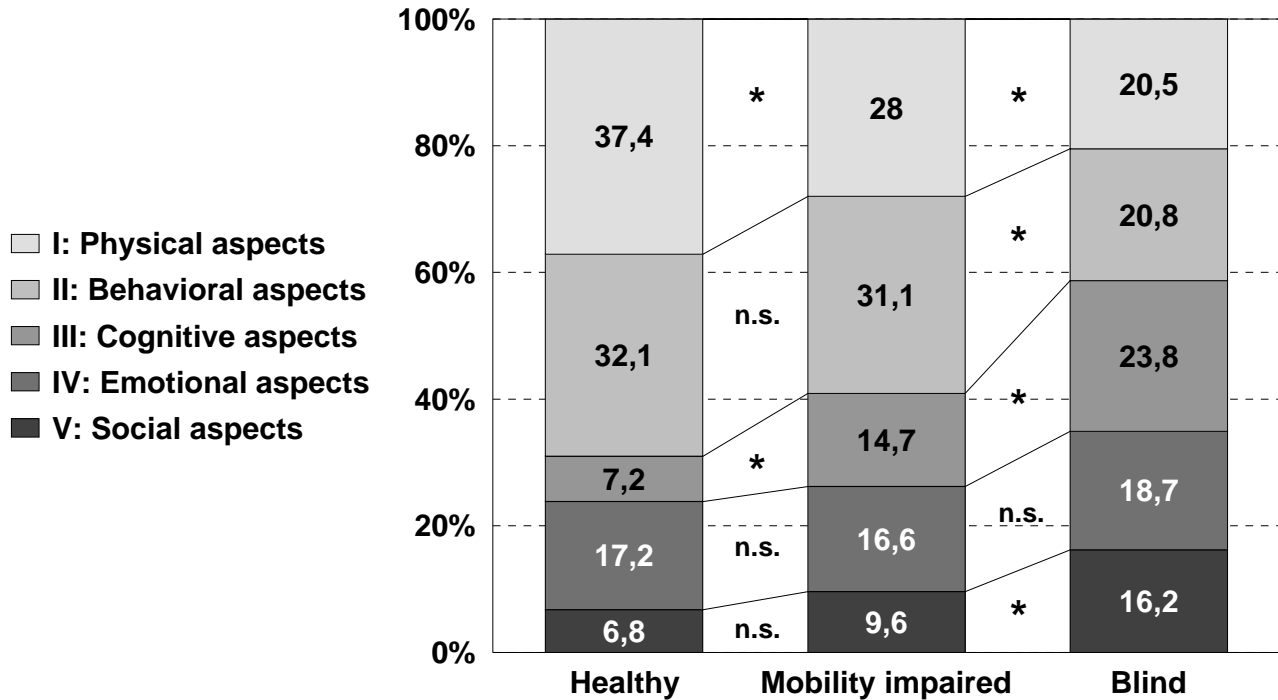


Figure 2



Note. Evaluation of verbal transcripts and tapes, based on 1,804 statements of $N = 126$ subjects. Mean number of statements per person amounted to 14.3. Multivariate MANOVA procedure for five domains was conducted to test differences between subgroups (Wilk's Lambda = .707; $F = 4.40 (10, 232)$; $p < .05 = *$; explained variance: 29.3%). To show differences in detail, univariate simple contrasts were computed for each category between healthy and mobility impaired, as well as between mobility impaired and blind subjects.

Table 1

Domains of meaning of home (<i>M, SD</i>)	West Germany (<i>n</i> = 114)	East Germany (<i>n</i> = 113)	Differences
I: Physical aspects			
(1) Residential area and quality of neighborhood	0.82 (0.59)	1.01 (0.43)	**
(2) Accessibility to the outdoor environment	0.63 (0.67)	0.65 (0.53)	n.s.
(3) Amenities, furnishing	1.09 (0.28)	1.23 (0.53)	*
II: Behavioral aspects			
(4) Everyday indoor activities	0.95 (0.66)	0.68 (0.60)	***
(5) Proactive environmental manipulation	0.96 (0.62)	1.06 (0.57)	n.s.
III: Cognitive aspects			
(6) Perceived autonomy	0.36 (0.65)	0.26 (0.58)	n.s.
(7) Familiarity, maintenance, routine	1.00 (0.50)	1.09 (0.47)	n.s.
(8) Reminiscence, insideness, planning	0.25 (0.54)	0.15 (0.38)	n.s.
(9) Identity	0.11 (0.35)	0.11 (0.43)	n.s.
IV: Emotional aspects			
(10) Privacy, safety, retreat	1.32 (0.52)	1.17 (0.44)	*
(11) Stimulation, pleasure, excitement	0.99 (0.62)	1.21 (0.66)	**
V: Social aspects			
(12) Relation to fellow-lodger	0.65 (0.62)	0.61 (0.66)	n.s.
(13) Visitors, neighbors	0.75 (0.74)	0.71 (0.65)	n.s.

Note. Data from *N* = 227 subjects from the Interdisciplinary Longitudinal Study on Adult Development (ILSE), birth cohort 1930-32, supported by the German Federal Ministry of Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Science, Research and Art grant Ref. 314-1722-102/16. Results are based on expert ratings from 0 = nonexistent, 1 = existent, 2 = important aspect of meaning. ANOVA procedure for 13 domains was conducted to test differences between subgroups ($\alpha_{Bon} = .05/2 = .025^*$; $.01/2 = .005^{**}$; $.001/2 = .0005^{***}$ [categories II and V]; $\alpha_{Bon} = .05/3 = .017^*$; $.01/3 = .003^{**}$; $.001/3 = .0003^{***}$ [category I]; $\alpha_{Bon} = .05/4 = .0125^*$; $.01/4 = .0025^{**}$; $.001/4 = .00025^{***}$ [category III]). To consider multiple

correlations of domains, discriminant function analyses was conducted ($F = 3.22$, $p < .001$), approving important categories for group differences (Gansera-Baumann, 2002).