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Social Use of Streets by Older Adults*

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Easily accessible social places are invaluable to older adults who seek social interaction or whose physical environments may be limited. Previous studies have conceptualized the interior spaces for social activities (e.g., "third places"), as playing a crucial role in person-environment interactions in later life. This study explored space outside of the home by interviewing older adults about their informal social lives with their neighbors. The interviews were conducted with 50 older adults across 26 social locations in Seoul, Korea. A pattern emerged that while parks served as open inclusive social places, neighborhood streets were actually preferred by older adults who lived in close proximity. Furthermore, the social gathering locations were not random. Specific configurations of the streets provided social spaces with certain features conducive to social bonding as if they were "temporary mini-parks" for groups of older adults. The older adults selected efficient locations nearby their homes for their group members with mobility limitation to socialize with them, which allowed them to stay autonomous as small groups. The results suggest that how well the older adults could claim or control space mattered more than how much space or amenities they had for their social activities.

Keywords: *older adults, neighborhood, street, park, territoriality, social support, social interaction*

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Introduction

Older people face increasing challenges due to sensory and other changes that may accompany aging. The social support they receive from family members and members of their community provides them with the means to stay active physically and socially. Being dependent on or receiving excessive support, however, undermines their independence, which often leads to emotional distress, decreased self-esteem, and feelings of vulnerability or being coerced. Therefore, the key to addressing an aging society is to create social and physical environments that promote social support without making older adults feel like they are a burden to society and/or their family members. In the case of Seoul, neighborhood alleyways, known as *golmok-gil* locally, have served as places where people, especially older adults, socialize and form small autonomous support groups. However, the roles and characteristics of places, especially public places, in fostering social support networks have been comparatively under researched (Gardner 2011; Wahl, Iwarsson, and Oswald 2012). This paper suggests that alleyways in front of older adults' homes are a valuable social space for maintaining autonomous support networks. Alleyways can be a hybrid zone between public and private (Gehl 2011) that older adults can occupy, and at the same time be a path in the middle of the street network of a neighborhood or a city. These overlapping dual roles give a unique freedom to choose a use in the same space which helps the autonomous group adapt to the situations given. This article highlights the physical environmental conditions that foster such freedom and propose exercising temporal territoriality on officially public space as a way to encourage these autonomous support groups to take advantage of such space. Specifically, the article examines Korean neighborhood alleyways as places where older adults congregate and explores how older adults select easily accessible locations near their alleyways and optimize their social activities with neighbors by compensating for each other's social and physical challenges (Baltes and Baltes 1990).

Considering the importance of neighborhood alleyways for older adults in maintaining their social lives and forming small autonomous support groups, this article examined the social use of streets in the Jeonnong-dong neighborhood of Seoul, South Korea. Recently, South Korea has experienced a rapid aging of the population with the percentage of the population 65 and over rising from 7 percent to 14 percent in just 18 years. Furthermore, a process known as "renewal-induced gentrification" has taken place as part of

a large-scale urban development strategy in Seoul (Ha 2014), resulting in urban residents with limited resources, including older adults, losing public and private spaces at which to conduct their informal social lives. Jeonnong-dong, however, is a unique place in Seoul where both new high-rise complexes and low-rise housing communities are intact and have coexisted for more than 30 years.

Although research has demonstrated that older adults are significantly influenced by the intimacy and configurations of their physical environments (Carstensen 2006; Wahl Iwarsson, and Oswald 2012; Wiley et al. 2009), which has been explored in commercial spaces such as cafes (Oldenburg 1999; Murphy 2017), shopping malls (White, Toohey, and Asquith 2015), and fast-food restaurants (Cheang 2002), previous works in aging studies have not sufficiently examined the environment outside of older adults' immediate homes (Wahl, Iwarsson, and Oswald 2012). In an effort to understand the characteristics of person-environment interactions outside of homes in neighborhoods, this study examined the physical characteristics of neighborhoods and interviewed older adults about their social activities, social support, and the places they go to socialize. As a conceptual framework of the social use of alleyways (Hassen and Kaufman 2016; Thompson 2013), this study used territoriality to explain the spatial features and the utilization of these places. The study focused on older adults' informal social lives with their neighbors and how the neighborhood environments affect these relationships. Older adults take advantage of specific environmental configurations. Likewise, older adults' activities may develop or deteriorate depending on changes in these configurations (Wahl, Iwarsson, and Oswald 2012).

This research engages in a deeper descriptive exploration as opposed to a quantitative analysis of specific physical elements. The complexity of circumstances surrounding spaces, especially with regard to their physical configurations (Lawton 1985), are not well understood in previous literature from the fields of sociology, gerontology, psychology, and architecture (Thompson 2013; Wahl, Iwarsson, and Oswald 2012). Considering the rapid increase in the aging population in many countries, this study provides insight into how older adults use streets in their neighborhoods to socialize and form small autonomous support groups.

Theoretical Framework

The idea to consider the locations of social activities in this study reflects Lawton's (1985) description of older adults with limited mobility remaining at home. Lawton found that older adults placed themselves in locations where they could efficiently control their circumstances to compensate for moving less. By choosing a comfortable chair and positioning it in a particular way, they could observe what was going on inside and outside of the home. A phone and a TV remote would be in reach and everyday living necessities (water, medicine, pencil, bills, snacks, etc.) would cover side tables next to the chair, making it a "control center" (Lawton 1985). The older adult could efficiently access her surroundings while others could approach her in a predictable way. There was also a way the chair involved territoriality in the practice of choosing a specific chair and its location in order to select and optimize efficient control of surroundings and thus compensate for reduced mobility (Baltes and Baltes 1990).

This is analogous to the case of alleyways in Seoul where social support networks of older adults are fostered. Older adults with declining health have often gathered in front of their houses. In addition, their houses are in easy reach of social gathering locations so they can easily go back and forth to fetch items or take care of things at home if needed. The use of the out-of-home space as a "control center of social life" or a "private mini-park" could be due to smaller housing units in Seoul that are close to each other and on narrow streets. Territories become very flexible spaces when they are in public domain areas such as alleyways because people can enjoy the openness of a public space and have a sense of belonging at the same time. While this flexibility could also pose a risk of conflict over the ownership of public space (Salari, Brown, and Eaton 2006), it can also set the conditions for individuals claiming their territories embedded in the physical configurations, which was explored in this study.

In order to understand the physical characteristics of alleyways outside of homes and the person-environment interactions in neighborhoods, this study used the person-environment framework that focuses on agency and belonging as two processes (Wahl, Iwarsson, and Oswald 2012). Agency reflects purposeful action and behavior while belonging reflects attachment to other people and the environment (Wahl, Iwarsson and Oswald 2012). For example, active social interactions to share emotions (agency) (Carstenesen 2006) between neighbors generates invisible boundaries to others who are

not party to them, which render a sense of belonging and ownership of the space when the involved occupy it at least temporarily. With this sense of ownership over a space that comes from intimate communications, neighbors feel like they belong to each other in a space. In addition, a sense of ownership can be supported by territoriality that comes from what is within occupied spaces including objects, surrounding physical structure, and people.

Territoriality refers to the use of a physical environment over time in a somewhat exclusive manner (Edney 1974) and is often achieved either by the presence of people or through a process of setting up boundaries with physical features. While the balancing of agency and belonging contributes to a person-oriented understanding of the heuristic person-environment interaction perspective (Wahl, Iwarsson, and Oswald 2012), territoriality contributes to the environment-oriented understanding of the interaction. Territoriality is known to play the role of a psychological mechanism in terms of how physical features of spaces support the development of social relationships (Brown 1987). People claim space to signal social and physical intentions (Salari, Brown, and Eaton 2006) and will be less confused and more efficient if their behavior patterns are established in the public domain with territoriality. For example, a person visiting a café might regularly sit at a specific table, and a waiter will therefore guide him/her to the table even before being asked. In other words, a fixed location or territory can be an organizer that enables predictions by simplifying information processing or by fixing event locations (Edney 1976). In this sense, territoriality can promote smooth interactions, support social roles (Edney 1974), and help reduce tension (Kinney, Stephens, and Brockmann 1987) because it gives certain individuals freedom by regulating the access of unknown outsiders (Edney and Uhlig 1977). People can get along better with fewer conflicts if they have space that belongs to them with clearly defined boundaries. Social life in the public domain depends on how well territories are managed because territorial behavior structure is embedded in the social structure of communities and societies (Edney 1974).

Methods and Research Setting

In the context of Seoul, many older neighborhoods have narrow streets and alleyways that were planned at a time when most people used public transportation and before car-ownership became widespread. At the time,

streets were frequently occupied by neighbors for social activities while there was limited accessibility for cars due to their relatively narrow width. With rapid developments in the economy and in housing, "renewal-induced gentrification" has been deliberately planned as a large-scale urban renewal strategy through partnerships of governments and developers (Ha 2004; Shin 2009). The development of access-controlled high-rise housing complexes with parks and other amenities inside have replaced some of the existing low-rise housing areas and has left streets in conditions primarily for vehicular transportation with boundaries that are not accessible to the outside (Figure 1). This is similar to gated or enclosed communities in the Western world (Hamers and Tennekes 2015; Jon 2009; Schorr et al. 2017).

The study was conducted in a neighborhood, Jeonnong-dong, where

Fig. 1.—Low-Rise Housing, High-Rise Housing, and a Public Park (From Left to Right).

Source: Author.

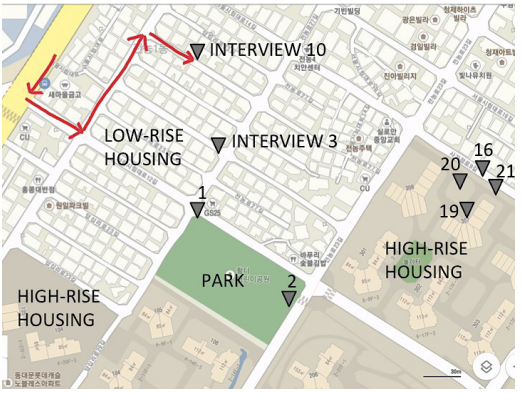

Fig. 2.—Neighborhood Map with Arrows Plotting the Interview Locations.

Source: Daum Map Service with mark-up by author.

both new high-rise complexes and low-rise housing communities that have been relatively intact for 30 years have coexisted (Figure 2). The two housing types provide very different settings with respect to how far they are from public spaces, and this difference in accessibility can render different levels of control and territoriality in the public spaces around the housing units. Jeonnong-dong (the research site) is approximately 1.19 square kilometers in size with a population of 30,215 individuals from 13,955 households, based on 2017 data.[1] All of the interviews took place out front of private housing units except for two interviews at a public high-rise housing unit subsidized by the government (interviews 20, 21). There were three public parks of different sizes in the areas where the interviews were conducted. An example of a physical analysis of an interview location is shown in Figure 3.

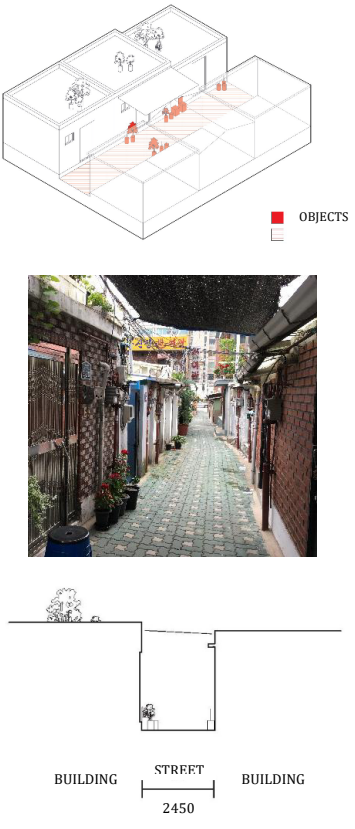

Fig. 3.—An example of a "Temporary Mini-Park" (Interview Location 24, Width in Mm)

[1] The city of Seoul has a population of almost 10 million with an area of 605.21 square kilometers (233.67 square miles) (Seoul Statistics, 2018).

Fieldwork

The research conducted for this study integrated qualitative methodological approaches including a case study and narrative research (Gardner 2011). The data were collected from conversational interviews in situ, participant observation during the interview about social behavior, and spatial analysis, using supplementary information from city census data and street-view photos taken during the interview and from an online map service. Researchers were familiar with neighborhood, which they commuted through, and were aware of the locations where older adults gathered. On the day of fieldwork, researchers headed to the location known to be where older adults gathered and interviewed older adults found on the spot. Fieldwork was conducted between March and June of 2019. Overall, 50 older adults were interviewed (Table 1) at 26 locations (Table 2) resulting in a response rate of about 60 percent over the total four-month period. Often a group of older adults congregated at each interview location, so the interviews were conducted with entire groups rather than with specific individuals. The researchers approached interview locations instead of seeking out individuals to understand their social relationships and the surrounding physical configurations. Verbal consent was acquired, but some potential interviewees rejected the interview requests at the beginning or walked away in the middle of the interviews. Only the perspectives of those who remained throughout the entire interview conversations are reported here. Each conversation lasted from 20 minutes to an hour initially and tended to be shorter when the same interviewees were interviewed again or multiple times. The conversations were audio-recorded and, in addition to conducting the interviews, the interviewers documented the physical environment by taking photos and measurements of the locations. Ethical approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Seoul.

The conversations started with open-ended questions to allow for new discoveries. The questions asked included: "Do you meet other older adults here (or elsewhere)?" "How close are you to each other?" "Why is it good to meet here?" If we were unable to identify the strength of social ties from the initial questions, we asked about the following six activity types that would indicate the strength of social ties: A) saying "hi" to each other, B) having conversations, C) sharing food, D) discussing or helping each other with difficult matters, E) visiting neighbors' houses, and F) borrowing money from each other. Relationships that involve sharing nearly any type of

Table 1
Demographics of Participants

Variable	Frequency
Age	
60s	4
70s	38
80s	7
90s	1
Household living arrangement	
Living alone	16
Living with one or more family member	34
Length of residence (year)	
Less than 3	3
3~10	5
10~30	14
30+	28
Housing type	
Low-rise	39
High-rise	11
Socializing location	
Street	27
Public park	15
Park in high-rise complex	8

resource are generally regarded as having strong ties. "Strong social ties" in this study refers to the ties among older adults who participated in three or more of the above social activity types in total.[2]

[2] Each question represented types of social support such as companionship (A and E), emotional support (B and D), and instrumental support (C and F) (Wellman and Wortley 1990). Previous studies have shown that ties, or relationships that involve strong obligations for offering comfort and emotional support, also involve a strong obligation to offer other types of support, such as financial assistance and visiting each other (Rossi and Rossi 1990; Kim and Waite 2016). Thus, relationships that involve sharing nearly any type of resource are generally regarded as having strong ties.

Table 2
Summary of Interview Locations

Interview location	# of Participants	Gender	Age	Length of residence (yr)	Social support/ Shared activity[1)] A	B	C	D	E	F	SUM	Housing type[2)]	Gathering/interview location	Immediate physical features[3)]
1	1	Female	70s	30+	1						1	L	Public park	Public park bench, 5,300sqm
2	1	Male	70s	50	1						1	L	Public park	Park installation for stretching, park size: 5,300sqm
4	1	Female	70s	40	1	1					2	H	Public park	Public park bench, 5,300sqm
5	2	Male	60s	20	1	1					2	HL	Public park	Public park bench, park size: 60sqm
		Male	60s	30+										
6	2	Female	70s	30+	1	1					2	L	Public park	Public park bench, tree
		Female	70s	50+										Park size: 15,000sqm
7	2	Female	70s	20+	1	1	1				3	L	Public park	Public park bench, fountain
		Female	70s	40+										Park size: 165sqm
8	2	Female	70s	30+	1	1					2	L	Public park	Public park bench
		Female	70s	40+										Park size: 165sqm
9		Female	90s	50	1						1	L	Public park	Stone barrier to sit on, park size: 60sqm
11	1	Female	80s	1	1	1					2	H	Public park	Public park bench, tree shade, park size: 300sqm
18	1	Male	70s	10	1	1	1				3	L	Public park	Public park bench, pavilion, Korean chess, park size:15,000sqm.
22	1	Female	80s	30+ in the area	1	1	1	1			4	L to L	Public park	Public park bench
19	1	Male	70s	5	1	1					2	H	Park (in high-rise)	Sit on entry steps
20	2	Male	60s	5	1	1					2	H	Park (in high-rise)	Private park bench
		Male	60s											50sqm
21	1	Female	70s	30+	1						1	L to H	Park (in high-rise)	Sit on curb
23	1	Female	80s	50	1	1	1				3	H	Park (in high-rise)	Park bench, 40 sqm
26	3	Female	70s	11, 30-40	1	1	1				3	H	Senior center (in high-rise)	Living room and kitchen with furniture
		Female	70s											2-story and 100sqm per story
		Female	70s											

3	3	Female	70s	20	1	1	1		1		4	L	Neighborhood street	In front of corner store, planter pot
		Female	70s	30+										Block size: 95mX18m(appr.), Street width 4m
		Female	70s	30+										
10	4	Female	70s	2, 30 - 40	1	1	1	1		1	5	L	Neighborhood street	Plastic crate, planter pot, parking spot, piloti parking
		Female	70s											Block size: 95mX18m(appr.), Street width 4m
		Female	80s											
		Female	80s											
12	2	Male	70s	20+	1	1	1	1		1	5	L	Neighborhood street	Side street space, personal chair, planter pot
		Male	70s	30+										Block size non-applicable. Street width: 4m
13	2	Female	70s	20	1	1					2	L	Neighborhood street	Personal bench, sit on ground, planter pot
		Female	70s											
14	4	Female	70s	40 - 50	1	1	1	1		1	5	L	Neighborhood street	Personal chair and table, rice cake store
		Female	70s											Block size irregular, street width 6m
		Female	70s											
		Female	70s											
15	4	Female	70s	30 - 40	1	1	1	1			4	L	Neighborhood street	Flat sitting table, stool, planter pot,
		Female	70s											Block size irregular, street width 3m
		Female	70s											
		Female	70s											
16	2	Female	70s	15	1	1	1		1		4	L	Neighborhood street	Sit on curb with paper as cushion
		Male	70s											Block size irregular, street width 6m(appr.)
17	1	Female	80s	3	1	1					2	L	Neighborhood street	Personal chair, flat sitting table, planter pot,
														Block size irregular, street width:9m
24	1	Female	80s	1	1	1	1	1			4	L	Neighborhood street	Personal stool, planter pot, narrow street width
														(2.45m)
25	4	Female	70s	15	1	1	1	1			4	L	Neighborhood street	Personal chair, planter pot, piloti parking
		Female	70s											Block size: 32mX27m, street width: 6m
		Female	70s											
		Female	70s											

1) A: Saying "hi"; B: conversation; C: sharing food; D: discussing or helping on difficult matters; E: visiting neighbor's houses; F: borrowing money from each other

2) H: high-rise housing, L: low-rise housing, HL: mixed in a group

3) Width and area measures are approximate.

Data Analysis Process

The analysis adopted a grounded theory by identifying the keywords (coding) for social activities and the places in which they occurred (Strauss and Corbin 1998). For each of the 26 interview locations, one researcher (PI) explored emerging findings by considering data from a single interview location at a time. Using the narrative analysis technique (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber 1998), the initial analysis began with a close reading of the interview transcripts along with a review of the reflexive notes from the observation and careful consideration of the maps and photos. This analysis focused on how person and place interact to shape older adults' social connectedness and sense of belonging. To facilitate the data exploration process, we used map visualization (Hand et al. 2018) to track distances from the interviewees' homes to the gathering places, identify areas of frequent activity, and create layouts of the streets and buildings. We did further analysis for each area, repeating each previous stage of analysis in an iterative process.

Results

Neighborhood Streets as Places to Socialize

By analyzing conversations, this study found that the streets themselves in addition to parks were important social spaces. While public parks were certainly places that allowed for openness and inclusion (Askari and Soltani 2019), neighborhood streets were actually preferred by older adults who had strong and close support relationships with others in the neighborhood. Although designed for movement and diverse everyday functions, the unique layout of certain locations on the streets allowed them to function as suitable locations for social gatherings (Figure 4 and Table 2). When interviewees at one location were asked if they gathered inside of their homes, an older woman mentioned how she gathered with others on a street.

> We don't get together inside of our homes because everyone lives near here (in front of a rice cake store). One lives right here, another over this direction, another over there. We just come out briefly for a couple of hours, then go back home to take care of things, and again come back out.

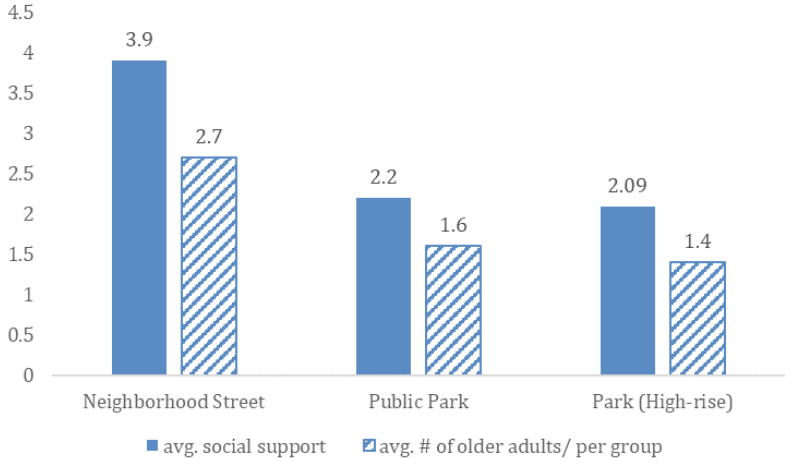

Fig. 4.—The Average Level of Social Support and the Number of Older Adults Per Groups by Type of Places.

(Interview 14)

Specifically, the average number of social activity/support types (A to F, as mentioned earlier and in Table 2) and the average number of older adults per group were higher for those gathered on streets in the low-rise housing section than those in the other locations (Figure 4). One man who had lived in the community for 20 years explained why this was the case.

> The good thing about living in a low-rise housing unit (instead of a high-rise apartment) is this: We say hi to each other, but they don't do that in the high-rise apartments. They don't know who lives in front of their homes. I heard the same thing from my daughters and son who live over there (other parts of the city)…. As for us, we just sit here together and grab a bite of a Korean pancake together. Those of us living in low-rise housing units live here for the fun of talking together and maintaining a sense of connection. After living here for a while, we get to know what the neighbor in the front of and next to us are like and get to know each other psychologically. Then, we can connect emotionally. (Interview 16)

In addition, older adults demonstrated better control of space in neighborhood streets than either public parks or the parks of high-rise complexes (agency) by placing personal objects on the streets (Graham et al.

2018). They took advantage of locations where cars could not pass through easily and used personal chairs or other objects to claim the street space for their gatherings as if the spaces were private "mini-parks."

In public parks, older adults were not able to use personal chairs and thus were not able to have as much control over space as they did in the streets of the low-rise housing sections. Although some interviewees came to public parks every day (interviews 6, 7, 8, 18) to enjoy the shade of trees on hot summer days and made new friends there, their relationships seemed limited to casual conversations and sharing food at most (Table 2). Parks were seldom preferred by older adults with close social ties even when they lived nearby. One of the reasons for this was the potential for undesirable encounters to take place. For example, a person interviewed at a park mentioned he used to be an alcoholic and encountered many fellow alcoholics who came to the large park. In fact, an interviewee from a street avoided the park in particular because of the alcoholics. Another possible explanation for weaker social ties at parks is that older adults came to the park because they did not belong to a group near their homes, but this requires further examination in the future.

Similar to public parks, in the private parks of the high-rise housing complexes, older adults could not use personal objects in their gathering locations at the complexes because property management would not allow them to do so. Older adults from all four interview locations at high-rise complexes did not share food except for those who were in groups of long-term neighbors for about 30 or 50 years and who had resided at the same site since before the construction of their high-rise housing complexes (interviews 23, 26). In other words, older adults preferred places where they could easily claim territoriality and engage in social activities/support.

Why Streets

Many of the older adults interviewed were able to walk to the streets in front of their homes except for one interviewee (interview 15) who had to stay home due to her difficulty walking.[3] The interviews revealed that going out was more enjoyable when one was with company (Graham et al. 2018). A group with close ties tended to be 10 members or fewer overall (interviews

[3] Researchers did not ask about interviewees' health conditions directly, but there were older adults who voluntarily mentioned some level of difficulty in walking (interviews 2, 9, 10, 15, 20, 24) and surgery they had (interviews 10, 21, 24).

10, 14). Many of them were female long-time residents for more than 20 years, and some had lived in the area for about 50 years.[4] Members of groups had different capabilities or impairments and thus provided support and made things convenient for other members with mobility limitations so that they could all be more autonomous as a small group. For this reason, members who are more active and relatively healthy strategically chose gathering locations right in front of the home of an older member who had difficulty walking (interviews 10, 15, 24) and where other members who were healthy enough to walk around could access. At location 10, for instance, an older woman could not walk further than the front of her home or across the street after her surgery, so other older adults gathered at the location convenient to her. In another location (15), an older woman could only step out to a wide flat bench in front of her home, and other older adults would come to her place as a result.

> The husband of this neighbor made a flat bench…. This old woman has serious back pains, and we cannot walk around (far) because of her leg pains. We cannot go to parks, so we get together here when this woman (owner of the house at the interview location who had back pain) comes out. (Interview 15)

Another example of providing support involved a group of 10 older adults who would share information about health services from local government clinics and help read leaflets to those with weak vision or who were illiterate. Similarly, members of one group implicitly shared the roles of bringing out the ingredients for Korean pancakes and cookware, providing space and chairs, and many other roles. Having at least one active person in the groups also helped to ensure the social activities would take place. This active person, who tended to be younger (early in their 70s) and healthy, would check if someone did not show up (interview 10) and fix things in neighbors' homes (interview 12). Even younger people (probably in their 50s or 60s) who did not join the older adults' gatherings came by and gave drinks to the older adults to share (interview 10). Sometimes it was not clear who had installed a cover for shade over a narrow street (Figure 3) or placed chairs at the gathering places, which suggests a potentially wider social network

[4] Most who congregated around residential areas were mainly homeowners and longtime female residents with close ties. Older men were seen in larger parks gathered around small crowds playing Korean chess. As a whole, the men gathered in this way did not seem to have close ties.

beyond those who were most often seen.

In short, older adults chose a place, neighborhood streets in this study, they could access and privatize easily by putting out their chairs and other personal effects and thus provide support and convenience for members with mobility limitations. With this in mind, how do these older adults claim territory? What are the physical characteristics that lead older adults to privatize neighborhood alleyways, and thus allow them to form bonds of strong social support and participate in group activities that create a sense of belonging? The older adults' strong social bonds with each other (belonging) appeared to be associated with better control of space (agency and territoriality), as seen in the low-rise housing areas, which led us to examine both the objects that were used to claim territory and the physical configurations that were easily accessible to older adults and which allowed them to form small autonomous groups.

How Old Adults Claim Their Territory

Although a chair is a good simple sign of an out-of-home use of space, there were various other forms from the multiple environmental configurations (Lawton 1985) that signaled a social use of the streets. What one experienced or perceived as territory (such as proximity to their home) was embedded in the configurations.

(1) Chairs for Territorial Claims on Alleyways

Personal chairs on the streets were a clear signal that someone was around at a certain time of day. Although neither aggressive nor protective in a strong way, a personal chair was an act of reinforcing a territorial claim on public property in front of one's home (Brown 1987; Moran and Dolphin 1986; Skjaeveland and Garling 1997; Taylor and Brooks 1980). This personalization set the stage for social activities (Salari, Brown, and Eaton 2006) and helped older adults spend time outside of their homes (Graham et al. 2018) (agency). If someone feels comfortable enough to place a personal chair at a certain public location, this means that person has a sense of ownership in that space—i.e., a sense of territoriality (Kinney, Stephens, and Brockmann 1987). A chair was an excellent instrument for this purpose because it was easy for older adults to move the chair around and was useful for sitting outside (Lawton 1985; Whyte 1980). By moving around their chairs along a street, older adults would optimize gathering locations to avoid sunlight in the summer and pursue it in the winter. Personal chairs meant only someone

close to the owners could sit on it (Lyman and Scott 1967). Expanding the space for their activities to the front of their houses would be another way to understand the action. In fact, someone new could be a potential member, but their different habits or patterns from the group made it difficult for them to mingle. Older adults did not like to have new benches placed in front of their home because of who might show up to sit there. For example, a drunken person could make loud noises late at night, which is similar to a case of benches being removed in a high-rise housing complex (interview 26) because of smokers. In addition to chairs, other forms of seating were used. The simplest was layers of newspaper on a curb (interview 16 in Figure 5). In some cases, borrowed milk crates were turned upside down and used for seating as well (interview14), and light plastic stools were also used, probably because of their low cost and ease of storing in stacks (interview 24). White Styrofoam parts from packaging were also used as sitting cushions and wedged into gaps between walls used for storage (Figure 5).

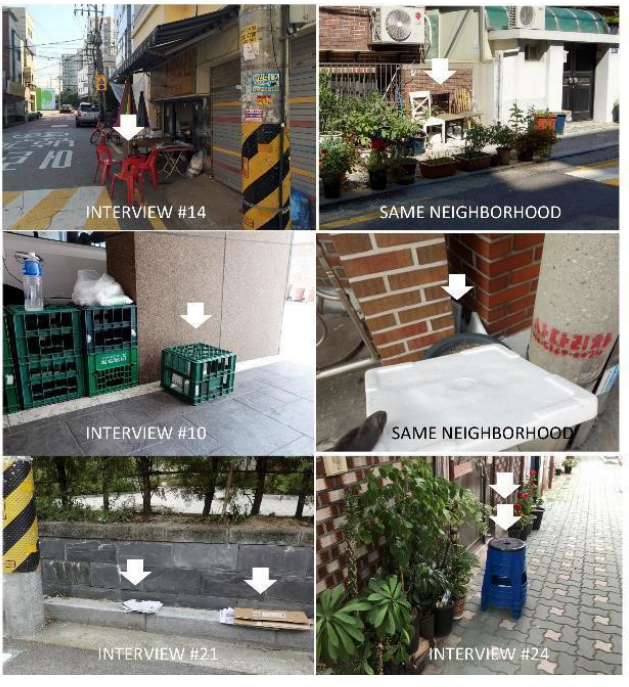

Fig. 5.—Personal Chairs/Seats (and Planter Pots) on Streets Used in "Temporary Mini-Parks."

Source: Author.

(2) Planter Pots for Socializing and as a Sign of Territory

Other objects for claiming territory were planter pots (Figure 5). What made the pots relevant to social activities was that the plants required caretakers to be outside for some time, which opened up opportunities for the older adults to come across other neighbors and talk about flowers (Egli, Oliver, and Tautolo 2016). Other older adults came by when the owners were around or taking care of plants.

> Flowerpots, very nice flowers here. I come here all the time. I cannot walk around a lot because I have leg pain. I always come here because this lady lives here. She had leg pain and fell which made it worse. (Interview 15)

All of the interview locations at parks and high-rise housing complexes had a significant amount of greenery including tall trees and large plants, but the residents did not take care of them. In terms of the scale of greenery coverage, the street locations had the least amount, but all of the planter pots were personal ones that were tended by the residents. Out of the 10 street locations, 8 had planter pots. In terms of open space, parks had the greatest amount and the low-rise section had the least amount. Older adults who had more greenery in their neighborhoods have been found to be more satisfied with their neighborhoods (Burton, Mitchell and Stride 2011). Based on the interviews, however, the strength of social bonds among neighbors did not seem to be proportional to the amount of greenery around the place nor the amount of open space but might have been affected by the ownership and/or caretaking practices of the greenery. Furthermore, other personal objects such as hang-drying clothes or other household items on or within viewing distance from the streets in low-rise housing sections also reflected a sense of ownership.

Physical Factors That Make Older Adults' Social Activities more Sustainable

(1) Street Layout Against Vehicular Traffic

In order for someone to put his or her own chair outside safely, the streets should also have extra width between building setbacks and should not be filled with cars. The 30-year-old streets in the low-rise housing areas were not designed for today's vehicular traffic volume, and certain sections have embedded features that make driving inconvenient. As a result, older adults took advantage of the absence of cars in locations where cars were supposed

to be (Balfour and Kaplan 2002; Morrison, Thompson, and Petticrew 2004). They occupied parking spots that were underused due to their lack of accessibility from bumps or other objects or because of the time of day. One of the interviewees characterized the inconvenience of these circumstances as follows:

> I wish there were a bench here, but it cannot happen because this is a parking spot. I don't want these parking spots, the flat bench (that used to be here) is gone because of the new (high-rise) apartments. We have to move soon when the cars come in (to park at the spot in the evening). (Interview 16)

One older adult even rented a parking spot in front of her house from the local government for a fee, and this spot provided the space for the social gatherings (interview 10). The gathering locations of the older adults could be found inside the neighborhoods after making a couple of turns from an arterial road. In these areas, the streets were short and had intersections or dead ends as shown in Figure 2. In other words, drivers seemed to prefer passing through high-rise housing sections and larger urban blocks with wider streets and fewer junctions over low-rise sections where the opposite was the case even if those streets were straight.

The grid street pattern of the low-rise section in Figure 2 indicates approximate block sizes of 100-meter and 17-meter sides with some variations, while those in the high-rise housing section indicate large blocks with much more than 100-meters in length on both sides. Six blocks of the low-rise housing sections were equivalent in area to one block of the high-rise section. Most of the time, the interviewers did not see cars passing through the streets of the low-rise housing sections during the interviews, with the exception of delivery trucks.

A street's width also directly affected car movement in the area and thus indirectly affected its potential to be used as a social space. It was apparently easier to occupy a street that was about 5 meters (about 16 feet) wide or narrower. This width did not allow cars to travel both ways at the same time, and cars going in one direction had to wait until cars from the other direction cleared out of the way, as shown in the first picture on the left in Figure 1 and interview 10 in Figure 2. One interview location (24) was on a street that was only 3 meters wide, which made it impossible for cars to pass by (Figure 3). The neighborhood streets in this study were without crosswalks or overpasses for pedestrians to cross between rows of houses on both sides, and

this could have made drivers alert of potential pedestrians. Traffic calming efforts on narrow streets have actually been found to support older adults' social activities (Lehning, Smith, and Dunkle 2014).

In addition, low-rise housing buildings rarely had setbacks or were a couple of meters at most from the streets while high-rise housing buildings were at least 5 meters away from public streets (Figure 2). Some of the low-rise housing buildings had walls with windows that were immediately open to the streets. The low-rise housing areas with direct visual and physical access to the streets may have encouraged older adults to claim territory on the streets right in front of their houses (Ghel 2011; Newman 1996). One interviewee mentioned that she regularly goes back and forth between her house and the gathering location (interview 14).

(2) Corner Stores for Business and Social Activities with Neighbors

Corner stores on the streets encouraged older adults to take trips on foot, and some gatherings took place in and around the stores (interviews 3, 14). The types of stores included convenience (grocery) stores, hair salons, (rice) grain stores, dry cleaners, and rice cake stores, all of which functioned as social places (BBC 2017). In addition to the services they provided, corner stores possessed unique functions and resources for neighbors. While other locations with close social ties had minimum vehicular traffic, one rice cake store (interview 14) was on a two-lane, two-way street with a width of about 9.5 meters (about 31 ft 3 in, from wall to wall). It rarely got congested, but most of the time it had cars passing through it. While the street itself was not suited for social gatherings, the store was an obvious territory for the group. There were no other locations along the same street where people gathered regularly.

When one customer approached to buy a small pack of rice cakes, one of the gathering members at the store provided an explanation about the rice cakes, accepted the money, and bagged them for the customer. At the time, the owner of the store was going back and forth to and from the store because she was preparing rice cakes. When the owner was about to leave, she and the gathering member talked to make sure someone was at the store.

> Neighbor 1: Go ahead [and get free physical therapy]. I will go after you come back. Why did you ask us? Just go.
> Owner: I should let you guys know that I am going now. Those are 10,000 won (price of rice cake), and I haven't gotten money for them yet. Those who want white cakes will say so.

Neighbor 1: Go, go.

The owner needed help with the labor of preparing and selling the rice cakes because she could not do it all on her own. Rather than part-time employees, her neighbors were helping her out. It was not clear how the neighbors were compensated for their contributions, but monetary compensation was unlikely considering the style of friendship in Korean culture. What made the business run was a collaboration of neighbors and an owner whose bodily movements were visibly slow probably due to her deteriorating health conditions. These neighbors used the place for both business and social activities (Oldenburg 1999). The members prepared the ingredients, sold the products, talked, and ate food together on the street right in front of the store. While the busy street with cars was not likely to be a good social territory, a small public area with a building setback in front of the store for light plastic tables and chairs enabled them to claim the area as territory in addition to the interior space of the store (Lyman and Scott 1967) (interview 14 in Figure 5). The researchers only conducted interviews outside and did not go into stores, but stories about other stores functioning as social places are well-known in Korea. For example, hair salons can function as social places for older women where neighbors not only can get their hair done but can also come for conversations that can last for hours (Goh 2011). Some hair salon owners even served meals informally to about 10 or more older adults in the store and to the store owner next door.

Discussion

This study showed that older adults chose neighborhood streets close to their home they could easily access and privatize by putting out their chairs, plants, and other personal things, and exchange social support as gathering spots. Configuration of streets against through traffic and easy access for residents along it and their demographics could have allowed social territory claims where they had certain freedom to use the space. For example, they would choose (selection) a meet-up spot in front of a neighbor's home to compensate for his or her difficulties in walking so that more members can take part (optimization) (Baltes and Baltes 1990). There were more social gatherings inside the neighborhood alleyways than around the wide streets congested with vehicular traffic, which older adults referred to as "outside" of the neighborhood. In contrast to the "outside," the "inside" alleyways were

more likely to be occupied by older adult groups. Within these inside neighborhood areas (i.e., within a certain distance of an alleyway), older adults could occupy and socialize (agency) to get along with their neighbors (belonging). Physical conditions (layouts of streets and short distances between houses) that supported the claiming of territory stabilized social activities (agency) and helped build social bonds (belonging). In addition, being aware of these territories could have helped older adults get out of their homes to participate in the social activities (agency).

The design and planning of residential areas could be harnessed to enhance the balance between temporarily claiming territoriality and being open in public spaces for social activities (Ghel, 2011). This can be done as simply by allowing one's "my chair" or movable chair (Whyte 1980) to be used in public, although creating the circumstances that support this practice is not a simple process and involves various configurations as described in this study. Additionally, if an older adult did not show up, a member active in the group would go and check up on them. In this sense, the social networks also functioned as safety nets for the older adults belonging to them. The social life of these older adults exchanging intimate support were more likely to have tied their identities to these places as their own "temporary mini-parks" on the streets (Lyman and Scott 1967; Oldenburg 1999; Wahl, Iwarsson, and Oswald 2012).

Advantage of Alleyways

Although putting out personal things allows one to claim territoriality in public space, one of the obvious characteristics of being in public areas is being able to observe others' activities taking place in an open space (Graham et al. 2018). People tend to watch others and their activities multiple times (Odzakovic et al. 2019) before actually starting a conversation with them, which helps them verify like-mindedness visually to some extent. The temporary ownership of public streets secures territory for social interaction in a very open location, which enhances the likelihood of social encounters. In this sense, the public and private domains coexist temporarily, an attribute of spaces for transit in terms of the possible spontaneous social interactions, which blur the boundaries of social territory. This ambiguity of presumably being in transit provides a sense of ease for joining a conversation because of the reduced need for commitment and the freedom to exit the interaction suddenly to some extent. Temporary "mini-parks" as open public spaces can provide flexibility to adjust the intensity of interactions, which contributes to

the forming of acquaintances, lighter versions of friendship (belonging) (Oldenburg 1999), and the flourishing of life between different buildings (Gehl 2011).

In addition, the public domain aspect of the low-rise housing spaces made the places open to the support that the government and other neighbors could provide. Some neighbors provided resources to benefit other unspecified neighbors. Older adults in this study could not identify those who installed a shade cover over a street or brought chairs (interviews 10, 24). In the low-rise housing areas, older adults were directly exposed to the routines of public services such as mail delivery, garbage pick-up, utility meter reading, and others, which increased their chances for interactions with service providers and helped older adults be identified for any abnormal patterns they exhibited. In addition, the doors of private homes became conduits to public spaces where government services operated. Residents would be keener on public services in low-rise housing units than those from subdivisions or enclosed high-rise housing complexes where common space was cleaned by the property management and home doors were away from public streets (Hamers and Tennekes 2015; Newman 1986).

Limitations

With its small sample size, this study could be missing many other characteristics of older adults who were not interviewed, especially disadvantaged ones. This is because many of those interviewed who reported or exhibited close ties with others in the community were homeowners and longtime residents and were at least outside of their homes enough to experience daily life. Older adults who were isolated at home or refused interview requests were not included in the data. Other older adults who might have socialized in recreational centers away from the neighborhood were also not included. However, gatherings of older residents with close ties to each other tended to be open to new members in the low-rise housing sections.

Homeownership and the length of residence in the neighborhoods could have supported the building of social connections, but older adults in this study also showed they had close relationships with renters whose length of residence was as short as less than a year. The researchers in this study did not directly ask about homeownership unless interviewees mentioned it or gave relevant information regarding it. Future studies could further examine

its relevance to social activities.

Moreover, this study is limited in that it was unable to show how social relationships inherent in actions can affect the formation of and maintenance of support networks. While this study showed how older adults chose neighborhood streets and privatized them (agency and belonging) and how the physical configuration of a street supported the claiming of territory, these findings focused on women in their 70s or early 80s. It is well known that girls are more likely prefer intimacy in their relationships and thus prefer smaller and homogeneous clique than boys (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001), and it is possible such a gender difference influences social use of streets, resulting in a preference for the "inside" alleyways. Moreover, Korean women have traditionally taken full responsibility of household chores and tend not to stray far from their homes so they can tend to whatever needs to be done there. While the older women stayed near their homes with conversation as their main activity, the men might have gone to work or stayed outside of their homes most of the day even if they were retired. The older men who participated in this study were frequently seen playing Korean chess or going to parks. Further investigation is needed to understand more about older Korean men and what supports their social lives.

The findings may also depend on the season. Since the study was mainly conducted in the spring and summer, future research on how such support groups of older adults are maintained in the winter should be conducted. Furthermore, further studies are needed to find what takes the place of plants as a sign of territoriality in the winter.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, this study shows that specific configurations of streets with certain features are conducive to social bonding and how the process of maintaining autonomous support networks takes place by privatizing the place with a sense of belonging. This suggests that when it comes to the fostering of person-environment interactions and resources for aging well, how well older adults can occupy and control the environment outweighs the quantity of amenities that exist in the environments for their social activities. This has significant implication for "aging in place," which emphasizes independence and integration of older adults into their communities. Although the street configurations might certainly vary in

different cultures, the size and locations of parks can be carefully considered to support neighbors' social activities and sense of ownership that foster independence and autonomous support networks for older adults. The potential of streets to be reconceptualized as public social spaces that are available for everyone including those with limited resources.

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