The unraveling of cause and effect relationships is a complex business, sometimes hopelessly so. The ascription of monolithic causes to any but the most simple of effects could well be considered suspect. So it is with the sudden burgeoning of the population aged 50 years and over. Very likely our advanced medical technology could be identified as one of the multiple determinants, but there surely are others.

Robert Siegel estimates that in the United States there are about 44 million people fifty years of age and older, ten million more than in 1950.[1] In a society which more-or-less enforces compulsive retirement at an age so far removed from death as to be characterized as just out of middle age, and one whose norms operate to keep the parental and grandparental generations separated physically, psychologically, and economically, the problem of housing for the elderly becomes the concern of almost everyone sooner or later.

The complex nature of human beings and the tremendous gamut of influences which affect their life styles and economic positions, have rendered all social engineering attempts to cope with the problem, less than adequate. One of the attempted solutions to the housing problem of the elderly is what Siegel refers to as ". . . segregation based on your birthday" — the retirement community.[2] He goes on to say: "Whole cities have sprung up, where thousands of citizens are offered a never-known-before package of stimulating play and independence. For many, these cities will make retirement not something to dread but something to anticipate."[3]

The attractions of the retirement community do not appeal to everyone, however. Bultena and Wood who made a study of retirement communities in Arizona, write:

Widely divergent views prevail as to the desirability of older persons segregating themselves in planned retirement communities. These places have been criticized as unnatural and stultifying enviroments as well as heralded as offering an exciting new concept in meeting the needs of the aged. Residents of retirement communities have been pictured as bored and disillusioned persons who had

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Retirement Communities are not for Everybody

*by Victor A. Christopherson**

shallow lives dominated by a hedonistic pursuit of happiness.[4]

Siegel also indicates a controversial side to the appeal of the retirement community. "Promoted under the banners of providing a new way of life, the community actually offers a new way of dying."[5] Siegel quotes Dr. Paul Starr, Emeritus Professor of Medicine at the University of Southern California, who says, ". . . it is detrimental to incarcerate the elderly with their own generation."[6] In short, retirement communities engender mixed feelings.

One of the sources of difficulty probably is to think of the retirement community simply as a housing arrangement, e.g., dimensions, design, and materials. As Edward H. Hoban, as cited by James A. Peterson says:

There is no such thing in today's cities as dwellings that constitute adequate housing in themselves. Only when a pattern of various services for health, safety education, recreation and so forth is laid over the fabric of the land and buildings is there created the garment of good environment which we call housing in the fullest sense.[7]

It appears to be the case that much of the disenchantment some residents and former residents feel for retirement communities might be laid at the feet of the developer who overlooked this intricate network of services that can change a cluster of houses into a viable human community.

Lest the evidence seems to be aligned against the retirement community, Bultena and Wood in a comparison of the inhabitants of retirement communities and non-retirement communities in Arizona, found that:

Aged migrants to retirement communities were found to have higher morale than those selecting regular or age-integrated communities in Ari-

Table 1

The Ten Most Desirable Characteristics of Retirement Communities in Rank Order Designated by Males and Females

Characteristic	Males (N=44)		Females (N=110)	
	Rank	%	Rank	%
The ease with which new friends are made	(1)	30	(2)	29
The recreational facilities	(2)	26	(7)	19
The people are of one's own age	(3)	25	(6)	23
The abundance of social activity	(4)	20	(1)	32
The attractive surroundings (environment)	(5)	15	(3)	28
The proximity to church and shopping facilities	(6)	11	(8)	15
The fact that there are no children around	(7)	10	(9)	7
The economical way of life	(8)	9	(10)	5
The many opportunities to gain new interests	(9)	7	(5)	24
The safety (protection, lack of crime or violence)	(10)	6	(4)	25

3

Retirememt Community

zona. This difference can be attributed in part to the differential characteristics of persons settling in these two types of communities. Those in the retirement communities were drawn, to a greater extent than those in regular communities, from the higher socio-economic segments of the aged population, and more often perceived themselves in good or very good health.

The structural features of these two types of communities also are important to the morale of their residents. The retirement community, with its greater opportunities for friendship interaction growing out of age-grading, and the functions it performs as a supportive reference group for leisure-oriented life styles, is found to provide an environment conducive to the adaption of its residents to the retirement role.[8]

While retirement communities do not appear to be the final answer for all of the elderly at this time, they are apparently here to stay, and as the formula for successful communities becomes better known and more widely applied, the housing likely will draw large percentages of those eligible. Peterson offers some thoughts on the etiology of the most impressive development in housing in recent times.

The relative popularity of age-segregated housing can be attributed in part to a change in the concept of retirement. Previously, retirement was, for the most part, an involuntary action resulting from the inability to continue effectively in the work role. Added to the problems of forced inactivity was the congruent loss of income and the subsequent constriction of a standard of living. But this has, and continues to change. Organizationally imposed pension systems, consistent lower age for retirement have enabled many persons to redefine retirement as a desirable state. When individuals can view their later years assured of a steady income, they can begin to rationalize the retirement experience and look forward to a number of years in which they can do as they please. This attitude represents the beginning of a redefinition of retirement as desirable and an opportunity, rather than as an inevitable superannuation with consequent loss of status. It allows the individual to look forward and to plan for the special status of the retiree . . . This attitude is reinforced by new definitions of free time or leisure at the summum bonum of life.[9]

It is apparent from records and studies that some older people choose retirement communities and stay; others move out. Others, still, choose not to live in such a community, and others would live there if their incomes permitted. All of these, however, have ideas about and attitudes toward these age-segregated housing communities. A study was undertaken in the summer and fall of 1969 to assess the attitudes toward retirement communities of a sample of subscribers to a publication entitled Your Digest* which is addressed to the retirement-age population of the state of Arizona.

PROCEDURE: A questionnaire was sent to three hundred persons selected in random fashion from a directory compiled by the Co-operative Extension staff in Home Economics at the University of Arizona. The directory is used to send a monthly newsletter to the retirement-age population over the entire State. Approximately three thousand copies are sent out.

While this procedure did not yield a random-type sample, the representativeness of the contacts was judged to be indicative. Forty-four males and one-hundred and ten females returned completed questionnaires by an arbitrary cut-off date.

DISCUSSION: Seventy-five per cent of the males and forty-five per cent of the females lived in retirement communities. The age distribution reflected the longivity patterns characteristic of the sexes. The female ages were bimodal with 29 per cent falling at both ends; i.e. age 50-60 and over 70 years. This pattern would seem to emphasize the tendency for women to become widows at the younger age and to live on into the advanced age group.

The majority of the males fell in the 60-70 age group, and the majority of both males and females had resided in Arizona more than five years. The percentage of males living with spouse as opposed to living alone or with others was approximately twice that of the females; i.e., 89 per cent and 44 per cent respectively.

With regard to pre-retirement occupational status, the distribution of males was as follows: Professional, 32 per cent; manager or entrepreneur, 9 per cent; Sales or white collar, 45 per cent; military, 2 per cent; and blue collar, 14 per cent. Thirty-two per cent of the females were represented in the categories with professional and sales or white collar reflecting the highest percentages, 19 and 13 respectively. Sixty-eight per cent listed no occupation. The majority of both sexes lived in single-unit dwellings, and the majority also owned or were buying their homes.

All respondents were asked to list the three most desirable characteristics of retirement communities. No attempt was made to separate the age-segregated residents from those who preferred or had to settle for other types of housing arrangements. Th

Table 2

The Ten Most Undesirable Characteristics of Retirement Communities in Rank Order Designated by Males and Females

Characteristic	Males (N=44)		Females (N=110)	
	Rank	%	Rank	%
The emphasis among residents on their health problems	(1)	21	(8)	12
The high cost	(2)	16	(2)	24
The lack of medical facilities	(3)	12	(6)	17
The isolation from other age groups	(4)	11	(3)	21
The lack of privacy	(5)	8	(9)	7
The lack of adequate transportation	(6)	7	(7)	15
The sameness or lack of variety in housing	(6)	7	(4)	20
The isolation from former friends and relatives	(7)	6	(1)	26
The poor shopping facilities	(7)	6	(5)	18
The over emphasis on group activity	(7)	6	(10)	4

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were also asked to list the three least desirable characteristics. The characteristics, both positive and negative, were ranked from one to ten in order of the frequency with which they were mentioned for both males and females.

On the part of the males, of the ten most frequently mentioned characteristics, four were definitely of a social nature, and, more-over, appear as the first four ranked items. Some interesting differences appeared between males and females in terms of their rankings. It would be interesting to know the extent to which these differences are genuinely characteristic of the sexes in terms of their attitudes toward retirement communities. The females tended to respond more positively to the attractiveness of the surroundings and were more impressed by the safety features of the communities. Both males and females were in agreement, apparently, that the economy of the retirement community is not one of its most attractive features. This would seem to indicate the need for a fairly wide range of prices with regard to housing in these communities. The notion that all the people who live in these age-segregated societies are affluent, is apparently a rather thin myth. In a sense undesirable characteristics could be considered the converse of the others, at any rate, as seen in Table 2 below, the high cost is ranked number two by both males and females.

As with the desirable characteristics some interesting differences were reflected between the sexes. The same quality or characteristic was often perceived differently by different people. Some enjoy the peace, communality of interests, similarity of circumstances, availability of organized social activities, and so on, while others see these same qualities in a negative light. A considerable number, both males and females, identified the health area as a significant problem which retirement communities had not solved adequately. Many, also, characterized retirement communities as undesirable because of the constant preoccupation of the residents with their health problems. The separation from friends and families was perceived as an undesirable situation by many. Of course, it could be argued that this type of segregation is one of the pre-conditions of living in such a community.

Those who actually lived in a retirement community at the time of the study were asked to designate the characteristics of retirement communities that were satisfactory or unsatisfactory. They did this by means of a check-list rather than open-end responses. The majority of the responses for both males and females appear in the satisfactory columns. Apparently, those who actually reside in the communities have made a satisfactory adjustment to most of the conditions. The individuals who might be expected to contribute more substantially to the unsatisfactory columns, apparently either move back into non-segregated communities, or they never try the retirement communities in the first place.

In summary, it appears that the technology which is involved in developing housing communities must be based on firm grounding in the understanding of the general and special human needs of the retirement-age population. Health-care provisions must be improved, transportation to services and cities must be made more readily available, and greater opportunity for solitude and privacy must be included. Recreation appears to be adequate, but as the respondents indicated in many ways, there is more to life after retirement than the constant pursuit of pleasure, and one neglected area is still the relative lack of opportunity to fill useful roles that are self-satisfying and perceived as useful by mankind.

Notes

° The investigation upon which this study was based was supported in part by a research grant awarded by The University of Arizona Alumni Association, and in part by The Agricultural Experiment Station, The University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona.
[1] Robert Siegel, "The Pros and Cons of Retirement Cities," House Beautiful, October, 1964, p. 216.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Gordon L. Bultena and Vivian Wood, "The American Retirement Community: Bane or Blessing?", Journal of Gerontology, April, 1969, p. 209.
[5] Siegel, Ibid., p. 248.
[6] Siegel, Ibid.
[7] James A. Peterson, with Theodore Hadwen and Aile E. Larson, "A Time for Work, A Time for Leisure: A Study of Retirement Community In-Movers," University of Southern California, Gerontology Center, 1966, p. 117.
[8] Bultena and Wood, Ibid., p. 216.
[9] Peterson, Ibid., p. 13.
* Your Digest is a gerontologically oriented newsletter published jointly by The Cooperative Extension Service, The University of Arizona and The United States Department of Agriculture.

Table 3

Characteristics of Retirement Communities Designated by Male and Female Residents as Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory

| | Males (N=31) | | | | Females (N=52) | | | |
| | Satisfactory | | Unsatisfactory | | Satisfactory | | Unsatisfactory | |
Characteristic	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Housing costs	30	68	1	2	40	36	8	7
Design								
Room size	28	64	3	7	48	44	2	2
Kitchen arrangement	27	61	4	9	45	41	4	4
Hall width	30	68	1	2	43	39	4	4
Appliance and other work hts.	28	64	3	7	45	41	2	2
Other	28	75	3	7	45	41	—	—
Opportunities to make friends	29	66	2	5	52	47		
Recreation facilities	29	66	2	5	52	47		
Isolation from other age groups	29	66	2	5	40	36	9	8
Landscape design	29	66	2	5	51	46		
Privacy	29	66	2	5	44	40	3	3
Transportation								
Within community	23	52	8		38	35	9	8
To nearby city	20	45	11	25	29	26	17	15
Arrangements for pets	25	57	3	7	27	25	7	6
Other	3	7	—	—	14	13	5	5