

## **Refining Research on Older Adults' Leisure: Implications of Selection, Optimization, and Compensation and Socioemotional Selectivity Theories**

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Continuity and activity theories are often used to study leisure behavior but have limitations that hinder their application to older adults. Two theories from Lifespan Development Psychology—selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC) and socioemotional selectivity—are increasingly used in interdisciplinary research on older adults and are likely to contribute to the study of leisure behavior. Selection, optimization, and compensation theory describes how older adults set and pursue goals. Socioemotional selectivity theory describes continuity and change in social relationships. Both theories are empirically robust but have only been applied to leisure research in a few instances. Despite limited attention by leisure researchers, these theories provide a unique perspective on later life that may enhance the explanation and prediction of older adults' leisure pursuits and related relationships. If SOC or socioemotional selectivity theories are used to guide leisure research, the mechanisms that older adults use to adapt to changes in later life and their sources of social support must be addressed. The following article describes SOC and socioemotional selectivity theories, their relevance to leisure research, and provides guidance for using them in research on leisure behavior.

**KEYWORDS:** *Aging, research, selection, optimization, and compensation theory, socioemotional selectivity theory.*

### Introduction

Continuity theory and, to a lesser degree, activity theory are widely used to explain and predict leisure activities and social patterns of older adults. These theories, however, have limitations which hinder their ability to predict behavior accurately. Two theories based on Lifespan Development Psychology, selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC) and socioemotional selectivity, are increasingly used in gerontology, human development, and psychology to study older adults' behavior (Baltes, 2003; Baltes & Carstensen, 1999; Lawton & Schaie 1991; Schaie & Willis, 2002) and appear to provide guidance for refining leisure research. Both theories predict successful aging when the investment of resources (e.g. time or energy) is maintained or

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altered in desirable ways. SOC theory predicts that people who age successfully employ three basic strategies: (1) selection, (2) optimization, and (3) compensation. Selection refers to identifying and reprioritizing goals, optimization refers to maximizing performance, and compensation refers to adapting to current or anticipated limitations. Socioemotional selectivity theory predicts that, as perceived time left diminishes, people discard peripheral relationships and focus on important ones, such as those with close family members and friends. Despite an overall decline in the number of relationships, this process appears to be positively related to affective well-being in older adults and may even promote it by enabling them to focus their limited time and energy on relationships that are most beneficial while avoiding those that are inconsequential or detrimental. A growing body of research exists to support SOC and socioemotional selectivity theories and they appear to be broadly generalizable. While they have been used to study leisure behavior in only a few instances, the theories appear to be relevant. In particular, SOC and socioemotional selectivity may be used in conjunction with or in place of continuity and activity theories. Doing so will require leisure researchers to consider the mechanisms that older adults use to adapt to changes in later life and their sources of social support.

### Current Theories

Continuity theory is commonly used in the study of older adults' leisure behavior (Godbey, 1999; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). It stipulates that age related changes threaten inner psychological well-being and outward social behavior (Atchley, 1989). The theory predicts that older adults who use familiar strategies to adapt to changes associated with aging can preserve inner and outward states and, ultimately, well-being. Continuity is thought to exist in three realms: (1) the maintenance of inner psychological states, (2) the maintenance of outward social behavior, and (3) the methods people use to negotiate change. General hypotheses based on continuity theory are,

1. Older adults who maintain inner psychological states have higher rates of well-being.
2. Older adults who maintain outward behavior have higher rates of well-being.
3. Older adults who use familiar strategies to adapt to changes have higher rates of well-being.

Leisure researchers who use continuity theory measure variables pertaining to inner psychological states, outward behavior, and adaptation strategies and predict a positive relationship between continuity in these variables and well-being. Of these, predicting outward leisure behavior, such as rates of activity participation or social interaction, is of particular interest.

While continuity theory is often used to study older adults' leisure, its usefulness in explaining and predicting older adults' behavior is limited (Matras, 1990). The theory only applies to people who experience "normal ag-

ing”, not “pathological aging” (Atchley, 1989, p. 183). People aging normally are described as “independent adults with persistent self-concepts and identities. They can successfully meet their needs for income, housing, health care, nutrition, clothing, transportation, and recreation” (p. 184). In contrast, people who experience pathological aging are those “who cannot meet their own needs because they are disabled or poor” (p. 184). Atchley acknowledges that “external continuity is a less practical adaptive strategy” for people who experience pathological aging and suggests that “continuity theory is not very helpful in understanding the external reality” of this group, a primary concern of leisure researchers (p. 184).

In addition to continuity theory, its forerunner, activity theory, is still used in investigations of older adults’ leisure (Fernandez, Zamarron, & Ruiz, 2001; John, 1996; Reitzes, Mutran, & Verrill, 1995; Zaranek & Chapleski, 2005). Activity theory predicts that high rates of social interaction contribute to older adults’ affective well-being (Lemon, Bengston, & Peterson, 1972; Longino & Kart, 1982). The theory assumes that interpersonal contact is essential to maintaining self-concept and people derive meaning from the roles that they occupy. In later life, many of these roles, such as worker or spouse, are eliminated or altered and these changes minimize social contact. Older adults who replace relationships through leisure, thereby simulating social interaction patterns of early adulthood, tend to be healthier than those who do not. One general hypothesis based on activity theory is,

Older adults who have high rates of social interaction, particularly in informal groups, are more likely to find meaningful relationships and, consequently, have higher rates of affective well-being.

Leisure researchers who use activity theory measure rates of social interaction and predict a positive relationship between it and affective well-being. A growing body of literature, however, questions the merit of activity theory (Lemon et al., 1972; Lennartsson & Silverstein, 2001; Menec, 2003). In particular, physical health, rather than rates of social interaction, appears to account for variations in affective well-being (Lee & Markides, 1990).

### Lifespan Development Psychology

While continuity and activity theories have limitations that hinder their prediction of older adults’ leisure behavior, two theories from Lifespan Development Psychology, selection, optimization, and compensation and socioemotional selectivity, appear to augment it. Lifespan Development Psychology examines growth and decline throughout the life course and is based on three principles of development that contribute to the understanding of SOC and socioemotional selectivity theories. First, growth is bound by people’s competencies and the demands of their environment (Freund, Li, & Baltes, 1999; Lawton, 1989). Second, resources, including skills, objects, and relationships, are finite and fluctuate throughout the life course (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996; Freund et al., 1999; Lang & Carstensen, 1994). Third,

development is a dynamic process. Some aspects improve while others simultaneously degrade (Freund et al., 1999; Lang & Carstensen, 1994). Included in the latter point are two key concepts, multidirectional development and multifunctionality. Multidirectional development refers to concurrent growth and recession within or across domains. For example, a man may improve his cardiovascular health by riding a bike but simultaneously experience a decline in his eyesight due to macular degeneration. Multifunctionality describes the dynamic relationship between gains and losses within or across domains. Since resources are finite, gains, which consume resources, lead to losses and losses, which free up resources, facilitate gains. For example, a gardener who wants a raised flowerbed may decide to build it herself or pay someone to build it for her. If she does the work herself, she will save money but expend time and energy. If she pays someone else to build it, she will save time and energy but spend money.

Using theories based upon Lifespan Development Psychology is advantageous in two respects. First, unlike continuity and activity theory, which emphasize decrement, they take growth and decline into account to provide a more accurate model of development in old age (Baltes & Carstensen, 2003). Cognition, for example, has been firmly established as a multidimensional domain in which some aspects tend to decline early in life while others develop in maturity (Schaie, 2005). Second, these theories address the heterogeneous ways in which older adults define and measure success (Baltes & Carstensen, 2003). While high levels of physical fitness maybe considered successful aging by some, for many older adults, simply maintaining residence in a private home constitutes successful aging (Bayer & Harper, 2000).

### Selection, Optimization, and Compensation Theory

Selection, optimization, and compensation theory describes “the processes that people use to reach goals under increasing limitations in resources” (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Baltes & Carstensen, 1996, p. 399). It has been used to study a wide range of phenomena, including economics (Behrman, 2003; Chou & Chi, 2002), but has been primarily applied to various domains of health including: disability adjustment and life management (Gignac, Cott, & Badley, 2002; Freund & Baltes, 1998; 2002; Ryan, Anas, Beamer, & Bajorek, 2003); social relationships (Lang & Carstensen, 1994); and cognition (Li, Lindenberger, Freund, & Baltes, 2001).

#### *Component Processes*

SOC suggests that older adults who age successfully employ three basic strategies to sustain themselves and grow: (1) selection, (2) optimization, and (3) compensation (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996, 2003; Freund et al., 1998). Selection refers to the judicious use of limited resources, such as energy or time. It includes goal identification, prioritization, and commitment. In addition to establishing and modifying goals, selection includes eliminating

unattainable goals. For example, a highly intellectual but physically uncoordinated man is likely to set goals related to the cognitive domain and largely ignore the physical one. Selection takes two forms, elective and loss-based. Elective selection refers to choice in goals. For example, a volunteer who is presented with two opportunities but only has time for one commitment, must pick one or the other. Loss-based selection refers to goal alteration in response to losses or anticipated losses. For example, a retiree who misses the companionship of co-workers may set a goal of becoming involved in a church congregation. In summary, selection is a deliberate process of establishing, refining, and relinquishing goals and may be proactive or reactive.

Optimization is the process of maximizing performance by capitalizing on internal and external resources (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996, 2003; Freund et al., 1998). It includes factors such as the degree of focus, the timing of goal pursuit, the tenacity with which goals are pursued, learning new skills, modeling others who are successful, developing resources, and adjusting the degree of investment and the amount of time dedicated to goals (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996, 2003; Freund et al., 1998). For example, a man who wishes to write his autobiography of World War II may learn to use a computer so he can more efficiently pursue his goal. He has optimized his effort by creating circumstances that facilitate success.

Compensation is the process of adapting to limitations that interfere with goals. It includes the use of assistive technology, obtaining help from others, developing new skills and resources, employing previously discarded skills and resources, devoting more energy, dedicating more time, and modeling others who compensate well (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996, 2003; Freund et al., 1998). For example, many older adults enjoy reading but find that it is increasingly difficult due to declining eyesight. Using a large print books or books on tape are compensatory strategies facilitate goal pursuit.

While the elements of SOC are thought to work together (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996, 2003), one or two may be favored. Abraham and Hansson (1995) suggest that people who have more self-determination in their work are more likely to favor selection rather than optimization and compensation. They also suggest that people who have "tenacious, problem-oriented" coping methods at work rely on optimization more than selection and compensation (Abraham & Hansson, 1995, p. P100). Freund and Baltes (1998) suggest that, for the oldest old, optimization and compensation are more closely associated with successful aging than selection. Various circumstances, personality types, and demographic characteristics may favor one or two portions of the SOC theory instead of all three elements equally. One general hypothesis based on SOC is,

Older adults who use selection, optimization, and compensation strategies to identify and pursue goals will adapt to aging better than those that do not.

SOC requires researchers to measure goal identification, alteration, and termination (selection), the use of optimizing strategies, and the use of compensation strategies. Freund and Baltes (1998, 1999, 2002) have developed

short and long questionnaires to assess these dimensions. A positive relationship between the frequency of use of these strategies and well-being is predicted.

### *Generalizability*

SOC appears robust across various demographic groups. The theory has been applied to people from various cultures including Americans (Abraham & Hansson, 1995), Canadians (Gignac et al., 2002), Chinese (Chou & Chi, 2002), and Germans (Freund & Baltes, 2002; Lang & Carstensen, 1994; Li et al., 2001). It has also been applied to people in various age groups including youth (Sherrod, 2001), middle-aged adults (Abraham & Hansson, 1995; Li et al., 2001), and older adults (Freund & Baltes, 1998, 1999; Lang & Carstensen, 1994). Investigations with older adults indicate that employing the SOC strategies predicts "satisfaction with aging, lack of agitation, [and] absence of emotional and social loneliness" (Freund & Baltes, 1998, p. 540). It is also moderately correlated with "subjective aging well" (Freund & Baltes, 1999, p. 700).

### *Critiques*

While SOC is not widely criticized, two issues remain. First, the theory appears to be less salient for older adults who have profound limitations since they have fewer opportunities to make selections and diminished capacity to reallocate resources (Baltes, 2003; Freund & Baltes, 1998). Second, SOC theory suggests that people's actions are rational. While this may be true in many instances, inspiration also shapes behavior (Pieper, 1998). At most, therefore, SOC contributes to the explanation and prediction of rational behavior.

### *SOC Theory and Leisure Studies*

Despite its use in inter-disciplinary research, SOC has been applied to the study of older adults' leisure in few instances. Lang, Rieckmann, and Baltes (2002) used SOC to examine continuity and change in older adults' everyday functioning, including leisure. A sample of 195 older adults from the Berlin Aging Study provided three waves of longitudinal data. It was hypothesized that people who were resource rich (had stronger "sensorimotor, cognitive, personality, and social resources") were more likely to use SOC strategies, live longer, and fare better in everyday activities than those who were resource poor (p. P501). Their hypotheses were confirmed. People who were resource rich demonstrated higher rates of selection, including leisure specialization, and optimization. They participated in a narrower set of leisure pursuits (selection), devoted variable amounts of time to them (selection), and spent less time "doing nothing" (optimization, p. P508). People who were resource poor, many of whom died during the survey, demonstrated lower rates of selection and optimization but increased rates of

compensation. They reported longer periods of passivity (absence of selection), more time sleeping (compensation), and diversity within their most important leisure pursuits (absence of selection).

Since SOC neatly fits with key concepts in therapeutic recreation, goal pursuit under limiting conditions (Van Anandel, 1998; Dattilo, Kleiber, and Williams, 1998), it has been used as a heuristic device for analyzing older adult's choices and coping strategies in leisure pursuits. Ryan et al. (2003) examined reading, including reading for pleasure, in 26 older Canadians who had visual impairments. Participants in the study demonstrated numerous examples of SOC including discontinuing some types of reading (selection), learning how to use talking book players (optimization), and using numerous assistive devices including powerful lights and magnifiers (compensation). Boothman and Savell (2004) developed a leisure assessment for nursing home residents based on SOC. They found the selection component of the theory particularly useful and used it to match environmental demands with motivations for leisure.

#### *Incorporating SOC into Leisure Research*

While continuity theory may explain and predict the outward leisure behavior of older adults who experience normal aging, it is inadequate to do so for older adults who experience pathological aging (Atchley, 1989) which is an inevitable part of later life. Predictions of outward leisure behavior of people with health or financial limitations may be improved if a series of hypotheses that combine continuity and SOC theories are used. Hypotheses which reflect this approach are,

1. The reexamination of leisure related goals and associated behavior promotes well-being (SOC).
- 2a. If pathological aging does not impact important goals, continuity in outward leisure behavior promotes well-being (continuity).
- 2b. If pathological aging does impact important goals, the use of optimization or compensation enables goal pursuit and promotes well-being (SOC and continuity). While outward leisure behavior is altered somewhat, a general sense of continuity is maintained.
3. If pathological aging renders leisure goals impractical or meaningless, discontinuing related behavior promotes well-being (SOC).

To test these hypotheses, researchers would examine the continuity and change of leisure goals and related behavior and compare it to measures of well-being. The indicators of well-being would depend on the focus of the research but may include mastery, positive affect, or absence of loneliness. Ideally, longitudinal or sequential designs combining cross-sectional and longitudinal data would be used to determine the degrees of continuity and change in leisure goals (Schaie & Willis, 2002). Grand theories, such as continuity, cannot accurately predict the heterogeneity of later life or its processes (Utz, Carr, Nesse, & Wortman, 2000). However, when combined with

SOC, they may be used to predict the subtle ways in which leisure behavior evolves throughout later life.

### Socioemotional Selectivity Theory

Socioemotional selectivity theory predicts changes in social network size and composition throughout the life course (Carstensen, 1991). It should be of particular interest to leisure researchers because, while many leisure activities are solitary, most occur within the social realm. When examining participation in leisure activities, therefore, it is important to describe the interpersonal relationships that are often associated with them (Hong & Duff, 1997; Kelly, 1993; Longino & Kart, 1982). Moreover, companionship and social support become increasingly important motivators for leisure participation in later life (Iso-Ahola, 1989; Kelly & Godbey, 1992; Lawton, 1993). As Mannell and Kleiber (1997) suggested, "it is not the activity per se that is important, it is what the activity and its social context mean to" older adults (p. 267). Thus, social relationships are not only a fundamental part of many leisure pursuits, but, for older adults, the primary goal. Since socioemotional selectivity theory predicts continuity and change in older adults' social patterns, it holds great potential for explaining and predicting their leisure participation.

Socioemotional selectivity theory explains the composition of social networks in terms of perceived time left. When perceived time left is short, as it is in late life, people spend their limited resources on close and important relationships, such as those with family members and old friends, and disregard tangential ones (Carstensen, Gross, & Fung, 1998; Charles & Carstensen, 1999; Lang & Carstensen, 1994; Lang, Staudinger, & Carstensen, 1998). Selecting relationships based on perceived time left alters the composition of social networks in two ways. First, discarding peripheral relationships makes social networks smaller (Lang & Carstensen, 1994). Second, social circles include a high proportion of close and important relationships (Carstensen et al., 1998; Lang et al., 1998).

While developing smaller social networks is often viewed as harmful (Lemon et al., 1972; Longino & Kart, 1982), socioemotional selectivity theory predicts that this process is helpful because it regulates emotions, an increasingly important competence in later life (Baltes & Carstensen, 1999; Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999; Carstensen et al., 1998; Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990). Emotion regulation refers to processes that people use to alter emotions or reactions to them. It takes two forms, antecedent-focused and response-focused (Gross & Levenson, 1997). Antecedent-focused emotion regulation is behavior that preempts harmful emotions. Avoiding new social contacts is an example. Response-focused emotion regulation is behavior that moderates the response to or the appraisal of an incident after it has occurred. Discontinuing meaningless or detrimental relationships is an example. Actively selecting relationships based on their contribution to emotional well-being is an adaptive measure that predicts affective well-being.



It avoids investing limited resources (such as energy) in relationships that do not have the time to develop and frees resources up so that they may be used to cultivate established relationships with important people. Support for this supposition comes from the Berlin Aging Study in which 90 year olds reported smaller social circles but higher rates of closeness than those in their 70's and 80's (Lang et al., 1998).

It is important to note that age, in and of itself, is not directly linked to social network composition. Younger people with terminal illnesses demonstrate a preference for smaller and more intimate social networks (Carstensen & Fredrickson, 1998) while older adults who imagine that they have 20 or more years to live do not (Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990). In general, however, low amounts of perceived time left and age are highly correlated such that older adults demonstrate a preference for smaller intimate social circles. As expected, this pattern is most apparent in older adults with disabilities (Charles & Carstensen, 1999). As age related functional limitations increased, peoples' resources are taxed and they are forced to prioritize most aspects of their lives including relationships. One general hypothesis based on socioemotional selectivity theory is,

When perceived time left is limited, maintaining or enhancing intimate relationships while decreasing tangential ones promotes affective well-being.

### *Generalizability*

Socioemotional selectivity theory is supported by an extensive body of innovative and rigorous research (Schulz, 1998). A number of cross-sectional and longitudinal studies have been conducted to substantiate it (Carstensen, 1992; Carstensen & Fredrickson, 1998; Fung, Carstensen, & Lang, 2001; Fung, Carstensen, & Lutz, 1999; Fung, Lai, & Ng, 2001; Lang & Carstensen, 1994, 2002; Lang et al., 1998). In addition to experimental studies, the influence of time left on patterns of social interaction is apparent in real-world events (Fung, Carstensen, & Lang, 2001; Fung et al., 1999). The generalizability of the theory has been examined in regard to personality type (Lang et al., 1998), family composition (Lang et al., 1998), culture (Fung, Carstensen, & Lang, 2001; Fung et al., 1999; Fung, Lai, & Ng, 2001), and age cohort (Lansford, Sherman, & Antonucci, 1998). In each case, a preference for smaller but meaningful social networks was apparent when perceived time left was limited.

### *Critiques*

Socioemotional selectivity theory is limited in four respects. First, it assumes that social relationships serve a purpose. In particular, they contribute to the affective domain by improving emotion regulation. An aspect of social relationships that is not addressed by socioemotional selectivity theory is the role of social relationships as a form of entertainment (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Second, limited perceived time left is ill defined. Fredrickson and

Carstensen (1990) provide only a rough indication, less than 20 years. The trajectory of the relationship between the amount of perceived time left and behavior is unknown. Third, the nature of relationships is likely to limit the explanatory and predictive power of socioemotional selectivity theory. Older adults may maintain deleterious relationships with family or formal caregivers due to social convention, ease, or need. The theory is likely to be more useful in examining continuity and discontinuity of friendships since they are voluntary. Fourth, in some extreme cases older adults may not have very close social contacts due to death, disability, or relocation. In such cases, socioemotional selectivity theory would not be useful in predicting emotional well-being (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2003).

### *Use in Leisure Studies*

Socioemotional selectivity theory has been associated with leisure studies in several instances. It was used to predict volunteer motivations in a study conducted by psychologists with mixed results (Okun & Schultz, 2003). After a meta-analysis of the literature revealed six motivations for increasing and continuing volunteering behavior, a sample of 523 older adults associated with International Habitat for Humanity completed a Volunteer Functions Inventory. Consistent with socioemotional selectivity theory, older respondents reported lower rates of two types of motivation, acquiring career related experience and understanding others. In contrast to the theory, however, age (which was used as a proxy for perceived time left) was not predictive of four other types of motivation: (1) enhancing self-esteem, (2) reducing negative affect, (3) exercising values, and (4) making friends. Despite the inconclusive findings in this study, Carstensen and her colleagues (1998) identify leisure as an important realm in older adults' lives to which socioemotional selectivity theory may be applied. The theory was also included in a recent leisure studies textbook (McGuire, Boyd, & Tedrick, 2004).

A stronger argument for adopting socioemotional selectivity theory in leisure research is its congruence with several trends in older adults' leisure behavior. The notion that familiar, rather than novel, relationships are more desirable in later life is consistent with studies of novelty and stability in leisure over the life course. Iso-Ahola, Jackson, and Dunn (1994) suggested that the need for arousal varies throughout the life course and that older adults' "need for novelty may be satisfied within a narrower scope of activities" (p. 245). Therefore, expanding or replacing leisure pursuits, including relationships, appears to be less beneficial in later life (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). The purposeful and adaptive narrowing of social networks described by socioemotional selectivity is also congruent with leisure specialization. Bryan (1979) argued that people engaged in leisure go through several stages of specialization ranging from the general to the specific. Similarly, Stebbins (1992) suggested that people who specialize in leisure pursuits tend to move through a hierarchy from "dabbler", the least serious, to "amateur",

the most serious. While Bryan and Stebbins described specialization of leisure pursuits, socioemotional selectivity theory describes a specialization of social relationships. Given the relevance of socioemotional selectivity theory to established concepts in leisure, the importance of social contacts in older adults' leisure, and its prominence in inter-disciplinary research, the theory appears to be an important tool for explaining and predicting older adults' leisure behavior.

### *Incorporating Socioemotional Selectivity Theory into Leisure Research*

Socioemotional selectivity may be used as a substitute for activity theory. Fundamental aspects of the theories are similar. Both assume that meaningful social relationships promote affective well-being. While they share this assumption, they explain different mechanisms by which optimal mental health is achieved. A hypothesis of activity theory is,

The formation of new relationships in later life leads to the development of some meaningful ones, and meaningful relationships promote affective well-being. In short, the formation of new relationships in later life facilitates affective well-being.

In contrast, socioemotional selectivity theory explains that perceived time left in later life is limited so new relationships are unlikely to have the time to develop into meaningful ones. A more efficient use of older adults' limited resources is to avoid superficial relationships, including new ones, and promote interaction in established meaningful relationships. Hypotheses of socioemotional selectivity theory are,

1. The formation of new relationships in later life does not markedly promote affective well-being.
2. Limiting social interaction to meaningful relationships leads to optimal affective well-being.

To test these hypotheses, leisure researchers would examine the frequency of contact with close and important people as well as tangential people and compare it to measures of affective well-being such as closeness, compatibility, or loneliness. Lang and Carstensen have developed two strategies for assessing contact with close and tangential people (1994, 2002; Lang et al., 1998) which may be of use to investigators. In addition to these variables, a gauge of perceived time left is essential to the analysis. Age may be used as a proxy but is imprecise. A better approach is to assess perceived time left directly. An item such as "I have the feeling that my time is coming to an end", which may be answered using a 5-point Likert scale anchored by *almost never true* and *almost always true*, can be used (F. Lang, personal communication, November 17, 2005).

### Conclusion

The development of theory used to study older adults' behavior is an evolutionary process (Hendricks & Achenbaum, 1999; Lynott & Lynott,

1996). Theories based upon Lifespan Development Psychology augment the explanation of older adults' behavior, which is complex, and results in more precise predictions than continuity or activity theory. They acknowledge that later life includes growth, as well as recession, and the interplay of resource investment.

SOC predicts a positive relationship between the use of selection, optimization, and compensation strategies and successfully aging. Selection refers to identifying, refining, and terminating goals. Optimization and compensation refer to maximizing performance and adapting to current or anticipated limitations respectively. The theory appears to be empirically valid and broadly generalizable. While SOC has been applied to a variety of subjects, it has been used to study leisure behavior in few instances. The theory, however, is congruent with key concepts in leisure studies and holds potential for refining research in this area.

Socioemotional selectivity theory predicts that, as perceived time left to live diminishes, affective well-being is highest among people who discard peripheral relationships and focus on important ones, such as those with close family members and friends. Despite causing an overall decline in the number of relationships, this process appears to be positively related to affective well-being in older adults and may even promote it by enabling them to focus their limited time and energy on relationships that are most beneficial while avoiding those that are inconsequential or detrimental. These assertions appear to be robust regardless of personality, family structure, cultural background, or cohort affiliation. Like SOC, socioemotional selectivity theory is increasingly used in inter-disciplinary research but has been used to study leisure behavior in few instances. Socioemotional selectivity theory, however, appears to be especially valuable to leisure research since social relationships are an increasingly important element in older adults' leisure.

"Developing a valid and reliable scheme for appraising the salient domains of leisure and (other types of) productive activities is "one of the most challenging tasks of the time-use researcher" (Klumb & Baltes, 1999, p. S273; parentheses added by authors). SOC and socioemotional selectivity theories appear to provide important perspectives on older adults' behavior that is not found in continuity and activity theories. If SOC and socioemotional selectivity are utilized in leisure research, explanations and predictions of older adults' engagement in leisure activities and related relationships is likely to improve.

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