

FROM LIVING APART, TO LIVING-APART-TOGETHER: OLDER ADULTS  
DEVELOPING A PREFERENCE FOR LAT

Jacquelyn J. Benson

Dr. Marilyn Coleman, Dissertation Chair

ABSTRACT

This study explores living-apart-together (LAT) relationships among Midwestern men and women between the ages of 60 and 88. Twenty-five men and women completed genograms and unstructured interviews addressing decision-making processes leading to living apart together, and strategies for maintaining LAT relationships. Grounded theory analyses suggest that deciding to LAT in older adulthood is a gendered process involving seven contributing factors, including: personal and relational goals, age, health, partner factors, relationship history, historical time, and relationship beliefs. Reconciling relationship beliefs represent the core concept because the data demonstrate that reconciling these beliefs — particularly those surrounding commitment and expectations — is key to understanding the process of how older adults decide to LAT. Participants had varied responses regarding their preference to LAT, ranging from opposing the arrangement, being ambivalent, to championing LAT as a lifestyle choice. Two broad relational maintenance strategies were identified: *maintaining separateness* and *redefining commitment*.