

Consumer Identity Renaissance: The Resurgence of Identity-Inspired Consumption in Retirement

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Using multimethod data, we investigate retirement as a life stage centered on consumption, where cultural scripts are particularly contested and in flux and where we witness an increase in breadth and depth of identity-related consumption, which we term consumer identity renaissance. While prior research on older consumers focuses on corporeal and cognitive decline and its impact on individual decision-making situations, our attention is drawn to the competency and growth potential of those who have exited their formal productive stage and privilege consumption as a means to create and enact identity. Contrary to the received view of older consumers simply reviewing and integrating their already developed identities, we find retirement can be a time of extensive identity work with multiple revived and emergent inspirations weaving across all time orientations (past, present, and future) and involving intricate consumption enactments.

What inspires Billy Dodd, a retired baker, to buy property in a remote area of Florida, build an observatory with telescopes and cameras trained on the stars, and ultimately start an amateur astronomy community on the Gulf of Mexico (Finn 2007)? What makes Helen Yarber suit up at 84 years old to join the Texas Challenge basketball squad, a team for players age 80 and up (Batsell 2007)? What drives

Harlan Creech to take piano lessons at 92 (Haight 2007)? These lively consumption examples from popular press venues highlight a substantive area neglected by consumer researchers: consumers' vibrant identity projects in retirement.

At every stage of life, consumers use material, symbolic, and experiential resources to enact personal and collective identities (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Consumption patterns facilitate social differentiation; identity and lifestyle are shaped by practices of consuming (Gilleard et al. 2005). Curiously, research on consumption related to identity projects focuses on consumers in their early and mid-adulthood (Belk and Costa 1998; Kates 2002; Mick and Buhl 1992; Schau and Gilly 2003; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Thompson and Haytko 1997), with two notable exceptions: Bonsu and Belk (2003) examine identity work in death rituals and Price, Arnould, and Curasi (2000) demonstrate identity work in older consumers' dispossession of cherished objects. We assert that, once retired, consumers reflect an increase in breadth and depth of identity-related consumption; we call this *consumer identity renaissance*. We define consumer identity renaissance as a resurgence of unbounded identity-directed consumption postadolescence that is triggered by major changes in consumers' assumptive worlds (Janoff-Bulman 1989) associated with life transitions (e.g., graduation, marriage, parenthood, divorce, drug rehabilitation, and retirement). We identify two categories of consumer identity renaissance: (1) *revived*, when previous or classic identity projects are revitalized, and (2) *emergent*,

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when entirely new life projects are launched. While we believe consumer identity renaissance can occur anytime post-adolescence, here we focus on retirement as the trigger.

We argue that retirement has become a time of growth when identity is broadened, expressed, and completed through consumption as individuals devote time and resources to contemplate and reorient their place in the world after rearing children and exiting primary jobs. These forays into self-development in retirement are facilitated by a cultural context in which identity experimentation is increasingly acceptable and common and in which there is a plentitude of attractive consumption options. In a postmodern world, everyone, including retirees, can make and remake their identities over the courses of their lifetimes and choose to what degree the new identities are consistent with the old.

As a structural functionalist, Erik Erikson theorized that cultural and societal factors merely affected the specific identities chosen rather than the broader identity conflicts or issues faced at each stage of life. He identified just one stage for older adults, mature age, lasting from 65 years of age until death. At this stage, older individuals focus on life review and “the acceptance of one’s own and only life cycle and of the people who have become significant to it as something that . . . permitted no substitutions” (Erikson 1982, 104). He also recognized that concern for future generations, what he calls grand-generativity, can be part of later life (Erikson, Erikson, and Kivnick 1986). More recently, social constructionists Gergen and Gergen (2000) critique and strongly oppose the idea of a naturalized life course that conceptualizes mature age as a stage with fixed issues and a petrified identity. The retirees in our opening vignette are consistent with the constructionist viewpoint as they are evolving and actively pursuing new identities as astronomer, as athlete, and as pianist.

By all accounts, retirement, as a life stage defined by the withdrawal from formal productive domains in favor of leisure and consumption, warrants scholarly examination. With a few notable exceptions (Gilly and Ziethaml 1985; Price et al. 2000; Ursic, Ursic, and Ursic 1986; Williams and Drolet 2005), research on older consumers tends to focus on age-related physical and cognitive deficiencies (Cole and Balasubramanian 1993; John and Cole 1986; Phillips and Sternthal 1977; Tepper 1994; Yoon 1997). Moschis (1992, 1993) offers a gerontographics framework that includes a “healthy indulgers” segment, which recognizes that seniors can be active. Nevertheless, current literature does not address retirement as a life stage and implicitly assumes that older consumers are fragile, vulnerable, and slouching toward insignificance.

Echoing very recent research in gerontology that builds on the social constructionist perspective (Gergen and Gergen 2000) and acknowledges the expanded identity options of older adults (Biggs 2005; Gilleard and Higgs 2000), we posit that aging is not about the inevitable end but rather about the evolving self. Waldrop (2007, 1) finds retirement explicitly privileges consumption (living) over production (work): “Retirement is a growth opportunity, a time to pick

up where they left off before work got in the way of living.” Gilleard and Higgs (2007) argue that retirement is not a chronological group per se but rather a cultural field, or a social space representing opportunities for continuing participation in mass consumer society. While retirement once was the loss of social identity through departure from the productive sphere, it is now ripe with consumption prospects: retirement is “something to look forward to, a good to invest in, and, increasingly, a resource to struggle for” (Gilleard et al. 2005, S305).

Following the CCT (consumer culture theory) tradition, specifically the consumer identity projects research program, we recognize “a social arrangement in which relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, are mediated through markets” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 869). Moreover, we start with the premise that “the marketplace has become a preeminent source of mythic and symbolic resources through which people, including those who lack resources to participate in the market as full-fledged consumers, construct narratives of identity” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 871). Because so little is known about retirement as a life stage, and more precisely consumption inspirations and enactments within this stage, we investigate retirement as a cultural field and what we term **consumer identity renaissance** occurring among retired people as they connect to past and deferred identity projects and create new identities through consumption. Our goal is to address what we perceive to be significant oversights in the current literature: (1) retirement, as a life stage where consumers withdraw from the formal productive domain and explicitly privilege consumption over production, deserves examination in consumer research, (2) the literature’s focus on older consumers in the context of cognitive and corporeal decline fails to recognize the dynamic life projects of retirees, and (3) consumer identity project research, which heavily favors early and middle adulthood, has missed the unique perspective of retirees who weave rich life narratives across time orientations (past, present, and future) and **focus on identity-centered consumption**.

To examine retirement as a life stage ripe for consumer identity renaissance, we took our unit of analysis to be the **individual’s experience of retirement**. Of course, this unit of analysis is deeply embedded in larger collectives such as household, family, cohort, social class, and culture, which we access through the personal narratives of individual retirees. In particular, our data are rooted in the individualistic cultural context of the United States, where cultural categories are indeterminate, elective, and subject to rapid change (Gergen 1991; Gergen and Gergen 2000; McCracken 1986; Wurgaft 1995). We acknowledge that retirement as a cultural field is in a state of flux as societies rethink their notions of aging, productivity, and identity. To set the stage for our empirical inquiry, we elucidate the cultural context by reviewing the historical growth of a retirement lifestyle and the existing literature on older consumers, life transitions, and identity projects.

THE GROWTH OF A RETIREMENT LIFESTYLE

Life expectancy in America increased from 47 years in 1900 to almost 78 years by 2004 (Nuland 2007). People are not only living longer than they did previously; they are also remaining healthy longer. A government report concludes that people age 65 and older are “on the threshold of a boom” in health (Nuland 2007). While loss and decline are inevitable aspects of the last phases of aging, several historical factors have created a context in which a large mass of older consumers are able to experience an active, enjoyable, and lengthy retirement.

The History of the Retirement

Retirement is a relatively new phenomenon found in wealthy, developed nations. As late as the nineteenth century, parenthood and productive contribution to collective welfare stretched out over adulthood, without an “empty nest” period or compulsory retirement, ending in individuals’ incapacitation or death (Chudacoff and Hareven 1979). The old were to “withdraw from work, abandon all vigorous exercise, and prepare for the afterlife” (Haber and Gratton 1994, 160–61).

With the exception of pensions awarded to Civil War veterans, government pensions for the elderly did not begin to appear until the 1930s. These programs grew slowly, but by 1950 only 47% of men were in the labor force at age 64, a decrease of 18% since 1900. Nevertheless, many retirements continued to occur involuntarily, due to poor health or unemployment (Costa 1998). The ideology that aging is pathological and that the aged inevitably become sick and institutionalized postretirement persisted. In the 1940s, union leader Walter Reuther described retirees bleakly as being “too old to work, too young to die,” while in 1952 sociologist Ernest Burgess famously referred to retirement as the “roleless role” (Achenbaum 2005). In 1961, Cumming and Henry (1961) published the influential book *Growing Old: The Process of Disengagement*. The authors proposed that older citizens lose abilities and ego energy over time and thus relinquish work and socioemotional roles. This disengagement facilitated the life review posited by Erikson as the final stage of life.

While industrialization is often blamed for involuntary retirement, it ultimately enabled the “retirement lifestyle” currently enjoyed by older Americans. The impact of industrialization on retirement was complex and unfolded over several decades; however, the overarching effect was increased economic wealth. Over time, industrialization increased the capacity to fund pension plans and government programs for retirees (Haber and Gratton 1994).

Importantly, industrialization not only led to a generally more affluent economy but also created increasingly attractive leisure opportunities. Between 1941 and 1951, only 3% of men reported that they retired because leisure was more desirable than work. In 1963, the percent preferring leisure to work was 17%, and by 1982 it was fully 48%. More compelling evidence is provided by an empirical analysis

of the relationship between the price elasticity of leisure opportunities and the growth of retirement, which shows that the increasing availability of reasonably priced attractive leisure activities strongly contributed to the flowering of retirement in more recent decades (Costa 1998).

Busyness and Activity in Retirement

Historians, gerontologists, and other social scientists note that retirement is often filled with pleasurable activities. In contrast to the rocking chair ideology of retirement as a period of quiescence and decline (McHugh and Larson-Keagy 2005), the busy ethic is one that honors an active lifestyle in retirement. Calling the busy ethic a logical extension of the Protestant work ethic, an ideology that emphasizes industriousness and self-reliance, Ekerdt (1986, 239) “suggest[s] that retirement is morally managed and legitimated on a day-to-day basis in part by an ethic that esteems leisure that is earnest, occupied, and filled with activity.” The busy ethic is upheld by retirees who subscribe to the ethic and profess to be “doing things”; friends, relatives, and coworkers who attempt to keep conversation about retirement focused on activity; and marketers who depict retirement as consisting of an active lifestyle.

Schlossberg (2004) identifies six forms of retirement, almost all of which are expressions of the busy ethic: (1) continuers who stay connected with past skills and activities but modify them to fit retirement, (2) adventurers who start new activities or learn new skills not related to their past work, (3) searchers who learn by trial and error as they look for a niche, (4) easy gliders who enjoy unscheduled time, (5) involved spectators who maintain an interest in their previous field of work but assume different roles, such as a lobbyist who becomes a news junkie, and (6) retreaters who become depressed, retreat from life, and give up on finding a new path. The path retirees choose after retirement is not static, Schlossberg (2004, 27) says: “The longer you live, the more your path will shift and change.” While Schlossberg segments retirees by amount and type of activity performed, she does not analyze what drives these activities or specifically how consumption inspirations relate to consumption enactments in retirement.

Aging Selves and Identity

Research in gerontology on the topics of personal growth, life goals, positive aging, and possible selves broadly supports the notion of consumer identity renaissance in retirement. While old age is related to physical decline, most elders continue to experience hope for the future and a belief that aging is an opportunity for personal growth (Steuerink et al. 2001). Hope often manifests in a commitment to life goals where individuals create meaning and purpose in their life through the active efforts to fulfill goals (Mannell 1993; Payne, Robbins, and Dougherty 1991). Commitment to life goals leads to psychological well-being (Holahan 1998; Holahan and Sears 1995). In essence, positive aging begins with a rejection of the pathology of aging, or the stereotype that aging is akin

to a disease (Katz 2000), supplanting that ideology with one of empowerment and possibility, with labels like “middles-cents,” “young fogies,” and “age pioneers” (Biggs 1997; Smith and Freund 2002). Advertising in the last decade indicates that marketers are responding to this change in seniors’ self-perception and their desire for increased consumption opportunities.

Markus and Herzog (1991) find that throughout life possible selves are acquired, maintained, transformed, and given up. Adults 70 years of age and older were asked to generate at least two important hopes and fears about their future at two points in time 4 years apart. While the under-80 group generated more future hopes than did the 80-plus group, the dominant motivation underlying future possible selves for all age groups was improvement (Smith and Freund 2002). Their finding that seniors continue to generate possible future selves supports the concept of consumer identity renaissance in retirement.

Life Themes, Life Projects, and Life Stories

To address the connection between retirement and consumer identity renaissance, we call upon concepts from CCT, which explore sociocultural processes and structures related to consumer identity projects. Consumer culture theorists recognize that identity projects, while goal-driven, may involve ambivalence, bricolage, and coping behavior aimed at restoring identity and/or reconciling contradictions (Arnould and Thompson 2005). The “consumer cum bricoleur” theoretical perspective is particularly relevant to an elder population that is restoring, renewing, and rewriting their identities in retirement against a backdrop of ideologies of aging, a long history that suggests that decline is the central aspect of aging, a culture that reveres youth and fears aging, real life losses, a lack of consistency between the physically aging person others see and the actual (younger) sense of self, and the Protestant work ethic’s emphasis on productivity as a central value (Featherstone and Hepworth 1995; Gergen and Gergen 2000).

The concept of identity development in retirement is consistent with a social constructionist rather than a structural viewpoint such as Erikson’s that avers that specific identity issues occur in each life stage. In a treatise aimed at redefining aging, Gergen and Gergen (2000, 283) argue against “the widespread tendency within the social and biological sciences to search for the *naturalized life course* . . . to chart the innate development and decline of human capacities, tendencies, proclivities. . . . Over the life-span . . . there is nothing about changes in the human body that require a concept of age, of development or decline.”

We draw on literature from industrial psychology to illuminate the loss of work identity. During adult life, consumers have many subidentities, for example, spouse, neighbor, or gym member, but the one subidentity around which most of our role performance occurs is the workplace. West, Nicholson, and Rees (1987) argue that the amount of commitment required by work results in our work role identity having extremely high salience. But, what happens when

people transition from employment to retirement? Nicholson (1984, 173) defines work role transitions as “any change in employment status and any major change in job content,” and he explicitly includes retirement as a type of work role transition.

Nicholson (1984) examines modes of adjustment to work role transition as both personal and role development. Transitioning from being an employee expected to use organizational resources to be productive under known organizational rules and constraints to being a retiree expected to be productive (Ekerdt 1986) with a great deal of discretion and novelty is likely to lead to identity exploration and innovation. Thus, while work focuses on production, retirement privileges consumption in a way that enables retirees to maintain active lifestyles through consumption.

Two other concepts frequently employed in CCT analyses are relevant to our analysis of retirement: life themes and life stories (Mick and Buhl 1992). Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie (1979) use the term *life themes* to refer to values linked to specific life events that become robust enduring frameworks individuals employ to make sense of and guide their lives. The life story is a narrative understanding of self, where “people create life stories that reconstruct the past and anticipate the future in order to provide their lives with meaning, unity and purposes” (Hooker and McAdams 2003, 298). The life story integrates the more abstract life themes with the more manifest life projects, such as life goals, into a cohesive, expository narrative that often includes aspects of consumption (Ahuvia 2005).

Our study posits that retirement is a dynamic life stage full of self-evolution and identity work that is enabled by a culture of identity play, an emphasis on staying busy, evolving cultural ideologies of age, and the increased attractiveness and relatively low price of leisure options. We show that retirement is a life stage during which consumers intentionally reduce the time and energy spent on formal production and favor consumption. It is a stage where consumers have more time to devote to life themes, projects, and goals and to add rich detail to their individual life stories through the consumption of goods, services, and experiences. Our data reveal two overarching types of the consumption inspirations (self-expression and affiliation) that are performed via consumption enactments, resulting in consumer identity renaissance.

METHOD

Research Team

The research benefits from a multidisciplinary (marketing, social psychology, and sociology) perspective. Three researchers with a 17-year age span made up the team, with differences in age and training providing triangulation in terms of both convergence and divergence in interpretation (Price and Arnould 1998; Thompson, Stern and Arnould 1998). Being naive to retirement was a strong advantage as the informants assumed we did not know first hand about the phenomenon. However, because none of the authors are of



TABLE 1
FIELD SITES

Site region	Research engagement	Site description
(1) West Coast, U.S.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duration 6 months • Two researchers • Naturalistic observation • Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior center • Suburban area between two major metropolitan areas • Clientele primarily middle class • Clientele predominantly white and first-generation immigrant • Enrichment classes offered
(2) East Coast, U.S.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duration 2.3 years • One researcher • Naturalistic observation • Participant observation • Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior center • Major urban, inner-city center • Clientele primarily working poor and working class • Clientele predominantly but not exclusively black, including a first-generation immigrant population • Financial advice, health education, enrichment classes offered • Affiliated with a housing alliance (aiding healthy retirees to locate safe affordable housing), rehabilitation center (recuperation site with on-site physical therapy), and a hospice (terminal care facility)
(3) East Coast, U.S.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duration 1.5 years • One researcher • Naturalistic observation • Participant observation • Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior center • Major urban center • Clientele primarily working poor and working class • Clientele predominantly but not exclusively black • Financial advice, health education, enrichment classes offered • Affiliated with a housing alliance (aiding healthy retirees to locate safe affordable housing)
(4) Southwest, U.S.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duration 1.25 years • One researcher • Naturalistic observation • Participant observation • Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior center • Midtown facility • Clientele approximately 70% working class, 30% middle class • Clientele white, Latino, and black, with first- and second-generation immigrants • Financial advice, health education, enrichment classes offered • Affiliated with a housing alliance (aiding healthy retirees to locate safe affordable housing), rehabilitation center (recuperation site with on-site physical therapy), and a hospice (terminal care facility)
(5) Southwest, U.S.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duration 1 year • One researcher • Naturalistic observation • Participant observation • Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resort community outside a metropolitan area • Clientele approximately 65% middle class and professionals and 35% working class • Clientele: white, black, Asian, Latino, and immigrant (first- and second-generation) • Financial advice, health education, enrichment classes offered • Affiliated with an assisted living center
(6) Southwest, U.S.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duration 3 months • One researcher • Naturalistic observation • Participant observation • Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rehabilitation and hospice care facility in midtown, affiliated with a major medical center in the city • Clientele both working and middle class • Clientele: white, black, Asian, Latino, and immigrant (first-generation)
(7) Online, primarily U.S.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duration 4 years • One researcher • Naturalistic observation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three forums devoted to senior citizens • Topics addressed include finances, health, retirement, consumption (products and services), and governmental policies • Caters to English-speaking Americans in the United States and abroad, though some threads include participants who are not American

retirement age and all are still active in their profession, informants may have had the temptation to enhance their self-reported efficacy and agency in their narratives. To mitigate the potential to gloss the experiences, we were vigilant in our probing questions.

Data

Our data consist of in-depth interviews with retired informants, naturalistic and participant observation of senior centers and a rehabilitation facility, and monitoring of public online forums. Initial data collection was naturalistic ob-

servation. Then we moved between data types and between data collection and interpretation.

Field Sites. To locate relevant field sites and recruit informants, we opted for theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Miles and Huberman 1994). Senior centers were chosen to locate retired individuals. See table 1 for a detailed description of the field sites and researcher engagement. The clientele across the centers represents a diverse set of retirees in terms of background and socioeconomic status. The informants in the five senior centers represent the categories identified by Moschis (1992, 1993),

except for the Healthy Hermits (who tend to be employed) and the Frail Recluses. To locate participants in the Frail Recluse category, a sixth site was used, a regional rehabilitation and skilled nursing facility catering to seniors recovering from serious health conditions. However, we found these informants to be Ailing Outgoers despite their confinement to a nursing facility. We concluded that true Frail Recluses would not be willing or able to be informants.

Naturalistic Observation. All three researchers visited at least one senior center prior to conducting interviews. Visits forged trust between the researchers and the center administrators and the clientele. We became familiar with the facilities, resources offered, and the environments in situ, including behavioral norms and expectations, which helped to contextualize the interview protocol and aided in our interpretations of interviews and online forums. Observation continued throughout data collection and into our interpretation.

In-depth Interviews. Within the field sites, we used a convenience sample of willing retirees. While our informants include retirees who had blue collar jobs, we do not have representation from the 9.7% of seniors living below the federal poverty line (<http://www.census.gov>, 2008). Because informants were selected based on retirement status, they vary in age and health status. At the time of participation, only two informants had diagnoses that suggested death was likely within a year; most informants had no reason to believe death was imminent.

A semi-structured interview protocol was designed to capture intentions and behaviors of retired informants. Through idiosyncratic probing, we encouraged narrative responses linking manifest behavior to intangible inspirations and meanings, specifically related to life themes and life projects (Kvale 1983). All three authors conducted face-to-face interviews with consenting informants at the senior centers. A total of 65 interviews were conducted (see table 2 for descriptions of the informants). Most interviews were videotaped and/or audiotaped and transcribed. Interviews lasted between 24 and 156 minutes. Twenty-nine informants participated in face-to-face follow-ups and/or e-mail exchanges; these ranged from brief clarifying encounters to enduring research involvement.

Participant Observation. We use the term *participant observation* to describe observation of senior centers and the rehabilitation facility when the researcher was actively engaged in activities. This is not full participation as we did not participate as retirees. Rather, we use the term to capture the sense that we interacted with retirees across activities and that our participation was conspicuous and altered the social enactment. This less structured time with the informants was valuable in building rapport and uncovering meanings in the interview and observational data. The first author taught technology classes, becoming a known and trusted participant in the field sites. This status offered her access to six primarily social events, planning and executing two fundraising events for the senior center activities, three hikes, planning and ex-

ecuting three outreach events, and two multiday retirement seminars. In the rehabilitation facility, the first author actively participated in recreation time with residents. In this way, she observed different modes of engagement and participating retirees' interactions across multiple contexts (Jorgensen 1989). All told, in the spirit of prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Hill 1991; Hill and Stamey 1990), we logged over 1,000 hours of field engagement and garnered a close rapport with our informants.

Online Forums. In our quest for emic understanding, we turned to discussion threads in three online forums for older Americans. We chose forums with larger numbers of discrete message posters and greater among-members interactions (Kozinets 2002). Online forums feature naturally occurring behavior; thus responses are not changed by researcher observation. We followed threads on retirement activities.

Data Analysis

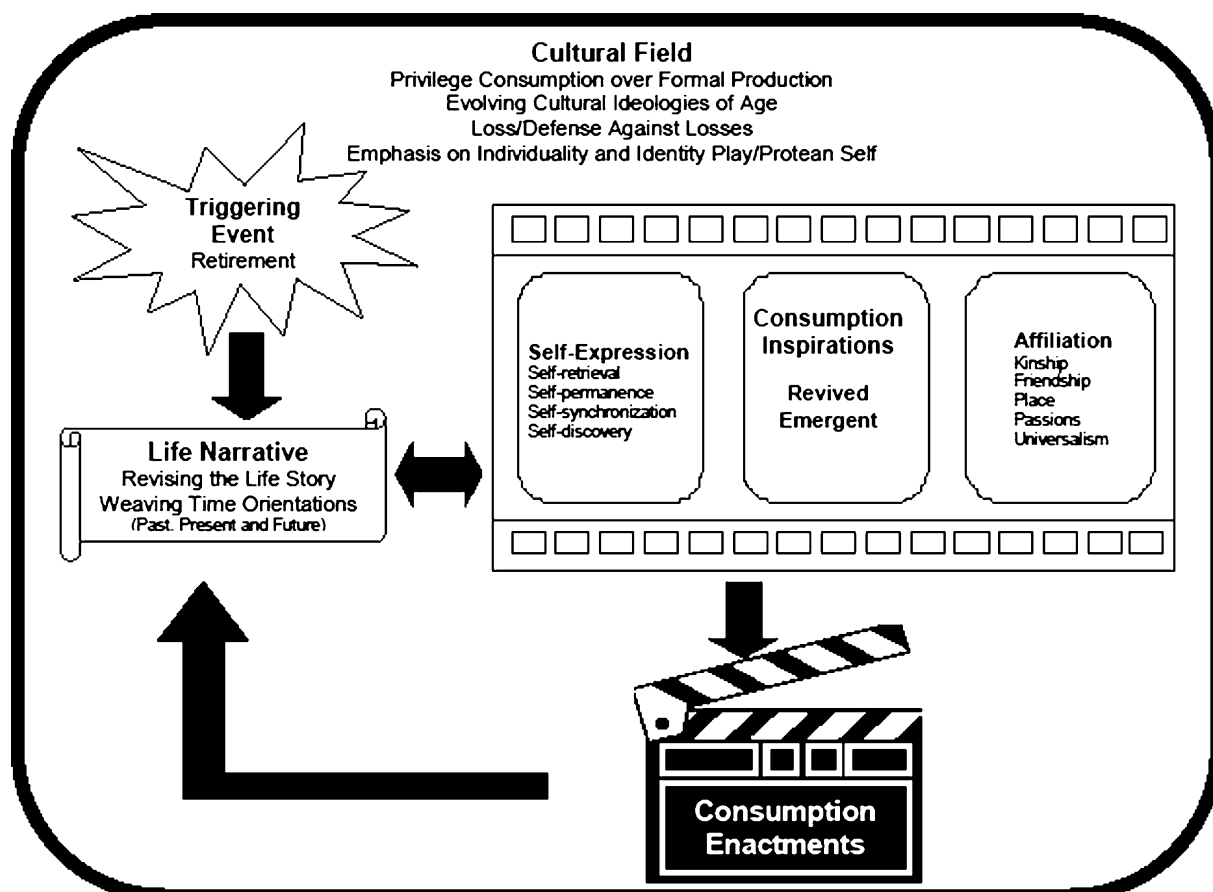
Data consist of interview videos and audiotapes, still photos of informants and senior centers, interview transcripts, field notes of the observations, and online discussion threads. All authors performed axial coding of interview transcripts, noting relationships among the codes (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Miles and Huberman 1994). Patterns of experiences were sought and identified within individual interviews (idiographic analysis) and across informants' interviews (nomothetic analysis), as well as across data sources (Mick and Buhl 1992; Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1990). Consensus regarding themes and patterns of themes was reached. To assure emic validity, researchers performed member checks by asking key informants to read and comment on interpretations (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). Next, transcripts and field notes were reread and iteratively coded to flesh out thematic relationships (Spiggle 1994). Finally, we made an effort to conform to "reflexivity within research," where we considered observational and interview data from the retiree cultural group plus reflexive material that comes from participating in the group (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993, 342); we used our prolonged engagement as a data source and an interpretive lens toward achieving emic validity.

FINDINGS

The Process of Consumer Identity Renaissance

We examine, with no a priori expectations, the identity-related consumption in older adults who have exited their formal jobs and professions. Early in our data collection and interpretation, a strong theme emerged regarding the resurgence of life projects postadolescence: a notion that identity projects were shelved or repressed in favor of more immediate production-oriented obligations. The term *identity renaissance* was suggested by our informants, who actively invoked the notion that individual identity work outside the

FIGURE 1
THE PROCESS OF CONSUMER IDENTITY RENAISSANCE IN RETIREMENT



confines of employment and child-rearing had virtually stalled. As Doug (81) explains, “Not since I was a teenager have I had the time to really think about life and my place in the world. . . . I do so many things I never thought I could or would do. I’m a regular renaissance man!” Betty (70) echoes this sentiment: “I’m doing some of the things that I never had time to do.” Likewise, Jorge (72) states: “I worked 6 days most weeks. . . . There was never any time to rest or have a hobby or travel.” Finn (68) boasts: “I bike in races, which I never had time to do when I was working and had kids. I beat guys in their 20s and 30s. Why? Because I have time to train! While they work, I train and follow the [race] circuit.” Doug, Betty, Jorge, and Finn exemplify the process of consumer identity renaissance that crossed all informants. Their activities postretirement represent a complex array of consumption enactments, including collecting and cataloguing Native American jewelry, rebuilding heavy motorcycles, and bicycling all over the world.

We believe the emicly derived term *renaissance* is appropriate because etymologically the French root word *renaistre* means born again, which resonates with retirees’ expressions about retirement in our data set. The term cap-

tures the artistic and intellectual activity or revival (<http://Webster.com>) that pervades the data. The following details our findings organized around our process model of the resurgence of consumer identity projects in retirement (see fig. 1).

Retirement as a Cultural Field

Earlier, we reviewed the literature related to the history of retirement as a life stage defined by departure from the formal productive sphere, evolving ideologies of aging, salience of loss (cognitive and corporeal decline, shrinking social network etc.), and new cultural emphasis on identity play. Because these cultural issues are documented in the literature, we will only briefly demonstrate how they operate specifically within our data set (see table 3 for additional support for each element of fig. 1).

Privilege Consumption over Formal Production. Our informants actively discuss retirement as the departure from the productive sphere and explicitly reveal that it is a time uniquely driven by consumption. The primacy of consump-

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTION OF INFORMANTS

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Diversity code	Affiliation	Interview location (U.S.)
Alan	66	M	White	Senior center	Southwest
Alma	82	F	Dominican American	Senior center	East Coast
Amato	76	M	Latino	Rehabilitation	Southwest
Artemio	68	M	Latino	Senior center	Southwest
Barbara	61	F	White	Senior center	Southwest
Betty	70	F	White	Senior center	West Coast
Bill	70	M	White	Senior center	Southwest
Bruce	73	M	Black	None	Southwest
Candace	71	F	Chinese American	Senior center	Southwest
Cliff	88	M	English	Senior center	Southwest
Dan	75	M	Black	Senior center	East Coast
Diane	71	F	White	Senior center	West Coast
Doris	<70	F	White	Senior center	West Coast
Doug	81	M	White	Senior center	Southwest
Edna	78	F	Black	Senior center	East Coast
Elliot	82	M	White	Rehabilitation	Southwest
Ernesto	73	M	Latino	Rehabilitation	Southwest
Eunice	>70	F	Black	Senior center	East Coast
Finn	68	M	Norwegian	None	Southwest
Frank	>70	M	White	Senior center	West Coast
Fred	>70	M	White	Senior center	West Coast
Gabe	83	M	Latino	Senior center	Southwest
Gina	77	F	Black	Senior center	East Coast
Grace	64	F	Norwegian	None	East Coast
Howard	>70	M	White	Senior center	West Coast
Ivan	68	M	Russian American	Senior center	Southwest
Jake	79	M	White	Senior center	Southwest
James	79	M	Black	Senior center	East Coast
Jo	73	F	Black	Senior center	East Coast
Joanne	70	F	White	Senior center	Southwest
John	>70	M	Black	Senior center	East Coast
Jorge	72	M	Latino	Senior center	Southwest
Judith	72	F	Korean American	Senior center	Southwest
Ken	75	M	White	Senior center	West Coast
Laura	74	F	Latina	Senior center	Southwest
Lionel	>70	M	White	Senior center	West Coast
Lucinda	81	F	Latina	Rehabilitation	Southwest
Mack	76	M	Latino	Senior center	Southwest
Manuel	67	M	Latino	None	Southwest
Marla	78	F	Latina	Senior center	Southwest
Martin	77	M	Korean American	Senior center	Southwest
Maureen	82	F	White	Senior center	Southwest
Meredith	>70	F	Black	Senior center	East Coast
Miguel	74	M	Latino	Senior center	Southwest
Missy	72	F	Vietnamese American	Rehabilitation	Southwest
Monty	73	M	White	Senior center	Southwest
Muriel	74	F	Black	Senior center	East Coast
Nan	71	F	White	Senior center	West Coast
Nisreen	74	F	Pakistani American	Senior center	West Coast
Olivia	69	F	Latina	Senior center	Southwest
Otto	66	M	German American	Senior center	Southwest
Pat	<70	F	White	Senior center	West Coast
Peter	68	M	White	Senior center	East Coast
Phyllis	>70	F	Black	Senior center	East Coast
Ruth	72	F	Israeli American	Senior center	East Coast
Sam	82	M	White	Senior center	Southwest
Sarah	67	F	White	Senior center	Southwest

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Diversity code	Affiliation	Interview location (U.S.)
Selma	<70	F	White	Senior center	West Coast
Sophia	74	F	Black	Senior center	East Coast
Suzanne	77	F	White	Senior center	Southwest
Tony	66	M	Latino	Senior center	Southwest
Valona	81	F	Latina	Senior center	Southwest
Victoria	74	F	White	None	Southwest
Walter	75	M	White	None	Southwest
Wendell	63	M	White	Rehabilitation	Southwest

NOTE.—*Diversity code*: While no single diversity code can adequately capture an individual, we have attempted to describe the informants briefly in the table. For informants with multiple generations in the United States, we use U.S. Census codes (white, black, Latino, etc.). For first- and second-generation immigrants, we use their preferred hybrid code, for example, Israeli American. For those living in the United States but claiming another citizenship, we use their country of citizenship. We fully recognize that these monikers are imperfect, but we feel they assist us in highlighting the diversity of our informants. *Affiliation code*: Affiliation refers to the informants' affiliation while they were participating in the study. "Senior center" refers to an affiliation with a senior center as described in the table 1. Similarly, "Rehabilitation" refers to informants who were in a rehabilitation center at the time of participation. "None" indicates that the informant had no affiliation with any type of field site at the time of participation. *Location code*: Location refers to the site of the interviews and research engagement.

tion is manifest in dual, oppositional ways: both empowering and dismaying. Empowerment comes from the newfound time and freedom to engage exclusively in consumption and the availability of attractive consumption options. Dismay is characterized by the worry that resources the retiree has accumulated or is entitled to from benefits accrued in their jobs is finite and can be depleted if they are not careful to budget and mete out their consumption. Bruce (age 73) explains this duality: "Everyday I can decide what to do and where to go. . . . The world is my oyster, but I have to watch my wallet. I know what I have each month to spend and since I don't work anymore, that is not going to magically increase." Bruce makes it clear that retirement is no longer about work (production) but about enjoying the resources you have (consumption), tempered by the responsibility to budget wisely because these resources are relatively fixed. Our informant retirees range from working poor to upper middle class, and this duality universally crosses the data.

Evolving Cultural Ideologies of Age. The notions of aging and cultural templates of age are in flux. Our informants represent the tension between these ideologies of age. They are acutely aware that notions of the life of leisure range from rocking chair retirement, or whiling away the hours rocking on the front porch, to the busy ethic, which is characterized by the pressure to use your retirement in the most effective manner. Current ideology strongly favors the busy ethic, and the informants in our data proudly oblige. As Amato (age 76) states, "My parents retired when it meant 'prepare to die.' That's not me. I'm going to make the most of these golden years or die trying [laughs]. . . . Hell, I'm not gonna wait here [rehabilitation facility] to die, I'm gonna live every moment to the hilt . . . go out with a bang." Although Amato was in a rehabilitation hospital at the time of the interview, he was determined to remain busy and eke out the most value from his retirement. After he left the hospital, Amato returned home, and while still recovering

he manages to maintain a very full schedule, including participating in Wii tournaments, attending dog shows, collecting folk art, and downloading and sharing music on his iPod.

Loss/Defense against Losses. Unfortunately, loss, or defense against loss, is a salient feature of aging and retirement; it is not, however, the defining feature. Most of our informants expressly addressed either loss or the need to safeguard against potential loss. The loss they reference ranges from corporeal and cognitive decline, being closer to the end of life, loss of family and friends, loss due to relocation, and simply loss of status due to the departure from the work domain. For example, Candace (age 71) remarks: "I'm fortunate. . . . I am healthy and I own my home. . . . That home represents freedom to me. I know I could sell it if my husband or I became critically ill." Candace is proud of her plan to defend against illness and the potential illness or loss of her husband. Similarly, Marla (age 78) confides: "I'm nervous about it [illness]. As you get older it is a real possibility that you will at some point be debilitated. I joined the gym and I do Pilates three times a week. Sweating now increases my likelihood of breathing later." Marla consumes a gym membership and all the accoutrements of being an active exerciser to defend against physical decline. Sam (age 82) sometimes laments the loss of his professional status; he confides: "I was used to walking into a room and having everyone's attention. . . . I miss it. Now people just see another old fart in a golf shirt and Bermudas." Sam was CEO of a national chemical firm; now he is just one of the many retired golfers in the Southwest.

Emphasis on Individuality and Identity Play. Common to all informants in our study is the notion of identity as a set of multiple, different, and at times simultaneous and conflicting notions of self, or what Lifton (1993) terms the *protean self*. Informants describe their various roles, their life stages, and the manner in which their interests and goals have

TABLE 3
ELEMENT EXAMPLES

Element	Examples
Retirement as cultural field: Privilege consumption over production	<p>John (> age 70) states: "I gotta be careful about blowing it [monthly budget] on a toy . . . or a crazy night. . . . When you are working there is less time to blow money. . . . Now I got nothing but time."</p> <p>Bill (age 70) reveals: "When I thought about retiring I did the math. Can I afford it? Can I do all the things I want to do on this pension and this set of investments? I knew I wanted to retire and have a lifestyle that was interesting and comfortable, but I'm not rich, so I have to stretch."</p> <p>Barbara (age 61) says: "Retirement is about living. It about doing what you always wanted to do. It's about ditching the job and making it a permanent weekend."</p>
Evolving cultural ideologies of age	<p>Tony (age 66) remarks in early 2008: "Some people dream of long days doing nothing. I can't imagine wasting this time. I have plans clear through 2010." Tony, like the rest of the informants in this study, is proud of his busyness and of making the best use of his retirement.</p> <p>Maureen (age 82) asserts: "I buck the stereotype. I keep on living and proving the naysayers wrong."</p> <p>Gabe (age 83) suggests: "I'm off my rocker alright. I'm doing everything!"</p>
Loss/defense against losses	<p>Ivan (age 68) says: "I ward against what can go wrong. Growing old isn't for sissies. I exercise to keep my joints and muscles healthy. I eat right. I weigh every expense, making sure it's what I really want. . . . So much is out of my hands. I do what I can to protect what I can."</p> <p>Elliot (age 82) lost his wife. He says: "I lost my best friend. It is unspeakable how much that hurts and how constant it is. I find myself struggling to live with the pain. . . . Still I carry on."</p>
Emphasis on individuality and identity play	<p>Alan (age 66) acknowledges that the protean self takes considerable effort to maintain: "People say that they want to retire and slow down, but since I've retired I find I'm constantly busy and always pushing myself to try something new, learn something else. I'm a jack-of-all-trades: a gardener, a handyman, a babysitter for my grandkids, a vegan chef, a tennis tutor, a photographer, an evangelical environmentalist. I just seem to add new roles." Alan's retirement has been marked by trials and evolutions and managing his new roles takes finesse.</p>
Triggering event	<p>Walter (age 75) was eager to become vested and leave his factory job in the Midwest to retire. As he got older, Walter worried that he might forget something or "drop a ball" on his daily responsibilities that could literally cost his employees their lives. He reports: "I wanted to retire. The pressure to check everything twice or three times was great. I became kind of obsessive about double and triple checking <i>everything</i>. I'd have dreams that I forgot something with some horrible outcome. I just wanted to put my time in, take my watch, and never work again. I was young enough to start something new, but I was burnt out." Walter could have changed jobs, but he opted to retire with his pension and his wife's income.</p>
Life narrative: Revising the life story	<p>Maureen (age 82) participates in the living history program. She laughs about the school children's assumption that her life is over and her story concluded: "I think the children mimic society's bias against older people. They are innocent and trusting and buy into the realities around them uncritically. I'm not waiting to die, and I'm clearly not dead, yet the questions inevitably assume that I am speaking to them from beyond the grave starting out 'so when you were alive, did you used to. . . .' It's a tad unsettling and yet very funny." She continues to participate actively in life and enjoys the fact that she is disproving others' expectations. Maureen is a ranked senior golfer and just recently bought a pottery kiln for her new creative pursuit.</p> <p>Walter (age 75) who claims to be "waiting for the reaper" has already lived 20 years in retirement. His reaper statement is a form of co-optation and resistance to the Eriksonian cultural myth of aging, since he also indicates he cannot leave home for more than 18 days due to his obligations as a quartermaster for the Veteran's of Foreign War (VFW). On closer inspection he indicates he is planning future trips to visit relatives and is working on VFW events well into 2010. In retirement, he was able to choose a "job" he finds fulfilling in a way his previous job was not.</p>
Time orientation	<p>Mack (age 76) donated a sum of money to a local center devoted to helping pregnant teens finish school, become financially independent, and learn to be good mothers. His reasons are complicated and inspired by kinship: "My mom was age 14 when she had me. She was all alone. Her parents threw her out for dishonoring them. My father never owned up to me. It was before fancy DNA tests. When my mom died 6 years ago, I invested the inheritance she left me, her only child. I made some real estate deals and doubled the money. I decided to use the money to make a donation in her name to the teen center. Part will go to an endowment that will fund scholarships for college-bound pregnant teens. The other part will help keep the center stocked with groceries and necessities." Mack's granddaughter became pregnant this year at 17, jeopardizing her educational dreams. Although he is personally committed to helping his granddaughter, this event really cemented his donation idea. Mack is looking backward to his mother's struggles, present to his granddaughter's circumstances, and forward to helping other pregnant teens.</p>

changed over time, defying a singular notion of essential identity. Manuel (age 67) expresses this complicated form of self: “At any time, I am a Mexican, an American, a Mexican American, a carpenter, a former carpenter, a husband, a father, an elder, a dreamer, a businessman, a man of leisure, a landscaper, a grandfather, an artist. . . . I’m all of those things and I’m still growing!” Manuel admits that being “all of those things” is sometimes complicated and that his selves are, at times, in conflict: “Sometimes I think it was easier when my parents grew older because they didn’t have to do all this . . . juggle these. They were grandparents and laborers. It was simpler . . . quieter.” While retirees in our data set revel in their newfound freedom, they admit that they feel the pressure to manage these different selves and test their personal boundaries.

Triggering Event

In this research, we take retiring as the triggering event that leads to a life stage, known as retirement, that explicitly privileges consumption over formal production. This trigger may emanate from an external locus (corporate downsizing or relocation, caring for an infirm loved one, financial windfall or incentive), an involuntary internal locus (disease, impairment), or a voluntary internal locus (desire, choice). For all informants in our sample, the option to be in the productive sphere in some capacity is forgone, meaning that at the time of initial retirement each informant could have chosen to take a job perhaps unrelated to their former job or career path. For example, James (age 79) admits: “I couldn’t really do the physical things I had been doing at my job [construction], but I knew I could get a retail job . . . maybe at a hardware store. I could be a greeter at Walmart or a host at a diner, but I didn’t want to do that. I wanted to try new things . . . not be living for the paycheck and the weekend.” James made choices among options available to him and chose a life based more on consumption than production.

Life Narrative

This section highlights that retirement is a life stage when mature adults are actively continuing their life story and beginning a new chapter in their evolving personal narrative that weaves across all time orientations. The active construction of a continuing narrative differs from Erickson’s notion of life review in that retirees in our sample do not simply review and integrate their past into a singular life story, as Erikson et al. (1986) theorized, but instead actively draw from the past, the present, and the future, perpetually revising the narrative and consciously starting a new chapter. This also differs from Price et al. (2000), where older consumers’ disposition inspirations are assumed to be life review but may be part of an identity renaissance. Across informants, throughout the observations and present on the message boards, is the theme of retirement as a stage of life in which the life story becomes an overarching concern and identity becomes a central project. These informants dispute

that life is over, and they assert their vitality through continued identity evolution and management of who they were, are, and will be.

Revising the Life Story. During a rehearsal for a living history presentation to local public schools, retirees reveal their desire to be considered a work in progress, entering a new chapter, rather than a finished product. Martin (age 77) disclosed: “Now, I give talks at the local schools on what it was like to be a Korean American during that time [the Korean War]. Kids ask, ‘So now that your life is over, would you have done anything different?’ I laugh and say, ‘My life is far from over. Some of my most exciting experiences happened just last year when I went to Africa on safari and toured the Vatican City at Christmas.’”

Sarah (age 67) explains that retirement is a time to continue her life story: “It’s so easy to say, ‘I’m a mother of three and I’m an architect, but what else am I?’ It’s exciting to find out.” Sarah is not only undergoing the task of self-discovery; she also wants to “solve the mystery of who my husband is—so many years spent running the rat race and building the family.” She claims that retirement is the time to get in touch with her individual priorities and enjoy the man she married and has loved for 40 years. Retirement is a welcome time of renewal for their relationship and their identity as a couple. Rather than emphasizing the inevitable end of life, she is reveling in the newfound freedom to build the life story, “that story we started on our wedding [day]. . . . The happily ever after part is what we’re writing now.” She plans to visit Egypt, run a half marathon, and bicycle through national parks with her husband. Sarah delights in the elaborate consumption constellation needed to achieve these goals, searching online for fares and travel accommodations, visiting bicycle shops to locate the best bike for her needs, and undergoing foot analysis at *Foot Solutions* to select the perfect running shoes.

Beginning a new chapter can also reveal incompatibilities and disrupt the trajectory of the life story in disturbing ways. Another married couple, Barbara (age 61) and Wendell (age 63), discovered that they had little in common other than their children. Barbara explains: “When the kids left, we realized we were comrades in the struggle [to raise their family] but we don’t have any other common interests.” Barbara and Wendell are in couples’ therapy trying to find common ground to continue their marriage successfully. They participate in the seniors’ tennis league, Habitat for Humanity, a local college course, and an upcoming center-initiated excursion to visit the Mayan Ruins, all in an effort to develop common interests.

The online forums are ripe with threads focusing on retirement as a continuation of the life story, not the inevitable end. Many thread titles betray the ageism seniors must actively oppose to focus on their life in progress, not their life completed: “The Living Dead—assumed dead in American society”; “Walking among You,” a thread about ageism and actively pursuing the next chapters of your life; “Another Third” referring to retirement as a third of life with all the promise of the preceding two-thirds; “Every Breath You

Take,” a reference to The Police song with thread content describing how with each breath you are actively writing the life story; and “It Ain’t Over Til It’s Over,” a thread devoted to maximizing life experiences even when in frail health. These threads contain inspirational posts that reveal a future time orientation and a distinct belief in living every day to the fullest. With retirement lasting some 20 or so years, there is no reason to believe that retirees’ lives are over any time soon.

Revising the life story includes rethinking life projects and reconsidering consumption inspirations. The two-way arrow in figure 1 reflects this reciprocal relationship between the life narrative and consumption inspirations that lead to consumption enactments.

Weaving Time Orientations. In our study, retirees have had a lot of experiential ground to cover—more than 60 years. Longevity provides a unique opportunity to witness complex consumption inspirations and enactments that negotiate the past, the present, and the future. For example, Sam (age 82) donated a large sum to a local high school to fund its athletic facilities and refurbish its gymnasium. “Sure, I wanted the kids to have better equipment, but I also wanted to prove to myself, my family, and my friends that I can and did make a difference. They will see the bronze donation sign, and they will think of me, and I hope see that they too can make a difference.” Sam was very involved in the gift allocation. He chose the equipment and consulted on the facility’s enhancement. As a former athlete, he is aware of what sorts of equipment can be the most beneficial. Sam, acting on a kinship inspiration (see section on affiliation consumption inspirations), was adamant that the girls receive equal resources because they were overlooked when he was a child: “I was concerned that the girls get the same amount of equipment even if it was different. They don’t play the same sports, like football, but they should have what they need from my donation. My sisters had to settle for watching me play sports in high school, and my wife tells me she always wanted to play sports but was never allowed. I want to help make things fair in this generation. I want my wife and sisters to see that I heard them all these years.” The wing he has donated includes a large women’s locker room and a studio for the dance program. The plaque (see section on emblematic self-permanence) is inscribed with his name and “on behalf of” followed by his sisters’ names and his wife’s name in much larger font than his own. Sam is compensating for disparity in sports opportunities in the past, letting his sisters and his wife know that he values their concerns in the present, and improving the circumstances for girls who want to be athletes in the future.

Older consumers, with their long experiential resumes, offer increased opportunities for complex consumption inspirations and enactments that cross time orientations. Their life narratives are forward-looking, but they are influenced by past experiences and current circumstances.

Consumption Inspirations and Enactments

We observed retirees’ consumption enactments and asked retirees to describe the consumption and their inspirations. Table 4 contains examples from our informants demonstrating consumption inspirations and enactments beyond those described in the text below. Constrained by the linear format of text, we cover each element of the inspirations and related enactments separately below.

Our data reveal two categories of inspirations: *self-expression* and *affiliation*. Self-expression refers to the inspirations that are inner-directed, about enhancing or developing the self. Affiliation inspirations are other-directed, about forming, symbolizing, and maintaining social connections. While affiliation inspirations are most consistent with Erikson’s notion of “the grand-generativity that characterizes old-age caring” (Erikson et al. 1986, 93), our data contain evidence of additional inspirations that do not seem consistent with his vision of end-of-life review and closure: self-permanence, self-synchronization, and self-discovery. These categories of inspirations can be uniquely defined and teased apart, but they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Our inspirations for identity work can and often do work in tandem.

Consumption enactments are the retirees’ manifest consumption behaviors, or what they do and buy in the marketplace. They are resource allocations that demonstrate identity renaissance in retired consumers. The identity renaissance may be revived inspiration, emanating from prior or existing life projects, or emergent, stemming from a brand new inspiration.

Recognizing the artificial nature of the distinction between consumption and production, or that consumption and production happen simultaneously as to consume is at once to produce value (Firat and Venkatesh 1995), the enactments vary along a continuum of consumption-oriented and production-oriented behaviors. This means that some consumption enactments may be more or less productive: tourism is more consumptive than building furniture. It is potentially impossible, likely irrelevant, and certainly beyond the scope of our present inquiry to attempt to place the enactments in our data on the continuum of consumption and production.

In the following sections, we examine each of the inspirations found and discuss consumption enactments within the context of these inspirations. We offer examples of both revived and emergent identity inspirations and enactments.

Self-Expression Inspirations. Self-expression inspirations are inner-directed but outwardly displayed individual identity-related inspirations. We identify four types.

The first type of self-expression inspiration involves *self-retrieval*, the renewing and fulfilling of life goals that relate to (1) deferred life projects and (2) past identity that is maintained under changed circumstances. For example, Ernesto (age 73), a resident of the rehabilitation center, has renewed his interest in music as part of his evolving life story. Although he has been recovering from a serious double hip replacement surgery, he has great optimism for the

TABLE 4

EXAMPLES OF CONSUMER IDENTITY RENAISSANCE

Inspirations	Consumer identity renaissance	
	Examples	Consumption enactment
Self-expression: Self-retrieval	Ken's (age 75) stroke left him with one hand impaired and in a wheelchair. "My hobbies have always been with my hands. Now, it's hard to do it with one hand. But I still try woodworking. I set up a table in the garage. I back my van in the garage so I can . . . get out on the ride side. On the other side, I made a big table. I took a sheet of plywood and split it in half and had two of those table legs that you fold up, so I can raise it. Well, it was too heavy to raise, so I try to get one of those bicycle things that hoists bicycles up to the rafters just to hoist the table up to get it out of the way, so I can get the car in the garage."	Accommodation requires purchasing plywood, bicycle hoists, and so forth. Ken also has ongoing purchases of woodworking supplies and specialty tools.
	Artemio (age 68) was a laborer in the fields, and he later parlayed a modest inheritance into farm land in California, which he farmed and ultimately sold to a large fruit grower. He says: "I spent my whole life learning how to grow things, how to turn land into a harvest, how to live off the land. I learned a lot in the fields. Now, I subscribe to <i>Farm Journal</i> and <i>Farming Magazine</i> . I like to know what the new trends are. People expect me to know."	Subscriptions to farming periodicals keep Artemio current. He also continues to shop at Farm and Fleet.
Self-permanence (emblematic)	Jake (age 79), a retired chemist, donated a significant sum to a public university in hopes that he will be remembered: "I know it sounds kind of vain, but I donated the money, and I'm so proud to see my plaque up. I think those kids that are interested in the sciences here will benefit from the equipment my donation bought and the facility it helped to build, but I also think they might ask themselves who that donor is and why he cared about the [university]. That plaque will make them think of me long after I'm gone."	While Jake's donation will improve the experience of science students, the plaque provides the permanence he desires and continues/revives his identity as a scientist.
	Sarah (age 67), a retired architect, created a fund at a local high school to encourage a new generation of architects (a universalism inspiration under the affiliative category), but she reveals: "Sure I want to help the next generation of architecture, but to be honest, I like the way it feels to see my name on the plaque on the wall of the drafting room. I like that it will be there long after I'm gone. I'll be 'with them' in their new quests, and the girls will see I did it so they can!"	Purchase of the plaque lets future students see that women, and one woman in particular, could succeed in the profession of architecture. While universalism is also present, Sarah's primary motivation is emblematic self-permanence.
Self-permanence (creative)	Diane (age 71) has sewn most of her life and uses heirloom fabrics to create her own quilt designs that represent her place in the social world, her genealogy, and her sense of self (past, present, and future). Diane looks for pattern ideas in Amish quilt designs posted online.	Diane purchases fabric and sewing equipment, as well as a computer to research Amish quilt patterns.
	Muriel (age 77) became a poet, writing and publishing poems only after she retired. Her poetry, published in online forums and in a hardbound book, is evidence of her thoughts, her creative word play, and her style. She could have written poems for her own enjoyment, but she has chosen to publish them for posterity.	Muriel purchased a computer and online service to publish her work online. She also collects poetry volumes and attends poetry readings.
Self-synchronization	Valona (age 81) confides: "In my day I was a fashion fiend. I was . . . trendy. I wore the latest and greatest. Looking at my pictures is like looking through a history of fashion trends . . . the Lauren Bacall look, girdles and the tailored smart look of the fifties, panty hose and mini skirts, bell bottoms, disco clothes, big 80s hair . . . the whole thing. Now, I can't dress the latest fashions, but I know them and I know who the pop stars are."	Valona subscribes to fashion and celebrity magazines and watches celebrity news on television.

TABLE 4 (Continued)

Inspirations	Consumer identity renaissance	
	Examples	Consumption enactment
Self-discovery	Peter (age 68) says: "The technology is advancing at such a rate that you just have to go with the flow like Madonna. That song, 'Go with the flow.' . . . You are going to have people that still have touch tone telephones. You are always going to have that 2%–3%. You can't go to work today without having a computer on your desk, otherwise you are not making any money. So it's just a natural flow. Right now, I'm in the dark ages."	Peter has purchased a computer, has internet access, and consumes computer classes at the senior center.
	Phyllis (age >70) takes Italian lessons and aspires to learn Spanish. She had neither the inclination nor the impetus to study a foreign language before retirement: "Back in the old days, the average person didn't travel outside the country much, so other languages weren't that interesting to me. Now, it's common to go abroad, and I want to be able to communicate!"	Learning a new language requires hiring a tutor, purchasing language tapes, and reading books about other countries. Ultimately Phyllis intends to travel to Italy and Spain.
	Olivia (age 69) did not travel before retirement. Now, she remarks: "I love to pack, to anticipate what I'll need and see it all bundled up. I feel so proud of myself when I plan and pack and I get it right. I'm also amazed at how little I actually need. I'm a great traveler. I eat the local food. I try to live like the locals do. . . . Who knew?!?"	Olivia purchases luggage, travel-sized hygiene products, travel services, airline tickets, hotel stays, and restaurant meals, and she subscribes to travel magazines.
Affiliation: Kinship	Tony (age 66) admits: "I'm the one who makes a point of organizing family get-togethers or reunions. . . . I'm the one that scouts out a place and then books it. I'm the one that sends out the notices to everyone. I'm the one that gathers the common funds when necessary."	Tony uses travel services such as airlines and hotels, and he uses a computer and internet access to research possible reunion locations and venues.
	Finn (age 68) took up genealogy as a hobby. He now has an ongoing project to tell the history of his family and preserve this history: "I know you're sick of it, but it's my goal to get this down . . . to tell the story of my life, of our family. I'm not sure if I care if anyone reads it, but I need to do it." Interestingly, many family members and friends have not only read it but contributed to it, providing old family photos and facts.	Finn bought a scanner to digitize the images so he could share them widely with the family. He also bought an external hard drive where he stores a back-up copy of the digitized photos for redundancy and safekeeping.
Friendship	Marla (age 78) indicates that her initial interest in live theater came from a friend in high school who was a member of the drama club. She reports: "I never saw a play or a musical in my life until I became friends with Gretchen who was in drama in our high school. She was my best friend and I was also her biggest fan. I think I saw all her performances in high school and I even went to see her in community theater and the university. I started to get into art, and I did some set design. Now, I paint, and every time I do I think of Gretchen."	Marla's interest in art requires her to purchase oil and acrylic paint, canvases, brushes, smocks, and other equipment.
Place	Cliff (age 88) transitioned from tennis to golf based on friends he had at his senior center who talked him into golfing, "I was playing tennis and doing pretty well at it. Winning more than I lost. Then, my knees started to give me trouble, and some friends at the center said I ought to try golfing with them as a lower impact exercise."	With a new hobby, Cliff had to purchase golf clubs and shoes and lessons, as well as regularly pay green fees.
	Otto (age 66) is a German American who is inspired to keep an existing geographically based affiliation to Germany. He has his Web browser set to German language, opening to a German newspaper Web site and giving him performance updates on German soccer teams.	Otto accesses the Internet to German news sites, which he voraciously consumes.
	Olivia (age 69) dreams of going to Italy; she aspires to have an affiliation with Italy. She has Italian night once a week, where she and her boyfriend go out to eat Italian food, listen to Italian music, and watch films with Italian motifs.	Consumption of all things Italian is important to Olivia: restaurant food, music, films, books about Italy, and so forth.

TABLE 4 (Continued)

Inspirations	Consumer identity renaissance	
	Examples	Consumption enactment
Passions	Suzanne (age 77) enjoys crafts and has since her “girlhood.” She says: “I first started doing crafts with my mother many years ago. When life got busy, I gave it up, but I always come back to it when I have time.” Now, Suzanne makes landscape decorations out of common discarded items. She donates her work to charities. Her yard sculptures are in high demand locally.	While Suzanne actually purchases few of the items featured in her craft projects, she consumes others’ discarded items. She does purchase the tools to create and display them in a book of her creations.
	Amato (age 76) developed new passions in retirement, including playing the Wii and participating in dog shows. He reports: “I started judging dog shows after I retired. I never owned a dog growing up, but I married a dog lover about 15 years ago, and I got hooked. Now, I judge shows, and my wife shows dogs. Of course I never judge a round she shows in. . . . I began to Wii in the rehab center. It’s fun and easy to play.” Now, he competes in Wii tournaments.	Having tried the Wii at the rehabilitation center, Amato purchased his own. For dog shows, Amato purchases travel services to get to venues where he is a judge.
Universalism	Howard (> age 70) pursues his passion about a new type of physics that he promotes tirelessly to scientists and government officials. His engagement with improving the circumstances of people around the globe is important to him, although he will not live to see the benefits he believes are possible.	Howard researches information (requiring computer and Internet access), writes letters to legislators (also requiring computers and the Internet, as well as paper and postage), and disseminates a newsletter.
	Alan (age 66), in retirement, actively pursues a future that affects future generations. He takes great pride in recycling, buying green, and reducing his carbon footprint. Alan is trying to live an environmentally conscious lifestyle to conserve resources, not his own resources, but those of the world.	Alan bought Starbucks coffee despite higher price because they support free trade and human rights, “but then I realized it’s only 30% free trade coffee. I started to think more locally. I now buy from Coffee Exchange. . . . They pay a living wage, put their grounds in a compost heap and return the compost to the university ag dept.”

future and a strong sense of his life continuing for the foreseeable future. He has retrieved his past identity project as a mariachi musician after a 50-year hiatus when he gave up his dream of being a professional musician to support his family as a factory worker. As his consumption enactment, Ernesto recently purchased a new violin and mariachi sheet music and has hired a private violin instructor to come to the rehabilitation center to restart his musicianship.

For some retirees, it is difficult to maintain identities that were central throughout their lives. Due to changes in health or living situation, they have to adjust methods or expectations to maintain valued past selves. Frank (> age 70) longed to take up his previous craftsman life project:

I used to work in furniture, and I had every tool possible in my garage. I miss that. Now, I’m in a one-bedroom apartment with hardly any tools. . . . The other day, I saw one [actually three chairs] in the dumpster, you know these director chairs with the canvas back. I looked at [them], and they were perfectly good chairs. Brand new almost. So I took them, and this was just about 6 months [ago], and I have tried to find where you get canvas seats. . . . Santa Ana Patio and Fireplace . . . had them in stock, \$16 a set. So I bought three of them. So now I spent the last 2 weeks revarnishing all of the frames.

Adapting to his limited workspace and tools, and purchasing

supplies (canvas seats, varnish, and brushes) for his consumption enactment, Frank reinvigorates a past life project as a craftsman, enabling him to see himself again in that role.

These examples, like those found in table 4, involve revival or continuance of past identities, although identity can be expressed in a new way (emergent). For example, Laura (age 74) claims that she “ran and played with the boys,” but as she approached adolescence she gave into social pressure to “be more ladylike.” Now, Laura hikes and plays tennis and softball. Her athletic ambition is a self-retrieval inspiration, but her enactment is emergent, as she had never played tennis or softball in her youth. Her revived identity requires purchase and use of sporting equipment, athletic clothes, and lessons. These are important inspirations in that they focus on allowing retirees to experience continuities from the past, in the present, and into the future; they also fashion a self that evolves from former life projects that had been deferred by other goals and obligations or derailed by health.

The second self-expressive consumption inspiration is *self-permanence*, which involves the creation of a lasting unique legacy. These retirees want some way to achieve self-permanence, so that future generations will know they were here and that their life was important enough to be remembered. In this case, permanence is the central concern,

not necessarily the positive change in the lived experience of others. While Erikson (1959/1980) talks of grand-generativity in old age, his focus is on “establishing and guiding the next generation,” including building relationships with grandchildren and/or altruistic concerns. He does not recognize the idea of self-permanence in his conceptualization of grand-generativity as having a self-enhancement component. Here, we are focusing on self-permanence as ego-focused, not other-directed, and as either emblematic or creative. Self-permanence may be emblematic as the focus is a marker of one’s life not created by the individual. Alternatively, self-permanence may be artistic, as acts of creativity often leave an idiosyncratic trace of the individual.

Some manifestations of self-permanence are simply emblematic. On the forums, there are threads dedicated to opportunities for the consumption enactment of self-permanence divorced from self-discovery and once removed from future public benefit. Threads focusing on naming a star after yourself and/or a spouse, donor plaques and personalized bricks where the donation fund is absent or secondary to the self-permanence of being named somewhere, and entrepreneurs who sell product/service names to the highest bidder to fund new ventures. The appeal is that someone can buy a symbol of themselves that will outlast their physical form.

During observation, retirees often disclosed an ego-driven desire to be remembered and a life goal of creating a symbol for others to access the memory. For example, Suzanne (age 77) self-consciously confesses: “I know older people are supposed to be focused on making a positive impact on future generations. They are supposed to be altruistic and benevolent. So, this probably makes me sound bad, but I worry that I’ll be forgotten. That people won’t remember that I was ever here.” To defend against the potential loss of identity, Suzanne donated money to a local elementary school, and the gift includes a plaque that will list her and her husband by name. Suzanne’s children never attended the school, and she admits that she has no idea what the actual donation is for; she simply bought the plaque: “I never asked what the money goes for beyond the plaque. I really don’t care. I know it sounds bad. I just want people to see my name and wonder who I might have been.” Making a donation for a plaque is a consumption enactment that provides the symbolic permanence Suzanne desires.

As an example of creative self-permanence, Pat (> age 70) creates digital artwork that she disseminates online: “I want to do some artwork on it so that it moves and it changes and it touches you and it makes you want to go to the next and see what the next is. It’s like walking down your imagination and bringing somebody with you. . . . Where you have a picture and you move your cursor through it and it changes, it’s like a ribbon effect and then another picture will come out to you.” Pat learned about new media to create novel special effects. Her consumption enactment involved purchasing hardware and software to achieve the effects. Pat’s artistic works are a way that she expresses her creativity, but she does not keep them to herself: “I’d like to

think these images will be enjoyed [in the future when I’m not around to] . . . communicate my ideas.” Rather, they are a way that she can touch people after she is gone.

With self-permanence inspirations, retirees gravitate toward enactments that provide emblematic or creative self-permanence. Some informants want only their name on a plaque, while others want to create something unique that will outlast them. Some acts of creative self-permanence are hobbies pursued when younger (revived), and some are new (emergent). The creative self-permanence activities may result in a broader sense of self that is social and future-oriented, but the primary inspiration is self-permanence.

The third type of self-expression consumption inspiration identified is *self-synchronization*. We use the term *self-synchronization* from the Greek root *synchronízein*, which means “to be contemporary with” (<http://www.Dictionary.com>), to refer to the inspiration wherein retirees desire to align themselves with the current state of culture and society, or “keeping up with the times.” The life projects enacted to stay culturally current have to do with resisting negative age myths and proving that one is part of both the past and the present and still relevant for the future.

Betty (age 70) visited Eastern Europe with her sister, children, and grandchildren. To keep her ties to these distant relatives, Betty decided that she needed to master new communications technology: “In fact, my sister and I and our children and grandchildren went down to Eastern Europe last summer and met relatives and have been communicating with them by email . . . [Learning the Internet is] kind of a way that I tell myself that I’m still flexible enough to learn and try new things. That I’m not yet a foggy.” Betty’s consumption enactment is her adoption and use of the current technology, which proves that she can keep up with the times.

It is not only technology that keeps people current. It can be an advance in popular culture more broadly or a specific topical area of interest such as business, physics, agriculture, or mechanics. Lucinda (81) is a resident of the rehabilitation center. Her favorite book, *Love in the Time of Cholera* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, was recently adapted into a film starring Benjamin Bratt. At the time of the interview, she desperately wanted to heal and be released from the center in time to see the film in theaters. She reports: “It’s my favorite book. I love Marquez and the way his stories intertwine together [across books], with history and with the characters and plots of Carlos Fuentes [author]. They are beautiful and otherworldly. It is fantastic that the story will come to film. I want to see it first in the theaters and be surrounded by the story. I want to be one of the people other people ask about it, ‘Was it good? Did you think Benjamin Bratt was a good choice?’” Lucinda’s consumption enactment is attending the movie, which makes her a current, in-the-know opinion leader. For these retirees, keeping up with a changing world is a life project and an inspiration for their personal identity renaissance. This inspiration helps retirees defend against becoming stagnant and irrelevant. They want to be assured that they are still vital

human beings who understand the world today, not “fogies” or “dinosaurs.”

The final self-expressive consumption inspiration we find is *self-discovery*. Beyond nostalgia, retirees who display this inspiration create new memories and enact new life goals and sometimes entirely new life projects. Our data reveal little diminution of future plans, even for our informants with significant physical limitations.

Some retirees take up language studies and travel as their consumption enactment. Elliot (age 82) went to Korea and says: “My wife recently died. She was my best friend, but I know she’d want me to go on with my life while I still can. . . . I got to talking to Ms. Kim, her hospice nurse. She was a Korean immigrant. I took private lessons from her for several months until I could at least recognize a bit of Korean. Then, I went. I just up and went with an old friend. It was a great experience. New. Different. There was a time I doubted I would do anything new or different. And there I did it.” Elliot’s self-discovery following the loss of his wife made him proud of his accomplishment, and he was sure his wife was, too. Unlike those inspirations that manifest primarily as self-retrieval, the notion of learning Korean and traveling to Korea is a journey of self-discovery, entirely and intentionally different from his experiences with his wife.

Sophia (age 74) started hiking in retirement, a completely new experience, and she reports: “This is my second hike. As a child I never hiked. Girls didn’t do that—outdoors stuff with mud and sun. I wasn’t allowed to get tan or muddy. Then I was busy raising my kids, and their father took them camping—that was my break. The new Sophia hikes trails and rides a bike. I get good and grubby.” Sophia participates in numerous hikes and even gives advice to new hikers regarding supplies that they may need for a more comfortable experience. Hiking for Sophia is primarily inspired by self-discovery of a potentially repressed identity. However, she never really considered outdoor activities prior to this self-discovery in retirement. Her consumption enactment involves the purchase of hiking shoes and other accoutrements.

As part of their identity renaissance, Elliot and Sophia both sought novel experiences. They chose new arenas to enact life projects and anchor new identities. While all self-discovery is inherently emergent, some seniors claim their inspiration for self-discovery is life-long, simply having more time to pursue self-discovery in retirement (revived).

Affiliation Inspirations. These consumption inspirations are other-directed and focus on creating, maintaining, and symbolizing social relationships. They may be loosely related to kinship, friendship (social bonds outside the family), place (specific region), passions (e.g., music, quilting, golf), or universalism (the desire to make the world a better place).

Kinship inspires Missy (72) to engage in consumption enactments that represent efforts to maintain a complex identity project drawing from the past, the present, and the future, and she expresses this as follows:

It’s hard when I can’t get out [of the rehabilitation center]

to shop. It’s my brother’s birthday next week, and I need to get him a present. I always buy him clothes. . . . We come from a big family, 13 kids. When we were growing up he was one of nine boys in the family. He had to wear everyone’s hand-me-downs. We all did, but it bothered him. He’s very stylish, and being poor was much harder on him than the rest of us. I always go to Macy’s and have someone in the men’s department help me choose a present. This year, he gets a gift certificate. I bet he’ll enjoy shopping for himself, but it isn’t the same.

Attempting to compensate for past poverty, she says, “I like choosing something special and having it wrapped at the store in fancy wrap. I think it tells him that he is special. He is special to me.” Missy struggles to defend against the loss of her identity as caretaker for her brother’s ego even as her physical limitations preclude her usual birthday shopping. Her recollection of past poverty, her present acknowledgment of her brother’s birthday in a less than ideal but acceptable way, and her commitment to make him feel special in the future expresses her identity as she draws from multiple time orientations, but this emanates from the inspiration to maintain kinship.

Friendship can be a consumption inspiration. Walter (age 75) admits that he and his wife moved to Upper Michigan in large part because a military buddy and his family lived there: “We went to see them, and we all got along so well as couples . . . and we decided to move there upon retiring. We actually bought a house very soon after the visit [laughs]. Usually people retire to milder climate, but we did just the opposite.” Here Walter and Victoria made a major consumption decision based on friendship.

Place can also be a basis for affiliation. Ivan (age 68) is a Russian American with a strong affinity for his homeland, which no longer exists as a nation. He buys memorabilia on eBay related to the former USSR, including flags, government documents, and newspapers; Ivan is known on eBay and Wikipedia as a “Soviet Union historian.”

Like all consumers, retirees are inspired to consume by passions or deep abiding interests. The passions are many and varied: music, dog shows, Wii, politics, quilting, and golf, to name a few. These inspirations too can be revived or emergent. Olivia (age 69) is a self-proclaimed political junkie: “I need to know everything that goes on in DC and at the local level. I read every single published ruling of the national Supreme Court and several from our local supreme court. I’m not sure where this came from. I never cared much for politics when I was working, but now . . . I can’t get enough. I have the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and my local paper delivered daily.” Olivia’s passion is emergent and entails consumption of periodicals. For others, retirement provides increased time to devote to long-time passions.

Many retirees are inspired by universalism, the desire to leave the world a better place than they found it or at least not do it any harm. One expression of this inspiration is an interest in sustainability, specifically expanding conserva-

tion knowledge and elevating global standards of living. This particular form of affiliation inspiration is global and cross-generational. Identity is actively broadened to consider one's self in relationship to the community, the nation, or the world. Vaillant (2002, 48) calls this task "Keeper of the Meaning," which he defines as "conservation and preservations of the collective products of mankind—the culture in which one lives and its institutions—rather than on just the development of its children." Gabe (age 83) states: "My chief mission at this point is to undo what I've done. I've tread with a heavy foot over this land, and I'd like to tend to those ruts a little and smooth them out. I give a lot of my time and resources to the local Native American community here. I help in the elementary schools, I assist in event planning and fund raising for the community center, I serve meals at the shelters twice a week, and I organize the art shows piggybacking off the Tucson gem show." He purchased a truck to haul supplies to charity events, buys food from local grocers for the shelters, and books venues. He has inspired others to give their time and resources to improving the circumstances of Native Americans in his community, creating a legacy.

For these retirees, the central inspiration for their activities is affiliation. They seek out opportunities to enact positive change in ways that they themselves will likely not live to experience. Evidence of these consumption inspirations was found throughout the data. These seniors were quite varied in the interests they chose to pursue in retirement, but the themes were consistent. Activities pursued vary depending on financial and health resources, but informants see retirement as an opportunity for consumer identity renaissance.

Summary of the Consumer Identity Renaissance Process

Consumer identity renaissance currently takes place in a cultural context that favors individuality and where identity play is permissible, where retirement and leisure consumption ideologies are in flux, and where there is a multitude of available and attractively priced consumption options. Losses were integrated into informants' narratives, even though we did not question the retirees directly about this topic. Retirees' identity work proceeded against a canvas tinged with loss but with an optimistic determination to move forward. When a loss is a physical loss, informants often maintain an identity project through accommodation—by developing a method to work around their limitations, by doing less and taking more time—but nevertheless continuing an identity project that is central for them. Informants also frequently mentioned losses of loved ones, including friends, family, and spouses. Resilient seniors revive or create new, emergent identity projects to prevent loss from being their central storyline.

Our informants' life stories reveal that they largely embrace the idea that they can revive identity projects, even under adverse circumstances, or engage in emergent identity projects. Our informants actively reject age stereotypes and enjoy

explaining to us that retirement is for them a time of growth and personal development. The double arrow in figure 1 depicts the interplay between the life narrative and the consumption inspirations that lead to consumption enactments.

Two categories of inspirations (self-expression and affiliation) are apparent in our informants' narratives, and these inspirations varied in their time orientation from past through future, often crossing multiple time orientations. The past was likely to be salient in identity retrieval when an identity project from the past was never pursued or was given up because of an extrinsic reason. In the self-permanence inspiration, the future was especially salient as retirees desired to leave a marker of their identity in the world. Self-synchronization is a present-oriented inspiration that involves keeping up with the times, thus fending off age stereotypes and staying relevant. Like self-synchronization, self-discovery is a largely present-oriented inspiration that includes learning new skills and starting new identity projects. In addition to self-creation, retirees also seek to affiliate with kin, friends, locations, and interests. Retirees often cultivate their memories of, and connections to, important locations—places they had lived or visited. The arrow from consumption enactments to the life story depicts the manner in which the manifest behavior leads to revising the life narrative.

DISCUSSION

This study builds on CCT's assertion that identity projects are integral to understanding consumption (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Our findings reveal the process of consumer identity renaissance, which we argue can occur with any major shift in assumptive worlds (Janoff-Bulman 1989). Our research on retirement gives us a unique vantage from which to view identity construction and consumption during a major life transition that involves loss of at least one significant subidentity (working self) and simultaneously the potential for identity growth. However, subidentities are lost and reconstructed during other times of life, including graduation, career changes, marriage, divorce, parenthood, death of a loved one, recommitment to religion, major weight loss, and recovery from drug and alcohol abuse. In these situations, consumers must adapt to a substantially new situation in a way that resonates with past or existing life projects and life themes or establishes new ones (Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie 1979). Consumption enactments are outcomes of identity renaissance that fill gaps between the old diminished identity and a new emerging identity.

Discovering and illuminating the consumer identity renaissance in the context of retirement makes three broad contributions to consumer research: (1) it shifts the research agenda related to older consumers, (2) it examines a life stage that privileges consumption, especially with respect to identity construction and expression, and (3) it demonstrates that identity is a dynamic tapestry where consumers weave time orientations and identity projects as lives evolve.

Perhaps consumer research has focused on cognitive and corporeal deterioration of older consumers because the dom-



inant ideology views aging as a state of perpetual decline. Consumer research has neglected retirement, an adult life stage defined by departure from the formal productive sphere and privileging consumption. Our article introduces retirement as a life stage centered on consumption and ripe for empirical analysis in consumer research. Our data clearly reflect the cultural context of retirement as depicted in figure 1. Echoing Waldrop (2007), our informants mention that they devote more time, attention, and resources to personal consumption in retirement than they have in any previous life stage. This finding neatly complements the current literatures on personal finance and gerontology that focus on financial planning for retirement to fund this assumed, yet unstated, consumption-centered life stage (Haber and Gratton 1994; Hershey and Mowen 2000).

Our research suggests that, when a life narrative is being significantly revised, past selves may be an inspiration upon which to build. Like Noble and Walker's (1998) study of consumption during a liminal state, which finds that consumers transitioning from high school to college rely on possessions that symbolize the past and those that explicitly represent the new role, we find that retiring is a life transition to the retirement life stage and that identity-related consumption takes center stage as consumers revive past identity projects and new projects emerge. For triggering events other than retirement, emergent identities may be much more important as past identities are rejected rather than revived. Consumer researchers should study past selves to determine the situations in which past selves are likely to be retrieved for current and future identity projects. Are some past selves destined to be left behind permanently and some to be revisited? Why and when do consumers choose to revive past identity projects rather than start new projects? Future research should address how consumers cope with identity loss; how they draw on the past, the present, and the future to rebuild their identities; and how and when their consumption enactments help them develop the right balance of continuity and change.

Our findings also reveal aspects of the consumer identity renaissance process that are likely unique to retirees. Loss may be more of a key element of the cultural field for seniors than for other transitional consumers, as they are losing their professional identity and experiencing more contraction in their social network: loss of work friends and acquaintances and aging of their social network. Aging perhaps renders universalism more salient as a consumption inspiration. For example, some younger consumers want to improve the world, but seniors may be more attuned to this inspiration as they take stock of their accomplishments and are less likely to live to see the results of their universalism enactments. Researchers should determine how life stage affects universalism as an inspiration and the associated enactments.

Our data show that retirees create identity tapestries by pulling inspirational threads from the past, the present, and the future; they show that identity projects do not occupy one temporal sphere but rather move between the past, the present, and the future in a nonlinear, iterative way. This

means that our informants work through past, present, and future life projects simultaneously, where, for example, the donation to a high school will give future children resources and also prove to family members in the present that past injustices were not acceptable. This revelation expands the concept of life projects and increases the importance of explicating the role of life projects in consumption. Additionally, the weaving between time orientations that we witness in our informants should be explored in younger consumers to see if it is an age-related phenomenon or if perhaps people at all life stages use the past, the present, and the future in complex ways as they use consumption to articulate identity. Although not explicitly recognized as such, an analysis of the juggling lifestyle (Thompson 1996) suggests that life projects of baby boomer women are oriented around this past-present-future nexus. Baby boomer mothers seek to recreate valued experiences for their children from their own childhoods while not sacrificing their own contemporary identities and, most importantly, these women perform this balancing act to prevent regret later in life. Similarly, case studies presented by Fournier (1998), Holt (2002), and Mick and Buhl (1992) suggest that temporal complexities may be seen in younger consumers' life narratives as reactions to advertising and relationships with brands span time orientations.

Our findings directly demonstrate Gergen and Gergen's (2000) conception of dynamic ego development in retirees and show how ego development occurs throughout life and is supported by consumption enactments. We show that our informants can and do evolve beyond their preretirement identities but also that they revive favored or salient classic identities in times of transition such as retirement. This resonates with Schouten's (1991, 416) findings related to consumers of plastic surgery, where elements of previous identity are brought back or enhanced in the identity reconstruction phase: a facelift erases "the visible signs of a widow's grief and hardship," bringing the woman back to her old self. Thus, ego development is not a linear progression but rather contains looping trajectories. Further, we show that consumers actively confront negative stereotypes in the cultural field through continued ego development and consumption enactments (Bramlett-Solomon and Subramanian 1999). In our study, retirees reject a rocking chair retirement for an action-oriented retirement, as they subscribe to the cultural ideology of the busy ethic (Ekerdt 1986). Adoption of the busy ethic requires continuous engagement in consumption of products, services, and experiences.

One limitation to our study is our unit of analysis: the individual and specifically the individual's life narrative. Future research should expand the unit of analysis to include couples' experiences. Some couples (such as Sarah and Tom in our data set) easily find shared identity projects in retirement. Others (such as Barbara and Wendell) struggle to find common interests once they have finished rearing children. While our data do not include sufficient numbers of paired spouses for deep understanding of couples'

identity projects in retirement, our findings suggest that couples deserve further study as identity projects may diverge. Research indicates that couples today spend less time together (Shellenbarger 2008), which may have implications for the pursuit of common identity projects in retirement. Common identity projects do have an impact on consumption. Curasi, Price, and Arnould (2004) demonstrate the use of consumption objects to project family identity into the future. As well, Gentry et al. (1995) examine the highly disruptive impact of life transitions (in their case, death of a loved one) on households' consumption patterns and attachment to specific objects associated with the deceased. Similarly, family and extended family of those undergoing retirement as a life transition (e.g., siblings, children, grandchildren) should be included in future research. As Epp and Price (2008) suggest, taking a broader unit of analysis, for example, consumption from the perspective of the family, has the potential to clarify consumer inspirations and go beyond self-reports; in particular, including more informants within a social network can better illuminate affiliation inspirations and collective identity projects.

Finally, as discussed in this article's method section, we attempted to include all relevant informant types according to Moschis's (1992, 1993) typology. We engaged residents of a rehabilitation center. However, we found these participants to be as actively engaged in identity projects as healthier retirees. Our sample does not include true frail recluses, who undoubtedly exist, especially in care facilities, but these individuals are exceptions and were not interested in participation. Thus, our positive portrayal of retirement (tempered by the recognition of loss) is not universal as there are retirees who are not physically and/or mentally capable of identity projects or participating in research. Similarly, our study omits consumers below the poverty line, who have significantly fewer resources to engage in identity renaissance consumption.

CONCLUSION

Our research demonstrates that consumer identity renaissance is a robust phenomenon that can create, authenticate, situate, and enlarge our sense of self through life transitions. Specifically, we address retirement as a life transition and demonstrate that this later life stage need not focus on cognitive and corporeal decline but rather is able to celebrate the vibrant identity projects of retirees. The 2007 film *Because I Said So* casts Diane Keaton as a woman turning 60 who laments, "Why are we celebrating my descent into oblivion?" Her daughter, played by Mandy Moore, remarks, "It isn't too late," and the Diane Keaton character does indeed discover that adventure and romance have not passed her by. Retirement need not be a time of irrelevance. Rather, for current and future generations, it is and will be a time of renewal, when people have the time to engage in identity work in a way not possible since their adolescence.

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