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# Life course transitions and the future of fandom

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## Abstract

We explore the future of media fandom through integrating insights from gerontology, human development, fan studies, and marketing. Given population aging and the dismantling of the normative 20th-century life course, along with rapid changes in the extent to which our lives are mediated, fandom is undergoing significant modification. We focus on how new findings on emotional maturation over the life course and scholarly identification of self-narrativization as a resource for 21st-century aging suggest ways that fandom may change over time.

## Keywords

aging, demographic transitions, marketing, media fans, media representations

We write this in the context of multiple, ongoing, rapid, and intersecting transformations – political, economic, cultural, technological, and demographic – that are profoundly re-scripting social life in as yet unknown ways. While the new normal has so far not emerged, pronouncements of the end of the old normal, both within and outside the academy over the past 15 years, have become almost comical in their combined implications, ranging from the end of childhood (*The Guardian*, 2006), to the end of adolescence (Graham, 2004), to the end of marriage (Lewis, 2002), to the end of motherhood (*Newsweek*, May 29, 2006), to

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the end of fatherhood (Paul, 2010), to the end of the job (Bridges, 1994), to the end of colleges (Rosenberg, 2009), to the end of the internet (Prince, most interestingly; *New York Times*, 2010), to the end of men (Rosin, 2010), and to the end of grandparenthood (if we take seriously the argument for 'killing granny' in recent US health care debates; Thomas, 2009). In the context of media fan studies, the central focus of this article, the anthology *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* was bookended by a debate over whether fandom is the dominant mode of consumption in late modernity and thus *everyone* is now a fan (see Gray et al., 2007), or whether, *since* everyone is now a fan, the term has lost its meaning and *no one* is a fan (see Jenkins, 2007) – the end of media fandom, in other words.<sup>1</sup>

A beyond-the-headline reading of the works cited above reveals (unsurprisingly) that none of these phenomena are actually ending but rather altering in capricious ways and with unclear outcomes. As such, and as indicated by our title, we explore not the *end* but the *future* of fandom in this manuscript, with particular focus on major demographic and life course transitions under way – the aging of the global population and the dismantling of the 20th-century life course in Western nations – and their potential impact on fandom. While recent media scholarship includes examination of the youth/teen markets and the emergence of the digital generation (e.g. Buckingham, 2008; Montgomery, 2007), little has been written about the adult/late-life market or about broader life course transitions. This article extends an ongoing project on aging and fandom, with previous articles exploring the age-related structure of fandom in the late 20th/early 21st centuries (Harrington and Bielby, 2010a), aging fans and fan-objects in one particular community (Harrington and Brothers, 2010a, 2010b) and the psychological processes through which fan-based experiences become embedded in larger life narratives (Harrington and Bielby, 2010b). While the project thus far has analyzed how age and aging have shaped fandom as we know it today, this manuscript extends that focus into the future by exploring demographic and developmental projections and their possible influence on fandom. Our project thus engages Gray et al.'s provocation (2007) – that the extent to which our lives are mediated today renders all of us fans – by introducing *demography* into the conversation. We aim not to predict the future of fandom but rather to suggest ways that fandom may modify in an increasingly mediated and rapidly graying global culture.

While our primary audience is media scholars, we integrate life course, media, and marketing research in this article. The first two literatures are obviously central to our approach; the third perhaps less so. As we will argue, however, market constructions of adulthood and late life are increasingly important to *how it is* that adults negotiate 21st-century aging. As such, understanding the future of fandom necessitates considering how media industries themselves conceptualize aging fans. Our effort to synthesize these literatures presents us with two challenges. First, demographers are tracking *global population trends*, but media scholars' understanding of what this means for *global marketing efforts* – and how domestic strategies might translate into global ones – is nascent at best, especially in the context of adulthood/late life (Moschis and Mathur, 2007). In addition, the phenomenon of *global fandom* remains under-documented and -theorized. Fan studies are conducted worldwide but tend to focus on local contexts and communities. There are very few explicitly comparative or global fan studies (Harrington and Bielby, 2007). Due to limitations in the literature, then, our evidence is sometimes at the global level, other times at the regional (Western) level, and still others at a national (US) level.

A second challenge is that these three bodies of literature – life course, media, and marketing – are developing unevenly and on parallel (not dialogic) tracks. The literatures do engage one another *if* the focus is childhood and adolescence: marketers and media scholars draw on life course scholarship to understand developmental needs, to create, produce, and sell products and services to kids and teens, and to critique those efforts to do so. In the context of adulthood/late life, however, life course scholarship is largely absent from media/fan studies (even as more scholars focus on older adults) and only variably appears in marketing literature (even in that literature focused explicitly on older consumers). The latter disjuncture can be explained, in part, by the inherent tension between the two fields. Marketers are interested in demographic changes such as population aging insofar as they impact profit potential; in contrast, life course scholars are interested in those changes to better understand and address the changing needs of older adults. Those goals can potentially meet in the middle (i.e. serving older adults' actual needs in ways that are profitable) but efforts thus far have been limited (e.g. life course theories are mobilized in marketing literature in notably non-critical ways). We are convinced that in order to understand the future of media fandom – in terms of aging adults' experiences, media texts' role in those experiences, and marketers' quest to understand that dually unfolding relationship – all three literatures are necessary *in their intersections*. So in this article we examine the *known* junctures between marketing and aging, and marketing and fandom – and the *emergent* junctures between fandom and aging, and (ultimately) between fandom, aging, and marketing. This is a complicated endeavor but a necessary one to fully understand how population aging may modify media fan engagement in the 21st century.

In order to advance our goal of identifying relevant intersections of these literatures, first we briefly summarize our prior research findings, the demographic and life course transitions currently unfolding around the world, and research on the relationship between chronological, subjective, and ideal age that has implications for market constructions. We then review the variable treatment of age in media marketing efforts in the US, arguing that age is not *irrelevant* to media industries today – as some marketing theorists contend – but rather is *differently* relevant. Indeed, we argue that the marketing construction of adulthood and late(r) life is directly relevant to older adults' negotiation of aging in the 21st century. In the third section we elaborate on two aspects of the emergent life course in the West that are implied by market constructions and that may shape the future of fandom: recent findings on emotional development over the life course (and their implications for affect-based marketing strategies), and the enhanced importance of self-narrativization (and the role of fandom therein) in navigating our current climate of multiple transformations. We conclude by discussing the potential impact of our argument for media and life course scholars.

## **Fandom, life course transitions, and the meaning of age**

Our prior work argued that while fan studies to date have addressed numerous issues central to the life course – including age and aging, process, autobiography, and self-identity construction and reconstruction – they have sidestepped explicit engagement with life course theories and perspectives on human development that help clarify how

fan objects and experiences become situated in life trajectories, the transformations of fandom over time, and the particularities of fandom in later life. Through an analysis of fandom and life milestones, changes in the fan self over time, age norms within fandom, and changes in the fan object over time, we argued that fans' identities, practices, and interpretive capacities have more age-related structure than has previously been addressed in fan studies (Harrington and Bielby, 2010a). For example, older fans are held accountable to age norms in ways that younger fans are not (e.g. they are expected to 'grow out of' their fandom), older fans' bodily changes (e.g. arthritis) impact their willingness to engage in long-held fan practices (e.g. diving into mosh pits), and cognitive changes reshape not only aging fans' pleasures (e.g. the ability to recognize once-cherished song lyrics or TV characters) but the very ability to access fan texts and communities given increasingly complex media technologies and changes in cognition over time (Slegers et al., 2009). Our prior work synthesized the past 25 years of fan studies – including seminal writings by Nancy Baym, Will Brooker, Daniel Cavicchi, Matt Hills, Henry Jenkins, Annette Kuhn, Cornel Sandvoss, John Tulloch and others – to examine the age-structuring of fandom in the context of the normative 20th-century life course. In Western contexts, that life course is (was) divided into three subsequent phases: education (childhood/adolescence), employment/parenthood (adulthood), and retirement (late life). Our point here, then, is the de-institutionalization of the 20th-century life course, a process engendered in part by population aging.

The world's population age 65 and older is growing at an unprecedented rate due to decreased fertility and life expectancy improvements. While the populations of more established nations have been aging for well over a century, this process began quite recently in most less-developed nations, where it is being compressed into a shorter time frame. For example, France took 115 years for its proportion aged 65 and older to grow from 7 percent of the population to 14 percent; the US took almost 70 years for this transition to occur. In developing nations, the speed of population aging is more rapid; for example, China is expected to undergo the shift from 7 percent population aged 65 and older to 14 percent population aged 65 and older in only 26 years (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005: 15). The US Census Bureau (2008) projects that the number of persons aged 65 and older worldwide will more than triple in the next four decades. This does not mean to suggest that the global population is 'only' getting older – rather, it speaks to different and multiple trends unfolding at different rates around the world. For example, nearly all the world's developed nations have total fertility rates below the replacement rate (thus accelerating the graying process) and the projected increases in the global population over the next 40 years will mostly be in the developing world (Balter, 2006).<sup>2</sup>

Population aging impacts not just old age itself but all other life phases. In North America and Western Europe, population aging has begun to re-order the tri-partite structure of the 20th-century life course (education, work/parenthood, and retirement) by extending schooling/training, delaying entry into full-time employment and household establishment, postponing or precluding life partnering and parenthood, delaying or eliminating retirement, and revising expectations regarding life post-employment. These changes rewrite the transitions from childhood to adolescence, adolescence to adulthood, and adulthood to old age, and as the opening paragraph suggests (albeit somewhat apocalyptically), redefine the existence and meaning of long-standing roles

and categories – student, spouse, employee, parent, retiree, etc. – around which both personal identities and social policies are based.<sup>3,4</sup> Aging experts warn that we have not fully appreciated the ‘massive transformations in the chronology of the changes’ under way and their concomitant policy implications (Warnes, 2006: 209). Summarizes human development scholar Richard Settersten:

Great shake-ups are afoot in every life period... New definitions abound regarding what it means to be a child or adolescent, a young adult, middle-aged, or old; what it means to be a man or woman; and how life can be organized or optimized. [L]ittle about life today comes close to what prior generations have known. (2007a: 1)

Receiving the most analytic scrutiny is the adolescent-to-adult transition, with policy-makers exploring changes in adolescent health, employment, citizenship, marriage, and parenthood in developing nations, and the role of the media in shaping those changes (e.g. Lloyd, 2005),<sup>5</sup> and Western media scholars exploring the developmental implications of growing up in a digital era (e.g. Mazzarella, 2005; Montgomery, 2007) and the new media education required for the 21st century (e.g. Jenkins et al., 2006). This body of research is clearly valuable to fan scholars and media industries worldwide, given the continued (over)-association of fandom with adolescence (Hills, 2005) and keen industry interest in the construction of the global youth market (Barak, 2009: 8), but the new instability and ambiguity experienced by today’s youth is shared throughout the life span. People of all ages are faced with new levels and kinds of uncertainties (Settersten, 2007b: 253, 254), which carry with them both risks and rewards. Pointing to increasingly ‘liquid lives’ lived in increasingly ‘liquid times’ (Bauman, 2005, 2007), life course scholars thus echo theorists elsewhere in the academy (e.g. Bauman, 1988; Beck, 1992, 2000; Giddens, 1991) in emphasizing an *individualization thesis* that characterizes the 20th-to-21st-century transition. As Settersten explains, ‘The new landscape of adulthood brings flexibility for people of every age to live lives that are congruent with their personal interests and wishes’ (2008: 22).<sup>6</sup>

Our central thesis is that the new landscape of fandom as documented in the West – its visibility and normalization – is a *manifestation* of this flexibility (Gray et al., 2007: 9; Harrington and Bielby, 2010a: 445), with the emotional anchoring provided through fandom supplanting the anchoring of the institutionalized life course. In other words, we argue that population aging and restructuring of the life course, on one hand, and the changing role of media and media fandom in people’s lives, on the other hand, are *dual processes* that *inform and shape* one another, and that therefore can and should be mapped onto one another by scholars working in disparate parts of the academy. We believe this argument may be applicable globally, but again, we are limited by extant scholarship in our ability to fully ground this claim. In short, there are complex intersections between: (a) uneven global demographic changes; (b) uneven globalization of media consumption, fan experiences, and media marketing; (c) and uneven scholarship on these transformations.

Returning to the individualization thesis, one of the most interesting aspects of the new ‘do-it-yourself-biographies’ (Beck, 2000: 166), and highly relevant to media industries/marketers, is the disconnect between chronological age (number of years lived),

subjective age ('the age I feel'), and ideal age ('the age I would most like to be'). Empirical research on chronological vs. subjective age dates back to the 1950s in the US and finds that, in general, younger adolescents feel older than their age, older adolescents feel younger than their age, and this disconnect intensifies across adulthood, with adults feeling younger than what their chronological age signifies. In other words, differences between chronological and subjective age become more pronounced as one ages chronologically (Montepare, 2009: 42). The measurement of subjective and ideal age outside the US is a recent endeavor but a meta-analysis of extant research finds that adults in at least 18 culturally dissimilar nations (including Western, non-Western, North and South) typically want to *be* younger and *feel* younger than their chronological age. In short, regardless of culture, respondents' report that their *ideal* age is younger than their *subjective* age, which is younger than their *chronological* age (Barak, 2009). While Barak concludes that this relationship may thus be universal in nature, there is competing evidence that it is context-dependent – for example, that the rapid dismantling of the life course in the West complicates the relationship between subjective and chronological age such that 35-year-old college graduates with full-time jobs don't feel 'grown-up' (Settersten, 2007b: 258), while teens struggling through middle school report feeling 'old' (see the literature on psychological weathering, e.g. Foster et al., 2008).

Subjective and ideal age matter in a media context because consumer age researchers and marketers believe them to be more predictive of consumption patterns than chronological age (Barak, 2009: 2). Indeed, even life course scholars today agree that chronological age predicts little. However, researchers and policymakers continue to segment life into discrete chunks based on chronological age (e.g. the age at which one can vote or get married), though they readily admit that this 'makes little sense' (Settersten, 2007a: 26), and media industries still invest meaning in chronologically based age demarcations (e.g. Nielsen's long-standing focus on the 18–49 demographic, PG-13 and NC-17 movie ratings, etc.). We agree with Settersten that it is not chronological age per se but rather cumulative life experience that 'is the very thing that leaves people in very different positions by the time they are old' (2007a: 21, italics deleted). We turn to these experiential and/or developmental aspects of aging and their impact on media fandom later in this article.

The major demographic transformations described in this section – population aging and the dismantling of the 20th-century life course in the West – and the social uncertainties they have engendered are not ignored by US media marketers and other content providers, who focus on the potential impact of these changes on the complicated (and poorly understood) relationship between age (chronological, subjective, and ideal) and consumer preferences. Witness the surge in dystopian young adult fiction (Miller, 2010) and 'millennial noir' on television (Stein, n.d.), which perhaps signal an end to youthful optimism, Judd Apatow's ongoing cinematic homage to masculinity-in-arrested-development (or Fox's 2003–6 series *Arrested Development*), the ambiguity of adult romance and sexuality as explored in *Cougar Town* (ABC) and *Men of a Certain Age* (TNT), the now-tired marketing mantra '60 is the new 40' and the youthification of actors hired for Viagra and Cialis commercials (Bob Dole, anyone?), the furor over the new 'adult' Miley Cyrus coupled with the unexpected hippification of Betty White, and so on. These examples, while illustrative, signal a cultural preoccupation with transgression of chronological age and lead us to ask: Does age matter anymore to consumer preferences? If 'yes',



what ‘kind’ of age, and how so? In the following section we briefly review the history of age-based media marketing, as it anticipates (albeit incompletely) two factors central to both the future of fandom and 21st-century aging (and to their interpellation with one another) – emotional development over the life course, and the role of self-narrativization in navigating the new landscape of aging.

## Age and media marketing

Chronological age has played a variable role in US marketing efforts over the years, given the shift from mass to niche to database marketing. Target marketing on the basis of demographic characteristics such as age has existed since at least the 1910s, with 18–49-year-olds the single most important market post-Second World War (Turow, 1997). The seeds of the current child/youth market were sown in the 1930s (Montgomery, 2007), the tween market was constructed in the 1980s, a redefined senior or mature market emerged in the 1990s with the aging of the baby boomers (Moschis, 2003), and boomers’ children (echo boomers or millennials) and un-retiring boomers (u-boomers) are currently being constructed (Ferguson and Brohaugh, 2010).<sup>7</sup> Since the 1980s, demographic markers such as age serve not as *endpoints* for marketing strategies but rather as one type of *entrée* into finer distinctions among consumers, with psychographic markers (psychological characteristics such as personality, attitudes, interests, values, and lifestyles) grafted onto demographic information. Turow describes these marketing shifts as such:

For decades, marketing and media firms learned as much as they could about social groups (women, baby boomers, rich people, African-Americans, and so on) and then tried to target people they thought were members of those groups. The emerging process is almost the opposite: They learn enormous amounts about individuals, consign them to various niches, and then determine whether and how they want to deal with them. (2006: 186)

The recent emergence of tribal marketing speaks directly to the cultural and social instability characteristic of contemporary life (discussed earlier), and is more relevant to fan studies than other marketing approaches given its distilled focus on affect or emotion compared to either demographic or psychographic methods. Grounded in Michel Maffesoli’s *The Time of the Tribes* (1996), tribal marketing takes participatory culture for granted – that is, the reformation of ‘consumer culture’ to highlight the ways that media audiences today both consume and create culture (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2006):

[Consumer tribes] do not consume things without changing them; they cannot ‘consume’ a good without it becoming them and them becoming it; they cannot ‘consume’ services without engaging in a dance with the service provider, where the dance becomes the service. Participatory culture is everywhere. (Cora et al., 2007: 3–4)

Tribal marketing focuses on affinity groups that emerge through shared passion, rejecting ‘the imposition of abstract modernist structures (class, age, gender, and so on)’ in favor of ‘what might be termed a bottom-up postmodern sociology’ (Cora et al., 2007: 5). Starting with an assumption of basic human sociality, agency and creativity, tribal marketers



emphasize the ephemerality and emotionality of postmodern consumers rather than their race, gender or age (see also Jenkins [2006: 61–2] on affective economics). We find tribal marketing fascinating in that it anticipates a critical element of the future of fandom – understanding the way(s) emotion changes over the life course – which we discuss below.

The shift from mass to niche to database marketing has not erased age-based criteria from marketing strategies, however. Generational branding to tweens or boomers continues to exist, as noted above. In addition, what might be called *conceptual* age clearly guides media content though it is not necessarily connected to chronological age. In the introduction of their anthology on teen television, for example, Ross and Stein (2008) note that most of the audience for teen TV is not in fact teenagers but instead is adults who tap into a concept of teenager-hood that is reflected in the content and approach of media products (such as the WB network). They write:

Notions of Teen TV are bound up with culturally specific ideas about adolescence and what it means to ‘be’ teen. Furthermore, since much of Teen TV is watched by viewers who are not teenagers themselves, the discourses about Teen TV also address ideas of what it means to be a viewer or consumer of Teen TV regardless of age (or, rather, despite one’s age). (2008: 6–7)

Here, the subjective age of viewers (or the nostalgic appeal of prior life phases) trumps chronological age, even as the categorical construction itself (‘teen TV’) alludes directly to numerics. Montgomery (2007) observes that advertisers in the US have long scrutinized the field of child development to understand changing relationships between chronological age, subjective age, and age-related processes of human development. For example, social changes in the 1980s (e.g. dual parents in paid labor) led marketers to conclude that ‘children are getting older younger’ and hence the 8–12 tween market was born. Similarly, marketers were early to recognize the extent to which interactive media are ‘uniquely suited’ to today’s teens’ developmental needs:

Online communication tools enabled instantaneous and constant contact with peers; personal Web pages offered compelling opportunities for self-expression and identity exploration; and ubiquitous portable devices facilitated mobility and independence.... Brands tailored their Internet marketing strategies to teenagers’ fundamental needs for identity development, self-expression, and peer group communication. (Montgomery, 2007: 108, 116)

Child development research is also the foundation for the various age-grading and/or age protections attached to media objects/content and monitored by policymakers, media companies, and family values watch groups, ranging from precise (numeric) age-ranges indicated on board games or via film ratings to more ambiguous concerns regarding ‘children’ accessing or producing ‘adult’ content online. For example, comic book companies vaguely recommend some titles ‘For Mature Readers’ only (Will Brooker, personal communication).

At the other end of the life course, subjective and ideal age are the clear foci of marketing efforts toward boomers (Moschis, 1996, 2003, 2007; Moschis and Mathur, 2007), but *developmental* considerations in either promotional campaigns or media content directed at older adults are less evident. It is admittedly difficult to imagine age-graded products for adults similar to those for children, and while the Jitterbug cell phone, *More*

magazine, and the cable network Retirement Living TV (among others) are explicitly geared to the needs and lifestyles of older consumers, their respective marketing campaigns appear free of the developmental guidance (or protectionism) shown toward the youth market. In part this reflects our cultural belief that adults can and should be able to select their own media devices and content (though they are beholden to age norms in doing so; Harrington and Bielby, 2010a). It may also reflect a lingering assumption among media content providers, media marketers, and media scholars that *adults do not develop as children and teenagers do* – that ‘growing up’ means growing *into an adult*, and once adulthood is established, developmental priorities recede. While marketers are attuned to the physical and cognitive challenges associated with late life (again, the Jitterbug)<sup>8</sup> and closely dissect adult consumption patterns, the developmental transformations that help modify those patterns remain under-scrutinized.

For example, over the past 15 years George P. Moschis and his colleagues have conducted exhaustive empirical work documenting the consumer needs of older adults. They emphasize the variability and multi-dimensionality of aging and the heterogeneity of the ‘mature market’, and their discussion of age-related changes is grounded in life course theory. However, they ultimately advocate a version of psychographics for the elder market termed *gerontographics* that is largely a-developmental (or static) in its approach (Mathur and Moschis, 2005; Moschis, 1996; Moschis and Mathur, 2007). One major drawback of gerontographics, from a critical perspective, is that it tends to highlight negative aspects of old age, perpetuating the assumption (noted earlier) that adulthood is a period of decline, not development. Consider the terminology attached to the four elder markets identified in their model: ‘healthy indulgers’, ‘healthy hermits’, ‘ailing outgoers’, and ‘frail recluses’ (Moschis and Mathur, 2007: 218).<sup>9</sup> Though the emergence of gerontographics in the late 1990s was progressive for its time, it no longer reflects the aging process as understood within critical gerontology. In a recent article Moschis (2007) calls for a more developmental approach to understanding consumer behavior over time, with particular attention to how early life experiences might impact consumer behavior later in life:

The use of the life course paradigm in marketing requires a change in how researchers and practitioners look at market behavior. A person’s consumption activity must be viewed not just as a behavior at a given point in time but as part of the person’s consumption history. (2007: 305)

Noting that consumer research over the life course has been mostly cross-sectional, he calls for empirical studies that take cohort effects into consideration to better understand how consumer choices might reflect not present experiences but prior ones (2007: 305). Even this approach, however, emphasizes age (via cohort) rather than changes taking place *within* phases of adulthood and late life, and obscures the fact that the process and experience of aging itself becomes more layered and complicated over time.

Our goal in this section has been to draw a distinction between the implications of *development* vs. *age* to the practice(s) of marketing. Development, as understood by life course scholars, implies comprehension of the subtle (dis)connections between chronological age, subjective age, and ideal age in each unfolding life stage. However, age per se does not – and age is the concept marketers continue to rely on to sell to adults, even as they show increasing awareness of the ways in which it can be complicated when it

intersects with life experiences (reflected in marketing approaches to youth, for example). In short, marketing's continued reliance on age closes off its potential understanding of the complexities of *age-ing* that are recognized and understood by life course scholars who study adult development – complexities that could better inform the relationship of older persons to consumption. Despite our critique, market constructions of adulthood and late(r) life remain crucial to our overall exploration of the future of fandom because they directly bear on older adults' navigation of 21st-century aging. As we discuss below, adults draw on those constructions to help make sense of their own aging process through the fashioning of ever more complex self-narratives. In turn, how adults utilize market constructions helps shape the future of marketing, since media industries are desperately trying to understand new consumer identities and activities to more effectively market to 21st century fans/prosumers (Cora et al., 2007: 21). The futures of fandom/aging/market-ing thus inform and shape one another in the current media/aging environment.

In the following section we explore two facets of fandom, *emotional maturation* and *self-narrativization*, that link gerontology, marketing and fan studies together in that they are: (a) anticipated by current marketing constructions; (b) related to processes of aging; (c) modifiers of fandom over time; (d) increasingly salient given population aging and the de-institutionalization of the 20th-century life course; and, (e) thus relevant to future media industries and media marketing. Our discussion is contextualized by the following points well established in gerontology. First, subjective and ideal age are not free-floating but rather derive from 'a process of anchoring and adjusting one's age in relation to distal and proximal reference points' (Montepare, 2009: 43), *which are themselves chronologically age-graded*. In addition, chronological age has an important influence on subjective age as it represents the passage of time and accumulated life experience (Mathur and Moschis, 2005: 997). Finally, general processes of human development – including biological, cognitive, social, sexual, and emotional maturation – are also chronologically age-graded (albeit loosely). As such, we suggest in the following section that age is not *irrelevant* to media industries/media marketers/fan scholars, but rather may be *differently* relevant in the current demographic landscape.

### **Fandom over time: emotional maturation and self-narrativization**

To recall, our central thesis is that the emotional anchoring provided through media fandom has come to supplant the anchoring provided by the institutionalized 20th-century life course. To more fully explore this thesis, we examine new research on emotional development over the life course and its implications for media fandom in the context of overall population aging. Then, we turn to an emergent adult developmental challenge identified by gerontologists – 'migrating in time' – that is rooted in the multiplicity of transitions currently under way, and we explore the role of self-narrativizations in successfully negotiating that challenge. In this latter discussion we focus specifically on the salience of linked lives and the need for new role models of aging. Both are crucial to how older adults 'story' their experiences, and both (re)implicate market constructions of adulthood and late life. As noted above, the concepts of *emotional development* (anticipated via tribal marketing) and *self-narrativization* (through utilization of market

constructions of adulthood and old age) serve as central threads that tie gerontology, marketing, and fan studies together and thus effectively illuminate the future of fandom.

### *Fandom and emotional development*

To put it simply, the future of fandom *is* the future of affect, a point recognized by marketers in their shift toward tribal approaches. Affect is at the core of both fan and anti-fan experiences (i.e. pleasure and/or the pleasure of displeasure) and is a central source of the historical stigmatization of fandom (i.e. the public suspicion of or derision towards others' cultural pleasures) (see Gray, 2005; Grossberg, 1992; Harrington and Bielby, 1995; Jensen, 1992). However, fan scholars and marketers rarely consider how age might shape affective ties beyond the taken-for-granted association of fandom with the emotional chaos and angst of adolescence, or bemused speculation about older fans' interest in the *Twilight* series, Justin Bieber or *Gossip Girl* (CW). In prior work (Harrington and Bielby, 2010b) we explored how aging modifies fan-based affective attachments over time in ways consistent with theories of human development. For example, long-term soap opera fans (the subject of our study) report intense emotional attachments to soap characters and communities at earlier life stages but a gradual distancing as they aged (see also Kuhn, 2002). Consider these two quotes from adult soap fans:

When I was young I felt a certain kinship to many of the characters [on *As the World Turns*]... I had a real love/hate relationship with most of the characters.... [However], I am not the easily entertained, naïve, willing to watch anything ... person I was back then. I am older and wiser and less willing to suspend disbelief. Unlike years gone by, I feel very little sympathy, or empathy, for the characters. (Harrington and Bielby, 2010b: n.p.)

[W]hen I was younger, I saw things in terms of black and white, right and wrong, good and evil. Now that I'm older, I tend to appreciate complexity of character over whether the character is 'good' or 'bad'.... I like to think that means I am a more complex person who is willing to see shades of grey rather than strict black and white. (2010b: n.p.)

Our analysis suggested that changes in emotional investment may reflect crucial self-transformation over the life course as fans negotiate developmental challenges associated with middle and late adulthood. Consider again the second part of the quote above – 'I am not the easily entertained, naïve, willing to watch anything ... person I was back then. I am older and wiser' – from a long-term fan who gives her age as '50 plus'. According to gerontologists, successful negotiation of the developmental challenge of late adulthood requires the acquisition of *gerotranscendence* – a 'more cosmic and transcendent [world view], normally accompanied by a contemplative dimension' (Tornstam, 1997: 143). In the context of self-development, acquisition of gerotranscendence suggests both greater coherence and stability of the processes through which we construct our life narratives (see below) and a gradually clarifying sense of self. While we tend to think of fandom's role in identity construction in the context of adolescence or adolescent-to-adult transitions, the very process of growing older presents unique challenges to the self and thus transforms fandom over time. Both of the quotations above suggest a distinctly mature fannish investment in soap opera (Harrington and Bielby, 2010b).

Our interest here is in how *affect itself* transforms over time in ways that may illuminate the future(s) of fandom. Simply put, since affect is the core of fandom, since fandom may be the dominant mode of consumption in the 21st century (Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington, 2007) as evidenced in new marketing approaches, and since fans are rapidly aging as the global population ages, we all benefit – life course scholars, media scholars, and media marketers – from better understanding the relationship between affect and the aging process. A recent meta-analysis finds that, despite the narrative of decline that characterizes our stereotypical understanding of aging, the ‘bulk of evidence ... points to no real declines in the capacity for emotion across the adult years; if anything, older adults sometimes express more acute emotional experience than younger adults’ (Magai, 2008: 383–4). In addition, this meta-analysis finds that there are ‘increases in the level or frequency of positive emotion and declines in negative emotion broadly across the adult years’ (2008: 388), that ‘adults become increasingly skilled emotion regulators over the lifespan’ (2008: 378–9), and that our later years in particular are characterized by heightened emotional mastery and complexity. Moreover, a recent *New York Times* article (Carey, 2010) points to research findings that persons 55 and older are much more likely than those 25 and younger to focus on positive thoughts when in a bad mood, and that older persons are twice as likely as younger ones to ‘bounce back’ quickly after dwelling on depressive memories. While we might assume that approaching mortality would be associated with emotional disengagement or retrenchment (as the now-discredited disengagement theory in gerontology would contend), older adults instead prioritize emotional goals by seeking to ‘create and maintain the kinds of social environments in which there is a balance between emotionally stimulating and insulating features, and in which they can avoid the occasion of conflict or negative effect’ (Magai, 2008: 379). Overall, the very process of aging brings with it an ‘increasing appreciation for the affective aspects of life and social relations’ (2008: 388) and increasing attunement toward positive affective experiences.

In part, these findings shed light on the specific fan experiences described above – soap fans’ greater orientation toward characters’ emotional complexity, for example, or their gradual distillation in emotional focus over time. More broadly, we believe this research elucidates the mentoring role that many older adults assume in fan communities (‘increasingly skilled emotional regulators’; see Harrington and Bielby, 2010a: 11), the potential for fans to prioritize fandom with age (as they prioritize pleasurable or positive affect) or to become ‘better’ fans as they age (e.g. through ‘heightened emotional mastery and complexity’ or what Biggs terms ‘an identifiably mature imagination’; 2006: 112), reasons *unrelated* to physical and/or cognitive decline as to why engagement in fan communities might change over time (‘avoid[ing] the occasion of conflict or negative effect’),<sup>10</sup> as well as the greater emotional rewards that may accompany such engagement (‘increasing appreciation for the affective aspects of ... social relations’). Fandom entails both emotional perils and emotional opportunities, and when and how we ‘live’ our fandom is thus shaped in part by how emotion itself transforms over the life course. From an industry/marketing perspective, these research findings are useful to understanding: (a) how passion (to use the tribal marketing term) transforms over time or might be differently conceptualized and measured at different life phases; (b) why fan practices may take different shape over the life course; (c) how older adults’ *emotional* mentoring might (or might not)

translate into *consumer* mentoring;<sup>11</sup> and (d) why *fandom itself* may be as central to (if not more central than) adulthood/late life as it is to adolescence.<sup>12</sup>

Scholars across the academy are engrossed with the liminal position in which we now find ourselves, with old structures and expectations dismantling and new ones yet to emerge. As Beck writes: ‘If globalization, detraditionalisation and individualization [and, we would add, population aging] are analysed together, it becomes clear that your own life is an experimental life. Inherited recipes for living and role stereotypes fail to function’ (2000: 169). The rapidity of change renders us both natives of and immigrants to our own social worlds, with media scholars focused on the digital divide and the literacies required for a new media age and gerontologists investigating how older adults process the impact of cultural change over time. While media scholars are most interested in the uncertainties facing children and adolescents (which is understandable given the bottom-line orientation of media industries), those facing older adults are equally compelling. Westerhof’s aforementioned notion of ‘migrating in time’ (2010: 12) refers to the fact that older persons are living in a culture radically different from the one in which they grew up. He argues that this experience presents older adults with a new developmental task unique to 21st-century aging – ‘identifying with contemporary culture without losing one’s identification with one’s past’ (2010: 13). As with all developmental challenges, migrating in time can be stressful – the maintenance of self-identity is in question – and fandom plays an important role in anchoring identity as other forms of anchoring dismantle. Given this, we now turn to *self-narratives*, the resource identified by Westerhof as central to successful task completion in this 21st-century context. We explore the role of both media fandom and market constructions of older adults in self-narrativization, paying particular attention to the salience of *linked lives* and *role modeling* in media fans’ construction and maintenance of self-narratives over time.

### *Self-narrativization*

As noted earlier, in prior manuscripts on fandom and aging we acknowledged the centrality of autobiography and self/identity construction in contemporary fan scholarship (Harrington and Bielby, 2010a), and explored the specific psychological strategies through which self-narratives are constructed in long-term fan communities (Harrington and Bielby, 2010b). Among developmental psychologists, narrativization or storytelling is proposed to be ‘at the heart of both stability and change in the self’ (McLean et al., 2007: 262), with the self-narrative conceptualized as a ‘set of autobiographical experiences that, together with interpretations of those events, explain how a person came to be who he or she is and projects a sense of purpose and meaning into the future’ (Pasupathi and Mansour, 2006: 798). Evolving self-narratives function to connect past, present, and future selves, and thus enable successful migrations through time.

Here we are interested in how media fans’ reliance on *self-narratives* to address the liminality of 21st-century aging implicates *others* as well – thus providing an unexpectedly *collaborative* resource for negotiating migrating in time – and what this may imply for the future of fandom and the future of marketing. The individualization thesis proposed by numerous social theorists highlights the variability and flexibility of new life trajectories while simultaneously obscuring the fundamental sociality required to



negotiate those trajectories. Human development scholar Rick Settersten (2007b: 255) explains that for much of the 20th century, achieving *independence* was the mark of adulthood but today it is about achieving *interdependence*. Interdependence is intrinsic to the concept of participatory culture that is taken for granted among fan scholars and tribal marketers today, to the collective intelligence and networking skills required to achieve media literacy in a digital age, and to the overall shift toward consumption as a networked practice (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2006; we acknowledge that we are referring to a privileged subset of fans/consumers here). In turn, life course scholars believe that ‘an especially effective strategy’ that we can draw upon to compensate for the de-institutionalization of the normative 20th-century life course is ‘to build wider and stronger webs of relationships with other adults’ (Settersten, 2007b: 255). Fandom represents one such opportunity and the rapid spread and normalization of fandom over the past 20 years is visibilization of that strategy in action. Since today ‘we communicate through our fandoms’ (Gray et al., 2007: 5), through self-narrativization fans are thus able to leverage their fandom as a resource to negotiate the new terrain of aging and – for older adults – the new developmental challenge of migrating in time (Westerhof, 2010).

In a recent article outlining 10 reasons why the de-institutionalization of the life course should alter our approach to old-age policies, Settersten (2007a: 23) includes the point that ‘linked lives’ are central to understanding the protections and risks of old age. The concept of interdependent or linked lives ‘underscores not only the ways individuals influence one another but the ways that lives are lived in tandem’ (Moen, 2001: 101). The life events that any one person experiences are also experienced, though differently, by those in one’s relationship networks: parents, partners, children, friends, etc. (Elder, 1994: 6). As alluded to above in our mention of consumer mentoring, the importance of linked lives is also recognized by marketers and marketing scholars (using different terminology), who warn against a myopic focus on the level of the individual, since other people influence purchasing decisions and in many instances, ‘participants in such decisions are anything but homogeneous’ (Moschis and Mathur, 2007: 173). Assessing media fans’ self-narratives reveals the presence of perhaps unexpected (from both marketing and life course perspectives) relationship networks – not just the ‘real’ friends and family who help articulate and define who we are, and not just our off- and on-line fan contacts or our Facebook/MySpace/LinkedIn friends (or ‘friends’), but *fictional* texts, characters, and textual fragments that serve as anchors or throughlines to fans’ lives as they age – and to the actors, singers, musicians, and celebrities that construct and embody them over the long haul (Harrington and Brothers, 2010a). Fan scholars are well aware of the power that cultural objects have on self-narratives and emotional wellbeing, but neither marketing nor life course scholars have fully considered the *developmental* implications of living lives in tandem with fictional others. Consider the following quotes, the first from a long-term soap opera viewer, the second from actress Jacklyn Zeman, who has played the role of Bobbie Spencer on the US soap opera *General Hospital* (ABC) for more than three decades:

Soaps accompanied my real life as a stay at home mother, chronicled my years as a working adult, kept me company when I was alone, gave me something to bond with my mother, sisters, daughters, and daughter-in-laws over.... I heard my oldest son ... say that when he is home sick



he plays the ABC soaps in the background because it makes him feel safe, secure, and loved: just like when he was a child. (quoted in Harrington and Bielby, 2010b)

I like to think that playing Bobbie has opened my mind to ... a different way of thinking about people and circumstances and relationships that might not be Jackie's way of thinking, my way of thinking, but it's certainly valid.... Two people can be in exactly the same moment at exactly the same time and yet have a completely different take on what actually happened.... And playing Bobbie has made me so aware of that ... I feel like we've gone through life and we've gone through a lot of stuff together.... My experiences as Bobbie are just as important to me as my experiences as Jackie. (quoted in Harrington and Brothers, 2010a: 24)

For both long-term fan and long-term actor, the history of the self is intimately intertwined with the history of the soap opera, such that the fictional helps construct what it is the 'real' self *becomes*. While soaps are not unique in this regard, they are an interesting genre to examine as they provide the possibility of decades of linked lives between viewers, actors, and characters, with three related narratives (the fan's self-narrative, the actor/character's dual narrative, and the fictional community's narrative) unfolding in the same temporal framework. If self-narratives are crucial to older adults' successful negotiation of migrating in time, as Westerhof (2010) contends, we need to take seriously the potential role of fictional others in constructing those narratives, given the centrality of fan attachments today. As people's location in family/educational/employment structures becomes increasingly varied and thus offers fewer anchors for constructing and maintaining personal identities, fandom returns us those resources in terms of both ('real') *fan communities* and ('fictional') *fan/object relationships*. Gray et al. elaborate:

[There is an] inherent symbiosis between fandom and modernity.... [A]s much as fan objects are experienced in and through media texts, so are the very challenges to life in the twenty-first century ... war, ethnic conflicts, widening inequality, political and religious violence, and ecological disasters are to most of us, most of the time, experienced through the same patterns of mass mediation, and, crucially, often related to by the same mechanisms of emotionally involved reading as fan objects. (2007: 15, 10)

We would add population aging and de-institutionalization of the 20th-century life course to this list of fan-mediated experiences. In short, we propose that what is unmoored in part by *demographic* transitions – our specific contribution to the provocation raised by Gray and his colleagues – is re-moored via fandom.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to (and related to) linked lives, *age-based role models* are crucial to the formation of self-narratives across the life course and they reinvigorate questions of how older markets are constructed since, and as noted earlier, those constructions ultimately shape media content. For much of the 20th century in the West, role models were provided through shared cultural notions about the 'normal, expectable life' (Settersten, 1999: 86) and how it 'should' unfold. The institutionalized life course offered 'mental maps' that gave us a 'sense of what lies ahead' in our lives and allowed us 'a chance to prepare for those experiences' (1999: 86). Popular media aid(ed) this effort by offering representations of normatively appropriate (and inappropriate) age-based identities and activities against which to evaluate ourselves. Elsewhere we have discussed age norms

and role modeling within 20th-century adult media fandom, focusing on how aging fan objects serve as models for how to age well (or poorly; Harrington and Brothers, 2010a). Settersten emphasizes the gravity of this task for fashioning coherent self-narratives in the 21st century:

[I]n the absence of clear life scripts, one must ask what happens to the mental health of individuals when they cannot interpret their pasts or project their futures, when there is no shared framework for assessing themselves and others or within which to make plans and set goals. (2007b: 243)

Writing in a different analytic context, Nick Stevenson describes how media texts (here, David Bowie) may help aging fans negotiate migrating in time:

Bowie for the fans is representative of change and the passing of time.... Bowie is valued precisely because he can positively respond to change, and has done so in a way that is seen to be 'appropriate' for a man at his stage of life. He offers a model for how to grow old without shutting out new ideas and influences.... Bowie is valued as someone who could help you respond to change in your own life. (Stevenson, 2009: 86)

This quote speaks directly to Westerhof's (2010: 13) contention that older adults in the 21st century must learn to identify with contemporary culture without losing their identification with the past, points to the growing significance of media fan attachments to coping strategies for 21st century aging, and implicates media content providers (including media marketers) directly in those strategies.

Given that 'little about life today comes close to what prior generations have known' (Settersten, 2007a: 1), it becomes important to explore new ways of imaging aging – new role models for uncharted terrain. Gerontologists have long been concerned with how negative media images of age and aging perpetuate ageism and impact the subjective experience of growing older, concerns heightened by the demographic transitions under way. Marketers have had varied success over the past 30 years in moving past stereotypical depictions of older adults which portrayed them as cranky, isolated, unhealthy, and dependent (such as LifeCall's infamous 1989 slogan 'I've fallen and I can't get up!'). Moschis (2003) points to the 1980s/early 1990s as a trial-and-error period during which marketers – aware of aging boomers and the extent to which they remain moneyed – began updating those representations through images of active, engaged and happy elders. Still today, however, many companies remain cautious about how to sell products and messages to older adults,<sup>14</sup> which impacts images of aging throughout the media.

Newly visible to marketing efforts in the 2000s is the disconnect noted earlier between chronological, subjective, and ideal age, such that the older we become, the younger we feel, and the younger still we want to be (Barak, 2009). While from a marketing perspective this is a useful guide for selling to graying consumers – Moschis advises advertisers to hire spokesmodels who are chronologically younger than the target audience by 10 to 15 years (2007: 523), presumably hitting some mix between the subjective and the ideal – gerontologists find this disconnect troubling, a defensive reaction to ageist images and the decline narrative of aging still pervasive across media forms. Featherstone and Hepworth are cautiously optimistic that processes of globalization will render no single model of

aging dominant, including the ‘Westernized consumer culture image’ (2009: 143), but also remind us that media images of aging ‘cannot be easily detached from the politics and economics of aging’ (2009: 135). Various forms of media entertainment have always exposed teenagers to a wide variety of role models, allowing them to explore a range of possible selves in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. This variety is urgently needed by adults fashioning self-narratives in unfamiliar territory with no living role models to emulate (Furman, 1997: 101). This variety may also be unlikely to appear given the ongoing centrality of the youth market and the continuing reluctance to engage the older market (Moschis, 2003). As Turow (1997) points out, industry struggles about market constructions are ultimately struggles about which people in society matter and which do not, and how those struggles are resolved has direct implications for the media content delivered to them. We are still grappling to understand how and to what extent ‘old people matter’ in a 21st-century media landscape, but population aging demands that we do so.

In this section we have examined how new research findings on emotional maturation, as well as the new gerontological emphasis on self-narratives as the central resource for negotiating this new demographic landscape, may shape the future of fandom. While our goal in the prior section was to explore the *known* junctures between marketing and aging, and marketing and fandom, our goal in this section has been to explore *emergent* junctures between fandom and aging, and finally between fandom, aging, and marketing. As cautioned in the introduction, this has been a complicated journey with shifting foci and at times disparate evidence – necessary, we believe, to illuminate the intricacies of 21st-century media engagement in the context of global population aging. Below, we turn to implications of our argument for media scholars and media industries, calling for enhanced dialogue between life course, media, and marketing scholars.

## Conclusion

We have proposed in this manuscript that the new visibility and entrenchment of fandom today is associated not only with the broad range of economic, political, and cultural transformations routinely associated with contemporary social life (as argued by Gray et al., 2007), but also with *demographic* transformations that significantly impact media industries worldwide. This point is recognized by media scholars and media marketers in the context of childhood/adolescence but is overlooked in the context of adulthood/late-life. We echo our colleagues in emphasizing that we are in the *midst* of a transitional period – in understanding the implications of population aging and the dismantling of the 20th-century normative adulthood, in understanding its impact on the future of fandom, and in reconciling different scholarly and industry conversations (which may be very differently motivated) about these processes. Settersten offers a useful reminder to all involved that:

Virtually everything known about aging is based on cohorts born early in the 20th century... As a result, it is unclear whether and how much our current knowledge will apply to future cohorts whose historical experiences are dramatically different. (2007a: 22)

In turn, media scholars remind us that the speed of transformation renders our media landscape peopled by both natives and immigrants simultaneously, with the knowledges,

experiences, and expectations held by one group shaping those of the other. For example, Herring (2008) cautions that the 'rampant speculation' surrounding the generational digital divide may be misplaced, noting that: 'Neglected in most of this discourse about the Internet Generation and its transformative potential is the continued presence and influence of adults in the larger digital landscape inhabited by young people' (2008: 71). As such, even as we explore the future of media fandom we emphasize that the age-structuring of fandom in context of the institutionalized life course dominant in the 20th-century West continues to wield influence. Adult fans hold themselves and others accountable to age norms, they struggle to justify and maintain fan practices given normative life course restraints, they experience lingering shame and stigma surrounding fandom in ways unfamiliar to younger fans, and they struggle to make new meanings out of fan texts and fan pleasures given cognitive and bodily aging, and their own impending mortality (Harrington and Bielby, 2010a, 2010b; Harrington and Brothers, 2010a, 2010b). In short, the new landscape of adult media fandom is only beginning to emerge.

Given the reality of aging audiences, a key theme of our ongoing project on aging and fandom is the importance of bringing the scholarly discourses of gerontology, fan studies, and marketing studies into conversation with one another. Consider some key questions we did not fully address in the article. For example, how do we reconcile the marketing-based claim that 'the "youth" segment ... represent[s] the perfect example of a universal global common segment' (Barak, 2009: 8) with the life course-informed empirical finding that 'the experiences of today's young people ... vary enormously' (Lloyd, 2005: 3), and that rapid global changes have led to both greater heterogeneity *and* greater homogeneity among global youth (2005: 58)? Or, let's go back to the fanboy/fangirl assumptions and debates that continue to shape how media products are designed, marketed, and studied. What are the implications for the future of fandom that *gender* is central to the sequence and timing of life course transitions (that are undergoing significant revision), but that 'gender categorization becomes less central as an organizing principle among older people' (Silver, 2003: 381)? Or, how do we project the future of presumption and participatory culture given new findings on the role of cognitive functions in the operation of technological devices (Slegers et al., 2009) and the 'uncorrectable vision problems ... increasingly common with age' (Moschis and Mathur, 2007: 57)? This is not to say that all of the potential scholarly 'lessons' flow from gerontology to the rest of the academy. For example, life course scholar Dale Dannefer acknowledges that:

The producer–consumer relationship is consequential for the life course of all parties to the transaction, yet it is hidden from view in everyday social life, and has been largely ignored by life-course research. (Dannefer and Miklowski, 2006: 38)

A recent issue of *Journal of Communication* (2008, vol. 58, no. 4) was devoted to 'epistemological and interdisciplinary intersections' and explored the benefits of greater linkages between communications and a number of other fields, including anthropology, economics, political science, public health, social psychology, and sociology. We simply encourage adding gerontological and life course perspectives to that conversation, as well as a greater consideration of critical cultural and media studies approaches within life course research.

Finally, we return to Settersten's (2007a, 2007b) core claim that the new terrain of aging adds unique risks and opportunities to those identified by other scholars of late modernity. In this era of momentous and multiple transformations: 'Crafting a life of one's own, especially when it goes against the grain, is ... a difficult exercise' (Settersten, 2007b: 244). Fandom, of course, carries with it its own risks and opportunities – economic, relational, familial, affective – that may modify with age. 'One must also be open to experiences that are revisited repeatedly in every period of life ... even if the specific forms of those things, or one's responses to them, change over time' (Settersten, 2007b: 241). We agree that there is a deep-seated symbiosis between the practices and perspectives of being a fan and global modernity at large (Gray et al., 2007: 9), and demography partly accounts for that symbiosis. In the context of demographic projections, then, the time for studying the future of fandom is now.

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### Notes

- 1 The difference between a fan and a consumer is one of degree, not kind. A survey of 65 scholars concluded that fans can be distinguished from consumers on the basis of fans' heightened emotional, psychological and/or behavioral investment in media texts, their active engagement in the production and consumption of media texts (prosumption), the inherent sociality of fan vs. consumer communities, and regularity of consumption (Harrington and Bielby, 2007: 186). For our purposes, these basic distinctions are both analytically useful and linguistically practical, even as we explore the provocation suggested by Gray et al. (2007).
- 2 Despite overall population aging, then, scholarly and marketing interest in childhood and the adolescent-to-adult transition is not misplaced, as there is rapid growth in the population of people aged 10–24 in the developing world (Lloyd, 2005: 2).
- 3 For old-age policy implications see Settersten (2007a). For gender implications see Arber (2006). For family life transition implications see Harper (2006). Again, we do not mean to imply that all of these 'end of' predictions are accurate; see Kehily (2010), for example, on historically recurrent moral panics about the end of childhood.
- 4 We do not have space to do justice to all of the rapid social transformations taking place and their impact on media engagement. The Pew Research Center offers useful websites for tracking social trends (Social & Demographic Trends project at <http://pewsocialtrends.org>) and changes in media use (Internet & American Life Project at <http://www.pewinternet.org>). See also the US Census Bureau's 2010 Statistical Abstract (<http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/>).
- 5 Cynthia B. Lloyd's (2005) massive edited report represents a three-year effort by a panel of experts to analyze the transition to adulthood in developing nations. An important new research area for global policymakers is understanding the role of the media 'in forming and changing social norms, values, perceptions of opportunity, cultural identity, and goal aspirations' (Lloyd, 2005: 588).
- 6 Gerontologists use the term 'third age' to describe the post-retirement years 'in which people who are no longer confined by the labor market and are free from direct responsibility for children can pursue leisure interests, develop aspects of their personalities, and enjoy the fruits of later life' (Twigg, 2003: 145). The third age is associated with the 'self-fashioning' described by Giddens and others whereas the 'fourth age' refers to the later life phase

- characterized by declining health, diminishing social worlds, and approaching mortality. The new interest in elder consumers is clearly focused on the third age (Turow, 1997: 74).
- 7 Chronology-based market constructions lag behind the socio-historical construction of life stages themselves. For example, the concept of childhood was first formulated in the US in the early 1800s, the concept of adolescence in the late 1800s, a new understanding of 'old age' emerged in the early 1900s, and by the 1970s gerontologists distinguished the 'young old' from the 'old old' (Harevan, 1995).
  - 8 Physical and cognitive changes gradually erase older adults from most marketing campaigns save for products (such as pharmaceuticals) directly addressing those changes. The historical marginalization of older adults by media marketers reflects assumptions that they have little discretionary income, are too brand-loyal, are low-volume consumers, are easier to target than younger viewers, and are un-hip by definition, thus negatively impacting a company's or brand's reputation (Turow, 1997: 74–7). Space limitations prevent us from discussing the growing evidence to the contrary. We return to the media representation of older adults in our discussion of role modeling below.
  - 9 'Healthy indulgers' are those who are financially well off and actively engaged in leisure pursuits (current boomers best fit this segment); 'healthy hermits' are socially withdrawn but healthy, preoccupied with physical and financial independence, and internalize many of their frailties; 'ailing outgoers' include those who remain active and self-confident despite adverse life experiences, are concerned with daily tasks, and tend to deny 'old age'; and 'frail recluses' include those with chronic ailments, who are socially/physically isolated, and tend to think of themselves as 'old' (Moschis et al., 1997).
  - 10 While this claim may seem counter-intuitive, given our association of fandom with pleasure, anyone who has researched (or been a member of) fan communities is well aware of the conflicts in fandom.
  - 11 See Tootelian and Varshney's (2010) article about the importance of the grandparent market because it serves as an *entrée* into the more widely desired grandchildren's market. While the supposed self-fulfillment orientation of the elder (boomer) market has received attention from media marketers, the importance of mentoring to adult development (i.e. how 'consumer socialization' addresses developmental needs at *both* ends of the life cycle) has received less consideration.
  - 12 As noted earlier, media scholars (as well as the general public) tend to over-associate fandom with adolescence and the adolescent-to-adult transition (Hills, 2005).
  - 13 We do not mean to suggest that the affective resources gained through fandom literally *replace* the economic, material or political needs of older persons; rather, we aim to highlight the complexity of intertwined resources in increasingly globalized and mediated societies and lives.
  - 14 Current approaches are clearly dissatisfying to older adults themselves: 'up to 78 per cent of Americans age 55 and over are not happy with the products and services available to them' (Moschis, 2003: 519).

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