

Role Transitions in Older Adults: A Marketing Opportunity

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ABSTRACT

Consumers act out roles throughout their lives. Marketers assist in this role playing by providing the wardrobes, props, and sets in the form of products and services. They also help people understand acceptable role behavior by portraying roles in their communication programs. Consumers assume new roles as they age. This article is designed to enhance understanding of the often-ignored roles that accompany aging and provides examples of and suggestions for effective marketing for these role transitions.

"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players," wrote William Shakespeare. It has long been realized by marketers that consumers act out roles, use props, and wear costumes to carry out scenes in various settings, and speak special languages with cast members (Schewe, 1973). Marketers provide props and costumes with the products they offer. They depict role playing in scenes portrayed in advertising and other communication forms showing people using language appropriate to social positions. In doing so, marketers help consumers learn the appropriate behaviors of the various roles they play out—parent, spouse, teacher, manager, and so on. The major roles that marketers have focused on are youth and family oriented. Yet the evol-

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ing American demographic landscape suggests that marketers should attend to roles enacted in older years.

The Target Market—An Aging Population

The composition of the American marketplace is being forevermore redefined by three key forces (Age Wave Inc., 1989). First, there is the senior boom. Americans are living longer than ever before. In the year 1900, life expectancy was 47 years; today it has rocketed to 75 years. There are now 30 million people in the 65-plus age bracket, a full 12% of the American population. This will continue to grow; by 2050 it is expected that there will be 67 million people in this segment.

A second factor shaping America is the parallel phenomenon called the *birth dearth*. The fertility rate is declining, shrinking the younger segments of the marketplace. It is estimated that 20% of the baby boomers have no children at all, and still another 25% will have only one child. There are presently more people over age 65 than there are teenagers!

The third factor is the aging of the baby boomers, those 76 million persons born between 1946 and 1964. In the next 10 years, the number of middle-aged (35–54 years) will swell by 28% to 81 million. This group earns and spends 30% more than people of other ages. As this group enters its 50s, many will have children already gone from or soon leaving the home, debts incurred for children's schooling paid off, and higher per capita disposable income than any younger market segment. As the 20th century ends, these baby boomers will move into the ranks of those aged 65 plus. Marketers must not only be aware of these demographic changes, but must also strive to understand the behavioral underpinnings that shape the desires of this burgeoning aged marketplace. Understanding roles that accompany aging can increase marketing effectiveness.

ROLE THEORY AND ROLE TRANSITIONS

The focus of role playing is role enactment, the actual performance of a role (Goffman, 1959). Role enactment is the result of a number of factors. Role expectations are the rights and privileges and duties and responsibilities that define the boundaries of acceptable behavior for a role. These expectations are not rigidly defined, but rather provide limits within which individuals may act. Roles are enacted before observers called the audience. Role location reflects the need for individuals to locate themselves within the social structure and select the appropriate role for the situation. Once the location of the social position has been obtained, some potentially more restrictive constraints are often imposed as the specifics of the situation are perceived. These

restraints, called role demands, reflect the requirement for a specific role enactment. Role skills are the physical and psychological characteristics possessed by individuals that result in effective and convincing role enactment—aptitude, experience, and training, for instance. Self-role congruence exists when the demands of the role are consistent with the self-characteristics of the individuals playing the roles. Role enactment generally is more appropriate when self-characteristics coincide with role expectations. Role conflict develops when players are required to play out two or more roles that are incompatible with each other. Finally, role ambiguity results when the expectations and demands of a role are not clear to the player.

Roles are overt social conduct. They are played out in the presence of others; they do not reflect the behavior of isolated individuals. Individuals are forced into social situations where they must choose among alternative roles and where multiple role obligations create anxiety (conflict) for the performer. For example, middle-aged adults may concurrently play out the roles of parent to their children, child to their parents, and spouse to their spouse. People also transfer from one role to another, from wife to mother, for example. Over his or her lifetime, an individual makes transitions among roles. The roles of adolescence melt into the roles of parent, spouse, and worker. With aging, the roles of empty nester, widow(er), and retiree are added.

Roles are learned; we are not born with an instinctive understanding of how to behave. People look to those around them to understand the socially expected role enactment. Other role portrayals such as those seen in movies, television programs, and commercials provide evidence of acceptable and unacceptable role behavior. But looking to these sources to understand role expectations is much easier for younger persons than older ones. Research has found substantial underrepresentation of older people (compared to their representation in the population) in television programs (Arnoff, 1974; Northcott, 1975), television commercials (Swayne & Greco, 1987), and magazine advertising (Gantz, Gartenberg, & Rainbow, 1980; Langmeyer, 1983; Ursic, Ursic, & Ursic, 1986). This is especially true for women (Gantz, Gartenberg, & Rainbow, 1980; Harris & Feinberg, 1977). Furthermore, the stereotyping of older persons in these media is most often in minor (Swayne & Greco, 1987) and derogatory (Harris & Feinberg, 1977) roles. Older people are rarely depicted as romantically involved, engaged in positive physical activity, or demonstrating good health. What may be even more alarming is that older people do not view such negative portrayals as inappropriate (Kubey, 1980; Schreiber & Boyd, 1980). Although older consumers have been found generally to complain less than other age groups (Bernhardt, 1981), their acceptance of a less-than-positive self-portrayal in roles could have a subconscious negative impact on their self-perception.

Marketers need to understand the full range of roles that accompany

aging and to portray them in an accurate and positive manner. Just as adolescents shape their adult role playing by modeling on perceived adult role behavior, older consumers need sources for understanding what could be their role behavior. With fewer external informational cues to direct socially acceptable role playing, older people are looking for more information on how to enact their roles. This article explores the gamut of roles that older adults act out as they age. Marketers cannot only properly depict roles with their products and in their promotions, but can also help shape the role enactments of older people.

ROLES IN LATER LIFE

The types of roles to be played and the timing of their portrayal can vary with generations. For instance, with the increased labor force participation of women, the spinster role has all but disappeared. Divorce has spawned an array of single-parent and single-grandparent households. And the forming of new postretirement jobs is still another newly formed role. Furthermore, the linear life plan where time-defined sequences of role enactments were the rule has given way to a new cyclical life cycle (Dychtwald, 1989). It used to be that the period of youth was dedicated to education and job preparation, early adulthood to parenthood and career formation, and late adulthood to retirement. This was the linear life cycle. It was as if growth periods in life took place in the first half of life and the second half was relegated to decline. Now people are moving in and out of roles and back into old roles. People take sabbaticals from their careers and go back to school to reeducate themselves. Or once formal retirement comes, new careers are entered. Leisure-time roles that used to be relegated to retirement are ongoing throughout life. No longer can our lives be mapped out as a simple series of predictable roles. Let us look at some of the roles that come as people age from their middle years.

The Empty Nest Roles

The empty nest identifies the stage in the family life cycle when the last child departs from the parental home; it typically happens when the parents are in their late forties or early fifties. This event has almost become a rite of passage in one's life along with births, weddings, and deaths. This departure marks the end of day-to-day child-rearing role demands and results in a return to the couple-based household. One might easily assume that this event would be quite stressful, especially for mothers, because it results in giving up high-involvement responsibilities and involves a loss of a major life role. Yet research has shown the departure to be a rather minor event with little social adjustment required (Burr, 1970; Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Rollins &

Feldman, 1970). In fact, the years just before the departure of children are seen as most stressful for a married couple.

Marital satisfaction is a U-shaped phenomenon. Couples are happiest at the newly married and new parents stages and again at the post-parental and aging family stages (Rollins & Feldman, 1970). This is particularly true for women and is found to be more a function of stage in family life cycle than age. Levels of marital satisfaction are lowest in the *launching stage* which just precedes the departure of the last child. The high levels of satisfaction in the empty nest stage come from the personal freedom that is rediscovered, the feelings of accomplishment from successfully propelling children into their own social positions, and from the new excitement of developing a social relationship with an adult child. And because the departure of the last child is expected well in advance of the event, parents anticipate the change and prepare for it cognitively and socially. Furthermore, the empty nest transition is not the termination of a relationship but rather the alteration of an existing one. All these forces make this role transition less stressful than others experienced in one's life.

There are some qualifications worth noting, however. Not all couples find this role transition easy. Women are affected more than men by the last child leaving. The later in life this event occurs, the more negative the event is found to be. When parenting is the focal role in one's life, the empty nest transition results in a greater sense of loss.

Marketers have focused little direct attention on this stage in role transitions. The opportunities to serve people in this role are without bounds. For instance, the 55–65 age group of this role generally just precedes has the highest per capita income of all age groups—26% greater than the national average. Discretionary income, the marketer's key to purchasing, is nearly twice that of the under-35 age group so frequently courted by marketers. The empty nesters, for instance, focus more of their buying more on services than things. They crave “experiences” over tangible goods (Wolfe, 1990). Travel, for example, expands. Because of this, Greyhound, Amtrak, and even rental car companies offer special savings to lure these travelers. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) targets older people for its services at age 50. Sears, Roebuck, and Co. recently focused on the buying needs of the 55-plus market with its Mature Outlook Club. This division offers free home appraisals through Coldwell Banker, stock and bond portfolio analysis from Dean Witter Reynolds, and discounted insurance through Allstate.

The Caregiver Role

Middle-aged and older people today can expect to spend more time caring for parents than they do their children. Called “the sandwich generation,” many men and women are caught in the middle of role

responsibilities of child care and parent care. Five forces shape this increasingly critical role. People are living longer than ever before, with the over-85 age group being the fastest-growing segment of the population. Today there are more living grandparents per family than children. Second, the incidence of chronic disease keeps older people living in a weakened state for a longer period of time. Third, while the need for caregivers is increasing, the number of possible caregivers is decreasing. At the turn of the century, there were 13.6 adults aged 18 to 64 for each person 65 or over; now there are only 4.8 for each 65 plus individual. Fourth, there is a greater incidence of widows who, being alone, need help to sustain independent living. And finally, there has been a dramatic surge of women of caregiving age into the workforce, resulting in a reduced supply of family support systems for day-to-day care (Dychtwald, 1989).

In the U.S., it is expected that 80% of older people will get personal care from their families. This role has been predominantly a woman's role. It is estimated that 90% of caregivers are women with an average age of 57. More than one-third of caregivers are aged 65 or above. The responsibilities that surround the caring for aging and often infirm relatives are frequently in conflict with one's other roles such as spouse and parent. The caregiver role is often filled with emotional and financial burdens. It often demands personal skills to cope with role strain and stress. Extending the caregiving role to external organizations often creates better care than when adult children take on this role.

With nearly one-third of all working adults now accepting some responsibility for older relatives, adult day care centers are sprouting up as alternatives to costly nursing homes. In 1988, more than 1500 such centers catered to the relatively healthy clients, usually from 9 to 5, but with flexible hours to accommodate working schedules. These operations provide physical and mental stimulation with crafts, mild aerobic exercises, and group discussions on topics of interest. At a cost estimated by The National Council of the Aging to be \$27 to \$31 per day, they offer the caregiving role at a cost much below the average \$80 per diem expense of a medical center or an average \$79 per day cost of a nursing home. VIP Companion Care Co., a franchise offering live-in, full-time, and part-time companion/sitters also gives financial services and counseling to caregiving family members in addition to healthcare services to older people. The price is \$8 to \$9 per hour.

Many corporations are developing internal products and taking on the role responsibilities of the caregiving role. Remington Products, Inc. of Bridgeport, Connecticut, funds "respite care" programs that give its employees a break from caregiving activities on weekends and at night by paying half the cost of temporary care for aged relatives. IBM offers a national eldercare program as an employee benefit. Through a national companywide network, employees can arrange for home assistance for parents in different parts of the country. Travelers Corporation,

the insurance company, holds a caregiving informational fair for its employees, and PepsiCo provides a telephone hotline as well as a community resource book for caregivers needing information on available resources. Such programs suggest a myriad of commercial and socially responsible opportunities for firms external to these companies.

The Retirement Role

Often thought of as an event occurring at a specified age (sometimes mandated and most frequently so at age 65), retirement is really defined by the ending of one's occupational career. Even though women have taken on more of a role in the workforce, retirement today still tends to focus on dramatic changes for men. The future will require adjustments as women also retire in greater numbers (Szinovacz, 1982). Retirement no longer can be equated with lack of employment; in fact, many retirees take on part-time jobs or new full-time careers while receiving a retirement pension. Retirement has been characterized as a "roleless role" because it lacks well-defined role expectations. The major rights that accompany retirement are economic support without a job and without social disapproval as well as individual management of personal time. Responsibilities focus on unassisted management of personal lives and making appropriate lifestyle decisions. More flexible and informal than other roles, advancement into retirement does constitute a major social role transition.

Work provides a source of income. But it can also function as a life routine that structures time usage, as a key source of personal identity and status, as a source of meaningful experience which provides a sense of accomplishment, an expression of creativity, and a service to society. It can also offer a context for social interaction. To the extent that individuals find these rewards no longer available after retirement, they experience a sense of loss.

In what sociologists call traditional households, husbands derived great satisfaction from their jobs, and nonemployment-seeking wives found satisfaction from social relationships built up through social networking. When such husbands retired, they experienced significant stress from detachment from their deeply rooted work roles. Wives found retirement less of an adjustment. Upon retirement, husbands in these families tended to take on more internal household roles, and wives found themselves continuing with their in-place social networks, therein experiencing less social detachment (Foner, 1986).

In more modern households, masculine and feminine roles tend to disappear after age 60 (Romer, 1981). As they age, spouses become less concerned with the give and take of their relationship and take on a more egalitarian sharing of everyday household tasks earlier than in traditional households (Schafer & Keith, 1981). Marital role load, the competing demands on a spouse's time, energy, and resources, dimin-

ishes in preretirement and retirement stages. Hence, more joint decision making occurs at this time, and it happens at a more leisurely pace (Foxman & Burns, 1987). The division of housekeeping chores is negotiated. The extent to which responsibilities are made equal makes a smoother transition from what once were separate domains. Not all households maintain separate task spheres. The more traditional the household in its gender-based division of labor, the less likely the couple is to negotiate change or express concern with inequities. When less communication exists and the level of education is lower, a greater degree of role separation will exist (Lopata, 1973).

Many organizations are helping employees "rehearse" for role changes that come with retirement. Fourteen percent of American companies have instituted sabbaticals to allow employees "practice" for retirement. Other companies phase in retirement by blurring the lines between work and retirement. They promote opportunities for employees to build new outside social relationships and start new personal activities. Others provide sequences of part-time, then full-time employment to ease workers into new roles. Aerospace Corporation in California offers its managers a list of alternatives as they approach retirement—reduced workloads of 20 to 40 hours a week, part-time employment, and unpaid leaves of absence. Some companies are providing retraining for employees to help them reengage after their first retirement. IBM, for instance, has provided as much as \$5000 in tuition in the three years prior to and two years after retirement.

Most attention given by marketers to retirement roles have focused on providing activities to take up their new-found leisure time. For example, travelers aged 62 and older have been offered by numerous carriers coupon books that let them fly round-trip anywhere in the continental U.S. for roughly \$235, a big break over most discount airfares. Hilton has offered travelers 65 and over a one-year pass for accommodations for \$999. With retirees' interest in eating away from home, many family restaurant chains offer Early Bird Specials to bring in older customers at usually slack times. Real estate developers offer retirement communities where residents can enjoy community activities and social interactions. Marriott Corp. has targeted retired Army officers and their wives for its new flagship retirement community project just outside Washington, D.C. Military personnel, they figure, are people who plan ahead, have much in common, and know how to put down roots after a move.

Beyond Retirement: Career, Volunteering, and Education Roles

More people today are viewing retirement as an opportunity to begin another career. A recent study of older workers completed by the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP) found productivity not declining with age, attendance records equal or better than other age

groups, fewer injuries per person, and greater commitment to jobs (Rosenblum, 1989). Employers, too, are recognizing the value of older workers. Travelers Corporation again has established a Retirees' Job Bank with more than 750 retirees from Travelers and other insurance companies using their experience in part-time positions as consultants. McDonald's employs retired people as hosts and hostesses; it finds they appeal to kids and attract other elderly persons.

Little research on return-to-work roles has been done. Available data suggest that over 50% of those who return to work do so within the first year of retirement (George, 1980). Lower- and higher-socioeconomic status retirees are the most likely to return. Lower-status people do so for economic reasons while upper-status persons do so because of the noneconomic benefits of a job noted earlier. Clearly a return to work reduces the stresses associated with retirement and promotes a meaningful self-definition.

An alternative to working to achieve a meaningful role is serving others through volunteering. According to an AARP study, 30% of Americans over age 55 do some volunteer work. It helps them make new social contacts, remain active, play out a sense of duty, and gain a sense of satisfaction with themselves. The role skills demanded of volunteers are knowledge, energy, and resources (Dychtwald, 1989). Highlighting knowledge, the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) is a network of over 12,000 volunteer retirees who offer advice and experience to younger entrepreneurs. Offering time as well as energy, retired volunteers distribute thousands of "Meals on Wheels" to homebound elders. And many successful retirees give back some of their financial gains in the form of donations. Many marketing opportunities emerge from such role enactment. Organized elders can provide child care, professional counseling, community fund raising—the list of possibilities is virtually endless.

The cyclical life cycle includes a commitment to lifelong learning. More elders are rediscovering the role of student. Harvard offers its Institute for Learning in Retirement with both older professors and students. In St. Petersburg, Florida, Eckerd College's Academy of Senior Professionals, a group of over 120 retirees, provide advice and counsel to the 1200 young liberal arts students. Amherst, Brown, and 11 other highly selective New England colleges have formed the Consortium for the Education of Non-Traditional Students (CENTS) to attract older students.

The back-to-school role of older people has its own unique role demands and skills that need accommodation by educational institutions. Certainly the instructional facilities need to attend to the physical comforts of older people. The traditional, authoritarian role of the teacher must soften to accommodate older students' desire for group interaction. Learning materials need modification to include audio and video cassettes with a lessened reliance on printed materials; those printed ma-

terials used need larger print. Course scheduling and location should accommodate lifestyle patterns of older people. Conducting seminars in community centers can compensate for transportation difficulties (Dychtwald, 1989).

The educational role can be played in new learning environments. Elderhostel, the self-supporting, nonprofit program based in Boston, provides just such an example. Each year thousands of students over the age of 60 travel to a college campus, retreat, or other location—even abroad—and take a wide range of college courses. They live in dormitories and eat in campus dining halls; they thrive on the social and intellectual stimulation. In its first year, 1975, Elderhostel was held at 5 locations and served 220 students. In 1988, course enrollments had grown to 170,000 at 1000 sites in 37 countries.

The Grandparent Role

Now that grandparents are healthier, more active, and better educated, the role of grandparenting has taken on new dimensions. It no longer signals the proximity of death. The role enactment of grandparenting has been categorized into three major styles (Neugarten & Weinstein, 1964). Grandparents must locate the appropriate role for them. The *formal* role involves a clear distinction between parenting and grandparenting. Although an active interest in the grandchildren is maintained, the grandparents limit their behavioral involvement and do not intrude on the role of the parent. In the *distant* role, grandparents have low levels of involvement with their grandchildren. Interactions are quick and highly structured. Informality and shared leisure activities between grandparents and grandchildren are the norm with the *fun-seeking*, or *companionate*, role. Grandparents become good pals to their grandchildren in this, the most common, grandparenting role.

The grandparenting role can encompass many different duties. Grandparents can be role models for grandchildren, be teachers, be problem-solvers, offer selfless love, and even provide a place of refuge for troubled grandchildren. In some cases, grandparents even become surrogate parents and take on major child-rearing responsibilities. But understanding the role expectations, demands, and skills required is not always easy.

Grandparenting today is more flexible, less restricting than in past generations. Yet role conflict does exist as the sense of independence and self-satisfaction that accompanies empty nesting comes in conflict with feelings of family obligations and a desire for good relations with children. Educational courses, grandparenting advice books, even forms of therapy can help resolve these difficulties.

In this role, grandparents become an important market. Grandparents buy 25% of all toys, especially the most expensive ones. Mattel markets a Grandma and Grandpa doll to interact with its ever-popular

Ken and Barbie. At Saks Fifth Avenue in Palm Springs, California, the children's section is known as "the grandmothers' boutique," and prestigious F.A.O. Schwartz hires grandparents as salesclerks to work in its "Grandparents' Boutique." Grandtravel offers educational tours for grandparents and grandchildren to a range of locations—from Washington, DC, to Kenya—that include scheduled private time for grandparents to spend with grandchildren.

The Widowhood Role

Between 1950 and 1980, life expectancy at birth increased 5.5 years. But this increase was not uniform across both genders; life expectancy for women grew 6.3 years, and for men it increased 4.4 years. In 1985, men could expect to live 71.2 years and women could expect 78.2 years. As a result of these differences, there are presently five widows for every widower. Of women over 65, 50% are widows. And after the age of 65, the rate of remarriage is eight times greater for men than women. Clearly, the death of a spouse, a major shift in roles, causes more adjustment for women than men.

The major role expectations are substantial: to learn to live independently, to absorb the tasks of the deceased spouse, and to socially adjust to a new identity. Widowhood has also been viewed as a role loss rather than a new role since the role expectations of being a spouse are lost. Furthermore, the widow is left with few attainable substitute roles.

Death of a spouse is highly stressful and disruptive. The immediate period following the spouse's death is characterized by grief, or bereavement. Grief follows a rather identifiable sequence of stages—numbness, pining, yearning, and then depression—but these states eventually disappear as emotional upheaval becomes less severe and less frequent. The grieving process varies in intensity and length depending on the individual. The mourning period is always present in some form, no matter what the quality of the marriage had been. During the bereavement stage, spouses often feel anger at being left to cope with the role demands of the deceased and/or guilt for the manner in which they treated the spouse. Although these feelings are more short term, the long-term result of widowhood is loneliness (Kubler-Ross, 1969). In addition to the husband-wife relationship features lost—companionship, someone to love, someone to structure and organize time, a source of status and lifestyle, and task completion, widows also face disruption in their couple-based social relationships. These changes all contribute to the feeling of loneliness.

Successful adjustment to widowhood depends on a number of factors. Younger widows exhibit a lesser sense of well-being than older widows—yet they are more likely to remarry, which somewhat counters

this more dramatic sense of loss. Men have a much more difficult time coping with death of a spouse. Having sufficient income is definitely associated with better adjustment to widowhood, as is having more education. Although special social support networks—the audience—typically arise to help the spouse cope with the loss, their assistance is viewed with ambivalence as the widow quickly seeks a sense of independence.

Three types of widows have been identified (Lopata, 1973). The *modern* widow is characterized by a period of intense grief and moderate individual disorientation. These modern widows, however, adjust over time to their new identity, gain a sense of independence, and involve themselves in society again. The *traditional* widow finds the loss to shape little change in lifestyle or identity. These women continue to pursue their usual activities. Those widows, like the modern type, who had husband/wife relationships that were highly based on being a couple exhibit more difficulty with adjustment than those, such as the traditionals, where each spouse possessed more of their own separate identity, activities, and social network. With the latter type, self-role congruence helps ease the transition to a new independent identity. With the traditional type, self-role congruence helps ease the transition to a new independent identity. The final widow model, the *social isolate*, exhibits unsuccessful adjustment. Typically from a lower socioeconomic position, this widow lacks the financial, social, and educational resources to regroup and effectively reengage in society.

This role has been particularly neglected by marketers, most likely because of the sadness associated with it. Yet the role offers many opportunities for supplying satisfaction. The tasks of the deceased spouse must be undertaken. Women are less likely than men to have bought insurance, maintained cars, and purchased financial services. The formation of their new identity can be helped by positive role portrayal in promotional pieces. We are now seeing successful, active, healthy single women in a number of television programs—“The Golden Girls” and “Murder She Wrote” are two examples. Much more can be done to facilitate role adaptation and role enactment, however. Many personal and at-home services such as housecleaning, yard work, and home repair present particular opportunities, for example.

The Dating, Cohabitation, and Remarriage Roles

Some of the stresses of widowhood reflect concerns about whether to date, when to start dating, and whether to remarry. Once the decision to date has been made, older people face the same enthusiasm and anxieties as younger people (Bulcroft & O'Connor-Roden, 1986). The

dating role enactment involves the typical sense of anticipation, an opportunity for dressing up, and even flirtatious behavior. Dating behavior, however, tends to be more varied—opera, camping, and weekend holidays in addition to movies and pizza—than in younger years, with the pace of the relationship considerably accelerated. Older people do not get into the game-playing behavior that younger counterparts do. Contrary to popular opinion, sexual drives are very much alive. While sexual behavior is involved, the emphasis, however, turns more toward physical closeness—hugging, touching, and kissing.

Dating in older age presents role ambiguity and conflict. Determining appropriate dating behavior is not easy; the dating role was enacted many years before and those skills have gone without practice. Conflict arises as the role expectations for romantic and sexual behavior demanded in earlier ages are different than those for modern adults. The thought of shocking one's children often causes stress. Often older couples feel the need to hide the intimate side of their relationship for fear of social disapproval. In fact, adult children are very supportive of their parents' dating activity (Bulcroft & O'Connor-Roden, 1986).

Marketing opportunities to serve the new dating role abound—social clubs, dances, nightclubs, dating services, and romantic hide-aways, to name a few. Club Med, with a client median age close to 40 years, is redefining its activities in favor of the older population. A Florida television station offers a dating service for older people with suggestions of a happy remarriage. Ads feature a gray-haired man driving home to his loving wife in an electric golf cart.

More often than in previous generations we find dating leads to cohabitation instead of marriage. There is a reluctance to marry among many older adults. There is no family-building reason. With age comes a strong desire for the feeling of freedom and independence. And the possibility of deteriorating health can cause undesirable role demands in anticipation of nursing another spouse through an illness. Cohabiting avoids the estate planning associated with insuring one's children the benefits of an inheritance. Finally, there is the increasing acceptance of singlehood in today's society.

The rate of remarriage is low for all individuals over 65—but it is particularly low for women. The desire to remarry is much greater in women widowed at younger ages and with a strong couple orientation in their previous marriage. Those who remarry indicate a desire to have a companion and to avoid becoming dependent on their children (McKain, 1969). The desire for companionship is clearly the critical motivating factor. Successful remarriages are found when the individuals had been long time acquaintances, shared interests, had well-adjusted earlier marriages, possessed adequate financial resources, had their children's approval, and put the new spouse's desires above those of the children (McKain, 1969).

CONCLUSION

As the population, and especially the baby boom cohort ages, many facets of aging—physiological changes, cognitive capabilities, interpersonal relationships, as well as role enactment—will shape marketplace behavior to a greater extent. Aging will be viewed less often as a negative experience. This will demand that marketers shift their focus away from its present preoccupation with youth to older citizens. Knowledge of the transitional roles one acquires with aging can improve marketers' activities.

Furthermore, emerging older generations will be offered a wider variety of roles than in the past. "Older persons upon retirement will be deciding whether or not to invest greater time and energy in family roles, recreation and leisure roles, volunteer roles, educational roles, political roles, or perhaps a second career" (Cox, 1990). Marketing effectiveness will come from a clear understanding of the roles that make up the fabric of older adult life.

Marketers can help make aging easier by positive portrayal of role changes that occur in later years. Consumers and society in general, bombarded by marketing communications, not the least of which is advertising, find their behavior shaped as well as mirrored by marketers. Providing quality products and services to help older consumers fulfill new roles and educating aging consumers about proper role expectations will only contribute to greater satisfaction for our aging population.

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