Brand Communities and Well-being: Learning to Age in a Red Hat

Emily Marie Moscato

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Business, Marketing

Julie L. Ozanne, Chair
Jane E. Machin
Kent Nakamoto
Kimberlee Weaver

April 29, 2014
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: older consumers, play, costuming, social support

Brand Communities and Well-being: Learning to Age in a Red Hat

Emily Marie Moscato

Abstract

The older female segment plays a critical role in society's fabric, as women past retirement volunteer a significant amount in their communities and provide essential caregiving to family members and friends. Moreover, older females outnumber older males and with the baby boomer population aging over 65, this segment is becoming more influential. Yet there is surprisingly little marketing research that focuses on this older female segment, their lived experiences, and their well-being. Working within the tradition of consumer culture theory, this project is an ethnographic exploration of the Red Hat Society (RHS), a brand community which focuses on celebrating older women. This research adds to the theoretical understanding of older female consumers by exploring how older women negotiate the meaning of aging, gender, and identity. Extending on brand community literature, I suggest how the RHS manages to create a supportive, "safe space" in which members are able to engage play and learning. Play performances, enacted in through costuming and other rituals within the brand community, are extended beyond the bounds of this "safe space" to influence the identities and well-being of these women.

Acknowledgments

Firstly, thank you to my advisor Julie Ozanne for her constant support, critique, humor, mentoring, and supplies of coffee during my entire PhD career. I could never ask for a better advisor.

To my committee members, Kimberlee Weaver, Kent Nakamoto, and Jane Machin, for their feedback and encouragement throughout this process.

To Red Hat Society for their help and support, especially Debra Granich and the rest of Hatquarters. To the Red Hat members I had the privilege to meet during my fieldwork, especially those wonderful women I was fortunate to meet before their passing.

To my parents, Susan and Louis Moscato (M&D), I could not have done this without you.

To my amazing friends and rest of my family for their love and support. And special thanks to my cheerleader, Thierry Platini, for remaining positive throughout my dissertation.

To my former officemates Anne Hambey, Derick Davis, Meghan Pierce, and Ashley Eliasoph, thank you for putting up me. Thanks to Nora Moran and Rebecca Rabino for being additional sounding boards.

Lastly, even though I know she cannot read this, I am indebted to my dog Nikkei for being my companion and reminding me, through her gentle napping under my desk, to keep things in perspective.

Photos by author, 2014.

Table of Contents

List of tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

The challenges and opportunities that accompany the aging population are of particular interest to governments, economists, healthcare providers, marketers, and others for more than a decade. In 2011, the first baby boomers turned 65 years old. By the end of this decade, the global population of people age 65 and over will outnumber children under the age of five for the first time in history. Worldwide the 65 years old and over population is expected to grow by 160% from 2008 to 2040 (Kinsella and He 2009). In the United States, nearly one in five citizens will be age 65 or over by 2030, which is up from 13% in 2010 (Vincent and Velkoff 2010). The majority of these individuals will retire in their middle to late 60s and longer average lifespans indicate that they will live 20 years beyond their retirement (Pettigrew and Moschis 2012).

Along with the growth of this segment, the baby boomers (those currently aged 50-68 in 2014) have greater prosperity than any other segment. By 2017, boomers are forecasted to control 70 percent of the disposable income in the United States. Within the next 18 years, they stand to inherit $15 trillion (Brady and Hubbell 2012). While social security payments will account for 55% of their annual income, the average net worth of households headed by someone in the 65 and over age group is 47 times that of households headed by the 35 or younger age group—$170,494 versus $3,662 (Taylor et al. 2011). Scholarly consumer behavior and marketing research on older consumers exists, yet research focuses primarily on how this group processes information and makes decisions (e.g Drolet, Schwarz, and Yoon 2010). These studies

are typically experimental or cross-sectional (for a few notable exceptions, see Barnhart and Peñaloza 2013; Schau, Gilly, and Wolfinbarger 2009a; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000).

Little academic marketing research focuses specifically on older women. The female population in the United States will continue to outnumber the male population because of lower mortality rates and longer life expectancies (Kochanek et al. 2011). Although the gap between sex ratios is predicted to narrow, in 2050 women are projected to comprise 55% of the 65 years and over population and 61% of the 85 years and over population (Vincent and Velkoff 2010). As the size and net worth of the older population grows, older women become an especially attractive target market since women in the United States are generally found to influence 80% of all buying decisions (Brown and Osborne 2006). Moreover, the older female segment plays an important role in society's fabric. Women past retirement spend a considerable amount of time volunteering in their communities and are a major source of caregiving to aging family members and friends (Erlinghagen and Hank 2006; National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP 2009). Yet older women also face distinctive challenges and adjustments because of their gender. The stigmas of aging—unattractiveness, frailty, and dependency—are often amplified by gender expectations for women (Cruikshank 2009). For instance, appearance is traditionally a source of cultural capital for women and, thus, women are judged harshly as their "looks fade." Older women struggle to possess positive self-evaluations in a society that equates beauty with youth and thinness (Calasanti and Slevin 2001; Hurd 2000). Yet there are ways that older women resist old age stereotypes and stigmas determined to reshape social dictates of old age (Cruikshank 2009).

Working within the tradition of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) (Arnould and Thompson 2005), this research explores how older women negotiate the meaning of aging and

society's expectations. This research seeks to add to the theoretical domains of marketplace cultures by investigating the role a brand community plays in shaping how members reappraise their identities and experiences in light of aging and female stereotypes. Insights gained from this investigation are intended to enhance the understanding of older female consumers, extend theory on how brand communities help consumers negotiate negative social identities, and offer suggestions on how to promote well-being later in life.

The focus and context of the study is the Red Hat Society (RHS), which is a brand community for women over the age of 50 who gather together for leisure and companionship. This brand community serves as a valuable site for understanding the roles that consumption practices and socializing play in how older women react to and enact social expectations regarding age and gender. A brief background on the RHS organization is provided next to introduce the brand community and contextualize the focal research questions. Included in this section is an overview of the research that has been conducted on the RHS in other domains. Consistent with interpretive research, this research is also integrated into the discussion and interpretation of the findings.

The Red Hat Society

Founded in 1998, the Red Hat Society is an organization for women 50 years and older dedicated to celebrating aging through "fun, friendship, freedom, fulfillment, and fitness" (Yost 2012, 2). Its founder, Sue Ellen Cooper, began the organization with a gift of a red fedora to her best friend on her friend's 50th birthday, along with a copy of Jenny Joseph's poem, "Warning," which starts, "When I am an old woman I shall wear purple / With a red hat that doesn't go, and

doesn't suit me" (Joseph 1973, 609). Cooper and her friends started wearing red hats and purple outfits to afternoon tea. Media coverage led other women to imitate this idea. Thus, the Red Hat Society was born and has grown and developed with a plethora of goods and services conveniently offered through their official website. Sue Ellen Cooper continues to reign over this empire as the "exalted queen mother" and the original red fedora is now part of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History collection (Dowdle and Duff 2010). Currently, the RHS has around 57,000 registered members. This number is likely low since many RHS members are not officially registered with the association (in 2008, total membership was estimated to be 150,000 [Granich, 2008]). The number of "unofficial" members is likely double or triple this registered number.

Members attend monthly local chapter meetings at restaurants wearing their regalia of red hats and purple attire, usually accessorized with feathers, flowers, beads, and sparkles. RHS members are known for their over-the-top attire, loud laughter, spontaneous singing, and frequent playing of red and purple kazoos (Stalp et al. 2009). Membership gives women discounts to the RHS online store where they can buy branded products ranging from red hats to paperclips. Communication from the RHS parent organization, affectionately called 'Hatquarters,' goes so far to state that "the official sport of Red Hat Society is shopping." Over the course of its 16 year history, the RHS has expanded its mission to welcome women of all ages, although only members over age 50 have the privilege of wearing red hats. Those under age 50, known as 'Pink Hatters,' must wear pink hats and lavender attire until they celebrate their 50th birthday and have their 'reduation' (i.e., their graduation to red hatter status).

Previous research on the RHS has been conducted by a limited number of scholars mainly in the domain of recreation and leisure, sociology, and aging studies. Research focusing

on RHS apparel finds that 'doing dress up' provides members with a sense of freedom through conspicuous consumption and public exhibition, which in turn encourages positive self-image (Lynch, Stalp, and Radina 2007; Stalp et al. 2009; Yarnal, Son, and Liechty 2011). Other studies find the RHS's emphasis on play contributes to a sense of freedom and an escape from everyday stressors. These studies also link fun and play as leisure activity to personal optimism and social bonds among members (Liechty, Ribeiro and Yarnal 2009; Mitas et al. 2011; Radina et al. 2011; Stalp, Radina and Lynch 2008; van Bohemen, van Zoonen, and Aupers 2013; Yarnal 2006; Yarnal, Chick, and Kerstetter 2008). Still, other studies suggests that the RHS acts as a support group in helping members cope with aging and stress by providing members opportunities to socialize with other women who share similar experiences (Barett, Pai, and Redmond 2012; Hutchinson et al. 2008; Kerstetter et al. 2008; Radina et al. 2008; Son and Yarnal 2011; Son et al. 2007; Son, Yarnal, and Kerstetter 2010). In the marketing literature, Peters, Shelton, and Thomas (2011) use RHS members as a convenience sample of survey participants to examine self-concept and clothing choices in women over age 50, but they did not collect further data on RHS affiliation. Thus, it is unclear in this study if and how involvement in the RHS may have influenced these women's fashion choices.

Articles focusing on RHS members demonstrate a positive influence of membership. However, previous research lacks a focus on the consumption aspects of the RHS and the mechanisms through which the RHS brand community enables members to learn how to navigate their own experiences with aging. For example, past research suggests that the RHS focuses on conspicuous consumption in an exaggerated performance of femininity (Stalp et al. 2009). Yet, a more nuanced attention to consumption practices can expand this understanding, which is explored in Chapter 4. The negotiation of gender is more complex since the women

maintain some traditionally feminine practices, such as gift giving, and also traditionally masculine practices such as patronizing restaurants in a loud and boisterous manner. Moreover, their hyper-feminine attire draws on symbols of youth and competition for the male gaze (e.g., their showgirl apparel) yet they spend significant time counseling one another on medical procedures and health practices associated with aging. In addition, while research on the RHS have been conducted through large surveys (i.e., Yarnal and colleagues' research), and interviews and participant observations (i.e. Stalp and colleagues' research), none report conducting fieldwork with RHS chapters over an extended period of time. Those researchers who have conducted fieldwork used more of a snapshot approach having gathered their data from a brief cruise (van Bohemen et al, 2013) and employing limited attendance at some chapter meetings (Radina et al. 2011). This current research stresses long-term participant observation with local chapters as a means to understand how the RHS functions in the lives of these women beyond the intense episodic adventures associated with events like cruises. Moreover, a primary focus of this research is on participant observations with two distinct chapters: the Capped who are associated with the RHS organization and meet monthly in their red hats and attire, and the Uncapped, who have disassociated themselves from the RHS organization and no longer wear the fashion. This sampling approach enables a deeper understanding of the role of costuming and rituals in brand communities. These participant observations combine with findings from in-depth interviews with RHS members and fieldnotes from an international convention provided an opportunity to observe and interact with RHS members at various levels of involvement and engagement in performance.

Organization and Focus

The focus of this dissertation is on the value created within the RHS community as members contend with the challenges of growing older. The theoretical questions that this research seeks to address are: How do women negotiate their identity as older women in a society where ageism is prevalent? How do brand communities encourage women to reappraise their identities and experiences in light of aging and female stereotypes? What narratives on aging do RHS members learn and develop within their group? How do RHS members express their narratives within and outside their group? Do these narratives contribute to the well-being of its members? Specifically, what role does consumption play in enacting these narratives?

The goal of this dissertation is to conduct an ethnographic study into the RHS to explore how the community's values, structure, rituals, and consumption practices contribute to these women's experiences surrounding aging and identity. Throughout the dissertation, these four aspects (values, structure, rituals, and consumption practices) are highlighted as the mechanisms through which issues of aging and gender are navigated by RHS members. Moreover, this research explores how play and learning factor into these women's experiences in expanding and developing their identities.

Chapter 2 provides overviews of two relevant literatures. First, I discuss relevant literature on aging, including social gerontology theories, ageism and gender, ageism in marketing, and consumer behavior research on aging. Second, I explore literature on consumption communities. This provides the bases for understanding the mechanisms through which RHS provides value for members. Chapter 3 discusses the ethnographic methodology used for collecting data and the process for analyzing the data. Chapter 4 provides additional

context for the exploration of the RHS as a consumption community by examining its structure, rituals, and practices. Chapter 5 explores the social support gained through RHS. I look at the RHS from a social capital perspective and then focus on the avenues of information exchange in the RHS. I distinguish the organization from traditional support groups and discuss how the RHS creates a space for members to grow and exercise resiliency. Chapter 6 focuses on the significance of costuming in the RHS, highlighting its connection to group identity, consumption and creativity, and the tensions around dressing up. Chapter 7 unites findings through investigating how play within the RHS allows members to explore their identities and promotes well-being. Chapter 8 concludes with a discussion of conceptual contributions, limitations, and future research opportunities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To ground this investigation of the Red Hat Society, two streams of literature are reviewed. First, given the focus on older women, theory and work on aging and gender is reviewed including marketing research on older consumers. Second, given the context of RHS as a community, literature is reviewed on marketplace cultures. Beyond this review, relevant literature is integrated in the presentation of the results as is consistent with qualitative research.

Aging and Gender

A Brief Overview of Past Theories of Aging.

A brief background on social theories of aging helps to illuminate the evolution of thinking around aging that both informs and is formed by society. Early in social gerontology, during the 1940s, role theory gained prominence (Cottrell 1942). This theory dictates that individuals play particular roles throughout their lifespan, primarily marked by their chronological age and social norms of aging. For example, children are expected to play and learn in school. Adults are expected to get married and raise families. Retirees are expected to slow down, participate less in civil organizations, and spend time on a favorite hobby such as fishing or sewing. The underlying assumptions of role theory are that individuals should perform or cease to perform certain activities at definite ages and stages of life.

In the 1950s and 1960s, additional theories grew in popularity including activity theory, disengagement theory, and aged subculture theory. Activity theory assumes that older people will have more positive aging experiences if they take on a different and larger number of activities and roles (Havighurst and Albrecht 1953; Burgess 1953). Within activity theory, aging is viewed as a social issue and individuals must be actively engaged to age positively. Disengagement theory takes a similar view of aging as a social issue in which older individuals and society mutually withdraw from one another (Cummings and Henry 1961). The older individual desires to withdraw from society, which is conceptualized as an adaptive behavior that is unavoidable and universal. In both activity and disengagement theory, the emphasis is placed on the individual to make decisions in order to best serve society's expectations.

Aged subculture theory assumes that older individuals form their own separate subculture, with their own norms, expectations, and beliefs (Rose 1965). The creation of an aged subculture is a response by older individuals to their loss of status within the larger American society. Aged subculture theory stresses that a strong relationship exists between peer group participation and adjusting to the aging process. Yet in all these theories, aging is conceptualized as an activity that occurs separate from larger society.

Interestingly, a long history exists of framing aging as a social problem with high economic and social costs to society. The prevailing assumption of these earlier theories is that old age is associated with societal problems including poor health, functional inability, loss of social status, reduced income, and increased social isolation. Moreover, these theories influence public policy and social attitudes towards older adults.

Current social theories on aging mitigate some of these biases by highlighting the tremendous diversity of older individuals and focusing on understanding how individuals interact

within larger socio-economic, political, and physical environments (Lawton 1983; Wahl and Weisman 2003). In addition, more recent theories examine the substantive disparities associated with aging. For example, feminist gerontology criticizes the male-centric view found in these early theories and focuses on explaining how and why group inequalities are amplified by aging. While current theories seek to rectify the totalizing approaches to aging by highlighting how different groups interact within different environments, negative associations with aging continue and hamper society's and individuals' abilities to address problems by leveraging the strengths and diversities of aging citizens.

In the next sections, the current literature on older consumers is reviewed focusing on the implications of ageism and the traditional approach taken on older consumers within the field of marketing.

Ageism and Gender.

Ageism describes prejudicial attitudes, discriminatory practices, and social norms that propagate negative aging stereotypes, which are similar to the patterns found with racism and sexism (Wilkinson and Ferraro 2002). Research on attitudes towards younger and older adults supports the presence of ageism (Kite et al. 2005). These negative age stereotypes affects how people perceive old age and the aging process, how younger people view older individuals, and how older individuals view themselves (Kite et al.2005; Levy and Banji 2002). Biases against older adults are found to be strongest in stereotypical beliefs associated with old age (e.g., hard of hearing, old-fashioned) and assessments of attractiveness (Kite et al. 2005). These stereotypes lead to older individuals being generally defined solely by their age, giving rise to an old age stigma. Stigmas are considered discrediting attributes placed on an individual that diminishes the holder from being seen as "a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman

11

1964, 3). While stigmas may or may not be internalized, it is important to keep in mind that it is society that initially constructs the stigma.

For women, stigmas of aging are often amplified because of gender expectations. Generally, older women are perceived more negatively than older men (Kite and Wagner 2002; Kite et al. 2005). Older women are seen as facing double invisibility, the double jeopardy that results from being both female and old (Cruikshank 2009). This double invisibility occurs when gender stereotypes intersect with age. In the United States, women grow old while men become distinguished; men are seldom accused of "sagging" (Calasanti 2005). Social norms about appropriate behavior and appearance of older women often suggest that they should retire from public view and "fade into the woodwork" (Stalp et al. 2009, 247).

The field of marketing has often been complicit supporting this position by disregarding female consumers over 49 as a market segment (Brown and Osborne 2006; Moschis et al. 2000). And older women continue to be underrepresented in advertisements compared to older men (Simcock and Sudbury 2006; Lee, Carpenter, and Meyers 2007). Yet older women also resist old age stereotypes and stigmas and are determined not to be shaped by social dictates of old age (Cruikshank 2009).

Ageism and the Marketplace.

Ageism is pervasive and wide-spread in the marketplace. Consider the use of the term "anti-aging" on products and in marketing messages: what would be the reaction if the term "aging" was replaced by a signifier of another stigmatized group? As Calasanti (2007, 338) observes, it is an "interesting sign of the entrenchment of ageism that such nomenclature does not raise eyebrows or objections." In Western societies where beauty is synonymous with youth, anti-aging industries contribute to the stigma against aging with promises to alter or slow the

12

aging process in order for consumers not to "look old" (Wilkinson and Ferraro 2002). In the United States, anti-aging products for enhancing appearance (e.g., skin care and hair color) is estimated to reach $5 billion by 2015 and globally, the total market for anti-aging products (including pharmaceuticals, supplements, skin care, and other) is projected to reach $291.9 billion by 2015 (Global Industry Analysts 2009). The growth of this market segment is attributed, in part, to an aging population seeking to distance themselves from the stigma of aging and negative stereotypes (Wilkinson and Ferraro 2002; Global Industry Analysts 2009).

Research suggests that good reasons exist for this distancing from negative stereotypes (Zebrowitz and Motepare 2000; Cuddy and Firske 2002). For example, in one study, individuals 65 years old and over were primed with positive, neutral, or negative age stereotypes. Compared to the other two groups, those primed with negative age stereotypes demonstrated higher levels of risk-aversion and feelings of loneliness, and lower levels of subjective health ratings (Coudin and Alexopoulos 2010). Similarly, in a longitudinal study, Levy et al. (2012) found that individuals currently aged 60 years and above who held more negative age stereotypes throughout their life had a 30.2% greater decline in memory performance over a 38 year period compared to those with less negative age stereotypes. Additionally, this study observed that individuals who made the negative age stereotype self-relevant (i.e., placed themselves in the category of 'old age') performed worst of all (Levy et al. 2012).

This latter finding supports the notion of 'social downgrading,' a self-protective tendency for maintaining positive self-view by perceiving same-aged people to be worse off that oneself. Heckhausen and Brim (1997, 610) used the term to describe their finding that older individuals especially employ social downgrading to position perceived problems (e.g., money, children, marriage, health) as more serious for "most other people my age" than for themselves. In

13

addition, higher levels of subjective well-being (i.e., quality of life and good mental health) are found in individuals who disassociate with their chronological age (Beaumont and Kenealy 2004; Gana, Alaphilippe, and Bailly 2004). Thus, propagating old age stereotypes may act as an adaptive strategy by which individuals distance themselves psychologically from prototypical representation of 'old age.'

Although older women may try to distance themselves from old-age stereotypes, market research finds older women are distinct from younger women in their purchasing decision making and that older women resent the marketplace's largely myopic messages that focuses on women under forty (Brown and Osborne 2006). When older adults (defined as 50, 55, or 60 years and over within the studies) are portrayed in advertising, research finds they are not depicted using negative stereotypes (Simcock and Sudbury 2006; Roy and Harwood 1997), rather they are predominately characterized as healthy, active, and happy (Lee et al. 2007). Yet older individuals remain underrepresented within advertisements and portrayals are dominated by white males (Atkins, Jenkins, and Perkins 1990; Lee et al. 2007). Moreover, older individuals in ads are featured more often in healthcare and financial management contexts, and are generally absent in cosmetics and beauty products, fashion, and clothing (Ursic, Ursic, and Ursic 1986; Carrigan and Szmigin 1998; Simcock and Sudbury 2006). The practices of ignoring or narrowly defining older consumers leads to ineffective marketing strategies and missed opportunities (Brown and Osborne 2006), but it also raises questions about the need to promote more positive perspectives on aging (Levy and Banaji 2002).

Research indicates both positive and negative stereotypes of aging are developed though out the consumers' lifespan (Zebrowitz and Montepare 2000; Levy, Chung, and Canavan 2011). What remains unclear is how implicit aging stereotypes may affect the ways individuals

reconcile their social identities as they age (Levy, Chung, and Canavan 2011). Since the

marketplace provides consumers with opportunities to inhabit various identities, investigating

consumption among older women provides us with a means to explore how the social self is

shaped through these practices.

Consumer Behavior and Marketing Research on Aging.

Over the last twenty years, consumer behavior and marketing scholars have increasingly

turned their attention to the decision making processes and consumption practices of older

consumers, led predominantly by George Moschis and his colleagues. Yet the accumulation of

knowledge about older consumers is sparse in comparison to research on younger consumer

segments (Pettigrew and Moschis 2012; Yoon, Cole, and Lee 2009).

Current research primarily focuses on differences in information processing, decision

making, and physical abilities among older consumers (Cole et al. 2008; Drolet et al. 2010a;

Gregoire 2003; Moschis 2012). A reoccurring theme within this literature is the lack of

homogeneity within the older consumer population, which is similar to findings among younger

segments (Drolet et al. 2010a; Kohlbacher and Herstatt 2011; Moschis 1992). Despite this

consensus, researchers continue to group older consumers into a single category and compare

them to younger population (see, for example, Cole et al. 2008). Such a totalizing approach tends

to reinforce elder stereotypes of incompetence and decline (Cuddy, Norton, and Fiske 2005).

Moreover, differences in older consumers' decision making and information processing

compared to young consumers are positioned as deficits (Cole et al. 2008). For example, older

consumers are found to have more difficulty filtering out irrelevant or distracting information

than younger consumers (Chen and Blanchard-Fields 2000; Lustig, May, and Hasher 2001; Hasher, Zacks, and May 1997). These findings are typically positioned as shortfalls and a potential source of vulnerability (Moschis, Mosteller, and Fatt 2011). An alternative view suggests that younger consumers do not need to be used as the standard to measure against older consumers because they differ in how they conceptualize 'optimal' decisions (Moschis 2012). Researchers find that older consumers have different motivations and are more attentive to subjective, emotional information (characterized as irrelevant or distracting information), which is largely attributed to their reliance on lived experience to guide their attention (Drolet et al. 2010b; Price et al. 2000). This coincides with socio-emotional selectivity theory that states that when future time is limited, individuals focus their energies on emotions and feeling what is most salient in their lives. This leads older adults to be less innovative, less likely to seek new informative connections over well-known emotional sources, and more likely to allocate their energies to optimizing emotional material over cognitive processing (Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent 2010; Carstensen, Isaacowitz, and Charles 1999; Isaacowitz, Charles, and Carstensen 2000). As Salthouse (2010, 152) suggests, "there is more to life than cognition" and the age-related declines measured through laboratory cognitive testing can likely be compensated for through accommodation and skill developed through greater life experiences.

Similarly, 'cognitive age' is commonly used in studies seeking to understand consumer behavior of older adults (Mathur and Moschis 2005). Cognitive age, also called subjective age, is the individual's self-perception of his or her age. In general, and as might be expected, cognitive age is lower than chronological age with individuals over 40 responding to feeling 20% younger than their age (Rubin and Bernsten 2006), which roughly translates to finding that cognitive aging is between eight and fifteen years younger (Szmigin and Carrigan 2000; Sherman,

Schiffman, and Mathur 2001; Gana et al. 2004). Findings also suggest that discrepancy with felt age increases in later life (Kleinspehn-Ammerlahn, Kotter-Grühn, and Smith 2008). Generally studies have not found a statistically significant difference between men and women in their cognitive age (Mathur and Moschis 2005; Rubin and Bernsten 2006), however, some studies found that women have younger cognitive ages than men (Montepare and Lachman 1989; Szmigin and Carrigan 2000). Cross-cultural studies have found that Americans are more biased towards younger age identities, to varying extents, than other countries including Brazil, India, Nigeria, Finland, Japan, and Germany (Barnes-Fareell et al. 2002, Barak et al. 2003; Uotinen 1998; Van Auken, Barry, and Bagozzi 2006; Westerhof, Barrett, and Steverink 2003;). Although this variable is widely used, its explanatory benefits are questionable since it cannot be untangled as a cause or consequence of consumer behavior (Moschis 2012). As it is generally measured, cognitive age provides little insight into the interplay of cultural conditions (e.g., stereotypes, advertising, and age cohort) and individual experiences (e.g., role transitions, loss of a loved one, health status, or education) in influencing behavior. Yet, using chronological age provides similar problems in grouping consumers who have had different life experiences. Indeed, individuals are labeled as "older consumers" and are treated as such by society long before they would position themselves as old (Barnhart and Peñaloza 2013; Sudbury and Simcock 2009).

To understand the connections between age and consumer behavior, a more accurate measure of age appears to be dependent on personal experiences regarding transitions into social roles (e.g., retiree, widow, grandmother; see Mathur and Moschis 2005) and the acquisition of characteristics associated with old age (Moschis 2012). With this in mind, researchers are highlighting the need to study older consumers in a life-course paradigm, which takes into consideration role transition and age cohort, but also considers more contextual effects on older

17

consumers, including macro-level factors of culture and socio-economic status and micro-level factors such as gender, family composition, and support groups (Moschis 2007, 2012; Yoon et al. 2009). Consistent with this approach, the current investigation will contextualize participant narratives through the development of their personal histories and the incorporation of social and historical factors by employing hermeneutical framework for analysis (Thompson 1997).

Beyond research based on information process changes and cognitive differences in older consumers, research on older consumers with the consumer behavior literature is sparse (Moschis 2012). Investigations of older people's consumption behavior predominately focuses on consumption of health-related goods and services (Pettigrew and Moschis 2012). Granted, health-related goods and services account for 13.2% of older consumers' total yearly expenditures, which is double the amount spent by all consumers (Taylor et al. 2011) and older women are higher users of medical services (Cruikshank 2009). Yet, there is significantly more diversity to older people's consumption behavior that has not been explored. Moreover, with three notable exceptions (Price et al. 2000; Schau et al. 2009a; Barnhart and Peñaloza 2013), studies with older consumers have been experimental or cross-sectional.

In their phenomenological inquiry, Price et al. (2000) investigated the meaning surrounding older individuals' disposition of special possessions through in-home interviews with participants ranging in age from 55 to 95 years. The researchers chose to focus on older adults in order to understand how meaning of possessions are influenced by a life review process, which is found to increase with age as mortality becomes more salient. Participants saw their special possessions as extensions of their selves and desired to distribute these possessions in a manner that would allow part of their identity to live on past their deaths. Although it was

not the focus of the research, the researchers noted a common theme of exclusion from some social roles among participants, especially those tied to employment and productive work.

Productivity is not a new concept in this country. It is fair to say that the work ethic does not stop at retirement. As Schau et al. (2009a) discovered, individuals past retirement actively pursue social engagements in order to keep their identities relevant and seek out new advantageous roles. Through participant observations and interviews with retirees aged 61 to 83 years, Schau and colleagues found that consumers past retirement embark upon a 'consumer identity renaissance' in which individuals increase identity-related consumption related to revived and emergent identity projects. Similarly, Barnhart and Peñaloza (2013) find lack of productivity and other negative stereotypes associated with age are negotiated by older consumers through their consumption practices. Continuations and adjustments to practices allow older consumers to maintain their not-old identity in light of limitations and treatment as an 'old person' by family members and service providers.

These identity projects are heavily influenced by the concept of 'successful aging.' This concept entered into aging discourse as alternative to stereotypes that framed older people as dependent and resource drains on society (Tornstam 1992). This perspective has had significant influence on how aging is conceptualized through its use by scholars, practitioners, and policymakers (Dillaway and Byrnes 2009). Individuals who age "successfully" are defined as having three characteristics: 1) low probability/risk of disease and disease-related disability, 2) high levels of cognitive and physical health, and 3) active engagement with life (Rowe and Kahn 1997). Proponents of successful aging see this idea as a means to promote criteria and strategies that reinforce the principles that "aging and poor health are not synonymous" (Franklin and Tate 2009, 9). At first glance, the successful aging approach seems praiseworthy since it seeks to

endorse staying socially engaged and physically and mentally healthy throughout life. The potential harm of the successful aging approach derives from possible social pressures and the internalization of successful aging's productivity 'requirements' by older individuals, especially if those elders are denigrated if they cannot perform because of health, income, or other obstacles (Holstein 2007; Dillaway and Byrnes 2009). Thus, successful aging potentially engenders aging stereotypes as it neither takes into account the heterogeneity of the older population (Calasanti, Slevin, and King 2006), nor does it empower older individuals since successful aging is often "defined from the outside" (Dillaway and Byrnes 2009; 717). Still, successful aging is found to influence how older consumers navigate their identities (Schau et al. 2009a; Barnhart and Peñaloza 2013), and it will likely have a similar influence on RHS members. A difference is how the RHS community engages in productive behavior within their organization by challenging social norms around aging and reinforcing participants personal worth through costuming and rituals that encourage play and learning. In the next section, literature focusing on the communal aspects of RHS is discussed by exploring the community as a marketplace culture.

Marketplace Cultures

The investigation of marketplace cultures falls within the tradition of consumer cultural theory (CCT). CCT is the comprehensive label used to describe research aimed at exploring the interconnections among consumers, the marketplace, and cultural meanings (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Arnould and Thompson (2005) organize the theoretical contributions of CCT into four domains: (1) consumer identity projects, (2) marketplace cultures, (3) the socio-historic patterning of consumption, and (4) mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers'

interpretive strategies. The domain of marketplace cultures includes consumption influenced by geographically-based cultural traditions and the interpretation of these consumption experiences, such as the examination of death rituals in Asante, Ghana (Bonsu and Belk 2003). The study of marketplace culture also includes consumption communities, which is the exploration of cultural production and the forming of social identities through membership in communities that share common consumption interests. The stream of research on consumption communities is particularly relevant to this investigation of the RHS as it provides frameworks and concepts that shed light on how production and reproduction of culture within the RHS community fosters the learning and shaping of social identities.

Within the tradition of CCT, marketplace cultures or consumption communities are generally divided into three categories: subcultures of consumption (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), brand communities (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001) or consumer tribes (Cova and Cova 2002). All of these classifications seek to represent ways in which consumers build social connections and feelings of solidarity through community affiliation with other self-selected, like-minded consumers while pursuing their consumption interests (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Although each classification system draws on different individual literature streams and traditions, considerable overlap exists among these categories (Thompson and Troester 2002; Canniford 2011).

Important to the discussion of the RHS, these three approaches highlight various aspects of community, membership, and the relationships among members and their community and the marketplace. The purpose of this literature review is not to label RHS as a specific type of community, but to demonstrate how concepts and ideas found in these research streams assist in exploring RHS as a consumption community in which consumers express and reproduce cultural

meaning (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Holt 1998). The three research streams on consumption

and their theoretical roots provide a foundation for how we think of community. Each of these

streams highlights relevant concepts to the investigation of RHS, such as the concepts of

resistance, stigma, escape through costume, storytelling and mythmaking, and play.

Subcultures of Consumption

In their seminal ethnographic study on Harley Davidson riders, Schouten and

McAlexander (1995, 43) offer the term 'subculture of consumption' to distinguish "a distinctive

subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product

class, brand, or consumption activity." These authors explore how Harley riders develop the

meaning of the Harley brand from their communal interaction with other riders. This interplay

between the brand meaning and communal interaction becomes a way of life for riders, a way of

defining themselves in the culture (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). The centrality of

experiential and brand consumption coalesce in a shared and distinct representation of *style* in

fashion, objects, behaviors, and attitudes (Hebdige 1979). Members of this community don a

'biker uniform' of black leather jackets, t-shirt, jeans, and black boots. Members demonstrate a

shared ethos (i.e., common cultural meanings that bind a subculture) pertaining to the biker way-

of-life through enacting core values of personal freedom, patriotism, and machismo (Schouten

and McAlexander 1995). Although these core values are observed throughout various subgroups

within the Harley community, it is noted that the expression of these values are contextual to the

bikers' situated position. For example, a weekender rider or a female Harley owner may have

varying commitment to these values and/or interpret them differently (Martin, Schouten, and

22

McAlexander 2006). In his seminal work *Subculture: The Meaning of Style,* which looks at the Punk, Mod, and Teddy boy subcultures, Hebdige (1979, 102) states that communicating difference as well as group identity "is the 'point' behind the style of all spectacular subcultures." The shared *style* of fashion, objects, behaviors, and attitudes found within the Harley community, and this *style*'s contrast to mainstream society, is what links the subcultures of consumption to 'conventional' subculture studies that are traditionally based on sexual orientation, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, class, and age.

Historically, the study of conventional subcultures gained prominence with the founding of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the United Kingdom in 1964 (Muggleton 2000). This period of post-war Britain saw greater prosperity and the growth of the middle-class. Concurrently, the rise of civil rights movements by women and racial groups gave voice to a harsh critique of Britain's institutionalized class system (Muggleton 2000). Along with this prosperity came an increased interest in consumerism and marketing, and a desire to link consumption to values and lifestyles of individual consumers (Friedman 1992). The CCCS researchers sought to explore how consumers use consumption for greater self-expression in relation to mainstream ideology.

This interest continues today as the marketplace provides consumers opportunities to inhabit various social positions as identities and lifestyles are shaped through people's consumption (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Groups of consumers use symbolic resources, such as fashion, brands, objects, and experiential resources, to negotiate shared meaning and orient their members' experiences and lives (Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993; Kozinets 2001). For example, Kozinets (2001) recounts a narrative from one Star Trek fan who began to proudly

wear her Bajoran earring[1], demonstrating her devotion to the Star Trek community and the

centrality of her fandom to her identity. As Hebdige states, (1979, 102) "by repositioning and

recontextualizing commodities, by subverting their conventional uses and inventing new ones,

the subcultural stylist… opens up the world of objects to new and covertly oppositional

readings." This contrast and opposition to the 'everyday' often defines a marketplace culture and

its symbolic boundaries (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Subcultures are conceptualized as

segregated from the mainstream society and resistant to conventional consumption ideologies,

such as Goths (Goulding and Saren 2009), surfers (Canniford and Shankar 2007), or individuals

subscribing to voluntary simplicity (Cherrier and Murray 2002). Within marketplace culture,

groups' usage of certain *styles*, brands, and activities take on a particular meaning and this

meaning is in turn expressed through these *styles*, brands, and activities creating a cycle of

cultural production and reproduction (Diamond et al. 2009). For example, within extreme sports

subcultures such as skydiver (Celsi et al. 1993) and the X Games communities (Hong 2011),

clothing and gear are used to improve performance and increase individual achievement. This

sense of personal achievement is then expressed through choices of clothing and gear. In

addition, this association between *style* and the subculture becomes embedded in the wider

society's vision of the prototypical subcultural member (Hong 2011). Because of these

connections with subcultures, *styles* may be appropriated by consumers who may not subscribe

to a subcultural lifestyle, but identify with the values associated with the subculture. Thus, for

example, clothing and gear brands associated with extreme winter sports subcultures (e.g.,

Burton clothing and Never Summer longboards) become a style emulated by those who seek a

---

[1] An elaborate earring worn by the Bajoran people, an advanced humanoid species native to the planet Bajor in the Alpha Quadrant, which are creations of the Star Trek franchise (Okuda, Okuda, and Mirek 1999).

loose association with members in this subculture and to reinforce their social identity as a

snowboarder (Hong 2011).

This literature on subcultures of consumption makes clear that meanings are continually

being created and challenged, and subcultures of consumption are an important site of dynamic

meaning creation. Because these meanings arise in reaction to dominant cultural meanings, the

concept of resistance often arises as an important idea in defining the subculture, which is

discussed next.

Resistance in Marketplace Cultures.

Cultural studies researchers theorized subculture as a collective form of problem-solving

through resistance (Muggleton 2005). For example, Young (1971) conceptualized London's

marijuana-smoking hippie subculture of the late 1960s as a way for middle-class youth to

problem solve their discontentment with traditional social structures. As media sensationalized

the *style* of this group in contrast to 'straight' society, police action against marijuana smokers

also increased. This police activity united drug users in a position against the police and

heightened conformity to *style* stereotypes within the subculture. This cycle, termed 'deviance

amplification' by Young (1971), demonstrates how social realities are created through

consumers' shared negotiation of meaning and perceptions of roles that are then used as label

signifiers, such as the use of the term 'hippie' to denote a divergent subculture (Muggleton

2005). Young (1971) illustrates how subcultural stereotypes become perpetuated through media

and societal institutions (such as policing and the marketplace), and how the interplay between

such forces creates an amplification of subculture *style* and membership identity. Young focuses

on finding the 'inception event,' or the cultural phenomenon or event that first contributed to the

demarcation of the subculture *style*. As such, some critics attack the CCCS approach as overly deterministic and for failing to emphasize the agency and creativity of individual participants within the larger evolution of a subculture (Muggleton 2000).

CCCS studies demarcate 'authentic' subcultural membership through its focus on resistance to 'mainstream' ideology and much research concentrates on the inception event (Muggleton 2000). For instance, in Young's (1971) study of London's hippie culture, he traced the inception event to the disenfranchised middle-class young males resisting social norms of the times, such as being unemployed, growing their hair long, and participating in illegal drug use. The individuals who later adopt this *style* are not seen as 'authentic' members because they lack a clear link to the inception event, the socio-historically situated context that initially spurred a resistance to society's norms. This focus gives rise to approaching a subculture as a static entity, rather than an evolving *style* made up of individuals who have different interpretations of the *style* as well as considering the activities of an opportunistic marketplace that seeks to capitalize on these trends.

Within the field of consumer behavior, the residual carryover to marketplace cultural studies is the desire to categorize subcultural members into hardcore—'authentic' in their resistance and deviant in their lifestyle pursuits (Canniford 2011)—and followers who co-opt the *style* the community in their leisure activities or as supplementary roles. This demarcation of subcultural membership is seen in the hierarchy of Harley owners, in which hardcore bikers are seen as embodying the deviant "live to ride, ride to live" lifestyle and values, demonstrating their commitment and authenticity (Schouten and McAlexander 1995, 50). In contrast, Harley riders who are 'weekend warriors' are seen as interchanging mainstream and subculture *styles* and values, using their time on the bike as a temporary transcendental experience from the mundane

26

(Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Commitment to normative influences within the group is seen to increase status within the subculture, which in turn leads to a feeling of greater authenticity within the community experience (Mathwick, Wiertz, and de Ruyter 2008). Thus, the hardcore bikers are more authentic than the weekend warriors. But authenticity is a matter of perspective (Schouten, Martin, and McAlexander 2007). For example, within the Mountain Man community's rendezvous events the greatest emphasis is placed on creating an experience of living in the year 1840, where clothes and campsites are regulated by authorities to fit 1840 standards (Belk and Costa 1998). Yet even this authenticity is achieved through ongoing compromises, such as letting white women attend the rendezvous and letting the researchers use a camera as long as it was covered in buckskin (Belk and Costa 1998).

On a social level, commitment and authenticity of subcultural lifestyle, including the fashion, creates social structure and hierarchies within the community. These qualities signal differences from wider society, while instilling the meaning of the subculture affiliation through the symbolic resources, and in so doing create a specific *style* germane to the subculture. On an individual level, commitment and authenticity creates an internalization of the subcultures values. So, for example, male, hardcore Harley riders internalize the value of personal freedom through their tattoos, long hair, and bushy beards, signifying their resistance (or liberation) from mainstream values and social structures (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Other approaches to marketplace cultures, such as brand community and consumer tribes, challenge these rigid structures and are elaborated in the next two sections.

Within the examination of the RHS community, understanding the values and lifestyle that underscores membership may help in determining the extent to which the community acts as an independent social structure, promoting resistance to the mainstream values among its

27

members. Such an approach then raises the question, what mainstream values are RHS women resisting? At first blush, it might be what it means to be an older woman. As previously stated, within Western society, older women are stigmatized by perceptions of their unattractiveness, frailty, and dependency (Cruikshank 2009).Yet researchers of subcultures of consumption (Martin et al. 2006; Kozinets 2001) would caution that the RHS women may have many different interpretations and expressions of the community's values. It may be that RHS community does not demonstrate a highly delineated position within mainstream culture, but like 'weekend warriors' of the Harley community may use their engagement with the RHS as a transcendental or escapist experience from the mundane. Indeed, as is be explored in later chapters, members of the RHS see their time in the community as both a separate place where they can let loose, but it also creates an opportunity to take this identity work into their lives beyond the RHS.

Stigma in Marketplace Cultures.

Delineation from mainstream culture or norms leads communities, such as Star Trek fans (Kozinets 2001) or Goths (Goulding and Saren 2009), to share a sense of marginalization connected to a stigma associated with their consumption practices. A stigma is defined as an "attribute that is deeply discrediting" and that diminishes the holder "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman 1964, 3). Feelings of marginalization and stigma from mainstream society provide these community members with a source of solidarity as they are united in a common struggle (Schau and Muñiz 2007). Kozinets (2001, 72) observes that many Star Trek fans have personal struggles because they "do not easily fit into mainstream social roles (i.e., those who are already stigmatized in some sense or another)" and are able to find refuge and acceptance within the Star Trek community.

This idea of not being able to fit easily into mainstream social roles is also reflected in Kates' (2002) investigation into the gay male community. Kates' (2002, 387) ethnography on the gay community in a large Canadian city provides insight on how a diverse community of individuals, united by their sexual orientation, navigate consumption practices that can both accentuate their differences from mainstream, hetero-patriarchal society (e.g., males using makeup) and reproduce the hetero-patriarchal society's norms (e.g., personal ads using the phrase "no fats, no fems" to indicate only straight-looking and straight-acting men should respond the ad).

Kates (2002, 383) distinguishes the gay community from other consumption communities of Harley riders (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), mountain men (Belk and Costa 1998), and Star Trek fans (Kozinets 2001) by observing that the majority of these community members "step into costume (literally and figuratively)" only when pursuing leisure activities, but this is impossible for gay men. While members of subcultures of consumption are self-selecting, membership in socially constructed categories based on sexual orientation, gender, race, ethnicity, disability, class, and age are prescribed. So a consumer may ride their Harley on the weekend, attend Mountain Man retreats for a holiday, or join the conversation on a Star Trek message board after work, but gay men cannot partition their sexual orientation to leisure time. They may decide how central their affiliation with the larger gay community and with local communities may be, but they cannot escape their categorization. In a similar fashion, although RHS is also a voluntary affiliation, its members are women who cannot escape their position as older women in a society that celebrates youth. Their membership in this community, like that of the gay community, endures and permeates through facets of their relationships with other individuals, social institutions, culture, and the marketplace (Kates 2002).

29

To expand, a stigma exists with homosexuality and the gay subculture. Building on Goffman's (1964, 4) description of a stigma as a relationship between an "attribute and a stereotype," Jones el al. (1984) define stigma as a 'mark' (attribute) that connects an individual to an objectionable characteristic (stereotype). Homosexuality is not volitional like other consumption communities (Branch 2007); it is a permanent 'mark' that perpetuates negative stereotyping and discrimination in everyday life. In Kates' (2002) study, the 'gay ghetto' was seen as a safe haven for gays to be themselves. But it is also an unsafe place because it was linked so closely to the stigmatized group that it became a place for outsiders to enact violence on its members. Many members of the gay community avoid certain places in the 'gay ghetto' in order to protect themselves from being associated with this stereotype and possible physical attacks (Kates 2002).

Within Western society, older people and especially older women are similarly subjected to discrimination because of their 'marks' including wrinkles, slowness, and dependency. Older people are also known to avoid discriminatory situations, even going so far as apologizing when their walking speed does not match the fast pace prescribed by social norms (Cruikshank 2009). For the RHS members, they resist the 'marks' of old age through their public displays of *style,* including dressing in bright colors, engaging in laughter, and boisterous socializing. They demonstrate that these 'marks' do not necessarily correspond to traditional stereotypes of older women. The RHS women refuse to be ignored.

The literature on meanings of dress or costuming in consumption communities is explored next given its relevance to the RHS.

Escape through Costume.

Some subcultures of consumption, such as mountain men and Star Trek fans, use dress as a fantasy escape (Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets 2001). A costume is like an identity to be put on or taken off. These costumes are often used to escape the confines of imposed roles, and "crossing this boundary into stigmatized consumption seems to provide the thrill of the forbidden" (Kozinets 2001, 76). In a similar manner, when RHS was first founded twelve years ago, it focused on "fun and friendship" with a mission of providing women 50 years and over with a way "to escape the pressures and demands placed on their everyday lives" (Yost 2012, 2). The costuming might be a way in which RHS can reject social conventions and therefore have permission to act freely, outside of social expectations (Yarnal, Son, and Liechty 2011).

Yet, costuming may be more contentious for RHS members. For example, Star Trek fans demonstrate ambivalence towards displaying their costumes in public, seeing it both as a positive symbol of the community's values (e.g., egalitarianism) and a symbol that would be misunderstood and ridiculed (e.g., reinforcing a stigma). Kates (2002) also demonstrates the tensions between identity politics and the reinforcement of mainstream perceptions of the gay stigma in the use of "ghetto queen" fashion. Within the gay community that Kates (2002, 393) investigated, the emic term "ghetto queen" is used to denote "hopelessly extreme, stereotypical gay consumers." The fashion uniform of a "ghetto queen", tight t-shirt, short shorts, and black combat boots, provides a caricature that mainstream culture can use to stigmatize the gay community (Goffman 1964). While this fashion may stigmatize, the uniform can also be used as a show of solidarity among the gay community. Kates' (2002, 395) informants use the uniform to play a "role that can be assumed or discarded at will with one's clothing while having some fun." Alternatively, other members incorporate pieces of the ghetto queen fashion into their clothing ensembles instead of donning the entire uniform. This means of incorporating the

31

fashion provides members with a sense of connection to their community, while also emphasizing that their identities are not limited to this one aspect of their lives. For RHS members, how they embrace the RHS 'uniform,' incorporate parts of RHS fashion into their everyday wardrobe, or possibly even store their red hats in a place of honor in their homes, provide insight on how their identity as a red hatter affects their management of the stigma associated with aging. These themes are explored in Chapter 6 on costuming.

In the following section, the research stream on brand communities is discussed highlighting how storytelling and myth building provide greater cohesion to community building.

Brand Communities

A traditional community is a network of social relations connected through mutual and emotional bonds (Bender 1978, 145). Brand communities possess many of the hallmarks of traditional communities, yet are defined as specialized, dispersed communities that form around a brand or activity (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Brand community research draws upon the work of Boorstin's consumption communities (1973) and Maffesoli's concept of neotribalism (1996). The concept of neotribalism also inspires the work of consumer tribes, which is discussed within the 'consumer tribes' section. In his social history of the United States, Boorstin (1973, 147) wrote how advertising promoted the formation of 'consumption communities' that consisted of individuals with common interests and concerns and a shared sense of well-being. These bonds between consumers developed from "consuming the same kinds of objects: from those willing to 'Walk a Mile for a Camel,' those who wanted 'The Skin You Love to Touch,' or who put their

'faith in General Motors'" (Boorstin 1973, 147). Although these communities were assumed to be less binding and involved than traditional communities (Boorstin 1973), research on brand communities has demonstrated connections between community members can be intense and meaningful (Mathwick et al. 2008; Muñiz and Schau 2005).

Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) investigated brand communities that developed around three brands: Saab, Ford Bronco, and Macintosh. They found that these brand communities exhibit three 'markers of community,' which correspond to the traditional definition of community: consciousness of kind, shared rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). The difference with these 'markers' is the prominence that the brand played in committing members to the collective group. Consciousness of kind refers to a shared knowledge of belonging that derives from a mutual understanding of in-group members and out-group members. It represents a feeling of connectedness not only to the brand but also to other consumers of the brand. Members of brand communities will identify themselves as a distinct group, such as 'Saabers' or 'Mac people' (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Community rituals reinforce social solidarity within the group and provide visual displays of community membership. Rituals consist of behaviors occurring in fixed, episodic sequences, which are repeated over time. Rituals have expressive and symbolic qualities that provide valuable insight into consumer and consumption behavior (Rook 1985). For example, Jeep Wangler owners have a ritual of the "Wrangler wave" given to other Wrangler drivers as they pass each on the road (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002). Traditions also reinforce the community by promoting the sanctioned behavioral norms and values (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Traditions include sharing stories about first time consuming the brand, such as the fans of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers relating tales about their first concert or first song (Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould

2009b). Finally, a sense of moral responsibility exists, which refers to feelings of personal duty

or obligation to individual members or the community as a whole. This obligation is exemplified

within the Mac user community on websites where members supply maintenance and service

information for other Mac users (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001).

Evidence of these community markers provides greater understanding of a community's

structure, character, and particularities, and they can guide the current investigation of the RHS

community. For example, shared rituals performed by the women and the meanings and values

that are expressed are explored throughout the dissertation. One particular aspect of rituals and

traditions found in communities is storytelling and myth-building, which merits further

exploration for its relevance to the exploration of the RHS community.

Storytelling and Myth-building in Marketplace Cultures.

Within the CCT literature, narratives and storytelling are often an important way that

consumers position themselves within the mythology of the marketplace culture (Arnould and

Price 1993; Diamond et al. 2009; Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010; Muñiz and Schau

2005). For instance, Muñiz and Schau (2005) explore the community that formed around the

Apple Newton PDA (personal digital assistant), a product that Apple discontinued in 1998.

Members of this community have a strong sense of commitment to keeping the Newton relevant

in a marketplace that has forsaken it. Their online community of Newton users share stories of

persecution for using what the mainstream society considers to be an outdated technology. They

exchange tales of renewed faith when the Newton is able to perform a task that is beyond its

initial design (for example, a post on a Newton website in January 2012 provides instructions on

34

how to connect with Facebook using Newton[2]) and heroic survival stories in which the Newton endures drops and damage (Muñiz and Schau 2005). Such narratives of persecution, renewed faith, and survival reflect religious and mystical undertones found within other consumption communities, such as Star Trek fans (Kozinets 2001), Hummer drivers (Luedicke et al. 2010), Macintosh and Saab of the mid-90s (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001), and X-Philes (i.e., 'lovers' of the X-Files [Kozinets 1997]).

The brand's underdog status also provides a context that enables a community member to connect his or her life struggles to the brand's struggles, deepening both personal and communal connections (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Moreover, storytelling is a type of practice that promotes the collective well-being of the community and enhances the value individuals receive from engaging in the brand communities (Schau et al. 2009b). Stories are means to thread together and reinforce core community values and virtues (Luedicke et al. 2010). Within the RHS community, examples of storytelling and myth-building provide insight into how these women conceptualize the RHS brand and the community's core values. For example, stories where women press against their own personal boundaries of appropriate behavior reveals their commitment to group solidarity and the personal meaning they derive from the group experience.

The next section on marketplace communities discusses the third stream of literature on consumer tribes exploring the similarities and differences among these three community types. Also, the concept of 'playfulness' is explored in the research on consumer tribes as it relates to the RHS community.

---

[2] http://myapplenewton.blogspot.com/2012/01/keeping-up-with-facebook-on-your-apple.html

Consumer Tribes

Consumer tribes are more fluid forms of consumption communities. Individuals who make up a tribe are linked through aesthetic and social expressions (Canniford 2011; Maffesoli 2007). Tribes are seen to manifest when members engage in symbolic rituals and persisting only as long as the rituals and cult-objects maintain their attractive powers over tribal members (Cova and Cova 2002). Tribal consumers "both absorb and resist" the "pre-packaged" brand and product messaging from marketers (Cova, Kozinets, and Shankar 2007, 4). The consumer tribes and brand communities literature overlap with subcultural literature in significant ways. Regardless of the marketplace culture's label, these communities demonstrate commonalities, such as a shared ethos among community members, status hierarchies (of varying strength), and patterns of integration and conformity (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001; Cova and Cova 2002). Additionally, all three literatures stress the importance of understanding the evolution of community.

Similar to Boorstin's (1973) concept of 'consumption communities,' Maffesoli's (1996) work on neotribalism compares the changing structures of American life past and present. In a reaction to heightened individualism and alienation within postindustrial society, Maffesoli argues that consumers seek tribes as sources of community and identity. These affiliations are dynamic and fluctuate as consumers' interests wax and wane (Maffesoli 1996). Unlike traditional tribal communities or even traditional subcultures such as the Punks, Mods and Teddy boys (Hebdige 1979), postmodern consumers may be members of many tribes or brand communities (Cova and Cova 2002). Community can therefore transcend traditional boundaries of geography, time, and concretized membership identification (Cova 1997). For instance, while

traditional group affiliations might have been with a small rural community, consumption

communities allow consumers to connect virtually with people who share interest in such things

as cooking and culinary matters (de Valck 2007) or Harry Potter fan fiction (Lanier and Schau

2007).

Consumer tribes are characterized as being fluid, and fast moving, such as ravers

(Goulding et al. 2009) or consumers seeking alternative marketplaces (Kozinets 2002; Thompson

and Coskuner-Balli 2007). This dynamic nature does not mean that consumer tribes cannot be

leveraged or in some way harnessed by the marketplace (Canniford 2011; Cova and Cova 2002).

Goulding et al. (2009) demonstrate how the illegal rave scene of the late 80s and early 90s

became commercialized through club promoters, DJs, and nightclubs. They transformed

venues—through lighting, music, and space planning—to complement the experience of being

on the drug ecstasy, which heightens sensitivity to sensory input and was in common use among

these clubbers (i.e., former rave goers).

Tribes typically form around a complex system of consumption practices that foster

community in the fundamental sense that "people feel emotion together" (Maffesoli 2007, 27).

Value within a tribe is created through 'playing' with marketplace resources, creating and

twisting meaning through consumption practices that ignite passion and create social connections

(Canniford 2011). The investigation of RHS events, ranging from local chapter luncheons at a

restaurant to the 'red carpet gala' at the international convention, help inform how 'emotion

together' functions to form emotional bonds between members. Moreover, the variety of

membership involvement offers greater insight on the similarities and differences between how

Red Hat members (or tribes of members) create, shape, and 'play' with meaning around the RHS

brand, while enhancing their social connections and interpreting the boundaries of their community.

In summary, across all of the approaches to communities of consumption, community members create value for themselves through interpersonal connections and shared meanings (Cova et al. 2007; Schau et al. 2009b). For the RHS, part of the value arises in the active resistance against dominant social images on aging. RHS members may seek to challenge the stigma of old age through their public displays, costumes, and dedication to a community ideology that promotes positive images of older women. Yet, the RHS is not an organization founded to combat ageism; in fact, the association promotes fun rather than resistance or activism. Cova et al. (2007) suggest that rebellion can take different forms and the interactions of consumer communities "are often equal parts playful and liberatory, a place where struggles against the system are cloaked less in ideology of resistance and more in identities of liberation" (Cova et al. 2007, 8). Thus, it is in the meaning of the RHS activities of fun and play where this dissertation explores whether these practices are merely leisure activities or they represent higher level identity work (see chapter 7).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

The purpose of this research was to understand how consumption communities can offer value to women during later life stages. Ethnographic methods were employed because of the fit between these methods and the aims of the research (Arnould and Thompson 2005).

Qualitative methods, such as ethnographic methods, provide a flexible approach to investigate the dynamics of social interactions among social actors and how meaning is constructed as it relates to social and cultural contexts (Creswell 2013). The RHS is composed of women who explicitly meet to socialize and have fun. Local RHS groups are consumption communities that have fluid and dynamic boundaries with members entering and exiting over time. Although some loose rules guide the conduct of gatherings, these meetings can quickly move from light-hearted conversations to serious discussions of sensitive issues about aging and illnesses. An important focus of the data collection was capturing these experiences in context. This emphasis is consistent with ethnographic work, which uses semi-structured interviews and participant-observations in a systematic approach to understand how individuals make sense of their surroundings, behaviors, and interactions in the context of everyday life (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). This investigation of the RHS seeks to explore the first-hand experiences of community members (i.e., emic understanding) in order to build theory that extends beyond the particular context studied (i.e., etic understanding) [Arnould and Thompson 2005]. In this study,

the focus is on the RHS but the goal is to develop theoretical insights on aging and well-being

that can extend beyond this context. Data for this project is gathered from a range of sources in

order to derive a quality and textured understanding of the phenomena under investigation

(Creswell 2013).

The primary source of data was interviews with participants during which they shared

their stories and spoke about their own experiences. In conjunction with the interviews,

participants' photographs from RHS events and inventories of participants' RHS-related

possessions were also gathered. Fieldwork at local and national events supplemented the

interview data. Improvised field methods were also used. Finally, archival and secondary data of

marketing communications from the parent RHS association and over seven years of chapter

newsletters provided insights into national and local issues within the RHS.

This chapter details the methodology employed for this study. First, I discuss entry and

selection of the informants. Next, I provide an overview of the data gathering techniques.

Finally, I discuss the research process including ethical considerations, analysis, and research

rigor.

Entry and Selection of Informants

Initial contact with RHS members began in October 2011 through an email request sent

out by a family friend who is in her late sixties and a longtime resident of this area. Following up

on leads produced from this email, I met with Maddy and Norma who provided introductions to

two different chapters where I conducted the majority of my interviews and fieldwork. I

discovered that a number of active RHS chapters operate in the area, but the majority of these

groups are not officially registered with the RHS association. This finding provided a valuable opportunity to explore the boundaries of the RHS community. Thus, I began my initial focus on two local RHS chapters: the Uncapped and the Capped[3]. The Uncapped group first originated as an official RHS chapter, but this group broke away from the RHS organization in mid-2009. This group no longer wears the red hat regalia to meetings and does not associate with the organization. Yet the Uncapped continue to carry on many of the traditions and rituals that began during their stint as red hatters. In contrast to this group, the Capped are an official RHS chapter. Members proudly wear the regalia to all their chapter outings. Research on these two chapters and their members offer the opportunity to explore the connection among the visual display of RHS affiliation, the influence of rituals and traditions, and the effects on community solidarity (see Appendix A: Chapter Profiles and Observations).

Following each interview, a snowballing technique was used to identify additional participants. During fieldwork, I met additional RHS members with whom I held both formal and informal interviews. In total, sixteen in-depth interviews were conducted (see Appendix B: Interview Informant Table). Ten in-person interviews were conducted with local members: five Capped members and five Uncapped members. Six phone interviews were conducted with members from other RHS chapters to better understand involvement with the parent organization and to supplement findings regarding costuming and social support. The sample consisted of white women from the U.S. Although the RHS is highly diverse on an international level, local chapters are less diverse and sampling for ethnic and racial diversity is beyond the scope of this project.

---

[3] Pseudonyms are used for chapter and informant names.

Informants were purposefully sampled for their various levels of active involvement within the RHS community and generally range from members with high levels of involvement who play important leadership and organizational roles to members who attended infrequently or have left the organization. By exploring members with varying levels of involvement, I sought to understand the range of benefits and meanings members derive from participating in this consumption community. For instance, on the one hand, Maddy left the Uncapped chapter after they voted to stop wearing the red and purple attire. As a former member who was disgruntled, she offered a different perspective on the role of the trademark RHS attire. Laura, on the other hand, prefers the new policy of wearing regular clothing, even though she fondly remembers the rituals that have ceased because of the formal organizational break.

Data collection continued until reaching redundancy, or the conventional point at which interpretive sampling ends (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Redundancy occurred when additional interviews and field observations yield significantly diminishing returns or novel insights.

Data Gathering Techniques

Four primary methods for collecting data were used: interviews, participant observation, an improvised field technique, and archival data. In total, I conducted sixteen in-depth interviews, and attended fourteen local chapter outings and one international convention. Along with fieldnotes at the international convention, we gathered stories from 50 RHS members. Each of these methods is discussed next.

Interviewing.

As Robert Weiss (1994, 1) states, "interviewing gives us a window on the past. We can also, by interviewing, learn about settings that would otherwise be closed to us." Interviewing provided a foundation for understanding the RHS and the meaning participants subscribe to their membership by allowing the emic perspective to emerge. The techniques used for interviewing informants drew heavily on feminist research methods (Reinharz 1992). Specifically, the decision to use participant-led interviews, in which participants take the lead, was made for two reasons. First, aging women are stigmatized in American culture (Calasanti 2005). Consistent with feminist principles, which stress sensitivity to issues of power in the research relationship, participants told their stories in their own words and a relaxed, conversational style of interviewing was used (Reinharz 1992). Second, my positionality, or social situatedness as a younger female, needed to be taken into consideration for its effect on the potential power divides (Nager and Geiger 2007). I negotiated this position by placing myself in the role of a student seeking to learn from these women about their experiences. Generally, red hatters were willing to speak candidly about their experiences with the understanding that they were helping me learn more about the group for my dissertation. For example, women spoke frankly about private issues such as health issues and family problems. Only a few times did members ask to speak off the record, at which time I turned off the recorder and listened to them before asking permission to restart the recording.

Also consistent with feminist interviewing techniques, I sought out narratives recognizing the situatedness of meaning in the multi-contexts of participants' lives, experiences, and culture (Reinharz 1992). Interviews were primarily conducted in the homes of participants. This location has the advantages of increasing the participants comfort during the interview, providing them with easy access to artifacts to share, and allowing the researcher a fuller description of

43

participants' life contexts. For those with whom I conducted phone interviews, I personally met each of them prior to the interview, except for Shelley. I was given Shelley's contact information through her friend from her church who also provided Shelley with an endorsement on my behalf. The majority of interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded after receiving signed permission from in-person interviewees and oral permission from phone interviewees. The recordings from all the interviews were transcribed (see Appendix C: Interview Consent Form and Phone Interview Consent Script; permission is discussed in more detail under the section on Ethical Considerations).

The interview protocol was initially designed to solicit participants' experiences related to four broad areas of inquiry: 1) history with the RHS (i.e., entry, involvement, practices, and rituals), 2) interpretations of RHS dress, 3) aging and gender, and 4) issues surrounding the national RHS (see Appendix D: Interview Protocol). However, many members provided narratives of hardships and the subsequent support that they received through the RHS. Emergent themes included learning about aging and identity work. These emergent findings prompted a revision of the interview protocol to ensure descriptions within these domains were captured during the interview process (see Appendix D: Revised Interview Protocol). In the remainder of this section, I discuss the areas of inquiry used and the differences between the two protocols.

Questions related to first area included "What attracted you to the organization?" and "Take me through a typical chapter outing." The aim of these questions is to encourage stories that illuminate the culture of the consumption community and personal connections and identification with the group. The protocol was revised and questions in this area focused less on asking about the rituals and traditions and more about their own personal involvement and how they would characterize relationships within their chapters (e.g. "What roles in the chapter do

you play?", "What type of women does it attract?" and "Are there topics that are easier to talk about with your Red Hat group than with other groups to which you belong?"). Initial interviews probed the costuming and fun in the RHS outings. Later interviews sought to dig deeper to understand how the RHS is a learning community and support group.

Questions related to RHS dress, such as "How is getting dressed and ready for a red hat outing different or like other times you go out?," facilitate participants sharing stories that help illustrate the personal meaning behind the style promoted by the RHS. With the Uncapped, these questions were changed to elicit a comparison between what it was like when the chapter dressed in red hat regalia compared to now (when members wear their regular clothes). While questions about dress were dropped from the revised protocol, this topic continued to come up during the interviews (see Appendix D: Revised Interview Protocol). Generally questions were asked that probed the meaning of wearing the red hat such as, "What did you think about wearing the red and purple?" and "Do you feel [the red hat] makes a difference?"

Questions on learning and values found within the community include, "What have you learned from other members in your Red Hat group?" and "What are the most important values that are embraced by you and other Red Hat members?" These questions probe narratives focused on the relationship between self-identity, perception of aging, and influence of the RHS on identity and aging perceptions. These questions evolved in the revised protocol to explore changes they felt had occurred since they joined the RHS (e.g., "Can you think of an instance where you may have realized you're different or said to yourself 'wow, I wouldn't have done that or thought that before the RHS'?"). In addition, the revised protocol focused on asking about what participants learned specifically about managing aging and hardships from other members in the RHS.

Finally, since the initial foray into research of the RHS uncovered ambivalent relationships with the parent organization, questions such as 'How involved are you with the national Red Hat Society?' and 'Are there things about the national organization that you would change?' were also included. These questions help to understand the value local members perceive in the national organization and the relationship between the brand message promoted by the organization and the brand meaning experienced and created by these local women.

Over the course of the interviews, I became more skilled in interviewing. In particular, I found that repeating back what informants said helped encourage them to elaborate and explore issues. Additionally, as I spent more time with these older women, I felt more comfortable asking about issues on aging than I felt when I first entered the field. At first, when I asked these questions. I felt awkward and that I was highlighting my position as a younger woman. Through positioning myself as both a woman and student who is interested in learning from women who have more experience, I became more confident and at ease asking questions about aging.

Participant-observation.

Attending monthly meetings provided important first-hand knowledge about the interactions among RHS chapter members. Participant-observations were conducted primarily at monthly chapter luncheons sponsored by local RHS chapters. The locations of these outings rotates monthly, but are usually held within a 30-40 miles radius. In full, I attended fourteen outings, six with the Capped chapter, seven with the Uncapped chapter, and one with another regional chapter[4]. This fieldwork spanned two years (see Appendix A: Observations).

---

[4] Due to a mistake on my calendar, I showed up at the restaurant on the wrong week, but found out there was a RHS group meeting for lunch there. Upon seeing a woman I had met through other circumstances, I was invited to join the chapter for lunch without incident.

Participant-observation with the two chapters provides the opportunity to discover the embeddedness of practices and rituals within distinct factions of a consumption community. From the outings observed, the two chapters demonstrate a range of monthly practices and rituals (see Appendix A: Chapter Profiles for examples).

In addition to the chapter outings, I attended the annual RHS conference, themed "Golden Age of Glamour," held on June 28-July 1, 2012 in Las Vegas. The conference afforded another first-hand account of more dedicated Red Hat members. One informant, Donna, has attended two conventions with her daughters and commented that these conventions have many mother/daughter pairs. This story gave me the idea of inviting my own mother to accompany me to the convention location. Being that she holds a doctorate in education administration and is trained in qualitative methods, she graciously acted as a second researcher at the convention location.

Before attending the conference, I received permission to set up a table near the RHS organization booths. Using promotional tactics, we set up the booth with a sign saying "Tell Me a Red Hat Story" and provided a contact card for women to share their stories (see Appendix E for a picture of the booth and contact form). Many women filled out contact cards and were pleased to share their stories at the booth. For this reason, extensive fieldnotes were taken of these short conversations. In total, we received contact information from 32 members and stories from over 50 members. Following the conference, I contacted all these members but I was only able to conduct in-depth interviews with four respondents. I speculate three reasons for this low conversion rate. First, the primary source of contact information was email addresses. Second, I did not emphasize the desire to have a follow up interview after speaking with members. They may have felt they had already provided me with enough information during our conversation at

the convention. Third, it may have been an issue of timing as the convention was right before a holiday. Moreover, the women I spoke to did talk about the toll the convention took on them. They were exhausted and needed time to recover. Wanting distance from the event likely worked against me in gaining additional interviews. While this was a low conversion rate, the stories and fieldnotes from the convention provided a wealth of data. In addition to the booth, I also attended meals, educational sessions, and other activities held during the convention.

Fieldnotes were recorded during each participant-observation during the convention and at chapter monthly outings. During the lunches, I kept a small, credit card sized notepad in my lap. At the first opportunity, I laid out the position of all the attending members at the table. I either used their pseudonyms or a number to indicate their position at the table and also noted what (if any) type of hat they were wearing and what they consumed. Following this practice of sketching the layout of the meeting, I used the pad to jot down key words corresponding to particular details I heard or observed around me throughout the event. After the meeting, I used my drive home to digitally record my recollection of the lunch, starting with my entrance into the restaurant's parking lot, in order to establish a general timeline of events and expand upon observations. From these initial notes, I composed a descriptive narrative of the encounter to be utilized during data analysis.

Improvised Techniques.

Over the two years of being in the field, the women in the local chapters have gotten to know me and have become comfortable with me. For example, during a gathering in April 2013, as part of the queen's announcements of the Capped chapter, I was asked how my research was going. I shared with the women that it was progressing and that I am in midst of coding interviews. I added that one of the themes that emerged is the sense of camaraderie among

members and if anyone had any stories they would like to share, I would love to hear them. This inspired three spontaneous stories by three different members about what the Red Hat Society means to them and gave new depths to findings on topics such as the meaning of diversity, risk taking, and defining friendships. The casual, group setting was conducive to sharing and one story triggered another story. From this first experience, I asked another question during the next meeting. The goal here was to have the question ignite discussion in situ. Only one question was asked to avoid disrupting the gathering. This technique would not have been appropriate early on in fieldwork when I was establishing rapport with the group. Also, at this stage in the research, I was able to use this valuable time to get additional elaboration on key issues that had emerged in my analysis.

In addition to this method, I explored relationships among members of one chapter by diagraming how each member entered into the chapter. This chapter is smaller than the other chapter making this exercise manageable. At one gathering, I received permission from the queen to involve the group in this exercise. I laid a big sheet of paper on the floor and started by asking who the founding members of the group were. I then mapped out the network of women based on who introduced them to the chapter and what relationships they had with other members in the group. This exercise proved valuable in identifying central connectors in the group and the exercise prompted an explanation that group founders purposefully sought to keep the group open to any women interested in joining the chapter.

Collection of Artifacts and Secondary Texts.

With their permission, I photographed items participants shared with me during the interview. I also collected materials related to local chapters when possible and gathered marketing communications from the parent RHS organization.

Photographs, local chapter newsletters, and paraphernalia gifted to me from participants account for the artifacts collected. With each of the in-person interviews conducted, participants were asked if they have RHS photos and/or memorabilia that they would be willing to share. Eight out of eleven participants had prepared for the interviews by bringing out RHS materials to share. For example, Donna had a treasure trove of materials displayed on her dining room table in anticipation of the interview (see Appendix H, photo example #1).These items provided a useful introduction to the interviews allowing the women to talk comfortably about their experiences with the RHS community and provided examples of consumption related to RHS. Photo #1 in Appendix H depicts a display of the aforementioned RHS paraphernalia, which included a number of photos and Red Hat branded items from Donna's attendance at two international RHS conferences. The pictures and items acted as a focal point around which participants were able to tell detailed stories.

Ethical Considerations and IRB

Ethical considerations when conducting ethnographic research include issues of informed consent, privacy, harm, and exploitation (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Given that the topic of this dissertation is on consumption communities, issues of harm and exploitation are unlikely (particularly given the measures that were taken to preserve confidentiality). However, maintaining informed consent and privacy for participants are important ongoing ethical considerations. The IRB protocol supplies the basic groundwork for adhering to ethical responsibility and sensibility in the field.

In October 2011, I submitted and received IRB approval to conduct interviews and observations with the RHS (see Appendix F for current IRB Approval Letter). I have followed IRB standards that require informed consent from participants before conducting interviews. Along with outlining the promise of confidentiality, the interview consent reinforces the purpose of this research (see Appendix C for Interview Consent Form). The request for pictures demands additional care in protecting participant privacy. As outlined in the IRB protocol, photographs were managed to maintain confidentiality including only selecting photos that obscure any distinguishing features. For example, a large picture of the informant was cut out of the photo #1 in Appendix H in order to maintain her privacy.

Chapter names and participants all received pseudonyms, which were used throughout the transcription, analysis, and write-up process. I first asked women to select their own pseudonym. Unfortunately, women often gave names that were variations on their real names or a nickname from their RHS affiliation. Because these names offered low privacy, I instead created more "anonymous" pseudonyms.

I also disguised information about the location and identity of the towns, commercial spaces, organizations, and institutions named in interviews and participant-observations. Moreover, to maintain participant confidentiality, I feigned ignorance during interviews when one participant mentioned another participant or made inquiries about people who I had interviewed.

IRB policies do not require a consent form for doing fieldwork. Even so, during the first few observations with each chapter, I handed out flyers about the research to the chapter attendees. The flyer offered background on the research's focus. The flyer was often a conversation opener for attendees to give their thoughts on aging (see Appendix G on for

Observation Flyer). Because the Uncapped have disassociated from the RHS, a second version of the flyer was used that removed references to the RHS.

Analytical Procedures

Analysis of data focused on interview transcripts and fieldnotes, supplemented by photographs, local chapter newsletters, and marketing communications from the parent RHS association. This analysis was conducted within a hermeneutical framework, which uses the lenses of a participant's own personal history and a broader cultural meaning to understand and explain consumption meanings. The hermeneutical approach consists of three interrelated 'levels' of analysis: *intra*-textual analysis, *inter*-textual analysis, and a dialectical analysis, which are discussed next. These levels make up the hermeneutical 'part-to-whole iteration' approach to interpretation, in which analysis moves in interrelated cycles to derive themes and categories in an expanding and evolving process (Thompson 1997).

Intra-textual analysis.

First, in the *intra*-textual cycle, the interview transcript, fieldnotes, and materials associated with a participant is read and analyzed as a whole. An understanding of each participant's story is developed through the examination of the narrative *plot lines*, which indicate how participants organize events (circumstances, experiences, and characters) in relationship to their own identities, goals, and motivations. Integral to plot line development are narrative movement and narrative framing. Narrative movement refers to a story's chronological order of events that indicate how a participant interprets her situation through the telling of

relevant past and present events, and envisioning outcomes and her future state. Narrative framing denotes selective highlighting of events within a participant's story, which in a hermeneutical interpretation serves to demonstrate what are the salient issues and concerns in the participant's life. In both narrative movement and framing, there are the associations or linkages that a participant creates among different events discussed in her story that adds to the narrative plot line.

The process of analysis is assisted by coding the data. Coding functions as an infrastructure for searching and retrieving data and plays an active role in discovering patterns, themes, and ideas (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Beginning with the *intra*-textual stage, data are placed into categories, which are based on existing theoretical concepts (i.e., *etic* categories), the researcher's inductive sorting structures, and concepts borrowed from participants (i.e., *emic* categories) (Maxwell 1996). Coding continues as an iterative activity as categories are tested and key themes or ideas are identified during the *inter*-textual and dialectical cycles. To aid in coding the data, Dedoose qualitative data analysis software was used.

Inter-texual Analysis.

In the next level, analysis is conducted across all participants in order to identify similarities and differences within and among their narratives. In addition to creating and testing categories, this level provides an opportunity to find anomalies, contradictions, and inconsistences that test the adequacies of current theoretical frameworks for understanding the experiences of participants. This process of testing the theoretical framework is continued in the dialectical cycle.

Dialectical Analysis.

53

The final level is the dialectical analysis. This analysis is based on developing an understanding of the link between the personal history of participants and the broader socio-historical meaning. The analysis begins with formulating a larger narrative of each participant through identifying the relationships in meaning across different texts (i.e., interviews, observations, artifacts) that become integrated into the participant's personal history (Thompson 1997). It also requires the development of socio-historical knowledge relevant to the research questions (i.e., the perspective from the theoretical literature) and broader cultural systems. This level provides a basis for hermeneutical interpretation that recognizes the influences of cultural systems (i.e., education, mass media, advertising, and other systems "used to create a sense of a shared social identity among individuals") in shaping an individual's perceptions of lifestyle and identity options (Thompson 1997, 449). Through negotiating socio-historical knowledge and personal histories, the analysis leads to an understanding of how metaphors and concepts used by participants reflect, challenge, or expand existing knowledge related to communities of consumption, learning, gender, and aging.

Research Rigor

The criteria for evaluating qualitative research differ from those imposed by quantitative research because of their fundamental differences in both objectives and methods. Qualitative research seeks to explore in depth the nuances experienced by people in the course of everyday life. Quantitative research aggregates evidence to explain and predict future behavior. In this latter tradition, the terms *reliability* and *validity* are used as measures of consistency in results and the degree to which tests measure what they claims to measure (Fowler 1995). Although

54

qualitative researchers have borrowed these terms from positivists, their meanings are transformed by virtue of the research and the knowledge sought (Wittemore et al. 2001). While the exact interpretations of these terms are debated in qualitative research, scholars maintain the need for research rigor and offer strategies to ensure qualitative methods are applied appropriately (Creswell 2013, Wittemore et al. 2001, Angen 2000).

The rigor of qualitative research increases when researchers employ different methods and have prolonged engagement within the field. This allows for building trust with participants, gaining experience with the community's culture, exploring different contexts, and correcting of misinformation (Creswell 2013). Sampling is approached differently as well. For example, quantitative methods often involve sampling representatively so findings can be generalizable. Alternatively, qualitative research employs sampling across relevant theoretical domains. These strategies minimize the risk that the data reflects a systematic bias or a limitation in the research method for uncovering data. As previously laid out, I sought participant diversity through purposefully sampling women of different levels of RHS involvement and different chapter configurations. Settings for conducting data collection include multiple chapter outings held in various locations, informants' homes, the RHS international convention, and online communications. Regarding research methods, in-depth interviews, participant-observation, and collection of artifacts provide variety. Together these techniques allow for the development of "thick descriptions," which contribute to the vividness and clarity of the research, enabling the development of "structures of significance" and contributing to the research's quality (Geertz 1973, 9; Wittemore, Chase, and Mandle 2001).

During data collection, credibility is assessed through accuracy of describing what is seen and heard (Wittemore et al 2001, Maxwell 1996). Threats of credibility in interview data are

reduced through audio recording and having these conversations professionally transcribed. In addition, interview data was reviewed periodically to ensure I kept my influence on interviewees' answers at a minimum by avoiding leading questions and reactions. Recording in real time is more difficult during participant-observations, but strategies of note taking, previously detailed, help reduce threats, as well as creating concrete, detailed, and chronological fieldnotes (Maxwell 1996).

Integrity of interpretations is handled through strategies that reduce the potential of researcher bias (Whittemore et al. 2001). Integrity is aided by providing corroborating evidence from various sources, including participants, methods, and settings, that sheds additional light on a theme or perspective (Creswell 2013). Interpretations of themes and perspectives were conducted with transparency in mind to ensure clear explanations of why a given interpretation is made and how an interpretation is linked to prior theory or theory building. Additionally, interpretations were checked through feedback provided by committee members and colleagues.

Criticality is threatened when alternative explanations or understandings are ignored in order to support preconceptions or to fit within existing theoretical frameworks (Whittemore et al. 2001). These threats are addressed through the iterative hermeneutical approach, which requires continual engagement with socio-historical knowledge in conjunction with data analysis.

The next chapter explores the context of the RHS in greater depth by highlighting the structure and rituals that support the function of the community and provides a foundation for members to derive meaning and value from their association.

Chapter 4: Structure and Community Practices that Build Meaning in the RHS

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a more in-depth introduction to the RHS from a consumption community perceptive. This discussion sets the stage for exploring the different ways that meaning and value are created by highlighting practices central to the RHS community. RHS is placed within the consumption community framework developed by Thomas, Price, and Schau (2013). In their article, Thomas et al. (2013) analyzed 100 papers published on consumption communities and developed a classification based on their findings. First, I discuss access to the community. Second, I examine the structure of the community and various levels of association members demonstrate. Third, I explore the influence that marketplace orientation and the focus has on the community. Last, I discuss collective belonging and the rituals of meal sharing and gift-giving in strengthening the community. Table 1 provides dimensions used in framework and how the RHS fits within each dimension. Examining RHS using this frame helps better define the RHS and reveals how the RHS is similar and different from past communities studied (Thomas et al. 2013).

Table 1[5]: Structure of Red Hat Society

Dimension	Definition	RHS Status	Details
Access	The openness of the community to new members including, 1) barriers to entry and 2) amount of welcoming and recruiting behavior	1) Low barriers 2) High welcoming	The barrier to entry for RHS is low. The only requirement is to be female. Otherwise, entry into the RHS can come from an invitation from a local chapter member. Or potential members can sign up with Hatquarters and choose to join a local chapter, create their own chapter, or become an online community member. Overall, RHS is very welcoming. There is variation at the national level and the local level as some chapters are closed to new members.
Heterogeneity	The level of difference or variations in how members are positioned, derive meaning from association, and produce shared resources	Heterogeneous	The centrality of the RHS identity varies across members.
Marketplace Orientation	The level of collaboration with the marketplace, whether synergistic, neutral (limited), or oppositional	Synergetic/ Oppositional	While all members support marketplace vendors through purchases of red and purple clothes and associated paraphernalia, not all members support the official RHS brand by maintaining their membership.
Focus	The emphasis of the community being on a brand, activity, or ideology	Brand, activity, and ideology	RHS has a triple focus stressing the Red Hat brand, congregating for fun, and promoting core values.
Collective belonging	Spirit of solidarity (*communitas*) as part of collective identity promoted by the community	Prominent	The sense of togetherness is emphasized at the national and the local levels.

---

[5] Modified from table in Thomas et al. 2013.

Access

RHS is a very open community. Communities, such as skydiving (Celsi et al. 1993) or mountain men (Belk and Costa 1998), have high barriers to entry because of the significant investment in acquiring skills, gaining technical knowledge, and purchasing gear and fashion necessary for membership within the community. The barriers to entry for RHS are low. The only requirement for access is to be female. Entry into the RHS can come from an invitation from a local chapter member. Or potential members can sign up with Hatquarters and choose to join a local chapter, create their own chapter, or become an online community member. The various levels of involvement possible with the RHS are similar to other heterogeneous communities that have low barriers of entry, such as the running community (Thomas et al. 2013) or the peer-to-peer online problem solving community (Mathwick et al. 2008).

Welcoming new members is one practice that is widely seen in RHS. Welcoming practices include open invitations to join the community, introducing friends and family members to the group, and providing information on community resources. For instance, one RHS conference attendee told how she had moved to a retirement community in Florida where she did not know anyone. She went online and discovered all the RHS chapters in the area were full. "I put a Red Hat flag in my garden–like a flag signal!–and the red hatters came out of the woodwork. There was my neighbor next door and one down the street… They welcomed me into the community" (convention fieldnotes, June 2012). It is also common for members to invite younger family members to join them in Red Hat activities. For example, Catherine has signed up her daughter-in-law and they attend area events together. Members are known to bring friends or daughters to monthly gatherings when they are visiting from out of town.

These practices present a positive outward impression of the brand and its members (Schau et al. 2009). As previously noted, RHS is an open community with low barriers of entry. Moreover, many members spread the message of fun and friendship by evangelizing to other women about the community. For example, members are encouraged to wear Red Hat attire when traveling in order to represent RHS and engage others in conversation (a red hatter was personally spotted walking through the Chicago airport on a date that did not correspond with the international convention). More than one member told stories about recruiting women while in the ladies room at a restaurant or shopping center. The practice is also supported by Hatquarters through their "Red Hat Society Ambassadors" who evangelize for the organization, signing up new members, and reinforcing the value of the parent organization and the importance of paying dues.

Within local chapters, however, little explicit evangelizing occurs. No active push was made to gain more members. Occasionally, women were invited to attend local chapter gatherings to see if they enjoyed eating lunch with a new group of women and fit into the group. But this process was more of a mutual exploration rather than an active process of recruitment.

Structure of RHS and Heterogeneity

Red Hat Society has a fluid social structure compared with other consumption communities. For example, in the Harley community, a fairly rigid hierarchical social structure exists based on commitment to the community's core values and involvement with the consumption community (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). The RHS organization has a simple structure that is quite flexible outside of the formal parent organization (i.e., Hatquarters). This

parent organization identifies itself as a 'dis-organization' with a relative flat membership structure, made up of chapter leaders, called "queens," and chapter members. While queens are typically chapter members, the only obligation necessary to be a queen is to pay a percent higher in yearly dues. In other words, any member can buy into queen status.

A high degree of heterogeneity exists in the RHS. Members vary in their involvement within the community and derive different meanings from membership. Heterogeneity in the community is demonstrated in the different functioning of various chapters and how connected members feel to the larger, centralized sisterhood and ideology of play and fun. For example, Betty talks about the loose organization of her chapter. She took over leadership from the founders of the chapter who did not expect it to last more than five years. Although the chapter is ten years old, members still do not hold strong affinity towards the parent organization and do not pay dues. The chapter is a fun, social activity that members do on an irregular monthly basis. The Capped and Uncapped chapters fit within the middle of the spectrum. They meet monthly on a regular basis, have a leadership structure within the chapter, but do not have a strong connection to the parent organization. Different practices across the chapters demonstrate how the brand is adapted to fit the needs of the members. For example, the Capped chapter rotates their queen every year in order to relieve each woman of the work it takes to organize monthly events. Arguably the Uncapped chapter's decision to leave the organization is a way they have customized the brand. While the Uncapped chapter no longer wears red and purple, they still maintain many of the rituals that mark RHS groups. For instance, they publicly recognize members' birthdays, share announcements, tell off-color jokes, are known to order cocktails with lunch, and they still maintain a queen mother. This customizing can create problems within the formal RHS organization since it distances some chapters from the centralized brand. Yet, it is a

61

way for members to take greater ownership of their chapter, shaping the community to meets its unique and changing needs. In Chapter 6, various levels of participation are also explored in terms of costuming.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Margaret's and Sylvia's two chapters embrace the Red Hat ideology of fun, play, and global sisterhood. These women are committed to supporting the parent organization and the RHS brand. They require all their chapter members to be 'official' paying members. Moreover, Margaret has a magnet on her car with the RHS logo and carries RHS paraphernalia in her car in case an opportunity arises to talk to a woman about joining the group.

Marketplace orientation

The two dimensions—heterogeneity and marketplace orientation—are not easily untangled. As Thomas et al. (2013) point out a single dimension alone is less interesting than how the interplay between these dimensions create community types. Following this line of thinking, what becomes interesting is how the RHS's marketplace orientation affects the way its members interact within the heterogeneous community.

Marketplace orientation is the level of collaboration with the marketplace and can be categorized as synergistic, neutral (limited), or oppositional. The RHS's marketplace orientation can be seen as both synergetic and oppositional. All red hatters are asked to be supporting members to the Red Hat Society, but many do not comply with this regulation. In 2009, RHS increased yearly dues to $20 per year and required all members to be paying members. Many red hatters resented this change. Some chapters complied, while others did not. But whether due

paying or 'renegade,' most RHS chapters still consider themselves part of the consumption community. For example, members of the Uncapped chapter still feel a kindred spirit towards other red hatters. "I think that we would still feel free to go up, if we saw a Red Hat group …and identify ourselves as Red Hat, formerly Red Hat. I can't see any consequences, I personally don't feel any" (Laura). Yet, many members do not see the parent organization providing any additional value that justifies paying dues. Instead, they see themselves as responsible for the value that they create within their local chapter. The focus of the community may be another source of contention as some member fully embrace all aspects of the community's focus, while others do not.

Focus of the RHS

Thomas et al. (2013) distinguish between three types of foci: ideology (e.g., Burning man [Kozinets 2001]), activity (e.g., skydiving [Celsi et al. 1993]), or brand centric (e.g., American Girl [Diamond et al. 2009]). The Red Hat Society focuses on all three. It is an ideology that concentrates on the promotion of fun and freedom among older women; it is an activity that revolves around "Red Hatting" and celebrating life; and it is a brand with distinguishable characteristics. The meaning around Red Hat as an ideology, activity, and brand are explored in greater detail next (see Table 1).

Ideology.
The RHS ideology of fun and freedom is explored throughout the dissertation as it is present across practices and members' narratives of gender and aging. There is an interesting

ideological tension that members feel they need to reconcile. With the focus on fun, an external

stereotype exists that the RHS has no depth to it. This stereotype is similar to impressions of

college sororities, where outsiders view them as shallow and their relationships as superficial.

Sylvia encountered a woman who shared this impression, "I held back. I really held back. I

would have. Probably should have. But I thought, you know what the woman doesn't get it. She

doesn't get it. She's a snob. A total snob. Frivolous? Lady you should only know all the things

that we've done!" As becomes evident across the findings, the RHS members struggle with

significant life challenges and provide strong social support.

Although both the central organization and members state that fun is an end in itself, just

as quickly members point out that their chapters give back to the larger community through

philanthropy. Both the Uncapped and the Capped chapters donate money to local charities. A

queen at the convention mentioned that she asks her members to bring boxes of feminine

hygiene products to their gatherings, which she collects for a local women's shelter. Sylvia's

chapter also does philanthropic work, but she makes a point of adding a creative twist that keeps

the work in line with the values of fun and play. When the chapter watched the royal British

wedding in 2011, they pretended their invitations got lost at sea, but they still had a celebration

that helped others in need.

> We said when you go to a wedding you bring gifts, so please bring paper products. I
> know that the [Donation Center] here, their food pantry never gets toilet paper, Kleenex,
> paper towels, so bring me that as a wedding gift. You don't have to wrap it, don't spend
> money on wrapping paper, just bring paper goods. And we had mounds of it. (Sylvia)

Engaging in philanthropy helps deepen members' connections to the community and

reconciles their RHS identity with traditionally feminine characteristic that they value, such as

being charitable and thinking of others.

Activity.

RHS forms an activity that centers on "Red Hatting," which is any time a group of red hatters gets together wearing their red hats. But expectations guide this activity. The women typically meet and socialize in a public setting, such as a restaurant, shopping mall, theater, cinema, or park. Whatever the activity of the day may be, the mood of the gathering is positive, celebratory, and usually loud. Their presence is accompanied by looks and stares from other patrons, whispered comments among onlookers.

Red Hatting focuses on the shared ideology of fun, friendship, freedom, and the celebration of age. Fun rituals include choosing different restaurants or leisure activities each month, breaking out into song during lunch, and dressing up. As Maddy states:

> ...it was just so much fun. I loved the part of getting dressed up and seeing all those feathers. And every time I'd wear those feathers, they'd just be falling everywhere. And scarves, I just still have so many scarves with the Red Hat symbol on them.

Another fun tradition is creating humorous chapter names, such as the Grateful Reds, the Loose Tea Ladies, Old Spice Girls, or the Red Hat Peppers (Cooper 2004). Friendship rituals include gift giving, which often occur at the monthly meeting when those hosting the meeting provide favors and during Christmas gift exchanges (Ruth, Otnes, and Brunel 1999). RHS ladies also extend invitations to other members to join in local or regional meetings, which the RHS calls 'Hoots.'

Freedom rituals and traditions include the emphasis on letting members be unguarded, or telling uncensored jokes and stories. Finally, celebration of aging is exemplified in rituals that mark birthdays, such as the 'reduation' and publicly recognize member's birthdays. During their birthday month, members reverse colors–wearing purple hats and red outfits–in order to distinguish themselves and their chapters sings the 'happy birthday' song to them. In addition,

celebration of aging is reinforced by the telling and retelling of the Red Hat Society's creation

story and making reference to the Jenny Joseph's poem "Warning." Members highlight aspects

of the poem that support freedom from expectations and celebrate youthful, rebellious behavior,

such as "when I'm old I shall wear purple and spit on the sidewalk" (Sarah) and "taking extra

samples, extra cheese samples" (Nadine). The defiance found in the creation story builds on Red

Hat Society as a space separate from ordinary activities.

When Red Hatting, members are sending an important external message in these public

activities. The members demonstrate that they do not fit stereotypical beliefs about older

women—they are lively individuals who are capable of gaining attention and having fun.

Interestingly, some tensions arose around a recent interest by the parent organization in

promoting fitness. This "new" activity has not been widely embraced likely because it conflicts

with the activities of having fun and breaking free from expectations. Finally, the RHS brand is

also a focus, which is discussed next.

Brand.

At the center of RHS is a specific brand. A brand is defined as a symbol of attributes and

benefits of a product, service, or idea. The Red Hat Society is a trademarked brand said to be

dedicated to the promotion of women (Trademark office). The brand is representative of its

mission: "fun, friendship, freedom, fulfillment, and fitness". Important to this focus is the

consumption of brand-related items.

The possessions associated with RHS center around costuming, decorative, and

entertainment items. These products are typically red and purple and are embellished with

feathers, embroidery, and rhinestones. These possessions squarely reside in traditional female

spheres, particularly in terms of costuming. Yet it is not unusual to find subversive items with

66

phrases including "drama queen," "diva," "be outrageous," "red hatters matter," "talk to the hat," and "hatitude is everything." These messages reinforce the RHS's focus on the self and valuing the individual woman over her social roles. Another common message on RHS branded items center around friendship. Again, this reinforces the values of RHS and the member's shared expectations. These items also represent a level of indulgence that excites these women.

> My husband doesn't want me to join… but my husband is nuts. He talks about how it costs too much and that we're not doing anything. Well then he goes off on these hunting trips, and you know cost of that hunting gear? And what do they do on those trips? They sit around. Men don't do a thing. They just don't understand. (convention fieldnotes, June 2012)

Self-gifting reinforces to these women they are deserving of the item and arguably, it is a way for them to maintain their positive associations with the RHS (Luomala and Laaksonen 1999; Mick and Demoss 1990).

As mentioned earlier, members vary in the extent to which they are committed to the RHS. In particularly, Uncapped members have weaker ties to the RHS and red paraphernalia has lost some of its meaning. While members of the Uncapped chapter have held onto certain items associated with the RHS, they have for the most part put them in storage or away from general use. For example, Laura showed a logoed coin purse she received as a gift from another member. Laura used this coin purse for a number of years when she played cards with friends. More recently, she has stopped using the purse and uses one "that's not red, not Red Hat" (Laura). This disengagement with Red Hat demonstrates how the brand has lost some as its meaning to Laura. Not only has Laura's chapter disassociated itself from the organization, Laura herself has become more distant with the chapter as her network and activities have expanded beyond the RHS. In the last section, collective belonging and the practices that promote this feeling are explored.

Collective belonging

Consumption communities often seek to capture the internal cohesiveness and solidarity

of the group through different concepts. Thomas et al. (2013) explore the extent to which

members feel a sense of collective belonging (see Table 1), which is strongly felt by many

individual members:

> Denise announced, "I am not a group person. This is it!" [talking about RHS chapter].
> Always ready for a quick laugh, the women in the group giggled and Norma mockingly
> said "get out." But Denise stood by her statement that she is a traditional homebody but
> knows it's important to have friends outside of her family circle. Denise continued
> saying, "I don't care if you like me or not, hopefully you like me, but I am there for you. I
> will be there for you. And I will go through hell and high water for a friend." (fieldnotes
> April 1, 2013)

Denise's declaration was not unusual among individual members for a strong sense of solidarity

or *communitas* exists in the group (Yarnal 2006). On the one hand, women who are official RHS

members and attend national or regional events are likely to feel a greater sense of *communitas*

to the wider RHS community. Their experience during these events is likened to the adventures

of river rafting, during which consumers develop a sense of *communitas* through working

together and bonding over navigating the experience (Arnould and Price 1993). On the other

hand, members who do not see the value of paying dues towards the parent organization and

only attend local RHS chapter gatherings arguably limit their *communitas* to their immediate

chapter and its members. This split creates division within the consumption community, yet the

shared ideology keeps the community together providing value to its members.

An issue arises over how well the ideology can support the community if the brand

becomes decentralized. The Uncapped chapter offers some insights. This chapter began as a full

participating chapter and has roots within the RHS. Although the Uncapped chapter no longer

practices costuming, two rituals that are maintained are meal sharing and gift-giving. Both of these practices help strengthen *communitas* within the group and are explored next.

Meal Sharing.

An important aspect of RHS is chapter outings which typically occur at a local restaurant. By contributing economically to their communities and consuming in public, chapters are reinforcing RHS ideology that older women should be seen and have a valuable place in society. Moreover, their eating together has significance in deepening interpersonal connections. Food sharing has been demonstrated to have positive effects including increasing cooperation and bonding (Howarth 1997; Wittig et al. 2014). They are engaging in the ritual of eating and drinking at the same table, which is a demonstration of solidarity and expression of friendship among women (Jerrome 1997). Interestingly, long before this research, language has supported the strong correlation between food and friendship. The Latin root for 'companion' derives from the words "com" meaning "with" and "panis" meaning "bread."

The meals are also an opportunity to enact the RHS ideology of fun and freedom. The community promotes the mantra "have dessert first" and members do not scorn those who order an alcoholic drink (or two) with lunch. Since RHS outings are considered special times, the community provides members with a legitimate reason to indulge and pamper themselves (Xu and Schwarz 2009). On more than one occasion members made off-handed comments about splurging for their meals. For example, "Lil said that she is on a diet but not for this meal. She is going to order what she wants" (fieldnotes, February 2013). Beyond indulging, there is a sense of freedom from social pressure that comes from eating with the RHS. Along these lines, having dessert first and ordering drinks with lunch are ways for members to flip the script and break from social conventions by challenging expectations of proper behavior within the restaurant

69

space. Spectators are bound to take notice when these women deviate from ordinary conventions and are participating in something special. Nevertheless, boundaries do exist. The community does monitor their member's behavior to some degree.

> Around this time the waiter came by with dessert tray. Many of the ladies ordered dessert and Lana waited her turn and then slyly said to the waiter in a rather loud voice, "I want another one of these" pointing to her appletini [apple vodka flavored martini]. The group howled with laughter. After the waiter left, a few women mentioned that Lana is cut off after this one because she's driving. Under pressure from the group, Lana asked Denise to split her appletini. Denise finally agreed and among giggles, Lana walked over and poured half of her appletini into Denise glass. (fieldnotes, April 2013)

This type of monitoring is unusual; in this case, it is clear that limitations were imposed with the best of intentions and in a light-hearted manner. It is a demonstration of support, which is also seen symbolically in gift-giving.

Gift-giving.

Gift giving is a common practice in the RHS. Members are generous in both compliments and tangible gifts. In addition, gifting of red hat material is also a common way that friends and family show their support.

Compliments can be viewed as a type of gift-giving or way to demonstrate social affiliation (Belk 2010). Complimenting each other's physical appearance is commonly heard in the RHS setting. Members frequently point out how another member looks put-together, has a smart hairstyle, or has attractive clothing or jewelry. If the compliment is related to a Red Hat item, usually the recipient provides a narrative on the acquisition or creation of the item. For example, in fieldnotes I capture a common social exchange, "Nancy asked about Jones's hat: 'Is it new?' No, she has had it for a while. Jones got the hat from Wal-Mart for $8 and just added

70

ribbon to it. Nancy complimented her on the look" (fieldnotes, February 2012). These compliments within the group increase members' self-confidence and support positive feelings of group affiliation while maintaining individualism. Compliments on appearance are also common within the Uncapped chapter. For example, "Evelyn soon entered to the greetings from the other members. She wore a bright quilted jacket and accepted a number of compliments on her style" (fieldnotes, April 2012). Indeed, the Uncapped chapter continues to dress up, although not in the red and purple, and compliments are still is an important practice that reinforces connections within the group.

Along with compliments, gift giving among members is common. For example, as the Capped chapter gathered to carpool to a restaurant, Denise came over to Lucy's car:

> ...she passed Lucy a bag through the window. Denise said it contained two knitting books—she was cleaning and thought Lucy might be interested in them—and some stickers and toys for Lucy's granddaughters. Lucy exclaimed in delight and thanks Denise for thinking of her as she put the bag beside her" (fieldnotes, November 2012).

Gift giving strengthens bonds within a community through a sense of gratitude and by creating unspoken expectations of future reciprocity (Algoe, Haidt, and Gable (2008); Belk 2010). Gift-giving is expressive and can also reinforce connections. For example, Norma's mother-in-law, who was a red hatter, passed away leaving Norma with RHS paraphernalia. Norma decided to give these items to other chapter members:

> [Norma] gave all of her Red Hats—wrapped up, each of her Red Hat items and put 'em under the tree when we have our [holiday party] and you could pick one. …I know she was a dear lady. And this was one of her little things. I have got to put it on somethin'… she loved it, she had a lot, a lot.

Norma's gift to her chapter friends expresses her deep affection as she shares items that evoke memories from a former member.

Within the Uncapped chapter, gift-giving is a ritual that is practiced at every meeting. In this chapter, two or more members act as hostesses each month. They are responsible for coordinating the restaurant reservation. Although the hostesses' "official" duty may end there, customarily they set up decorations and provide goodies for each attendee, such as chocolates or small gifts. Many times the hostesses will have special gifts for members who are celebrating birthdays. Gift-giving is such a strong expectation that members will be very explicit in announcements when the lunch is, "no frills, which means no gifts, no stuff, we're just getting together" (Sarah). While gift-giving is presented as non-reciprocal, it is not the case in practice. Parties feel an obligation to give a gift in return (Belk 2010; Cialdini 1993). For example, there were two times that hostesses have announced a "no frills" luncheon, yet when entering the restaurant, the tables have been decorated by the hostesses with gifts at each table setting.

Buying RHS paraphilia provides one way for friends and family to show their support and be involved. At Maddy's birthday party; "they surprised me with a birthday party and gave me the red hat and all the purple stuff and all the beads and all that. They made [all guests] wear red hats, so everybody who came to the party wore purple." Family and friends show their approval and recognition of a member's social identity as a red hatter by buying Red Hat gifts. Similarly, Laura showed Red Hat related gifts she has received over the years. Two items were given to Laura by friends outside of the RHS to affirm her involvement with the group. Laura points out that she did not realize how much she must have spoken about RHS until she started getting Red Hat related gifts from friends and family. Although she was part of the Uncapped chapter, Laura has a vintage red hat, a gift from a family member, which she keeps on a hat stand on her bedroom dresser. Even though she no longer participates in the costuming, the hat is still meaningful to Laura.

Chapter 5: Social Capital and Support Building Personal Resiliency

Within this chapter, I discuss how RHS enables members to gain social capital through involvement with their chapters and the larger organization. Second, I examine how the extended RHS social network provides social scaffolding for learning about the challenges surrounding aging. Third, RHS is compared and contrasted to traditional support groups. Both function to offer their members support, but each uses different mechanisms to deliver this support. Last, I explore how personal resilience increases through the social space created by the RHS.

Social Capital

Social capital is the idea that social networks with their reciprocal ties have value to individuals and society. Individuals gain social capital by taking advantage of the resources that flow from belonging to various social networks (Putnam 2001). Participation in social networks contributes to an individual's social identity and offers a sense of belonging (Tajfel 1978). In addition, research increasingly links positive social identity to greater well-being and better health outcomes (Jetten, Haslam, and Haslam 2012). RHS provides members with social capital through both "bonding" and "bridging" capital (Putnam 2000).

Bonding Social Capital.

Bonding social capital is associated with strong social ties, such as family and close friends, with whom individuals share a similar situation. Through bonding, there is increased cooperation with a community and a reinforcement of social identities (Putnam 2000). Strong bonds are found in the RHS through members who enter with existing friends or develop new friendships within the group. Women speak of meeting their best friend through the RHS and having "fun with ladies my age" (convention fieldnotes, June 2012). Part of this affinity can be attributed to the majority of these women being from the same generation, which strengthens positive social identity within the group (Weiss and Lang 2009). For example, more than one member discussed how different it was for her growing up before the women's movement and how that impacts her friendships and life choices. Being with other women who share similar social and cultural experiences, both good and bad (e.g., the lived experience of rigid gender expectations and discrimination), provides a shared understanding from which they are able to build friendships.

Friendships in the RHS extend beyond the boundaries of the group into the everyday life of members. Members talk about having dinner parties, exercising, visiting, and vacationing with other RHS members outside the regular monthly meetings. The closeness of these relationships is expressed in their body language as well. Close friends at the conference tended to lean into each other when talking about meeting each other through RHS. Audrey and Sarah demonstrated their relationship at one outing, "On Audrey sitting down, Sarah and she exchanged glances, smiling at each other. Briefly, Sarah rested her head on Audrey's shoulder as Audrey leaned into her, both of them closing their eyes for a second before Sarah lifted her head" (fieldnotes, June 2012). In general, the women have little physical space between and among one another and frequently touch when greeting one another at the beginning of the luncheons. Many times

women will put their hand on the other's shoulder or over the other's hand while talking

together. These moments of interpersonal touch are known to have a comforting effect, adding to

members' well-being and creating bonds that increase mutual trust and cooperation (Field 2001;

Gallace and Spence 2010). Moreover, touch is known to reduce levels of stress, enabling more

efficient problem solving (Coan, Schaefer, and Davidson 2006). This leads to greater sense of

community as women see each other as "sharing their load."

Bridging Social Capital.

Although strong relationships exist among women within RHS, arguably, the broader

organization is primarily made up of weak ties among members. Bridging social capital expands

individual's social capital through the access to different groups and individuals from across

different social strata. This expands members' access to new perspectives, ideas, and

relationships that they would not have gained otherwise (Putnam 2000). Bridging social capital is

developed by organizations like the RHS. The core of the RHS is an extended network made up

of chapter groups that share rituals, consuming, and values associated with the organization but

members may not know each other personally. For example, the larger community supports what

they named "gutsy gals." These are women who travel by themselves to the conventions and

usually room by themselves. "Gutsy gals" is a moniker of pride for many women—both

Margaret and Catherine self-identify as "gutsy gals." Although they arrive alone, these women

are quickly "adopted" by other members and brought into activities at the convention. Their

shared social identity becomes a basis for enabling members to form connections with other

members even though they may be temporary or transitory.

The heterogeneity of the group allows bridging to occur by opening members up to

groups and individuals beyond their immediate circles (Putnam 2000). These groups include

associations around social leisure and wellness related activities such as card games, water

aerobics, line dancing, singing, knitting, volunteering with local charities, and various church

congregations. Connections to these groups provide additional resources these women can

leverage. Within the group itself, members are diverse in terms of their life experiences including

hardships and health challenges. This heterogeneity enables members to be resources for each

other (Granovetter 1983). RHS extends the women's 'radius of trust' to others outside of their

small networks. Cooperative relationships are formed that allow for learning through sharing of

information and ideas (Fukuyama 2002).

This diversity of social networks is seen as a benefit by many of the members. Lil is a

founding member of a chapter, which was a breakaway group from an initial chapter she started

with friends from high school. These friends wanted to keep their chapter small.

> This didn't sit right with Lil. This wasn't what RHS was about, in her mind. There were a
> number of women interested in the group and Lil thought it was important to be
> diversified. "I mean, after a while, what do you talk about?" She and a few others decide
> to start a chapter that was open to more women and that is what they did. "It's just more
> fun that way. More interesting." (fieldnotes, May 2103)

Indeed, when asked about their chapters, a number of informants spoke positively about the

diversity of their RHS chapter; "everyone is just so different" (Maddy) and "it's all different

walks of life of women" (Norma). The RHS enables members to expand their network beyond

their densely knit circles allowing them to create and maintain both weak and strong ties.

Although this diversity is generally perceived as a benefit, for Judy, meeting people who are

different was at first an obstacle to be overcome:

> The first few times Judy came to RHS, she listened to the ladies talk and she didn't know
> a whole lot of them. She said, "You know, I don't like this because all these people are so
> different from me. And I don't have the same interests as they have, and some have really
> strong personalities." She said she has always been follower, not a leader, and she doesn't
> like going places by herself. But then she said to herself, "why would you deny yourself
> learning something? Why would you not want to have this experience? Why not learn

from these ladies and listen to what they have to say? And, all at once, I felt like I belonged." The group said, "Ahhh," and giggled. Judy continued saying "now I feel like each one of you are my friends." (fieldnotes, April 2013)

The expanded social network requires members to move outside of their comfort zones, and many are rewarded by developing meaningful relationships. Research finds that extended social networks are associated with less cognitive decline in older individuals and benefits them through greater activity and emotional support (Holtzman et al. 2004).

In addition, when members are actively engaging with the group, they are likely to adjust their behavior to be consistent with the group (Oyserman 2009). To be consistent with the RHS, members need to be comfortable challenging social expectations, such as being boisterous in public and asserting themselves with confidence. Laura captures her successful struggle to defy old conventions: "it's just fun to be part of a group of women [who]… loosen things up and lighten things up and it's okay to laugh and have a silly and make noise in a restaurant and do things that I've been socialized and conditioned not to do all these years." Research indicates that emotional states are activated by salient social identities (Coleman and Williams 2013). The RHS is associated with fun and laughter so this social identity evokes a positive emotional state that its members enact. This is aided through the process of emotional contagion, which finds that happiness in individuals spreads throughout their social network (Fowler and Christakis 2008).

As part of this social network, women feel that they can count on the community for emotional support. The social network connects the women to one another so that those in need will not be overlooked. Lucy gives an example of this benefit of the extended network:

> One of the ladies' husbands was really bad and everybody was very concerned. And you wouldn't be if you weren't in a group… You hear a lot more, you know a lot more by being in a group. …You see them out, we'll send a birthday card, and you would not have done that otherwise. (Lucy)

77

Members of the RHS generally express interest in the well-being of other group members. Women support each other with kind words and by the tokens of support given to each other (Putnum 2000). During meetings there are updates on members who are not present due to illness or other problems. Upon an update on a member who struggles with a degenerative illness, "Teresa asked everyone to keep this member in their thoughts and the member would love to hear from them – send her something humorous. Ronette seconded that, saying 'send her funny things, something to make her laugh'" (fieldnotes, February 2013). In the case of another member's recent illness, a card of encouragement was circulated for all members to sign. At other times, emails are circulated updating members.

This caring ethos is demonstrated in the thoughtful support provide to women with mobility problems that help these women attend chapter gatherings. The chapters frequently practice carpooling and take care of members who may need extra assistance, "We walked together towards the door of the restaurant keeping pace with Eileen who walked with a stiff, short gate. Norma asked that someone help Eileen navigate the curb as she went ahead and opened the door" (fieldnotes, November 2011).

The RHS members have extensive life experiences that provide perspective on acknowledging significant life events. For example, Judy discussed how the she was supported during her husband's death:

> One of the things that impressed me so much was when I was fairly new, my husband died. And none of you knew him and I was all the way in Springfield. And all at once at the funeral home, here were a bunch of red hatters. And that meant so much to me because that was all the way to Springfield that they would come and I hadn't been a member long, but they were there to support me. (fieldnotes, April 2013).

In addition, social media plays a part in keeping some members connected to the greater "sisterhood."

> I have an example here in Greenville of a Queen who got cancer and she had support from all over the United States because she was active on the [message board]… and, she got cards and, and encouragement and everything else to help her fight this cancer that she had. (Margaret)

Members who are active contributors to RHS's social media networks benefit from these connections. Julee told about her own bout with cancer. Before her surgery, her sister posted her address on social media and Julee received "cards and cards with feathers from so many, from all over." Julee said that this helped give her strength, and "I went into the surgery with a pink scepter and crown on my head. And told the doctor, 'bring it on'" (convention fieldnotes, June 2012).

The same extended network that allows emotional support to flow freely also facilitates the flow of information. This sharing of information benefits the members by providing members the opportunities to learn, which is discussed next.

Sharing Information in the RHS

Research finds increased perceptions of shared social identity lead to a positive impact on well-being, which in turn enhances learning opportunities and behavioral change (Jetten et al. 2012). For example, a recent study examined the effects of older individuals participating in a 'water club,' which is a social peer group focused on changing behaviors to combat the dangers of dehydration. Participants in an experiment were divided into four conditions: the 'water club,' a controlled social club, a group that received educational interventions, and individuals in a control condition. The water club and the social club participants were found to have improved levels of hydration, perceived social support, and enhanced well-being (Gleibs et al. 2011).

Social learning theory maintains that the learning process cannot be separated from the situation in which the learning occurs. Social learning views knowledge as co-produced through "the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used" (Brown, Collins, and Duguid 1989, 32). The RHS outings provide a novel social space in which new learning can occur. Through observation, social modeling allows individuals to form an idea of how to perform a new behavior and this encoded information serves as a guide for later action (Bandura 1997). Members in the RHS quickly come to understand that monthly outings are not a space for negativity. They learn they can laugh, make fun of themselves, and enjoy being present in the current moment. Beyond learning to have fun and stay positive, the extended social network provides an opportunity to share health and wellness information. For example, at one meeting, "a member came up to me teasingly saying that I should be on their side of the table, 'we're talking about hearing aids, what fun!' and they started laughing and welcomed me" (fieldnotes, March 2012).

The women learn how to handle new age-related experiences, such as getting hearing aids, through their interactions with other members. Engaging in peer-to-peer interactions allows for skill and strategy development that is often more effective than if accomplished alone (Vygotsky 1978). Some of the women are more publically forthcoming about changes they are experiencing, such as forgetfulness or their loss of hearing. These women socially model more positive ways of managing the inescapable challenges of aging. Speaking about another member, Annie reflects "[she is] extremely open about her forgetfulness, and not embarrassed by it, and I think that's amazing." These incidents lead to personal reflections about aging and the opportunity to develop strategies that work best for the individual member. The conversations

also help normalize aging. When asked about conversations that occur in the RHS about aging, Norma says, they discuss issues that they did not have to face when they were younger:

> ...you know, wearing makeup you have to wear. Maybe you have to [making a lifting gesture in front of her chest] raise them up a little. And of course, we have more cellulite. More hot flashes, or no hot flashes all, it's different as you're growing older. And we joke about it, we have to… we got a laugh about it, there is nothing else we can do. It's age, it's the aging process. And sure we always bring it up, some way or another. Because we're all in it… it's a personal, but maybe not when we get together because we're all in the same boat. (Norma)

Members will take it upon themselves to share information that they feel would be valuable to the entire chapter. For example, Evelyn who had recently recovered from a series of significant health problems stood up and gave "testimony" to the entire group. Most of her problems, Evelyn had learned, stemmed from prolonged sleep deprivation and significant weight gain. She described her recovery process and stridently offered concrete recommendations.

> She concluded her testimonial by recapping her advice on sleeping and said that those carrying extra pounds should consider losing them. She also mentioned that we should all be stretching. The doctor told her the importance of stretching and that we can't overestimate the importance of stretching especially at night. Women began to nod at this recommendation and as she finished the group started clapping. (fieldnotes March 2012)

These experiences provide inspiration for other members to take control of their own health. For example, Denise recalls how she had gone to the dermatologist who found a pre-cancerous spot on her nose. She went to a RHS luncheon soon after its removal and used this experience as a shared learning moment to empower other women in the group.

> I took my hat off and they were like, 'ahh'… and I said okay, pre-cancerous and I explained the whole story and I said I'm just making you aware. Three of them went and three of them had to have pre-cancerous growths. …I explained and educated them, and now they're going once a year and I felt it was good. (Denise)

Members regularly discuss recent medical procedures and their progress, and share their physician's name and recommendations. Members ask questions and give advice freely based on

their personal experiences. For example, Audrey who sought out help from another member who was having mobility problems because of her bad knees.

> So I sat down with her one day and I said, I want to tell you about my surgeries because you look like you're in pain. And, sweetheart, it's nothing. I mean the rehab is a pain, but, when you first get up on those new knees and you find, oh, my God, there's not that initial pain. There's scar pain, there's muscle pain, but you work that out. And by golly, she went off, had one done and I don't think it was about 2 months later, she had the second one done. (Audrey)

Consistent with RHS values, sharing information about health issues are typically done in a lighthearted manner. One chapter calls this information sharing, "organ recitals," alluding to a long performance that others are forced endure. As Laura said about organ recitals: "rather than lamenting about our aches and pains and growing older… [instead] someone manages to make a joke out of it in some way to help you see the lighter side of that." This approach to information sharing was demonstrated in casual conversation at another chapter event.

> The subject went to knee replacement surgery and jokes about showing off scars. The question went out to who has had knee surgery – about four or five women had it done – and there was a comparison of scars among Kimmy and Sheryl. They asked Joan who was sitting next to them if she had hers done. She said no, but she had her hip replaced and moved to her hands mimicking pulling down the side of her waist band in order to show her scar. The other women laughed loudly. (fieldnotes, May 2013)

The RHS is a different type of space where women can more freely share. How RHS creates this supportive space and how it differs from traditional support groups is explored more deeply in the next section.

Comparison to Support Groups

The support provided by the RHS raises the question of how RHS compares to traditional support groups, which arguably provide similar group cohesion, member learning, and emotional

82

support. In traditional support groups, such as Weight Watchers or Alcoholics Anonymous, practices include confessions, oversight, and testimonials to achieve their stated objectives to help members achieve specific goals (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010). Within these support groups, confession and oversight play important roles. Both of these practices are negligible in the RHS.

In traditional support groups, confessions of transgressions provide members the opportunity to share their struggles, which increases group involvement. It is also a chance for reflection and sense making. Moreover, a tendency exists to dwell on the past through confessions. In Weight Watchers, an admission and forgiveness cycle is common. In Alcoholics Anonymous, members retell high and low times from their past. Confessions are discouraged in the RHS since members are coming together fully engaged in the joy of the moment and they are outside of their everyday lives. The distinct nature of RHS was demonstrated to me during one luncheon:

> I sat across from Gersten. I reintroduced myself and said that I might be taking notes in my little notepad. Gersten took the pad from me and wrote "I just found out this a.m. I have breast cancer. Red Hats is my support group. ♥ Gersten" (fieldnotes, February 2013, see Appendix H #2)

Throughout the entire lunch, Gersten did not speak about her diagnosis although she happily engaged in conversation. RHS provides the distance that allows members to think of problems differently. This helps build personal resilience by showing members viable alternatives that focus on positive emotions that are not just goal oriented. This is not to say that issues such as Gersten's are never brought forth in RHS. Indeed, at a later meeting her health challenges were discussed:

> A member called over, "Gersten, we want to know how you're doing." Gersten repeated her prognosis that there is a very low chance of reoccurrence, but they are going to keep

an eye on things through regular mammograms and meetings with the oncologist. "But I'm good," she concluded. Members applauded and said "that's wonderful." (April 2013)

While updates are generally asked for, as will be discussed later, when a member talks about their problems, diversion is emphasized.

The second practice of oversight in a traditional support group helps people stay motivated by monitoring performance and tracking progress toward goals. Oversight is important to the goal orientation of traditional support groups. It allows for supervising and accountability of members. This is a striking distinction from the structure of the RHS, where members have little requirements for belonging or repercussions for not attending meetings. Oversight in the RHS takes the form of a wellness watch in which RHS members look out for each other and share information through their network.

Both traditional support groups and the RHS engage in testimonials. Testimonials are viewed as autotherapeutic in nature, allowing individuals to celebrate accomplishments through group authentication that demonstrate "successes are simultaneously individual as well as collective feats" (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010, 869). Although testimonials are not a formal part of RHS outings, they happen regularly. The testimonials given in the RHS fall under two categories. The first is healthcare related, which is exemplified by Evelynn's and Denise's statements about their medical situations and advice. The second is related to the social support received through RHS. For example, "Josie reiterated what Annie said earlier that RHS is about friendship. She was choking up as Josie explained that because of her pain, if it wasn't for the RHS, she would be isolated." (fieldnotes, November 2011). At the international convention, testimonials about the benefits of RHS were plentiful. Members openly shared how RHS has helped them through divorce, loss, and health problems. Women told of their depression before RHS, one member proudly proclaimed, "Now I'm not depressed, I'm off my meds!" (convention

fieldnotes, June 2012). These shared stories strengthen bonds within the group by showcasing how the RHS community provides a nurturing space for its members (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010).

A Different Kind of Space that Promotes Personal Resiliency

Members talk about RHS as a separate social space for fun and laughter. "You have fun. It's purely fun. And we all have enough in our lives that's not fun that we have to get through" (Donna). RHS provides members with an escape from their problems and everyday stressors; people are bound by their shared desire to still enjoy life and laugh in the face of adversity.

In other small groups, Betty argues that members "tend to be 'woe is me,' 'life is tough,' and 'can you help me' you know? Where I think that sometimes we just need harmless friendships that just give us three hours of good fun and that makes us feel normal again." This sentiment was repeated by other members and supported in participant observations. Stories that have a serious tone are kept short, quickly turned into jokes, or another member may cut in and provide a positive twist. Updates on missing members who are facing health or family problems are usually followed by a member sharing a funny story or a member announcing celebratory news such as a new grandchild, a wedding, or an anniversary.

Many of these women are primary caregivers for spouses or other loved ones and RHS provides a "respite" or an island of normality for its members. Catherine is one such member who cared for her disabled husband until his death. RHS gave her a reason for "getting away from the home. Getting out and doing things that I wouldn't do ordinarily."

> ...to get out from under the pressure of being 24/7 nursing care for [her husband]. I had to get away for a while. And the only time I could get away was either Red Hats or grocery store, and that's it. That's the only time I got away from him. Otherwise we were joined by the hip. And you can only take a person so long that way. (Catherine)

Similar stories were repeated by other women who saw RHS as a way to "stay sane, healthy" (Sarah), citing that, "you need a break. You'll just start to hate the person if you don't take a break from it" (Sylvia). RHS lets members "feel normal again" by letting women have fun and set aside demands for a short period.

Laura personally sees the value of having fun and letting go, "So they were just perfect for where I was at that particular point in time—coming off the cancer surgery and treatment. It was just exactly what I needed to redirect." This redirection or distancing can help women gain new perspectives on their roles and revitalize them in their efforts. RH outings are focused on the women having fun and living in the moment. For example, Margaret's daughter died but rather than providing her a space to unleash her grief, RHS provides her a place where she can feel joy again.

> This gives you time and gives you permission to play after cancer, after the loss of your child, after the loss of your husband. We're telling you it is okay to laugh again, it is okay to play again, it's all right. You can go out and smile at the world. It's okay. So this is how we differ, as I see it, from the other support groups. And if you need that support--go, do it, if that's what you need. But laughter is one of the greatest medicines we have. (Margaret)

RHS demonstrates coping through laughter and camaraderie, which directly ties into increasing personal resilience.

Resilience is the process of coping that enables an individual to "bounce back" to normal functioning following adverse circumstances (Masten 2001). RHS helps members cope by building connections, allowing members to see a crisis from a different perspective, and learn that it is surmountable from others who have gone through a similar crisis. Many of these women

face stressful events, such as health problems, loss of loved ones, and challenging transitions of

retirement, divorce, and disability. These stressors contribute to the potential vulnerability of

these older women (Moschis 1992). To manage vulnerability, individuals employ different

coping mechanisms including fantasy and emotional regulation (Baker, Menzel, and Rittenburg

2005). Fantasy is enacted in practices that allow members to dress and act differently from

everyday life. During luncheons, it is not uncommon to hear members talk about wanting to

escape on adventures.

> One of the members was asked about her family. She said she dreams about buying a
> camper and leaving this place to "destinations unknown." She ordered a fruity alcoholic
> beverage from the waiter, saying that she needs it. On hearing the remark about the
> camper, the waiter commented "I was going to say, take me with you." To which she said
> "gladly," and the group laughed and giggled. (fieldnotes, February 2012)

Although ordinary life may be burdened with caregiving and health challenges, RH outings are

extra-ordinary where women let down their hair, laugh loudly in public, order drinks in the

middle of the day, and flirt with young men. Everyday expectations are suspended.

Moreover, with older adults facing hardships, a tendency exists to regulate emotions over

issues that they cannot control (Moschis 2000). Research finds that a developmental shift occurs.

Among youth, a preference exists for negative information, but among seniors a preference

exists for positive information, which is call the "positivity effect" (Carstensen, and Mikels

2005). These tendencies are exemplified by Betty:

> When I first lost my husband, I was surprised that people who have lost their spouse
> didn't kind of come to me more and try to share it. But after I went to a grief group and I
> realized how many of them didn't have a grip at all and that's why they were there. But I
> realized that I wasn't in that place and just going and talking about it didn't make me feel
> better, it made me feel worse. And then I thought that is why they're not coming to me
> and talking to me about it, because they [RHS members] just want to have a good time.
> And it helps them deal with it privately... so just join and meet up to do something fun
> and just–forget it! (Betty)

There is a bond that is formed among members; they share a sense of camaraderie through having fun with women who have gone through similar situations.

The camaraderie of the RHS gives a new perspective on hardships. Parallels can be drawn to research on stigmatized individuals who face negative feedback. These setbacks can harm well-being because these individuals tend to draw global conclusions based on this negativity, affecting their sense of worth and belonging. By realizing that they are not alone and others have gone through rough times, the women can cope more successfully in their situation (Watson and Cohen 2011). The space of the RHS enables women to meet other women who have gone through similar experiences. Catherine discussed how she felt when dealing with her husband who had dementia:

> ...you feel so alone when, when you're going through it, you just feel like, "oh, my God I'm the only person that's ever experienced this. I'm so alone." But it's so nice to know that somebody else has been through it and maybe can give you a few hints or say, "I know what you've been through" and *really mean* they know what you're going through. And that really makes a difference. (Catherine)

Catherine was comforted in knowing that her experiences are normal. This was true for Piper who lost her partner. Being a younger woman, many of her friends could not relate to her experience.

> She said that although her friends were kind and wanted to help, it was hard because they were just in a different place. They had never experienced anything like that–losing a partner. Then she joined the RHS as a pink hatter. Here were women, some who have gone through what she had been through, that were still living their lives, still active and vivacious. They were 20, 30, 40 or more years older than Piper and they were thriving. (convention fieldnotes, July 2013)

Resilience here is strengthened through the hopeful outlook the women share that the circumstances will improve and emotional support is available (Carver, Scheier, and Segerstrom 2010; Werner and Smith 1992). While many of these women actively seek an escape from their hardships, their use of the RHS is not the same as disengagement or avoidance coping (Skinner

el al 2003). These women are processing their emotions and engaging in problem solving. As, Margaret states, "we all have other lives outside of Red Hatting, naturally, sometimes we wish we didn't because we'd like to play all the time, but reality sets in and you can't."

Some members deliberately seek out this emotional support in preparation for what is to come. Denise, on more than one occasion, discussed how she plans to outlive her husband and she sees RHS as a community that will continue to support her when this happens.

> I think it's a backup kind of thing, if something happens to our husbands we have people to share with. There's some people there that are widows already, and I think it's just like you know there's somebody there, so it's a comfortable feeling. But these ladies, I mean, actually we don't hang around together, but we know that we're there. In other words, pick up the telephone, and so and so would be here to help out. So it's a backup, it's a comfortable feeling to know that somebody is there and they've been through it. (Denise)

The idea here is the "perceived availability" of support through an extended network acts as a stress-buffer (Wethington and Kessler 1986). The RHS is a caring network guided by generalized reciprocity—people provide support for one another anticipating that this support will be there for them when they need it most (Sahlins 1972).

One of the binds of this community is found in the visual display of their red hats and purple attire. While costuming links the community together, its bold color and creative styling require members to contend with social norms surrounding appearance and expectations that can test their internal and external boundaries. The significance and multiple meaning of costuming are explored next.

89

Chapter 6: Costuming in the Red Hat Society

This chapter explores the meaning of the red hat regalia within the Red Hat Society. Costuming through dressing up in a red hat, purple attire, and accessories is an important aspect of this brand community. From leather-clad Harley riders (Schouten and McAlexander 1995) to Star Trek fans wearing authentic Starfleet uniforms (Kozinets 2001), costuming is a classic practice of community engagement. The practice strengthens members' involvement in the community and differentiates committed community members from casual members (Schau et al. 2009). Moreover, costuming identifies community members and distinguishes the community from outsiders. These patterns hold true for RHS members, "Well, you're set apart as a group not just as an individual, and I like it because it makes you feel a part of something... And it's important I think to feel like you belong to something" (Josie). Costuming reinforces in members their shared identity and values, and their sense of belonging in the world.

Within the RHS, the term "hattitude" generally refers to the attitude and behavior that comes from wearing a red hat. Although hattitude is rarely defined explicitly, the word is integrated into the RHS's branded books, promotional materials, and products. When asked to define the term, one participant explained, "it's kind of like if you think of Frosty the Snowman. Once they put that hat on his head, he came to life and began to dance around—yes? And that's exactly what happens to the red hatters" (Sylvia). Hattitude is enacted by members who share this common understanding, as Sylvia suggests. Red hatters see beyond the superficial practice of dressing up in gaudy attire. Costuming also provides members with opportunities for greater

self-expression and creativity. For the RHS, the costume signals acceptance of the group's ideology of fun and letting go. In the costumes, members embody the ideology of the RHS as they enact a performance of aging as a positive life stage. Although spectators' reactions are generally positive, within the community some tensions exist. First, group identity and the perceptions of costuming are explored. Next, individual creativity and self-expression are examined. Last, negotiating the boundaries of spectacle is discussed.

Group Identity

The red hat regalia acts as a visual representation of a differentiated community. The regalia is like a military uniform demonstrating group belonging and solidarity among members (Joseph 1986). As members of a larger organization, the women feel camaraderie with other red hatters:

> I was at a restaurant with my husband, for my birthday and wearing a purple hat with a red dress. A stranger, a woman, came up and said "Happy Birthday." My husband asked "How did she know it was your birthday?" I said, "Because we are sisters." (convention fieldnotes, June 2012)

The costuming rituals, such as reversing colors during a member's birthday month, visually signal a shared affiliation. Moreover, as a uniform, the costuming indicates a common purpose that links members across the dispersed community (Joseph 1986). Women who put on the red hat and purple clothes understand its implications: they are a recognizable part of a community with expectations to have fun, let loose and socialize.

Costuming also plays a role in the social networking practice of governing within brand communities. Governing practices set specific behavioral expectations in order to maintain

91

cohesion within the group (Schau et al. 2009b). For example, in the peer-to-peer online problem solving community there are norms surrounding volunteering and reciprocity that regulate members (Mathwick et al. 2008). Those members who do not comply become disconnected from the community. Within the RHS, governing is demonstrated by the expectation that each member will wear a red hat. Betty makes sure her chapter members do not have an excuse for not wearing a hat, "Some don't come with a hat… so then I just bring my hat box with hats—fancy and just caps—so they can pick one to have." While governing within the community stresses wearing the costuming, there is also an emphasis on the inclusionary nature of RH costuming, "red hat casual is always welcome" (Nadine), especially in small, informal chapter settings. This exemption is also pragmatic since a number of members have mobility or balance problems that influence their clothing selections. As Donna sees it, "you could wear your Reeboks if you wanted to. Anything goes, as long as you were having fun." Yet some participants forcefully express their annoyance when discussing women who refuse to wear a hat of any kind to chapter meetings. Although the red hat positively affirms group membership and community cohesion, there are conflicts over dressing up based on a range of different meaning of costuming, which are discussed next.

Perceptions of Costuming

Informants describe dressing up in a variety of ways that both affirm and challenge their self-perception. The range of perceptions is delineated in Table 2 that follows.

Table 2: Perceptions of Costuming

Self-affirming	Playful	Spectacle: positive	Spectacle: being the "other"
Queenly Elegant Dress up Glammed up Festive Tasteful Nice Look extra good Hattitude	Really nutsy Crazy Silly Gutsy Flashy Hoot Kooky Perky	Celebrity Ooohed and aaahed Costume party Striking Curiosity and interest	Talk of the town Lady Godiva Vulgar Flamboyant Overboard Embarrassing

The first column includes positive attributes that reinforce a traditional feminine image—such as elegant, tasteful, and glamorous. Column two captures more playful perceptions, such as looking crazy and kookie. While self-affirming and playful ideas are contrasting, informants celebrate that they can be both traditionally feminine and progressive. The costuming rituals allow the women to push their own personal boundaries around appearance and behavior by exploring different degrees of risk and challenge of social norms. The idea of spectacle, in columns three and four, also has positive and negative attributes that informants must reconcile. Receiving celebrity status reinforces personal worth—the women draw attention and are affirmed. Yet standing out in a crowd can incur negative judgment. Members test their willingness to defy social norms or even to be associated with other community members' costumes that are more spectacular. These tensions are examined throughout this chapter beginning with an exploration of whether costuming is even necessary in the community.

Perceptions of Dress: From Red Hat to Uncapped.

To explore the various meanings of dress in the Red Hat Society, it is helpful to compare members who do and do not dress up. In May 2009, the Uncapped chapter decided to break from the official organization after seven years of membership. One impetus for the change was the RHS organization changed their membership policy requiring all members to pay yearly dues. The national organization sent out notices reminding women that it was not legal to meet as a chapter while wearing the signature attire (red hat and purple dress), unless they were official members. The Uncapped chapter members voted to leave the organization because they felt the dues were higher than the value they received from the organization. Because of Sarah's professional experience with copyrights and trademarks, she encouraged the chapter to break completely from the organization:

> I read the wording on their new sort of contract about this and it said they would prosecute if they found any chapters that were wearing red hats and having red hat in their name and hadn't paid their dues, and so I said let's just be safe and change our name. (Sarah)

For these reasons, the Uncapped chapter voted to leave the RHS, change their name, and discontinue dressing up. Sarah, who is an active group member, argues that the spirit of the RH chapter is unchanged even though they no longer wear red hats.

An intriguing question is would the group bonds be as strong if the chapter had not first been part of the Red Hat Society? By the time the split occurred, the chapter's identity was already established. At one outing, "I asked other members if they think this group would be around if they hadn't dressed up in the beginning. Upon reflection, a member answered, 'Probably not. Without dressing up, there wouldn't be something to tie the group together.' And others nodded with agreement as she spoke." (fieldnotes October 2012). This sentiment also demonstrates how it is difficult to separate out dressing up in the red hat regalia from the other practices of the organization. The costuming is interwoven with the rituals and practices of the

group that reinforce the brand, the activity, and the ideology associated with the fun and friendship for older women.

Within community engagement practices, individual costume items act as 'badges' that document member experiences and 'milestones' within the community (Schau et al. 2009). For example, participants talk about the different hats they have purchased or how they put together a clothing ensemble for their first introduction to their RHS chapter. "I didn't mind the red and purple thing. And I went immediately to my closet to try to figure out what do I have. And I have more than I imagined that I could put together" (Annie). The antithesis of this experience also demonstrates the significance of badging and milestoning. When the Uncapped chapter decided to leave the RHS, they had members bring in their "red hat gear" they no longer wanted and donated them to another chapter that functioned out of a nursing home. Still, Uncapped members confess to holding on to their favorite hat, "it's a red biker hat, I'm keeping it" (fieldnotes, June 2012). For the Uncapped chapter, deciding to no longer dress up represents a clear milestone in their community.

Before separating from RHS, the Uncapped chapter borrowed heavily from the broader RHS community to form its rituals, such as using kazoos and switching colors for their birthday month (email newsletter, April 2004). Despite supporting the uncapping of the chapter, Sarah explains the transformative power of the red hat and embodying a more riotous character through costume (such as with Star Trek fans or Mountain Men—see Kozinets 2001; and Belk and Costa 1998).

> I mean I would go to lunch…with someone and we would sit and chat and laugh but that was all. But there was something about that red hat that you just, really nutsy, and everything was hilarious, and I don't know, I think that was it for me. (Sarah)

This statement demonstrates how the costume amplifies enjoyment. As Sarah says, the red hat gives these women "the permission to be silly" and to break from social norms.

The camaraderie among group members increases the opportunity for letting loose and enjoyment. The process happens in two ways. First, the group provides a 'buffer' against those who might stare or socially sanction if two older women were alone and laughing boisterously. It is through the wearing of the uniform and the associated group identity that the minority is transformed into the majority in these public spaces. "Have you ever seen a group of red hatters together? Oh well, it's sort of striking when you see a bunch of women of all different heights and sizes walk into a restaurant—when fifteen of them walked into the restaurant" (Norma). Second, positive emotions flow through the group as a contagion, which is well established empirical finding (Fowler and Christakis 2008).

> There is more laughter in the Red Hat Society than anything I've ever belonged in before. Because that's what we're all about, we're about havin' fun. And, havin' fun you laugh. And when you're laughin', you're happy. (Catherine)

The costuming reinforces the ideology around fun and laughter, while simultaneously reinforcing the camaraderie in the group.

Perceptions of Dress: Tensions over Red Hatting.

Many members see advantages to dressing up as a group, but some members are less enthusiastic about the practice. When asked if she misses dressing up, Laura who was a member of the Uncapped chapter replied, "Actually, no. I hate wearing hats and so... And some of the other women were more into the bling and the Red Hat and all that than I was. So in some ways it was a relief to not have to wear those." Yet, without the red hat training, it is arguable whether the group would be brazen enough to be as loud and lively. Laura fondly recalls:

96

We still, not wearing our Red Hats, we create a scene whenever we go into a restaurant…
[at the] June meeting and we were at [a restaurant] and our theme was summertime and
beach, and we're playing the kazoos and singing birthday and we sang Summertime, so
people in the restaurant were kind of looking at us, checking us out. … And that is often
the case wherever we go we create a little extra excitement or whatever in the restaurant.
(Laura)

Along with Laura, Annie who is a member of the Capped chapter prefers not wearing the red hat

or dressing up. As Annie says about her dislike of hats:

'Cause I don't want to draw attention to myself that way. ...I mean it helps you be
identified with the group. There's nothing wrong with that. But I don't particularly like
hats. And, I really don't want anybody in particular to stare at me, because I have on a
hat. I like the colors, because they're outrageous colors together. I'd just rather not wear a
hat, but that's just me. (Annie)

Annie would "prefer that we dress more casually and just be a women's group." In their

interviews, both Annie and Laura emphasize the opportunity to socialize with other women

through RHS over the ability to dress up and act differently. As is common in other

consumption communities, members vary in their level of commitment to the group's ethos and

practices.

Many members see the dressing rituals as important way to separate out the time that

they participate in RHS by dressing differently than they do in everyday life. For Josie, it bothers

her that members will not wear a hat;

...because it's a respect thing, I think, …you're not respecting what a red hatter really is.
The Red Hat is a symbol of women who are over 50 and it's just very disrespectful to be
a red hatter or be a part of a Red Hat group and not wear the signature red hat. (Josie)

Whether en masse or in smaller settings, wearing the red hat regalia becomes symbolic of a

shared ideology of fun and pushing against social expectations of how older women should look

and behave. As Maddy laments about the Uncapped chapter after they stopped dressing up, "We

were just a bunch of women eating lunch. You didn't stand out at all." Representing the group by

wearing the 'uniform,' and standing out from the crowd, obliges the wearer to hold to certain

97

standards of behavior that helps legitimize their group and their ideology (Joseph 1986). Many

members feel it is important to wear the emblem of the red and purple colors because it

symbolized their shared ideology.

Within the Uncapped chapter, Donna petitioned to have the group stay in the Red Hat

Society. As Sarah points out, "she was the only hold out." When they took the vote, Sarah

recounts how Donna "stood up and she said, 'I just have to say this.' And she had a little

speech." Sarah believes Donna became attached to the organization because it gave Donna

something different, "something that was just really fun," to do after Donna's husband passed.

Donna very much enjoyed dressing up for RHS. She was also the only chapter member that had

attended an international RHS convention. So while Donna associated these positive

characteristics with the parent organization, other chapter members felt less need to be connected

to the larger organization.

When asked if she misses dressing up, Audrey stated, "No, because I dress up anyway!"

This played out at one gathering: "Audrey came in wearing a very nice sundress. She apologized

for being late as members gave her compliments on her sundress and they hinted her husband

must be a fan of it. She brushed off the compliments as she sat down" (fieldnotes, June 2012).

While she may have demurred over the compliments, it was clear that Audrey had put effort into

her clothing and enjoyed the accolade.

Maddy left the Uncapped chapter when the group stopped wearing the red hat regalia.

Maddy had not attended outings for a few months because of a health problem. When she

returned, the group was no longer wearing the red and purple.

> I wore my red stuff and I was only one there with that on and I said, "Hey, what's
> happening? Why is everyone not dressed?" And that's when they told me everything that
> they decided that since we can't be part of the national society that we are just going to
> wear regular clothes. Well after that I decided I can do that anytime. …I really felt stupid

for a few minutes but then I thought, "nope that's who you are Maddy, don't sweat stuff like that." But once they became the Uncapped, it just did not interest me anymore because I love the part where everybody dressed up in purple and red.

Maddy discusses how she sees costuming as a status equalizer. "It was like tacky was okay. More beads or purple and red and the gloves and all that, it made it fun" (Maddy). After the chapter stopped wearing the regalia, the observations around clothing changed. Instead of being a show-and-tell about red hat items and crafts, it became centered on labels and fashion. "There would be some women with everything they own is from Coldwater Creek or Talbots or there'd be some there with Belk and it was kind of like who tried to out dress the other one? And I thought I don't need this." The understanding that the regalia helps to create a more egalitarian atmosphere is reflected in the Capped chapter as well. Similar to the use of uniforms in schools settings, the wearing of the red hat regalia promotes equality within the community by eliminating markers of social class (Joseph 1986). Josie comes from a working class background and she values that the red hat regalia places the women on an equal footing.

> Josie went on to say that she has never been bothered by the difference between people because really we are all the same. She mentioned that some in the group are well educated and she was too at one point. But it doesn't matter how many initials are after your name, "we all put on our cotton panties the same way – with panty liners sometimes." (fieldnotes, April 2012)

Josie not only reinforces the position of status equality, but highlights connections, as the women in the group are connected through facing similar experiences surrounding aging. The red hat regalia removes the focus on economic capital and replaces status with an emphasis on creativity and daring to dress outside of normal constraints. As Lucy states, "because it was kind of like the tackier, the cuter you were." The following section explores how creativity and self-expression extend the meaning of costuming.

RHS members reinforce their group membership and the values of the community through their consumption practices. They buy and wear the red and purple celebrating their membership within the community and generating the compliments on their RHS 'finery.' As Sylvia states:

> As I've said on many occasions to [her chapter], you know darn well that the first thing you do when you walk into any store now is head for the stuff to see what's new in purple and if they have any new red hats, and what kind of jewelry do they have. And that's the first thing they do. And they laugh, because it's the truth. 'Cause I know, 'cause I do it. (Sylvia)

RHS members are producer-consumers, or prosumers, proactively consuming red hat artifacts and transforming them to fit their wants and needs (Toffler 1980). Members buy, create, and alter items to use during RHS activities. These customized items attract attention and provide fodder for show-and-tell in which members share stories about where they bought the item, how much they paid, or how they made the item.

Consumer creativity refers to an individual's problem-solving capability applied towards consumption-related problems (Hirschman 1980). Consumer creativity is associated with positive traits such as openness to new ideas, seeking novel experiences, acquisition and application of knowledge, and active memory capacity (Hirschman 1980, 1983). Creativity allows members to reinforce their commitment to the consumption community through co-creation. For example, at the international RHS conference, a member (Harriet) came up to talk with a RHS Hatquarters staff member. Harriet was carrying "two blinged out scepters" that she had just bought. The staff member commented "that she bets Harriet will take it and make her own that's even better" (fieldnotes June 30, 2012). Similarly, Sylvia spoke about the trend of

members decorating solo cups in preparation for the upcoming convention that had a country western night. RHS social media was abuzz with pictures of the cups that women decorated, tips on how to make the cups, and reactions from other members.

Members create themes for their celebration, which are a common site of innovation. Nadine is part of a chapter that focuses specifically on historical dress and women come costumed from different time periods. For instance, instead of the traditional RHS pajama breakfast, this chapter had a "Sunday's undies" event where women dressed up in their Victorian underwear, including "bloomers and fancy corsets and chemises and the like" (Nadine). In another example, Sylvia's chapter put on a "Queen of the Nile" themed picnic. Sylvia says that her chapter likes themes because, "sometimes you just don't know what to wear and if you have a guideline…they now know which direction to go. Costumes can be optional. I just know that some people enjoy doing all that and some people are very crafty and can create anything from anything." These events give the women an opportunity to show off their skills and receive social affirmation from other members.

Creativity is also celebrated at the international convention. Each meal has a theme associated with it and there is also a fashion show in which one member is voted a winner. Women who create unique looks or dress over-the-top are commonly photographed by other members (see Appendix H #3). These women receive positive reinforcement and social capital within their community for these demonstrations of creativity.

Moreover, creativity facilitates customizing solutions that lead to greater expression of individuality. For example, Norma speaks with pride about the alterations she made to her hat that she wore to our interview (see Appendix H, #4). She received it in a gift exchange within the chapter, "I ended up with this beautiful lady. And then I thought, what can I do with that?

Actually it is an ornament for the tree, but I decided I would prefer it on my hat." The co-creation by individual members makes each item more meaningful and personal. They feel connected to the group but also are able to express their personal flair. Thus, these creative expressions allow members to balance individuality and autonomy while maintaining social affiliation (Thompson and Hayko 1997). However, RHS is not without its internal frictions when it comes to costuming.

Negotiating Boundaries

Tensions do exist within the RHS as to appropriate dress. The ideology of the RHS is oppositional to popular ideology around age and gender. Yet, as with oppositional ideologies, freedom from the traditional order and power relationships is often short lived and soon replaced with new expectations, rules, and relationships (Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Mikkonen, Vicdan, and Markkula 2013). The power relations that come into play in the RHS can be seen in the invisible boundaries of appropriate dress and behavior expectations, which is most apparent when these boundaries are crossed.

Many members see some dress as garish or over-the-top. During interviews, the mention of "extreme" gaudy attire caused both Denise and Sarah to roll their eyes. Some members feel the need to preserve some social norms around age-appropriate behavior. In reacting to one episode that Sarah found distasteful, she contends, "it's one thing to act like you're 25, but you still have to maintain some dignity with your wrinkles." Still other times judgments are opposed externally regarding appropriate age behavior. For example, Audrey recalls why one woman was not allowed to participate in a local parade, "Oh, it was a Santa Claus parade and we made these

sweatshirts with I think a beard or something like that on it, and it said Ho Ho, and they wouldn't

let her be in the parade because they thought that was disrespectful." Audrey's recollected that

the member's children felt the sweatshirts were insinuating something negative about the women

in the group. To this assertion, Audrey replied, "Screw 'em! You know. I mean that was

ridiculous." Within the group, outside sanctioning is considered to be inappropriate, Yet within

the group, members debate over what costumes push the boundaries of appropriate social norms.

Nadine described different attitudes within the RHS about the dress and behavior code.

> Ah, the women who wear the bras over their t-shirts, for example. I don't exactly criticize
> them for it, I don't give them a hard time to their faces, but I am concerned that that gives
> people the wrong idea about Red Hat Society. Although it doesn't give them the wrong
> idea about that particular segment of the Red Hat Society, there are certainly some very
> earthy elements in it. Ah, I just don't happen to be one of them. (Nadine)

Nadine distances herself from certain costume rituals and imposes judgment on members

because of how she feels it will reflect on her as a member of the organization. Sarah shares this

sentiment as retold in her experience at the regional RHS convention.

> They had a talent show the first night and it apparently had been sort of organized. But
> this one overweight woman got up in what we thought was dirty gray underwear and did
> sort of a bump and grind. … Now a lot of them, or a group of them, thought she was
> hilarious, but our group didn't and most people around. … It was just so embarrassing.…
> the women got drunk and that's where I-- when you see a bunch of women who are late
> 60's up to 80 or more, drunk and shrieking and falling around, it was awful. I could not
> wait to get us out after two days. At the earliest time, I left.

For Sarah, this interaction with other chapters put the RHS into a different light and she did not

feel this behavior was representative of her chapter. This experience partially contributed to

Sarah campaigning for the Uncapped chapter's split from the RHS.

Yet these same members are also the recipients of negative evaluations. Nadine was on

the other end of criticism when she first joined the group.

> My Chapter Queen told me that some of the ladies were concerned about how I liked to
> dress up. We went to a high definition opera at a movie theatre… I dressed up like you

would go, like I would have once dressed up to go to the opera matinee, I mean it wasn't fully formal, it was more like afternoon formal. And, because, it was this is the Red Hat Society, that's part of what you do in the Red Hat Society. And some of the ladies were upset at the idea of my, I guess of my showing shoulder, I don't know what. I call it my fettuccine strap dress because at my age of course you don't wear spaghetti strap dresses.

When later asked how she felt about receiving this message from the chapter queen about her "provocative clothing," Nadine answered, "I was pretty upset. I mean I cried. You know, I got this in an e-mail, so I had the opportunity to read it, and I absorbed it, and you know, I was like, okay, they didn't like it and all that, and that's okay." This episode proved pivotal in Nadine finding a community within the larger RHS organization. Nadine discovered an online community of RHS members where she could share her experience, receive support, and was invited to join another chapter.

These informant narratives are noteworthy as exceptions, RHS is generally a welcoming community where members focus on putting their best foot forward and looking their best by dressing up.

"Looking Extra Good"

Many participants, even those who do not like wearing hats, express their enjoyment of "dressing up" for RHS. Sylvia discusses how in the beginning her chapter was "much too casual about it. They thought all you needed was like a purple t-shirt and a baseball hat." Sylvia believes there is transformative power in dressing up and she organizes an annual event at a location requiring a high standard of dress. She created a new set of expectations for this event that she had to stress to her chapter members. "Well, everybody came dolled up. And then it

became the thing, they all wanted to be beautiful then. And to the point now which I don't have to ever tell them." The preparation for RHS events gives these women a reason to pay special attention to their appearance and focus on looking their best. "When I get dressed up it's like, you want to have your makeup, your little lavender eye shadow and you just want to look extra good" (Denise).

This preparation 'to look extra good' translates into more confidence for these women. As women are traditionally judged on their appearance, spending time and effort on their appearance reinforces personal worth (Calasanti 2005). As Josie observes, "You feel elegant, yes. You know that all that time that you took getting ready has paid off." Women are judged highly on physical appearance and, within North American culture, youth is prized (Calasanti and Slevin 2001). These twin expectations affect older women significantly as they receive less attention for their appearance. Costuming enables members to combat this norm. By donning on a red hat, purple clothes, feathers, and bling, they are noticed. Moreover, this self-attention counteracts the primary focus in most of these women's lives of caregiving for others.

Informants suggest they have found costuming as a way to elevate their status while allowing them to have freedom to be different.

> It just makes you feel very, it makes you feel queenly. It makes you feel very elegant, I'm a country bumpkin for heaven's sakes, I mean look at me, I'm just an old rag, but it really makes you feel very elegant and queenly, it really does. Very queenly. (Josie)

Connecting oneself to royalty brings forwards concepts of luxury and leisure. Josie also suggests dressing up allows the possibility to escape from negative self-image: the ability to transform oneself by changing clothes and embracing a new identity. In discussing how she feels, Josie would straighten up in her chair when she would say "elegant" and "queenly." Similarly, Sylvia and Denise linked playfulness with altering their relationship to their body. The body becomes

physically larger by straightening up and occupying more space and becoming more visible.

Becoming a larger presence also pushes members to be more fearless. "It's like their shoulders

go up straight, and they walk differently, their attitude changes, and they smile at people and

they have all whole new perspective on who they are. They don't shy away from people"

(Sylvia).

> [Dressing up] makes you feel perky and you want to, you know, bring that to the luncheon, I mean you want to walk in there and you just, you know, people are gonna look at you and admire you and think you're nuts wearing red and purple, but I've always stressed… standing up straight, you'll draw more attention to yourself standing up straight than you will slouched… so it's the presenting, you walk into the room and you own it, you know, it's not like I'm being conceited or anything, but you walk in and you feel like, ahh, this is wonderful, I'm having a good time with friends and enjoying ourselves. Laugh louder and you have fun. (Denise)

Through wearing the regalia, members began to increasingly embody their performance,

becoming more comfortable and confident in their new role (Sandikci and Ger 2010).

This idea that RHS enables women to take on another persona seems to be attractive to a

certain segment, especially for women who have faced hardships and struggle to maintain their

confidence. This is true for members such as Josie and Catherine. Both women emphasize how

they love to dress up. Both of these women have also recently struggled with personal hardships

and have faced difficulties in the past. Josie is on disability and, at time of the interview, she

recently separated from her husband. Catherine was divorced at a young age. "That was before

women's lib took in. That was still kind of a, 'oohh, you're one of those'" (Catherine). More

recently Catherine lost her second husband for whom she was the primary caregiver. Both

Catherine and Josie appear to enjoy RHS as a way to break free of their constraints. This is a

time of rediscovery for them and they are incorporating the attributes of play and freedom into

their identity work.

As a group, the women often create a spectacle in which the gaze of outsiders is sought and expected. "Oh we have had people stare at us, 'Oh, wow!' they'd say. And we've had men come up to us and say, 'Oh, I like this, this is neat to watch this.' So we stand out, we definitely do" (Norma). Outsider comments were also directed towards individual women. A number of women highlighted receiving compliments from men: "They think we're so attractive and they just love us. And the younger men and the old men are the ones who really love us" (Margaret). The approval from men regarding their appearance further reinforces confidence as older women are typically not the recipients of male attention. This is attention that is usually reserved for younger women who are seen as sexual objects (Calasanti 2005). Interestingly, younger members in RHS (women under 50) are required to wear the muted and soft colors of pink and lavender, making them less visible. Yet this attention may be distinguished from the sexualized gaze of men. As one member relates, "her husband says he doesn't mind her going out with red hatters, 'If you saw how she was dressed, you would know she wasn't going out to pick up men!'" (convention fieldnotes, June 2012). While having aspects of showgirl or burlesque attire, the red hat regalia is not traditionally 'sexy' attire: it is over-the-top in a camp, rather than sexual statement. The campy nature of the dress attracts male attention. But rather than creating the sexualization of the women, their unusual dress requires spectators to negotiate and explore the meaning of their attraction to the performance. In this way, it is similar to drag queen and king performances that require spectators to reconcile their enjoyment of the performances with social norms around gender and age (Rupp, Taylor, & Shapiro 2010). The comparison to gender bending performances will be explored further in the next chapter that explores the role of play within the RHS community as it relates to practices, costuming, and learning in the RHS.

Chapter 7: Playing in a Red Hat

The goal of this dissertation was to explore how RHS members' experiences surrounding aging and identity are influenced by the values, structure, rituals, and consumption practices within this brand community. This chapter integrates findings from the previous chapters and explores the emergent themes through interpreting RHS as a "safe space" for learning and play. First, RHS as a "safe place" is discussed. Second, relevant literature on play and learning provides a backdrop for understanding play in this brand community. Third, the wide ranging integrations of play and learning are explored as they are manifested in the lives of RHS members.

A Safe Space to be Playful

Recall in chapter 5, RHS was described as "safe space" for its members to express themselves and take risks that were not possible in other social places. As a particular space, this social space shares some functional similarities with "third places" (Oldenburg 1989). Third places are locations such coffee shops, salons, pubs, or other hangouts that provide a social place for people to meet their needs for community. These places are defined in contrast to work and home. In a third place, far fewer obligations exist to take on formal social roles, such as employee, boss, or parent. These "third spaces" offer people opportunities to act outside of the

boundaries of prescribed roles. These spaces provide individuals with an opportunity to express themselves, let their guard down, and relax. Within these casual environs people can connect socially with others and receive positive feedback through shared experiences and practices.

Traditionally, "third spaces" are located geographically in a location like a bar or coffee shop. RHS does not exist in a single physical location. Arguably, when a group of women arrive in force, particularly when they are donning a costume and a boisterous and fun loving attitude, they transform the public spaces into their playground. Moreover, unlike many "third places" where relationships are casual, relationships within the RHS are cultivated beyond the confines of the leisure place and involve significant depth of exchange. Although RHS members provide more social support, as discussed previously, it does not use the same mechanisms as traditional support groups. RHS focuses on the lighter side, which is similar to exchanges in these "third spaces." Throughout the dissertation, I have noted how RHS's rituals, practices, and costuming reinforce this emphasis.

The RHS establishes a "safe space" for members to be playful. Playfulness is viewed as "an attitude of throwing off constraints" (Millar 1974, 20) and embracing an activity in an imaginative manner (Gylnn and Webster 1992). Playfulness by individuals is linked to positive emotions (e.g., zest and hope), creativity, life satisfaction, and well-being (Proyer 2013; Proyer and Ruch 2011). Playful attitudes are prevalent and fostered in the RHS.

> I think a lot of it is just the mindset—it's a group of women that are spontaneous and outrageous in a way. And that encourages other people who may be more shy or more— well not that way. Most of us aren't that way when you are on your own out in the daily world and yet you get together as a group, you kind of feel free to do so. (Shelley)

Shelley underscores the importance of the group dynamics in creating an atmosphere in which playfulness is both permitted and inspired. Within these bonds of trust, the women have greater freedom of expression:

It gives us the freedom to be ourselves. ...You're not being judged for who or what you are… there's really no place for prejudice in our Red Hat group. If we do then that person won't last long in the group, because they will be uncomfortable (Margaret).

Tribes, such as at Burning Man, create spaces where new ideologies are tested (Kozinets 2002). In a similar fashion, RHS provides a space for its members to explore and develop their playfulness, although this imaginative play is directed toward a variety of ends. Playfulness develops through the repeated exposure to the RHS ideology and learning by example from other red hatters.

This lady was really straight-laced if you met her...she was just not real talkative or outgoing to everybody, but then one time...she got up and told this joke and we were all like (mouth agape) and then from then on, it was, she's just really funny... Because there are a few in our group that are very, straight-laced, but it's fun how they've come out since we've all been together. It's really fun. (Lucy)

Members begin to test their own boundaries in terms of being "spontaneous and outrageous," allowing them to find their own voice and reflect on how they will "do aging" rather than to only continue the past roles or potential ascribed roles. In chapter 6, I explored costuming in general. Next, I explore costuming as a key ritual through which women play. However, play serves different purposes at different times.

Dress to Play and Playing Dress Up.

The red hat costume both signals that the women are entering into a special social space and time, but it also gives them permission to experiment with different personae. Margaret sees the regalia as signaling it is time to play.

Because it's the red and purple that really makes us stand out and makes us able to be silly, because we're playing dress-up. We're being little girls playing dress-up. So without the red and the purple and the bling and the feathers, and the outrageousness of it all, we're not giving ourselves to play, permission to play… Like when I was growing up, we had our play clothes, our school clothes, and our Sunday clothes. And never the twain shall meet. ...But with our red hats and our purple clothes and our outrageous feathers and

our boas and our bling..., it's play time. So we get to laugh and giggle and play. (Margaret)

Costuming sets the stage for new experiences. A number of participants commented that members understand 'hattitude.' This includes the idea that dressing up to look your best and get attention from others go hand in hand. Appearance and how you present yourself matters. Research indicates that nonconformity to dress codes and etiquette, such as wearing red sneakers while giving a talk at a prestigious institution, can have positive outcomes to inferences of status and competence by others (Bellezza, Gino, and Keinan *forthcoming*). Similarly, the red hat regalia signals nonconformity and the confidence needed to wear the red hat regalia. As Josie sees it, "It takes guts to be a Red Hatter." When asked what she means by this, Josie replied that dressing up is not for everyone. Like subcultures formed around *style*, the RH members disrupt consensus, in this case, by challenging social expectations around gender and age (Hebdige 1979). Inside the RHS, dress can be used to play with expectations around being female and older. For example, Maddy discusses how "if you had gloves that were red or purple, you'd wear those and your handbag always had to match and if you had red shoes, you wore those. You were just really fashioned out. You really did." The idea of matching handbag and shoes is a traditional fashion rule to which Maddy insinuates women in the RHS subscribe. Yet members mix this with tacky jewelry and color combinations that break fashion rules. Some members are known for extreme costuming by dressing up in evening gowns while wearing bra hats—which are highly decorative hats built around a brassiere (see Appendix H #5).

Their attire both reproduce and opposes traditional feminine norms. This contentious space has similarities to the boundaries around which drag performers play. Drag queens (and drag kings), by highlighting performances associated with gender, destabilize the understanding of gender roles as natural and authentic (Butler 1990). Their parody of gender has parallels to the

111

RHS in some aspects. The RHS setting allows performances where the women practice a stylized dress that requires spectators to reconcile what they are viewing. Since their appearance does not fit into normal expectations, this incongruence requires the spectators to process what they are viewing in a more conscious fashion (Rupp, Taylor, & Shapiro 2010).

The costumed performance affects both spectators and the performers. Margaret talks about how she sees women come to the convention in their regular clothes and "they're a little more uptight." The regalia changes how the women interact with other people and their surroundings. As Margaret states, "many ladies need it as a, as another persona, because when I've got on my red hat and my purple clothes I can be silly and I can play and I can act up." Taking on a different persona can be compared to the drag and cosplay (i.e., costume play) communities. Within these communities, individuals will embody different personas that sensitize them to dress, move, and act with more awareness (Lamerichs 2011). These performances cause participants to become more reflective as they have an opportunity to contrast their performance in everyday life with their costumed performance (Rupp, Taylor, & Shapiro 2010). Margaret states, "it does spill over into other aspects of our life, and in a good way, to loosen us up, it makes us more responsive to people where before maybe you wouldn't speak to someone." Through playing with costuming the women bring forward characteristics that they want to highlight while minimizing attributes that they might want to change, such as their insecurities. In costume, they can take risks that they would not take otherwise. They can misbehave, speak their minds, and test boundaries without the fear of damaging their more traditional identities.

Play is a difficult concept to define, in part, because no specific activity defines play (Grayson 1999; Sutton-Smith 1997). Instead, play is often defined in contrast to work. For example, work is serious while play is fun. But this does not provide a helpful definition since conceptualizations of both work and play are socially constructed (L'Abate 2009). Consider the 'work' of canning vegetables. Not many years ago, canning was a means of survival. Now, for many individuals, it is a fun hobby.

Play is generally defined as an activity that is intrinsically motivated, pleasurable, and involves role-playing and suspending reality. These three defining characteristics are explored next.

First, play is distinguished from non-play activities because it is an activity that one does for oneself. Play is intrinsically motivated because people engage in play as an end in itself (Holbrook 1999). "To play one needs to be relaxed, with a minimum of need to impress anybody, including the self. This is why play represents an intrinsic pleasure that is self-reinforcing and self-propagating" (L'Abate 2009, 13). Indeed, RH activities are often the highlight of the members' monthly calendars giving them something to which they look forward. "Other than going to church on Sundays, they are really not doing anything. So red hatters are going on a trip or going to lunch, or whatever, [it] gives them something else to work into their week" (Shelley).

Second, play is fun and enjoyable (Cotter 2004). The RHS's calls itself a society that "connects, supports and encourages women in their pursuit of fun" (redhatsociety.com). Play is fun because few obligations exist, "It's not like you have to have an order of business and, it's

just fun" (Lucy). Members highlight that laughter is a staple of RHS meetings, "you always ended up laughing at the meetings" (Laura) and "there is more laughter in the Red Hat Society than anything I've ever belonged to before" (Catherine). Laughter serves important roles within the group. Laughter allows for reappraisals of negative situations to less threatening ones and reduces stress (Martin 2010). It also increases bonds among individuals, unifying group members and influencing members' perceptions of others' likeability (Wilkins and Eisenbraun 2009). Fun and laughter creates a positive atmosphere and increases the social support within the group.

Finally, play involves the suspension of reality and experimenting with different roles that are within the control of the individual (Gordon 2009). A function of play is enabling the player to ascend prescribed roles. The benefit here is that "by bracketing experience, it enables us to step outside of and manipulate interpretive frames from the perspective of another frame" (Gordon 2009, 4). Play is imaginatively stepping outside of the confines of social rules and obligations. Within research on children's play, make believe and pretense is widely noted as an important function of play through which children exert control over their social and physical environment (Scarlett et al. 2005). Generally, the role of play is less frequently acknowledged or explored for older consumers (Cheang 2002). Within traditional social theories of aging, there is mention of leisure activities but little exploration of imaginative play, costuming, or silliness and its role-played in exploring new identities. In RHS, play opens up new possibilities for members for how they might behave as older women.

In his widely referenced text, *Homo Ludens* (which translates to 'Man the Player'), Huizinga (1949, 1) states, "In play there is something 'at play' which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action. All play means something." Through play,

Huizinga and other scholars argue individuals experience freedom that allows them to try out new behaviors and identities without the fear of consequences (Gordon 2009; Hendricks 2002).

Within play, opportunity exists for learning social, academic, and creative skills (Wood and Attfield 2005; Howard-Jones, Taylor, and Sutton 2002). Learning theorists Piaget and Vygotsky both saw play as fundamental to children's development since it is a way of self-teaching. Piaget argues children move from 'pretend play' to more social play where children must negotiate and follow the rules of the game. Vygotsky also views play as vital in promoting social development and considers all play as a social exercise. Exploring and manipulating the rules of play enables children to learn social skills and practice self-regulation as they appropriate resources from the pre-existing cultural world (Nicolopoulou 1993).

Extending these concepts to adulthood, 'imaginative play' or 'role playing' still has value in adult learning as it enables adults to continue to experiment with their social identity as they move into different life stages. Interestingly, Vygotsky promoted the important idea of peers and teachers providing a social scaffolding allowing children to learn things that they could not achieve on their own (unlike Piaget who argued children progress through stages). Similarly, the RHS members provide one another with social scaffolding to engage in activities that they would not attempt alone.

From earlier chapters, it is clear that the women understand and enacted these first two dimensions of play as an intrinsic activity that is done for enjoyment. Women play to have confidence, play to be seen, play to be more assertive, play to be beautiful, and play to take care of themselves. Yet the women are less explicitly reflective about just how this imaginative play allows them to improvise and develop into new identities. These issues are explored next.

Being an "older woman" is not a static position. It is not a liminal space. It is a position

that is navigated by women who have personal histories that are set in the context of an evolving

society. These women bring into this life stage experiences, identities, regrets, and

accomplishments. Moreover, these women are tied to multiple roles, as daughters, mothers,

employees, wives, churchgoers, and others. There is not a single story to be told. Yet by

exploring the narratives of various members, a fuller picture is created on how their identities are

affected by RHS. What the RHS does for these women is support their exploration and the

development of their own understanding of what it means to be an "older woman." How playing

and learning within the safe space of the RHS manifests within the identity work of these women

is explored through four performances: 1) play as a reprieve, 2) play as a means to rewrite

personal history, 3) play as a way to incorporate new qualities into the lives of members, and 4)

play as a mechanism for identity renaissance. While these four types of play are conceptually

distinct, participants may use play across all four performances. Indeed, these women are many

works in progress and their stories span multiple performances.

Reprieve.

As discussed in chapter 5, RHS acts as a break for many members from their daily lives.

RHS gatherings are a day that many of the women look forward to because it is extra-ordinary

and outside of their daily routines and expectations.

> So, I took the Red Hat as a mental health for me. Yeah, it really was very comforting to
> me, stimulating to me to get out. I had somethin' to do rather than just stay home. … So
> it was very therapeutic, that's what I was trying to think of, very therapeutic. …The
> camaraderie, you know, the just the going out, getting out of the house, getting in the

outside world and the camaraderie. (Josie)

These gatherings are often an escape from the arduous caregiving roles many of these women undertake. Moreover, this distance provided in these outings helps members gain new perspective on their daily lives. The change can help stimulate creative thinking and problems solving. Sylvia talks about members in her chapter who, "are caregivers to their spouse [and] it doesn't occur to them to ask their kids for help." These women benefit from having distance, focusing on the hedonic experience of RHS, where the center of the activity is themselves, rather than their responsibility to others. In having a break from caregiving demands, Nadine says, "in most chapters… you get the idea pretty quickly that you're not supposed to talk about the unpleasant things, the negative things." The reprieve requires both fun and socializing with women who are well aware of the challenges they face but choose to laugh rather than dwell on their troubles.

Nadine maintains a "fun" chapter, but it was also important for her to have a group of women with whom she could laugh about matters that would "totally creep out" members not dealing with similar situations. Nadine has two sons that are special needs and she began a chapter in RHS for women who have a family member with special needs. She created this group because she says "I wanted to have some place where we could actually talk about what's going on and get someone who can laugh with us about some really horrible stuff." In particular, the experiences of fun and laughter help balance the grave nature of the demands these women face. It gives members access to women who have had similar experiences, and the opportunity to learn by example and share information. Nadine told the story of meeting up with two members of her special need's chapter.

> Mrs. Tremond said that they had decided that they were quite a pair—"the dead and the dying," And I said, "Yeah, well, then I guess that's three of us—the dead, dying, and

117

demented," [since] my dad has Alzheimer's. So, yeah. You know, 'cause Mrs. Tremond lost her husband and Mrs. Chalfont is waiting for her grandson to die. So, I mean that's the kind of thing that we can talk about… we couldn't make a joke like that if there were other people in the room, 'cause …they would be horrified that we're joking about something so serious. (Nadine)

Their common experiences provide the bond of trust through which the women can explore the complexities of life—both the humor and the pain—and receive acknowledgement in a way neither a traditional support group nor a traditional RHS group could provide. The mixture of "fun and sadness" enables coping that spans a wide range emotions, and with less judgment of what is "right or wrong."

Redressing 'Herstory.'

RHS creates a space for identity play against the socio-historical setting in which these women were raised and became adults. As the majority of these women are over 65 years old, they were in their 20s or older when the women's liberation movement began. They have witnessed and lived through deep changes in how American society views women such as the shift to the majority of women working outside of the home. Participants discuss how their upbringing has shaped them. The RHS ideology of fun and freedom stands in contrast to the traditional social expectations in which they were socialized. Members spoke about the work they had to do as children, "being the only girl and being raised in a time where boys didn't have to do housework. It was very, very difficult to find a playtime." (Margaret). Participants reflect on how RHS activities allow them to make up for the missed playtime from their youth. One convention member shared, "I am 73 and had no fun growing up, just a lot of responsibility. Now the child is coming out and I have a lot to learn." Play involves a process through which the women become more comfortable expressing themselves and making social connection. RHS experiences stand in contrast to lessons taught by their mothers. Women were taught to see other

118

women as competition, which they see as a disservice to older women who need one another for support.

> I was raised in an age which wasn't very nice. Women weren't very nice to women, they were trained to be competitive with one another. And so, the age that I'm in right now is extraordinarily different and much, much, much better because I see women reaching out to women and being true friends, trying to help each other advance anyway they can. …I grew up under this veil of mistrust. And I had to break out of that in order to have women friends. (Annie)

Other participants talked about how the environment is much healthier for women being friends with other women. They see RHS as a catalyst for allowing friendships to form.

> I wanted that bonding with other women. I wanted that safe place to go. To, to have fun and enjoy one another's company and have a good time and play because as a child I didn't play that much. It was work, work, work. (Margaret)

These women give themselves permission to engage in the play that they were denied as children. Other instances emerged of women re-doing their past in a child-like and expansive experience. It allows members to make up for missed opportunities when they were younger. RHS becomes a space that the women can be free to make mistakes, learn, and change. Another subgroup of the RHS provides a case in point. These are RHS members who have met through RHS social media and are regular contributors to the forum. This group meets annually outside of the international convention and holds its own themed convention. The group embraces the costuming taking it a step further by incorporating role playing. One of these themed conventions was called "Red Hat High School." As Nadine says, "it was a chance to revisit high school and do it right this time." She took this opportunity to dress and play cheerleader, which was an opportunity that she never sought in high school. Another red hatter received her first ever high school diploma from "Red Hat High School." Members who never had the opportunity to go to a prom in high school went to their first prom. During another year, the theme was "Fairy Tales Can Come True." This event included a wedding for one member who had eloped

with her husband and never received the "fairy tale" wedding she wanted. The event included a bachelorette party and a Jewish wedding ceremony complete with a *chuppah* and a cardboard cutout of her husband. This prosumer (i.e., producer-consumer) approach allows these women to create an experience that is personalized to their desires and makes up for regrets or missed opportunities. Enacting these performances is exciting and provides the women with a sense of accomplishment.

Incorporating New Qualities.

Play can be an opportunity to relive an event or fulfill a regret. But it can also be a way of incorporating characteristics of the RHS into the women's everyday lives. Three of these attributes: openness to new experience, confidence, and assertiveness were reoccurring and are expanded upon next.

Through the RHS, women become more open to new experiences by testing their boundaries and playing outside of their comfort zone. There is a sense of "you go girl, you can do it, you can get it done" (Margaret). This support helps to encourage women to try new things. For example, soon after meeting Josie in the fall of 2011, she became separated from her husband and started divorce proceeding. Throughout the experience her chapter provided her with support, such as embracing the activities she suggested for the group. Over the course of a year and an half, Josie has moved past this difficult time and has turned her attention to positive engagements. In April 2013, she spoke about taking a trip to Europe that she was planning with another RHS member. Prior to the announcement, there was no indication from our interview or subsequent interactions that travel was a priority for Josie. She was enticed by a special package deal and put a call out to friends to see if they were interested in joining her. Josie's horizons

expanded through the RHS as she transitioned from an identity of divorcee to a more self-affirming identity of world traveler.

Along with being open to new experience, many of the women's confidence grew. As previously explored, these women associate wearing the costume with feeling queenly and being the focus of attention. Over time, they begin to embody this confidence in their behavior both in and out of the costume. Catherine tells the story of going to a Christmas party in her apartment complex:

> ...everybody dressed up with their fancy dresses and their fancy clothes and I dressed up, too, and, and I put on my red hat, red feather boa. I was the talk of the town, I mean, oohh, how far out that was let me tell ya. Everybody knew that Catherine and her feather boa. I mean you'd a thought I'd gone naked with a horse, ala Lady Godiva. I mean it was just, ohh my dear, how far out is that, you know. (Catherine)

In response to this reception, Catherine said she "was having a ball. I felt a little bit intimidated, and then I said, the heck with it I'm enjoying it and if they aren't that's their problem." Here Catherine takes the confidence learned from being within a group of women dressed in red hat regalia and applies the same fun and confident attitude to an unrelated group. Catherine also believes she has made positive changes in her later years. In reflecting on how she has changed as she has aged, Catherine says she is learning to develop a spine.

> And I think that would probably go for my first marriage and maybe even my second marriage a little bit, develop a spine, and learn to say no…Well, to not lettin' people run over me. I had a tendency to let people tell me what to do. And, I think if I had practiced it when I was younger, I probably wouldn't have had as many problems as I had.

RHS provides opportunities for Catherine to develop the confidence that allows her to be assertive in other aspects of her life. Now, Catherine has a more assertive and liberated take on life. Catherine flippantly says, her niece "should have known it was me" when she gifted

121

crotchless panties to her niece at a wedding shower. She is less concerned about what others think and is more determined to be an advocate for herself.

This new found confidence helps the women be more assertive in important domains such as health care encounters. Members discuss how this is not something that was instilled in them growing up. Annie discusses how her mother did not raise her to be assertive, "you need to be assertive and that takes practice; because that is not what women were taught to be" (fieldnotes November 2011). The RHS provides women with role models who share their stories on how they were assertive. In addition, the RHS events help the women practice taking charge by giving them an opportunity to control their environment through their costumes and rituals.

Dale discussed how institutions "expect us to be passive" (fieldnotes April 2012). This is a theme members emphasized, the need to stand up for themselves, especially in dealing with situations such as their health care. Members share many stories about their experience with healthcare providers, often emphasizing how they took charge of their own situation. For example, Dale discussed how her physician mishandled a vascular problem in her leg. Then the physician's office submitted a dermatological procedure as an outpatient surgery. Dale proudly stated she "fought this charge with the HMO and the physician's office backed down" (fieldnotes April 2012).

Identity Renaissance - Navigating Aging as a Woman.

While qualities associated with the RHS are incorporated into the lives of members, the play in RHS can also act as catalysts to build new identities important to aging women. These identities add to their well-being by providing them with expanded social identities, support networks, and a new vision on what it means to be an older woman.

Schau et al. (2009a) use the term 'consumer identity renaissance' to describe the development and expansion of identities in retirees. Similarly, RHS members see that traditional roles expectations are often detrimental to women, such as demands that they act as primary caregivers. Many of the women have neglected themselves, spending little time attending to their own needs. They have also had little opportunity to form friendships outside of the immediate circle of their family. Betty laments:

> I think it is a big problem for women and women with kids. I know when I was in the leadership of the women's organization, getting women to free themselves from their kids' routines and having time for themselves. ...I felt like some of them were just didn't have the idea that they should have their own identity for a few hours a week. So I'm somebody's mom or somebody's wife all the time, rather than–I think you are healthier when you have this balance.

The women have experienced many significant life changes, such as their children leaving home. But many women are becoming single through divorce or the death of their husbands. Thus, these women are forced to reevaluate their roles and identities. Members discuss how they had to deal with prejudice, learn new skills, and redefine themselves. "When I got divorced, it was like I was always the '3rd wheel.' Everyone just knew me as part of the couple and that wasn't me anymore. Red Hat was an opportunity to get out and meet new friends" (conference fieldnotes, July 2012). Although difficult, many women found that it was a "relief not to have to take care for someone" when their husband died. Still, it remained a challenging transition to achieve "their independence" (fieldnotes, November 2011).

Along with independence is the possibility of isolation for these women. In general, research shows that self-reported global well-being (overall appraisal) and affective well-being increase in later adulthood (Stone et al. 2010). But many older adults suffer from mental distress due to hardships surrounding their health, caregiving, and loss. Many older women live alone because they are much more likely to be widowed. Women age 65 and over were three times

more likely than men of the same age to be widowed, 40% compared to 13%. The rate is the highest for women 85 and over, with 73% being widowed, compared to 35% of men in this age group. Moreover, 11% of women 65 and over are divorced and 4.5% were never married (National Center for Health Statistics 2012). It can be a difficult transition for many women as they move from being a couple when they lose a partner due to death or divorce. It can lead to isolation and increased likelihood of depression and illness (Miller, Chen, and Cole 2009). In addition, research finds that being alone leads individual to more self-identify as 'old,' which has negative consequences for well-being (Logan, Ward, and Spitze 1992).

In the RHS, women going through these transitions are able to meet other people who have experienced similar transitions. Thus, there are experienced red hatters who can help the women navigate these transitions and find positive role models for successful transitioning. The safe space of the RHS allows members to learn how to handle this new found independence:

> ...it's women mentoring women. Whether they're younger, and sometimes they're maybe your own age. Maybe this gal never had time alone. Maybe she always had her husband and her kids around her and she never had women around her. (Margaret)

Within the RHS, women have the opportunity for new friendships and experiences. For example, Laura's work life kept her from being engaged in the community. Following her retirement, Laura had a significant adjustment. At "a Red Hat lunch and I went to …people would say are you new to [the area]? And I've been here 20 years… and it just really struck me how isolated I had become, and I just didn't have time to participate in a lot of activities." Yet, just a few years later, Laura's social network has changed dramatically. Laura tells of visiting her older brother and how a loud group of red hatters were dining at the same restaurant. She introduced herself to the group as a red hatter from another town.

> And my brother was really taken aback, you know, "what is that?" I don't think he was quite sure about me being one of those ladies with the [laughs] red hats in a restaurant

124

making a spectacle. I just really got tickled. …And it just didn't fit with his image of me, I think, and what [laughs] I was doing and associating with that group. (Laura)

The RHS community allowed Laura to expand her social network and explore dimensions of her personality she might not have done otherwise. Laura reflects on what the RHS taught her, "life's too short and you should have fun." For Laura, this manifests in a change in how she views her priorities. She has freed herself from following what she felt were obligations imposed on her by society. She no longer has to be a rule follower, she can make her own rules.

> I was on another organization's board for a short period of time and I just didn't feel good when I came home from those meetings. It was all this bickering back and forth, and I was just, it wasn't a good match. And one day I was headed, I was dressed, I was ready to go out the door to this board meeting, and I had a position that was really nonessential, so they wouldn't know whether I was there or not. I had my hand on the doorknob and I thought, "you're breaking a rule about doing something that you don't want to do, with people you don't want to be with" [laugh]. I turned around and came back in. I have never been that irresponsible [chortle]. And I went off the board of that particular group. In a way I was proud of myself that I didn't give in to social convention. The person that I have been all my life and dutifully attending those meetings and participating and I don't have to do that anymore. (Laura)

The question remains if Laura would have the same experience if she had joined the Uncapped chapter after they had no longer dressed up in the red hat regalia. Although Laura would have expanded her social network, arguably the experience would not have had the same risk taking aspects that challenged her in new ways. The costuming pushed Laura outside of her comfort zone which allowed her to get a sense of what is important to her.

The RHS also challenges members to reappraise their identities as older women in various ways. For example, Donna showed me a portrait that she recently took as part of her church's directory. At 89 years old, she proudly showed off a framed 8x10 of herself wearing a smart, bright red suit jacket and knee length pencil skirt with matching red kitten heels. The dress of the RHS no doubt influenced this choice.

The pervasiveness of old age stigma conditions individuals to look at being old as shameful. As research suggests, the majority of individuals will respond that they feel younger than their chronological age would position them (Montepare and Lachman 1989; Rubin and Bernsten 2006). As a member said about being an older woman, "You look in the mirror and you don't recognize that person– in your mind, you look much younger. That person in the mirror isn't how you *feel* you are" (fieldnotes, November 2011). In this way, RHS enables women to play out how they feel without criticism from others. Upholding the RHS ideology allows them to circumvent pressures to "act your age" that would require them to be responsible and more subdued.

Distancing from aging will likely increase among the aging Baby Boomer population. Baby Boomer consumers do not want to be associated with products or labels generally associated with older individuals. The consequences can be seen in the advertising efforts of products like Depends undergarments, which features younger celebrities wearing a premium line of inconspicuous undergarments developed for Baby Boomers (Newman 2012). Additionally, there has been a trend in grandparenting, a traditional benchmark to the beginning of old age, for choosing to be called alternative names to avoid associations with "grandma" or "grandpa" (Kaufman and Elder 2003; Zimmerman 2009). The Red Hat Society contributes to the concept of defying 'old age' by focusing on fun and enjoyment. As Sarah states:

> Our society in general thinks you're not necessarily old anymore when you're 60 and so forth. If you've been out dancing around and, and just acting silly with the Red Hat on, you're thought to be younger than somebody that's probably the same age who doesn't do it or who frowns on it. Just because it's that little bit of liveliness that you don't expect from your own grandmother. My grandkids just thought it was hysterical.

In a similar manner, Denise contrasts herself to a 'traditional' grandmother figure, enjoying her perceived positioning in the minds of her grandchildren.

That's better than being blahh, you know, I like being a little kooky. My granddaughter says 'you're my crazy grandma', the other one is like just sits and does nothing and that kind of stuff where she thinks I'm the kooky grandmother.

Both of these women enjoy being admired by their grandchildren and their ability to bridge this divide. Sylvia sees this in her involvement with younger members of the RHS, "Pink Hatters love to be with the red hatters, the Pink Hatters look up to the red hatters and say, oh my God you're so cool. A lot of them will say to me, I wish my mom was like you." These women are distancing themselves from behaviors associated with older woman stereotypes. They are not complacent—they are active and productive (Barnhart and Peñaloza 2013). Annie shares a vision of productivity, stating that she feels she has much more to contribute. It is one reason why she prioritizes other activities over the RHS. Annie feels that, "I have something to give in this field, and I want to give it now, while I'm at the top of my game."

These women generally relish breaking age expectations. Denise talks about being the "kooky grandma," Sarah talks about "acting silly." The organization also promotes games that blatantly challenge aging norms. One member told how she took an idea from the RHS blog:

"We went to a park for a picnic and games one year. We had a wet t-shirt contest." They threw wet t-shirts as far as they could. Then they took a member's cane and measured the distance. The winner ended up being their oldest member. "I remember the park rangers not knowing what to make of us, but really getting a kick out it." (conference fieldnotes, June 2012)

In and out of the red hat, these participants work outside traditional age expectation with lively and surprising activities. Many members share this joie de vie:

One woman I know is [late 80s], and… I mean she's just as lively as can be. We had a little impromptu picnic a couple years ago in one of the local parks and she was climbing one of those rope things sort of like in the Army where the guys climb up on big rope things—she was hanging on that thing like a monkey and so, why not? (Sarah)

These lively women embody many of the characteristics that the women admire. As Nadine says, "being together with women, I do learn about the aging process. And seeing how different

127

women age at different rates and kind of watching what they do." They see these other members as role models and they have a desire to continue their association with women and a community that supports these ideals. This helps to maintain congruency between their self-image and expectations. Annie responded, "I don't think any of us would consider ourselves as old. The view we have of ourselves doesn't match what other people see" (fieldnotes, November 2011).

Although some argue that RHS represents a "new women's movement," its lack of cohesive goals and organized structure defy this categorization (Kozinets and Handelman 2004). Indeed, some members reject this strong positioning, but do feel they are looking to redefine themselves as older women against commonly held beliefs. As Margaret states, "If we're fighting for anything it's for the respect of women, if we're fighting for anything. And the respect of the elderly. They're realizing that we are not ready to hang up the dishrag and go quietly into the night. We're not ready to do that."

Nevertheless, the RHS clearly enhances the member's well-being. For example, research supports the notion that individuals who value fun and enjoyment over security have a younger cognitive age (Cleaver and Muller 2002; Subbury and Simcock 2009). In turn, younger cognitive age is associated with greater well-being. As one member said, "My kids love that I am doing all these new things. I've become more fun, less conservative, and doing things I have never done before" (conference fieldnote, June 2012). The RHS gives members an opportunity to be active and socialize. It lets them explore friendships and their own identities in new ways.

Chapter 8: Contributions, Limitations, and Future Directions

This dissertation explored the findings and the interpretations of an ethnographic study of older female consumers in the RHS. The primary goal was to develop a deeper understanding of how this brand community influences members' perceptions on aging and identity. As discussed, research suggests that Americans hold strong cultural biases against older adults and the stigmas of aging are magnified for women because of gender expectations. The RHS offers a valuable space for investigation since its members are primarily female consumers over 50 years old, a segment that is often neglected by advertisers and marketing scholars alike. As a brand community, RHS provides a context to explore how consumption practices help shape the social self.

The data used in this project consisted of in-depth interviews with RHS members, fieldnotes from participant observations at local chapter gatherings and the international convention, photographs, and secondary texts. Through in-depth interviews, members shared their narratives, paraphilia, and photographs related to RHS. Participant observations took place at the national and local level. The international convention provided the opportunity to interact with and interview highly involved national members. The participant observations at the local level occurred over a two-year period and offered the opportunity to see how life events affected members (e.g., health challenges, divorce, death, civic achievements, birth of grandchildren). Examining two local chapters, Capped and Uncapped, provided the opportunity to compare and contrast communities and insight into how local chapters function away from the oversight of the

central organization. Observing the Uncapped chapter that left the RHS provided a different perspective on the rituals, costuming, and group cohesion.

The findings from this research focused on how the rituals, costuming, social support, and play created and maintained the brand community. The findings provide a window into how women dynamically navigate their position as older women. In this chapter, I review the contributions and implications, limitations, and opportunities for future directions.

Contributions

The theoretical contributions of this dissertation research deepen our understanding of how a brand community can add to the well-being of older female consumers through social support, play, and learning. Through its rituals, costuming, consumption practices, and values, a brand community can create a space in which members can explore their identities and learn through engaging in play. The theoretical contributions are threefold. First, this research explores how the antecedents—the rituals, costuming, and support structure—that enable the community creates this "safe space" to play. Past research on the RHS has also focused on costuming, support, and play. For example, Yarnal (2006) explored how the RHS offers an escape from everyday stressors and a place for social connections and fostering self-expression. Yet this research does not investigate the drivers that allow for the creation of this space. Moreover, researchers do not examine this process as it evolves over time or the different ways that members use play to affect their lives beyond the liminal time within the RHS. Beyond being a reprieve from the stressors of everyday hardships, RHS offers members opportunities to reflect on and shape their identities. Through RHS, women can redress past mistakes and missed

opportunities through imaginative play. Play within the RHS allows these women to incorporate qualities practiced in the RHS such as opening themselves to new experiences, becoming more assertive, and developing greater confidence. RHS provides a space were members can leverage their experiences to experiment and evolve more free-spirited identities that are apart from traditional caregiver roles, and separated from the "grandma" stereotype.

Additionally, no other research has explored the various levels of participation in the RHS and its effect on the community. In this study, women who have left the community were interviewed along with women who were at the highest level of involvement. Also, the Capped and Uncapped chapters provided variance in terms of community affiliation. Findings from this research help to illuminate the importance of ritual and costuming for creating group cohesion. I contend that without this shared set of practices, the Uncapped chapter would not have had its strong coherence and playfulness. It is because of their roots in the RHS that makes the group more than "just a bunch of women eating lunch" (Maddy). They still demonstrate behavior that is not typical of older women, such as joking, singing, laughing loudly, and acting 'silly.' Yet, the costuming was missed by members such as Maddy who saw the 'uniform' as a way to demand more attention from outsiders and opportunities for positive feedback on their appearances. As women grow older in the United States, they are generally less likely to receive the same accolades they were accustomed to in their youth. The red hat costume enables older women to once again stand out and be noticed.

A second contribution of this study is that it extends research on brand communities by focusing attention on a stigmatized population segment. While brand communities are widely researched among youth subcultures, researchers have not explored the role of brand communities with regards to aging. Researching stigmatized segments sheds new light into the

131

challenges faced by these groups and the ways individual members reduce the stigma and transform their status through various consumption practices. Similar to Kates' (2002, 2003) findings among the gay men's community and their performances, older women in the RHS seek to undermine the social status quo and develop their own sense of self through various levels of participation in consumption practices. Within the RHS these consumption practices are focused around creating an environment of freedom and play.

The third contribution of this research is in the domain of play and older consumers. In general, play is a subject that is missing from social theories of aging. While predominate social theories encourage activity among older individuals, these theories do not highlight play and playfulness as a valuable part of successful aging. Altogether, there is a dearth of research exploring the role of imaginative play among older consumers. This study demonstrates play among older consumers is an important area of research for a number of reasons. First, play enables individuals to create social bonds and offers new avenues of self-expression. Second, play increases well-being and may increase cognitive abilities. Third, play can be a catalyst for new and revitalized identities. Finally, play can be leveraged in a variety of flexible ways to meet the needs of older consumers.

From a managerial perspective, older consumers constitute a large and growing market segment. Implications for marketing managers include the opportunity to create "safe spaces" for older consumers to engage in more imaginative learning and play. For example, travel is popular among older consumers and vacation services might capitalize on these consumers' desire to pursue missed opportunities from the past or forward-looking opportunities at identity exploration. Similarly, neighborhoods and apartments for older consumers might work to foster greater occasions for community experiences that are valued by this segment.

This research also contributes to the growing awareness that considerable diversity exists in the older consumer segment and, while they face many hardships, this segment appears to respond well to positivity and fun. The connection between fun and well-being is important for healthcare providers to consider. With the proportion of older women increasing over the next decades, the findings on the constructive benefits of fun are relevant. These findings can be applied to the development of successful programs and interventions that focus on supporting women in maintaining their well-being as they encounter challenges and transitions associated with aging. As individuals live longer, they need to be challenged and offered chances to expand their perspective. RHS offers a space where members are allowed to experiment, which helps them maintain flexibility and adapt throughout this life stage.

Limitations

A main limitation of this study is that the participants were white, heterosexual, and middle-class. Arguably, lower-income groups often rely on systems of social support. Over their life time, lower-income older adults may have developed significant social capital upon which they can draw. Similarly, different ethnic groups, such as Latinas, may have more extensive social networks that they can leverage. In addition, participant observations of local chapters were constrained by geographic location, which is not reflective of the diversity of the RHS or the older female population. Certainly, a greater diversity of opportunities exists for older consumers within urban areas. The diversity of the older female segment is an important factor to acknowledge and it would be a valuable extension to see how various socio-demographic factors affect older women's experiences within brand communities and, in particular, across different

133

opportunities for play and learning. Nevertheless, the theoretical findings are still relevant. Across all of these segments within the United States, older women are socially degraded and they must still work to assert their value across their life trajectory.

Second, it is unclear how much play as an imaginative and dramatic performance can be generalized to broader female elderly segments or older consumer segments overall. Different leisure activities such as lawn bowling, swimming, vacationing, or throwing theme parties, all provide opportunities to play. Yet these activities do not seem to incite challenges to one's identity or the opportunity of growth that occurs in the RHS. It may be that these activities do incite growth but the changes are more modest or incremental. Of course, women self-select into the RHS so their members may be seeking out opportunities for growth and change. In the RHS, the costuming and the rituals around fun challenge members through imaginative play. The use of imaginative play may be limited to specific communities. Play may be a difficult concept for some older consumers since it requires suspension of reality, which may be uncomfortable for some. Understanding how imaginative play factors into the lives of older individuals is one opportunity for future research. Additional opportunities are discussed next.

Future directions

This study offers several areas for future research. Theoretically, it is worthwhile to advance research on the power of imaginative play for well-being among older consumers. This research can focus on the learning and adaptation that accompanies play within communities. Such research can be conducted with the RHS through a longitudinal study of members and how their membership has affected their sense of self. Additionally, programs can be tested within

community centers or retirement communities where imaginative play is encouraged through involvement in play activities developed to stimulate participants such as role playing, theater, art, dance, or signing.

Given the significant benefits of RHS, it is interesting to consider why certain women are attracted to RHS and others are not. Perhaps women who have more social or cultural capital would not find the RHS as appealing. Alternatively, women may be uncomfortable with what the RHS represents or they may not care to participate in these public performances. A large-scale survey of women who are RHS members, as well as non-members, could provide insight into the underlying reasons why RHS attracts certain women to the organization. Another future research idea would be to compare the RHS to other women's leisure groups that target older consumers. For example, gardening clubs often attract older women and may provide similar social support yet may encourage a different type of learning and play that is more skilled based. Knitting, crafting, and scrapbooking are popular creative hobbies for older consumers that might be compared to RHS; yet these leisure activities may be more focused on consolidating existing identities rather than exploring new ones. Yet older woman who engage in volunteer activities may find similar supportive environments as RHS that also provide opportunities for social support, growth, and fun, such as volunteering in after-school programs for children.

Another avenue would be a comparison of the findings with older men's social groups, such as the R.O.M.E.O.s (retired older men eating out). This group's website hints to its existence as a male alternative to the RHS. It is a much smaller organization and a significant difference is that these men do not wear costumes when they attend these luncheons. What is the value of costuming for the older women and why does it not hold a similar significance for men? In more general terms, this brings forward the question, how do older men play? Sports-

related leisure activities may be more widespread for older men; yet comparing these activities to women pursuing similar activities would provide insight into the extent men value social relationships created through sports or other leisure activities. Moreover, there may be a gendered difference between the use of imaginative play among older men and imaginative play among older women, which would be interesting to explore.

Considering future research from a managerial perspective, it is thought-provoking to consider the RHS brand and future issues facing the RHS brand community. The peak of RHS participation occurred ten years ago. Many chapters are a decade old and now have members in their seventies, eighties, and nineties. These women came of age before the women's liberation movement. Younger members will have different experiences that will influence their expectations of the RHS. For example, the majority of baby boomers work outside the home, which means that 50 years old (the time of the 'reduation') is no longer a transitional age when children are grown and have left the house. Research indicates that old age is socially constructed and the age of retirement greatly influences this perception. The question becomes how RHS stays a viable brand for this changing target audience without alienating its current members.

Another aspect of the RHS community that would be interesting to explore is it recent addition of "fitness" to its mission. Discussions with members demonstrate ambivalent feelings towards this new tenet since it contradicts the RHS culture of indulgence and self-gifting. It is unclear just how the corporate RHS can reconcile this new focus on health and nutrition with leisure activities such as lunches that begin with dessert and martinis. These future research projects could add to our understanding of how brand communities can aid their members in learning and increasing the well-being of older consumers.

References

Algoe, Sara B, Jonathan Haidt, and Shelly L Gable (2008), "Beyond Reciprocity: Gratitude and Relationships in Everyday Life," *Emotion*, 8 (3), 425-29.

Angen, Maureen Jane (2000), "Evaluating Interpretive Inquiry: Reviewing the Validity Debate and Opening the Dialogue," *Qualitative Health Research*, 10 (3), 378-95.

Arnould, Eric J. and Linda L. Price (1993), "River Magic: Extraordinary Experience and the Extended Service Encounter," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20 (1), 24-45.

Arnould, Eric J. and Craig J. Thompson (2005), "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (4), 868-82.

Atkins, T. Virginia, Martha C. Jenkins, and Mishelle H. Perkins (1990), "Portrayal of Persons in Television Commercials Age 50 and Older," *Psychology: A Journal of Human Behavior*, 27 (4), 30-37.

Baker, Stacey Menzel, James W. Gentry, and Terri L. Rittenburg (2005), "Building Understanding of the Domain of Consumer Vulnerability," *Journal of Macromarketing*, 25 (2), 128-39.

Bandura, Albert (1997), *Social Learning Theory*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Barak, Benny, Anil Mathur, Yong Zhang, Keun Lee, and Emmanuel Erondu (2003), "Inner-Age Satisfaction in Africa and Asia: A Cross-Cultural Exploration," *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 15 (1/2), 3-26.

Barnes-Farrell, Janet L, Steven M Rumery, and Cathleen A Swody (2002), "How Do Concepts of Age Relate to Work and Off-the-job Stresses and Strains? A Field Study of Health Care Workers in Five Nations," *Experimental Aging Research*, 28 (1), 87-98.

Barnhart, Michelle and Lisa Peñaloza (2013), "Who Are You Calling Old? Negotiating Old Age Identity in the Elderly Consumption Ensemble," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39 (6), 1133-53.

Barrett, Anne E, Manacy Pai, and Rebecca Redmond (2012), ""It's Your Badge of Inclusion": The Red Hat Society as a Gendered Subculture Of Aging," *Journal of Aging Studies*, 26 (4), 527-38.

Beaumont, J. Graham and Pamela M. Kenealy (2004), "Quality of Life Perceptions and Social Comparisons in Healthy Old Age," *Ageing & Society*, 24 (05), 755-69.

Belk, Russell W. (2010), "Sharing," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36 (5), 715-34.

Belk, Russell W. and Janeen Arnold Costa (1998), "The Mountain Man Myth: A Contemporary Consuming Fantasy," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 25 (3), 218-40.

Bellezza, Silvia, Catherinecesca Gino, and Anat Keinan, (forthcoming) "The Red Sneakers Effect: Inferring Status and Competence from Signals of Nonconformity," *Journal of Consumer Research*.

Bender, Thomas (1978), *Community and Social Change in America*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

van Bohemen, Samira, Liesbet van Zoonen, and Stef Aupers (2013), "Negotiating Gender through Fun and Play: Radical Femininity and Fantasy in the Red Hat Society," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (Online access 30 October 2013), 1-19.

Bonsu, Samuel K. and Russell W. Belk (2003), "Do Not Go Cheaply into That Good Night: Death-Ritual Consumption in Asante, Ghana," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30 (1), 41-55.

Boorstin, Daniel J. (1973), *The Americans, the Democratic Experience*, New York: Random House.

Brady, Beth and Peter Hubbell (2012), "Introducing Boomers: Marketing's Most Valuable Generation," Nielsen report, in collaboration with BoomAgers, (accessed on 3 March 2014) [http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/reports/2012/introducing-boomers--marketing-s-most-valuable-generation.html]

Branch, John D. (2007), "Postmodern Consumption and the High-Fidelity Audio Microculture," in *Consumer Culture Theory (Research in Consumer Behavior)*, Vol. 11, ed. Russell W. Belk and John F. Sherry, Oxford, UK: Elsevier, 79-99.

Brown, John Seely, Allan Collins, and Paul Duguid (1989), "Situated Cognition and the Culture of Learning," *Educational Researcher*, 18 (1), 32-42.

Brown, Mary and Carol Orsborn (2006), *Boom: Marketing to the Ultimate Power Consumer--the Baby Boomer Woman*, New York: American Management Association.

Burgess, Ernest W. (1954), "Social Relations, Activities, and Personal Adjustment," *American Journal of Sociology*, 59, 352-60.

Butler, Judith (1990), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge.

Calasanti, Toni (2005), "Ageism, Gravity, and Gender: Experiences of Aging Bodies," *Generations*, 29 (3), 8-12.

--- (2007), "Bodacious Berry, Potency Wood and the Aging Monster: Gender and Age Relations in Anti-Aging Ads," *Social Forces*, 86 (1), 335-55.

Calasanti, Toni M. and Kathleen F. Slevin (2001), *Gender, Social Inequalities, and Aging*, Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Calasanti, Toni M., Kathleen F. Slevin, and Neal King (2006), "Ageism and Feminism: From "Et Cetera" to Center," *NWSA Journal*, 18 (1), 13-30.

Canniford, Robin (2011), "A Typology of Consumption Communities," in *Research in Consumer Behavior*, Vol. 13, ed. Russell W. Belk, Kent Grayson, Albert M. Muñiz and Hope Jensen Schau, Bingley, UK: Emerald, 57-75.

Canniford, Robin and Avi Shankar (2007), "Marketing the Savage: Appropriating Tribal Tropes," in *Consumer Tribes*, ed. Bernard Cova, Robert V. Kozinets, and Avi Shankar, Oxford, UK: Elsevier.

Carrigan, Marylyn and Isabelle Szmigin (1998), "The Usage and Portrayal of Older Models in Contemporary Consumer Advertising," *Journal of Marketing Practice: Applied Marketing Science*, 4 (8), 231-48.

Carstensen, Laura L., Derek M. Isaacowitz, and Susan T. Charles (1999), "Taking Time Seriously: A Theory of Socioemotional Selectivity," *American Psychologist*, 54 (3), 165-81.

Carstensen, Laura L. and Joseph A. Mikels (2005), "At the Intersection of Emotion and Cognition: Aging and the Positivity Effect," *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 14 (3), 117-21.

Carver, Charles S., Michael F. Scheier, and Suzanne C. Segerstrom (2010), "Optimism," *Clinical Psychology Review*, 30 (7), 879-89.

Celsi, Richard L., Randall L. Rose, and Thomas W. Leigh (1993), "An Exploration of High-Risk Leisure Consumption through Skydiving," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20 (1), 1-23.

Cheang, Michael (2002),"Older adults' frequent visits to a fast-food restaurant: Nonobligatory social interaction and the significance of play in a 'third place'" *Journal of Aging Studies* (16) 3, 303-321.

Chen, Yiwei and Fredda Blanchard-Fields (2000), "Unwanted Thought: Age Differences in the Correction of Social Judgments," *Psychology and Aging*, 15 (3), 475-82.

Cherrier, Hélène and Jeff Murray (2002), "Drifting Away From Excessive Consumption: A New Social Movement based on Identity Construction," *Advances in Consumer Research*, 29 (1), 245-47.

Cialdini, Robert B. (1993), *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, New York: Quill William Morrow.

Cleaver, Megan and Thomas E. Muller (2002), "I Want to Pretend I'm Eleven Years Younger: Subjective Age and Seniors' Motives for Vacation Travel," *Social Indicators Research*, 60 (1-3), 227-41.

Coan, James A., Hillary S. Schaefer, and Richard J. Davidson (2006), "Lending a Hand: Social Regulation of the Neural Response to Threat," *Psychological Science*, 17 (12), 1032-39.

Cole, Catherine, Gilles Laurent, Aimee Drolet, Jane Ebert, Angela Gutchess, Raphaëlle Lambert-Pandraud, Etienne Mullet, Michael Norton, and Ellen Peters (2008), "Decision Making and Brand Choice by Older Consumers," *Marketing Letters*, 19 (3/4), 355-65.

Coleman, Nicole Verrochi and Patti Williams (2013), "Feeling Like My Self: Emotion Profiles and Social Identity," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40 (2), 203-22.

Cooper, Sue Ellen (2004), *The Red Hat Society: Fun and Friendship After Fifty*, New York: Warner Books.

Cotter, Mark (2004), "A Closer Look at the Ontological Role of Play," in *The Child's Right to Play: A Global Approach*, ed. Rhonda L. Clemons and Leah Fiorento, Westport, CT: Praeger, 329-41.

Cottrell Jr, Leonard S (1942), "The Adjustment of the Individual to his Age and Sex Roles," *American Sociological Review*, 7, 617-20.

Coudin, Genevieve and Theodore Alexopoulos (2010), "'Help me! I'm old!' How negative aging stereotypes create dependency among older adults," *Aging & Mental Health*, 14 (5), 516-23.

Cova, Bernard (1997), "Community and Consumption: Towards a Definition of the 'Linking Value' of Product or Services," *European Journal of Marketing,* 31 (3/4), 297-316.

Cova, Bernard and Veronique Cova (2002), "Tribal Marketing: The Tribalisation of Society and Its Impact on the Conduct of Marketing," *European Journal of Marketing*, 36 (5/6), 595-620.

Cova, Bernard, Robert V. Kozinets, and Avi Shankar (2007), "Tribes Inc.: The New World of Tribalism," in *Consumer Tribes*, ed. Bernard Cova, Robert V. Kozinets, and Avi Shankar Oxford, UK: Elsevier, 3-26.

Creswell, John W. (2013) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cruikshank, Margaret (2009), *Learning to be Old: Gender, Culture, and Aging*, Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.

Cuddy, Amy J. C. and Susan T. Fiske (2002), "Doddering But Dear: Process, Content, and Function in Stereotyping of Older Persons," in *Ageism: Stereotyping and Prejudice Against Older Persons*, ed. Todd D. Nelson, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Cuddy, Amy J. C., Michael I. Norton, and Susan T. Fiske (2005), "This Old Stereotype: The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Elderly Stereotype," *Journal of Social Issues*, 61 (2), 267-85.

Cummings, Elaine and William E Henry (1961), *Growing Old*, New York: Basic Books.

Diamond, Nina, John F. Sherry, Albert M. Muñiz, Mary Ann Mcgrath, Robert V. Kozinets, and Stefania Borghini (2009), "American Girl and the Brand Gestalt: Closing the Loop on Sociocultural Branding Research," *Journal of Marketing*, 73 (3), 118-34.

de Valck, Kristine (2007), "The War of the eTribes: Online Conflicts and Communal Consumption," in *Consumer Tribes*, ed. Bernard Cova, Robert V. Kozinets, and Avi Shankar Oxford, UK: Elsevier, 260-74.

Dillaway, Heather E. and Mary Byrnes (2009), "Reconsidering Successful Aging," *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 28 (6), 702-22.

Dowdle, Elizabeth and Laura Duff (2010), "National Museum of American History Accepts Red Hat Society Donation," July 30, (accessed on 12 April 2012) http://americanhistory.si.edu/news/pressrelease.cfm?key=29&newskey=1173.

Drolet, Aimee, Norbert Schwarz, and Carolyn Yoon (2010a), *The Aging Consumer: Perspectives from Psychology and Economics*, New York: Routledge.

Drolet, Aimee, Loraine Lau-Gesk, Patti Williams, and Hyewook Genevieve Jeong (2010b), "Socioemotional Selectivity Theory: Implications for Consumer Research," in *The Aging Consumer: Perspectives from Psychology and Economics*, ed. Aimee Drolet, Norbert Schwarz and Carolyn Yoon, New York: Routledge.

Erlinghagen, Marcel and Karsten Hank (2006), "The Participation of Older Europeans in Volunteer Work," *Ageing & Society*, 26 (04), 567-84.

Field, Tiffany (2001), *Touch*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Fowler Jr., Floyd J. (1995), *Improving Survey Questions: Design and Evaluation*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fowler, James H and Nicholas A Christakis (2008), "Dynamic Spread of Happiness in a Large Social Network: Longitudinal Analysis over 20 Years in the Framingham Heart Study," *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 337.

Franklin, Nina C. and Charlotte A. Tate (2009), "Lifestyle and Successful Aging: An Overview," *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*, 3 (1), 6-11.

Friedman, Monroe (1992), "Commercial Influences in Literature and Culture in the Postwar Era: Major Findings of a Ten-Year Research Project," in *Meaning, Measure, and Morality of Materialism*, ed. Floyd W Rudmin and Marsha Lee Richins, Kingston, Ontario: Association for Consumer Research, 199-201.

Fukuyama, Francis (2002), "Social Capital and Development: The Coming Agenda," *SAIS Review*, 22 (1), 23-37.

Gallace, Alberto and Charles Spence (2010), "The Science of Interpersonal Touch: An Overview," *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 34 (2), 246-59.

Gana, K., D. Alaphilippe, and N. Bailly (2004), "Positive Illusions and Mental and Physical Health in Later Life," *Aging & Mental Health*, 8 (1), 58-64.

Geertz, Clifford (1973), *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York: Basic Books.

Gleibs, Ilka H., Catherine Haslam, S. Alexander Haslam, and Janelle M. Jones (2011), "Water Clubs in Residential Care: Is it the Water or the Club that Enhances Health and Well-being?," *Psychology & Health*, 26 (10), 1361-77.

Global Industry Analysts (2009), "Global Anti-Aging Products Market to Reach $291.9 Billion by 2015," (accessed on 9 August 2013) http://www.strategyr.com/pressMCP-1107.asp.

Glynn, Mary A. and Webster, Jane (1992), "The Adult Playfulness Scale: An Initial Assessment," *Psychological Reports*, 71 (1), 83-103.

Goffman, Erving (1963), *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

Gordon, Gwen (2009), "What is Play? In Search of a Definition," in *From Children to Red Hatters: Diverse Images and Issues of Play* ed. David Kuschner, Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Goulding, Christina and Michael Saren (2009), "Performing Identity: An Analysis of Gender Expressions at the Whitby Goth Festival," *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 12 (1), 27-46.

Goulding, Christina, Avi Shankar, Richard Elliot, and Robin Cannford (2009), "The Marketplace Management of Illicit Pleasure," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35 (5), 759-71.

Granich, Debra (2008) "SOS: Save Support our Society," (accessed April 29, 2012), [available at www.redhatsociety.com/pdf/SOS_FAQ.pdf]

Granovetter, Mark (1983), "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited," *Sociological Theory*, 1, 201-33.

Grayson, Kent (1999), "The Dangers and Opportunities of Playful Consumption," in *Consumer Value: A Framework for Analysis and Research*, ed. Morris Holbrook, New York: Routledge, 105-25.

Gregoire, Yany (2003), "The Impact of Aging on Consumer Responses: What Do We Know?," in *Association for Consumer Research*, Vol. 30, ed. Punam Anand Keller and Dennis W. Rock, Valdosta, GA, 19-26.

Hammersley, Martyn and Paul Atkinson (2007), *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, New York: Routledge.

Hasher, Lynn, Rose T. Zacks, and Cynthia P. May (1999), "Inhibitory Control, Circadian Arousal, and Age," in *Attention and Performance, XVII, Cognitive Regulation of Performance: Interaction of Theory and Application*, ed. Daniel Gopher and Asher Koriat, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 653-75.

Havighurst, Robert J and Ruth Albrecht (1953), *Older People*, New York: Longmans Green.

Hebdige, Dick (1979), *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen.

Heckhausen, Jutta and Orville Gilbert Brim (1997), "Perceived Problems for Self and Others: Self-protection by Social Downgrading throughout Adulthood," *Psychology and Aging*, 12 (4), 610-19.

Hirschman, Elizabeth C. (1980), "Innovativeness, Novelty Seeking, and Consumer Creativity," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 7 (December), 283–95.

------ (1983), "Consumer Intelligence, Creativity, and Consciousness: Implications for Consumer Protection and Education," Journal of Public Policy and Marketing, 2(1), 153–70.

Holbrook, Morris (1999), "Introduction to Consumer Value," in *Consumer Value: A Framework for Analysis and Research*, ed. Morris Holbrook, New York: Routledge, 1-28.

Holstein, Martha B. (2007), "A Critical Reflection on Civic Engagement," *Public Policy & Aging Report*, 16 (4), 1-26.

Holt, Douglas (1998), "Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption?" *Journal of Consumer Research*, 25(1), 1-25.

Holtzman, Ronald E., George W. Rebok, Jane S. Saczynski, Anthony C. Kouzis, Kathryn Wilcox Doyle, and William W. Eaton (2004), "Social Network Characteristics and Cognition in Middle-Aged and Older Adults," *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 59 (6), P278-P84.

Hong, Soonkwan (2011), "Skating Dialectics and Flipping Genealogy," in *Research in Consumer Behavior*, Vol. 13, ed. Russell W. Belk, Kent Grayson, Albert M. Muñiz and

Hope Jensen Schau, Bingley, UK: Emerald, 163-84.

Howard-Jones, Paul, Jayne Taylor, and Lesley Sutton (2002), "The Effect of Play on the Creativity of Young Children During Subsequent Activity," *Early Child Development and Care*, 172 (4), 323-28.

Howarth, Glennys, (1997) "Food Consumption, Social Roles and Personal Identity" *Ageing, Independence, and the Life Course,* edited by Sara Arber, Maria Evandrou 65-77

Huizinga, Johan (1949), *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Elements in Culture*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Hurd, Laura C (2000), "Older women's body image and embodied experience: An exploration," *Journal of Women & Aging*, 12 (3-4), 77-97.

Hutchinson, Susan L., Careen M. Yarnal, Julie Staffordson, and Deborah L. Kerstetter (2008), "Beyond Fun and Friendship: the Red Hat Society as a Coping Resource for Older Women," *Ageing & Society*, 28 (07), 979-99.

Isaacowitz, Derek M., Susan Turk Charles, and Laura L. Carstensen (2000), "Emotion and Cognition," in *The Handbook of Aging and Cognition*, ed. Fergus I. M. Craik and Timothy A. Salthouse, Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 593-631.

Jerrome, Dorothy (1992). *Good Company: An Anthropological Study of Old people in Groups.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Jetten, Jolanda, Catherine Haslam, and S. Alexander Haslam (2012), *The Social Cure: Identity, Health and Well-being*, Hove; New York: Psychology Press.

Jones, Edward E., Amerigo Farina, Albert H. Hastorf, Hazel Markus, Dale T. Miller, and Scott. Robert A. (1984), *Social Stigma: The Psychology of Marked Relationships*, New York: W.H. Freeman.

Joseph, Jenny (1973), "Warning," in *The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse*, ed. Philip Larkin, Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 609-10.

Joseph, Nathan (1986), *Uniforms and Nonuniforms: Communication through Clothing*, New York: Greenwood Press.

Kates, Steven M. (2002), "The Protean Quality of Subcultural Consumption: An Ethnographic Account of Gay Consumers," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29 (3), 383-99.

--- (2003), "Producing and Consuming Gendered Representations: An Interpretation of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras," *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, 6 (1), 5-22.

Kaufman, Gayle and Glen H. Elder Jr (2003), "Grandparenting and Age Identity," *Journal of Aging Studies*, 17 (3), 269-82.

Kerstetter, Deborah L., Careen M. Yarnal, Julie S. Son, I. Yin Yen, and Birgitta S. Baker (2008), "Functional Support Associated with Belonging to the Red Hat Society, a Leisure-Based Social Network," *Journal of Leisure Research*, 40 (4), 531-55.

Kinsella, Kevin and Wan He (2009), "An Aging World: 2008," *International Population Reports*, P95/09-1, Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

Kite, Mary E., Gary D. Stockdale, Bernard E. Whitley, and Blair T. Johnson (2005), "Attitudes Toward Younger and Older Adults: An Updated Meta-Analytic Review," *Journal of Social Issues*, 61 (2), 241-66.

Kite, Mary E and Lisa Smith Wagner (2002), "Attitudes toward Older Adults," in *Ageism: Stereotyping and prejudice against older persons*, ed. Todd T. Nelson, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 129-61.

Kleinspehn-Ammerlahn, Anna, Dana Kotter-Grühn, and Jacqui Smith (2008), "Self-Perceptions of Aging: Do Subjective Age and Satisfaction With Aging Change During Old Age?," *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 63 (6), 377-85.

Kochanek, Kenneth D., Jiaquan Xu, Sherry L. Murphy, Arialdi M. Miniño, and Hsiang-Ching Kung (2011), "Deaths: Preliminary Data for 2009," *National Vital Statistics Reports*, 59 (4), Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

Kohlbacher, Florian and Cornelius Herstatt (2011), "Preface and Introduction," in *The Silver Market Phenomenon Marketing and Innovation in the Aging Society*, ed. Florian Kohlbacher and Cornelius Herstatt, Heidelberg; New York: Springer, v-xxii.

Kozinets, Robert V. (1997), "'I Want to Believe': A Netnography of the X-Philes' Subculture of Consumption," in *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 24, ed. Merrie Brucks and Deborah J. Macinnis, Provo, UT Association for Consumer Research, 470-75.

--- (2001), "Utopian Enterprise: Articulating the Meanings of Star Trek's Culture of Consumption," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28 (1), 67-88.

--- (2002), "Can Consumers Escape the Market? Emancipatory Illuminations from Burning Man," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29 (1), 20-38.

Kozinets, Robert V. and Jay M. Handelman (2004), "Adversaries of Consumption: Consumer Movements, Activism, and Ideology," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (3), 691-704.L

L'Abate, Luciano (2009), *The Praeger Handbook of Play Across the Life Cycle: Fun from Infancy to Old Age*, Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger/ABC-CLIO.

Lambert-Pandraud, Raphaëlle and Gilles Laurent (2010), "Why Do Older Consumers Buy Older Brands? The Role of Attachment and Declining Innovativeness," *Journal of Marketing*, 74 (5), 104-21.

Lamerichs, Nicolle (2011), "Stranger than Fiction: Fan Identity in Cosplay." *Transformative Works and Cultures,* 7, (accessed January 13, 2014) [available at http://journal.transformativeworks.com/index.php/twc/article/view/246/230].

Lanier, Clinton D. and Hope Jensen Schau (2007), "Culture and Co-Creation: Exploring Consumers' Inspirations and Aspirations for Writing and Posting On-line Fan Fiction," in *Consumer Culture Theory (Research in Consumer Behavior)*, Vol. 11, ed. Russell W. Belk and John F. Sherry, Oxford, UK: Elsevier.

Lawton, M. Powell (1983), "Environment and Other Determinants of Weil-Being in Older People," The Gerontologist, 23 (4), 349-57.

Lee, Monica M., Brian Carpenter, and Lawrence S. Meyers (2007), "Representations of Older Adults in Television Advertisements," *Journal of Aging Studies*, 21(1), 23-30.

Levy, Becca R. and Mahzarin R. Banaji (2002), "Implicit Ageism," in *Ageism: Stereotyping and Prejudice Against Older Persons*, ed. Todd D. Nelson, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 49-75.

Levy, Becca R., Pil Chung, and Maureen Canavan (2011), "Impact of Explanatory Style and Age Stereotypes on Health Across the Lifespan," in *Handbook of Lifespan Development*, ed. Karen L. Fingerman, Cynthia A. Berg, Jacqui Smith and Toni C. Antonucci, New York: Springer.

Levy, Becca R., Alan B. Zonderman, Martin D. Slade, and Luigi Ferrucci (2012), "Memory Shaped by Age Stereotypes over Time," *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 67(4), 432-436.

Liechty, Toni, Nuno F. Ribeiro, and Careen M. Yarnal (2009), "'I Traveled Alone, but Never Felt Alone': An Exploration of the Benefits of an Older Women's Group Tour Experience," *Tourism Review International*, 13 (1), 17-29.

Lincoln, Yvonna S., and Egon G. Guba (1985), *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Logan, John R., Russell Ward, and Glenna Spitze (1992), "As Old as You Feel: Age Identity in Middle and Later Life," *Social Forces*, 71 (2), 451-67.

Luedicke, Marius K, Craig J. Thompson, and Markus Giesler (2010), "Consumer Identity Work as Moral Protagonism: How Myth and Ideology Animate a Brand-Mediated Moral Conflict," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36 (6), 1016-32.

Luomala, Harri T. and Martti Laaksonen (1999), "A Qualitative Exploration of Mood-regulatory Self-gift Behaviors," *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 20 (2), 147-82.

Lustig, Cindy, Cynthia P. May, and Lynn Hasher (2001), "Working Memory Span and the Role of Proactive Interference," *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 130 (2), 199-207.

Lynch, Annette, Marybeth C. Stalp, and M. Elise Radina (2007), "Growing Old and Dressing (Dis) Gracefully," in *Dress Sense*, ed. Donald Clay Johnson and Helen Bradley Foster, Oxford, UK: Berg, 144-55.

Maffesoli, Michel (1996), *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

--- (2007), "Tribal Aesthetic," in *Consumer Tribes*, ed. Bernard Cova, Robert V. Kozinets and Avi Shankar, Oxford, UK: Elsevier.

Martin, Diane M., John W. Schouten, and James H. McAlexander (2006), "Claiming the Throttle: Multiple Femininities in a Hyper-Masculine Subculture," *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, 9 (3), 171-205.

Martin, Rod A. (2010), *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*, Burlington, MA: ElsevierAcademic Press.

Masten, Ann S. (2001), "Ordinary Magic: Resilience Processes in Development," *American Psychologist*, 56 (3), 227-38.

Mathur, Anil and George P. Moschis (2005), "Antecedents of Cognitive Age: A Replication and Extension," *Psychology and Marketing*, 22 (12), 969-94.

Mathwick, Charla, Caroline Wiertz, and Ko De Ruyter (2008), "Social Capital Production in a Virtual P3 Community," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34 (6), 832-49.

Maxwell, Joseph A. (1996), *Qualitative Research Design: A Interactive Approach,* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

McAlexander, James H., John W. Schouten, and Harold F. Koenig (2002), "Building Brand Community," *Journal of Marketing*, 66 (1), 38-54.

Mick, David Glen and Michelle DeMoss (1990), "Self-Gifts: Phenomenological Insights from Four Contexts," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17 (3), 322-32.

Mikkonen, Ilona, Handan Vicdan, and Annu Markkula (2014), "What Not to Wear? Oppositional Ideology, Fashion, and Governmentality in Wardrobe Self-help," *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 17 (3), 254-73.

Millar, Susanna (1968), *The Psychology of Play*, Baltimore: Penguin Books.

Miller, Gregory, Edith Chen, and Steve W. Cole (2009), "Health Psychology: Developing Biologically Plausible Models Linking the Social World and Physical Health," *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60 (1), 501-24.

Mitas, Ondrej, Xinyi Lisa Qian, Careen Yarnal, and Deborah Kerstetter (2011), "'The Fun Begins Now!': Broadening and Building Processes in Red Hat Society Participation," *Journal of Leisure Research*, 43 (First Quarter), 30-55.

Montepare, Joann M. and Margie E. Lachman (1989), "'You're Only as Old as You Feel': Self-Perceptions of Age, Fears of Aging, and Life Satisfaction from Adolescence to Old Age," *Psychology and Aging*, 4 (1), 73-78.

Moisio, Risto and Mariam Beruchashvili (2010), "Questing for Well-Being at Weight Watchers: The Role of the Spiritual-Therapeutic Model in a Support Group," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36 (5), 857-75.

Moschis, George P. (1992), *Marketing to Older Consumers: A Handbook of Information for Strategy Development*, Westport, CT: Quorum Books.

--- (2000), "Consumer Behavior in Later Life: Multidisciplinary Approaches and Methodological Issues " in *Research in Consumer Behavior*, Vol. 9, ed. Russell W. Belk, Janeen Arnold Costa and John W. Schouten, 103–28.

--- (2007), "Life Course Perspectives on Consumer Behavior," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 35 (2), 295-307.

--- (2012), "Consumer Behavior in Later Life: Current Knowledge, Issues, and New Directions for Research," *Psychology & Marketing*, 29 (2), 57-75.

Moschis, George P., Euehun Lee, Anil Mathur, and Jennifer Strauman (2000), *The Maturing Marketplace: Buying Habits of Baby Boomers and Their Parents*, Westport, CT: Quorum Books.

Moschis, George P., Jill Mosteller, and Choong Kwai Fatt (2011), "Research Frontiers on Older Consumers' Vulnerability," *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 45 (3), 467-91.

Muggleton, David (2000), *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style,* Oxford, UK: Berg.

--- (2005), "From Classlessness to Clubculture," *Young*, 13 (2), 205-19.

Muñiz, Albert M. Jr. and Thomas C. O'Guinn (2001), "Brand Community," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27 (4), 412-32.

Muñiz, Albert M. Jr. and Hope Jensen Schau (2005), "Religiosity in the Abandoned Apple Newton Brand Community," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (4), 737-47.

Nagar, Richa and Susan Geiger (2007), "Reflexivity and Positionality in Feminist Fieldwork

Revisited," in *Politics and Practice in Economic Geography*, ed. Adam Tickell, Eric Sheppard, Jamie Peck and Trevor Barnes, London: Sage Publications, 267-79.

National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP (2009), *Caregiving in the U.S.: A Focused Look at Those Caring for Someone Age 50 or Older*, Washington, DC: Authors.

National Center for Health Statistics (2012), *Older Americans 2012: Key Indicators of Well-being*, Washington, DC: Federal Interagency Forum on Aging Related Statistics.

Newman, Andrew Adam (2012), "A Young Spin on Incontinence, in Spots Skirting Images of Aging," *The New York Times*, March 29, 2012.

Nicolopoulou, Ageliki (1993), "Play, Cognitive Development, and the Social World: Piaget, Vygotsky, and Beyond," *Human Development*, 36 (1), 1-23.

Okuda, Michael, Denise Okuda, and Debbie Mirek (1999), *The Star Trek Encyclopedia*. New York: Pocket Books.

Oldenburg, Ray (1989), *The Great Good Place*, New York: Marlowe & Company.

Oyserman, Daphna (2009), "Identity-based Motivation and Consumer Behavior," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 19 (3), 276-79.

Peters, Cara, Jeremy A. Shelton, and Jane B. Thomas (2011), "Self-Concept and the Fashion Behavior of Women Over 50," *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 15 (3), 291-305.

Pettigrew, Simone and George Moschis (2012), "Consumer Well-Being in Later Life," in *Transformative Consumer Research for Personal and Collective Well Being*, ed. David Glen Mick, Simone Pettigrew, Cornelia Pechmann and Julie L. Ozanne, New York: Routledge Academic, 565-81.

Price, Linda L., Eric J. Arnould, and Carolyn Folkman Curasi (2000), "Older Consumers' Disposition of Special Possessions," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27 (2), 179-201.

Proyer, René T (2013), "The Well-being of Playful Adults: Adult Playfulness, Subjective Well-being, Physical Well-being, and the Pursuit of Enjoyable Activities," *The European Journal of Humour Research*, 1 (1), 84-98.

Proyer, René T and Willibald Ruch (2011), "The Virtuousness of Adult Playfulness: The Relation of Playfulness with Strengths of Character," *Psychology of Well-Being*, 1 (1), 1-12.

Putnam, Robert D. (2000), *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

Putnam, Robert D. (2001), "Social Capital: Measurement and Consequences," *Canadian Journal of Policy Research*, 2 (1), 41-51.

Radina, M. Elise, Annette Lynch, Marybeth C. Stalp, and Lydia K. Manning (2008), "'When I Am an Old Woman, I Shall Wear Purple': Red Hatters Cope with Getting Old," *Journal of Women & Aging*, 20 (1-2), 99-114.

Radina, M. Elise, Lydia K. Manning, Marybeth C. Stalp, and Annette Lynch (2011), "'Give Me a Boa and Some Bling!': Red Hat Society Members Commanding Visibility in the Public Sphere," in *Embodied Resistance: Challenging the Norms, Breaking the Rules*, ed. Chris Bobel and Samantha Kwan, Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 67-77.

Reinharz, Shulamit (1992), *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Rook, Dennis W. (1985), "The Ritual Dimension of Consumer Behavior," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 12 (3), 251-64.

Rose, Arnold M. (1965), "The Subculture of the Aging: A framework for research in social gerontology," in *Older People and their Social World*, ed. Arnold M. Rose and Warren A. Peterson, Philadelphia: FA Davis Co, 3-15.

Rowe, John W. and Robert L. Kahn (1997), "Successful Aging," *The Gerontologist*, 37 (4), 433-40.

Roy, Abhik and Jake Harwood (1997), "Underrepresented, Positively Portrayed: Older Adults in Television Commercials," *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 25 (1), 39.

Rubin, David and Dorthe Berntsen (2006), "People Over Forty Feel 20% Younger Than Their Age: Subjective Age Across the Lifespan," *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 13 (5), 776-80.

Rupp, Leila J., Verta Taylor, and Eve Ilana Shapiro (2010), "Drag Queens and Drag Kings: The Difference Gender Makes," *Sexualities*, 13 (3), 275-94.

Ruth, Julie A., Cele C. Otnes, and Frederic F. Brunel (1999), "Gift Receipt and the Reformulation of Interpersonal Relationships," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 25, 385-402.

Sahlins, Marshall David (1972), *Stone Age Economics*, Chicagp: Aldine-Atherton.

Salthouse, Timothy A. (2010), *Major Issues in Cognitive Aging*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Sandikci, Ozlem and Güliz Ger (2010), "Veiling in Style: How Does a Stigmatized Practice Become Fashionable?," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37 (1), 15-36.

Scarlett, W. George, Sophie Naudeau, Dorothy Salonius-Pasternak, and Iris Ponte (2005), *Children's Play*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Schau, Hope Jensen, Mary C. Gilly, and Mary Wolfinbarger (2009a), "Consumer Identity Renaissance: The Resurgence of Identity-Inspired Consumption in Retirement," *Journal*

of Consumer Research, 36 (2), 255-76.

Schau, Hope Jensen, Albert M. Muñiz, and Eric J. Arnould (2009b), "How Brand Community Practices Create Value," *Journal of Marketing*, 73 (5), 30-51.

Schau, Hope Jensen and Albert M. Muñiz Jr. (2007), "Temperance and Religiosity in a Non-marginal, Non-stigmatized Brand Community," in *Consumer Tribes*, ed. Bernard Cova, Robert V. Kozinets and Avi Shankar, Oxford, UK: Elsevier, 144-62.

Schouten, John W. and James H. McAlexander (1995), "Subcultures of Consumption: An Ethnography of the New Bikers," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (1), 43-61.

Schouten, John W., Diane M. Martin, and James H. McAlexander (2007), "The Evolution of a Subculture of Consumption," in *Consumer Tribes*, ed. Bernard Cova, Robert V. Kozinets and Avi Shankar, Oxford, UK: Elsevier, 67-75.

Sherman, Elaine, Leon G. Schiffman, and Anil Mathur (2001), "The Influence of Gender on the New-Age Elderly's Consumption Orientation," *Psychology & Marketing*, 18 (10), 1073-89.

Simcock, Peter and Lynn Sudbury (2006), "The Invisible Majority? Older Models in UK Television Advertising," *International Journal of Advertising*, 25 (1), 87-106.

Skinner, Ellen A., Kathleen Edge, Jeffrey Altman, and Hayley Sherwood (2003), "Searching for the structure of coping: A review and critique of category systems for classifying ways of coping," *Psychological Bulletin*, 129 (2), 216-69.

Son, Julie, Careen Yarnal, and Deborah Kerstetter (2010), "Engendering Social Capital through a Leisure Club for Middle-aged and Older Women: Implications for Individual and Community Health and Well-being," *Leisure Studies*, 29 (1), 67-83.

Son, Julie S., Deborah L. Kerstetter, Careen M. Yarnal, and Birgitta L. Baker (2007), "Promoting Older Women's Health and Well-Being Through Social Leisure Environments: What We Have Learned from the Red Hat Society®," *Journal of Women & Aging*, 19 (3-4), 89-104.

Son, Julie S. and Careen M. Yarnal (2011), "An Integration of Constraints and Benefits within an Older Women's Social Club: An Examination, Extension and Critique," *Leisure Sciences*, 33 (3), 205-27.

Stalp, Marybeth C., M. Elise Radina, and Annette Lynch (2008), "'We Do It Cuz It's Fun': Gendered Fun and Leisure for Midlife Women through Red Hat Society Membership," *Sociological Perspectives*, 51 (2), 325-48.

Stalp, Marybeth C., Rachel Williams, Annette Lynch, and M. Elise Radina (2009), "Conspicuously Consuming," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 38 (2), 225-53.

Stone, Arthur A., Joseph E. Schwartz, Joan E. Broderick, and Angus Deaton (2010), "A Snapshot of the Age Distribution of Psychological Well-being in the United States," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 107 (22), 9985-90.

Sudbury, Lynn and Peter Simcock (2009), "Understanding Older Consumers Through Cognitive Age and the List of Values: A U.K.-based Perspective," *Psychology & Marketing*, 26 (1), 22-38.

Sutton-Smith, Brian (1997), *The Ambiguity of Play*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Szmigin, Isabelle and Marylyn Carrigan (2000), "The Older Consumer as Innovator Does Cognitive Age Hold the Key?" *Journal of Marketing Management*, 16 (5), 505-27.

Tajfel, Henri (1978), *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Oxford: Academic Press.

Taylor, Paul, Richard Fry, D'Vera Cohn, Gretchen Livingston, Rakesh Kochhar, Seth Motel, and Eileen Patten (2011), "The Rising Age Gap in Economic Well-Being," Pew Research Center, (accessed on 27 February 2013) http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2011/11/WealthReportFINAL.pdf.

Thomas, Tandy Chalmers, Linda L. Price, and Hope Jensen Schau (2013), "When Differences Unite: Resource Dependence in Heterogeneous Consumption Communities," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39 (5), 1010-33.

Thompson, Craig J. (1997), "Interpreting Consumers: A Hermeneutical Framework for Deriving Marketing Insights from the Texts of Consumers' Consumption Stories," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34 (4), 438-55.

Thompson, Craig J. and Gokcen Coskuner-Balli (2007), "Countervailing Market Responses to Corporate Co-Optation and the Ideological Recruitment of Consumption Communities," *Journal of Consumer Research,* 34(June), 135-52.

Thompson, Craig J and Diana L Haytko (1997), "Speaking of Fashion: Consumers' Uses of Fashion Discourses and the Appropriation of Countervailing Cultural Meanings," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24 (1), 15-42.

Thompson, Craig J. and Maura Troester (2002), "Consumer Value Systems in the Age of Postmodern Fragmentation: The Case of the Natural Health Microculture," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28 (4), 550-71.

Toffler, Alvin (1980), *The Third Wave*, New York: Bantam.

Tornstam, Lars (1992), "The Quo Vadis of Gerontology: On the Scientific Paradigm of Gerontology." *The Gerontologist* no. 32 (3):318-326.

Uotinen, Virpi (1998), "Age Identification: A Comparison Between Finnish and North-American

Cultures," *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 46 (2), 109-24

Ursic, Anthony C., Michael L. Ursic, and Virginia L. Ursic (1986), "A Longitudinal Study of the Use of the Elderly in Magazine Advertising," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13 (1), 131-33.

Van Auken, Stuart, Thomas E Barry, and Richard P Bagozzi (2006), "A Cross-country Construct Validation of Cognitive Age," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 34 (3), 439-55.

Vincent, Grayson K. and Victoria A. Velkoff (2010), "The Next Four Decades, The Older Population in the United States: 2010 to 2050," *Current Population Reports*, P25-1138, Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

Vygotsky, Lev S. (1978), *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Mental Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wahl, Hans-Werner and Gerald D. Weisman (2003), "Environmental gerontology at the beginning of the new millennium: Reflections on its historical, empirical, and theoretical development," The Gerontologist, 43 (5), 616-27.

Walton, Gregory M. and Geoffrey L. Cohen (2011), "A Brief Social-Belonging Intervention Improves Academic and Health Outcomes of Minority Students," *Science*, 311, 1147-51.

Weiss, Robert Stuart (1994), *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*, New York: Free Press.

Weiss, David and Frieder R. Lang (2009), "Thinking about my Generation: Adaptive Effects of a Dual Age Identity in Later Adulthood," *Psychology and Aging*, 24 (3), 729-34.

Werner, Emmy E. and Ruth S. Smith (1992), *Overcoming the Odds: High Risk Children from Birth to Adulthood*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Westerhof, Gerben J., Anne E. Barrett, and Nardi Steverink (2003), "Forever Young?: A Comparison of Age Identities in the United States and Germany," *Research on Aging*, 25 (4), 366-83.

Wethington, Elaine and Ronald C. Kessler (1986), "Perceived Support, Received Support, and Adjustment to Stressful Life Events," *Journal of Health and Social behavior*, 78-89.

Whittemore, Robin, Susan K. Chase, and Carol Lynn Mandle (2001), "Validity in Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Health Research*, 11 (4), 522-37.

Wilkins, Julia and Amy Janel Eisenbraun (2009), "Humor Theories and the Physiological Benefits of Laughter," *Holistic nursing practice*, 23 (6), 349-54.

Wilkinson, Jody A. and Kenneth F. Ferraro (2002), "Thirty Years of Ageism Research," in *Ageism: Stereotyping and Prejudice Against Older Persons*, ed. Todd D. Nelson,

Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 339-58.

Wittig, Roman M., Catherine Crockford, Tobias Deschner, Kevin E. Langergraber, Toni E. Ziegler, and Klaus Zuberbühler (2014), "Food Sharing is Linked to Urinary Oxytocin Levels and Bonding in Related and Unrelated Wild Chimpanzees," *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 281 (1778), 1-10.

Wood, Denisebeth and Jane Attfield (2005), *Play, Learning and the Early Childhood Curriculum*, New York: Sage.

Xu, Jing, and Schwarz, Nobert (2009). "Do We Really Need a Reason to Indulge?," *Journal of Marketing Research,* 46(1), 25-36.

Yarnal, Careen Mackay (2006), "The Red Hat Society®: Exploring the Role of Play, Liminality, and *Communitas* in Older Women's Lives," *Journal of Women & Aging*, 18 (3), 51-73.

Yarnal, Careen Mackay, Garry Chick, and Deborah L. Kerstetter (2008), "'I Did Not Have Time to Play Growing Up... So This is My Play Time. It's the Best Thing I Have Ever Done for Myself': What is Play to Older Women?," *Leisure Sciences*, 30 (3), 235-52.

Yarnal, Careen, Julie Son, and Toni Liechty (2011), "'She was Buried in her Purple Dress and her Red Hat and all of our Members Wore Full "Red Hat Regalia" to Celebrate her Life': Dress, Embodiment and Older Women's Leisure: Reconfiguring the Ageing Process," *Journal of Aging Studies*, 25 (1), 52-61.

Yoon, Carolyn, Catherine A. Cole, and Michelle P. Lee (2009), "Consumer Decision Making and Aging: Current Knowledge and Future Directions," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 19 (1), 2-16.

Yost, Emily (2012), "Red Hat Society, Inc.- 2012 Press Kit" (accessed on 12 April 2012) www.redhatsociety.com/press/2010MediaKit.pdf.

Young, Jock (1971), "The Role of the Police as Amplifiers of Deviancy," *Images of Deviance,* ed Stanley Cohen, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 27-61.

Zebrowitz, Leslie A. and Joann M. Montepare (2003), "Too Young, Too Old: Stigmatizing Adolescents and Elders," in *The Social Psychology of Stigma*, ed. Todd F. Heatherton, Robert E. Kleck, Michelle R. Hebl and Jay G. Hull, New York: Guilford Press, 334-73.

Zimmerman, Ann (2009), "A Grandma or Grandpa by Any Other Name Is Just as Old," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 23, 2009.

Appendix A: Chapter Profiles and Observations

Chapter Profile

	Capped	Uncapped
Official RHS affiliation	Pays chapter dues (a.k.a 'queen mother dues' of $39 per year)	None (broke ties in July 2009)
Dress in RHS regalia	Yes	No
Leadership structure	Queen mother rotates each year	Single queen mother; scribe – previously provided monthly newsletters
Luncheon coordination	Managed by the queen mother (carpooling is usually coordinated by members beforehand depending on outing location)	Two volunteer members (hostesses) who rotate each month. Nametags are provided for all members and guests
Luncheon activities	Lunch only at rotating area restaurants	Each luncheon has a theme and decorations provided by hostesses; rotating area restaurants
Rituals observed	- Drinking during meal - Provocative comments (about fun, being free, not caring what others think) - Show and tell of RHS accessories - Following up on members who were not present, checking in on their health status — calling from the table to see why they are not present - Planning outings for the group in the spring	- Drinking during meal - Singing happy birthday - "Organ recital" (emic term for telling each other about health problems, aches and pains) - "Testify" (emic term describing animated narrative of a group member who had recovered from considerable health and weight problems) - Providing entire group with update on the health status of an absent member
Chapter description (by members)	"Laid back"	"Diverse"
Length of association	Nine plus	Eleven plus

Local Chapter Observations

	Date	Chapter	# Attendees
1	Nov-2011	Capped	13
2	Feb-2012	Capped-Regional	18
3	Mar-2012	Uncapped	27
4	Apr-2012	Uncapped	33
5	Jun-2012	Uncapped	24
6	Sep-2012	Uncapped	32
7	Oct-2012	Uncapped	28
8	Nov-2012	Capped	18
9	Dec-2012	Capped	19
10	Feb-2013	Capped	20
11	Feb-2013	Uncapped	17
12	Apr-2013	Capped	13
13	May-2013	Capped	11
14	Jan-2014	Uncapped	20

Appendix B: Interview Informant Table

Name	Age	Chapter	Length in RHS	Type of involvement	Children	Occupation	Marital status	Health
Annie	70-74	Capped	5+	occasional (local)	yes	professional, retired	married	good
Audrey	70-74	Uncapped	10+	high (local)	yes	administrative, retired	married	fair
Betty	65-69	Other - West	4+	high (local)	yes	administrative, retired	widowed	fair
Catherine	65-69	Other - Midwest	6+	average (national)	yes	administrative, retired	widow	poor
Denise	70-74	Capped	5+	average (local)	yes	childcare for grandson; healthcare, retired	married (second)	fair
Donna	85-89	Uncapped	9	average / now former (national)	yes	homemaker	widow	fair
Josie	55-59	Capped	4+	average (national)	yes	healthcare, disability	separated	poor
Laura	65-69	Uncapped	8	occasional / now former (local)	no	professional, retired	never married	fair
Lucy	65-69	Capped	8+	average (local)	yes	professional, retired	married	good
Maddy	70-74	Uncapped	5	former (local)	yes	administrative, retired	married	fair
Margaret	75-79	Other - Southwest	8+	high (national)	yes	professional, retired	married (second)	good
Nadine	55-59	Other - West	8+	high (national)	yes	professional, retired	married	good
Norma	65-69	Capped	7+	average (local)	yes	healthcare	married	fair
Sarah	70-74	Uncapped	10+	high (local)	yes	professional, retired	married (second)	good
Shelley	70-74	Other - West	4+	average (local)	yes	retail	married	good
Sylvia	60-64	Other - Midwest	10+	high (national)	yes	administrative, retired	married	good

Involvement	High = queen or other chapter responsibility
	Average = member, occasional organizer
	Occasional = has not attended 4 or more gatherings in the last 6 months
Health	Good = no major chronic health, possible past surgeries, possible slightly overweight
	Fair = manageable chronic health condition, possible overweight, possible smoker, possible mobility problems
	Poor = major chronic health problem, overweight, mobility problems, possible smoker

Appendix C: Interview Consent Form and Phone Interview Consent Script

Interview Consent Form

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
Interview Informed Consent

Title of Project: Red Hat Society and Member Experience
Investigator: Emily Moscato

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The purpose of this study is to examine how the Red Hat Society membership influences the experiences and lifestyles of its members.

II. Procedures
In agreeing to participate, I will conduct an audio-recorded interview with you at the location of your choosing. I will ask you to tell me about yourself, and will then ask more specific questions concerning your involvement at the Red Hat Society and your experiences with this community. You may refuse to answer any questions without penalty.
If you are willing to share, I would find it helpful to see and record photographs and/or memorabilia related to your participation in the Red Hat Society. Of course, it is fine to decline.

III. Risks
The proposed research presents minimal risks to subjects.

IV. Benefits
This project will contribute to understanding and recognition of mature women in consumer behavior research.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality
Only Emily Moscato and her advisor (Julie Ozanne) will have access to the audio files of your interview. Your name will be assigned a code (a name of your choosing) when the interview data are transcribed and coded.

Any photographic images acquired concerning the participants will be carefully managed to maintain confidentiality. Such images will only be used for presentations at academic conferences. Other images may be used as references during the transcribing and coding processes. At no time will participant images be associated with the participant's real name or other personal information.

We will carefully maintain procedures to protect confidentiality. At no time will the researcher release your interview to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent.

VI. Freedom to Withdraw
You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You are free to refuse to answer any questions that you choose without penalty.

VIII. Subject's Responsibilities
I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

IX. Subject's Permission
I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

Researchers' Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

A copy of this form has been given to me to keep. If I have any questions in the future about this project I can contact Dr. Julie Ozanne at 540-953-3994, email (jozanne@vt.edu), or at the addresses listed below.

Office: 2021 Pamplin Hall (0236)
      Virginia Tech
      Blacksburg, VA 24061

Appendix C: Interview Consent Form and Phone Interview Consent Script (continued)

Phone Interview Consent Script

Thank you for agree to this phone interview. I really appreciate it.
Before we get started, there are a few things I need to go over because this is a research project and I want to make sure you're fully informed. This is a bit formal and it's mostly covered in the attachment that I sent you, so I will go over it quickly, but please stop me if you have any questions.
I will be using data I have collected from interviews and observations to write a paper about the RHS.
I will ask you to tell me a little about yourself, and will then ask more specific questions concerning your involvement at the Red Hat Society and your experiences with this community.
You are free to refuse to answer any questions that you choose without penalty.
Confidentiality is very important and stories you provide will be maintained separate from your contact information.
At no time will the researchers release contact information to anyone other than research team without your written consent.
Before continuing, I would like to audio record this interview, would that be ok with you?

Domain	General Question	Probing Question
Rapport Red Hat Society	To start, can you tell me a little about yourself?	Can you tell me a little about your family? Are you working inside or outside of the home?
	Could you describe your Red Hat group?	The community: How many ladies? How long have you been together? How frequently do you all meet? Your involvement: When did you join the group? How did you hear about the organization? Did you know anyone in your chapter before joining? What attracted you to the organization?
	What is a typical chapter meetings like?	Take me through a typical chapter outing/ How are the meetings structured? Are there certain things you do at each meeting or traditions you have - such as at the beginning or the close? What types of things do you talk about?
	What are your typical social outings with the Red Hat women like?	Do you have any common practices that occur, say at the beginning or end of each outing? Tell me about a memorable outings
Consuming in the Red Hat Society	Tell me about the red hats and purple dresses.	How does it make you feel when you wear it alone or with others? Has this red hat style influenced the way you regularly dress? (In what ways are these clothes similar or different from your other clothes?) How many do you have? If you are comfortable, I would very much like to see them! Where do you get the red hats and purple dresses? Do you accessorize with this outfit? (i.e., purse, shoes, jewelry,…)
	How is getting dressed and ready for a red hat outing different or like other times	

	you go out?'	
Community values and learning	What have you learned from other members in your Red Hat group?	Have you learned any lessons on aging from the Red Hat group? What advice would you give your younger self if you could go back in time knowing what you know now? What unique perspective does an older woman have that a younger woman has yet to learn? What are your current ideas about what makes a woman beautiful?
	What are the most important values that are embraced by you and other Red Hat members?	Besides "fun," what does the Red Hat Society represent to you?
	What makes a good Red Hat Society member?	Is there someone in the group who is strongly committed? Can you describe their commitment?
	How is socializing with the Red Hat group similar or different from other groups with whom you interact?	Do you socialize with other members of your chapter outside of red hat events? How is it different when socializing with chapter members when you are not wearing the red hats (attending a red hat event) versus wearing red hats? Who would you recommend join the Red Hat Society?
National Red Hat Society	What type of interactions do you have with the Red Hat Society's national organization?	Outside of the chapter meetings and outings, how involved are you with the organization? How involved are you with the national Red Hat Society? Are there things about the national organization that you would change?
Wrap up	Is there anything I didn't ask about that you think is important to know?	
	Is there anyone that you think I should speak with who might have an interesting perspective or would enjoy sharing?	

Revised Interview Protocol (7-Sept-12)

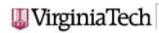| Domain	General Question	Probing Question
Red Hat Society	To start, could you take maybe 2-3 minutes and tell me a little about your background?	Can you tell me a little about your family? Are you working inside or outside of the home?
	How did you hear about or discover the organization?	**Attracted to:** What attracted you to the organization? **When joined:** When did you join the group? **Connections:** Did you know anyone in your chapter before joining?
	What roles in the chapter do you play? (if leader or organizer) What made you decide to take on that role? How would you <u>describe your chapter(s)</u>? What type of women does it attract?	**Other activities**: Are there other activities besides monthly lunch that your chapter does? **Describe outing:** Describe an outing that was memorable.
	Besides monthly chapter outings, what other ways do you interact with red hatters?	
	Are there topics that are easier to talk about with your Red Hat group than with other groups you belong ?	Do you socialize with other members of your chapter outside of red hat events?
RHS and Managing Hardship	You shared that the RHS helped you when you faced _____ (hardship). Can you tell me about this experience?	In what ways did Red Hat Society support you through your hardship? (chapter/online/Hatquarters) What kind of support(s) were particularly helpful? (or was there anyone/anything from RHS that was particularly helpful?) How was the support you received through the Red Hat Society different from the support you received from family, your church, other friends?
	Have any other members faced hardships where you and other chapter members helped out? Can you tell me about this?	

	What have you <u>learned</u> from other members in your Red Hat group?	**Learn Aging:** What have you <u>learned about aging</u> from the Red Hat group? **Learning Hardships:** What have you learned about handling hardships from other members of your Red Hat group?
Identity	When you think of yourself before the RHS, how have you changed because of the RHS? Can you think of an instance where you may have realized you're different or said to yourself 'wow, I wouldn't have done that or thought that before the RHS'?	I have been told by some red hatters that being in the RHS has made them more "resilient." Can you share any experiences where RHS made you stronger? In what ways are you stronger? (Follow up)
Wrap up	Is there anything I didn't ask about that you think is important to know?	
	Is there anyone that you think I should speak with who might have an interesting perspective or would enjoy sharing?	

Appendix E: Convention Booth and Contact Card

★ *I have a story to tell…* ¶

☐ → What RHS means to me… ¶

☐ → Why I am a Red Hatter… ¶

☐ → When RHS helped me through a challenging time… ¶

☐ → What I want for the future of the RHS… ¶

☐ → Why my RHS regalia is special to me… ¶

☐ → How RHS enhanced my wellness… ¶

★ *Want a hint?* (write a few words that will remind you of the story you want to tell and I'll include them when I contact you) ¶

_____ ¶

_____ ¶

¶

★ *Name* _____ ¶

★ *How would you like to tell your story?* ¶

☐ → **Email** me & I will **write** you back with my story. ¶

My email address _____ ¶

☐ → **Call** me & I will **tell** you my story ¶

My phone number _____ ¶

☐ → **Mail** me a prepaid envelope & I will **write** you back with my story. ¶

My address _____ ¶

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ ¶

166

Appendix F: Amended IRB Approval Letter

VirginiaTech

Office of Research Compliance
Institutational Review Board
2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)
Blacksburg, VA 24060
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
email irb@vt.edu
website http://www.irb.vt.edu

MEMORANDUM

DATE:	September 7, 2012
TO:	Julie L Ozanne, Emily Marie Moscato
FROM:	Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires May 31, 2014)
PROTOCOL TITLE:	Red Hat Society and Member Experience
IRB NUMBER:	11-795

Effective September 7, 2012, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the Amendment request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As:	Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5,6,7
Protocol Approval Date:	October 5, 2011
Protocol Expiration Date:	October 4, 2012
Continuing Review Due Date*:	September 20, 2012

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

Appendix G: Observation Flyer

Capped

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
Observation Information

Title of Project: Red Hat Society and Member Experience
Investigator: Emily Moscato

Overview
I'm a graduate student at Virginia Tech and my research interests are how women build supportive communities as they age. I felt that a good starting point would be to explore the Red Hat Society, because it's all about women and positive aging. Plus, it piqued my curiosity because it just seems fun and I wanted to learn more about it!

Why I'm here
I am attending RHS events in order to gain a better understand of this community. I am first and foremost an observer, but I am a willing participant if my involvement does not interfere with the usual flow of activities and conversation.

Your rights and protections
Confidentiality is of the utmost importance. Within my notes, you will be assigned a code name (a name of your choosing). You are free to refuse to answer any questions that you choose without penalty.

Any photographic images acquired during RHS events will be carefully managed to maintain confidentiality. These images may be used as references during the analysis process. Besides references, images may be used solely for presentations at academic conferences. If images contain distinguishing features of individuals, these pictures will not be used without the written permission of those individuals featured in the photograph. At no time will the photographs be associated with your real name or other personal information.

Only my advisor (Julie Ozanne) and I (Emily Moscato) will have access to the observational notes and images.

If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please contact
        Emily Moscato at 404-217-2294, email (emoscato@vt.edu)
        or Dr. Julie Ozanne at 540-953-3994, email (jozanne@vt.edu)

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
Observation Information

Title of Project: Community and Member Experience
Investigator: Emily Moscato

Overview
I'm a graduate student at Virginia Tech and my research interests are how women build supportive communities as they age. I felt that a good starting point would be to explore [the Uncapped], because it's all about older women and community. Plus, it piqued my curiosity because it just seems fun and I wanted to learn more about it!

Why I'm here
I am attending [the Uncapped] events in order to gain a better understand of this community. I am first and foremost an observer, but I am a willing participant if my involvement does not interfere with the usual flow of activities and conversation.

Your rights and protections
Your anonymity and confidentiality are of the utmost importance. Within my notes, you will be assigned a code name. You are free to not answer any questions that you choose without penalty.

Any photographic images acquired during [the Uncapped] events will be carefully managed to maintain confidentiality. These images may be used as references during the analysis process. Besides references, images may be used solely for presentations at academic conferences. If images contain distinguishing features of individuals, these pictures will not be used without the written permission of those individuals featured in the photograph. At no time will the photographs be associated with your real name or other personal information.

Only my advisor (Julie Ozanne) and I (Emily Moscato) will have access to the observational notes and images.

If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please contact
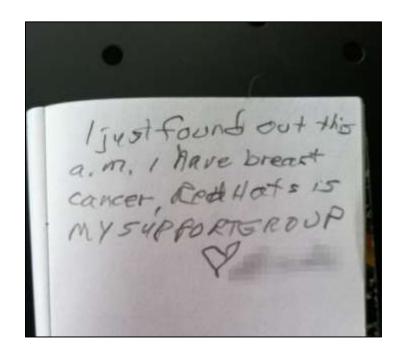**Emily Moscato at 404-217-2294, email (emoscato@vt.edu)**
or Dr. Julie Ozanne at 540-953-3994, email (jozanne@vt.edu)

Appendix H: Photographs

#1, Donna's display of RHS artifacts

#2, Gersten's note

I just found out this a.m. I have breast cancer, Red Hats is MY SUPPORT GROUP

#3, Red hatter dressed like Elizabeth Taylor's Cleopatra having her photo taken by other
  red hatters

#4, Creativity of seen in RHS Attire

#5, Examples of bra hats