

The Long Strange Trip Continues: Aging Deadheads

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Abstract:

The community surrounding the Grateful Dead, a San Francisco-based psychedelic rock band that had played together for thirty years when its lead guitarist Jerry Garcia died in 1995, still persists. For many Deadheads, as these fans are called, membership in this community has been a major component of their identity and following the band from place to place had provided structure and meaning to their everyday lives. Many older Deadheads continue to participate not only via online, recorded, and print media but also by attending performances of bands including surviving members of the Grateful Dead, cover bands, and other jam bands. This chapter examines the challenges to identity maintenance and community participation faced by Deadheads as they age, the ways in which the community has addressed the aging of its population, and how fans have adapted the ways in which they participate in the community to allow continuity in their identity as Deadheads.

Keywords: Grateful Dead | Deadheads | aging | identity | musical community

Chapter:

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THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Since Havighurst and Albrecht's (1953) original statement of Activity Theory in their book, *Old People*, and especially since Havighurst (1961) published his influential editorial in the first issue of *The Gerontologist*, aging scholars have studied what Havighurst called "successful aging"—the "maintenance of the level and range of activities that characterize a person in his [*sic*] prime of life with a minimum downward adjustment" (10). Although early debates focused on whether continued involvement in middle-aged activities was important for well-being in later life as Havighurst had argued or, in contrast, whether disengagement from society led to well-being during old age as Cumming and Henry (1961) had observed, gerontologists since the 1980s have emphasized the importance of continuity for successful aging (Adams and Taylor forthcoming; Atchley 1989; Rowe and Kahn 1987).

Atchley (1989) described "continuity" as "a grand adaptive strategy that is promoted by both individual preference and social approval" (183). He argued that

in making adaptive choices, middle-aged and older adults attempt to preserve and maintain existing internal and external structures; and they prefer to accomplish this objective by using strategies tied to their past experiences of themselves and their social world. Change is linked to the person's perceived past, producing continuity in inner psychological characteristics as well as in social behavior and in social circumstances. (183)

This distinction between "inner psychological characteristics" and "social behavior in social circumstances" is relevant here, because some Deadheads continue to identify with the community even though they no longer attend live performances. These fans sometimes interact with other members of the community outside of shows (i.e., online or elsewhere) or lead "invisible lives" (Unruh 1983) as Deadheads through consumption of recorded or print media. So here we focus on the challenges posed by the increasing difficulty of attending live performances but also acknowledge that aging Deadheads may also experience decreasing opportunities to participate remotely in the community.

Gerontologists since Atchley (1989) have emphasized that as the relationship between the person and the environment and the goodness of fit between them changes with age, adaptation becomes important to successful aging (Adams and Taylor forthcoming). Goodness of fit is sometimes achieved through modifications to the environment (Wahl, Fänge, Oswald, Gitlin, and Iwarsson 2009), adaptation of the individual (Baltes and Lang 1997), or the older adult's identification of and relocation to new environments more suitable for an aging individual (Kahana, Lovegreen, Kahana, and Kahana 2003). In this chapter we conclude by discussing the ways in which goodness of fit between the older Deadhead and the Deadhead community is facilitated by an existing infrastructure and has been improved by recent changes to the show environment, through changes in Deadhead behavior, and by older Deadheads "relocating" to an area where it is more convenient to attend shows, to venues set up to accommodate aging fans, or to online communities. We conclude by discussing how some Deadheads continue to identify with the community although they no longer interact with other members.

THE DEADHEAD COMMUNITY PROJECT

The data on aging Deadheads were collected as part of the Deadhead Community project, 1987-present (Adams 1998). The data consist of a 1987 parking lot survey of Deadheads ($N = 286$), observations at ninety-one Grateful Dead shows and nine Jerry Garcia Band concerts (1989-1995) by Adams, online conversations starting in 1989 among members of the Usenet users group rec.music.gdead, eighty-four observations of shows, and seventy-seven open-ended interviews by twenty-one students in that same year, 177 responses to three mailed questionnaires with open-ended questions (1990-1996), and interviews with Deadheads with identifiable roles within the community and key members of the Grateful Dead organization. Between Garcia's death in August of 1995 and May of 1997, Adams received 150 letters describing Deadhead reactions to his death (Adams, Ernstes, and Lucey 2014). In 1998, the Grateful Dead organization collected responses to a self-administered questionnaire during their twenty-two-venue national Furthur Festival tour and hired Adams to analyze the data ($N = 6,020$) (Adams 2012 [2010]). Since that time she has continued to attend performances by Grateful Dead survivors, performances of jam bands, and other Deadhead gatherings, and the second author of this chapter, Harmon, has done so as well. Throughout this research process, Adams has also collected artifacts, photos, videos, recordings of performances, and Deadhead and mainstream media. Although the project was not designed to examine the effects of aging on fan identity and community participation, ample information on older Deadheads are included in these data to allow for preliminary analysis.

THE DEADHEAD COMMUNITY

The Deadhead community is long-lasting, distributed, and large. Its roots are in the hippie culture that grew up in the Western United States during the 1960s. The Grateful Dead were the "house band" for the Acid Tests, public psychedelic celebrations held in 1965 and 1966 before LSD became illegal. By late 1966, the Grateful Dead were headquartered in San Francisco, California, at 710 Ashbury, near its intersection with Haight Street, the symbolic heart of the hippie community (Adams and Rosen-Grandon 2002; for more detailed histories of the Grateful Dead, see Greenfield 1996; Lesh 2006; McNally 2003; Troy 1991).

The community continued to spread and grow in size after its inception in the 1960s. By 1995, when Garcia died, Deadheads lived throughout the United States and in many other countries as well, which is not surprising because during its career, the band played at least once in forty-five states and thirteen foreign countries (Scott, Dolgushkin, and Nixon 1997). Based on information provided by Grateful Dead Productions during the summer of 1998, a conservative estimate of the number of Deadheads at that time is more than a half million (Adams and Rosen-Grandon 2002).

The Deadhead community is not only remarkable among music communities because of the length of time it has survived, how geographically dispersed it is, and how large it is, more relevant here is the length and intensity of involvement of individual fans (Adams 2012 [2010]). On the average, the fans who Grateful Dead Productions surveyed in 1998 saw their first show in 1984 or 1985, with 50 percent of them having seen their first show at least eleven years previously. The average Deadhead had traveled 1,223 miles to attend a show and had attended sixty-one concerts.

Deadheads did not attend shows merely for entertainment or to socialize with like-minded people. Many of them reported having spiritual experiences at shows, which provided them with an additional motivation to attend (Sutton 2000) and contributed to community solidarity. Although the spiritual experiences of Deadheads varied widely and included feelings of déjà vu, out-of-body experiences, connecting with a higher power, and living through the cycle of death and rebirth, the most commonly mentioned experiences were inner and outer connectedness—self-revelation and unity with others (Adams 1991). Although dancing and drugs surely contributed to these experiences for some Deadheads, others attributed their occurrences, at least in part, to the power and trajectory of the music (Goodenough 1999; Hartley 2000). “Getting it” is an expression Deadheads use to describe the process of learning to perceive shows as spiritual experiences and to understand “these spiritual experiences as inseparable from the music, the scene, and a cooperative mode of everyday existence” (Adams quoted in Shenk and Silberman 1994, 106).

The feelings of unity and empathy Deadheads experienced at shows often were extended to the band. Some Deadheads claim that the band was psychically “connected” to the audience or that the audience “controlled” the band (Carr 1999). These Deadheads believe that they influenced the selection of songs, the way they were played, and thus the trajectory of the music. Lyricist John Barlow confirmed Deadhead beliefs that band members did not know what they were going to play before a performance but were rather guided by “the groupmind” in selecting songs while they were on stage (Shenk and Silberman 1994, 127). Thus by having spiritual experiences at many shows over a long period of time, Deadheads developed feelings of closeness, a high level of commitment to the band, and a high level of identification with the community.

COMMUNITY EFFORTS TO PRESERVE CONTINUITY

Deadheads never relied exclusively on interaction at shows to maintain their community, even when the majority of the audience was young and able to attend live performances more easily. Even before Garcia died, Deadheads kept in touch between the Grateful Dead’s performances so they would know when tickets were available, to trade tapes of live performances, by attending performances of cover bands, attending Deadhead parties, interacting via the Internet, and reading the Deadhead print media. By wearing tie-dye and subsequent to its popularization, more exclusively used in-group symbols such as the Skull and Lightning Bolt (known as a “Steal-Your-Face” or “Stealie”), Skeleton and Roses, or Dancing Bear, Deadheads were able to recognize each other as they lived their mainstream lives. Although these activities were not consciously designed to maintain Deadhead identity and community between shows, they served this purpose (Adams 1992; Barnes 2011).

Garcia’s death represented a threat to community solidarity and challenged Deadheads to rethink their identities and lives as fans. Although Deadheads lamented Garcia’s passing and celebrated his inherent value as a human being, many of them, even in the early stages of mourning, also expressed their concerns about how his death would affect their own way of life, identity, and community (Adams, Ernestes, and Lucey 2014). Fortunately for Deadheads, however, because an infrastructure for maintaining contact between shows already existed, they did not have to start from scratch in developing mechanisms to achieve continuity. After his death, they continued to

listen to recordings of Garcia's music; organized and participated in Deadhead subgroups and networks; planned and attended local annual celebrations; established and participated in sometimes more frequent local gatherings; connected with other Deadheads on the Internet; attended performances by or themselves played in cover bands, other jam bands, or bands including one or more of the remaining members of the Grateful Dead; and traveled to annual festivals outside of their local areas. Far from being passive consumers, they have actively participated in the creation of opportunities to enjoy music and other community activities. For example, even immediately after his death Deadheads have already begun to help establish annual festivals that now attract national audiences. One consequence of Garcia's death was thus the strengthening of this infrastructure—locally, nationally, and virtually. This infrastructure is still in place to facilitate the continued involvement and identification of aging fans.

THE AGING OF THE DEADHEAD COMMUNITY

Grateful Dead Productions surveyed 6,020 people attending the shows that were part of the 1998 Furthur Festival Tour (Adams 2012 [2010]). These data represent the largest and probably the most geographically dispersed sample of Deadheads ever studied systematically. Furthermore, given that they were collected after Garcia passed away, they do not include the Deadheads who permanently disengaged from the community in response to his death and thus are more likely to be predictive of current community demographics. Assuming these data accurately represent the age distribution of Deadheads in 1998 and assuming that this distribution has not been greatly affected by attrition and recruitment, it is possible to project that, fifteen years later, the average age of Deadheads is now approximately forty-seven years and the range in ages is now from twenty-five years through seventy-seven years. Comparisons of these 1998 data and the projected 1998 ages of Deadheads who participated in older, smaller studies suggest that there is some attrition from shows as fans age (Adams 2012 [2010]). Although 2.9 percent of the 1998 respondents were more than forty-nine years old, it is probable that fifteen years later, in 2013, that a lower percentage of those still actively attending live performances of the bands in which the remaining members of the Grateful Dead perform are sixty-five years old or older. The next youngest cohort of Deadheads, who were between forty and forty-nine years old in 1998 and would now be between fifty-five and sixty-four years old, was much larger (21.5 percent) however, so the number of fans facing the challenges of aging will soon increase.

CHALLENGES OF MAINTAINING A DEADHEAD IDENTITY

Although continuity is desirable in old age, it is also challenging to achieve. Immediately after retirement some older adults participate more fully in the activities that they have enjoyed earlier in life (Holloway 2007; Nimrod and Kleiber 2007), but with the physical, social, and financial constraints imposed by aging, it eventually becomes necessary to prioritize and focus on the activities most vital to well-being (Kleiber, McGuire, Aybar-Damali, and Norman 2008), to preserve involvement in the most significant leisure pursuits (Lang, Rieckmann, and Bates 2002), and to pursue meaningful relationships rather than superficial social interactions (Tornstam 2005). For Deadheads, who consider participating in their community important for their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual health (Adams and Rosen-Grandon 2002), attendance at shows remains an important priority during old age. An increased focus on spirituality often accompanies these age-related changes (Atchley 2009), presumably making

continued involvement in shows even more important for older Deadheads than for younger ones. Although recent observations suggest it less true for older Deadheads, some fans are also dependent on shows for their financial health because they derive income from selling food, clothing, or drugs in the parking lot before and after shows (Sheptoski 2000). Similar to the aging punk rockers that Bennett (2013) studied, music is intertwined with Deadhead lives.

Overcoming barriers to attend shows is not a new experience for aging Deadheads. Deadheads of all ages experience tribal stigma (Goffman 1963) due to their musical taste, their assumed use or approval of use of psychedelic drugs, and the way they dress. Due to the association of these “hippie” attitudes and behaviors with youth, this stigma is particularly salient for midlife and older Deadheads. Deadheads struggle to carve out time from their mainstream lives to go to shows because those surrounding them do not necessarily value or even tolerate their involvement. Married Deadheads, especially those married to non-Deadheads and those with children, face the same problems all couples face when they do not share leisure interests, but because the Deadhead lifestyle is costly both in terms of time and money, sometimes involves participation in illegal activity (i.e., drug possession and use), and involves noncouple socializing, the challenges posed to participation are greater than those for participation in more acceptable activities (Adams and Rosen-Grandon 2002).

Despite the estimated age distribution reported earlier, the Deadhead community is still a relatively young community, with most of its older adults still in the “third age,” the period between active earning and deep old age (Holloway 2007). Although some Deadheads are beginning to experience the physical and mental constraints associated with aging, some members of the community who are leading-edge baby boomers are currently experiencing an at least temporary lessening of the constraints on participation imposed by midlife career and family responsibilities. Like other adults in the third age, Deadheads in this cohort are inclined to travel now more than they probably will later (Kelly, Steinkamp, and Kelly 1987). Although Deadheads (and hippies in general) are often stereotyped as slackers (Paterline 2000), the vast majority of Deadheads eventually obtain college degrees or finish graduate school and become professionals or fill white-collar positions (Adams 2003). In retirement then, they have the resources to attend live performances and enough leisure time to go “on tour,” in some cases for the first time in their lives. Even older adults with a limited fixed income sometimes make sacrifices in other areas to meet their social needs (Roalf, Mitchell, Harbaugh, and Janowsky 2012), and Deadheads on fixed incomes are not an exception.

Some older Deadheads are not so fortunate, however, and are physically challenged in ways that make it difficult or impossible for them to attend shows. Ironically some of these physical constraints result from the accumulated effects of past participation in the community (e.g., wear and tear on joints and muscles from standing and dancing, physical effects of prolonged drug or alcohol use, hearing issues resulting from exposure to loud music). Whatever their causes, however, the physical changes that often accompany aging, such as decreased physical mobility (Hillsdon, Brunner, Guralnick, and Marmot 2005), increased risk of falling (Merom et al. 2013), decreased energy levels and ability to go without sleep (Venn, Meadows, and Arbor 2013), and hearing impairment (Walling and Dickson 2012), sometimes interfere with the ability of older Deadheads to travel to shows and to participate fully once there.

DEADHEAD-ENVIRONMENT FIT

The Show Infrastructure

Fortunately for aging Deadheads, just as an infrastructure already existed to facilitate the continuation of the community when it was endangered by the death of Garcia, the Deadhead community has traditionally had mechanisms in place to support its age diversity and inclusiveness. Although venues vary in how automatically accommodating they are, Deadheads have a history of active advocacy when necessary. All public venues are technically required to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (as subsequently amended) which requires the provision of full and equal access to goods, services, facilities, and accommodations. In the Grateful Dead's later years it was therefore possible to navigate a show in a wheelchair and a spot was always reserved for the "Wheel Chair guys," as Deadheads called them. In addition, the Grateful Dead often reserved space, known as the Deafzone, for deaf Deadheads, who were known as the Grateful Deaf (Ladd 1990, 1996). Although people who develop hearing impairments as they age do not usually learn sign language and therefore would not benefit from sitting in this section, its existence does illustrate a commitment to adapt the concert context to accommodate a wide variety of participants.

The Grateful Dead were also pioneers in offering medical assistance at rock 'n' roll concerts. In 1972, Bill Graham, the Grateful Dead's promoter, asked the Haight Ashbury Free Clinics to staff a medical care tent at his Grateful Dead and Led Zeppelin outdoor events. Rock Med is still in operation and setting the standard in nonjudgmental event medicine (Rock Med, n.d.). Not all venues have medical staffs as extensive as provided at venues served by Rock Med and not all medical staff have the same nonjudgmental philosophy, but emergency medical care is generally available at public venues.

In addition to these occasionally officially sanctioned aspects of the infrastructure, Deadhead culture also has characteristics that should be supportive of continuity in participation with aging. Not only do Deadheads respect "old hippies" as those who experienced a romanticized past and have survived a lifetime of stigma and discrimination, they believe that "what goes around comes around," which encourages them to treat each other well. Furthermore, status within the Deadhead community is enhanced through sharing resources. A relatively new custom of "pinning" of fellow Deadheads in response to acts of kindness is a visible representation of a long-standing community norm. Affluent Deadheads have always supported younger Deadheads currently on tour by shopping in the parking lot, "miracle-ing them" with free tickets, or sometimes offering them places to sleep, but recent observations suggest that intergenerational transfers are becoming even more common now that the population is aging. These intergenerational transfers of resources include direct ones such as the older Deadheads buying food, clothing, or drugs from younger ones, but also indirect ones such as random acts of kindness that Deadheads believe affect their Karma. For example, one young woman who has been touring the last few years with Dark Star Orchestra (the leading Dead cover band) and then Furthur (including Phil Lesh and Bob Weir, original members of the Grateful Dead) often watched over an older Deadhead with breathing problems as he danced at shows. At a recent Furthur show, an older Deadhead who had heard of her kindness gave her two tickets to a sold-out show for her and her boyfriend. When the person who had told him the story thanked him for

his spontaneous gift to her young friend, he simply said “it seemed like it was the right thing to do.” This tendency of the young and old to support each other within this community bodes well for the continued involvement of older fans.

The increase in the number of festivals allows affluent older Deadheads more options for hearing multiple bands perform over a series of days without traveling from place to place. VIP tickets ensure easy access to the venue and comfortable priority seating with good sound and views of the stage, access to nicer bathroom facilities, and shorter lines for food and drinks. These tickets can sometimes be combined with hotel packages, complete with shuttle service. Some festivals also or alternatively supplement VIP tickets with onsite cabins, already setup rent-a-tents complete with beds, or VIP RV camping. These festivals often take place in the same place year after year, so improvements are made overtime and the festival grounds become easier to navigate as a result (e.g., Bonnaroo and Electric Forest).

Deadhead Behavioral Changes

Deadheads also tend to modify their behavior as they age. Although retirement frees some Deadheads up to attend more shows than previously, with advanced age some find themselves unable to attend as many shows. Many of them travel by air rather than by driving or allocate more time to go to a live performance than they would have when they were younger. They sometimes travel at a more leisurely pace, arrive earlier, stay later, or “take off” or “take it easy” for a night during a festival or run of shows. Rather than “doing” a whole tour, some older Deadheads do a minitour in a geographically defined area. They may consciously select shows to attend that are easy to navigate or set up to accommodate Deadheads of all ages. Once they are in the show environment, older Deadheads are less likely to move from place to place than younger Deadheads. Even if they like to immerse themselves in the fray with the rest of the crowd occasionally, they tend to establish a “home” a distance from the stage where the sound is not too loud and where it is possible to sit down comfortably when necessary. They tend to wear shoes, presumably to protect their feet and to enhance their balance, rather than going barefoot the way many younger Deadheads do. They may cut back on how much of the show they remain standing or dancing. To prevent hearing damage, they wear earplugs, sometimes the type designed for musicians that make it possible to hear the music while wearing them. Some older Deadheads try to get more sleep while on tour than they did when they were young; as one older Deadhead mentioned recently, he sleeps at night now instead of “raging until dawn.”

Deadhead Relocation

For Deadheads, relocation to a new environment to improve person-environment fit can mean moving to a location where it is more convenient to attend shows, selecting venues designed for all-age access, or participating in the community only via online interaction (i.e., “moving” to a virtual environment). Some Deadheads relocated to San Francisco years ago to be closer to where the band members have always lived and given the most performances. With the development of bassist Phil Lesh’s Terrapin Crossroads in San Rafael and rhythm guitarist Bob Weir’s Sweetwater Music Hall in Mill Valley, San Francisco remains a retirement destination for Deadheads, but other areas of the country where music is easily available also attract them. Due to the common use of marijuana by older adults (Benyon 2009), the recent legalization of

marijuana in some states and not in others could affect some Deadheads' retirement destination decisions as well. Recently Phil Lesh announced a deal with promoter Peter Shapiro to play multiple concerts at his New York venues (the Brooklyn Bowl in Williamsburg, New York, and the Capitol Theater in Portchester, New York) as well as the Lockn' Festival Shapiro sponsors in Arrington, Virginia (Sisario 2013; www.thecapitoltheatre.com). This decision to perform multiple shows in a few locations, made by Lesh in deference to his own aging, will provide an opportunity for older Deadheads to attend multiple shows without traveling in between them, whether as visitors to the area or as local residents.

Some older Deadheads do not choose to live near or are not able to relocate to live near venues where the remaining members of the Grateful Dead, cover bands, or other jam bands play regularly. For these Deadheads who choose retirement destinations for other reasons or decide to age in place, person-environment fit can be improved by selecting shows to attend based on how well the venue is set up to accommodate aging fans. Challenges to be considered include loss of hearing and eyesight, physical impairments, bodily needs, and decline in cognitive functioning. Strategies to increase a safer and more welcoming environment for the aging fan include decreasing background noise, speaking (or singing) more clearly and slowly, providing physical assistance, and displaying easy-to-read signs for restrooms and refreshments (Barba and Tesh 2011). Some venues are easier to adapt to the needs of older adults than others because they have better acoustics, are better lit, include seating, are easier to navigate, and have more accessible facilities. Of course, not all of these features will be important for all older Deadheads—it depends not only on how they are aging but what is important for their enjoyment of shows, for example, sound quality, seeing the band, or being able to dance (Adams 1999).

Not all older Deadheads can continue to attend shows no matter how much they would like to do so or how conveniently they are located and set up. Fortunately, however, Deadheads were Internet pioneers (Hoffman and Cosgrove 1990), participating in a Usenet group, `rec.music.gdead`, and a virtual community, the Well (the Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link), and other bulletin boards, chat rooms, interactive web sites, and social networking sites long before such activities became common (Rheingold 1991; Smith and Kolluck 1999). As long as they have access to a computer and retain the ability to log on and use it, older fans can choose one or more of many virtual Deadhead communities to join.

Invisible Deadhead Lives

The Grateful Dead and other bands have left a rich recorded legacy of music. Even older Deadheads who can no longer attend shows and do not participate in their community interactively online can continue to lead what Unruh (1983) called “invisible lives” as Deadheads by “listening to the music play” (Hunter 1990, 84) and, at least if they remain somewhat autonomous, by maintaining a hippie lifestyle at home. Although most Deadheads have purchased or downloaded ample numbers of Grateful Dead and related shows (Bradley 2007), some Deadheads also listen to music played on the radio programs such as *The Grateful Dead Hour* and *Tales from the Golden Road*, all with the realization that tens of thousands of other fans are participating in these same events. In similar ways, Deadheads can maintain their identity by reading Deadhead print media, such as *Relix* magazine or some of the many books and articles about the Grateful Dead and Deadheads, many of which are cited in this chapter.

These Deadheads with invisible lives may wish to continue other behaviors sometimes associated with a hippie lifestyle such as illegal substance use, but this could be difficult for them to achieve unless they maintain autonomy and control over their living environment.

CONCLUSION

For more than half a century, gerontologists have stressed the importance of continuity in activities and identity for successful aging (Adams and Taylor forthcoming; Nimrod and Kleiber 2007). Attending live performances by the remaining members of the Grateful Dead, cover bands, or other jam bands is important to the well-being of Deadheads of all ages and provides meaning to their lives. With aging, physical, cognitive, and emotional challenges naturally occur, and participation in their community sometimes becomes more challenging for older Deadheads.

Adams was inspired to write this chapter after an experience she and her partner had at the Allgood Music Festival in 2012. At the ages of fifty-nine and sixty years, she and her husband were among the youngest people on the hotel shuttle leaving Legend Valley in Thornville, Ohio, sometime after one in the morning. A young woman standing at the front of the bus cautioned occupants to remain awake so they did not miss their stops and end up in Columbus with no place to stay. At that moment, Adams saw her future flash before her and began to problematize her own aging. This chapter represents her attempt, in collaboration with Harmon, to explore whether it is likely to be possible to continue participating in this community as she grows older.

Continuity is more achievable when the fit between the person and environment is good. Sometimes this goodness of fit can be achieved by modifying the environment in which the older adult ages (Wahl, Fänge, Oswald, Gitlin, and Iwarsson 2009). Fortunately for older Deadheads, the show infrastructure that is already in place is fairly accommodating and recent changes to the show environment have improved it further. Other times this goodness of fit is improved through the adaptation of the aging individual (Baltes and Lange 1997). For aging Deadheads, this sometimes means attending fewer shows, perhaps closer to home, taking precautions to protect their physical well-being, and participating in them less strenuously. Finally, goodness of fit can be improved by the location of an aging individual to a more suitable environment (Kahana, Lovegreen, Kahana, and Kahana 2003). For some Deadheads “relocation” means moving to areas of the United States where it is more convenient to attend shows, attending shows in venues designed for all-age access, or participating in the community online. Even Deadheads who cannot continue to interact with other members of the community can maintain their identity by staying in touch through the Deadhead media and by listening to recorded music. After exploring the possibilities, Adams is now feeling better about her future and the future of other Deadheads.

Deadheads are not, however, the only older adults who benefit from listening to music (Coffman 2002) or derive their identities from it (De Nora 2000). Music has been linked to well-being in numerous ways, including as a conduit for spirituality and increased cognitive maintenance (Perkins and Williamson 2013) and as the most frequent trigger of peak experiences integral to self-image, esteem, and the creation of meaning in one’s life (Schäfer, Smukalla, and Oelker 2013). Research on the effects of music involvement for seniors has shown that it can be very beneficial to maintaining a sense of belonging and improving depressive symptoms that might

coincide with other impairments that come with the aging process (Cooke, Moyle, Shum, Harrison, and Murfield 2010). Involvement in music has also been shown to mediate physical symptoms through increased vitality, as well as to provide structure to life and routine events and activities to anticipate (Creech, Hallam, McQueen, and Varvarigou 2013).

Social norms dictate that old people should act their age, and unfortunately these ageist expectations lead older adults to disassociate themselves from the activities they love (North and Fiske 2013). Despite the evidence of age-related schisms in our society, however, older adults are commonly open to interacting with youth as a manner of sharing valuable life experience and knowledge (Sedgley, Morgan, and Pritchard 2007). Music scenes not only provide the opportunity for the aging individual to “play” but also serve as safe places for shared intergenerational experiences (Yarnal 2006). Fortunately for aging Deadheads, the surviving members of the Grateful Dead and other like-minded musicians have worked with members of the Deadhead and larger jamband communities to provide safe, age-diverse, nonjudgmental spaces to support the continued involvement of community elders. To paraphrase the Grateful Dead, it is no longer just “the kids” who “dance and shake their bones” (Barlow 1987); so do those whose hair has more than “a touch of grey” (Hunter 1990, 228).

NOTES

The title of this chapter references Robert Hunter, *A Box of Rain: Collected Lyrics of Robert Hunter* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 230.

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