THE article by Carder and Hernandez in this issue ("Consumer Discourse in Assisted Living") should remind readers how the meaning of later life is continually under construction in the marketplace. Parties who conceive and sell products and services for older people are daily about the business of defining what elders should want and what their behavior should be.

In this case, the advent of a novel sort of long-term care arrangement, assisted living, occasions the need to teach everyone involved, practitioners and public alike, how to think about such places and their inhabitants. Carder and Hernandez show how language is mobilized to distance and distinguish assisted living from nursing homes. Clients are “consumers” (not patients or recipients of care). Services are specified by “agreements” (not charts) that flow from “choices” (not needs) that have been “negotiated” (not ordered). The facility—as a home—“assists” the independent, autonomous elder. This portrayal of clients was a stretch in some actual instances, but that takes nothing away from the effort to enforce it.

Upon inventing a new product or form, it is often necessary to typify its ideal users in this way. Thus it was that developers of planned subdivisions in the early 20th century invented a prototype, the neighborly homeowner with community spirit (Worley, 1990). Thus it was that the nascent retirement housing industry of the 1950s created the “active” retiree (Calhoun, 1978). And now the assisted living industry gives us the freely choosing consumer, who joins other advertised models of maturity like the “fun” grandparent, the foresighted financial planner, and those who “age successfully” (Katz & Marshall, 2003). This metaphorical creep bears watching. Gerontology should welcome further scholarship on consumers, commodities, and consumption as a way to understand how this activity shapes and tugs the contemporary idea of age.

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