

*Special Issue: Pedagogy in Reminiscence and Life Review*

## Reminiscence as a Tool for Pedagogy in a Fashion Design and Merchandizing Curriculum

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The use of reminiscence methodology, in the form of oral history or life story projects, is not uncommon in higher education coursework. It provides students the experience of working with older adults and learning about historical events. However, it might also be successfully used in other academic disciplines, particularly for providing students with the opportunity to apply course material to everyday environments. This article describes the development of a reminiscence project used in Fashion Design and Merchandising Courses. For this project, students applied Consumer Culture Theory to their interviews with older adults about people, places, social roles, and events around their clothing choices at various points of the lifespan. The pilot project demonstrated that dyadic reminiscence interviews around clothing-related reminiscence can be successfully applied to teaching Consumer Culture Theory. Further applications for use of this methodology are discussed.

The use of reminiscence methodology is increasing in both clinical and research settings (Westerhof & Bohlmeijer, 2014). Yet its use as a pedagogical tool is limited to a few disciplines (e.g., nursing, gerontology, history) and for a relatively small number of reasons, most typically to foster intergenerational exchange and promote positive attitudes toward older adults (Augustine & Freshman, 2015; Roodin, Hess-Brown, & Shedlock, 2013). This narrow use of reminiscence in pedagogical settings underutilizes the vast range of personal, historical, and procedural knowledge that older adults can convey to students and society as a whole (Thomas, 2004). The value of older adults' knowledge extends far beyond education aimed at preparing students for the medical and helping professions. The purpose of this article is to describe the development of an educational project using reminiscence methodology as a pedagogical tool in a Fashion Design and Merchandising curriculum.

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### Why Use Reminiscence to Teach Fashion Theory?

#### *Reminiscence as a Pedagogical Tool*

It is important to acknowledge the variety of practices that fall within the realm of reminiscence and identify types of reminiscence relevant to this project and to pedagogy in general. Reminiscence, broadly defined, is "the volitional or non-volitional act of recollecting memories of one's self in the past... [which] may or may not be shared with others" (Bluck & Levine, 1998, p. 188). Although people reminisce at all ages, the term was coined by the gerontologist Robert Butler, and the practice has close connections with research and clinical work with older adults (Westerhof & Bohlmeijer, 2014). The practice of reminiscence includes life review (Haight & Haight, 2007); however, because the term "life review" involves integration of older adults' positive and negative memories into a personally meaningful structure, it is irrelevant for this purpose. Reminiscence that is used to teach or inform has social functions and would be classified as "simple reminiscence" (Westerhof, Bohlmeijer, & Webster, 2010). There are three things to consider in the practice of this type of reminiscence: process, product, and outcome.

The process of reminiscence with others can occur within one-to-one or group settings (Gibson, 2001). While group settings are possible in the classroom, it may be difficult to locate older adults who are willing and able to share with a large group. Reminiscence can also be expressed through written or oral modalities (Gibson, 2011). Oral interviews are preferred because student contact with older adults is associated with positive

attitudes toward aging (e.g., Ehlman, Ligon, Moriello, Welleford, & Schuster, 2011). Regardless of setting or modality, reminiscence can also be facilitated by themes and props (Burnside, 1995). A variety of themes can be used in both research and practical applications of reminiscence with older adults, such as automobiles, (Anderson & Weber, 2015), baseball (Wingbermuehle, et al., 2014), football/soccer (Coll-Planas, Watchman, Doménech, McGillivray, O'Donnell, & Tolson 2017), and pet dogs (Yancura, 2013).

Product refers to the direct result of the reminiscence process. Students may be required to write a paper that applies what they learned from older adults to a relevant academic theory or they can reflect on their experience in guiding an older adult through an interview (Ehlman, et al, 2011; Ligon, Ehlman, Moriello, & Welleford, 2009). Student products do not necessarily have to be written. Reminiscences may be shared through visual means such as storyboards (Kindell, Burrow, Wilkinson, & David-Keady, 2014) or movies (Yancura, 2013). Visual reminiscence products fit well with processes involving props or themes because they lend themselves to presentations in class or public settings such as care facilities or community centers. Storyboards can be used to post on campus, in residents' rooms within care settings. In addition, watching movies can be a fun, inter-generational, activity.

Outcomes answer the question, "Was this reminiscence project beneficial?" With regard to education, answers can be considered from three perspectives: the student, the older-adult participant, and the recipient/consumer of the product. For student participants, there is evidence that general contact with older adults leads to an increase in positive attitudes toward older adults and a decrease in ageism (Lytle, Levy, & Meeks, 2017; Roodin, Hess-Brown, & Shedlock (2012). It also appears that reminiscence projects specifically can lead to more positive attitudes toward aging and the aging process (Ligon et al., 2009), in both in-person and online teaching formats (Ehlman et al., 2011). For older adult participants, general social reminiscence has positive benefits (Pinquart & Forstmeir, 2012). To our knowledge, benefits to older adults specific to participating in course-based reminiscence and oral history reports are rarely reported, but one qualitative study of a student life review project noted that older adult participants found it to be a positive experience (Zuccherro, 2010). There is even less formal evidence for the benefit of sharing the outcomes of reminiscence projects; however, anecdotal evidence suggests that it fosters positive attitudes toward older adults and may foster student interest in pursuing careers in aging (K. Ehlman, personal communication, [November 19, 2017]).

### *Older Adults as a Resource*

Older adults are viewed as valuable sources of knowledge in many cultures (Thomas, 2004); they can inform students about communities, history, and human

behavior (Coll-Planas et al., 2017; Menec, Bell, Novek, Minnigaleeva, Morales, Ouma, et al., 2015). Having older adults serve as educational resources is particularly apt because mentoring others fits in with fundamental theories of lifespan human development (Erikson, Levinson), which posit that older adults value giving back to younger generations (e.g., generativity) and desire to derive meaning from their lives. These goals are concordant with the identity/problem solving and teach/inform functions of Webster's (1993) Reminiscence Functions Scale. The knowledge that older adults share with students may also be valuable in many other life domains, including interpersonal relationships and consumer behavior.

### *Fashion Theory*

The modern fashion design and merchandising industry is driven by consumer behavior (Welters, & Marcketti, 2015). Therefore, a great deal of education in this academic discipline focuses on theories of self-concept and consumer decision making (Rath, Bay, & Gill, 2014; Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). Notable among these is a family of interrelated theories, which are referenced under the umbrella term Consumer Culture Theory (CCT; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). As a whole, CCT seeks to shift analysis away from economic explanations for behavior toward dynamic configurations of symbolic, ideological, and experiential components. "CCT explores the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that exist within the broader sociohistorical frame of globalization and market capitalism" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 869).

CCT provides a multidisciplinary lens through which to view behavior and relies largely on qualitative research to capture its complexity (Joy & Li, 2012) Research in CCT involves four overlapping domains identified by Arnould and Thompson (2005). The first, *consumer identity projects*, considers how consumers use market-generated materials construct a sense of self. The second, *marketplace cultures*, examines how consumers enact social solidarity and create social worlds through objects. The third, *sociohistoric patterns of consumption*, explores how institutional and social structures influence consumption. The fourth, *marketplace-mediated ideologies and strategies*, investigates how meaning systems enforce societal messages.

Reminiscence activities with older adults provide a novel and compelling way for students to explore these issues. A theme of "clothing over the lifespan" is very fitting for those who harbor a great deal of their personal identity in their apparel. Individuals often use clothing to express and communicate their social identity with other people (Feinberg et al., 1992). Clothing also plays a role as a filter between the individual and the social world by reflecting the perception of self (Crane & Bovone, 2006). A reminiscence-based discussion about valued items of clothing provides a rich source of data for analysis within

the CCT framework because it allows for the consideration of clothing purchases within a variety of times, social contexts, and age-associated identities. Thus, each participant is a case study of changing roles, events, and social environments within which fashion decisions are made.

### *Learning Objectives and Project Outcomes*

- 1) Apply theory to consumer behavior
- 2) Describe the identities, contexts, and constraints within which consumer decisions are made
- 3) Practice interview skills
- 4) Identify how storyboarding is used to structure a presentation
- 5) Create a multimedia presentation

### Process

#### *Pre Interview*

For this pilot study, the student worked closely with a faculty member to prepare for the interview. IRB approval was not necessary because the reminiscence film product was intended for educational, and not research, purposes. However, an informed consent document was prepared for the older adult participant's signature. This document was modified from an existing photo/video consent form that was supplied by the university. The participant, to whom we will give the pseudonym Elaine, was recruited by word-of-mouth.

The student also prepared interview questions designed to elicit Elaine's memories of clothing at different times in the lifespan. These included questions such as, "What is your first memory of a specific item of clothing?", "Tell me about the type of clothing you wore in high school?", "Describe the clothing you bought to wear for your first job", "Where did/do you obtain your clothing?", and "How has your style of dress changed over the years?" These questions were practiced with peers and a faculty member, who gave feedback on tone of voice and timing of questions. The student also assembled examples of clothing styles from all of the decades of the participant's life to use as memory prompts (see Figures 1 and 2 for examples). The student kept written notes of the interview and video recorded Elaine's responses to some of the questions so the responses could be used in the movie.

Preparation also included training on skills specific to creating a movie, such as consideration of lighting and sound quality (see Yancura (2013) for a more detailed discussion of these issues). The student shot video of the interview from a phone (using a tripod) and collected the audio track with the use of an external microphone. Like many in her age group, the student was very confident in using this technology.



Figure 1. Pattern for a teen dress in the 1950's (open source: [http://vintagepatterns.wikia.com/wiki/Advance\\_8085](http://vintagepatterns.wikia.com/wiki/Advance_8085)).



Figure 2. Pattern for a women's suit in the 1970s (open source: [http://vintagepatterns.wikia.com/wiki/Simplicity\\_7930](http://vintagepatterns.wikia.com/wiki/Simplicity_7930)).

#### *Participant Interview*

The student met with 69-year-old Elaine twice, once for a preparation session and once for the filming of the interview. Before the first meeting, Elaine was asked to look through her photo albums to find pictures of herself wearing some of her favorite outfits and to locate cherished items of clothing in her closet. Both meetings took place at Elaine's house, per her request. The purpose of the first meeting was to prepare the participant for the interview. The student shared the questions and clothing picture

prompts, gave Elaine a chance to add or modify the questions, scanned the photos from Elaine's albums, and took still photos of garments. Together, they chose a quiet, well-lit location in the home to film the interview and decided upon era-appropriate music to use in the movie. The purpose of the second meeting was to film the interview.

### *Post Interview*

After the interview was filmed, the student used footage from the interview, scanned photos, and pictures of clothing to create a storyboard for the movie. In order to make an entertaining and professional looking movie, the student varied the visual style within the presentation. As an example, one section might start with a few seconds of a title, followed by 20 seconds of interview footage. That was in turn followed by 30 seconds of a picture slide show with a musical sound track. Sketching the storyboard allowed the student to think critically about the chronological and social contexts of the clothing items.

After the storyboard was completed, the student used editing software (iMovie) to create a documentary-style film using clips from the interview. The rule of thumb for slideshows is 12-15 slides per minute, so this approach requires quite a few pictures. When there were not enough pictures, or the participant covered something for which she did not provide a picture (i.e., high school gym bloomers from the early 1960's, protesters during the Vietnam War), the student used suitable open-stock pictures from the internet. As was the case for using the smartphone and auxiliary equipment for filming and recording the interview, the student was very comfortable with the editing process.

### *Products*

Two concrete products emerged from the project. The first was a written paper analyzing Elaine's apparel buying decisions through the lens of CCT, and the second was the movie. Elaine received several copies of the movie to share with family and friends and the student received independent study credits for her work on this project.

### *Lessons Learned*

The purpose of this article was to describe a pilot study of the use of reminiscence methodology as a pedagogical tool in a Fashion Design and Merchandising curriculum. The most important lesson learned from this project centers on the feasibility of the structured dyadic reminiscence process for use in a theoretical context. It provided a valuable context for critical application of CCT. The student found examples for each of its four domains. For instance, the *consumer identity projects* domain was illustrated by Elaine's description of using different types of clothing at various times in her life. She wore "power suits" when she worked downtown in the 1970s, but

switched to more casual clothing, such as shorts and knit shirts, when she became a mother. She talked about adopting a "softer, more flowy" wardrobe in the early 2000s when she began working in the resort business. These contextual examples clearly embody the concept of using clothing provided by the marketplace to create and/or reflect an identity. Another instance of interview content that matched nicely to theory came in Elaine's description of working in a high-end, female-managed business in Honolulu during the 1970s. She and all of her female co-workers bought fur coats, as if these coats were a symbol of working for such a prestigious firm. She laughed as she described how they all paid to keep them in refrigerated storage so the coats would not spoil in the local, tropical climate. That anecdote provided a good example of the *marketplace cultures* domain, which is concerned with how consumers use objects to create social worlds and enact social solidarity. The movie contained many more examples of the tenets of CCT.

There were clear strengths and weaknesses to the making of a movie in order to analyze its content. On one hand, both the interview and the movie required a substantial time commitment from the student. With recent advances in consumer technology, the movie editing process was not as difficult as it would have been a few years ago, yet it was still time consuming. It is possible that other sources might be used to help students learn to analyze data, such as transcripts of interviews, photo albums, or pre-made films. Despite the investment of time, working with Elaine to create the movie was an invaluable experience for the student. Together, they discussed the social and historical contexts behind consumer decision-making across many situations. Consideration of these contexts afforded the student a unique opportunity to go beyond the academic exercise into an experiential pursuit.

### *Conclusions*

This reminiscence project enhanced student learning within a Fashion Design and Merchandising curriculum. Personal contact with an older adult allowed the student to understand the meanings behind consumer decision making across a variety of sociohistorical contexts. From this experience, the student learned to consider the person behind the consumer and gained an in-depth appreciation for CCT. An additional benefit for the student was to experience historical clothing styles within social contexts. That is, to perceive them not simply from a style or cut perspective, but as having meaning in a specific time and place. The benefits from this project extended beyond the academic, as it was an enjoyable experience for both Elaine and the student and gave the student a greater appreciation for aging. The project also provided a unique cross-disciplinary collaborative opportunity for the involved faculty.

The use of reminiscence projects shows great promise for disciplines outside of gerontology and the helping professions, such as linguistics (i.e., popular slang over

time), nutrition (i.e., shopping and cooking), and American Studies (i.e., popular culture, LGBTQ populations). If the course cannot contain the movie component, an in-depth interview would most likely work as well. However, a visual assignment such as a movie, virtual poster, or storyboard would be most appropriate for disciplines with a design or aesthetic component.

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