

## **50 Senior Essentials: A Course Using Diverse Research Methods to Better Develop New Apparel Lines to Address the Needs of Older Adult Females**

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*Student teams at a large Southern university conducted mixed method research including Q-Methodology and Focus Groups to develop business plans for a 50 item assortment and shop concept in a sponsoring retailer's stores (i.e. Supercenter or Department Store). Students worked in five member teams with varied areas of responsibility requiring frequent collaboration. Students reviewed and discussed current literature, developed and executed research to address specific research questions about older adult female wardrobe preferences. The course reinforced to students the need for in-depth understanding of a target market before beginning assortment planning and how product lines should satisfy consumer needs.*

### **PURPOSE**

This curriculum development case study was gathered from a required entrepreneurship and product development course part of a fashion merchandising curriculum and aimed to teach undergraduate students about research and development of a product line targeting older adult females aged (60+). Student teams integrated both consumer research and retail assortment planning methods to produce competitive apparel assortment plans to satisfy one of two assigned target markets: a first tier department store and a chain of supercenters. The project was useful for helping students explore their career aspirations as buyers and learn that products they select or develop for a retailer may not conform to their personal tastes and interests. Assortment plans should be carefully developed with the wants and needs of the end customer in mind. The project also illustrated to students that strong research methods should support retail planning and decision making. The goal of the class environment was to shift the students from a teacher centered classroom to one of teamwork as distinct from group work. Teams work together rather than submitting individually created project components and during this iterative process they develop synergies and skills to leverage member's individual talents to accomplish the best possible outcome. Creativity was emphasized by allowing students to use different processes and approaches for developing their assortment plans by using diverse sources such as consultations with partnering retail management, StyleSight.com, Mock Shop, Microsoft Office, Illustrator, and other Internet based research resources. For example, shop concept renderings could be created using multiple software tools, but standards for fixture notation and financial planning templates for floor plans were consistent for all groups. This multi-method approach to designing the final project materials allowed students to leverage their unique talents and visual communications, but provided a consistent framework for project assessment. Creativity was also demonstrated during final presentations and written business plans by

methods used to help judges visualize complex assortment planning information. Checkpoints, tasks, goals, and due dates during the project provided structure and helped simulate the constraints of seasonal assortment planning in a buying department of large retail corporation.

Some students opted to select a leader or manager for their group and others worked in horizontal organizational structures. The key advantage of incorporating discretionary organizational structure allowed the functional members of teams to present dimensions of their project work to other teammates, stimulating teaching and learning to create consensus (i.e. negotiation and influencing) and students often transferred tacit knowledge to their peers throughout the semester. Top down group organizational structures functioned as time and activity managers who ensured the group stayed on track and in some cases performed project activities in excess of their peers. All 49 of the students in the class kept a weekly diary of the project process and short reflections which generates approximately a thousand pages of text which will be explored in a future study.

## **BACKGROUND**

The consumer products landscape has been changing with a greater emphasis on transferring feedback of end-users into new product designs. To achieve the course goals of educating students about recent trends in customer co-created product development, the researcher used the service dominant paradigm (Vargo & Lusch, 2010) to frame the course challenge of designing wardrobe assortments for older females that address this demographic group's unique needs. In addition, the researcher used generational cohort theory as a framework for exploring how older females clothing choices may differ from female college students and how understanding these differences in target markets may inform strategic decision making in assortment planning. Students first learned about older female wardrobe preferences by reading and discussing prior research studies. In-class activities, guest speakers, and short videos supplemented the readings. The purpose of preliminary work of discussing research studies was designed to help students develop more informed questions about the subject matter of the course. Later in the semester selected students were granted access to a group of older females living in a continuing care retirement center where the instructor conducts frequent research for field research involving focus group interviews. For twelve weeks, as students learned about the idiosyncrasies of the older adult female apparel market, they also began planning and successively editing an assortment of 50 wardrobe essentials for their assigned retail channel (department store or supercenter). Ten student teams of five members were assigned distinct cross-functional roles and responsibilities for completing the project. At the end of the semester, the students' assortments were judged by senior managers, buyers, and planners from two retailers.

Older adults are motivated by independence and a desire to control their lives (Herzog, Wilson, & Rideout, 2010). Prior research has explored the wardrobe concerns of older females (Thomas & Okleshen-Peters, 2009; Pak & Kambil, 2006; Herzog, Wilson, & Rideout, 2010; Williams & Page, 2011) and provided the basis for student exploration of older female wardrobe perceptions during the class. Prior research has identified four key dimensions influencing older adult decision making including: biological, psychological, social and economic factors as we age (Pak & Kambil, 2011). These factors may also directly influence consumption behaviors and decision criteria of seniors as well. Older female consumers have expressed interest during prior qualitative focus group research in self-expressive and even non-conformist clothing preferences as they age that allow them to remain physically and socially active, while tending to obey social mores for appropriate dress in non-conformist clothing choices (Thomas & Okleshen-Peters, 2009). Non-conformity in this context might include bold prints and unusual elements in age appropriate styles. Some older women's beliefs about wardrobe priorities from prior research appear to conflict with aspects of generalizations in generational cohort theory of key traits (Strauss & Howe, 1992; Codrington, 2004). To help students create strategic assortment plans incorporating the preferences of older consumers with diverse tastes, and converting those preferences into private label shop concepts for the mass market, several research studies were compared and discussed during class sessions as they relate to generational cohort theory (Codrington, 2004). Some

differences were identified from the body of research for older consumers from generational cohort theory which allowed students to create clarifying terminology and questions during the research study. For example, some apparel related word changes were identified by students to better understand generational differences (e.g. conformity) from Codrington's (2004) research compared to the term (e.g. non-conformity) in Thomas & Olkenshen-Peters (2009) study findings. Differing findings in the body of older adult research created enthusiasm among students to better understand what influences buying patterns, and may also contribute new information of interest to the scientific literature related to generational cohorts. The student developed research questions are presented below.

## Research Questions

*RQ1: What are the characteristics of wardrobe essentials desired by a diverse group of older adult females?*

*RQ2: How do the older female consumer's opinions change about wardrobe essentials if they are downsizing their wardrobe?*

*RQ 3: What are specific motivations of the target market for identifying the dimensions of their wardrobe essentials?*

*RQ4: What design modifications do older adult females desire in the assortments currently offered in retail stores to better meet their needs?*

## DESIGN

To better understand how students beginning the class might understand the wardrobe needs of seniors, we started by first exploring the student's concept of wardrobe essentials personally. Each student brought a wardrobe essential top and bottom at the beginning of the semester. The 98 resulting student wardrobe essentials were photographed and aggregated in a document to create a baseline assortment relevant to the student population, summarized by silhouette and style. The students were challenged from the beginning of the semester to reflect on how older adult female wardrobe essentials may be similar or different to the student group and how to determine those differences to inform wardrobe purchase decision making.

After reading several articles about the target market characteristics of older adult females from prior research (Doteuchi, 2008; Eshelman & Evans, 2002; Williams & Page, 2011; Pak & Kambil, 2006; Thomas & Olkenshen-Peters, 2009), students were tasked with developing a set of words and clarifying statements that best defined the apparel preferences of older adult females. These statements were discussed and agreed upon as a group. Q-Methodology provided the framework for student analysis and decision making in this phase of the class project. The Q sample consisted of 36 statements (Figure 1).

The selection of these 36 words led to development of a Q-Sample. A total of two sorts (self-assessment and projection of older/younger generational cohort) were completed in each of two groups (students and older adult females. The findings of the Q-Sort were summarized and presented to students who then began designing questions for a focus group interview guide. After refinement and agreement of the interview guide questions, a group of students traveled to an independent living center in a nearby community and observed the researcher conduct focus groups. Findings from the focus groups were analyzed and presented to students for consideration of additional refinements of their assortment plans.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Q-SORT CARDS FOR DIMENSIONS OF WARDROBE PREFERENCES**

<b>ATTRACTIVE</b> TO BE ATTRACTIVE TO OTHERS	<b>AUTHORITY</b> TO CONVEY YOU ARE IN CHARGE	<b>CHANGE</b> TO REFLECT MY NEED TO TRY DIFFERENT THINGS	<b>CONFIDENCE</b> TO SHOW THAT I FEEL GOOD ABOUT MYSELF	<b>CRAFTSMANSHIP</b> TO REFLECT QUALITY MATERIALS AND CONSTRUCTION	<b>CREATIVITY</b> TO EXPRESS YOUR NEW IDEAS AND INDIVIDUALITY
<b>DURABILITY</b> TO APPEAR LONG LASTING	<b>EASE OF USE</b> TO REFLECT EASY TO PUT ON AND WEAR DESIGNS	<b>FITNESS</b> TO CONVEY THAT YOU ARE PHYSICALLY FIT	<b>FLEXIBILITY</b> TO BE ADAPTABLE TO NEW CIRCUMSTANCES EASILY	<b>FUN</b> TO PROJECT PLAYFULNESS AND HAVING FUN	<b>HEALTH</b> TO REFLECT PHYSICAL WELL BEING
<b>HUMOR</b> TO PROJECT THE HUMOROUS SIDE OF MYSELF	<b>INDEPENDENCE</b> TO SHOW THAT I DON'T RELY ON OTHERS	<b>LEISURE</b> TO SHOW THAT I AM RELAXING AND ENJOYING LIFE	<b>MODERATION</b> TO CONVEY THAT I AVOID MATERIAL EXCESSES	<b>NON-CONFORMITY</b> TO REFLECT MY DESIRE TO QUESTION AND CHALLENGE NORMS AND AUTHORITY	<b>OPENNESS</b> TO REFLECT MY APPROACHABILITY AND RECEPTIVITY TO OTHERS
<b>ORDER</b> TO DEMONSTRATE MY ORGANIZED APPEARANCE	<b>PERSONALITY</b> TO HIGHLIGHT WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT ME	<b>POINT IN TIME</b> TO PRESENT AN IMPORTANT PERIOD IN MY LIFE TO OTHERS	<b>POPULARITY</b> TO SHOW I AM WELL LIKED BY MANY PEOPLE	<b>RISK</b> TO SHOW MY NEED TO TAKE CHANCES	<b>SAFETY</b> TO PROJECT THAT I AM AT LOW RISK OF INJURY
<b>SELF-ACCEPTANCE</b> TO SHOW THAT I ACCEPT MYSELF AND CLOTHING AS THEY ARE	<b>SELF-CONTROL</b> TO REFLECT THAT I AM DISCIPLINED IN MY OWN ACTIONS	<b>SELF-ESTEEM</b> TO SHOW THAT I FEEL GOOD ABOUT MYSELF	<b>SENSE OF PLACE</b> TO SHOW MY AFFILIATIONS TO PLACES AND ORGANIZATIONS	<b>SEXUALITY</b> TO SHOW MY DESIRE TO HAVE AN ACTIVE AND SATISFYING SEX LIFE	<b>SIMPLICITY</b> TO PROJECT MY DESIRE TO LIVE SIMPLY WITH MINIMAL NEEDS
<b>STATUS</b> TO SHOW I AM PART OF AN ELITE GROUP	<b>TACTILE</b> TO WEAR ITEMS THAT FEEL PLEASANT TO TOUCH	<b>TRADITION</b> TO FOLLOW RESPECTED CUSTOMS OF DRESS FROM THE PAST	<b>USEFULNESS</b> TO DEMONSTRATE MULTIPLE OCCASIONS THAT THE CLOTHING MAY BE WORN	<b>VISUAL</b> TO REFLECT MY NEED TO PROJECT AESTHETICS TO OTHERS	<b>WEALTH</b> TO CONVEY I HAVE PLENTY OF MONEY

### Case Selection

Participants for the study were recruited by the researcher from an older adult congregate living facility in a large city approximately 60 miles from the large Southern University where the students were enrolled in the Entrepreneurship and Product Development course. Students were selected to participate in the study based on their enrollment in a required senior level course. Students in three disciplines were enrolled in the class: merchandising, interior design, and apparel design and production. Teams were balanced to include at least one member from each discipline on a team. Students then self-selected their role on the five person team based on a speed dating approach with other members (Collins & Goyder, 2013). Team formation was followed by written learning team charters highlighting each student's self-identified strengths and weaknesses for successfully completing the project: researcher, presenter, buyer, planner, trend analyst/visual merchandiser). Students designated as researchers on their teams traveled as a group in a university owned van to the field research activities: Q-Sort and focus group interviews at the older adult living facility. 48 female students and one male student participated in Q-Sort and ranged in age from 21-29 with a mean age of 23 years. 10 older adult females, aged 65-98 with a mean age of 76 attended the Q sort portion of the study, and 16 older adult females aged 65-98 with a mean age of 72 participated in the focus group interviews at the facility.

The older female participants were selected based on their desire to share information about their wardrobe how downsizing has impacted their wardrobe preferences. All participants were residents of the partner older adult congregate living community. The Q-sort activity and subsequent focus groups conducted one month later were held at the older adult facility in the community room. Students assisted the older adult females in how to complete the sorting matrix (Figure 2) for the Q-sort activity.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

# Q SORT CLOTHING OPINIONS


## Procedures

36 Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice Vol. 15(3) 2015

them to least like them. In the subsequent sort the students were asked to project and rank the same 36 cards for senior's wardrobe preferences, and seniors were also asked during their second sort to rank the 36 cards projecting the wardrobe preference of students from their perspective. Data from Q-Sort worksheets were entered into PQ Method software and analyzed. The factor loadings of the principal components may be found in (Tables 1-3).

**TABLE 1**  
**FACTOR LOADINGS FOR OLDER ADULT FEMALE SELF-SORTS AND PROJECTED**  
**STUDENT SORTS OF WARDROBE CONCERNS**

Older Women Sorts (Self/Students)	Statement	Z score (Self/Students)	Position
Factor 1	Self Esteem*/Popularity	1.97/1.79	5
Image	Confidence/Attractive	1.71/1.78	4
	Leisure*/Sexuality	1.46/1.32	4
	Attractive/Self-Esteem	1.39/1.19	3
	Creativity*/Personality	1.2/1.11	3
	Openness*/Durability	-1.1-1.22	-3
	Durability*/Ease of Use	-1.4/-1.46	-3
	Wealth/Tradition	-1.6/-1.48	-4
	Authority/Safety	-1.87/-1.63	-4
	Sense of Place/Tactile	-1.99/-1.71	-5
Factor 2	Status* /Order	2.28/1.77	5
Signals	Sense of Place*/Self-Acceptance	1.79/1.77	4
	Wealth*/Durability	1.72/1.63	4
	Self-Acceptance/Ease of Use	1.35/1.33	3
	Sexuality*/Personality	1.29/1.33	3
	Flexibility/Tradition	-1.03/1.33	-3
	Health/Sense of Place	-1.04/1.63	-3
	Craftsmanship/Risk	-1.38/1.63	-4
	Attractive/Authority*	-1.72/-1.74	-4
	Simplicity/Wealth	-1.83/-1.77	-5
Factor 3	Ease of Use*/Moderation*	1.68/1.77	5
Control	Order /Self-Acceptance	1.49/1.63	4
	Change/Openness	1.39/1.45	4
	Flexibility/Sexuality	1.21/1.33	3
	Self-Control/Simplicity*	1.18/1.13	3
	Safety/Wealth	-1.03/-1.33	-3
	Simplicity/Tactile	-1.4/-1.43	-3
	Tradition/Self-esteem	-1.67/-1.67	-4
	Wealth/Leisure	-1.68/-1.77	-4
	Sexuality/Non-conformity	-2.05/-1.86	-5

p<.05, \*p<.01

**TABLE 2**  
**FACTOR LOADINGS FOR STUDENT SELF SORTS AND PROJECTED SENIOR**  
**SORTS OF WARDROBE CONCERNS**

Student Sorts (Self/Older Women)	Statement	Z score (Self/Older Women)	Position
Factor 1	1 Risk/2 Fun*	1.84/1.66	5
Image	1 Change/ 2 Self-Acceptance	1.74/1.45	4
	1 Attractive*/2 Change	1.69/1.40	4
	1 Sense of Place/2 Order*	1.68/1.40	3
	1 Creativity/2 Sense of Place	1.45/1.22	3
	1 Wealth*/ 2Self Esteem	-1.46/-1.32	-3
	1 Self-control/2 Craftsmanship*	-1.47/-1.55	-3
	1 Order/2 Status*	-1.53/-1.60	-4
	1 Point in Time/2 Point in Time	-1.7/-1.63	-4
	1 Status/2 Confidence	-1.85/-1.65	-5
Factor 2	Ease of Use/Creativity	1.79/1.88	5
Lifestyle	Moderation/Authority*	1.67/1.58	4
	Flexibility/Fitness	1.62/1.56	4
	Tradition/Safety	1.56/1.37	3
	Fitness/Status	1.55/1.27	3
	Self-Control/Self-Acceptance	-1.3/-1.19	-3
	Craftsmanship*/Leisure*	-1.5/-1.21	-3
	Order/Confidence	-1.5/1.55	-4
	Personality/Self Control	-1.7/-1.65	-4
	Independence/Independence	-1.8/-1.99	-5
Factor 3	Durability/Risk	1.84	5
Clothing Design	Safety*/Self-Acceptance*	1.74	4
	Simplicity/Simplicity	1.69	4
	Usefulness/Safety	1.368	3
	Craftsmanship*/Independence*	1.45	3
	Fun/Leisure	-1.03	-3
	Openness*/Confidence	-1.06	-3
	Leisure/Point in Time	-1.3	-4
	Order/Status	-1.6	-4
	Self-Acceptance/Craftsmanship	-1.7	-5

p<.05,\*p<.01

The senior self-sorts found six individuals in factor one “image”. When older females projected the students wardrobe essentials two individuals loaded on factor one. Three older females loaded on factor two “signals”, but when the older females projected student wardrobe preferences, four older females loaded on factor two. Five older females loaded on factor three “control” in the self-sort and three older females loaded on the projections of student wardrobe preferences. The three factor solution explained 76% of the variance of senior wardrobe preferences.

Twenty-nine students loaded on the self-sort for factor one “image” however the keywords differed dramatically when compared to older female sorts with the exception of the keyword “creativity” which was similarly ranked in position three by both older females and students. Seventeen students loaded on factor two for the self-sort “signals” and nine students loaded on the older female projection for “image” and only the keyword craftsmanship was similarly shared by students and older females in the negative four sorting position. Eight students loaded on factor three “control” both groups of older female and the students’ demonstrated similar predictive validity for “self-acceptance” in the projective sorts. Older females ranked the keyword “safety” in the negative three position as a wardrobe priority while students ranked safety in the positive three position and this ranking was significant at the  $p < .01$  level (table 4). Noteworthy are the older female generational self-sorts that are significantly  $p < .01$  shared among the peers loading on the same factor: self-esteem, leisure, creativity, openness, durability, status, sense of place, and ease of use describing wardrobe preferences. For the student generational cohort loading on the same keyword demonstrating significance at  $p < .01$  includes: attractive, wealth, safety and openness.

Students used the keywords identified in each factor of the Q-sort phase of the study to create questions for the follow-up focus group phase that further clarified the senior self-sorts and research questions. The interview guide for the focus groups was created from 100 preliminary questions, 10 questions created by each of 10 learning team groups. The top fifteen question votes from the class’s 100 question samples are presented in (Table 3).

**TABLE 3**  
**TOP FIFTEEN FOCUS GROUP QUESTION STUDENT REFINEMENT PROCESS**

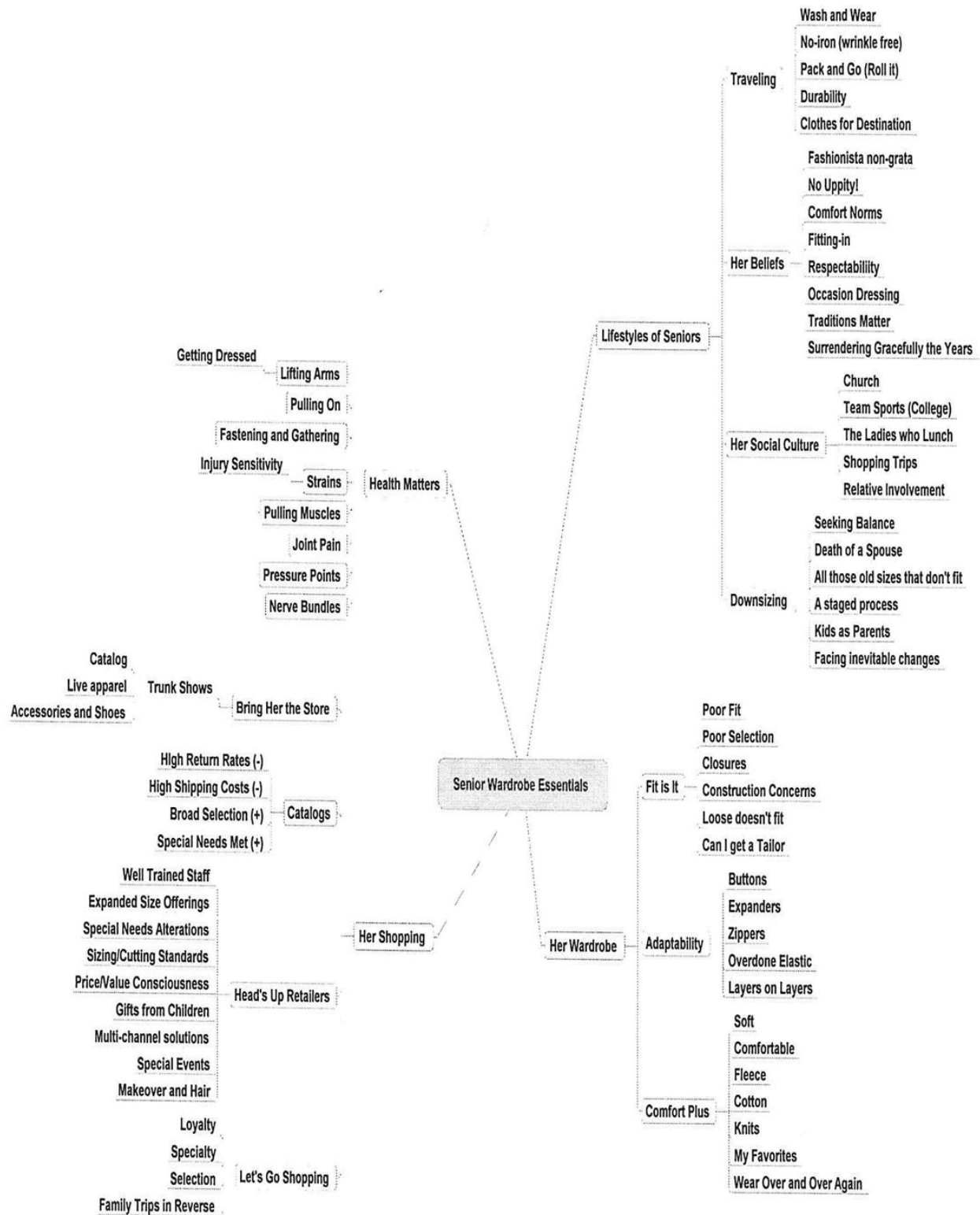
Question	Rank	Votes
48--When you moved to Edmond Mansions and had to downsize your closet, what items did you find that you no longer needed? What types of items did you decide to keep?	1	25
84--What is the price range that you usually spend for each item? Winter coat, Black jeans, Dress blazer, Button down dress shirt, dress shoes with covered toe?	2	22
14--What is the most important factor for you when you choose apparel?	3	18
85--What emotion do you desire to experience the most when well dressed? (Achievement/Status, Wealthy/Highest Quality Goods, Comfortable/Modest, Fashionable/Trendy)	4	17
26--What is your ideal everyday outfit?	5	16
28--What ratio of tops to bottoms do you own?	6	15
38--Do you prefer short sleeve shirts to layer with cardigans or jackets or do you also like long sleeve shirts/sweaters?	7	14
27--Do you prefer solid colors, patterns, or logo clothing items?	8	14
23--What type of closures do you like to wear most often? (pull-on/over, button down, zipped, wrap and tie)	9	14



22--What is the most influential feature/aspect of a clothing item that will affect your buying decision? (closure types, color, hem, or sleeve length, etc.)	10	14
19--What is your favorite apparel item and what makes it your favorite?	11	14
1--Can you describe your current wardrobe in one or two words?	12	13
11--What types of activities do you dress up for versus wearing more casual apparel?	13	13
13--Is keeping up with current fashion trends important to you?	14	13
46--Do you prefer trendy or classic styles?	15	12

Of these questions the first 10 questions were asked of participants during the focus group interviews. Recorded transcripts were transcribed and analyzed in NVIVO software, and four dimensions were derived that expanded the findings of the three factor Q-Sort solution including: health matters, her shopping, lifestyles, and her wardrobe. The dimensions and keywords from the newly derived dimensions, lifestyles and her shopping were not reflected in the Q-sort factors and greatly expanded the teams' knowledge about the target market. The "her wardrobe" dimension addressed some of the issues of the three factor Q-sort findings pertaining to the terms, tactile, quality and construction issues, but information about specific design considerations such as apparel closure preferences added deeper insights to the assortment planning and product development process. The lifestyles dimension from the focus groups also offered new knowledge about traveling, the social culture of older women, and downsizing considerations which supported many component keywords of the Q-sort process and factor structure (Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3**  
**EVOLVING THEMES FROM SENIOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS**



### **Roles of Case Study Members**

The students served as one group for analysis of perceived wardrobe essentials personally followed by what they believed to be the wardrobe preferences of older adult females living in congregate living facilities. The researcher acted as the primary arbiter of both group activities and ensured all procedures were completed. Students were then required to integrate the findings of both the Q-Sort activity and the focus groups to their assortment plans and product development portfolio after data was collected, entered, analyzed and summarized for them by the faculty researcher. The students then had to tailor research findings within their group to create a highly competitive assortment to address their assigned target market. To accomplish this goal, students used black and white flat diagrams from Stylesight (or draw their own), coloring them according to seasonal assortment trend plans/mood boards and then creating annual plan-o-grams and financial plans to round out the project activities. Members of the groups were also required to leverage skills in their chosen specialization (e.g. buyer, trend analyst/visual merchandiser) in developing the 50 item competitive assortment based on the in-class generational cohort research findings. The student roles often overlapped, for example the buyer developing the assortment and the planner developing the space plan had to interact frequently to ensure a cohesive assortment plan. The presenter and the trend analyst had to work together to ensure the final presentation reflected the brand identity of the new assortment. The visual merchandiser had to work with the planner to design the placement of signage and display fixtures into the shop concept floorplan diagrams. These examples reflect a small sample of cross-functional collaboration required of students to successfully complete the project. Each team's assortment was presented in semi-final elimination sessions and finalist judging was conducted by the partner retailer's senior management who reviewed the best three final projects in each group (mass merchant and department store). Faculty judges performed semi-final eliminations allowing a reduced number of assortment plans (3) to be presented to management from each of the two retailers during two class periods to value their time during the busy fourth quarter when judging occurred.

Older consumers identified four key dimensions that influenced their wardrobe choices which relate to biological, psychological, social and economic factors (Pak & Kambil, 2011). Health matters describes the influence of inevitable changes to the human body as we age and how the wardrobe must adapt to these changes. Closures and the ability to put on and take off the garment easily were highlighted. The shopping environment for older females addressed multiple dimensions of Pak and Kambil's older adult decision-making model including economic constraints and reversals of the female's children providing their mothers with clothing gifts as the parent did when the child was growing up. Price and value consciousness were major concerns for older females on fixed incomes. The consensus among participants was that retailers should do a better job of providing additional selection, alteration and fitting services for females whose bodies are changing as they age.

Participants desired their clothing to fit appropriately regardless of their age or physical condition. Sensitivity to the living environment requires the older females to frequently layer clothing and preferences for closures on layering pieces that are easy to use and adaptable, i.e. buttons, expanders, zippers and minimizing overuse of elastic were discussed extensively in the focus groups. Comfort was also a major concern for participants and cotton knits were the preferred fabrication. Tactile concerns related to softness of the fabric and fleece was mentioned often as a preferred fabric among participants.

The lifestyles of older females are vibrant and highly social. Church, team sports affiliations luncheons, shopping outings, and trips with relatives highlighted the need for a flexible wardrobe within reduced closet constraints. Traveling during the elder years was also identified as a top priority and wash and wear, pack and go, versatility, and durability in different climates were identified as key concerns. Within the social culture pretentiousness was viewed negatively and older females addressed a need to fit-in with peers. Respectability of dress and appropriate fashions for occasions and traditions were highlighted.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The model used in this class provides a useful framework for yearly adaptation of the subject matter for a retailing oriented entrepreneurship and product development course. The purpose of the course was to integrate learning from multiple sources and using mixed research methods and curriculum based technological tools in problem solving to culminate the prior three years of student learning in their respective program emphasis. Ultimately, the students created a detailed plan for a new business and profit center in their assigned retailer, including the difficult job of selling their ideas to senior management of two different retailers. Q methodology used as a preliminary stage in market research to further develop focus group interview guides is a novel approach that will likely increase the specificity of focus group questions content and improve the relevance of elicited responses. Students responded favorably to developing a research method collaboratively in small teams and as a group. Q methodology is useful for customer co-created product development because it allows the researcher to explore diverse consumer views about targeted subject matter such as the generational cohort priorities, ethnic or gender differences. Subsequent research from Q-Methods such as focus groups or quantitative studies deepens understanding of the subject matter for students and may be a useful recruitment tool for graduate study from an undergraduate program. For the classroom experience, engagement in reflection from Q sorting activities combined with attempts to integrate the findings of how other students and older females completed sorts differently, provides problem solving challenges for students to ask more specific questions about the relevance of research to assigned marketing tasks.

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