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SELECTION OF READY-TO-WEAR DRESSES
BY WOMEN IN DENVER CITY, TEXAS

THESIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Consumers today do not always find it easy to obtain the specific type of ready-to-wear dresses which they wish to buy at the prices which they are able or willing to pay.

Consumers may buy all of their clothing in the market, either by purchasing ready-to-wear garments or by purchasing materials to be fashioned into garments in the home. It is not always easy for the consumer to satisfy her desires in the local market. Dresses to be found in these markets do not always meet her price range, size, quality, or style.

The lack of knowledge pertaining to the needs and buying habits of the purchaser is responsible for many of the problems of the consumer and of the producer. It is to the advantage of both the manufacturer and the consumer to know what is demanded by the consuming public. The consumers would benefit because producers and manufacturers would be considering these factors in the production of ready-to-wear garments. Also, both time and money would be saved by both wholesalers and retailers if they possessed such information.

At present, the studies of consumers' purchasing habits cover only a limited number of commodities which seem to benefit the manufacturer or merchant rather than the consumer.

Usually only such information as that which will be beneficial to the merchant is made known to the buying public. Possibly if manufacturers and producers knew what the consuming public wanted, that would influence the kind and amount of information they would be willing to give the prospective buyers of their merchandise.

Studies attempting to gather such information have been made by Phelps in Minnesota^{1,2} and Thor in Wisconsin.³ One of Phelps's studies was made as early as 1920; the other, in 1939. Thor's study of the purchasing desires and habits of Wisconsin women was made in 1933.

The first study by Phelps, in 1920, was of the purchasing habits of Minnesota housewives and professional women. The questionnaire method was used to obtain information regarding service dresses. Of 1,500 to 2,000 questionnaires sent out, about 789 were used to compile the results; and the following observations were made: (1) wool was used more widely than silk for service dresses in Minnesota's northern climate; (2) 55 per cent of all wool dresses purchased were made of serge; (3) 50 per cent of all silk dresses were made

¹Ethel L. Phelps, "A Study of Clothing Purchasing Habits," Journal of Home Economics, XII (1920), 491-495.

²Ethel L. Phelps, "A Study of Certain Factors Related to Consumer Choices in the Purchase of Silk Street Dresses and Yard Goods," Journal of Home Economics, XXXI (1939), 393-398.

³Esther K. Thor, "How Women Select Dresses," Journal of Home Economics, XXV (1933), 573-576.

of either taffeta or satin.⁴

In the more recent study, 1939, Phelps interviewed 294 Minneapolis women to determine their practices in selecting silk dresses. During the interview, a questionnaire was filled out to determine what factors influenced the buying of ready-to-wear, dressmaker-made, or homemade dresses. As a result of this study, Phelps made the following observations: (1) the popularity of ready-to-wear garments was shown by each person's having an average of between four and five ready-to-wear dresses as compared with the seven or eight dresses owned per person; (2) employment outside the home did not appear to affect the practice of purchasing ready-to-wear, since similar usage was reported by both the employed and the unemployed women.⁵

The third study, that by Thor in 1933, made use of the observation method. Consequently, the actual purchase of ready-to-wear by two hundred customers was observed. This study revealed (1) that 25 per cent of the two hundred customers were sale customers and 75 per cent were "no-sale" customers; (2) that 94.4 per cent of the customers, definitely stating prices, asked for \$16.75 dresses, which were the cheapest in the department but which, according to prevailing prices, were medium-priced dresses; (3) that almost

⁴Phelps, Journal of Home Economics, XII (1920), 492-494.

⁵Phelps, Journal of Home Economics, XXXI (1939), 393-398.

90 per cent of the two hundred customers specified the colors of the dresses they wished to buy and that twenty-nine of the eighty-three "no-sale" customers specifying colors refused to buy because they could not secure the color desired.⁶

The purpose of the present study is to observe how the consumers select ready-to-wear dresses in a small oil town, which had a population of 3,336 in June, 1940. These women represent different known incomes (\$140.00 to \$425.00 per month) and have access to the same stores.

⁶Thor, op. cit., pp. 573-576.

CHAPTER II

METHOD OF DETERMINING CONSUMER BUYING HABITS

Denver City, Texas, started its oil development in October, 1938. This resulted from the establishment, in the midst of an oil field, of an oil camp with its subsequent demands for supplies. In order to supply these demands, stores were opened and the town developed rapidly. In November, 1938, a post office was established at Denver City. At that time, there was only one school in the district, a two-room frame building at Sligo, fifteen miles distant. A combination grade- and high-school brick building was completed in Sligo in August, 1939, to accommodate the children of Sligo and Denver City. With the continued rapid growth of the oil town, emergency plans were made for a frame grade-school building in Denver City. This grade school was completed in October, 1939; and a brick high-school gymnasium was started in May, 1940.

Before the oil boom at Denver City began, Sligo was a small, two-teacher school which accommodated fifty-two children of ranchmen during 1937-1938. This school first began growing in 1938-1939, when five teachers were required for the scholastics. In the following school year, 1939-1940, twenty-one teachers were employed for 517 students. The

school census taken in March, 1940, for the approaching school year of 1940-1941 showed a scholastic enrollment of 754, or 45.8 per cent increase over the 1939-1940 enrollment.

Of the 287 families which were represented at the Denver City High School during the 1939-1940 school term, only 13 per cent (thirty-seven) had some type of sewing machine in the home. It is justifiable to assume that the ratio in the grade school, in which 1,009 families were represented, was even smaller, since the homes had not been established for as long a time. From this, it is obvious that it is almost impossible for all women of Denver City to have home-constructed dresses; consequently, it was of interest to determine how the ready-to-wear dresses were purchased and what prices were paid for them.

In September, 1939, it was observed that Denver City stores carried only men's clothing and women's house dresses. As a result, the stores in the neighboring towns were observed in order to study the consumers and the kinds of merchandise carried. Seagraves, fifteen miles distant, appeared to offer an opportunity to study consumer practices; but this plan was ineffective when it was found that the shops there did not carry popular-priced merchandise, which would be essential in a study of consumer practices. A similar attempt was made at Brownfield, but consumers there were found to be chiefly from the ranches and therefore not typical of the

women in an oil town. In the meantime, September and October, dress shops had been established in Denver City. However, it was not until November that popular-priced merchandise was introduced. A preliminary study was made in Denver City in November to determine the advisability of an intensive study of the buying practices found in an oil community. As a result, an independent store located in the town was chosen for the study. The president of the local Retail Merchants Association classified the store as being reliable and under experienced management. The dress stock at the beginning of this study showed an average of six hundred dresses, divided equally among price groups of \$7.95, \$10.95, \$16.95, and \$29.95.

The manager of the store in which the study was made permitted the investigator to pose as an employee and to appear to be assisting clerks and customers. However, no sale was made unless the customer definitely requested it; this occurred on approximately fifteen occasions. Two full-time saleswomen were employed in the dress department of this store. The procedure followed by the investigator was to observe the customer closely from the time she entered the store until she left. As soon as the sale was completed, the customer's remarks were recorded on a special form card.¹ The check list on this card was determined after two tentative sets were used during the preliminary studies. These

¹See Appendix, p. 37.

cards contained abbreviated questions concerning the information which was desired. The clerk who took charge of the customers also helped to supply the desired information.

The data reported in this study were collected during a five-month period of time, January until June, 1940. No data were collected during December because the store was conducting a sale.

CHAPTER III

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The investigator observed 215 women while they looked at or tried on dresses in a Denver City, Texas, store. In order to facilitate the analysis of these data, the customers are divided into two groups, the sale and the no-sale group. The sales customers, those who bought dresses, totaled 130, or approximately 60 per cent of the total number, as will be seen by Table 1, as compared with Thor's study in which only 25 per cent of the two hundred women were sales customers.¹

TABLE 1

THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF 215 CUSTOMERS WHO DEFINITELY STATED THE PRICE DESIRED, WHO PARTIALLY STATED THE PRICE DESIRED, WHO DID NOT STATE THE PRICE DESIRED; AND THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF EACH GROUP TO WHOM SALES WERE OR WERE NOT MADE

Request for Price	Customers					
	Sale		No-Sale		Total	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
Definitely stated . . .	81	59.6	55	40.4	136	63.3
Partially stated . . .	37	60.7	24	39.3	61	28.3
Not stated . . .	12	66.7	6	33.3	18	8.4
Total	130	60.5	85	39.5	215	100.0

¹Thor, op. cit., p. 574.

As shown by the table, 136 customers, or 63.3 per cent of the total 215 studied, specified the price garment they desired; of this group, 59.6 per cent (eighty-one) purchased dresses. This percentage was larger than in Thor's study, in which only about one-third of the customers definitely stated the price they desired to pay.² In the present study, 60.7 per cent (thirty-seven) of the sixty-one women partially stating the price they desired to pay purchased dresses. A fact still more astonishing is that 66.7 per cent (twelve) of the eighteen not stating any price at all nevertheless purchased dresses.

Customers who definitely stated the price did not always ask for dresses which were in stock. For this reason, the 111 customers asking for dresses which were in stock are discussed separately from the twenty-five definitely asking for dresses at other price levels. Of those 111 customers, 58 per cent (sixty-four) bought dresses. Almost 50 per cent (fifty-four) of these customers called for \$7.95 dresses, which were the cheapest in stock. This number is in sharp contrast to the 90 per cent who asked for the lowest priced dresses in Thor's study.³ However, as was previously reported in the introduction, the lowest priced dress in Thor's study was \$16.75, as compared to \$7.95 in this study. In the present study, 61 per cent (thirty-three) of the fifty-four

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

women asking for \$7.95 dresses were sales customers. About the same result was noted in the sale of \$10.95 dresses, since 60.7 per cent (seventeen) of the twenty-eight asking for this priced dress made purchases. Ten, or 52.6 per cent, of the nineteen women asking for \$16.95 dresses bought them. Only 40 per cent (four) of the ten women asking for the \$29.95 dresses purchased them; these were the highest priced ones stocked by this retail store. Table 2 summarizes the data on these groups. Apparently, the women asking for and

TABLE 2

THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF 111 CUSTOMERS WHO STATED THE PRICE OF DRESS DESIRED, AT \$7.95, \$10.95, \$16.95, AND \$29.95, AND THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF EACH GROUP TO WHOM SALES WERE OR WERE NOT MADE

Price Requested	Customers					
	Sale		No-Sale		Total	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
\$ 7.95	33	61.1	21	38.9	54	48.6
10.95	17	60.7	11	39.3	28	25.3
16.95	10	52.6	9	47.4	19	17.1
29.95	4	40.0	6	60.0	10	9.0
Total	64	57.7	47	42.3	111	100.0

purchasing \$7.95 and \$10.95 dresses knew what they wanted and were satisfied with the dresses shown them.

Of the 215 customers observed, 23.3 per cent (sixty-one) partially stated the priced dress they desired to buy. A request by a customer for a low-, medium-, or high-priced dress was considered as partial indication of the priced

dress she desired. Data on these customers are presented in the following Table 3.

TABLE 3

THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF 61 CUSTOMERS WHO STATED THEY WANTED A LOW-, MEDIUM-, OR HIGH-PRICED DRESS, AND THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF EACH GROUP TO WHOM SALES WERE OR WERE NOT MADE

Price Requested	Customers					
	Sale		No-Sale		Total	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
Low	14	82.4	3	17.6	17	27.9
Medium	23	52.3	21	47.7	44	72.1
High . . . . .	. .	. .	. .	. .	. .	. .
Total	37	60.7	24	39.3	61	100.0

Of these sixty-one customers who partially stated the desired price, 61 per cent (thirty-seven) bought dresses. Of the seventeen asking for low-priced dresses, 82 per cent (fourteen) purchased one; and 52 per cent (twenty-three) of the forty-four who asked for medium-priced dresses were also sales customers. Therefore, 60 per cent of the women who were indefinite as to the exact price they wished to pay for a dress purchased the one displayed. Of the sales customers, 60.7 per cent (thirty-seven) asked for cheap or medium-priced dresses. While 37.8 per cent (fourteen) asked for cheap dresses, about one-third (five) of them paid \$10.95 for their purchases; the remaining two-thirds (nine) paid \$7.95. Of 62.2 per cent (twenty-three) asking for medium-

priced merchandise, one-fourth (six) purchased \$10.95 dresses; three-eighths (nine) paid as much as \$29.95 for "medium-priced" dresses. Approximately an equal number of women considered \$10.95 dresses as medium-priced or cheap merchandise. But none of the purchasers considered \$16.95 or \$29.95 dresses as cheap. However, about 20 per cent of the entire number partially stating prices considered a \$29.95 dress as being of medium price range. This suggests that these women probably represented the purchasers from the highest income level. The reason more customers did not indicate prices may have been that they saw the dresses hanging on racks with the desired price sign conspicuously displayed. Among the non-purchasers were probably "lookers," women who did not intend to buy; so they were not concerned about the prices. Many others probably knew the price range of the merchandise carried by the store.

Although 8 per cent (eighteen) of the 215 customers observed gave no indication of the price of dress desired, two-thirds (twelve) of them were sales customers. Of the twelve purchasers, three bought \$7.95 dresses, three purchased \$10.95 dresses, two took \$16.95 dresses, and three purchased \$29.95 dresses. The only customer observed who purchased more than one garment bought one \$29.95 dress and five \$16.95 dresses. Table 4, on the following page, shows data on this group and also on customers who requested dresses in a price range not stocked.

TABLE 4

THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF 43 CUSTOMERS WHO DID NOT STATE THE PRICE DESIRED AND THE NUMBER AND PER CENT WHO GAVE THE PRICE OF DRESS FROM \$3.95 TO \$15.00, WITH THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF EACH GROUP TO WHOM SALES WERE AND WERE NOT MADE

Miscellany	Customers					
	Sale		No-Sale		Total	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
Not stated . .	12	66.7	6	33.3	18	41.9
Other amounts (\$3.95 to \$15.00) . .	17	68.0	8	32.0	25	58.1
Total	29	67.4	14	32.6	43	100.0

Even though 12 per cent (twenty-five) of the 215 customers definitely requested a priced dress which was not stocked, 68 per cent (seventeen) bought dresses. Two-thirds (twelve) of the seventeen women paid only \$7.95 for dresses; two paid \$10.95; one paid \$16.95; and two purchased \$29.95 dresses. Of the women buying dresses, fourteen asked for dresses priced at less than \$7.00 and three asked for garments priced between \$7.00 and \$15.00.

It is evident from Tables 2, 3, and 4 that sixty-four of the women stating the price of the dress desired purchased one; thirty-seven of those partially stating the price purchased a garment; and twelve of those not indicating the price of dresses stocked bought one. These figures are 29 per cent, 17 per cent, and 5.6 per cent, respectively, of the total number of customers observed. It may then be

stated that when a customer knows what she wants to pay for a dress, she is more likely to purchase than when she is indefinite about price.

Table 5 presents the data concerning the customers who definitely stated a desired price, who purchased dresses at the price requested, and who purchased dresses at other prices.

TABLE 5

THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF 64 PURCHASERS STATING A DEFINITE PRICE, WHO PURCHASED DRESSES AT THE PRICE STATED AND WHO PURCHASED DRESSES AT OTHER PRICES

Prices Requested	Sales Customers									
	Purchasers Requesting		Purchased \$7.95 Dress		Purchased \$10.95 Dress		Purchased \$16.95 Dress		Purchased \$29.95 Dress	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
\$ 7.95	33	51.6	14	42.4	13	39.4	6	18.2	...	...
10.95	17	26.6	..	....	10	58.8	6	35.3	1	5.9
16.95	10	15.6	..	....	..	....	7	70.0	3	30.0
29.95	4	6.2	..	....	..	....	..	....	4	100.0
Total	64	100.0	14	....	23	....	19	....	8	....

It is evident that the request for a \$7.95 dress did not mean that such a priced garment was purchased. As many customers asked for a \$7.95 dress as for all others together; but only 42.4 per cent (fourteen) of the women asking for this priced dress bought one. This number compares favorably with the sale of \$10.95 dresses. From the customers who considered this latter-priced group, 39.4 per cent

(thirteen) bought such dresses; while the remaining 18.2 per cent (six) paid \$16.95 for their dresses. Of the seventeen sales customers asking for \$10.95 dresses, 60 per cent (ten) purchased these dresses; 35 per cent (six) took \$16.95 dresses; and 5 per cent (one) paid \$29.95 for the dress. Of the group asking for \$16.95 dresses, 70 per cent (seven) bought such a garment; the remaining 30 per cent (three) paid \$29.95 for their dresses. Of the four sales customers asking for \$29.95 dresses, 100 per cent paid that amount for the garments. As shown by Table 5, about one-third of the sales customers bought a dress from the price group next higher from the one requested; at no time did a customer pay less than the designated price. In Thor's study, only one purchaser who called for a dress of a definite price bought one at another price.⁴

About two-thirds of the 215 women observed requested plain colors, and the remaining one-third asked equally for printed fabrics or gave no preference. It is of further interest to observe that three-fourths of the 135 dresses purchased were plain colors and that the remaining one-fourth were printed ones. Of the thirty-seven customers not giving color preference, 60 per cent (twenty-one) of them were sales customers. Table 6, on the following page, presents the data concerning the number and per cent of customers who expressed or did not express a preference as between plain or printed fabrics.

⁴Ibid.

TABLE 6

THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF 215 CUSTOMERS WHO REQUESTED EACH TYPE OF FABRIC AND THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF EACH GROUP TO WHOM DRESSES WERE SOLD

Fabric Requested	Customers				Dresses Sold	
	Sale	No-Sale	Total		No.	Per Cent
			No.	Per Cent		
Plain fabric . .	87	56	143	66.5	102	76.0
Printed fabric . .	22	13	35	16.3	33	24.0
No preference .	21	16	37	17.2	...	....
Total	130	85	215	100.0	135	100.0

Differences of opinion regarding plain-colored and printed dresses were also observed. For instance, one woman stated that she preferred a printed dress because it would not show soil as soon as the plain color. Another said that she would not pay \$29.95 for a printed dress because she tired of one so quickly. However, about 25 per cent of the dresses purchased were printed.

The weight which customers placed on desirability of color for themselves when purchasing dresses is shown by Table 7, on the following page. About 83 per cent (178) of the 215 customers specified the colors of the dresses they contemplated buying. This is similar to data in Thor's study, which states that 88.5 per cent designated the color desired.⁵

⁵Ibid., p. 575.

TABLE 7

THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF 215 CUSTOMERS REQUESTING
DEFINITE COLORS, PURCHASING DEFINITE COLORS,
AND REFUSING TO BUY BECAUSE OF COLOR

Color	Requested		Purchased		Refused Because of Color	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
Navy . . .	29	13.5	24	17.8	2	.9
Tan . . .	19	8.8	24	17.8	2	.9
Blue . . .	27	12.6	17	12.6	2	.9
Green . . .	17	8.0	14	10.4	..	...
Rose . . .	6	3.0	8	5.9	..	...
Aqua . . .	11	5.0	8	5.9	2	.9
Black . . .	15	7.0	7	5.2	1	.5
Pink . . .	8	4.0	7	5.2	..	...
Beige . . .	11	5.0	6	4.4	..	...
White . . .	5	2.3	5	3.7	..	...
Lavender . . .	5	2.3	5	3.7	..	...
Wine . . .	7	3.2	4	3.0	1	.5
Gray . . .	7	3.2	3	2.2	3	1.3
Red . . .	1	.5	2	1.5	..	...
Maize . . .	5	2.3	1	.7	1	.5
Yellow . . .	3	1.3	..	....	..	...
Cream . . .	1	.5	..	....	1	.5
Brown . . .	1	.5	..	....	..	...
Any . . .	37	17.0	..	....	1	.5
Total	215	100.0	135	100.0	16	7.4

As shown by the table, in the present study navy and tan were the colors bought most frequently, as 35 per cent (forty-eight) of the 135 customers making purchases bought one of the two colors. Blue and green were asked for about an equal number of times by 25 per cent of the customers. About 20 per cent of the 215 asked for rose, aqua, black, or pink. The remaining 20 per cent bought different colors,

beige being the leading color sold in this group. However, of the 39.5 per cent (eighty-five) customers not buying dresses, only 7.4 per cent (sixteen) of the total number refused to buy because the color did not satisfy them.

Ordinarily, customers knew the correct size of the dress which they wore. Out of 130 purchasers, 97 per cent (115) called for garments by the sizes designated; and 83 per cent (108) of the 130 bought garments of the size designated. Thor found that about 90 per cent of the Wisconsin women knew the correct size of the dress which they wished to buy.⁶ About 40 per cent (eighty-seven) of the 215 customers asked for size 16, and 41 per cent of the purchasers bought this size. Sizes 14 and 18 were asked for by 25 per cent (thirty-seven) and 11 per cent (twelve) respectively. However, 29 per cent of the sales customers bought size 14, and only 9 per cent (twelve) purchased size 18. Judging from both the sizes asked for and the sizes actually purchased, there was more demand for size 16 dresses than for sizes 14 and 18. Data are presented in Table 8, on the following page, concerning the sizes requested by the customers, the percentage purchasing the size requested, and the percentage of each group to whom sales were made. As will be seen from a study of this table, the fact that a woman did not know the correct size did not necessarily prevent a sale, since slightly more

⁶Ibid., p. 576.

than half of the thirteen who did not state size nevertheless made purchases.

TABLE 8

THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF 215 CUSTOMERS DEFINITELY STATING SIZE DESIRED, NOT STATING SIZE DESIRED, PURCHASING SIZE REQUESTED, AND NOT PURCHASING SIZE REQUESTED; AND THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF EACH GROUP TO WHOM SALES WERE OR WERE NOT MADE

Size Requested		Customers					
		Sales		No-Sale		Total	
Age	Bust	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
12	30	3	2.3	6	7.0	9	4.2
14	32	37	28.5	16	18.8	53	24.7
16	34	54	41.5	33	38.8	87	40.4
17	35	2	1.5	..	....	2	.9
18	36	12	9.3	12	14.1	24	11.2
20	38	10	7.7	10	11.9	20	9.3
22	40	5	3.8	2	2.3	7	3.3
None	..	7	5.4	6	7.1	13	6.0
Total		130	100.0	85	100.0	215	100.0
Those buying size requested		108	83.1	..	....	108	83.1
Those buying another size		15	11.5	..	....	15	11.5
Those not stating size		7	5.4	..	....	7	5.4

The customers had little knowledge regarding trade names and materials. They requested gabardine, chiffon, alpaca, and crepe without designating the fiber preferred. The saleslady judged the fiber desired by the price range requested. The kind of material requested and the kind

purchased were by no means identical. Specific data on this item are presented in the following table.

TABLE 9

THE NUMBER OF CUSTOMERS REQUESTING OR NOT REQUESTING DEFINITE KINDS OF MATERIALS, AND THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF CUSTOMERS TO WHOM SALES OF MATERIALS WERE OR WERE NOT MADE

Kind of Material	Customers					No. Sales Requested
	Sale		No-Sale		Total	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	
Rayon						
Spun rayon	28	20.7	1	1.2	29	8
Sharkskin	6	4.4	4	4.7	10	7
Sheer	13	9.6	3	3.5	16	13
Taffeta	2	1.5	2	2.3	4	6
Gabardine	4	3.0	2	2.3	6	2
Chiffon	2	1.5	2	2.3	4	10
Alpaca	22	16.3	10	11.9	32	15
Jersey	3	2.2	1	1.2	4	2
Moire	1	.7	2	2.3	3	3
Crepe	5	3.7	11	12.8	16	27
Washable	..	....	1	1.2	1	13
Wool						
Twill	9	6.8	5	5.9	14	11
Jersey	6	4.4	3	3.5	9	5
Wool	..	....	3	3.5	3	8
Flannel	..	....	2	2.3	2	2
Wool crepe	5	3.7	1	1.2	6	3
Boucle	2	1.5	2	2.3	4	5
Silk						
Alpaca	5	3.7	..	....	5	..
Silk crepe	4	3.0	10	11.9	14	31
Chiffon	3	2.2	4	4.7	7	..
Lace	1	.7	..	....	1	2
Gabardine	1	.7	1	1.2	2	1
Wash	..	....	..	....	..	7
Linen						
Linen	4	3.0	..	....	4	2
Silk linen	..	....	2	2.3	2	2
Lace	2	1.5	1	1.2	3	2

TABLE 9--Continued

Kind of Material	Customers					No. Sales Requested
	Sale		No-Sale		Total	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	
Cotton						
Eyelet-embroidered pique	2	1.5	..	....	2	1
Eyelet-embroidered batiste	2	1.5	1	1.2	3	2
Seersucker	3	2.2	..	....	3	..
Wool and silk	..	....	1	1.2	1	..
None	..	....	10	11.9	10	25
Total	135	100.0	85	100.0	220	215

An examination of the preceding table shows that about 27 per cent (fifty-eight) of the women asked for silk or crepe. Seven per cent each requested alpaca, wool twill, sheer, or washable dresses. Other materials were asked for less frequently. About 12 per cent (twenty-five) of the customers did not even ask for the material by its textile fiber. There was no outstanding difference between the requests made for dress materials by purchasers and by non-purchasers. Of the 135 purchasers, 64 per cent (eighty-six) bought rayon and spun rayon dresses. Wool was second in popularity (16 per cent) and silk was third (10 per cent). Twice as many twill dresses were sold as any other wool fiber, while silk alpaca was purchased more than any other silk fiber. In 1920, Phelps reported serge to be the most popular of the

woolen fabrics and taffeta the most popular of the silk fabrics.⁷ Cotton and linen, in the present study, were sold less frequently than any other fibers, averaging about 5 per cent each.

Table 10 shows the observations made as to the types of dresses requested by the customers, together with the number in each group that made purchases.

TABLE 10

THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF 215 CUSTOMERS WHO DEFINITELY STATED OR DID NOT STATE THE TYPE OF DRESS DESIRED, AND THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF EACH GROUP TO WHOM SALES WERE OR WERE NOT MADE

Type of Dress	Customers					
	Sale		No-Sale		Total	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
Tailored	32	24.6	24	28.2	56	26.0
Plain	18	13.9	8	9.4	26	12.1
Dressy	13	10.0	10	11.9	23	10.7
Tailored suit	12	9.2	7	8.2	19	8.9
Evening	11	8.5	6	7.0	17	7.9
"Gone-with-the-wind"	6	4.6	1	1.2	7	3.3
Princess	5	3.9	..	....	5	2.3
Sport	4	3.1	4	4.7	8	3.7
Redingote	3	2.3	6	7.0	9	4.2
School	3	2.3	1	1.2	4	1.9
Continuous pleated skirt	2	1.5	..	....	2	.9
Shirtwaist	2	1.5	1	1.2	3	1.4
Two piece	2	1.5	4	4.7	6	2.8
Maternity	1	.8	4	4.7	5	2.3
None	16	12.3	9	10.6	25	11.6
Total	130	100.0	85	100.0	215	100.0

⁷Phelps, Journal of Home Economics, XII (1920), 493.

It is evident from the preceding table that the women requesting plain dresses purchased tailored ones; therefore the two groups will be combined and considered only as tailored dresses in the discussion. About 40 per cent (eighty-two) of the 215 customers asked for tailored dresses, and almost 40 per cent (fifty) of the 130 sales customers bought this style of dress. From 11 per cent (twenty-three) of the total number of customers asking for "dressy" dresses, 10 per cent (thirteen) of the sales customers bought them. Tailored suits and formal dresses ranked next in popularity, judging by the number of sales. About one-ninth (twenty-five) of the 215 customers did not state any preference for any particular type of dress; yet it is evident that three-fifths (sixteen) of them bought dresses.

About 80 per cent (173) of the 215 customers tried on dresses in order to find those that were becoming to them. It follows that 20 per cent of the women were not interested enough to try on dresses. More than 70 per cent of the women tried on from one to three dresses; the majority tried on two. About 5 per cent (eleven) tried on four dresses, and one woman tried on as many as seven. The one customer who purchased more than one garment picked out eight dresses, tried on four, and bought six. Table 11, on the following page, presents the specific data as to the number of women who tried on various numbers of dresses and the number and per cent from each group to whom sales were made.

TABLE 11

THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF 215 CUSTOMERS NOT TRYING ON OR TRYING ON FROM 1 TO 7 DRESSES AND THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF EACH GROUP TO WHOM SALES WERE OR WERE NOT MADE

Dresses Tried On	Customers					
	Sale		No-Sale		Total	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
None	5	12.0	37	88.0	42	19.6
One	32	61.5	20	38.5	52	24.2
Two	50	79.4	13	20.6	63	29.3
Three	29	76.3	9	23.7	38	17.7
Four	8	72.7	3	27.3	11	5.1
Five	1	33.0	2	67.0	3	1.3
Six	4	80.0	1	20.0	5	2.3
Seven	1	100.0	..	....	1	.5
Total	130	60.5	85	39.5	215	100.0

Of those who did not try on dresses, 88 per cent (thirty-seven) did not buy; therefore, in general, those who did not try on dresses did not make purchases. The 130 sales customers tried on 287 dresses and purchased 135. This was an average of 2.2 garments tried per person and an average of 2.1 dresses tried on for each one purchased. The eighty-five non-purchasers trying on dresses tried on a total of 101 garments, or an average of 1.2 dresses per person. About 40 per cent of the non-purchasers tried on no dresses, in contrast with 66.6 per cent of the non-purchasers in Thor's study who did not try on dresses.⁸

The time it took a customer to buy or refuse to buy a

⁸Thor, op. cit., p. 574.

garment was estimated on the basis of the time spent with the clerk until the time the customer left. Table 12 presents specific data on this point.

TABLE 12

THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF 215 CUSTOMERS SPENDING FROM 5 MINUTES TO 1 HOUR IN LOOKING AT DRESSES, AND THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF EACH GROUP TRYING ON OR NOT TRYING ON DRESSES, WITH THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF EACH GROUP TO WHOM SALES WERE OR WERE NOT MADE

Approximate Time in Minutes	Customers						Trying on Dresses		Not Trying on Dresses	
	Sales		No-Sale		Total		No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent				
5	...	....	11	100.0	11	5.1	....	....	11	100.0
10	9	33.3	18	66.7	27	12.6	12	44.4	15	55.6
15	47	67.1	23	32.9	70	32.5	56	80.0	14	20.0
20	33	70.2	14	29.8	47	21.9	46	97.9	1	2.1
25	12	85.7	2	14.3	14	6.5	14	100.0	..	....
30	14	70.0	6	30.0	20	9.3	20	100.0	..	....
40	4	44.4	5	55.6	9	4.2	9	100.0	..	....
45	4	50.0	4	50.0	8	3.7	7	87.5	1	12.5
60	7	77.8	2	22.2	9	4.2	9	100.0	..	....
Total	130	100.0	85	100.0	215	100.0	173	80.5	42	19.5

As indicated by the above table, 5 per cent (eleven) of the 215 customers spent five minutes looking at dresses, but none of them tried on or bought a dress. Most of the women, 72 per cent, decided in twenty minutes or less whether or not they wanted a dress. While 80 per cent of the non-purchasers had made a decision in that length of time, only 68.5 per cent (eighty) made a purchase. Therefore, it seems

that it takes longer for a person buying a dress to make a decision than it takes a non-buyer. Of the women not trying on dresses, 97 per cent rejected the garments in twenty minutes or less. These women requested definite prices, colors, and style of dresses; and when there were none to show them, they did not linger to look at others. There were also women in this group who quickly decided that none of the ready-to-wear dresses suited them. These customers, more than likely, had no intentions of buying when they entered the store but were "just looking." One customer took more time and stayed forty-five minutes without trying on a dress. Since she spent her time criticizing the dresses she saw, she too apparently came in with no idea of purchasing a garment.

The effect of a companion or companions upon a customer looking for a dress is shown in Table 13, on the following page. About 50 per cent (107) of the customers came alone; eighty-four of this number, or 39.1 per cent of the total 215, purchased dresses. The next largest buying group was the customer accompanied by one woman friend. There were eighty-one of them, and 14 per cent (thirty-one) of the group bought dresses. About one-half of the remaining twenty-seven, who were accompanied by a man, a daughter, a mother, or two friends, purchased dresses. About 50 per cent (108) of the customers were accompanied by from one to three persons. This figure is in accordance with Thor's⁹

⁹ Ibid.

findings except that a larger proportion of those who purchased, in this study, had no shopping companions. The above data are summarized in the following table.

TABLE 13

THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF CUSTOMERS ALONE AND ACCOMPANIED BY COMPANIONS, WITH THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF EACH GROUP TO WHOM SALES WERE OR WERE NOT MADE

Number Accompanying Customers	Customers					
	Sale		No-Sale		Total	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
Alone	84	39.1	23	10.7	107	49.8
One female . .	31	14.4	50	23.3	81	37.7
Two females . .	2	.9	..	....	2	.9
Mother	6	2.8	4	1.9	10	4.7
Daughter . . .	2	.9	2	.9	4	1.9
Male	5	2.3	6	2.8	11	5.0
Total	130	60.4	85	39.6	215	100.0

In this study, a total of 135 dresses was purchased by 130 sales customers, these purchases being about equally divided among \$7.95, \$10.95, \$16.95, and \$29.95 dresses; while Thor found that with successively higher-priced dresses, fewer were bought. The low price in Thor's study is third in price range in this study.¹⁰ Table 14, on the following page, presents the data concerning the number of plain or printed dresses purchased in each price group, together with the method of payment, either by cash or by a down payment. According to the number of dresses purchased, as shown in

¹⁰Ibid.

Table 14, the cheapest dresses did not seem to be any more popular than any of the higher priced dresses.

TABLE 14

THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF PLAIN AND PRINTED DRESSES
BOUGHT IN EACH PRICE GROUP BY CASH OR DOWN
PAYMENT METHOD

Price Group	Purchases							
	Printed		Plain		Total		Payment	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	Cash	Down Payment
\$ 7.95	14	10.4	24	17.8	38	28.2	28	10
10.95	12	8.9	26	19.3	38	28.2	21	17
16.95	5	3.7	32	23.7	37	27.4	20	17
29.95	2	1.5	20	14.7	22	16.2	18	4
Total	33	24.5	102	75.5	135	100.0	87	48

About 24 per cent (thirty-three) of the consumers purchased printed dresses, and 10.4 per cent (fourteen) of this number were \$7.95 dresses. The second largest group of printed dresses sold, 8.9 per cent (twelve), were priced at \$10.95; while 3.7 per cent (five) and 1.5 per cent (two), respectively, were sold at \$16.95 and \$29.95.

No credit was extended to people in this oil town, because usually they stayed only a short period of time. Cash was by far the most common method of handling the purchase of a dress, as can be seen from Table 14. The 130 sales customers purchased 135 dresses and paid cash for about two-thirds of them; the remainder paid from \$2.00 to \$15.00 down on a dress and paid the remainder before taking the dress home.

Of 215 women looking at dresses, 68.3 per cent (147) made some inquiry or comment pertaining to workmanship, style, guarantees, or informative labeling. The sales customers comprised 55.7 per cent of those showing interest in such things, in contrast with 12.6 per cent no-sale customers who were interested. The women showed most interest in workmanship and style; only 6 per cent of 215 customers paid any attention to informative labeling. Twenty-nine of the forty asking for definite guarantees were interested in the fastness of color, eight wanted to know if the dress would look nice after it was cleaned, and three were interested in knowing if the quality of the material was guaranteed. These inquiries are summarized in Table 15.

TABLE 15

THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF 147 CUSTOMERS ASKING FOR SPECIFIC INFORMATION CONCERNING DRESSES AND THE NUMBER AND PER CENT TO WHOM SALES WERE OR WERE NOT MADE

Information Requested	Customers					
	Sale		No-Sale		Total	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
Ask for guarantee						
1. Color	26	12.1	3	1.4	29	13.5
2. Cleaning	6	2.8	2	.9	8	3.7
3. Quality	1	.5	2	.9	3	1.4
Workmanship	44	20.4	7	3.3	51	23.7
Informative labeling	12	5.5	1	.5	13	6.0
Individual style	31	14.4	12	5.6	43	20.0
Total	120	55.7	27	12.6	147	68.3

The total number who checked on the excellence of material and workmanship (ninety-one, or 42.3 per cent) is somewhat larger than the 32 per cent (sixty-four) in Thor's study.¹¹ It is reasonable to think, then, that consumer education in the past seven years, the time elapsed between studies, has been effective to some degree.

Table 16 shows the reasons given by customers for not buying a dress, together with the number and per cent expressing each reason.

TABLE 16

THE REASONS EXPRESSED BY 85 CUSTOMERS FOR NOT PURCHASING DRESSES AND THE NUMBER AND PER CENT OF CUSTOMERS EXPRESSING EACH REASON

Reason for Not Buying	Non-Purchasers	
	No.	Per Cent
Two or more reasons	20	23.5
Kind of material	5	5.9
Quality	6	7.1
Upkeep	1	1.2
Fit	9	10.6
Price	6	7.1
Color	16	18.8
Style	11	12.9
"Looking"	11	12.9
Total	85	100.0

The table shows that approximately 25 per cent of the customers had more than one reason for not buying a dress. Even though only 7.4 per cent of the total 215 customers refused to buy because of color, as previously mentioned,

¹¹Ibid.

this was the chief single reason given by the non-purchasers. Of this group, 18.8 per cent refused to buy because they failed to find the color desired; style was the next major reason for the loss of sale, as it was mentioned by 12.9 per cent of the non-buyers. Only one customer mentioned upkeep as the reason for not buying a dress. In her criticism of a \$29.95 dress she said, "I wish this white collar were detachable; it will need cleaning more often than the dress." It was found that 10 per cent of the non-purchasers objected to necessary alterations because they were afraid the dress would not fit and its appearance would be altered.

It is evident from these data that consumer education has not reached this oil town to a very large extent. Some of the implications are that there is a greater need for emphasis on textile fibers and fabrics. It is of primary importance that a consumer should know something of these if she is to buy intelligently and economically. It is evident that this would also require a standardization of fabrics and of their commercial names. The problem of alteration would be minimized if manufacturers would make a study of the physical measurements of the buying public. This has been made of children's garments, but no attempt has been made for adults. Not only the consumers but also the saleswomen need to know the basic principles in clothing and design, in order to help in the selection of suitable garments. If the consuming public would be frank in stating reasons for not buying

garments, it would be easier for the manufacturer and the retailer to benefit from such information, thereby helping the buying public.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY

As was indicated in the beginning of the study, the observations of the customers were made to find out how consumers with different incomes in an oil town select ready-to-wear dresses. As was to be expected when analyzing the records of 215 customers, there were some pronounced tendencies in their buying habits. Price, color, workmanship, and personal suitability were the major factors in the selection of dresses by the consumers observed. Little attention was given to informative labeling. The price was usually of major importance and was often apparently uppermost in the customer's mind upon entering the store. Women who definitely stated the price did not always ask for dresses which were in stock. According to the number of dresses purchased, the cheapest dresses did not seem to be any more popular than the other dresses. It may be concluded that when a customer knows what she wants to pay for a dress, she is more likely to purchase than when she is indefinite about the price. Also, a customer is willing to pay more for a garment than originally intended if she finds exactly what she wants in a higher priced dress.

The preference of plain colors to printed fabrics is

shown by the fact that three-fourths of the dresses purchased were plain colors. Almost half of the printed dresses purchased were the cheapest in stock.

Judging from the number sold, tailored garments were much preferred to the other types. Dressy and formal clothes ranked next in popularity, in the order named.

It might be of interest to managers of stores to know that about half of the non-purchasers did not try on a dress. It is, then, reasonable to think that if a saleslady can induce the customer to try on a dress, she will be more likely to make a sale.

While half of the customers were accompanied by someone, the largest purchasing group were those who came alone. It may be assumed that those coming alone are less likely to be "looking" to pass away the time and are more serious about buying. It must be admitted that it is possible that many of the customers observed came alone because they had not been in Denver City long enough to acquire shopping companions.

A brief summary of the entire study follows:

1. Of the 215 customers, 60 per cent were sales customers and 60 per cent stated the price they wished to pay.
2. The 135 dresses purchased were about equally distributed among \$7.95, \$10.95, \$16.95, and \$29.95 values.
3. The color desired was specified by 83 per cent of

the customers. Navy and tan were the two leading colors sold. Only 18.8 per cent of the non-purchasers refused to buy because of color.

4. While 97 per cent of the women designated the size they needed, only 83 per cent purchased the size requested. Size 16 was bought by more women (40 per cent) than any other size.

5. Customers had little knowledge regarding trade names and materials. Of the dresses sold, 64 per cent were rayon.

6. About 90 per cent of the women designated in some manner the type of dress they desired. Almost 50 per cent of the purchasers selected tailored garments.

7. Slightly less than half of the customers checked on the quality of workmanship or material in the dress. Only 15 per cent of the women asked for a guarantee of any type.

8. Ten per cent of the women objected to the alteration of the garments which they contemplated buying and did not make a purchase because of this fact.

APPENDIX

COPY OF THE FORM CARD USED IN SECURING DATA

1. Date _____ Sale _____ Length of sale _____
2. Alone _____ Male _____ Female _____
3. No. dresses tried on _____
4. Method of payment: Cash _____ Paid down _____
5. Dress called for: Type _____ Kind material _____
Price _____ Color _____ Size _____
Plain _____ Figured _____
6. Dress purchased: Type _____ Kind material _____
Price _____ Color _____ Size _____
Plain _____ Figured _____
7. Examined seams _____ Stitching _____ Placket _____
Hem _____ Test material _____ Analyze line _____
Look for informative labeling other than price and
size _____
8. Ask for definite guarantee: Color fast _____
Quality material _____ Cleaning _____
9. Reason not buy: Material _____ Upkeep _____ Quality _____
Fit _____ Price _____ Color _____ Style _____ Object to
alteration _____ Looking _____
10. Consumer's comments (on back of card)

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