

THE CHOICE OF MEDIUM-PRICED DAY-TIME DRESSES
FOR WOMEN FIFTY YEARS AND OLDER

by

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INTRODUCTION

Difficulties confront the older woman in the choice of medium-priced day-time dresses. Designers and manufacturers have produced almost exclusively for the youthful, tall and slender figure whereas the average American woman over 50 years old does not fit into this category. Due to natural aging processes she has often experienced certain figure changes which have given rise to dissatisfaction with available ready-to-wear garments. Problems in alteration have been posed which are both time-consuming and expensive. Then, too, design and color as well as the fabric have often fallen short of meeting the needs of this older group of women.

There are a number of forces which are giving impetus toward the solution of a better choice of medium-priced day-time dresses for the older woman. For some time retailers have been experiencing real difficulties with alterations and they are using their influence with the manufacturers to improve the sizing of women's clothing. Mail order houses have undertaken the promotion of improved sizing of ready-to-wear garments. Along with the retailers and mail order houses, pattern companies have accepted the challenge that dissatisfied purchasers have given them. Women are refusing to buy garments that do not fit. More recently the designers are recognizing the market for dresses designed specifically to meet the needs of women whose figures reflect the changes due to aging.

This study was undertaken (a) to learn the problems encountered by women 50 years and over when they shop for ready-to-wear day-time dresses, (b) to learn the average price paid for these dresses, (c) to ascertain the alterations usually necessary in ready-to-wear dresses for women of this age

group, (d) to present from these findings suggestions that dress designers and manufacturers may use to develop more functional, better fitting and more becoming dresses in the average price range.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Figure Changes which most Women Experience due to Aging

Women often experience changes in face and figure with added years. Hamblen (8) notes that there is a tendency for weight to be gained as the climateric advances. "Not infrequently this produces the so-called 'middle-age spread' due to accumulation of fat in the 'girdle area'." In a study made by Blair (3), she reports the following changes in the appearance of older women 45 to 65 years of age which have contributed to fitting problems: added weight, thickened waist, sagging bust, heavier upper arm, rounded shoulders, dowagers hump (a pad of fat at the base of the neck in the back), unattractive elbows, wrinkles, graying hair and a crapy neck, among others. The most consistent change seemed to be that of "thickened waist". Hempstead (10) stated that "defects of figure, accumulations of flesh, unequal distribution of flesh are common at middle age", but that there are women of this age who frequently fail to see the changes that the years have made not only in her figure, but in her face. She suggests that they should consider methods of reducing the apparent size of these disturbing factors, for example, large bust or rounded shoulders. She believes that simplicity and quality should be the keynote of the middle aged woman's costume, and that it is important to accent her remaining points of beauty.

According to Burgoon (5), all of the dermal appendages show decreased activity in old age -- the striking loss of elasticity in the aged skin is

the culmination of a combination of events. The appearance, wrinkles, liver spots, freckles (large), prominent blood vessels are some of the results. Catherine Macfarland, M. D. (Gross, 7) in a talk included in the Home Economics Symposium at Michigan State University's Centennial Year (1955) stated that everything that the woman of middle age eats goes to build up flesh and blood since she no longer needs this food for other functions, therefore, she tends to put on weight, and must become calorie-conscious.

The Changing Role in American Society of
Women Fifty Years of Age and Older

In the past half century women of 50 years and older have been taking an increasingly active part in social and civic affairs, and more are becoming a part of the labor force. This latter has been an outgrowth of a need for women to take the place of men during wartime. They liked the independence and the stimulation of outside activity. Experience has shown that these older women have competence to bring to the job. There are figures to substantiate the increasing number of women engaged in work outside of the home, with predictions for an even greater number. The proportion of women in the labor force, 45 to 54 years of age, increased 19 percent from 1946 to 1956 according to Blaisdel (4). This high percentage of participation had not been expected until 1965 or 1970.

Among women of the age group 55 to 64, the increase in the number employed was approximately one million between 1940 and 1950, whereas for women of 65 and over the increase was about two million. The projected estimate is for increasing numbers in this group (15). Dr. Roland R. Renne, a member of the National Manpower Council (1951) reported that for the past three years, the Council has had under consideration a thorough study of

woman-power. Since the employment of women has contributed to the increase of the national output of goods and services, it has made possible a higher level of living for Americans. "The employment of women in the American economy has increased rapidly since 1940." Renne (14) further states that due to a rapid increase in the birth rate in the United States, significant changes in age distribution of the population during the next two decades will be brought about. There will be a much larger proportion of youth and aged, and a lower proportion of the total population in the working age group. This changing age distribution of the population in America is of special significance to women.

At the Conference on Aging which was held in Washington, D. C., in 1950, and sponsored by Federal Security Agency, 800 delegates from every part of the country emphasized their concern not merely with the aged but the whole process of aging. They believe that the role of the aging citizen presents one of the greatest challenges of our time, to provide the economic goods necessary for this increasingly active group (Bring, 6). In 1957, this committee reported further that it is now known that if proper measures are taken that the later years can literally be a period of continuing growth and development. It has been demonstrated that mental capacities, provided they are constantly exercised, remain virtually intact (17).

"Essentially, women are becoming equal partners with men in the enterprise of modern living," was one of the observations of Havighurst (Gross, 7). He feels that they are striking a balance between old roles played during the past, and the new ones. In respect to the after 45 group, it is a developmental phase rather than the end of her interest in life; and she may expand her activities to include her interests into new and larger fields. There is evidence that women are healthier than men, and "there is a certain amount

of evidence that women retain their intellectual vigor and their creativity longer than men do."

The Needs of Older Women for Day-time Dresses

There are, then, a number of reasons why ready-to-wear dresses for the mature woman have come to be important. Little clothing is made in the home, general prosperity has relieved many people of economic worries, older women have fewer family responsibilities and because of improved health standards, are alert and ready for interesting activities. Sometimes this culminates in a job, a civic or social activity, or several activities. Hartmann (9) suggests that clothing has a double aspect, that it is a personal problem and a social issue. "Educationally, clothing is a persistent 'interest center' in everyone's life." This "double aspect" factor means that human beings wear apparel which is both a stimulus and a response. The use of an article of clothing is "simultaneously a source of stimulation to the wearer and the beholders, as well as a reaction on their parts to certain physiological needs, social expectancies, and esthetic tensions focused in the organism." He asks, "Shall we stress the demands of the head or the heart in solving clothing problems?" Most men and women reply, "Both." Clothes are valuable only to the degree that they enhance value-experiences of persons who wear them. From the standpoint of mental hygiene, a person who feels well dressed expresses more of the quiet confidence of the well-adjusted individual. The ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity are expressed in different ways. This twofold principle shows itself in the very strong desire which people have to conform to the prevailing style of dress. There is a real demand for distinctiveness as the personality becomes more complex. As people grow older they become more complex personalities,

and they have developed certain attitudes toward dress in which the "latest thing" is not of interest to them. They want to look up-to-date and attractive in clothing that fits well and brings out their best qualities.

Blair (3), in the study of changes in appearance of women 45 to 65 years of age, commented that there are certain problems related to the dress of older women which seem to be causing them "a great deal of annoyance and distress"the proportions on which measurements in ready-to-wear garments and commercial patterns are made are based on the body contours and proportions of young women ... Patterns can be bought in large sizes which allow for increased bust, waist, and hip measure, and ready-to-wear garments in large sizes allow for these same increases. But provision is not usually made for the longer back line and back armscye needed for rounded shoulders and dowager's humps, and for lower placement of full areas in the front for lower bust line.

It was not until well into the twentieth century that work was done toward making clothes that would be acceptable to the growing numbers of women 50 years of age and over. The first attention given to women's sizing began after the Civil War, but only tentative measurements were arrived at, according to Nystrom (13). In the '20's it was found by manufacturers and distributors that it was possible to produce garments of standard sizes that would fit about 50 percent of the population. At least half of the people were sufficiently alike in physical proportions to be fitted with clothing made according to regular sizes. Those that varied from the standard not only varied in size but also in proportions. This meant that only one-half of the adult population could be properly fitted with ready-to-wear apparel. Manufacturers of women's clothing then worked out measurements and sizes to meet the requirements of some of the women who could not wear regular

sizes. These fell into eight groups: misses', which was 50 percent of the total, short or little women, regular stout, short stout, long stout, stylish stout, stubby stout, and junior. This was a help, but in spite of this attempt for many years there was still no carefully defined set of standard sizes for outer apparel either for men or women. There was a great deal of variation in actual measurements for any given size, and these variations seemed to occur in all kinds of clothing. According to Nystrom (13), "As long as there are no standards set up by some central authority, there are almost certain to be individual manufacturers, who in order to cut prices to secure orders, will skimp measurements and save production cost." Women's garments, especially lower priced dresses, are in a high percentage of cases, made with scant measurements. Sleeves are generally small, insufficient grading in length, often two or three sizes are cut together and dishonestly designated by different sizes. Larger sizes are often more badly sized than regulars. A proper system of standardized sizes would eliminate a large part of this. Most important, is the loss of goodwill of customers who rarely ever forget their dissatisfaction in connection with the purchase of badly fitting garments. Most of the difficulties referred to above are unavoidable as long as there continues to be no general system of standard sizes. With the best of intentions on the part of everyone concerned, it is too much to hope that all of the manufacturers of apparel should be prevailed upon to make garments according to certain measurements, unless some strong force is applied.

In 1945, plans were made for a special research toward sizing women's patterns and apparel. The study was made for the Commodity Standards Division of the Office of Industry and Commerce, U. S. Department of Commerce by the National Bureau of Standards in Cooperation with the Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. This work was

undertaken at the request of the Mail Order Association of America to provide scientific body measurement data to industry for the sizing of women's apparel. The Quartermaster Corps, Research and Development Laboratories, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the Corset and Brassiere Association of America contributed valuable assistance in the technical phases of the project (16). The Commercial Standard CS 215-58 recently adopted provides standard classifications, size designations, and body measurements for consistent sizing of women's ready-to-wear garments. The measurements in the draft are body, not garment measurements. A further purpose was to provide the consumer with a means of identifying her body type and size and enable her to be properly fitted by the same size regardless of price, type of apparel, or manufacturer of the garment. Lonie (12) states that the manufacturers have not only agreed to use CS 215-58 as their standard, but they have made a supplementary agreement to identify the dress sizes they plan to fit. They will also be published in a standard. The most important users are the large mail order companies. They published this size scales from the standard in their catalogs as soon as they were completed in 1953.

The aging woman, the one who may need some assistance in putting on and removing dresses, has been given the least consideration by dress designers. The mature woman also wants dresses that are convenient to put on and take off. The button-down-the-front shirtwaist dress, so popular in America, has been the answer for many women who have wanted convenience. Depending upon the kind of material of which it is made, it can travel through the day, and into the evening. Anspach (1) found that the choice stability in the selection of dresses increased with age. This was particularly noticeable in items of the silhouette. Choice became more stable in large sizes after the age of 45. The increase in choice stability for this group came in those

items which are often emphasized by stylists as affecting "apparent" size.

Since older women are planning for a life of continuing activity, clothing comes to be of real importance to them. They have more freedom than men, for the men are usually still busy with a job, and for "those women who can use freedom, the middle years are potentially the best years of their lives." (Gross, 7). The world is full of examples of people who have become successful not in spite of, but because of their age. Older people are working in all fields, intellectual, cultural, political, and scientific. They are young-old for they see the world through the eyes of experience through which progress may be gained (Beatty, 2). The older person should seek contact with those of their own age, and also with younger people. The new attitude in this country is not one of veneration or worship of old age (Lonie, 12). But it is respect and admiration for ability, clear thinking and alertness to the challenges of today, together with understanding and thoughtfulness for all mankind. The writer considers suitable, attractive, well fitting, day-time dresses which are within the average budget a definite contribution to the well being of its older women, and to the happiness and satisfaction of the family as a whole.

PROCEDURE

After making a study of the problem to be investigated, a tentative check sheet was made out which included questions on physical characteristics, colors, and certain style features preferred, together with alterations usually needed, and price usually paid. A small number of women were asked to check the trial sheets, and make criticisms and suggestions. On the basis of information gained several changes were made. The revised schedule was sent to a selected group of 150 who are 50 years of age and over.

Thirty-one respondents were members of Home Demonstration Units who were in attendance at the Kansas Home Demonstration Advisory Council Workshop. The remainder were women from Wichita, Hutchinson and Manhattan, Kansas, for the most part. The interest was evident for the returns were prompt and most gratifying. The first 100 received were used in the tabulations. A request, "If you have any special problems or suggestions, please write them on the back of the paper," brought many interesting and revealing facts together with attitudes toward the available selection of dresses, and problems they had experienced when shopping. The replies were tabulated and comparisons drawn.

Physical Characteristics

The physical characteristics of 100 women are presented in Table 1. Sixty-eight percent were five feet three inches to five feet six inches tall; 26 percent were shorter and six percent, taller.

Over one-third (36 percent) of this group weighed between 125 and 139 pounds. The second largest group (22 percent) weighed from 140 to 149 pounds. The remainder was about equally divided between 124 pounds (18 percent) and 150 to 169 pounds (17 percent). The smallest group (seven percent) weighed 170 pounds or over.

The respondents 55 to 64 years were in the majority, representing 47 percent of the total. Those 54 years or less, and 65 years and older, were about equally divided, being 26 percent and 27 percent, respectively.

Those women having gray hair were just a little over one-half of the group (52 percent). Twenty-seven percent checked brown hair, while those women having black, white, and other colors were about equally divided, and were in order - 8 percent, 5 percent and 8 percent.

Table 1. Physical characteristics of the 100 women 50 years and over.

| Characteristic | : | Percent |
|----------------------|---|---------|
| <u>Height</u> | | |
| 5'2" or less | | 26 |
| 5'3" to 5'6" | | 68 |
| 5'7" or over | | 6 |
| Total | | 100 |
| <u>Weight</u> | | |
| 124 lbs. or less | | 18 |
| 125 lbs. to 139 lbs. | | 36 |
| 140 lbs. to 149 lbs. | | 22 |
| 150 lbs. to 169 lbs. | | 17 |
| 170 lbs. or over | | 7 |
| Total | | 100 |
| <u>Age</u> | | |
| 54 yrs. or less | | 26 |
| 55 yrs. to 64 yrs. | | 47 |
| 65 yrs. or older | | 27 |
| Total | | 100 |
| <u>Hair color</u> | | |
| Black | | 8 |
| Brown | | 27 |
| Gray | | 52 |
| White | | 5 |
| Other | | 8 |
| Total | | 100 |

Color Choices

The response to the question concerning the choice of color for day-time dresses indicated quite definitely that women 50 years of age and older, do not, in general, prefer one color exclusively (Table 2). Forty-nine percent made multiple choices, from two to four in number, and 51 percent single choices. The choice was largest for navy, being twice that of any other color. Medium blue was next with 29 choices. It would seem that blue is an overwhelming choice, and since navy is a basic color, with a wide range of accessories suitable to be worn with navy, this is understandable. Usually navy is flattering to skin with a hint of yellow in it, and since the older woman's skin is often not as clear as formerly, navy would be becoming if selected in the right value and intensity.

Black and brown scored 19 and 20, respectively, with green, gray and other colors in descending order, 15, 11 and 10 choices. Red received only eight tallies. One respondent did not answer. Black and brown, both basic colors, are not usually becoming to women with graying hair, and skin in which the pigment is not well distributed.

The question was asked, "Which color do you prefer?", in an attempt to find out whether the available colors in ready-to-wear day-time dresses were numerous enough to satisfy the purchasers. An increase in choices was made for medium blue and gray, preference being given to gray. Forty-four preferred gray while 33 indicated medium blue. Navy was still a strong choice, with 41, and brown and black dropped to 17 and 13, respectively.

Table 2. Frequency of purchase of specified colors compared to preference of color reported by 100 women.

| Color | Purchases | Preferred |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| Black | 19 | 13 |
| Medium blue | 29 | 33 |
| Gray | 11 | 44 |
| Brown | 20 | 17 |
| Navy | 60 | 41 |
| Red | 8 | 6 |
| Green | 15 | 9 |
| Other | 10 | 3 |
| No answer | 1 | 6 |

The responses to the query as to whether they would like a wider variety of colors received interesting answers; 42 percent indicated "Yes" and the same number indicated "No". Sixteen did not answer (Table 3).

Table 3. Responses of 100 women to the question, "Would you like a wider variety of colors to choose from."

| Responses | Percentage |
|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 42 |
| No | 42 |
| No answer | 16 |
| Total | 100 |

Further questioned as to whether they preferred plain colored fabric or figured fabric, 89 respondents indicated plain, and 14 figured. This should be a definite indication to designers, manufacturers and retailers, as to preference between plain and printed fabrics (Table 4).

Table 4. Frequency of choice between plain colored fabric and figured fabric.

| Fabric | : | Number checked |
|--------------------|---|----------------|
| Plain color fabric | | 89 |
| Figured fabric | | 14 |
| No answer | | 1 |
| Total | | 104 |

Approximate Amount Paid for Day-time Dresses

The group was given a price range from \$7.95 to \$29.95 and over, to indicate the approximate amount that they paid for their day-time dresses. The largest number, 17, indicated that they paid over \$29.95, while the next largest, 14, checked \$14.95. One respondent stated that she did most of her own sewing, but she indicated over \$29.95, as the average price she paid for a ready-made dress. Many who sew for themselves may follow this practice to insure the generous cut and wider seams found in more expensive dresses. The remainder of the choices indicated a range of prices paid. Twenty-nine respondents made multiple choices, which could indicate that they selected for the occasion, for the fit, for the color, or for the style, and others may have bought on sale, as one respondent commented (Table 5).

Table 5. Approximate amounts usually paid for day-time dresses by women 50 years and over.

| Prices Indicated | : | Choices indicated (71) |
|------------------|---|------------------------|
| | : | |
| | : | |
| \$ 7.95 | | 5 |
| 10.95 | | 3 |
| 12.95 | | 8 |
| 14.95 | | 14 |
| 19.95 | | 9 |
| 22.95 | | 6 |
| 24.95 | | 5 |
| 29.95 | | 3 |
| Over \$29.95 | | 17 |
| No preferences | | 1 |

Alterations Needed

The results shown in Table 6, indicate that alterations on the dresses purchased were quite varied, with the most frequent being to shorten the skirt, 51, and to shorten the blouse, 40. Seventeen said that they did not need alterations if they could buy a certain size, while eight did not show alterations nor did they give any reason for not responding. Seven indicated that if they could buy half sizes they did not need alterations. Several mentioned that they needed little or no alterations if they could find certain "brands". Eighteen needed to let cut the waist line, 15 to take up the shoulder seam width, and 11 needed to take up the width across the shoulders. Eight respondents raised the skirt for more width through the hips, while one both let out the side seams of the skirt and raised the skirt for width.

"No alterations" were reported in the following categories with the appropriate percentages: blouse side seams, 90 percent; sleeve width, (upper arm), 89 percent; width across shoulders, 88 percent; shoulder seam, 83 percent; waist measure, 73 percent; skirt side seams, 66 percent; blouse length, 54 percent; and skirt length, 43 percent. It would indicate that manufacturers are giving more adequate seam allowances, and more length for the skirts, or it could mean that women are not buying unless the dress fits. This latter statement was given by several respondents. As women grow older they tend to thicken through the waist and hips, and this in turn tends to make a shorter waist. Generous seams apparently are needed for "let-out" seams, as shown by the 14 who widened or let out skirt side seams, and the 18 who did the same to enlarge the waist. Narrow shoulders in relation to bust measurement were indicated in 15 instances where shoulder width was narrowed.

The alterations for blouse side seams were necessary in five instances for both let-out and take-up seams. Only seven out of 100 needed to let out the seams of the sleeves to fit the upper arm. Again, this would indicate average weight for women, or manufacturers are giving more width in the sleeves for the upper arm. Women evidently are experiencing better fit when they shop for day-time dresses. Only two told of unusual alterations. One needed six inch underarm seams. The other had very narrow shoulders, and needed to take up a one and one-half inch pleat at the armseye seam.

Sleeve Length Preferences

An interesting comparison is shown in Table 7 concerning the sleeve lengths and the age of the respondents. Only three checked full length sleeves. The sleeve length, "Just below the elbow" received the largest number of tallies, 51, and the second choice was for "Just above the elbow".

Table 6. Alterations needed on ready-to-wear day-time dresses as checked by women 50 years old and over.

| Alterations | Widen or let out | Narrow, take up or shorten | No alterations |
|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Shoulder seam | 2 | 15 | 83 |
| Blouse side seam | 5 | 5 | 90 |
| Blouse length | 6 | 40 | 54 |
| Skirt side seams | 14 | 13 | 66 |
| Skirt length | 6 | 51 | 43 |
| Waist measure | 18 | 9 | 73 |
| Width across shoulders | 1 | 11 | 88 |
| Sleeve width (upper arm) | 7 | 4 | 89 |

Table 7. Sleeve lengths preferred by 100 respondents expressed as percentages.

| Sleeve lengths | 55 years or less | 55 to 65 years | 65 years and older | Percentages |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| Above the elbow | 12 | 14 | 7 | 33 |
| Just below the elbow | 12 | 21 | 18 | 51 |
| Full length | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| No preference | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Two choices indicated | | | | 10 |
| Total | | | | 100 |

Twenty-one out of 47 who were 55 to 65 years of age indicated that they preferred sleeves just below the elbow, while 14 of this age group indicated that they preferred sleeves above the elbow. Eighteen out of 26 in the age group 65 years and older checked "just below the elbow", while seven of this age group checked "above the elbow". In the younger age group, 55 years or less, they were evenly divided as to preference, 12 each for "sleeves above the elbow", and "sleeves just below the elbow". Ten respondents checked two each. Several commented that the choices "varied", and others remarked "that the type of the sleeve varied with the style of the dress, and the purpose of the garment." The results of this question concerned with sleeve length is significant in that, as women advance in age, they become conscious of changes in their appearance. The elbow, in many instances, is not as attractive as in younger years (Hair, 3), and a "just below the elbow" length of sleeve is both comfortable and becoming. The sleeve length, "just above the elbow" is a bit more comfortable and can be worn when doing more active work. Again, this is a significant finding for the designer, the manufacturer, and the retailer, when considering day-time dresses for the woman of 50 years and older.

Choice of Neckline Finishes and Designs

The response to the question, "Which neckline finish do you prefer?", was quite definite. Sixty choices were made for a collar, 32 for a collar effect, while 13 indicated a collarless finish, leaving no doubt that most women prefer a collar or collar effect. Eleven preferred to make two choices, while six did not indicate any choice.

The selection of kind or shape and size of a neckline was quite varied. Fifty respondents indicated two choices, 49 made one choice, in answer to the question, "Which kind of neckline do you prefer?" (Table 9.) The totals

for each category in descending order of choice are as follows: Short "V", 76; neckline close to base of neck, 40; one inch to two inches away from the neck, 15; deep "V", 7; wide neckline, five; and nine, no response. Two conclusions may be drawn from these results; (1) that the short "V" is preferred by about three-fourths of the respondents, and (2) almost half of the respondents prefer the neckline close to the base of the neck. Holverson (11) found the "V" neckline a favorite, also. This would be an indication that women preferred a close fitting neckline. Then, too, women of this age group have fairly well established ideas of dress, and do not care for unusual lines and shapes especially if they reveal the body unduly.

Choice of Dress Openings

The popularity of the shirt waist dress has led many to believe that women of today want clothes that are easy to care for, easy to take off and put on, and that are simple in design. It would seem that when people are busy with a variety of activities, they want clothing that will save time. Getting into and out of a dress can be, not only time-consuming, but can be devastating to a hair-do. For the woman who is not as agile as she once was, a dress opening can be a major issue in the selection of a dress. Table 10 shows the distribution of choices of the 100 respondents in this report. The question asked, "Which dress opening do you prefer (write first and second choices)?" Forty-three gave first and second choices; 22 checked two, but did not indicate first and second choices; and a third group of 26 indicated only one choice. The dress opening, "Front opening, buttoned to waist with an underarm zipper", received the most tallies, 124; with the "Front opening and buttoned full length" receiving second highest, 90. The third highest, or 68, was for "Front opening buttoned to placket depth below waist line." All

Table 8. Neckline finishes preferred by women 50 years of age and older.

| Neckline finish | : | Number of necklines checked |
|-----------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Collar | : | 60 |
| Collarless | : | 13 |
| Collar effect | : | 32 |
| No preference | : | 6 |
| Total | : | 111 |

Table 9. The kinds of necklines preferred by women 50 years of age and older.

| Kind of neckline | : | Number of necklines checked |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Short "V" | : | 76 |
| Deep "V" | : | 7 |
| Neckline close to base of neck | : | 40 |
| 1" to 2" away from neck | : | 15 |
| Wide neckline | : | 5 |
| No preference stated | : | 9 |
| Total preferences indicated | : | 152 |

Table 10. Responses to the question "Which dress opening do you prefer (write first and second choices)?"

| Types of dress openings | Those checking : first and sec- : ond choices (43) | Those checking : those checking : two but not in- : dicating 1st and : 2nd choices (22) | Those checking : one choice (26) | Total : tallies |
|---|---|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| | First : Second | | | |
| Front opening and buttoned full length | 12 7 | 45 | 26 | 90 |
| Front opening, buttoned to waist with underarm zipper | 19 11 | 62 | 32 | 124 |
| Front opening buttoned placket depth below waistline | 8 11 | 34 | 15 | 68 |
| Scooped out neck and underarm zipper | 3 3 | 15 | 9 | 30 |
| Back opening with zipper to below waistline | 1 9 | 13 | 3 | 26 |
| Diagonal opening to waist with underarm zipper | 0 2 | 5 | 3 | 10 |
| No preference | 0 0 | 3 | 3 | 6 |

three are comparatively easy to don. The first choice is found not only in house dresses, dresses for shopping, and those for general day-time wear, but also in "dressy" dresses. The two remaining groups, "Back opening with zipper to below the waist line", and "Diagonal opening to waist with underarm zipper", received 26 and 10 choices, respectively. Six respondents did not give a preference.

Discussion of Respondents' Comments

Waldrop (18), in 1953 expressed the opinion from her study that manufacturers should give more consideration to the older woman in the manufacturing and the styling of clothes, that women's sizes were too old, and junior sizes were too youthful.

Some of the comments given on the check sheet in answer to "If you have any special problems or suggestions, please write it on the back of the paper", concerning difficulties encountered when shopping for day-time dresses, are as follow: five respondents expressed the wish for more mature styles, and also more variety. This group was both short and average in height, and weighed under 124 through 139 pounds. A larger group, seven in number, asked for more youthful styles. This group fell in the weight range, 150 to 169 pounds. They made their comments in such terms as, "Would like younger styles, not all tailored", "Most styles are so matronly looking; I am not young but I don't like to look older than I am", "Younger styles in sedate color", "Wish they would design older women's clothes to look more youthful, but yet smart looking", "Most of the small size dresses look too youthful", "Not enough different styles for small mature women who are five feet or less and weigh about 100 pounds. Most such sizes are too young looking and the few choices are so very staid and have little style

and no 'dash' to them", "Prefer very simple lines - not much trim - bound buttonholes", "I prefer a 12 $\frac{1}{2}$, and they fit me exactly - but it is so hard to find a good selection of 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ dresses."

SUMMARY

The need for suitable day-time dresses for women 50 years of age and over has been growing because of their increased participation in world activities. This study concerned itself with four objectives: (1) to learn the problems encountered by women of fifty years and over when they shop for dresses; (2) to learn the average price paid for ready-to-wear dresses by women of this age; (3) to ascertain the alterations usually necessary in ready-to-wear dresses; (4) to present from these findings, suggestions that dress designers and manufacturers may use to produce more functional, better fitting, and more becoming dresses in the price range for this group.

To gain information on physical characteristics, habits, and problems encountered in the choice of ready-to-wear dresses, a check sheet was sent to a selected group of women 50 years of age and older. The first 100 returns were tabulated and the results summarized.

The distribution of ages indicated that almost half were between 55 and 64 years of age; 27 were over 64; and 26 were under 55. Sixty-eight women were between five feet three inches and five feet six inches tall; 26 were shorter, and 6 were taller. As to weight, 36 weighed 125 to 139 pounds, 18 below 125 pounds, 39 from 140 to 169 pounds, and seven over 170 pounds. Fifty-two of the 100 respondents had gray hair, 27 brown, both black and "other colors" had eight each, and only 5 had white hair.

The preferences for color almost paralleled the colors these women had purchased with one exception, gray. Navy was purchased in 60 instances, more than twice as often as any other color. It was preferred in 41 instances; the preference for gray, 44. Navy, medium blue and gray ranked high in preference, with fewer choosing brown and black. The group was equally divided on whether they would like a wider variety of colors; 16 percent gave no response. Questioned as to preference for plain colored fabric or figured fabric, 89 respondents indicated plain, 14 figured.

Although the price range given on the check sheet was from \$7.95 to "over \$29.95", there is little indication of a particular price preference. Seventeen women checked "over \$29.95", and 14 checked \$14.95. The remaining number of responses were rather equally divided.

Alterations did not seem to present the problem that might be expected. The greatest number needed was for shortening the skirt, and the second largest, for shortening the blouse. Eighteen let out the waist, while 14 let out the side seams in the skirt. "No alterations needed" was the response in a high number of instances when women were asked concerning specific areas of the garment.

The preferences indicated for sleeve lengths were significant. Before 55 years of age, the choice was equally divided between sleeves above the elbow and those below the elbow. After 55 years of age, there was increasing preferences for sleeves below the elbow. This could be attributed to a desire to cover aging arms, also to a more or less stabilized preference for certain design features.

Specific preferences were indicated in the choice of neckline. Over half wanted a collar, with about an additional one-third indicating a collar

effect. Lines close to the base of the neck were often chosen by this group.

Response concerned with the type of dress opening preferred showed that out of 354 tallies, 124 were for a blouse front opening buttoned to the waist with an underarm zipper. Ninety indicated a front opening, buttoned full length. The third choice was for a front opening buttoned to placket depth below the waistline.

From the preferences checked and the comments made, it is evident that women in the age group of 50 years and over not only know what they want, but they are using every opportunity to make their likes, dislikes and needs known. They want to feel well dressed, suitably dressed for their age. They are looking for simplicity, ease of donning, becoming color, and style. They do not necessarily limit themselves to one price when shopping but they are aware of their needs as they make their selections.

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APPENDIX

THE CHOICE OF MEDIUM-PRICED DAY-TIME DRESSES
FOR WOMEN FIFTY YEARS AND OLDER

by

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of Agriculture and Applied Science, 1929

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

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OF AGRICULTURE AND APPLIED SCIENCE

1958

The need for suitable day-time dresses for women 50 years of age and over has been growing because of their increased participation in world activities. This study was undertaken to learn the problems encountered by women of fifty years and over when they shop for dresses, the average price paid, and the alterations usually necessary. From these findings it was hoped to formulate suggestions that dress designers and manufacturers might use to produce more functional, better fitting, and more becoming dresses for this age group.

To gain information on physical characteristics, buying habits and problems encountered in the choice of ready-to-wear dresses, a check sheet was sent to a selected group of women 50 years of age and older.

The distribution of ages among the 100 replies studied indicated that almost half were between 55 and 64 years of age; 27 were over 64; and 28 under 55. Sixty-eight women were between five feet three inches and five feet six inches tall; 26 were shorter, and 6 taller. As to weight, 75 were between 125 and 169 pounds. About half of the respondents had gray hair.

The preferences for color somewhat paralleled the colors purchased. Navy was purchased in 60 instances, more than twice as often as any other color. It was preferred in 41 instances. Gray was purchased in 11 instances whereas 44 preferences were indicated for the color. Medium blue ranked high in preference, with fewer choosing brown and black. Questioned as to preference for plain colored or figured fabric, 89 respondents indicated plain, 14 figured.

There was little indication of a price preference.

Alterations did not seem to present the problems that might be expected. The greatest number needed was for shortening the skirt, and the second greatest, for shortening the blouse. Eighteen let out the waist, while 14 let out the

side seams in the skirt. In a high number of instances, no alterations were needed.

The preference for sleeve length was significant. Before 55 years of age, the choice was equally divided between sleeves above the elbow and those below the elbow. After 55 years of age, there was increasing preference for sleeves below the elbow.

In the choice of neckline, over half wanted a collar, with about an additional one-third indicating a collar effect. Lines close to the base of the neck were often chosen by this group.

As to the type of dress opening preferred, a blouse front opening, buttoned to the waist, with an underarm zipper was first choice, and a front opening, buttoned full length, second.

From the comments made, it is evident that women in the age group of 50 years and over not only know what they want, but are using every opportunity to make their likes, dislikes, and needs known.