

Ouachita Baptist University

Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita

Honors Theses

Carl Goodson Honors Program

1-1970

Opportunities in the Business of Fashion

Mary Moyers

Ouachita Baptist University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [Fashion Design Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Moyers, Mary, "Opportunities in the Business of Fashion" (1970). *Honors Theses*. 532.
https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses/532

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Carl Goodson Honors Program at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact mortensona@obu.edu.

Opportunities in the Business of Fashion

A Research Paper

Presented to

Mrs. Frances Elledge

Ouachita Baptist University

In Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the

Honors Program

by

Mary Lea Moyers

January 1970

251

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Retailing.....	2
The Salesperson.....	7
The Stock Clerk.....	12
The Designer.....	14
The Photographer's Stylist.....	17
The Fashion Coordinator.....	18
The Buyer.....	19
The Comparison Shopper.....	20
The Fashion Writer.....	20
The Fashion Illustrator.....	21
Advertising and Publicity.....	22

The business of fashion is one of the largest in the world today. According to a survey from "The Teen-age Girl Today", in the fall of 1968 6,350,000 girls between the ages of fourteen and seventeen enrolled in high school. These girls spent \$2,152,209,000 on fashion and non-fashion back-to-school merchandise.¹

Modern trends, in giving a new look to fashion and in influencing expansion have created many fresh opportunities for women in business. A few are listed as follows:

1. Because of increased suburban living, people are wearing more colorful, casual, and informal clothes.

Women are showing a new interest in maternity wear, as well as in clothing for men, boys teenagers, subteens and children.

2. Because of improved travel, fashion designers feel the cross current of influence and inspiration from all parts of the world.

3. Because of new synthetics and blends, fabric manufacturers contribute fashion excitement.

4. Because apparrell design has broadened in scope, the designer is no longer limited to dresses, coats, and

¹The Teen-age Girl Today, Seventeen, 1968.

suits. Through wardrobe coordination and reversible garments, the designer has a wide field for her creative talent.²

Some of the responsibilities of the career woman in apparel design are researching, studying the market, sketching, modeling, selecting fabrics and trimmings, preparing sample garments, organizing and supervising design rooms, figuring costs, and working with the production department. In my practical experience which accompanied this study I worked in selling and stocking. I worked at El'Ann's Fashions in Arkadelphia as a salesgirl. In this I not only learned how to sell garments but also how to mark clothes, price them and put them out. I also worked in the clothing department at Gibson's Department Center in Arkadelphia. Before the store opened I worked stocking merchandise. I worked as a salesgirl after the store opened.

RETAILING

One of the most important parts of the fashion business is retailing or merchandising.

The merchandising part of retailing requires many highly paid executive division and department managers, buyers and their assistants. Buyers make from six to a dozen trips a year to New York, Chicago, Europe and many other places

²Gladys A. Baird, "Is Fashion Business for You?", Whats New in Home Economics, (May 1964) p. 35.

in search of the newest in fashions, furniture and everything else from alarm clocks to zippers that a department store sells.

Retailing includes much more than just the sales staff. Dozens of different talents and skills back up every sale across the counter. In a large department store there is at least one employee behind the scenes for each salesperson.³

The most interesting positions in the field of fashion merchandising in department and speciality store work include those of buyer, merchandise manager, salesperson, comparison shopper, training director and president or owner. Advertising and publicity are such important responsibilities that many large stores maintain their own advertising and publicity organizations, or even have such work done by an outside agency. Recognition has been awarded to many competent women in the retailing field through appointments to major positions in large department and speciality stores.

Of the many types of retail stores, three are especially important in the distribution of fashion-merchandise--the speciality shop, the department store, and the mail-order house. Each of these types of stores may be owned by independent or chain-store organizations. Requirements of workers differ

³Walter N. Rethschild, "The Retailing Business", 1965.

according to the organizations. Many specialty shop buyers co-ordinate, or style the merchandise. Mail-order house executives frequently work closely with designers in having special models designed for them. In chain stores the buyer is in reality the manager of the department and he does not select the merchandise. In the average independent store, however, selection is the buyers most important task.⁴

In a small shop, the owner may buy, sell, supervise alterations, write and place advertising, plan and execute the window displays himself, hire and fire employees and plan and control the stock. There are shops of this character in every large and small town in America. In the larger store, the president or owner may buy for several departments and supervise the advertising and displays while another member of the firm buys other lines and supervises salespeople and the operation of the store. Some independent store owners have their buying done through one of many resident buying offices in New York and other large centers, and come to the market themselves only a few times a year.⁵

⁴Bernice G. Chambers, Fashion Fundamentals (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1947) p. 20.

⁵Ibid., p. 22

Experience of many kinds is to be gained in a small store. By working in close contact with the owners, a staff member may learn many things he would not learn in a large organization. For instance, by working in the shipping department of a small store, an inexperienced person can see how merchandise comes in, examine and mark it, learn price ranges, sizes, and colors and become familiar with the stock. Selling to all kinds of customers gives valuable experience. Selling from a small stock is more difficult than selling from a large assortment and requires top-notch salesmanship.⁶ Cleanliness, order, and correct selection of merchandise and accessories, lighting, signs, and displays are major problems in the small store and the employee engaged to sell is obliged to help with stock and window displays whenever needed.

Another advantage of working in a small store is that the work is varied. An opportunity for learning all phases of retailing is presented, while in a large organization the worker is not always permitted to find that department for which he is most suited.⁷

The willingness to learn and to do any work required and the ability to adapt oneself to the policies and level of taste of the store, are always considered when top execu-

⁶Ibid., p. 22.

⁷Ibid., p. 23.

tives review employees eligible for promotion. Obviously, the buyer who shows the highest profit in his department receives a high rating, but profit is not the only consideration. A buyer or merchandise manager may show a profit but he may be so disliked by the store employees that he undermines morale and creates unhappiness and discord. To gain success in a small store, the worker should be sure, first, that he affiliated with the right organization, and then should study the policies and objectives, of the store and carry out these plans in whatever department he is placed.⁸

The duties of workers in a large organization are more specialized than those of workers in a small store. Display, advertising, publicity and personnel are separate departments. Selling is frequently the first work a newcomer who has high school or college education is given to do. In certain lines of merchandising, as in the self-help market, the salesperson merely tabulates the purchases. The successful selling of fashion merchandise demands a greater sense of responsibility in the employee.

In the leaflet "The Retailing Business", Fred Lazarus, Junior President, Federated Department Stores, Inc., said one of the most important qualities for success is common sense.

⁸ Ibid., p. 30.

The youngster who behaves sensibly in small day to day emergencies shows the good judgment so important in our business. A major difference between retailing and most other careers is that it calls for being right in hundreds of small decisions, rather than in just a few big ones. Good common sense and the understanding and liking of others give the good batting average that means success.⁹

Promotion is faster than in other fields for two reasons.

One: retailing requires more executives than most other business--about ten percent of our employees have executive rating. Two: effectiveness or lack of it, shows up immediately in a sales book, the department report or the pulling power of an advertisement.¹⁰

THE SALESPERSON

One of the important but often unsung people of the retailing world is the salesperson. A salesperson's duties and responsibilities differ according to the type of store. The duties can be grouped generally into three categories. In the selling part of her job the salesperson is responsible for serving the customer, recording the sale, receiving the payment, and wrapping the merchandise. The salesperson is also in charge of stock control. In this she must check in merchandise, prepare merchandise for sale, arrange merchandise, keep merchandise in order, keep work area neat and clean,

⁹Fred Lazarus, "The Retailing Business" 1965.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 30.

take stock counts and inventories and help with ordering merchandise. Finally the salesperson helps with promotion of the products by preparing display and plan and execute sales promotions.¹¹

In some situations, the salesperson may be involved with nothing but direct selling duties. In a small, independently owned store however, a salesperson may be responsible in all areas.

The salesperson must know the merchandise in stock-- including sizes, colors, styles, fabrics, and price lines, the correct use of the article and proper accessories for it, the customers of that particular store, and their needs for both social and business wear. In certain departments, such as jewelry, furs, rugs, and furniture, the salesperson is given specific training thereby becoming a specialist in that particular line of merchandise.

A knowledge of color and design is necessary because the question of taste is involved. The customer expects the salesperson to know just what hat will be correct for her face, figure, coiffure, and dress, and exactly how and for what occasion it should be worn.

Enthusiasm and a friendly attitude are valuable assets

¹¹Irene E. McDermott, Opportunities in Clothing-Fashion Merchandising (Peoria, Illinois: Charles A. Bennett Co., Inc., 1968)

for the salesperson. These qualities frequently help the inexperienced boy or girl when the older salespersons have become bored, indifferent, and lazy. A genuine interest in helping the customer in her purchases is detected by the store patrons. The intangible approval of the salesperson gives the customer confidence. Girls sell college clothes and sportswear more satisfactorily than elderly women who harbor an unvoiced disapproval of such clothes.¹² Being fashion-minded indicates both a liking for fashion merchandise and understanding of new styles as they are introduced. The goal of the salesperson is to maintain a low selling cost in proportion to the volume of goods sold.¹³ But, in addition the approval of other workers is desired, and that forbids sales snatching.

High school graduates are preferred. Subjects that provide a good background for selling include salesmanship, merchandising, business, mathematics, and home economics with emphasis on fabrics, color-line-design, fashion and clothing construction.

A cooperative school-work experience program provides a person an opportunity to get supervised practical experience. This may lead to immediate full time employment. Then most

¹²Bernice G. Chambers, Fashion Fundamentals (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., p. 35.

¹³Ibid., p. 36.

stores give new employees some instructions before they start to work--perhaps informally or in an extensive training program, depending upon the type and size of the store. On-the-job training is necessary to acquaint them with store procedures and policies.¹⁴

A salesperson may be paid on a straight salary basis or a base pay plus commission. Beginning salaries are moderate--often the minimum wage required by law--and part-time workers are often paid less than the minimum wage. Fringe benefits usually include the privilege of buying merchandise at a discount, usually ten to twenty per cent off the regular price.

Full-time salespersons may work a five day forty hour week; usually the hours are not regular. In most stores, employees are scheduled to work at least one evening a week--more in stores that are open every evening. Saturday is a busy day, so salespeople usually work that day and have some other day off during the week. During peak seasons--Christmas, pre-Easter, anniversaries and special sales--hours may be longer than usual. During inventory it isn't unusual to work until midnight--for which you are paid and might have fun doing it because it is different, informal and more relaxed.¹⁵

¹⁴Irene E. McDermott, Opportunities in Clothing-Fashion Merchandising (Peoria, Illinois: Charles A. Bennett Co., Inc., 1968)

¹⁵Ibid., p. 36.

Salespeople work in pleasant surroundings. The physical surroundings must be pleasant to appeal to the customers--well-lighted, colorful, clean, often carpeted and tastefully furnished and usually air-conditioned. The work can be physically tiring if you try to do everything at once--a salesperson spends her day on her feet and some days may be mentally tiring. Dealing with people demands courtesy and tact, even at the end of a long, hard day. If a person likes people, she will find sales most interesting.¹⁶

Sales jobs are available in almost every community in all sections of the country, wherever clothing is sold--in department stores, in speciality shops, and even by direct selling. Naturally, most openings are found in the large cities and the rapidly growing suburban areas, but every community has stores. Job openings occur regularly, both new jobs and job replacements. The turnover in sales is rapid as women leave to get married and rear families and as young people gain experience and move on to other jobs.

It is expected that the need for salespersons will steadily increase as population increases and communities grow rapidly.¹⁷ New communities and more people mean new shopping areas, more stores and more sales jobs. The self-service trend in retailing indicates that there will be little demand for people

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

without skill or training to fill routine sales jobs. Sales employment is expected to increase, but the demand will be for people who are skilled in sales ability and have a real knowledge of the merchandise they sell.

THE STOCK CLERK

Closely connected with the salespersons job is that of the stock clerk. The stores receiving department is responsible for merchandise from the time it arrives at the store until it reaches the selling floor. The duties of the stock clerk include receiving merchandise and preparing the merchandise for sale.

Instead of going directly to the selling floor, merchandise may be kept in reserve in the stock room, usually located close to the selling department for convenience. Here stock duties include storing the merchandise in a logical manner and keeping it arranged in proper order. Stock work may also include the transfer of merchandise and the record keeping involved in transferring, plus filling special merchandise orders.

Pay is on an hourly wage basis, with beginners starting at a moderate minimum. As a store employee, discount privileges usually are expended the same as to all others. Hours are regular--usually forty hours a week for full-time employees.

Whereas the selling floors are made attractive to appeal to

the customers, the stock rooms and receiving rooms are storage and work rooms behind the scenes. As such they are plainer. They are often large open areas resembling warehouses. Some work is exposed to weather, as when unloading trucks. This is an advantage on a nice day. Since merchandise can stack up in peak seasons, a great deal of physical activity may be involved. On quieter days stock clerks arrange stock, clean up, mark shelves and do other maintenance work.

Wherever there is a retail store, there is stock work. In the small stores, however, there probably will not be stock clerks hired as such--salespeople often do the stock work. The larger department stores, where duties are specialized, offer more opportunities. They hire employees specifically as receiving clerks or stock clerks to work in separate receiving and stock departments. With increasing efficiency and automation both in record keeping and in handling merchandise, more work can be done with fewer workers. This means that the need for employees in this area of retailing may not increase in proportion to the need for sales personnel as the retailing field grows. There is expected to be a gradual increase however. Competition for employment may be high since special training and skill are usually not required and there are generally many young applicants.¹⁸

¹⁸Ibid.

THE DESIGNER

One of the most interesting and imaginative jobs in the fashion business is that of the designer. A designer may own a shop of which he may be manager, director, and designer. Or he may work for a garment or fabric manufacturer or a retail or mail-order house. "Free-lance" designers, or those who sell their sketches to various wholesale manufacturers, are found in the market, but the successful free-lance designer soon finds employment with an established firm.¹⁹ Many textile print designers prefer to work on a free-lance basis, but these workers are artists, and not designers. While the designer on his own has a very difficult time, there are in America many small shops, not always widely known, which do a profitable business catering to a small but loyal and appreciative clientele. Generally, these shops are known as tailors or dressmakers, even though they use original designs.

Designing is one of the highest paid but also one of the most exacting positions in the fashion world. Successful American designers, and those associated with famous couture houses in Europe, are unanimous in the opinion that the past supremacy of Paris in the fashion industries was due in a large measure to the splendid training of the young designers.

¹⁹Bernice G. Chambers, Fashion Fundamentals (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1947) p. 36.

Talent, ability, courage, determination to work, and a knowledge of fabric, draping pattern making, and historic costumes are requirements for designing.²⁰

Sketching is not designing. It is always possible to employ good sketchers for reasonable salaries. A designer must know and be able to do much more than draw pictures. He must know how to make a garment, hat, or shoe so that it can be worn; an article new yet not bizarre; an interpretation in line, color, and material that is acceptable for the time and market for which it is presented. A good designer makes what people want to buy, working in advance of the season. He must be able to predict, forecast, or predetermine the color, fabric, silhouette, and trim that will be accepted. This ability in designing is known as timing. It is an awareness, an acute sensitivity, to changes in public taste. Accuracy in timing insures a degree of success to competent designers. The Parisian couturiers demonstrated this ability with repeated success.

Since Paris model garments were not available during 1940-1945, outstanding American designers began presenting collections which were equal, in some cases, to the fine tradition of France.

It is very difficult for the person without training in the industry, and with no previous professional experience, to secure a designing position. While American trade schools

²⁰Ibid., p. 37.

and colleges are increasing the numbers of courses which train young people to design for manufacturers of retail stores, most designing taught in schools has been for the individual customer or the small dress-making shop rather than for the needs of the manufacturer.²¹

The designer who works free-lance or for a shop or manufacturer must know fabrics. The amateur often sketches or paints a colored design without a thought for the kind of cloth best suited to make the particular garment. This is a mistake because clothing fabrics are made for specific uses. The most successful creators adhere to a reasonable observance in using this cloth.

Knowing the names, character, hand, cost and available colors of fabrics is only one of the preliminary essentials in successful designing. Not all designers are familiar with all fabrics. Coat and suit designers have no occasion to know the market offering in evening wear fabrics. Each designer must know the fabrics used in his particular industry. In Europe, to gain an understanding of the use, hang, and fall of fabric, students used to be required to reproduce a princess garment, a dress with gores from the shoulder to the hem, in fifteen different materials--such as velvet, chiffon, taffeta,

²¹Ibid., p. 36.

satin, gingham, organdy, and so forth.²²

An understanding of anatomy underlies the designing of good clothing; a knowledge of body structure, bones, muscles and action is basic. To be worn, clothing must be constructed in such a way that the wearer can move his arms, walk, and sit without pulling the seams--and without destroying the grace and comfort of the garment.²³

THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S STYLIST

The photographer's stylist assembles whatever is needed for the days shooting and arrives early at the studio to make sure that everything is on hand. She sees that the garments are pressed and ready for the model to wear. She may supervise the makeup or hair style to make sure it is appropriate for the photographs to be taken. When all is ready, it is the stylist's job to pin, smooth, straighten and rearrange the merchandise so that it is as attractive as possible. It is not at all unusual for a stylist to whip out a needle and thread and hastily take in or let out a seam and she must be prepared for a certain amount of pressure.²⁴

²²Ibid., p. 37

²³Ibid.

²⁴Seventeen, "Guide to Careers in Fashion", 1968.

The various phases of styling, whether concerned with sales promotion, creative styling, co-ordination, or publicity, require men and women well trained in fashion information, customer buying habits and trends. Styling and co-ordination involve selection, either of color, fabric, or silhouette, of the particular garments to be shown together.

It is necessary for a store to have a responsible person supervise the various items to be purchased for basic stock and to be promoted in the advertising, window displays, and fashion shows.

THE FASHION COORDINATOR

The fashion coordinator of a store promotes the sale of merchandise in a very special way and develops the fashion image of the store. She pulls together the newest styles, colors and concepts and presents seasonal forecasts as a guide to the buying staff of the store; she also selects the merchandise used in window and interior displays. The fashion coordinator is responsible for the presentation and preparation of all store fashion shows as well as special events. Though writing is not a primary part of her job, she may prepare the commentary for these events. The position calls for an ability to communicate, to move quickly, to work with many people and to keep ahead of all fashion developments.²⁵

²⁵Ibid.

Styling and coordination requires an ability to get along with people who are also doing exacting and difficult jobs. If a store wants to feature a certain color in fall and winter coats, obviously it should offer hats and accessories in harmonizing colors. This means that the stylist must work with many executives, buyers, and others in the store, as well as with manufacturers outside the store. This selecting and combining require not only experience but skill, care and much thought.

THE BUYER

The buyer, who is responsible for profit, is the manager of the department. This work involves selling, selection of merchandise, training, promoting, advertising, publicity, fashion shows, and interior and window displays. To be successful, the buyer must himself be sold on the merchandise and on the organization. Enthusiasm is essential. The sportswear buyer who neither swims, plays golf, rides, nor skates has a difficult time being convincing because he has no first hand information about the use of sports apparel and accessories. The ambitious buyer aims for a high turnover and this calls for a loyal sales staff. Thus, he spends part of his time on the floor selling to the customer and constantly keeps the staff sold on the merchandise.²⁶

²⁶Bernise G. Chambers, Fashion Fundamentals, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1947) p. 38.

THE COMPARISON SHOPPER

The work of the comparison shopper involves making detailed reports and, frequently, buying merchandise for comparison with that sold in the department. The report includes such facts about the article as price, color, size, range, construction, the amount of merchandise on hand and the number of customers in the competitors's store. Work in this department is valuable because the shopper learns merchandise values in all kinds of goods. A successful girdle buyer for a Fifth Avenue store knows daily every item sold by all upstairs and basement girdle departments in the entire city of New York. Success in retailing fashion merchandise is based on facts.²⁷

THE FASHION WRITER

The person who is articulate about fashions finds a ready market for well-written articles dealing with fashion. In addition to knowing many facets of the manufacturing business, a fashion writer must be able to adapt his writing to various markets. Many magazines regularly publish pages of special interest to women and the fashion magazines publish a great variety of fashion news.

Radio and television fields are also introducing fashion programs. Newsreel and motion picture companies, also, use

²⁷Ibid.

scripts prepared by men and women writers who know this business.

A sense of news, of knowing just the right angle from which to appeal to the readers of a paper, of knowing what to feature and what to ignore, are the requirements of the trade. These are learned from experience and observation.²⁸

Fashion editors, like theatre critics or news commentators, play a more important role than the public realizes. They succeed by successful performance, as do designers and actors. Perspective, experience, knowledge of consumer needs, familiarity with women's buying habits, and a mastery of writing technique are the background for this work. In addition to these current writing jobs, some women in fashion write books on design, on the history of style, or on other subjects allied with this field.

THE FASHION ILLUSTRATOR

The fashion illustrator with her professional training uses all the art media and studio equipment to present fashion merchandise in a way that underscores the look of the fashion scene of the moment. What establishes her as a successful fashion illustrator is a unique style that sells the fashion--dramatizes it while rendering clearly its line and detailing.²⁹

²⁸Ibid., p. 39.

²⁹Seventeen, "Guide to Careers in Fashion", 1968.

ADVERTISING AND PUBLICITY

Advertising positions involving fashion merchandise for men and women include those of copywriter in an advertising agency, a retail store, or a manufacturing establishment, account executive or art director in an agency, and advertising and publicity manager or director in a store. Fashion advertising is a field of work in which salaries are often very high. The person who has a flair for this work should learn the techniques of the trade through special courses offered in schools and colleges. Then he should try to obtain a position in an advertising agency handling fashion accounts, in the advertising department of a store or in a manufacturing firm.³⁰

Publicity or "free advertising", editorial mention for which no space rate is paid, is a special form of advertising placed in the editorial columns of magazines and newspapers in the form of articles, and photographs of openings, exhibits, new products, and creations. The publicity writer reports fashion shows and sends press releases to the newspapers and magazines, selects clothes for the photographing, and in many other ways acts as liaison between the client and the

³⁰Bernice G. Chambers, Fashion Fundamentals (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1947) p. 40.

press. The fashion editor of a publication prints a publicity item because of its new value. Publicity writing calls for a knowledge of newspaper and magazine writing, style, a fashion sense, and a general awareness of trends and events.

The careers in fashion are wide and varied. And there are even more than I have mentioned such as pattern making and modeling. A person interested in fashion and clothes should check the careers available because the opportunities are unlimited.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Chambers, Helen G. Clothing Selection: Fashions, Figures, Fabrics. Chicago:Lippincott, 1961. 470 pp.
- Chambers, Bernice Gertrude. Fashion Fundamentals. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1947. 501 pp.
- Dariaux, Genevieve Antoine. Elegance. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1964.
- Gold, Annalee. How to Sell Fashion. New York: Fairchild Publications, Inc., 1968.
- Hawes, Elizabeth. Fashion is Spinach. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1960.
- Hurlock, Elizabeth Bergner. The Psychology of Dress. New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1929.
- Kaledny, Rosalie. Fashion Design for Moderns. New York: Fairchild Publications, Knc., 1968.
- McDermott, Irene E. Opportunities in Clothing, Fashion and Merchandising. Peoria, Illinois: Charles A. Bennett Co., 1968.
- Oglesby, Catherine. Fashion Careers: American Style. New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1935.
- Roshco, Bernard. The Rag Race. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1963.
- "Changing Styles and a Retail Boom". U. S. News 64:72-4, May 20, 1968.
- "The Teen-age Girl Today". Seventeen, 1968.
- "The Retailing Business". 1965.
- Seventeen, "Guide to Careers in Fashion", 1968.