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/A STUDY OF THE MOTIVES FOR AND SATISFACTIONS OF  
HOME SEWING AS EXPRESSED BY A SELECTED GROUP  
OF MICHIGAN WOMEN WHO DO HOME SEWING/

By

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//

A PROBLEM

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE . . . . .	3
III. PROCEDURE . . . . .	10
IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDY SAMPLE . . .	12
V. ANALYSIS OF SEWING PRACTICES . . . . .	19
VI. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS . . . . .	29
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	32
APPENDIX . . . . .	34
Cover Letter . . . . .	35
Questionnaire . . . . .	36
Sources of Commercial Surveys . . . . .	41



## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	Page
I. Reasons for Home Sewing as Expressed by Women Surveyed in Recent Studies. . . . .	6
II. Reasons for Home Sewing as Expressed by Michigan Women Who Sew. . . . .	20
III. Types of Garments Made by 100 Michigan Women for Their Sons and Husbands. . . . .	23
IV. Types of Garments Made by 100 Michigan Women for Their Daughters, 13 Years and Under . . . . .	24
V. Types of Garments Made by the 100 Michigan Women for Themselves and Their Daughters, 14 Years and Over. . . . .	24
VI. Problems Encountered in Home Sewing as Expressed by 100 Michigan Women. . . . .	25

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Home economists and other educators frequently differ in opinion as to the need for courses in clothing construction. The basis for controversy has been that new developments in textiles and mass production have made it possible for American women to purchase ready-made garments economically.<sup>1</sup> There is no longer as great a need for women to make garments for themselves or their families as may have been the case in the past. The average family income has also risen considerably so that more money may be available for the clothing budget; in 1960 it was 114.4 percent higher than it was in 1945.<sup>2</sup>

If economy was the only reason why women were engaged in home sewing then the numbers of women who are sewing today would be decreasing rapidly. On the contrary, recent surveys show that home sewing has reached an all time high.<sup>3</sup> It was estimated in 1954 that 52 million women were engaged in home sewing.<sup>4</sup> Do women sew because they still feel they need to for economic reasons or do they sew to satisfy a creative urge and to express their individuality in clothing?

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<sup>1</sup>Doris Johnson, "New Directions in Clothing," Journal of Home Economics (November, 1960), p. 752.

<sup>2</sup>United States Bureau of Census, Current Population Reports Consumer Incomes (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.), Series P-60, No. 2, March 2, 1948. Series P-60, No. 36, June 9, 1961.

<sup>3</sup>Johnson, loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup>Editors of American Fabrics Magazine, "Home Sewing Report," American Fabrics (Winter, 1954-1955), p. 80.

The writer wanted to know why people were engaged in home sewing. It is her belief that an understanding of the motives for home sewing, the satisfaction with the end result, and the problems encountered by women in home sewing are essential if the home economist in industry and education is to meet the needs of this group. A knowledge of home sewing practices could help to strengthen, to give insight, or to enrich the existing clothing programs at the high school and college level.<sup>1</sup>

The objectives of this study are:

1. To determine the motives for home sewing.
2. To ascertain the kinds of garments women usually make.
3. To find out how women feel about the garments they make.
4. To survey what formal training or experience women have had in clothing construction.
5. To determine what women feel are their greatest problems in home sewing.
6. To analyze what help or information women need and want most in this area.

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Adeline Hoxworth, "A Study of Certain Selected Home Sewing Surveys of Recent Years," (unpublished Master's Thesis, Cornell University, 1958), p. 3.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Changes in the American way of life have affected the clothing habits of many women. The labour saving "technology for the home" and expanding job opportunities have made it possible for women to find employment outside the home.<sup>1</sup> The new responsibilities outside the home have necessitated a change in their wardrobes; their clothes must meet the needs of home and business as well as those of community and social activities.

More leisure, the result of shorter working hours, the five-day week, and longer vacations has created a need for special purpose clothing--clothes that are casual, comfortable, easy to wear, and easy to maintain.<sup>2</sup> Casual living has made people want simpler and less expensive clothing.

The trend to suburban living has increased the importance of the family unit and family activities. Americans are having larger families and having them earlier in life.<sup>3</sup> To support the same standard of living they must modify their saving and consumption patterns. This requires a more careful consideration of their clothing dollars.

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<sup>1</sup>Daniel Bell, "The Great Back to Work Movement," Fortune, (July, 1956), pp. 91, 172.

<sup>2</sup>Editors of Fortune, The Changing American Market (Hanover House, Garden City, New York, 1955), p. 182.

<sup>3</sup>Editors of Fortune, America in the Sixties: The Economy and the Society (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 60.



These changes in society have brought increased demands on the clothing budget. One way to extend a limited budget is by home sewing. The increased sales of yard goods and commercial patterns, and the increased enrollment of girls and women in clothing courses indicates a keen interest in home sewing.<sup>1</sup> This interest may represent an effort to satisfy a basic need to create as well as a means of extending the clothing dollar. Perhaps women have a desire to express their individuality in clothing which the sameness of mass-produced clothes does not allow. Or women may enjoy sewing as a hobby activity. Every woman who sews has her own special reasons for this activity.<sup>2</sup>

Several recent surveys<sup>3</sup> indicate the strength of the economic aspect and the enjoyment value in making garments at home. These two reasons

<sup>1</sup>Editors of American Fabrics Magazine, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>2</sup>Marjorie F. Mitchell, "A Study of Home Sewing Practices of a Group of 100 Women in Lubbock County, Texas," (unpublished Master's Thesis, Texas Technological College, Lubbock, Texas, 1959), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>The following are good examples of such studies and surveys:

Nettie Marie Ledbetter, "Home Sewing Practices of Marries Graduates, School of Home Economics, Oregon State College," (unpublished Master's Thesis, Oregon State College, 1950), p. 36.

Lillian Beatrice Matthews, "Some Cost Factors of Home Sewing Versus Purchasing Ready-to-Wear for Fifty Women Who Have Taken Clothing Construction Classes," (unpublished Master's Thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1955), p. 41.

Pearce C. Kelly, Consumer Economics (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin Inc., 1953), p. 193.

Editors of American Fabrics Magazine, op. cit., p. 81.

"Home Sewers Speak," Department Store Economist, March, 1959, p. 50.

Wage Earner Forum, Sewing Habits Among Wage Earner Wives, Special Report No. 3, Vol. 60, April, 1960 (MacFadden Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N.Y.), p. 3.

Rowena Melford Lutz, "Why Illinois Women Enroll in Adult Classes in Clothing," Journal of Home Economics (February, 1958). Abstract of an unpublished Master's Thesis, Southern Illinois University, p. 113.

were most often mentioned by women who sew in six out of eight studies. However, economy was given first importance in five out of eight studies. The third reason most often mentioned by the women was "to obtain individual styling" and "originality" in their clothing. "To obtain a better fit and to avoid alterations" is becoming equally important to women who sew. Mitchell found in her study that "the third reason for sewing 'to obtain a better fit' stemmed from the general dislike to alter ready-made clothing."<sup>1</sup> The women in her study also indicated that "they could produce more original designs than were available in their price range for purchasing ready-made garments."<sup>2</sup> (See Table I, p. 6.)

Home economics graduates in Frazier's study (as reported by Mitchell) and in Ledbetter's study gave "better quality of fabrics" as one of their main reasons for sewing while only a small percentage in another study (Matthews) mentioned quality. "Better workmanship" was also important to the home economics graduates. It may be assumed that their specialized training in clothing construction has made them more aware of the differences in quality and workmanship of ready-made garments.

The woman who sews has been described by McCalls Magazine as "a woman between 25 and 39 years of age, in middle-class circumstances with a moderate income, married and not employed, caring for a family which includes one or two children."<sup>3</sup> In the 1957 USDA survey the woman who sews had similar income and family characteristics but she was "under 50 years of age."<sup>4</sup> The largest percentage of women who sewed in

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<sup>1</sup>Mitchell, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Editors of American Fabrics Magazine, op. cit., p. 80.

<sup>4</sup>Jewell G. Fessenden and Alice Linn, Clothing the Family, A report from a National Study of Home Demonstration Members, 1957, Extension Service Circular 524 (United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.), p. 3.

Table I. Reasons for Home Sewing as Expressed by Women Surveyed in Recent Studies.

Reasons for Home Sewing	Mitchell study 1959	Frazier study as reported by Mitchell	Ledbetter study 1950	Matthew study 1955	Henry Tavs report as reported by Kelly	McCalls survey as reported by American Fabrics 1954	McCalls survey as reported by Dept. Store Economist 1958	Wage Earner Wives survey by McFadden Publications 1959	Lutz study (abstract) Main reason
To save money	96.0%	First Reason	86.0%	76.0%	29.4%	65.0%	68.0%	33.0%	
Enjoyment, like to sew	77.8%	Second Reason	73.0%	66.0%	32.7%	72.0%	70.0%	38.0%	
To obtain a better fit, avoid alterations	59.0%			38.0%	66.5%		16.0%		
Originality, individual styling, creativity, be own designer	47.2%	Fourth Reason			29.4%	33.0%	28.0%	7.0%	
Better quality of fabrics		Third Reason	81.0%	14.0%					
Better workmanship			64.5%						
Part of household chores								15.0%	

Only the first four reasons mentioned in each study are recorded; totals may be less than 100%. Totals may exceed 100% because of multiple mentions.

Mitchell's study were between the ages of 30 to 50, with incomes ranging from \$5,000 to \$9,999, married and not employed.<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to classify the home sewers. They are not restricted to any one age group, income level, nor locality. A good portion of the teenage group are enjoying the creative aspects of home sewing. It has been estimated that 56.1 percent of all teenage girls sew and over half begin before they are 13 years of age.<sup>2</sup>

The studies indicate that women who sew are more likely to sew for themselves than for any other member of the family, and that they sew more often for their children than for their husbands or other adults. They make dresses more frequently than any other item. Next in frequency are skirts, blouses, sportswear, pajamas, and suits or coats. When women make childrens clothes, dresses, skirts, playclothes, blouses, and coats are most frequently made in the order named. Sportshirts are most frequently made when they sew for their husbands.

There are indications that the amount of home sewing done has little relation to the family income. Women at all income levels are sewing. There is no evidence indicating that women at one income level sew more garments per year than women at another level.

One-fourth of the respondents in the 1957 USDA survey reported having problems in clothing their families.<sup>3</sup> The types of problems named were:

<sup>1</sup>Mitchell, op. cit., pp.21, 33.

<sup>2</sup>"40,000,000 Women and Teens Make Home Sewing Important Segment in the American Way of Life," Home Sewing News (May, 1960), Reprint from Notions & Novelty Review.

<sup>3</sup>Fessenden, op. cit., pp. 4-5.



General construction	28% <sup>1</sup>
Children's clothing	27%
Individual figure problems	26%
Fitting and size	24%
Buying, selecting, care	18%
Financial problems	12%
Remodeling, altering, repair	7%

In the area of general construction, problems centered around general sewing; the use of patterns and single techniques such as zippers, collars, sleeves, belts, and buttonholes. The women often found it hard to fit themselves as well as to alter their patterns. Buying fabrics and selecting suitable styles and color were a problem to 18 percent. In children's clothing special figure problems and fitting were a problem due to lack of standard sizes for children's patterns and clothing.

Wage earner wives indicated problems in making different garments--dresses, coats, blouses, and skirts.<sup>2</sup> Sleeve, collar, zipper, buttonhole, lining, and fitting problems were most often mentioned. Respondents in Ledbetter's study "indicated that they would do more sewing for themselves if they could do a better job in fitting garments on themselves. Only 39.5% of the total group felt adequate in this technique."<sup>3</sup>

Fifty-four percent of those who had clothing problems in the 1957 USDA survey said they would like to have more information on one or two of the problems they named.<sup>4</sup> Thirty-three percent wanted more information on construction; 23 percent wanted information on buying,

<sup>1</sup>The percentages are based on the number who said they had problems, and not on the total number in the sample.

<sup>2</sup>Wage Earner Forum, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>Ledbetter, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>4</sup>Fessenden, op. cit., p. 9.

selection, and care. In Ledbetter's study 60.5 percent of her sample expressed a need for more instruction in children's clothing, and 23.5 percent felt a need for more instruction in tailoring.<sup>1</sup>

When purchasing fabrics, respondents in Mitchell's study considered suitability to the person, ease in care, color, suitability to the pattern, fiber content, ease in construction, durability, and price.<sup>2</sup> McCalls' respondents did not consider the suitability of the fabric to the person or pattern. They seek fabrics that are colorfast, washable, preshrunk, crease-resistant, and serviceable.<sup>3</sup>

The samples used in each study had specific characteristics and were not truly representative of the American sewing population. Mitchell's sample represented the clientele who bought fabrics at three different types of stores in Lubbock County, Texas--a large department store, a chain store, and a fabric mart. Both Ledbetter and Frazier used home economics graduates in their respective studies. Women who had taken clothing classes or who were enrolled in adult clothing classes were used in the studies by Matthews and by Lutz. Random samples of paid subscribers to the McCalls' Magazine were used in both of the McCalls' surveys. Wage earner wives were represented in the MacFadden survey.

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<sup>1</sup>Ledbetter, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Mitchell, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>Editors of American Fabrics Magazine, op. cit., p. 82.

## CHAPTER III

### PROCEDURE

The names of 275 women used for this study were drawn at random from the customer mailing list of a reputable fabric store in East Lansing, Michigan. The investigator wanted a sample comprised of women who had one characteristic in common--that they were actively engaged in home sewing. It is natural to assume that women who buy fabrics are engaged in some area of home sewing.

A questionnaire was developed to obtain data relevant to the objectives of this study. It was pretested by 25 women drawn from the random sample. Twenty questionnaires were mailed and five women were selected for interviews. Only two of the prospective interviewees contacted were willing to participate in the pretest. Seventy percent of the mailed questionnaires were returned. The pretest indicated that no major changes were necessary.<sup>1</sup>

The questionnaires with a cover letter were mailed to 250 women and collected during the period of April 7-12, 1961. A total of 137 questionnaires were returned, 54.8% of the mailing. Ninety-four (69.3%) of the returned questionnaires were usable, 23 (16.85%) were incomplete, 12 (8.75%) women indicated that they did not sew themselves but employed the services of a professional dressmaker, and 7 (2.8%) were returned

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<sup>1</sup>The two women interviewed had no difficulty in completing their questionnaires, but did suggest a change in the age ranges, e.g. 20-30, 30-40 be changed to 20-29, 30-39, etc. The pages of the questionnaires used for the pretest were not numbered, consequently many of the respondents missed one or two complete pages. This was corrected in the final questionnaire.

from the dead letter office. Since no major changes were made in the questionnaire after the pretest, six of the most complete pretest responses were included in the total sample used for this study.<sup>1</sup> This was done so that the findings of this study could be based on 100 completed questionnaires.

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<sup>1</sup>The two questionnaires obtained by interview were not used.



## CHAPTER IV

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDY SAMPLE

In order to ascertain the composition of this group of women who sew, questions to obtain data concerning age, income, occupation, family composition, and formal education were included in the questionnaire.

Ninety percent of the respondents were married; 10% were single, widowed, or divorced. The family size ranged from one to six children; 14.4% of the married respondents had no children.

<u>Family size</u>	<u>Percentage</u> <sup>1</sup>
1 child	12
2 children	35
3 children	15
4 children	14
5 children	1
6 children	2

The investigator found that the largest percentage (62%) of women who sewed were between 30-49 years of age; 22% of the respondents were in the 20-29 age range. These findings are similar to those of Mitchell's study.<sup>2</sup> In her study, the largest percentage (66%) of the women who sewed were between the ages of 30-50, and 22% of her sample were in the 20-30 age range.

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<sup>1</sup>All percentages are based on the total sample unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup>Mitchell, op. cit., p. 21.

The age range of the respondents is as follows:

<u>Age range</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Under 20	3
20 - 29	22
30 - 39	34
40 - 49	28
50 - 59	7
Over 60	2
No response	<u>4</u>
Total	100

The white collar worker was represented by 82% of the respondents, and 17% of the respondents represented the blue collar workers. There was one "no response." The breakdown of the occupational groups is indicated in the chart below.

<u>White Collar Worker</u>		<u>Blue Collar Worker</u>	
<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Professional	35	Manual worker	10
Proprietors, Managers	4	Protective service worker	2
Business men	8	Farmers	3
Clerks, kindred workers	26	Retired	2
M. S. U. students	7		
Retired	<u>2</u>		
Total	82	Total	<u>17</u>

Sixty percent of the women indicated that they were not currently working outside the home nor had worked outside the home during the past year. Thirty-nine percent of the women were employed outside the home--10% on part-time basis and 29% on full-time basis. There was one "no response" to the question.

The median family income for this study sample falls in the \$8,000 to \$8,999 income bracket. This is considerably higher than the national median family income of \$5,620 for 1960.<sup>1</sup> Seventy-five percent of the sample had family incomes over \$5,000; one-third of this segment had yearly family incomes over \$10,000. Sixty-six percent of Mitchell's study sample had family incomes over \$5,000; almost one-half of this segment was represented by the \$5,000-\$6,999 income group.<sup>2</sup> When the income levels in the present study are combined as in Mitchell's study, the result is somewhat different. More than one-third of the "over \$5,000" segment is represented by the \$7,000-\$9,999 income group (see the table below).

Family Income Ranges of the Present Study Sample as Compared with Mitchell's Study Sample.

Income Range	Percentage	
	Present Study	Mitchell Study
\$1,000 to \$2,999	2	6
3,000 to 4,999	16	16
5,000 to 6,999	18	31
7,000 to 9,999	32	25
10,000 and over	25	10
Unknown	7	12

<sup>1</sup>United States Bureau of Census, loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Mitchell, op. cit., p. 33.

Family Income Range for the 100 Michigan Women Represented in this Study.

Income	Percentage
\$2,000 to \$2,999	2
3,000 to 3,999	4
4,000 to 4,999	12
5,000 to 5,999	11
6,000 to 6,999	7
7,000 to 7,999	10
8,000 to 8,999	10
9,000 to 10,000	12
Over 10,000	25
No response	7

The source of the two study samples may account for the differences in their incomes. Mitchell's study sample consists of women who purchased fabrics at three different stores representing three price levels, while the present study sample consists of women who purchased fabrics at one store. Differences in geographical location may be another influencing factor.

Family incomes in U.S.A. have been steadily rising. The number of family units in the low income group (under \$4,000) has declined, while the number of family units in the middle income group (\$4,000 to \$7,500) and in the high income group (over \$7,500) have increased.<sup>1</sup> "Right now there are more families in the middle than at the top or bottom."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Editors of Fortune, 1960, op. cit., p. 92.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

This was not the case for the income groups represented in this study. Six percent of the sample were in the low income group, 40% of the sample were in the middle income group, and 48% of the sample were in the high income group. This inverted income pyramid represents what has been predicted for the future American income pyramid of 1970--that the largest percentage of American families will have incomes over \$7,500.<sup>1</sup> Although this study sample is not truly representative of the American population, the findings are interesting.

Ninety percent of the women live in the cities of East Lansing (47%) and Lansing (43%), 3% live in small towns, and 7% live in rural areas in Michigan.

All but two of the women had completed their senior high school education. Sixty-two percent of the women have had training beyond senior high school; 20% of the women are college graduates, 17% of the women have done college graduate work, 11% of the women have had 2 years of training beyond high school.

#### Educational Background of the 100 Women in the Study Sample.

Formal Education	Percentage
Completed junior high school	1
2 years of senior high school	1
Completed senior high school	35
1 year training beyond high school	8
2 years training beyond high school	11
3 years training beyond high school	6
College graduates	20
Graduate work	17
No response	<u>1</u>
Total	100

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

Eighty-nine percent of the women indicated that they have had formal instruction in sewing. The largest percentage received their training while attending high school. Equally important as sources of training were adult evening classes and the home. However, the training in clothing construction has been gained from various other sources as well--4 H Clubs, extension classes, classes sponsored by sewing machine companies, and college classes.

Source of Training in Clothing Construction as Indicated by the 100 Women.

Source	Percentage
In the home	44
4 H Clubs	15
Junior high school	44
Senior high school	46
Extension classes	3
Adult evening classes	36
Classes sponsored by sewing machine companies	29
College	12
No formal instruction	11
Home instruction	5
No instruction	6

Total exceeds 100% because of multiple mentions.

The source of training in clothing selection and construction was somewhat similar in Mitchell's study.<sup>1</sup> Public schools (33%), college (11%), home demonstration clubs (8%), Singer Sewing Machine Company (5%), and the home (6%) were most often mentioned as sources of

<sup>1</sup>Mitchell, op. cit., p. 29.

training. Adult classes and the home were not as important as sources of training in her study as they appear to be in the present study.

A smaller percentage of Mitchell's sample (63%) had had formal training in clothing construction.

Almost one-half of the women (46%) have had some advanced instruction in clothing construction beyond basic dressmaking, 40% of the women have had instruction only in basic dressmaking, and 11% of the women have had no instruction.

Type of Formal Instruction the 100 Women Have Had in Clothing Construction.

Type of Instruction	Percentage
Basic dressmaking	86
Advanced dressmaking	30
Pattern making	10
Tailoring	29
Draping	3
No instruction	11
No response	3

Totals exceed 100% because of multiple mentions.

## CHAPTER V

### ANALYSIS OF SEWING PRACTICES

One of the main objectives of the study was to determine what reasons women gave for engaging in home sewing. The women were asked to rate their three most important reasons in the order of their importance to them. In the first rating, the principal reasons women gave for sewing were that: (1) they enjoy sewing (29%); (2) sewing saves them money (27%); (3) dressmaking has a creative appeal for them (17%); and (4) they can have more clothes for the same amount of money (11%). In their second and third ratings, the reason that "they can have more clothes for the same amount of money" became their third most important reason for sewing (see Table II, p. 20).

When the two occupational groups were compared, the reasons given by the white collar worker remained the same as those given by the total sample in their first rating. However, almost one-half of the blue collar workers indicated that their main reason for sewing was because "sewing saved them money" (see Table II, p. 20).

Women in the high income group (\$8,000 and over) sewed for different reasons than the women in the middle income group (\$4,000 to \$7,999). The principal reasons women in the high income group gave for sewing were that "they enjoy sewing" (27.66%), and "dressmaking has a creative appeal for them" (23.4%).<sup>1</sup> Forty percent of the women in the middle income group made garments at home because "sewing saved them money"; 32.5% "sew for enjoyment" (see Table II, p. 20).

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<sup>1</sup>Percentages are based on the number of women in the income group, and not on the total study sample of 100.



Table II. Reasons for Home Sewing as Expressed by Michigan Women Who Sew.

Reasons	Reasons for Home Sewing as Expressed by 100 Michigan Women		Reasons for Home Sewing as Expressed by Michigan Women in Two Occupational Groups		Reasons for Home Sewing as Expressed by Michigan Women in Two Income Groups	
	First Rating	Total of Three Ratings	White Collar Group	Blue Collar Group	Middle Income Group	High Income Group
	%	%	%*	%*	%**	%**
You enjoy sewing	29	81	29.27	29.42	32.5	27.66
Sewing saves you money	27	59	23.17	47.07	40.0	19.15
Dressmaking has a creative appeal for you	17	40	17.07	17.64	10.0	23.40
You can have more clothes for the same amount of money	11	46	12.20		2.5	17.02
You have fitting problems in ready-made clothes	5	12	6.10		5.0	6.38
You have a wider choice of fabrics and colors	4	31	4.88			2.13
You cannot buy styles you want in ready-made clothes	1	14	1.22		2.5	
Other reasons	2	5	2.44		2.5	2.13
No response or not rated	4	4	3.65	5.87	5.0	2.13

\* Percentages are based on the number of women in each occupational group.

\*\* Percentages are based on the number of women in each income group.

The six respondents in the low income group (\$4,000 and under) each checked a different reason for sewing, consequently, no comparison could be made of their reasons for sewing.

The findings of this study are in general agreement with other studies in regard to the reasons given for home sewing (see Table I, p. 7). However, economy does not play as an important part as in other studies, instead "sewing for enjoyment" is most often mentioned as the main reason for sewing.

Other studies<sup>1</sup> have indicated that women are more likely to sew for themselves than for any other member of the family. This was not found to be the case in this study. Women, who had daughters made 5 to 6 garments more for their daughters per year than they did for themselves. They sewed an average of 8.1 to 9.6 garments per year for themselves, and sewed an average of 13.9 to 14.8 garments per year for their daughters.<sup>2</sup> They sewed considerably less for their sons and husbands.

The respondents (total sample) made an average of 24.18 garments per year. The women in this study are more actively engaged in home sewing than the women reported in other studies and make an average of 3.18 to 9.88 more garments per year. As a total group, the respondents sew almost as many garments for their daughters, 13 years and under, as they do for themselves.

<sup>1</sup>The following are good examples:

Fessenden, op. cit., p. 3.

"Home Sewers Speak," op. cit., p. 50.

Editors of American Fabrics, op. cit., p. 82.

Parents' Magazine, Home Sewing and Needlework Survey, Special Report Prepared by Research Department, Parents' Magazine, 1954, p. II.

<sup>2</sup>The averages are based on the number of women who had daughters and not on the total sample of 100.

Number of Garments Made per Year by Respondents in Other Studies as Compared with the Present Study.

Study	Number of Garments Made per Year
Present study	24.18
McCalls'	21.0
Simplicity (as reported by Matthews)	19.03
Parents' Magazine	15.8
Matthews	14.3

Average Number of Garments Made Per Year Per Respondent in the Present Study:

For themselves	9.25
For daughters, 13 years and under	8.73
For daughters, 14 years and over	4.14
For sons	1.34
For husbands	<u>.72</u>
Total	24.18

The relationship between family income and the amount of home sewing done was not as the investigator had expected. Women in the high income group (\$8,000 and over) tend to make the most number of garments, an average of 29.12 garments per year. In the middle income group (\$4,000 - \$8,000) women made an average of 20.02 garments per year, 9.1 fewer garments than the high income group. The women in the low income group (\$4,000 and under) made an average of 19.16 garments per year, slightly less than the middle income group. Women in the high income group are sewing primarily for enjoyment and creative reasons which perhaps may account for the differences.

When the women sew for themselves and their daughters, 14 years of age and over, the garments they most frequently made ~~were~~ dresses; followed by skirts, blouses, sportswear, nightwear, and suits in that order (see Table V, p. 24). School dresses and sportswear were most frequently made by the women for their daughters, 13 years of age and under; followed by skirts, blouses, dress-up dresses, and nightwear (see Table IV, p. 24). When they sew for their husbands and sons, they most frequently make shirts and pajamas (see Table III, below). The findings of this study are similar to those of other studies in regard to the kinds of garments women most frequently sew.

Table III. Types of Garments Made by 100 Michigan Women for Their Sons and Husbands.

Garment	Total Number Made in the Past Year	
	For Sons	For Husbands
Coats	1	1
Separate jackets	14	14
Slacks, bermudas	30	14
Shirts	53	28
Pajamas, robes	36	15
Total	134	72

One-quarter of the study sample reported having little or no difficulty in constructing garments. The greatest problem that the women encountered in home sewing was "fitting the garments on themselves"; 40% of the women had considerable difficulty with this technique (see Table VI, p. 25). Over ninety percent of the study sample have one or more figure problems, which may account for part of their difficulty in fitting garments on themselves.

Table IV. Types of Garments Made by 100 Michigan Women for Their Daughters, 13 Years and Under.

Garment	Total Number Made in The Past Year
Coats	36
Separate jackets or blazers	34
Dresses - school	182
dress-up	79
Skirts	143
Blouses	137
Sportswear (shorts, slacks)	184
Nightwear (robes, pajamas)	67
Slips	9
Costumes	2
Total	873

Table V. Types of Garments Made by the 100 Michigan Women for Themselves and Their Daughters, 14 Years and Over.

Garment	Total Number Made in the Past Year	
	For Themselves	For Daughters
Coats	21	11
Suits	42	9
Separate jackets, blazers	14	7
Dresses	374	142
Skirts	180	85
Blouses and shirts	133	70
Sportswear	99	58
Nightwear and lingerie	56	32
Total	925	414

Table VI. Problems Encountered in Home Sewing as Expressed by 100 Michigan Women.

Problem	Percentage*
Taking body measurements	3
Selecting the correct pattern size	8
Selection of a suitable fabric for the style of garment chosen	7
Altering the pattern	17
Understanding the pattern guide sheet	7
Fitting a garment on yourself	40
Fitting a garment on others	8
Choice of seams or seam finishes suitable to the fabric	2
Making bias facing and bindings	6
Applying fitted facing	4
Making collars and cuffs	5
Attaching collars and cuffs	7
Setting in sleeves	21
Corded or bound buttonholes	29
Applying plackets or zippers	10
Pockets	9
Yokes	1

\* Total exceeds 100% because of multiple mentions.

In the area of general construction, problems centered around single techniques such as bound buttonholes (29%), setting in sleeves (21%), and applying zippers (10%). Altering their patterns was a difficult process for seventeen percent of the women. The problems encountered by the respondents were similar to those encountered by women in other studies.

When asked "are there some garments that you have made for yourself which you seldom or never wear?" sixty percent of the women answered in the affirmative. Dresses were most often mentioned by the women (65%) as the garments that they make and seldom wear; 20% of the women have made suits that they seldom wear.<sup>1</sup> Their reasons for not wearing the garments were mainly: poor fit (58%), error in style selection (35%), looks homemade (18%), and poor choice of fabric or inferior fabric (18%). Their reasons for not wearing the garments are closely related to the problems they reported having in home sewing. The difficulties they have in fitting garments on themselves and in construction techniques are reflected in the "poor fit" and "looks homemade" reasons for not wearing the garments.

A small percentage of the women (16%) have made garments for other members of their families which are seldom or never worn. The types of garments most often mentioned as being seldom worn were dresses and slacks. Other garments mentioned were skirts, men's shirts, and children's clothing. The respondents said the reasons family members gave for not wearing these garments were: poor fit (43.75%), dislike the style (25%), unhappy choice of fabric (18.75%), and looks homemade (12.5%).<sup>2</sup>

Slightly less than one-third of the women have made garments for their friends. Types of garments most often mentioned as being sewn were dresses, childrens clothing, blouses, and skirts in the order named. A very small percentage of the women (4%) have sewn garments for customers--mostly dresses and children's clothing.

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<sup>1</sup>Percentages are based on the 60 women who answered in the affirmative, and not on the total sample.

<sup>2</sup>Percentages are based on the number of women who answered in the affirmative and not on the total sample.

The fiber content of the fabrics preferred and used most often by the respondents in their sewing are: cotton (68%), wool (49%), cotton blends (40%), wool and synthetic blends (24%), and Dacron (14%). The difficulty of setting in sleeves that the women reported may be related to their most frequent use of cotton fabrics which are difficult to ease into the armhole. A few women use linen, silk, nylon, acetate and arnel fabrics. When shopping for fabrics, the women (81%) most frequently purchase the fabric because it "has a design, color, or texture they like." Other features that influence their purchases are: Sanforized or other shrinkage treatment (56%), easy-to-care features (55%), crease resistant (52%), colorfast (51%), on sale (40%), and fiber content (37%).<sup>1</sup> Less than one-fifth of the women are influenced by the feature "new this season" when selecting fabrics.

When the women were asked "would you like further instruction in sewing?" sixty-seven percent answered in the affirmative. They indicated a need for further instruction in: tailoring (44.9%), advanced dressmaking (19.4%), pattern making (14.9%), and fitting and altering (7.5%).<sup>2</sup> Other areas of need were mentioned by a few women--basic dressmaking, new techniques in construction, children's clothing, and a short-cut or speed method of clothing construction.

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<sup>1</sup>Percentages exceed 100% because of multiple mentions.

<sup>2</sup>Percentages are based on the number of women who indicated a need for further instruction in sewing, and not on the total sample.



## Need for Further Sewing Instruction as Expressed by 100 Michigan Women.

Type of Sewing Instruction	Percentage*
Tailoring	44.8
Advanced dressmaking	19.4
Pattern making	14.9
Fitting and altering	7.4
Basic dressmaking	4.5
New techniques	9.0
Children's clothing	4.5
Short-cut or speed method	3.0
Use of machine attachments	3.0

\* Percentages based on the number of women that expressed a need for further instruction. Totals exceed 100% because of multiple mentions.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Home sewing continues to be a "high interest" center in the lives of many American women who sew. This interest represents a means of extending the clothing dollar and at the same time provides enjoyment in creating fashionable clothing in their leisure hours.

From the findings of this study, it has been concluded that the women sew primarily because "they enjoy sewing," "sewing saves them money," "dressmaking has a creative appeal for them," and "they can have more clothes for the same amount of money." Differences in reasons for sewing were noted between the two occupational groups. The wives of the white collar workers most often sewed for the enjoyment value of making garments at home; the wives of the blue collar workers most often sewed because "sewing saved them money." Differences were also noted between the high income and middle income groups. Women in the high income group most often sewed because "they enjoy sewing" and "sewing has a creative appeal for them"; the middle income group most frequently sewed because "sewing saves them money."

Women who have daughters often sew more garments for the daughters than for themselves. On the whole, the women sewed more often for themselves and their daughters, 13 years and under, than for any other member of the family. The women make an average of 24.18 garments per year. It was found that women in the high income group made 9 to 10 garments more per year than the women in the middle income group.

When women sew for themselves and their daughters, 14 years and over, they most frequently make dresses. School dresses and sportswear are most often made for their daughters, 13 years and under. Shirts and pajamas are often the garments made for their sons and husbands.

Women who sew often encounter problems--three-quarters of the women in this study reported difficulties in their sewing. The problem most frequently mentioned was the difficulty of fitting garments on themselves. In the area of general construction making bound buttonholes and setting in sleeves were most often mentioned as problems by the women.

Satisfaction with the end result is an important aspect of home sewing. Enjoyment gained from home sewing is not just in the mechanics of making a garment but in creating one that is becoming to the individual and a joy to wear. Over one-half of the women have had the unhappy experience of making garments for themselves which they have seldom or never worn. The women most frequently mentioned "poor fit, " "error in style selection, " "looks homemade, " and "poor choice of fabric" as their reasons for not wearing the garments. Dresses were most often mentioned as the garments in this category.

The fiber content of the fabrics preferred and most often used by the women in their sewing were cotton, wool, cotton blends, and wool and synthetic blends. When the women shopped for fabrics, they most frequently purchased a fabric because it "had a color, design, and texture they liked. " They were often influenced by other features such as Sanforized or other shrinkage treatment, easy-to-care features, crease resistance, and colorfastness.

In this study the woman who sews can be described as one who is between 30 and 49 years of age, married and not employed, with a family income of \$8,000 to \$8,999, and caring for a family which includes one

to six children. The majority of them have had educational training beyond senior high school.

High school clothing courses were an important source of formal training in clothing construction for the women. Equally important were adult evening classes. Clothing teachers at this level must be aware of the problems women encounter in their home sewing if they are to meet the needs of this group. There are indications that students need more experience and training in altering and fitting of patterns to overcome figure defects. More emphasis may also be needed in the selection of suitable pattern styles and fabrics for the individual.

#### Recommendations for Further Studies

1. Further studies be made to determine what proportion of the low income group is engaged in home sewing.

2. Additional studies be made to survey the home sewing practices of women who are a typical representation of the total population of one area.

3. Additional studies be made of the cost of home sewn garments and estimated savings of clothing dollars.

4. Additional studies be made to gain a knowledge of clothing budget practices.

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## APPENDIX

Room 427 Owen Hall,  
East Lansing, Michigan  
April 7, 1961.

Dear Madam:

As a graduate student in the Textiles, Clothing, and Related Arts Department of the College of Home Economics at Michigan State University, I am making a special study of why women sew today for themselves and for their families. I am also interested in the kinds and numbers of garments they make and what kind of problems they encounter when sewing.

A compilation of information of this type is of great value to teachers of clothing at all levels. Your willingness to fill in the enclosed questionnaire and tell us about your sewing experiences will be greatly appreciated.

Please return the completed questionnaire in the enclosed self addressed and stamped envelope on or before April 15, 1961.

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to contribute valuable information for my study.

Sincerely,

*Annette Ostapovitch*

Student: Annette Ostapovitch

*Margaret Hearn*

Faculty Advisor: Mrs. Margaret Hearn



1. The first part of the document is a letter from the President of the United States to the Congress, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very important document, as it contains the President's annual message to Congress. The letter is written in a formal, dignified style, and it is one of the most important documents in the history of the United States.

2. The second part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the Treasury, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very important document, as it contains the Secretary's annual report to Congress. The report is written in a formal, dignified style, and it is one of the most important documents in the history of the United States.

3. The third part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the Interior, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very important document, as it contains the Secretary's annual report to Congress. The report is written in a formal, dignified style, and it is one of the most important documents in the history of the United States.

4. The fourth part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the War, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very important document, as it contains the Secretary's annual report to Congress. The report is written in a formal, dignified style, and it is one of the most important documents in the history of the United States.

5. The fifth part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the Navy, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very important document, as it contains the Secretary's annual report to Congress. The report is written in a formal, dignified style, and it is one of the most important documents in the history of the United States.

# SURVEY OF HOME SEWING PRACTICES

1

1. Below is a list of reasons why people sew. Rate your reasons in the order of their importance to you. Place a number "1" before the most important, number "2" before the one next in importance, and "3" before the one that is third in importance. Rank only 1 to 3.

- ☐ a. You enjoy sewing
- ☐ b. Sewing saves you money
- ☐ c. You have fitting problems in ready-made clothes
- ☐ d. You have a wider choice of fabrics and colors
- ☐ e. You can have more clothes for the same amount of money
- ☐ f. Dressmaking has a creative appeal for you
- ☐ g. You cannot buy the styles you want in ready-made clothes
- ☐ h. Other reasons (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ i. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Which of the following sewing processes do you find difficult? Place a check mark in the appropriate column opposite those you find difficult.

	Considerable Difficulty	Moderate Difficulty	Little Difficulty	NO Difficulty
Taking body measurements .....				
Selecting the correct pattern size...				
Altering the pattern.....				
Understanding the pattern guide sheet				
Choice of seams or seam finishes suitable to the fabric .....				
Making bias facings and bindings ...				
Applying fitted facings.....				
Making collars and cuffs .....				
Attaching collars and cuffs .....				
Setting in sleeves.....				
Corded or bound buttonholes .....				
Pleats, tucks, darts .....				
Plackets and zippers .....				
Pockets .....				
Yokes .....				
Fitting a garment on yourself .....				
Fitting a garment on others .....				
Selection of a suitable fabric for the style of garment you have chosen.				
Other difficulties (specify) -----				
-----				
-----				
-----				
-----				

3. Of the sewing processes which you checked in the chart above as considerably difficult, which three do you consider are the most difficult problems for you?

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. most difficult
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. next most difficult
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. third most difficult

1. The purpose of this document is to provide information regarding the security of the system. The information is classified as CONFIDENTIAL - SECURITY INFORMATION.

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7. The information is provided for the use of the system and is not to be distributed outside the system. The information is classified as CONFIDENTIAL - SECURITY INFORMATION.

4. Below is a list of common fitting problems, which of these are your fitting problems? (Check one or more) <sup>2.</sup>

<input type="checkbox"/> a. Large upper arm	<input type="checkbox"/> h. uneven shoulders
<input type="checkbox"/> b. dowagers' hump	<input type="checkbox"/> i. sloping shoulders
<input type="checkbox"/> c. round shoulders	<input type="checkbox"/> j. square shoulders
<input type="checkbox"/> d. short waisted	<input type="checkbox"/> k. overdeveloped thighs
<input type="checkbox"/> e. long waisted	<input type="checkbox"/> l. bust large in proportion to hips
<input type="checkbox"/> f. flat chested	<input type="checkbox"/> m. bust large in proportion to waist
<input type="checkbox"/> g. sway back	<input type="checkbox"/> n. hips large in proportion to waist

Others (specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. When you are shopping for fabrics for garments to be made at home, what influences your purchases? (Check one or more)

<input type="checkbox"/> a. is a remnant	<input type="checkbox"/> f. has a design, color or texture that you like
<input type="checkbox"/> b. is new this season	<input type="checkbox"/> g. is Sanforized or has other shrinkage treatment
<input type="checkbox"/> c. is on sale	<input type="checkbox"/> h. has easy-to-care-for features (special finish)
<input type="checkbox"/> d. is colorfast	<input type="checkbox"/> i. has a suitable fiber content
<input type="checkbox"/> e. is crease resistant	

Others (specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Check the kinds of fabrics you have used, and then double check the ones you like or use most often.

Natural: Wool ☐ Cotton ☐ Linen ☐ Silk ☐  
Synthetic: Nylon ☐ Dacron ☐ Rayon ☐ Acetate ☐ Arnel ☐ Orlon ☐  
Blends: Cotton and synthetics ☐ Wool and synthetics ☐

7. Which of the following commercial patterns do you buy?

Vogue: Regular ☐ Special ☐ Couturier ☐ French ☐  
Simplicity ☐ McCall's ☐ Advance ☐ Butterick ☐ Designer "Spadea" ☐  
Modes Royale ☐

8. What pattern size do you buy? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Do you sew for your friends? Yes ☐ No ☐. If yes, specify the types of garment

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Do you sew for customers? Yes ☐ No ☐. If yes, specify the types of garments.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. Are there some garments that you have made for yourself which you seldom or never wear? Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

a. If yes, please list the garments. \_\_\_\_\_

b. What are your reasons for not wearing them? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

12. Are there some garments that you have made for the members of your family which they seldom or never wear? Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

a. If yes, please list the garments. \_\_\_\_\_

b. What are their reasons for not wearing them? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

13. Check any of the following items which you have sewn for your daughters who are under 14 years of age. In addition, in the column provided mark how many of each article you have made in the past year.

	New	Remade	Number made in past year
Coats .....			
Separate jackets or blazers.			
Dresses - school .....			
dress-up.....			
Skirts .....			
Blouses .....			
Shorts, slacks .....			
Nightwear - robes .....			
pajamas.....			
Others (specify) .....			
.....			
.....			

14. Check any of the following items which you have sewn for your husband and for your sons. In addition, in the column provided mark how many of each article you have made in the past year.

Garment	For Husband			For Sons		
	New	Remade	No. made in past yr.	New	Remade	No. made in past yr.
Overcoats .....						
Separate jackets .						
Slacks .....						
Shirts .....						
Pajamas .....						
Others (specify)						



15. Check any of the following wardrobe items which you have sewn or remade for yourself and for your daughters who are 14 years of age and over. In addition, in the column provided mark how many of each article you have made in the past year.

Garment	For Yourself			For Daughters		
	New	Remade	No. made in past year	New	Remade	No. made in past year
<b>OUTERWEAR</b>						
Coats						
Suits - lined						
unlined						
Separate jackets, blazers						
<b>DRESSES</b>						
Formals						
Cocktail						
Afternoon or church						
Street or casual						
Jacket dresses						
Coordinates (2-3 piece)						
House dresses						
Maternity						
Jumpers						
<b>SKIRTS</b>						
Fitted						
Pleated						
Gathered						
<b>BLOUSES AND SHIRTS</b>						
Long sleeves						
Short sleeves						
Sleeveless						
<b>SPORTSWEAR</b>						
Slacks						
Pedalpushers, slimjims						
Shorts						
Culottes						
<b>NIGHTWEAR and LINGERIE</b>						
Robes						
Pajamas						
Gowns						
Slips						

16. Age Range: Under 20 \_\_\_ 20-29 \_\_\_ 30-39 \_\_\_ 40-49 \_\_\_ 50-59 \_\_\_ Over 60 \_\_\_

17. Marital Status: Single \_\_\_ Married \_\_\_ Total number in family \_\_\_

Number of sons \_\_\_ Ages \_\_\_

Number of daughters \_\_\_ Ages \_\_\_





18. Husband's Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_ 5.

19. Are you presently working outside the home, or have you worked outside the home during the past year? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

a. If yes, is it part-time \_\_\_\_\_ or full-time \_\_\_\_\_

b. What type of work do you do? \_\_\_\_\_

20. In which of these brackets does your family total yearly income fall?

1, 999 or less _____	6, 000 to 6, 999 _____
2, 000 to 2, 999 _____	7, 000 to 7, 999 _____
3, 000 to 3, 999 _____	8, 000 to 8, 999 _____
4, 000 to 4, 999 _____	9, 000 to 10, 000 _____
5, 000 to 5, 999 _____	10, 000 and over _____

21. Community Type: City \_\_\_\_\_ Small town \_\_\_\_\_ Suburban \_\_\_\_\_ Rural \_\_\_\_\_

22. Formal Education: Circle the number of years completed.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6	7 8 9	10 11 12	13 14 15 16	17 and over
Grade School	Junior High	High School	Training beyond High School	Graduate Work

23. What kind of instruction have you had in sewing?

In the home \_\_\_\_\_ years  
4H clubs \_\_\_\_\_ years  
Junior High School \_\_\_\_\_ terms \_\_\_\_\_ semesters  
Senior High School \_\_\_\_\_ terms \_\_\_\_\_ semesters  
Extension classes \_\_\_\_\_ weeks \_\_\_\_\_ terms  
Adult evening classes \_\_\_\_\_ weeks \_\_\_\_\_ terms  
Classes sponsored by sewing machine companies \_\_\_\_\_  
College \_\_\_\_\_ terms \_\_\_\_\_ courses

24. In which of the following have you had instruction? You may check more than one.

\_\_\_\_\_ Basic dressmaking  
\_\_\_\_\_ Advanced dressmaking  
\_\_\_\_\_ Pattern making  
\_\_\_\_\_ Tailoring

25. Would you like further instruction in sewing? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, specify \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



Sources of Commercial Surveys

McCall Corporation  
Advertising Research Department  
230 Park Avenue  
New York, N. Y.

Research Department  
Parents' Institute Inc.  
52 Vanderbilt Avenue  
New York, N. Y.

Educational Department  
Vogue Pattern Service  
Conde Nast Publications Inc.  
420 Lexington Avenue  
New York 17, N. Y.

MacFadden Publications Inc.  
205 East 42nd Street  
New York 17, N. Y.

Ladies Home Journal  
Research Library,  
Curtis Publishing Company  
Independence Square  
Philadelphia 5, Pennsylvania



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