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SYDNEY’S BIG STORES 1880-1930: GENDER AND MASS MARKETING

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the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

Women, Men and Retailing: Histories and Theories 1

The Expansion of Sydney's Big Stores 1880-1930 17

I. RETAIL COMMODITIES AND LABOUR

CHAPTER 1: Retailers as Clothing Manufacturers 44

CHAPTER 2: The Sexual Organisation of Commodities, Spaces and Personnel 76

CHAPTER 3: The Management of Sales Assistants:
Paternalism 115
Welfarism 135
Scientific Salesmanship 147
Industrial Psychology 153

II. CONSUMPTION

CHAPTER 4: Class, Gender and the Mass Market 161

CHAPTER 5: The 'Difficult' Customer and the Management of Buying 190

CHAPTER 6: Shoppers and the Big Stores 225

III. MARKETING

CHAPTER 7: Marketing and the Manufacture of Consumer Desire 252

CHAPTER 8: Advertising: Sexual Difference:
Displays 274
Catalogues 297
Advertising Policy 313

CHAPTER 9: Fashion, Femininity and Profit 327

CONCLUSION 361

BIBLIOGRAPHY 379
ILLUSTRATIONS

Farmers, exterior, c. 1882 18
Anthony Hordern & Sons' New Palace Emporium, exterior, c. 1907 21
David Jones, millinery department, 1887 78
David Jones, men's hat department, 1887 78
David Jones, costume department, 1887 79
David Jones, tailoring department, 1887 79
Farmers, ground floor, 1890 276
David Jones, Elizabeth Street store, ground floor, 1927 276
Civil Service Co-operative Society Stores, ground floor, 1907 277
McCathies' window display of underwear, 1917 293
David Jones' window display of bridal clothes, 1927 293
David Jones' catalogue, male figures, 1910 302
David Jones' catalogue, female figures, 1899 302
David Jones' catalogue, modernistic female figures, 1924 305
David Jones' catalogue, standardised female faces, 1926-7 305
Millinery display model 1926 310
The Model Trader (Grace Brothers' catalogue), men at work, 1921 310
Civil Service Co-operative Society Stores, toilet and perfumery department, 1907 342
INTRODUCTION

Gender and Retailing: Histories and Theories

The department stores of the world’s big cities have since the 1880s exerted a strong fascination for writers and shoppers alike. Their grand architecture and opulent interiors provided literary and historical backdrops for numerous tales of manly entrepreneurship and the seduction of women unable to resist temptation. Émile Zola’s Au Bonheur des Dames (The Ladies’ Paradise) is perhaps one of the most evocative and popular of these fictional representations.¹ Most of the early and some recent histories conducted – as the title of one states explicitly – a romance with retailing.² John Ferry’s frequently cited History of the Department Store is typical of studies which described the blossoming of humble drapery stores into mammoth emporia, largely through the allegedly exceptional personal qualities of the firm’s founder and his male successors.³

At their best, commemorative store histories and biographies of the great retailers are affectionate portraits of store personalities and celebrations of managerial perspicacity. Keith Dunstan’s history of the George & George’s store and Lesley Hordern’s sophisticated family history, two Australian examples of this international genre, ¹ London: Hutchinson & Co., n.d. [1895, 1st pub. 1883]. Zola based his novel on a detailed investigation of Parisian department stores.

² Frances Pollon and Philip Geeves, A Romance with Retailing: An Early History Before 1900 and Progress to 1913. (Sydney: Retail Traders Association of New South Wales, 1983).

approach their subjects with more nostalgia than critical analysis. At their worst, commemorative histories are hagiographic eulogies to merchant princes. This applies particularly to early store histories such as The Romance of the House of Foy (1935), Charles Lloyd Jones's 'The History of David Jones Limited' (1955), Farmer & Company's Ninety-seven Years (1937) and numerous short histories which appeared in George Forbes' History of Sydney (1926) and in the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal between 1923 and 1935. Perhaps less excusably, more recent accounts such as Ambrose Pratt's biography of Sidney Myer and the Grace Brothers' publication The Model Store exalt the business skills and paternalism of Australian retailers with little attempt to present a more balanced view of the effects of their management on the working and shopping community.

A second strand of the early school of retail history described the experiences of shopping or, as Alison Adburgham subtitled one of her books, accounts of 'Where and in What


Manner the Well-Dressed Englishwoman Bought her Clothes. The attempts of social historians like Adburgham, Molly Harrison and Dorothy Davis to place shopping in a wider context were welcome but partly constrained by their view of consumption as a pleasurable activity which created 'interest and social enrichment' for the shopper rather than profit for the retailer. The social historians of shopping also failed to show how retailers and sales experts constructed and attempted to manipulate the shopper as a social stereotype based on a negative characterisation of women.

That shoppers, sales assistants and drapery commodities were predominantly female was acknowledged but not analysed by these historians. Standard works on retailing written before the 1970s such as James Jefferys' Retail Trading in Britain and Lawrence Neal's Retailing and the Public made obligatory but perfunctory mention that department stores were 'women's stores' as if this were common knowledge that required no further explanation. Many of these retail histories, moreover, divorced developments in the distributive trade from changes which were occurring in the world outside the store.

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H. Pasdermadjian's *The Department Store* (1954) was a harbinger of later studies which placed histories of retailing more firmly and more usefully within related social structures and economic developments.\(^\text{10}\) Some Australian historians of the 1970s interested in the growth of cities, notably Michael Cannon and Peter Spearritt, suggested that department stores were an integral part of commercial expansion and the urban experience.\(^\text{11}\) American and British historians such as Daniel Boorstin, Neil Harris and W. Hamish Fraser placed the development of department stores more explicitly in the context of industrial societies in which mass production was matched by the drive to stimulate consumption on a grand scale.\(^\text{12}\)

The work of feminist scholars in the 1970s awoke historians of the department store from their long ungendered slumber. The combination of marxist and feminist interpretations evident in articles by theorists such as Batya Weinbaum and Amy Bridges, Nona Glazer and Rosemary Pringle drew welcome attention to the economic significance


of women's domestic labour and the social relations of consumption under monopoly capitalism.\(^{13}\) Shopping, they suggested, was unpaid but nevertheless productive labour which realised for capital the profits of industrial methods of manufacture.

At the same time, feminist historians such as Theresa McBride, Lee Holcombe and Susan Porter Benson began to explore the world of women's paid labour as shop assistants in France, Britain and America.\(^{14}\) Jennifer MacCulloch's article on female shop assistants in Sydney's department stores between 1890 and 1930 was an important inspiration for this thesis.\(^{15}\) Michael Miller's study of the Bon Marché


\(^{15}\) "This Store is Our World": Female Shop Assistants in Sydney to 1930' in Jill Roe (ed.), Twentieth Century Sydney. Barbara Little's unpublished economic history of the Sydney retail industry also described the effects of female labour and provided valuable context: 'Retail Trade and Distribution in Sydney 1880-1914', PhD thesis, University of
store in Paris was also an exemplary model of a store history that revealed the centrality of household values and paternalism to the development of a modern bureaucratic organisation. Miller's analysis suggests that historians must take gender and family ideologies into account if they are to fully understand the social relations of distribution.

The growing literature on women in retailing was supplemented in the early 1980s by a new interest in the culture of consumption. Rosalind Williams' *Dream Worlds* explored the intellectual origins of consumer consciousness in France, as did Daniel Horowitz for the United States. Rachel Bowlby, one of the few writers to explicitly suggest a relationship between commerce and femininity, and Neil Harris analysed images of the consumer society in literature. Elizabeth Ewen and Stuart Ewen included department stores in their analysis of the iconography of consumption, *Channels of Desire*. Partly in response to *Channels of Desire*, William Leach argued that instead of being simply manipulated by management elites, women enthusiastically and autonomously

Sydney, 1979.

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participated in the culture of consumption created by American department stores and found within it a source of pleasure, self-determination and empowerment.20

Leach was able to characterise department store retailing as a largely positive development for women because he and most other writers on consumption tended to ignore the active intervention of retail managers and sales experts in shaping and controlling the human, ideological and material resources at their disposal on both sides of the counter. Susan Porter Benson is one of the few historians to have perceived and attempted to break down the theoretical and historiographical barriers between buying and selling. First published in a series of articles and recently in book form as Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers and Customers in American Department Stores 1890–1940, Benson’s work has considerably influenced this thesis.21 As well as showing the link between saleswomen and customers, Benson demonstrates how important was the self-conscious intervention of managers as human agents in the processes of retailing and consumption. Her study is valuable, moreover, for suggesting that women were neither the passive victims of managerial strategies nor free agents, but rather forged a work culture that enabled them to resist managers’ attempts to control their labour, whether waged or unwaged.

Benson’s work, probably the most impressively researched and invigorating account of women in retailing yet written, focuses almost exclusively on the department store as the


stage on which managers, customers and workers played out a complex drama. It consequently marginalises external social, economic and political forces acting upon the retail industry. As a result Benson acknowledges in passing but does not pursue the impact of industrial methods of clothing manufacture (perhaps because the American clothing trade industrialised earlier than the Australian), or retailers’ involvement in the advertising industry. Neither does she admit the ideological influences on retail management of popular psychology, fashion, or notions of consumer desire. The effects of state intervention and the political organisation of the retail industry are also peripheral to Benson’s analysis - again, perhaps because of cultural differences between the United States and Australia.

The second major limitation of Benson’s work is its inadequate recognition of gender as a category of socio-sexual organisation. She uses gender as a descriptive term, usually linked with class to describe influences on managerial policy, rather than as an analytical device. For example, she notes managers’ attempts to rationalise selling space within department stores without exploring the significance of segregated male and female spaces or commodities. More importantly, by concentrating on women rather than gender, Benson finds it difficult to demonstrate how ideas of masculinity and femininity pervaded marketing and labour management policies. Retailers may have been operating in what they described as an ‘Adamless Eden’, but men and masculine principles were just as much a part of their concern to maximise their sales as were women. Indeed, they largely defined the female characteristics of their
merchandise, workers and customers in relation to their own masculinity.

Despite its insistence on the primacy of women as the inhabitants of the department store, *Counter Cultures* is ultimately a pluralist account of the different political forces which were acted out on the sales floor. According to Benson, managers, saleswomen and customers each exerted pressure on the other members of the triad such that no one group achieved its objectives without mediation, alliance and compromise. While this approach admits more historical complexity and grants more agency to female customers and saleswomen than is usual in the historiography of retailing, it also suggests that retailers were considerably circumscribed in their activities.

The extent of this female-imposed constraint on the activities of male retail capitalists and their allies needs, I believe, careful interrogation. If retail managers were as tentative, frustrated and unsuccessful as Benson implies, how then do we account for the vast and increasing disparity between their financial and social position and that of most workers and shoppers? Saleswomen's work culture may have ameliorated the affective aspects of their work experience but did little to challenge their employers' hegemony over material factors such as low wages, long hours, excessive supervision and a sexual division of labour that assigned most managerial and executive positions to men. Similarly, department store customers may have subverted and undermined retailers' attempts to control their consumption behaviour, but their choice of merchandise was nevertheless limited by managerial marketing policies and prices determined by
managerial decisions. Ultimately large retailers had more power than did assistants or shoppers to influence patterns of retailing and consumption.

This thesis, therefore, sees managerial imperatives as the decisive (but not determinant) force in the development of mass retailing and marketing structures. This is not to invoke a straightforward control model of social relations, even though this thesis suggests that retailers did considerably more controlling than did their employees or customers. As historians we have a responsibility not only to allow historical actors a degree of agency—particularly those who have traditionally been denied an historical voice—but also to reveal the constraints imposed upon agency by political, social and economic structures. Benson's pluralist and cultural framework is limited in its explanatory power because it cannot show how gender meshed with, reinforced and shaped the social relations of capitalism. As Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle have argued, 'we cannot think capitalism without gender'.

Game and Pringle's Gender at Work was one of several recent works of feminist scholarship written outside the history of retailing that contributed to the theoretical framework of this thesis. Australian feminist historians have recently shown how gender identity has been actively, if not energetically constructed and reconstructed both in and outside the workplace by those with power and influence in society. Jill Matthews' Good and Mad Women in particular revealed the substantial ideological effort which 'managers

\[22\] Gender at Work (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1983) p 23.
of the gender order' invested in the social construction of
femininity in twentieth century Australia. Retailers,
advertising and sales experts were not alone, in other words,
in their preoccupation with female nature or their perception
of femininity as more complex, ambiguous and potentially
dangerous than their own masculinity. Neither did they work
in an ideological vacuum but drew upon gender ideologies
shared by women and men on the other side of the shop window.

Marilyn Lake's articles on the history of Australian
masculinity suggest an important area of feminist historical
inquiry with implications for the study of retailing. Her
work reveals the extent to which men were preoccupied in the
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with defining and
articulating their own manhood and its relationship to
femininity. This thesis suggests that retailers and
marketing experts contributed to the social construction of
Australian masculinity. They had good economic reasons to
explore and formulate differences between male and female
shoppers, and to exploit masculinity as well as femininity as
sales strategies.

Kerreen Reiger's The Disenchantment of the Home,
although it dealt with changing attitudes to the Australian
family between 1880-1940, has a broader application in the

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23 Good and Mad Women. The Historical Construction of
Femininity in Twentieth Century Australia (Sydney: George

24 'Socialism and Manhood: the Case of William Lane',
Labour History 50 (May 1986): 54-62; 'The Politics of
Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context',
context of changes in the retail industry in the same period. Reiger showed how the late nineteenth century ideology of the home as a haven from the public world controlled by 'natural' patriarchal authority was overlaid in the twentieth century by a view of the family as the proper subject of 'expert' rational and bureaucratic intervention in the name of efficiency and science. In retailing, too, managers and experts with a desire to increase the efficiency of selling intervened in marketing procedures more decisively, co-operatively and self-consciously in the early twentieth century.

Some aspects of current feminist philosophy have also helped clarify my ideas about women and men, female and male, femininity and masculinity. As French 'feminists of difference' such as Luce Irigaray and her commentators have pointed out,

the difference between the sexes is radical and it is constitutive of the human experience; it should be listed alongside mortality as the ineluctable frame of reference of the human being. Just like death, sexual difference is always already there, whether we acknowledge it or not.\(^{26}\)

Irigaray argues that the subject of discourse is never gender-neutral but always sexed: she attacks the unspoken but implied association between masculinity and rationality.\(^{27}\) This thesis suggests that the men who controlled and supported the Sydney retail industry created an apparently


\(^{26}\) Rosi Braidotti paraphrasing Luce Irigaray in 'The Ethics of Sexual Difference: the Case of Foucault and Irigaray', Australian Feminist Studies 3 (Summer 1986) p 9.

\(^{27}\) Braidotti, 'The Ethics of Sexual Difference' p. 8.
universal sales discourse that in fact articulated a male point of view which implicitly privileged masculinity by setting its values as the standard against which femininity was measured. The radical nature of sexual difference, moreover, influenced retailers' allocation of selling space, the organisation of commodities, display techniques, advertising and marketing policies and strategies of customer control.

This sexual difference was, as Moira Gatens has pointed out, both material and ideological. Gatens suggested that the biological experience of sex and the social experience of gender are closely linked such that sexual difference has a material basis in male and female bodies 'as lived'.

Retail management policies which segregated male and female spaces and male and female commodities depended on managers' perceptions of physical and sexual propriety associated with drapery goods intimately connected with the male and female body such as corsets and underwear. They allocated male assistants to the men's departments and female assistants to the women's departments because it was only sexually proper to do so.

The social and historical assignation of ideological sexual difference was, however, neither arbitrary nor politically neutral. The feminist critique of philosophy in, for example, the work of Janna Thompson and Genevieve Lloyd, revealed a long-standing tradition in western social and political thought that associated rationality with men and,

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by implication, irrationality with women. This thesis suggests that retailers' marketing and human management policies were marked by a sexual asymmetry that implicitly relied on a view of gender relations in which men possessed reason and women lacked it. Women's presumed irrationality, spontaneity and suggestibility, moreover, constituted an exploitable resource for retail management.

Some semiotic and critical theories of consumption, while largely gender-blind, can help us account for the eagerness with which retailers appropriated (and helped construct) gender ideologies in their drive to market drapery commodities on a mass scale. Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* showed how everyday commodities contained within them masked but potent social meanings, while his *Fashion System* explored the ways in which fashion advertisers and sellers consciously enveloped their merchandise with a 'veil of images, reasons and meanings' with desire as its object.  

Wolfgang Haug's *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics* extended Barthes' analysis into the realm of sensuality. He argued that in order to realise the exchange value of a commodity, advertisers and sellers aesthetically 'wrap' it so that it appeals to the sensual needs of the consumer. Although alien to Haug's project, his theory of commodity

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aesthetics can usefully be extended to illuminate the gender relations of retailing. Sensuality and sexuality as appropriated by capital in the pursuit of profit are not only gender-specific but sexually asymmetrical. This study suggests that retailers and sales experts perceived women to be more susceptible than men to sensual packaging and the 'aesthetic illusions' of promised use value. Haug's theory also anticipates an optimistic resolution of the 'consumer as victim' trap without inflating consumer power by stressing the symbiotic nature of the relationship between sellers and buyers and the paradox by which capital must be attuned to the real needs and desires of women and men to be effective.\footnote{32}

Jean Baudrillard's essays on consumption in \textit{For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign} and his book \textit{The Mirror of Production} also revealed the ways in which capital invests ideas and social values in the commodities it produces and must sell.\footnote{33} Baudrillard argued that after the crisis of capitalist production in 1929 the bourgeoisie of the western world shifted its attention from production to consumption, from the control of labour to the control of consumers, and from selling commodities to selling ideas.\footnote{34} The evidence presented in this thesis supports the importance of Baudrillard's posited dynamic but not his chronology. Drapery commodities were sold for their ideological

\footnote{32} Haug, \textit{Critique of Commodity Aesthetics}, p 54.

\footnote{33} \textit{For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign}, translated by Charles Levin (St. Louis, Telos Press, 1981); \textit{The Mirror of Production}, translated by Mark Poster (St. Louis, Telos Press, 1975).

\footnote{34} \textit{The Mirror of Production} p 144 and throughout.
associations as early as (perhaps earlier than) 1890. What changed in the early years of the twentieth century was the ways in which these strategies were self-consciously articulated, co-operatively disseminated and ideologically legitimated.

Some terms used in the thesis require clarification. Where other historians have referred ubiquitously to the 'department store', I use the term 'big stores' as a generic description of those inner city shops, usually drapery establishments, which expanded into what were commonly known by the 1920s as department stores and which constituted the membership of the Council of the Master Retailers Association (later the Retail Traders Association) of New South Wales. This designation is more historically accurate — large drapery stores were referred to as universal providers, emporia or big stores between 1880 and 1920 — and reflects the significance of the political organisation of the major retailers as a distinct interest group.

Second, the recent literature on department stores and consumption uses the concept of a 'culture of consumption' to indicate the network of social values promoted by capital (and presumably adopted by waged and unwaged labour) to increase the rate of acquisition of commodities produced under industrial methods of manufacture. A culture of consumption, according to these writers, defines social worth in terms of an individual's (or family's) buying power and material possessions instead of his or her contribution to socially productive labour. I have avoided the term because it is difficult to document the existence or influence of something as nebulous as a 'culture of consumption' in any
time or place, let alone Australia in the period before 1930. I present instead evidence of a growing but consistent ideological agreement among retail proprietors, managers, advertisers, sales experts and writers on labour management that to maximise sales they had to pay deliberate, vigilant and 'scientific' attention to marketing their goods. I argue, therefore, that what began after the first few years of the twentieth century and gathered momentum in the subsequent two decades was less a shift from production to consumption, than a shift from selling to marketing.

The Expansion of Sydney's Big Stores 1880-1930

The material basis of this self-conscious attention to retail theory and organisation was the economic success and physical expansion of the metropolitan drapery stores, and their growing tendency to monopolise the distribution of clothing, household, and many other non-food commodities. Sydney's retail industry was transformed between 1880 and 1900 by the rise of the big city stores.

As Table 1.1 (overleaf) shows, the majority of retail giants such as Anthony Hordern & Sons, David Jones and Farmers began their commercial lives between 1820 and 1880 as specialty drapery establishments selling dresses (dress materials such as tweed, calico, serge and silk); trimmings and haberdashery such as laces, ribbons, needles and thread; manchester (towels, sheeting, table coverings, blankets) and household drapery; millinery; ready-made mantles (cloaks and outer garments), costumes (skirts and jackets) and men's clothing (suits, trousers and jackets); women's underwear and corsets; men's mercery (shirts, collars, ties, underwear);
### Table 1.1

**Establishment Dates and Businesses of Sydney's Big Stores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EST.</th>
<th>STORE</th>
<th>LIMITED LIABILITY CO.</th>
<th>ORIGINAL BUSINESS</th>
<th>MAJOR BUSINESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>ANTHONY HORDERN &amp; SONS</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Stays &amp; Millinery</td>
<td>Drapery from 1827, universal providers from 1876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>DAVID JONES</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>FARMERS</td>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>EDWARD ARNOLD</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>LASSETTERS</td>
<td>1878</td>
<td>Hardware &amp; ironmongery</td>
<td>Universal providers from 1894 (incl. drapery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>E. WAY</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Millinery</td>
<td>Drapery from 1866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>PEAPES &amp; SHAW</td>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
<td>Menswear from c.1890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>CIVIL SERVICE CO-OPERATIVE STORES</td>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Grocery</td>
<td>Grocery, household + fancy goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>NOCK &amp; KIRBY</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>Hardware</td>
<td>Hardware + drapery from c.1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>WINNS (NEWCASTLE)</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>HORDERN BROS</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>MARCUS CLARK</td>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
<td>Drapery + furniture from c.1906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>MARK FOY</td>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
<td>Drapery + furniture &amp; hardware from 1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>GRACE BROS</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>W.T. WATERS</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>MURDOCHS</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Mercers &amp; hatters</td>
<td>Drapery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>LOWES</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>Drapery in 1905</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_n.a._ = information not available

**Sources:** Store histories in *Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal* May 1923 - Dec 1924, Mar & June 1932, July 1933, Oct 1935; George Forbes, *History of Sydney from the Foundation of the City in 1788 up to the Present Time 1926* (Sydney, 1926); store records and publications in Mitchell Library.
Farmers, c. 1882 [Small Pictures File, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales].
accessories such as boots, hosiery, gloves and parasols; and high-class dressmaking and tailoring.

The exceptions to the common drapery inheritance were the ironmongers and hardware stores of Nock & Kirby and Lassetters, both of which later added drapery and fancy goods (stationery, toiletries, jewellery, tobacco, etc.), and the Civil Service Co-operative Society Stores which conducted a high-class grocery and fancy goods business. A second generation of drapery proprietors - Grace Brothers, Mark Foy and Marcus Clark among them - entered the Sydney retail trade in the 1880s and 1890s.35

The typical pattern of development for a successful retail establishment was gradual evolution between 1880 and 1900 from a small shop selling the staple drapery lines to a 'universal provider' or 'emporium'. A universal provider such as Lassetters sold a wide range of non-drapery lines including hardware and groceries, whereas the term emporium usually referred to stores like Farmers with a reputation for high-class fashion goods. The two terms were, however, often used interchangeably by contemporaries referring to the big stores. Drapery stores more than any other branch of retailing were able to expand their stock because proprietors found it easy to add departments selling new but related goods without having to seek a different group of customers.36 Non-drapery lines such as fancy goods, china

35 Other big stores in this period for which I could not confirm either establishment dates or types of business were McCathies (c.1885), Winns' Sydney store (c.1890-1901), Buckinghams (pre 1903), Hattes (pre 1903), Snows (pre 1920), Sweet Bros (pre 1907) and McDowells (established 1889 and known as McDowell & Hughes in 1907).

and cutlery, ironmongery, hardware, leather goods, paints, trade and gardening tools, furniture and furnishings, grocery and pharmaceutical products and toys were offered by universal providers from 1880 and commonly by 1900.\(^{37}\) Those involved in the retail industry began to call the big drapery houses 'department stores' after 1900, but the term was not widely used until the 1920s. By 1930 a department store like David Jones included in its merchandise electrical appliances, radios, cosmetics, cakes and confectionery, books, sporting requisites and flowers.\(^{38}\)

Anthony Hordern & Sons was perhaps the most striking example of this developmental pattern. Different members of the Hordern family established a number of distinct and often competing retail enterprises in Sydney in the nineteenth century: John Hordern's, A. & L. Hordern, L. & E. Hordern, Edward Hordern & Sons, Hordern Brothers, Hordern & Company, Percy Hordern's and A. & A. Hordern.\(^{39}\) It was Anthony Hordern & Sons, however, that dominated its commercial siblings and became one of the Sydney retail empires.

The business began its life as a single-storey stay-making establishment run by Ann Hordern in 1825. She was joined in what had grown into a general drapery business by her husband Anthony in 1838. Their son Anthony took over and developed the Brickfield Hill shop in 1847 and opened a new three-storey shop at the Haymarket in 1854. The business developed into universal providers with buying offices


\(^{38}\) Plan of Elizabeth Street store departments 1927 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/574.

\(^{39}\) See Hordern, *Children of One Family*, appendix 2.
throughout Europe and in China under his sons Anthony and Samuel after 1876. The store expanded dramatically in the next ten years, in which time the six-storey Palace Emporium complex was opened. By 1886, when Samuel Hordern became sole proprietor, Anthony Hordern & Sons claimed to be Sydney's leading retailer selling 'everything made or manufactured'. After fire destroyed the Haymarket building in 1901, Samuel Hordern ensured his dominant position in the city by opening the new Palace Emporium at Brickfield Hill in 1905. The new store was magnificently decorated in true emporium style, covered an entire city block and had a total floorspace of nearly 20 acres. It was widely advertised as the largest store in the southern hemisphere and by 1922 claimed to serve 30,000 customers daily.\footnote{The quotation is from Hordern, Children of One Family, p 231. The account of Anthony Hordern & Sons' development in this and the preceding paragraph is taken mostly from Hordern's book but see also George Forbes, History of Sydney from the foundation of the city in 1788 up to the present time 1926 (Sydney: William Brooks & Co., 1926) and histories of the business in Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal May 1923 and June 1932.}

The history of Anthony Hordern & Sons illustrates some of the major features of expansion found in most of the stores analysed in this thesis. The most obvious of these was the successive physical extension of premises and the erection of imposing new buildings. These displayed a distinctive interior and exterior architectural style which suggested that the big stores were just as much respectable city institutions as banks and offices. Drapery shops became 'palaces of consumption' and 'cathedrals of commerce'.\footnote{The phrase 'palaces of consumption' is used by Susan Porter Benson in 'Palace of Consumption and Tool for Selling: the American Department Store 1880-1940', Radical History Review 2 (Fall 1979). The phrase 'cathedral of commerce' was}
Larger and more luxurious premises housed a growing range of goods and demanded a correspondingly expanded workforce to make, sell, repair, carry and account for the new stock. The building-up of a family business originally owned by or in partnership with a woman which was then passed on to male 'Napoleons of Commerce' was also typical of many of the major retail enterprises.\textsuperscript{a2} The conversion of most of the large Sydney retail businesses into limited liability companies between 1897 and 1920 (see Table 1.1) was a further sign of their commercial success which consolidated their ascendant position over smaller traders.

The most convincing evidence of the big stores' commercial success was their increasing profitability. Mark Foy's profits in its first year of operation in Sydney (1885) were £8,000; twenty years later its profits amounted to £1 million.\textsuperscript{a3} David Jones reported an increase in gross profit of 28 per cent in the four years between 1902 and 1906.\textsuperscript{a4} When Anthony Hordern & Sons converted into a limited liability company in 1912 it had a capital of £2.5 million. Samuel Hordern died a millionaire in 1909, earning him the distinction of being the only Australian entrepreneur to

\textsuperscript{a2} This applies to Farmers, Anthony Hordern & Sons, E. Way, Grace Bros, McCathies and Edward Arnold. Samuel Hordern was frequently described in newspaper articles and celebratory histories as a 'Napoleon of Commerce'.

\textsuperscript{a3} \textit{Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal} Oct 1935 p 14.

\textsuperscript{a4} Figures supplied to the New South Wales Court of Arbitration 1907 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/22.
leave more than £3 million in the period before 1939.\textsuperscript{45}

Sales figures show a similar pattern of increase. Total cash and credit sales at Nock & Kirby, for example, increased from £2,595 in 1896 to £469,977 in 1921; and Marcus Clark reported greater sales in 1920 than in any previous year since 1883.\textsuperscript{44}

George Beeby, counsel for the Shop Assistants Union in its hearing before the New South Wales Court of Arbitration in 1907, stressed that the large retail proprietors enjoyed a steady reinvestment of profits and rapid turnover of capital.\textsuperscript{47} He probably reflected the feelings of many Sydney people when he told the Court that:

> It is a matter of common knowledge that all the large firms have expanded enormously during the last few years. We only have to look round Sydney today; we see the enormous expansion of Anthony Hordern’s emporium; we see the sudden growth of Messrs. Grace Bros.’ palatial establishment; we find that Mr. Mark Foy to-day is contemplating ... a huge emporium in Elizabeth Street; we have the extension of Hordern Bros. and Farmer’s; we find the additions to Messrs. David Jones; we find the sudden appearance of firms like Hathe’s [sic], Sweet Bros., Buckingham, and Arnold. All of them have grown up in the last few years and assumed gigantic proportions.\textsuperscript{48}

Beeby’s perceptions of dramatic retail growth were confirmed by Factories and Shops Inspector Annie Golding when she


\textsuperscript{44} Sales figures in Nock & Kirby papers, Mitchell Library MLMSS 4454; Marcus Clark Annual Report 1920 in Fisher Library.

\textsuperscript{47} Transcripts of evidence presented at the Shop Assistants case heard before the New South Wales Court of Arbitration 1907 in Archives Office of New South Wales 2/95-98 (hereafter Shop Assistants case 1907) v 45 p 1843.

\textsuperscript{48} Shop Assistants case 1907 v 42 p 3.
reported in 1912 that the old-established stores were almost
double their original size.**

The reasons for the commercial success of the big stores
are clearly more complex than most of the celebratory store
histories suggest. These accounts give the impression that
it was largely due to the determination, probity and business
acumen of the proprietors that the major drapery stores
prospered. The personal qualities of individual retailers
such as Samuel Hordern, Joseph Neal Grace or Charles Lloyd
Jones probably had less influence on the expansion of their
enterprises than the existence of favourable conditions
within and beyond the distributive trade between 1880 and
1929.

To some extent proprietors were affected by conditions
prevailing in the national economy. It is significant,
however, that well-established drapery businesses appear to
have benefited more from economic booms than they were
threatened by depression. Barbara Little found in her study
of the Sydney retail and distributive trade that the retail
industry was a major participant in the steady economic
growth of the 1880s, and that drapers established in this
period tended to stay in business longer than proprietors in
other retail trades.*** Despite their fears of the economic
and social effects of the 1890s depression, large retailers
appear to have had sufficient flexibility in stock and labour
management (many dismissed assistants to reduce wage costs)

** New South Wales Department of Labour and Industry,
Reports on the Working of the Factories and Shops Act, 1912 p 34.

*** 'Retail Trade and Distribution in Sydney 1880-1914',
PhD thesis, Department of Economic History, University of
Sydney, 1979, pp 127-8.
to enable them to emerge into the twentieth century relatively unscathed.\textsuperscript{51} The \textit{Draper and Warehouseman}, \textit{Clothiers'} and \textit{Costumiers'}\ Gazette suggested in its first issue in 1892 that, despite the depression, the future looked bright for the softgoods trade as Australians would continue to want to 'clothe themselves well and comfortably'.\textsuperscript{52}

The period of recovery from the depression and drought after 1905 was one of dramatic retail growth in tune with a general trend towards national prosperity. The Gross National Product per head of population achieved an average rate of annual increase between 1900 and 1911 which was higher than that in any other period since 1861 or before the 1930s. The decade preceding World War I was, moreover, a period of rapid expansion in manufacturing activities and employment.\textsuperscript{53} The managements of the big stores exploited to the full innovations in clothing and household commodity manufacture and rising levels of per capita income.\textsuperscript{54} The economic significance of the period is indicated by the physical expansion (re-building, new premises or extensions) of all of the major drapery stores and many of the smaller ones between 1902 and 1908 (see Table 1.2 overleaf).

The stores also appear to have survived the trade disruption created by World War I by careful stock ordering

\textsuperscript{51} See, for example, correspondence between the partners of David Jones & Co. and Edward Lloyd Jones 1891-2 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/24.

\textsuperscript{52} Nov 1892 (editorial).


\textsuperscript{54} Little, 'Retail Trade and Distribution in Sydney' pp 21, 31-2, 248.
TABLE 1.2
EXPANSION OF SYDNEY STORE PREMISES 1900-1929

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PERIOD 1 1902-1908</th>
<th>PERIOD 2 1921-1929</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EDWARD ARNOLD</td>
<td>1902</td>
<td>1922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FARMERS</td>
<td>1902, 1906</td>
<td>1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUCKINGHAMS</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCATHIES</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LASSETTERS</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.T. WATERS</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>(1913)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRACE BROTHERS</td>
<td>1904, 1906</td>
<td>1921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANTHONY HORDERN &amp; SONS</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEAPES</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID JONES</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARCUS CLARK</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOCK &amp; KIRBY</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>(1918) 1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HORDERN BROTHERS</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>1922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARK FOYS</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. WAY</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIVIL SERVICE CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY STORES</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1927</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Store histories in Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal May 1923-Dec 1924, Mar and June 1932, July 1933, Oct 1935; George Forbes, History of Sydney (1926); store records and publications in Mitchell Library.
and the use of either their own factories or local suppliers. Although inconvenienced by the restrictions on and increased cost of imports, retailers were able to pass on many of these added costs to consumers in the form of higher prices. Evidence given by retailers at enquiries into alleged profiteering suggests that their profit levels were not substantially affected by the War. The post-war period saw a return to conditions of steady growth, evidenced by healthy sales figures and a second wave of building activity (See Table 1.2).

Demographic as well as economic changes had important consequences for retailers aspiring to a mass market. Sydney's population roughly trebled between 1880 and 1914 as a result of natural increase, migration from the country into the city, and state-assisted migration from Great Britain. Immigrants not only helped supply the stores' considerable demand for labour but also constituted a greater market for drapery goods by bringing consumers and expendable income into the stores. Comments made by the factory managers of Grace Brothers and David Jones at the 1911 Royal Commission on the Alleged Shortage of Labour suggest that this rise in demand as a result of increased population and prosperity

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* Summarised in the Draper of Australasia (hereafter Draper) June 1918 pp 208-9.

contributed substantially to the stores' growth in the pre-war period.\textsuperscript{57}

The concentration of the state's population and the increasing centralisation of consumer services in Sydney also favoured the inner city drapers. The extension of the railway network throughout the period brought shoppers into the city from outlying areas until by 1914 the city centre was linked to suburbs in all directions except the north.\textsuperscript{58} Ferries, horse omnibuses and, most of all, trams transported shoppers from the railway stations into the heart of the city and carried them to all the major stores.\textsuperscript{59} The removal of the central railway station from Redfern to Railway Square in 1906 gave a boost to stores such as Marcus Clark and Grace Brothers, and the opening of the inner city railway loop in 1926 brought more customers to the doors of stores such as Farmers, Mark Foys and David Jones.\textsuperscript{60}

Connected to these transport developments was the increasing polarisation of metropolitan and non-metropolitan retail trade. The trend towards centralisation was accelerated by the Early Closing Act of 1899 which forced suburban and country drapers to conform to the shorter


\textsuperscript{58} Little, 'Retail Trade and Distribution in Sydney', p 51.


closing hours observed by city drapery houses such as Farmers and David Jones which catered to a middle and upper class trade. Sydney suburban proprietor repeatedly complained to the 1901 Royal Commission on the Factories and Shops Act of Victoria, the 1907 New South Wales Court of Arbitration hearing, the British enquiry into early closing legislation of 1908 and the Royal Commission on the Saturday Half-Holiday of 1909 - that their businesses had suffered severely and that the working class trade had gravitated to the big city stores.\textsuperscript{61} William Probine, secretary of the New South Wales Political Reform League, argued that as a result of the Act 'Horderns and others do a large business in their dinner-hour with men who never bought drapery before'.\textsuperscript{62}

The state constituted an obvious target for suburban and country shopkeepers in their fight to retain a share of the retail trade. However, other factors contributed to the pre-eminence of the city trade. Alan Foley, in a series of pamphlets written for country traders to use as ideological ammunition in the battle for trade with the city houses, argued that country shoppers were induced by attractive advertising into buying their goods through city department store mail order services rather than from their local


\textsuperscript{62} Royal Commission on the Victorian Factories and Shops Law 1902 p 192.
draper. Although many city people continued to shop in their local suburbs, the glamour and variety of merchandise offered by the drapers in the central business district exerted an increasingly irresistible pull.

Technological developments such as the introduction of lifts, escalators, pneumatic tube cash systems, office machinery, cloth measuring devices and improvements in shop and display window construction probably contributed only marginally to the success of the big stores. As Susan Porter Benson found for the United States, technology was not a significant factor in the rise and subsequent dominance of the department store. Retailing appeared to be peculiarly resistant to penetration by technological innovation, including cash collection. Large retailers preferred the pneumatic tube system to cash registers from the 1890s until at least 1930. As the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal remarked in 1928, the 'personal element in selling has worked against the use of mechanical aids in distribution'. Because the realisation of retail profits

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43 The Fight for Trade. A series of articles prepared for the use of country traders who wish to combat the influence of Mail Order Houses and City Traders generally, article no. 1 (Bondi, NSW: n.d. ?1928).

44 Benson, Counter Cultures, pp 39-40.

45 Details of changes in cash collection technology are difficult to trace, but in general there was a shift from the use of 'cash boys' who carried change between the customer and a central cash desk to centralised cash systems using hollow balls or pneumatic tubing and employing female cashiers from the 1890s. David Jones installed some cash registers in 1921 (David Jones board minutes 5 Jan 1921 in David Jones Archives), but this may have been, as Benson suggests for American department stores, for use in toiletry and fancy goods departments where there was a high volume of small transactions (Counter Cultures p 40).

46 Mar 1928 p 47.
occurred at a point of personal interaction between sales assistant and customer, innovations such as centralised cash systems extended management's control over labour more than they increased productivity. The introduction of lifts and, in the 1920s, escalators similarly functioned most effectively as publicity features that encouraged customers into the store.

In addition to favourable conditions existing as a result of changes in the national economy, demography and communications, developments specific to the retail industry contributed to the success of the big stores. The drapery trade, for example, had considerable economic advantages over other branches of the retail industry. Barbara Little found that drapery was the largest single retail trade in the state, had higher rates of business longevity, the highest average takings per head, the highest average levels of proprietor takings, and a greater monopoly over the city trade than other forms of retailing. This evidence suggests that drapery goods were inherently more profitable than other commodities. Drapery establishments were, moreover, able to take full advantage of the extension of credit through cash order trading because individual transactions were sufficiently large to make the operation of credit schemes profitable.

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Little, 'Retail Trade and Distribution in Sydney', p 273.

'Retail Trade and Distribution in Sydney' pp 40, 127, 148, 249.

'Retail Trade and Distribution in Sydney' pp 130, 274–6.
The strength of the country mail order trade was another reason for the big stores' success. Howard Wolfers estimated that the mail order business of Sydney's stores amounted to 15 to 20 per cent or more of total turnover.\textsuperscript{70} All the major stores employed large staffs in their country order despatch rooms - Anthony Hordern & Sons had 70 in that section in 1922\textsuperscript{71} - and put considerable effort into the production and distribution of illustrated catalogues. The mail order business was relatively stable, incurred fewer labour or customer control problems, and returns on advertising were more easily calculated than over-the-counter transactions.

Higher levels of capitalisation clearly also facilitated the dominance of Sydney's big stores over their smaller competitors. Drapery proprietors with capital to invest in the importing, buying, manufacture and marketing of commodities were in a much stronger position than their rivals in the softgoods trade. Witnesses and counsel for the Shop Assistants Union agreed in 1907 that the retailer who could afford to import direct from Britain was at a considerable economic advantage because he could avoid middleman costs and exert a monopoly over particular lines.\textsuperscript{72}

Most of the big stores had their own buying offices in London, Europe, and some of them later in New York. Stores as large as Anthony Hordern & Sons were also able to make contracts with local manufacturers to supply them with goods direct to avoid wholesalers' costs.\textsuperscript{73} Finally, businesses

\textsuperscript{70} Wolfers, 'The Big Stores between the Wars', p 25.
\textsuperscript{71} Forbes, \textit{History of Sydney}, p 19.
\textsuperscript{72} Shop Assistants case 1907 v 42 pp 4-5, 289-90.
\textsuperscript{73} Draper June 1918 pp 208-9.
which had the capital to develop and organise their in-house manufacturing under factory conditions were in a much better position to control costs and quality.

Competition between individual retail outlets was a salient and inevitable fact of commercial life that did not disappear with the rise of the department stores. Lesley Hordern's study of the Hordern businesses in the nineteenth century reveals the intense and often hostile rivalry existing between the various Hordern proprietors and their competitors—and frequently between each other.\(^7\text{a}\) Thomas Nock, a hardware proprietor in partnership with Herbert Kirby and 'struggling to become an emporium' in 1907, bitterly told the Arbitration Court that competition from the big stores was so fierce that 'we have to be like the bantam cock, when the game cock lifts his wing, get a peck in or you do not get a chance.'\(^7\text{b}\)

David Jones' correspondence for the 1880s and 1890s also betrays a constant preoccupation with the activities of competitors and an almost obsessive secrecy about stock orders and the engagement of top personnel.\(^7\text{c}\) On many trade matters managements either remained silent or did not record their thoughts in what remains of the historical record. Any information that might have been seen as a 'trade secret' that a rival house could exploit was either kept out of business records, destroyed, or coded. Departments, for example.

\(^7\text{a}\) Hordern, *Children of One Family* pp 254, 295, 299 for example.

\(^7\text{b}\) Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 546.

\(^7\text{c}\) Correspondence between Edward Lloyd Jones and partners of David Jones 1844-1894 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/24 and miscellaneous correspondence 1873-1907 in BRG 1/22. See also Hordern, *Children of One Family*. 
example, were commonly referred to in financial papers by letter codes (Department C, Department XX and so on). Similarly telegrams containing details of important employment contracts or stock orders were coded. In wholesale houses such as Sargood Gardiner this secrecy extended to cutting the supplier's name off the top of the invoice so that even employees would not know the name of the mill or manufacturer. The purpose, according to the warehouse manager, was to 'keep the business to ourselves'.

What appears to have changed between 1900 and 1930 was that this individualistic and informal competition was transformed into a more systematic and institutionalised competition in which the competitors operated according to a common and articulated set of business principles and co-operated on certain political issues. Retailers before 1930 did not hold a monopoly of control over production or marketing through common ownership and corporate structure, nor by their exclusive possession of trade in a particular commodity. But they did increasingly demonstrate a monopolistic tendency in the sense of dominating the local

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^77 See correspondence in David Jones Archives.

^78 Minutes of evidence taken before the Fair Profits Commission, Melbourne, 1920 in Sargood Gardiner records, University of Melbourne Archives LS 4/5/2 Box 1.

^79 For a discussion of the meaning of 'monopoly' see Raymond Williams, *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1976) pp 175-6. There are few useful historical studies of monopoly capitalism in Australia, but for a preliminary discussion see Humphrey McQueen's afterword to the revised edition of *A New Britannia: An Argument Concerning the Social Origins of Australian Radicalism and Nationalism* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1986).
market for commodities which were more or less interchangeable.

The arbitration system and other forms of state intervention in the retail industry such as the Factories and Shops Act of 1896 and the Early Closing Act of 1899 fostered industry co-operation by encouraging employers to work together to defend their interests against unwanted government interference and labour mobilisation. An organisation for retail employers - initially the Master Drapers and Clothiers Association, then the Master Retailers Association of New South Wales - was established by the proprietors or directors of most of Sydney's big stores in 1902 to counter the Shop Assistants Union's log of claims to the recently-established New South Wales Arbitration Court. As the votes awarded each representative depended on the number of assistants he employed, the Association was effectively controlled by the largest employers. By prompting the more effective organisation of employers, the arbitration system thus indirectly facilitated the formation of a self-conscious employer class in the retail industry.

Attempts by the Master Retailers Association to prevent

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81 Draper Mar 1902 p 95; Rules and Regulations and minutes of preliminary meeting held 15 May 1903 in minutes of the Master Retailers Association and Annual Report 1906 in Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Archives.

rival organisations such as the Country Storekeepers' Association (which tried to become registered under the Arbitration Act at the same time as the Master Retailers) and the City and Suburban Shopkeepers Association (established in 1915) from challenging their control over the retail trade exacerbated existing conflict between the big city stores and smaller traders.\textsuperscript{83} The Master Retailers Association assured its position of political leadership when it absorbed the membership of the City and Suburban Shopkeepers Association in 1921.\textsuperscript{84}

The Arbitration Act galvanised retailers into co-operative association not just within the industry, but also with other Sydney employer groups such as the Employers Federation, the Sydney Chamber of Commerce and the Clothing Industries Employers Council.\textsuperscript{85} The large city stores were uniquely placed as producers, wholesalers, importers and retailers to encourage co-operation between the various components of industrial and commercial capital. As William Leach has suggested for an earlier period in the United States, department stores ushered in 'an interlocking network of self-conscious capitalist elites'.\textsuperscript{86} The distribution of the Association's journal and trade papers such as the Draper

\textsuperscript{83} Master Retailers Association 1st Annual Report 1904; minutes of MRA in Retail Traders Association Archives.

\textsuperscript{84} Master Retailers Association of New South Wales Journal June 1921 p 369.

\textsuperscript{85} Minutes of the Master Retailers Association 13 July 1903; Sydney Chamber of Commerce, Annual Report 1920; Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal June 1925.

of Australasia contributed to this climate of guarded co-operation.

Competitors became 'friendly rivals'. The Draper reviewed in 1922 the major changes that had occurred in the 21 years of its existence it listed the lack of secrecy in business methods, the common recognition that welfare facilities and good wages were 'good business', and the 'growing spirit of friendly rivalry' created by trade associations and journals. The Draper asserted that the new competition was 'friendly, fair and square' and added that this mutual regard encouraged the shopping public to trust retailers. Co-operation was both a political necessity and good publicity. Members of the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales (the Master Retailers Association changed its name in 1921) co-operated in special campaigns such as the 1925 'Spring Shopping Week' and the 1929 inaugural Father's Day promotion. On the eve of the Great Depression nine retailers combined to organise a 'Balance the Budget Sale' to counter declining trade.

The first public fears of a retail monopoly were voiced simultaneously with the opening of Anthony Hordern & Sons'.

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87 The phrase was used by Charles Lloyd Jones, referring to Farmers, in his unpublished autobiography co-authored with Desmond Robinson, 'Customers are Human', c. 1958, in David Jones Archives.

86 David Jones board minutes 21 Apr 1927 in David Jones Archives.

87 Draper Feb 1922 p 56.

new Palace Emporium in 1905. In an address to the Women’s Political Educational League, W.M. Hughes claimed that competition had been replaced by monopoly and gave as an example the store with which his audience would have been very familiar:

Let us take a walk down George Street.... There had risen a mammoth store, which pronounced the doom of the small trader, whose day was done in Sydney. Let a small store spring up within its blackening shadow, and that flower dies!**¹

The Australian Worker carried a cartoon in 1907 portraying the large retailer as ‘monopoly’ resting on the backs of the small traders and sweated shop employees.**² In the Arbitration Court George Beeby agreed that the ‘tendency to concentration’ in the retail trade was squeezing out all but those men with capital.**³ Joseph Neal Grace claimed that Frederick Lasseter favoured a minimum wage for shop assistants because it would benefit the big stores such as his own by putting the smaller shops in the city out of business.**⁴ The Sydney Morning Herald greeted the erection of the Palace Emporium more positively but nevertheless as a clear symbol of the ‘concentration of an enormous proportion of the retail trade of a growing community in one hand.’**⁵

By 1923 government officials concerned with the cost of living acknowledged that they were living in an era of

**¹ Newspaper clipping n.d. in Rose Scott papers, Women’s Political Educational League — Item 2, Mitchell Library MLMSS 38/43.

**² Worker May 23 1907 p 1.

**³ Shop Assistants case 1907 v 45 pp 1743-4.

**⁴ Worker May 23 1907 p 1.

**⁵ Sydney Morning Herald 11 Sept 1905 p 7.
'organization and combination' in the retail trade. Royal Commission on the High Cost of Living. Report no. 4, Victoria. Votes and Proceedings, Legislative Assembly 1923-4, v 2 p 1081 [my thanks to Meredith Foley for this reference].

Even the Draper admitted in 1929 that there was little to choose between the goods and services of any two stores. Though still 'friendly rivals', by 1930 the big stores had an effective monopoly of drapery distribution.

Even as the big store capitalists were consolidating their position in mass marketing, their dominance was being

Footnotes:

76 Draper Feb 1929.
threatened by the chain store operators, particularly Coles (established in 1914) and Woolworths (established in 1924). The entry of Coles into membership of the Retail Traders Association in 1928 marked the end of an era. Five years later the Association was deeply concerned about the competition of the chain 'variety' stores which dispensed with expensive customer services and operated on the basis of a high turnover of goods with a low profit margin.\textsuperscript{101} The advent of the chain stores, depressed trading conditions, increasing ownership of cars and hence the ability of people to shop in suburban centres, and changes to the city's transport system all challenged the city department stores' hegemonic position as innovators in mass marketing by 1930.

* * * * * * * * * *

Increasing trade concentration, monopoly and co-operation were fundamental to the development of techniques which facilitated mass marketing. The following chapters explore in greater detail the part played by retail proprietors, managers, sales writers and labour relations experts in promoting mass consumption. They also reveal the social and sexual substructures of mass marketing techniques in Sydney's big stores. In retailing, as in other spheres of social action, sex and gender constituted both a primary frame of reference and an exploitable resource. This thesis explores some of the economic implications of sexual asymmetry.

This is a gendered political economy of the history of mass retailing which integrates several aspects of the

\textsuperscript{101} Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Jul 1933 p 3.
evolution of department store trading into a conceptual whole. The development of department stores as the first retail institutions to consciously market their goods on a mass scale was an historical process connected to and embedded in several layers of the social structure. This thesis attempts to extract selected material and ideological facets of that process in order to make the whole more intelligible: it is, as a result, organised thematically rather than in narrative form.

The thesis is divided into three sections. The first part describes various material aspects of the development of mass retailing: changes in the production of drapery commodities and the active intervention of retailers in clothing manufacture; retailers' categorisation of drapery commodities by sex and the subsequent sexual division of selling space and labour; and the means by which employers attempted to manage their workers, whether through paternalist ideology, the rhetoric of welfarism, industrial psychology or scientific salesmanship.

In the second part I turn to the human agents of consumption — shoppers — and their role in the development of mass retailing. As economic and human resources and as social constructs, shoppers embodied the material and ideological aspects of retailing. I explore three aspects of the relationship between shoppers and the big stores: the ways in which shopping patterns (with particular reference to class and gender) influenced and were shaped by mass retail structures; the attempts by retailers and sales experts to manage customers by constructing a social stereotype of the
shopper and a criminal category of the shoplifter; and shoppers' responses to the big stores.

The final section looks at some of the ideological foundations of mass marketing adopted and developed by Sydney's major retailers. The first chapter in this section surveys the range of strategies employed by retailers to encourage customers into the store, and provides an account of the development of theories of consumer desire and marketing. Advertising in the form of window displays, interior arrangements, catalogue illustrations and print media policy is the subject of the next chapter. The final chapter suggests the ideological and material importance of fashion and its relationship to fantasy and femininity.
Without an assured supply of drapery commodities, Sydney's big stores would not have survived, let alone prospered. Their expansion depended on the ability of their managers and buyers to procure a larger quantity and better variety of desirable merchandise than their competitors so that they could offer their customers a superior selection. The more manufactured articles — especially of clothing — that they were able to present to the shopping public, the greater were their chances of dominating the local market and creating mass demand.

Historians have typically treated production and consumption as two distinct processes on the assumption that manufacturers and retailers were two separate social groups. Some of the more recent histories of retailing acknowledge the close relationship between industrialisation and department store trading but pay little attention to the manufacturing activities of the stores themselves.1 Susan Porter Benson explicitly divorces the factory from the department store by drawing numerous and illuminating comparisons between the social relations of manufacturing and those of distribution. She suggests that American department

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store managers had little economic incentive to engage in production and that as a result only a few firms did so.²

A close examination of the activities of Sydney retailers using sources largely unexplored by Benson, however, reveals this dichotomy between manufacturing and retailing to be misleading, if not false. Scattered references to the manufacturing activities of retailers can be found in store histories, Arbitration Court transcripts, New South Wales Government reports and enquiries, the records of individual stores such as David Jones and Marcus Clark, and trade journals. Shops which engaged in some form of production included Anthony Hordern & Sons, Grace Brothers, Mark Foys, David Jones, Murdochs, Sweet Brothers, Sydney Snow, Lasssetters, Marcus Clark, Hordern Brothers, Edward Arnold, Peapes, Farmers and W.T. Waters.

The goods that retailers produced to sell in their shops were predominantly, but not exclusively items of clothing; their manufacturing activities extended into industries as diverse as furniture, ironmongery, marbleworks, bedding, printing and laundry work. The proprietors of nearly all the major drapery businesses were fully engaged in both the manufacture and the marketing of commodities by the 1920s.

The extent to which retailers were involved in manufacturing in a period significant for the development of mass retail structures denotes a compelling economic imperative. The link between production and distribution strongly suggests that the retail revolution that took place between 1880 and 1920 was shaped as much by developments in

² Counter Cultures, Saleswomen, Managers and Customers in American Department Stores 1890-1940 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986) p 33.
manufacturing as it was influenced by rising consumer demand. Techniques of mass production were developed and adopted by retailers simultaneously and in constant interaction with mass marketing strategies.

Most major retail houses imported considerable quantities of drapery goods from Europe and, later, from the United States throughout this period. The trade journal the Draper of Australasia noted in 1903 that Canadian and American imports were confined to manchester, dress and fancy goods, which suggests that most manufactured articles of clothing came from Great Britain. It is unfortunately difficult to ascertain from store records or statistical data the amount of imported goods as a proportion of all goods sold. Occasional references in company records and state government enquiries, however, suggest that indented goods were an important source of manufactured commodities.

James Macken told the New South Wales Court of Arbitration in 1907 that Mark Foy's indented about two-thirds of its stock. George Wright, managing director of Farmers, told the

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3 May 1903 p 164.

4 Retailers were either unable or reluctant to record financial details such as these, perhaps because they feared competitors would take advantage of the information. Statistical data such as those found in the Statistical Registers are also unhelpful, as classification systems changed considerably over the period. The Draper found it difficult to ascertain the exact quantities of goods imported from the United States as much merchandise was shipped through London agents (May 1903 p 164).

6 See, for example, transcripts of the Shop Assistants case heard before the New South Wales Court of Arbitration 1907 in Archives Office of New South Wales 2/95-98 (hereafter Shop Assistants case 1907); and letters received from the London office of David Jones 1880-1893 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/13.

7 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 934.
Interstate Commission in 1918 that 55 per cent of his firm's purchases that year were from Australian manufacturers or wholesalers. As Farmers was unusual in engaging in almost no manufacturing itself, the bulk of the remaining goods must have been imported. Most of the big stores also imported manufactured articles from other Australian states, especially from Victoria.

Economic and sentimental ties with the Home Country persisted despite Australia's belated industrialisation in the twentieth century. For example, the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales organised patriotic Empire Shopping Weeks to stimulate the sale of goods produced in the Commonwealth. In the light of retailers' continuing reliance on indented goods and the belief of many customers that Australian manufactures were inferior to their imported counterparts, it is significant that Sydney retailers nevertheless found it profitable to produce certain commodities for their own markets.

Drapery shops were principally engaged in the various sections of the clothing trade: tailoring, dressmaking, millinery, shirts and underclothing. As Raelene Francis has shown in her study of gender and the work process in the Victorian clothing trade, all these sectors underwent considerable changes after rationalisation of the work

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Draper of Australasia (hereafter Draper) June 1918 p 208.

For the persistence of colonial ties between Australia and Great Britain see Peter Cochrane, Industrialization and Dependence, Australia's Road to Economic Development 1870-1939 (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1980).

Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Feb 1929 p 5.
process and the introduction of the steam-powered sewing machine after the 1890s. Tailoring was characterised by subdivision, the increasing use of finishing machines, and the shift from small-shop manufacture to factory production; dressmaking and millinery by the impact of mass production methods and technical training; and shirt and underclothing by particularly high levels of specialisation and subdivision after World War I.\textsuperscript{10} Many of these trends are evident in the history of retail-manufacturing in Sydney and acquire additional significance when seen in the light of retailers' management of both production and consumption.

Until they began to expand their selling operations in the late nineteenth century, many drapery shops combined the functions of manufacturer and distributor in the same premises. Anthony Hordern & Sons, for example, began its retail career in 1825 as Ann Hordern's stay-making and millinery establishment.\textsuperscript{11} Similarly, David Jones & Company advertised itself in 1851 as 'Scotch and manchester warehousemen, slop manufacturers, slop sellers, clothiers, shirt makers, hatters, etc.' and Peapes and Shaw as 'tailors, hatters and woollen drapers' in 1872.\textsuperscript{12} These self-descriptions indicate the extent to which early drapers saw themselves as both manufacturers and retailers.


\textsuperscript{12} Forde's Australian Almanac 1851 in David Jones Archives; invoice of Peapes & Shaw 28 June 1872 in Peapes & Co. papers, Mitchell Library MLMSS 2161/Box Y012.
Hand-made methods of clothing production in retail-manufacturing shared an important role with machine production until the early years of the twentieth century. Tailors, milliners and dressmakers were key personnel in the large drapery stores who commanded status and salaries equal to, or higher than those of heads of department or buyers. Because the drapery shop's clientele was overwhelmingly female, dressmakers and milliners assumed as much or more economic importance than tailors. An efficient and fashionable millinery department was crucial to the store's good reputation, and women expected the shop milliner to have the necessary skill and artistic sensibility to be able to design or trim a model to their requirements. In some large drapery shops head milliners combined the roles of manager of the department and head saleswoman. The store's dressmaker had to be a woman who was not only highly skilled but also knowledgeable of fashion, a sound businesswoman, and someone who possessed the social skills to enable her to converse with some of the wealthiest women in Sydney. Most retailers acknowledged that the dressmaking section had to be retained 'whether it pays or

13 See, for example, David Jones staff agreements 1873-1906 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/8.

14 See correspondence concerning the millinery department between Edward Lloyd Jones and the partners of David Jones 1891-2 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/24; articles on millinery in The Lone Hand Nov 1907 and Nov 1911.

15 'Information Respecting the Census and Industrial Returns Act 1891' (by T.A. Coghlan), Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales 1891-2 v 7 (hereafter Census and Industrial Returns 1891).

16 See, for example, letter to David Jones & Co. from James Woodward at the firm's London office 28 Jan 1887 and 18 Feb 1887 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/13.
not' - and it frequently operated at a loss - because it attracted women to the shop and, together with millinery production, stimulated the sale of materials, trimmings and accessories.\textsuperscript{17}

An outing to the dressmaking department of one of the big stores was as much a social event and an opportunity to exercise female skills as a shopping expedition. There women could share ideas about styles, colours, fabrics and trimmings. They could discuss with their dressmaker the latest fashions and offer opinions on dress matters in an environment designed to make them feel comfortable and valued customers. David Jones' dressmaker Josephine O'Keefe was reported to have run a department that was 'more of a reception room than a salon', while Madame Favenc of the same firm supplemented her dressmaking activities by engaging domestic servants for her country clients.\textsuperscript{18}

Working under the direction of the head dressmaker in the drapery shop's workrooms were large numbers of female dressmaker's assistants. According to the report on the 1891 census, there were approximately 700 women thus employed in Sydney under conditions that compared favourably with similar employment in other dressmaking establishments but which nevertheless subjected them to long hours and frequent

\textsuperscript{17} Letter to Edward Lloyd Jones from William Newman 24 Aug 1891 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/24. On the lack of profitability of dressmaking departments and their use as a strategy to increase sales see Census and Industrial Returns 1891; New South Wales Department of Labour and Industry, Reports on the Working of the Factories and Shops Act 1898 p 12; Draper May 1918 p 144.

\textsuperscript{18} Obituary of Josephine O'Keefe in Daily Telegraph 16 Apr 1931 in David Jones Archives newspaper cuttings; David Jones board minutes 26 Mar 1907 BRG 1/32/1.
compulsory and unpaid overtime.\textsuperscript{19} Apprentices commonly received no pay for the first six months of their employment and 2/6 p.w. for the second six months; a head dressmaker made on average 71/- p.w. Wages for all classes of dressmakers were approximately 10 per cent higher in retail shop workrooms than in dressmakers' establishments.\textsuperscript{20} As Edward Wilcox of David Jones' London office commented in a letter to the Sydney store in 1887, 'the engagement of so large a staff of dressmakers is a most hopeful sign ... it is certain that all these hands must use and cut a great deal of stuff and should make the work of the other departments much larger.'\textsuperscript{21}

The millinery workrooms of the large drapery shops also employed considerable numbers of women. David Jones employed 20 women in its millinery workroom as early as 1876.\textsuperscript{22} Women who entered the millinery trade, according to Timothy Coghlan, came from a 'class accustomed to the enjoyment of a considerable degree of comfort' whose parents were relatively well-to-do and who saw millinery as a respectable occupation because of the absence of night employment and the 'tasteful

\textsuperscript{19} Census and Industrial Returns 1891.

\textsuperscript{20} Census and Industrial Returns 1891. Classes of dressmakers in order of wages received were: apprentices, improvers, skirt hands, bodice hands, sleeve hands, machinists, heads of tables, skirt drapers and head dressmakers.

\textsuperscript{21} Letter from Edward Wilcox to David Jones & Co. 25 Nov 1887 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/13.

\textsuperscript{22} List of millinery workroom employees Feb 1876 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/22.
and artistic character' of the work.\textsuperscript{23} Average wages were a little lower than those for dressmaking, and the length of unpaid apprenticeship generally longer.\textsuperscript{24}

The tailoring department of the late nineteenth century drapery store was responsible for the production of men's and women's outer or heavier garments such as suits, costumes, skirts and mantles (cloaks or coats). The large stores were principally engaged in what was known as the 'first class' trade; that is, making garments to order by hand. David Jones recruited their mantle cutters, costume makers and tailoring department managers from England and paid them salaries comparable with those of its dressmakers.\textsuperscript{25}

According to detailed records of applicants for employment kept by Peapes & Co., there were some female first class mantle and costume cutters working in Australian drapery establishments in the 1870s and 1880s. Thereafter, however, all the tailors and cutters who sought positions in the company were male, probably because the firm gave up the women's trade about 1890.\textsuperscript{26}

The apparent male control of high class tailoring and the increasing use of women in tasks created by the subdivision of the work process was reinforced by the

| \textsuperscript{23} Census and Industrial Returns 1891. |
| \textsuperscript{24} Apprentices commonly received 2/6 p.w. after one year and 5/- after two years' employment; improvers 7/- for 4-5 years; assistants 15/5 p.w.; forewomen £1/16/1 p.w.; head milliners £3 p.w. |
| \textsuperscript{25} For example, staff agreement with Walter Grundy 1891 at £300 p.a. in David Jones Archives BRG 1/8; see also Applications for Engagement, Peapes & Co. papers in Mitchell Library MLMSS 2161 Box Y812. The book records name, address, position and salary sought, and past experience. |
| \textsuperscript{26} Applications for Engagement, Peapes & Co. papers. |
widespread use of the power-driven sewing machine in the late nineteenth century. As Coghlan noted, a garment which was previously made by one person often passed through the hands of four or five workers by 1891. This division of labour was more extensive in the 'slop' clothing factories than among home workers or, presumably, retail workrooms in which much of the work was done by hand and to measure. Coghlan counted 43 tailoring workrooms employing 1300 operatives, 900 of them female, in retail establishments.\textsuperscript{27} This represented almost half of all tailoresses working in Sydney that year.\textsuperscript{28}

Retailers were keen to take advantage of cheaper and more flexible female labour in tailoring, but were initially reluctant to antagonise their male tailors and their customers. The management of David Jones astutely seized upon the opportunity of their tailors going on strike in 1891-2 to publicize the department's work and to introduce female machinists on trouser and coat-making work. As William Newman commented to Edward Lloyd Jones, 'we could not have initiated the machinery under other circumstances'. The company reinstated only 30 of the original 90 male tailors after the unsuccessful strike, and congratulated itself on achieving excellent profits in the tailoring department

\textsuperscript{27} Census and Industrial Returns 1891.

\textsuperscript{28} Evidence of Peter Strong of the Tailoresses Union, Report of the Royal Commission on Strikes 1891 (Sydney, 1891) p 395.
thereafter. 27 Ten years later David Jones employed 100 'tailors' on the premises, presumably most of them female. 28

A few retailers apparently deliberately deceived their customers who equated male tailoring with quality by professing to employ only male tailors while having the work carried out by women. Peter Strong, President of the Tailoresses Union, told the 1891 Royal Commission on Strikes that it was commonly believed that women were not as competent as men in 'building' garments, that is, in placing the material to add strength. 29 No doubt retailers could also ask higher prices for clothes assumed to have been made by male tailors.

Retailers was also extensively involved in general clothing manufacture such as slops (casual ready-made clothes, usually for working men), shirts and blouses, underclothing, and articles made of lighter fabrics such as aprons, house linen and children's clothing. As with the high class clothing, whitework was carried out in workshops attached to drapery establishments from at least 1880. 30 Some retail houses in some periods also used female outworkers for whitework, women who typically received higher


29 Royal Commission on Strikes 1891 p 397.

piecework rates than those employed by clothing factories. Generally, however, large drapery houses appear not to have employed outworkers on a large scale. More than half the total number of whiteworkers employed in workshops were machinists earning wages which were on average less than those paid to dressmakers' assistants. David Jones, Peapes & Shaw and Anthony Hordern & Sons were among those retailers who made shirts on the premises in the nineteenth century.

The men's ready-made or slop trade catered mainly to the needs of working men in both city and country and was an important section of the drapery trade from the early nineteenth century. David Jones made slops from at least 1851 and began manufacturing men's ready-made clothing in 1887 under its own trade name 'Orient'. Menswear led the way in cheaper manufactured clothing; by the early twentieth century manufacturers applied the same methods to women's fashion garments. David Jones, for example, operated a successful 'ladies tailoring Orient department' in 1910.

Shortly after the turn of the century major retailers extended, reorganised and relocated their clothing

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34 Census and Industrial Returns 1891.

35 See, for example, advertisements for drapery shops in Forde's Australian Almanac 1851 in David Jones Archives.

36 Forde's Australian Almanac 1851; David Jones & Co., Souvenir 1887 in David Jones Archives.

37 David Jones board minutes 30 Aug 1910 in David Jones Archives.
manufacturing activities. Their promotion of sales depended heavily on the mass output of clothes made possible only with factory methods of production. Once established as retail structures catering to a mass market, managers of the big stores had to find the commodities to fuel the marketing machine they had set in motion. They needed equally to be able to exert as much control as possible over the production of the goods they sold. As a result they removed their manufacturing activities from workshops on store premises to separate factory buildings.

Samuel Hordern was one of the first retail proprietors to establish a (men's) clothing and shirt factory in 1898, reported to be the largest in the colonies. The new Palace Emporium building opened in 1905 gave Hordern the opportunity to expand his manufacturing and included provision for 200 sewing machines powered by gas engines. By 1907 Hordern employed more operatives than any other Sydney factory. Unlike other retail-manufacturers, Hordern did not need to seek separate premises for his factory. The rebuilding of the Palace Emporium at an auspicious time for expansion enabled the company to incorporate the factory under the same roof as its retail outlet.

Mark Foy's began clothing manufacture in 1894 and exhibited a miniature clothing factory at the 1902 Royal

36 Australian Storekeepers Journal Apr 1898 p 107; Lesley Hordern, Children of One Family, p 253.

37 Australian 6 June 1907 pp 14-15; Thomas J. Redmond, The History of Anthony Hordern & Sons Ltd (1938) p 91. The Draper (Sep 1903 p 337) reported that a ruling by the Arbitration Court prevented Anthony Hordern & Sons from making suits for country clients by self-measurement. As a result Samuel Hordern was forced to establish a separate factory outside the business which he did by incorporating the factory in the new Palace Emporium.
Agricultural Show. The company operated three clothing factories employing 300 workers by 1907, and opened a knitting factory and woollen mill in the early 1920s. Grace Brothers began manufacturing clothing with eleven workers in 1899 and five years later opened three factories, one of them to make men's and boys' clothing, ladies' costumes, skirts and blouses. The factory employed 200 workers by 1913. David Jones began making men's shirts in its George Street workrooms in 1905 and expanded into leased workrooms in Clarence, York and Hutchinson Streets between 1909 and 1912. The company opened its Marlborough Street factory, employing 800 workers mainly in the manufacture of clothing and using electric sewing and buttonholing machines, in 1914.

Snows operated its own whitework factory in 1919 and a manchester workroom in 1928; Murdochs' menswear store opened a factory in 1922. There is conflicting evidence on

Draper Apr 1902 p 165.

James Macken of Mark Foy's referred to the factories in his evidence to the Arbitration Court (Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 905) but I could not trace their existence in Sands Sydney Directories.

Nicholas Brash, Anne Burke and Colette Hoeben, The Model Store 1885–1985 (McMahons Point NSW: Kevin Weldon, 1985) p 28; Royal Commission on the Shortage of Labour 1911 p 148; Sands Sydney Directory 1904; Draper Sep 1904 p 341.

Newspaper clippings from Daily Telegraph n.d. (?May 1914) in David Jones board minutes; David Jones board minutes 27 May and 9 Sep 1909, David Jones Archives; Sands Sydney Directories 1909–1912.

Daily Telegraph clipping (?May 1914); Sydney Morning Herald 12 May 1914 clipping in David Jones Archives.

Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Sep 1923 pp 61–6; New South Wales Board of Trade Enquiry into the Cost of Living for Adult Female Employees 1919, transcript of proceedings in Archives Office of New South Wales 2/5770 (hereafter Female Cost of Living 1919) p
Farmers' involvement in manufacturing. It is listed in Sands Sydney Directory under 'Clothing Manufacturers' from at least the late 1890s, but no reference to a clothing factory could be found in any other source and the firm's managing director told the Necessary Commodities Control Commission in 1920 that Farmers did not have a factory. It did, however, open a furniture factory in 1902 and operated workrooms for manufacturing 'a small, exclusive lot of goods, special designs of our own and superior quality'.

The Draper estimated that retailers manufactured at least 30 per cent of all the garments they sold in 1901.

By 1925 the President of the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales could boast that the organisation included in its membership the largest clothing manufacturers in Sydney. The proliferation of retailers' clothing factories during the first fifteen years of the twentieth century prompts speculation on the reasons for their enthusiasm for industrial manufacture in this period. The introduction of a uniform federal tariff may have facilitated industrial entrepreneurs in the retail trade, especially those who exported manufactured articles to other states. Frederick Lasseter, for example, supported the tariff for this

622; minutes of meetings of Sydney Snow Ltd 24 May 1928 in Cox Bros papers, University of Melbourne Archives.

** New South Wales Department of Labour and Industry, Necessary Commodities Control Commission, transcripts of proceedings in State Archives of New South Wales 2/5729 21 May 1920 p 96; Draper July 1902 p 245.

** Aug 1901 p 11.

** Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal June 1925 p 376.
reason. The introduction of the federal tariff on clothing may also have stimulated demand for locally-produced articles.

Retailers probably had as much to lose as to gain from protection, however, since many were substantial importers. Articles on the federal tariff in the Draper, which saw its introduction as an opportune moment to establish a national organ for the softgoods trade, suggest that many retailers viewed the tariff as disruptive and likely to deter custom as a result of the higher prices it necessitated.\(^9\) John Hordern of Hordern Brothers was critical of the federal tariff for its 'absurdities and anomalies' and feared that the cost of imported articles, already high, would increase further.\(^1\) Retailers appear not to have argued in favour of tariff protection before the Royal Commission on the Tariff in 1906, and comments in the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal suggest that the organisation was opposed to increases in the tariff throughout the 1910s and 1920s.\(^2\)

The period of retailers' investment in factory production was also one in which the clothing trade underwent considerable subdivision, rationalisation and mechanisation. Kaelene Francis has shown how the widespread adoption by manufacturers of mass production methods and new technology such as finishing, cutting and pressing machines radically


\(^9\) Aug, Sep, Oct 1901; Aug 1902.

\(^1\) Dawn Nov 1901 p 5.

\(^2\) See, for example, Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Feb 1926 p 253.
transformed the labour process in the Victorian clothing industry between 1900 and 1930. Retail-manufacturers were at the forefront of these innovations, and in some cases pioneered the use of new machinery and sources of power. However, most of these developments took place towards the end rather than the beginning of the period 1900–1930. While they help to explain the expansion of factory production, we need to look elsewhere for conditions which might have favoured its initiation.

The period from 1905 to the outbreak of war in 1914 was one of recovery from the 1890s depression, peace and relative economic stability. A pervasive 'mood of optimistic expansion', at least among the bourgeoisie, no doubt encouraged many entrepreneurs to risk investment in manufacturing enterprises as soon as the effects of the depression and drought had receded. Comments made by retailers and their factory managers at the New South Wales Arbitration Court in 1907 and at the Royal Commission on the Shortage of Labour in 1911 suggest that the period was one of exceptional growth in both production and sales. As we have already noted, all of the large Sydney stores expanded their premises between 1904 and 1908.

It may be significant that this period of rapid growth in retail-manufacturing coincided with the New South Wales

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53 Francis ('No More Amazons' p 99 footnote 18) refers to Anthony Hordern & Sons' early use of cutting machines in 1901, and Redmond (History of Anthony Hordern, p 91) notes the use of sewing machines powered by gas engines in the new Palace Emporium factory.

Government's aggressive immigration policy and assistance to migrants between 1906 and 1914. A total of 59,160 assisted migrants arrived in the state in this period, the largest increase in population attributable to immigration (10.7 per cent) since the 1880s. The Government purported to select only those applicants likely to find jobs (principally farm workers and domestic servants) and ensured that they received at least minimum wages by controlling the influx of labour through the Government Immigration and Tourist Bureau.

As A.C. Kelly has pointed out in his study of the relationship between demographic change and economic growth, migrants were largely young and single wage-earners who were more likely to spend than save their earnings. Many migrants brought considerable amounts of capital into the state. The Government Immigration and Tourist Bureau estimated that at least £1 million entered New South Wales annually this way. Retailers contemplating expansion of their manufacturing activities would have been encouraged to invest capital in property and equipment and engage a large workforce once they were sure that the state would supply both workers and consumers.

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* Kelly, 'Demographic Change'. p 267.

Evidence of retailers' direct promotion of government immigration policies is scant. However, Australian businessmen in general and Chambers of Commerce in particular supported government moves to increase the population after the turn of the century. Evidence presented by factory managers employed by Anthony Hordern & Sons, Grace Brothers and David Jones at the Royal Commission on the Shortage of Labour in 1911 suggests that the major houses favoured immigration. John Greathead (a former president of the Sydney Clothing Manufacturers Association) of Grace Brothers reported that he had recently spoken publicly in its favour. Representatives from Anthony Hordern & Sons and David Jones speculated that the main cause of the shortage of labour was a prosperous economic climate which had created both employment opportunities and increased demand for clothing. Jacob Segal of Anthony Hordern & Sons went further in attributing this demand to an increased population with additional spending power, and more specifically to the Government's push to settle people on the land. Segal's comments suggest that the management of Sydney's largest store was alive to the benefits of state-sponsored immigration.

The result of this growth in retail-manufacturing and the shift to mass production techniques carried out in separate premises during the first twenty years of the twentieth century was a dramatic increase in the production

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"Royal Commission on the Shortage of Labour 1911 p 154.

"Royal Commission on the Shortage of Labour 1911 p 80."
of ready-made clothing. High class dressmaking, tailoring and millinery continued to be important to the drapery trade, but after World War I began to lose their privileged status and catered increasingly to a smaller and more exclusive market. Staff records kept by David Jones, for example, suggest that the firm employed fewer dressmakers and tailors after the War.\textsuperscript{62} Drapery stores nevertheless continued the men’s and women’s high grade, handmade tailoring and dressmaking business throughout the 1920s.\textsuperscript{63}

Statements made by dressmakers employed by the major retail houses to the Select Committee held to enquire into a dispute between dressmaker Madame Bell and the Education Department over cutting techniques in 1912 suggest that the dressmaking departments were doing considerable business in making alterations to ready-made dresses alongside the traditional business of making up new models.\textsuperscript{64} Moreover, new methods of pattern drafting and cutting that challenged the traditional craft skills of the male tailor were being taught to women by the Sydney Technical College in 1912.\textsuperscript{65}

The Master Retailers Association of New South Wales capitalised on this development by arranging with the College in 1918 to employ at 2/6 p.w. over the award rates all the women who successfully completed the course. It set up an

\textsuperscript{62} Staff agreements in David Jones Archives BRG 1/8.

\textsuperscript{63} See, for example, David Jones’ departmental trading results 1930 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/140.

\textsuperscript{64} Evidence of Leonie Sawle of David Jones, Report from the Select Committee on the Claims of Madame Bell against the Education Department, Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales 1911-12 v 2 p 67.

\textsuperscript{65} Evidence of John Stewart, tailor’s cutter, at Select Committee on Madame Bell 1912 pp 74-5.
Advisory Committee to oversee the syllabus (which in 1919 included Miss J. Chalmers of Farmers) and offered an annual prize to the best students in the Department of Women's Handicrafts. This intervention in the education and training of its employees extended retailers' control over the production process and ensured a ready supply of labour.

Costume, skirt and dress making shifted from the tailors' and dressmakers' workrooms to retailers' factories after the turn of the century. Anthony Hordern & Sons' factory in the new Palace Emporium, for example, produced dresses, millinery and underclothing for the first time in 1905, and Grace Brothers manufactured women's clothing in its new factory in 1904. The transfer of order work from the tailor to the factory common to the clothing trade in general was first noticed by inspectors reporting on the operation of the Factories and Shops Act in 1902. Six years later they remarked that the rising price of tailoring and high class dressmaking, combined with the cheaper cost of coats and skirts for everyday wear, was creating a large demand for ready-made clothing. Mark Foy's magazine-style catalogue the Magnet noted in 1909 that there had been a 'wonderful change' in its ready-made department. It no longer sold

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**Master Retailers Association of New South Wales minutes 15 Aug 1918 in the archives of the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales; Sydney Technical College Handbook 1919.**

**Redmond, History of Anthony Hordern p 91; Australian 6 June 1907 pp 14-15; Draper Sep 1904 p 341.**

**Report on the Working of the Factories and Shops Act 1901 p 1 and 1908 p 19.**
clothes of the 'charity garment' type but clothes that were of the very best quality.\(^4\)

Retailers frequently engaged in a form of mass-produced tailoring known as the slop-order trade that was half-way between tailor-made and ready-made. The shop would take the customer’s measurements and send them to its own or a local factory which would then make up the order using mass production techniques. In some cases this was done without the customer’s knowledge, who was under the impression that her or his garment was being made by hand on the premises.\(^7\)

Retailers appeared anxious to disassociate themselves from the stigma of factory production. Harold Anderson of David Jones, for example, stressed to the Royal Commission on the Shortage of Labour that the company’s Orient workshop was a workroom not a factory by virtue of the fact that it ‘made to measure’.\(^7\)

Several factory managers employed by retailers gave evidence to the Commission that the demand for tailoresses was the result of this expansion in the ready-made trade and increased sales over the previous ten years or so.\(^7\) Jacob Segal estimated that the volume of trade at the Palace Emporium had increased by 30 to 50 per cent in the previous two or three years. As he explained to the Commission:

There is no shortage [of labour] at all in the factory - the shortage is in regard to the demand

\(^4\) Magnet Dec 1909 p 3.

\(^7\) Evidence of Morris Leventhal and Benjamin Farbstein at the Select Committee on Madame Bell 1912 pp 68, 88.

\(^7\) Royal Commission on the Shortage of Labour 1911 p 126.

\(^7\) Evidence of Harold Anderson (David Jones Orient workroom) p 126; Edward Moir (David Jones costume and mantle factory) p 25; John Greathead (Grace Brothers) p 150.
from the Palace [Emporium]. I have as many
employees now as I had two years ago, but the
demand has become so great that I cannot cope with
it ... 73

It seems likely that this unprecedented demand was
stimulated, if not provoked by consumers' awareness of the
advantages of cheap ready-made clothing once it was promoted
in the stores. As a manufacturer of napery goods explained,
the demand for his products increased after they appeared on
the market. 74 A survey of American women's reasons for
buying ready-made clothing carried out in the mid-1920s and
reported in the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales
Journal found that they preferred ready-made garments because
they saved the time and energy necessary for home-made items,
and because they offered better styles and design. 75

Some retailers deliberately promoted their own lines of
ready-made clothing as a form of advertising. As part of its
decision in 1916 to appeal to a wider clientele, David Jones
urged its department heads to sell its own products at
competitive prices and to sell more factory-produced goods of
a standard style, rather than smaller numbers of a wide
variety of goods. 76 In a re-arrangement of the departments
the same year, the management discontinued the making of
costumes to order and extended the ready-made costume and

73 Royal Commission on the Shortage of Labour 1911 p 90.
74 Evidence of Charles Copeland, Royal Commission on
Shortage of Labour 1911 p 157.
75 Retail Traders Association of New South Wales
Journal Feb 1928 p 47.
76 David Jones board minutes 20 June 1916; 'The Future
Policy of the Company', report of the executive submitted to
the Board of Directors of David Jones 18 July 1916 in the
board minutes, David Jones Archives.
Comments in the Draper suggest that other drapery stores were making good profits out of the ready-made clothing departments by 1914. An editorial in the Draper of 1924 drew retailers' attention to what it perceived as changed shopping patterns in the softgoods trade since the War. Whereas before the War the middle class woman had typically bought one good fashionable dress for each season (that is in spring and autumn each year), she now bought less 'showy' outfits more frequently for everyday wear. The fashions of the second half of the 1920s, with their shorter skirt lengths, simpler designs and lighter fabrics, consolidated the economic ascendancy of ready-made clothing. As an article in the American trade journal the Dry Goods Economist reproduced in the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal in 1927 pointed out, 'Garments could be cut by the dozen instead of by ones or twos or threes'. The importance of the women's ready-made clothing departments to the drapery store by the 1920s is revealed by the appointment by David Jones of Mrs Searle, formerly a costumier and buyer, as head of these departments at the exceptional salary of £1,000 p.a. plus bonuses.

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77 David Jones board minutes 11 Oct 1916 and 21 Nov 1916 in David Jones Archives.
78 Draper Feb 1914 p 37.
79 Draper Oct 1924 p 558.
81 Personnel file of Mrs Searle 1923-4 in David Jones Archives.
The advantages to retailers of operating their own factories were clearly sufficient for them to have invested considerable capital in manufacturing. However, and sadly for the historian, they seldom made explicit their reasons for doing so. Retailer-owned factories certainly eliminated 'middleman' costs by reducing the stores' dependence on manufacturers' or wholesalers' prices. David Jones, on the other hand, cited quality control and the promotion of Australian industry as the most important reasons for setting up its new Marlborough Street factory in 1914. Factory production could thus be used to enhance the store's community reputation as fair dealers concerned only with the quality of its merchandise and national well-being. Store managements needed to control the quality of the commodities they sold if they were to cultivate a regular and loyal clientele.

Proprietary lines sold under trade marks such as the Orient label helped promote a store image and created a demand for goods which only that retailer-manufacturer could supply. Well-run factories could also be used for advertising purposes. Promotional literature for David Jones emphasised its factory's superior working conditions, staff welfare schemes and the hygienic and efficient methods of production. Such arguments were persuasive when retailers were aware that consumers with a 'consumers' conscience'

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82 Daily Telegraph clipping n.d. (?May 1914) in David Jones board minutes, David Jones Archives.
83 Draper Jan 1917 p 25.
84 David Jones, A Visit to David Jones. Reviewing the George Street Store, the Country Order Department and the Marlborough Street Factory (1923) in David Jones Archives BRG 1/134.
might exercise, as they had done in the United States, boycotts of stores selling goods produced by sweated labour.\textsuperscript{85}

The need to control not just quality but the factory workforce and the labour process was also behind retailers' adoption of industrial methods of clothing manufacture. In a report on the company's efficiency to the directors of David Jones in 1913, A.R. Harwood noted that the workrooms were operating at a loss. This he attributed to 'laxity' and the absence of managerial or executive supervision.\textsuperscript{86} The company's decision to consolidate its manufacturing activities in the new factory building the following year may have been the directors' solution to this management 'problem'.

Retailers could also use their dual role as production and consumption managers and their image as model employers to advantage in the industrial relations arena. They justified their refusal to pay higher wages to factory staff on the grounds that the products were passed on to the shop at cost price and that they therefore made no profit out of the manufacturing operation.\textsuperscript{87} However, as counsel for the Shop Assistants Union George Beeby pointed out to the Arbitration Court in 1907, the functions of production and distribution were inseparable in the process of profit


\textsuperscript{86} Report to the directors of David Jones Ltd by A.R. Harwood 1913 in David Jones Archives.

\textsuperscript{87} Samuel Hordern used this argument to oppose wage rises for his furniture factory employees, cited in Shop Assistants case 1907 v 45 pp 1694-1703.
realisation: 'The men engaged in distribution are practically engaged in the production of goods; the goods are not produced until they get into the hands of the consumer.'

Control over both factory and sales workforces also gave retailers considerable flexibility in the deployment of labour. During slack periods in the factory they could transfer staff to the sales floor instead of risking public disapproval by dismissing them.

But combining production and sales could be a mixed blessing for retailers. The close proximity of workrooms and sales floor brought manufacturing and sales staff into contact with each other, so that employers were seldom able to grant concessions in working conditions to one group without also granting them to the other. For example, when shop assistants were granted a weekly half-holiday under the 1899 Early Closing Act, inspectors received numerous complaints from workroom employees that they had been denied the same rights:

It is no small hardship for girls who are working daily in a sedentary occupation, which allows of little or no exercise, to see their friends released for one half day every week ...

For similar reasons the directors of David Jones granted their workroom employees at George Street (that is, in the retail store premises) one week's paid holiday over Christmas.

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Shop Assistants case 1907 v 44 p 954.

Communication from Raelene Francis 19 Nov 1986 based on her research on Foy and Gibson in Melbourne.

in 1919 to lessen the distinction between shop assistants and workroom employees.\textsuperscript{71}

Women employees of retail-manufacturers were uniquely placed to appreciate - and criticise - the surplus value realised by employers from their labour. Mary Edwards, a dressmaking machinist employed on piecework by Grace Brothers around 1910, left her job there because she considered she was not being paid sufficiently for her work:

They gave me blouses to make. They were getting 9s. or 10s. in the shop for them, and from my book I saw I was only getting 9d. That is why I left there ... I do not think we were paid sufficient for the coats. I know for a fact that the coats sold for 42s. in Grace Brothers and we got 2s.6d. for them.\textsuperscript{72}

It is likely that Mary Edwards was not the only factory worker to notice the disparity between factory costs and shop prices.

The close proximity of sales and manufacturing workforces also enabled some women to be 'promoted' from workroom to sales floor. The Draper noted in 1924 that the large stores sometimes selected their saleswomen from the millinery and mantle workrooms because 'the girls know what they are talking about'.\textsuperscript{73} More commonly, however, the two groups remained distinct and did not mix socially, even under

\textsuperscript{71} David Jones board minutes 17 Dec 1924 in David Jones Archives. (The concession was withdrawn in 1925).

\textsuperscript{72} Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Hours and General Conditions of Employment of Female and Juvenile Labour in Factories and Shops, and the Effect on such Employees, \textit{New South Wales Parliamentary Papers} 1911-1912 v 2 3rd session p 39.

\textsuperscript{73} Draper Apr 1924 p 211.
shared recreational facilities provided for them by their employers.\footnote{See, for example, references to separate social functions for factory and sales staff in David Jones’ staff organ Between Ourselves 1919-1921.}

The predominance of women workers in the clothing industry also helps explain the alacrity with which retailers established industrial methods of clothing manufacture. Dressmaking, millinery, shirtemaking and whitework had always been exclusively female occupations, and tailoring became increasingly female after the 1890s. Proprietors’ extensive use of female labour in the production process was one of the many ways in which they embraced the prescriptions and realities of gender in their promotion of mass retailing. A female workforce considerably reduced employers’ wage costs. The average wage for a male tailoring machinist in 1891 ranged from 45/- to 80/- per week; that for a female machinist from 15/- to 40/- per week.\footnote{Census and Industrial Returns 1891.} Both male and female labour was relatively cheap as a result of declining wage levels in New South Wales between 1891 and 1906\footnote{P.G. Macarthy, ‘Wages in Australia 1891 to 1914’, Australian Economic History Review v 10, no 1 (Mar 1970), table 5.}, possibly a contributory factor in retailers’ decisions to enter manufacturing in this period.

Retailers could, moreover, justify their extensive use of female labour by summoning the familiar ideological wraiths of femininity. They claimed that the making (just as the purchase) of clothing was woman’s proper sphere, that she ‘naturally’ did it better than men, and that low wages were justified by her existing or potential state of economic
dependence. The fitness of women for clothing manufacture rested on traditional assumptions of their affinity with tasks usually associated with the domestic sphere such as making, mending, altering, darning and beautifying household linens or clothes worn by the members of the family.

Before they removed manufacturing to separate factory accommodation, retail-manufacturers could also avoid paying higher wages to women by exploiting the higher status of 'shop' work compared with other forms of female employment. As one male tailor remarked scornfully in 1891, tailoresses believed that 'putting dresses on and going to a shop is a great deal higher than being in domestic service'.

Retailers made similar remarks. This status value of women's shop-based manufacturing work applied particularly to millinery, which allowed retailers virtually unpaid labour for at least the first two years of an apprentice's employment.

As in other seasonal industries such as food preserving, women provided a more flexible workforce for employers who needed to respond quickly to peaks and troughs in consumer demand as the cycle of spring and autumn fashions dictated. Over-stocking or a miscalculation in fashion trends could spell disaster for a department's performance. Women could be dismissed with less risk to the employer of industrial action or public censure than may have occurred with male workers. They could probably also be recruited at short notice.

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See, for example, Francis, 'No More Amazons' pp 99, 110.

Royal Commission on Strikes 1891 p 398.

Census and Industrial Returns 1891.
notice from the pool of women desperate for any means of supplementing their income, especially when jobs were scant and male breadwinners likely to be unemployed.

Employers could respond to criticism of their treatment of women by arguing, as did the manager of one of Anthony Hordern & Sons' factories in 1911, that female workers continually resigned of their own accord to marry or take care of relatives.\textsuperscript{100} By a neat rhetorical twist, the blame for the shortage of labour could then be placed at the feet of women. If supervised labour was either unavailable or unsuitable for some kinds of work, employers could always fall back on the labour of women forced by domestic circumstances to work in their own homes.\textsuperscript{101}

Sydney retailers constituted some of the largest clothing manufacturers in the state and probably in Australia. As shop and factory employers, the large stores exerted control over a major portion of the Sydney workforce, over the production of drapery commodities and over their sale. They were major participants in the national trend towards industrialisation in the early twentieth century and contributed to the development of industrial methods of clothing manufacture in New South Wales by investing considerable capital in their factories and by utilising the latest technology. As the tailors' strike at David Jones suggests, they were also at the forefront of employers' moves to replace 'skilled' male clothing workers with 'less-

\textsuperscript{100} Evidence of Jacob Segal in Royal Commission on the Shortage of Labour 1911 p 77.

\textsuperscript{101} See, for example, references to outwork in Jacob Segal's testimony and that of Harold Anderson in the Royal Commission on the Shortage of Labour 1911 p 126.
skilled' and consequently cheaper female machinists in the 1890s. Retail-manufacturers were, moreover, quick to take advantage of a favourable economic climate and indirect state support through Government immigration initiatives and trade protection.

Sydney's large drapery store owners and managers harnessed the power of industrial methods of manufacture to the machine of mass marketing. It is significant that most of the producers, sellers and buyers who populated these retail empires were female, just as the commodities they produced, sold or bought were predominantly goods perceived to be feminine in nature. As Adrian Forty has suggested in his study of the relationship between design and society, manufacturers made their products desirable by endowing them with ideas and social values. Variations in design crystallised contemporary ideas of social and sexual difference by differentiating between men's and women's commodities.102 By manufacturing clothing, therefore, retailers in effect constructed the material of gender. Because they catered to an overwhelmingly female market, they were principally engaged in the manufacture of femininity.

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David Jones' millinery department. David Jones Ltd, Souvenir, 1887 [David Jones Ltd].

David Jones' men's hat department. David Jones Ltd, Souvenir, 1887 [David Jones Ltd].
David Jones' costume department. David Jones Ltd, Souvenir, 1887 [David Jones Ltd].

David Jones' tailoring department. David Jones Ltd, Souvenir, 1887 [David Jones Ltd].
CHAPTER 2

THE SEXUAL ORGANISATION OF COMMODITIES, SPACES AND PERSONNEL

The goods sold by the city's big stores represented the social world in microcosm. A lady's mantle, a man's hat, a parasol, a teacup, a comb or a clock all fulfilled a combination of physical, psychological and social needs. A man's straw boater, for example, did more than keep the sun from its wearer's head. It also functioned as a sign of youth, social position, sartorial propriety, summer and leisure. Above all, a man's boater represented masculinity. A lady's boater may have been almost identical except for the addition of a decorative ribbon, but that ribbon transformed it into an unambiguously feminine article.

Commodities were perceived, categorised, and organised by retailers according to their differences: despite identical physical functions, a man's straw hat had an entirely different social meaning from an article of millinery. Similarly, an umbrella was masculine and a parasol feminine, a cravat was masculine and a shawl was feminine. As Adrian Forty has shown in his study of design and society, variations in design also differentiated between male and female versions of the same commodity. The design of goods such as penknives, hairbrushes and watches indelibly marked them as either male or female and 'provided enduring, visible and tangible signs of the differences between men and women as they were held to exist'.1 In a world that demanded order for it to be intelligible, the differentiation of

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commodities by sexual association was a primary category of difference.  

The sexual association of commodities played a large part in determining the organisation of large drapery stores. The mid-nineteenth century drapery proprietor had little need to extensively organise his goods. Records which survive for David Jones, Peapes & Shaw, and Farmers for the period before 1880 suggest that articles were only loosely grouped according to function, and that male and female commodities were placed in close proximity to one another.  By the late 1880s, however, departments were more clearly designated as either ‘men’s’ or ‘women’s’.  David Jones, in its 1887 pictorial souvenir of the enlarged George Street store, classified its sales departments into ‘ladies’, ‘men’s’ and ‘furniture and furnishings’.  By the late nineteenth century most leading drapery establishments separated their women’s fashion goods into what was known as the ‘ladies’ showroom’, indicating both the sexual segregation of clothing


3 David Jones’ trade list in Forde’s Australian Almanac 1851 in David Jones Archives; Farmer & Co. engagement book 1873-1889; invoice from Peapes & Shaw 20 June 1872 in Peapes papers MLMSS 2161 Box Y812.

4 David Jones, Souvenir (1887) in David Jones Archives; Farmer & Co. engagement book 1873-1889 and board minutes 8 Oct 1897; invoice for Peapes & Shaw 28 Sep 1889.

5 David Jones & Co., Souvenir 1887 in David Jones Archives.
and the different methods of display applied to men's and women's goods.

As drapery shop proprietors expanded their stock by adding new varieties of merchandise, they made sense of their increasingly complex economic, visual and spatial domain by imposing a logic of difference upon the commodities they sold. The primary, if unarticulated, difference was that between male and female goods. The sexual division of commodities shaped store layout and the management of space, the division of labour, accounting procedures, display and advertising principles, stock control and marketing strategies.

Retailers organised their stores according to sexual difference in a dialectical process in which their own economic imperatives incorporated and were mediated by perceptions of gender held by men and women on the other side of the shop window. Retail managers conformed to popular notions of sexual propriety because to do otherwise might lose them custom. On the other hand, although the gender of a given commodity was usually compelling, it was neither fixed nor impervious to managerial control. The particular character of the sexual division of commodities depended on the requirements and mechanisms of capital at any given moment and, as a result, a few drapery commodities were susceptible to gender change during the first two decades of the twentieth century. It is equally clear, however, that the social constraints imposed on the organisation of goods by sex consistently overruled retailers' capacity to challenge it for material gain.
Articles of manufactured men’s and women’s clothing and accessories were the most unambiguously gendered drapery commodities. As the Draper of Australasia advised window dressers in 1908, the adjectives ‘ladies’ or ‘men’s’ were superfluous on show cards as ‘the article shows for itself that it is for a man or a woman’. Retail managers sexually assigned other commodities on the basis of a perceived division of labour between men and women. Children’s clothes (boys as well as girls) were categorised as women’s goods because women were responsible for child care and for buying the clothes of their sons and daughters. Haberdashery, furnishings, manchester and most fancy goods were also women’s commodities because of their affinity with the domestic sphere. Ironmongery, hardware (except for household items such as crockery and cooking utensils), workmen’s tools and materials such as paint, smoking requisites, leather goods and sporting goods were male. Furniture occupied a peculiarly ambiguous position in the gendered world of commodities, male by virtue of its bulk but female in its household association.

The sex of the commodity in large part determined the sex of the sales personnel employed to sell it. That is, women were usually employed to sell women’s clothing, accessories, haberdashery and trimmings; men to sell men’s clothing, hats, boots and hardware. The rationale behind the sexual division of labour in large drapery stores thus differed from that common in other areas of work in which levels of skill, manual strength, dexterity, and ideologies of domesticity reinforced employers’ allocation of women and

* Dec 1908 p 415.
men to different parts of the labour process. Although not absent in retailing, these factors were generally subordinated to retailers' perceived need to match the sex of the commodity to the sex of the sales assistant.

The exception to this sexual division of labour occurred at the level of department head and buyer, where men might be placed in charge of women's departments such as underclothing or hosiery (but rarely of costumes, mantles or millinery). Employers engaged men as managers of women's departments because they believed women lacked sufficient business acumen. They were able to transcend the unwritten rule that goods and sellers be of the same sex because at that level of responsibility employees had little direct contact with the commodity or customer. Samuel Hordern told the New South Wales Court of Arbitration in 1907 that men supervised stock control in the women's underclothing department, but 'the girls keep it forward'. Despite his staunch and atypical opposition to the employment of women (only 200 of his 1100 sales staff were female) Hordern conceded that he had no option but to employ women in the ladies' showroom and underclothing departments. Hordern's evidence suggests that it was physical contact with the goods and social contact with the customer that determined the sexual division of

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* Transcript of evidence presented in the Shop Assistants case, New South Wales Court of Arbitration 1907 in Archives Office of New South Wales 2/95-98 (hereafter Shop Assistants case 1907) v 44 pp 1040-1.

* Shop Assistants case 1907 v 44 pp 1042, 1089.
labour in the store rather than a direct equation between commodity and salesperson.

The sexual division of commodities and labour helps to explain the increasing employment of women in retailing after about 1890. Feminist historians of retailing have previously cited the decline in male retail apprenticeship and the subsequent 'deskilling' of retail work, the greater demand for sales assistants as a result of expansion, and the preference for cheaper and more docile female labour in accounting for the feminisation of wage labour in shops.10 Although the decline of the drapery apprenticeship tradition in the second half of the nineteenth century undoubtedly changed the social relations of retail employment, female shop assistants were required by proprietors to be just as skilled in selling as male drapers' assistants, albeit utilising marketing skills and personality rather than their knowledge of the commodity.

As retailers attempted to explain to puzzled state government officials, the relative proportions of male and female staff had less to do with the displacement of skilled male workers by women than with the nature of the goods they sold. John Hordern agreed with counsel for the employers T. Rolin that the decision whether to employ men or women was not based on their relative merits but 'practically settles

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itself ... it all depends what the department is ...’.\textsuperscript{11}

When Thomas Brocklehurst, General Manager of David Jones, was asked by the 1902 Royal Commission on the Operation of the Victorian Factories and Shops Law whether his company had different pay rates for men and women, he replied that wage rates were not comparable as male and female assistants were not employed in the same departments.\textsuperscript{12}

Given this degree of departmental/sexual segregation, I would argue that the feminisation of the retail workforce was in part attributable not just to the demand for labour created by overall expansion, but to the greater expansion of the women's departments — particularly in the ready-made clothing sections — as a result of the changes in clothing manufacture outlined in chapter 1. The employment records of Farmers suggest that its engagement of women assistants was closely tied to the development of its women's fashion departments. As far as I could tell from the names and job designations listed in the company's record of engagements for 1873, all except two of the sales personnel were male 'draper's assistants', the exceptions being one unspecified female assistant and one millinery assistant.\textsuperscript{13} By 1889, however, the company had eliminated the (male) job category of draper's assistant and instead employed male and female assistants in a wider range of departments. Women were

\textsuperscript{11} Shop Assistants case 1907 v 44 p 1191.


\textsuperscript{13} Farmer and Co. Engagement Book 1873-1889 in Grace Brothers Archives.
employed in the mantles, millinery and costume departments. This suggests that the increasing employment of women was intimately connected to the growing economic significance of in-house tailoring and dressmaking, and the sale of manufactured women's clothing.

The close relationship between the sex of the department and that of the assistant is further demonstrated by the employment records of those firms which gave up or entered the women's trade at some point in their commercial careers. Peapes & Shaw, for example, employed female dressmakers, mantle cutters, milliners and saleswomen from the late 1870s to the late 1880s. Invoices for goods bought at the shop suggest that Peapes and Shaw was a general drapery establishment selling men's and women's clothing from 1870 to 1889. However, the store reverted to the menswear trade sometime between 1889 and 1897, possibly after F.C. Millin took charge of the business under the name of Peapes & Co. in 1891. After 1889 all the applicants for employment at the store were male. It appears, therefore, that Peapes ceased to employ women when it gave up the sale of women's goods. Similarly, William Lowe told the Arbitration Court in 1907 that he had not employed female assistants at his George

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14 Farmer & Co. Engagement Book 1873-1889 in Grace Brothers Archives.

15 Invoices dated 1872 and 1889 in Peapes & Co. papers in Mitchell Library ML 2161 Box Y812.

16 Peapes & Co. catalogue c. 1897; Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Jan 1924 pp 173-180.

17 Peapes & Co. 'Applications for Engagement' in Peapes & Co. papers MLMSS 2161 Box Y812.
Street store after he removed the women's departments to new premises in Oxford Street in 1906.\(^\text{18}\)

While employers were quick to capitalise on cheap and amenable female labour, there were clear limits to the extent to which they could employ women in traditionally male departments. No matter how cheap their labour, there were overwhelmingly resistant social barriers to the employment of women in men's departments. A salesman in the millinery showroom would have been seen as plainly absurd, while a woman selling men's clothing would have transgressed the strictest of sexual taboos. The head of Mark Foy's mercery department told the Arbitration Court with some discomfort that

it would be impossible to have a girl in the mercery department, for instance, with underpants, where we have to measure customers sometimes, it would be impossible to have a lady there.\(^\text{19}\)

Bennett of the Shop Assistants Union agreed that mercery was 'hardly a fit department for a woman to serve in ... A girl behind the counter serving those things would have to meet all classes of men ...'.\(^\text{20}\)

It is perhaps significant that retailers were most adamant on the need to match the sex of the commodity with that of the salesperson in the case of underclothing. Underwear was intimately connected both materially and ideologically to the body of the wearer. As Moira Gatens has argued, the human body as lived is not neutral, but male or female. The experience of maleness or femaleness is located

\(^\text{18}\) Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 1517; Draper Aug 1906 p 263.

\(^\text{19}\) Shop Assistants case 1907 v 42 p 123.

\(^\text{20}\) Shop Assistants case 1907 v 42 p 95.
within the body as well as in the mind, such that the connection between femininity (gender) and the female body (sex) is not as arbitrary as many feminists have assumed.21 Both sex and gender were implicated in the matching of sexed bodies to sexed commodities.

In handling underpants, especially if the sale required personal fitting, an assistant was handling an article which represented the male body of the customer and therefore maleness itself. Retailers’ refusal to contemplate employing women in the sale of men’s underclothing was not just a matter of sexual morality or gender ideology, but indicated the strength of a materially-expressed sense of sexual difference. Women sold corsets both because corsets were socially constructed as feminine commodities, and because corsets were materially inseparable from the female body. This suggests that one of the unwritten rules of the deployment of retail labour in the sale of sexually-specific goods was that the sexed body of the salesperson be the same as the sexed commodity she or he sold.

If the sexual division of labour in the sale of underwear was compelling, other commodities were the subject of negotiation by the early twentieth century. The most sexually-ambivalent goods in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century department store were furniture and some articles of hardware such as crockery, pots and pans. Hardware was usually associated with men’s work, and furniture with heavy goods requiring strength to handle (at least in the shop, if not at home), so were perceived by many  

in the retail trade as masculine commodities. However, as goods which were inevitably placed in a female domain - the home - and seen to be susceptible to feminine taste and judgement, they could also be defined as female. Manchester (house linens such as towels, sheets, blankets and tablecloths) and dress materials were also sexually-ambivalent. The source of their masculinity resided in their 'raw' and unmanufactured state, in their weight, and in the nineteenth century drapery tradition that defined the sale of materials as a male occupation. Like crockery, however, manchester goods had clearly feminine associations.

Evidence presented by salesmen and store proprietors at the 1907 Shop Assistants case shows how these commodities had begun to be redefined by retailers by the early twentieth century. As part of their first log of claims to the Arbitration Court the Shop Assistants Union asked that no female assistant be employed in the manchester, dresses, (men's) clothing, mercery, ironmongery, furniture or sporting material departments. The evidence male unionists presented to support their request to exclude women, and that presented by retailers against exclusion, suggests that the nineteenth century gender ideology of commodities was under challenge as a result of commercial expansion.

The Union and the employers agreed that women were being increasingly employed in male departments, particularly in manchester. Some drapery shop owners admitted that they asked female assistants to serve in the manchester department if there was a sudden rush of customers, while in larger

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22 *New South Wales Industrial Arbitration Reports* 1907 p 145.
stores such as Mark Foys three women out of a total of 33 in the department were permanently employed selling small items such as doyleys, table covers, towels, pillow covers and other 'light things, the selling of which is really not a man's occupation.' These items were deemed to be female both because of their household-related function and because they were physically easy to handle. The salesmen's argument that manchester goods were too heavy for women to carry was difficult to sustain as many manchester items were no longer sold from large rolls but in smaller lengths known as short ends.

Some employers also argued that there was nothing improper in women serving certain dress goods. Samuel Hordern claimed that 'it is their place to serve dresses. Ladies would just as soon be served by a girl as by a man.' John McDowell agreed that women worked well in the sale of silks:

...the females are more particular; whether they are more adapted to the colours when they are a younger age or not, I could not say, but we find them more particular than the males in getting a good match for whatever is required.

Customers appeared to agree. One 'shopper' wrote to the Draper in 1904 that she preferred to be served by women in the haberdashery department because they knew instinctively how to match colours and silks. Other retailers saw no reason why women should not be employed in the kitchen

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23 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 947; v 44 p 1358.
24 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 44 p 1058; v 43 p 824.
25 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 44 p 1058.
26 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 701.
27 Nov 1904 p 383.
section of the ironmongery department, as 'every lady who manages a house, or the servant of a house, has to handle these articles'. A Petersham ironmonger frankly admitted that women knew more about teapots than he did.

The retailers' insistence that they be allowed to employ women in male departments, and their justifications for doing so, suggest their active intervention in the sexual division of commodities and labour. Male commodities were becoming feminised as a result of retailers' need for a cheap and flexible workforce and their attempts to extend managerial control. In the process they modified what were considered to be acceptable boundaries of feminine action by modifying ideas about womanhood and domesticity. As John Hordern explained:

A woman can sell anything, and lift anything up to two or three pounds weight in a shop, the same as she does in her own home, and she has a tongue in her head, and it is a pity to knock the word freedom on the head.

As a series of correspondence in the Draper about whether boys' tunics should be sold in the (female) costumes or the (male) juvenile clothing department suggests, retailers' major concern was that they might lose customers who had to go from one department to another to buy what they wanted. Customers often expected to be 'served through' the shop - that is, taken from counter to counter by one assistant - and this might entail a stop at a department usually staffed by men such as manchester or hosiery. In

28 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 45 p 1675.
29 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 887.
30 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 44 p 1198.
31 May 1903 p 168 and June 1903 p 200.
this case, John Hordern argued, a female assistant should be allowed to serve:

Sometimes in the middle of the day I will say to a little girl in the Haberdashery, go over and see that lady is attended to. Every lady wears hose. Why should not a girl cross from the Haberdashery to sell a pair of stockings in a rush of business?32

This need for flexibility was particularly important for smaller drapery proprietors who aspired to membership of the big league of department stores but whose shops were not yet sufficiently large to permit physically separate departments. When Judge Heydon upheld the employers’ right to employ women in non-traditional areas, he sanctioned and legitimated an entrepreneurial managerial practice which allowed retailers to intervene in the sexual order in the name of business efficiency.33

The arguments put forward by retailers in favour of the feminisation of commodities also suggests their embryonic awareness and public justification of the economic advantages of selling goods for their ideological associations over their materiality. Lace d’oyleys, teapots and silks were sold by women because they were more strongly associated with domesticity, fashion, femininity, gentility and household aesthetics than they were with the heavy bulk goods of the manchester, ironmongery or dresses departments. This was partly the result of industrial methods of manufacturing drapery commodities which in the nineteenth century were typically sold in their ‘raw’ state as lengths of material or as haberdashery notions which women would make up themselves

32 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 44 p 1198.
at home. By 1900 drapery proprietors were selling more and more manufactured articles which inherently incorporated more exploitable marketing potential. The barriers to women's employment by virtue of the weight or bulk of objects - their material presence - were overruled by their ideological value to the customer and retailers' desire to exploit that value.

Other evidence suggests that the sexual division of commodities in department stores was compelling but not impervious to social change or retailers' attempts to capitalise on shifts in gender relations. As early as 1895 the Australian Storekeepers Journal speculated that the popularity of the bicycle was creating a 'revolution in ladies' dress' and ran a series of articles over the next year on suitable fashions for lady bicyclists.34 However, the journal hastened to reassure its readers that there were limits to the masculinisation of women's clothes: 'the adoption of male attire in its entirety cannot be universal simply because it would be, in the vast majority of cases, most unbecoming.'35 Gayle Rubin, in her discussion of Levi-Strauss, has suggested that the division of labour by sex acts as a taboo against the sameness of men and women.36 Because the division of commodities by sex similarly functioned to preserve sexual difference, retailers could only go so far in shifting gender boundaries.

34 Australian Storekeepers Journal Apr 1895 p 9, June 1896 p 167.
The entry of women into traditional areas of male activity during World War I also created some confusion in the drapery trade. A cartoon in David Jones' house magazine *Between Ourselves*, headed 'Wartime in London', showed the interior of a drapery store in which a female land worker dressed in riding jacket, breeches and boots asked a perplexed shopwalker to direct her to the underclothing department. The shopwalker replied: 'Certainly - er - ladies or men's?'

By the 1920s retailers exploited a wide range of marketing strategies which challenged the sexual definition of some drapery goods. The *Draper* advised retailers in 1923 to make a special lingerie display in the men's mercery department to encourage men to buy these articles as gifts for women. But the stores were warned not to make the mercery department look too much like a women's store. Just as men were being encouraged to buy women's goods, so were women being persuaded to buy menswear. As the *Draper* noted contentedly in 1927, 'the mannish mode for feminine sports wear has sent Miss '27 to the men's department for the real thing.'

It is significant that although the stores were fully aware that women as well as men bought mercery goods, their display and advertising policies for this department ensured that they retained their masculinity. Designed to appeal to an overwhelmingly female clientele, stores nevertheless marketed their men's goods in conformity with male rather

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\[^{37}\] *Between Ourselves* Feb 1919 back cover.

\[^{38}\] *Draper* Oct 1923 p 627.

\[^{39}\] *Draper* Aug 1927 p 359; Oct 1928 p 495.
than female ideological associations. It appears then that the gender of the commodity rather than that of the customer determined sales strategies. It also suggests that retailers were aware of the commercial necessity of 'selling' both masculinity and femininity to a largely female audience. To have marketed men's goods in a feminine fashion would have transgressed deeply-entrenched gender norms and perhaps inhibited sales by alienating the customer.

Retail managers closely followed and reinforced the sexual division of commodities in the spatial organisation of their stores. As retailers expanded their stock and extended their premises they found it necessary to allocate merchandise and personnel to separate departments to retain control over all aspects of the business. Departmentalisation was primarily an accounting procedure that helped the retailer analyse and compare rates of profit for different types of commodities. It enabled him to keep a close check on profitable and unprofitable lines so that he could pinpoint sales difficulties promptly.\textsuperscript{40} Departmental organisation also facilitated personnel management by delegating responsibility for returns to departmental heads, and by fostering loyalty to the store through inter-departmental rivalry. Customers, moreover, might be induced to buy on suggestion if goods were grouped according to similar function.\textsuperscript{41}

The sexual division of selling space became more pronounced as the stores expanded their stock and premises

\textsuperscript{40} Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Jan 1928 p 41.

\textsuperscript{41} Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Jan 1928 p 41.
after the Sydney retail building boom of 1902–1908. As a contributor to the *Draper of Australasia Diary* counselled in 1903, customer convenience demanded that the softgoods proprietor arrange his stock of men’s and boys’ wear as one department, ladies and children’s wear as another, and general stock in a third.²²

Men’s and women’s commodities were separated not only into discrete departments but increasingly also on different floors of the building. Farmers and Buckinghams both devoted their ground floor to men’s clothing and their first floor to women’s showrooms.²³ Anthony Hordern & Sons’ new Palace Emporium store also reserved the ground floor for menswear, the first floor for manchester and the second for the women’s fashion showroom.²⁴ Marcus Clark’s Railway Square building opened in 1906 similarly placed the men’s, drapery and floor covering departments on the lower three floors, the millinery showroom on the second floor, ironmongery and fancy goods on the third, and furniture and furnishings on the fourth and fifth.²⁵ David Jones sold dress materials and trimmings and men’s clothing on the ground floor, millinery, costumes, mantles, carpets and curtains on the first, and furniture on the second.²⁶ And Lassetter and Company in 1908 had one section for ironmongery; another for drapery and groceries; one floor ‘devoted to the needs of merely men’; the first

²² *Draper of Australasia Diary* 1903 p 33.
²³ *Draper* Dec 1902 p 443, Apr 1903 p 136.
²⁴ *Australian* 6 June 1907 p 15.
²⁶ Charles Lloyd Jones and Desmond Robinson, ‘Customers are Human’ unpub. typescript c. 1958 in David Jones Archives.
floor of the George Street section sold millinery, ladies boots, underclothing, mantles and costumes; and furniture was sold on the next.\textsuperscript{47} McDowell and Hughes used the same principle in the arrangement of its new 1915 store, as did David Jones on a larger scale in its 1927 Elizabeth Street store.\textsuperscript{48} Wholesale houses such as Robert Reid ran their businesses along similarly gendered lines.\textsuperscript{49} 

The physical segregation of men's and women's departments reached its culmination in the creation of separate men's stores which were advertised as being quite distinct from the women's departments.\textsuperscript{50} Lowes was one of the first Sydney stores to remove its women's section to new premises in Oxford Street in 1906, allowing its George Street store to be devoted entirely to menswear.\textsuperscript{51} Mark Foys opened a new men's 'store' in 1929, and David Jones converted its George Street premises into a men's store in 1935.\textsuperscript{52}

Advice given to retailers through trade literature provides some insight into the marketing rationale behind the increasing segregation of men's and women's commodities after the turn of the century. Retailers were convinced that the different attitudes to shopping of male and female customers required separate sections. The recognition by retailers

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{47} *Town and Country Journal* 13 May 1908.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Draper Mar 1915 p 83; plan of Elizabeth Street Store Departments 1927 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/574.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Robert Reid catalogues 1899-1912 in Robert Reid papers, Australian National University Archives of Business and Labour 81/310A.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Draper Dec 1929 p 648.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Draper Aug 1906 p 263.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Barbara Horton, 'Brief History of David Jones Limited' 1985 in David Jones Archives.
\end{itemize}
and sales experts that mens' departments should be run separately and according to different principles from women's sections appears to date from the first decade of the twentieth century. The Draper first included an article on the subject, reproduced from the American trade journal Printers Ink, in 1905. One large American store, it stated, had realised that its men's department was failing because it had been run on the same lines as the one for women. The management consequently substituted salesmen for women, secured a window dresser experienced in men's goods, advertised its menswear separately from its other goods, and employed two extra cashiers so that male customers would not have to wait around for their change.\textsuperscript{33} The journal thereafter continued to pay special attention to men's departments in drapery stores.

A man, according to retail experts, tended to do his shopping 'in the few minutes he has to spare on his way back to the office from lunch'; therefore male departments (including here gloves, which retailers noticed men bought as presents for women) should be easily accessible from the street.\textsuperscript{34} As we have seen from the departmental organisation of most big stores after 1900, menswear was usually sold on the ground floor.

Men apparently disliked having to walk through the women's sections of the store. Most found it an ordeal to 'pass under the gaze of rows of lady assistants through departments where are displayed women's garments, very often

\textsuperscript{33} Draper Sep 1905 p 316.

\textsuperscript{34} Draper Aug 1914 p 370; Apr 1922 p 183.
of an intimate nature'. Consequently the Draper believed that it was 'absolutely necessary' to separate menswear from drapery and to place it as close as possible to an entrance so that the embarrassed male could make a quick getaway. The Draper went so far as to advocate separate men's and women's entrances.\(^5\)

While separate entrances may have encouraged the reluctant male shopper into the store, retailers were anxious not to deter the female shopper from the menswear sections. Just as retailers deliberately challenged the sexual division of commodities, so they sought ways to break down the sexual segregation of space without overstepping the limits of propriety. Menswear department managers were advised in the 1920s to 'get the women's business' by making the female customer feel comfortable and welcome.\(^5\)

In 1925 the Draper ran an essay competition on 'How to Attract Women to a Men's Wear Store'. One contributor, apparently seriously, suggested that the only answer was to split the store down the middle and to make the entrance on one side, "Lady buyers this side", and on the other "Gentlemen buyers this side" ... thus showing there are two distinct, individual and separate sides to the shop for a settled and specific purpose, which plainly shows itself to be "Separate sides for the sexes"...Then the women could shop with women, and a lady assistant if necessary to serve them, and the men could gather with men on their own side without qualms of conscience or fear of women's interruption.\(^5\)

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\(^5\) Draper May 1918 p 188.

\(^6\) Draper Sep 1914 p 406; May 1915 p 164.

\(^7\) Draper Apr 1922 pp 184-5.

\(^8\) Draper Oct 1925 p 167.
Commenting that some women felt as uncomfortable in the men’s underwear department as a man in a corset department, William Allen suggested counter notices stating ‘This portion for lady buyers only’. He concluded:

That there are the two sexes and that both buy in a men’s shop. That some men feel awkward buying beside women and vice versa [and] That both are valuable to the mercer and neither must be lost...**

Allen may have been overstating his case for sexual segregation. His essay nevertheless touches on what was probably a common and deeply-held belief among retailers — and perhaps customers — in the need to preserve the sexual order. The separation of men’s and women’s departments because of men’s perceived aversion to female space continued as an established retail policy supported by psychological theory well into the 1930s.*** At least one customer suggested that the aversion was mutual: she told the Draper that women resented the presence of male shopwalkers in the women’s showroom.**¹

The material division of goods by sex was matched by a difference in the economic performance of men’s and women’s departments. The profitability of a particular department depended on several factors: stock turnover; departmental expenses including labour costs; the price of individual items; the extent to which the goods were subject to fashion; the judgement of buyers and department heads; advertising expenditure; seasonal shifts in demand; and the unpredictable

** Draper Oct 1925 p 167.

*** See, for example, Rydge’s Business Journal, Rydge’s Retail Merchandising Course (Sydney, 1937) p 16.

**¹ Oct 1904 p 347.
preferences of shoppers. The most successful departments, therefore, were those that employed junior and female assistants and sold popular high-cost fashion goods at a consistently high rate of turnover.

The store management would fix a certain rate of gross profit for each department at which the department head was expected to aim.\textsuperscript{42} Gross profit referred to the difference between cost price and selling price, net profit to the gross profit less expenses (wages, building costs, import duties and so on), and rate of gross profit to the ratio of gross profit to the total volume of sales expressed as a percentage. The rate of gross profit is therefore the most useful indication of the relative profitability of different commodities and departments.

Price determination was usually the responsibility of the departmental head. He or she would make up prices as high as possible 'without driving the public away'.\textsuperscript{43} Harry Lasseter told the New South Wales Arbitration Court in 1907 that his firm marked up 'according to the value; there is no fixed rule. We arrive at the value by what we think it will fetch'.\textsuperscript{44} The arbitrary nature of the value of department store goods was discovered by Housewives Association representative May Mathieson when she compared prices on a ladies' serge costume for the Necessary Commodities Control


\textsuperscript{43} Charles Lloyd Jones at the Necessary Commodities Control Commission 17 May 1920 p 15.

\textsuperscript{44} Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 499.
Commission in 1920. She found that the same costume was priced anywhere between 8 guineas and 17 guineas, with David Jones proving exceptionally expensive at 21 guineas. Farmers and David Jones claimed that as 'credit' stores they had to charge higher prices than the cash or time payment traders in order to provide their customers with a higher level of store service.

Evidence presented by retailers and shop assistants in the Court of Arbitration in 1907 indicates that the big stores had a hierarchy of departments according to their profitability. Several retailers argued that wage levels should be determined by department rather than by age or experience because different rates of profit accrued to the employer in different departments. The least profitable were haberdashery and trimmings, followed by lace, ribbons and fancy goods. Retailers explained that women and juniors were used extensively in these departments because little experience was necessary.

More importantly from an economic point of view, these departments had a smaller volume of sales than the 'heavier' clothing sections. John McDowell of McDowell and Hughes explained that, especially in smaller shops, the small trade counters were necessary to bring customers in but were not always busy. He also pointed out that 'a customer may come

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66 Necessary Commodities Control Commission 10 June 1920 p 3.

66 Evidence of Charles Lloyd Jones at Necessary Commodities Control Commission 19 Feb 1920 p 16; George Wright 19 Feb 1920 p 43.

67 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 44 p 1169; v 42 p 114.

68 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 709.
in and take an hour to spend 3/- or 4/-, whereas in another
department she will spend £2 or £3 in the same time'. Thus
it was the combination of low sales volume and a fixed wage
cost that made these counters the least profitable.

Small drapery proprietors told the Court that assistants
working in the big stores benefited from the opportunity to
advance by moving up from haberdashery, fancy or ribbons to
better departments such as mantles or millinery. Shop
assistants themselves were well aware of this hierarchy.
Margaret Ryan spent 14 years working in Mark Foy's
haberdashery department before being 'promoted' to lace. She
then asked to be placed in the ladies showroom 'as I
understood it was the best experience a girl could get.'

The men's and women's clothing departments were at the
top of the departmental hierarchy in terms of status, profits
and wages. Of these, the women's departments sold a larger
amount of goods and showed a greater rate of profit than the
men's. The privileged position of the women's fashion
departments appears to have been at least as old as the
institution of the ladies showroom. The dressmaking, mantle
and millinery workrooms at David Jones in 1875 showed
considerably greater net profits than did the men's mercery
and tailoring departments. Correspondence preserved in the

\textsuperscript{49} Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 709.
\textsuperscript{49} Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 709.
\textsuperscript{70} Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 582.
\textsuperscript{71} Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 583.
\textsuperscript{72} Debit and credit account of workroom expenses 1875
in David Jones Archives BRG 1/22.
David Jones Archives also suggests the economic importance of its millinery department in the 1890s, and the healthy state of trade in the mantles, underclothing, costumes and millinery departments which were 'crowded with buyers' during the 1890s depression.\textsuperscript{73}

The superior profitability of the women's departments continued and was consolidated in the twentieth century. Small and large proprietors, employers and assistants giving evidence at the 1907 Arbitration Court case agreed that the men's clothing, mantles, millinery and costume departments were the most profitable.\textsuperscript{74} Reginald Marcus Clark outlined a similar hierarchy in his store in 1920, describing haberdashery as low profit, boots and furniture as average, and costumes as the most profitable department.\textsuperscript{75} Sydney Snow considered replacing its Melbourne store's men's departments with women's goods in 1928 because the ground floor selling and window space was considered 'too valuable for Men's Clothing and Mercery' and could be more profitably allocated to haberdashery, fancy and women's goods.\textsuperscript{76}

The \textit{Modern Draper} noted in 1927 that the mantle, costume and millinery departments were the most important branches of drapery, attributing their 'tremendous' development to the

\textsuperscript{73} Correspondence relating to the millinery department 1891-2 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/13 and 1/24; letter to Edward Lloyd Jones from William Newman 13 June 1892 BRG 1/24.

\textsuperscript{74} Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 515; v 42 pp 283-7; v 42 p 304.

\textsuperscript{75} Necessary Commodities Control Commission 18 Feb 1920 p 15.

\textsuperscript{76} Minutes of Sydney Snow Ltd 7 July 1928, records of Sydney Snow Pty Ltd in Cox Bros papers, University of Melbourne Archives.
growth of the ready-to-wear trade. By 1930 the mantle department covered not just outer garments but also frocks, blouses and skirts: in other words, the majority of women’s manufactured clothing. David Jones’ departmental trading results show how the women’s, boys’ and girls’ ready-made clothing departments grew in number and specialisation between 1921 and 1930.

Comparable series of statistics which indicate relative rates of gross profit for the men’s and women’s departments are unfortunately rare and often obscured by the common practice of referring to departments by numbers or letters instead of names. However, those figures which can be gleaned from a variety of sources support retailers’ impressions of the greater profitability of women’s commodities.

David Jones’ departmental trading results for the period 1921 to 1930 suggest that many women’s departments made a higher rate of gross profit than comparable men’s sections. The trading results for 1921, for example, show that ladies’ blouses made 29.9 per cent and men’s shirts 25.7 per cent; ladies’ boots 24.5 per cent and men’s boots 21.9 per cent; millinery 26.7 per cent and men’s hats 25.9 per cent. The firm achieved relatively high rates of gross profits on corsets, millinery, perfumery and beauty products, furs, paper patterns and jewellery, as well as the less feminine

77 The Modern Draper. The Draper’s Encyclopaedia by Experts in all Branches of the Trade (London, 1927) v 2 p 27.

78 David Jones trading results in David Jones Archives BRG 1/140.

79 David Jones trading results 1921 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/140.
men's tailoring, regalia, stationery, blankets and woollens
departments.

Table 2.1 shows the anticipated rate of turnover in
women's, men's and household goods. Turnover referred to the
movement of stock in and out of the store: the quicker the
turnover, the more profit the retailer realised from his
investment in the goods. Joseph Neal Grace's figures suggest
that department store managers expected most goods to be
turned over four times a year, except those in the women's
fashion departments which they hoped would turn over five,
six or eight times a year. Although this table shows
recommended rather than achieved rates of turnover, it seems
reasonable to assume that it reflected an existing
differential between women's and other departments.

Table 2.2 shows the maximum mark-up that retailers were
allowed by law to add to the imported cost of drapery
commodities. The permitted mark-up on women's clothes was
greater than those on men's or household items. These
figures from the Queensland Board of Trade suggest that the
greater profitability of women's clothes was a largely
unacknowledged marketing principle which was by 1927
enshrined in state legislation.

Table 2.3 shows how the greater profitability of women's
clothes was expressed in the prices of one store in 1919.
With some exceptions, most women's clothing which served
essentially similar functions and contained a comparable
quantity and quality of material, cost the consumer more than
the male equivalent. These results are confirmed by the

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David Jones trading results 1921 and 1930 in David
Jones Archives BRG 1/140.
**TABLE 2.1**

RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF TIMES DEPARTMENT STORE STOCK SHOULD BE TURNED OVER PER YEAR, 1924

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WOMEN'S</th>
<th>MEN'S</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Millinery</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mantles</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mercery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costumes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laces &amp; ribbons</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosiery, gloves</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; haberdashery</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underclothing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lecture on turnover and profit by Joseph Neal Grace, reported in Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Sep 1924 p 81 [my categorisation].

**TABLE 2.2**

MAXIMUM ADDED PERCENTAGE ALLOWED ON LANDED COST OF CLOTHING AND DRAPERY BY QUEENSLAND BOARD OF TRADE, 1927

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WOMEN'S</th>
<th>MEN'S</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockings</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Socks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dresses</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Shirts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton vests</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>Cotton singlets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoes</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>Boots &amp; shoes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Feb 1927 p 33 [my categorisation].
TABLE 2.3

AVERAGE PRICES OF MEN'S AND WOMEN'S CLOTHES
AT ANTHONY HORDERN & SONS, 1919

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WOMEN'S</th>
<th>MEN'S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tweed costumes</td>
<td>75/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serge skirts</td>
<td>55/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton blouses</td>
<td>9/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton knickers</td>
<td>6/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calico nightgowns</td>
<td>10/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashmere stockings</td>
<td>4/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking shoes</td>
<td>25/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wool singlets</td>
<td>7/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collars</td>
<td>5/11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: New South Wales Board of Trade, Cost of Living Enquiry, Males and Females General, 1920 (Archives Office of New South Wales 2/5775) pp 233-6 [my categorisation].
findings of the enquiry into the Basic Wage of 1920, which set the annual cost of clothing for women at £30/4/6 and that for men at £23/18/-.\textsuperscript{a1} The reasons for this apparent sexual asymmetry are not immediately obvious but are probably related to a number of factors peculiar to the retail trade. Perhaps the most critical of these was that women’s goods were more susceptible to fashion and so accumulated a higher social and economic value. Retailers stressed in defence of their profits to the Court of Arbitration and to state government enquiries into prices and the cost of living that ‘high grade’ or fashion goods carried considerably higher rates of gross profit than those such as men’s boots or men’s ready-made clothing aimed at a working class or ‘bread-and-butter’ trade.\textsuperscript{a2} Whereas these ‘necessary’ commodities attracted rates of gross profit generally lower than the 33.3 per cent fixed rate recommended by the Interstate Commission in 1919, fashionable lines brought in gross profits up to 80 or 100 per cent on cost price.\textsuperscript{a3} The comparatively greater value of female fashion commodities is also suggested in retailers’ comments on their profitability. Millinery, overwhelmingly dependent on the ephemeral whim of fashion, was described by trade experts in

\textsuperscript{a1} Report of the Royal Commission on the Basic Wage 1920 p 30. Note, however, that boy’s clothing was estimated to cost more per year than girls’ clothing.

\textsuperscript{a2} Shop Assistants case 1907 v 44 pp 975, 1340-1, 1220-1; Necessary Commodities Control Commission 1919, transcript in Archives Office of New South Wales (hereafter AONSW) 2/5727 p 7 and throughout; Interstate Commission of Australia, Prices Investigation no. 11 Report – Clothing, Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers 1917-1919 v 5 p 434.

\textsuperscript{a3} Necessary Commodities Control Commission 1919 AONSW 2/5727 p 11.
the 1870s as an ‘item of feminine attire [in which] taste is everything’ and, in the 1920s, as ‘almost entirely a matter of style’.

Retailers typically extracted a greater rate of gross profit from millinery than most other lines of drapery merchandise – often as much as double the average rate. The women’s costume department at Marcus Clark was the most profitable of its sections in 1920. George Wright, managing director of Farmer & Co., told the Commission that whereas men’s boots yielded a gross profit of 20.1 per cent, women’s shoes produced a rate of 26.4 per cent. The mere addition of a buckle to a ladies’ shoe, he pointed out, transformed it from a necessary commodity into a fashion article and therefore added considerably to its value. The same commodity – blue serge – was awarded a higher maximum rate of gross profit by the Victorian Fair Profits Commission when it was sold in wholesalers’ women’s departments than it was when sold in the men’s departments because the material assumed the status of a fashionable commodity in the mantle department.

Retailers argued that they needed to allow for a comparatively higher rate of gross profit on fashion goods

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**Evidence of Hugh Macken at the Necessary Commodities Control Commission 17 May 1920, AONSW 2/5729 p 33; Draper Oct 1926 p 471.**

**Necessary Commodities Control Commission 18 Feb 1920 AONSW 2/5728 p 15.**

**Necessary Commodities Control Commission 19 Feb 1920 AONSW 2/5728 pp 37, 41.**

**Report of the Fair Profits Commission 23 Apr 1920 in Sargood Gardiner papers Box 1, University of Melbourne Archives**
because of the greater risk that unpopular or 'unfashionable' lines of merchandise would have to be sold at a loss. Despite this economic rationalisation of their actions in achieving higher rates of gross profits on fashionable items, it is clear that retail managers were able to extract more exchange value from women's fashion goods than more stable commodities. For the retailer who bought wisely and marketed carefully, fashion stood for entrepreneurial profit. The successful stores which are the subject of this study consequently owed much of their expansion to the profitability inherent in women's fashion commodities.

A second factor, probably closely allied to fashion, which contributed to the greater profitability of the women's departments was the apparently higher turnover in women's clothes. Retailers pointed out to the Arbitration Court that the women's trade was larger than the men's, and that the women's departments had expanded more significantly than others in the years prior to 1907.** Jacob Segal, factory manager for Anthony Hordern & Sons, explained to the Royal Commission on the Alleged Shortage of Labour in 1911 that in prosperous times the women's departments did a better business than the men's because women 'will have the new dress or hat whether the husband will have to wait or not'.*** Segal's comment may have reflected his own perceptions of women's impetuous nature as much as actual shopping patterns.

But it was probably representative of a common assumption

** Shop Assistants case 1907 v 42 p 457; v 45 p 1453.

within the drapery trade that women bought more goods for themselves than they or men bought from the men's departments. And, as Joseph Neal Grace told colleagues in 1924, 'a quick turnover means profit'.

The lower wages of women assistants in the female departments also lowered trading expenses considerably. As counsel for the Shop Assistants Union, George Beeby, pointed out, despite high profits and a similar value to the employer in men's clothing and women's mantle departments, a saleswoman was paid £1 p.w. compared with £2/10/- for a man. The cheaper labour of women did not affect the rate of gross profit - the expression of the inherent profitability of the goods - but did lower overall departmental expenses and hence increase net profits.

It is also significant that those departments which consistently showed comparatively high rates of gross profit - millinery, corsets, mantles, costumes and women's ready-made clothing - contained unambiguously feminine commodities which by the 1920s were manufactured. The expansion of the women's ready-made clothing trade boosted the economic lead of the female departments by creating a particularly profitable relationship between manufacturing and femininity. The incorporation of design in the clothing production process made manufactured fashion goods more definitively sexed, more desirable and hence more marketable than unmanufactured dress materials.

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¹ Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Sep 1924 p 79.

² Shop Assistants case 1907 v 42 p 284.
Retailers were in the business of marketing femininity (and to a lesser extent masculinity), just as they were intimately involved in the social construction of gender through the segregation and arrangement of commodities and spaces. The sexual division of commodities had its roots in gender ideologies current outside the store, but was manifested and manipulated by retailers physically, spatially and economically. The retail industry played an important social role in reinforcing the sexual order. Perhaps more significantly, retailers also subtly shifted the boundaries of a gendered world and exploited femininity for material gain.
CHAPTER 3

THE MANAGEMENT OF SALES ASSISTANTS

When David Jones opened his first drapery establishment in 1838 in a shop the size of a large dining room, he was able to keep a close eye on the activities of two male assistants who lived on the store premises. By 1929 David Jones Ltd occupied a multi-storey shop and employed 3,500 workers, most of them female, in a number of premises throughout metropolitan Sydney.¹ This expansion, typical of other large stores and notable particularly after the 1890s, created a labour management problem for retailers. The success of their constant drive to increase turnover and promote consumption depended on securing the co-operation and loyalty of both employees and customers. Retailers had to maintain control over an increasingly young and female workforce without compromising their popular image as benevolent employers and dedicated servants of the buying public.

Recent histories of American labour relations have charted a shift from nineteenth century centralised and authoritarian supervision to more indirect and bureaucratic methods of control in the twentieth century which increasingly relied on the influence of management.²

¹ David Jones & Company, A Retrospect 1837-1897 (Sydney, 1897) in Mitchell Library 658.4/D p 3; Report of Chairman at Annual General Meeting 1929 in David Jones board minutes, David Jones Archives BRG 1/32/1.

Retailers applied a number of labour management strategies after World War I which included salesmanship training, industrial psychology and welfare work. Welfare schemes were a popular and well-publicised means of achieving worker loyalty and preventing unionisation in large corporations after the 1890s; so much so that some American historians have characterised the first three decades of the twentieth century as the period of welfare capitalism. Evidence from the Australian retail industry suggests, however, that twentieth century welfarism evolved gradually out of nineteenth century paternalist social relations largely as a result of material changes in class and gender relations between 1890-1930. Paternalism and the rhetoric of the happy family survived at least into the 1930s with a resilience that suggests that it was incorporated into, rather than superceded by welfarism.

Drapery store proprietors needed to employ more waged labour as they expanded their premises, stock and sales activities after 1880. According to census data the total number of wage-earners other than manufacturing workers employed in Australian drapery shops increased from 3,250 in 1891 to 23,968 in 1921, with the greatest increase occurring

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4 See, for example, the persistence of strict house rules and staff discipline in Grace Brothers employment records in Grace Brothers Archives; advice to staff superintendents to act as "head of the family" and cultivate a family spirit in *Rydge's Business Journal* Feb 1930 pp 126-7; and Charles Lloyd Jones’s insistence on the value of paternalism in his autobiography (co-authored with Desmond Robinson), "Customers are Human", unpub. typescript, c. 1958 in David Jones Archives.
between 1901 and 1911. These figures would be considerably larger if the manufacturing employees of retailers were included. An estimated 7,000 shop assistants were employed in Sydney's big stores in 1907. By 1910 the largest stores - Grace Brothers, David Jones and Anthony Hordern & Sons - each employed between 1,000 and 4,000 workers, and eight stores between them employed over 10,000 workers. This

Occupations Table 7, New South Wales Census of 1891; Table 8, New South Wales Census of 1901; Tables 18 and 19, Commonwealth Census of 1911; Tables 25 and 26, Commonwealth Census of 1921.

Transcript of evidence heard before the New South Wales Arbitration Court Shop Assistants case 1907 in Archives Office of New South Wales 2/95-98 (hereafter Shop Assistants case 1907) v 45 p 1742.

makes the city department stores amongst the largest employers in Sydney, and probably Australia, in this period. The trend towards concentration continued between 1910 and 1930, with six firms employing a total of 12,500 workers in the 1910s, and five employing 8,300 in the 1920s.\footnote{Compare with factory workforce statistics in G.P. Walsh, 'Factories and Factory Workers in New South Wales 1788-1900', Labour History 21 (Nov 1971) p 11.}

Comments made by male union officials at the 1907 New South Wales Court of Arbitration Shop Assistants hearing make it clear that the increase in the previous ten to fifteen years had been predominantly in junior and female labour.\footnote{Individual store records underline this expansion. For example, the number of Anthony Horden & Sons' employees increased from 300 in 1881 to 5,000 in 1901; David Jones from 224 in 1897 to 2,260 in 1919; and Lasseters from 120 in the 1890s to 1,000 in 1910.} This impression is confirmed by census figures which suggest that women constituted only 17 per cent of Australian drapery employees in 1891, but over 50 per cent by 1911. Evidence of the male/female ratio in individual stores is fragmentary but suggestive of feminisation. Grace Brothers employed 404 women and 265 men, and Lasseters 200 women and 300 men in their sales staff in 1907. Anthony Hordern & Sons had a more masculine profile, with 200 female and 900 male assistants, as did Marcus Clark with 300 women and 700 men in 1913. Farmer and Company, on the other hand, employed 1,300 women and 300 men in 1916, and at David Jones four-fifths of its 2,260 employees were female by 1919. Retailers' preference for female employees thus varied considerably but was due only in part to the prejudices of individual proprietors.\footnote{For example, Shop Assistants case 1907 v 45 p 1781.}
(Samuel Hordern told the Arbitration Court that he believed men to be better sales assistants). The masculinity of store sales forces was more importantly a function of the type of business carried out: Marcus Clark sold a high proportion of furniture, and Anthony Hordern & Sons had a substantial trade in ironmongery and workmen’s tools.

The absence of complete employment records makes it difficult to assess the impact of World War I on employment patterns, but retailers' apparent silence on the matter, and census data both suggest that the War had a minimal effect on the sexual composition of the retail workforce. This may have been because the sexual division of labour between male and female departments made it difficult for employers to place women in men's departments without offending customers' sense of sexual propriety. Probably more significantly, the salesforce was by this stage already predominantly female, so that the absence of some male employees on military service had no major effect on managers' recruitment policies. One government official estimated in 1924 that female department store employees outnumbered men four to one.\(^\text{11}\)

**Paternalism**

Methods of labour control in the drapery trade changed with the gradual incursion of this largely female waged labour force. Relations between store owners and their employees in the second half of the nineteenth century were characterised by personal and authoritarian forms of supervision, unregulated and highly variable wages and working conditions, and unorganised resistance to managerial

\(^{11}\) Draper Aug 1924 p 475.
control. Employers had wide discretion to enforce discipline and loyalty through a system of rewards and punishments which drew on the nineteenth century drapery trade tradition, practiced by some firms in Sydney until the 1880s and still in evidence in England in 1907, in which male drapers' apprentices lived on the premises as part of the draper's household with all the duties and obligations associated with an authoritarian father-son relationship.  

Assistants lived on the store premises and spent their work and leisure time as part of the household. It was a paternalist system in which the employer perceived his role as the stern but charitable head of the drapery household entitled to the filial devotion and gratitude of his employees.

Retailers were free to determine wages as they saw fit, but within broad limits set by prevailing economic conditions and informal common industry standards. They aimed to make the percentage of wages to turnover as low as possible in order to increase net profits. Beyond this, proprietors were keenly aware of wages paid by their competitors and of shifts in labour supply and demand. Skilled and experienced employees were in more demand than

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12 See, for example, recollections of elderly shop assistants in the Draper May-Aug 1902, Jan 1904, Aug and Nov 1906. The reference to the English living-in system is in the Worker May 16 1907 p 17. For mention of the living-in system in David Jones see Personal Recollections of J. Goudale, 1925 (who joined the staff in 1863) in David Jones Archives BRG 1/577.

13 An employee complained to the Draper (Nov 1902 p 433) that employers were agreed amongst themselves on a uniformly low level of wages. This criticism was denied in the next issue of the journal by a Sydney employer who described the allegation of standard wages as 'absolutely unbusinesslike' (Dec 1902 p 439).

14 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 42 p 6.
cheaper junior applicants in the retail labour market. Good
dressmakers and tailoring department managers, for example,
were highly valued and commanded salaries up to £300 p.a. in
the 1880s and 1890s.\textsuperscript{15}

At the other end of the retail hierarchy, young workers
entering the industry at the age of 14 or 15 often received
either no pay at all or as little as 2/6 p.w. (for girls) or
5/- p.w. (for boys).\textsuperscript{16} Employers were able to extract junior
labour at virtually no cost because competition for positions
among young people was reportedly so fierce that parents not
infrequently offered payment to retailers to take on their
son or daughter so that they could 'learn a trade'.\textsuperscript{17}
Employers also benefited economically from lower female
wages. Senior drapery saleswomen received between 9/- and
£1/10/- p.w. in 1898, compared with £1 to £3 paid to
salesmen.\textsuperscript{18}

Retailers commonly supplemented wages with premiums and
bonuses, a mechanism which justified low wages and rewarded
those employees who made sales efforts on behalf of their
employer beyond their standard duties and in competition with
their co-workers. Mark Foy and Anthony Hordern & Sons, for
example, gave assistants one penny in the pound commission on

\textsuperscript{15} Applications for employment, staff agreements and
related correspondence 1876-1906 in David Jones Archives BRG
1/8.

\textsuperscript{16} New South Wales Department of Labour and Industry,
Reports on the Working of the Factories and Shops Act 1898 p
13; Edna Ryan, Two-thirds of a Man. Women and Arbitration in
New South Wales 1902-08 (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1984) p 146.

\textsuperscript{17} See, for example, Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p
703.

\textsuperscript{18} New South Wales Department of Labour & Industry,
sales, while others offered 'spiffs' (inducements to sell
certain lines quickly because they were out of season).\(^1\) Department heads, managers and buyers were also paid bonuses
as a reward for responsibility and for good departmental
performances.\(^2\) Lassetters gave its employees a five per-
cent bonus of net profits of their department, allocated
according to wages.\(^3\) As John Hordern explained to the
Arbitration Court in 1907, spiffs, bonuses and commissions
gave assistants 'some interest in the business besides
standing up like lamp posts'.\(^4\) Such payments also suggest
that retailers had a relatively high degree of discretion in
determining employees' remuneration under a paternalist
system that rewarded dedication and penalised indifference.

An employee's rate of progress from apprentice to junior
sales assistant to senior assistant to head of department or
buyer depended on the requirements and goodwill of the
proprietor as much as individual effort. It was not unusual
for assistants to remain in junior positions for ten years
before promotion.\(^5\) Hours of employment were similarly
arbitrary and varied considerably depending on the

\(^1\) Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 928.

\(^2\) Marcus Clark bonus lists 1904-1927 in Australian
National University Archives of Business and Labour 74/30;
David Jones personnel files and Report on Buyers in board
minutes 12 Sept 1916, David Jones Archives.

\(^3\) Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 473.

\(^4\) Shop Assistants case 1907 v 44 p 1187.

\(^5\) Elizabeth Walsh, for example, had worked for nine
years in the ribbon department at Mark Foy's at the wage of
17/6 p.w. (Shop Assistants case 1907 v 42 p 222).
establishment and its class of customer. Paid annual holidays were rare in the nineteenth century retail trade and any employee who took unpaid leave risked losing his or her position. Unpaid vacations imposed on employees in slow seasons operated as an informal mechanism of staff control.

The criteria used by employers in selecting employees were another indirect means of staff control. Workers were recruited according to departmental and manufacturing requirements through newspaper advertisements and from the pool of applicants seeking work by letter or in person. Advertisements placed in English periodicals by Australian stores attempted to lure saleswomen here by promising good wages, short hours, cheap living, plenty of marriage prospects and a climate like the South of France. By the turn of the century retail employment was so much in demand that Samuel Hordern reported receiving 60 to 100 applicants each day, one-quarter of them women. Proprietors such as Hordern and Francis Foy selected their staff personally (and


25 In a letter to David Jones & Co., a group of Sub-Inspectors referred to their privilege of two weeks' holidays which were presumably paid, and to annual holidays being established in 'inferior houses' (21 Oct 1897 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/24).

26 Applications for employment in David Jones Archives BRG 1/8; Peapes & Co. 'Applications for Engagements 1878-1902' in Peapes & Co. papers MLMSS 2161 Box Y812.

27 Draper Mar 1904 p 95. The advertisement was brought to readers' attention by employees attempting to improve their working conditions and wages through the Shop Assistants Union.

28 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 44 p 1134.
often idiosyncratically), as did Edward Lloyd Jones and his partners for David Jones. 29

The qualities sought by retailers in prospective employees depended greatly on the applicant’s sex and whether he or she was to be engaged in the workroom or on the sales floor. Employers expected milliners, dressmakers and tailors to have the necessary manual skills and an ability to fit, as well as a refined manner of behaviour in dealing with wealthy customers. Managers of the workrooms, especially in dressmaking and millinery, were also required to have good business and management skills. 30

An English advice book written for aspiring drapers’ assistants in 1878 specified as necessary qualities courtesy, cleanliness, punctuality, honesty and a sense of ‘duty to God’. 31 While piety appears to have disappeared as a desirable attribute, the other qualities continued to be sought by employers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Retailers expected female assistants to be ‘ladylike’ (tall, attractive and refined) and male assistants ‘gentlemanly’ (honest, sober and industrious). By 1920, however, retailers were urging women to be not ladylike but charming. Female assistants were expected to use their knowledge, personality and ‘insight into human, and

27 Francis Foy, for example, selected women according to the neatness of their hair (Romance of the House of Foy p 35).


especially feminine human, nature' to win over customers.\textsuperscript{32} Both men and women had to be courteous, tactful and deferential in their dealings with customers.\textsuperscript{33} By insisting on this informal code of deference and respectability, heads of retail firms tried to employ staff who would secure the loyalty of customers and submit to the authority structure of the store.

Major retailers exerted their authority most visibly through disciplinary strategies such as fines, rules and regulations, and through employment contracts.\textsuperscript{34} David Jones' standard memorandum of agreement between the company and new employees in the 1890s required the employee to refrain from intemperate habits and 'readily and cheerfully obey all the lawful orders, commands, directions and instructions of the Employers'.\textsuperscript{35} As late as 1921 Marcus Clark insisted that its new employees agree not to attend horse races or engage in any form of gambling.\textsuperscript{36} These attempts by drapery proprietors to regulate the private lives of their employees represent the remnants of the living-in apprenticeship tradition in which male draper's assistants

\textsuperscript{32} Address to David Jones' saleswomen by Mademoiselle D'Alroy on 'The Gospel of Enthusiasm', \textit{Between Ourselves} (David Jones' house magazine) Feb 1920 pp 16-17.

\textsuperscript{33} Shop Assistants case 1907 v 44 p 1330; Reekie, 'David Jones', p 8.

\textsuperscript{34} For more details of rules and regulations see Jennifer MacCulloch, "'This Store is Our World': Female Shop Assistants in Sydney to 1930' in Jill Roe (ed.), Twentieth Century Sydney. Studies in Urban and Social History (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1980) pp 170-1.

\textsuperscript{35} For example, agreement between David Jones and Santa Maria Baker 30 Oct 1891 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/8.

\textsuperscript{36} Marcus Clark, agreements and other papers concerning Branch Managers and other employees 1909-1924 in Australian National University Archives of Business and Labour 74/29.
were closely supervised both on and off duty. All large retailers insisted on the termination of employment 'at a moment's notice' because they believed that an assistant working out his or her notice could drive customers away from the shop out of spite.  

Records of stores' rules and regulations are scarce for the nineteenth century, but early twentieth century sources suggest well-established and formalised mechanisms of staff discipline and punishment. For example, David Jones' directors reminded employees in 1908 that their failure to carry out the 'rules of the house' would lead to instant dismissal. A booklet published by Marcus Clark, probably between 1902 and 1906, sets out a formidable list of Rules, Regulations and Reminders relating to 'unbusinesslike behaviour', dress requirements, adherence to the sales and stock management systems and so on. Farmer's sales assistants were forbidden to talk to the store cashiers, and Marcus Clark employees were not allowed to disclose the amount of their salaries or push goods carrying a bonus.

House rules were regularly enforced by a system of fines which, if not paid, could lead to instant dismissal. The rule and fine system acted, as the Victorian labour paper Tocsin put it in 1900, as 'the bludgeon by which the employer harasses, unlawfully harasses, an independent and honourable employe [sic] into the servility and sycophancy of genteel

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37 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 495.
38 Board minutes 10 Dec 1908 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/32/1.
39 Marcus Clark, 'Rules, Regulations and Reminders' n.d. in Australian National University Archives of Business and Labour 74/49/26-27; Farmer & Co. minute book 30 Apr 1897 in Grace Brothers Archives.
slavery'. Grace Brothers, Marcus Clark, Anthony Hordern & Sons and David Jones were amongst those firms which in the early twentieth century imposed fines (deducted from wages) for incorrect dockets, incorrectly addressed parcels, allowing goods to leave the store unpaid for, and unpunctuality. Grace Brothers, moreover, paid bonuses to cashiers and clerks out of the fines fund. The introduction of centralised cash systems, therefore, not only permitted closer supervision and facilitated departmental accounting, but also divided the workforce by ensuring that the clerical staff was diligent in detecting mistakes made by sales assistants.

The hierarchy and division of workers within each firm supported the store's chain of authority as increasing staff numbers presented problems of control for store proprietors. Workroom staff - tailors, seamstresses, milliners and their assistants - were physically separated from the sales staff and worked under separate management. Sales staff were organised horizontally by department and vertically by a hierarchy determined by age, experience, responsibility and sex.

Female apprentices were on the lowest rung of the sales ladder. Provided they adhered to the rules of the house and proved diligent, apprentices would be promoted to junior sales assistant, then senior assistant, and a lucky and

40 Tocsin 23 Aug 1900 p 5 (xerox in Melbourne University Archives).

41 Marcus Clark, 'Rules, Regulations and Reminders'; Shop Assistants case 1907 v 42 p 431 and v 44 p 1414; David Jones board minutes 3 Dec 1907 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/32/1.

42 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 45 p 1461.
patientfew might make it to department head. A male assistant had only a one-in-ten chance of being promoted to department head in 1907, and a woman's chances were even slimmer.\(^3\) In addition to their duties related to sales and stock, department heads effectively controlled the store's sales staff by checking sales procedures, enforcing house rules, levying fines, and hiring and firing junior workers in their sections.

The material embodiment of patriarchal authority in the nineteenth century store was the shopwalker. Selected for his imposing stature, air of authority and ability to act courteously towards customers, the shopwalker appropriated the proprietorial functions of personal attention to customers combined with high status and strict supervision of the staff in his department. His dress - the highly formal morning suit - placed him apart from more lowly employees and symbolised the dignity and aristocratic nature of his position.

The shopwalker represented the Victorian father of the store family, the physical manifestation of adult male power over women and juniors. Assistants and female reformers perceived and resented this often harsh authority. Young women were intimidated by the shopwalker: as one Factories and Shops Inspector noted in 1900, "many a tired woman would think more than twice before she sat down in the awful presence of the "shop walker"."\(^4\) One female assistant described the shopwalker as a 'savage monarch' who bullied,

\(^3\) Shop Assistants case 1907 v 45 p 1742.

abused and insulted shop women.\footnote{\textsuperscript{45}} Male assistants also complained that shopwalkers harassed juniors 'whose sense of manhood is considerably wounded through the unnecessarily snobbish and bullying manner in which they are addressed on every occasion'.\footnote{\textsuperscript{46}} Witnesses and Arbitration Court officials at the 1907 shop assistants' hearing repeatedly referred to the shopwalker as a 'man in authority'.\footnote{\textsuperscript{47}}

At the pinnacle of the nineteenth century store hierarchy was the proprietor himself (the only female exception among Sydney's large stores in this period was Mrs McCathie), together with a small number of partners or, if the firm was a limited liability company, a board of directors. In the absence of substantial evidence of the stores' managerial structures, it appears that this small group of men with a direct investment in the firm in the form of shares made most of the managerial decisions. There was little specialisation of managerial function, and the dominant voice was always that of the head of the firm.

This combination of public figurehead and material power supported the paternalist image and strategies of the big city retailers. Disciplinary measures were tempered with arbitrary but much-appreciated concessions which fostered workers' loyalty to, and identification with the firm. This paternalism was an attenuated version of the older apprenticeship system which formalised the mutual obligations of master draper and his male assistants.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{45}} 'Shop Girl's Plea to the Wives of Working Men', \textit{Worker} June 6 1907 p 15.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{46}} \textit{Draper} Nov 1902 p 434.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{47}} See, for example, Shop Assistants case 1907 v 45 p 1877.
Although Sydney assistants no longer ‘lived in’ by the late nineteenth century, drapery proprietors continued to cultivate in their employees a sense of family in which strict discipline and punishment was tempered with occasional rewards for dedicated service. Celebratory histories of Sydney’s big stores are replete with anecdotes which characterise late nineteenth century employers as both disciplinarians and kindly fathers.\footnote{See, for example, \textit{The Romance of the House of Foy} p 35.} The records of David Jones, Farmers and Marcus Clark all show an \textit{ad hoc} system of individually-tailored special payments to selected employees on their retirement or illness, bonuses paid to staff in responsible positions, and the occasional granting of special leave.\footnote{See, for example, David Jones board minutes 26 Feb 1907 in David Jones Archives; Marcus Clark board minutes 8 Nov 1902 in Australian National University Archives of Business and Labour M30/1; Farmer & Co. minutes 13 Aug and 9 Apr 1897 in Grace Brothers Archives.} Rewards, wage rises and promotions were granted informally as a concession by retail managers, just as punishments were summarily exacted by their disciplinary representatives on the sales floor.

The patriarchal model of labour relations found in the big stores appropriated gender and family ideologies current in Australian society in this period. The kindly father image of the big retailers made shop employment attractive to parents who wished to place their daughters in a respectable, protected and closely-supervised working environment.\footnote{Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 pp 932, 738, 1042.} As James Macken of Mark Foy’s explained in 1907, mothers liked their daughters to work in a drapery store because they had
plenty to do, were able to walk to and from work with their friends, and would be 'under control'. Paternalist assumptions also underpinned employers' provision of separate dining rooms for male and female employees, and arrangements whereby women were made to leave work five minutes earlier than men so that the two sexes would not mingle in the streets outside.

Just as employers used largely informal methods of staff control in the late nineteenth century, so did employees express their resistance to managerial power in uncoordinated ways directed at individual employers rather than the industry as a whole. The only organised opposition to employers' monopoly over working conditions in the nineteenth century was the early closing movement. As Denise Roberts has argued, the early closing movement attracted diverse interest groups - bourgeois social and religious reformers, feminists such as Rose Scott, assistants and proprietors - and did not represent labour conflict along clearly-defined class lines. Shop owners joined the movement to safeguard their own economic position by forcing their competitors to conform to standard trading hours as much as to improve the working conditions of retail employees.

Beyond the agitation for early closing in the 1880s and 1890s, evidence of open conflict between shop owners and sales staff is rare. The only reported strike by shop assistants in New South Wales took place some time between 1913 and 1928 over the employment of women in positions the

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81 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 932.
82 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 44 p 1051.
83 Roberts, 'Early Closing of Shops' pp 50-1.
union regarded as male.\footnote{Brief comment by E.C. O'Dea of the Shop Assistants Union to the effect that the union was opposed to strikes in Sydney Morning Herald 23 June 1928 p 19. I could find no other reference to the strike.} There were, however, several occasions on which manufacturing staff employed by retail houses went on strike. A strike over piece-rates by male tailors working for several city workrooms in 1891 initially caused David Jones considerable consternation, but turned out to be an unexpected boon to the management. The firm took every opportunity to publicise its tailoring services and introduced sewing machines (and female machinists) into the tailoring workroom during the strike, with good economic results.\footnote{Reekie, 'David Jones', pp 13-14.} The strike ended after 13 weeks in a victory for the employers.

Ten years later tailoresses employed by Anthony Hordern & Sons, Grace Brothers, Mark Foys and other manufacturers went on strike over the employers' refusal to pay a fixed minimum wage and the principle of union membership. After taking the case to the new New South Wales Arbitration Court, the tailoresses union was successful in securing an award in 1902.\footnote{Ryan, Two-thirds of a Man ch 3.} There were further disputes between clothing trade unions and David Jones in the 1920s.\footnote{Ruth Thompson, 'David Jones in War and Peace', B.A. Hons thesis, Macquarie University, 1980 p 63.}

Before state intervention in the retail industry and the formation of unions, however, employees more commonly extracted concessions from their employers through individual negotiations. This system clearly favoured the skilled, economically valuable and articulate workers over those at
the lower end of the staff hierarchy. In some cases groups of employees approached management with a specific grievance, as did the Sub-Inspectors at David Jones - 'old and trusted hands' placed in charge of junior boys - who requested in 1897 that the company restore to them the privilege of two weeks' (presumably paid) holiday in lieu of time spent in supervisory duties. Likewise, a group of senior showroom assistants wrote to Rose Scott in 1897 to bring to her notice poor working conditions at Grace Brothers.

David Jones' personnel records for the period before 1914 contain numerous requests from staff at the upper levels of the hierarchy for salary increases or changes in their employment contracts. Dressmakers and milliners formed the majority of these cases, women who clearly used their bargaining power as skilled workers to secure more favourable terms of employment. Santa Maria Baker, for example, refused to make any articles for the millinery department after being denied its management in 1892. Store records and Arbitration Court transcripts also suggest that theft - a covert form of conscious or unconscious protest used by individual employees against their employers - was a pervasive and continual retail management problem throughout the period. According to one saleswoman, the assistant who 'pans a fringe of bordered muslin handkerchiefs [sic] under

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86 Letter to David Jones & Co. from the Sub-Inspectors 21 Oct 1897 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/24.
87 Rose Scott Correspondence MLMSS 38/20 pp 243-4.
88 Letter to Edward Lloyd Jones from William Newman 8 Aug 1892 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/24.
89 See, for example, letters of confession and newspaper clippings in David Jones Archives.
her dress' was not uncommon. 62 Another alleged in 1906 that one store allowed £2000 a year for leakage through theft and argued that there would be less stealing if employers paid their assistants higher wages. 63

Conflict in the 1890s between capital and labour at a broader level of Australian class relations paved the way for a series of measures taken by the New South Wales Government which fundamentally challenged retailers' control over their own workers. The Factories and Shops Act (1896), the Early Closing Act (1899), the New South Wales Arbitration Act (1901), the Minimum Wage Act (1908) and the Saturday Half-Holiday Act (1910) together represented a determined, but not always successful, attempt by the state to regulate wages and working conditions in factories and shops.

This legislation articulated the concern of various reform movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the welfare of women and young workers. The provision of seating for female shop assistants, the limitations on nightwork and overtime, the enforcement of adequate ventilation and sanitary facilities, and the attempt to eliminate the worst abuses of the apprenticeship system were all aimed at safeguarding the health, reproductive capacities and morals of working class women. The all-female inspection staff who reported on the working of the Factories and Shops Act in relation to shops between 1897 and 1913 made reference solely to conditions affecting female and junior

62 Article on shop assistants in Woman's Budget Feb 27 1906 p 18.
63 Woman's Budget Feb 27 1906 p 18.
assistants, despite the fact that the legislation ostensibly covered adult men.\footnote{New South Wales Department of Labour and Industry, \textit{Reports on the Working of the Factories and Shops Act 1896-1913}; see also MacCulloch, 'This Store is Our World', pp 172-4.}

State intervention in the retail industry strengthened the position of the big city stores (the suburban trade was adversely affected by the early closing legislation) and convinced their owners that industrial co-operation was necessary to defend their interests against unwanted interference and labour mobilisation. The New South Wales Arbitration Court, established in 1902, provided a legal arena within which retail labour and capital could settle industrial disputes and consequently trespassed on ground traditionally held sacred by drapery proprietors.\footnote{For a full account of the first Shop Assistants hearing at the New South Wales Arbitration Court see Ryan, \textit{Two-thirds of a Man} ch 6.} The arbitration system was, at least at the level of public discourse, keenly resented by retailers. The editor of the \textit{Draper} described the Shop Assistants Union's first log of claims as drastic, unworkable, and destined to erode the confidence and harmony existing between employer and employee.\footnote{\textit{Draper} Aug 1903 p 269.} Retailers argued that working conditions should be determined privately between master and man:

The rule in the trade is that when a man proves himself efficient, and is making a good man of himself, he comes along to his employer, and says: "I think I am entitled to more money". And if he does not get it, he tries to get another billet
where he does get it. It is always settled amicably.47

The introduction of institutionalised wage-fixing was therefore an unmistakable signal to employers that a new era in labour relations had begun. Labour practices which had previously been the subject of private negotiation between employer and employee were now open to public scrutiny with the result that shop assistants’ working conditions were 'on the tongue of nearly every person in Sydney' in May and June 1907.48 The shop assistants’ case became a state election issue when ALP candidate James McGowan cited the evidence of injustices brought to light during the Court hearing as an argument in favour of retaining the arbitration system.49

Retailers’ antagonism to government and labour interference was the ideological cement that united the Master Retailers Association of New South Wales (after 1921 the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales) for at least the first three decades of its existence. The Association provided a forum in which retailers could discuss labour issues and share current business practices: its journal disseminated labour policy, political statements and the latest ideas in retail management from Great Britain and the United States. Association members were united in their concern with labour management ‘problems’ which increasingly


48 Worker June 6 1907 p 15.

49 Sydney Morning Herald 22 May 1907 p 10 and editorial p 3; Worker May 23 1907 p 23.
after 1907 centred on the need to control labour without resort to harsh measures and open conflict.

With its antecedents in the early closing associations of the 1880s and 1890s, the Shop Assistants Union was also formed in response to the arbitration system in 1902.\textsuperscript{70} As far as we can judge from scant union records for the period before 1945, the union was neither militant nor strongly representative of shop assistants in the state. Only five per cent of New South Wales' 20,000 shop assistants belonged to the union in 1907, and ten per cent in 1931.\textsuperscript{71} A Commonwealth Shop Assistants and Warehouse Employees Federation of Australia was formed in 1908, giving the New South Wales branch national support.\textsuperscript{72} The union proved a moderate but tenacious adversary of the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales and claimed that by 1927 it had achieved for its members a minimum wage, a 44 hour week and earlier closing times, a Saturday half-holiday, one week's paid holiday a year, and preference to unionists.\textsuperscript{73} The union and the arbitration system effected improvements, albeit minor and piecemeal, in wages and working conditions, and gave shop assistants an opportunity to openly confront their employers with a degree of state protection.

The union, at least in its early years, allowed a muted female voice to be heard in industrial matters. Just over

\textsuperscript{70} History of the Shop Assistants Union in the Co-operator Oct 7 1912 p 20.

\textsuperscript{71} Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 659; Select Committee on the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Bill 1931 in New South Wales Parliamentary Papers 1930-32 v 5 p 18.

\textsuperscript{72} Draper Jan 1908 p 4.

\textsuperscript{73} Shop Assistants and Warehouse Employees Federation of Australia, New South Wales Branch, Annual Report 1927.
one-third of the union's members were women in 1907 — that is, a proportion which corresponded with the ratio of female to male employees — and five of the fourteen members of the first committee were female.74 Women's rights advocate and sole female delegate to the Sydney Labour Council Selina Anderson was the union's Vice President in 1905.75 Either Anderson or another equally vocal woman wrote to the Draper that female shop assistants were entitled to equal pay with men, a demand echoed by at least one female witness at the Arbitration Court hearing (and, surprisingly, supported by the Draper).76 Other women publicly disagreed with the union's attempt to exclude them from certain 'male' departments or pleaded with shoppers for sympathy.77

If some women disagreed with union policy, the majority appeared to have either accepted it or were unconcerned. According to an article on female shop assistants in the Woman's Budget, many agreed that lower wages for women were justifiable.78 Some were more interested in being granted the Saturday half-holiday than they were in securing a minimum wage. It is difficult, however, to distinguish between the genuine sentiments of women and what male union officials interpreted as 'apathy among the ladies'.79 Women

74 Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 665; Draper Apr 1902 p 138.
76 Draper Sep 1903 p 334; Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 585.
77 Draper Oct 1903 p 365; Worker June 6 1907 p 15.
78 Woman's Budget Feb 1906 p 18.
79 Woman's Budget Feb 1906 p 18.
certainly faced if not outright hostility, at least scepticism and paternalistic attitudes in their male colleagues. Male unionists, for example, argued that they were merely safeguarding women’s health by prohibiting them from working in the heavier ‘men’s’ departments.\(^0\)

Nevertheless, women’s union activity, however constrained, and the publicity given to the poor ‘shopgirl’ legitimated a significant female presence in the retail industry which employers would have found difficult to ignore in constructing their labour management policies.

Welfarism

The potentially disruptive existence of the Shop Assistants Union coupled with widespread industrial unrest in the years immediately following World War I forcefully impressed upon retailers the need to present a united political front against labour and to seek new methods of labour relations more appropriate to the changed industrial environment. Humphrey McQueen has shown how Australian capitalists and the state reacted to the threat of international communism between 1918 and 1921 with military preparations and anti-Bolshevik propaganda.\(^1\) Retailers were no exception in their willingness to see reds under every counter. Several editorials in the Master Retailers Association of New South Wales Journal used the language of

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\(^0\) Draper Oct 1903 p 363; Woman’s Budget Feb 1906 p 18.

\(^1\) ‘Shoot the Bolshevnik! Hang the Profiteer! Reconstructing Australian Capitalism 1918-1921’ in E.L. Wheelwright and Ken Buckley (eds.), Political Economy of Australian Capitalism v 2 (Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Book Co., 1978).
war to urge its members to join forces against the socialist threat:

Commerce must unite. Business men must copy the self-denying close loyalty of their opponents. In the period before us we must present a closely-united and financially-powerful front to the many onslaughts made on capital.\(^{92}\)

Retailers were particularly upset at being targeted by both consumers and the Government as profiteers and feared the damage this adverse publicity might do to their carefully-nurtured public image. They responded by working closely with the city's Economic and Social Propaganda Committee in a campaign designed to dispel the profiteering 'myth' from the buying public's mind.\(^{93}\)

The threat of social instability following the War mobilised retail capital and labour and brought them into open confrontation. A moribund Shop Assistants and Warehouse Employees Federation of Australia regrouped in 1918.\(^{94}\)

Retailers were shaken by the industrial unrest (with implications for sales as well as class relations), the threat of bolshevism, and the presence of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Articles in the Draper, for example, expressed concern that IWW publications advocated commercial sabotage by shop assistants who were urged to persuade customers to shop elsewhere. Another described the IWW worker as 'the naughty boy of industry' and advised


\(^{93}\) Master Retailers Association of New South Wales Journal Nov 1920 p 244.

\(^{94}\) Draper Oct 1918 p 355.
retailers to invest in improving the physical and mental health of employees to defuse potential conflict.\textsuperscript{65}

Retailers’ fear of bolshevik shop assistants meshed with a persistent concern that intensified during the War that the retail workforce displayed a disturbing degree of ‘apathy’. Dorothea Proud, one of the new social scientists interested in industrial fatigue and its effects on productivity, believed that lack of motivation was a problem more commonly associated with women workers. Her influential 1916 study of British and Australian factories found that women’s work was more monotonous than men’s and was therefore ‘uninspiring and inefficient’.\textsuperscript{66} Moreover, Proud argued, women did not apply themselves fully to their work because they ultimately expected to marry and give up their employment. Hence they needed to be convinced that ‘efficiency is essential to their future’.\textsuperscript{67}

Whether Sydney retailers consciously incorporated Proud’s principles is unclear. Although the link was never made explicit, employers were by this stage describing the characteristics of a largely female workforce. What is certain is that they were forced to acknowledge that the old disciplinarian methods of labour control were by 1918 neither effective nor desirable. At least one draper admitted that


\textsuperscript{67} Proud, Welfare Work p 81.
the commission system had failed to secure staff loyalty. 

The suicide of a female assistant in 1920 after she was summarily dismissed by her employer prompted calls for less authoritarian labour relations:

The Old-Style Employer may say: 'I am not going to allow anyone else, much less an employee, to say whether I may dismiss a man or not'. The New-Style Employer will say: 'I am not going to run the risk of lowering the tone of the staff by allowing a suspicion of unfairness to grow up'.

The Draper advised the Master Retailers Association of New South Wales to negotiate with the Shop Assistants Union in a less 'electrical', more conciliatory atmosphere. Wishing to stress further this harmony of interest between capital and labour, the Master Retailers openly advocated projects such as employee savings clubs as a means to 'affiliate the interests of employers and employees' and counteract socialism by inducing workers to accumulate capital. For the same reason the Association decided that the word 'Master' was 'obnoxious' when it was trying to promote the mutual interests of employers and employees, and hence eliminated the term from its title in 1921.

Australian retailers shared with their American colleagues a desire to improve efficiency by understanding the 'human' element of business. Just as Kerreene Reiger has shown in her study of the Australian family, Australian industry abandoned a nineteenth century discourse stressing control by 'natural' patriarchal authority in favour of one

\[88\] Draper Sep 1918 p 314.
[90] Draper May 1920 p 96.
[91] Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Sept 1921 p 441 and Jan 1922 p 593.
emphasising technical rationality administered by scientific experts.\textsuperscript{92} Desley Deacon has also shown how the proponents of the infant welfare movement in the first two decades of the twentieth century employed the rhetoric of 'efficiency' to legitimate their intervention in maternal practices.\textsuperscript{93}

The answer to the 'problem' of the IWW and industrial unrest, according to Australian industrial relations experts such as Irving Fisher and A.B. Fitt, quoted in the Draper, was to 'humanise' industry by investing in the physical and mental health of the workers.\textsuperscript{94} This was a view shared by Elton Mayo, another expert whose ideas on industrial and social relations were eagerly seized upon by the retail industry. Mayo held that industrial unrest was a symptom of social pathology and human irrationality. Society's task, aided by psychology, was to restore efficiency and rationality to labour relations.\textsuperscript{95}

Retailers' institution of welfare schemes put into practice this move to humanise industrial relations. Employers' initiatives in establishing welfare schemes have a history as old as industrial capitalism. J.R. Hay has suggested that Australian welfare schemes had their origins in company housing provided for employees in mining districts.

\textsuperscript{92} The Disenchantment of the Home, Modernising the Australian Family 1880-1940 (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985).


\textsuperscript{94} Draper May 1920 p 99 and series of articles on 'The Human Instincts in Business' Feb 1921-Jan 1922.

\textsuperscript{95} Helen Bourke, 'Industrial Unrest as Social Pathology: the Australian Writings of Elton Mayo', Historical Studies v 20, 79 (Oct 1982):217-33.
in the 1850s and 1860s, and were extended in the late 1880s and early 1890s. ** It was during World War I, however, that Australian employers such as Broken Hill Associated Smelters and Pelaco began to look to industrial co-operation schemes to solve labour unrest, increase productivity and allow a limited degree of management-controlled worker participation. **

These initiatives had the blessing of the Commonwealth Government. The Commonwealth of Australia Advisory Council of Science and Industry published two bulletins in 1919 and 1920 for employers 'seeking for some road to industrial peace' which described welfare work in European, American and Australian industries. The Government further promoted welfare work and occupational health by inviting A.E. Lanza from the United States to set up an Industrial Hygiene and Medical Division of the Public Health Service in 1921. **

Advocates of welfare work stressed its economic advantages: lowered compensation costs, reduced time lost due to sickness, increased output and a longer working life for employees. ** Joseph Melling has suggested that British employers provided welfare to industrial workers in order to create and dominate local labour markets, particularly where they wanted to recruit female and junior labour in the face


** Commonwealth of Australia Advisory Council of Science and Industry Bulletin no 17, Industrial Co-operation in Australia (Melbourne, 1920) [hereafter ACSI, Industrial Co-operation], pp 7-17.

** Draper Nov 1921 p 474.

** Draper Aug 1924 p 475.
of male opposition. This may well have applied to
Australian retailers who persistently conflicted with the
Shop Assistants Union over the employment of women in men's
departments. Just as importantly, welfare schemes were
promoted as a means of securing the goodwill of the workers,
making the firm an attractive employment prospect for
potential recruits, and as an excellent form of advertising
amongst consumers who might be critical of firms employing
sweated labour.

This recognition by employers of a 'consumer's
conscience' that might disrupt sales was clearly a persuasive
argument in favour of welfare work for big retail firms in
Australia. Unco-ordinated steps towards welfare work can
be detected as early as the 1890s in some retailers'
provision of dining rooms, provident societies, social
activities and sporting clubs. David Jones was one of the
first retail employers to institutionalise the concept of
welfare work, if in a limited form, in its trading policy of
1916. In a section revealingly headed 'The Discipline of
Freedom' the David Jones executive declared its intention to
eliminate fines and institute a staff training scheme, as
well as continue its half-pay for absence through illness.

100 'Employers, Industrial Welfare, and the Struggle
for Work-Place Control in British Industry, 1880-1920' in
Howard F. Gospel and Craig R. Littler (eds.), Managerial
Strategies and Industrial Relations. An Historical and

101 ACSI, Welfare Work, p 14; Draper Jan 1919 p 16 and
Aug 1924 p 475.

102 Lasseters sponsored a Benefit and Provident
Society and a cricket club (Australian Field Sept 1894 p
269), Anthony Hordern & Sons ran a provident fund (Shop
Assistants case 1907 v 44 p 1054) and rifle club (Hordern
Family newspaper cuttings, 1915).
the provision of lunch rooms, free medical advice and the services of a matron for its female staff.\textsuperscript{103} Farmers invited Dame Nellie Melba to launch its welfare scheme in 1919, reportedly the first of its kind in Australia.\textsuperscript{104} The company engaged former science teacher Eleanor Hinder as its first welfare superintendent, with responsibilities for organising health services, recreational activities and educational classes.\textsuperscript{105}

Most Sydney department stores formalised welfare schemes for their staff between the War and the early 1920s. The Draper noted in 1921 that many Australian stores had included welfare facilities in their plans for extensions or rebuilding.\textsuperscript{106} Marcus Clark established an Employees Assurance, Superannuation and Welfare Fund in 1917, Nock & Kirby set up a welfare scheme in 1920, and Anthony Hordern & Sons engaged a welfare superintendent in 1923 to co-ordinate work begun in 1919.\textsuperscript{107} Anthony Hordern, typical of the larger programmes, offered the services of a medical officer and nurse, commerce and salesmanship classes, a library, physical culture classes, a musical society, dancing, sports, a provident fund, and classes in cooking, drama, psychology,

\textsuperscript{103} 'The Future Policy of the Company' 1916 in David Jones board minutes BRG 1/32/1.

\textsuperscript{104} Draper Jan 1919 p 16.

\textsuperscript{105} Eleanor Hinder, Biographical Notes, in Hinder papers MLMSS 770.

\textsuperscript{106} Draper Nov 1921 pp 476-8.

\textsuperscript{107} Papers relating to the Marcus Clark & Co. Ltd Employees' Assurance, Superannuation and Welfare Fund in Marcus Clark papers, Australian National University Archives of Business and Labour 74/32-33; Justly Rawlings, 'Welfare Work at Anthony Hordern & Sons Ltd', Health v III, 3 (May 1925) pp 69-75; Draper Sept 1920 p 284.
literature, hygiene, home nursing and millinery. Hordern's welfare work, according to the *Shop Assistants Magazine*, 'starts where government legislation leaves off'.

The management was also convinced that the scheme could 'do much to smooth down all kinds of minor disturbances'.

Australian department stores were perceived by Government and business to be innovators in welfare work, as they had been in the United States a decade or so earlier. Schemes initiated by Farmers and Marcus Clark are described in the Commonwealth Government's 1920 bulletin on welfare work, and articles on welfare at Anthony Hordern & Sons appeared in the journal *Health* in 1925, in the *Shop Assistants Magazine* in 1926, and in *Helen's Weekly* in 1927.

The economist F.R.E. Mauldon noted in 1931 the lead taken in welfare work by large stores which also manufactured clothing: of the 76 private enterprises with organised welfare plans, 11 were retailers and 17 clothing manufacturers.

The language of efficiency constitutes a recurring motif in the literature on welfarism, as does a preoccupation with

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science, psychology, health and industrial hygiene. Drapers had since at least 1870 urged their male assistants to participate in 'athletic sports and exercises' in preference to 'the bar or the tap-room'. Feminisation of the drapery workforce by World War I, however, required that employers pay specific attention to women's health. A pageant written by Eleanor Hinder and performed by Farmer's female employees in the early 1920s suggests that the labour managers of the 1920s were consciously promoting new values based on physical and psychological efficiency. The pageant demonstrated the advance of Modern Industry over the Ancient Shopkeeper, who marvelled:

'Tis new indeed, to sport in stream and surf
And play with ball upon the springing turf.
For maidens in my day sat prim in state,
Content in maiden's bower for love to wait.

The Spirit of Modern Industry proceeded to summon her sister spirits of Health, Knowledge, Play and Citizenship.

Many of the stores' welfare schemes appear to have been aimed primarily at female employees and were designed, as David Jones put it, 'to look after the welfare of our girls'. The close correspondence between a significant female presence and welfarism in the big stores suggests that retail employers' new approach to labour relations in the 1920s implicitly acknowledged the feminisation of the

112 See, for example, articles on welfare work in Master Retailers Association of New South Wales Journal Apr and June 1920, and on industrial efficiency in the same journal July 1919.

113 Hayes, The Draper and Haberdasher, p 16.

114 Text of pageant in Hinder papers MLMSS 770.

115 'Future Policy of the Company' in David Jones board minutes 1916.
workforce. Lanza noted in 1922, for example, the tendency of large employers of women to employ an on-site nurse.\textsuperscript{116} By 1931 approximately one-half of the recipients of large-scale Australian employers' welfare schemes were female, and 50 of the 76 industries listed in Mauldon's study were major employers of women.\textsuperscript{117}

David Lloyd George's foreword to Proud's study and the Commonwealth Government bulletins on welfare attribute the rise of welfare schemes to the influx of women workers into industry during the War. The new welfarism thus retained elements of nineteenth century paternalism and continued the state's concern for female workers in its insistence on the need to safeguard the health of those destined to be the 'mothers of tomorrow'.\textsuperscript{118} Moreover, women were perceived by employers and the new industrial relations experts as less capable than men of taking care of themselves or making intelligent decisions concerning work. They were, as a result, less 'efficient' workers.\textsuperscript{119} The Advisory Council on Science and Industry consequently advised employers of women to focus on organising their social life and recreation, and those with a male workforce to concentrate on improving wages and working conditions.\textsuperscript{120} Or, as the Anthony Hordern's Staff Dining Room Supervisor explained to the Home magazine

\textsuperscript{116} 'Industrial Hygiene and the Medical Profession', Medical Journal of Australia Aug 26 1922 p 233.

\textsuperscript{117} 'Co-operation and Welfare in Industry' p 185.


\textsuperscript{120} ACSI, Welfare Work, p 21.
in 1926, welfare schemes acknowledged that ‘young girls of 20 or so do not live to work - they work to live’.\textsuperscript{121}

The interest in Hordern’s scheme shown by women’s journals such as the Home and Helen’s Weekly underlines the perceived female nature of welfare work as a profession. Recreational and educational classes provided training for respectable womanhood as much as for salesmanship, a potential that did not escape the notice of the Young Women’s Christian Association. Meredith Foley has shown in her study of women’s organisations between the wars that the YWCA took the initiative in promoting welfare schemes for women workers after 1919, and in the training of and support for women welfare workers after 1922.\textsuperscript{122} The Association organised a conference in 1923 on the Human Factor in Industry to explain to Sydney employers the principles underlying welfare work.\textsuperscript{123} Several women prominent in welfare work were associated with local women’s organisations: the YWCA’s Margaret Thorp organised Hordern’s welfare department in 1922, and Eleanor Hinder of Farmers was an executive member of the National Council of Women of New South Wales in the same year.\textsuperscript{124} By 1927 the Home was advocating welfare work as a suitable career for middle class women.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{121} Home Apr 1926 p 35.


\textsuperscript{123} Association Woman Nov 1923 p 15.

\textsuperscript{124} Association Woman May 1925 pp 11-12; Foley, ‘The Women’s Movement’ p 74.

\textsuperscript{125} Home June 1924 pp 18, 78.
Welfare programmes and house rules also allowed retail managements to formalise gendered expectations of staff. David Jones, for example, ran a house magazine called *Between Ourselves* between 1919 and 1921 which was designed to foster harmonious relations between management and staff and to induct junior staff into the store's practices and policies. The magazine urged male employees to 'stick with the firm' by pursuing long-term career goals, while women were subjected to numerous, if chatty and often humourous, injunctions relating to their physical appearance, deference to male authority and the adoption of middle class values of respectability. A dominant theme was the necessity for a saleswoman to be 'charming' to her customers, and in 1921 David Jones ran a competition to find the store's 'most charming girl'. A charming, feminine and deferential sales assistant would not only secure more custom for the store but was also less likely to challenge her employer over wages and working conditions.

**Scientific Salesmanship**

Training schemes set up by stores in the 1920s were also designed to mould a sales force that could translate managerial policy into practice at the point of sale. Retailers were painfully aware of the need to control sales assistants' interaction with the store's customers: an inconsiderate, discourteous, unknowledgeable or even indifferent assistant could alienate customers and

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126 Reekie, 'David Jones' pp 24-27.

127 *Between Ourselves* Feb 1921.
consequently do irreparable damage to the store’s reputation and sales performance.

Advice manuals for drapers’ assistants included sections on ‘technical education’—stock arrangement, handling boxes and drawers of merchandise, tying parcels, measuring, folding and rolling cloth and displaying goods—as early as 1878.\textsuperscript{128} By the early twentieth century, however, retailers were calling for ‘scientific’ training in salesmanship; that is in sales techniques based on personal qualities rather than manual skills. Australian retailers adopted the American rhetoric of ‘scientific salesmanship’ and promoted the benefits of systematic training from 1901.\textsuperscript{129} The intervention of the state into wage-fixing and the introduction of a minimum wage in the retail industry after 1907 may have provided employers with further economic justification for their demands for an efficient, trained and enthusiastic workforce.\textsuperscript{130}

The cry for scientific and technical training intensified in the columns of the Draper and the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal after 1914.\textsuperscript{131} Although training programmes were an integral part of the big stores’ welfare schemes instituted after 1916, details of salesmanship courses are unfortunately rare. David Jones’s ‘Improvement Class’ heard a lecture in 1925 on the company’s

\textsuperscript{128} Hayes, Draper and Haberdasher, ch IV.

\textsuperscript{129} See, for example, Draper Aug 1901 pp 4-5; Model Trader (Grace Brothers catalogue) Oct 1908 p 37 in Grace Brothers Archives.

\textsuperscript{130} Editorial on the Shop Assistants case in Draper Aug 1907 p 363.

\textsuperscript{131} For example, Draper Nov 1917 p 353.
history, customer policy, and rules and regulations which placed considerable stress on the 'value of keeping the customer pleased'.

Anthony Hordern's course in salesmanship covered the store's policy and merchandise information, and impressed on women that salesmanship was a profession 'to which a girl can give her intelligence and thought and work'.

Although there is little direct evidence that retail managements used training schemes to turn working class shopgirls into respectable skilled sellers, as Susan Porter Benson has indicated for the United States, a 'humourous skit' on scientific salesmanship in the Commonwealth Home suggests female assistants were expected to dress in 'good taste' and exude feminine charm.

Educational work for women working in shops was perceived by reformers and sales experts alike as the means by which working women might achieve professional status in the industry. The Draper, discussing a training scheme in operation at Bright and Hitchcock's store in Geelong in 1917, pointed out that women as well as men could benefit because 'efficiency in business will make a woman all the more competent to manage a home and income'.

A similar view was expressed by one writer in the Shop Assistants Magazine, who added that women could be trained to 'look upon all women

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132 Speech by Mr Stark, Secretary's Office, on the history and policy of David Jones Ltd to the Improvement Class, March 1925 (David Jones Archives BRG 1/496).

133 Draper Sep 1924 p 534; Cunningham, 'Welfare Work', Shop Assistants Magazine July 1926 p 11.

134 Commonwealth Home Dec 1927.

135 Draper Nov 1917 p 354.
customers as sisters, or mothers'. The Housewives Association of New South Wales was also impressed with the advantages of training. Citing with approval David Jones's lead in instituting the first training scheme for juniors in Australian stores in 1919, the Association's organ *Ours* argued that women's retail careers were becoming carefully organised and would result in more female buyers and departmental heads.

Retailers were anxious, however, to remove the responsibility (and perhaps the costs) of sales training to the state education system. Individual store training schemes did not answer the need for a standardised commercial education that would create a pool of suitably-trained labour. Having had some success in persuading the Sydney Technical College to set up a certificate course in dressmaking in 1919 which channelled trained workers into the stores' manufacturing workrooms, the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales began negotiating with the College to establish classes to educate young men in topics ranging from 'Tying up Parcels' to 'Staff Control'. Their call was echoed by the United Commercial Travellers Association of Australia which proposed that the University of Sydney and other Australian universities set up courses in marketing and salesmanship.

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137 *Ours* Aug 1922 p 19.


139 Sydney Morning Herald 18 July 1928 p 19.
Salesmanship was first included in the Sydney Technical College course offerings as a component of the Department of Commerce's 'Business Principles' syllabus in 1927. This was supplemented by a new course in Stock Management, designed for retail, wholesale and manufacturing employees, in 1929. Although the Retail Traders Association finally agreed upon a syllabus over which they would have sole control in 1929, a distinct course in Salesmanship was not introduced into the part-time Day Commercial Department until 1935.\textsuperscript{140} The Salesmanship and Advertising course, following the principle of sexual segregation established in store training schemes from at least 1917, was divided into Course A for male students (a general introduction to salesmanship) and Course B for female students (with special reference to retail store requirements). The male version of the course was designed for those wishing to make a career as managers of sales departments, while the course for women placed more emphasis on department store merchandise, organisation and function, sales floor duties, and customer relations. A number of topics were common to both courses, including those relating to appearance, manner, voice and personality.\textsuperscript{141}

This emphasis on the need to train young men contrasts markedly with Benson's account of American department store training schemes. Although by the 1920s the retail workforce was predominantly female, Australian store managers appear to have been just as concerned to train young men in managerial and executive skills as they were to induct female shop

\textsuperscript{140} \textit{Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal} Aug-Oct 1929.

\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Sydney Technical College Handbooks} 1927, 1929/30, 1934 and 1935.
assistants into the middle class values of gentility. This was in part a response to the transformation in the managerial structure of the big stores after about 1910. Managerial elites gradually replaced the autocratic rule of the proprietor and the decision-making power of his salesfloor representatives (buyers, department heads and shopwalkers), first with boards of directors, then with trained managers. Sydney Snows, for example, created the position of Merchandise Manager in 1928.\textsuperscript{142}

David Jones began to centralise its decision-making processes after 1906, and by 1913 operated under an executive which supervised the day-to-day running of the store. Of its 15 members only two were female (heads of advertising and the complaints office), and one of these was replaced by a man in 1914.\textsuperscript{143} Two years later the company announced the establishment of a Junior Executive which it hoped would eventually form a trained management elite. The nominees to the first Junior Executive were exclusively male.\textsuperscript{144} The Board took this policy one step further in 1924 by encouraging the training of young men taken from prominent public schools and the University of Sydney for administrative positions.\textsuperscript{145}

Retail management and retail 'success' were clearly articulated as the province of men by the 1920s. Grace

\textsuperscript{142} Minutes 11 May 1928, records of Sydney Snow Pty Ltd in Cox Bros. papers, University of Melbourne Archives.

\textsuperscript{143} A.R. Harwood, Report to the Directors of David Jones Ltd, 1913, pp 1-2 in David Jones Archives.

\textsuperscript{144} Future Policy of the Company in David Jones board minutes 1916.

\textsuperscript{145} David Jones board minutes 12 Mar 1924 BRG 1/32/1.
Brothers started a Boys’ Model Trader Club in 1923 to encourage boys to become ‘men of business ability’ by selling the store’s catalogue on commission in the form of commercial education classes. Similarly, Rydge’s Business Journal related the fictional success story of Jimmie, a working class lad from Redfern, who worked in a large Sydney department store ‘From the Ground Up’ to become its advertising manager. Management was increasingly institutionalised as a male prerogative at the same time as women came to dominate the lower levels of the sales hierarchy.

Industrial Psychology

Together with welfare and training schemes, retail store owners looked to the insights of industrial psychology to help them manage their workers. Some employers had been aware of the value of psychology since the turn of the century. But it was not until the period immediately following World War I that trade journals hailed psychology as the answer to labour efficiency and salesmanship training. Psychological theories of customer ‘types’, for example, constituted part of the syllabi of several training schemes discussed by the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales.

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\text{Brash, Burke and Hoeben, The Model Store p 182.}
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\text{Rydge's Business Journal Jan 1929 pp 23-5, 69.}
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\text{Draper Aug 1902 p 319.}
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\text{Summary of Bright and Hitchcock's (Geelong) training scheme in Draper Nov 1917 p 353; Sydney Technical College Handbook 1935.}
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By the 1920s Australian businessmen were keen to bring psychology into their service to help them predict workers' behaviour and forestall labour disruption by a scientific understanding of the 'human instinct' in the workplace.\textsuperscript{150} Industrial psychology began to make a significant impact on American management after 1915 and its value was confirmed by the application of psychological testing to recruits during World War I.\textsuperscript{151} Several Pittsburgh department stores, for example, pooled their resources to establish a Research Bureau for Retail Training at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1917 which drew on the insights of psychology.\textsuperscript{152} British industrial psychology, with its greater emphasis on human relations and industrial fatigue, was also accepted by employers by 1920.\textsuperscript{153}

Australian retailers seem to have adopted a combination of the British and American models of industrial psychology, if more slowly and perhaps more cautiously than overseas employers. But strategies applying psychology to merchandising and labour management increasingly filtered through to them in the pages of retail manuals, the Draper of Australasia and the Retail Traders Association's Journal. By the time Australian retailers started to use vocational testing in the selection of employees in the mid 1920s,


\textsuperscript{152} Baritz, \textit{Servants of Power}, p 40.

\textsuperscript{153} Baritz, \textit{Servants of Power}, pp 54-5.
Americans had begun to lose their faith in its ability to solve labour management problems.  

Farmers was one of the first Australian firms to apply industrial psychology, a science designed to 'eliminate human waste and select suitable workers', to the selection of its staff in 1925.  

Winifred Taylor reported on the store's successful introduction of intelligence tests which helped determine whether a junior employee was more suitable for stock, office or sales work. Test results could, moreover, bring to light 'maladjusted individuals' who could be transferred to other positions 'with profit to themselves and to the firm'.

Vocational guidance, salesmanship, advertising and the psychology of management were among the most important applications of industrial psychology, according to the Science Research Scholar in Psychology at the University of Sydney.  

Indeed, there was close co-operation between industrial psychologists and employers from 1928, when an Australian Institute of Industrial Psychology was established at the instigation of the Chamber of Manufacturers.

Professor Tasman Lovell of the University of Sydney gave a public lecture on the 'Psychology of Salesmanship' in 1927,  

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154 Baritz, Servants of Power, p 74. Baritz notes that Macy’s department store began intelligence testing in 1919 (p 68).


158 Lovell, 'The Value of Industrial Psychology'. 
and in an address entitled 'Psychoanalysis Applied to Business', E. Scott-Erenburg stressed that salesmen must be able to analyse the mind of customers who displayed an unreasonable preference for goods manufactured in England.\textsuperscript{159} Fully persuaded of the value of psychology, the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales agreed to send a representative to the Institute of Industrial Psychology meetings one year after its formation.\textsuperscript{160}

Workers' responses to retailers' labour control strategies are largely submerged in the historical record. However, it is clear that many employees enthusiastically participated in the amenities provided for them, particularly the social and sporting activities.\textsuperscript{161} This enthusiasm does not necessarily imply that workers uncritically adopted the values the stores wished them to internalise. Their response to management's social contract may have been, as Gerald Zahavi found for American shoe workers, a form of 'negotiated loyalty'.\textsuperscript{162} Store grievance committees such as that established at Anthony Hordern & Sons, while circumscribed, may have given employees normally shy of unions an

\textsuperscript{159} Sydney Morning Herald 13 July 1927 p 17; 5 May 1928 p 18.

\textsuperscript{160} Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Nov 1929 p 19.

\textsuperscript{161} See, for example, the column 'The Trade at Play' in the Draper from 1906 and particularly after 1924. See also photographs of Farmer's women employees enjoying recreational and holiday activities in Hinder papers MLMSS 770.

institutional channel through which to raise problems with management.

It is also evident from the pages of *Between Ourselves* that retail workers were not uncritical of management practices. Many used the house organ as a medium through which to express dissatisfaction with, for example, irksome house rules, dress regulations and an inequitable distribution of the yearly bonus. Welfare schemes may have been designed primarily as staff control systems, but they also represented a limited avenue of critical response and participation for workers, and a considerable improvement in their working and social environment.

In assessing workers' responses to paternalist and welfare schemes, however, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that in general employers successfully imbued in many of their workers a sense of family loyalty. Many gave long years of contented service, benefited from the opportunity for upward career mobility, and enjoyed the higher prestige and white collar status associated with the major drapery houses. This would have applied particularly to women, whose opportunities in the labour market were more limited than those of men.

The nineteenth century retailer promoted the belief among his assistants that they were his 'confidential' servants and therefore superior to manual workers. He was outraged if any employee dared to challenge his authority and could intimidate his assistants to the extent that they were too frightened to ask for improvements in wages or working
conditions. The demand for and prestige of work in the large drapery houses, together with retailers' careful cultivation of a sense of family fealty made most assistants too grateful for their opportunities to encourage them to risk their employment by direct confrontation.

To a lesser extent this deference continued into the twentieth century. When unionism among shop assistants was being discussed, some were convinced that 'the masters' couldn't afford to pay a living wage; others that they were 'too well placed not to be satisfied as matters are'. Jessie Ackermann reported in 1913 that Australian saleswomen identified so strongly with their own store that they never mixed socially with women from other shops. Shopwomen were also quick to defend their institution against press criticism. One told the Sun and Guardian in 1934 that she admired the 'splendid inner routine' of David Jones, and that it was 'impossible for an outsider to realise the privileges enjoyed by the staff, and the consideration they are shown'.

Despite structural changes in the retail workforce and store organisation between 1890 and 1930, material rewards, status and decision-making power remained largely unaltered: that is, in the hands of men and of retail capitalists. If Australian saleswomen constructed a salesfloor culture that

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163 Recollections of shop assistants in the Co-operative Oct 7 1912 p 20 and the Worker 27 June 1923 p 7.

164 Woman's Budget Feb 20 1906 p 18.

165 Australia from a Woman's Point of View (Melbourne: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1981. 1st pub. 1913) p 232.

166 Sun and Guardian 18 Feb 1934 clipping in David Jones Archives.
was resistant to managerial attempts to control the retail workforce as Susan Porter Benson suggests — and the evidence here does not appear to support such a theory — then it was a culture that ameliorated rather than challenged the material effects of employers' strategies.

Employers' desire to disown the nineteenth century authoritarian ethos in favour of 'humanising industry' in the years following World War I suggests not a new stage in capitalist social relations, but rather a changed way of articulating those relations. The humanisation of paternalism implied the incorporation of what were perceived to be middle class, democratic and feminine principles: conciliation replaced confrontation, co-operation replaced competition, and an emphasis on healthy minds and bodies replaced an exclusive focus on employees as mere instruments of labour. As the Advisory Council on Science and Industry ingenuously told employers, old-style employers called their employees 'hands' and 'failed to realise that those hands might do better work if they were kept clean, strong, and well-manicured'.

Changing managerial strategies of labour control in Sydney's big stores suggest that the sexual composition of the workforce was a significant, although perhaps unacknowledged, determinant of labour relations in this period. The sexual order was fully integrated into the hierarchical authority structure of the store and reinforced the vertical organisation of staff while allowing employers to take advantage of a cheaper and more malleable supply of female labour. Ideologies of female nature, furthermore,

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147 Welfare Work p 7.
facilitated state intervention and reform and the implementation of welfare programmes and training schemes in the retail industry.

The new welfarism of the 1920s may have implicitly acknowledged the greater female presence in industry and made working conditions for both men and women more pleasant, but did little to challenge the material basis of paternalist social relations. Welfare schemes and industrial psychology presented the human face of paternalism while institutionalising and legitimating the authority structure of the store. Ultimately, therefore, the new approach to labour relations functioned most effectively as a form of store publicity which promoted the big stores as progressive, enlightened and humanitarian institutions in which the consumer would have no qualms in parting with her money.

\[169\] Hay makes a similar point in 'For the Benefit of the Company' p 29.
CHAPTER 4

CLASS, GENDER AND THE MASS MARKET

The growth and success of the big stores were partly dependent on the existence of a large and freely-spending public. Some historians of retailing have stressed that rising levels of working and middle class demand provided the essential impetus for department store retailing.¹ This thesis, on the other hand, points to the significance of industrial methods of manufacture producing more commodities for sale, and the vigourous and deliberate attempts by retailers and their allies to stimulate consumption. Without attempting to assign primacy to either supply or demand in the rise of mass retailing, clearly both sides must be considered in any assessment of developments in the retail trade.

Although it would be useful to be able to relate department store trading to changes in aggregate disposable income, such an enterprise poses considerable methodological difficulties.² Moreover, as Jean Baudrillard has cautioned, there is no universal or material basis of human need: all cultures socially construct notions of what are considered to


² The problems include extreme variations in income patterns, life cycle changes in expenditure, wide price and quality ranges of commodities, and the difficulty of distinguishing 'necessary' from 'luxury' items of purchase.
be 'essential' food, clothing or shelter requirements.³ Commodities considered by some to be luxuries may be viewed by others as necessities.

While conceding that the social determination of necessities is more relative than absolute, there is nevertheless a material basis to demand which must be taken into account in a study of mass marketing. Regardless of capital's ideological strategies, customers must at some basic level have had the material means with which to purchase a given commodity. The sexual and class distribution of wealth evident in broad economic, demographic and social trends and in the observations of contemporaries is therefore relevant to this study of mass retailing.

One of the fundamental prerequisites for mass retail structures is a local population sufficient to support them. The evolution of the department store was largely an urban phenomenon of western industrial nations.⁴ Australia was, by the late nineteenth century, no exception. In common with the United States and Great Britain, Australia's population was both growing and increasingly centralised in cities. State-sponsored migration in the 1880s and between 1906 and 1914 also significantly added to Sydney's population, facilitated the inflow of capital, and increased the number of inhabitants more likely to spend than save their


earnings. Also in common with America and Europe, Australian fertility rates and the average number of children born to married women declined significantly after the end of the nineteenth century. Smaller average families may well have freed more household income for expenditure on 'non-essential' commodities.

There is also some evidence to suggest that except during the 1890s depression, Australians enjoyed relatively high levels of expendable income relative to prices in the period between 1880 and 1914. Barbara Little, drawing on N.G. Butlin's work, has suggested that income growth (in the form of gross national product per head of population) facilitated rising demand, particularly between 1900 and 1910. She also argues that saving and home ownership were not granted a high priority by a large section of the population before 1914, with the result that more money was spent on immediate consumption.

While this is likely to remain a matter for speculation, contemporary observations tend to support Little's thesis. For example, several witnesses employed by large retail

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* Little, 'Retail Trade and Distribution in Sydney', pp 21, 231. Butlin's standard economic histories (Investment in Australian Economic Development and Australian Domestic Product, Investment and Foreign Borrowing) were of little use in this study of consumption patterns because of their national focus and aggregate statistics.

* Little, 'Retail Trade and Distribution in Sydney', pp 33, 234.
establishments testified to the Royal Commission on the Alleged Shortage of Labour in 1911 that there appeared to have been a general increase in prosperity in previous years. This impression is confirmed by the Commonwealth Labour Report for 1912 which reported an apparent improvement in the standard of living suggested by increased levels of consumption per head since 1903, particularly in 'luxury' commodities.

P.G. Macarthy's study of wages between 1891 and 1914 also suggests that after recovering their 1891 level in 1901, wage rates rose faster than prices resulting in material progress for workers in Victoria and New South Wales between 1909 and 1913. Relatively high prices after 1914 appear to have reversed this trend. The Royal Commission on the Basic Wage found in 1920 that there had been a 61 per cent increase in the cost of living between 1914 and 1920. Commissioner A.B. Piddington concluded that families with more than one child had, since 1914, been forced to live 'at a standard below what is reasonable'.

Conditions appear to have improved for wage-earners in the 1920s. Average weekly wage and cost of living

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7 Interim Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Alleged Shortage of Labour in the State of New South Wales 1911 in New South Wales Parliamentary Papers 1911-12 v II, 3rd session.

10 Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics. Labour and Industrial Branch Reports 1912 p 84.


determinations by the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics after 1914 are probably distorted by so many hidden variables that it would be unwise to rely too heavily on them for support. However, it is perhaps suggestive that the relative cost of living (as set by the Royal Commission into the Basic Wage of 1920) as a proportion of the average weekly adult male wage declined from 128 per cent in 1914 to 100 per cent in 1927.\textsuperscript{14} The increased demand for labour, the fixing of minimum and basic wages by the state, the proliferation of cheaper manufactured goods, and the growth of unionisation probably materially improved average standards of living for working people after the turn of the century.

The distribution of income to individual consumers, however, depended heavily on family structure and prevailing gender relations. The nineteenth century ideology of the male breadwinner who was expected to provide for his dependents persisted and was reinforced by the family wage concept in the twentieth century. As a result, few married women enjoyed economic independence, and wage-earning women had considerably less to spend than their male counterparts. Most female wage-earners, married or single, would have had limited discretion in determining how their wages were spent as household incomes were pooled and re-allocated according to family needs.

Two significant changes that occurred in women's economic position after the 1890s had particular relevance to consumption patterns. First, while female factory employment continued to be significant, there was a greater increase in

\textsuperscript{14} Calculated from statistics in Labour Reports 1921-1930.
white collar and service occupations such as teaching, nursing, clerical and sales work. These growth sectors of the economy opened up new and welcome opportunities for middle class and some working class women for whom the more traditional areas of women's work were both unattractive and socially unacceptable. Unlike factory or domestic service, these occupations required their female employees to spend part of their income on good quality and smart work clothes. The stores themselves were inadvertently instrumental in creating a large body of consumers by welcoming women into their workforce (albeit without giving them princely sums to spend) and demanding that they be well-dressed.

Retailers acknowledged the beneficial influence of the female wage-earner on their business by the 1920s. The Shop Assistants Magazine noted optimistically in 1926 that it was no longer considered to be a social stigma for a woman to remain unmarried and pursue a career. The Draper warned drapery proprietors that working women were 'endowed with an economic sense' that discouraged them from buying exclusive clothes for special occasions on a seasonal basis. Instead they appeared to want to be well but sensibly dressed

15 Jill Matthews, Good and Mad Women. The Historical Construction of Femininity in Twentieth Century Australia (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1984) Table 3 p 54.


17 Shop Assistants Magazine Dec 1926 pp 24-5.

18 Draper June 1929 p 262.
throughout the year, because the business woman ‘comes into contact with more people in her hours in the city than in her home at the weekends.’ This constant demand, the editor of the Draper reminded his readers, meant greater sales for the retailer.

The second major development in the nature of women’s work between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century was what Jill Matthews has called the decline of the domestic service economy and the consequent construction of the classless housewife. Upper and middle class women who could no longer rely on the labour of servants for household chores were more likely to do their own shopping as the twentieth century progressed. This material change was supported ideologically by the concept of the housewife as scientific manager of the household economy. Advertisers, government officials and feminists formalised and elevated women’s unpaid work in consumption into an occupational role essential to national as well as family welfare.

The extent to which women had material access to the family income, particularly to her husband’s wages, for expenditure on drapery and other goods is, unfortunately, difficult to determine from available sources. Few records of customer accounts have survived, and in any case tell us

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17 Draper Oct 1924 p 558.

20 Jill Julius Matthews, Good and Mad Women, pp 65-73.


little about decision-making processes and the distribution of economic power within each household. Fragmentary evidence suggests, however, that women were granted some (in some cases considerable) discretion in spending their male provider’s money on household commodities and clothing.

Customer accounts at David Jones in the 1890s, for example, were typically listed under a male name but were treated by the firm as accounts to which both husband and wife had access. Couples setting up home such as Mr and Mrs G. H. Jones would ‘furnish’ exclusively with David Jones. These accounts occasionally presented problems for men whose female dependents spent more than they considered reasonable. Edward Flood instructed David Jones in 1884 not to supply goods to any member of his family on his account, and asked that if his married daughter ordered any more goods they should be placed on her husband’s account.

In some cases, where the store considered that a wife had purchased goods for her own personal use and possessed ‘ample means in her own right’, it sent accounts direct to her rather than her husband. A woman’s economic dependency on a male breadwinner could also place the retailer in a difficult position. Mrs D. Piercy and her husband furnished on credit with David Jones in 1891. Shortly afterwards, however, Dr Piercy deserted his wife, who

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23 Letter to Edward Lloyd Jones from William Newman 20 June 1892 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/24.

24 Letter to David Jones & Co. from Edward Flood Jr., Quambone, 19 Feb 1884 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/22.

was unable to pay the account. Just as David Jones repossessed the furniture at her request, her husband returned and the furniture was promptly and courteously replaced.\textsuperscript{26}

Women also held accounts in their own name at David Jones, probably widows or single women with independent income. Of 18 accounts listed in David Jones’ correspondence as paid in October 1892, one was a ‘Miss’ and two were ‘Mrs’.\textsuperscript{27} The Misses Cathcart and Mason were reported to be very slow in paying their account and did not improve their standing with the company by presenting a rubber cheque.\textsuperscript{28}

At the other end of the social scale women appeared to have considerable control over the way each pay packet was spent. ‘Pay Friday’ night and ‘Pay Saturday’ in the Newcastle Coalmining Districts saw the wives and daughters of miners flocking into town to do their shopping since at least 1880.\textsuperscript{29} The Early Closing Inspector for Newcastle pointed out in 1904 that the local shops were allowed to remain open late on Friday night because otherwise the breadwinner would be tempted to leave early on Saturday for what Ellen McEwen has called ‘the old Geordie habit of a fortnightly spree’ and

\textsuperscript{26} Letter to Edward Lloyd Jones from William Newman 23 Mar 1891 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/24.

\textsuperscript{27} Letter to Edward Lloyd Jones from N. Mason 24 Oct 1892 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/24.

\textsuperscript{28} Letter to Edward Lloyd Jones from (?) 8 June 1891 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/24.

\textsuperscript{29} New South Wales Department of Labour and Industry. Reports on the Working of the Factories and Shops Act 1899 p 17; New South Wales Legislative Assembly, Royal Commission re Saturday Half-Holiday, 1909 p 20.
perhaps forget to leave his wife the money for the settling of accounts.  

Several years later Newcastle shopkeepers and shop inspectors noticed a change in working class shopping and leisure activities. By 1907, the Monday following Pay Friday was the heaviest trading day of the fortnight because Saturday was devoted to family leisure pursuits such as picnics and visits to the seaside:

on the Monday the miner has gone back to work, the children are at school, the good wife comes into town and leisurely, without any bustle, makes the purchases she requires.

This suggests that mining families were deciding to remove shopping from family recreation time and make it instead women’s work to be carried out during the breadwinner’s working hours.

The apparent shift to weekday shopping in Newcastle after 1905 may have reflected changes in shopping habits that were occurring in other working class communities. As families became more financially secure, fewer working class women needed (or wanted) to engage in paid employment outside the home and worked instead in full-time unpaid domestic labour. It seems likely that a pattern of wage expenditure common to working and middle class families was developing in which the wife was largely responsible for buying most articles such as food and clothing which were consumed on a daily or weekly basis within the household. Many witnesses

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at the 1920 enquiry into the cost of living indicated that it was usual practice for married women to buy household commodities and spend the family income; or, as a male gardener succinctly told the enquiry, 'the wife buys my clothes.'\textsuperscript{32} The Draper reminded retailers in 1908 that women spent the bulk of their husbands' earnings, an observation repeated frequently in trade literature thereafter.\textsuperscript{33} The Commonwealth Home, for example, asserted in 1928 that women spent 80-90 per cent of their husbands' income.\textsuperscript{34}

That women were given responsibility for household purchases, however, does not necessarily mean that they had complete freedom to buy as they pleased, or to buy goods for their own pleasure. The right of a married woman to her own allowance to spend as she chose was a matter of some debate after the turn of the century, and one in which retailers were keenly interested. They presumably anticipated that women would spend most of their allowance on the highly profitable fashion articles of personal and home adornment sold in the big stores. A 1910 editorial in Mark Foy's magazine-style catalogue the Magnet argued strongly in favour of married women's allowances and suggested that a husband's refusal to grant his wife a regular sum of money which she could spend as she pleased constituted a sure road to marital discord.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} NSW Board of Trade, Cost of Living Enquiry, Males and Females General, 1920, transcript of evidence in Archives Office of New South Wales 2/5775 p 66; see also evidence of Caroline Martin, \textit{ibid.}, p 156 and Mrs Jordan for the Housewives Association, \textit{ibid.}, p 487.

\textsuperscript{33} Jan 1908 p 27.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Commonwealth Home} Aug 1928 p 35.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Magnet} Mar 15 1910 p 2.
Members of the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales were also interested in court cases heard in London in 1922 in which a wife’s access to her husband’s credit was questioned. The judge in one case upheld the husband’s right to restrict his wife’s expenditure; the second ruled that ‘a wife living with her husband as manager of his household has presumptive right to pledge his credit for what were called necessaries’ which might include, according to the judge, an item such as an evening dress.\textsuperscript{35} The Association’s Journal did not comment on the cases, but retailers were likely to have seen advantages to themselves in the second ruling.

Access to credit facilities was another determinant of levels of consumption. Wealthy customers with sound financial reputations were able to open credit accounts with David Jones from its establishment in 1838.\textsuperscript{37} By the 1890s, however, the Australian Storekeepers Journal noted that retailers were turning to cash business in preference to credit.\textsuperscript{38} Cash traders such as Anthony Hordern & Sons and Grace Brothers operated on the basis of a high turnover combined with a lower rate of profit than the credit traders, a system which resulted in lower prices and hence encouraged a larger middle and working class custom.\textsuperscript{39} The ubiquity

\textsuperscript{34} Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal July 1922 pp 728-31.

\textsuperscript{37} See, for example, Charles Lloyd Jones and Desmond Robinson, ‘Customers are Human’, unpub. typescript c. 1958 in David Jones Archives.

\textsuperscript{38} Australian Storekeepers Journal June 1896 p 161.

\textsuperscript{39} Evidence of George Wright of Farmers at the Department of Labour and Industry’s Necessary Commodities Control Commission, transcript of proceedings in Archives Office of New South Wales 2/5728, 19 Feb 1920 p 43. See also advice in the Draper June 1924 p 365 on how to dress windows to attract both credit and cash buyers.
of price tickets, assumed in the trade to be evidence of the retailer’s desire to appeal to a working class trade, suggested to the Draper that even the ‘first class houses’ were trying to ‘catch the cash trade’ by 1903.\textsuperscript{40} Some big stores – notably those selling high-expenditure items like furniture and pianos such as Marcus Clark – established formal time payment schemes in the 1880s.\textsuperscript{41}

Time payment facilities were supplemented by lay-by and cash order systems, popular with and often essential to working class shoppers after World War I.\textsuperscript{42} Under the cash order system, a finance company issued the borrower with an order to a nominated store (usually a drapery house) to supply her with goods to a certain value. The retailer paid the company 15 per cent of the value of the order in return for the custom, while the borrower paid 5 per cent as a premium and 5 per cent as a first instalment. Cash order companies specifically targetted married women as clients, even though they usually took a guarantee from the man of the house for repayments.\textsuperscript{43} The cash order, lay-by and time payment systems together represented a significant extension of credit to working class shoppers by the 1920s.\textsuperscript{44}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} Draper May 1903 p 191.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Little, ‘Retail Trade and Distribution in Sydney’, p 274. David Jones instituted a similar system in 1908 but ‘along the lines of Harrods’ (David Jones board minutes 15 Oct 1908). For Melbourne see Graeme Davison, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne} (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1978) p 196.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Interstate Commission of Australia. Prices Investigation no. 11 Report, Clothing, 1919 in \textit{Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers} 1917-1919 v 5 pp 429, 435. See also Little, 'Retail Trade and Distribution in Sydney' p 130.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Interstate Commission on Clothing 1919 p 429.
\item \textsuperscript{44} \textit{Shop Assistants Magazine} June 1926 p 34.
\end{itemize}
Demographic, economic and social changes between 1880 and 1930 affected gender and class differences in shopping patterns only at a broad level. To place this analysis more specifically we need to find out who shopped where and when in Sydney’s large drapery establishments. Drapery and clothing constituted, at least from 1900, a significant portion of overall national household consumption. In relative value per head of population of all major imports for home consumption between 1896 and 1900, drapery and clothing ranked first by a large margin. These two types of commodity came second only to food and drink in the total estimated expenditure of the people of New South Wales for 1900, and represented 15.3 per cent of average daily expenditure per person in that year. Slightly lower but similar proportions of family income were allocated to clothing by 999 people surveyed in 1910-1911, and by 392 households in 1913.

The Royal Commission on the Basic Wage, in contrast, found in 1920 that 23 per cent of the total cost of living was allocated to clothing and 18 per cent to miscellaneous household needs. Whether this increase was the result of a different method of determination or attributable to a material increase in expenditure on clothing is unclear. Official cost of living statistics typically referred to rent and food only and do not allow us to compare changes in

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46 Coghlan, Wealth and Progress 1902, p 775.

47 Labour Reports 1912 and 1914.

actual clothing costs (as opposed to relative increases in price) with wages.** Nevertheless, it appears that perhaps 15 per cent to 40 per cent (combining the clothing and household requisites percentages determined by the Basic Wage Commission) of total household expenditure was allocated to goods sold by department stores.

Observers agreed from at least the 1890s that women formed the majority of customers in drapery stores.*** These clear but statistically unconfirmed early impressions by retailers increasingly became the focus of scientific specification as salesmanship assumed a more professional mantle in the 1920s. Women, it appeared, constituted somewhere between 70 per cent and 95 per cent of all shoppers.\(^1\) One sales expert, Herbert Casson, estimated in 1927 that women spent more than three times as much money as did men.\(^2\)

There were sound material reasons for this gender imbalance in shopping. With the exception of lunch hours, Saturdays and the late shopping night after 1899, drapery

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\(^{**}\) The Labour Report estimates of the cost of living did not include clothing and drapery goods before 1921 as the Bureau of Census and Statistics held that expenditure varied according to individual taste, fashion, price and quality of goods (Labour Report 1912 p 19). Thereafter increases in clothing costs were indexed only.

\(^{***}\) Australian Storekeepers Journal Apr 1899 p 93. See also various comments by retailers at the Shop Assistants hearing before the New South Wales Court of Arbitration 1907, transcripts of evidence in State Archives Office of New South Wales 2/95-98.

\(^{1}\) Herbert Casson, The Art of Customer-finding (Sydney, 1928) ch. 5; Herbert Casson, Better Salesmanship and Twelve Tips on Finance (Sydney, 1928) pp 46-7; Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Oct 1927 p 35; Rydge's Business Journal, Rydge's Retail Merchandising Course (Sydney, 1937) p 8.

\(^{2}\) Casson, Better Salesmanship p 47.
stores were open only during working hours, which precluded wage-earners - most of whom were male - from shopping. Because most married and some single middle class women were not engaged in the full-time or formal labour market they consequently had more flexibility than men with which to arrange their daily work to accommodate shopping. It is also possible that men preferred to spend their disposable income on commodities other than clothes or fashion goods. The Sydney Morning Herald reported in 1929, for example, that men were spending less money on clothes and more on motoring and holidays.\(^3\) Shopping as a recreational activity was less likely to appeal to men, who had a wider range of socially-acceptable public leisure activities to choose from, particularly after the turn of the century when shopping came to be widely perceived as a female pursuit.

Rather less expected were retailers' observations from at least the turn of the century that women bought not just for the home, their children and themselves, but also for their close male relatives.\(^4\) Women went to the men's departments of the big stores to buy shirts, pyjamas, underwear, handkerchiefs, ties and socks (but apparently not collars or hats) for their men.\(^5\) As the Shop Assistants Magazine explained, 75 per cent of men's personal wear was

\(^3\) Quoted in Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Mar 1929 p 51.

\(^4\) For example, evidence of Frank Smith at Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 858.

\(^5\) Draper Oct 1928 p 495; Mens Wear Jan 1924 clipping in Peapes & Co. papers MLMSS 2161 Box Y812; Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Oct 1927 p 35.
bought by women: a mother bought for her son until his late
teen, and when he married his wife took over the job.  

Other goods such as suits and coats which men usually
bought for themselves were frequently purchased with wife or
mother present, or on her advice given at home.  Women,
Casson estimated, directly or indirectly bought 90 per cent
of men's suits.  They also bought men's clothing for
themselves during the 'masculine' phase of women's fashions
in the late 1920s.  As the Shop Assistants Magazine
commented, from the retailer's point of view 'Man is
essentially the earner, woman the spender.'

If there was a relative degree of consensus on which was
the shopping sex, few people in the retail industry were
willing or able to specify the class composition of the
department stores' clientele. This was understandable, given
the visible differences between male and female shoppers, and
lack of them between customers of varying socio-economic
backgrounds. Evidence of customers' class status, therefore,
is scant, impressionistic and frequently coloured by
retailers' expectations.

This lack of statistical data has created a conflict of
opinion among historians of the department store. Susan
Porter Benson, William Leach and Dorothy Davis assume that
English and American department stores attracted mostly
middle class and wealthy customers, and Theresa McBride

  86 Shop Assistants Magazine Dec 1926 p 20.
  87 Shop Assistants Magazine Dec 1926 p 20.
  88 Casson, The Art of Customer-finding ch. 5.
  89 Draper Oct 1928 p 495.
  90 Shop Assistants Magazine Dec 1926 p 20.
suggests that French stores catered to both the traditional and the petite bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{61} Others, including Howard Wolfers in his study of Sydney’s big stores, imply that department store shopping was a more popular experience.\textsuperscript{62} Daniel Boorstin has also argued that American department stores promoted a ‘democracy of consumers’ in which ‘any man [sic] might be a buyer’\textsuperscript{63}.

As centrally-located public institutions to which admission was not only free but actively encouraged by retail managements, it is almost certain that people from all classes at least entered and browsed in the big city stores. A working class woman might buy cheaper goods in smaller quantities and buy less often than her wealthier sister, but was nevertheless an equally valued customer. Whether the working class customer was an habitual patron of the stores is another matter.

Certainly there were other ways in which people with limited means might meet their clothing and household needs. The poorer suburbs had their small drapery, second-hand


clothes and 'Johnny-allSorts' shops. Street stalls and local markets such as Paddy's Market were also important sources of clothing, crockery, fancy, haberdashery, drapery and ironmongery goods: of the 338 stalls at Paddy's Market in 1909, 34 sold new clothing, 39 used clothing, 28 fancy goods and 12 haberdashery. As the Town Clerk of Sydney submitted to the Royal Commission on the Saturday Half-holiday, 'the continuance of the "Paddy's Market" business is almost an imperative necessity in the interests of the poorer classes of the city and immediate suburbs.' Many working class women would also have made their families' clothes themselves, or altered 'hand-me-downs' from relatives and neighbours.

While home sewing was practiced by women of all classes, there is some evidence to suggest that until the 1920s the market for ready-made clothing was predominantly working class. Women engaged in full-time waged labour for whom the distinction between work time and leisure time was clearer than it was for women who saw themselves as full-time housewives may have found it more difficult (or were less inclined) to devote time to needlework. Twopenny observed disapprovingly in 1883 that whereas it was common for upper and middle class girls to sew their own clothes, the servant

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For the nineteenth century see Report of the Sydney City and Suburban Sewage and Health Board in Votes and Proceedings of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly v 5 1875–6 pp 595, 599, 626; for later periods see references to suburban shopping in Reports on the Factories and Shops Acts.

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New South Wales Legislative Assembly, Royal Commission re Saturday Half-Holiday 1909 Appendix D.

Royal Commission re Saturday Half-Holiday Appendix D.

Davis, Fairs, Shops and Supermarkets p 261.
class invariably had their hats made up at considerable cost by milliners.\(^{68}\) Witnesses employed as kitchenhands and factory workers who gave evidence at the 1918 enquiry into the cost of living for female workers stated that they bought all their clothes ready-made.\(^{69}\) Other working women might make their own underclothes and blouses but not their costumes or 'best dresses'.\(^{70}\) A woman could buy a ready-made costume for around seven guineas in 1920, considerably less than the eight to twenty-one guineas asked by ladies' tailors for a comparable article.\(^{71}\)

Female wage-earners shopped at department stores because they needed a smart and durable wardrobe and the stores stocked a good range of manufactured clothing. As one female witness told the 1920 cost of living enquiry, a working woman wore out boots and blouses more rapidly than 'a lady of leisure'.\(^{72}\) Susan Wilcox told the 1918 cost of living enquiry that a working woman needed a good costume to save wear on other clothing and because it could be worn both on cool summer days and in winter without an overcoat.\(^{73}\)

Working class customers were, moreover, driven into the big stores by the necessity to buy as cheaply as possible. One advocate for the employers at the 1919 hearing commented:


\(^{69}\) New South Wales Board of Trade, *Cost of Living of Adult Female Workers 1918*, transcript of proceedings, Archives Office of New South Wales 2/5768 pp 21, 58.

\(^{70}\) *Cost of Living of Adult Female Workers 1918* p 65.

\(^{71}\) *Necessary Commodities Control Commission 10 June 1920* (2/5729) pp 3–4.

\(^{72}\) *Cost of Living Enquiry, General, 1920* p 157.

\(^{73}\) *Cost of Living Enquiry, Women, 1918* p 148.
I think it can be well expected that the working class can appreciate a bargain whenever they see it ... One has only to go to Newtown on any Friday night to see the trams crowded coming into Sydney.  

The big city stores were a considerable attraction for anyone interested in, or compelled to compare prices. 

But working class people were not always solely concerned to buy the cheapest and most serviceable drapery commodities. Most had at least one set of 'best' clothes, or what Twopenny called a 'Sunday-go-to-meeting' suit. Like most women regardless of class, many engaged in the pursuit of beauty, fashion and personal adornment (to the suspicion of middle class observers and the delight of retailers). Annie Golding noted with regret in 1919 that '[working] girls like a little broader, and a little better lace, and they will have it, even if they have to go short of their food.'  

A departmental manager at Sydney Snows agreed that factory girls preferred camisoles with more trimming on them than the cheaper varieties. Janet McCalman similarly noted in her study of the working class in Richmond the importance for working people to own at least one good set of clothes. Young women, in particular, 'almost as a gesture of insane defiance at their poverty ... would allow themselves

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74 Cost of Living Enquiry, Women, 1919 p 754.
75 Twopenny, Town Life in Australia p 81.
77 Cost of Living Enquiry, Women, 1919 p 692.
78 Cost of Living Enquiry, Women, 1919 pp 623-5.
one absurd luxury' such as an expensive hat. There were many good reasons, therefore, for working class as well as wealthier women and men to shop in Sydney's big stores.

That they did so is clear from retailers' comments on the class nature of their trade. It is not always easy to distinguish retailers' desired trade from their actual clientele, especially when individual houses deliberately cultivated a class-specific store image. However, there did appear to be a general consensus among both retailers and public that some stores carried on a high-class business, others a working class trade, and still others had a mixed clientele.

At the top end of the trade were David Jones and Farmers, both stores offering a wide range of customer services with a reputation for highly-priced and good quality merchandise. David Jones, for example, attracted the patronage of Sydney's elite in the nineteenth century. Stores which had been established in the boom years of the 1880s such as Grace Brothers, Mark Foy's and Marcus Clark, on the other hand, were perceived by the trade and by the public as catering to a working and middle class trade.

Advertisements for retail stores accepted by the Australian Worker after 1906 suggest that Lassetters, Hattes and Gowings were also seen as stores for the working man. These were


80 See, for example, references to Lady Jersey in letter to Edward Lloyd Jones from William Newman 23 Mar 1891 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/24.

81 See, for example, Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 865; Cost of Living Enquiries Women 1918 and General 1920.
joined after World War I by Sweet Brothers and Sydney Snow.\textsuperscript{92}

The class distinction among stores was not always clear-cut, however. Most representatives from stores known for their working class trade who gave evidence at the cost of living enquiries stressed that they served customers 'from factory girls to the very best of customers'.\textsuperscript{93} Similarly, evidence given by witnesses at the 1918 enquiry suggests that working class women at least occasionally bought from stores normally associated with a high-class trade such as Farmers.

Anthony Hordern & Sons occupied a particularly ambiguous position in the Sydney retail trade by catering to both a working class and a 'better' trade.\textsuperscript{94} Although its seniority, reputation and architectural style spoke for a bourgeois trade, it clearly also served the working class of Sydney. As Landon, representing the employees, argued in 1919, 'if Anthony Hordern & Son do not depend on the families of working men, where do they get sufficient people in and around Sydney to keep a large emporium of that kind going?'\textsuperscript{95} The same argument might have been applied to David Jones which in 1929 claimed to serve over 3.5 million customers annually.\textsuperscript{96}

\textsuperscript{92} Cost of Living Enquiry, Women, 1919 p 753.

\textsuperscript{93} See, for example, Leslie Conway of Sydney Snows Ltd in Cost of Living Enquiry, Women, 1919 p 623.

\textsuperscript{94} Shop Assistants case 1907 v 44 p 1162.

\textsuperscript{95} Cost of Living, Women, 1919 p 753.

\textsuperscript{96} Chairman's address to shareholders 16 Oct 1929 in board minutes, David Jones Archives. (The high figure suggests that the firm might have been referring to the number of individual transactions rather than shoppers).
Before state regulation of shop trading hours by the Early Closing Act of 1899, there appeared to be a class difference in shopping habits. Men and women engaged in full-time waged labour and working class families shopped mostly at night and on Saturdays. Wage-earning women would have had limited opportunities to shop during the working day and working class wives were more tied to the arrival of the weekly pay packet on a Friday or Saturday than their wealthier sisters. Married women who spent all or most of their time in domestic duties and women from middle and upper class families typically completed their shopping by 6 p.m. It was considered not quite respectable for a woman to be out in the streets after dark, even for a feminine occupation such as shopping.

In restricting night shopping to one evening a week, therefore, supporters of the Early Closing Act of 1899 effectively sought to impose bourgeois shopping patterns on the working class. Reports on the working of the Act suggest that government officials were keen to eliminate the 'slip-shod household management' of working class housewives 'devoid of any education in the economy of household management, born to wastefulness, negligence, and the lack of system.' As another report argued in 1908, 'the social

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effects of regulation that induce[s] method and care may not be inconsiderable."  

The Act apparently did little to change the custom of Friday night shopping, despite the intentions of its advocates. Retailers testified to the popularity of late night shopping among working class families well into the 1920s.°° One country retailer asserted that city shops did as much as 60 per cent of their weekly turnover on Fridays.°¹ The legislation would not have greatly inconvenienced wealthier customers who already shopped in the daytime, but must have made life more difficult for wage-earning consumers. 

The major perceived effect of the Early Closing Act was to push some working class trade away from suburban retailers into the city stores. The suburban retail trade was predominantly working class and relied on the evening custom of people shopping after work hours. Suburban shopkeepers were therefore disadvantaged by the Act, and complained bitterly that its beneficiaries were the big city stores.°² They asserted that working men and women who had previously shopped at their leisure in their local suburb after tea

°¹ Master Retailers Association of New South Wales Journal Nov 1920 p 239; Sydney Morning Herald 9 July 1928 p 5.  
°² Alan Foley, The Fight for Trade. A series of articles prepared for the use of country traders who wish to combat the influence of Mail Order Houses and City Traders generally (Bondi, New South Wales, n.d. ?1926), article no. 1.  
°² See, for example, Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 812
instead visited the city stores on their way to or from work or during their lunch hour.\textsuperscript{73}

Stores like Anthony Hordern & Sons which catered to a working class trade opened at 8 a.m. to serve workmen, dressmakers' assistants and 'girls going to business', whereas the 'ladies' trade' began mid-morning and ended when it began to get dark.\textsuperscript{74} The only time available to the wage-earning woman to look for bargains was, as Elizabeth Daw complained to the 1918 cost of living enquiry, on a Friday night.\textsuperscript{75} The restriction of late night shopping to one evening a week was also more likely to turn shopping into a special outing in the city instead of an everyday routine practice. Window shopping, or promenading in the city's fashionable shopping district, appears to have been an activity shared by middle and working class people after the 1880s.\textsuperscript{76}

There is further evidence of an erosion of class differences in shopping between 1880 and 1920. The deliberate attempts by drapery retailers to cultivate a mixed trade by stocking a wide range of differently-priced merchandise contributed to this homogenisation, as did the

\textsuperscript{73} Royal Commission on the Operation of the Factories and Shops Law of Victoria 1901, \textit{Victoria, Parliamentary Papers} 1902-3 v 2 no. 2 p 192; Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 858 and v 45 p 1596.

\textsuperscript{74} Evidence of Samuel Hordern in Shop Assistants case 1907 v 44 p 1050; v 43 p 719; v 42 p 105.

\textsuperscript{75} Cost of Living Enquiry, Women, 1918 p 98.

extension of the ready-made clothing business after World War I. The Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal reprinted in 1929 an article from the American trade journal the Dry Goods Economist stating that in contrast to the pre-war years, 'well-to-do women and those of the better classes are very often just as ready buyers of popularly-priced ready-to-wear as their less fortunate sisters.'

This opinion was supported by the Draper which noticed that by the mid 1920s it was often difficult to tell mistress from maid, 'both evidently very good customers of the draper'.

In his history of the department store, Pasdermadjian argued that the department store not only reduced class differences in consumption but also diminished the contrast between city and rural lifestyles through the widespread distribution of catalogues. I would go further and suggest that by the 1920s there was a distinct department store mode of shopping that crossed national boundaries. The Draper carried an article in 1922 entitled 'Cosmopolitan Shopping' in which a well-travelled woman compared department stores in London, Paris, Berlin, Athens, the United States and Australia. Despite some differences, she concluded that department stores were more alike than dissimilar, and that a woman could 'in any of the world's big cities buy anything

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** Draper Sep 1930 p 479; Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Jan 1929 p 15.

** Jan 1929 p 15.

** Feb 1926 p 44.

she needs at a varyingly reasonable price, and with the minimum of difficulty.¹⁰¹

The attraction of the big stores to working class customers was a result of the stores' marketing efforts, of state regulation, of the entrepreneurial activities of the cash order companies and of improvements in the manufacture of drapery goods. Department store shopping was also a conscious choice of working class consumers with particular clothing needs, particularly wage-earning women. Store managements sought to increase turnover by creating and extending their market, whether it was the new wage-earning woman or the household manager of domestic consumption.

In the sense that the customer's class was to a large extent immaterial as long as she bought the goods, there is some validity in Boorstin's characterisation of the department store as a 'democratic' institution. In the sense that there were equal opportunities for working and middle class customers, however, his theory needs some revision. Although the stores sold to all classes, they probably sold more goods and more expensive goods to those customers who had the money to buy them. Retailers, moreover, were less concerned with democracy than with profits: a poor woman's coin was just as welcome and eagerly sought as that of a rich woman because managers were in the business of stimulating aggregate sales. Retail managers also, as Susan Porter Benson points out, recognised that their most consistent and efficient source of profit was the middle class shopper. It was the middle class trade that retailers tried hardest to attract, and appeals to middle class values and aspirations

¹⁰¹  Draper, May 1922 pp 212-3.
that they employed to encourage customers of all classes into the store.
CHAPTER 5
THE 'DIFFICULT' CUSTOMER AND THE MANAGEMENT OF BUYING

The customer has typically been seen in an unsympathetic light by writers seeking to glorify the success of the big stores. She is either an object of anecdotes designed to display the master retailer's good business-sense, or an obstruction in the smooth path of sales success. According to the author of the *Romance of the House of Foy*, written to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Mark Foy's in 1935, Francis Foy one day noticed one of his male assistants attempting to sell some material to 'an apparently difficult lady customer'. Foy told his assistant to go and serve another customer and when the woman protested, told her to 'go home and tell your husband to give you a jolly good hiding for wasting my man's time'.¹ Charles Lloyd Jones believed that the customer was always right, 'even when she is being unreasonable, cantankerous and perhaps a little dishonest, as customers sometimes are.'²

This negative characterisation of customers has been uncritically adopted by some social historians. Janet McCalman writes of the large crowds of shoppers at the big Melbourne stores' sales, 'where ample backsides and the judicious use of the high heel got you first go at the tables


² Charles Lloyd Jones and Desmond Robinson, 'Customers are Human', unpub. typescript c. 1958 (Charles Lloyd Jones's autobiography) in David Jones Archives.
groaning with bargains.'Susan Porter Benson presents a
more sensitive account of department store customers and
their conflict with saleswomen. In her concern to show the
class differences between the two groups of women and in her
desire to delineate the work culture of American shop
assistants, however, Benson tends to accept without question
the perception of department store customers held by
saleswomen who resented shoppers' demands, complaints,
ignorance and lack of consideration. She fails to make a
clear distinction, moreover, between individual customers as
historical subjects and 'the customer' as a social construct.

From a different perspective, William Leach has argued
that department store consumer culture had a largely positive
effect on women by offering 'a liberation that promised to
expand the province of rewarding work and of individual
expression for women.' Leach's culture of consumption may
have 'emancipated' some women from dull and oppressed
existences, but its promoters also - and, arguably, more
influentially - created a derogatory characterisation of
female shoppers which contributed to a restrictive
construction of femininity. Retailers and sales experts
created, without conscious intent, a stereotype of the

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3 Janet McCalman, Struggletown. Public and Private
Life in Richmond 1900-1965 ( Carlton: Melbourne University

4 See, for example, Counter Cultures. Saleswomen,
Managers and Customers in American Department Stores 1890-

5 William Leach, 'Transformations in a Culture of
Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890-1925', Journal

6 See Jill Matthews, Good and Mad Women. The
Historical Construction of Femininity in Twentieth Century
Australia (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1984).
difficult customer in the process of attempting to modify customer behaviour to serve their marketing objectives. It is important, therefore, to distinguish between 'women who shopped' as described in the previous chapter, and the 'woman shopper' as a social category created by retailers and sales experts.

The persistence of retailers' complaints about difficult, wayward or simply irritating female customers suggests that they appreciated the need to understand and manipulate women's shopping activities. If retailers were to realise profits through the sale of as much merchandise as possible, it was crucial that each individual sales transaction between assistant and customer proceeded smoothly, speedily and according to management's plans. They had reason to seek to supervise, therefore, not just the work of shop assistants in selling the goods, but also the work of shoppers in buying them.

Domestic labour in the form of shopping, as Nona Glazer has argued, is directly appropriated by commercial capital and inserted into the work process so that the buyer increasingly does the work once performed by paid workers. Women's work as consumers is not just peripheral or indirectly necessary to capital but '[d]aily life is actually organized so that women's unpaid work outside the household is a critical aspect of the very basis of consuming in capitalist societies.'

service was not a marked feature of department store retailing before 1930: Grace Brothers cash-and-carry grocery department, opened in 1921, was a rare example of this form of shopping. However, women at least shared with shop assistants the labour of distribution by allocating time to deciding family requirements and attending the store; making decisions relating to quality, price, style and durability; selecting, inspecting and comparing commodities; appropriating part of the household budget for the purchases; and in most cases transporting the commodities back to the household.

Retailers were somewhat more constrained in supervising the work of their customers than they were with their paid employees: assistants could, after all, be dismissed if they failed to conform to house rules. Customers, on the other hand, had to be wooed and flattered into loyalty to the store. Retailers attempted to manage difficult customers without giving offence to their clientele as a whole or jeopardising their public image by distinguishing between good and bad shoppers, and by referring to 'the customer' as an all-embracing category which subsumed individual differences. A common notion of 'the customer' not only helped shop assistants to defend the autonomy of their own work culture, but also enabled retailers and sales experts to devise strategies which facilitated selling on a mass scale at the same time as giving the public impression that the customer was always right.

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* Notes from the *Evening News* 24 Dec 1921 in Grace Brothers Archives.
Shopkeepers recorded their dissatisfaction with shoppers from at least 1870. Shoppers — usually assumed to be female — were typically portrayed in early trade literature as 'cranky', thoughtless or inconsiderate. These critics appear to have directed their comments predominantly at wealthy customers. The Draper and Warehouseman accused women shoppers of depressing the wages of shop workers by bargaining with retailers to obtain goods close to cost price. Early closing reformers and Factories and Shops inspectors also condemned the callousness of the late shopper who was indifferent to the sufferings of her 'helpless sister' across the counter. One advocate of early closing commented sadly that not even a sign for employees which said "All hope abandon ye that enter here" ... would fail to keep away the lady in search of a bargain, la belle dame sans merci. In their criticism of customers' thoughtlessness, these reformers echoed the opinion of government statistician T.A. Coghlans in his account of the dressmaking trade in 1891. Customers of dressmaking establishments, he argued, gave their orders at the last moment, failed to keep fitting appointments and placed unreasonable demands on their seamstresses. This 'careless neglect or indifference', he


10 Draper and Warehouseman, Clothiers' and Costumiers' Gazette Sept 1894 p 3.


12 Early Closing Association of New South Wales, A Few Facts Concerning the Hours Worked by Shop Assistants in Sydney and Suburbs, 1898.
concluded, was 'highly discreditable'. The Australian Worker was scathing in its condemnation of the meanness of women at sale time in 1906:

Women sweating, struggling, swarming round the damaged gloves; snarling, gesticulating over the eighteen-penny muslins. Scratch a bargain-hunter and you get a Tartar every time ... Their fat, bulging, glittering eyes are twinkling with greed. Their hands lovingly fondle the prizes they are losing their self-respect to win. Never once do they pause to realize that someone must go short that their insatiable greed may be satisfied.  

The inconsiderate female shopper here appears to be a metaphor for the bourgeoisie in general, a female counterpart of the fat cat capitalist.  

The typical shopper became a more complex, classless and contradictory creature after about 1910. Aided by 'scientific' psychological theories of personality, retailers and sales experts delineated a number of customer characterisations, each of which was designed to facilitate the sales procedure by 'rationalising' customer behaviour. John Chynoweth Burnham found that controllers of large bureaucratic organisations in the United States used psychology in the 1920s as a tool to explore human motivation and predict human behaviour. Australian retail trade sources suggest, however, that retailers, sales experts and

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14 Worker, Mar 1 1906. See also 'Shop girl's plea to the wives of workingmen', Worker, June 6 1907.

15 My thanks to Jill Matthews for suggesting this interpretation.

some manufacturers began this process of rationalisation well
before they could have been influenced by the 'new'
psychology.

Probably the most prevalent of retailers’
rationalisation strategies was their categorisation of
shoppers. The Draper referred in 1901 to 'Tabbies' or
'Tabs', women who never knew what they wanted, 'except to
give as much trouble as possible'.\(^\text{17}\) The tendency of
observers to type customers was present from at least 1908,
when journalist Beatrix Tracy noticed the 'managing mother',
the 'bustling spinster' and 'the dreadful person who became
reminiscent, and enlarged upon bargains she had got
elsewhere.'\(^\text{18}\)

The typing of customers became a serious matter worthy
of scientific application during World War I. The Draper made
the distinction in 1915 between the 'homely matron' and the
'fashionable lady', each theoretically attracted to different
types of merchandise.\(^\text{19}\) At about the same time the retail
industry became enthusiastic about the benefits of
salesmanship training. One such scheme run by Bright and
Hitchcock of Geelong included a Study of Types of Customer.
Three general types - the Sanguine, Nervous and Phlegmatic -
were joined by the 'special' types: the calmly-indifferent,
over-careful, grumpy, overbearing, argumentative, frigid,

\(^\text{17}\) Aug 1901 p 15.

\(^\text{18}\) Beatrix Tracy, 'The Shop Girl', The Lone Hand Sept 1
1908, reproduced in Beverley Kingston, The World Moves
Slowly. A Documentary History of Australian Women (Stanmore:
Cassell Australia, 1977), p 118.

\(^\text{19}\) May 1915 p 129.
procrastinating, prejudiced, logical or emotional types of customer.\textsuperscript{20}

Lustre Hosiery Limited was more expansive in explaining the mental characteristics of customers to its sales personnel in the 1920s. The nervous and querulous type, for example, consisted of 'spoiled children in adult form', typically found among women of the wealthy class in the larger cities.\textsuperscript{21} Similarly William Beable advised shop assistants that customers could be impulsive or nervous (the pronoun suggests this is a female type), confident or decisive (a male pronoun), or vacillating or suspicious (both female).\textsuperscript{22} Rydge's Retail Merchandising Course outlined eight types: vacillating, hesitating, argumentative, quiet, quick-tempered, doubting, the customer who cannot say yes, and the customer who is 'just having a look around' - all of them female.\textsuperscript{23}

Personality was not the sole criterion used by sales experts to assign shoppers to different categories. Customers could also be categorised according to their age and lifestyle, as did American scientific home management expert Christine Frederick, quoted in the Commonwealth Home in 1927. Female customers, she suggested, could be divided into the flapper, the practical housewife, the society woman

\textsuperscript{20} Draper Nov 1917 p 353.

\textsuperscript{21} Lustre Hosiery Limited, The Craft of Retail Selling. Dedicated to the great army of men and women who fill a most important niche in the realm of merchandising (Sydney, n.d. ?1920s), p 15.

\textsuperscript{22} Behind the Counter. A Practical Guide for Shop Assistants (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1930), ch. 10.

\textsuperscript{23} Rydge's Business Journal, Rydge's Retail Merchandising Course (Sydney, 1937), pp 123-4.
and the club or professional woman. The years between 18 and 22 belonged to the flapper, 22-25 to romantic home building, 25-28 to practical home building, and over 28 to motherhood. Another expert suggested classifying women according to age, marital status and occupation, each with specific style and price requirements. The major purpose of all these types was to convince sales people that they needed to adjust their sales techniques accordingly. Negative stereotypes also enabled retailers to justify to themselves and their public their attempts at customer management more effectively than would have been possible with a more sympathetic portrayal.

Another major preoccupation of sales writers from at least 1890 was the difference between male and female shoppers. It was usually assumed that the typical shopper was female and that men, while undeniably part of the department store clientele, represented the minority. Many trade experts believed, perhaps because they were of the same sex, that men were ideal customers. Or rather, that the ideal customer had noticeably manly attributes. Men, according to the Draper and Warehouseman of 1894, were stable and predictable: they 'stick to some shop they know, and where they are known'. The Draper, quoting an article from the American trade journal Printers Ink, stated that men had a natural distrust of department stores, but once won over were 'good, regular purchasers; they do not haggle, and their

\[24\] Commonwealth Home Nov 1927 p 29.

\[25\] Norris Brisco's 1927 study, cited in Rydge's Retail Merchandising Course, p 112.

\[26\] May 1894 p 3.
trade is desirable. In contrast to the invariably female 'difficult' customer,

The really good customer is the man who buys what he wants at the same price and on the same terms as other buyers get, and who pays for what he buys when he says he will ... A good customer is a man who gives and expects a fair deal in every transaction.

There is a sense of grudging respect and male bonding here, a man-to-man exchange between individuals who understand each other without feminine dissembling.

If the ideal customer was male, nevertheless real men did not know how to shop well. Or, as My Lady's Journal put it in 1906,

Men cannot shop; they do not know how ... Men take what is given them regardless if it is really what they want; pay what is asked for it, without the least consideration as to its actual worth; and, as to counting their change, they would think that unmanly in the extreme.

The Draper noted on several occasions, and with some regret, men's natural reluctance to shop. 'Shopping' in the sense used by those in the retail trade referred to carefully considered inspection, comparison and judgement of the goods offered for sale. It also implied a pleasurable but serious activity which kept customers in the store where they might be persuaded to buy more articles, or buy more expensive articles than they originally intended. A man, according to the trade papers, typically decided outside the store exactly

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27 Draper Sep 1905 p 316.
28 Draper June 1914 p 255.
29 My Lady's Journal March 1906 p 29.
what he wanted, dashed in, bought it, and rushed out again.\textsuperscript{30}

The reason, one article suggested, was that men had limited time to shop and were therefore anxious to get through an objectionable duty as expeditiously as possible.\textsuperscript{31} The sexual division of labour which allocated domestic tasks such as shopping to women and full-time wage earning to men made it more likely that men would have little time or inclination to engage in what was seen as a feminine occupation. Men's apparent aversion to female retail space, as we noted in chapter 2, contributed to their reluctance to shop. Lustre Hosiery agreed that men typically disliked shopping and were embarrassed by it, whereas women usually found shopping a pleasure. Men could be induced to buy more by suggesting that it would save them time and trouble to buy two or three articles at one time.\textsuperscript{32}

Men shoppers were also portrayed in the literature as more cautious, sober and conservative in their tastes than women. Where women were influenced by fashion and season, men preferred to conform to tradition and bought clothes only when they needed them.\textsuperscript{33} The male shopper wanted satisfaction rather than a bargain; he had definite needs and wanted them filled.\textsuperscript{34} The Retail Traders Association of New South Wales reproduced in its journal an article which appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald in 1929 which stated that 'sartorially

\textsuperscript{30} Draper Apr 1904 p 125. See also Draper Oct 1921 p 447; May 1915 p 129.

\textsuperscript{31} Draper Dec 1902 p 438 and Sep 1921 pp 403-4.

\textsuperscript{32} Lustre Hosiery Ltd, The Craft of Retail Selling, p 22.

\textsuperscript{33} Draper May 1918 p 188; Lustre Hosiery, The Craft of Retail Selling, p 23.

\textsuperscript{34} Draper May 1918 p 188; Dec 1914 p 469.
every boy that is born into this world alive is an ardent and impenitent conservative'.\textsuperscript{35} If the inherent conservatism of men was a source of concern to retailers, it was also tacitly approved as a masculine virtue. Professor J. C. Flugel told the London Sex Congress the same year that man's dress may have lacked romance, but it also lacked the 'envy, jealousy, petty triumphs, defeats and spitefulness engendered in women over dress.'\textsuperscript{36}

If retailers viewed men's responses to shopping as regrettably but understandably rational, they were fascinated by the apparent irrationality of female shoppers. They paid particular attention to the psychology of women, and particularly to interpretations which suggested that women were innately impulsive and impressionable. The Draper held that all the retailer had to do was give the customer ideas and 'she will, woman-like, immediately want to carry them out, and buy, then and there.'\textsuperscript{37} Her subconscious mind was, moreover, constantly taking in impressions every time she visited the store.\textsuperscript{38} Typically indecisive, women were more 'open to persuasion' and 'susceptible to suggestion' than men.\textsuperscript{39}

The advertising industry formalised this theory of the inherent suggestibility of women in the late 1920s. Roland

\textsuperscript{35} Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Aug 1929 p 27.

\textsuperscript{36} Sydney Morning Herald 13 Sept 1929 p 11.

\textsuperscript{37} Draper Sep 1917 p 291.

\textsuperscript{38} Draper May 1918 p 144.

\textsuperscript{39} Draper Apr 1915 p 118; Oct 1917 p 318; Lustre Hosiery, The Craft of Retail Selling, p 23.
Marchand's analysis of the American advertising industry in this period suggests that consumers were increasingly perceived as an 'emotional, feminized mass' characterized by an inability to make rational judgements. It is difficult here to distinguish between marketing experts' observation that women constituted the majority of consumers, and their perception of (or desire to see) consumers as people with distinctly feminine characteristics. Advertisers and retailers thus contributed to the feminisation of consumption by blending common perceptions of female personality with the desirable attributes of a community of consumers. Australian business experts also believed that women were more impressionable than men. 'Psychologist', writing in *Rydge's Business Journal* in 1928, recalled overhearing a conversation between two women on a tram. When one said she needed a new sink grating, her friend replied, 'Oh, I know, you're "sure to get it at Grace's"'. According to Psychologist, this was clear proof that Grace Brothers' advertising slogan 'Sure to get it at Grace Brothers' was hitting its mark:

> Nearly every woman will tell you with conviction that you can get anything you want at Grace Bros. She tells you this only because she has been taught by the slogan to believe it.  

One of the most forceful exponents of the theory of women's suggestibility was Phil Warner, Director of Advertising, Sales Promotions Manager and Demonstration

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Organiser for Berlei Limited in Australia. Warner told advertisers that women were more susceptible to dramatic selling than men because they arrived at a conclusion via feeling rather than by logical reasoning. Warner argued that women should be encouraged to avoid 'constructive thinking' by saving them the time and bother of reasoning for themselves. Women entered a shop with a subconcious mental resistance to sales appeal that could be overcome by a theatrical-type presentation and a co-ordinated sales plan. 42 The Commonwealth Home agreed: 'there are few women in the world who can tarry in a shop and not spend money.' 43

An image of a customer whose mind and desires were pliable encouraged retailers to 'educate' women who were ignorant of their own needs. Although the concept of 'educating customers' to buy expensive goods appeared in the Draper as early as 1903, it was not until the 1920s that the stereotype of the ignorant shopper became a stock figure in sales literature. Female shoppers were frequently portrayed as people incapable of knowing their own mind, or, if they did know what they wanted, possessing poor judgment. The Shop Assistants Magazine, for example, warned millinery saleswomen that if they presented too many hats at once the customer would become confused and too uncertain to buy. 44 The same magazine suggested that women's vagueness and indecisiveness was a result of their traditional dependence on men to do all the thinking. 45 Sales assistants should be

42 Advertisers Monthly Nov 1929 p 5.
43 Commonwealth Home Oct 1928 p 35.
44 Shop Assistants Magazine Feb 1927 p 17.
45 Shop Assistants Magazine Feb 1927 p 17.
trained to show them 'the real joy of helping those who are ignorant of what suits them.'\textsuperscript{46} The Draper also advised its readers that as 99 per cent of women lied about their size, the assistant's job was to prevent the customer deciding on the wrong article.\textsuperscript{47} Retailers should 'educate the consumer' that a certain commodity was economical or necessary for happiness.\textsuperscript{48} Any woman who presumed to know what she wanted was instantly dubbed determined and 'difficult'.\textsuperscript{49}

Apparently at odds with this perception of the customer as in desperate need of education was a view of women as innate and 'born' shoppers. As Rydge's Retail Merchandising Course expressed it, 'men come into the shop to buy, women to shop.'\textsuperscript{50} The chance of getting a bargain, according to the Draper and Warehouseman of 1894, 'appeals irresistibly to the female mind'.\textsuperscript{51} Women were better bargain-hunters than men, not just because of their 'natural' instincts as shoppers: women made enquiries 'more naturally' than most men, and they were keen shoppers who always compared prices and quality before buying.\textsuperscript{52} Unlike men, women always visited several shops and compared before they bought; they

\textsuperscript{46} Shop Assistants Magazine Aug 1927 p 4.
\textsuperscript{47} Draper Nov 1923 p 660.
\textsuperscript{48} Draper Nov 1928 p 543.
\textsuperscript{49} Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Oct 1928 p 49.
\textsuperscript{50} Rydge's Retail Merchandising Course, p 268.
\textsuperscript{51} May 1894 p 3.
\textsuperscript{52} Men's Wear Jan 1924 in Peapes & Co. papers MLMSS 2161, Box Y812 (Mitchell Library); Draper Oct 1925 p 466; Rydge's Retail Merchandising Course p 8.
knew what they wanted and were well educated in consumer matters. They had practical and everyday experience in the home making. They were惠南 keen and discriminating judges of goods. By the late 1920s there was a consensus amongst the experts that the female consumer was the 'Queen of the Market.' These two views of women as, on the one hand, requiring training in consumption and, on the other, as innately skilful shoppers are perhaps not as incompatible as they appear at first glance. Marketing experts did not, after all, suggest that men needed consumer education. They believed that they could develop and mould women's 'natural' predisposition to shop well into the kind of buying activity they preferred. They wanted to turn a biologically-determined attribute into a scientific and controllable activity.

One reason for the sales experts' insistence on the supremacy of the female customer was their belief in the necessity to train sales staff to understand her psychology and defer to her wishes. They admitted, however, that this was not always easy, and that some tension existed between assistants and customers. The Draper, for example, published a series of sketches showing various counter conflict scenarios in which assistants were inattentive and shoppers...

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[^3]: Herbert Casson, Better Salesmanship and Twelve Tips on Finance (Sydney, 1928) p 57; Rydge's Retail Merchandising Course pp 102-3.

[^4]: Draper Oct 1925 p 466.

inconsiderate. The Shop Assistants Magazine, aimed specifically at salespeople, reinforced the latent hostility felt for shoppers with misogynist descriptions of customers such as this:

She has protruding eyes and bulbous, battered features, which would only look well if closely covered with a bag that was not transparent.

The magazine approved of a talk given to salespeople on what the shopper expects from the person behind the counter, but commented that 'shoppers might also be taught something of what the person behind the counter has a right to expect.' Retail house magazines such as David Jones' Between Ourselves contain numerous jokes and anecdotes that poke fun at the customer and suggest a good deal of antipathy, perhaps of a class nature, between paid sales workers and unpaid consumption workers.

Susan Porter Benson has interpreted shop assistants' defiant and critical responses to customers as evidence of a resilient work culture within department stores which was resistant to managerial control. Benson's work is a valuable corrective to versions of women's history which stress women's passive victimisation in the workplace. Conflict between customers and salespeople undoubtedly testified to some degree of worker resistance. However, we need also to bear in mind retail management's pressing need to manage customers' behaviour through sales assistants, and its consequently acute observation of the customer-assistant

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56 Draper May 1920 p 104.

57 May 1926 p 34.

58 Shop Assistants Magazine May 1926 p 7.

59 Counter Cultures, pp 258-265.
relationship. Managers were not only fully aware of the antagonism between the two groups, but sought to exploit that tension to their own advantage.

Retailers openly agreed with their workers that shoppers were difficult and demanding. The Retail Traders Association of New South Wales, opposing a 1923 Shop Assistants Union attempt to abolish late night shopping, argued that the shop assistant's duties were not arduous, 'though perhaps irksome at times, in trying to please a thoughtless or irritable customer ...'. Berlei Limited also suggested its solidarity with its sales staff against a common enemy in a series of sales manuals published in 1926. Female customers, it asserted, were more 'touchy' than men, but nevertheless must be respected: using a military metaphor popular with sales and labour relations experts after World War I, the company told assistants that 'many a soldier has had to salute an unworthy officer.'

By implying the 'shared interests' of management and labour in combating the difficult customer, managers could use assistants as allies in their battle to manage shoppers. Despite the preponderance of female assistants by World War I, this alliance was based on a shared and negative stereotypical view of women that appears to have transcended class differences. Perhaps female assistants saw women across the counter as potential enemies because they believed customers had more autonomy to act as they pleased than they

[^0]: Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Oct 1923 p 90.
[^1]: Berlei Limited, Fifty-two Practical Aids to Better Salesmanship (a collection of salesmen's manuals, 1926).
had as employees of the store tied to a code of deference and service.

By appearing to sympathise with sales assistants in their battle with difficult shoppers, retailers could more effectively manipulate the assistant/customer relationship to their own advantage. If the customer was perceived to be a common foe, retailers might have more success in persuading sales staff to extract from the consumer the greatest possible co-operation by spending in the store as much as possible as quickly and as frequently as possible. The Draper noticed, for example, millinery saleswomen's glee in selling a particularly ugly hat to an unpopular customer: 'I sold that awful old model so-and-so to Mrs. so-and-so today - she did look a fright.'\(^{\text{62}}\) The journal suggested that this game could be turned into a useful object lesson by impressing on the saleswoman that as she knew more about hats than her customer, it was her duty to sell her a flattering hat so that she did not become a laughing-stock amongst her friends, and consequently shop elsewhere in future.\(^{\text{63}}\)

The same magazine noted the common practice among shop assistants of mimicking their customers behind their backs and humourously dramatising salesfloor interactions with disliked customers. The journal advised retailers to capitalise on this element of women's work culture by constructing similar playlets designed to teach some elements of sales technique.\(^{\text{64}}\) Sales workers' antipathy towards customers can be seen, therefore, as both affirming

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\(^{\text{62}}\) Draper June 1918 p 213.

\(^{\text{63}}\) Draper June 1918 p 213.

\(^{\text{64}}\) Draper May 1918 p 155.
assistants' identity as workers, and as an exploitable resource for sales managers in their struggle to control women on both sides of the counter.

Retailers' mechanisms of customer management were frequently less subtle and more coercive than the relatively covert strategies outlined above. More 'difficult' than the shopper who wasted the assistant's time or walked out without purchasing the proffered article, was the shopper who yielded to the store's exhortation to possess, but failed to pay. People's impulse to steal department store goods paralleled those of people who bought them; they were both responding to retailers' and advertisers' determined efforts to stimulate the desire for commodities and promote consumption. Retailers might induce in consumers the need to possess and the act of possession, but not the direction to buy. Consequently, theft rates, as Wolfgang Haug has argued, are as suggestive as sales figures in determining the effects of mass marketing techniques.

Similarly, apprehension rates and publicity surrounding shoplifting indicate the degree of retailers' concern and their need to establish mechanisms of customer surveillance. Retailers' attempts to curb customer and employee theft can therefore be interpreted as the physical and judicial arms of consumption and labour management.

It is difficult to chart with any certainty changes in the extent of shoplifting, or in the social composition of shoplifters. Police reports fail to differentiate

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shoplifting from the broader category of petty larceny; and, as Judith Allen has shown in her history of women and crime in New South Wales, criminal data probably tell us more about legislators, police and policing than they do about crime. However, it appears from scattered statistical evidence and impressionistic observations that rising concern about the extent of shoplifting coincided with the rise of the department store. The Draper and Warehouseman noted in 1893 that drapers encountered more female shoplifters than any other tradesmen.\footnote{Women, Crimes and Policing in New South Wales 1880-1939, PhD thesis, Macquarie University, 1984.}

\footnote{Aug 1893 p 5. The article's use of the term 'shoplifting' demonstrates that the word was used much earlier than Allen suggests (Women, Crimes and Policing, p 117).}

\footnote{Master Retailers Association minutes (Retail Traders Association of New South Wales archives) 19 Nov 1908.}

\footnote{The Water Police Court convicted 30 shoplifters, but it is not clear which stores this area covered. Department of the Attorney-General and of Justice, Special Correspondence Bundles -Papers re Shoplifting, First Offenders (Women) Act, and Women's Legal Status Bill 1905-1939 in Archives Office of New South Wales 3/3165 (hereafter Attorney-General's shoplifting file).}
similar urban/suburban pattern was evident in statistics collected in 1919. The apprehension of shoplifters was predominantly an inner-city phenomenon, probably centred on the large stores able to employ store detectives. By 1926 the number of shoplifting charges brought before the Central Police Court had apparently risen to 60 in six months, with one city store reporting an average 'daily catch' of four shoplifters. At sale time the rate of conviction rose dramatically, with the Central Police Court recording over 150 in one ten-week period.

Although figures are too unreliable to allow more than informed speculation, it seems that more women were apprehended for shoplifting in the late 1920s than they were before World War I. When a deputation from the Master Retailers Association urged the Minister of Justice to enforce harsher penalties for store theft in 1913, its members cited only male offenders. Almost one-half of the 264 shoplifters convicted at the Central Police Court were male. By the first six months of 1926, however, 97 per cent of convicted shoplifters were female; and in June to August

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70 See, for example, statement by the manager of Woolworths at Kogarah, Labor Daily 12 Sep 1934 clipping in Attorney-General's shoplifting file.


72 Memo from Detective Sergeant Thomas Thornley 27 Aug 1928 in Attorney-General's shoplifting file.


74 Returns of shoplifting convictions 1915 in Attorney-General's shoplifting file.
1928, 121 women were convicted compared to 32 men. These figures support Allen's conclusion that by the 1920s shoplifting was a female offence: simple larceny accounted for 75 per cent of all female arrests, but only 50 per cent of male arrests.

Allen suggests that the increase in the apprehensions of female shoplifters in the 1920s reflected the work of store detectives. The change in the sexual composition of those convicted of shoplifting may also have been due to the First Offenders (Women) Act of 1918 which allowed first-time female shoplifters to have their cases heard in camera and may have encouraged more stores to prosecute the 'gentler sex'. The Act may equally have reflected and codified in law the increasing proportion of women shoplifters.

Magistrates preferred the more lenient punishments required by the First Offenders Act (regular reports to the police, police surveillance and finger-printing) to the imposition of fines because a significant proportion of shoplifters were 'in comfortable circumstances, of good social standing, and some of them wealthy.' Members of the Retail Traders Association agreed that shoplifters were frequently the 'wives and daughters of reputable citizens, and are not driven by necessity to steal.' To what extent

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75 Memos from Detective Sergeant Thomas Thornley 16 June 1926 and 27 Aug 1928; Daily Guardian clipping 21 July 1926 in Attorney-General's shoplifting file.

76 'Women, Crimes and Policing', pp 119-121.

77 Memo from Chairman, Metropolitan Branch of Stipendiary Magistrates 9 Aug 1922 in Attorney-General's shoplifting file.

78 Minutes of deputation 11 June 1926 in Attorney-General's shoplifting file.
extent these perceptions reflected reality is unclear. In her sample of women imprisoned for property offences — a small proportion of those apprehended — Allen calculated that 60 per cent were married and involved in home duties, and a further 31 per cent were in domestic service.\textsuperscript{79}

This tells us little, however, of the economic circumstances of those who stole from the big stores. Press reports of shoplifting cases heard after 1929 suggest at least a mix of working and middle class women. Men were reported much less frequently, and were typically working men like printer Harry Savage.\textsuperscript{80} Where working women were cited (domestics, waitresses), they appeared not to be poor. Annie Jones, a 41-year-old domestic, had a ‘good’ husband in constant work, a good home and no children.\textsuperscript{81} Gertrude Holbrow was described as a ‘wealthy’ woman with an account at David Jones; Mary Dain was reported to live in a ‘fashionable residential’ in Neutral Bay, was married to an optician, received an income from her father, and owned over £1,000 in shares and bonds.\textsuperscript{82}

Such women may have appeared wealthy but perhaps lacked access to the family purse or an independent allowance. Shoplifting may in these cases have been an unconscious protest against economic dependence or a form of release from

\textsuperscript{79} ‘Women, Crimes and Policing’ p 125.

\textsuperscript{80} Sydney Morning Herald clipping 14 May 1929 in David Jones Archives.

\textsuperscript{81} Sydney Morning Herald 3 Dec 1929 in David Jones Archives.

\textsuperscript{82} Truth clipping 15 Dec 1929 in Attorney-General’s shoplifting file; Sydney Morning Herald clippings 3 Dec and 10 Dec 1929; Guardian clipping 27 Sep 1929 in David Jones Archives.
the social expectation that women be thrifty housewives willing to sacrifice their own pleasures for the well-being of their family. Women typically stole clothes, watches, jewellery, and articles of personal or home adornment, 'the extras that poverty or low wages precluded'. As William Leach has suggested, stealing possibly substituted for 'selfish' spending that may have more openly expressed a woman's resentment against her husband, mother or father.

For the purposes of this thesis, however, we are more concerned with reactions to the shoplifter than with her psychological motivation. There is in some of the press reports of shoplifting cases a tone of moral outrage that women who were apparently well-provided for by male breadwinners should be so ungrateful as to steal for no obvious economic reason. Their behaviour was seen to be irrational in an objectionable and typically female way. As the Truth moralised in its report of Mary Dain's case:

When the poverty stricken mother steals to cover the shivering bodies of her babies, or some food to quieten their starving cries, society is not too hard on her. But what can be said in amelioration of the women who, living in the lap of comparative luxury, calmly walk into our department stores and deliberately steal articles of clothing and jewellery, merely to satisfy their vanity?

Shoplifting was perceived by the 1920s as a female crime, or, as the Chairman of the Metropolitan Branch of Stipendiary Magistrates put it, as 'an offence to which females are

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5 Truth clipping 15 Dec 1929 in Attorney-General's shoplifting file.
peculiarly addicted." The Retail Traders Association, unconsciously revealing the implicit connection between shoplifting and consumption, complained that the First Offenders Act protected the woman who 'acts impulsively and yields to sudden temptation.' This woman was precisely the desirable object of their marketing policies.

Although police and magistrates tended to place much of the responsibility for shoplifting on the display methods and advertising techniques of retailers, they stressed that only weak-willed people were tempted. Other comments suggested that it was women who were particularly feeble-minded as a result of their 'vanity' and 'love of finery'. Shoplifters were described in the Sydney Morning Herald as women driven by an immoral and insatiable lust for expensive clothes. The paper suggested a causal relationship between an 'astounding' increase in female shoplifting and the advent of spring goods and new seasons' dresses in shop windows.

Kleptomania does not seem to have been taken up with much enthusiasm as a clinical explanation for shoplifting, although the Draper observed 'kleptomaniacal tendencies' in

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** Memo 22 Mar 1922 in Attorney-General's shoplifting file.


** Memo from Detective Inspector John Pattinson, 28 Aug 1928 in Attorney-General's shoplifting file; statement by Chief Stipendiary Magistrate Gates in Sydney Morning Herald 20 July 1929 in David Jones Archives.

** Sydney Morning Herald clipping 7 Dec 1929; Telegraph clipping 12 June 1929 in David Jones Archives.

** Sydney Morning Herald 31 May 1929.

** Sydney Morning Herald clipping 27 Sep 1929 in David Jones Archives.
two shoplifters in 1915 (McCathies refused to prosecute one woman because one of the directors knew her husband).\textsuperscript{72} An article on the subject in the \textit{Evening News} described kleptomaniacs as people with the primitive lack of moral control and selfishness of spoiled children - the 'nervous, querulous' type of customer in pathological form - who 'spot something, desire it, and take it.'\textsuperscript{73} The analogy with children and the implication of impulsiveness suggests kleptomania was viewed as feminine by definition.

How, then, did retailers attempt to dissuade customers from this undesirable practice? One of the shopwalker's duties was to keep an eye out for shoplifters, and the use of elevated cash desks also provided a means of customer surveillance. Many large stores employed their own detectives, many of them female, at least by 1902.\textsuperscript{74} Some had a detective staff as large as six by 1928.\textsuperscript{75} Farmer's House Inspector and Special Constable reported to the Attorney-General in 1921 that he had 17 years' experience in the job.\textsuperscript{76} The connection between policing and managing was strong. A former chief of the Criminal Investigation Branch

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Draper} Jan 1915 p 5; Feb 1915 p 33.

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Evening News} clipping 16 Aug 1926 in Attorney-General's shoplifting file.

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Draper} Sep 1902 p 329.

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} clipping 15 Jan 1913; memos from Sergeant A. Winter 8 Oct 1919, no. 2 Police Station 2 Oct 1919 and Metropolitan Superintendent 9 Oct 1919 in Attorney-General's shoplifting file; \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} 22 Aug 1928 p 15.

\textsuperscript{76} Report 21 Nov 1921 in Attorney-General's shoplifting file.
of New South Wales was appointed to an executive position on the staff of Farmers in 1928.\textsuperscript{77}

Details of these shoplifting store detection schemes are, unfortunately, difficult to find. However, it appears that at least one store kept a 'confession book' which offenders were required to sign if they were 'in poor circumstances, or in an advanced state of pregnancy' before being allowed to go home uncharged.\textsuperscript{78} Police officers investigating the case of Emily Austin, a detective instrumental in charging 107 people (10 of them male) with shoplifting at Mark Foys between 1926 and 1928, alleged that she followed customers around the store, waited for them to throw away their docket, then accused them of stealing and pressured them into signing the confession book.\textsuperscript{79} The charges against the zealous Emily Austin were never proven, but it is not unlikely that shoppers were occasionally harassed without cause.

This was almost certainly the case with a co-operative detective scheme organised by the major retailers in 1929 to stop theft by employees. Employers frequently complained in the same breath of dishonesty among both employees and customers, and used similar means of surveillance and coercion to deal with theft on both sides of the counter.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{77} Draper Apr 1928 p 158.

\textsuperscript{78} Notes from Under Secretary 12 Dec 1929 and Crown Solicitor 17 Oct 1928 in Attorney-General's shoplifting file.

\textsuperscript{79} Memo 9 Oct 1928 in Nancy Green case papers in Attorney-General's shoplifting file.

\textsuperscript{100} See, for example, Sydney Morning Herald clippings 15 Jan and 23 Jan 1913 in Attorney-General's shoplifting file; also press reports of court cases involving store employees, for example Sydney Morning Herald 1 May 1929 clipping in David Jones Archives.
Early in 1928 the Retail Traders Association investigated the practices of two inquiry agencies and recommended them to their members who wanted to investigate suspected theft and 'keep a check on efficiency'.\(^{101}\) These private detectives masqueraded as customers, keeping an eye out for assistants seen to be spending money regularly on sweets or engaged in similarly suspicious activities.\(^{102}\)

One 17 year-old woman employed on the handkerchief counter of a big store was questioned by detectives after making a mistake in ringing-up a sale. She was asked about her clothes, her parents and her private life, and was told she had stolen £150 over previous months. The detectives said if she refused to sign a confession she would be sent to a reformatory until she was 21.\(^ {103}\) The Shop Assistants Union insisted that this case was not unusual, and that many innocent assistants, most of them young women, were being unnecessarily intimidated and unfairly dismissed through the activities of the 'Purity Gang'.\(^ {104}\) Deaf to objections from the union and the Australian Labor Party – even the threat of a strike – the retailers responded that honest workers had nothing to fear, and that the purity gang was a 'godsend' to beleaguered proprietors.\(^ {105}\) The press, hostile to what it described as American business practices which smacked of the

\(^{101}\) Unmarked clipping (?Feb 1929) in David Jones Archives.

\(^{102}\) Unmarked clipping (?Feb 1929) in David Jones Archives.

\(^{103}\) *Sun* clipping 4 Mar 1929 in David Jones Archives.

\(^{104}\) *Sydney Morning Herald* 2 Feb 1929 clipping in David Jones Archives.

\(^{105}\) *Daily Telegraph* 12 Feb 1929 and *Sydney Morning Herald* 2 and 5 Feb 1929 clippings in David Jones Archives.
'methods of the agent provocateur', appeared to support the union in its outrage at 'Sydney Shop Girls Being Terrorised by Yankee "Purity Gang"'.

Retailers were in the meantime engaged in a more long-standing and potentially effective strategy to control customer behaviour. As they estimated that only one shoplifter in ten was caught, deterrence was held to be the best way of stopping those women tempted to steal. As early as 1909 the Master Retailers Association protested to the Attorney-General that sentences passed on convicted store thieves were too lenient, and a deputation to the Minister for Justice several years later argued that offenders should be punished by imprisonment rather than fines.

Under First Offenders (Women) Act of 1919, female first offenders had the right to have their cases heard in private and not to have reports published in newspapers. The Act was the result of pressure placed on legal institutions by various women's groups to cater for the special needs of women offenders, particularly shoplifters. It was this lack of publicity that concerned retailers as much as the

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106 Unmarked clipping (?Feb 1929) in Grace Brothers Archives.

107 Master Retailers Association minutes 19 Nov 1908 and 25 Feb 1909 in Retail Traders Association archives; report on deputation 1913 in Attorney-General's shoplifting file.

alleged leniency of the sentences. A further deputation of retailers in 1926 impressed upon the Minster that most shoplifters feared publicity more than any other form of punishment. Detective Keogh of Farmers asserted that before the Act, women were even prepared to 'sacrifice their bodies' to him to avoid the humiliation of having their husbands and families find out. Other women implored store managers not to inform their families, or offered to plead guilty if their husbands were not told of their offence. Retailers fully realised that they had a potent psychological weapon in the threat of public humiliation, and placed continual pressure on the Attorney-General to allow cases to be heard in open court.

They were finally successful in 1929 in having the First Offenders (Women) Act amended to exempt shoplifters from its protective provisions and hence require shoplifting cases to be heard in public and permit full details to be published in newspapers. The Retail Traders Association noted with satisfaction the publicity immediately given to such cases, and clippings which survive in the archives of David Jones and Grace Brothers suggest the relief with which retailers greeted the amendment. The amendment, however, appeared to have little effect on the rate of shoplifting. As the


110 Minutes of deputation 11 June 1926 in Attorney-General's shoplifting file.


Chairman of the Metropolitan Branch of Stipendiary Magistrates astutely commented to the Under Secretary for Justice in 1934, the effects of greater punishment were outweighed by the effects of the stores’ attractive advertising and display methods.\textsuperscript{113}

Shoplifting can be interpreted as a conscious or unconscious response to mass marketing policies. Although publicity given to cases after 1929 tended to emphasise the remorse and penitence of women who could offer no explanation for their actions, many women had no moral qualms in deliberately cheating the retailer of payment for the goods he offered so temptingly. Jessie Powell and Minnie Munro systematically stole from their store employers for three years: Munro stole shoes from Farmers while Powell took dresses from David Jones, then they would exchange goods.\textsuperscript{114} Other gangs of women clearly worked together on pre-meditated and ingenious strategies designed to deceive store detectives.\textsuperscript{115} Many paying customers strongly disapproved of shoplifting, however, while others joined the magistrates in criticising the display of small items on tables which placed temptation in people’s way.\textsuperscript{116}

It is difficult to determine the effect of retailers’ covert and overt strategies of customer control on the customers themselves. If the ubiquity in various printed

\textsuperscript{113} Memo 13 Sep 1934 in Attorney-General’s shoplifting file.

\textsuperscript{114} Sydney Morning Herald 1 May 1929 clipping in David Jones Archives.

\textsuperscript{115} Sydney Morning Herald 5 Mar 1929 clipping in David Jones Archives.

\textsuperscript{116} Sun 5 Jan 1928 clipping in Grace Brothers Archives; Sydney Morning Herald 25 Apr 1929 p 4.
sources of customers' complaints about poor service and inattentive assistants is any indication of consumers' responses, retailers were engaged in a constant battle to ensure shoppers' co-operation in the sales transaction. Several examples can also be cited of shoppers who refused to be duped by sales tactics, or who criticised store management for poor stock management.\(^{117}\) One of the most common forms of customer subversion of management's intentions was their practice of 'looking around' and handling the merchandise without buying. An article in the Shop Assistants Magazine, for example, deplored the habit of flappers who tried on numerous hats with no intention of buying.\(^{118}\) Women frequently turned the approbation (approval) system to their advantage. A cloak given to a potential customer on approval would be returned to the shop with a lace handkerchief and a theatre ticket in the pocket, indicating that it had been worn for a special occasion.\(^{119}\)

Given that the attempts by retailers and sales experts to understand and categorise shoppers constituted a discourse which was largely internal to the trade, the consequent stereotyping probably had little direct effect on shoppers, except by deepening the rift between customers and sales assistants. In a way perhaps contrary to the intentions of the constructors, the creation of a female role devoted to consumption did, as the following chapter shows in more

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\(^{117}\) Letter to Edward Lloyd Jones from William Newman 13 July 1891, BRG 1/24 in David Jones Archives; Shop Assistants Magazine Oct 1926, 'Shop Gossip' column; Draper Dec 1915 p 375.

\(^{118}\) Shop Assistants Magazine May 1926; see also Draper Feb 1920 p 55.

\(^{119}\) Draper Jan 1902 p 5 and editorial Feb 1902.
detail, give many women the authority to voice their opinion on political issues. However, the stereotype of the difficult shopper contributed and lent support to other restrictive and unfavourable public representations of women.

By the late 1920s the earlier criticism of the inconsiderate and wealthy shopper had been superceded by retailers' recognition that it was profitable to attempt to analyse and explain consumer behaviour on a mass scale. They brought crude concepts of collective psychology to bear on the problem of the 'difficult' customer which, because the majority of department store customers were female, inevitably blended with beliefs about female nature. The Draper and Warehouseman argued in 1894, for example, that women were temperamentally suited to the excitement of city shopping:

> Men find it difficult to understand the more highly-strung, nervous temperaments of women, the fits of depression many of them are subject to, the absolute craving for change, and for the excitement and bustle of a crowd.\(^{120}\)

Dominant in the sales experts' analysis of feminine character was women's presumed irrationality and impetuousness - features which the honest and dishonest, the accommodating and the difficult customer held in common.

It was on this perception of women as pliant and suggestible that retailers based their strategies aimed at inducing levels of consumption appropriate to an age of mass production. Men constituted what retailers considered to be normal and rational but less useful consumers. Retailers held that there was a close association between femininity and excitability which made women more receptive to mass

\(^{120}\) Draper and Warehouseman Nov 1894 p 8.
marketing techniques, while masculinity exerted constraint. It was women who shopped, rather than men who bought, who constituted the human and ideological resource for retail expansion in the twentieth century.
CHAPTER 6

SHOPPERS AND THE BIG STORES

Women's responses to Sydney's big stores and the mass marketing techniques they employed were critical to their success. Always aware that they were catering to an audience overwhelmingly composed of women - male shoppers, they assumed, were not sufficiently interested in shopping to express an opinion - store managers' deference to the customer was more than a matter of courtesy. Any proprietor who ignored his customers' reactions to stock choices, display methods or the behaviour of employees risked financial disaster. The extent to which the actions and attitudes of customers materially affected retailing practice, however, is open to question. How much control did consumers exert over the conditions of consumption (prices, quality, choice of goods and shopping environment)? Did women approve or disapprove of the new methods of selling drapery commodities?

There are, unfortunately, few sources which allow us to answer these questions with any confidence. If women infrequently left records of their thoughts on any subject, then they appear to have done so even more rarely on the matter of shopping. Perhaps like other domestic tasks, shopping was considered to be too mundane to have warranted inscription in the historical record. The little we can ascertain about women's views on consumption, moreover, is reduced even further when we interrogate the sources specifically for responses to the big stores. What follows
is a necessary but patchy account, based on fragmentary evidence, of women's consumer consciousness.

The clearest expression of the potential power of the consumer can be found in retail trade literature. Retailers' recognition of the need to take account of customers' responses probably dates back to the beginnings of systematic marketing in the 1890s. The institution of industry organisations and trade journals after the turn of the century consolidated this awareness into retail policy. The Draper of Australia acknowledged the importance of women's opinions in 1907 when it carried an article written by a Lady Shopper on 'On the Other Side of the Counter'.¹ The journal continued to advise proprietors to listen to the opinions of its customers throughout the 1910s and 1920s. The editor remarked in 1917, for example, that he noticed his own womenfolk complaining of assistants' rudeness and ignorance, and that this constituted a problem which drapers should take seriously.² An article written by a female customer in 1921 suggested that retailers were particularly sensitive to customer criticisms of harsh labour practices. The author came out of one shop 'nursing an ugly suspicion of the employer' that his women employees did not get a fair deal. She chided retailers: 'The customer is not necessarily blind or deaf, because good manners generally require her to be dumb.'³

¹ Aug 1907 pp 324-5. See also Draper Dec 1907 for an article on 'the customer's point of view'.
² Draper Jan 1917 p 2.
³ Draper Nov 1921 p 480.
By the mid-1920s sales writers such as Herbert Casson also stressed the need to study women's opinions and pander to their wishes. The Draper reproduced a survey carried out on English shoppers in 1926 which found that 27 per cent of those questioned complained of slow service, short change, unsatisfactory goods, high prices, or assistants pushing the goods. Rydge's Business Journal urged retailers to consider the customers' opinion on the value of goods when deciding on the mark-up. Similarly, the Sydney Publicity Club (a group of advertising personnel) heard talks on 'A Woman's View of Advertising' and 'What Housewives Expect from Advertising' in 1930. The Draper summed it up by stating that 'if [the wife of the wage-earner] is happy then she will make you, if she finds the atmosphere uncongenial she will break you.'

Spokesmen for the retail industry may have given an inflated impression of consumer power in their enthusiasm to spread the doctrine of mass marketing. Several recent studies of women's relationship to consumption and the fashion industry, however, take a similar position. William Leach has argued in relation to American department stores that women in general and feminists in particular exhibited at best an ambivalent attitude to consumption, at worst positive enthusiasm. Citing the overt collaboration between

* Draper July 1926 p 286-7 (editorial).
* Rydge's Business Journal, Rydge's Retail Merchandising Course (Sydney, 1937) p 378.
* Draper Sept 1928 p 422.
suffragists and department store managements, Leach concludes that many women 'thought they had discovered a more exciting, more appealing life, freedom remade within a consumer matrix.'

Leach's positive interpretation of the effect of the 'culture of consumption' on women's self-determination is shared by two recent studies of fashion. Fashion, according to Valerie Steele, constituted a source of erotic expression and self-identity; to Elizabeth Wilson, women were able to counter the dominant aesthetic decreed by the industry with their own freely-chosen style.¹⁰ Both implicitly deny that women have been or are victims of the fashion and retail industries. But, as Robyn Cooper points out in her review of these books, fashion is more than just a game. It can also be physically and psychologically oppressive.¹¹ Women could only derive pleasure from the consumption game if they agreed to accept the rules defined by those with capital and control in the fashion and retail industry, that is, by men. The evidence of this chapter suggests that most women in the period to 1930 had little option but to accept those rules, while a significant minority sought to change them.

Perhaps only one aspect of mass retailing practice provoked women to voice a confident, co-ordinated and persistent critique: shop assistants' working conditions. The involvement of upper and middle class women in the Sydney


early closing movement dated back as far as 1866, when a number of wealthy women subscribed to the Saturday Half Holiday Association.\textsuperscript{12} When the movement revived with increased political pressure in the late 1890s, women were again in the forefront as members of the executive committee of the Early Closing Association of New South Wales and as contributors on the subject to newspapers and publications such as the \textit{Australian Economist}.\textsuperscript{13} The National Council of Women of New South Wales included a desire to ameliorate the working conditions of shop assistants among its objectives when it was established in 1896.\textsuperscript{14}

In many ways the interest of women reformers in shop assistants was an extension of their general desire to eliminate sweating and protect women workers from physical, moral and economic abuse.\textsuperscript{15} However, female advocates of early closing had direct and almost daily contact with women working in shops in a way they could have had only rarely with factory workers. They used their own shopping experiences and observations to add force to their arguments for shorter working hours in shops.

\textsuperscript{12} Farmer & Co., \textit{Ninety-seven Years} (Sydney, 1937), Australian National Library.

\textsuperscript{13} Early Closing Association of New South Wales, \textit{A Few Facts Concerning the Hours Worked by Shop Assistants in Sydney and Suburbs} (1898); article by Miss McKenny on early closing in \textit{Australian Economist} 24 Nov 1898 p 86. See also Denise Roberts, 'The Movement for the Early Closing of Shops in New South Wales 1890-1899', BA Hons thesis, University of New South Wales, 1981.

\textsuperscript{14} National Council of Women of New South Wales. Report of meeting held to establish the Council June 26 1896.

Rose Scott, Vice President of the Early Closing Association and one of its most vocal proponents, consistently referred to conditions with which many women would have been familiar:

A visit to a well-known shop in Sydney during bargain sale week would reveal to many that the suffocating atmosphere at night, with the flaming gas jets above the crowds of people in the shop, is quite enough to prevent many customers from going there even for one night.\(^\text{14}\)

If customers found shopping a trial under these conditions, how much worse was it for their sisters across the counter? Another advocate of early closing decided to investigate for herself allegations of poor ventilation and excessive hours at Mark Foy's as she 'had to go in any case'.\(^\text{17}\) In her report on Scottish shop girls printed in the *Woman's Voice* in 1895 Margaret Irwin asked her colleagues:

> How many of us think when we stand or sit at one side of the counter, and perhaps remark to the quiet girl who stands upon the other that "It is a hot day", that she has been standing there for hours, serving exacting customers, until the shop must seem a dreary blur of heat and color.\(^\text{18}\)

Rose Scott was unusual, however, in explicitly criticising male employers for their exploitation of female workers. In a speech given at the newly-formed Glen Innes branch of the Women's Political Educational League in 1902 Scott urged her listeners to 'Walk through the gaols, visit the shops, streets and factories, enter the home - everywhere woman's life and happiness are at the mercy of individual

\(^{14}\) Article on early closing in *Daily Telegraph* Dec 8 1898 based on a paper read by Rose Scott at a meeting of the National Council of Women, Scott Papers MLMSS 38/50.

\(^{17}\) Letter to Gertie [?] from Blance Uther n.d. [?1890s] in Rose Scott's correspondence MLMSS 38/58X, pp 33-5.

\(^{18}\) *Woman's Voice* Feb 9 1895 pp 170-1.
man. In an emotional speech on early closing Scott exclaimed impatiently:

... what a farce it was for People to talk the claptrap nonsense of Home being a Woman's Sphere when here, before me, were young women, representing 100s of other young women, whose tired souls could only see life as a treadmill, with sometimes insulting and brutal men as task Masters.

Scott was also one of the few feminists of the 1890s to record her observation that female shop assistants were employed for their appearance 'merely to add to the other shop decorations'.

Annie Duncan was one of the first female inspectors to be employed under the 1896 Factories and Shops Act and the 1899 Early Closing Act to oversee women's working conditions in the city. She was subsequently joined in the inspectorate by other reformers such as Belle Golding. Through their regular, published and often critical reports to the state government, these women contributed to a feminist critique of shop working conditions and brought them to public notice.

Ten years after its passage, Duncan criticised the 1899 early closing legislation for having too many loopholes and insufficient provisions for enforcement. Women, she argued, should not allow 'commercial competition to rule the situation ... competition which attains its end by sweating women and children and ultimately men, must be controlled if

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19 Glenn Innes Examiner 9 Dec 1902 in Scott Papers MLMSS 38/43.


21 Scott papers ML 38/28 p 269.

22 Reports on the Working of the Factories and Shops Act 1897 p 1373.
humanly possible..." The provision of seats for female shop assistants was a further feminist demand provided for but not adequately enforced under the Factories and Shops Act. It continued to be the subject of complaint by female inspectors and the Women’s Political Educational League until at least 1906.

Although state legislation forced retailers to improve wages and working conditions to a certain extent, women’s organisations continued to voice a concern for female shop assistants. The National Council of Women, Labor Women and the Militant Women’s Group were among those groups that demanded the abolition of the late shopping night throughout the 1920s. The Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) attempted to meet shop women’s recreational and welfare needs after 1916, usually with the blessing of store managements, and was joined in this project by the National Council of Women in the 1920s. The Young Men’s Christian Association, by contrast, appeared to have had no interest in shop assistants in particular or in industrial welfare work in general. This suggests that shop reform was perceived

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24 President’s address Nov 5 1906, Woman’s Political Educational League, Rose Scott Papers MLMSS 38/43.


27 YMCA Sydney, Annual Reports 1904-1923.
to be the province of middle and upper class women, just as
the stores themselves were largely female terrain.

Some groups of women extended this critique of shop
working conditions into a desire to widen the opportunities
and education of young women in retail employment. The
Housewives Association and the National Council of Women
initiated a campaign in support of training schemes and
vocational guidance for female shop assistants. May Matthews
of the Council’s Standing Committee for Professions and
Trades of Women reported in 1919 that the extensive
employment and exploitation of juniors by many retail houses
was an acute problem. Miss T. Thorpe represented the
Council in the enquiry into apprenticeship for junior shop
assistants set up by the New South Wales Board of Trade in
1925. The Council also recommended the establishment of
a Vocational Guidance Bureau, a proposal supported by the
Retail Traders Association which was seeking to improve the
efficiency of the staff selection process. The
Housewives Association agreed that vocational training was
essential for the career development of women working in
shops and praised David Jones for introducing the country’s
first training scheme for juniors in 1919. Proper training,
according to the Association, enabled a woman to advance in

\[28\] National Council of Women of New South Wales,

\[29\] Retail Traders Association of New South Wales
Journal Sep 1925 p 83.

\[30\] National Council of Women of New South Wales,
Biennial Report 1925-6 p 17.
her retail career to become a buyer or even a member of the Board.\textsuperscript{31}

All this concern for female shop workers, however, appears to have resulted in only minor improvements. Despite material improvements in working conditions since the turn of the century, shopwork was still tiring and uncomfortable in the late 1920s, as the Militant Women’s Group pointed out:

No one who has been into a big store at the busy hours can cherish any illusion as to working under such conditions - badly-ventilated rooms, insufficient accommodation and the harrowing supervision of the "floorwalker".\textsuperscript{32}

The Group’s description is so similar to those of shop reformers in the 1890s that it is hard to escape the conclusion that forty years of feminist agitation had had little material effect on retailers’ labour management policies. The plight of saleswomen might have been the major source of shoppers’ criticism of the management of the big stores, but it was also a sphere over which retailers were determined to retain their control.

It is possible that women’s relative lack of success in the employment area was attributable to a failure of strategy. The consumer’s equivalent to the strike weapon was a boycott of stores seen to be engaging in unfair labour practices. Although many early closing reformers urged women not to indulge in late night shopping out of consideration for the assistants, Sydney women appear not to have seriously contemplated shopping boycotts as a means of exerting their power as consumers. Unlike the United States, where a

\textsuperscript{31} Ours Aug 1922 p 19.

\textsuperscript{32} Militant Women’s Group, Sydney, Woman’s Road to Freedom (1927) p 16.
National Consumers League was established in 1892 to pressure retail employers into improving working conditions for shop assistants, there was no formal association of consumers in this period.\[^33\]

The Civic League, an organisation established by members of the Women's Club, considered forming a consumer's association in 1909 when Miss E. Fry presented a paper on the Consumers Leagues of the United States, France, Switzerland and Germany.\[^34\] Members agreed with the aims of the Leagues and resolved to ask other women's organisations to join them in forming a similar group in Sydney. Before they could do so, however, the Civic League appears to have run into organisational difficulties and there was no further reference to the proposal after 1909.\[^35\]

Women's involvement in consumers' co-operatives seems to have been equally tentative and short-lived. A Women's Co-operative Society with membership restricted to women only was established in 1911 to carry on wholesale and retail business and cover 'all matters of benefit or interest to women'.\[^36\] Sadly, other than the book of rules, no other records exist for the Society. It is possible, however, that its members participated in the Australian Congress of


\[^34\] Civic League minute book 18 Aug 1909, MLMSS 2024/1.


\[^36\] Women's Co-operative Society Ltd, *Rules* (Balmain, 1911).
Consumers' Co-operative Societies which met in Sydney in 1920, at which a female speaker from a Balmain Society argued for the involvement of women in the co-operative movement.\textsuperscript{37}

Women shareholders interested themselves, if only briefly, in the management of the Civil Service Co-operative Society Stores, established in 1871 'for the supply of household necessaries for any [person] employed in the public service'.\textsuperscript{38} Although the Civil Service Stores prospered into the 1920s, the business struck financial and managerial problems in 1929. At a 'stormy' shareholders meeting, women criticised the management 'from the housewife's viewpoint'.\textsuperscript{39} A subsequent meeting of 60 female shareholders agreed to support two candidates for the board of directors and discussed methods of improving the store's performance.\textsuperscript{40} To no avail, apparently, as the business failed shortly after.

Such direct intervention by women in store management on the basis of their social role as consumers was, however, rare. A more commonly-utilised medium through which women could publicly express their expertise as shoppers was in popular print. Shopping columns for women began to appear in newspapers and women's magazines after the turn of the century. These typically contained fashion information and details of the major stores' goods, and were written by

\textsuperscript{37} Australian Congress of Consumers' Co-operative Societies (Sydney, 1920) [My thanks to Meredith Foley for this reference].

\textsuperscript{38} Cyclopedia of New South Wales (Sydney, 1907) p 681.

\textsuperscript{39} Daily Telegraph 3 Oct 1929 clipping in David Jones Archives.

\textsuperscript{40} Sydney Morning Herald 20 Sept and 21 Sept 1929 clippings in David Jones Archives.
'Housewife' or 'Shopper'.

The Draper also instituted a series of columns written by a Woman Shopper in 1914, and the Commonwealth Home ran a 'Shop Window' page in the late 1920s. Several women's magazines offered the services of an expert shopper who would undertake to buy specified articles for readers at the lowest possible price.

Shopping columns and services not only provided employment and print exposure to individual women but also legitimated shopping as a socially useful activity for women. It was, moreover, a social role from which women might derive considerable self-esteem as the undisputed experts on fashion, style and bargain-hunting. A word of approval from an influential fashion writer could substantially increase a store's turnover. These columns gave a few shoppers the opportunity to express their opinions on the goods offered by the big stores, opinions which were, almost without exception, entirely favourable.

The tide turned briefly and temporarily against unrestrained consumption during World War I. The wartime emergency, as Meredith Foley has shown in her study of women's organisations' promotion of household economy, prompted many women to speak out publicly against excessive consumption. The Women's Commonwealth Patriotic Association formalised this theory in a thrift campaign which

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41 For example, column by Housewife in Sydney Mail 13 Sept 1905; 'Purely Business' column by Shopper in Australian Worker 30 Jan 1929; Women's Column in Sydney Morning Herald 30 Sept 1918.

42 For example, Ours July 1921; My Lady's Journal Feb 1906; Helen's Weekly Oct 1927.

extended to clothes and fashion, a campaign which can hardly have pleased retailers in its insistence on economy, conservatism and the advantages of tailored over ready-made garments.\textsuperscript{**} The criticism of newspaper columnists, such as that levelled in the Sydney Morning Herald's Women's Column against extravagant fashions, might also have had a depressive effect on sales.\textsuperscript{**} Any slump in wartime sales, however, was more likely to have been the result of rising prices than the exhortations of shopping experts.

The War also encouraged women's organisations to argue for preference for British and Australian made goods and to urge a boycott of articles manufactured in Germany.\textsuperscript{**} On this occasion the interests of women and those of retailers were fully in accord. Women's promotion of locally manufactured goods continued in peacetime. The Retail Traders Association of New South Wales co-operated in 1929 with the YWCA, the Feminist Club, the Professional Women's Association and the Women Workers Association to promote Empire Shopping Week.\textsuperscript{*} The women's magazine Herself and Labor Women also supported the campaign to consume Australian made goods.\textsuperscript{**}

\textsuperscript{**} Women's Commonwealth Patriotic Association, series of pamphlets on Thrift, 'Thrift in Dress' (Sydney, n.d.?1915-1917).

\textsuperscript{*} Sydney Morning Herald 30 Sept 1918.


\textsuperscript{*} Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal May 1928 p 3 and Feb 1929 p 5.

\textsuperscript{**} Worker 13 Mar 1929 p 15; Australian Labor Party, minutes of Second Interstate Conference of Labor Women at Canberra, May 1930; Herself June 1930 p 34.
The increased cost of commodities during the War and the desire of some women to impress on government that it was the wage-earner’s wife who bore the brunt of its effects led to the formation of the Housewives Association of New South Wales in 1917. Its objects included procuring ‘by every lawful means the reduction of excessive prices of necessary commodities’, including boycotts if necessary. In practice, however, the Housewives Association appears not to have organised boycotts, despite pressure from other Sydney women’s groups, the example of boycotts against high-priced fashion goods by women in the United States, Europe and New Zealand, and the militancy of Melbourne women who violently demonstrated against high prices in 1917.

The Housewives Association instead devoted most of its energies to establishing co-operative buying schemes for tea and sugar and setting up suburban food markets. It is significant that the Housewives Association (and other women’s organisations such as the National Council of Women) were more interested in food than in clothing or other

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47 The Housewife Magazine Feb-Mar 1934. See also petition from the Housewives Association of New South Wales praying that the House deal with the high cost of living, New South Wales Parliamentary Papers 1919 v 4 (4th session) p 697.


dramery commodities. The Association’s indifference or reluctance to tackle the large drapery stores was identified by the Lone Hand in 1920, when it suggested that it ought to show the difference between the necessary cost of distribution, and the unnecessary luxury of distribution, such as the costly furnishing of show-rooms, the expensive clothing of attendants, and so on, the price of luxuries coming out of the price we pay for clothes and furniture. Citing the example of a coat which sold wholesale at £7/5/- and retail at £10, the journal argued that the difference represented a ‘fairly large sum for the retailer’s profit’. The Lone Hand article is a rare example of direct criticism of the inequalities created by mass marketing.

A second major concern of the Housewives Association was to ensure female representation on government enquiries into matters related to consumption. Mrs Jordan, for example, argued that the basic wage should be determined using the evidence of women witnesses who had daily experience in coping with the cost of living. This suggestion was adopted at the New South Wales Board of Trade enquiry into the cost of living for adult female workers in 1919, which appointed a committee of four women (two representing the

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53 See, for example, the National Council of Women of Tasmania’s proposal for Housewifery Schools reported in the Examiner 14 Mar 1907 in Scott Papers MLMSS 38/50.

54 Lone Hand Feb 1920 p 38 [my thanks to Meredith Foley for this reference].

55 Lone Hand Feb 1920 p 38.

56 New South Wales Board of Trade, Cost of Living Enquiry, Males and Females General, 1920, transcripts of proceedings in Archives Office of New South Wales 2/5775 p 487.
employers, two the employees) to advise it on the cost of
women's clothing, boots and toilet requisites.\textsuperscript{67}

Once the principle of female representation had been
established, women witnesses - Housewives Association
representatives prominent among them - gave evidence of
clothing costs, quality and requirements at cost of living
enquiries, basic wage hearings and the Necessary Commodities
Control Commission. They justified their presence by arguing
that not only did women spend the household income but that
they did not approve of four or five men deciding
whether a bit of lace on a working girl's camisole
was a reasonable expenditure when considering her
basic wage. Men, in fact, could not decide the
basic wage for women ...\textsuperscript{68}

Men, in other words, were incapable of understanding women's
needs and motivations in buying clothes.

Female representatives on government enquiries into
income and expenditure tended to reinforce retailers'
 attempts to maximise consumption. By helping to create a
'regimen', or standard set of clothing and other personal
requirements - nearly all of which were sold by the large
stores - these enquiries institutionalised the idea that
working women had to possess certain commodities to achieve a
minimum standard of respectability. Most female
representatives believed, moreover, that quality rather than
cost was the crucial factor to be considered when deciding on
a working woman's basic clothing requirements. Labour women
argued that the middle class women who gave evidence at these

\textsuperscript{67} New South Wales Board of Trade, \textit{Compendium of Living
Wage Declarations and Reports} 1921 pp 53-4.

\textsuperscript{68} Kate Dwyer speaking at the first interstate
conference of the National Council of Women, unmarked
newspaper clipping in Scott Papers MLMSS 38/50.
enquiries did not understand the needs of working class women. Mary Gilmore, writing 'For Worker Women' in the Australian Worker, criticised the National Council of Women for ignoring the clothing needs of women workers who were married, and suggested this was because the Council disapproved of married women in the workforce.\textsuperscript{59}

The extension of credit facilities, especially the cash order system, also concerned some women in the late 1920s. The National Council of Women first discussed the credit issue in 1928, and two years later joined a deputation of women to the Attorney-General which claimed that consumers were being exploited by the hire purchase system.\textsuperscript{60} According to the deputation, 60 per cent of furniture and 75 per cent of sewing machines were bought on hire purchase and purchasers were being 'unfairly deprived of property for which they had almost completed payment'.\textsuperscript{61} However, these women and those who gave evidence at government cost of living enquiries directed their criticism at the state, finance companies and employers in general rather than at the retail and advertising industries. They were also decisively in the minority. A much larger group of women supported retailers who presented the Minister for Justice with a petition signed by 139,000 housewives and 217,000 unionists in support of the coupon system.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{59} Worker May 27 1920 p 9.
\textsuperscript{60} National Council of Women, Biennial Report 1926-8 p 22; Sydney Morning Herald 15 Aug 1930 p 11.
\textsuperscript{61} Sydney Morning Herald 15 Aug 1930 p 11.
\textsuperscript{62} Sydney Morning Herald 29 Mar 1928 p 11.
Direct and specific criticisms of the big stores, albeit muted, began to appear in magazines and women's organisation records only in the late 1920s. References to department stores in organisation minutes and reports are exceptional, cryptic and their meaning often unclear. The Women's League of New South Wales and the Labor Women's Conference both protested at 'unhealthy' basements in city retail houses. The Country Women's Association of New South Wales sent copies of unspecified resolutions passed at their 1929 conference to the Retail Traders Association, but 'in spite of repeated applications, no satisfaction [was] obtained.' And the Home magazine's 'Clearing House' page, devoted to the 'philosophy of home-making', suggested as a possible topic of debate 'big shops v. little shops - monopoly or competition?' The debate was not taken up and no further reference to the subject was made in subsequent issues.

Less ambivalent was public criticism of David Jones' new Elizabeth Street store opened in 1927. Customers' negative responses were largely on aesthetic grounds. The store managers had done their utmost to employ modern concepts of interior design and display and were consequently dismayed to discover that customers found it 'barn-like', 'bald' and 'drab', with the 'barrenness of a storehouse'. Moreover,

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The composition floor, with its appearance of ingrained dirt and potholes, makes no appeal to the woman used to regard her own highly-polished floors as the acme of refinement and cleanliness. Lack of resilience and foot comfort does not contribute to popularity.**

Women also complained that the stairs were like factory fire escapes and the positioning of the lifts forced them to walk a long way from the entrances.*** The reaction to the store suggests that by the 1920s shoppers had a clear idea of what they expected in a modern department store, and that they preferred luxury and comfort to utilitarian design.

These untypical but critical voices were supported by an embryonic consciousness among feminists that women made an economically vital contribution to the social process of consumption. Constance Davey, awarded a Master of Arts in mathematics and economics in 1918 and later a PhD in psychology, was one of the first to formulate a feminist theory of consumption in her article on 'The Problem of Spending' in the YWCA's Association Woman in 1919. Davey argued for an 'economy of right choice and an economy of right use', economies which women failed to exercise when they spent their incomes on luxuries or harmful goods. They could learn to satisfy their wants by the 'harmonious consuming' of goods which cost relatively little. In an attempt to endow her theory with the authority of science and the language of economics, Davey concluded that women must strive for 'the greatest surplus utility over ... cost, and

** Commonwealth Home 2 Apr 1928 pp 29-30.
this is found by constantly considering their marginal values.\(^7\)

Other spokeswomen supported the argument for woman's intervention in the economy based on her domestic role and the ideology of thrift.\(^7^0\) Janet Mitchell B.A., Thrift Service Director to the Government Savings Bank of New South Wales in 1928, and also a member of the YWCA, argued in Rydge's Business Journal that as women were the nation's major purchasers, 'the greatest field for the thrift education of the future lies in the economic education of women.'\(^7^1\) This could be achieved through training courses in Household and Personal Finance and, within the family, through mutually-determined family budgets and the education of children in financial awareness.\(^7^2\) Mitchell recognised women's power as consumers, therefore, only to restrict its application in ways which serviced capital and the social order.

Feminists Florence Fourdrinier and Mary Moss articulated a more radical theoretical connection between shopping and politics. Fourdrinier edited the official organ of the Housewives Association, Ours. A Paper for Australian Homes, which in 1921 pointed out that the word 'economy' derived from the Greek for the regulation and management of the household. She suggested that as women were better

\(^7\) Association Woman Dec 1919 pp 5-6. For details of Constance Davey's life see Australian Dictionary of Biography v 8 pp 216-7.

\(^7^0\) Foley, 'The Women's Movement in New South Wales and Victoria' ch 4.

\(^7^1\) Rydge's Business Journal Nov 1928 p 737.

\(^7^2\) Rydge's Business Journal Nov 1928 p 738.
shoppers than men because of their association with the principles of household management, they should vote as carefully and intelligently as they shopped.\textsuperscript{73}

The feminist journal Herself similarly put forward strong arguments in favour of a female politics based on a theory of consumption. Mary Moss described how industrialisation had ousted women from their productive function with the result that men were now the producers and women the consumers. The art of right buying, however, was just as important as the art of right producing, and women must use their consumption powers wisely to improve the quality of goods on sale.\textsuperscript{74} Moss went on to explain in a second article that commercial interests had exploited feminine qualities derived from women's responsibility for feeding, clothing and sheltering human beings. She argued that this femininity ought to be applied to govern the sphere of production as well as consumption in a balance of Head and Heart.\textsuperscript{75}

It would be mistaken, however, to give the impression that critical voices such as these represented anything other than a minority view. Just as Leach found for American women, Sydney shoppers' responses to department stores appeared to be overwhelmingly positive. Although Sydney feminists apparently did not collaborate with retailers to the same degree as their American sisters, organisations such as the Country Women's Association and the YWCA did not refuse the stores' occasional donations of money and

\textsuperscript{73} Ours Dec 1921 p 2.

\textsuperscript{74} Herself June 1928 (n.p.).

\textsuperscript{75} Herself July 1928 p 9.
facilities. The National Council of Women of New South Wales, for example, held several lunches in Farmer's restaurant in 1923-4.Æ As this chapter has suggested, the interests of women's groups and those of retailers frequently coincided.

Women's organisations commonly helped finance their publications by carrying advertisements for the big stores, often with apparently incongruous results. The Woman, for example, carried a large advertisement for Grace Brothers' sale alongside an article supporting the Early Closing Bill in 1892.ÆÆ Similarly advertisements for Anthony Hordern & Sons assuring readers that it offered 'the best value in the land' appeared on the back covers of the Women's Commonwealth Patriotic Association's 1915-17 series of pamphlets on thrift.Æ‰ Most of the big stores also co-operated with the Association's National Economy Exhibition of 1917.Æ‰

With some exceptions, then, women appeared to embrace the new stores and their marketing techniques with alacrity. However, Leach's explanation that women found in the 'culture of consumption' a source of individual expression and fulfilment that blunted their critical faculties and subverted feminist objectives is useful only with qualifications. First, as this chapter has shown in detail, critical responses to large retail structures may have been largely submerged beneath a more dominant acceptance, but

ÆÆ Woman Feb 1892 p 10.
Æ‰ For example, 'Thrift in Dress'.
Æ‰ National Economy Exhibition. Official Catalogue (Sydney, 1917) [my thanks to Meredith Foley for this reference].
they certainly existed from at least the 1890s. Some women used their role as shoppers to legitimate a feminist critique of capitalist social relations.

We also need a theory of consumer politics which is more sensitive to conditions and ideologies existing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Leach’s analysis implies that feminists ought to have been critical of mass marketing policies in the same way that the women’s movement of the 1970s challenged the exploitation of women in advertising. But feminists’ awareness of advertising’s use of female sexuality was largely unarticulated, if not absent, before 1930. Nor did Australian women of the early twentieth century have a tradition of a critical discourse of consumption on which to draw, as European and American women had. Mass marketing, in any case, did not develop into big business in Australia until the 1920s; few feminists or socialists would have realised the full implications of consumerism in its formative stages.

It was rare, moreover, for any woman or man to question the superior abilities of men as managers of business. In an article in Newspaper News, the secretary to the Managing Editor of the Evening News asked why men edited women’s magazines. Drawing an analogy with men’s control of the fashion industry, Evelyn Caspersz concluded that ‘men can see

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80 There appears to have been very little reaction from Australian intellectuals to consumerism and its social effects, or awareness of American or European critiques. Compare with the rich French literature (Rosalind Williams, Dream Worlds. Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) and similar sources for the United States (Daniel Horowitz, The Morality of Spending, Attitudes Towards the Consumer Society in America 1875–1940, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985).
what a woman cannot see about herself in particular, about all women in general. They are women's opposites.' Just as few women disputed the right of talented male designers such as Paul Poiret to rule the world of fashion, few challenged the male hegemony of marketing, display and commercial design.

It was also understandable that women (including feminists) viewed the developments in retailing after 1880 as incontrovertible proof of material and social progress. The expansion of the large stores was a major source of civic and national pride in a period in which many Australians wanted evidence that their country could compete in the world of international commerce. As the Housewives Association put it in 1922, 'continuous improvements in methods of production and distribution are the only means by which a country may hope to gain supremacy.' The 'Shop Window' columnist of the Commonwealth Home lauded improvements in shop architecture which she or he attributed to the emancipation of women and the making of shopping into a fine art. 'The modern store', the writer asserted, 'has passed right away from the days of a shop into something which is far better and far bigger.' The big stores, for all their exploitation of labour and negative stereotyping of the female shopper, did materially improve shopping conditions for many women.

This wealth and variety of merchandise from which to choose may have dampened any potential critique of mass

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81  Newspaper News, July 1928 p 17.
82  Ours, Aug 1922 p 12.
83  Commonwealth Home, July 1928.
marketing methods. Neil Harris suggests that by the 1920s the proliferation of commodities threatened to overwhelm the consumer and made it almost impossible for her to contemplate direct resistance: 'corruption could be avoided not by a refusal to participate in the great consumer drama, but by the exercise of choice and the determination of particular relationships between objects and individuals.'

This is a more sympathetic and historically specific theory of consumer politics than that suggested by Leach. Given that the juggernaut of industrialisation appeared to be unstoppable by the beginning of the twentieth century, it is hardly surprising that consumers were both seduced and bemused by the cornucopia of commodities. As Rydge's Business Journal explained in 1928:

Although the average income is slowly rising, desires rise faster, and merchandise objects of desire multiply more widely in number. Where there were once 500 things for a woman to buy there are now 5,000. There are said to be 13,000 items in the average chemist's and fancy goods shop, and 18,000 items in a grocery and hardware store. As a result there is a clash of desires ... In a mechanical inventive age like ours, the multiplicity of merchandise, together with the myriad show windows and advertising pages, constitutes a high pressure system of selling which no age has ever before known.

Women, then, developed new areas of expertise and self-esteem in selecting and evaluating goods from the confusing spectacle presented to them by retailers and advertisers.

Whether they were openly critical of retailers or whether they derived a source of personal power and pleasure

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**Rydge's Business Journal Aug 1928 p 519.**
from the large stores, women constructed a particular relationship to mass marketing which was active and creative. The politics of shopping gave women a voice and a 'place from which to speak' in a culture that prescribed shopping as women's work, and credibility in a society in which women fought for equal rights to citizenship. Those voices may have been scattered and only rarely dissident in the period before 1930, but they anticipated and constituted an historical continuity with a more formal and coherent feminist critique of mass marketing later in the century.

**The phrase is used by Michelle Walker in her report on the Feminism and the Humanities Conference 1986 in Australian Feminist Studies 3 (Summer 1986) p 106.**
CHAPTER 7

MARKETING AND THE MANUFACTURE OF CONSUMER DESIRE

This thesis has shown how the proprietors of Sydney’s big stores attempted to exert as much control as possible over their human and material resources. If they were to increase their sales and capture a mass market, however, retailers also needed to persuade large numbers of potential customers to enter their stores. Even if they acquired drapery goods under the best conditions, secured a pliable and loyal workforce, organised commodities into the best possible departmental arrangement and instituted mechanisms of customer surveillance, retailers were still faced with the problem of inducing in consumers the desire to buy. They had to create — or contribute to the creation of — a cultural milieu in which the consumption of ‘non-essential’ goods was perceived as not only desirable but normal. If demand for a particular commodity did not already exist, retailers and their associates in the sales industry had to manufacture that demand.¹

Store managers consequently devised various marketing strategies designed to stimulate consumption. They promoted, for example, a particular store image which impressed on customers the shop’s respectability, reliability and concern for its clientele. Other strategies encouraged new customers to enter the store, or existing customers to shop there more often. Once attracted to the store, retailers hoped that shoppers would buy more than they originally intended. The

The general objective of marketing policies was to increase the number and value of individual sales transactions.

Before the ascendancy of the major drapery houses after the 1880s, many proprietors considered that a conscious attention to marketing was neither appropriate nor respectable. Drapers appealing to a bourgeois trade who advertised in *Forde's 1851 Australian Almanac*, for example, expressed an aversion to 'the too common practice of PUFFING'.\(^2\) Victor Portois made it clear to the ladies of Sydney that he was not one of those pretentious drapers who 'ticket their goods and promenade their low prices all over town.'\(^3\) This suggests that deliberate attempts to stimulate sales were considered the province of shopkeepers catering to a working class trade.

Francis Foy, considered to be one such draper, was reported to have employed various ingenious strategies to encourage customers into his shop in the late nineteenth century. According to two celebratory histories of the store, Foy would take a roll of material out of the shop to the nearest tram stop and arrange with the tram guard for a momentary 'breakdown'. He or his assistants would then leap into the stationary trams carrying the material, display them to the captured women, and encourage them to come into the shop to inspect further.\(^4\) The story is probably apocryphal, __________________________

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\(^2\) Advertisement for G.C. Tuting's drapery establishment in *Forde's Australian Almanac 1851* in David Jones Archives.

\(^3\) Advertisement for Victor Portois in *Forde's Australian Almanac 1851* (emphasis in original).

but it nevertheless suggests the tacit social approval accorded the enterprising retail entrepreneur by his peers (and perhaps the public). Innovative marketing techniques were perceived as a healthy sign of progressive retail management.

Many of the marketing strategies employed by department store managers persisted relatively unchanged from the earliest years into the 1920s and beyond. Regular sales or stock clearances by Sydney drapers, for example, dated back at least to 1844. Francis Foy was notorious for his 'fairs' which, according to the Romance of the House of Foy, attracted crowds so great that police were required to ensure order and protect the plate glass windows from being smashed. End of season clearing sales were a common feature of the Australian drapery trade by the 1890s.

Retailers might find different ways of advertising their sales, as did Lasseters with its 'Little Snap Days'; or they might combine forces in a Mammoth Sale Drive. But the economic principles behind sales remained the same: to advertise the store and clear 'slow' lines to make way for more profitable stock. The losses a retailer might incur by offering goods for sale at reduced prices were usually

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* Romance of the House of Foy, p 38.

* Australian Storekeepers' Journal July 1895.

* Australia. The Australasian Weekly Magazine, June 20 1907 p 16.

* Draper of Australasia (hereafter Draper) Oct 1930 p 565.

* The Draper of Australasia Diary 1903 p 35.
more than compensated for by increased turnover. As the Royal Commission on the Basic Wage found in 1920, 20 per cent of all sales were effected during sale periods, and the total price paid by the public for their total purchases in the year by sales was only 3 per cent less than those purchased at regular prices. Retailers therefore made good profits out of sales while giving shoppers the impression that they were doing them a favour.

Entertainments were another popular means of attracting customers to the store that dated back to 1880. Anthony Hordern & Sons organised an exhibition and promenade concert to publicise the opening of its Palace Emporium in 1881, and in 1884 held a musical conversazione and spring show. Both David Jones and Lowes held piano and pianola recitals to attract customers to their stores around the turn of the century. Animated window displays using live performers were a particular feature of this period. Lowes advertised its 'fast black hats' in 1903, for example, by employing two black men ('coons') to perform various 'antics' in the window. Store entertainments became more extravagant in the inter-war years, as Howard Wolfers has shown in his study of Sydney's big stores. Lectures, demonstrations, art exhibitions (often in the store's own gallery), Christmas pantomimes and theatrical presentations were some of the

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13 David Jones Ltd board minutes 8 Apr 1907 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/32/1; advertisement for Lowes in Sunday Sun 17 Sep 1905.

14 Draper Apr 1903 p 152.
events organised by retailers to seduce shoppers into their stores.¹⁵

In addition to placing regular advertisements in newspapers and journals, the big stores also employed magazines as an indirect means of fostering customer loyalty. In some cases store proprietors published their own magazine in which self-advertisements were interspersed with articles of a general nature designed to appeal to a feminine audience. John O’Connor and Charles Cummings have shown in their analysis of Bamberger’s Charm magazine how store periodicals functioned as carefully-orchestrated forms of institutional advertising which appealed to the upwardly-mobile and promoted a high-consumption lifestyle.¹⁶

The only surviving Sydney store magazine of this nature was Mark Foy’s The Magnet, published in 1909–1910. The Magnet is interesting not so much for its direct promotion of consumption as for its editorial attitudes to women as the primary agents of consumption. Perhaps predictably, the magazine displayed a preoccupation with marriage and motherhood: it ran an essay competition, for example, on the topic ‘Which makes the best wife, the business girl or the at-home girl?’ (proponents of both opinions were awarded prizes).¹⁷ One article declared that ‘the art of making a


good home underlies all professions and all occupations and all moral betterment.'

More intriguing is the periodical's underlying anti-feminism. The Magnet quoted 'a famous Viennese physician' critical of intellectual and politically-active women. Another issue captioned a photograph of British suffragettes with the comment that 'insolence, noise, disorder and importunity' were met with imprisonment; whereas a photo of a German woman with seven sons was captioned 'This woman never worried about the vote; she simply built up a home and provided SEVEN voters and fighters for the Fatherland'. A review of Cicely Hamilton's Marriage as a Trade in the same issue criticised the author for her 'bitter and unreasonable' views on such an absorbing subject. The Magnet, with or without conscious intent, promoted domesticity and elevated the home-making role of women. It was to the store's advantage to encourage women to see themselves as wives and mothers with a full-time commitment to family consumption.

Block 14 Weekly, published co-operatively in 1923 by the stores bounded by Elizabeth, Goulburn, George and Liverpool Streets (which included Mark Foys, Snows and Anthony Hordern & Sons) was another short-lived retailer-sponsored periodical. It demonstrated a less restrictive view of woman's role than the Magnet, and was clearly influenced by the movement for the scientific management of housework. The paper's title page showed the block overseen by a woman

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18 Magnet Nov 1909 p 22.
dressed in flowing robes, arms outstretched, wearing a headpiece lettered 'Economy'. An editorial entitled 'Making Both Ends Meet' stressed the enormous national importance of the working class mother's work in controlling and planning the household expenditure. In contrast to the Magnet, Block 14 Weekly carried favourable articles on the 'new woman' and her advances in the workforce.\textsuperscript{22} Both magazines, however, shared the attempt to validate women's role as consumer.

The big stores also used existing women's periodicals to promote sales. Fifteen drapery firms, including David Jones and Hordern Brothers, co-operated in a 'Good Taste Competition' run in New Idea in 1902. Photographs of fashionable clothes stocked by the stores were published in each issue, and readers were invited to submit designs for an up-to-date summer walking costume.\textsuperscript{23} The Home, an expensively-produced quarterly magazine published after 1920, displayed the big stores' merchandise in an aesthetically tempting manner. Charles Lloyd Jones, at that time the chief executive of David Jones Ltd, was one of the magazine's directors. The first editorial stated that the directors intended to 'enlist the aid of some of the best Australian stores in showing latest fashions in interior decorations.'\textsuperscript{24}

The Shop Assistants Magazine, conducted by Steele Rudd in the mid-1920s for the entertainment and edification of store employees, was another useful medium for retailers to 'educate shop assistants to a keener appreciation of the need

\textsuperscript{22} Block 14 Weekly 1923.

\textsuperscript{23} New Idea Aug 1902 p 32.

\textsuperscript{24} The Home Feb 1920.
to sell Australian-made produce.' The publishers claimed that it had several hundred subscribers, including the directors, executives, buyers and shop assistants of the state's retail firms, and members of the public. Priced 6d per copy, the magazine was also distributed through the branches of the New South Wales Bookstall Company. With an estimated circulation of 50,000 shop assistants throughout the state, the magazine was a convenient way for retailers to encourage their staffs to take their selling vocation seriously. It included numerous articles on sales technique, understanding the shopper and 'arousing the desire to buy'.

Despite its role as an employer-oriented organ, the Shop Assistants Magazine took a pro-worker and pro-feminist position on contemporary issues such as equal pay for women and the fight for early closing.

The publishers of Shop Assistants Magazine were also aware that its readership constituted a considerable market for retailers. Its editors estimated that the state's shop assistants earned £150,000 each year which could be spent on shop goods. Retailers were also aware of the value of their employees as potential customers at least from the turn of the century. James Macken of Mark Foys, for example, admitted to the New South Wales Court of Arbitration in 1907 that it was a financial advantage to have his employees

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25 Shop Assistants Magazine Mar 1926, editorial.
26 Shop Assistants Magazine July 1926 front cover and p 25.
27 Shop Assistants Magazine Oct 1926 pp 4-5.
28 For example, Shop Assistants Magazine May, Aug and Nov 1926, Feb 1927.
29 Shop Assistants Magazine May 1926 p 21.
shopping in his own establishment.³⁰ David Jones also actively encouraged its Heads of Department to promote 'house sales' and to offer a discount (retail price less 10 per cent in 1916) to its employees.³¹ Retailers did not, however, appear to want to raise wages in order to stimulate consumption.

Retailers also sought to retain custom by instructing their sales assistants that the customer was not only always right but should always be deferred to. David Jones was probably not the only drapery house that offered a money-back-if-not-satisfied guarantee from its earliest days of trading.³² The same store formalised its customer policy in lectures given to the 'Improvement Class' in 1925. Employees were directed to show courtesy to customers 'always and under every circumstance ... Too much stress cannot be laid on the value of keeping the customer pleased.'³³

In addition to customer policy, it appears that most large stores had some kind of trading policy which targetted a particular class of customer. David Jones's 'business policy' of 1908, for example, included a decision to 'capture a larger portion of the best class of Town customers.'³⁴ The

³⁰ Transcript of evidence presented in the Shop Assistants Union case 1907 at the New South Wales Court of Arbitration (Archives Office of New South Wales 2/95-98) v 44 p 976.

³¹ David Jones board minutes 15 Apr 1909 and 2 Aug 1916.


³³ 'History and policy of David Jones Limited, March 1925', speech by Mr Stark to the Improvement Class, David Jones Archives BRG 1/496.

³⁴ David Jones board minutes 15 Oct 1908.
store management revised this policy in 1916 to codify changes that had occurred in the business during the previous ten years. What had traditionally been 'an exclusive, largely personality business' selling a wide range of goods to meet the individual requirements of customers, now aimed to be a 'Trading House' selling fewer and more standardised lines. Where a particular department might have previously had a stock of 200 lines, it would now have only 100; and instead of ordering 50 dozen of an individual line, buyers would now order 100 dozen.\textsuperscript{35}

Although the executive of David Jones acknowledged that its new marketing policy would probably lose it the 'specialty customers', it believed it would 'hold the majority of men [so that] we become Traders, not a specialty house, tending to less loss, more stable profit rates and bigger turnover.'\textsuperscript{36} David Jones' 1916 policy statement not only gives us a rare glimpse into the minds of retail managers but captures a key moment in the development of mass marketing techniques. The store executive made a deliberate decision to cater to a broad market which, despite its consciously deployed image as a 'quality' store, turned David Jones into a mass retailer catering to middle and perhaps even working class customers. As the Draper explained in 1930, while every astute retailer set out to cater to a particular class, he also stocked goods of higher and lower grades to maximise his market.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{35} 'The Future Policy of the Company'. Report of the Executive to the Directors of David Jones 12 July 1916 in David Jones board minutes.

\textsuperscript{36} 'The Future Policy of the Company' 1916.

\textsuperscript{37} Draper Sep 1930 p 479.
These strategies, then - sales, entertainments, magazines, house sales, customer and marketing policies - persisted relatively unchanged from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s. Other marketing techniques demonstrate marked historical change within this period, with most major developments occurring after World War I.

One example was the development of a theory of consumer desire. The language of desire, temptation and abandonment permeated publicity writing for the big stores from the 1880s. An enraptured writer for the *Town and Country Journal* described a visit to Hordern Brothers in 1886 in which silks and satins 'tempt and fascinate the aesthetic eye' and a staircase was bordered with exotics, plants and ferns. 'Where', the writer asked rhetorically, 'is the lady who could withstand such a temptation to invest in something for nature's adornment?' Similarly, there was a 'tempting profusion' of goods on display in Lassetters store in 1894 and Anthony Hordern & Sons' new Palace Emporium in 1907 was a 'fairy mosque of Aladdin' and a 'veritable Garden of Eden'.

That it was Eve and not Adam who was meant to be tempted in this retail paradise is clear from comments which suggested a peculiarly female inability to resist persuasion. No woman, according to the *Australian Storekeepers Journal* of 1900, could resist the temptation of 'pretty and artistic

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38 *Town and Country Journal* 24 Apr 1886 p 84.
things ... She will first admire them, and then want to possess them. Anthony Horderns was like

a realised embodiment of fairyland. Here a hint of delicate audacity; there a shimmering seductiveness; yonder a creation highly ornate; and everywhere pervading an all-absorbing, bewildering, fascinating atmosphere of artistic conceptions that suddenly make one feel old-fashioned, dissatisfied, and dowdy, and out-of-date – and – and – and – that a new hat is an absolute necessity.  

As a passage from John Galsworthy's novel Beyond, quoted in the Draper suggests, retailers understood and sought to exploit the sensuality inherent in shopping:

Gyp never went shopping without that faint thrill running up and down her nerves. She hated to be touched by strange fingers, but not even that stopped her pleasure in turning and turning before long mirrors, while the saleswoman or man, with admiration at first crocodile and then genuine, ran the tips of fingers over those curves, smoothing and pinning and uttering the word "moddam".

Galsworthy's text with its implied female narcissism has been re-contextualised by its reproduction in the Draper. Women are seen as seducible creatures who existed in a constant state of desire for drapery commodities and irresistible attraction to the arena in which they were sold.

Major retailers consolidated and made more explicit their attempts to seduce women by constructing formal strategies of desire in the 1920s. Charles Lloyd Jones stated in his autobiography that about this time he decided to make shopping in his store 'a journey of discovery in which the lady of the future would be beguiled by colour, bright lights, new fabrics, new shapes and designs, new

40 Australian Storekeepers Journal Jan 1900 p 3.
41 Australian 6 June 1907 p 15.
42 Draper May 1918 p 151.
smells, sweet and spicy.'David Jones' Elizabeth Street store, opened in 1927, was specifically designed to stimulate women's desire for the commodities it sold by displaying them amidst lofty ceilings, bright lights, broad aisles and glass display fixtures.\(^{43}\)

Retailers began to utilise the insights of popular psychology to articulate a theory of female desire. Sales experts employed the language of psychology to explain women's nature and their motives for buying. A favoured explanation was women's narcissism expressed in their presumed innate desire for adornment.\(^{44}\) The Draper carried several articles in the early 1920s on this subject, one written by Melbourne University Professor T. Tucker. Tucker suggested that women's desire for adornment was akin to that of savages who wore ornamental rather than functional clothing. After all, he asked his readers, 'for what else are feathered hats and jewellery intended?'\(^{44}\) According to an American woman commenting on the Ladies' Home Journal's unsuccessful attempt to persuade women to buy American-designed clothes, 'When it comes to the question of personal adornment, a woman employs no reason; she knows no logic ... that is the feminine nature.'\(^{47}\)

\(^{43}\) Charles Lloyd Jones and Desmond Robinson, 'Customers are Human', unpub. typescript c. 1958 p 85, David Jones Archives.

\(^{44}\) Sun clipping 27 Nov 1927 in David Jones Archives.

\(^{45}\) Draper Dec 1920 p 400; Oct 1922 pp 481-2.

\(^{46}\) Draper Jan 1921 p 5.

Clothed in the socially acceptable language of scientific principles, the new psychology of desire nevertheless continued to draw on sexual imagery for its effectiveness. Lustre Hosiery told shop assistants in the 1920s that women's unconscious motivations for buying included 'self-gratification' and 'yielding to weakness'.

Sales literature aimed at retailers stressed that for women shopping was a 'pleasurable excitement' that should be indulged. Women's desire to buy could be stimulated by sensual displays: 'Keep in mind that 65 to 80 per cent of the impulse to buy a given article comes when the customer is where she can touch, feel or smell ... the goods.'

By the late 1920s sales experts were busy convincing retailers that desire could be deliberately manufactured in the mind of the shopper. An article in the *Commonwealth Home*, for example, urged proprietors to use sale points to 'create desire' for the goods on sale. Another in the *Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal* entitled 'The Psychologist and the Businessman' showed how psychology had contributed to effective selling by describing the buying process as a chain of mental processes - attention, interest, desire, confidence, decision, action and

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48 Lustre Hosiery Ltd, *The Craft of Retail Selling*. Dedicated to the great army of men and women who fill a most important niche in the realm of merchandising (Sydney, n.d. ?192-) p 23.

49 *The Craft of Retail Selling*, pp 17, 22.


51 *Commonwealth Home* Feb 1928 pp 29-30.
satisfaction - and by making selling a 'scientifically-controlled adventure' in which desire could be created.52

Retailers’ attention to creating desire in the 1920s was supplemented by their recognition that they must create demand. George Wright of Farmers was one of the first to use the phrase ‘create a demand’ in his evidence to the Necessary Commodities Control Commission in 1920.53 Charles Lloyd Jones recalled in his autobiography that he realised that 'a departmental store would not only have to sell things, but also create public taste and help cultivate it ... be a guide to gracious living.'54

The Draper agreed that retailers should 'educate' the consumer into believing that she needed more commodities than she initially intended to buy. The journal praised drapers who had 'taught women to wear a tennis frock for tennis and a golf suit for golf, and to eschew both for afternoon wear.'55 Rydges Business Journal formalised this theory with an article entitled 'Consumer Education, and the Problem of Distribution'. Alex T. Whyte, B. Litt., pointed out the bewildering choices facing the modern consumer. To increase sales he therefore advocated a policy of Educational Development of the Consumer, based on principles of progress such as science, beauty and efficiency.56

54 'Customers are Human' pp 84-5.
55 Draper Nov 1928 p 543.
56 Rydges Business Journal 1 Aug 1928 pp 519-521.
The growing awareness among retailers, sales experts and
the advertising industry that it was crucial to understand
and mould the buying public's consumption patterns developed
into an explicit attention to marketing and marketing
analysis. Interested in American surveys of shopping
patterns from the early part of the decade⑤7, the Australian
retail industry was enthusing about the value of market
research by the late 1920s. Rydge’s Business Journal in
particular proselytised the gospel of marketing by urging
businessmen to investigate the potential market for their
products.⑤8

The concept of the 'sales promotion' was added to the
vocabulary of sales experts by 1929.⑤9 The big city stores
played a leading role in devising special promotions to
attract customers. Many of these, such as Empire Shopping
Week and Australia-Made Preference League displays, were, as
Howard Wolfers has observed, an opportunity for store
managements to make use of public patriotism.⑥0 Others
exploited family sentiment in inaugurating Mother’s Day
(1925) and Father’s Day (1929) promotions in Australia. The
Retail Traders Association of New South Wales instituted
these celebrations 'to boost business in quiet periods'.⑥1
As the Advertiser's Monthly pointed out approvingly, 'but for

⑤7 See, for example, Draper Mar 1923 p 141.
⑤9 Rydge’s Business Journal Dec 1929.
⑥1 Retail Traders Association of New South Wales
those with commercial interest, Father’s Day would not have been inaugurated in Australia.\textsuperscript{42}

The department stores also contributed to the Australian Christmas scene and by the 1920s were staging spectacular promotions designed to appeal to men, women and children. David Jones employed a Gift Secretary at Christmas 1920, whose special mission it was to ‘help the man-purchaser, usually at a loss when it comes to a transaction of this kind.’\textsuperscript{43} Christmas displays were gender-specific, with fairy dolls containing dolls for girls and dragon displays with toy engines for boys.\textsuperscript{44} The Sydney stores vied with each other to provide the most novel and attractive entertainment for children in December 1930: a Santa Claus pageant from Iceland to Farmers Cove by flying boat organised by Anthony Hordern and Sons; a smugglers’ cave at Mark Foys; Punch and Judy at McDowells; a Ginger Meggs tableau at Grace Brothers; and circus acts at David Jones.\textsuperscript{45}

At other times of the year the big stores organised special promotions around the seasons. An important feature of drapery store displays (and the dressmaking and tailoring trade) from their earliest days, seasonal fashion changes in Spring and Autumn became the explicit focus of retailers’ marketing policies in the mid-1920s. Working co-operatively as they had done in instituting Mother’s and Father’s Day, Sydney retailers combined in a financially successful ‘Official Opening of Spring’ campaign which involved co-

\textsuperscript{42} Advertising Monthly Aug 1930 p 2.

\textsuperscript{43} Draper Oct 1921 p 447.

\textsuperscript{44} Draper Oct 1921 pp 445-8.

\textsuperscript{45} Draper Jan 1930 p 15 and Mar 1930 p 125.
ordinated posters, parcel stickers, window displays and newspaper articles. Also designed to appeal to female customers, some stores organised demonstrations of 'labor-saving devices for the home', complete with afternoon tea.

The provision of refreshment was one of the first and most enduring of many services offered to customers by store managements to encourage them into the store. As early as 1886 Hordern Brothers arranged with Sydney caterer Quong Tart to supply tea to visitors to its recently-opened Pitt Street premises. Retailers used restaurants, lifts and escalators as selling points after the turn of the century. It was not until the 1920s, however, that retailers consciously used customer services as a marketing technique.

Charles Lloyd Jones defended his store's relatively high rate of gross profit to the Necessary Commodities Control Commission in 1920 by arguing that David Jones had to cover the cost of services such as delivery, customer credit and greater individual attention from sales people. Farmers also advertised 'complete service' in 1924 which included a telephone bureau (an attendant dialled the number while the customer rested), a ladies' writing and rest room, an information bureau at which public transport timetables and

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67 Herself Mar 1929, advertisement for Nock and Kirby.
68 Town and Country Journal 24 Apr 1886 p 84.
69 See, for example, Romance of the House of Foy p 60.
70 Wolfers, 'The big stores between the wars'. pp 23-4.
71 Necessary Commodities Control Commission 19 Feb 1920 p 16.
theatre booking facilities were available, and a post office. Anthony Hordern & Sons offered a similar range of services in 1930, supplemented by a branch of the Commonwealth Bank, a Tourist Bureau and a removal service.

Although some of these facilities would have been used by both male and female shoppers, features such as the ladies' lounges and beauty salons were clearly feminine spaces. Department store services were gendered; that is, they were designed to cater to and attract either women or men. Stores with a significant men's trade directed some of their customer services towards perceived male needs. David Jones's Elizabeth Street store opened in 1927 with a Barber's Shop in its menswear basement, while Peapes' 'Pepys Room' offered the discreet ambience of an exclusive men's club, elegantly furnished with antiques and period portraits. The Draper reported in 1927 that menswear shops had countered the big stores' techniques by offering the services of golf and tennis teachers, advisers on wireless and experts on angling.

The provision of space, political and financial support to various women's organisations was another means by which store managements attempted to capture a loyal corner of the female market. David Jones, Farmers and Marcus Clark were among those stores which co-operated in the Women's Commonwealth Patriotic Association's National Economy

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72 The Home Mar 1924 p 50.
73 Anthony Hordern & Sons Ltd, Annual Report 1930 (Fisher Library).
74 Sydney Mail 19 Dec 1923 clipping in Peapes & Co. papers MLMSS 2161 Box Y812.
75 Draper Aug 1927 p 359.
Exhibition in 1917. The Young Women’s Christian Association was on good terms with several of the city’s big stores through its involvement in welfare work and sporting activities for working class women: the stores contributed, for example, to the YWCA’s 1919 fund-raising campaign. Charles Lloyd Jones was chairman of the campaign’s Publicity Committee and Farmers loaned its Welfare Hall for the Association’s Girls Meetings. The Country Women’s Association also attracted financial support from several of the stores, David Jones offering the organisation space for its head office and rest rooms at a nominal rent in 1931.

A final marketing strategy increasingly used by retailers in the 1920s was the deliberate arrangement of goods in such a way as to increase consumption. The management of Farmers, a store with the reputation for marketing innovation, was praised by the Draper for its cleverly designed ground floor displays in 1918. Displays of inexpensive items designed to meet ‘everyday requirements’ (slippers, manicure sets, handkerchiefs) were changed daily so that customers would not become accustomed to and therefore overlook the goods. By the mid-1920s sales experts were recommending to retailers that they arrange near the door a counter of ‘convenience goods’, articles which

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76 National Economy Exhibition. Organised by the Women’s Commonwealth Patriotic Association. Official Catalogue (Sydney: 1917)[My thanks to Meredith Foley for this reference].


80 Draper Oct 1918 p 334.
'no-one has to buy of necessity, but what they would buy if they thought of them.'\textsuperscript{81} This was, according to the Draper, 'an appeal that rarely fails with a woman.'\textsuperscript{82}

Trade journals also began to use the term 'accessories' in the mid-1920s, indicating that retailers were attempting to stimulate consumption by selling complete outfits or ensembles. When inexpensive ready-made dresses became popular in the early 1920s, retailers worried that the blouse and skirt departments would become the 'poor relations' of the costume department. The answer, according to the Draper, was to amalgamate the blouse and skirt departments so that customers would come to see them as inseparable and would 'be unable to buy a blouse without a suitable skirt.'\textsuperscript{83}

By the late 1920s, then, retailers had supplemented and rationalised various marketing strategies designed to increase sales. Traditional methods of attracting custom such as clearance sales and store entertainments continued to be popular throughout the period, but a greater attention to sales promotions, customer services and the arrangement of goods in the 1920s signalled a new era in department store marketing. These more deliberate and often co-operative ventures were aided by greater industry organisation and the application of consumer psychology after World War I. Theories of marketing articulated by advertisers and the business community in the late 1920s, moreover, tended to standardise the big stores' marketing techniques at the same time as they were catering to a mass market.

\textsuperscript{81} Draper May 1924 p 278.

\textsuperscript{82} Draper May 1924 p 278.

\textsuperscript{83} Draper Mar 1922 p 126.
Although accounts of customer motivations in buying acquired the 'scientific' cloak of psychology after World War I and the rationality of consumer analysis in the late 1920s, women and feminine psychology continued to represent the most significant marketing challenge to the sales and advertising industry. As the Draper commented with regret in 1922, the menswear departments of the average drapery store did not receive the same careful consideration in advertising, display and prospecting for new customers as did the millinery and mantle departments."" Because retailers were aware that the great majority of their customers were female, and because they believed that women were by nature irrational and easily diverted from logical reasoning, they concentrated their marketing attention on women. Marketing discourse was infiltrated by popular notions of woman's nature not only because she constituted the object of marketing strategies, but also because a presumed feminine lack of reason coincided with retailers' and advertisers' project to increase consumption.

** Draper Apr 1922 p 183.**
CHAPTER 8

ADVERTISING SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

Marketing strategies were one way in which retailers attempted to stimulate consumption. Probably more significant in impact were forms of store advertising such as window displays, interior decoration, mail order catalogues and newspaper and magazine advertisements. Sydney department stores were prolific advertisers. It is difficult to open any newspaper or women’s magazine published after 1890 and not see prominent advertisements for the large city drapery stores. The ubiquity of department store advertisements in the period before 1930 makes a comprehensive content analysis impossible to attempt within the scope of this thesis. I have chosen, therefore, to focus on three important aspects of store publicity with implications for gender relations: the display of goods both inside the store and in shop windows; mail order catalogues; and advertising policy.

Display

Perhaps the most immediate and visually appealing of the stores’ promotional techniques was the display of goods both inside the store and in their show windows. Most department store historians have suggested that retailers deliberately created opulent and alluring interiors and tempting window displays in an attempt to make consumption desirable.¹ Enticing displays were the aesthetic lure with

which retail managers tempted consumers to spend their money. Store displays, especially brightly lit and colourful windows, were public spectacles that rivalled the cinema in their popularity as a mass form of visual entertainment. They were, moreover, free. Department store windows changed the face of the urban streetscape and transformed definitions of interior public space. Few shoppers remained untouched by their underlying message urging them to buy.

These historians have failed to observe, however, that the gendered nature of the commodities sold by the stores imposed a particular and incontrovertible logic on interior and window displays. As we saw in chapter 2, retailers consciously segregated their goods not just into separate departments but into sexually-specific departments. They then decorated and arranged these male and female spaces in ways that reflected and contributed to contemporary notions of masculinity and femininity. This chapter examines some of the aesthetic and psychological principles used by retailers and their display experts in arranging drapery commodities, and demonstrates the ways in which they exploited the social categories of class and gender in their desire to increase sales.

Changes in large drapery store interiors indicate the extent of the revolution in retailing that took place between 1890 and 1920. Until the turn of the century universal providers and emporia were typically divided into departments by dark wood and plaster walls. Departmental managers kept

Farmers, ground floor, 1890 [Grace Brothers Ltd].

David Jones' Elizabeth Street store, ground floor, 1927 [David Jones Ltd].
Civil Service Co-operative Society Stores, ground floor. 
*Price List* 1907 [Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales].
stock in large boxes stored on shelves which extended from floor to ceiling. They rarely fully displayed clothes, except for millinery which was placed on tables, and selected models of women's costumes or mantles. Sales assistants hung other draperies such as lace and sheeting around the counter like washing on a line.²

As Susan Porter Benson found for American department stores, retail managers realised around 1910 that these display methods resulted in assistants spending more time handling the goods and less attending to customers.³ To increase sales efficiency they began to pay deliberate attention to the organisation of selling space and the arrangement of stock. Glass display cases and shop fronts manufactured by companies such as Beecham and Company appear to have been used by storekeepers in 1900, but display hardware was not consciously promoted as a feature of Australian stores until Bray and Holliday opened their Sydney factory in 1911.⁴ The firm expanded to such an extent over the next decade that it claimed in 1924 to be the largest shop and office fitters in the southern hemisphere.⁵ As Bray and Holliday pointed out in their promotional literature, it

² Charles Lloyd Jones and Desmond Robinson, 'Customers are Human', unpub. typescript c. 1958 in David Jones Archives; Frances Pollon and Philip Geeves, A Romance with Retailing: An Early History Before 1900 and Progress to 1913 (Sydney: Retail Traders Association of New South Wales, 1983) p 21.


⁴ Australian Storekeeper Aug 1900 p 28; Bray and Holliday Ltd., Products of Bray and Holliday Ltd (Sydney: Adshead Rose Publicity, n.d. ?1924-1929).

⁵ Products of Bray and Holliday.
was 'easier to sell to a customer who says "I'll take one of those" than it was to the customer who asks "Have you got so-and-so?"'.

By the mid 1920s retailers were convinced that open display methods were crucial to economic success. They opened up departments and used glass fixtures extensively. When modifications were made to Hordern Brothers' store in 1927, for example, more than half of the supporting columns were removed from the sales floor. As an article in the Commonwealth Home magazine noted the same year, the architectural development of large retail houses such as David Jones, Farmers and Grace Brothers no longer concentrated on cathedral-type exteriors but emphasised instead interior shop display. The Sydney Morning Herald agreed that the setting of the goods was as important as the goods themselves, particularly when stores used the latest ideas in interior decorating and modern art in their displays.

This increased attention to interior display was partly the work of store design experts. Retailers such as David Jones employed 'store specialists', or experts in store planning, who designed stores to display the merchandise under the 'most pleasing conditions' to encourage 'self-selling'. As a result of Albert Gregory's work, David Jones used fixtures and colour schemes to draw customers' attention to goods and encourage purchases.

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* Products of Bray and Holliday.
* Sydney Morning Herald 27 Apr 1927 p 9.
* Sydney Morning Herald 2 Jan 1929 p 4.
* Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal July 1929 p 27.
Jones’s Elizabeth Street store claimed to offer ‘palatial, lofty ceilings, broad aisles [and] glass display fixtures, making possible the inspection of almost every article.’\(^{11}\)

The universities also began to train professionals in shop design. Ian Fell explored the architecture of modern shop design in his 1928 Bachelor of Architecture thesis for the University of Sydney. Likening department stores to public buildings in which people took a personal pride and sense of ownership, Fell argued that the modern store should conjure up images of dignity, stability and ‘the promise of fine goods’.\(^{12}\) It should also ‘harmonize with the spirit of progress and mass production’ that was a part of modern civilisation.\(^{13}\) In keeping with modern thought and using David Jones as a model of fine planning, Fell argued further that retailers should design their interiors so that customers were encouraged to pass by as many displays as possible on their way to the lifts or restaurant.\(^ {14}\)

In opening up their entire store for the customer’s inspection retailers followed a principle established in rudimentary form in the sale of women’s fashion goods since at least the 1880s. Women’s costumes, mantles and millinery were typically sold in what was known as the ‘ladies’ showroom’, a department characterised by the display of women’s clothes, an abundance of mirrors and a genteel

\(^{11}\) Sun 27 Nov 1927 in David Jones Archives.


\(^{13}\) Fell, Modern Shop Design, p 11.

\(^{14}\) Fell, Modern Shop Design, pp 7-8.
drawing-room ambience. In contrast to, say, the men’s
mercery department, in which goods were stored in drawers and
boxes or occasionally displayed on counters or tables, the
ladies’ showroom allowed customers room to walk around,
inspect and touch the garments with or without the intention
to buy.

When Buckinghams extended their premises in 1902, the
new showroom featured an abundance of windows, including one
made of stained glass which lent a ‘soft and rich’ appearance
to the room. Marcus Clark’s millinery showroom opened in
its new Railway Square building in 1906 was decorated in
Morris green, boasted a lavish distribution of mirrors, and
had a ‘moonlight’ carpet that reputedly changed colour at
night. Farmers decorated its showrooms in 1918 with large
bowls of arum lilies and Iceland poppies, green carpets, rich
mahogany fittings and walls lined with mirrors and glass
cases. All the women’s floors of David Jones’ Elizabeth
Street store were covered in thick, pale grey carpets ‘in
which the feet sink in as in wild-couched lawns’.

Women’s underwear departments and beauty parlours were
the targets of conscious planning for femininity in the
1920s. Corsets and brassieres, as an article in the Shop

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10 See, for example, David Jones, A Souvenir, 1887, in
David Jones Archives; article on Lasseter and Company in
Town and Country Journal 13 May 1908. For an explanation of
retailers’ use of space in women’s clothing departments see
Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Nov
1929 pp 55-7.

16 Draper of Australasia (hereafter Draper) Apr 1903 p
136.


18 Draper Oct 1918 p 333.

Assistants Magazine advised, were sold in a space that was 'intimate' and 'refined', because women were believed to be 'peculiarly susceptible to environment'. Consequently experts recommended soft colours, pretty furnishings, restful backgrounds and dainty accessories to counteract the 'commercial' atmosphere of the rest of the store. ²⁰ David Jones' beauty parlour was similarly decorated in pale pink with floral designs by Thea Proctor. ²¹

Men's departments, on the other hand, epitomised sobriety, utility and restraint. Farmer's menswear department, opened in 1902, was furnished with cedar wood counters and a linoleum floor. ²² Although Peapes' menswear store removed its department walls to create more spaciousness in its new premises in 1905, nevertheless 'conservatism reign[ed] supreme'. ²³ Descriptions of the new building are replete with manly adjectives: the building was bold, simple, geometric and - repeatedly - handsome in design. ²⁴ The same conservative principles dominated the store eighteen years later, when the company opened the 'Pepys Room' in its new building. This was an 'elegant chamber of the style of so long ago', furnished with antique furniture and old portrait paintings. ²⁵

²⁰ Shop Assistants Magazine Sept 1926 p 25.
²² Draper Aug 1902 p 279.
²³ Newspaper clipping 1905 in Peapes and Co. papers MLMSS 2161 Box Y812 (Mitchell Library).
²⁴ Sydney Mail Sept 13 1905 p 678.
²⁵ Sydney Mail Dec 19 1923 in Peapes & Co. papers MLMSS 2161/Y812.
Lowes' hat store, opened in 1928, was also uncompromisingly masculine, with its wood panelling, dignified setting and 'clubroom effect, with handsome swing mirrors, carved service tables, comfortable chairs and smoking stands.'

* Even floor coverings were gendered. The only floor which was not covered in pale grey carpet at David Jones' Elizabeth Street store was that belonging to the men's department - there it was marble.  

Shop windows showed an equally striking contrast between male and female commodity worlds. As with interior display techniques, window dressing underwent significant transformations during the first decades of the twentieth century. Shop windows were important sales points from the drapery store's earliest years, important enough for Hordern Brothers to employ (male) window dressers from the early 1880s, and David Jones from at least 1891.  

* A disapproving reference in the *Australian Storekeeper* of 1895 to 'the showman propensities of the proprietors of drapery establishments' suggests that attractive window displays were the hallmark of the progressive retailer by the 1890s.

Window dressing remained a male profession in Australia until long after 1930, despite its penetration by British women by this time, and despite men's alleged embarrassment in arranging 'dainty pretties of lace and frills in front of

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26 Draper Nov 1928 p 551.
29 Australian Storekeeper Mar 1895 p 9.
passers-by.\textsuperscript{30} David Jones, which, together with Farmers, was considered to be the leading house in window displays, ran window dressing classes from 1912.\textsuperscript{31} This was supplemented from 1916 with a window dressing course at the Sydney Technical College, at which students learnt about backgrounds, draping, the use of stands, fabrics, colours, lighting, lay-out and 'effects'.\textsuperscript{32} Retailers budgeted for window displays as part of their advertising expenditure, but at a fixed amount rather than as a percentage of turnover. David Jones, for example, allocated £1,800 towards ticket marking, windows and display fittings in 1919.\textsuperscript{33}

Display styles changed as window dressing became professionalised. Windows which throughout the nineteenth century had revealed a confusing and cluttered array of goods using every inch of space were, by the early twentieth century, used in a more restrained and 'artistic' manner. According to the Draper, attractive settings and 'suggestive presentations' were more effective than the old-style clutter and signified a superior class of trade.\textsuperscript{34} Articles in the Draper suggest that menswear store windows lagged behind women's fashion displays in this development. Whereas the object in women's clothes in 1914 was to 'concentrate the eye on a few articles, and to attract the women into the store to

\textsuperscript{30} Sun Pictorial 22 May 1930 clipping in David Jones Archives.

\textsuperscript{31} Draper Feb 1914 p 47.

\textsuperscript{32} Draper Jan 1914 p 31; Sydney Technical College Handbook 1916.

\textsuperscript{33} David Jones board minutes 27 Aug 1919 in David Jones BRG 1/32/1.

\textsuperscript{34} Draper Aug 1902 p 323 and Oct 1918 p 335.
see more', in men's windows the goods were crowded into the space. Photographs of drapery shop windows reproduced in the Draper confirm the impression that women's windows were more consciously and carefully arranged to catch the eye of the passer-by. Trade journal complaints that men's windows were too cramped continued into the 1920s.

Gender differences in displays became more obvious as window dressing developed into an art with its own literature and technical advice. An implicit recognition of different principles for men's and women's goods is evident in the Draper from 1901. For example, the Window Dressing column of 1904 drew readers' attention to two displays: one featuring millinery in a window decorated with a giant butterfly made out of feather tips; another by Lowe's menswear store showing the manufacture of straw hats. Beauty was associated with femininity, utility and practicality with masculinity.

Men's and women's goods rarely appeared in the same window. Indeed, Rydge's Business Journal advised retailers that windows would 'pull better if they appeal to only one sex.' The only exception to this rule was in tableaux such as drawing-room scenes in which both male and female figures appeared. Women's windows predominated in department store displays. All of Mark Foy's eleven windows in September

35 Draper Jan 1914 p 31.
36 Draper Aug 1924 p 493.
37 Draper Oct 1904 p 374.
38 Rydge's Business Journal, Rydge's Retail Merchandising Course (Sydney, 1927) p 267.
1918, for example, displayed women's clothes and accessories.\textsuperscript{37}

The Draper began to pay explicit attention to gendered display methods after 1910. The journal advised window dressers to dress their windows differently for men's and women's goods. Menswear windows had to appeal to a man's mind rather than his eye, and were supposed to have 'character and strength' so that the man in a hurry would grasp the message quickly.\textsuperscript{40} Farmer's windows in September 1920 demonstrated the application of masculine and feminine principles to display. The women's fashion windows used graceful Australian flowers and birds, arranged so that the light 'fell softly on the feathered occupants'. In the menswear windows birds of 'more sober plumage' were used: wood pigeons, kookaburras and savage hawks.\textsuperscript{41} A textbook of window dressing and display written in 1922 advised retailers to use the new seasons's 'vogues and vanities' to make women's fashion displays redolent of spring and autumn; mercery, however, was 'prosaic' merchandise calling for 'utilitarian treatment', and men's tailoring needed dignified, simple and practical display.\textsuperscript{42}

The Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal suggested to window dressers in 1929 that men and women were attracted by different colours. It cited research that showed that people's 'primitive, natural response' to

\textsuperscript{37} Advertisement for Mark Foy's in Sydney Morning Herald 30 Sept 1918.

\textsuperscript{40} Draper Nov 1917 p 366; Nov 1919 p 408.

\textsuperscript{41} Draper Sep 1920 p 308.

\textsuperscript{42} Alan Foley and W.J. Hewett, Textbook of Window Dressing and Display (Sydney, 1922-3) pp 90, 96, 98.
strong colour had been repressed in civilised societies and suggested that because women were more daring than men in their colour preferences, they were therefore more primitive. Women preferred red, an 'exciting and stimulating' colour, whereas men favoured 'cool and sedate' blues. Men, commented the article sadly, had 'too many repressions.' While we cannot necessarily assume that window dressers consciously followed such advice, it is likely that display men based their arrangements on largely unarticulated assumptions about male and female nature. It is perhaps significant, for example, that Peapes' 1905 premises were decorated in parchment white and wedgwood blue.

Window displays were also designed to appeal to middle class status. The Draper advised retailers wishing to attract a working class custom to use show cards – descriptive tickets attached to displayed goods – with 'class appeal' captions such as 'Miss F.Y. wore this frock at the A.J.C. races' or 'skirts to wear in the country when motoring, yachting or golfing'. Displays were specifically tailored to attract different sections of the trade. The Draper suggested in 1906 that windows should be dressed according to the class of customer: 'mechanical' or entertaining windows for the working class, artistic colour schemes and single articles for a high class trade, and a

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43 Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Dec 1929 p 65.

44 Sydney Mail 13 Sept 1905 p 678.

45 Many stores also co-operated in patriotic displays during the War and in campaigns to promote Australian-made goods and wool products. Draper Feb 1915 p 71; Apr 1930 p 179; May 1930 p 285.

46 Draper Sept 1917 p 292; Sept 1918 p 324.
mixture for a middle class custom.\footnote{Draper} One drapery shop proprietor suggested to the \textit{Draper} in 1914 that whereas working class women were more attracted by door displays, where they could carefully inspect the goods on sale, wealthier women preferred the 'glamour and glitter' of large plate-glass windows.\footnote{Draper} The Champion Window Dresser of Australasia advised retailers in 1924 to aim at attracting account customers, leaders of fashion and the 'better people' early in the season; middle class and cash buyers mid-season; and the working class at the end of season or sale time.\footnote{Draper}

Display figures had a dramatic impact on shop windows after 1910. Drapery commodities and dress materials were previously 'draped' on display stands or dummies without heads. The \textit{Draper} referred to wax models in 1902 but they appear not to have been widely accepted until later, when improved production techniques made them more 'lifelike'.\footnote{Draper} Some window dressers preferred headless dummies into the 1920s because they believed this method of display leaves something to the imagination, so that the customer can easily visualise her own figure in the frock ... the simple suggestion of a drape [leaves] the rest to the customer's imagination. She gets a real pleasure in fancying how she will look in this or that material etc. Don't deprive her of that pleasure. She can't imagine herself as the theatrical young lady with the pearly complexion and ruby lips of the wax model.\footnote{Draper}

\footnote{Draper} Feb 1906 p 95.\footnote{Draper} Oct 1914 p 412.\footnote{Draper} June 1924 p 365.\footnote{Draper} June 1902 p 231.\footnote{Draper} June 1924 p 365.
However, this Champion Window Dresser was apparently fighting a rearguard action. Photos in the Draper suggest that window dummies typically had heads after about 1914.

By the late 1920s the wax model had not only become ubiquitous, but was being modified to become even more eye-catching. Display figures demonstrated 'realistic' modern hairstyles, while London models became surrealist in design and were made in brilliant metallic colours with the hair in gold and silver. The Sydney Morning Herald reported in 1928 that although Sydney shops had not yet copied London's 'robot figures', they did contain figures of golden papier-maché with heads showing 'startlingly sleek shingles and vividly red lips'.92 One year later the paper reported that wax mannequins had been 'modernised'. Figures were no longer rosy-cheeked and simpering, but slim, boyish and tanned. Others 'only faintly resemble the human form, being all angles and fly-away curves, and headless, after the fashion of the futuristic school of artists'. Hair was either white or was dyed to match the frock on display.93

The trend towards a more explicit representation of the female body was mirrored in the beginnings of fashion photography evident in drapery trade literature by the 1920s. Photographs of models wearing millinery or of costumes displayed on a headless dummy were occasionally used in the Draper from 1901, but were extremely rare. Retail advertising experts preferred line drawings as late as 1924 because they believed drawings conveyed aesthetic emphasis,

92 Sydney Morning Herald 26 Apr 1928 p 5 (Women's Page).
93 Sydney Morning Herald 2 Jan 1929 p 4.
whereas photos were 'stubbornly impartial'. However, photography constructed gender forms far more authoritatively than drawings, precisely because it purported to more directly represent reality. As Ann Stephen has pointed out, during the inter-war years the photograph became the 'most natural way' of representing appearances and selling commodities. Influenced by the New Photography of the 1920s, an approach which attempted to emphasize the 'essential nature' of objects by drawing attention to their forms and meanings, fashion photography increasingly represented women as commodities. Photos of female models began to appear more frequently in the Draper around 1915 and were used increasingly over the next ten years, until by the late 1920s the photos took up entire pages. As the photographs in the Australian National Gallery's 1986 'Glamour Show: Studio Photographs 1925-1955' suggest, commercial photographers were engaged in the project of representing a 'staged and constructed reality' in which the viewer was invited to consume the products they advertised.

Portrait-style photos of female models' heads, particularly in the advertisement of millinery, presented female features and the use of cosmetics more emphatically than did drawings. Portraits of models and film stars in the Glamour Show suggest physical perfection: surfaces are black, white, matt and smooth; lighting effects accentuate contrasts, light and shadow; blemishes or irregularities are

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Draper May 1924.

"Mass Produced Photography in Australia during the Inter-War Years', Art Network 9 (Autumn 1983) p 40.

inconceivable. The self-conscious arrangements of the bodies and the construction of their completeness make even the glamorous men in the portraits appear feminine, as if the art itself was by definition feminine.

The retail trade was by the late 1920s intimately involved in the construction of female rather than male physical perfection: artistic and photographic representations of men in fashion and trade journals were rare. This shift to a more deliberate representation of the female form suggests that retailers increasingly employed sales techniques that sold femininity as a commodity. When display men used headless dummies, the woman customer contributed some of the ideological labour involved in selling the goods by putting herself in the picture and imagining the clothes or millinery on her own person. Dummies with perfect hairstyles, pearly complexions and ruby lips, on the other hand, provided a fabricated image of perfect womanhood.\(^7\) The ideological sign labour that retailers invested in the display of commodities and their models arguably made it more difficult for the female customer to adjust her self-image to that of the model displaying feminine perfection. The process of mediation between female self-image and feminine window-image became more problematic for women as retailers increasingly appropriated and consciously constructed femininity.\(^8\)

\(^7\) See Jean Baudrillard, 'Fetishism and Ideology: the Semiological Reduction' in his *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St. Louis, Telos Press, 1981).

\(^8\) My thanks to Meaghan Morris for helping me to clarify some of the ideas contained in this paragraph.
Retailers' creation of 'atmosphere' windows also indicates their increased attention to the promotion of ideas and values. An article in the *Draper* told retailers that 'modernistic' ideas and new materials could be used to create display atmosphere by, for example, showing a bride's trousseau in a cathedral-type setting.** Farmer's windows in August 1930 displayed light spring fabrics in a tableau that included geese in flight, deer leaping from rock to rock, and dolphins playing in the sea.*** Hordern Brothers constructed equally evocative rustic displays which incorporated fountains, rock grottos and miniature trees in shades of gold and green.****

Live models supplemented photographs, display dummies and 'atmosphere' windows in the display of department store merchandise after World War I. A highly critical report of a mannequin display organised by an anonymous emporium in 1916 suggests that these were early days for the fashion parade. The store had apparently used 'shop and factory girls' who were ungainly, wore too much face colour and had pimply backs.***** Farmers developed the technique with typical flair several years later, with dramatic presentations featuring a lady's boudoir or the office of a costume and millinery showroom.****** By the late 1920s these live presentations included dances, songs, films, orchestral accompaniment and

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** *Draper* Sept 1930 pp 18-19.
*** *Draper* Aug 1930 p 462.
**** *Draper* Nov 1928 p 549.
***** *Draper* Aug 1916 p 271.
****** *Draper* Dec 1918 p 425.
Mc Cathies' prize-winning window display of underwear. The display is in pink, white and black, with a jardiniere of pink roses lit by red lights in the centre. Draper of Australasia May 1917 [Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales].

David Jones' window display of bridal clothes 'in a cathedral-type setting', 1927 [David Jones Ltd].
even operatic arias. Mark Foys staged a mannequin parade by Bonds entitled 'The Magic of Silk and the Secret of Warmth', while Hordern Brothers produced a live display of foundation garments in collaboration with Berlei Limited called 'Modelling the Mode'.

How did customers respond to these determined strategies to win their attention and open their purses? A survey carried out in the United States in 1923 to find out 'Why Women Buy' found that city women were more often influenced by window displays than any other form of publicity. From the limited evidence that can be gleaned from magazines and trade literature, it appears that with few exceptions Australian women also reacted enthusiastically to the large stores' displays. A contributor to the Shop Assistants Magazine in 1926, for example, expressed her relief that flannelette underwear had been replaced by 'the giddiness of georgette and alluring mystery of crepe-de-chine'. There was, she pointed out, no such allure in windows dedicated to men's wear. The 'Shop Window' column of the Commonwealth Home, also written by a woman, passed (invariably favourable) judgement on the relative merits of the different store windows and asserted that well-dressed windows attracted the female customer: 'she is drawn into that shop in spite of her economical resolutions, and feels sure she will look as graceful as that figure in the window draped by a master hand'.

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44 Draper May 1929 p 258; Aug 1930 p 413.
45 Draper March 1923 p 141.
46 Shop Assistants Magazine June 1926 p 23.
47 Commonwealth Home Sept 1928 p 35.
appeal of women’s clothes. It described a Mark Foys window depicting a drawing-room scene containing male and female figures:

...the thought struck one that the shop windows would no longer have any attractions if women’s fashions changed as infrequently as men’s. This man in his dinner suit was quite correct but not a bit different from every other man. The lady at the piano was wearing a scrumptious dress of pale pink georgette with sprays of autumn leaves scattered over, bordered with diamante.**

Similarly, the live modelling entertainments proved remarkably popular with women. The Draper reported that response to Farmer’s 1918 lunchtime playlets for business girls was so overwhelming that admission had to be restricted to ticket-holders only, as a result of the ‘great rush of the feminine public of all classes’.*** The popularity of these events does not necessarily imply that every member of the audience automatically bought the articles on display. Fashion shows and attractive window displays were popular free forms of entertainment and fashion information for many Sydney women.

There were occasional voices of dissent. Jocelyn Perkins, writing in Helen’s Weekly, for example, believed that women were often lured into shops by bargains displayed in windows, only to meet assistants determined to sell them more expensive articles. It was, she stated, selling on false pretences.** Margaret Barnard Eldershaw put the same point more forcefully in her novel Tommorrow, Tommorrow and Tommorrow when she described Sydney shop windows in the 1920s

** Commonwealth Home Sept 1928 p 39.
*** Draper Dec 1918 p 425.
** Helen’s Weekly Jan 1928 p 39.
as 'Bright shop windows, endless with fulfillment, emblems of paradisaical, unattainable living ...' W. Davies MLA complained in the Worker that fur coats were being displayed in George Street shop windows while working families struggled to clothe themselves. His anger, however, was misdirected: he blamed the wealthy women who bought the coats and lived a life of idleness rather than the retailers who sold them.  

The new open display techniques were a mixed blessing for retailers as well as consumers. The open display of goods made shoplifting much easier than it had been under the old methods. As one magistrate commented in 1929: 'In the old days we had to ask for anything we wanted: under modern conditions it is scarcely possible to walk through a shop without dragging something off a table.' An article in the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal admitted that the new methods might encourage shoplifting but they also stimulated the customer to buy more than she initially intended, and so retailers were reluctant to 'surrender the advantage'. Hoist with their own petard, retailers drew up the balance sheet and concluded that the advantages of open displays outweighed the disadvantages.


72 Worker 27 May 1920 p 11.

73 Sydney Morning Herald 20 July 1929 clipping in David Jones Archives.

Retailers believed that the new display techniques that placed female commodities on show stimulated more demand than those catering to menswear. Department store display methods suggest that the context of femininity that formed the unwritten organising principle around which female goods were marketed was exploited more rigourously and more systematically than masculinity. Women's departments were more seductively comfortable than men's, women's windows were deliberately more alluring, and female models were more extensively and carefully deployed than male figures. The new marketing trend toward selling ideas found particularly fertile ground in the social representation of femininity. The sale and display of menswear trailed lamely behind its female leaders.

Catalogues

Department store goods were displayed not just in their departments and in windows, but also in mail order catalogues. The most useful store catalogues for this study are the almost complete series which survive for David Jones, Grace Brothers and Peapes and Company. These and similar publications were widely distributed to city and country customers. Country shoppers in particular relied on the store catalogues for fashion and commodity information, and used them to order goods from the store by mail. The male and female images and implicit gender messages presented in

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78 The Model Trader 1908-1930 in Grace Brothers Archives; Peapes & Co. catalogues c. 1897, 1907-1930 in Mitchell Library; David Jones mail order catalogues 1899, 1902-4, c. 1910, 1916-17, 1924-1930 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/83.
the catalogues therefore reached a wide and receptive audience.

Information on catalogue production and the relationship between retail management and commercial artists is scant. Catalogues appear to have been produced by major retailers such as Anthony Hordern & Sons in conjunction with their country order departments from the late 1880s. As Charles Lloyd Jones noted in his autobiography, catalogues were an important advertising medium not only because they reached a large clientele, but because their effectiveness could be measured more precisely than other forms of publicity. David Jones employed a woman in 1913 to take charge of the catalogue production. She and her eight assistants wrote descriptions of the advertised goods from outlines provided them by the department from which they came, while the Artists Department was responsible for sketching the costumes. The head catalogue artist was also female. Several years later the firm produced and distributed 75,000 copies of the catalogue.

There are few, if any, analyses of catalogue advertising which focus on gender images. The historian may usefully apply some of the analytic tools developed within the theory of advertising to 'de-code' illustrative material, but only with caution. Contemporary structures of significance may

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*Australia* 6 June 1907 p 14.

Charles Lloyd Jones and Desmond Robinson, 'Customers are Human', unpub. typescript c. 1958 in David Jones Archives.

Report to the Directors of David Jones Ltd by A.R. Harwood 1913 p 28 in David Jones Archives.

David Jones board minutes 18 Sep 1917 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/32/1.
differ from those created by advertisers in earlier periods with possibly alien aesthetic and social values.\textsuperscript{30} Historians can, without doing too much violence to contemporary perceptions, nevertheless chart differences in the representation of women and men at specified periods, and show how these images changed over time.

A second problem in applying existing theories of advertising to store publicity is that the form and content of product advertising (created by the manufacturer) differed markedly from that of store advertising (created by the retailer). Source material used by Roland Marchand in his study of American advertising in the 1920s and 1930s, for example, reveals advertising forms which rarely, if ever, appear in advertising designed to sell the store image rather than the commodity.\textsuperscript{31} Catalogue and newspaper figures almost invariably appear in isolation from each other (rather than in tableaux or family groupings) and are accompanied by a descriptive instead of a narrative text. As a result, patterns of domination and subordination in gender relations such as those traced by Erving Goffman and Roland Marchand are difficult to detect in store advertisements.\textsuperscript{32}


\textsuperscript{32} Erving Goffman, \textit{Gender Advertisements} (London: Macmillan, 1979). The only example of a composite advertisement I encountered in the catalogues was the back cover of David Jones' catalogue of 1919 which showed a family group.
Advertising style and the form given to male and female figures in catalogues were closely influenced by prevailing standards of beauty (especially female beauty), by fashions in art, and by developments in advertising technology. Lois Banner has shown how the ideal American form underwent significant changes in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The voluptuous model of feminine beauty popular from 1860 to the 1890s was gradually superceded by the boyish ‘flapper’ in the 1910s.\(^3\) While these two American ideals of beauty corresponded with Australian figures presented in catalogues at the same time, the Gibson Girl look (tall, athletic and patrician) popular in America between the 1890s and 1910s does not appear to have been adopted with the same enthusiasm by Australian retailers.\(^4\) The commercial version of the ideal Australian woman appears to have shifted directly from the buxom matron of the 1890s to the ‘boyish’ girl of the post-World War I period.

The second general shift in catalogue style that took place between 1890 and 1930 was the change from line drawings to a bolder, cartoon-style of half-tone illustration which paid less attention to detail and more to blocks of light and shade and definitive boundary lines. These drawings were occasionally supplemented by photographs, apparently touched up for emphasis. Peapes’ store, for example, displayed its menswear almost exclusively by photograph by the late 1920s. However, photography was not used extensively in the Grace

\(^3\) Banner, *American Beauty* p 5.

\(^4\) Alexandra Joel (*Best Dressed, 200 Years of Fashion in Australia*, Sydney: Collins, 1984) places more emphasis on the Gibson Girl look and suggests that the ‘tailor-made’ fashions of the 1900s reflected her influence (p 42).
Brothers or David Jones catalogues, and fashion drawing remained the preferred mode of figure representation at least to 1930. David Jones, which produced the most visually appealing and 'artistic' of the catalogues to conform with its high-class store image, also introduced colour to considerable effect after World War I. The use of colour gave greater prominence, for example, to women's lips.\textsuperscript{55}

Beyond these aesthetic and technological innovations, the store catalogues presented a historically-contingent yet enduring message of femininity to their readers. Body shape was presented as feminine ideal: the 'embodiment' of femininity. David Jones' catalogue of 1899 and the Model Trader of 1908 show women's bodies constructed - the viewer assumes with the aid of corsets - into an S-shape in which the top part of the torso was pushed forward and the bottom part pushed back in an extreme manifestation of what Goffman has called 'body cant'.\textsuperscript{56} The essential feature of body cant is the body's asymmetry and consequent lack of balance which created the illusion of dependence (on an object such as a parasol or chair back or another person) and hence subordination.

The precariousness of the forward tilt of the women's bodies was heightened by the placing of both feet close together and the decorative nature of arm and hand placement. Arms and hands were drawn in balletic poses and either pointed outwards in a gesture of appeal, or directed narcissistic attention to the woman's own clothing, hair, body contours or accessories. Women clasped the symbols of

\textsuperscript{55} See, for example, David Jones catalogue 1919.

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Gender Advertisements}, p 46.
Male figures in David Jones' catalogue, 1910 [David Jones Ltd].

Female figure in David Jones' catalogue, 1899 [David Jones Ltd].
femininity: necklaces, scarves, handkerchiefs, parasols, fans, flowers and mirrors. Their smiles were mona-lisa-like, demure yet appeasing. The catalogue women of the 1890s and 1900s met the viewer’s gaze with a seductive combination of passivity and coquetry.

Despite these features common to the turn-of-the-century female model, women’s faces exhibited a degree of individual characterisation. Catalogue artists appear to have made a deliberate attempt to show a variety of facial types, features and hairstyles. This differentiation was aided technically by the detail characteristic of fashion line drawings, and aesthetically by the elaborate and highly varied millinery styles of the period. (Few female models of the period were pictured without a hat). Similarly, a range of ages is detectable, from faces which appear to be in their early 20s to those closer to middle age. The overall impression is that advertising artists of the period 1890–1910 aimed at representations of women that showed the clothes to best advantage, while retaining some conformity to what they believed to be objective female reality.

A subtle shift in the representation of women in the Model Trader and the David Jones catalogues began around 1914. The extreme body cant was relieved by a more upright and less corsetted posture; feet were placed a little further apart; and hands were placed on hips assertively rather than narcissistically. The figures appeared less fragile and static, more confident and solid. Faces, for example, started to look plumper and healthier than their 1890s counterparts. This solidity was emphasised by the trend towards a more stylistic portrait that de-emphasised facial
heterogeneity. Similarly, the age range began to narrow. Mature faces became less common, and many assumed a youthful, almost tomboyish appearance. The post-War women looked out of the page in a more playful and challenging manner than their predecessors would have dared ten years earlier.\footnote{See, for example, Model Trader 1914 and David Jones catalogue 1916.}

The modernistic style popularised by commercial artists after 1921 consolidated the trend away from naturalism towards abstraction. I use the term modernism here to denote the aesthetic movement of the 1920s and 1930s that placed particular emphasis on the meanings embodied in form rather than content, and which replaced attempts at direct representation with deliberate discontinuity and disjuncture. Marchand has suggested that modernism served the interests of American advertisers by inducing consumers to buy through an appeal to emotion and imagery rather than reason. Commercial artists' use of the diagonal, off-centre layout, fragmentation, caricature and exaggerated simplicity all combined to arrest the consumer's eye on the advertisement and invite her or his active participation in reconstructing the commodity.\footnote{Marchand, Advertising the American Dream p 182.} Store catalogues began to incorporate aspects of modernism into female figures in the early 1920s, and by 1930 presented women in an extremely stylised and 'unrealistic' fashion.\footnote{See, for example, Model Trader 1930.}

The disproportionally elongated silhouette with tapered feet and hands identified by Marchand in American advertising
Modernistic female figures. David Jones' catalogue, 1924 [David Jones Ltd].

Standardised female faces. David Jones' catalogue, 1926-7 [David Jones Ltd].
is also evident in Sydney store catalogues by the mid-
1920s.\textsuperscript{90} Hats, previously highly individualised extensions 
of a woman’s hair and face, obliterated the hair and covered 
much of the head, so that sometimes only the lips or a single 
curl was visible.\textsuperscript{\textdagger} This millinery fashion gave more 
prominence to eyes and lips and accentuated the increased 
marketing of female beauty products in the 1920s. Women’s 
faces, particularly in the colour pages of the David Jones 
catalogues, took on a doll-like character. Bodies assumed a 
more angular and geometric appearance which emphasised the 
retreat from naturalism. By 1930 women were presented with 
identical faces and bodies that bore little resemblance to 
reality. Moreover, these ideal women were uniformly 
youthful.\textsuperscript{\textdaggerdbl} As the Draper noted in 1918, millinery fashion 
artists were used to drawing ‘young and pretty’ faces. To 
advertise hats for ‘matrons and other types’ would have made 
the artists’ work more difficult and hence more expensive.\textsuperscript{\textdaggerddbl} 

Catalogue artists’ presentation of men in this period 
showed less variation and an immunity to modernistic 
treatment. Male figures in Peapes’ catalogue of the late 
1890s and in the David Jones catalogues around 1910 were 
presented in an aristocratic style which suggested an upper 
middle class background. The figures were typically stiff, 
static and haughty. By the mid 1910s, however, the men 
appeared to be both middle and working class. They had a

\textsuperscript{90} Advertising the American Dream p 182.

\textsuperscript{\textdagger} See, for example, David Jones catalogue 1926-7.

\textsuperscript{\textdaggerdbl} See, for example, Model Trader 1921 and 1930; David 
Jones catalogue 1924 and 1929.

\textsuperscript{\textdaggerddbl} Draper June 1918 p 207.
more casual posture which allowed greater movement, and the severity of the masculine expression was occasionally softened by a smile. The tall and lean look of the male aristocrat was replaced by a more solid and chunky masculinity and almost rectangular silhouette. Apart from a few more smiles and a slightly slimmer silhouette, this type remained unaltered into the 1930s. It was not unusual, lamented the Draper in 1922, to find designs for male figures in the latest catalogues that were ten years old.

A comparison of female and male catalogue images reveals striking differences in form, arrangement and context. The severe body cant characteristic of female figures before World War I was absent in men. Where women’s feet were invariably drawn close together, men’s were placed solidly apart in an attitude that gave a strong impression of balance, body symmetry, and reliability. This sense of male physical (and by implication, psychological) balance was occasionally supplemented by the man’s use of a walking cane drawn as if were a third leg, or a gun as a third arm. By comparison, women’s use of the parasol was tentative and decorative. Masculine solidity was also emphasised by the ubiquitous rectangular body shape.

Whereas women’s hands either fluttered decoratively or tapered modernistically, men’s hands were squarer, more functional, and appeared to be more definitively connected to the male body. Male hands were frequently placed jauntily in

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** See, for example, Model Trader 1913; Peapes & Co. catalogue 1918; David Jones catalogue 1916-17.

Draper Dec 1922 p 591.

David Jones catalogue 1910.
trouser pockets; male legs were casually crossed at the ankle or bent at the knee. Men were often drawn with one foot slightly raised above the other (placed on a tree stump, for example) in an attitude of confident body display forbidden to women.**

Men were typically portrayed in action, in contrast to women who appeared to be almost exclusively creatures of leisure. When the artist sketched in a background to the figures, women were displayed in drawing rooms or gardens, engaging in activities little more exerting than drinking tea or eating chocolates.*** Men, on the other hand, were placed in city streetscapes, offices, stables, paddocks, stockyards, on golfcourses, in cars, riding horses, bathing, hiking, surfing, shaving, digging, fencing or oiling machinery. Even when men and women engaged in the same activity - smoking - men were pictured lighting-up energetically and puffing vigourously, while women's cigarettes dangled languidly from their fingers.**

The greater range of active contexts for men reflects the artists' and retailers' acceptance of the primacy of men's occupational roles. Unlike Marchand, who found hardly any working class men portrayed as consumers in American product advertisements, Sydney store catalogues paid considerable attention to the clothing needs of the male Australian worker. This applied equally to Peapes and David Jones, which aimed at a high-class store image, as it did to the broader market of Grace Brothers. By the 1910s men were

** David Jones catalogue 1916-17, 1919.
*** Model Trader Feb 1921.
**** See, for example, David Jones catalogue 1916-17.
portrayed as businessmen, rural workers, delivery men, mechanics and labourers. They held not fans and flowers but saws, rakes, spanners, hammers and knives.\textsuperscript{100} The \textit{Model Trader} of 1921 had a composite page advertising men's work clothes which showed men swinging axes, shovelling coal, rolling barrels, working on the railroad, mending fences and shoeing horses. The clothes were advertised for their comfort, durability and strength in a way that women's clothes could never be. The men who displayed them symbolised strenuous activity, masculine action and the rewards of hard physical labour.

Just as catalogue images of men resisted the disorienting impact of modernism, so did male figures appear to be less susceptible to the standardisation evident in female figures by the mid-1920s. Male portraits retained their pseudo-naturalism and a greater range of age-types throughout the 1920s.\textsuperscript{101} Although male features were perhaps less individualised than women's at the turn of the century, they were nowhere as homogeneous as women's by 1930. The effect of this masculine image freeze was a greater divergence in male and female images in the 1920s. The polarisation of gender display was noticeably greater in 1930 than it was twenty years earlier.

It is difficult to assess the social effects of retailers' promotion of gender ideologies through their catalogues. We can perhaps speculate that for a community largely reliant on the printed media for its information

\textsuperscript{100} See, for example, \textit{Model Trader} 1912.

\textsuperscript{101} See, for example, David Jones catalogue 1919-20, 1924.

Men at work. *The Model Trader* 1921 [Grace Brothers Ltd].
about the world including gender relations, the catalogues contributed to the construction of gender more authoritatively than they would today in the age of television. The gendered body language presented in the catalogues drew upon but also helped define the limits of acceptable public display and action for women and men.

Retailers also reinforced through the catalogues the popular ideology that women belonged to the world of leisure and men to the world of work. Given women's continuing unpaid labour in the home and increasing rates of participation in the paid workforce, retailers' determination to present women as ladies of leisure is significant. Their presentation of bourgeois images of womanhood helped to sell the high status value of a leisured lifestyle to female customers of all classes. It was also to retailers' advantage to promote women as consumers rather than producers if they were to cultivate a section of the unpaid labour force exclusively devoted to the social work of shopping.

Retailers were equally engaged in promoting masculinity. Their presentation of menswear as commodities imbued with popular notions of manliness—strength, action, work—suggest that it was as important to sell masculinity to female shoppers as it was to sell them their own femininity. Marchand found a concern among American advertising men that male figures would be 'prettied up' too much for perceived feminine consumer taste. It was to retailers' economic advantage, therefore, to reinforce the broad sexual division of labour in which one social group (men) earned the family income and another (women) spent it.

102 Advertising the American Dream p 190.
The asymmetry in the development of catalogue images of women and men in the 1910s and 1920s is also significant. Female figures were more susceptible to aesthetic modification along the lines of what retailers and commercial artists considered to be 'modern'. Perhaps retailers paid more artistic attention to female figures because they were aiming at a predominantly female clientele; perhaps the boundaries of femininity were seen by men as less rigid than those of masculinity. The shifts in female representation might also signal an unarticulated ideology of women as malleable and passive receptacles of aggressive marketing policies.

Women have a more profitable relationship with aesthetics than do men. As Jill Carrick has argued in her analysis of poster art between 1890 and 1910, commercial artists fused the symbol of 'woman' with that of 'art' with the result that the commodities they advertised exerted a powerful fascination on the viewer.103 A similar process might account for the modernistic treatment of women in store catalogues and suggests that retailers consciously and rigourously promoted women's commodities for their ideological value.

Second, the standardisation of feminine ideals of beauty and bodily form paralleled a similar process evident in clothing manufacture and cosmetics marketing by the 1920s. Retailers and the artists who served them created images of women on the same principles of mass production as the clothes they were advertising. As a result, the women who

displayed the clothes were as much commodities as the garments they wore.

Print Advertising Policy

Displays and catalogues were the more glamorous and visually appealing forms of advertising used by store managements. Printed media advertisements were superficially more prosaic, but were the lifeblood of the big stores' marketing drive. Almost every time someone in Sydney opened a newspaper or magazine they saw advertisements for the big stores urging them to come in and buy, and encouraging them to identify with a distinctive store image through a store-specific style of presentation.

The function of advertising under monopoly capitalism, as both American and Australian historians have pointed out, was to expand the internal market for goods by creating social images that exploited individuals' desire to possess the material and psychological benefits of a consumer society.\(^{104}\) The advertising of the big stores differed, however, from the general product advertising that these and other writers have focused their attention on. Where manufacturers aimed to sell a commodity, retailers were primarily interested in selling themselves. The store itself became a product for which advertisers attempted to cultivate a form of product loyalty. In a retail world in which there was little difference in the goods the stores offered, advertisements were designed to attract customers by creating

a recognisable store image. Retailers aimed first to manufacture consumer wants, then to physically get the consumer into the shop. A specially-advertised line acted, therefore, as the bait with which to entice the shopper into the store where she would hopefully be induced to buy other items.

This chapter is more concerned with the intentions and motivations of retail advertisers than with the effects of advertising on consumers. The relationship between the intents and the effects of advertising is too complex to be addressed in detail here, and evidence of people's responses to advertising too scant to allow a confident assessment of its results. What there is, however, suggests the existence of both positive and negative points of view. Occasional criticism of 'dodges in the advertising profession' was voiced in, for example, the Australian Worker. Government officials and consumers who participated in cost of living enquiries also complained that advertising by softgoods firms was inflationary and often misleading. President Heydon remarked at the 1918 Board of Trade enquiry into the cost of living for female workers that newspaper advertisements

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106 See, for example, references to 'store identity' in an article on David Jones' advertisements in the American trade journal the Dry Goods Economist 27 Oct 1923 in David Jones Archives; and the Draper Feb 1929 p 52.

104 Draper Feb 1914 p 45.

107 Women's column in the Worker Feb 18 1905.

108 Report of the Royal Commission on the High Cost of Living no. 4 (General), Victoria, Votes and Proceedings, Legislative Assembly 1923-4 v 2 p 1077 (my thanks to Meredith Foley for this reference); New South Wales Board of Trade, transcripts of proceedings of the Inquiry into the Cost of Living of Adult Female Workers 1918, Archive Office of New South Wales 2/5768 p 97.
attracted people into the shop and 'having got them there, as
the spider gets the fly into his web, by appropriate methods
they are eaten up.' More unusual were the feminist
comments of a Shop Assistants Magazine columnist who
complained in 1926 that various parts of women's bodies
(knees and ankles) were too often used as sexual advertising
bait in posters, newspapers and magazines.  

Probably more typical were appreciative comments on
advertising in two women's periodicals of the period. Craig
Campbell in the Association Woman (organ of the National
organisation of the Young Women's Christian Association) saw
potential in 'this most human science' to render a great
service to humanity. On a more practical level, Herself
argued that advertising had benefited women by bringing
information about the modern world into their homes.

Regardless of consumers' opinions, advertising appears
to have worked. A survey by the American National Retailers
Association cited in the Shop Assistants Magazine in 1927
found that when two similar articles were placed on sale at
the same price, one advertised and the other unadvertised,
the customer bought the advertised product 87.6 times out of
100, compared with 3.6 times for the unadvertised. When the
advertised product was sold at a higher price than the

107 Cost of Living of Female Workers 1918 p 97.
110 'Woman to Woman', Shop Assistants Magazine Oct 1926
p 24.
111 Association Woman Feb 1921 p 14.
112 Herself July 1928 p 3.
unadvertised, customers still bought it 60.6 times out of 100.113

Advertising was certainly sufficiently successful for retailers to pay it increasing attention as mass retailing institutions developed. The major drapery houses advertised themselves from their establishment in the early to mid nineteenth century. Humphrey McQueen has traced the origins of mass marketing techniques in Australia to the presence of the sales-conscious National Cash Register Company and the activities of advertising agents after the 1880s.114 Drapers contributed to this embryonic industry structure by placing advertisements in newspapers, journals and other printed material such as street directories. They supplemented this publicity in the 1880s and 1890s with hand-distributed circulars, sale notices and price lists, and with posters by the turn of the century.115 At least one store, Farmers, employed an advertising manager by the 1890s.116

Store advertising entered a new era of professionalisation at the turn of the century, aided by technological developments in engraving, photography and typography. The Australian Storekeepers' Journal acknowledged in 1900 the influence of 'expert adsmiths' and

113 Shop Assistants Magazine June-July 1927 p 15.


115 See, for example, advertising card 1880 in David Jones Archives; comment on circulars in the Australian Storekeepers' Journal July 1895 p 92; and examples of posters for David Jones, Mark Foy's and Lasseters in Art and Architecture 2 (1905).

116 Farmer & Co. minute book 15 Apr 1897 in Grace Brothers Archives.
the importance of a progressive advertising policy, while the Dawn suggested copy-writing for department stores as a new career opportunity for educated Australian women as it was in the United States.\(^{117}\) A new journal called The Reason Why devoted to the 'science' of advertising and containing advice by men prominent in the Australian industry, was established in 1908.\(^{118}\) Amongst them were Sydney retailers William Lowe and Charles Lloyd Jones, the latter a self-proclaimed Australian leader of retail advertising who created the position of advertising manager at David Jones after a visit to the United States in 1905.\(^{119}\) Another David Jones employee, Anna Donaldson, claimed a similar pioneering status as the 'mother of retail advertising in New South Wales'. Donaldson became the firm's advertising manager in the mid 1920s and is credited with devising the store's slogan 'David Jones for Service'.\(^{120}\) David Jones was not alone in this explicit attention to advertising: several major retailers told the New South Wales Arbitration Court in 1907 that they employed managers to supervise expenditure on advertising, Samuel Hordern admitting that he spent up to £35,000 p.a.\(^{121}\)

The organisation of the retail industry through its employer association the Master Retailers Association of New


\(^{118}\) The Reason Why July 1908.

\(^{119}\) Robinson and Lloyd Jones, 'Customers are Human'.

\(^{120}\) Obituary in Sydney Morning Herald 15 Aug 1986.

\(^{121}\) Evidence of Samuel Hordern presented before the New South Wales Court of Arbitration Shop Assistants case 1907, transcripts of evidence, Archives Office of New South Wales 2/95-98 v 44 pp 1046-7; evidence of James Macken (Mark Foys) v 43 pp 924-5.
South Wales, and the emergence of an advertising industry structure complete with service agencies, made store publicity even bigger business after World War I.\textsuperscript{122} Retailers assumed a prominent position in the fledgling Australian advertising industry from the outset: more than one-third of the delegates at the first Australasian Conference on Advertising held in 1918 were connected with the retail trade.\textsuperscript{123} The amount of column inches devoted to drapery goods in 1921 outnumbered most other commodity types in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Daily Telegraph*, and all other advertisements in the *Sun* and *Evening News*.\textsuperscript{124} Retailers' reverence for the power of advertising was such that by 1929 the *Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal* claimed that 'we have passed through a great production era and are on the threshold of an advertising and selling one.'\textsuperscript{125}

Psychology was the primary ideological foundation and legitimating force of the new advertising after the turn of the century. As John Chynoweth Burnham found for the United


\textsuperscript{123} Spierings, 'Realising Dreams', p 1.

\textsuperscript{124} Analysis of display advertising in *Advertising in Australia* July 1921 pp 15-25.

\textsuperscript{125} *Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal* July 1929 p 39.
States, Australian advertising experts and retailers were amongst the most eager consumers of applied psychology.\footnote{126}{The New Psychology: From Narcissism to Social Control' in John Braeman, Robert H. Bremner and David Brody (eds.), Change and Continuity in Twentieth-Century America: the 1920s (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968) p 391.} The advertising journal the \textit{Reason Why} told its readers, perhaps a little optimistically, that psychology was a recognised factor in advertising as early as 1908.\footnote{127}{Reason Why Aug 1908 p 21.} Two years later the author of a book entitled \textit{Wisdom and Success in Advertising} stated that its aim was to impress on the business man that the only scientific basis of advertising was the psychological study of the mind he was attempting to influence.\footnote{128}{E. Gewurz, \textit{Wisdom and Success in Advertising} (Melbourne, 1910) p 11.}

The integration of psychological principles into advertising theory was further boosted and legitimated in the 1920s by the proselytising of proponents such as Professors Elton Mayo and Tasman Lovell.\footnote{129}{Stephen, 'Agents of Consumerism' pp 82-3; Spierings, 'Realising Dreams' pp 7-12.} Retailers appear to have been just as enraptured with the potential of the new social sciences as any other section of the business community and frequently reproduced the holy words of Mayo and Lovell in their trade journals.\footnote{130}{See, for example, \textit{Draper} Sep 1920 p 296.}

The new psychology of the late 1920s was increasingly used by advertisers to determine the specific desires of consumers through market research.\footnote{131}{Burnham, 'The New Psychology' p 392.} Just as psychology was
used in industry as a means of social control by attempting to meet the 'human' and welfare needs of workers, in marketing it was applied to the problem of 'humanising' advertising. As Herbert Casson wrote in his 1928 book *The Art of Customer-finding*, advertisers were 'learning to write in terms of people and not of commodities.'

Psychology gave advertising experts a language with which to articulate their intuitive perception that 'people' came in two varieties: male and female. While retailers probably organised their advertising either consciously or unconsciously along gendered lines in the late nineteenth century, it was only after the rationalisation of mass marketing in the early twentieth century that trade literature revealed a deliberate attention to sexual difference. The advertising column in the *Draper*, for example, paid no explicit attention to gender until 1907. Thereafter contributors made it increasingly clear that to be successful, advertising policy had to take account of differences between men's and women's commodities and between male and female consumers.

Advertising menswear to men (some men's goods were bought by women) was perceived fairly consistently by retailers as a marketing problem. The sale of menswear was, according to the *Draper*, 'the most difficult of advertising tasks'. The journal frequently criticised menswear advertisements as being conservative, dry and lifeless. Part of the problem lay in the nature of male commodities:

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132 *The Art of Customer-finding* (Sydney, 1928) p 141.

133 *Draper* Sep 1916 p 295.

134 See, for example, *Draper* Apr 1923 p 199.
advertisers admitted that it was difficult to be innovative in advertising such mundane items as shirts, pyjamas and collars.\textsuperscript{136} Trade journals believed that male readers were unlikely to be attracted by lyrical and feminine flights of advertising fancy which drew their attention, for example, to wattle bursting into bloom or similar 'useless figures of speech and flowery phrases.'\textsuperscript{136}

The male customer, indeed, represented a considerable challenge to advertisers. Many were reported to be 'too matter-of-fact' to pay any attention to advertisements and generally did not pay as much attention to them as women; while those men who could be induced to scan the newspaper advertisements were apparently too busy to waste their time on such feminine pursuits.\textsuperscript{137} Store advertisers were therefore advised to reduce copy to the bare essentials to give the male reader the impression that he could buy the goods 'with a minimum of fuss or bother.'\textsuperscript{138} Menswear advertisers were also urged to provide 'reason why' copy (that is, reasons why the consumer should buy the goods), strong headlines to make a man 'sit up and think', bold type to give the impression of solidity, and simple, strong and terse language.\textsuperscript{139} The Draper 'Ad-man' also considered it important to design advertisements to appeal to a specific

\textsuperscript{136} Draper Sep 1921 p 407.

\textsuperscript{136} Draper Dec 1914 p 491, Apr 1923 p 199.

\textsuperscript{137} Draper Apr 1907 p 155, Apr 1923 p 199, Mar 1929 p 136.

\textsuperscript{138} Draper Mar 1927 p 115, Apr 1925 p 180.

\textsuperscript{139} Draper Apr 1923 p 199, Dec 1923 p 742, Apr 1925 p 180, Mar 1927 p 115.
social class of male customer, whether working men
(emphasising price), or professionals (stressing quality). He hoped that this 'psychological effect of atmosphere' would
overcome men's inherent resistance to advertising.

Women customers were seen as quite different creatures.
They had, according to the Reason Why, both the time and the
inclination to read closely the advertising section of the
newspaper. As it was women who bought an estimated 90 per
cent of all drapery goods, the business man would be wise to
make his advertising 'replete with sentiments that appeal to
women.' The fundamental difference between male and
female shoppers lay in women's 'natural' attachment to home
and family; it was she who played the major role in the
domestic economy and who therefore had a 'natural' propensity
for bargain-hunting. Advertising policy-makers constantly
stressed women's susceptible eye for value and price, and
believed that despite repeated disappointments, women were
'always ready to listen again to the fairy story of
"miraculous values".' The language here reveals the
Draper's perception of women as more attached to fantasy than
to the real world.

The psychology of the female customer appears to have
excited more interest in retail advertisers than that of her
male equivalent. It is significant that the Draper's Monthly

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141 Draper Mar 1929 p 136.
143 'Advertising for the Woman', Reason Why Feb 1909 p 16; Draper June 1914 p 278, Sep 1914 p 400.
144 Draper June 1922 p 277.
Advertising Review was sub-titled for a period in the early 1920s 'Our Ad man talks on the psychology of the woman purchaser of Australian-made goods'. This attention to the psychology of the feminine was due in large measure to the greater economic value of women to store managers. Because women constituted the majority of shoppers, it made more sense for retailers to spend more time trying to understand the female rather than the male mind.

However, in analysing retailers' application of psychological theory to marketing, it is often hard to distinguish between genuine psychological principles and popular conceptions of femininity. Ideas about women appear to have had as much impact on popular psychology as the other way around. One American expert quoted in the Draper, for example, claimed that he used psychology in stressing beauty and visual appeal in selling to women because 'the mind of woman always responds more readily to the elemental, emotional appeal than the mind of man.' Similarly, an article on 'the psychological buying instinct in women' in the Advertiser's Monthly pointed out their 'highly developed sense of values', their liking for imaginative atmosphere rather than plain products, their innate concern for the welfare of their families, and their fondness for 'human interest' stories rather than technicalities. Psychological language became an effective way of articulating and formalising notions of sexual difference in general, and femininity in particular.

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145 Draper Oct 1918 p 345.
Marcus Clark's newspaper advertisement scrapbook for 1922 suggests that store copy-writing practice followed these general advertising principles. Advertisements publicised either men's or women's or household goods, but never a combination. Bold headlines for women's clothes began with such phrases as 'There is character ...', 'An Enticing Range ...' and 'A Charming Display of Elegant Autumn and Winter Frocks ...'. Those for men's goods indicated 'Rational Summer Wear ...', 'Serviceable Serge Suits...' and 'Being Dressed ...'.

A comparison of women's and men's advertisements appearing on the same day highlights Marcus Clark's implicitly gendered advertising policy. A woman's chic robe was described as 'Putty Crepe de Chine, made on straight lines, round neck, set-in sleeves, vestette of jade jersey silk; bodice, sleeves, smartly trimmed steel bugle beads and putty stitching; swathed belt to finish'. Youths' sac suits, on the other hand, were 'in Best Quality Indigo Dye Serge, fine twill, and all wool. An ideal Serge for summer wear. Best workmanship, made in our own workrooms. Coat having 2-button style, with medium roll lapels, well-shaped, fashionable ...'.

This language of fashion, as Roland Barthes has shown in *The Fashion System*, draws a veil of meaning around the garment being advertised to create desire in the mind of the

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147 The scrapbook is contained in the Marcus Clark papers in the Australian National University Archives of Business and Labour 76/48.

148 Woman's advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* 1 Nov 1922; man's from *Daily Telegraph* 1 Nov 1922 in Marcus Clark scrapbook.
That veil of meaning was consciously constructed by retail advertisers in different ways for men's and women's goods. The meanings inherent in female fashion language were, as these illustrations and countless other examples suggest, more sensuous and aesthetically evocative than those attached to menswear.

Sales experts' characterisation of women's innate predisposition for ideas and atmosphere - also evident, as we have seen, in display principles by the late 1920s - was related to women's perceived antipathy to mechanical and intellectual matters. The Draper warned its readers that women did not appreciate advertisements which talked about patriotism, business ethics or similar lofty sentiments. Casson's insistence on retailers' need to humanise advertising by selling 'affection not jewellery, home comfort not furniture' was in part a result of his analysis of the 'contents of a woman's mind':

Women are not mechanical. They do not appreciate the value of ball bearings or six cylinders. They do not understand the technical language of the mill and the factory. They have a point of view of their own ... A woman is most interested in a subject that relates to herself, her family, her duties, and her surroundings. She is not so much interested in general facts nor in abstract problems that do not personally concern her.

Women's interests, Casson concluded, were primarily personal: they were interested in people not things, especially the people in their own families and immediate social circle.


\[181\] Casson, Art of Customer-finding, pp 82, 141-2.

\[182\] Casson, Art of Customer-finding, p 84.
Humanising advertising policy, like humanising labour relations in the retail industry, implied the incorporation of values popularly attributed to women. Retail advertisers believed that their copy had to appeal to everyday notions of domesticity and familial affection by surrounding the goods they advertised with an aura of femininity. Retail advertising policy of the 1910s and 1920s revealed the constraints of masculinity inherent in men’s goods and the apparent difficulty in selling to men. The male customer was, as the Draper put it in exasperation, as ‘conservative as a Prussian’. ³⁵³

Women and their commodities, on the other hand, were capable of greater exploitation for advertising purposes, because advertisers perceived in femininity a profitable indeterminacy and malleability. It was easier to advertise to women who appeared to lack reason and logic than to men whom retailers assumed had too much sense to be taken in by their strategies. The retail industry took considerable pains to answer Freud’s question ‘what do women want?’ for, as Casson remarked, the world’s most successful merchants knew the minds of women. ³⁵⁴

³⁵³ Draper Mar 1918 p 97.
³⁵⁴ The Art of Customer-finding p 85.
CHAPTER 9

FASHION, FEMININITY AND PROFIT

Historians of retailing and consumption have acknowledged rather than analysed the relationship between mass marketing and fashion. William Leach argues that fashion added to the desirability of department store commodities, and Elizabeth Ewen and Stuart Ewen suggest that fashion constituted an 'essential channel of popular desire' which expressed certain ideas about class, gender, sexuality, conformity and resistance.¹ Susan Porter Benson shows in more detail retail managers' ambivalent attitudes to fashion but, by stressing the 'note of uncertainty' and unpredictability that fashion introduced into managerial policy, masks their active exploitation of fashion for its economic potential.² None of these histories explore the intimate and ultimately profitable relationship between fashion, fantasy and femininity. By 'fashion' here I mean the arbitrary but socially and economically valuable differences of style created by designers and manufacturers, and distributed by retailers on a seasonal basis.³


Drapery store proprietors recognised from the early nineteenth century and probably earlier that to be successful they had to be sensitive to the dynamics of fashion. The need to follow shifts in fashion became more imperative as the expansion of the clothing trade and developments in textile manufacture produced more commodities for sale after the turn of the century. John McDowell of McDowell and Hughes emphatically impressed upon the New South Wales Arbitration Court in 1907 that fashionable goods virtually sold themselves. He told the Court that in his store fashions changed twice a year in all departments, but particularly in dresses, millinery and mantles. A subtle change in colour from, say, a wine shade close to purple in 1906 to a wine shade close to red in 1907 marked a shift in fashion that enabled the retailer to promote the social value of the latest shade. This arbitrary but socially meaningful difference enabled retailers to take full advantage of fashion in their attempts to increase turnover.

Retailers and sales experts were preoccupied with the nature of fashion, its locus of control and its source of power from at least 1900. An article in the Australian Storekeepers' Journal suggested that 'the clever people who sell [women] clothes' set the fashions and women 'simply follow like sheep in the path marked out for them by the softgoods merchant'. The Draper of Australasia agreed in

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* Transcript of evidence presented at the Shop Assistants case heard before the New South Wales Arbitration Court 1907 in Archives Office of New South Wales (AONSW) 2/95-98 (hereafter Shop Assistants case 1907) v 43 p 799.
* Shop Assistants case 1907 v 43 p 799.
* Feb 1900 p 51.
1917 that fashion was created jointly by designers, manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers. The art of the successful retailer therefore lay in his (or his buyers') ability to seize upon the right 'psychological moment' for a swing in the pendulum of style.\footnote{329}

Retailers' relationship with fashion was, however, more problematic and ambivalent than these assertions imply. Although they had considerable control over which styles were displayed in their stores as the latest fashion, both the Retail Traders Association of New South Wales and the Draper held that women played an economically significant role in determining the relative success of a particular fashionable line of merchandise.\footnote{291} Business men typically attributed their fashion failures to the unpredictability and fickleness of women. One costume and mantle manufacturer, for example, blamed the shortage of labour in the Sydney clothing industry in 1911 to the capriciousness of female customers who created unexpected demand in the middle of the season.\footnote{287}

The expansion of the ready-made clothing trade, in which retailers were themselves instrumental, combined with simpler styles requiring less fabric and dressmaking skill made fashionable garments available to a mass market in the 1920s. The mass production of clothing probably also reduced some of

\footnote{3} Sept 1917 p 291.


the fashion risk for retailers by spreading it more evenly across a wider range of standardised commodities. The Draper noted with some pleasure that whereas before World War I women typically bought a new hat or dress each season, by the mid-1920s they bought a hat 'for every costume and for every occasion' and a variety of dresses throughout the year.\(^\text{10}\)

Although fashion in the drapery trade almost always implicitly meant women's fashion, there is some evidence to suggest that men's clothes were influenced by fashion to a greater extent in the late 1920s than they were previously. Menswear had never been completely immune to changes of style, but the drapery trade recognised that men's clothing was much less susceptible to fashion than women's goods.\(^\text{11}\)

The importance of fashion in, say, a man's suit was quietly but privately acknowledged in consultation between a male customer and his tailor.\(^\text{12}\) In contrast to the public legitimation accorded female fashion, fashionable men risked being ridiculed as dandies.\(^\text{13}\) One writer on the art of dress theorised that 'In dress, men are classical, women are romantic.' The rational man with little time to waste on fashion had banished emotion and feeling from his clothes and reduced the art of dress to 'a matter of rules and regulations'.\(^\text{14}\) By the early 1920s, however, writers for

\(^{10}\) Draper June 1921 p 224; Oct 1924 p 558.

\(^{11}\) See, for example, evidence of George Wright of Farmers at the Necessary Commodities Control Commission hearing, transcripts of proceedings 19 Feb 1920 p 42, ADNSW 2/5728.


\(^{13}\) Lone Hand Apr 1913 p 507.

\(^{14}\) Home June 1920 pp 29-30.
both trade and more widely-read publications commented on what they believed to be men's new awareness of fashion. It is doubtful, however, that these comments described a genuine shift in male sartorial consciousness. More likely is that the spate of articles on male fashion were the result of a determined push by retailers and advertisers to extend their marketing techniques into the traditionally intransigent menswear trade. Certainly the Draper was the most consistently vocal in heralding the arrival of 'fashions in menswear' and the 'entrance of the fashion element' into men's clothing.\(^\text{16}\) The Home magazine picked up the theme in 1926 with a new feature series on 'Fashions for Men'.\(^\text{16}\) Even the Sydney Morning Herald devoted an editorial to 'Clothes and the Man' which lauded the greater variety of colours and styles in men's clothing in 1929.\(^\text{17}\) Nevertheless, and in spite of retailers' determined optimism, fashion remained largely feminine by definition.

The importance of the relationship between femininity and fashion can best be illustrated by examining in detail three types of drapery commodities that were considered by retailers to be essential to the success of their businesses: corsets, millinery and beauty products. Corsets and millinery were staple drapery commodities from the early nineteenth century, while the sale of toilet preparations did not develop into the highly lucrative cosmetics trade until the 1920s. All three types of merchandise were subject to


\(^\text{16}\) Home Mar, Apr and June 1926.

\(^\text{17}\) Sydney Morning Herald 17 Aug 1929 p 14.
mass marketing drives that implicitly relied on their inherent femininity.

The ladies' underclothing and corset section was a core drapery store department which literally constituted one of the 'foundations' of department store retailing. Anthony Hordern and Sons, for example, began retailing as Mrs Ann Hordern's corset and stay shop in 1825. ¹⁸ Continued references to the high demand for corsets and the prominence of advertisements from corset importers in drapery trade literature suggests that by the 1890s retailers recognised their importance as particularly profitable and attractive commodities. ¹⁹

Why corsets were such an important part of women's wardrobe and self-esteem until relatively recently has been the subject of much academic debate. Valerie Steele suggests, for example, that they contributed to the erotic appeal of women's fashionable clothing. ²⁰ I would extend this to argue that the corset - from the French for 'little body' - represented a potent material connection between the female body and femininity. As Moira Gatens suggests in pointing out the difficulty in separating sex and gender at the level of 'the body as lived', the physiological and the psychic aspects of the body combine in what she calls 'the


¹⁹ See, for example, advertisements for C.B. Corsets in The Draper of Australasia Diary 1903; advertisements in the Storekeeper of Australia 1895-1900; and an article on advertising in the first issue of the Draper in 1901 in the Draper Feb 1922 p 67.

imaginary body’.\textsuperscript{21} Possibly more than any other female garment, the corset impinged directly on the (imaginary) female body in such a way as to shape a specifically feminine consciousness. The experience of being corseted came to be so strongly associated with, and hence internalised as women’s imaginary and feminine body that corsets represented the essence of female sexual appeal and self-construction.\textsuperscript{22}

Corset importers and retailers depended largely on this sexual appeal to sell their goods in the 1890s and 1900s, albeit clothed in the language of grace, elegance and womanly perfection.\textsuperscript{23} However, the development of the Australian corset industry after local manufacturers such as the Unique Corset Company (later Berlei Ltd) were granted tariff protection in 1915 encouraged manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers to seek new marketing techniques. ‘Scientific’ dressing, product diversification and fashion promotion transformed the women’s underclothing departments of the large stores in the 1920s.

The brassiere, for example, was developed from the corset and consciously promoted as a new and necessary female commodity in this period. By fracturing or deconstructing the female body into parts which they then ideologically reassembled to construct a perfect feminine form, corset manufacturers and promoters were able to extract increased


\textsuperscript{22} Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, ‘Yves Saint Laurent’s Peasant Revolution’, \textit{Marxist Perspectives} 2 (Summer 1978) p 63.

\textsuperscript{23} See, for example, corset advertisement in \textit{Australian Storekeepers’ Journal} Sept 1896 p 276.
value from the sale of women's underclothing.\(^{24}\) As one 1918 article pointed out, the brassiere trade was a big source of profit for the retailer and paid careful cultivation; especially if, as the Draper suggested, women could be persuaded that they needed six brassieres for morning, afternoon and evening wear.\(^{25}\)

The sale of corsets and brassieres became a specialised facet of scientific salesmanship which required certain skills and training after 1910. David Jones engaged highly paid corset fitters and demonstrators from the United States, while the Draper ran feature articles on successful sales techniques for the corset and brassiere department.\(^{26}\) Continuing the scientific theme, Farmers organised a mannequin parade in 1918 to promote corsets and underwear to women interested in the 'science of dress'.\(^{27}\) Berlei Limited started its own school for corset saleswomen in Sydney to promote its scientifically designed and fitted models. The school offered classes on female anatomy, the classification of Australian figure types and selling to 'the matron, the fashionable woman [and] the younger set' and promised to

\(^{24}\) This analysis is developed from Jean Baudrillard's essay on 'Fetishism and Ideology: the Semiological Reduction' in his For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981). Fractured and disembodied body images were also a feature of fashion and advertising photography after 1925, as suggested by the Australian National Gallery's 'The Glamour Show: Studio Photographs 1925–1955' May–Sept 1986.

\(^{25}\) Draper Sept 1918 p 312; Dec 1922 p 605.

\(^{26}\) Personnel files of Mrs Elizabeth Dumas (1910) and Mrs E. Hammond (1912) in David Jones Archives; Draper July 1917 p 229; July 1919 p 278; Aug 1919 pp 198–9.

\(^{27}\) Sydney Morning Herald 30 Sept 1918.
transform ordinary shop assistants into trained corsetieres.²⁰

By the mid 1920s the corset was being consciously marketed as a fashion commodity. The development of new, lighter fabrics such as rayon, and the use of pastel colours and trimmings helped transform the previously functional corset into a desirable item of fashionable lingerie.²¹ The new-style corset was advertised as a 'light, elegant and dainty' article which bore little relation to its pre-World War I ancestor. Retailers were advised to eschew the term 'corset' because it conjured up images of the old-fashioned, unattractive and restrictive variety. Instead they were urged to use brand names or euphemisms such as 'girdle', 'corselette' or 'wrap-on'.³⁰ In their attempt to re-educate women into corset consciousness, stores such as Hordern Brothers staged dramatised demonstrations of corsets for every occasion - sport, dancing, singing and even typewriting.³¹

Berlei Limited led the Australian field in promoting corsets as fashion items. It conducted a much-publicised 'anthropometrical' study of 5,000 women between 1926 and 1928 to determine five basic Australian figure types. The company conducted an aggressive marketing campaign supported by major retailers. In 1926 Berlei staged a revue entitled 'Radiant Woman at Beauty's Shrine', and three years later another

²⁰ *Shop Assistants Magazine* July 1926 pp 10, 23.
²¹ *Draper* Dec 1924 p 698; *Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal* Dec 1929 pp 41-3.
³⁰ *Draper* May 1925 p 244; *Home* Mar 1924 p 1.
³¹ *Draper* Dec 1923 pp 742, 763.
called 'Lady Be Beautiful'.\textsuperscript{32} Department stores such as Hordern Brothers later staged their own corset presentations in collaboration with Berlei.\textsuperscript{33}

A common theme in these displays was woman's 'instinctive' desire for beauty. Fairy caverns, nymphs, elves and enchantresses, magic mirrors and 'moonlit gardens of dreams' conjured up a fantasy world of femininity in which the corset represented grace, poise and womanliness.\textsuperscript{34} In its pageant 'Radiant Woman at Beauty's Shrine' staged at Her Majesty's Theatre in 1926, Berlei created a mystical world:

At the wave of a fairy wand and an uttered incantation, there rises from the mystic cauldron the ideal of modern beauty, the lissom figure, lightly encased in the natural fitting corset of to-day. The scene changes to a moonlit garden of dreams, where the seeker [after Beauty], still following the enchantress, learns the secret of poise, the art of being well dressed, and feels that at last she is on the threshold of the promised land.... In the final scene at Beauty's Shrine in an enchanted cave is seen the "Radiant Woman", the modern ideal, standing with outstretched arms receiving the homage of living jewels in gorgeous raiment.\textsuperscript{35}

The Berlei promotions capture in essence the way in which the new culture of marketing implicitly relied on a theory of female irrationality and intuition. The corset became a symbol of modernity, beauty, femininity and spiritual transcendence.

There is, however, an apparent contradiction in retailers' promotion of corsets as magical manifestations of

\textsuperscript{32} Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Dec 1927 p 31; Sept 1926 p 17; June 1929 p 55.

\textsuperscript{33} Draper Aug 1930 p 413.

\textsuperscript{34} Retail Traders Association of New South Wales Journal Mar 1927 p 16; July 1928 p 49; Draper Sept 1926 p 432.

\textsuperscript{35} Draper Sept 1926 p 432.
female fantasy and their insistence that corsets were
necessary to 'control' the female body. In an attempt to
recapture the market after many women apparently decided to
do without corsets in the late 1910s and early 1920s, the
Draper warned that

the vogue of the unrestricted figure has been
attended by unforeseen ill-effects.... The urgent
need of corrective corsetry in order to check the
resulting misdevelopment, and graceless carriage,
is now universally admitted.36

The language of body anarchy - slackness, thickening,
spreading, excess flesh, figure faults, correction and
control - recurs consistently in promotional literature for
corsets by the 1920s. Its ubiquity suggests that retailers'
concern for declining sales was intensified by their fear of
an uncontrollable and threatening female corporeality.37 It
says much for the ideological power of fashion that it was
able to mask and transcend the physical restraints and social
prescriptions incorporated into the marketing of corsets.

Like corsets, millinery represented an economically
powerful combination of fashion, fantasy and femininity.
Millinery referred to fashionable and, until the 1920s,
individually-tailored and hand-trimmed women's hats. An item
of millinery meant personal attractiveness to the shopper and
high gross profit for the retailer. Eugenie McNeil recalled
in her reminiscences of Sydney around the turn of the century
that hats were not designed to be functional but represented
'marvellous fantasies' constructed out of aigrettes,
pheasants' wings, ostrich plumes, silk roses, velvet ribbon

36 Draper May 1923 p 294.

37 See, for example, Home Mar 1924 p 1; comments of
Arthur Burley giving evidence at the Tariff Board, Sydney
Morning Herald 18 Sept 1929 p 16.
and lace. A spring hat, speculated a writer in the *Lone Hand*, was not a hat but 'sunshine and joy, moonlight and dreams, twilight and serenades'. Using similarly romantic rhetoric, a contributor to the *Woman's News* imaginatively and patriotically likened a pink and grey hat to dawn breaking over the Gippsland hills.°

Men in the retail trade confessed their inability to understand millinery's appeal to women. William Newman of David Jones, for example, argued that a buyer of his own sex was incapable of comprehending women's tastes in hats:

...the Millinery productions of recent seasons are almost outside the comprehension of the masculine mind—they are fantastic vagaries, grotesque and highly fanciful elegancies, with no standard of fashion, style or construction—it is only the feminine mind which can rise to such lofty heights of beauty and nothingness.°°

Millinery was still seen by men as an impenetrable female world in 1920, when the Chairman of the Fair Profits Commission admitted his reluctance to 'lay sacriligious hands on the millinery departments'°°

This did not stop retailers, needless to say, from fully appreciating the need to conduct efficient and profitable millinery workrooms and showrooms. The partners of David Jones took considerable pains to engage a capable milliner

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°° Nov 1911 p 12. See also an article on millinery in the same journal Nov 1907.

°°° Jan 1905 p 7.

°°°° Letter to Edward Lloyd Jones 5 Sept 1892 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/24.

°°°°° Report of the Fair Profits Commission 23 Apr 1920 in Sargood Gardiner records Box 1, University of Melbourne Archives.
and showroom manageress for its millinery department in 1891–2. As Edward Wilcox remarked in a letter to Edward Lloyd Jones, 'its productions are perhaps more talked about by ladies than any other goods'[^3] Drapery proprietors had to engage buyers who could pick styles that would be popular with women, an economic imperative that gave some women the opportunity to be employed as millinery buyers from the 1890s.

The sale of millinery was an art (later a science) that was perceived to be specifically female. The head of the millinery showroom of the large drapery stores held high status and was frequently an imposing figure capable of intimidating the most assertive of customers.[^4] Considerable skill and tact were necessary to fit millinery fantasy to female reality, a fact not lost on the Draper which urged millinery saleswomen to study the customer's features, shape of face and head, colouring and figure, and to remember that 'a hat is hopelessly and entirely "wrong" when it produces the effect of having no sort of relation to the wearer'.[^5]

Millinery, like corsets, enabled women to recreate their imaginary body to conform with an ideal of socially-constructed femininity. Women's hats were indistinguishable from women's faces and women's heads. As a female contributor to the Lone Hand noted in 1911:

> Curious, isn't it? that a man always does what’s left of his hair in the same old way, and buys a hat that fits his head; but a woman fits her head

[^3]: Letter to David Jones & Co. from Edward Wilcox 22 July 1892 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/13.

[^4]: Lone Hand Nov 1907 p 85.

to her hat, just as she fits her body to her corsets. By fitting her 'head to her hat' a woman could escape, momentarily at least, her own physiology to see reflected in the mirror an image of herself as feminine, fashionable and desirable.

Beauty products, our third case study, also mediated between body and image by reconstructing a feminine perfection through fetishism. Cosmetics appear to have been a relatively insignificant commodity until the 1920s. Before then, toiletry and perfumery sections of the fancy goods department commonly sold items such as face powders, creams, rouge and lip salves. Helena Rubinstein noted in her autobiography that women other than prostitutes or actresses rarely wore make-up before 1918, the year when American department stores first asked her to sell her products.

While historian Lois Banner found that cosmetics were worn by fashionable American women without stigma as early as the late nineteenth century, department stores probably helped cosmetics to become both more widely available and more socially acceptable. In an article entitled 'Should

46 Lone Hand Nov 1911 p 12.
47 Baudrillard, 'Fetishism and Ideology', pp 94-5.
48 See, for example, sections devoted to perfumery and toilet goods in the Christmas supplements of the Draper Oct 1916, Oct 1922 and Oct 1924; Robert Reid (wholesalers) price list of haberdashery and fancy goods 1911 in Robert Reid papers, Australian National University Archives of Business and Labour 81/310B.
49 My Life for Beauty (Sydney: Bodley Head, 1964) pp 40, 56, 60, 62.
Girls Make Up?’, a Mere Man told readers of Mark Foy’s magazine *The Magnet* in 1910 that despite his public condemnation of female artifice, the average man much preferred ‘a cream-complexioned girl, whose face represents the result of hours of steaming, and massage, and skin-food, and all the rest of the tricks of the beauty parlour’ to ‘the leather-skinned and brick-dust-hued child of Nature’.

Elizabeth Arden appears to have pioneered the sale of cosmetics through one major retailer in each Australian state capital: in Sydney, Elizabeth Arden products were sold exclusively through David Jones. A 1927 advertisement for Elizabeth Arden cosmetics exhibited in the Australian National Gallery’s ‘Glamour Show’ photographic display consisted of a photographic portrait of a model displaying a sphinx-like pose of inscrutability, symmetrical and clearly-defined features and a mask-like perfection. Accompanying de Meyer’s portrait was a 1931 issue of the *Home* in which the Arden advertisement text emphasised the cosmetics’ ability to transform women into ‘individuals’. As Maryanne Lynch has argued in her discussion of the cult of the body beautiful, capital camouflages the body as lived social reality with the illusion of individuality. The Elizabeth Arden promotion suggests that cosmetics were marketed for their potential to transform unremarkable and blemished women into flawless individuals while paradoxically imposing on them a standardised femininity.

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82 *Home* Dec 1925 p 9.
SECTION OF TOILET AND PERFUMERY DEPARTMENT—Ground Floor.
The sale of cosmetics through the big stores was part of a wider social marketing of female beauty in the 1920s. The Evening News sponsored a beauty contest in 1922 to find Australia’s Most Beautiful Girl, and the first Miss Australia contest was held in 1926. Lipstick, powder compacts, powdered and cream rouge, ‘liquid’ face powder, vanishing cream, eyebrow pencils and astringents were by 1928 part of the draper’s cosmetic counter. The sale of these items expanded such that the Draper described toilet articles and cosmetics as the ‘draper’s perquisite and excellent business’ in 1929.

At the same time, Sydney’s big stores began to provide beauty services for their female customers. David Jones incorporated a beauty parlour and hairdressing salon in its new Elizabeth Street store. According to Charles Lloyd Jones, this was an attempt to democratise beauty by helping women ‘of moderate means’ to improve their appearance. Marcus Clark employed a ladies’ hairdresser in 1929, and Buckinghams opened a ladies’ hairdressing salon and beauty parlour the same year. Haberdashery departments replaced sewing requisities with articles of female adornment such as

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+++ Home Sept 1922 p 75; Alexandra Joel, Best Dressed. 200 Years of Fashion in Australia (Sydney: Collins, 1984) pp 69-70.

+++ Draper Sept 1928 pp 459-462.

+++ Shop Assistants Magazine Aug 1926 p 10; Draper Sept 1929 p 516.

+++ Sun 29 Nov 1927 clipping in David Jones Archives.

+++ Marcus Clark Reference Book 1929 in Marcus Clark papers, ANU Archives of Business and Labour 74/31/1; Draper Oct 1929 p 534.
belts, shingle combs, hair wavers, clasps and hair slides.\(^5\)

As with clothing fashion, men's appearance was not immune from this marketing push: David Jones included a barber's shop and a man's manicure parlour in the Elizabeth Street store.\(^6\)

High fashion articles such as millinery, corsets and beauty products were commodities of considerable value to both seller and buyer. Using Haug's application of the use value/exchange value distinction to the sales transaction, fashionable commodities were marketed to consumers as promises or illusions of use value — sexual attractiveness, youth, physical perfection, individuality, femininity — in order for retailers to extract the maximum exchange value.\(^7\)

In the sales language of the 1920s, however, sellers and advertisers talked not about use value but about ideas. As Berlei's Phil Warner explicitly told his advertising colleagues in 1929: 'SELL IDEAS. Never mind about the commodity. SELL IDEAS. Show the commodity in the idea ...'\(^8\) The Director of Adshead Rose Publicity agreed that 'The idea — as Hamlet should have said — is the thing.'\(^9\)

The ideas theme took several forms. Herbert Casson, for example, told retailers to advertise 'in terms of people and not commodities': thus he should sell cleanliness not soap,

\(^5\) Draper Oct 1926 p 445.

\(^6\) Plan of Elizabeth Street store departments 1927 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/574.


\(^8\) Advertisers' Monthly Nov 1929 p 5.

fashion not gowns, social prestige not pianos. Alex Whyte, Advertising Merchandising Counsel, told Rydge's Business Journal that a car could be sold to a prospective customer by encouraging him to see himself 'in his mental picture palace rolling down the highway in a glittering limousine.' Casson and Whyte both urged retailers to sell the intangible and ethereal aspects of commodities; to sell dreams and fantasies as well as material objects.

Millinery in particular was singled out by sales experts as a commodity ripe for ideological exploitation. One writer asserted that a woman buying a hat was really buying 'beauty - admiring glances - youth'. Another, pointing out that women bought hats for 'sentimental' rather than practical reasons, told retailers that it was easier to sell high-priced goods on sentimental value than low-priced goods on economic value. Casson used the example of millinery to make a similar point in his book The Art of Customer-finding:

If I want to sell a trimmed hat to a lady of forty, I do not tell her what the hat is made of; certainly I do not tell her the price at first. NO! I tell her: "Well, madam, one thing is certain - that hat makes you look ten years younger".

Casson's advice suggests not only that millinery was a commodity that could easily be sold for its ideological value, but also that women were perceived as being

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** The Art of Customer-finding (Sydney, 1928) p 141.


** Customer-finding p 142.
disinterested in practical information and particularly susceptible to flattery.

The exchange value of fashion and femininity is clear from the comparatively high rates of gross profit that retailers were able to realise from women's fashion goods, outlined in chapter 2. Fashionable commodities that ideologically reconstructed the female body were amongst the most valuable to the drapery store proprietor. The price of stays in 1892, for example, was 200 per cent more than their manufactured cost.** Similarly, the *Draper* reported in 1929 that lingerie and corset departments were the most profitable sections of the drapery store.70 This general statement is supported by David Jones' departmental trading results which show that in 1921 the corset department yielded a rate of gross profit of 33.3 per cent, 7.8 per cent above the average for all departments. This rate had increased by 1930 to 46.7 per cent, 18.3 per cent above the average. Similarly, the Elizabeth Arden department achieved a rate of gross profit of 42.3 per cent in 1930.71

Retailers, then, found selling the ideas of fashion, fantasy and femininity a particularly profitable strategy. It would be misleading, however, to suggest that because retailers exploited concepts of femininity they therefore exploited women. Fashion appealed just as much to the majority of women as it did to the men who were trying to promote it. Women's responses to fashion and dress (men's

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** Letter from Edward Wilcox to David Jones & Co. 7 Oct 1892 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/13.

70 *Draper* Aug 1929 p 410.

71 David Jones Trading Results 1921 and 1930 in David Jones Archives BRG 1/140.
silence on the subject in the historical record is deafening) therefore give us an important insight into the dialectic between buyer and seller. Although retail managements assumed the overwhelming prerogative in decisions affecting the distribution of fashion goods through their shops, women could not be coerced into buying them against their will. Moreover, because fashion was so closely associated with the big stores in public consciousness, women's attitudes to fashion indicate in large part the nature of their responses to the drapery and department store trade in general.

Evidence of women's thoughts and beliefs about fashion can be found in popular and feminist periodicals, the records of women's organisations and (rarely) in the speeches of Rose Scott. The attitudes of individual women varied and conflicted to such an extent that it would be impossible and unwise to reduce them to a unitary response. Women's ideas about fashion and the ethics of dress took as many different shapes as there were classes, political ideologies, religious beliefs and generations. For the sake of explanatory clarity, however, they can be broadly grouped into negative and positive responses.

Probably the most consistently critical voice came from women and organisations which objected to fashionable clothes on moral grounds. Women appear to have first raised these objections at the same time as a marked change took place in women's clothing styles, prompted by Paul Poiret's 'natural' look and narrow skirts of 1908. The new style clothing was prevalent in Australia in general and in store catalogues in particular by 1913. Clothing manufacturers following Poiret's new look abandoned the noticeably corseted, boned
and constrained female silhouette for one that appeared looser, simpler and more sensuous. The social impact of the new fashions was heightened by a popular dance craze – most notoriously the tango – which encouraged (or provided the excuse for) less restrictive and more revealing dresses.\footnote{72}

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union was one of the first organisations to protest at the immorality and immodesty prevalent in young women's dress (low necks, short sleeves, tight and short skirts) in 1913.\footnote{73} Some members of the National Council of Women quickly followed suit in their condemnation of the 'low tone of society, [and] the inordinate love for pleasure and dress so frequently approaching indecency'.\footnote{74} At a discussion on the topic 'Should a Girl Dance?', one member of the Sydney YWCA agreed that 'if a girl's style [of dress] is loose she cannot expect to be treated with every respect'.\footnote{75}

Mrs Henry Dobson’s outspoken comments on fashion as a member of the National Council of Women, however, aroused some controversy. She asserted that modern styles of dress were extreme, immodest, ungainly and indecent. Women who wore them were, according to Mrs Dobson, foolish and a

\footnote{72} Alexandra Joel, \textit{Best Dressed. 200 Years of Fashion in Australia} (Sydney: Collins, 1984) pp 45-50. For the same trend in the United States see Valerie Steele, \textit{Fashion and Eroticism} p 6.

\footnote{73} \textit{White Ribbon Signal} May 1913 pp 8-9. (The article was written by a member of the Detroit YMCA and reproduced because the matter was causing concern in Sydney).


\footnote{75} \textit{Association Woman} Nov 1922 p 8.
'disgrace to humanity'.

Her comments were resented by at least one female correspondent to the Sydney Morning Herald who suggested that members of the National Council of Women would better devote their energies to seeking the cause of modern fashions rather than making sweeping and largely inaccurate condemnations of their sisters.

Members of the Mothers' Union in Australia also expressed their horror at unseemly, unladylike, frivolous and 'suggestive' fashions. However, an associate of the Mothers' Union (a single woman, perhaps?) confessed that fashion was a complex issue. Christian women had a duty to elevate God above self-gratification and to refuse to condone immodest fashions such as short skirts and flesh-coloured stockings. But, she went on, women did not want to be Puritans: 'we want to have all the beauty and comeliness that we can in our clothes, as in everything else that makes life beautiful'. Dress, she argued, should therefore be a matter of principle.

Dress was a matter of principle for other women's groups, particularly during and immediately after World War I, when war conditions and high prices made thrift both materially and ideologically desirable. The Women's Commonwealth Patriotic Association published a series of pamphlets on the subject, including one entitled 'Thrift in Dress' in which Ruth Beale gave a number of hints to women on

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Sydney Morning Herald 21 Jan 1914 clipping in Rose Scott papers MLMSS 38/50, item 2 p 87.

Sydney Morning Herald 21 Jan 1914.

Mothers in Australia Dec 1920 p 14.

Mothers in Australia June 1918 pp 15-16.
ways in which they could avoid waste, shop efficiently and buy economically. She stated at the outset of her lecture, however, that 'Good appearance is of enormous importance to a woman' and that despite economic stringencies her clothes had to be neat, appropriate and becoming.60 Stylish colours, patterns and designs, however, were uneconomical because they quickly went out of fashion.61 Caroline Martin, witness at the 1920 cost of living enquiry, also implicitly placed thrift and fashion in opposition. She told the hearing that she was regarded in Goulburn as 'being thrifty and not by any means fashionable'.62

Definitions of thrift and extravagance were, of course, highly relative. For the Women's Commonwealth Patriotic Association, thrift meant buying good quality materials, paying for the services of a good tailor and saving up for a real fur coat.63 The debate about fashion merged with the perennial complaint by the middle and upper classes that working class women were too extravagant in their dress. One writer in the Woman's Voice spoke for the New Woman when she observed that dresses were often spoilt by 'intemperance of embellishment'. This intemperance, she suggested, was characteristic of a 'certain class of customer' which flocked to the Pitt Street drapery stores at sale time:

This is the class that does not yet seem fully to understand that trimming of any kind will NOT make

61 Thrift in Dress p 11.
62 New South Wales Board of Trade, Inquiry into the General Cost of Living 1920-1921, transcript of proceedings AONSW 2/5784 p 163.
63 Thrift in Dress, pp 10-11.
an ill-cut dress becoming, or an ugly dress handsome, but will certainly succeed in making either vulgar. So the remnants of silk, the odd lengths of ribbon, the chaotic piles of damaged artificial flowers, the showy hats that previous customers have rejected, and all the wreckage and sediment of the season are just now melting away from the shop counters, and will presently reappear in our streets ...**

Enlightened new women, the writer suggested, had a responsibility to ensure that women dressed in good taste.

More rarely, women were critical of the elitist and exploitative aspect of fashion. A Worker journalist reported that the gowns displayed at a city costumiere may have resembled a ‘riot of hothouse blooms’ but they also represented the sweated labour of women workers.*** Rose Scott made the same point in an undated speech on ‘Dress and Character’.*** The Wardrobe noted in 1905 that the large daily newspapers advertised fashions and dresses which the average woman could not afford to buy. Every citizen had a right not only to political equality, good housing and proper food but also to ‘fashion and dress according to their means’.*

Other women condemned the slaughter of animals and birds used to decorate women’s fashionable clothes and millinery, arguing that women should refuse to buy ‘bloodstained fashions’.** As with the issue of modesty in clothing, this was not a universally held view. When the National Council

** Woman’s Voice Apr 6 1895 p 211.

*** Worker Jan 7 1905.

**** Speech on Dress and Character (n.d.) in Rose Scott papers MLMSS 38/29 p 349.


** Woman’s Voice May 18 1895 p 244. See also Rose Scott’s speech on Dress and Character p 349.
of Women of New South Wales debated the use of plumage in fashionable millinery, Mrs Molyneux Parkes exclaimed with spirit that she had no intention of joining the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals until she had worn out the feathers she already possessed. Rose Scott added that old turkey feathers didn't count. The meeting compromised by asking women to refrain from wearing the plumage of birds other than ostrich and those killed for food.**

While many feminists noticed that female consumers were typically blamed for the slaughter of birds and animals, Rose Scott and Mrs Molyneux Parkes untypically perceived that it was at least as much the fault of 'the men who set the fashions [and] displayed the tempting feathers in shops'. Rose Scott put it bluntly: 'Men controlled the fashions and owned the shops where they were set.'*** Feminists only occasionally acknowledged that men benefited economically from women's love of fashion:

...we wear cashmere or serge, or we are puffed up or flattened as it suits the maker of fabrics and Worth to decide. Isn't it comical? Hundreds of women getting into this, or that, or the other extraordinary rig, in order that men may grow rich by trading on their love of novelty.**

But, the writer concluded, women nevertheless liked and gained pleasure from fashion. Another women's rights publication, the Woman, made no apology for the fact that 'it

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** Unmarked newspaper clipping in Rose Scott papers MLMSS 38/50.

*** Unmarked newspaper clipping in Rose Scott papers MLMSS 38/50.

†† Woman's Voice Mar 12 1895 p 197.
is one of the prerogatives of the weaker sex to be snared by novelties' in shop windows.\footnote{2}

Feminists of the 1890s and 1900s found it difficult to reconcile this contradiction: on the one hand fashion contributed to women's oppression; on the other, it exerted such a strong appeal to women that it could not be completely renounced. One solution was to construct an 'ethics of dress' which attempted to counter charges of women's frivolity, extravagance and passion for clothes with the argument that 'a proper attention to dress is derogatory to no woman, however intellectual.'\footnote{3} Women, according to Lady Jephson, should economise in the quantity of their clothes rather than in their quality.\footnote{4} The \textit{Dawn} took a similar position when it stated that 'Love of decent dress does not always mean extravagance'. Indeed, a clever woman often finely tucks a shilling remnant [of material], and with a half-penny worth of silk or cotton, feather-stitches it into a dressy garment; and knows how to wear it with a whisp of tulle at her neck, and a two-penny string of pearls worn above a bunch of honeysuckle pulled from the nearest fence.\footnote{5}

By sewing, improvising, matching and 'making-do', women could effectively subvert retailers' attempts to sell them high-priced fashion goods while simultaneously creating highly individualised garments that reflected their personality and skills.

Rose Scott believed that women should use fashion as an expression of character in the same way as they used words to

\footnote{2} \textit{Woman} Mar 15 1892 p 6.  
\footnote{3} \textit{Woman's Voice} Feb 9 1895 p 174.  
\footnote{4} \textit{Woman's Voice} Feb 9 1895 p 174.  
\footnote{5} \textit{Dawn} Apr 1904 p 6.
express their thoughts. This 'language of clothes' communicated a woman's charm, age, dignity and self-respect. Being well-dressed, Scott argued, gave women an inner peace and could make life 'happier, brighter and more interesting'. In contrast to those who criticised women for dressing extravagantly and immodestly, Scott reclaimed for fashion a female morality and a feminist rationalisation.

Other women supported the view that women had a moral and political responsibility to dress well. An editorial in the Woman's Voice complained that young women did not know how to dress well and urged that they be taught the 'art of dress' at school. Happy Homes argued that 'it is one of the duties of women to beautify, to ornament the world, and especially their own homes and their own persons'. If she failed in this, she failed her life's work. In another article in the same periodical entitled 'Neatness in Dress at Home', the writer suggested that any woman who wore shabby and shapeless clothing for comfort at home provided an 'evil example' to her daughters and risked losing the respect of her husband and sons. The view that women had a duty to express their individuality and 'look as neat and nice as possible' was still evident in 1918 when the YWCA's Association Woman argued strongly against standardised clothing schemes.

** Speech on Dress and Character, Rose Scott papers MLMSS 38/29 pp 339-351.

** Woman's Voice Oct 19 1895 p 371.

** Happy Homes Dec 1891.

** Happy Homes Oct 1891.

100 Association Woman Sept and Oct 1918.
A fictionalised conversation between Ethel, Florence and Maud on the politics of dress in the *Woman's Voice* in 1895 illustrates women's need to rationalise and appropriate fashion for their own purposes. Maud took the traditionally feminine position in declaring that unfashionable clothing was inevitably dowdy and unbecoming. Florence, on the other hand, believed that

Fashion means waste of time, and waste of thought - stiff, starchy, tightness, or flimsiness, and floppiness; furs and feathers, ribbons and beads, flowers and chiffons - all manner of perishable flummery. How can one read, how can one exercise, play golf or tennis, and row or bicycle, if one goes in for fashion?¹⁰¹

Florence pressed her point by showing how comfortable and convenient were her serge suits, flannel and cotton blouses, sailor hats and thick boots. Rational dressing also meant that she wasted less time at shop counters and had no harassed and weary shopgirls on her conscience. Ethel disagreed. She stated that it was not necessary to neglect the aesthetics of dress, and that a dress had to be fashionably cut to look well. Cleverness, she concluded, was 'no excuse to be unkempt, untidy or unbecoming.'¹⁰² It is clear from the tone and structure of the article that Ethel was intended to represent the voice of womanly reason.

Some feminists argued further that women could use fashion to impress on a sceptical public that the New Woman was respectable, credible and discerning in her taste. The

¹⁰⁰ *Association Woman* Sept and Oct 1918.
Woman suggested in 1892 that there was little reason why women should not use fashion as 'one of their own most potent weapons to their improvement'. Rose Scott agreed that being well-dressed gave a woman 'more influence and power which she can use for good if she so pleases'. While these arguments are neither developed nor common, they suggest that some women recognised the social power of fashion. In this sense, the big stores, the major purveyors of fashionable goods, were paradoxically the inadvertent source of one of the tools of women's emancipation, as well as contributors to their oppression through their promotion of perfect womanhood.

Fashion served important psychological functions at an individual level, in ways which retailers were little able to understand, let alone control. Why else was the fashion column a universal feature of nearly all magazines and newspapers read by women, including those that might have been expected to object to fashion on ideological grounds? Using the Freudian theory of repression, Eleanor Allen argued in 1921 that if a woman suppressed her desire for beautiful clothes she was likely to display an unnatural anger against adornment and pretty dresses. Beatrix Tracy explained the appeal of drapery goods to women with unusual perception in her 1908 account of her experiences as a temporary shop assistant.

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103 Woman Mar 15 1892 p 3.
105 As, for example, in the Worker, the feminist publication Herself, and the Housewives' Association's Ours.
106 Association Woman June 1921 pp 5-6.
assistant. The connection between the drapery emporia and femininity was particularly strong because

Drapery is a feminine luxury, almost exclusively. It is the object on which we spend our drink-money, our tobacco-cash - it is our means of intoxication, of forgetfulness, of contentment. With clothes we revenge ourselves on our enemies and smother our remorse; with clothes we rejoice our lovers and enliven ourselves. They soothe out our irritations and dispel our woes. The dress-counter is our bar, and the women-servers there are its most suitable attendants. The idea of clothes is the one common ground on which all women meet; the reality of them is the biggest of barriers between any two.\(^{107}\)

Tracy's observation that women of all classes were united in their love of dress is difficult to document but, from the little evidence available of working class women's views on fashion, appears to be correct. Statements made by female witnesses at the New South Wales Board of Trade hearings on the cost of living for female workers in 1918 and 1919 suggest that fashion served both material and psychological needs for working women. Elizabeth Daw, a tailoress, told the hearing that a woman must have the latest fashion in hats because otherwise she would have difficulty getting a job

looking very old-fashioned and dirty.... It is not to say that a girl is in the latest mode, but she wants to wear something which will not make her look about ten years behind the times.\(^{108}\)

Annie Golding emphasised the same point when criticising a wool skirt that the Court had decided was suitable for a female worker. She argued that the skirt would not wear


\(^{108}\) New South Wales Board of Trade, *Cost of Living of Adult Female Workers 1918*, transcripts of proceedings AONSW 2/5768 p 85.
well, and besides 'it is a grandmother's colour, and I should say a grandmother's mixture ...'\textsuperscript{109} A third witness told the hearing that 'it really is essential for a girl to look medium, to look neat. An employer is always looking for the better class of girl.'\textsuperscript{110}

That working class women liked lacy underwear, however, caused considerable puzzlement among the hearing's male officials. According to a departmental manager employed by Sweet Brothers, working women preferred to pay more for a camisole with a little trimming on it than less for a plainer version.\textsuperscript{111} When the counsel for the employers suggested to witness Susan Willcox that lace and embroidery were not 'necessary' articles of clothing, she retorted smartly that a woman might as well be dead if she could not get a little trimming on her camisole, say ... the only people's undergarments I have ever seen without any trimming on are the girls who are going into a convent ... She has to wear strong black or dark clothes without the slightest trimming on them, because she has to renounce the world.\textsuperscript{112}

Other women, notably the National Council of Women, objected to 'four or five men deciding whether a bit of lace on a working girl's camisole was a reasonable expenditure' because men were incapable of understanding women's clothing needs.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{109} Cost of Living of Adult Female Workers 1919 AONSW 2/5770 pp 607-8.

\textsuperscript{110} Cost of Living of Adult Female Workers 1919 p 622.

\textsuperscript{111} Cost of Living of Adult Female Workers 1918 p 169.

\textsuperscript{112} Cost of Living of Adult Female Workers 1918 p 171.

\textsuperscript{113} Report of 1st Interstate Conference of the National Council of Women in unmarked newspaper clipping in Rose Scott papers MLMSS 38/50.
As the case of the lacy camisole suggests, the fashionable clothes sold by Sydney's major retailers occupied a central place in what Valerie Steele has described as the individual's search for the ideal self. Drapery commodities - especially articles closely associated with the body such as corsets, camisoles, hats and cosmetics - expressed 'a particular image of the physical body, the individual's self-awareness, and his or her social being'.\textsuperscript{114} Sex and gender, to incorporate Moira Gatens' theory of the imaginary body, were together and inseparably embodied in the ideal self such that fashion represented the essence of femininity (and to a much lesser extent, masculinity). For most women, therefore - and provided that they had the money - the fashionable commodities sold by drapery stores gave them the opportunity to contribute to the construction of their own femininity and to participate in defining the masculinity of their husbands and sons.

To the extent that fashionable drapery goods fulfilled women's personally-defined material and psychological needs, female consumers were not the inert victims of mass marketing strategies suggested by some historians of the 'culture of consumption'. But neither were they, as William Leach suggests, liberated from the restraints of traditional gender roles by the transformative power of consumer life.\textsuperscript{118} Department stores may have offered women (and men) more opportunities more seductively packaged to participate in defining their own gendered subjectivity, but the effects of

\textsuperscript{114} Fashion and Eroticism, pp 45-6.

\textsuperscript{118} 'Transformations in a Culture of Consumption' pp 331-342.
these commodities were individual rather than social, private rather than public, personal rather than political. If the big stores and the fashionable goods they sold tempted women into the public sphere, they did so without offering them the power, the social legitimation or the material means with which to stay there on the same grounds as men. Alison Lurie has drawn the analogy of clothing as a sign system with a fixed vocabulary in which there can be an infinite variety of different languages, dialects, accents and personal variations.\textsuperscript{116} Although this model allows consumers a degree of agency and personal choice in the fashion system, it ignores the fact that capital inevitably plays the decisive role in creating and modifying the system's vocabulary and syntax. Leach's theory falsely elevates consumer power by privileging the affective over the material aspects of mass marketing. This is not to deny that consumers and capitalists both found value in fashionable commodities. But, where fashion for most women represented femininity and fantasy, for retailers it meant femininity, fantasy and profit.

CONCLUSION

The period between 1880 and 1930 was one of significant change for Sydney’s big stores. The late nineteenth century drapery store, emporium or universal provider stocked a combination of ready-made clothing, mostly for men, and unmanufactured materials for making-up at home. The proprietor employed male draper’s assistants in the sale of drapery, manchester and men’s goods, and women to sell millinery, women’s underclothing and goods from the ladies’ showroom such as mantles and costumes. The employer exerted direct and frequently personal supervision over his staff, tempering authoritarian discipline with ad hoc concessions and bonuses.

The interior of the store was divided into distinct and enclosed departments, with stock typically kept out of the customers’ reach, while show windows tended to crowd as many articles as possible into the display space. The women’s fashion trade was seasonal and depended on women’s purchase of a few ‘exclusive’ models each autumn and spring. Women bought their gowns from the store’s dressmaking department where they would be individually fitted, and men their suits from the in-house tailoring department. Many of the clothes sold by drapery shops were made on the premises by skilled manual labour as well as machinists.

The local market for drapery goods was divided between high-class drapers such as David Jones, which cultivated a reputation for quality goods and personal service, and those stores catering to the working and middle classes which used popular marketing techniques to attract a broader trade.
Competition between retail enterprises in the nineteenth century was personal, just as their employment practices, stock orders and sales techniques were a matter of individual discretion. Major retailers referred to their establishments as 'houses': private commercial institutions whose employees were treated as part of the store family, customers as honoured if sometimes inconsiderate guests, and the proprietor as patriarchal head.

The heads of these houses sought custom by offering the people of Sydney and surrounding country areas the benefits of bourgeois individualism and respectability as well as merchandise. Their dressmaking, tailoring and millinery departments offered individual service and fitting; the arrangement of stock in the ladies' showroom resembled the discreet ambience of a Victorian parlour; the wages, working conditions and promotion prospects of each employee were unregulated and determined informally according to individual merit; the elegantly-dressed shopwalker offered personal attention to valued customers; headless show dummies allowed each woman to imagine herself wearing the goods displayed; and catalogue images of men and women showed a variety of face types and ages.

This attention to individual needs and tastes, however, limited the amount of goods that retailers could sell and the number of customers they could serve. Mass distribution required economies of scale, standardised commodities, and marketing theories based on groups of consumers with common characteristics. Retailers resolved part of the inherent difficulty in catering to individuals by categorising their potential market according to gender as well as class. They
identified two major social groups of customers: women and men. They believed that each sex had specific and distinct characteristics which led them to a certain kind of predictable consumer behaviour. Men were matter-of-fact, conservative and difficult to arouse to unrestrained consumption. Women, by contrast, were Eves awaiting the delicious temptations of the master retailer. By the turn of the century, retailers recognised not only that women constituted the majority of their customers, but that drapery goods held a more powerful appeal for women. Retailers’ adoption and cultivation of the popular perception of women as sensuous creatures constantly open to temptation was one of the earliest manifestations of standardisation in mass marketing.

At the same time, or more precisely between 1905 and 1915, a number of technological, economic, demographic, legislative, political and epistemological developments at the national level created the conditions under which Sydney’s major retailers became mass marketers. Retailers large enough to have survived the depression of the 1890s were in an excellent position to take full advantage of the return to economic stability after 1905 and higher levels of disposable income in the years between 1909 and 1913. The visible expansion and success of the stores after the turn of the century contributed to a public perception of the big stores as symbols of national wealth and progress. Larger premises, a greater variety of merchandise, and substantial workforces created the material demand for organisation and rationalisation.
The Commonwealth and New South Wales Governments were together, and inadvertently, responsible for fostering the organisation of the retail industry into a powerful lobby group with shared interests and common management policies. State regulation of hours, wages and working conditions and the establishment of a compulsory system of arbitration formalised labour relations in the industry and led directly to the formation of the Master Retailers Association of New South Wales. The introduction of uniform federal tariffs and state migration schemes in the first decade of the twentieth century created favourable conditions for some retailers, as did the development of state technical education and the provision of training in various aspects of selling and advertising in the second decade of the century.

These developments of scale and management proceeded simultaneously with the industrialisation of clothing production. Increasing mechanisation and the adoption of steam or electrically driven machinery, the subdivision of tasks in dressmaking and tailoring, and the organisation of production under factory conditions during the first three decades of the twentieth century created greater quantities and varieties of drapery commodities, at prices which made them accessible to a wide market. The large retailers' growth occurred simultaneously with the expansion of the ready-made clothing trade, particularly into women's fashion garments. It was the mechanisation and rationalisation of clothing manufacture and retailers' promotion of that process that, perhaps more than any other factor, created the material conditions for mass marketing.
Industrial methods of manufacture in clothing, household goods, accessories, ironmongery and many other regularly consumed non-food commodities produced an increasing array of goods for the universal provider to sell. As retail managers increased the volume and diversity of their stock, they rationalised their departmental organisation around the primary principle of sexual differentiation. Retail managers ensured that men’s spaces and women’s spaces were physically separate and aesthetically distinct. Interior spaces generally became larger and lighter, and goods were displayed where customers could inspect, touch and desire them. Store windows containing consciously evocative displays and ‘lifelike’ models were supplemented with representations of women in store catalogues which were standardised and stylised. Mass produced women’s fashions replaced seasonal and exclusive models, and menswear became more fashion-conscious than it had been in the late nineteenth century. Methods of standardised production, in other words, encouraged standardised marketing techniques.

Retailers similarly sought to rationalise and systematically manage the social relations of consumption after about 1910. They replaced personal and authoritarian supervision of employees with a ‘humanised’ approach to labour relations which aimed to manage large numbers of workers through bureaucratic structures such as welfare, training and vocational guidance schemes. They also paid increasing attention to customers by broadening their market to appeal to all classes and to working women, by categorising and constructing theories of consumer behaviour,
and by placing pressure on the New South Wales Government to penalise and deter shoplifters.

Retailers, advertisers and sales experts were increasingly engaged in the 1910s and 1920s with formalising mass marketing policies. ‘Sales promotions’, ‘consumer desire’ and ‘consumer demand’, ‘customer services’ and ‘market research’ had all entered the language of selling by 1930. Similar marketing concepts were present in the late nineteenth century retail industry, but were rudimentary, unrecorded and probably unarticulated. By the 1920s marketing constituted a new discourse, a common language with a unique form of expression and meanings shared by all those involved in selling and distribution. Retailers consciously tried to sell commodities for the ideas, fantasies and dreams they represented. In Haug’s terms, the managers of the big stores, in alliance with the burgeoning advertising industry, wrapped their merchandise in aesthetically pleasing packages designed to meet the perceived sensual needs of the customer.

The theory of mass marketing which emerged after 1915 and was fully formulated by 1930 drew on and formalised the principle of sexual difference on which nineteenth century retailers implicitly relied. Retailers were advised to – and did in practice – decorate departments, dress windows, construct advertisement copy, devise customer management techniques, and institute marketing strategies separately and differently for men and women. Sexual difference, as Joan Scott has suggested, constituted a ‘primary way of signifying differentiation’ within the conceptual language of mass
marketing.¹ The dualities, oppositions and contrasts implied in gender relations provided coherence, organisation and a comforting reinforcement of the social order in a world threatened by the disruptions of commercial capitalism.²

Psychology enabled retailers and sales experts to more clearly identify and articulate sexual difference after about 1905. It also constituted a recurrent and primary theme in the development of mass marketing techniques in Sydney’s big stores. Psychology as adopted by mass marketers was a body of knowledge, signified by particular concepts and language, that provided them with a ‘scientific’ means of understanding the minds of workers and customers.

Psychology may have provided some retailers with novel insights and new information, but in many cases its concepts merely codified and rationalised what business men already knew from practical experience and their observations of assistant–customer relations. Retailers recognised the ‘difficult’ shopper without scientific aid, for example, from at least 1880. Psychology contributed a system of categorisation, explanation and labels with which to educate sales assistants in appropriate tactics. Marketing psychology therefore legitimatied and lent authority to strategies employed by retailers informally in their day-to-day store management.


² For a brief reference to the relationship between sexual segregation and the social order see Jean Baudrillard, For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981) p 99.
By providing a common language used by all those engaged in selling and marketing, psychology also facilitated the organisation and political cohesion of the retail industry in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Retailers, salesmanship experts, window display advisers, labour relations theorists and advertising men all used psychology to promote 'modern' marketing techniques. Retailers incorporated its precepts into their labour management policies, mechanisms of customer control, the decoration of interior spaces, the arrangement of window displays, advertising policies, and theories of consumer desire. Psychological theories were inseparable from marketing theories by 1930. Psychology and mass marketing existed in a state of symbiosis, in which the popularisation of one rested on the authority of the other.

The Australian retail trade appears to have drawn its psychological information largely from American publications and trade journals such as Printers Ink, which carried articles on psychology from 1895.³ Retailers' knowledge of psychology was therefore usually second or third-hand, filtered through experience-based entrepreneurial logic and articulated in terms of common sense or common knowledge. There is good reason to believe that they played a more decisive role in constructing and disseminating the principles of psychology in the 1910s and 1920s than did the founding fathers of professional psychology. Retailers and sales experts set the terms of the discourse, selected and popularised those theories that best suited their

entrepreneurial purposes and expressed psychological principles in language that was reassuringly familiar because it relied on conventional theories of human nature and sexual difference. Retailers could, moreover, put their psychology into immediate practice, whether as employers of large workforces or as mass marketers. As a result, their psychology affected the working lives and daily experiences of a significant proportion of the Australian population.

The sources of the psychology appropriated and adapted by the Australian marketing industry are difficult to identify. If there were links between retailing and professional psychology and research, these were indirect, if not obscure. Australian trade journals and sales writers rarely referred by name to individual American or British psychologists. The *Draper of Australia* occasionally included articles by Australian psychologists such as Tasman Lovell, Elton Mayo and Bernard Muscio. However, these and other pioneers of Australian psychology were more interested in industrial relations, education, child development and vocational guidance than they were in advertising.*

The psychology of mass marketing in Australia appears to have been derived from behavioural psychology in general, and instinct theory in particular.** Behavioural psychology, a leading field of psychological research until 1930, constituted the basis of both industrial and marketing

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psychology. The study of the 'human instincts', drives, motives and their associated emotions was a dominant branch of behavioural psychology and the subject of debate by the late 1920s. The work of William MacDougall (1871–1938), one of the most influential exponents of instinct theory who published his *Introduction to Social Psychology* in 1908, was well known to Australian psychologists in the 1920s. Instinct theory sought to identify and analyse primary instincts such as food-seeking, escape and sex. It was implicitly taken up by marketing experts who used a theory of instincts to explain and rationalise customers' shopping behaviour and their motivations for buying. Their aim was to expose the buying process to scientific scrutiny so that retailers might devise appropriate strategies to release the acquisitive or pleasure-seeking instincts.

Although Australian retailers did not overtly or directly appropriate psychoanalytic theory, Freudian principles nonetheless saturated the language of mass marketing. Freud's work was first translated into English and publicly endorsed in the United States in 1909, and his lectures reprinted in the *American Journal of Psychology* in 1910. Freud was one of a number of late nineteenth century thinkers who challenged the view of society and humanity as rational. His theory of personality structure exposed the unconscious, the driving force of the libido, and the operation of human impulses according to a pleasure

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7 O'Neil, 'Teaching and Practice of Psychology in Australia', p 10.

principle. The id, the main motivational force of human personality, sought immediate gratification; the ego delayed immediate gratification by thinking and decision-making; and the superego exercised a restraining function by invoking the ethical standards of society. As Ruth Matarazzo and Ann Garner have explained, 'The id says, "Go ahead, do it now". The ego says, "Wait, think it over". The superego says, "Don't do it at all, or you'll hate yourself later"."

A theory that revealed that part of the unconscious human mind constantly sought to satisfy sensual gratification despite rational restraints would have been attractive to retailers. Although they did not express their objectives in psychoanalytic terms, and whether they knew it or not, mass marketers were engaged in the project of releasing the id from the judgements and restraints of the ego and superego. They wanted the shopper, when she saw a fashionable costume or an article of millinery, to say to herself 'Go ahead, buy it.' Retailers did their utmost to prevent her from thinking or planning rationally and from asking herself, for example, 'Can I afford to buy this hat?'. They wanted to relieve the shopper from any guilt she might feel for spending part of her income or allowance on a 'luxury', and to remove ethical restraints such as notions of thrift, household economy or the disapproval of parents or husband who might have stopped her from following her impulse to gratify her 'selfish' desire for pleasure.

Marketing experts' concern to release the unconscious desires of the consumer from personal and social restraints

meshed fortuitously with a second implied and reiterated perception: that women were less rational than men. As feminist philosophers such as Genevieve Lloyd have shown, there has long been an assumption within western social and political thought that reason was a male faculty. As men’s conceptual ‘opposites’, women represented disorder, sensuality, nature and passion. Philosophers conceived of reason as the transcendence of the feminine, the means by which the female threat of chaos might be averted and overcome. The idea of the moral immaturity of female consciousness was a significant component of our intellectual tradition by the eighteenth century.10

Early marketing texts betray the same dichotomy between male reason and female irrationality. It would be naive to suggest that the writings of philosophers directly influenced the marketing policies of Sydney’s retailers and their allies, or that they deliberately and consciously incorporated gendered notions of reason into their literature. Retailers were, however, intensely interested in the differences between male and female minds when it came to shopping, a concern that led them to draw on bodies of popular and academic knowledge that illuminated sexual differences within human nature. In constructing theories of male and female nature, retailers and sales experts selected, collected and codified ideas present in their epistemological environment; ideas they accumulated in random fashion from books, periodicals, newspapers, entertainment, schooling, trade literature, competitors, colleagues, friends and

10 The Man of Reason. ‘Male’ and ‘Female’ in Western Philosophy (London: Methuen, 1984) pp 50, 70, 104.
family. It is not unlikely that the dominant ideas of western philosophy, filtered and perhaps diluted through popular media and folk or business wisdom, were disseminated in some form into the culture of mass marketing.

It is perhaps no coincidence that philosophy and psychology constituted allied branches of the same academic discipline during the formative years of marketing theory. Both psychology and philosophy were concerned with rationality (or its absence) and its effects on society. The marketing literature of the late nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century relied on popular but 'unscientific' characterisations of female shoppers as creatures easily tempted to sensual abandonment and narcissistic pleasure. The language and concepts of psychology embraced with such zeal after 1910 rested on similar views of an essentially irrational female nature. It also, and more usefully for the retail industry, provided marketing experts with a scientific epistemological instrument with which to dissect the female shopper's psyche with authority and precision.

Psychology suggested that women's instincts, personalities, motives for buying, attitudes to sales assistants, responses to store decoration and advertisements were different to those of men. They differed in their affinity with family and domestic values, their greater emotional and instinctive responses to marketing strategies, their love of fashion and personal adornment, and the

\[11\] As suggested by the existence of Sydney's Australasian Association of Psychology and Philosophy in the 1920s. See also O'Neil, 'Teaching and Practice of Psychology in Australia' p 3.
seriousness with which they took their role as household manager. Men, on the other hand, were difficult to interest in shopping, conservative in their clothing tastes, businesslike and down-to-earth in their buying habits, and looked on shopping as an objectionable chore rather than a pleasurable pastime. Men applied reason and logic to consumption; women, on the other hand, rarely entered one of the big stores with a rational plan of action and, if they did, could be easily swayed into impulse purchases.

The dividing line between commonly accepted definitions of masculinity and femininity and the presumed objectivity of psychological observations was so thin as to be almost invisible. Marketing theory developed out of the intersection between common knowledge about men and women, a philosophical tradition that opposed male reason to female passion, and principles of professional psychology which analysed the irrational and instinctual bases of human nature. Gender thus shaped and was constructed within social structures and dominant intellectual traditions, in an interactive flow between common and academic knowledge, and between ideology and social practice. Marketing theory combined philosophical tradition, psychological concepts and popular gender ideology in its delineation of male and female nature. In the process of creating a mass market, marketing theorists inadvertently contributed to the historical construction of gender in Australia between 1910 and 1930.

Retailers' characterisation of women as, by nature or by psychology, irrational and impetuous was both observation and desire. It clearly suited their purposes if the shopping sex had an uncontrollable desire for self-indulgence, an
immediate emotional response to retail aesthetics and an
irresistible attraction to beautiful and fashionable
merchandise. Women's presumed lack of reason gave them a
distinct advantage over men as the targets of marketing
policies, and placed them at the centre of marketing theory
ideologically as well as empirically. Marketing experts
argued that consumers could be induced to buy on a mass scale
by eroding traditional distinctions between thrift and
profligacy, between necessary and luxury goods, and between
household and personal expenditure. Those distinctions could
only be broken down by irrational (= feminine) behaviour.
Femininity, not masculinity, constituted the basis of mass
marketing strategies. Men were cool, calculating and
reasonable shoppers. Their manliness placed restrictions on
uninhibited consumption, compared with the infinite
possibilities of femininity.

While many of these attributes represented the
antithesis of mass marketing strategies and therefore a
perennial retail 'problem', experts nonetheless described the
habits of the typical male shopper with barely concealed
admiration. Since they were describing themselves, this
was not surprising. Marketing discourse proclaimed a
universality which masked a male voice and invisibly
privileging the viewpoint of men. Men constituted the unseen
magnetic pole, the unmoving reference point around which
clustered intangible, mysterious yet fascinating female
wraiths. From their stable position of male rationality,
retailers and their supporters struggled ungainly to capture
the essence of woman's nature for their own profit. Women
were the objects of circulation - commodities - in an
intellectual exchange system with men at its centre. Male retail capitalists proudly notched up their conquests in their accumulation of women/shoppers whom they had seduced into buying.\(^{12}\)

If a textual analysis of marketing literature reveals women as exchange objects, commodities and sources of profit, an examination of the records left by these 'commodities' hints at another story of retailing. The overwhelming majority of women appear to have derived pleasure and personal satisfaction from the big stores, the goods they sold, the physical environment in which they were displayed and the windows which enlivened the city streets. Not all women, certainly, had the money with which to possess their fantasies in material form. Despite improvements in working class standards of living in this period, many working class women cannot have failed to notice the disparity between the stores' cornucopia of riches and their own empty purses. But they may have derived as much pleasure from an artificial flower, a few inches of ribbon, a lacy camisole or a visit to the store's world of dreams as wealthier women did from their expensive evening gowns and millinery. Shoppers could, if they wished, remove the aesthetic wrapping of the stores' commodities to meet their particular psychic needs, without buying - literally or metaphorically - the entire package.

The variety of merchandise from which to choose and the collection of more and more commodities in the one

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comfortable and attractive building represented a material improvement in shopping conditions over the old-style cluttered specialty shops with the obligation to buy on entry. Shop assistants also benefited materially from the increased scale of operations, and physically from retailers' adoption of welfare schemes and the 'human' approach to industrial relations. By comparison with other workplaces and public institutions to which women had access, the big stores did indeed represent 'cathedrals of commerce'. Retailers might have reaped economic profit from women, but women extracted their own personally-defined psychological and material profit from mass marketing.

Financial and affective profit cannot, however, be counterposed as equal and opposite forces in the growth of mass marketing and its manifestation in Sydney's large retail stores. Pounds sterling profit translated into decision-making power, control over labour, and capital assets. Retailers accelerated the rate of increase in profits in the 1910s and 1920s by adopting policies devised by marketing experts. They articulated those strategies through the language of sexual differentiation and the concepts of psychology, both of which implied that women/shoppers were more irrational and hence more susceptible to mass consumption than men. The development of mass marketing in Sydney's big stores depended on and exploited popular and academic theories of femininity and female nature.

The history of selling and buying in Australia remains a largely uncharted area. We frequently refer to our contemporary consumer society, for example, without examining the concept critically, or being specific about its
characteristics and chronology. The history of Australian consumer politics and its relationship with feminism is still to be written. We also need to know how the marketing, advertising and retail industries developed or modified the marketing principles outlined in this thesis to incorporate chain store and shopping centre methods of trading after 1930. This study of Sydney's big stores suggests that a recognition of gender differences, and an understanding of the ways in which gender and capital intersect, must underly these and other enquiries into the history of mass marketing and consumption.
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## ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AONSW</td>
<td>Archives Office of New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>APP</td>
<td>Australia. Parliamentary Papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPP</td>
<td>Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>ML</td>
<td>Mitchell Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSWPP</td>
<td>New South Wales Parliamentary Papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>VPNSWLA</td>
<td>Votes and Proceedings of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VPP</td>
<td>Victoria. Parliamentary Papers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### PRIMARY SOURCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Store, Wholesale and Retail Trade Association Records</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Manuscript Material</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Records - Australia, Great Britain and Victoria</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Records - New South Wales</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Published Material - Books</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Published Material - Articles</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periodicals and Newspapers</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### SECONDARY SOURCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpublished papers and theses</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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