

FAMILY CLOTHING

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MILDRED THUROW TATE

Writer and Consultant
Formerly, Professor and Head
of Home Economics
Virginia Polytechnic Institute

ORIS GLISSON

Professor and Head
Department of Clothing
Textiles and Related Art
School of Home Economics
Virginia Polytechnic Institute

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Original Drawings by Ann Hurt

PREFACE

This book is designed to be used as a text in courses dealing with family clothing or clothing selection for family members, at both the junior and senior college levels. In addition, it should prove a valuable reference for all professional home economists whose work involves clothing and textiles, such as home economics teachers in high schools, county home agents and clothing specialists connected with the Agricultural and Home Economics Extension Service in the various states, and home economists employed in business and industry and in welfare agencies. It should be especially helpful to home economists dealing with adults or with children and youth in personal and family clothing situations, and as a basis for clothing study in older youth and young married groups.

The approach of the book is quite different from that of the usual clothing text, in that it presents a family approach to clothing. Clothing needs, interests, and problems of family members are considered at the various stages of the family cycle, starting with marriage, pregnancy, and infancy, through preschool, elementary school, and teen-age groups, young adults at college or on their first job, to the senior citizen. The physiological and psychological factors related to clothing needs and interests are considered at each age level.

Recognition has been given to the clothing practices of individuals and families as they exist today. Too often clothing recommendations have been based on the standards and practices of professional men and women. Throughout the text an attempt has been made to interweave the artistic, psychological, social, physiological, and economic aspects of clothing.

It is believed that there is a real need for this type of book. Most colleges and departments of home economics offer courses in family clothing or clothing selection. Heretofore the information needed for teaching these courses has not been available in an organized form to clothing teachers, and for many teachers it has not been readily available at all. Clothing teachers who have attempted to teach clothing from a family viewpoint have expressed discouragement over the lack

of adequate subject matter sources. It is hoped that this book will meet these needs.

In preparing this book, we are greatly indebted to the library staff of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Special thanks are expressed to Gladys Johnson, Lucy Lee Lancaster, Robert Stephenson, and Thelma Weiler Rusk for their unending efforts in locating the information and source material necessary to bring this book to completion.

MILDRED THUROW TATE
ORIS GLISSON

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PART I

Clothing Decisions

1

HOW TO MAKE CLOTHING DECISIONS

Clothing American families presents a greater challenge today than in past generations. Custom and habit are no longer adequate criteria for clothing decisions. The kind and variety of clothes available today seem almost limitless, as a result of the new technology and its accompanying mass production of garments. The accelerated speed of production has resulted not only in a vast number of garments but also in a wide price and quality range from which selections can be made by the consumer. Today, modish apparel is within the reach of most consumers in the United States.

The invention of the man-made fibers has been one of the most important stimulants in the recent revolution in clothing and textiles. These fibers have increased greatly the variety and types of clothing available to families. Meanwhile new finishes, perfected for use with fabrics made of traditional fibers as well as with the man-made fibers, give fabrics new properties which make them easier to care for and more appealing to the wearer. The rising income over the last quarter century has made it possible for families of all income levels in the United States to exercise choice in the area of clothing. All of these factors have increased the range and emphasized the importance of decisions to be made by families in providing clothing for their members.

DECISION MAKING IS CHOICE MAKING

Intelligent decision making requires an evaluation of the several alternatives or possibilities for meeting one's needs. Clothing a family presents a never-ending array of decisions, since everything that is done with clothing involves one or more judgments. For example,

daily the individuals in a family are faced with the question of what to wear. They must select garments that are correct in weight for the climate, are suitable for the occasion, meet their emotional needs for the day, have the necessary degree of comfort or freedom for the work to be done, and are in suitable condition for wear.

Clothing decisions are not confined to the daily dressing period. The selection and care of clothing, buying of accessories to go with clothing, fitting of garments, as well as questions of how, when, and how much to pay for individual garments require thoughtful consideration. The effectiveness of the decision maker does not determine the extent to which she or he must make decisions about clothing; it determines only the character of the decisions. If these decisions are made intelligently, the family should be well dressed, and each member should have a feeling of satisfaction about his clothing.

Decision making always involves risks. Oftentimes decisions must be made without complete information as to the consequences of the possible alternative actions. Such is the case, for example, when an individual must buy a coat to be worn four or five years. The buyer cannot foresee everything that is likely to happen in the lifetime of that coat which might affect its suitability. However, considerable knowledge of style changes, materials, and color, as well as knowledge of the individual for whom the coat is intended, should increase the satisfactions of the wearer. Decisions must always be based upon judgments. They will have to be decisions for a future which is unpredictable.

Individuals can learn to make better decisions in the selection and purchase of clothing if certain processes involved in decision making and their application to clothing are understood.

STEPS IN DECISION MAKING

It is generally accepted that there are at least five steps in making a decision:^{1, 2*}

1. Defining the problem
2. Defining the expectations
3. Defining alternatives
4. Selecting the best alternative
5. Putting the decision into action

* All superior numbers in the text refer to references at the end of each chapter.

Defining the Problem

To define the problem is to understand or characterize what needs to be done. This is of crucial importance to those responsible for providing the family's clothing. Often there are so many problems to be solved that it is difficult for the inexperienced or untrained person to identify the major or most important one. This must be done, for the satisfactory solution of the major problem may determine the solution, at least in part, of many of the related problems.

For example, suppose the father of a family has been promoted from plant foreman to an office position in the same company. As a foreman, he wore work clothes, consisting of denim slacks and colored shirts. The father recognizes that these clothes are not appropriate for his new position. In the new position, he will need business suits, dress shirts, new shoes, a topcoat, and suitable accessories. All of these must be provided within the family budget.

Offhand, the problem may appear simple: buying new clothes for a new job. Further analysis, however, indicates the need for a more careful definition of the problem. In defining this problem, the first step may be to determine whether the father really needs the new clothing. It may not be difficult for the father to establish his need. The new office position carries higher prestige than that of plant foreman, and office workers generally wear business suits. Furthermore, he is less likely to be accepted by his fellow workers should he come to the office in a foreman's outfit. His one "good" suit, purchased several years ago, is beginning to show signs of wear and would not hold up long for daily use.

Many more questions in addition to that of establishing need must be answered in defining the problem: Will the family budget permit the unexpected clothing expenditures? Will the increased salary of the new job justify the extra clothing expense? What sacrifices will other family members have to make to provide an adequate clothing wardrobe for the father? What will be a minimum wardrobe for this new position? Who will purchase the clothing? When and where will the shopping be done?

Defining the Expectations

The second step in decision making is to think through the expectations. Perhaps the chief outcome that the father hopes to gain by correct appearance is a better chance of succeeding in the new position.

Correct attire will likely aid him in making a favorable impression on the company officials and his fellow workers. It may make him more readily acceptable by both. It will tend to give him greater self-assurance, and his full attention can be devoted to performing well on the new job. Another expectation may be increased prestige in the community for his family and himself. The possibility of future promotions if this opportunity is well met should not be overlooked. The fact that the clothing allowance for all family members may be increased if the father is promoted may more than compensate for some sacrificing now.

Defining the Alternatives

Defining alternatives or thinking through the various ways of meeting the problem is the third step in decision making. There are several ways to solve any problem. The challenge is to select (fourth step) the one way that seems best suited for the family in question. Certainly no one way will be "best" for all families; therefore the special resources and needs of the family must be considered. Time and money do not permit the actual trying out of the several plans; so they must be evaluated mentally. The planner must follow through the difficulties and consequences presented by each alternative in his mind, and must judge which plan offers the most satisfactory solution.

Consider first the problem of financing the father's new clothes in the foregoing case. Very few families have sufficient cash on hand to take care of such unexpected clothing expenditures. How, then, can the crisis be met? There are several possibilities:

1. The mother may suggest that a portion of the fund set aside for the children's education be used. However, the father may be reluctant to do this, since reducing the principal in the children's educational fund would mean a reduction in interest or dividends, thereby making it doubly expensive to replace the borrowed money.
2. Perhaps the son may offer his savings from a paper route, and the daughter be willing to share her earnings from baby sitting. Thus the combined funds of the family may be just enough to purchase one outfit, which the father could get by with temporarily by alternating it with the "good" suit he already owns.
3. A possible solution would be to get a short-term loan at the bank, but this presents considerations also: What will the interest rate be on a short-time loan? Is it advisable to seek another loan while payments

are still due on a previous loan for the family car? What about their plans to finish that room in the basement during the summer, so that the teen-age family members have a place to dance and entertain their friends? Borrowing money to buy the clothes would preclude borrowing money to finish the recreation room.

4. Another alternative may be to use the family's charge account at the local department store. This too presents problems: From previous experience, the father knows that the selection of men's apparel at this department store is limited and the price is higher than at the men's specialty store, where cash payment is required. Furthermore, the charge account will require regular monthly payments for several months, which will decrease the amount of money available for other family needs.

How to finance the purchase is only one of the many areas of alternatives to be considered. The type of clothes the father should buy may require considerable thought. Perhaps he has noticed that most of the men in the office are wearing sport coats and trousers. Should he buy sport clothes, or should he buy clothes that can be worn for dress as well as for work? If he can afford two suits, he may decide to buy one sports type and one business type. This brings up the matter of topcoat, hat, shoes, and accessories: can he find one set of these apparel items to go with both sport and business suits, or will each type of suit require its own hat, topcoat, shoes, and accessories?

The father needs to consider seasonal requirements when selecting his clothing. Will he be able to find clothes that are suitable for year-round wear, or will he have to reoutfit himself for spring and summer? He may have the alternative of getting one good suit that can be worn the year around or two less expensive ones—one for winter and the other for summer. Different individuals or families will give varying weight to these factors in making a decision.

The cost of clothing upkeep will have to be weighed as the father considers what type of clothing he should purchase. Clothes that have to be cleaned or repaired frequently increase the initial cost of being well-dressed. Cleaning and repair are costly not only in money but in the time necessary to take clothes to the cleaners and in the inconvenience of replacing them while they are being cleaned.

As the family thinks through the father's clothing problem, the father's likes and dislikes cannot be the final answer. He may need to consider the type of clothing that his family and friends enjoy seeing or expect to see him wear. His clothes must give him a sense of belonging, to his family, to his job, and to his social group.

Putting the Decision into Action

The final step in decision making is to put the plan decided upon into action. To become effective, every decision requires an action plan which spells out who is going to do what, when, and where.¹ The shopping for the clothes may be done by the father or by some other family member. Whoever it is that assembles the father's wardrobe must understand which alternative has been selected by the family, and must have the ability and the will to execute its plan.

To carry out the plan successfully requires time to shop and the knowledge necessary to evaluate the many shopping choices that will confront the shopper. These choices are associated with details of color, style, type of fabric, and relative cost. The shopper must decide which of several garments will most nearly meet the father's needs. Compromises may have to be made, for rarely is a perfect solution found. Usually there are two or three courses of action which seem equally desirable. If the father accepts the choices of the shopper, the decision process is closed; if not, the shopper must go back to the store to locate apparel which will be more satisfactory.

Many similar clothing decision-making situations face all families. As the children grow older, usually their clothing needs increase. If the family income has not increased at the same rate, other areas of family expenditures may have to be decreased. During some years, two or more family members may need major clothing items. If the clothing budget will not allow for all needs, those of one family member must receive preference. Different families will accept different solutions to these problems, but the steps described in the preceding pages are involved in all major decisions. In fact, they are involved in the decisions concerning each major purchase. For example, if a college girl wants a new formal dress not included in her budget, she must consider: (1) the advantage of having the dress; (2) what she is willing to forego in order to have it; (3) the various alternatives for providing it; (4) the cost in time and money of these alternatives; and (5) procedures for getting the dress.

The steps outlined here may seem laborious and too time-consuming for the average family. On the contrary, familiarity with the process saves time and money in the long run. It is much better to spend time and energy in the planning stage than to spend them trying to pull the family or its members out of trouble resulting from poorly defined decisions. Furthermore, the time spent on these steps is only a fraction of the time that many families spend in agonizing over a decision that has to be made or over one that was poorly made. A thoughtful

approach to decision making not only results in more satisfactory decisions, but should, with experience, result in easier and faster decisions.

When these steps of decision making are projected through the total process of clothing the family—setting aside the proportion of the income to be spent for clothing, dividing the clothing dollar among the various family members, dividing the clothing allowance for each family member among the various items in the individual wardrobe, and selecting and purchasing each item in the wardrobe of each family member—the number of decisions which must be intelligently considered becomes astronomical.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Select a major clothing decision confronting each class member in the near future. Analyze the decision according to the steps outlined in this chapter. If it is decided that a garment needs to be purchased, evaluate this decision on the basis of the requirements which the garment should meet.
2. Help a class member who has been unable to solve his or her clothing problem by discussing the problem in class and suggesting various alternative procedures. Evaluate these suggestions according to the above analysis.
3. Undertake to correct the clothing habits of a class member who is either unaware of or indifferent to his poor appearance, or who does not know how to proceed. How can the student's cooperation be obtained without hurting his feelings?
4. Give examples of personal experiences which have been helpful in making sound clothing decisions.

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