

FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE SELECTION AND PURCHASE OF CLOTHING  
IN CERTAIN WAGE EARNERS FAMILIES, DETROIT, MICHIGAN.

by

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## INTRODUCTION

### Statement of Problem

This investigation was an endeavor to discover the influences that are affective in the selection and purchase of clothing; and to determine to what degree these influences react upon the social well being of the wage earners family.

### Reason for Study

"Human behavior and habits in life as far as social communications are concerned are more determined by clothing than the majority of people realize". Dearborn (1918). Similar conclusions through the observations made while doing reconstruction work among wage earners families of Detroit, Michigan prompted this study. This problem become apparent through the greater inconsistencies noted in the purchase of clothing than in any other household article. In addition there are other factors that require consideration as is indicated by the following observed statements:

1. There is great need for authentic information showing the effects of the economic and psychological aspects of clothing upon the wage earners family.

2. There is need for an appreciation and reliable information on the part of the social worker as to the value of clothing in the family budget.

3. That unnecessary waste results from a lack of knowledge in the selection and purchase of clothing for the family.

2. There is need for training of the homemaker of the wage earners family in the various aspects of clothing.

#### Literature Reviewed

It was early recognized that one of the outstanding problems of modern civilization is the realization that the successful life of a social group is dependent upon the understanding, control, and improvements of the industrial forces within that group. This fact has furnished and is still furnishing a fertile field for study in the science of economics. The economist has tried to glimpse the forces that create future problems that make for social progress.

Desires or wants influence the standard of life, hence their psychological and economic value must be carefully considered. They are intangible and hard to measure but undeniable. They are operative in influencing the manner in which people spend their money, which often makes the difference for a family between poverty and comfort. Therefore

the fundamental problem in spending is choice; it is comparatively a recent one for the wage earners family.

Under the present system of mass production an endless number of commodities have been placed within the buying power of the wage earner, which he could not possibly have enjoyed a decade ago. Along with mass production has developed the part payment credit system which has been a contributing factor in the freedom of choice. There is no question but that the success of the choices made, will depend on the individual's ability to choose and that their results will influence the social well being of the family. "Unwise spending not only affects the individual family group but has its reactions on all the rest in the community, spending directs the efforts of producers and determines whether much or little effort shall go into the making or whether it shall go into mass wealth". Tugwell (1925).

One by one the productive arts have been taken from the home and transferred to the factory, until to-day the household has lost its value as a productive unit, and the question which arises is: How shall we, as consumers choose, in order to get the greatest satisfaction from our choice? Not only are most commodities no longer produced and consumed by the same household but there is a wide separation in time and space between production and consumption. Under these changed conditions the connection between cause and effect

is blurred by complex relationships of an impersonal highly specialized industrial system. The consumer of to-day has so little knowledge of raw materials and production that the various clothing problems cannot be approached in the same manner as they were by the women of previous generations who spun, wove and made garments for the whole family.

The factory system and the application of its principles to many processes connected with the manufacture of clothing, have prevented the girl's acquisition of the various kinds of skills which her mother acquired as a matter of course. Much of the work which the domestic woman once did in the home; wage paid women, now do, outside the home. It is therefore obvious that never was the position of the homemaker more important or her responsibility greater. The domestic tasks of earlier days have left the home, thus making way for a substitute. This substitution is the spending of money for ready made clothing and other factory made commodities. The woman not only provides for the wants of her family group by spending; but determines by what she buys the fate of innumerable workers. Hence she holds a grave responsibility and it is extremely hard to train the young women to meet these duties and responsibilities adequately. Talbot and Breckenridge (1913).

We cannot make the statement that production has been taken out of the home with out qualifying it. While woman

is not a producer of goods for the market, she is still a producer of wealth in another sense, that is, she creates utilities that satisfy human needs. "Out of the raw material she produces the finished goods, not only in food and clothing but in material forms that make up the very character and atmosphere of the home". Abel, (1921).

"While it falls to man chiefly to direct the general course of production, it is not true that he alone is a producer. Not only has the field of industry and professional life been occupied, and honorably so by women, but also the home itself. Women may be said in the strictest sense to be producers of wealth!" Devine, (1895). The work such as mending or remodeling a garment in the home is production. The prolonged life of a garment due to timely and careful mending or remodeling, has added materially to the family income. Clothing, after it has been selected and brought into the home is in need of constant care; if it is satisfactory. This is another form of service by which the woman adds to the income.

It is obvious however in the present economic order that the group of persons to whom the problem of consumption comes home most closely, is the woman of the household. Her contribution to the family welfare, necessitates that her daily activities embody the selection and disposition of goods as well as the spending of the family income. Since

the freedom of choice is vested in the woman she is definitely a director of production.

The study of consumption leads inevitably to the problem of choice and of valuation. "It is as choosers of economic goods that the consumers play their part in the organization and direction of industrial affairs. The problem, both as an individual process, significant for daily living and as a collective process, significant for its economic results, is fundamentally a problem of choice and selection between values". Dr. Kyrk, (1923). This economic significance of the consumer was brought out very clearly during the period of war economy.

Of the many household duties for which consumers are responsible, the one of selecting and purchasing of clothing is the most difficult. "Clothing is the expenditure in the budget which admits the most variation in the ordinary family. It is one of the most difficult items of the budget. While the primary purpose of clothing is undoubtedly to protect the body, it is generally obscured by the two secondary purposes that count most with the majority, that of adornment and that of conforming to the social usage". Lord, (1922).

"Society is ever at our elbow admonishing and compelling conformity to its standardized value. It bribes us with punishments and exercises a constant pressure to make



us into its likeness. What we choose and value is largely the result of our desire to live as part of society and win approval within it. In desiring a dress, a woman does not want it merely as clothes but as it is socially approved by fashion of the day, however poorly it may serve the purpose of clothes". J. E. Boodin-American Journal Sociology, Vol.XXI (1915). And so we have drifted with the crowd. Fashion has been our standard and as a guide there is little else for the masses of people.

There are no national standards for dress and until recently there has been an almost complete absence of any effort to devise satisfactory styles of dress, taking the lines of the human figure or the health of the individual as a basis for decision. "As to the adjustment of the weight, durability of clothing, and signs of fraudulent practices in fabrics, nothing has as yet been formulated". Talbot and Breckenridge, (1913).

Perhaps the greatest factor which has changed clothing consumption for the wage earner's family has been the breaking down of class distinction, thru dress. We have no national class distinction, in United States, the individual may copy, with reservation, whoever and whatever is desired. By our present method of production clothing can be produced cheaply, which looks to the mass like the more expensive clothing worn by the higher income group. In speaking of

clothing for the wage earner's family, Royal Meeker has the following to say. "It is repugnant to our senses of what is right that the working classes should dress in a way to set them apart from the well to do. Few men and women among the workers in this country are willing to appear in public unless they can dress near enough to the mode or standard of fashion so as not to attract critical attention. It is very clear then that the clothing of the worker's family should possess something of that subtle "something" called style". Monthly Labor Review (1919).

Another contributing factor is that the wage earner has had more leisure, due to the shortened work day, to observe dress and manners. This tends to create a greater desire for a higher standard of living and multiply his wants. "They have sensed the social importance of appearance and by emphasizing clothing in their living are able to overcome one of the economic obstacles to their ambitions. The necessities of life are at times sacrificed to allow for higher standards of dress than is advisable". McMahon (1925).

"Many wage earners are unacquainted with different values of the products consumed; hence have no basis for intelligent spending, and are more or less at the mercy of the skillful tactics of salesmen, and volumes of advertising, in which every device has been utilized to suggest and persuade a purchase. Consumers often appear to have no mind of

their own, they blindly accept the retailers guarantee, they do not take time to investigate; they are ignorant of tests of quality of what they want and need". Comish (1923).

The business of purchasing involves first of all a knowledge of values; to decide what is really wanted, to appreciate the worth of the article when found, and to utilize it to the best possible advantage. The housewife as a consumer of clothing is under a disadvantage in that she has no well known standards to fall back on. Where a government has not set up or established standards of quality the initiative must come from the consumer. For this she needs training. "The only measure of a buyers success seems to be the degree of satisfaction that the purchases bring to the family, but these standards are capable of great improvement by education in values. The knowledge of the buyer as to value of the articles between which she must choose is a very definite thing, and her usefulness to the family can be greatly increased by informing her as to qualities and prices and reason for prices". Abel (1921).

The need for training in the economic phases of clothing and textiles is just beginning to be felt. In view of this fact instruction for consumers regarding clothing is being developed in the following types of institutions, elementary grade schools, general high schools, technical and vocational high schools, colleges, universities and extension

instruction by agricultural colleges.

To a great extent the old tradition of training in household duties by the apprentice method has died, and training for the homemaker of to-day is to be found in the school. As to the training given in our schools, in regard to clothing the following questions arise; are the schools training the girls; to consider relative costs and value of work; to manage a home at moderate cost; have they a knowledge of materials, their proper value and use; do they dress appropriately and becomingly; do they understand hygiene of clothing; its importance as a factor in maintaining health; have they an artistic sense in developing good form; correct proportions and satisfactory line and color; or has the training only been to develop the ability to sew and construct? Clothing construction we must acknowledge has been the primary training given in the schools. Construction is an important factor in clothing, but it alone does not function in developing a knowledge of intrinsic value. The schools of to-day are realizing this fact. Hence there has been a transfer of emphasis from the making of clothing to its skillful selection and purchase; with special training in regard to the economic advantage gained through the proper care of the wardrobe.

For the girl, who is obliged to leave school at an early age to go to work, as is very often the case in a wage

earners family, there is little opportunity for training in clothing. The school offers little of such work in the lower grades and training in the home is negligible in the majority of families. "The notable barrier to home education is the ignorance of the mother, she in turn has not had any better opportunity than her daughter". Nearing (1918). Since the mother has lacked adequate training in homemaking, she cannot teach what she does not know. Unless these girls have an insight into the value of training in clothing and take advantage of evening classes they will drift with the throng. They will do what other girls do, wear what other girls wear and will want to appear as one of the group. "Consciousness of kind plays an important part in human behavior. In order to maintain peace in mind it is desirable that the individual should not run athwart the habits of one's group. One can be different in spirit, may entertain ideas wholly out of accord with the group but to differentiate from others in habits of dress, one is immediately conscious of an isolation which adds far more to discomfort than an unsatisfied desire for food. Insufficient food might impair physical efficiency but not to be able to dress in the customary way subjects one to personal humiliation which leads one to draw away from the group". McMahon (1925).

The desire to merit the respect and admiration of

others through clothing often prompts unwise economics. Many sacrifices are made in order to allow for more elaboration in dress. "The great difficulty with most of us is that we have no standards of which we are conscious and because we do not recognize them as standards, we frequently make purchases which are not consistent, clothing is therefore inadequate and unsatisfactory. Donham (1921).

There is need for establishing standards whereby clothing may be chosen according to well defined economic, hygienic and aesthetic principles instead of fashion. Clothes should be a means of expressing individuality instead of expressing social and financial superiority.

The public does not realize the need for study in the field of clothing. "It needs basic scientific information on how to clothe themselves properly so that they will be more efficient and more happy because continually more comfortable. Dearborn (1918).

## INVESTIGATION

### Procedure

This study was conducted by the survey method. To secure the desired information, two sets of questionnaires were organized and sent to the Visiting Housekeeper Associa-

tion ( a social agency ) of Detroit, Michigan. One set to be answered by the woman of the wage earning family and the other by the social worker herself. To reinforce this data personal experiences of the writer were frequently used in the discussion.

The questions planned for the homemaker were distributed among the wage earners families through the workers who had charge of each particular group.

The following is a copy of the questionnaire handed to the woman herself.

1. What is your nationality?
2. Were you born in this country?
3. What is the income of your family?
4. How much of the income do you spend for clothing?
5. How many are there in the family?
  - a. Number of children in family (state ages).
6. What did you do before you were married?
7. Before your marriage did you have any training in
  - a. cooking
  - b. sewing
  - c. homemaking (planning for the interest of family in the home)
8. Did you get your training in the following places:  
(Mark with a check x)
  - a. Home

- b. Grade school
  - c. High school
  - d. Night school
  - e. Continuation school
  - f. College
9. What did you learn in sewing and care of clothing from any of these places?
10. Have you made clothing for your family as:
- a. Under garments
    - 1. Bloomers
    - 2. Slips
  - b. Good dresses
  - c. House dresses
  - d. Boys clothing
11. For what would you use the following materials:
- a. Muslin
  - b. Cotton crepe
  - c. Sateen
  - d. Cotton voile
  - e. Gingham
  - f. Percale
  - g. Serge
  - h. Wool flannel
12. Do you use patterns
13. What are some of the points you need to know when



- a. Buying a pattern
  - b. Using a pattern
14. What kind of material do you usually buy for your daughters?
- a. School dresses
  - b. Good dresses
15. Do you buy at bargain counters?
16. In the line of clothing what do you generally buy?
17. Have you any material on hand that you bought at the bargain counter last year?
18. Do you buy any clothing by paying so much per week?
19. What kind of clothing is it?
20. Have you ever bought clothing at rummage sales. If so, what kind of garments?
21. How do you wash and iron
- a. Silk
  - b. Wool
  - c. Cotton
22. Are you particular about the fit of your clothes, why?
23. Why do you wear your good clothes when you go to the city, church or visiting?

No restrictions were placed on the type of family except that the women be able to read and answer questions without help from the social worker. This would mean that

the mother of the family had either been in our schools or had been in this country for a number of years and was familiar with our language and customs.

The staff members were required to answer the following list of questions and base their answers which were used in this investigation on the information which they observed while working with the families.

1. Where were you trained?
2. In what did you major in college?
3. Are you interested in clothing from the following points of view:
  - a. Art
  - b. Construction
  - c. Teaching
4. How many families do you work with?
5. What is the average income of the families with whom you work?
6. Where do the majority of the men work?
7. How many families applied directly for lessons in clothing?
8. In any instance wherein families were referred by indirect application was their interest aroused thru clothing?
9. How many of the women have had any training in sewing in grade school or night school?

10. How many of the women do all their own sewing?
11. What type of garment is usually made?
12. What materials were commonly used for various types of garments?
13. What number of women know the following material and uses:
  - a. Muslin
  - b. Gingham
  - c. Sateen
  - d. Percale
  - e. Cotton flannel
  - f. Cotton crepe
  - g. Serge
  - h. Pongee
14. What number know how to use patterns?
15. How many understand the laundering properties of wool, silk and cotton?
16. How many plan for the clothing used by the family?
17. How many know the amount expended for clothing per year?
18. What number buy at bargain sales?
19. What number buy considering family needs?
20. How many women have ability to plan garments from old clothing?
21. In any case have you found that the standard of living is better where women gave attention to buying, making and repair of clothing?
22. How many know effect of color and line in dress?
23. In any case where there has been any dilinquency or truancy has clothing been a direct cause?

24. Do the women notice the clothes you wear?

### Discussion

This study includes the answers given by the women from forty-five families and data collected in regard to four hundred sixty one families, through eleven staff members.

The information secured was classified under the following heads:

1. Economic stability of the family.
2. Educational ability of the homemaker.
3. Ability of woman in regard to clothing, construction, selection and care.
4. Social status of the family as determined by clothing.

In the tabulated data the value of these topics was considered in each case and later explained in the explanation of the tables.

A careful study was made of the answers given by the homemaker. To illustrate the procedure, the data for fifteen families are tabulated as is shown in Table I.

The ages of the parents were not included although in all cases the ages of children are considered. The place of birth and nationality were only given for the homemaker. The income and amount spent for clothing were given in terms

Table I. Economic Stability of the Families.

Families	: Income per year	: Size of family	: Ages children 0-6	: 6-17	: Place of birth of mother	: Nationality of mother	: Amount spent for clothing for family
1	: \$1680	: 4	: 4	: 10	: United States	: American	: No record
2	: \$1800	: 4	: 3	: 8	: United States	: American	: 22%
3	: \$1800	: 8	: 5	: 13, 11, 9, 7, 14, 6	: United States	: Greek	: No record
4	: \$1680	: 8	: 5	: 15, 8, 6, 17, 10	: United States	: Scotch	: 11%
5	: \$2160	: 4	: 1-3	:	: United States	: Scotch	: No record
6	: \$1200	: 4	:	: 7, 9	: United States	: American	: No record
7	: \$1440	: 6	:	: 13, 8, 12, 9	: United States	: American	: No record
8	: \$1800	: 5	: 6-4	: 10	: United States	: American	: No record
9	: \$1800	: 10	: 4-3	: 10, 11, 13, 8, 6, 7	: United States	: American	: No record
10	: \$1800	: 5	: 3	: 6, 7	: United States	: American	: No record
11	: \$1800	: 7	:	: 7, 9, 14, 10, 12	: United States	: American	: No record
12	: \$2220	: 4	:	: 7, 9	: United States	: American	: 19%
13	: \$1800	: 6	: 1-2	: 7, 6	: United States	: American	: No record
14	: \$1740	: 3	: 2	:	: United States	: Assyrian	: 9%
15	: \$1800	: 7	: 4	: 13, 11, 7, 14, 10	: Canada	: Canadian	: No record

of money, from these figures the per cent expended for clothing was determined.

Table II contains a summary of the questions answered by the homemaker in regard to the economic stability of the family.

In estimating the economic ability of the family there are many factors which are of importance in their life. The following were considered in this study; income, size and nativity of family, age of children and clothing expenditures. The average income for the families studied is \$1873.12 per year. According to the budget compiled by the Visiting Housekeeper Association for the budget study of the dependent and independent families of the city, these families are receiving a fair minimum wage. This remuneration is understood to provide for all physical and a few cultural needs.

The average size of the family is 6. persons. There are 4. children between the age of 0-17 years. Twenty-eight per cent of the children are between 0-6 years of age, and seventy-two per cent of the children are between 6-17 years of age or of school age. (The Michigan law requires that children between the ages of six and sixteen years attend school during the entire term unless their service is essential to their own support. They must have passed their fifteenth birthday before being excused even for this. All

minors under seventeen years of age, who have ceased to attend all day schools, are compelled to attend continuation school for at least eight hours a week). The number and ages of the children that are in school have a marked influence upon the amount planned for the clothing budget. The age of dependency of the child upon the family income is longer for the wage earners family in Detroit than is allowed by the standard budget studies.

There are for these families 2.8 children per home between the ages of 6-17 years. Of these there are thirty-six per cent between the age of 6-8 years, thirty-seven per cent between 8-12 years, twenty per cent between 12-15 years and five per cent between 15-17 years.

The relative distribution of the income between different items of the household budget varies according to the size of the income. In reports of most budget investigations we find that the amount spent for clothing per year is obviously the most difficult to estimate accurately.

Women do not keep accounts and cannot be depended upon to recall prices paid for clothing. Twenty-three per cent of the families were able to give an estimate of their clothing expenditures. This number showed that an average of sixteen per cent of the income of those so reporting is expended for clothing, which is less than the percentage recommended by the standard budget of the United States Bur-

Table II. Summary of the Economic Stability of the Family.

Number of families	45	Average income per year	1873.12	Average size of family	6+	Number of children for all families	181	Number of children per family	4+	Number of children 0-6 percent	28	Number of children 6-17 in percent	72	Number of children 6-17 per family	28	Number born in United States	36	Number foreign born	9	Descent:		Number of families kept record in percent	23	Amount spent for clothing in percent	16
																				American	28	Foreign	17		



eau of Labor Statistics 1918.

The nativity of the homemaker is of significance from various viewpoints. Her native customs and early training affect the traditions and manner of living within the home, and have a marked influence upon the way the family income is used. Thirty-six of the forty-five women are American born, which means they have been trained in our schools. Nine women are of foreign birth, of these, five were trained in the United States. Nationalities represented are Greek, Scotch, German, Canadian, Italian, Slavok and Assyrian.

Tables III-IV-(a and b)-V contain the detailed information from the answers received in regard to the abilities of the homemaker for the same families as studied in Table I. Summaries of these will be found in Tables VI-VII-VIII and are discussed accordingly.

It is of most importance that a woman be trained for the task of homemaking, for upon her rests the responsibility of the home. She is manager and dispenser of the family income. What is done with it and the amount of comfort it yields depends almost entirely upon her character and ability. With no domestic training the average working girl goes straight from factory and office to start a new home. Often times the results are deplorable. Many women finally are able to work out a system of household economy, though

Table III. Educational Abilities of the Homemaker.

Families number	Occupation before marriage	Training in home economics	Place of training	Instruction received in sewing
1	Teacher	Cooking Sewing Homemaking	Grade school High school College	General sewing Mending
2	Housework	Cooking	Home Grade school	Fancy work Mending
3	Factory	Cooking	Home Grade school	Repair
4	Telephone operator	No training	-	- -
5	Clerk	No training	-	- -
6	Telephone operator	Cooking Sewing Homemaking	Home High school Continuation	Lines and color Appropriateness of dress - general sewing
7	Traveling companion	No Training	-	- -
8	Factory	No training	-	- -
9	Housework	Cooking	Grades	- -
10	Home	Cooking	Grades Continuation school	General sewing - repair
11	Nursing	Cooking Sewing	Home High school	General sewing
12	Home	Cooking	Home Grade High school	General sewing - repair Hygiene
13	Telephone operator	Cooking	Home Grades	- -
14	Clerk	Sewing	Grades	- -
15	Telephone operator	No Training	Home Grade High school	

Table IVa. Abilities in Clothing and Textiles. Selection, Construction, and Care.

Family	Use of Material				Pattern: used	Points in:		School	Good
	Muslin	Crepe	Sateen	Voile		Gingham	Buying		
1	: Under- : wear	: Gowns	: Bloomer	: Under- : wear	: House : dresses	: Yes	: Size : Type	: Parts	: Gingham:Voile : silk
2	: Under- : wear	: -	: Lining	: Dresses	: School : dress	: Yes	: Ages	: Straif- : ght on : mater- : ial	: Gingham:Serge : Voile
3	: Under- : wear	: Gowns	: -	: Dresses	: Dress	: Yes	: Bust : measure	: -	: Gingham:Silk : Voile
4	: Bloomer	: Gowns	: Bloomer	: Dresses	: Boys' : blouses	: Yes	: Size	: Direc- : tions	: Percalé: -
5	: Cur- : tains	: -	: Cur- : tains	: Dresses	: Dress	: Yes	: -	: -	: English: : print
6	: Under- : wear	: -	: Bloomer	: Dresses	: Aprons	: Yes	: Size	: -	: Gingham:Serge
7	: Bed : linen	: Bloomer	: Slip	: Cur- : tains	: School : dress	: Yes	: -	: Parts	: Gingham:Voile
8	: Under- : wear	: Gown	: Dresses	: -	: Dresses	: Yes	: -	: -	: Gingham:Silk
9	: Under : wear	: Dress	: Lining	: -	: Dresses	: Yes	: Age	: -	: Gingham:Silk
10	: Slip	: -	: -	: Dresses	: Dresses	: Yes	: -	: Place : on ma- : terial	: Gingham:Serge
11	: Under- : wear	: -	: Dress	: Dress	: Dresses	: Yes	: -	: -	: Gingham:Voile
12	: Under- : wear	: Gowns	: -	: Slip	: School : dress	: Yes	: Age	: -	: Gingham: -
13	: Under- : wear	: Bloomer	: -	: -	: House : dress	: Yes	: -	: Age	: Gingham: -
14	: Under- : wear	: Gown	: Slip	: Dress	: School : dress	: Yes	: -	: -	: Gingham:Silk
15	: Under- : wear	: -	: Bloomer	: Dress	: Dress	: Yes	: -	: -	: Gingham: -

Table IVb. Abilities in Clothing and Textiles. Knowledge in Regard to Garments.

Family:	clothing made:	Knowledge of Laundering:			Type of Garments made at Home					
	from old garments	Silk	Wool	Cotton	Bloomer	Slips	Dresses	Boy	House	Blouse
1	School dresses Coats	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-				
2	Childrens' coats	No	No	Yes	-	-		-		-
3	Boys' trousers Dresses	No	Yes	Yes	-	-		-		-
4-5	Boys' trousers Coats Dresses	Yes	Yes	Yes	-					
6	Dresses Aprons	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-	-			-
7	Slips Dresses	No	No	Yes						
8	Childrens' coats Dresses	Yes	No	Yes	-	-		-		-
9	Underwear									
10	Coats Dresses	Yes	No	Yes				-		
11	Underwear Childrens' dresses	No	No	Yes	-	-				-
12	Boys' suit	No	No	Yes	-	-		-		-
13	Boys' trousers Dresses	No	No	Yes	-			-		
14	Dresses Aprons	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-		-		-
15	Childrens' dresses coats, hats	Yes	No	Yes	-	-		-		-

Table V. Social Status of Family as Determined by Clothing.

Families	Clothing Purchase				Material on hand from last year	Colors worn and why	Reason for wearing good clothes	Reason for being particular about clothes
	Bargain counter kind of material	Installment kind of clothing	Rummage sale kind of clothing					
1	: no	: no	: no	: no	: Black, in style	: Respect for self	: Good appearance	
2	: Yards goods : blouse	: no	: no	: no	: Blue style	: Respect for self	: Good appearance	
3	: Yard goods	: Coats	: no	: no	: Black blue	: Respect for self	: Good appearance	
4	: Yard goods	: no	: no	: no	: Red dark	: Respect for self	: Good appearance	
5	: Yard goods	: no	: no	: yes	: Blue looks well	: Pride	: Good appearance	
6	: No dresses	: Good dresses	: no	: yes	: Blue black	: Good impression	: Good appearance	
7	: No	: no	: School coats	: yes	: Blue style	: Good impression	: Good appearance	
8	: No	: no	: no	: yes	: Rose cheerful	: Good impression	: Good appearance	
9	: Yard goods : dresses	: coats	: no	: no	: Blue looks well	: Self respect	: Good appearance	
10	: Yard goods : bloom-ers	: no	: dresses	: no	: Black style	: Self respect	: Good appearance	
11	: Yard goods : dresses	: no	: no	: yes	: Blue in style	: Feels better	: Good appearance	
12	: no	: no	: no	: no	: Blue	: Good impression	: Satisfaction	
13	: no	: no	: no	: yes	: Black looks clear	: Respect	: Good appearance	
14	: no	: no	: no	: no	: Yellow dark C.	: Respect	: Good appearance	
15	: Yard goods : dresses : bloom-ers	: no	: no	: no	: Grey inconspicuous	: Respect	: Good appearance	

often at the expense of extravagance and waste.

Table VI states that practically all the women were engaged in gainful occupations before marriage this shows that they had initiative and ability. This fact would indicate that this group of women had greater possibilities for development than the average homemaker of the wage earning families. Of the number of women who remained in the home until marriage three had had high school training.

Fifty-seven per cent of women had been trained in Home Economics, forty-five per cent in cooking, twenty-four per cent in sewing and thirteen per cent in homemaking. (Homemaking as used here was understood to mean the direction of the social and physical life of the family). The greater per cent of women received their training in grade school. This high average may be due to two factors; many girls do not receive a higher education and often those who enter high school do not elect home economic work. A very small per cent of the women received training in night school and continuation schools. The instruction given in sewing as revealed by Table VI is mostly that of construction work, that is, the making of garments. The other training as reported by the homemaker, was repair, which was limited to mending and darning. Much of this no doubt was taught in the home as well as in the grade schools. Cleanliness and neatness were considered under personal hygiene. Fifty-four per cent

Table VI. Summary of Educational Abilities.

Occupation before marriage		Training in Home Economics					
Type	Percent of women	Kind	Percent of women	Place	Percent of women	Instruc- tion received	Percent of women
Teacher	11	:Cooking	45	:Grades	40	:General	90
Housework	13	:Sewing	24	:Home	35	:Repair	72
Telephone operator	20	:Home making	13	:High school	24	:Personal hygiene	54
Clerk	17	:No training	47	:College	6	:Appropri- ateness of dress	27
Traveling companion	2	:	:	:Continuation school	6	:Line and color in dress	15
Nursing	11	:	:	:Night school	4	:Fancy work	54
Factory	11	:	:	:	:	:	:
Remained in the home	11	:	:	:	:	:	:

of the women received instruction in fancy work, much of this is done in the home as well as in the grades and the parochial schools.

To aid in the selection and purchase of clothing one should know something of textile fabrics, at least have a rudimentary knowledge of the characteristics of standard materials. Table VII shows that a relatively small per cent of these women did not have a knowledge of the most common fabrics. Gingham, voile and muslin are the most popular. Through experience and observation it has been found that many women have no familiarity with the materials they buy. Their purchases are guided by appearance and price, rather than by the wearing qualities and suitability.

The garments most commonly made by the women were underwear and boys blouses. Only eleven per cent reported that they made their good dresses, which indicates that these are purchased ready made.

Materials used for children's school dresses were generally washable, the majority used gingham. The fabrics found in their good dresses were serge, voile and silk. Apparently they are chosen to the same degree by thirty-three per cent of the women.

Perhaps the greatest discouragement to home sewing is the lack of knowledge women have in the use of patterns. The desire to understand and use patterns, more than any other



Table VII. Summary of the Homemakers' Abilities in Clothing Selection and Care.

Fabric	Women %	Type of clothing made at home		Material used for childrens' dresses		Garments made from old clothing		Knowledge of laundering fabrics		Women using patterns %	Points in buying patterns	Points in using patterns
		Kind	Women %	Kind	Women %	Type	Women %	%	Women %			
Muslin	82	Bloom-ers	77	School dress		Children dresses	40	Cotton	98	40	Size	40
Cotton crepe	54	Slips	62	Percale	33	Boys' trousers	17	wool	37		Age	13
Sateen	76	Good dresses	11	Gingham	100	Children coats	20	Silk	40		Material needed	13
Cotton voile	91	Boys blouses	75	English print	14	Aprons	23				Bust measure	14
Gingham	100	House dresses	55	Good dresses							Hip measure	8
Wool flannel	24			Serge	33							
				Voile	33							
				Silk	33							
				Wool flannel	26							

item in clothing, prompted the women concerned in this study to make application to the Visiting Housekeeper Association of Detroit for clothing instruction. Table VII reveals clearly the lack of knowledge these women have in using patterns. Only four per cent of the women recognize the necessity for altering the pattern to fit the individual body measurements and requirements.

Investigators who have been interested in making budget studies for the wage earning family have in their estimates of clothing, presupposed on the part of the mother a high grade of efficiency in remodelling garments. This study shows that about fifty per cent of the women have remade clothing. The common articles made were childrens clothing from dresses and coats.

It was noted from the experience and observation of the writer that much waste in clothing could be avoided when the women had ability to remodel. In many instances families were given clothing of better material than they could afford to buy, without this skill these good fabrics were of no use unless they happened to fit a member of the family.

At the Household Economics Convention held in Chicago last December, Mr. Shaeffer (advertising manager for Marshall Field and Company) stated that the ability of the household buyer to care for articles purchased and taken into the home is more desired by salespersons than any other

one accomplishment. To use his own words. "We find an amazing lack of knowledge of this sort in the average home and are certain this lack results in a tremendous depreciation of satisfaction which might be reasonably expected from the article". In many instances the life of a garment is much shortened due to its treatment in laundering. In the majority of wage earning families very little dry cleaning is done. Washing of garments is usually used for all types of cleaning. Table VII shows that ninety-eight per cent of the women have a knowledge of the laundering of cotton garments but only thirty-seven per cent understood the processes involved in laundering woolen articles and forty per cent of silk.

Sales such as are found at bargain counters many times prove a snare by tempting one to buy an article for which there is no immediate use. A knowledge of values is necessary in order to be sure that the quality is satisfactory. Table VIII shows that seventy six per cent of the women studied, made clothing purchases at bargain counters; all of these women bought yard goods and forty per cent purchased ready to wear. Thirty-seven per cent of these women reported material on hand which they had secured at a bargain the previous year. This indicates that plans are not made before purchases are consummated. Many so called bargains are made with little, if any regard to the finish of the garment and

Table VIII. Social Status of Family as Determined by Clothing.

Material bought at bargain counter	Installation buying	Material on hand from last year	Clothing bought at rummage sale	Reasons for wearing good clothing	Reasons for being particular about fit of clothing	Colors and reason for wearing them
Women %	Women %	Women %	Women %	Women %	Women %	Women %
Yard goods 76	Coats 20	37	Dresses to make over 8	Respect for self 64	Satisfaction 6	Blue, black looks well and in style 53
Ready to wear 40	Good dresses 11		School coats for children 2	Good impression 18	Good appearance 71	Rose, green looks cheerful 2
Boys' blouses 40	Underwear 8			Confident feeling 9		Grey, tan are inconspicuous 3
Washable 76				Pride 9		Pink, red, yellow for dark complexions 13
House dresses 25						
Under garments 21						

types of material.

Installment buying of clothing is a common practice for wage earning families. Table VIII reveals that the larger articles of clothing such as coats and better dresses are purchased on the installment plan, of the women answering questions twenty per cent purchased coats and eleven per cent good dresses. Through personal observation it is known, that many of the homemakers buy the warmer underwear for the children on the installment plan, which is also substantiated by this study.

In the larger cities there are often worthwhile rummage sales easily accessible, wherein good clothing values may be found. This study shows that eleven per cent of the women made clothing purchase of this sort. Of this number eight per cent purchased dresses which were made over into childrens garments and two per cent purchased childrens school coats.

The appreciation of color and the part it plays in human life is becoming more and more important as individuals understand the various artistic principles upon which all beauty depends. The one outstanding result of this appreciation is the expression of personality as expressed through color and line in the wearing apparel. It is interesting to note in Table VIII that fifty-three per cent of the women selected dark colors in their clothing; dark blue and black

were the prevailing colors. The reasons they gave for these choices were that; these colors are generally in style, they always looked well and cost less for cleaning and laundering.

Underlying many human motives is the desire for esteem among associates, since in most cases it is considered the evidence of financial rating and social standing. Probably a sense of shabbiness and a failure to consider the standard set by the social group are more influential in retarding success than any two factors. It is said that clothing does not make the man, it is however, a subtle index to his character and value, and he is rated accordingly. It is interesting to find as is shown in Table VIII that sixty-four per cent of the women gave as their reason for wearing good clothing in public "respect for self" and eighteen per cent "to make a good impression". The majority stated that they were especially particular about the fit of the garment because it added so much to their appearance. Six per cent said that well fitted clothes gave them a feeling of satisfaction and confidence. It is easy to see that these women have sensed the social importance of appearance. The social value of clothing is hazily understood by many. Few, unless carefully educated, realize the nice distinctions which cannot be seen in the conspicuous copying so often tried.

The ability to observe and copy reasonably well the correct types of clothing, enables the individual to over-

come many serious obstacles in the way of realizing ambitions. It was observed that many families of the wage earning groups under go serious privations in regard to the comforts and necessities of life that they may appear well dressed. This fact become most apparent when planning budgets with the families themselves.

Clothes have a marked effect upon one's character and work, and are responsible for many maladjustments in society. The following case studies show that clothing is often the basis of social problems such as delinquency, family quarrels and divorce.

#### Case I-

Family A. consisted of father, mother, three daughters and two sons. The father was an employee of the Ford Motor Company receiving an average wage of one hundred fifty dollars per month. The family was buying a home paying forty-five dollars a month. The home was neatly furnished and kept exceedingly clean. The family was well liked and highly respected in the community. The ambition on the part of the mother, that her daughter should not work in the factory, lead her to secure a night job. This was necessary in order to provide clothing for the two older girls so they might attend business college. She left home at seven in the evening and returned early in the morning. There was little opportunity for rest through the day; as the younger chil-

dren needed personal care, consequently under this strain the mother became irritable, and lost her influence of leadership in the family. The oldest girl weary of life at home, left. This resulted in the mother having a nervous breakdown from which she has never fully recovered.

#### Case II

Sarah had been a telephone operator, earning a good wage which she spent extravagantly for clothes. She wore pretty garments, had a pleasing personality, was ambitious and won many friends who held her in high esteem. Sarah married a young man whose wage was but little more than she had been receiving. After their marriage Sarah soon realized she was not able to buy the clothing for herself that she had had previously. Not being able to appear among her friends in new garments as she had been accustomed to do, she withdrew from the group. She became morbid and careless; gave little attention to herself as well as the home. The husband tired of the situation complained to the Community Center. Upon recommendation a social worker was sent into the home as a friendly visitor to gain the confidence of Sarah. It was soon learned that the difficulty lay in the fact, that Sarah was not trained in matters pertaining to clothing. Upon the suggestion that she learn to sew in order to remodel the clothes in her wardrobe, she gave a quick response and became her old bright self. Sarah was



apt in planning and constructing garments and learned to appreciate the real value of clothing. After careful training she became a splendid homemaker.

### Case III

Nick age sixteen was the only boy and the oldest of six children. Nick was brilliant and well liked at school by his teachers. He was interested in drawing and spent much time in making posters for the school. After school hours he sold newspapers to supplement the family income. Nick, when it came to clothing always had to go without in order to provide for the rest of the family who were girls. He was obliged to go to school with unmated shoes. His comrades made light of his footwear. As a consequence Nick began playing truant from school and ceased to be interested in his work. He was found one day during school hours, by a watchman, jumping cars in a remote railroad yard and taken to the Detention Home, where his story was considered. The vital point was he had refrained from attending school because he was ashamed of his shoes. His home conditions were looked into and it was decided that Nick should be given employment. He was outfitted in decent clothing and placed as an office boy with an advertising company. Nick is succeeding in his work and is given every encouragement to develop his talent in drawing.

### Case IV.

Helen and Carl had been married a little over two years. Carl complained incessantly of her inability to keep his clothes mended and in good repair. Not only did he complain to her but also to his mother. His mother, with her German thrift, had always been particular about keeping his garments well mended. Carl's complaints caused the mother to dislike her daughter-in-law. This aversion for Helen resulted in the mothers interfering and causing trouble between the two. Finally Carl spent much of his time with his people and Helen was not welcome. Helen was one of nine children and had been obliged to become a wage earner at an early age with little opportunity for either school or home training. She had realized a lack of her training in foods and, previous to her marriage, had attended night classes through the winter at the Y. W. C. A. She now realized the need for training in sewing, and joined an afternoon sewing class at the community center. Carl noticed a gradual change in the care of his clothing, and recognizing Helen's efforts changed his attitude toward her.

The analysis and summary of the answers received from the staff members are itemized in Tables X-XI-XII-XIII. These are studies of the four hundred sixty one families including the forty five self reporting ones just discussed, with whom the eleven staff members worked.

The Visiting Housekeeper Association is a social agency

of Detroit, Michigan. The work of the association is fundamentally educational. Its aim is to establish each family as a self sustaining unit. Its object is to give to them an understanding and appreciation of factors involved in satisfactory homemaking.

Table IX shows that all members on the staff are college trained in HomeEconomics. One member of the staff specialized in clothing. The remainder however, had but a little work in clothing since the majority specialized in foods.

Table X shows that the average wage for the whole number of families is less than for the forty-five families studied and is also less than the minimum standard wage. This is possibly due to continued unemployment which has affected the many factory workers for the past year.

When comparing Table X with Table II approximately the same per cent of families have a knowledge of the money spent for clothing. Undoubtedly these families are directed in budget work by the staff member. It has been found that one of the best ways in which to make the family realize the need for training is through a budget plan.

Table XI shows that only eight per cent of the women have had training in sewing in the school system. The desire for training shows itself through the direct application of sixteen per cent of the women studied to the organ-

Table IX. Training of Staff Members.

Staff member	College trained	Major work	Interest in clothing from		
			Art	Construction	Teaching
1	Yes	Foods			x
2	"	"	x	x +	x
3	"	"	x		
4	"	"		x	x
5	"	"	x	x	x
6	"	"	x	x	x
7	"	Clothing		x	x
8	"	Foods		x	x
9	"	"			x
10	"	"			x
11	"	"		x	

x - Indicates interest

Table X. Economical Ability of 461 Wage Earning Families  
from Staff Member's Report.

Staff Member	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	Total	
	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	No.	%
Number of fam- ilies worked with	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
	:50	:21	:61	:46	:43	:36	:33	:23	:44	:48	:46	:	:	461	:
Average income for families per year	:\$	:\$	:\$	:\$	:\$	:\$	:\$	:\$	:\$	:\$	:\$	:	:	:	:
	:15	:12	:12	:14	:14	:15	:12	:15	:15	:12	:15	:	:	:	:
	:60	:00	:00	:40	:40	:00	:00	:60	:00	:00	:00	:	:	\$1392	:
Approximate number of men working in factories	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
	:37	:18	:42	:40	:31	:18	:22	:8	:33	:36	:39	:	:	327	73%
Number of home- makers making clothing pur- chase accord- ing to need	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
	:10	:11	:10	: -	:5	:30	:3	:15	:22	: -	:11	:	:	132	28%
Number of home- makers having knowledge of amount spent for clothing	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
	: -	:6	:3	:7	:12	:25	:8	:10	:16	:23	:17	:	:	127	27%

ization. Fourteen per cent of the families made indirect application, which means that the need for training in sewing for the family was reported by other organizations.

Table XII shows that only five per cent of the women do the family sewing. This indicates that much of the clothing is purchased ready made. There are many who feel that it is much cheaper to do one's own sewing than to buy ready made garments. This is a debatable question and there are many contributing factors. The outstanding problem is to determine the relative value of child training and the saving of money. No doubt the woman, who has the time and is not burdened with many home cares, can well afford to do the sewing. Experiences lead to the conclusion that knowledge in the construction of a garment is necessary where the clothing problem is dealt with adequately. The women who can sew, even if only the simplest garments are made, has a better understanding and appreciation of the essentials in ready made garments than the less gifted individual.

A much smaller number of the larger group studied are familiar with the use of patterns, knowledge of common fabrics, processes of laundering textiles and ability to make over garments. This would seem to indicate that the forty-five families belong to a more or less selected group.

Table XIII shows that fifty-five per cent of the four hundred sixty one families buy at bargain counters which

Table XI. Homemaker's Training. Staff Member's Report.

Staff Member	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Total	
												No.	%
Number of home-makers trained in sewing	6	-	19	-	4	-	-	-	3	5	8	37	8%
Number of home-makers making direct application for clothing instruction	4	3	3	2	3	6	16	3	4	8	23	75	16%
Number of home-makers making indirect application for clothing instruction	5	4	2	7	-	5	2	15	5	10	10	65	14%

Table XII. Homemaker's Abilities from Staff Member's Report.

Staff Member	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Total No.:	%
Number of home- makers doing family sewing	6	-	19	-	4	-	-	-	3	5	3	25	5%
Number of home- makers familiar with common fabrics	15	21	-	7	15	36	11	8	-	32	26	181	39%
Number of home- makers using patterns	2	21	21	16	9	5	7	6	9	3	22	127	27%
Number of home- makers having knowledge of laundry proper- ties of tex- tiles	15	21	61	5	10	36	10	23	-	32	15	208	45%
Number of home- makers with ability to plan garments from old clothing	4	21	6	13	4	18	10	-	10	10	26	122	26%



XIII. Social Status of Family as Determined by Clothing.  
Staff Member's Report.

Staff Member	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Total	
	No.											No.	%
Number buying at bargain counter	35	5	17	12	46	36	20	23	33	34	24	256	55%
Number of home-makers realizing color and line in dress design	4	-	6	3	3	11	3	2	9	4	4	46	9%
Do the women take notice of clothing you wear	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	-	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	
Where attention is given to clothing is standard of living better	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	
Number of delinquencies due to clothing	3	-	2	-	-	2	2	-	1	3	2	15	3%

substantiates the statement that it is a common practice for wage earning people to buy through this plan.

All staff members reported that, where attention had been given to clothing the standard of living was much better, which indicates that one's costume is an important factor in daily living.

Three per cent of the delinquency cases, reported for the larger group studied, shows that clothing was definitely a cause. From this it is possible that clothing problems may be contributing factors in social welfare.

#### Summary

In summarizing this study it appears that.-

1. The average earnings of the families studied are not enough to provide for the necessities of life.
2. The majority of the children are of school age and require a greater per cent of the income spent on them than they do earlier or later in life.
3. In most cases the families studied did not plan for clothing expenditures.
4. A small per cent of the women had training in schools regarding clothing construction and selection.
5. Relatively a small per cent of the women have usable knowledge in regard to common fabrics.

6. Few of the women understand or know how to use patterns.

7. Less than half of the homemakers have ability to plan and make over garments.

8. Childrens clothing was generally made from washable material.

9. In general underwear and boys blouses were the garments made at home.

10. Installment buying is a common practice. This method is used in the purchase of the more expensive articles, such as coats and hats.

11. The majority of the women are particular about their clothing because it gives them a good appearance.

12. Social workers lack an appreciation of the social significance of the importance of clothing in social service.

#### CONCLUSIONS

This study is too limited to draw absolute conclusions but the findings point to a number of interesting suggestions. They may be stated as follows:

There is need for more care in planning for clothing consumption among wage earners families.

Homemakers of the wage earning families are not trained for effective purchasing of clothing.

Clothing is a definite factor in the solving of social problems and until its value is fully realized there are apt to be many unhappy results.

There is need for training of the social workers in order that they may appreciate the value of clothing in handling the various problems they meet.

The answers in the survey in regard to types of garments, number allowed each child and approximate cost of each, were too limited to make an estimate of their adequacy and appropriateness. Possibly another method should be used to secure the desired information. One that might be feasible, would be to have a social worker who is especially interested and can spend much time for personal conference in conjunction with her work.

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