

# FAMILY DECISION-MAKING PATTERNS AND HOW THEY RELATE TO THE MEMBERS' CLOTHING PREFERENCES

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## ABSTRACT

*The study aimed to find the relationship between decision-making patterns and clothing preferences in the family. Specifically, it aimed to determine the spheres of influence of family members and the factors that relate to the individual's clothing preferences. The themes and topics that came out of two focus group discussions guided the formulation of interview questions for the case study of 10 purposively selected families/households. This study showed that the parents, particularly the mother, play the most influential role in allocating funds for clothes and in deciding the frequency of purchase of clothes. The sphere of influence of parents, however, vary as fathers are more concerned about modesty and cost while mothers are concerned with cost and other practical matters like comfort and durability. While parental influence is still important in matters related to dressing, this study shows the increasing role of children in decision-making. This important finding reflects a possible change in the structure of Filipino families towards a more egalitarian and consultative direction.*

## INTRODUCTION

The family is the basic social unit of the society. As a social group, it is a universal and important element of human life and

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has always been a good topic for investigation. Of particular interest to some are its implications on social, economic, and moral life.

One particular area that has been studied about the family is its decision-making patterns and how power relationships are exercised by the members (Kaiser, 1990). One's decision-making is based on the person's awareness and evaluation of the options that are currently available to the individual. If family decision-making consideration is found in the relationship among the members. How one relates to the other most likely affects the other's decisions. Webb-Lupo and Lester (1987) who made studies on clothing decisions, noted that it is the family who makes one's clothing choices while he is growing up. Through the choices the family makes for an individual, the person learns a certain style of clothing.

This research aimed to establish the relation between family decision-making patterns and the member's clothing preferences. It sought to answer the following questions: Do members of the family influence each other's choice of clothing? Who in the family influences the other most in deciding what type of clothes to buy? What clothing characteristics are considered in buying clothes? What other factors play significant roles in the decision-making? Does media and religion relate to the family members' clothing preferences?

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study aimed to find out the relationships between clothing preferences and decision-making patterns in the family. Specifically, it aimed to:

1. determine the spheres of influence of family members and ascertain who in the family decides how the members

- should dress up and who influence who in each one's clothing preferences;
2. determine factors that relate to the individuals' clothing preferences; and
  3. generate theoretical insights on the interplay of personal and family related factors in making decisions about dressing.

## METHODOLOGY

The collection of data consist of two phases. The first phase was the generation of themes and topics that relate to family decision-making patterns vis-à-vis dressing and clothing preferences. This was done by holding two focus group discussions (FGD) participated by men and women of various age, sexes, marital status and income brackets. The themes that came out of these FGDs guided the formulation of interview questions for the second phase of the study—the case study of ten purposively selected families or households.

Five participants coming from the lower income groups attended the first FGD while eight coming from middle- and high-income brackets attended the second. Both sessions lasted for about two hours. The researcher facilitated the discussions. She explained to the participants the purpose of the meeting and started the discussions by first asking very general types of questions. These questions enabled the participants to express their views and identify the themes and concepts that closely relate to family decision-making patterns and clothing preferences. The discussions were generally convivial and relaxed as the participants knew each other and were comfortable talking about the subject matter.

The second phase of the study, the case study of selected families or households, aimed to identify the various decision-

making patterns across different family or household types and the factors that influence the choice of clothes and manner of dressing. The selection of the ten families or households was based on the following criteria:

1. Type of headship of the family. Two types of families were included in this study: the single- and two-parent families;
2. Occupational status of head(s) of the family. Four types of families were identified according to this selection criterion: single parent households, working and non-working; two parent households with both parents and just one parent working.
3. Socio-economic status of the family. The families included in the case studies belonged to two socio-economics brackets – the C and D income groups or those earning between P8,000 to P20,000 per month and the A and B groups or those whose monthly incomes are over P20,000 per month.

Underlying these selection criteria are the assumptions that the socio-economic status and structure of the family are important determinants of power relations and clothing preferences.

A total of 26 respondents were interviewed individually and in groups. Thirteen were females (mothers and daughters) and 13 males (fathers and sons).

The themes generated from the FGDs were the following:

1. **The concept appropriate dressing.** The words that were closely associated with proper dressing were: age, style, body size, time and occasion for dressing, personality and mood.
2. **Other concepts associated with clothing choices.** Other than the concept of appropriate or proper dressing, the

FGD participants also discussed other factors that influence the final choice of clothes. These are affordability, practicality, acceptance by peer groups and other “significant others,” comfort and religious beliefs.

3. **Decision-making areas and influences.** The dominant spheres of decision-making include the following: (a) father-centered decisions, (b) mother-centered decisions, (c) individually- (including the children) determined decisions. Other than family members, peer groups and friends influence clothing preferences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1.

**Profile of the Case Study Families or Households**

Type of Family	Respondents	Age	Number of Siblings	Occupation of Respondents	Monthly Income
1. Single Working Parent Household	Mother Son	46 16	2 boys	Research Assoc. High School student	P11,000
2. Two-Parent household; one working	Father Mother Son	46 45 16	2 boys 1 girl	Businessman School employee High School student	No steady income P10,672 N/A
3. Two-Parent household; both working	Father Mother Daughter	64 64 27	3 boys 2 girls	School Maintenance Laboratory technician Office employee	P7,200 P7,000 P20,000
4. Single Working Parent Household	Mother Son	52 27	3 boys 1 girl	Businesswoman System Analyst	P30-50,000 P20,000
5. Single non-working parent household	Mother Daughter	61 33	4 boys 7 girls	Retired Employee	N/A P10,000
6. Two-Parent Household; One parent working	Father Mother Son	65 59 30	1 boy 3 girls	Lawyer Housewife Works for his father	P50-100,000 N/A P8-10,000
7. Two-Parent household; both parents working	Father Mother Daughter	43 42 17	1 boy 2 girls	Government employee Bank employee College student	P20,000 P15,000 N/A
8. Single working parent household	Mother Son	64 25	7 boys	Businesswoman Employee	P100,000 P15-20,000
9. Two-Parent Household; one parent working	Father Mother Son	50 45 14	2 boys	Medical Doctor Pediatrician High School Student	P100,000 P15-20,000 N/A
10. Two-Parent Household; both parents working	Father Mother Son	49 43 14	1 boy	Businessman Businesswoman High School Student	P150,000 P100,000 N/A

### Factors that Influence Clothing Preferences

The factors that relate to the clothing preferences of individuals and families purposively chosen for this study were categorized according to the following: (1) Individual physical, social, and psychological characteristics and needs, (2) Characteristics of clothes, and (3) Opinion or influence of family members, peers and other entities.

1. Individual Physical, Social, and Psychological Characteristics and Needs
  - a. Age. Six of the 39 informants mentioned age as a factor in their choice of clothing. All of them are female. The factor of age, however is influenced by other considerations like current fashion and style. For the younger age bracket, following current dress styles seems to be the trend. Older age women say that even if they wanted to follow current styles, they have to consider their age. Some mothers shared that their children already had their own clothing preferences even when they were still very young. As early as three years old, a child chooses the clothes he or she wears. These observations supported Well's study (1966) which revealed that children as consumers can actually influence the purchasing behavior of other family members. It was noted that children influence their mothers either directly or in passive ways as when a mother opts to make repeat purchases of the products that the child liked and wear. Ward and Wackman's study (1972; as cited by Runyon, 1980) claim that the frequency of request of the child and the percentage of yielding on the mother's part increases with the age of the child.
  - b. Body Size. People wear clothes to enhance their assets. One respondent shared that people wear clothes that look

good on them. Some respondents said that their figures keep them from wearing anything they want. The clothes must fit their size. Mary S. Ryan (1966) cited Alexander's study (1961) in her book, "Clothing: A Study in Human Behavior". It was noted that body size and physical looks are strong determinants of clothing preference particularly of women. One of the reasons for wanting to be well dressed was to minimize physical imperfections and to enhance physical attributes,

- c. Occupation. The result of this study validated Perry, Shutz, and Rucker's study (1983) which revealed that occupation is significantly related to clothing interest. One respondent, a medical doctor, said that it is important to wear what is generally acceptable by what culture dictates. He believes that if a doctor dresses up professionally, the patient will perceive him to be very knowledgeable. Another respondent said that it depends on the nature of one's occupation. He used to be in-charge of the school mimeographing services that involve operating machines. For this reason, he only wears jeans and t-shirt. On the other hand one respondent, a businesswoman, always wears suits to project a professional image to her clients. The foregoing responses of respondents indicate that many people choose clothes that go well with the nature of their job. They do so for various reasons such as to elicit the desired response from clients and other people they work with, to have confidence; to feel more at ease and comfortable in performing their everyday tasks.
- d. Personality and Mood. Some informants emphasized the role of personality and mood in their choice of clothes. They claim that people select certain dress styles or colors

depending on how they feel about themselves and their perception of how others look at them. Outgoing and gregarious people are usually comfortable with bright colors and “attention-getting” styles, while the more introvert or reserved ones prefer more subdued colors and simple or “ordinary” dress designs. Individuals choose to wear what they think would suit their character.

- e. Occasion. Filipino culture has defined to a large extent, the ideal ways of dressing for certain occasions. Customary norms require individuals to wear special clothes for special events like weddings, birthday parties, church activities, and other formal gatherings. Respondents shared that clothes for special occasions are always well thought of. Low-income groups tend to regard special occasions more as a chance to wear something nice and different. It is a chance to escape from the routines of their regular job. This is the reason why they take time in planning and preparing their clothes for the event.
- f. Skin tone. Some informants mentioned skin color as one of the factors that affect their choice of clothes. They choose colors that go well with their skin tone. Bright colors may not fit dark skin tones but may enhance light skin tones.

## 2. Characteristics of clothes

Other than the foregoing factors, the respondents also mentioned several other things when choosing what to wear. These are clothing characteristics such as style, comfort, fabric color and print, and price. Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage distributions of the clothing characteristics as considerations in the respondents' clothing preferences.



**Table 2**  
**Considerations in the Clothing Preferences**  
**of the Respondents**

Clothing Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Price	32	82%
Style	23	59%
Color and Print	19	49%
Comfort and Fit	13	33%
Brand	3	7.7%

- a. Price. The cost of clothes is considered as an important factor in the choice of clothes for most of the respondents. Twelve out of the 32 consider price as the number one consideration in their clothing preference. Nine of the 12 come from the low-income group. One respondent said that he would prioritize the education of his children and food for the family more than his own needs like clothes. Another respondent said that he and his wife only shop for clothes when the stores go “on sale.” One high-income couple also consider price as an important factor. Even if they could afford it, they would buy not so expensive clothes from regular shops. They explained that they would rather spend their money on food and travel than buy expensive clothes.
- b. Style. Those who mentioned style as a consideration in choosing their clothes come from all income groups. Style encompasses a greater range of factors relating to one’s clothing preference because it can be associated with other clothing concepts such as figure types and personality.
- c. Color and Print. One respondent mentioned that color affects how she feels. Johnson and Foster (1990) noted

that when one wants to project a confident and assertive image, he or she tries to wear bright colors. One respondent shared that she likes wearing clothes in red or with touches of red. She said that it is possible that her assertive nature has influenced her color preference.

- d. **Comfort and Fit.** Sixty-one percent of those who mentioned comfort as an important factor in clothing considerations are male. All come from the three income groups. Some respondents would prefer comfort than the style or price.
  - e. **Brand.** Respondents who mentioned brand as a consideration in their choice of clothing belong to the young age bracket. This may be attributed to having peers with preference to particular brands for clothes and other apparel items such as rubber shoes and bags.
3. **Opinion or Influence of Family Members, Peers and Other Entities**
- a. **Family Members.** Webb-Lupo and Lester (1987) noted that it is the family who makes one's clothing choices while the child is growing up. Through the choices that the family makes for an individual, the person learns a certain style of clothing. The individual gets familiar with the kinds of stores where his or her family shops and the prices they pay for the clothes they buy. The authors further noted that as an individual matures, he/she may develop individual choice of clothing, but also retains some of the family's buying habits. This study revealed that the respondents as family members can subtly and directly influence each other in their clothing preferences, depending on the decision-making roles each one holds in their respective households.

Four of the six fathers of the two-parent households require their wives and daughters to dress modestly. Two mothers mentioned that their husbands always comment on the short length of their skirts. Above-the-knee length is considered short. Another area of influence for the father-husband respondents was on the cost of clothes or things the family members buy. Though most of the parents jointly decide on household activities, the father-husbands give the final decision for matters concerning big expenditures.

Wife-mothers on the other hand mostly decide on what clothes to buy both for their husbands and children. However, their influence on which style to buy only extends to a certain age of the child. When the child reaches adolescent age, they dictate what they want. Wife-mothers normally accompany their family in shopping for their clothes. They help in making the final decision. The children of both single- and two-parent households shared that their family may directly or indirectly influence them in their choice of clothing. It is mostly the son-brothers who ask for opinion regarding their choice of clothes. Though they have their own preferences, they want their family with them when they shop to validate their choice. For some teenagers, however, if they are spending their own savings for clothes, they do not find the need to ask permission to buy and choose their clothes. This supported the study of Lewis et. al. (1995) on consumer purchases which noted that having discretionary income or their own money made the adolescents more independent and less dependent on the influence of their parents regarding clothing purchases. Adolescents who had less discretionary income tend to agree with parental influence.

- b. Peers. Mueller and Smiley's (1986) combined-need theory explains that clothing plays a big role in satisfying the need to conform and belong to a group. One adolescent respondent said that his classmates influence him in his clothing choices primarily because they see and talk to each other everyday. This also supported Webb-Lupo and Lester's study (1987) on clothing decisions as they noted that one's peer group is probably the most influential on his or her clothing choices. This was attributed to the fact that people of the same age or the same circle of friends often share the same interests.
- c. Religion. One two-parent household mentioned religion as a big factor in their choice of clothing. They belong to the Fundamental Baptist, a Bible Believing Christian group. They say that the proper way to dress is stated in the Bible. The mother-wife shared that since she joined this group, she does not wear pants anymore. Pants are said to be a man's attire. She only wear pants when she travels or during a sports event. As a family, they carefully choose their clothes for church.
- d. Media. Six members of the chosen households mentioned media as a factor in their clothing preference. Advertisements both on print and television influence their choices as they see the current fashion styles.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study was undertaken to determine possible relationships between decision-making patterns in the family and clothing preferences of selected respondents from low, middle, and high socio-income status levels.

The results of the study validate in some ways the findings of previous studies about the patterns of decision-making in the family. It has shown that the parents, particularly the mother, play the most influential role in allocating funds for clothes and in deciding the frequency of purchase of clothes. The sphere of influence of parents, however, vary as fathers are more concerned about modesty and cost while mothers are concerned with cost and other practical matters like comfort and durability.

While parental influence is still important in matters related to dressing, this study interestingly showed the increasing role of children in decision-making. This important finding reflects a possible change in the structure of Filipino families towards a more egalitarian and consultative direction. Perhaps, future studies can continue to explore this phenomenon to ascertain whether Filipino families are indeed charging along this line.

The study has shown that several factors influence individual choice of clothes. These factors operate in a very interactive manner providing some amount of individual autonomy in decision-making. Family members, therefore, have relative freedom to choose their clothes and determine the event and time to wear them even as they occasionally have to come to terms with the views and preferences of other family members. The poor, middle class and rich respondents have many common perceptions and values about what constitutes appropriate dressing. They differ, however, in terms of the amount of money that can go into the purchase of clothes. Families from low- and middle-income groups often balance their preferences for certain style with the cost of clothes. The factors of age, color and quality of fabric often take a back seat when cost becomes the primary determining factor.

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