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Decision Making within the Household

HARRY L. DAVIS*

Existing research on household decision making is reviewed in terms of three questions: (1) Which family members are involved in economic decisions? (2) What is the nature of family decision processes? and (3) Are decision outcomes affected by differences in family role structure and decision strategies? Problem areas related to each of these questions are discussed, including an overemphasis on decision roles rather than processes and outcomes, noncomparable and insufficient measures of purchase influence, and marketing's preference for individual-based models of consumer behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The literature on consumer behavior contains a growing number of references to the household as the relevant unit for studying consumer behavior. For example, Ferber (1973b) urged economists to incorporate findings about household decision making into their research on aggregate consumption and savings behavior. Six other papers prepared for that interdisciplinary conference on family economic behavior were published in the same volume (Sheldon, 1973). The first four issues of the *Journal of Consumer Research* included four articles related to family roles in consumer behavior (Davis and Rigaux, 1974; Ferber and Lee, 1974; Granbois and Summers, 1975; Munsinger, Weber, and Hansen, 1975). Academic meetings frequented by consumer researchers are now likely to include at least one session on family or multiperson decision making. The second edition of the largest selling textbook on consumer behavior (Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell, 1973) devotes considerably more space to the family than does the 1968 edition.

This paper attempts to review and evaluate this growing area of research interest. Since no overall theories or well-defined concepts have guided this literature, the best approach is to consider several related topics in some reasonable order. These are (1) the involvement of family members in economic decisions, (2) the process by which family decisions are made, and (3) the consequences of different family structures and decision-making styles.

Whether, in fact, the family is the appropriate focus in studying consumer behavior is a key issue that deserves comment from the outset. Casual observation would suggest that the family is a critical decision-making and consumption unit. Major items of con-

sumer spending such as food, shelter, and transportation are often jointly "consumed." A husband may buy a station wagon, given the reality of having to transport four children, *despite* his strong preference for sports cars. Husbands wear ties, underwear, and socks; yet the purchase of these products is often made by wives. A housewife bases product and brand decisions to some extent on orders or requests from family members and on her judgment of what they like or dislike and what is "good for them." Even preferences for products individually consumed are likely to be influenced by feedback from members of the family—e.g., Gee, Mom! That dress makes you look fat," or "I like the smell of that pipe tobacco." The number of products that an individual always buys for individual consumption must certainly represent a very small proportion of consumer expenditures.

These observations have not escaped some students of marketing. Almost 20 years ago, Converse, Huegy, and Mitchell (1958) dismissed the wife as the principal consumer and described the family as the "most important business conference in America." Alderson (1957) also devoted considerable attention to the family—i.e., the extent of task coordination and compatibility—as a critical aspect of consumer buying.

Two economists have made similar observations. Arrow (1951, p. 134) draws an analogy between the theory of the firm and consumer behavior: "The unit of the theory of production is not really the individual but the firm, which is an operating organization of individuals. Similarly, the unit of the theory of consumption is really the household, not the individual consumer." Samuelson (1956, pp. 8–9) remarks:

Who after all is the consumer in the theory of consumer's (not consumers') behavior? Is he a bachelor? A spinster? Or is he a "spending unit" as defined by statistical pollsters and recorders of budgetary spending? In most of the cultures actually studied by mod-

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ern economists the fundamental unit on the demand side is clearly the "family," and this consists of a single individual in but a fraction of the total cases.

Despite these observations, most research in this area has been characterized historically by a preoccupation with consumers as individual decision makers. Although various reference groups have been identified and studied, interest is most often focused on whether and how these groups affect individuals' attitudes and behavior. Questionnaires and interviews frequently ask who "really decided," "had the most to say," or "most often buys" in a given consumption category. Issues of group decision making are thus avoided by these procedures since they assume that decision responsibility can be attributed to one family member.

Researchers trying to develop and test various theories often link, without apparent concern, individual-based, independent variables to group-based, dependent variables. This approach can be no better observed than in studies using personality traits to predict brand choice. A well-known marketing study by Evans (1959) used husbands' personality to predict family ownership of Ford versus Chevrolet. In all the comments and rejoinders generated by this study, no one bothered to question whether husbands actually made the brand-choice decision. Could it be that Evans included a significant number of "wrong" respondents in his analysis?

This same point of view characterizes investigations of brand loyalty and consumer attitudes. Individual characteristics have been used, without much success, to explain differences in brand loyalty measured by panel data (Cunningham, 1956; Farley, 1966; Frank, 1967; Jacoby and Kyner, 1973). Since these data often reflect purchases by several family members as well as their brand preferences, why should one expect the *housewife's* brand attitudes or personality to predict household purchases over time? In a similar fashion, why should one expect an individual's brand attitudes to predict actual purchase behavior if the choice situation involves compromise and other relevant role attitudes, e.g., what a good spouse or parent should do?

By way of overview, this paper will show that recent work on household decision making has not had a noticeable impact in other areas of consumer research. The view of consumers as individual decision makers is still very much alive despite commonsense observations that the family is the relevant decision-making unit and a growing research interest in the field.¹ We further demonstrate that even the relatively simple task of describing which family members are involved in consumer decisions is clouded by a diverse and often non-comparable set of measures and concepts. It is argued

¹ Two papers prepared for this same project point to the fact that group level analyses have been largely ignored in studies of brand-choice behavior (Wind, 1976) and the diffusion of innovation (Rogers, in this issue).

that a whole set of group-related constructs, critical to understanding consumer decision making, has been largely ignored. And finally, we describe how researchers have only begun to explore the issue of whether differences in family role structure affect consumer decisions.

INVOLVEMENT OF FAMILY MEMBERS IN ECONOMIC DECISIONS

Categories of Economic Decisions

Research on which family member is involved in various financial decisions can be grouped roughly into three categories. The first two include spending decisions for frequently purchased goods or services and for durables. Almost without exception, data on the former have been collected by the print media with the objective of showing that husbands have a significant influence on household purchase decisions. Studies of family-member involvement in durable goods buying come from more varied sources, including sociologists and marketing researchers in addition to commercial organizations. Typically, these studies focus on interrelationships among decisions or various determinants of involvement such as social class, life-cycle stages, or the wife's employment status. A third category of economic decisions includes a very small number of published studies about husband-wife involvement in saving and investment decisions, tasks surrounding the family budget, and family planning.

Several examples from each category will be described in the following three sections. This review is not inclusive of all published research on household decision making.² Included are studies that sample different decision areas, employ various methodologies, or are frequently cited in the literature.

Frequently Purchased Goods or Services

Three of the earliest studies of male versus female influence were conducted for *True (Male vs. Female Influence, 1948, 1950; Starch, 1958)*. All were undertaken to dispel that "mythical idea" that 85 percent of every family dollar is spent by women. Products were selected on the basis of the then-current advertisers in *True*.

The first two volumes included information on some 65 product categories, 50 of which were nondurables. In the 1948 survey, questionnaires were returned by 1,376 households in which both husband and wife independently answered questions about "who originally decided on the make or brand" and "who made the most recent purchase." Less than 40 percent of the products studied were mainly husband or wife dominated (defined by 80 percent or more of the respon-

² Ferber (1973b), Sheth (1974), and Davis (in press) provide a comprehensive literature review.

dents in either category). The remainder had substantial proportions in at least two of the categories, i.e., husband, wife, or both. The percentage of respondents reporting "both" was consistently lower in response to "who went shopping" than "who decided on the brand."

The report by Daniel Starch and staff (1958) remains one of the most thorough studies of male versus female influence. The researchers focused on 12 products grouped into eight categories.³ Among the nondurables studied were beer, liquor, and shaving cream. Using relatively small samples of 100 couples for each product, in-depth interviews were conducted separately with the husband and wife. A wide range of topics were covered, including brand preferences of each spouse, relative involvement of each spouse in brand selection and in shopping, and motivation for involvement. Based on cultural attitudes and patterns of consumption, respondents viewed the three nondurable products as predominantly masculine. In these cases, wives expressed few brand preferences and purchased only those brands that husbands requested. A high level of within-family agreement regarding who influenced the choice of brand was found; i.e., an average of only 8 percent of the couples did not verify each other's answers for the three nondurables.

Undoubtedly, *Life* has sponsored more studies of husband-wife involvement in product decisions than any other publication. Its readership by men and women was viewed as attractive to advertisers if it could be demonstrated that brand decisions were frequently made jointly within the family. The products selected, therefore, were frequently purchased items targeted on TV or in print almost exclusively to women.

Two reports prepared for *Life* by Nowland and Company (1964, 1965) were among the earliest efforts to study brand preferences of husbands and wives. In the 1965 study, for example, each spouse in 1,134 households was asked to assess his or her preferred brand for 30 different supermarket products. Information was also collected on who went on the last shopping trip as well as brands actually in the home. The data showed that husbands go on 39 percent of supermarket shopping trips—15 percent alone and 24 percent with their wives. Both studies found an association between husband-wife brand consensus and the presence of that brand in the household. There is an advantage, according to the report, "in preselling both the husband and wife of about eight to five over selling the wife alone."

Jaffe Associates (n.d.) conducted a series of pilot studies for *Life* in 301 households. The 11 products studied included coffee, frozen orange juice, toothpaste, pet food, and seven durable goods. For each product, husbands and wives were taken through purchase histories in which they identified the role played by them-

selves and their spouse. The number of stages in the decision process was found to be less for nondurables than for durables. Yet, even for frequently purchased products, the husband's involvement varied by stage. For example, the percentage of husbands who actually purchased coffee (29 percent) was considerably less than the percentage who initiated the purchase or suggested a particular brand (41 percent). Only 16 percent of husbands initiated the purchase of pet food, while 40 percent of them suggested what brand of pet food to buy.

The Learner Marketing Research and Development report (1968) is an in-depth view of family-member involvement when new or different brands are brought into the home. Housewives, husbands, and teenagers from 706 households were asked to describe "critical incidents" surrounding the purchase of 30 supermarket items. In particular, they tried to recall the overall nature of the incident, who was involved, who initiated the change, and the role of advertising, price, and product dissatisfaction. The overall conclusions reinforced a now-familiar theme. Even though wives did most of the grocery shopping, they did so with an awareness of the products and brands that their families liked. Husbands and teenagers were frequently involved in new or different brand incidents, although the extent of their involvement varied significantly by product category. Interestingly, each family member apparently drew upon a different subsample of incidents (their reality?). Conclusions about who was involved were very sensitive to which respondent in the household was interviewed.

A recent survey sponsored by five magazines (Haley, Overholser and Associates, 1975) carried on the tradition of supplying information to advertisers about the relative influence of husbands and wives in specific product categories. Measures of shopping participation, direct and indirect influence at both product and brand levels, were obtained from 2,373 wives and 1,767 husbands on 87 packaged products.⁴ Husband involvement was lowest in actual shopping, with men having made an average of 23 percent of all purchases during the preceding month. At the same time, husbands directly influenced an average of 32 percent of the brand and product decisions. Husbands' indirect influence (taking their preferences into account) was even higher; they accounted for an average frequency of 38 percent of indirect influence for the 87 product and brand decisions.

A study for *Sports Illustrated* (Travel Research International, 1968) examined household decisions for pleasure trips involving airlines. Data from over 500

³ Product groupings included alcoholic beverages, automotive, clothing, insurance, major appliances, men's toiletries, sporting goods, and transportation.

⁴ Categories with two or more products included beverages, cereals, desserts, frozen specialties, meats, sauces and dressings, snacks, soups, vegetables, drugs, toiletries, cleaning products, paper products, pet foods, alcoholic beverages, health and personal care, and tobacco products.

male respondents showed that husbands played the "predominant" role in mentioning the initial idea to take a trip, suggesting a destination, and selecting an airline.⁵ The *decision* (as opposed to suggestion) on where to go was a mutual decision, however, in two-thirds of the households.

The nine commercial studies just reviewed have received relatively little attention by academic researchers. This is unfortunate in light of the large samples generally used and the large number of products represented. Moreover, the studies do dispel some of the conventional wisdom that views the world of super-market purchases to be the exclusive domain of women. Husbands are involved in actual purchasing, although wives clearly predominate. Husbands are aware of brands in many product categories and express brand preferences on questionnaires.

The commercial studies do seem weak, however, in tracing the extent and nature of the purchase influence of husbands. For example, knowledge that a husband and wife have the same brand preference does not indicate whether brands were discussed or when a discussion took place. It does not even reveal whether a wife is aware of her husband's preferences or vice versa. The husband's response to questions about brand preferences could reflect only awareness under the following logic: "I know what brands my wife buys since I see them on the table," or "I have seen ads for instant coffee on TV and it's good to have preferences when filling out questionnaires." Some of the attempts to measure the husband's influence are undoubtedly biased by social desirability. What "good wife" would want to admit that her husband's brand comments were not important to her or that she did not take his preferences into account? Finally, the analyses contained in these commercial studies are very limited: Nothing has been published about interrelationships among products in terms of who shops or influences, and little use has been made of predictor variables to explore differences in husband-wife involvement among families.

Durable Goods

Research on family-member influence in durable goods buying is more abundant than that on frequently purchased items. Even a casual observer would probably agree that important, one-time purchases are likely to involve more than one household member. In contrast to nondurables, purchases of durable goods are often preceded by a progression of interrelated decisions and activities through time. Husbands, wives, and children have more opportunities to become involved

at one or more steps in the process. One can presume that family members are also more motivated to participate, since the purchase of an automobile, for example, often precludes other acquisitions, given families' budget constraints.

At one extreme in terms of length of the decision process, amount of deliberation, and financial importance is the housing purchase. A number of studies have shown, not surprisingly, a high degree of joint decision making in buying homes (Bernhardt, 1974; Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Cunningham and Green, 1974; Davis and Rigaux, 1974; Hempel, 1974; Munsinger et al., 1975). Those studies that subdivided the purchase into several interrelated decisions found considerable variability in the relative involvement of husband and wife. Bernhardt (1974) reports that husbands' influence was highest for decisions concerning price range and whether to move, while wives' influence was highest in deciding on the number of bedrooms and other house features.

The automobile purchase has been another popular arena in which to study marital roles (Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Brehl and Callahan Research, 1967; Conway/Milliken Research, 1969; Davis, 1970, 1972a; Green and Cunningham, 1975; Haley et al., 1975; Jaffe Associates, n.d.; Starch, 1958). Some researchers have used overall measures of influence on "deciding about buying a new car." Others have focused on husband-wife influence regarding specific product attributes (e.g., make, model, color, interior, accessories, size, performance features), shopping or use characteristics, and budget considerations (e.g., price or when to buy). In contrast to the housing purchase, all these studies have found husbands' influence to be greater than wives'.

Empirical research has also investigated marital roles in the purchase of home furnishings (Davis, 1970; Green and Cunningham, 1975; Jaffe Associates, n.d.; Scott, 1970; Woodside, 1975). Other product categories for which similar data are available include small appliances, major appliances, home entertainment (e.g., TV and stereo), cameras, life insurance, vacation travel, and watches (Green and Cunningham, 1975; Haley et al., 1975; Jaffe Associates, n.d.; Starch, 1958).

Studies of marital roles in durable goods buying represent a very active area of empirical research. Identical measures of purchase influence for the same product categories have been used by different researchers. Even with the small, convenience samples that characterize some of these studies, the results are remarkably consistent. Three studies of automobile buying, for example, all show wives' influence to increase as one moves from the decision on make to that on model and finally on color (i.e., Conway/Milliken Research, 1969; Davis, 1970; Starch, 1958).

These same studies can be criticized, however, on the basis of their rather limited objectives. With few exceptions, researchers have not explored *why* some

⁵ This conclusion masks to some extent the amount of variability in the data. According to their husbands, 35 percent of the wives did make the initial suggestion. Moreover, the choices of airline and travel arrangements were made by wives or travel agents in over 40 percent of the cases.

product categories or subdecisions within product categories are dominated by husbands and others by wives. Since very few studies include more than one product, analyses of roles across product categories within households are rarely made. Little effort has gone into explaining why a single decision usually shows some variability in marital roles among families.

Other Economic Decisions

Although durable and nondurable purchases encompass a multitude of decisions, they have little to do directly with how families manage their overall finances or plan other areas of their life. These areas also require frequent decision making and thus provide opportunities for differing degrees of husband-wife involvement.

Ferber (1973b) has identified and reviewed relevant studies in three related areas of financial management. The first is money management—"an arrangement within the family for the handling of money, payment of bills, budgeting, and keeping accounts" (p. 32). Data from two older studies (Sharp and Mott, 1956; Wolgast, 1958) and a more recent study (Ferber and Lee, 1974) are remarkably consistent in showing considerable variability in the way families handle money and pay bills. These studies reported the percentage of families in which the wife is responsible as 40 percent, 40 percent, and 34 percent, respectively.⁶

A second area identified by Ferber (1973b, p. 33) is saving behavior—"the allocation of available financial resources for a given period between spending and saving, specifically what amount or proportion of these total resources should be allocated to saving and what proportion or amount to spending." Closely related is a third area—asset management. Information about marital roles in both areas is very scarce and generally limited to one question about who takes care of savings or life insurance (e.g., Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Davis and Rigaux, 1974; Green and Cunningham, 1975; Haley et al., 1975; Sharp and Mott, 1956; Wolgast, 1958). More detailed data about marital roles in savings and insurance decisions are contained in the Starch (1958) report and in panel data collected by Ferber and Nicosia (1972).

The reasons why researchers have ignored financial management decisions relative to product-specific decisions are probably numerous. With the exception of financial institutions, there is no constituency for funding such research. The home economics literature has long contained a normative but largely nonempirical discussion of family financial management. It is also true that studies of durable goods buying frequently

contain questions relevant to the family budget (e.g., deciding how much to spend and when to make the purchase, handling financing arrangements, or making monthly payments). The view of husband-wife involvement that emerges when these decisions are "piggy-backed" onto product decisions must surely be incomplete, however. Decisions to spend rather than save or to spend money for a new roof instead of a vacation involve "across-product" evaluations that cannot possibly be understood if one focuses only on one or two product categories.

A final area that has major economic consequences for the family concerns decisions about the number and spacing of children. Family planning programs generally assume that the wife is the major influence in a household's decision to use birth control practices. As a consequence, these programs are almost always directed toward women, and research is based almost exclusively on samples of women. The reasons for assuming that family planning is the wife's personal decision are numerous and surprisingly reminiscent of the logic encountered in consumer good studies. Consider the following:

1. Many modern birth control methods (e.g., IUD, pill) are used by women. It is convenient to assume that the person who uses a device will be the one who decides whether or not to adopt it.
2. Women are believed to be more receptive to the family planning concept than men. The day-to-day impact of having children falls more heavily on women. Women are also easier to reach since they are the ones who generally visit birth control or family planning clinics. Since children are presumably evidence of men's power and masculinity, it is often assumed that they want large, not small, families. Why promote a "product" to a market segment whose attitudes are basically neutral or even antagonistic?
3. The cost of reaching both spouses within the household must be weighed against the benefits of reaching more women. Program officials, who are typically evaluated on the basis of their activities rather than lowered birth rates, are likely to opt for reaching 10,000 women instead of 5,000 families.

Despite these "commonsense" reasons, recent studies have shown that husbands play an important, perhaps the major, role in family adoption decisions. In one of the earliest studies on the topic (Dubey and Choldin, 1967), the decision to use an IUD was made by the wife alone in only 7 percent of the cases. Husbands were reported to have made the final decision in 44 percent of the families. Other investigations carried out in both developed and underdeveloped countries confirm the husband's considerable influence in contraceptive use (Lam, 1968; Mercado, 1971; Mullen et al., n.d.; Pillai, 1971).

⁶ It is interesting to note that the Ferber and Nicosia sample consisted entirely of young marrieds. Since Wells (1959) found increasing specialization of these tasks with length of marriage, it may be that the difference here is due to the sample composition.

Some Recurring Findings

Three general findings about husband-wife involvement in consumer decisions continue to emerge from the many studies mentioned above.

Variability by Product Category

Husband-wife involvement varies widely by product category. This seemingly obvious conclusion contrasts, nevertheless, with discussions about differences in men versus women as consumers without regard to specific products. Wolff (1958), for example, suggested that women more than men take a long time to make up their minds and are more stubborn about changing them. Women were also described as having a different sense of humor, a tendency toward irrational beliefs, and less desire for achievement, domination, or power. Not only have studies failed to document many of these differences, but when this absolute view of roles is applied to household decision making, the results have also led to curious contradictions. Marketing textbooks in the early sixties (Beckman and Davidson, 1962; Phillips and Duncan, 1964) described both the growing involvement of women in family decisions *and* the growing importance of men as buyers!

Variability within Product Category

Husband-wife involvement within any product category varies by specific decisions and decision stages. Early writings often equated purchasing decisions with actual purchasing activities such that the person who went shopping for a product was assumed to have also made the product and brand decision. This view undoubtedly underlies the folklore that women control 80 percent of every family dollar. According to Converse et al. (1958), this "finding" was based on the rather unbelievable fact that someone once counted shoppers in a city department store and found that 80 percent were women. Manufacturers and advertisers have also found it convenient to look for one dominant spouse in each product category. The studies reported earlier, however, demonstrate again and again that family-member participation varies within each product category depending on what is being done or decided. From any point of view, it is a serious oversimplification to talk about a product category as simply husband dominant, wife dominant, or joint.

The automobile purchase illustrates how variable husband-wife involvement really is. According to the Jaffe report (n.d.), wives were as involved as their husbands in gathering relevant information from people. Davis (1970) found 60 percent of couples classified as husband dominant for the decision about make of automobile but only 25 percent for the decision

about color. Couples frequently shop together for the car and use the car equally after purchase.

Family-member involvement also seems to vary systematically at different stages in the decision-making process. In the family planning area, wives are found to be more involved than husbands in information seeking in contrast to initiating search or making the final adoption decision (Lam, 1968; Palmore, 1967). Davis and Rigaux (1974) obtained information about marital roles at each of three decision stages (problem recognition, search for information, and final decision) for 25 household decisions. While no significant differences were found in average relative influence across the three stages, the proportion of couples in the "joint" category was significantly less for the information search phase than for either of the other two phases. Similar data were reported by Wilkes (1975). Intercorrelations among relative influence scores in four decision stages (problem recognition, search, final decision, and purchase) were generally low. No significant association was found between "who purchased the major household good" and "who searched for information" ($r = .14$ for husbands; $r = .01$ for wives).

Variability among Families

Husband-wife involvement for any consumer decision is likely to show considerable variability among families. Discussions of marital roles frequently understate the variance that is found even in the case of highly specific decisions. To illustrate, the Starch report (1958, p. 59) concludes that "the husband, as the family 'authority' on mechanical matters, decides upon the make of the new family car." This conclusion was drawn from data showing that the husband decides in 61 percent of the families, the wife in 1 percent, and both in 38 percent. In contrast to the quotation, the data indicate that the decision about make of automobile is not actually the exclusive domain of husbands.

Some variability is even present in product categories characterized by a high degree of role specialization. The survey by Haley, Overholser and Associates (1975) reports the percentage of husbands who made purchases of packaged goods during the preceding seven days and the percentage who actually influenced the product and brand selected. In none of the 87 product categories did husbands make less than 10 percent of the purchases.

Marketing studies that show considerable variation in decision roles are paralleled in sociology. The Parsons and Bales (1955) theory, which predicts family role differentiation according to instrumental and socio-economic functions, has been criticized. Aronoff and Crano (1975), for example, document that contrary to theoretical predictions, women make substantial contributions to subsistence production in over 800 societies.

Some Recurring Problems

At least four problem areas can be identified in the research dealing with family-member involvement in consumer decisions. It is useful to discuss each area in order to highlight future research priorities.

Choosing Decisions and Tasks

The issue raised here, though not unique to the study of household decision making, is fundamental to all the research just reviewed. Before family-member involvement can be measured, the relevant universe of decisions and decision-related tasks must be determined. Researchers (including the present author) typically select decisions on fairly arbitrary grounds and ignore the implications of these choices.⁷

What decisions should be included in order to measure family roles in a single product or expenditure category? What might first seem like an easy task becomes exceedingly complicated on execution. Consider, for example, grocery shopping. In one family, "going shopping" means walking to the store, picking out a "few things that look good for tonight's dinner," and returning home. In another family, "going shopping" includes preparing a detailed list, driving to the store with two preschool children, cashing a check, looking for store coupons, buying a week's groceries, returning home, and spending a half hour putting things away. Since the meaning of "grocery shopping" differs in the two families, so does the meaning of husband-wife involvement in this activity. It is only possible to interpret answers to such questions once it is clear what *actual* task the respondent is asked to evaluate.

Attempts to specify various stages in the decision-making process are also subject to the same problems. Granbois (1963), as well as Davis and Rigaux (1974), employed traditional formulations of problem-solving behavior—i.e., problem recognition, determination of alternatives via search, and selection from among recognized alternatives. Gredal (1966) divided the purchasing process into a series of four gradual decisions ranging from the initial suggestion to the actual purchase. Specifically, she hypothesized a general purchasing or budgeting decision (how much money can be spent on individual items and how it is to be distributed among these), a concrete purchasing decision (e.g., "Let's buy a new car"), a series of selection decisions (price, quality, brand, store), and finally, a technical purchasing action (placing the order and picking up the product).⁸

⁷ As an example, it is interesting to note how frequently the Blood and Wolfe (1960) measure of power was used by other researchers simply because the study was widely cited.

⁸ Partial support for this typology of decisions and activities is found in a study of husband-wife influence in 12 automobile and furniture purchase decisions (Davis, 1970). Using a clus-

Jaffe and Senft (1966) proposed an even more elaborate framework including information seeking (via people and media), a prepurchase stage (initiating, selecting the type and brand, and budgeting), a buying stage (shopping and purchasing), and finally, a post-purchase stage (using and evaluating). All these formulations suffer from the same problem: They *begin* by assuming that households actually go through these stages. The fact that questionnaires are "correctly" filled out does not justify these questions. Is it any wonder that respondents enjoy answering questions that confirm the logic, rationality, and careful thought given to past decisions?

Studies of household decision making may also want to develop an overall measure of decision-making roles rather than limiting the focus to a single product category. While the objectives of such studies are somewhat different, the problem of specifying relevant decisions is exactly the same as just described. Families in different situations face a different set of decisions and tasks. A low-income household, for example, is not likely to spend much time considering details of a new home purchase. A family with three young children faces an additional set of decisions not present in a childless family. It is of doubtful validity, then, to compare marital roles across families when the universe of actual decisions and tasks is not the same or the weights attached to the same decision are different.

One possible way to deal with this problem is to obtain time budgets within families. An impressive international study (Szalai, 1972), which included about 30,000 time budgets drawn from 12 nations, illustrates the richness of data stemming from this procedure and shows its relevance to household decision making. Patterns of daily life were recorded in nine categories broken down into 96 specific activities. The 24-hour diaries included not only what activities were performed but also time, place, and duration. Secondary activities

tering technique to group decisions together in terms of their similarities on relative influence, two bases for role differentiation were apparent. The first was the product itself—decision roles in the purchase of an automobile were not related to decision roles in the purchase of furniture. Simply stated, knowing the roles played by a husband and wife in buying a car provides little or no information about who makes furniture purchase decisions in the same family. The study also showed that roles were differentiated on the basis of the type of decision being made. Within each product category, relative influence in "product-selection" decisions (what model, make, and color to buy) were unrelated to relative influence in "allocation" or "scheduling" decisions (how much to spend and when to buy the car). The decisions labeled as "product selection" seem very close to Gredal's (1966) selection decision. Moreover, the "allocation" decisions are similar to a general purchasing or budgetary decision. It would be interesting to know if additional questions about who made the initial suggestion and who assumed responsibility for shopping would form the two additional clusters suggested by Gredal.

that occurred simultaneously with the primary activity were also obtained. Data such as these would provide a basis for defining a family's relevant decision and task universe, which could then be used to measure who is involved.

A second approach to solving this problem is found in emerging typologies of household economic decisions. Ferber (1973b) classified financial decisions into four groups—money management, spending behavior, saving behavior, and asset management. Other writers have suggested product typologies that may explain family-member involvement in spending decisions. Gredal (1966) used the dimensions of durable versus nondurable goods and individual versus collective consumption. Individual decision making was hypothesized to be least important for durable goods collectively consumed and most important for nondurables individually consumed. Lovell, Meadows, and Rampley (1968) suggested a longer list of factors affecting the extent of interhousehold influence, including (1) whether the product is jointly or individually consumed, (2) whether it is consumed by children or adults, (3) whether the brand name is clearly visible during use, and (4) whether the product is changed between purchase and use. They hypothesized greater family influence either for durables jointly consumed by husband and wife or for products individually consumed by adults when the brand was visible during use and unchanged by the housewife after purchase. A typology of family consumption by final product is that suggested by Sheth (1974). He classified consumption by individual members (e.g., razor blades for the husband, lipstick for the wife), the family as a whole (e.g., food), and the household unit (i.e., products used indirectly, such as paint or a lawnmower, for maintaining the physical dwelling).

These typologies have been of limited use to date. With few exceptions, they have been developed on an a priori basis. Whether, in fact, the decisions classified together are similar has not been empirically established. Nevertheless, they represent an important first step toward defining the total universe of a household's economic decisions and specifying common decision characteristics that may influence "who is involved."

Specifying the Relevant Decision-Making Unit

The reader is now painfully aware that the "family" in most studies of household decision making is in reality just the husband and wife. While critics of consumer behavior research might argue that this is at least an improvement over research that "forces" decisions into an individual framework, this perspective is still a partial one.

Researchers have probably been guided by intuition in specifying the husband and wife as the relevant decision-making unit for durable goods buying. Measures

of influence become exceedingly complicated if more than two people are involved. It is also likely that the desire for comparability of research has tended to focus attention on the husband-wife dyad.

Whatever the reasons, serious problems do exist. The relevant decision-making unit is specified a priori by the research design rather than by the household. Casual observation suggests that some consumer decisions involve other than a husband-wife dyad, e.g., child-wife for cereals or husband-son for sporting equipment. Parents, as well as friends and relatives, can also participate in "family" decisions. It is also possible that the relevant decision-making unit varies throughout the decision-making process. For example, husband and wife decide together about whether to buy a new car or repair the old one; the husband and teenage son decide about what make to buy.

The solution to this problem is not an easy one. Davis (1972a) used information about who talked to whom regarding specific automobile purchase decisions as a method of verifying if the husband and wife were, in fact, the relevant decision-making unit. The results showed differences by families and decisions. (Husbands discussed what make of car to buy with other people as often as they discussed it with their wives.) Perhaps families and/or decisions should be grouped into common decision units *before* the part played by each member is assessed.

Further complicating this issue is the fact that different measures of influence often point toward a different decision unit as being relevant. Turk and Bell (1972) found that children had power—sometimes substantial—when observational measures were used, but they had no power when the same couples were asked to provide self-reports of decision-making power.

Measuring Involvement

The problems of measuring who participates in household decisions are embedded in the two problem areas already described. Several recurring problems should be mentioned, nevertheless.

Relative Influence versus Total Influence. The great majority of studies make use of a scale that measures the relative influence of husband versus wife. This approach has the advantage of being widely used and thus permitting comparisons across studies. Bernhardt (1974) argued that such scales assume an equal amount of influence associated with each decision, which is then partitioned between husband and wife. In reality, a wife may feel that she exerted substantial influence in some decisions and little influence in others quite *independent* of the part played by her husband. Bernhardt proposed an alternative approach whereby each spouse first assesses how much influence he/she had and then how much the spouse had in various decisions. The result is a measure of both total and relative in-

fluence. Thus, four housing decisions—choice of house, of community, and of neighborhood, and architectural style—were classified as joint. The latter decision, however, revealed a low level of husband-wife influence in contrast to the other three.

Response Categories. Researchers have utilized various response formats in order to measure purchase influence. Undoubtedly, the most common measure is a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “husband decided” to “wife decided.” Some researchers have used a 3-point scale, which has the effect of increasing the expected level of agreement between husbands and wives as well as possibly altering the proportion of families that fall into the “jointly decided” category. Other studies further divide “equal-influence” responses into syncratic (i.e., always decide together) and autonomic (i.e., sometimes one spouse, sometimes the other) in order to obtain a more sensitive measure of the amount of role specialization. Influence has also been measured by asking each spouse to divide 10 points so as to show “share of husband and wife influence” (Haley et al., 1975). More attention should be given to whether these differing response formats yield comparable results.

Number of Respondents per Family. Two conclusions on how many family members to question can be supported from the literature. If the purpose of a study is limited to describing the relative influence of husband and wife in various decisions, it is sufficient to question only one spouse. Considerable evidence shows that the responses of husbands and wives are very similar when compared on an aggregate basis (Davis, 1970; Granbois and Willett, 1970; Wilkening and Morrison, 1963). If, on the other hand, the researcher wants to use a measure of influence in subsequent analyses (particularly prediction studies), data should be collected from both spouses.

The percentage of couples who agree about the roles played by family members in decision making varies from 30 to 80 percent depending in part on the subject area, the specificity of questions asked, and the skewness of responses. Disagreements are particularly high in areas of communication and decision making—a finding that is worrisome since many studies operationalize the authority relationship between husband and wife in terms of decision-making behavior (Morgan, 1968; Olson, 1969).

A related issue is whether children, particularly adolescents and teenagers, can be used as reporters. An early study by Converse and Crawford (1949) used college students to assess family-member involvement in 19 expenditure categories. Although this study provided no estimate of reliability or validity, Marshall (1963) reported very low intercorrelations when children’s and parents’ reports about the child’s use of money were compared.

Self-reported versus Communication Measures. A

lively controversy surrounds the issue whether influence should be measured by self-reports or interaction analysis. Research has shown that when comparing husbands’ and wives’ responses, global reports about “who is the boss” or “who makes major decisions” are less valid than product-specific reports (Davis, 1971; Wilkes, 1975). Respondents apparently find it easier to recall decisions about specific choices and activities, particularly if a purchase occurred months or years ago. Even here the level of agreement between spouses in response to very specific decisions is far from perfect.⁹ Thus, a more fundamental issue regarding self-reports is whether couples can meaningfully think in terms of decision outcomes or power. As Kenkel (1961, p. 159) has remarked:

This assumes, of course, that individuals know the relative amount of influence they have, that they are willing to admit it to themselves and others, and that they are able to recall with accuracy how influence was distributed in some past decision-making session.

Olson and Rabunsky (1972) reported that individuals can more accurately report *what* decisions were made than *who* actually made them. It seems likely that respondents, faced with the tasks of answering questions that have little meaning, will respond in terms of what they consider to be the socially desirable role, namely, who should decide.

Interaction-based measures represent another tradition of research on family decision making (Kenkel, 1963; Mishler and Waxler, 1968; Strodtbeck, 1951). Power is measured in different ways. Kenkel asked families to decide how they would spend an imaginary gift of \$300. A spouse’s power was measured by the proportion of items “purchased” that were initially suggested by that person. Strodtbeck also used decision outcomes as a measure of power by noting who won a series of revealed-difference discussions. Other studies have focused on aspects of the interaction itself, e.g., the proportion of instrumental acts initiated or the proportion of interruptions initiated by each person.

As is the case with self-reports, these measures also have limitations. Bales’ (1950) Interaction Process Analysis excludes nonverbal communication, which is undoubtedly an important indicator of power in long-lasting groups such as the family. The laboratory certainly has an impact on “normal” family interaction: it is a highly reactive environment. The simulated problems given to families by researchers also reinforce the artificiality of the situation. Zelditch (1971) has argued persuasively that one cannot equate a family’s labora-

⁹ Convergent validity for seven automobile and seven furniture purchase decisions was reported as .66 and .61 by Davis (1971). Wilkes (1975) reported correlations ranging between .59 and .79 for specific stages in the decision process. These data show that the maximum variance explained by comparing both spouses’ assessment of the same decision is only 56 percent.

tory behavior with the behavior of natural families. On the one hand, experiments remove many "place cues" that impinge on families in normal decision-making situations. On the other hand, since families are more complex than the ad hoc small group, it becomes difficult for researchers to study a single phenomenon isolated from other family processes.

These issues aside, it seems clear that self-reports and interaction measures yield differing assessments of who is involved. Turk and Bell (1972) compared eight different measures of power within the same families. The measures were not highly interrelated. Only two associations (out of 36) were greater than .60; 81 percent were in the range of $\pm .20$. Thus, researchers must deal with the problem that characterizing families in terms of power will differ depending on which commonly used measure is employed.

The solution to these problems does not lie principally in methodological improvements—e.g., using more specific questions, specifying the appropriate referent, reducing the lag between decision and data collection, or asking more members within the same family. More important is how decision making itself is conceptualized. It seems likely that measures of *decision outcome* (e.g., who decided or who won) tap a very different aspect of decision making than do measures of the *decision process* (e.g., who initiated the most instrumental acts or interruptions). In this regard, Turner (1970) has suggested that wives are often able to exercise considerable influence in family decisions while at the same time accepting their husbands' superior authority. This is possible because the husband's authority and the wife's centrality in the network may be positively related: the greater the husband's recognized authority is, the fewer will be the direct requests made to him by his children.

As Turner (1970, p. 123) concludes: "An interesting speculation, empirically untested, is the hypothesis that the more unequal the authority of the father in the family, the more powerful the offsetting dominance arising out of the centrality of the mother." Students of consumer behavior have not even begun to consider which orientation (i.e., decision outcome or process) is the most relevant for particular purposes. More attention is given to this issue in the next major section of this paper.

Explaining Variability in Involvement

Researchers have devoted little attention to explaining why, for the same decision, families vary in "who decides." This issue will undoubtedly become more important as efforts are made to "locate" families having particular role patterns. Although a number of theoretical perspectives are available in the sociological and economics literature, these have not been systematically studied in terms of predicting purchase influence within

families. Three general conceptions of how tasks and authority are allocated within families are described here.

Cultural Role Expectations. A number of sociologists have suggested that power and task responsibility are built into the roles of husband and wife on the basis of cultural norms and controls (Burgess and Locke, 1960; Parsons and Bales, 1955). Similar to French and Raven's (1959) concept of "legitimate power," a spouse's authority is based on the belief that he or she *should* make a decision or carry out a task irrespective of the actual skills or interest that may be present. The source of a spouse's power is thus external to the family: Power resides in the position rather than in the person. A traditional role ideology specifies large authority differences between husband and wife and a highly differentiated division of labor. A husband will decide what make of automobile to buy and his wife what to serve for dinner when guests are invited, simply because these two decisions *should* be made by husbands and wives, respectively. Sharp distinctions are drawn between "things" that are masculine or feminine.

A companionship ideology, in contrast, prescribes a high degree of joint participation in tasks and decisions. Togetherness is viewed as a desirable end in and of itself. A husband may, therefore, help his wife cook and shop because he wants to spend more time with her. His wife may learn how to ski so that they can spend more of their leisure time together. When authority or tasks are delegated, they are done so only on a temporary and often expedient basis.

Measures of cultural role expectations are either direct or indirect. The direct measures include a large number of scales that ask respondents to agree or disagree about various aspects of the husband's, wife's, and parents' role (e.g., "Marriage is the best career for a woman," "A wife should fit her life to her husband," "I consider the kitchen as the wife's room," or "It is somehow unnatural to place women in positions of authority over men"). Indirect measures attempt to locate categories of families or people that hold a different set of role expectations. Thus, sociologists have found traditional role ideologies more common within families in later stages of the life cycle and among people with no college education, in blue-collar occupations, and with authoritarian personalities.

Comparative Resources. A second conceptualization of the allocation of tasks and authority within families views each marital partner as a source of valued resources to the other (Blau, 1964; Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Scanzoni, 1970). Responsibility for decision making is assigned to the husband and wife on the basis of each one's ability to reward or punish, personal attractiveness, or competence. These "resources," possessed in varying degrees by each spouse, are exchanged for the right to make (or not to make) decisions or to participate (or not to participate) in family

activities. Unlike cultural role expectations, exchange theory views the determinants of decision roles to be internal to the family itself. If the resources controlled by either spouse change, their decision and task involvement should also change.

Measures of comparative resources have been developed at both general and specific levels. Resources such as the husband's educational and occupational status are an illustration of the first of these levels. Scanzoni (1970, pp. 147–48) provides an explicit rationale for this relationship:

The more the husband fulfills his economic duties . . . , and thus the more the wife defines her status rights . . . [as] being met, the more she will allow her husband to define the norms for . . . decision-making. . . . She . . . gives him power to shape this dimension of the conjugal unit, in exchange for the economic rewards and status benefits he provides for her vis-à-vis the larger community. She is more motivated to "go along" with him, to "give in" to him, to let him "have his way" to the extent that he provides maximum economic rewards.

If the wife controls resources such as a college education or high occupational status, the husband's "right to govern" is likely to be attenuated. An appropriate measure, therefore, is a score that reflects the difference between the husband's and wife's education or occupational status. Resources also include such specific factors as the time available for decision making. For example, wives have been found to lose influence vis-à-vis their husbands during the child-rearing stage of the family life cycle (Blood and Wolfe, 1960). The reason appears to be the combined effects of having to care for children and of having to give up activities outside the home. Because wives have less time to be involved in decision making and less to contribute in terms of financial resources and information, they become more dependent on their husbands during this period.

Researchers interested in studying the effect of time pressures on household decision making will have to construct indices from sets of background characteristics. In order to construct a measure of the wife's time pressure, one might incorporate the number and ages of children, whether the wife is employed, availability of domestic help, and size of dwelling, among others.

Relative Investment. Closely related to the previous conceptualization is the relative investment that each spouse has in a particular decision domain. Typically, the outcomes of a decision do not fall evenly across all family members. These assessments of the costs and/or benefits associated with particular outcomes should influence whether and how each participates in a given choice situation. Two important differences distinguish the relative-investment and the comparative-resources explanations. First, resources define the *potential* to exert influence while investment defines the *motivation* of a family member to exert influence. Second, relative

investment leads to predictions about family-member involvement in specific decisions rather than about the general authority structure of the family.

Two economic theories are relevant to this third conceptualization. Coleman (1966) proposed that when individuals face a sequence of decisions, it is possible for them to give up control over those of little interest for more control over those of greater interest. An individual's power is defined as the ability to obtain outcomes that yield the highest utility. If one family member has control over actions that are important to others, he has a valuable resource that can be explained for the purpose of "getting his way" over actions that are more important to him. Coleman develops a precise algebraic expression for the power of an individual in a system of collective decisions.

Becker's (1973, 1974) "Theory of Marriage" represents another attempt to explain family behavior in economic terms. Spouses are assumed to maximize the consumption of household-produced commodities, which leads to optimal strategies regarding mate selection, love and caring, the incidence of polygamy, etc. The theory predicts that high-wage men will marry low-wage women to gain from the division of labor, that high-income persons marry earlier than low-income persons, and that high-income, high-education people are less likely to divorce than others. Although this framework has not yet specifically applied to predict family-member participation in decision making and tasks, the extension could certainly be made.

These three conceptualizations need to be tested together as predictors of marital roles. They are probably complementary rather than alternative explanations. French and Raven (1959, p. 155) have drawn attention to the several bases of power in small groups:

It is rare that we can say with certainty that a given empirical case of power is limited to one source. Normally, the relation between O [a person, role, norm, or group] and P [a person] will be characterized by several qualitatively different variables which are bases of power.

They may or may not reinforce each other. In traditional societies, a traditional family ideology is reinforced by the distribution of resources between husband and wife (e.g., women are denied occupational opportunities or family property rights). In modern societies, the stage is often set for conflict since comparative investment or resources may not be consistent with cultural role expectations. Finally, the predictive power of each conceptualization may differ by family and/or product category. Role expectations are likely to be a more important determinant of marital roles during the early years of marriage and less important during the later years. In the same way, role expectations may do a good job of explaining the general division of labor within the household (i.e., whether the wife is em-

ployed), while relative investment is a better predictor of involvement in specific product categories.

This discussion should also underline the fact that current efforts to explain this variability are not likely to be successful. Long lists of conventional demographic, attitudinal, or personality variables mechanically regressed against purchase influence reflect neither the appropriate form of the variables (e.g., difference measures between husband versus wife) nor the correct variables themselves (e.g., time pressure or one's stake in the decision).

PROCESS OF DECISION MAKING WITHIN FAMILIES

The problem areas just described are symptomatic of underlying problems with the research to date. Prescribed roles of husband and wife are probably good predictors of "who decides" in stable societies. However, in developed Western societies norms of shared interest, give and take, and companionship are likely to exist. In this situation it is difficult to predict who will win or decide.

Many of the studies already reviewed focus on the outcomes of decision making rather than on the process that has led to these outcomes. The result is that little has been learned about how families actually reach decisions. To use an analogy suggested by Sprey (1971), it is as though one has tried to understand the game of chess by looking only at the outcomes of each game, ignoring entirely the strategies used by each player.

This section describes some issues related to how families make decisions. It is argued that group decision making differs in some important respects from individual decision making. First, group members may not necessarily agree about goals, and agreement is not necessary to reach decisions. Second, families as groups have characteristics that differ from problem-solving groups in organizations or in the laboratory. Third, a repertoire of decision-making strategies is available, with their use depending on what is appropriate to the situation.

There is little research that is relevant to group decision-making processes.¹⁰ The emphasis is still very much on the individual. No theory of household decision making will emerge, nor will research findings build on one another, until the nature of these processes is made explicit.

Decision Making as Consensual versus Accommodative

Using an analogy from organization theory (Thompson and Tuden, 1959), two "ideal" representations of a group making a purchase decision can be proposed.

If decision making is consensual, there is either unanimity about what value—i.e., desired outcome—is relevant in the decision or no conflict among group members in the case where several values are relevant. The satisficing criterion (Simon, 1955) would predict that the group will engage in problem solving and will continue to search for alternatives until one is found that satisfies the minimum level of expectations of all members with respect to the value or values perceived as being relevant. If differences between members arise during the search process, the discussion will center only around questions of fact, i.e., whether a particular alternative will really satisfy the value in question. Relying on the judgment of all or a majority of group members, a choice will be made to which all will give equal consent without holding private reservations or resentments about the outcome.

A second "ideal" type of group decision is accommodative rather than consensual; that is, through discussion or observation, group members realize that priorities and preferences are irreconcilable. Even if the group can agree about the likely consequences of each choice, there will be no way that one alternative can be satisfying to all. Bargaining, coercion, and other means may be used to reach an acceptable solution. If the group is successful in this process, the commitment of each person to the solution will be conditional on others carrying out the terms of the compromise. The whole decision area can be reopened for further discussion when, for example, one member perceives that the resulting purchase is not entirely in accord with the agreed-on solution.

While the research evidence is limited, some authors suggest that groups, and particularly families, quite often bargain, compromise, and coerce rather than problem-solve in arriving at decisions. Blood (1960) argues that the involuntary and diffuse character of family relationships and the family's small size and changing developmental tasks lead to a high degree of conflict. Sprey (1969) maintains that treating the family as though the normal state were one of agreement and stability is inadequate, since decisions are frequently an on-going confrontation between members having interests in a common situation. It is important, according to Sprey, to understand how conflict management is possible through a set of mutually agreed-on rules. Weick (1971, p. 26) maintains that groups often form around common ends (means interdependencies) rather than common objectives: "In any potential collectivity, members have different interests, capabilities, preferences, and so forth. They want to accomplish different things. However, to achieve some of these diverse ends, concerted, interdependent actions are required."

It is significant to note that it is not necessary for a husband and wife to agree about objectives in order for them to exchange behaviors viewed as mutually rewarding. Weick continues by suggesting that the rela-

¹⁰ An exception is a paper by Sheth (1974) that applies a modified Howard-Sheth model to family decision making.

tionship between means and ends is continuous—i.e., common means will, over time, promote common objectives. One of the initial common objectives is preserving the group itself via the statement and articulation of norms, role specialization, and communication regularity. By preserving the group, members can continue to pursue diverse ends.

Three marketing studies have compared the goals or perceptions of husbands and wives. Project Home (Raymond Loewy/William Snaith, 1967) compared husbands' and wives' "motivations" in home buying within several segments of the market (e.g., first house, upgrade, retiree, two-family home). Substantial disagreements were found between males and females in the upgrade market based on the criteria of privacy, investment, children, and socializing. An apt summary of the differences in the orientation of men and women is as follows: "A man tolerates buying a house for the sake of the woman, while she tolerates the man for the sake of the home" (p. 15). One of the criteria—convenience—was even defined differently by husbands and wives. To women its meaning was functional convenience; men viewed convenience more personally—close to work and/or suitable for relaxation.

Doyle and Hutchinson (1973) presented the results of a multidimensional analysis of automobiles. Although the perceptual spaces were similar, men and women tended to weigh the two dimensions of size and quality (or luxury) differently. Finally, Cox (1975) found a curvilinear relationship between length of marriage and the amount of spousal agreement in preference for new automobile makes. The level of agreement was highest for couples in the intermediate stages of the life cycle.

In the area of family planning, a study by Poffenberger (1969) revealed marked differences in attitudes between husbands and wives regarding low fertility. Husbands emphasized the positive effects of low fertility on living costs and children's educational opportunities. Wives, in contrast, viewed low fertility as an advantage in terms of reducing their work load.

These results suggest that a goal-oriented, problem-solving approach is likely to characterize only a portion of a household's economic decisions. Future research needs to consider the relative frequency of consensual versus accommodative decision making within families. Moreover, little is known about the extent of goal agreement as a function of product category or such family characteristics as social class, race, or the wife's employment status. The accommodative model also points out that each spouse can engage in the same consumption behavior for different reasons. The diversity of ends that can support the same behavior within families needs to be explored.

Group Decision Making versus Family Decision Making

A number of writers have suggested that families, more than other groups, are likely to be "poor" deci-

sion makers. This is owing, in part, to the environment in which families decide, the nontask needs that impinge on all decisions, and the interrelatedness of family decisions. Each of these reasons is briefly considered here.

The Environment of Family Decision Making

Laboratory groups are studied under "ideal" environmental conditions. Members are rested, and meetings take place in rooms with good lighting, comfortable temperatures, and seating arrangements that encourage group interaction. Distractions are at a minimum. How does this environment compare with the typical family decision-making session? In the first place, families are often together when energy levels are low—early in the morning or late in the day. Little research has been conducted about decision making under conditions of fatigue although there is a good deal of folklore about the decisions of people "who can't get started in the morning" or "who are too tired to think in the evening." Second, family decision making is undoubtedly subject to distraction. In the morning, the demands of preparing breakfast, or the pressure to leave for work, interfere with concentrated problem solving. The evening contains many of the same distractions—dinner, TV, outside activities. Young children not only make constant demands on their parents throughout the day but also frequently interrupt the parents' conversations.

Although no research on the effects of distraction has been done using families, a laboratory study by Wright (1974) is instructive. He found that distraction (a taped radio program at different volume levels) had the effect of increasing the salience of negative evidence and lowering the number of dimensions on which alternatives were evaluated. It does appear, therefore, that the environment can alter strategies used for making decisions.

The Maintenance Needs of Families

Because of the long-lasting nature of family relationships, actions are frequently taken that assure continuance of the group. This contrasts with the ad hoc laboratory group that exists for a very short period of time. In contrast to a committee or task force, problem situations may be viewed as a threat to the stability of the family, particularly if they are novel or have no obvious solution. One manner of dealing with this situation is to avoid the issue itself and focus instead on group maintenance by minimizing expressions of conflicts and the number of alternatives considered. Aldous (1971, p. 267) suggests that the emphasis within families "tends to be one of reducing the tension-laden situations to an innocuous level rather than submitting the problem to rigorous analysis and assessing the consequences of possible alternative strategies."

Legitimate roles can be used to reduce conflict, and this can also have the effect of lowering the quality of decisions. It may be that in the interests of reducing conflict and reaffirming legitimate power (French and Raven, 1959), decisions may be made by a person with less expertise. Weick (1971, p. 5-6) described this intentional masking of expert power as a "delicate problem of balancing legitimacy with expertness in problem solving procedures" and one that differentiates the family from other decision-making groups.

Results from a series of focus-group interviews (Davis, 1972b) showed that consumers are very much aware of group-maintenance needs in describing their own family decisions. Conflict in at least three areas was described—who should make various purchase decisions, how the decisions should be made (amount of search, reliance on advertising, personal recommendations), and who should implement the decision. Since product-choice situations provide one context in which disagreements arise about appropriate roles in decision making, it is easy for family members to confuse the source of conflict. To the extent that they are confused about the reasons for disagreement, attempts to resolve conflict are likely to be unsuccessful. It is also difficult for the researcher to separate truly product-related disagreements from those relating to family-maintenance needs.

The Interrelatedness of Family Decisions

The typical problem dealt with by committees or laboratory groups is defined and worked on in isolation from other problems. This bypasses a number of questions relevant to the dynamics of family problem solving. Weick (1971, p. 9) succinctly describes the differences as follows:

They [laboratory groups] bypass such questions as how one comes to know that a problem exists, what it does to solution adequacy to be working on several different things *concurrently* with problem solving, what it's like to go about solving a felt, intuited problem rather than an explicitly stated consensually validated problem which was made visible to all members at a specific point in time.

Families face several problems concurrently. It is likely that among this set the most unambiguous and identifiable problems are solved first. This suggested to Aldous (1971) that the problems which families actually solve are likely to be the unimportant ones. More far-reaching problems may remain undefined or unresolved. This is true for at least two reasons. First, a husband and wife may fixate on different aspects of the problem. A husband, for example, may see the automobile "problem" as uncertainty about getting to work on time or the cost of repairs. His wife, on the other hand, might define the "problem" as the extra burden of monthly payments or her husband's infatua-

tion with cars. Because they do not define the "problem" similarly, it may be dropped and not resolved. A second reason that can delay decisions is the impact which each spouse's solution has on the other spouse, either in the same problem area or in different problem areas. Faced with a limited budget, a new car purchase, for example, precludes new carpeting.

Support for these hypotheses is found in at least two studies. Foote (1974) analyzed data from a three-generation study (Hill, 1970) based on 120 grandparent, 120 parent, and 120 young married families. He found both a high proportion of purchases that were not preceded by plans and a high proportion of planned purchases that were not fulfilled. In fact, in all generations unfulfilled plans and unplanned actions predominated over fulfilled plans and planned actions. The reasons for the discrepancies between plans and actions were numerous and often related to uncontrollable problems and immediate opportunities. This finding is in accord with Weick (1971) and Aldous (1971), who both asserted that families may be more solution oriented than problem oriented. According to Weick, it is the appearance of a solution that really precipitates choice, since family members often have only a vague sense of problems. Families frequently describe disagreements about whether a given purchase was legitimate. They disagree about such things as the timing of a purchase, whether it was *really* necessary, and whether other solutions for satisfying the same need might have existed (Davis, 1972b).

Existing research has tended to focus on "go-ahead" decisions as a means of understanding family decision processes; that is, having made or being about to make a purchase, families are queried about how this came about. Equally important, if not more so, are actions taken to abort or postpone consumer purchases given the interrelatedness of family decisions. Much could be learned about a household's priority patterns and the influence of different family members by recording not only whose purchase suggestions were realized but also whose suggestions were denied or tabled and for what reasons.

Alternative Decision-Making Strategies

Table 1 summarizes various decision-making strategies under the two models of consensus and accommodation. A brief description of each strategy is presented here.¹¹

Role Structure. The role-structure strategy serves to lessen or even eliminate the need for discussion by making one person (or sometimes two) responsible for

¹¹ A more detailed description of each strategy is contained in Davis (1972b). Sheth and Cosmas (1975) have also studied four alternative decision strategies in the purchase of automobiles and furniture—problem solving, persuasion, bargaining, and politicking.

TABLE 1
ALTERNATIVE DECISION-MAKING STRATEGIES

Goals	Strategy	Ways of Implementing
"Consensus" (Family members agree about goals)	Role structure	"The Specialist"
	Budgets	"The Controller"
	Problem solving	"The Expert" "The Better Solution" "The Multiple Purchase"
"Accommodation" (Family members disagree about goals)	Persuasion	"The Irresponsible Critic" "Feminine Intuition" "Shopping Together" "Coercion" "Coalitions"
		Bargaining

the decision. Frequently, family members come to accept one person as a "specialist" in a particular sphere of activity, thus making legitimate his or her right to decide without interference. Often, this expertise is maintained by developing a specialized jargon, by creating an air of mystery about how to perform the task, or by ridiculing the performance of others when they try to perform the same task.

Budgets. In the budget strategy, which is a second form of bureaucracy, decision responsibility is "controlled" by an impersonal arbitrator. Instead of nightly or morning crises, conflict can be restricted to once-a-week meetings at which time criteria of fairness and equity may receive more attention. Rules also serve to "institutionalize" power or coercion. Parents who believe that children should eat everything on their plates can establish a household rule. Thus, when children object, the mother can respond, "That's the rule—now eat!" If a wife has exceeded the clothing allowance set up by her husband, she may place the blame on the budget itself rather than on her husband for having set up such a small allowance. As Blood (1960, p. 215) concludes, "The process of agreeing on a budget is still liable to plenty of conflict, but, once formulated, a budget tends to divert attention from the hostile antagonist to the operational code."

Problem Solving. When agreement exists about which goals are desirable, problem-solving behavior is likely. "Experts," both within and outside the family, can be relied on to provide "proof" of the merit of one alternative versus others. Family discussion can produce a "better solution" than that originally put forth by any of the members individually. Although there have been few studies of problem-solving effectiveness in families, research on other small groups suggests some factors that may be applicable. Groups, for example, can ask more questions and get more information than any individual could alone. In this case, more

alternatives will be generated and more complete information obtained about the likely consequences of each alternative.

An example, perhaps, of a better solution is the "multiple purchase." As a way of resolving conflict or trying to avoid it, two or more brands can be purchased instead of one. Instead of a color TV, two black and white sets can be bought for the same outlay. The family vacation can be divided into two separate two-week segments if members are unable to agree on one site. Blood (1960, pp. 214–15) has observed that "the current trends to a second car, a second television set, and a second telephone result not only in increased profits for the corresponding manufacturers but in decreased tension for family personnel who can now use parallel facilities simultaneously instead of having to compete for control of single channels."

Persuasion Strategies. When family members do not agree about goals, strategies of persuasion and bargaining are likely. The distinction between these two strategies is not a sharp one. Persuasion can be viewed as a way of forcing someone to make a decision that they would not otherwise make. Bargaining, on the other hand, leads to willing agreement since by doing so both parties tend to gain.

Typically, the person who has the authority to make a particular decision also gets the credit or blame for how the decision turns out. Those who are freed from this responsibility can try to seize on certain of the advantages of being dominated. Thus, the "irresponsible critic" can put forth ideas freely without having to worry how realistic they might be. The "nagging wife," for example, can criticize her husband freely. If it turns out that he was right, she has nothing to lose; if he was wrong, she can adopt the self-satisfying stance of "I told you so." In the extreme case, the husband may become so tired of hearing his wife begin the same tirade that he prefers to concede to her regardless of the decision area.

When a wife is dominated by her husband, she may have to resort to a strategy referred to in folklore as "feminine intuition"; that is, she learns to identify the moods in which he is most susceptible to new ideas or persuasion. She may also find types of appeals to which he is especially weak. Television programs in the U. S. are filled with stories of wives "plotting" against their husbands to get a new fur coat, living-room furniture, or the like. The presence of this facility (to the extent that it actually exists) may have some basis in fact. As Turner (1970, p. 189) reasons:

Under the long-standing subordination of women to men, learning to detect and interpret the subtle gestures of the opposite sex accurately has been more adaptive for the woman than for the man. Such learning comes partly from individual discovery during the socialization process, partly from the accumulation of a woman's repertoire of folk techniques for under-

standing and dealing with men, and partly from the selective direction of attention during interaction.

An interesting persuasion strategy is to take another family member along when shopping for a product. "Shopping together" has the effect of securing a commitment from the other person. Having said Yes, it is more difficult for that person to back out of the decision at a later time.

"Coercion" is the most extreme form of persuasion since it implies unwilling agreement. The use of this strategy within the family is probably common when there are large authority differences among family members and no cultural norms exist against its use.

"Coalitions" can be formed within the family for the purpose of forcing the lone individual or minority to join with the majority. In cohesive groups, such as the family, the success of appeals designed to bring dissenters into line is probably high.

Bargaining Strategies. Unlike the persuasion strategies just mentioned, which represent relatively short-run efforts to win a specific decision, bargaining involves longer-term considerations. Thus, a wife may be willing to lose a given encounter on the grounds that she will "get her way" in a later decision. Given the long-run and diffuse nature of most family relationships, this situation poses difficult problems for researchers interested in understanding the decision process for one specific consumer good at one point in time. Explicit or tacit agreements may exist as a result of a decision made in a quite different area at an earlier time that will affect the outcome of a current choice.

Waiting for the "next purchase" is an obvious approach if one feels that one will lose or "use up" goodwill by forcing a showdown on a contested decision. The husband can say, for example, "O.K., you buy the fur coat but I'm going to take the two-week fishing vacation with the boys."

The timing of a purchase itself can be used as a strategy. An "impulse purchase" is similar to the first move in a game of strategy. A husband can choose to drive home a new car that he has just purchased without any prior discussion with his wife. The wife may view the decision as already having been made. Moreover, having seen the car, she may conclude that she really likes it.

"Procrastinating" is another way of continuing the bargaining process after a choice has been made. If the wife delays making a purchase that has been agreed on, new information may develop or the situation can change such that the original choice can be changed. In this case, she can easily assign the blame to an outside party, thereby concealing her own delaying tactics—e.g., "By the time I got to the travel agent, the tour was completely full," or "The store didn't have any more."

From this discussion of how decisions are made within families, we can see that the approach is much broader than simply determining who is involved in various decisions and tasks. Research should be directed to these alternative decision strategies—to specifying the circumstances under which each will be used in the same family and how their use differs among families.

CONSEQUENCES OF HUSBAND-WIFE INVOLVEMENT AND DECISION STRATEGIES

In discussing the Ferber (1973b) review paper, Hill and Klein (1973, p. 372) presented Guy Orcutt's comments on the lack of evidence about whether family decision roles make any difference. "I would like to have seen some evidence pointing up the implications of different role-playing allocations, and different budgeting procedures for the economic behavior and well-being of families."

It remains true that very little effort has been directed to the effects of different family structures, even though this is a critical issue. The usual justification of family research in marketing relates to better targeting of marketing activities. Studies of husband-wife influence have been justified in (1) selecting the proper respondent in consumer research surveys, (2) determining the content of advertising messages, (3) selecting advertising media, (4) guiding product designers to include features that appeal to those who are most influential in the purchase decision, and (5) assisting in the location of retail outlets. Although these reasons are legitimate, they represent only a small part of the justification for studying family-member involvement in consumer decisions.

At least two writers have speculated about the effects of household structure on purchase behavior. Alderson (1957) suggested two concepts that form a typology of households—compatibility of attitudes/preferences and coordination of goal-directed activities. Families can be classified into one of the following four "ideal" types: coordinated and compatible, coordinated and incompatible, uncoordinated and compatible, and uncoordinated and incompatible. Family purchase behavior is hypothesized to differ for each type. To illustrate, the coordinated but incompatible family is likely to be "especially price-conscious, immune to emotional appeal, and hard bargainers in the effort to get their money's worth" (Alderson, 1957, p. 179). In contrast, the uncoordinated but compatible family is hypothesized to be especially susceptible to persuasive efforts such as personal selling.

Scanzoni (1966) hypothesized unique consumption behaviors in families as a function of the aspiration and expectation level of the husband vis-à-vis his wife. If, for example, a husband's aspirations and expectations exceeded those of his wife, one would expect him

to be the motivating force behind an improved life style. His wife would be more likely to "go along" with his desires for increased consumption to the extent that his income level was high and his education substantially greater than hers. In another pattern, the husband could hope for a higher life style than his wife but actually have lower expectations about what was realistic. Unlike the previous pattern, the wife would probably be the major force behind a higher standard of living for the family and for that specific reason might want to work. According to Scanzoni, this pattern is likely to be present for many working-class families in the United States.

Beyond these speculations are a few empirical studies suggesting that family decision roles do indeed make a difference. Ferber and Lee (1974) found that when husbands were the "family financial officer," a higher proportion of income was saved, more assets were in variable dollar form (i.e., real estate, securities), and automobile purchases were less frequent. Granbois and Summers (1975) reported better estimates of total planned expenditures when interviews were conducted with both spouses together rather than with either the husband or the wife individually.

Considerable research has accumulated showing effective contraceptive use in families characterized by equalitarian roles, high within-family communication, and low extra-familial communication. Rogers (1973) described a family planning effort in Pakistan whose high success was attributed in part to the use of male-female teams as opposed to female workers only.

Finally, the Nowland studies (1964, 1965) found significant differences in purchase behavior depending on whether husbands and wives had the same brand preferences. When brand consensus existed, the preferred brand was usually the brand in the household inventory. When husband and wife did not agree, the wife's preferred brand rather than the husband's was more likely to be purchased.

These studies have just begun to examine the impact of the household on consumer behavior. An important research priority is to extend these tentative findings to many other areas of consumer choice.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Three brief summary comments capture the essence of this review.

1. The study of household decision and consumption behavior is not simply another "fashionable" topic for consumer researchers. Rather, the focus on consumers as a group acting collectively suggests a reorientation of many existing theories and methodologies. Research on household decision making will be judged on the extent to which it influences thinking about other areas such as family counseling, information dissemination, and marketing research.

2. Much of the work to date has taken an overly restrictive view of family-member roles. Most of the emphasis has been on who shops and decides within specific product categories. Studies of family decision making have in reality been studies of husband-wife decision making. Little is known about household roles (including children) in information gathering and storage, product use, and post decision evaluation or about family-member roles across product domains. Hill and Klein (1973, p. 373) have suggested that "scanty attention has been paid even to the descriptive questions of how and to what extent feed-back of information from past experience influences family decisions, who evaluates the family experience, who 'stores' the information for future use, and who draws on this information storage when the need arises."

3. A third and final research priority is the need to explore *how* families make decisions rather than simply who is involved. In the final analysis, a theory of household decision making will not emerge by focusing solely on decision outcomes such as who decided or who won. This approach has been described by Sprey (1972) both as "in no way sufficient" and as "highly unsuitable." The ongoing nature of family relationships, the interrelatedness of their consumer choices, and the financial and time constraints faced by the family define a unique decision environment. The impact of this environment on how households manage consumption and savings is an important question for future research.

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⁸ **Dimensions of Marital Roles in Consumer Decision Making**

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⁹ **Husband-Wife Influence in Purchase Decisions: A Confirmation and Extension**

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