

The Effect of the Wife's Working Status on Familial Dominance Structure

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INTRODUCTION

Although there has been considerable research in the field of marketing concerning the family decision-making process, many questions remain unanswered. One specific area in which questions still exist is the delineation of power structures in the family. Here, the primary concern is centered on which family member wields the most influence in the purchase of a specific product/service. The primary reasoning behind the interest in this type of research is founded on the assumption that if the researcher can delineate who is dominant in the family and why, this will enable the marketing manager to construct a strategic plan which plays to the favor of the dominant family member in that purchase decision category.

One reason why many questions remain unanswered in this field of study is that many methodological problems exist when researchers are trying to study the family power structure. The most predominant of these problems is the conceptualization and measurement of family power (Cromwell and Olson, 1975; Davis, 1976; Turk, 1972). Crucial to the understanding of this

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issue is the realization that family decision-making and consumption research fits into the category of small group research. The proper conceptualization of the family power structure must take into account this group notion if the complexity of the phenomenon is to be fully understood.

Few researchers in the marketing domain attempt to study family power structures in terms of a group decision-making instrument. Woodside (1974) utilizes a mathematical group measure of the power construct dominance to study marital decision-making in a marketing context. The results indicate that dominance did indeed vary across the eight product categories under study. More significantly, however, is the finding that this group conceptualization of power was useful in explaining these differences. Few other researchers in marketing have utilized this whole family measurement methodology in untangling the underlying bases of power in the family. However, this methodology is gaining greater acceptance in the sociological literature (Cromwell and Olson, 1975).

THE STUDY

The purpose of the present investigation is twofold. First, this study attempts to integrate and apply small group research in the field of family decision-making in a marketing context. Secondly, and more specifically, the study empirically examines (1) a group measure of one dimension of familial power, and (2) its relationship to the family characteristics of wife's working status (working vs. non-working), her reason for working (financial necessity or self satisfaction), and number of children living in the household under eighteen years old. These relationships are of interest in the marketing literature because of their potential usefulness in strategy formulation.

It is hypothesized in the literature that the employment status of the wife affects her role in the family decision-making process. The data related to this generalization are somewhat conflicting. Blood and Hamblin (1958) and Hoffman (1961) found no relationship between employment and what was termed power. Other studies by Heer (1958) and Middleton and Putney (1960) found the positive predicted relationship.

It can also be hypothesized that the number of children in the family and reasons for working may affect the power structure in the family. Although the evidence is tentative (primarily due to severe methodological problems), Heer (1958) found that work (of wife) was responsible for an alteration in family power.

Since the concepts of working wife, number of children in the family, and reasons for working appear to relate to alterations of power in the marital dyad, it would appear appropriate to examine these influences in a marketing/product decision framework. The present study utilizes a whole group measure of the control dimension of family power to test two research hypotheses.

HYPOTHESIS I: Control among members in the family dyad is related to specific product decisions.

This hypothesis is important to the present study because if control does not vary across specific products, it would suggest that product specific typologies are of limited use in the marketing literature in family decision-making.

HYPOTHESIS 2: Control among members in the family dyad is related to the:

- (a) wife's working status
- (b) reasons for working, and
- (c) number of children in the household.

Hypothesis 2 is of interest because it would be useful from the marketing manager's perspective to isolate factors that are related to particular control structures in the family for strategic planning purposes.

METHODOLOGY

Product Categories

Since the first hypothesis under study deals with whether or not there are varying degrees of control across specific product types, the products selected for study must be ones that could provide a rigorous test of the research hypothesis. The categories selected were women's casual clothing, vacations, men's casual clothing, life insurance, and homeowner's/renter's insurance. These products were chosen due to (1) their past use in the research literature, and (2) their theoretical ability to evoke varying degrees of control in the family purchase decision.

Measurement Instruments

Control is reflected in the formal and informal, overt and covert, pressures or appeals directed by one spouse to another as well as the latter's response to that pressure of appeal. The specific outcome of a product decision in such a process can be used as a measure of control. Alternatively stated, when one

person is able to realize the particular solution he/she favors over the other person, he/she is dominant. When he/she dominates more often than the other, he/she is said to have greater power in familial decision making.

This basic reasoning is utilized in the present study in the development of the family power/control instrument. The instrument is a restructuring of Corrales (1975) adapted version of Miller and Wackman's (1965) interaction research. The restructuring of the instrument made the scale statistically appealing and suitable for family survey research. The scale is characterized by upper and lower bounds of +7 to -7, and converges to zero. A positive score (greater than +.2) indicates general husband dominance, and a negative score (less than -.2) wife dominance for a particular product. An egalitarian decision situation exists as the scale converges to zero (ranged from -.2 to +.2). Since the development of the instrument is too lengthy to be fully explained in this paper, it must suffice to say that it is a dyadic measure of family decision-making dominance for product categories with a natural probability distribution (see Cosenza [1979] for a complete explanation of the procedure).

The variables of the wife's working status and the reason for her working were also assessed from the instrument. Here, dichotomous questions were asked to obtain the responses. Lastly, the number of children less than eighteen living in the household was ascertained from the demographic panel data maintained by Wright State University.

Sampling Procedure

The data presented was obtained from the Wright State University Consumer Panel. Each family chosen responded to an extensive questionnaire which provided data on measures of control in each of the five product categories, and various other situational and demographic questions. The sampling method utilized was an optimal stratifying procedure using length of marriage as the critical variable. The original sample contained two hundred and fifty-two (252). Incomplete and unusable surveys were eliminated resulting in a final sample of one hundred and fifty-five (155) respondent families on which the results of this survey are based.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Hypothesis 1

A two-way mixed-effects ANOVA with $n=1$ was utilized to test Hypothesis 1. Product type was the fixed factor and subjects the random

factor. Familial dominance was the dependent variable. As shown in Table 1, the F-statistic ($F=9.567$) was significant ($p < .01$) indicating that there are statistically significant differences in the mean control power scores across the five product categories under study.

TABLE 1: Summary Table of Two-Way Mixed Effects ANOVA Utilized to Test Hypothesis 1

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F
Products (A)	279.16	4	69.79	9.567*
Subjects (B)	1,858.62	154	12.07	
Error (A X B)	4,493.79	616	7.29	

$$.01F_{4, 616} = 3.32 \quad *p < .01$$

An examination of the mean dominance scores across products suggests which decisions are egalitarian or husband or wife dominant. As would be expected, both the female and male family member dominates its relative clothing category (mean scores of $-.632$ and $.8113$, respectively). The decision for family variations ($-.2181$) are dominated by neither family member and tend to be of an egalitarian nature. Finally, the decision process for life and homeowner's/renter's insurance tend to be dominated by the male in the household. ($.6955$ and $.7966$, respectively). These findings are not consistent with the previous role categorizations found by Davis and Rigaus (1974) and the replication of this research by Bonfield (1977) using a process model and consensus influence data.¹

Hypothesis 2

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was utilized to test Hypothesis 2. MANOVA is an appropriate means of testing the null hypothesis that the mean vectors of product dominance scores are equal across the independent variables of wife's working status, reasons for working, and number of children in the household. If the multivariate F-statistic was significant, the univariate $-F$'s were examined to isolate the specific product categories in which significant differences existed.

Table 2 presents the results with work as the independent variable. The multivariate F-statistic was significant which indicates a significant difference in control structures between families with working wives and those with non-working wives. The amount of variance explained in the design (9%) is generally high for behavioral research. However, since few studies

THE EFFECT OF THE WIFE'S WORKING STATUS
ON FAMILIAL DOMINANCE STRUCTURE

of this nature report the η^2 (eta square) statistic, no direct comparisons of past studies of this nature can be made.

TABLE 2: Multivariate and Univariate Tests of Dominance Scores
Across Working Status

Product	Dominance Scores		$F_{1,153}$	η^2
	Working (n = 72)	Non-working (n = 83)		
Women's Casual Clothing	.0230	-1.2002	8,8911*	.054
Vacations	.1940	-.5756	2.7585**	.017
Men's Casual Clothing	.7855	-.8337	.0119	
Life Insurance	1.1284	.3200	2.9996**	.019
Homeowner's Insurance	.7806	.8105	.0034	

$T^2 = 15.08$ *p < .01

MANOVA F = 2.93, p < .01, $\eta^2 = .09$ **p < .10

The univariate F-statistics are also presented in Table 2. Three product categories were significant beyond the .10 alpha level, these being women's casual clothing, vacations, and life insurance. Although the η^2 's are generally low and one must be cautious in interpreting the significant univariate F's, the exploratory nature of this study makes interpretation desirable.

As noted from Table 1, families tended to be dominated in the clothing categories by the partner wearing those particular garments. However, an examination of Table 2 presenting the dominance scores across working and non-working wives suggest some modification of this initial conjecture. Although families with non-working wives exhibit the same dominance structure, the working wife family tends more towards egalitarian decision-making. This suggests that for this particular product category the wife gives up control when she goes to work.

Since this type of purchase is generally considered "major" by females, it would appear that during employment, the wife gives up control. This is inconsistent (however, there is conflicting evidence as to the actual effect working has on dominance in the family) with an earlier finding by Blood (1958). Blood (1958) suggests instead that there is a decrease in "minor" decisions the wife makes when she is employed.

There also is a significant difference between family dominance with wife's working versus non-working in the product categories of vacations and life insurance. For vacations, the shift is away from egalitarian control.

This shift is towards a control structure where the wife dominates in vacation decisions when she is not working. However, the decision tends to be more towards egalitarian when she is working. Since planning is crucial to vacations, it would seem that if the wife is spending more time at home, she takes the opportunity to plan the vacation alone. However, when she is working, the time after work is spent with her husband, partially used for vacation planning.

The final product category in which there are significant differences in family dominance structures relative to the wife's working status is in life insurance. Recent research by Ferber and Lee (1974) indicates that employment has little effect on who is the family financial officer (FFO). If the FFO concept can be expanded to life insurance (due to the money allocation and types of plans, whole life, etc.), the results in Table 2 appear to contradict the Ferber and Lee (1974) findings.

The results indicate that when the wife is working, she depends more on the husband to make the life insurance decision. When she is not working, and perhaps raising a family and assuming life-oriented, family and children concerns, she becomes more aware of the importance of life insurance to her and the family and elects to become more involved in the decision-making process. The working wife's financial independence seems to eradicate her concern for the husband leaving the family unprepared financially, so the decision is left up more to the husband.

The final two independent variables of interest in Hypothesis 2 were that of the reasons for the wife working (financial necessity or self-satisfaction) and the presence of children less than 18 years old living in the household. The MANOVA F_s were not significant at the .05 level of significance. This finding suggests that in this study, neither independent variable had an effect on the dominance structure in the family.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that the locus of familial control appears to shift when the wife becomes employed. However, the shift is not necessarily in her favor as would be expected from the literature on the working wife's emerging independence. Furthermore, this study indicates that the number of children living at home and the reason for working does not affect decision making dominance in the family. The conclusions are tentative and further research is needed to validate these findings.

Further studies should begin to look at the effect of intervening variables

on dominance structure in their research designs. For example, one factor that could be hypothesized to affect familial dominance are the attitudes of each member of the dyad toward each other and their own occupational success. This and other variables may be found to modify the tentative findings of the relationships above on working status and dominance structure.

From a strategic marketing standpoint, the critical basis of the study was not only to ascertain dominance structures across product categories (although this in and of itself would be useful in a promotional sense, i.e., directed effort), but also it was to demonstrate the potential usefulness of a group measure of dominance for decision making within the family. Since at this time there are no true comparisons of "group" family research to this study (except for some sociological experiments, i.e., Berkowitz [1970]) in the marketing literature, the conclusions should be viewed as tentative. However, the methodological appeal of "small group" research does give face validity to the results as presented in this paper.

NOTE

¹Consensus influence data is a procedure which correlates a husband and wife's individual responses to a modified Blood and Wolfe influence/power measure. A process model in family research is not a longitudinal design, but rather a retrospective design. This simply means that the husband and wife are asked to recall what the general influence was in a specific phase of decision-making. This methodological weakness could be the reason for the inconsistent findings.

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