

## Review of Literature on Gender in the Family

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Much family research in Consumer Behavior has implicitly assumed that gender roles are shifting within the household, yet there is a dearth of direct investigation of that assumption. However, to understand the dynamic nature of households, we need to understand the manner in which spouses do gender. An examination of gender in the household is also important because many differences observed in household research do not appear to be biologically inevitable, but socially enforced.

We use the three theoretical gender traditions noted by Risman (1998) to evaluate gender research in sociology in general and consumer behavior in particular as it pertains to the roles that husbands and wives play in household consumption. Specifically, we review research on decision-making, leisure, sharing of labor, and conflict resolution. We suggest that most research has fallen within the gendered-self tradition (whether the sex differences noted are due to biology or socialization) and agree with Risman and Connell’s (1987) recommendation that gender needs to be investigated at the axis of the individual, the interaction among individuals, and the oversight of social institutions.

In terms of research on decision-making, we concur with Bristor and Fischer (1993) that not using a gendered-lens is preventing us from organizing our inconclusive findings to date. Given that such findings have been derived from a male-equals-masculine and female-equals-feminine perspective, they lack an acknowledgement of how gender roles are changing.

In terms of research on leisure and household labor, while the vast majority of studies reviewed has consistently found that men are not doing more in terms of domestic labor (despite the entry of large numbers of middle class women into the workplace), there is little support for the intuitively expected premise that this inequality in household responsibilities would result in overt conflict.

Subsequently, in our review of research on household conflict we find much evidence of conflict suppression processes. Such processes include subtle actions taken to maintain harmony within the household by constructing a form of “fairness” that may not be observable to a neutral third party. What is seen as an equitable distribution of household duties may well vary from an objective evaluation of the number of hours contributed by each spouse. Gendered interpretations

are most salient in research on management of household labor and conflict where it is often reported that potential conflict is reduced by the fact that spouses do not see the same outcome as having the same meaning.

The paper ends with a call for research in household consumption and production to incorporate a gendered lens in planning studies and interpreting findings. Specific areas needing such research are the gender socialization processes occurring in the modern household, the investigation of a gender switch phenomenon noted in the current cohort of elderly, more focus on family processes than outcomes, and greater representation of the husband's voice in gender research on households.

KEYWORDS: Gender, Family Communication Processes, Family Decision Making, Family Harmony, Conflict Suppression Processes, Sex Roles

## **A Review of Literature on Gender in the Household**

Sex is differentiated from gender in terms of its biological determinism. In other words, while some (sexual) differences between men and women appear to be biologically inevitable, others (gendered) are clearly social constructions that have been knit together to serve various purposes at various periods in time. However, in commentaries on how men and women differ, there is frequently a lack of attention to distinguishing differences that are biologically inevitable from those that do not bear any such biological determinism. The purpose of this paper is to document extant research to date on differences between men and women in the context of household. In documenting the extant research, it is hoped that the reader's attention may be drawn to the fact that many differences observed in such research do not appear to be biologically inevitable and therefore must be qualified in terms of the gendered lens that has been used to both document and interpret such differences.

### **WHAT IS GENDER?**

Gender is the symbolic role definition attributed to members of a sex on the basis of historically constructed interpretations of the nature, disposition, and role of members of that sex. It differs from a classification based on sex in that there is little evidence to suggest that gendered differences are biologically inevitable (while sexual differences are largely biologically determined); gendered differences are only sociologically inevitable, and that "inevitability" may diminish with time.

An interest in gender has been persistent and gender issues have been investigated in many domains, including workplace, marketplace, and leisure activities. Support for the socially constructed nature of gender lies in the evidence that gender is a malleable concept. For example, an assertive woman executive may enact her gender quite differently in the workplace than at home, or as Risman (1998, p. 2) writes, "the same person may display passive and subordinate 'femininity' in a love affair yet be a tyrant at the office." At other times, for marital harmony to exist, partners must please each other by behaving in ways that are at odds with their gender socialization and which they would not find pleasing themselves (Thompson and Walker 1989). Traditionally, the most basic form of gender was observed within a household, where the expectations for the fulfillment of various specialized household obligations were prominent. Yet, more recently, with the changing compositions of households and many emergent household structures, gender has evolved into a dynamic construct (Firat 1994) even within the household and a marketer must understand the changing nature of how gender is played by spouses in order to understand fully the rapidly changing nature of the household itself.

### **PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER**

Risman (1998) identified three distinct theoretical traditions that help understand sex and gender. A first tradition focuses on gendered-selves – whether the sex differences are due to biology or socialization. This focus is on the individual level of analysis, and encompasses social identities. Risman (1998, p. 16) noted that all theories of the gendered-self posit that by adulthood, most men and women have developed very different personalities: women have become nurturant, person oriented, and child-centered while men have become competitive and work-oriented. This perspective has been widely embraced in consumer behavior and marketing; for example, consistent with the gendered-self tradition, Meyers-Levy's (1988) selectivity hypothesis (which has been questioned by both Hupfer (2002) and Putrevu (2001) in this special issue) asserts that the male agentic role is characterized by concern for self, while the female communal role typically embraces concern for both self and others. Such coupling of male and "masculine" and female and "feminine" has been criticized by many researchers, largely because "gender" is seen to be dynamic in nature (Allen and Walker 2000; Risman 1998), changing for the individual on an almost continuous basis.

A second tradition focuses on how social structure creates gendered behavior. This approach argues that men and women behave differently because they fill different positions in institutional settings, work organizations, and families; in other words, they take on different gendered roles and, consistent with the role requirements, men and women in the same structural roles would be expected to behave identically. For example, Epstein (1988) found no documented differences

that can be traced to the predispositions of men and women, concluding that differences between men and women are largely due to gendered roles.

Risman (1998, p. 21) argues that there is a fundamental flaw in the logic supporting the gender role structure tradition: if women and men were to experience identical structural conditions and role expectations, then empirical gender differences should disappear. However, as Risman (1998, p. 52) asserts, no society without a gender structure has ever existed; researchers have investigated role structures as close to gender neutral as possible (Coltrane 1989; Risman 1986), and still have found gendered differences.

A third tradition is the interactional perspective, which emphasizes contextual issues such as cultural expectations and taken-for-granted situational meanings. This approach was best articulated by West and Zimmerman (1987); once a person is labeled a member of a sex category, s/he is morally accountable for behavior as ones in that category do. That is, the individual is expected to "do gender;" gender is not something we are but something we do, or, in other words, "doing gender" means creating differences that are not inevitable nor essential (Risman 1998). Therefore, doing gender implies legitimatising inequality, as what is female in a patriarchal society is devalued (Daniels 1987; Kynaston 1996). Scanzoni (1979) argued for this view of gender in family contexts, expressing the need to deal unambiguously with issues of reciprocity within a couple.

Risman (1998) argues that this tradition is also incomplete as it slights the institutional level of analysis, which includes issues such as distribution of material advantages between the sexes, formal organizational schemas, and ideological discourses. In other words, the links among gendered selves, situational expectations, and institutional gender stratifications need investigation (Connell 1987; Risman 1998). For example, women do gender in ways that support male privilege in family even when those women have overcome oppression and institutional barriers in other domains (Commuri 2000; Risman 1998). Such complex interplay of traditional and neo-traditional gendered selves cannot be understood unless the analysis is situated at the axis of the individual, the interactions among individuals, and the oversight of institutions.

## **THE DOMAIN OF THE REVIEW**

The focus in this review is on behaviors of men (husbands) and women (wives) in consumption and production roles within a household. Becker (1965) labeled family a "small factory" that produces commodities (children, health, leisure, etc.) of value to the family. As mentioned earlier, not only are the most basic forms of gender enacted in a household but also, as Risman (1998) suggested, a household is a *gender factory*. Therefore, understanding gendered differences in production and consumption rituals within the household is important. This need is further accentuated by the fact that, as stated earlier, our discipline has embraced a gendered-self perspective coupling man with masculine and woman with feminine. Such a categorical dichotomization across biological and social differences has not only led to an overall lack of acknowledgement of the lenses necessary in interpreting the findings of our research but also a corresponding under-interpretation of the findings. As Bristor and Fischer (1993) noted, it is one thing to observe a pattern of behavior in the household, and another to be able to interpret it fully upon acknowledging the gendered nature of the behaviors observed. The latter results in contextualizing the findings and prevents any researcher-imposed artificial labeling of the observed patterns of behavior. Despite the centrality of the gendered (and not biological) differences observed between men and women in households, there is no comprehensive review of the enactment of gender in the household. It is the purpose of this paper to fill that gap by providing a review of research that has observed differences between men and women in production and consumption rituals in households.

## **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

We will discuss "traditional gender roles" in the sense that they represent family hierarchies as first studied by consumer researchers in the 1950s. This "traditional" positioning is similar to what Parsons (1949, 1964) labeled "instrumental and expressive functions," in which husbands embrace the responsibility for providing for the family and wives embrace the

legacy of meeting the everyday needs of the family members. This "functional" perspective (or consumer research's notion of "traditional") may be quite limited in scope historically. Janeway (1971) noted that the notion of "the home" as a distinct sphere of life, as a stronghold of family and leisure, did not exist before the eighteenth century in Europe. Connell (1987) noted that the notion that women ought to be dependent on men would have seemed absurd in the context of the reciprocities of village agriculture and commercial towns, and that the gender-division construction of "breadwinner" and "housewife" has never been a reality for much of the working class.

Allen and Walker (2000) noted that the functionalist perspective is based on a narrow slice of history in the United States, peaking in popularity in the 1890s, at the height of the industrial era. "Prior to the 1940s, wage work for women was invisible; the labor participation of working-class and minority women was ignored, while middle-class women earned money in ways that were concealed from the economy, such as taking in boarders" (Bose 1987, p. 270). The post WWII era brought a resurgence of the functionalist view of gendered-segregated roles in the family. The 1950s were a strange decade in U.S. history, as there was a backlash to the temporary empowerment of women when they entered the workforce in large numbers during WWII. The gender conflict faced after the war resulted in the return of most middle class women to their "place" in the home. These traditional "inside/outside" roles are still prevalent in parts of the U.S. as well as across the world.

Firat's (1994) perspective of the separation of the home(stead) and the workplace in post-agrarian United States includes the notion that production was delegated to the public domain and was attributed positive values such as useful and creative. The home was for recreation, leisure, and consumption, and those in the private domain did not work. Though we now use the term "non-paid work" in discussing domestic labor, these domestic activities have been devalued because of their association with women and of the greater "usefulness" associated with work in the public domain. Daniels (1987) described "family work" as unseen and unacknowledged because it is private, unpaid, commonplace, done by women, and mingled with love and leisure.

The functionalist perspective of inside/outside roles has been questioned due to the dynamic nature of "gender." Risman (1998, p. 157) noted that gender is a "human invention and is subject to re-invention and re-creation." Similarly, Allen and Walker (2000, p. 4) noted that "although gender is a dominant structural force in families, it is constructed and reconstructed on a daily basis in private relationships." In Marketing, Ferber and Birnbaum (1980, p. 269) suggested that since "there is a diminishing utility for professional and house work, spouses are likely to find a more balanced sharing of housework beneficial, and the husband may enjoy getting to know the children better." Sussman (1993, p. 312) predicted that changes within the family will not revert to the old superordinate/subordinate pattern, but rather that equity and sharing will grow in both prevalence and incidence in the coming years. As we will see in the next section, the sharing of housework prediction appears to have little support, but fathers in the 1990s did spend significantly more time with their children than their fathers did with them (Gardyn 2000).

Firat (1994) predicted that post-modernity would be associated with the break between gender and sex categories, arguing that feminine and woman and masculine and man are no longer seen as exclusive representations [what Risman (1998) also referred to as *gender vertigo*]. Part of what is causing this change is the empowerment of the consumer (traditionally the woman) as consumption is becoming "the production and signification of one's self-image" (Firat 1994, p. 217).

While the research cited above would suggest that there is a blurring of gender, whether that is observable in household interactions with the marketplace remains to be established. We will review the family literature in Consumer Research to see how gender differences have been observed (measured) in terms of household production and consumption behaviors. Then we will make the case that the behaviors reported in such research may not be indicative of the underlying gendered differences; for example, though the husband may do much of the cooking or dress a child in the morning, the wife may still be responsible for menu planning or purchasing the child's clothes. Next we will look at the gendered nature of family conflict. Much of this literature comes from sociology, and will deal far more with household production issues than consumption issues. We conclude with a discussion of avenues for future research aimed at understanding how doing gender in the household is undergoing change.

## **GENDER IN HOUSEHOLD DECISION-MAKING**

As noted earlier, in nearly all societies, there has been an inside/outside dichotomy. Women, due to the stronger link to young children because of the birth process and to their generally smaller physiques, have been assigned roles inside the home, while men have been responsible for the outside roles, whether it was the provision of fresh meat, financial dealings with others, or, more recently, yard work. Thus, men have fulfilled the more instrumental family roles while women have traditionally fulfilled the more nurturing, supportive roles. To a great extent, these sex-differentiated roles have become perpetuated without being questioned sufficiently as to their appropriateness to modern (or post-modern) society.

### **Gender as Noted in Outcome Research**

The stream of research investigating family consumer decisions offers insight into changing family dynamics. Much of the early work focused on decision roles and provided results consistent with the provider/instrumental/financial officer role for men and the nurturing/supportive/home role for women. As will be discussed below, patterns changed for some households with the entry of women into the work force, but less so for more traditional sub-cultures. For example, Webster's (1994) study of Hispanic-Americans found the relatively simple inside/outside dichotomies that had been found among Anglo-Americans thirty years earlier. The gender perspective that seemed to underlie this stream of research is that of the gendered-self, and the implicit assumption was that men and women embrace household responsibilities consistent with respective biologically-based capabilities.

The changing work status of women in the 1970s and 1980s stimulated a great deal of research concerning decision roles and shifts in role responsibilities. In part, this research may reflect the assumption that roles within the family were expected to change as the wife entered the outside domain. Cunningham and Green (1974) found that decision roles had shifted, with there being more shared decision making for cars, vacations, and housing, but with the wife having more decision-making role in terms of food and groceries while the husband's influence had increased in the case of insurance. Belch, Belch, and Ceresino (1985), however, found rather "traditional" roles with men making the decisions for automobiles and televisions, and women dominating the purchase of appliances, furniture, and cereal. In other words, such investigations indicated that while men and women may take on new structural roles, their allegiance to masculinity and femininity respectively remains undeterred. Such assertions can be challenged (as will be discussed in detail toward the end of the paper) as they are steeped in an assumption that social actions result in the same outcomes for men and women and all that is of interest is who is performing those actions, not whether the actions mean different things for men and for women given how the meanings are uniquely socially constructed.

Much of the research dealing with the impact of the wife's changing work status on family decision-making was based on the fairly simple premise that working wives would be more time crunched, and would seek "time-saving" products and services in order to fulfill traditional gender roles. The assumption implicit here was that women would be compelled to continue to enact their feminine household roles and, therefore, time saving durables will allow them to take on new roles without relinquishing old ones. Such investigations did not reveal any conclusive evidence (see Commuri and Gentry 2000 for a recent review of findings in this stream of research). It is possible that we have not been able to find any conclusive evidence of, say, how households manage time (and which time-managing and timesaving strategies work and which do not) because we have adopted a gender-free lens to investigate that problem. Given that gender is a social construction, it is possible that when a woman spends time outside the home, neither she nor the rest of her family feel a need for a prorated compensation via freeing-up time at home. In other words, when a woman spends time away from housework, is that in addition to the time she spends at home or is that at the cost of the time she should have spent at home? When we assume that human actors are free from gendered skins, there is no need to ask that question. However, given that genders have been assigned primary responsibilities for various roles in a household (as discussed earlier), it is imperative that we use a gendered lens when we investigate behaviors that may carry gender overtones (please see Bristol and Fischer 1993 for an elaborate discussion of this argument).

From a gendered perspective, it can be proposed that when a wife spends time outside the home, she (and possibly others around her) may perceive such an activity to be at the cost of the time she should have spent at home. Under such circumstances, we can see why there has been little evidence that husbands take over traditionally "female" household

roles. Berk and Berk (1979), Meissner et al. (1975), Pleck and Rustad (1980), Robinson (1977), and Walker and Woods (1976) found husbands' behavior regarding household production to be the same regardless of the wife's working status. For example, DeVault (1997) found that working wives reported doing more housework than did single mothers. Such findings only make sense when inspected through a gendered lens; without such a lens, "all the talk about egalitarian ideology, abstract beliefs about what women and men 'ought to do' are not connected with the division of family work" (Thompson and Walker 1989, p. 857). Using a gendered lens, Allen and Walker (2000, p. 7) concluded "there is no better predictor of the division of household labor than gender. Regardless of one's attitude about 'gender' roles, the resources one brings to the relationship, and the time one has available, there is nothing that predicts who does what and how much one does in families than whether one is a woman or a man."

In marketing and consumer behavior, even when efforts were made to understand the roles of femininity and masculinity, the constructs were often reduced to a single measure of sex-role orientation. Green and Cunningham (1970) were the first to examine this variable in the context of consumer behavior while Scanzoni (1977) made the strongest effort to outline the relevance of shifts in gender roles for consumer behavior. Scanzoni identified two key demographic and social changes that bear relevance to gender roles: (1) women defining their paid employment in the same terms as men and (thus) (2) a change in relationships between men and women. Subsequently, Qualls (1982) found that not only did sex roles affect the distribution of influence and the extent of interaction within the family, but that they also accounted for differences in the reports of relative influence. Similarly, Rosen and Granbois (1983) found that sex-role attitudes and education were the most relevant determinants of how finances were handled within the household.

One significant departure from this general conclusion regarding "traditional" divisions of domestic labor is the phenomenon of a "gender switch" occurring in later life or as Gottman (1979) concluded, a decline in gender differences in later life. Within consumer research, Webster and Rice (1996) found that, upon retirement, a shift in power favoring women occurs, but only in cases where the incomes of the couples were significantly unequal before retirement. In other words, while men and money have been associated closely in our research (given the underlying gendered-self perspective), one can call for a decoupling of those two and suggest that household research should include independent variables that are not coupled with sex.

### **Gender as Noted in Process Research**

As mentioned earlier, the emphasis on household behaviors may not represent a true picture of gender in household responsibilities. Komter (1989) argued that the focus on observable outcomes diverted attention from the underlying processes. Even if women receive help in domestic chores from family members, many women report that they need to supervise such help (Berheide 1984). Similarly, DeVault (1997) noted that even in households in which husbands did most of the cooking, the wife was still the household manager and controlled most planning functions related to cooking.

Some women found it easier to do the housework themselves than to get other family members to do it to their standards. In a study of fairly "egalitarian" dual-career couples, Coltrane (1989, p. 480) found there were at least six frequently performed household chores over which the mother retained almost exclusive managerial control and made sure they were performed adequately. In general, mothers were more likely than fathers to act as managers for cooking, cleaning, and child care, even though half of the couples said that they "shared" responsibility in these areas. Helper-husbands often waited to be told what to do, when to do it, and how it should be done. Schwartz (1998) found that, among couples with high-earning career wives, men felt their partners were entitled to do less housework, but did little to integrate an egalitarian process. Ehrensaft (1987) found that women usually bought children's clothes and made sure they looked presentable, even when the father actually dressed the child. Hertz (1986) found that, even in high earning couples that hired housework done by others, the ultimate responsibility for household management still fell to the wives.

Without a gendered perspective, it is easy to propose attributions of expertise as bases for such divisions of labor. However, as Twiggs, McQuillan, and Ferree (1999) found, where men participate substantially in household chores, they must cross a series of hierarchical gendered thresholds in order to become high participators. It was not merely an issue of who was good at what but an issue of who is supposed to be seen doing what. For example, the lowest level tasks, or those that appear to be more gender neutral, include doing dishes and going grocery shopping, while at the high end is cooking meals. Therefore, husbands and wives do not easily take on a task if it calls for crossing a gender boundary. Even when

they suggest that they are involved in a task, it may be important to look beyond and verify that involvement includes an actual responsibility for the tasks.

### GENDER, LEISURE, AND DOMESTIC LABOR

Work in sociology has moved beyond the "who does what" question to investigate why the male/female divisions of domestic labor have changed so little, despite the prominent change in the gendered role of paid work. Given that neither men nor women perceive household tasks as constituting leisure (and in fact, women are far less likely to view them as such (Shaw 1988)), the fact that women are making strides in paid work outside the home yet hold primary accountability for household tasks could be a reflection of a masculine hegemony.

Though it was initially perceived "that leisure was leisure and what applied to males also applied to females" (Henderson 1990, p. 230), recent work has begun to acknowledge the variance between men and women in emic perspectives on leisure. Men see leisure being constrained by the level of paid work whereas women, even those in the work force, see leisure constrained by domestic labor responsibilities (Firestone and Shelton 1994). Thus, women are less likely to see a work/leisure dichotomy, and are likely to combine "leisure" with family activities (Henderson 1990). Women's traditional leisure activities (such as crafts, sewing, knitting, gardening, reading, cooking, and crocheting) are often associated with short time blocks that fit with domestic labor, whereas men's leisure is usually associated with much longer time blocks (including activities such as golf, hunting, fishing, and attending sports events). Women's leisure may be found in the community or time spent with family, and is perceived to be less free from constraints, while men's leisure is more self-involving and free of constraints. Because of the overlays of women's leisure with their domestic work, it was found that though it may appear that domestic work is typically free from supervision and criticism (Allen and Walker 2000), women's leisure is closely monitored (Henderson 1990). Thus, while domestic labor is not "leisure," it can be integrated with activities that are more enjoyable.

Since neither men nor women actually perceive household work as leisure, it is typically regarded as worrisome, tiresome, menial, repetitive, isolating, unfinished, inescapable, and often unappreciated (Allen and Walker 2000; Berheide 1984; DeVault 1987; Ferree 1984). It has been observed that when men "help" out, they usually do so by selecting some of the nicer household tasks such as playing with children while wives prepare meals or clean up. One of the reasons why men do not actively engage in domestic work has been found to be a matter of standards. Since women hold primary accountability for household tasks, there is a certain eagerness on women's part to have such tasks accomplished to their standards. Wives often complain about the quality of husband's housework and childcare (Lamb, Pleck, and Levine 1986). Further, given that femininity is often intimately tied with being a woman, Coltrane (1989) observed that some mothers found that relinquishing control over the management of home and children made them uncomfortable. Thompson and Walker (1989, p. 859) explain that, when women criticize their husbands' work in the household, they are protecting threatened territory. The home is the woman's dominion, and many women are reluctant to share control over the one domain in which they have power. In other words, some women do not wish to *not* do their gender.

A second reason why men do so little housework, even when they support the idea attitudinally, is that such men do not wish to do a gender that *they* are not. In other words, they do not want to do gender inappropriately. Coltrane (1989) reported that dual-career fathers' talk of spending time with their children was perceived by co-workers as indicating they were not serious about their work. These fathers reported receiving indirect messages that, for a man, providing for the family was primary and being with family was secondary. Further, over half of the dual-career couples reported receiving negative feedback from their own parents regarding their division of domestic labor when the man was actively involved in it, with most feedback indicating that the wife should quit work and stay home with the kids. Men and women who do gender *inappropriately* are thus prone to societal sanctions. Coltrane (1989, p. 473) concluded that while fathers typically derive a gendered sense of self from begetting, protecting, and providing for children, "their masculinity is even more dependent *on not* doing the things that mothers do." Kynaston (1996, p. 227) noted that "women may be called upon to do 'men's' work when necessary, but only women will ever do 'women's' work."

A more important perspective in understanding the meaning of domestic labor has been proposed by Ferree (1990). While resource models tend to see housework as an unmitigated "bad" that anyone with power would avoid doing, from a gender perspective, doing housework is understood as an expression of love and care. Ferree (1990, 1991) suggested that the creation of gender can be thought of as the creation of a division of labor between the sexes and that it shows that a wife's level of psychic identification with housework as well as her husband's expectations relate to important differences in practical equality. Thus, more important than actual spousal time discrepancies are differences among women in their feelings about housework and their perceptions of the division of labor (Blaire 1993).

### **GENDER AND CONSUMPTION-RELATED CONFLICTS**

The topic of "family" has long been associated with "conflict;" Scanzoni (1979) noted that the greater the relationship is, the greater is the inevitability of conflict. From a research perspective, this association of "family" and "conflict" has no doubt been exacerbated by what Hirschman (1993) referred to as the prevailing masculine research paradigm in consumer research, one which focuses on competition as opposed to cooperation. Commuri and Gentry (2000) argued that most family research has been undertaken from a fairly sterile, competitive perspective, implying an "either/or" mentality on the part of the spouses. For example, Qualls (1988, p. 443) stated, "Influence is defined in the present study as the perception of the action taken by one spouse to obtain his or her most preferred decision outcome while simultaneously stopping the attainment of their spouses' most preferred outcomes." While which gender wins a decision task or conflict has captured our research interest, the gendered interactions during the process, on the other hand, have been ignored. The consumer literature on household conflict in purchase contexts is somewhat limited, and the incorporation of gender perspectives within it is even more limited. There were strong early efforts (Granbois 1963; Pollay 1968) to develop frameworks for studying conflict resolution in families, but little subsequent work was undertaken. Further, the models discussed several strategies with little coverage of how they varied by gender. However, some strategies such as Pollay's (1968) discussion of the use of sex as a bargaining tool did carry gender implications.

A bigger focus of family conflict research in general has been the allocation of household production responsibilities, a very relevant topic for marketers given the concern about who uses household products and who makes the purchase decisions for them. DeVault (1997, p. 190) asserted that "overt conflict over who will do housework is surprisingly rare." Yet, when researchers place couples in tasks dealing with the allocation of domestic labor, conflict is very evident. For example, Pleck (1985) found that, when asked about it, one-third of the wives in his sample expressed the desire that husbands do more housework, and over one-half of the husbands sensed that wives expected more of them. Kluwer, Heesink, and Van de Vliert (1996) concluded that marital conflict comes from such discrepancies between actual and preferred labor division and that such discrepancies lead to dissatisfaction.

The inequity in the distribution of domestic labor results in men striving to maintain the status quo and in women striving for change. Several observational studies of marital conflict show that under such conditions, women exhibit greater emotional expressiveness whereas men rely on factual explanations or excuses (Margolin and Wampold 1981); women generate more negative affect and behavior than do men (Notarius and Johnson 1982; Raush et al. 1974); women are confronting and demanding whereas men are avoiding and withdrawing (Black 2000; Christensen and Heavey 1990; Heavey, Layne, and Christensen 1993); and women are more negative-active in their conflict management strategies than men who are more positive-passive (Hojjat 2000). Thus, we would expect that men would attempt to avoid change to protect their positions, or will withdraw from any attempts to get them to change (Jacobson 1983, 1989).

In Marketing, Spiro (1983) studied the influence strategies used by husbands and wives in resolving disagreements concerning purchase decisions and found that women were more likely to be "non-influencers" or especially "emotional influencers," while men were slightly more likely to be "light" or "subtle influencers." Thompson and Walker (1989) summarize the conflict process somewhat similarly, with wives often using more emotional appeals and coercion, while husbands tend to remain reasonable and calm, problem-oriented, and conciliatory, but largely trying to postpone or end the dispute. Similarly it was found that, while a wife begins a conversation by stating the issues (Ball, Cowan, and Cowan

1995), when husbands begin a conversation, they leave the elaboration and the guidance of the disagreement to the wife (Gottman and Krokoff 1989).

Gender differences were also noted in the "control" of the dispute and in how one communicates. Wives usually build a climate of agreement, and they also escalate or de-escalate the conflict with their verbal and non-verbal negativity (Thompson and Walker 1989). In "distressed" families, no one seems to temper the negative opinions expressed. Vuchinich (1987) found that daughters and especially mothers were the most active family members in closing off conflicts. Mothers made two-thirds of the compromises while daughters made about one-half of the submissions.

Tracing how such terminal stances are arrived at, Ball et al. (1995) found that both spouses agreed that wives were more active during the initial mobilization phase and that the husband had the "final say" over whether a decision was reached. However, in the middle phase, each spouse singled himself/herself as having the most influence in the way his or her interaction was structured. In particular, it was found that men and women differed with respect to the meaning of keeping their problem-solving discussions "focused." Most men defined "focus" as the ability to stay on the topic *originally raised*, whereas most women described "focusing in" on the real issues and getting to the bottom of things.

Viewing this through a gendered lens, it can be seen that the structure of the task explains the nature of the results quite well. The wife is more enthusiastic initially, as she has something to gain, but the husband has veto power as it is his behavior that would need to change. In other words, husbands seek to maintain the status quo (which favors them) rather than to make changes; Rausch et al. (1974) found that men attempt to keep a discussion on a track when it does not upset their feelings or disturb the status quo. Even in the mobilization stage in which wives were seen as dominating, wives noted that husbands were able to exert their control largely through a lack of active engagement. Based on Gramsci's (1971) concept of Ideological Hegemony, Komter (1989) theorized that prevailing everyday thought promotes social cohesion by masking contradictions and allows no real choice. Husbands enjoy the "benefits of marriage" (Allen and Walker 2000, p 16) which provide latent power and which induce no desire to change. Husbands' latent power can be used to prevent issues from being raised, which no doubt explains in part the lack of evidence of overt conflict. As Whisman and Jacobson (1990) noted, power or influence comes not only from talk and persuasion but also from not listening or not responding to what one's partner is saying. In a Marketing context, Lee and Beatty (2002) found somewhat similar results in that for fathers and older children, the use of "gaze" was highly related to their level of relative influence, whereas for mothers and younger children, having their suggestions accepted was more directly linked to their levels of relative influence.

### **Suppression of Conflict**

Conflict is not a highly sought goal for most people, especially those in a relationship based on love. We argue that there is much need for work investigating conflict suppression processes in households. One stream of research that has investigated suppression of conflict has dealt with issues of equity or fairness. Although it seems reasonable that satisfaction with the division of labor would be determined by the actual division within the family, research indicates that this expectation is wrong: wives are not necessarily concerned with the total number of hours they spend on household labor, but are dissatisfied with inequality or inequity (Benin and Agostinelli 1988; Mederer 1993; Stohs 1995). Distributive justice theory provides a theoretical basis and empirical evidence for the use of equity, equality, or need as principles of justice in the family (Adams 1965; Deutsch 1975; Greenberg 1983; Peterson 1987; Sampson 1975).

What is equitable might be seen quite differently by family members. For example, in the Ball et al. (1995) study discussed earlier, both husbands and wives may be content with the second phase of the negotiation process because they saw themselves as being more influential. The different emics (of problem focusing in this case) allowed both spouses to be satisfied. Further, what is fair is different for husbands and wives, and the gendered meanings attached to domestic and paid work are important in understanding these differences (Wilkie, Ferree, and Ratcliff 1998). Studies conducted from the perspective of gender ideology indicate that the wife's gender ideology functions as lens through which inequalities in the division of household labor are viewed, and provide evidence that inequalities in the division of household labor are more strongly related to perceptions of unfairness for wives subscribing to an egalitarian sex-role ideology than for traditional wives (DeMaris and Longmore 1996; Greenstein 1996).

Thompson (1991) suggested that, to understand women's sense of fairness, researchers need to consider (a) valued outcomes other than time and tasks, (b) between- and within-gender comparison referents, and (c) gender-specific justifications for men's small contribution to family work. First, Thompson included interpersonal outcomes of family work rather than labor time and tasks as valued outcomes, suggesting that relationship outcomes such as care are more important than task outcomes. This line of reasoning is supported by empirical studies showing that husbands' contributions to "female" tasks and appreciation of women's household labor are very important determinants of wives' perceptions of fairness (Blair and Johnson 1992; Hawkins, Marshall, and Meiners 1995). Hochschild (1989), Kessler and McCrae (1982), Pina and Bengtson (1993), and Ross, Mirowsky, and Huber (1983) suggested that it is the "symbolic meaning" of husbands' willingness to share family work that is important to wives' assessment of fairness, rather than the actual amount of work done. Backett (1987), LaRossa and LaRossa (1981), and Wilkie, Ferree, and Ratcliff (1998) noted that the empathy needed to acknowledge the "pressures" in each others' lives (i.e., not thinking that the other has an easier time) can make the division of domestic labor appear fair to partners, even if they are not sharing work equally.

Second, concerning comparison referents, Thompson (1991) suggested that women make within-gender comparisons when they judge the fairness of family work and also make within-gender comparisons of their husbands' contributions. Van Yperen and Buunk (1991) show that the correlation between referential equity comparisons, which involve the comparison of marital inputs and outcomes mainly with same-sex others in some reference group, and relationship satisfaction is significantly higher than the correlation between relational equity comparison, which involves the comparison within the relationship, and satisfaction. This indicates that satisfaction with the relationship is influenced to a greater extent by the perception of being better off than same-sex others than by the perception of being equally well off with the partner.

Finally, Thompson (1991) suggests that women experience a strong sense of injustice when they find justifications unacceptable for the reasons and circumstances underlying their husbands' failures to contribute more to family work. Hawkins et al. (1995) found that deciding together how things would be divided is an indicator of wives' perceptions of fairness: when wives reported that the division of family work was something that was worked out together with their husbands, wives also reported the division of labor to be more fair. "Deciding together" was correlated both with more equitable arrangements of family work and with feelings of appreciation, both of which, in turn, were associated with perceptions of fairness.

Other evidence of conflict suppression is apparent in studies of atypical (but functional) families. Commuri (2000) reported evidence of efforts to "normalize" a marriage in the case of couples where the wives earn more than their husbands. Steil and Weltman (1991) found that, even when wives earn more, there is pervasive evidence that both spouses define the man as the primary provider. Rosen (1987) noted that many working class wives realize that their husbands' prides, authority, and manhoods are founded upon being the provider and thus willingly do whatever they can to preserve the image of the husbands as the bread-winners, even though the wives may be earning more than their husbands. One way that couples try to maintain the image of wives as secondary providers is to use husbands' salaries for the essentials and wives' salaries for extras (Commuri 2001). Thus, the managing of financial resources in the households studied by Commuri reveals how some households preserve traditional roles of masculinity and femininity in the household even when the *masculine* role of good provision is played by women.

### FUTURE RESEARCH NEEDS

Households today are in the midst of a myriad of changes in their composition, functions, and form. We argue that issues of gender are central to understanding the changes taking place in households, be it from a marketing perspective or a broader sociological perspective. Given that our review has dealt with a process that is yet changing, we may be witnessing a transitional period leading to very different gender processes in the households of future generations. At the same time, there are several other issues even of the present that have not received adequate research attention and this section of the paper will discuss a number of gender issues in need of such attention. While we do not claim that they are comprehensive, we do see large gaps between what we now know and what we should know.

### **The Use of a Broadened Gender Perspective**

As advocated by Connell (1987) and subsequently by Risman (1998), gender is both constructed and perpetuated at individual, interactional, and institutional planes. Correspondingly, the enactment and enforcement of gender can only be grasped if our research is directed at all three planes. Unfortunately, our discipline is yet in a stage of denial as far as gender is concerned. But for the noteworthy examples such as Hirschman (1993) and Bristor and Fischer (1993), our attention to differences between men and women continue to rest at just that – differences between men and women. We have neither questioned the bases of such differences nor have sought to use a gendered lens to interpret the mostly inconclusive and disparate findings of our investigations among men and women within a household. As Bristor and Fischer (1993) demonstrated, using a gendered lens may help us place our extant findings that have hitherto appeared inconclusive into perspective.

Therefore, a first future research need is to begin acknowledging that many of the differences between men and women that we are picking up in our investigations of consumption and production rituals within a household are neither biologically determined nor inevitable. In fact, it may be no exaggeration to propose that the incidence of sociological differences rather than biological differences is so rampant in our extant findings that it may even be safer to assume that the differences we are capturing are gendered until proven otherwise. Such an acknowledgement should then be followed by efforts to seek an explanation of such observed differences between men and women at the individual (biography, fears, and hopes), interactional (relationship and decision histories, social constructions of norms), and institutional (rewards and sanctions) levels.

Today, we are at a stage where it is acceptable for a researcher not to explain his/her findings about the differences between men and women, however inconclusive they may appear. Therefore, the first research need is not so much of what we should study but how we ought to study what we claim to be studying. The form of the household reviewed here is an experimentalist's dream come true – a unified setting with only one layer of contrasting variable – one man and one woman and everything else constant. Isn't it surprising that under such seemingly clean conditions we discover findings that are anything but conclusive? Not only have man-and-masculine and woman-and-feminine been intermingled as if they are one and the same, but they have also been completely stripped of their history and context. How can we ever aim to understand gendered interactions if we do not study and situate our findings within historical and social contexts within which the behavior of interest is situated? For example, it is one thing to declare that our investigations have revealed what happens when women make substantial financial contributions to their households and another to explain such findings in the context of how women's contributions have been regarded historically, how men with successful wives have felt historically, and how society has rewarded or punished men who are not the primary providers of their families. In other words, differences between men and women that are not biologically inevitable are quite meaningless unless they are explained in the context of a gender complex. Our first research need is to move toward a richer understanding of what we observe rather than merely reporting what an informant indicates in a paper-and-pencil task.

Reaching such an understanding is not impossible. For example, Manchanda and Moore-Shay (1996), using a combination of methods, investigated the types of power strategies used by boys and girls. Boys generally used high power strategies (asking, bargaining) while girls reported more switching from high power to low power strategies (persistence, begging and pleading, anger, etc.). Parents, on the other hand, rated girls as being more likely to use high power strategies than boys. Manchanda and Moore-Shay (1996) acknowledge that parents may be unwilling to admit that their children resort to less desirable strategies such as begging and pleading. At the same time, they also suggest that there may be an institutional explanation (p. 89), "perhaps the messages filtered down through other socialization agents such as the mass media and peers alter the more egalitarian messages parents wish to convey." It is a commentary on and an understanding of such multi-tiered (individual, interactional, and institutional) levels of analysis that will enrich our understanding of the differences we observe between men and women.

### **Gender Socialization**

It is also important that we consider gender issues beyond the level of spousal interaction. The dynamic shifts in family and the fuzzy nature of gender in post-modern (Firat 1994) society offer a multitude of interesting research questions that have not been investigated. Risman (1998, p. 133) noted that boys are routinely socialized to learn to work in teams and compete, and that girls are routinely socialized to value nurturing. Crouter, McHale, and Bartko (1993, p. 169) noted that "housework is perhaps the domain of family functions in which ideas about gender roles are played out, debated, or suppressed the most clearly." They found that fathers interacted with sons more than with daughters, especially in single-income households.

At the same time, what is masculine in the household may be changing due to the modified roles faced by boys growing up in single-parent households (and possibly in latchkey dual-income households). Bates and Gentry (1994) found that adolescent children were treated more as equals in single-parent households, and given more household responsibility. Twiggs et al. (1999) hypothesized that men coming from single-parent households are more likely to progress through gendered hierarchies. On the other hand, South and Spitze (1994) found that girls do much more housework than boys, especially in single-parent households. These are interesting changes in and of themselves but what makes them even more interesting is how they will affect the socialization of future generations into one gender or another. This is an area that is emergent and open to investigation.

### **Study of the "Gender Switch" Phenomenon**

While more investigation of gender issues concerning the young is needed, so should the gender switch phenomenon observed among the elderly (Dickson 2002; Gottman 1979; Webster and Rice 1996) be studied. The shift in power favoring women among the elderly would seem to be predicted by Resource Theory when only the consequences of the husband's loss of resources is considered. However, as Commuri (2001), Rosen (1987), and Steil and Weltman (1991) offer evidence of "normalization" processes occurring in households where the wife earns more, the failure to find a gender switch phenomenon may be better predicted by ideology. Thus, there appears to have been asymmetry in gendered role changes in the past as resource generation processes changed: wives have not seen major empowerment in family roles as they have generated greater financial resources, but men apparently see reason to empower their wives as they cease generating tangible resources upon retirement.

More research is needed concerning the playing of gender by elderly couples. If health concerns are major explanators, we would expect the phenomenon to be relatively stable in the future (unless we begin to see men living as long as women). On the other hand, if gender roles become more egalitarian in the post-modern world as predicted by Firat (1994), maybe the phenomenon will cease to be observed in future years. In any case, it has strong implications for decision-making in elderly households.

### **More Focus on Process rather than Outcome**

Much study of gender roles in the family has relied on large-scale secondary data bases involving thousands of households, investigating the division of labor for preparing meals, washing dishes and cleanup, cleaning the house, child care, and shopping. Twiggs et al. (1999) note that most quantitative studies in this area focus on the amount of domestic work done by men and women rather than the kinds of work they do. Focusing on the latter will tell a more complete story of what is considered gender appropriate tasks, whether barriers are being crossed and, perhaps, what trends to expect in the future. Twiggs et al.'s (1999) concept of hierarchical gendered thresholds provides a base for investigating the gendered nature of various tasks. This approach can be augmented by Bearden and Etzel's (1982) notion of public versus private consumption; they found that reference groups (in our context, we would substitute social norms) have far greater influence on public rather than private consumption. This would suggest that a highly visible task such as shopping might involve more difficult transitions for men than a more private task such as doing laundry. There is need for research on the allocations of individual tasks using a gendered lens to interpret the results.

Further, as noted earlier, there is need to look beyond reported behaviors to see who has the planning responsibilities, as that individual may be more likely to be the actual decider and/or purchaser. In addition, the issue of "standards" for domestic tasks needs much more investigation. Research is needed on how standards get set in the socialization process,

how they are negotiated, and the extent to which they are a basis for family conflict versus only a concrete manifestation of a more underlying latent family dynamic.

### **More Emphasis on the Husband's Perspective**

As noted earlier, "egalitarian" couples still have unequal distributions of household responsibilities, but there is evidence that husbands are increasing their parental efforts (Gardyn 2000). More investigation of "peer marriages" (those where partners are social equals, both have careers and share equal responsibility for finances and other decision making, and fathers play greater parenting roles; Schwartz 1998) is needed. Is the "peer" positioning primarily attitudinal, or are we going to see behavioral changes in terms of household roles? We would expect husbands in these arrangements to be pre-disposed to being open-minded and thus more susceptible to egalitarianism. More study is needed to determine which partner has more influence in sustaining traditional gendered relations. The gender perspective (Risman 1998) might predict that the one in power, which in patriarchal societies is the man, would have more interest in sustaining hegemony. The literature dealing with wives earning more than their husbands (Commuri 2001; Rosen 1987; Steil and Weltman 1991) provides evidence that these wives desire "normalcy" and are concerned about maintaining their husbands' "masculinities." Is it possible that the wife believes she is doing a favor for her husband by protecting his manhood when in actuality the man is far removed from such feelings? For example, Fischer (2000, p. 186) noted the deeply embedded feminine role: "The care-giving role in general, and the mothering role in particular, are among the most sanctified across a broad range of collectivities, even those where the notion of the patriarchal nuclear family is not resonant." These issues are not independent of marketing concerns, as household maintenance and production behaviors are so very central to how one plays gender in the family.

Much of the research to date has focused on the wife's attitudes and behaviors, and has implicitly assumed that husbands are content with the status quo. Safilios-Rothschild (1969) criticized the study of family life based primarily on information provided by wives, and labeled the phenomenon "wives' family sociology." This limited perspective of family has also been common in consumer research. More investigation of male behaviors, attitudes, and roles in the household is needed. Do they actively avoid responsibility (or shared responsibility) for household production? What institutional sanctions do they face if they do gender in non-traditional ways? Is the nature of those sanctions changing? Does the portrayal of men in commercials for household products reflect the current state of the American household (for instance, try to recall a commercial showing a husband cooking a meal in a competent manner)? The husband's household role is changing, but it has received less attention than the wife's role.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has focused on gender issues in consumer family research, with much emphasis being placed on household production concerns. At this point in history, family is a very dynamic construct, due in part to the almost continuous redefinition of gender in society. We conclude that traditional functional gender roles are still observable in non-traditional couples, but question whether this is an equilibrium state.

Clearly, increased levels of research are needed to monitor family decision making and particularly issues of gender that may lead to changes in traditional functional roles. We argue that there is a large gap between what is currently known and what needs to be known in order to market effectively to the dynamic American household.

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