The Family as a Problem Solving Entity

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Abstract

This paper studies the family as a problem solving entity within which distributions and allocations must be made concerning decision making power, resources, products, activities, and outcomes. A framework for decision making within each of these areas is presented and examples are illustrated. The paper addresses several possible factors which serve to influence the decisions made by the family. One possible influencing factor is that of equity. The concept of an allocation process based on the maintenance of equity among family members is discussed in detail in the second portion of the paper.
The Family as a Problem-Solving Entity

Decisions Made Within the Family

Families allocate resources to activities, products, and services in an attempt to achieve a desired pattern of outcomes distributed among the family members. Foa (1974, p. 36) defines a resource as "any commodity -- material or symbolic -- which is transmitted through interpersonal activity." He developed a resource structure consisting of six classes of resources: love, status, information, money, goods, and services. Likewise, Adams (1965) describes resources (the investments in an exchange) as the relevant attributes that are brought by a party to the exchange: skill, effort, education, training, experience, age, sex, and ethnic background. Within a social or familial context, resources may also include time, physical and emotional energy, opportunity, and cooperation.

Since all resources possessed by a family are limited, it is impossible to achieve all outcomes desired by all of the family members. Consequently, the family must function as a problem-solving entity to resolve conflicts which arise in the allocation process. Resources and outcomes in the family will be allocated across various family members in a manner which will meet the goals and objectives of the family members who hold the decision-making power concerning resources, outcomes, and the distribution of both. Factors affecting these value-dictated patterns, including ethnicity, culture and upbringing, will be discussed in a later section. The allocation of resources may favor a dominant family member (the father, mother, or child, depending on the culture, ethnic background, or other influences); it is also possible that allocations may be made on the basis of maintaining equality or equity among the family members.
Decisions concerning resources. Figure 1 illustrates the decision-making power possessed by the various family members, as well as the aspects of family decisions over which they hold power: resources, activities, products, and outcomes. The "resources" column of the decisions model represents the various resources held by each family member; these may include time, money, or opportunity. Members may or may not have control over the allocation of their own resources. Moreover, the use of a person's resources may be influenced by one, or a combination of family members. For example, the first column illustrates the mother's resource use being influenced equally by her husband and herself. However, the father may make decisions concerning his own resources, with less influence from the mother, thus reflecting an unequal allocation of decision power regarding the use of his resources in the model: the column showing the relative influence in the decisions for the fathers' resources shows eighty percent by the father, but only twenty percent by his spouse. An equal allocation of decision making power between the spouses concerning their individual resources may be illustrated by a pooling of incomes and an equal influence over decisions such as home and automobile purchases or how time on the weekends is to be spent. An unequal allocation of resource decision-making power would result in certain decisions not being made jointly.

The allocations of decision-making power, whether equal or unequal, will be a reflection of the culture, ethnicity, and background of each family. For example, in some cultures, it may be considered appropriate for the father to hold the decision-making power concerning the allocation of the resources of the entire family, while in others this situation may be unthinkable. In some instances, the children may have an influence over the use of their parents' resources; e.g., for family vacations, the children's clothing, recreation,
and other decisions where the outcome will affect the child.

Depending on the values and structure of the family, a child may or may not have a significant influence over his or her own resource use. For example, if a daughter has a paper route, she may have the power to determine how part of her earnings will be spent, or her mother may have the authority for this decision. Likewise, parents often dictate how a child's resources such as time and energy may be spent: piano lessons, homework, help around the house, or other activities. It is possible that the culture may dictate that as children grow older, they should have more decision-making responsibility concerning the allocation of their own resources (as depicted in Figure 1).

**Decisions concerning activities.** Other decisions made within the family concern activities and associated products and services for which resources will be allocated. Certain family members possess the authority to make the decisions concerning the activities for which resources will be allocated: who determines the activities to be undertaken, and by whom. For example, a family may come to the decision that a son will play a musical instrument. This decision may be determined by either the son or the parents; likewise, the decision of what instrument to play (what product to purchase) may be the decision of the son, mother, father, or some combination of the family members. This is depicted in the diagram: the son's activities column indicates that the decision concerning the son's activities (playing a musical instrument) is largely determined by the son, with a small amount of equal input from both parents.

**Decisions concerning products to be purchased.** Certain family members have the power to delegate exactly which products best fit the activities taking place. Using the previous example, the son may have the power to deter-
mine that he, in fact, will play an instrument, but the decision of exactly what instrument he will play, (product to be purchased) is mainly determined by the parents, with minimal influence on the decision from the son. Perhaps he would prefer to take up drumming, but the parents decide he will, instead, opt for trumpet lessons. In some instances, the activity may be a night of fun for the family (movies, bowling, dinner out). The products to be consumed during the pursuit of these activities may include a Disney movie at a conveniently located cinema, bowling shoes and balls for the entire family, or dinner at the mother's preferred restaurant with a trip to the children's favorite ice cream parlor for dessert. Examples of such decisions are depicted in the "products" column of Figure 1.

The decisions concerning which products to buy may be "assigned" to certain family members for certain products; this phenomenon may occur due to role specialization, expertise, or equity -- it may be a certain family member's "turn" to make a product purchasing decision. Studies by Davis and Rigaux (1974), present explanations for different power allocation patterns by defining various types of purchase decisions. Their studies reveal four basic types of decisions made in spousal relationships: wife dominant, husband dominant, syncratic, and autonomic. Wife dominant decisions are historically those concerning groceries, furniture, and small appliances; husband-dominated decisions have traditionally consisted of life insurance, lawn mowers, and tires.

Some decisions made within the family are decided upon jointly, perhaps due to the fact that more than one member of the household is affected by the decision. These decisions, called syncratic, may include determining where the family will spend vacations, what movies they will see, or what type housing or automobile they will purchase.

Autonomic decisions are used in purchasing products for which different
families make their decisions in different ways. In the study by Davis and Rigaux (1974, p. 53), the authors classify autonomic decisions as those made syncratically by "less than fifty percent" of families. In one family, the decision may be arrived at jointly (a syncratic decision), while in other families the decision may be made by the husband or wife alone. An example of an autonomic decision may be the purchase of a necktie; in some families neckties may be purchased by the wife, in others by the husband, while in still others the purchase may be made jointly. Other examples may include alcoholic beverages and garden tools (Davis and Rigaux, 1974, p. 54).

Decisions concerning outcomes. Another allocation decision which must be made by the family concerns the outcomes resulting from the decision to allocate resources in a given pattern to activities, and to the products consumed during those activities. The power to determine the allocation of various outcomes for each family member should be distributed across the family members in a manner that reflects their value system. For example, the parents may hold the decision-making power to determine the outcomes for the children. These outcomes may be the ability to play a musical instrument, an appreciation of art or nature, or a more well-rounded personality. Depending on the family, the decision-making power to allocate outcomes will vary, as will the outcomes desired by the decision-maker. Examples may be noted in the "outcome" column of Figure 1.

Resources Allocated Within the Family

Within a family, any member's resources may be allocated across the other members; this allocation may differ by family. As with the allocation of decision-making power, resource allocation may be guided by several antecedents including ethnicity, culture, or geographic region. These influ-
ences will shape and define the patterns by which families and their members allocate resources.

*FIGURE 2*

The mother's resources may include her money, time, energy, and affection. However, in order to simplify the example, discussion will be limited to the resource of time. Thus, various ways in which the mother may allocate her time, whether it be for herself or other family members, are depicted in Figure 2. The mother may allocate part of her time to herself, dedicate much of it to her husband, while evenly dividing the remainder among her children. This can be seen in the row marked "time;" 100% of the mother's time has been allocated across the family members. Likewise, allocation of her energy, affection, and other resources will be distributed in some manner across the family members (as depicted in Figure 2).

Likewise, there are several ways the father may distribute his time. He may allocate his time largely to himself and his son, while donating little or no time to his wife and daughter (as depicted in Figure 2). This may reflect a culture that places a great emphasis on father-son relationships, while father-daughter interaction may not be regarded as important.

The resources (time, in this case) of the children must also be allocated. Their resources may be allocated to themselves, perhaps for recreation, (play time or participating on a sports team). The child's time may, instead, be allocated to another family member. For example, the child may be required by the parents to spend his or her time practicing a musical instrument, helping out around the house, or studying for school. In each case, individual members of families will allocate their time and other resources according to their values, as determined by factors including ethnicity, culture and background.
These factors, (ethnicity, culture and background) may place emphasis on equity within the family as a guide for resource allocation. As in the Anderson, Berger, Zelditch, Jr. and Cohen cases, where a balance of equity is sought by the subjects, a family member may put forth effort in order to keep exchanges "fair". For example, a child who is allocated more resources by the parents, (a car, own room, piano lessons) may attempt to balance the equity by donating more of his or her own resources to the family or parent (help around the house, good behavior). In the same manner, parents may provide extra resources (trips to the movies, spending money) to a child who behaves well or excels in school. Each exchange which is directed and/or influenced by the desire for a balanced (equitable) outcome is guided by the values in the family or individual; these values are an integral force in determining the distribution of equity in personal and familial exchanges.

It is interesting to note that within families, members may "swap" or exchange resources. This can be seen in the case of the children. A daughter may come to an agreement with her brother to exchange ways in which they use their time. For example, the daughter may agree to take out the trash for her brother if he will wash the dishes for her. Similarly, exchange members may opt to swap different resources, i.e., the daughter may give the son a portion of her allowance to wash the dishes for her (i.e., money for time). These exchanges may occur between any combination of family members and may involve any type of resource. Again, the exchanges may be guided by the influencing factors previously mentioned in this paper.

Activities and Products Allocated within the Family

Activities allocated within the family. Families and their members may engage in various activities. Some examples of how the members may spend their time include recreational activities, educational activities, time spent
with the family, or professional development. This paper will address the allocation of discretionary time: time available after the regular forty hours on the job or time attending school (in the case of the children). Each member of the family will spend his or her time on activities chosen by or delegated to him or her.

*FIGURE 3*

It may be the case that the mother dedicates her time to activities mostly involving the family, while spending very little time for herself alone (as depicted in Figure 3). This type of allocation for the mother may be a reflection of her culture, upbringing, or some other influence. Likewise, in some cultures and areas, the father is expected to devote much of his time to his career. In this case, the father may devote nearly all his discretionary time to professional development, while dividing the small remainder between time with the family and time for himself alone (Figure 3).

It is commonly seen that children spend more time on recreation than parents do. Although children have this in common, individuals may be influenced to allocate their time differently. For example, the oldest daughter (Girl number 1) may devote a large part of her time to education (in addition to the regular hours spent in classes). It may also be that this daughter devotes a larger portion of her time to the family in comparison to the other children, leaving her less time to devote to her own recreation (Figure 3). This may be an example of a culture or region in which the daughter is expected to do most of the work around the house (cleaning, babysitting her younger brother and sister) while maintaining exemplary performance in school. The younger sister and brother spend more time, respectively, on recreation and less on education. This could be a result of their ages, for example, the son may be at the age where his time is mostly devoted to himself (Figure 3).
Products allocated within the family. In many cases, the allocation of activities within the family will lead to the purchase and allocation of products. In a past example, it was determined by the parents (the parents held the decision-making power) that the son would play a musical instrument. It was also determined that this instrument would be a trumpet. The chosen activity therefore led to the purchase of a product (the trumpet). The converse may also be true, i.e., the purchase of a product may lead to activities. For example, a parent may purchase a park pass, which will lead to time spent in the park. This may also be true in the case where the father brings home a dog (purchases a product) which will lead directly to activities spent by various family members. For example, the children may devote part of their time to playing with and exercising the dog, while the mother may feed it and spend part of her time and money taking it to the vet.

Outcomes Allocated within the Family

The allocation of resources, activities, and products within the family will lead directly to the outcomes of each family member; however, it is also possible that these allocations may stem from predetermined outcomes for the various family members. For reasons of convenience, this paper will classify outcomes within the framework of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954). Due to the fact that outcomes are limited, this paper will use a total of 100 "points" which may be allocated in any fashion over the various family members (see Figure 4). These points represent not the outcomes themselves, but rather a weighting of outcome importance as judged by the family members who hold the decision-making power concerning outcomes within the family. It may be possible that certain family members will receive a greater number of points in various rows, as well as receiving a greater allocation overall in comparison to other family members. These allocations may be results of influences
such as social class, ethnicity, or culture; different antecedents may lead to variations concerning what the family decision-makers desire as outcomes for the various family members. Certain cultures may value, for the girls in the family, a greater emphasis on social and affiliation needs, while desiring self-actualization for the sons of the family (as depicted in Figure 4).

*FIGURE 4*

It may be seen in Figure 4 that the cells in the matrix add up to a total of 100 points. These points may be totaled by columns in order to determine which family members are receiving the greatest points where allocation of outcomes is concerned. The decision-maker may feel a great desire for Girl number 1 to have every opportunity to self-actualize, as may be seen in Figure 4; however, self-actualization by Girl number 1 may never be achieved.

Basis for Allocation Profiles

Families must solve allocation problems concerning resources, activities, products, and outcomes. A family's values will stipulate appropriate problem-solving methods, as well as the allocation patterns concerning decision-making, and resource, activity, product, and outcome allocation. These values should reflect regional differences, ethnicity, social class, and culture. The result may be an allocation pattern that favors a dominant family member. This may be seen in families whose culture emphasizes the importance of certain family members. The families may be male, female, or child dominant, depending on the orientation of the family and its culture. For example, certain cultures place a greater emphasis than others on the male-dominant role. This should be reflected in the allocation profiles of the family; in some cultures this may reflect a father or husband dominant profile. Other differences in culture may include the role of the children. It may be the case that children are considered members of the family who should be "seen
and not heard." However, in the American culture, there is a greater emphasis placed on the importance of children's involvement within the family. Children in the U.S. are also given more influence over their own resources and the decisions made regarding these resources.

It is also possible that the family may value an equal allocation among the family members (all members are allocated the same amount of resources.) Another possibility for allocation patterns may be an allocation based on equity. This would require more allocation to the family members who contribute a greater amount to the family.

Equity as a Basis for Family Decision Making

Definition of Equity

An equitable relationship, as defined by Walster, Walster, and Bersheid (1973), is said to exist when a person scrutinizing the relationship from within the exchange or as a third party perceives that all participants are receiving equal relative outcomes from the relationship. In such a relationship, \[
\frac{\text{outcomes of } A}{\text{inputs of } A} = \frac{\text{outcomes of } B}{\text{inputs of } B}
\] (1973). This simple formula defining equity was first proposed by Adams and has been adopted by several researchers; Pritchard (1969, pg. 177) defines equity in a similar manner: "Equity is said to occur when Person perceives that the ratio of his outcomes to his inputs is equal to other's outcome/input ratio." A problem arises, however, due to the fact that a given ratio may be perceived differently by each person evaluating the exchange; one subject may deem an exchange as "fair," another may view it as inequitable. This is possible due to differences in perception of the exchange partners, as well as the multidimensional nature of outcomes. This is illustrated by the equation: outcomes

\[
\text{outcomes } = W_1X_1 + W_2X_2 + \ldots + W_nX_n
\]

where \( W_1 \) represents the weight a subject applies to the outcome number 1 from a certain exchange, \( X_1 \) represents the level of outcome.
received from sub-outcome number one (this may be perceived differently by the members of the exchange), and \( W_nX_n \) indicates the possibility of a sub-outcome perceived by at least one of the exchange partners, but not necessarily all members of the exchange. A subject's perception of his or her outcomes will depend on the assigned weights of the outcome, the perceived level of equity of the outcome, and the perceived presence of additional, different outcomes.

The Role of Values in Equity

According to Anderson, Berger, Zelditch Jr., and Cohen (1969), there are two basic notions regarding the role value plays in the equity of an exchange: (1) individuals have what they regard as legitimate expectations about how rewards should be allocated, and (2) if such expectations are violated there is an effort put forth for a social change. In their theory, unbalanced situations develop strains and pressures for change, while balanced situations are stable. The decision as to whether a situation is adequately "stable" is dependent upon each individual and his or her own values. Factors influencing these values and desired outcome include gender, age (generation), education, upbringing, societal values, ethnicity, and social class. Equity research has shown that, generally, members in an exchange tend to favor a "balance" in the equity of the relationship. This can be compared to a mental "T-account" in which the individual will keep a record of debits (subject's outcomes, equal to what the subject owes) and credits (the subject's inputs, equal to what is owed to the subject). The research study conducted by Anderson, Berger, Zelditch Jr. and Cohen (1969) supports this hypothesis.

This research team focused on Adams' hypothesis that when an individual in a work environment is overpaid, he will produce more work than an equitably paid subject. The study indicated the following: in a inequitable situation, the subject feels under pressure to reduce his imbalance; however, if working
for a fixed pay per time unit he cannot reduce his total outcome. He can, however, attempt to produce more than he believes the equitably paid subject will; the subject thereby earns less per unit of output (Anderson, Berger, Zelditch, Jr., and Cohen 1969). The study went on to note that, in agreement with the findings of Adams, when subjects were paid at piece rates, those who were overpaid turned out less work, but of a higher quality than the equitably paid subjects. The subject, in this instance, created a lower salary for himself per time unit. The effort put forth in each instance indicates a pressure to create a balance in personal exchange situations.

Equity Pattern as a Guide for Resource and Outcome Allocation

In addition to the role played by values, equity patterns act as guides for resource and outcome distribution. The term equity is dynamic: a restoration of equity is required when equilibrium is disturbed. However, equity is not equal to equality (Keil and McClintock, 1983). This concept deals with the multidimensional qualities and characteristics of inputs and outcomes in an exchange situation. It is widely assumed that, in order to achieve equity, an exchange partner's outcome should be proportional to his input - not necessarily equal. This rule is not always applicable; special considerations must be made in the cases where input is multidimensional.

As stated by Farkas and Anderson, "In many social situations a person's deservingness depends not only on concrete accomplishment but also on how hard the person tried" (1979, pg. 879). The study also questioned how a one-dimensional outcome can be proportional to a two-dimensional input. This may apply to situations where a person tried hard but accomplished little, or accomplished a great deal with little effort. "Comparisons of effort, suffering, or importance indicate that the establishment of fairness or equity involves interpersonal comparison of subjective quantities" (Messick and Sentis 1983,
Not only is effort a factor in the perceived value of inputs, but also seniority, age, education, and family background (Adams 1965). Many characteristics of the exchange partner may have an effect on the perceived value of resources given to the exchange; effort, intentions, and even need may be considered along with actual performance. Farkas and Anderson propose a theory called "equity integration" (1979, pg. 880) to handle the multidimensional input. This process involves comparing the exchange partners on only one dimension at a time. Another suggestion made by this study is to apply weights to specific inputs, thus emphasizing them in the equations. Adams, (1965) however, subscribes to a different method for dealing with the problem of multidimensional inputs; his theory is that the unweighted inputs should be summed to simplify the exchange situation. Walster, Bershied, and Walster (1976) have also assumed the unweighted input summation rule.

As subjects tend to compare these subjective quantities, in some instances they may also find it appropriate to compare their outcomes to others'. Satisfaction with our outcomes depends in large measure on the real or imagined outcomes of others (Messick and Sentis, 1983). The concept of equity in a given exchange will be dependent upon each subject's perception of the outcome of the other. The judgment concerning equity versus inequity takes place through a social comparison processes. However, social comparison is not the only process that causes our satisfactions to depend upon the outcomes that others receive; another important process is empathetic responding to others' outcomes. This entails feeling vicariously the pleasure or pain as well as satisfaction or disappointment of others. When one responds empathetically to another's outcomes, one's own satisfactions become determined in part by the outcomes received by the other (Messick and Sentis 1983). This is true in the case of a parent. Generally, outcomes which are pleasing to the
child in turn satisfy the parent; likewise, outcomes aversive to the child may also lead to dissatisfaction for the parent. This further complicates and adds to the multidimensionality of the concept, and will also help to guide the pattern of equity.

Equity as a guide for resource allocation. In the past twenty years, equity theory has emerged as a major theory of work motivation (Adams, 1965). The theory's basic tenant is that people are motivated toward the attainment of equity in their social exchanges. Within these exchanges, equity serves as a guide towards the allocation of resources and outcomes.

Each resource, as defined previously, may be traded and/or substituted to achieve a "balance" of equity in the exchange. According to Brockner and Adsit (1986), such a balance of equity is determined by the relationship between an individual's perceived outcomes and inputs in comparison to the perceived outcomes and inputs of relevant others. If the outcome-input relationships are similar, then equity is said to exist. In order to avoid the distressing state which occurs if there is a discrepancy between the outcome-input relationships, individuals are motivated to substitute and trade-off their available resources. In a marital relationship, for example, one spouse may be better equipped to donate time and energy to the relationship while the other must compensate by contributing a greater monetary amount to the marriage. This is often seen in the case of the single income family where the husband works in order to provide the wife and/or family with luxuries or benefits such as a second home, college tuition, and extra money for leisure activities. In such a relationship the wife may contribute by devoting her time and energy to managing the household, raising the children, and caring for the husband. Both spouses contribute what they perceive as an "equal" amount; however, their resources are quite different. This concept is further complicated by a difference in each person's perception of value of various re-
sources. In the previous example, it is possible that the wife may feel "neglected" in the sense that she would prefer that her husband spend more time with the family; she may be willing to exchange a lower standard of living in order to receive more of her husband's time. The wife's perception of inequity in the exchange is created by the nature of resources in that they are limited. In the allocation of limited resources there may be a need for an equitable distribution of several resources as a "package".

The multidimensional characteristics of resources allow for a balance of equity through this idea of a "package" of resources. If a member of an exchange in a familial or social context is unable to balance the equity in the relationship with only one type of resource (time, money) then a "mix" of resources may be allocated in order to achieve an equitable situation. The composition of this bundle of resources will affect the perceived value of the final package. In some cases, the resource value is also influenced by the person who contributes it; this is defined by Foa as "particularism". The notion of particularism implies that there is a special consideration given to certain resources simply due to the fact that they were given by a particular exchange partner. For example, the value and appreciation of love varies greatly according to the person who gives it. This is not true in the case of certain resources such as money, however, due to the fact that any dollar amount of money maintains the same value regardless of the giver. Resources such as money are classified as "concrete" by Foa.

It is proposed by Foa (1974) as well as Walster, Walster and Bercheid (1978) that particularistic resources are exchanged more frequently within small, intimate groups such as the family. Due to the fact that for a particularistic resource to be given, the contributor must be known by the recipient and also that numerous encounters are usually involved, it is logical that re-
sources in a familial exchange situation will tend to be particularistic. The notion that particularistic resources are exchanged more frequently will be discussed later in this section. These exchanges may involve a parent exchanging time, energy, or opportunity for a child's love, cooperation, or energy. (Either member may contribute a combination of these resources.) Each of these resources will be considered in the context in which they were given, as well as by whom they were contributed.

It has been previously stated that particularistic resources are exchanged more frequently than other resources. This may be explained by examining the equation $\frac{1}{0} = \frac{1}{0}$ (inputs divided by outputs of exchange partners will be equal). In a familial situation, several exchanges are made over time. By assigning one "point" to each gift, favor, or other resource given, we may arrive at the equation: $\frac{1000}{1000}$, representing the balance of a wife's inputs over her outputs within her relationship with her husband. If at this time she gives him a gift, or does a favor for him such as making him a sandwich, her equation will be $\frac{1000+1}{1000}$ or $\frac{1001}{1000}$, thus making the equation in a state of imbalance: $\frac{1001}{1000} = \frac{1000}{1001}$. This imbalance is slight due to the large number of inputs and outputs to begin with. The husband, most likely, will not feel an urgent need to re-balance the equation immediately, partially due to the fact that the relationship will continue for a long period of time, thus providing several opportunities in the future for him to rectify the imbalance. However, in casual or short term relationships this is not the case. For example, in a casual relationship, exchange partners may have an equation such as $\frac{3}{3} = \frac{3}{3}$. When one of the exchange partners adds an input to the equation it becomes $\frac{3+1}{3} = \frac{3}{3}$ or $\frac{4}{3} = \frac{3}{4}$. After adding only one input in each relationship there is a much greater imbalance in the short term relationship equation than the long term: $\frac{1001}{1000} = \frac{1000}{1001}$.

The imbalance in the short-term relationship may prompt an urgent need for the
exchange partner with the lower inputs to re-balance the equation. This may be especially true considering the fact that the length of the relationship is questionable, and opportunities to re-balance the equation may not arise.

Equity as a guide for outcome allocation. These outcomes depend on the perspective of the family members; certain exchange partners may feel over or under-compensated when comparing their outcomes to their inputs. When the family strives to attain equity, conflicts may arise due to the limited nature of resources. Depending on the desired outcomes the decision-makers hold for others in the exchanges, certain products may fulfill the balance of equity. In the table, the parents hold the decision-making power to determine the outcomes for the children; these outcomes may be the experience of playing the piano or trips to the park. In each example, equity may be the factor sought in the exchange. For instance, the parents may strive to reward the children with outcomes which are proportional to the children's inputs; these inputs may include helping out around the house or excelling in school.

Equity as Applied to Consumer Behavior

The topic of family decision making is among the most important of all areas for marketers to understand in planning their strategies. (Wilkie, 1986). With the family as the unit of analysis, the influences, behaviors, and environments of several exchange partners require consideration, as do the interactions among these partners. Each family member is part of the social environment for the other family members; each will influence and shape the environment as well as become influenced by this environment. These family influences are often an important factor in developing marketing strategies (Sheth 1974). The concern with reciprocal influences creates a need to ana-
lyze the exchanges within a family, as well as the equity which directs the process.

Although it is debated by some researchers, according to Walster, Walster, and Bercheid, equity does exist in intimate relations (Walster, Walster, Bercheid 1978). According to Foa (1978), family members will strive for a balance of equity in each relationship with their various exchange partners. This balance may be approached or achieved by a family member through the purchase of a good or service. The diversity of resources and outcomes in the family allow for exchanges to be equitable without necessarily being "equal". For example, when a child behaves well, excels in school, or contributes other resources to the parent-child exchange, he or she may receive a trip to the movies, candy, new clothes, or some other resource purchased by the parent. In this type of situation, the parent feels compelled to create a balance of equity in the exchange; the larger the contribution of the child, the greater the "reward" or contribution given by the parent. Likewise, in a spousal exchange, a husband may treat his wife to a night out and an expensive dinner on weekends in exchange for her work in the home and dinners provided during the week. In general, contributions made in a familial situation will not go overlooked by the exchange partners; a restoration of equity will be striven for by the partner who benefits from the exchange. This is supported by Gouldner (1960), who postulated a norm of reciprocity, which he considered to be "universal and applicable to every human society although varying in its specific manifestation by time and place. The amount reciprocated would be commensurate to the amount and value of the new and previously received." In many cases restoration will be achieved not only through the purchase of a good or service, but the expenditure of the good or service over time. An example of this may be a family who restores equity with the children through the purchase of a park pass, board games, or some other good or service to be
used as a family, or which will require time and effort spent together in order to be expended. In both examples, there is a restoration of equity through a purchase in the marketplace. The family is a unit of usage and purchase for many consumer products; realizing that equity theory within the family applies to purchasing behavior, it may appear that the theory of equity has use in marketing strategies.

Conclusions

This paper provides a framework within which to examine family allocation patterns and for use in deriving possible research questions. Many questions are deserving of future enquiry. What are the predominant allocation patterns -- parent-oriented, children-oriented, individual-dominant, equality- or equity-based? How frequent is resource swapping within the family? What resources are swapped, as well as when, and by which family members? What antecedents predict allocation patterns within the family?

This study has presented some evidence of a relationship between antecedents and allocation processes, including examples concerning role-related decisions and allocations within certain families. However, there is much to be learned in order to better understand the relationship between variables which may predict allocation patterns within the family. This paper has presented a framework within which existing research may be positioned and from which hypotheses for future research may be generated.

The role of equity as a basis for family decision making has also been addressed in this study. This role varies by the family and individual involved in the decision making process, and is guided by the values of each. The concept of equity may, in fact, be the basis for resource allocation as well as the guide for outcome allocation within relationships. It is vital
for marketers to discover and understand the decision making process which is
used in the determination of outcomes for family members. The concept pre-
sented, that of equity serving as an influencing factor in the decision making
framework for relationships including families, holds the possibility for an
expanded study of consumer behavior.

REFERENCES


## DECISION POWER ALLOCATION

### Family Member Domains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Member with Control</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Products</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>G1</td>
<td>G2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother (M)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father (F)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Resource Allocations

Resource Recipients or Beneficiaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource Sources</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Girl 1</th>
<th>Girl 2</th>
<th>Boy 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2
### Allocation of Discretionary Time Across Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of Activities</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Girl 1</th>
<th>Girl 2</th>
<th>Boy 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing professional skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxing/time to oneself</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time with friends</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra time on the job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time with family members</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Outcome Allocation

### Family Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Domain</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Girl 1</th>
<th>Girl 2</th>
<th>Boy 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Actualization</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement/Esteem</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation/Social</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiological</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total points allocated = 100