He Wants, She Wants: Gender, Category, and Disagreement in Spouse's Joint Decisions

Cheryl Ward, Middle Tennessee State University

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INTRODUCTION
Consumers spend a whopping eight million dollars a minute in the United States (Wellner 2002). That figure encompasses nearly 110 million households, of which the majority are family household units. Recognizing the enormous economic impact of such expenditures, there has been a resurgence in research interest regarding family purchase-decision dynamics (Aribarg et al. 2002; Arora and Allenby 1999; Seetharaman, Ainslie, and Chintagunta 1999; Su, Fern, and Ye 2003). For instance, studies have shown that spouses may adjust influence strategies used in purchase decisions over time (Corfman and Lehmann 1987; Su et al. 2003). Marketers may gain insight into targeting communication messages (Arora and Allenby 1999; Petrevu 2001) and guiding personal selling activities (Aribarg et al. 2002) by better understanding the various effects of spousal influence.

In addition to spousal influence, marketers have also recently acknowledged the importance of differentiating product category in family purchase decisions (Aribarg et al. 2002; Seetharaman et al. 1999; Ward 2003). Aribarg et al. (2002) determined that product category may impact the effectiveness of salesperson strategies and Seetharaman et al. (1999) found that households display similar state dependence across product categories, with income and family size having little influence. Ward (2003) found that the perceived degree of conflict between spouses in purchase decisions is greater in across category choices than within category choices.

Purpose of Paper. This study extends the spousal family purchase-decision research by examining the impact of husbands and wives in joint decisions where decisions involve product choices both within and across product categories. In addition, previous research has indicated that how badly couples desire the product in question impacts the joint spousal purchase decision (Corfman and Lehmann 1987). However, Corfman and Lehmann did not investigate what happens when each couple individually differs in preference intensity for each product. Thus, this study looks at the impact differing individual preference intensity has on joint decisions, and how product category and differing preference intensity and product category interact in explaining joint product decisions. While this study focuses on the impact of the joint spousal decision process, the specific roles of husband and wives in the decision process will be investigated to further marketers understanding of the spousal communication process.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES
Since husbands and wives are separate individuals facing joint purchase decisions, it is proposed that in a significant number of cases a spouse may have desires for products which are not comparable to those desired by his/her spouse. Given that the vast majority of households have limited discretionary income, it stands to reason that the wants/likes of both spouses cannot always be met, resulting in the couple being faced with making a decision which is not optimal for either person individually. Hence, one spouse must either concede to the other or the two must work out a compromise acceptable to both parties, but with which neither party may be completely happy. As a result of the potential for conflict between spouses in this process, gender differences may be relevant.

Previous evidence has been found to indicate that males and females differ in their information processing, however, researchers have not addressed the specific issue of whether males and females differ in across versus within category decision processing (Corfman 1991; Kirchler 1993). Although researchers found some conflicting evidence, men are generally expected to use coercion, direct reward and informational power, whereas women are often thought to use helplessness, personal rewards and referent power. Specifically, Meyers-Levy (1988) found that males were more likely to adhere to self-relevant information, whereas females were affected not only by self-relevant information, but also by “other-sensitive” information.

Based on the gender research findings presented, one would expect across category decisions to be more important to men than within product category decisions. Accordingly, in choices involving two differing product categories, males would be expected to be less willing to compromise towards the product category favoring the female than the female would be towards the product category favoring the male. However, in within category choices, males may be more willing to compromise given that both products are from the same product category and males may be less likely to experience a sense of loss regardless of which product is chosen. In this instance, females may be likely to have more impact on the final product selection. Based on the aforementioned discussion, hypothesis one states:

H1: In joint decision responses, across category product decisions should be more likely to favor the male than the female; whereas, within category product decisions should be more likely to favor the female than the male.

In maintaining the stability of the relationship, Corfman and Lehmann (1987) found that relative couple preference intensity was the primary determining factor in a joint decision outcome; that is, how badly the couple wanted an item had the greatest impact on product selection by the couple. However, Corfman and Lehmann did not investigate what happens when each spouse differs individually in preference intensity (differing gender preference intensities) on the paired decision products in the couple’s joint decision. Based on the gender effects discussed thus far, this paper expects that when spouses differ in how badly each wants a specific product (differ in individual preference intensity for products), the final product choice will most likely favor the males. Thus, hypothesis two states:

H2: In joint decision responses where spouses differ in preference intensities for the products, the joint product decision should be more likely to favor the male than the female.
If gender differences are impacting results, then one would also expect a significant interaction between product category and differing gender preference intensities in explaining joint product choice decisions. In their previous studies, Corfman and Lehmann (1987) presented their participants with across product category decisions only. They did not distinguish between across or within product category decisions. It would seem that the impact of differing individual preference intensity on the joint product choice would be magnified in across product category decisions. The relative importance of the decision to each spouse, reflected by his/her differing preference intensity for each product, would seem to be of greater importance in across product categories than within product categories because of the “win/loss” aspect of the decision.

If spouses have differing preference intensities for the products, then conflict is greater in situations involving across product decisions, and each spouse would be less willing to compromise in paired decision choices involving across product categories. Prior research suggests that men are more likely to be self-relevant, whereas women are more likely to consider others when making a decision. Women are more emotional in an interpersonal context and men are more emotional in an achievement context (Kelly and Hutson-Comeaux 1999). This finding would seem to indicate that a man would be more determined to “win” when he differs in preference intensity with his wife and when the decision involves across category choices than within category choices. Wives are thought to be more likely to compromise than are husbands. Thus, hypothesis three states the following expected interaction:

\[ H3: \text{In joint decision responses, the decision will favor the male more when spouses differ in preference intensities for across category joint product decisions than when spouses differ in preference intensities for within category joint product decisions.} \]

**METHODOLOGY**

A total of 69 couples were recruited from various church, school, and community groups in the Nashville, Tennessee, area to participate in this study with 61 couples completing the entire task. This study involves both husbands and wives participating in joint product decisions. The couples resulted in a sample size of 480 joint product decisions or observations, an average of 7.8 observations per couple.

Each couple received $10 for their participation and an opportunity to win a $500 grand prize. Participating couples consisted of participants in a range of ages, incomes, education, number of hours worked, number of years married, and number of children.

**Stimuli**

The stimuli consisted of products and services within a wide price range ($15 to $4,000) that represented purchases that couples would likely make over the course of their marriage. The products were grouped into eight separate categories for within versus across category evaluations. A total of 54 different products were evaluated by participants and included choices in home entertainment, furniture, kitchen appliances, non-home entertainment, household chores, office/education, and environment/health.

**Data Collection**

*First Data Collection Phase.* This research project involved a considerable time investment on the part of the participants. Each spouse first completed an Individual Product Questionnaire in which he/she evaluated the likelihood of purchasing 54 products over the next two years (10 point scales) and what price level they would be willing to spend for the product (selecting one of three options). The couples also provided various demographic information. After the researcher received the Individual Product Questionnaires from the couples, couples were contacted and scheduled to participate in a joint interview session and Post-Questionnaire requiring both spouses to be present.

*Second Data Collection Phase.* The responses on the first questionnaire were used to create product pairings for the second stage of data collection, the joint interview. Based on their ratings of the 54 products/services, couples were randomly placed in one of two primary categories: (1) couples presented with choices of products from within product categories (29 couples), or (2) couples presented with choices from across product categories (32 couples).

The spouses were shown a series of products/services, two at a time. The joint decisions created were chosen for their propensity to generate conflict between the two spouses. Specifically, of the two products paired together, the female had initially preferred one product in the initial questionnaire and the male had preferred the other.

In a controlled meeting with the researcher, the spouses individually rated the likelihood of purchasing the items within the next two years, dividing 100 points between the two items (100 point constant sum scales). These numbers were used to indicate preference intensity for the products. A fifty-fifty evaluation was not allowed in that it indicated no decision for one product over the other. After evaluating the products individually, the couples then repeated the process except that this time they were presented the product pairings and told they were free to discuss the products with their spouses. The goal for the couple was to come to a joint consensus on which of the two products would most likely be acquired and to divide 100 points between the two products indicating their joint decision. The couple completed this step for each of the product pairings in order to create a decision history for the spouses.

The final step of the data collection was a Post-Questionnaire following the interview which spouses did independently. The Post-Questionnaire consisted of reality and manipulation check questions (5-pt. Likert scales) and influence tactic questions (7-pt. Likert scales).

**Development of Variables**

*Joint Decision Response (Dependent) Variable.* The joint decision response variable (DECISION) is measured based on the 100 points allocated by each couple to the paired decision choices. Responses below 50 favor the male’s preferred product, while responses above 50 favor the female’s preferred product. In this context, the couples were forced to come to a joint decision between the products as to which product was most likely to be purchased by the couple and then, also as a couple, to divide 100 points between the two products. It is important to note that when the paired choices were presented, one product represented the product that the male had favored in the Individual Product Questionnaire and the other product represented the product that the female had originally favored. Thus, this variable is able to capture whether the couple’s joint product decision favored the male’s or the female’s initial product preference.

*Explanatory Variables.* The explanatory variables used in this study to test the hypotheses consisted of variables measuring the following attributes: cumulative past decision history, couple preference intensity for products, product category, and difference in gender level of preference intensity.

Corfman and Lehmann looked at past decision history numerous ways in their study. They concluded that a cumulative history variable resulted in the strongest results. The variable is measured by identifying cumulatively which spouse has won in their prior
joint decisions. For the first decision, and in cases when each has won the same number of decisions, this variable is coded 0. All models in this study were rerun using the other past history measures used by Corfman and Lehmann. Like Corfman and Lehmann, the cumulative history variable always produced the strongest results.

Corfman and Lehmann found that a couple’s preference intensity for a product was one of the strongest variables in explaining product choices. Thus, this study includes preference intensity (PRE) as a continuous covariate variable to control for the perceived relative importance of each product to the couple.

Product category and gender preference intensity are the two variables of interest in this study. Product category (CATEGORY) is a dichotomous measure of the across versus within decision effects. All product choice decisions involved couples selecting between two products. These paired products were either from the same product category or from different product categories.

Gender preference intensity (GENDINTENSE) is a dichotomous measure of the gender effect of each spouse having different individual preference intensities for the joint products used in the joint product decision. When viewing the paired product choices and evaluating them individually, if both the male and female either rated product a (both assigned preference intensities greater than 50 points) or product b (both assigned preference intensities less than 50 points) as the preferred product, then both spouses are said to prefer the same product in the joint decision process. The spouses prefer the same product, thus their preference intensities should make the joint decision easier. However, if the male rated product a with more than 50 points and the female rated product b with more than 50 points (or vice versa), the spouses have differing gender preference intensities. He wants one product, she wants the other; therefore, a successful joint decision on the part of the couple will require more effort.

**Research Design**

A 2 (cumulative past history: female did not win vs female won) X 2 (product category: within vs across) X 2 (gender preference intensity: agree vs differ) between subjects design with one continuous covariate (couple preference intensity) is used in testing the hypotheses in this study. A second model examined the interaction of separating the couple’s preference intensity measure into its male and female components.

Since the 2 X 2 X 2 with covariate design contains three dichotomous variables and one continuous variable, it is an Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) model. The ANCOVA model was developed by regressing PAST, PRE, CATEGORY, and GENDINTENSE on DECISION. Because of prior expectations and hypotheses, all two-way interactions among the three dichotomous variables were generated.

**RESULTS**

**Main Effects.** The ANCOVA model was run using 480 joint decisions (observations). Table one reports the Type II Sums of Squares, F statistic, and P-Value for each variable and interaction term, along with the overall model statistics.

Table two contains the means assigned to the joint product choice (CATEGORY) for each level of the dichotomous explanatory variables (main effects). Remember, a mean greater than 50 means that the joint decision favored the female, while a mean less than 50 means that the joint decision favored the male.

Results for the control variables are as expected and consistent with Corfman and Lehmann (1987). Couple past history (PAST) and couple preference intensity (PRE) are both significant in explaining the couples’ joint decisions. The Type III SS shows that couple preference intensity is the strongest variable in explaining the joint decision. The means reported in table two show that in cases where the female had cumulatively won in prior decisions, the current joint decision favored the male (M=48.421), while in cases where the female had not cumulatively won in prior decisions, the current joint decision favored the female (M=51.424).

The main effect for product category (CATEGORY) was significant, F(1, 473)=20.52, p<.001. Means revealed that the male’s preferred product was significantly more likely to be chosen in across category product decisions (M=49.389) and that the female’s preferred product was significantly more likely to be chosen in within category product decisions (M=51.844). Thus, hypothesis one is accepted.

The main effect for gender preference intensity (GENDINTENSE) is significant, F(1, 473)=6.73, p<.01. When both spouses have strong preference intensities for different products, males are more likely than females to have the final product decision favor their preferred products (M: Agree=53.89, Disagree=22.94). Thus, hypothesis two is accepted.

**Interaction Effects.** Interaction between product category and differing preference intensity appear to provide information in joint product decisions above that explained by their main effects alone. The interaction term CATEGORY x GENDINTENSE is significant, F(1, 473)=17.89, p<.001.

Table three contains the means for product choice across the four cells for each of the two-way interactions. Decomposition of the interaction for CATEGORY and GENDINTENSE suggests that the effect of differing individual preference intensities between spouses on joint decisions is magnified in across product decisions (see figure 1).

Although, joint decisions still favor the male when spouses have differing preference intensity for within product decisions (M: Agree=54.169, Disagree=31.807), this effect is even stronger in situations involving across category decisions (M: Agree=53.589, Disagree=13.33). When the couples have major differences in preference intensity for the products, the joint product decision is more likely to favor the males in both across and within category product choices, but significantly more so for those joint decisions involving across product category choices. Therefore, hypothesis three is accepted.

Although the prior research and theory did not indicate that additional interactions should exist in explaining joint product decisions, we ran the models with all two-way interactions. The two-way interaction between product category and past history was not significant, F(1, 473)=.44, p<.51. However, the two-way interaction between gender preference intensity and past history is significant in explaining joint product decisions, F(1, 473)=10.55, p<.01. Investigation of the decision means across the four cells of the interaction suggest that relationship between past history and joint product decision may not hold true in situations where the couples have differing preference intensities.

**Model Rerun With Separate Male and Female Preference Intensity Variables.** Based on Corfman and Lehmann (1987), we included couple preference intensity as a control variable in this study. However, results could differ if one separates this measure into its male and female components. The author reran the model using separate male and female preference intensity variables. These results are reported in table four.

The results were the same for the variables of interest in this study, although the model was somewhat stronger (R-square of .747 versus .734 before). However, breaking down the preference intensity into its male and female parts did produce some interesting results for that measure. Although both variables are significant, the
Type II SS suggests that the male preference intensity for a product (MALEPRE) impacts the joint decision more than the female preference intensity for a product (FEPRE). This result would suggest that researchers using preference intensity as a variable should consider breaking down the variable into its male and female components in future research. Failure to do so could impact results.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Similar to prior research, this study finds that past history and couple preference intensity are significant in explaining joint product decisions. However, this study also finds that gender preference intensity (differing preference intensity) and product category are significant factors affecting the joint decisions made by couples. An intriguing finding from this study’s results involved gender effects and the joint decisions that couples ultimately reached. Specifically, joint product choices were most likely to favor the male’s preferred product in across category decisions and when the spouses had major differences in preference intensities for the products. Apparently, in those decisions when the products were from different product categories, males “won” more often than females, in that their preferred products were chosen more often than were the females. This finding lends support to earlier research.

### TABLE 1

**JOINT DECISION 2 X 2 X 2 ANCOVA MODEL WITH ONE COVARIATE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanatory Variables and Interaction Terms</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Type III SS</th>
<th>F statistic</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
<th>R-square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAST</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3185.66</td>
<td>12.13</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>290728.52</td>
<td>1106.68</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATEGORY</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5391.30</td>
<td>20.52</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDINTENSE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1768.53</td>
<td>6.73</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATEGORYxGENDINTENSE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4699.70</td>
<td>17.89</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATEGORYxPAST</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>115.69</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.507</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDINTENSExPAST</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2771.29</td>
<td>10.55</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Model Statistics</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>342261.37</td>
<td>186.12</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.734</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 2

**TESTS OF MAIN EFFECTS**

Means for DECISION Across CATEGORY (Test of H1 and CATEGORY Main Effect):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY=0 (Within Product Category)</th>
<th>CATEGORY=1 (Across Product Category)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51.844</td>
<td>49.389</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CATEGORY Main Effect: F Statistic=18.31 P-value=.000 (1 DF)

Means for DECISION Across GENDINTENSE (Verification of H2 and GENDINTENSE Main Effect):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDINTENSE=0 (Couples Concur in Preference Intensity)</th>
<th>GENDINTENSE=1 (Couples Differ in Preference Intensity)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>53.891</td>
<td>22.940</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GENDINTENSE Main Effect: F Statistic=8.74 P-Value=.003 (1 DF)

Means for DECISION Across PAST:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAST=0 (Female did not Cumulatively Win in Past Decisions)</th>
<th>PAST=1 (Female Cumulatively Won in Past Decisions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51.424</td>
<td>48.421</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GENDINTENSE Main Effect: F Statistic=13.29 P-Value=.0002 (1 DF)
TABLE 3
SUMMARY OF JOINT DECISION MODEL RESULTS:

Means for DECISION Across CATEGORY by GENDINTENSE (Verification of H3):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category =0</th>
<th>Gend intense=0</th>
<th>Category=0</th>
<th>Gend intense=1</th>
<th>Category=1</th>
<th>Gend intense=0</th>
<th>Gend intense=1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>54.169</td>
<td>31.807</td>
<td>53.589</td>
<td>13.333</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CATEGORY x GENDINTENSE Interaction: F Statistic=13.78, P-Value=0.000 (1 DF)

Means for DECISION Across CATEGORY by PAST Interaction:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category =0</th>
<th>Past=0</th>
<th>Category=0</th>
<th>Past=1</th>
<th>Category=1</th>
<th>Past=0</th>
<th>Category=1</th>
<th>Past=1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>52.069</td>
<td>51.161</td>
<td>50.716</td>
<td>53.542</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CATEGORY x PAST Interaction Effect: F Statistic=0.36, P-Value=0.547 (1 DF)

Means for DECISION Across GENDINTENSE by PAST Interaction:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gend Intense=0</th>
<th>Past=0</th>
<th>Gend Intense=0</th>
<th>Past=1</th>
<th>Gend Intense=1</th>
<th>Past=0</th>
<th>Gend Intense=1</th>
<th>Past=1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55.232</td>
<td>49.990</td>
<td>20.179</td>
<td>32.727</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GENDINTENSE x PAST Interaction Effect: F Statistic=14.37, P-Value=0.000 (1 DF)

FIGURE 1
TWO-WAY INTERACTION OF CATEGORY CHOICE BY GENDER PREFERENCE INTENSITY SIMILARITY ON PRODUCT CHOICE DECISION
TABLE 4

JOINT DECISION MODEL WITH SEPARATE MALE AND FEMALE INTENSITY VARIABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction Variables and Terms</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Type III SS</th>
<th>F statistic</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
<th>R-square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAST</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3315.48</td>
<td>13.29</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEPRE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5231.54</td>
<td>209.63</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALEPRE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12796.18</td>
<td>512.80</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATEGORY</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4568.45</td>
<td>18.31</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDINTENSE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2181.98</td>
<td>8.74</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATEGORY x GENDINTENSE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3438.80</td>
<td>13.78</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATEGORY x PAST</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>90.42</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.547</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDINTENSE x PAST</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3585.54</td>
<td>14.37</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Model Statistics</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>348719.23</td>
<td>174.67</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.747</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*FEPRE measures the female’s preference intensity for the paired product choice. MALEPRE measures the male’s preference intensity for the paired product choice.

which suggests that men and women may follow alternative sex roles with males following goals having immediate personal consequences and females focusing on harmonious relationships with other parties (Meyers-Levy 1988). When faced with a win/loss product decision, the male may have been most concerned with achieving the product of his choice, whereas the female was more likely to focus on preserving the relationship.

In decisions where the spouses disagree in preference intensity for the paired product choices, preference intensity was a significant factor in determining which product was selected by the couple in the final joint decision. This finding is true in both within and across category decisions, but the effect is stronger for across category choices than for within category choices (interaction effect). Apparently, when men and women express strong preference intensities for product choices that differ from each other, men are more likely to ultimately gain the product choice they preferred in the joint decision than are women.

The strength of this finding was further exhibited by the significant interaction between gender preference intensity and product category. When spouses exhibited clear preference intensities for differing products, the decision process was significantly affected for both types of product categories—across and within. Both across and within product category choices were more likely to favor the male’s preferred product than the female’s preferred product. However, additional contrast results indicated that the effects were more pronounced in across category product decisions than for within category decisions. Thus, even though across and within category decisions were more likely to favor the male when gender preference intensities varied, the result for across product category decisions was strong enough to be significantly different from within product category decisions.

Contributions

Some support was found for the notion that spouses, particularly males, are more concerned with the outcome of across category decisions than within category decisions. Another contribution of this research is to extend the research of Corfman and Lehmann (1987). This study extends Corfman and Lehmann by examining the impact product category has on decision choices and how individual spouses differing in preference intensity impact joint decisions.

This study found strong support for gender effects in spouses’ joint decisions. Final joint product decisions were more likely to favor males than females when decisions involved across category product choices and when decisions involved strong differences in preference intensities between the spouses. Apparently, when the spouses do not feel as strongly about the product choice to be made, they are more likely to be influenced by their spouse or to compromise due to their lack of commitment and to preserve harmony in their relationship. It seems that although women have come a long way in both the workforce and the household, results showed that there is still a tendency for decisions to favor men over women in situations involving greater conflict.

Finally, researchers in the past have frequently not been able to conduct studies involving participation by both spouses. This study is one of a relatively few that employed active involvement by both spouses (Corfman and Lehmann 1987; Kirchler 1993; Spiro 1983). With spouses reporting increasing levels of time poverty and lifestyles being busier than ever, it is increasingly difficult to gain cooperation by couples in completing this type of study. As a result, this study is more realistic in examining what happens when you bring a husband and wife together in a joint decision making process.

Limitations

Some limitations to this study should be noted. First, the results found here may have limited generalizability. This study was conducted in the Southeast where husbands and wives may have more traditional role expectations than in many other parts of the country. It would be interesting to determine whether the results found in this study hold constant in other geographic regions. Cultural and ethnic differences may also produce different results. Most of the participants in this study were from a white European, predominantly Christian background. There is some evidence that African-American and Hispanic couples may use different decision-making dynamics than do white couples (Cohen and Kaufman 1991; Webster 1994). Thus, participants from different racial or religious backgrounds may produce different results.

Although participants reported that they found the task realistic, the process was artificial and did not require actual expenditures on the part of the couple. Had actual monies been at stake, the results may have differed. However, by providing each couple with $10 for
their participation and a chance to win a $500 grand prize, the researcher attempted to ensure that the participants took the decision task seriously.

Participants were limited in this study by the researcher’s choice of products on the initial questionnaire. Also, participants were presented with only two products at a time (similar to Corfman and Lehmann 1987). In reality, participants may be faced with many more than two purchase options at a given time. Accordingly, products that may have been much more relevant to individual couples may not have been included. Though an effort was made to include a wide variety of products that are commonly purchased by married couples, each couple differs in their product and service preferences. Thus, some couples may not have enough products of sufficient interest to purchase, thereby limiting the relevance of this decision making process for them.

Future research. The findings in this study suggest several avenues for future decision-making research. Although not significant in all instances in this study, there is strong evidence to suggest that across versus within product category choices should be explored further. In certain conditions category choices do make a difference to the decision making process between couples. These findings could be explored more with different product categories than those used in this study, or perhaps with a larger, more varied sample than that included in this paper.

Corfman (1991) noted that researchers are beginning to acknowledge the importance of across product category choices, but that the choice processes underlying the decision process are understudied. The current review was unable to discover research studies that compared across category product choices with within category product choices. Realistically, individuals are typically presented with choices involving several different options from two or more different product categories. In addition, gender effects appear to still play an important role in spousal decision processes.

These hypotheses tested the implications for across product category choices on a primary decision unit in society—the family. Gaining an improved understanding of spousal decision making in differing product categories with differing product preference intensities will not only contribute to our understanding of joint decision making, but may also have implications for people who market to couples.

REFERENCES