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How Best to Get Their Own Way?: Children'S Influence Strategies Within Families

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We examine the influence strategies which children use to get their own way. We explore the moderating effect which the family environment has upon a child's choice of which influence strategy type to employ. We suggest that a child's unique place within their family ecology shapes both the level of resistance to the strategies they use, and also the types of influence strategy which they are able to utilize.

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How Best to Get their Own Way? Children's Influence Strategies within Families

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ABSTRACT

How do children decide how best to try and get their own way? Despite extensive studies of children's influence strategies there has been little research into understanding *why* children utilise given influence strategies i.e. "*the underlying motivations of strategy usage*" (Palan and Wilkes 1997, p.167). The motivations that drive the choice of different influence strategies result from a combination of personal goals and environmental factors. The family environment provides children with some of their most important experiences about how best to compete for limited resources (e.g. time, attention, money). Choices about the allocation of income across family members' preferences are central to children's consumer socialization. In order to throw more light on the motivations for children's choice of particular strategies in their family environment (Cotte and Wood 2004), we investigate the family environments in which the influence strategies are played out, and how far the family environment has a moderating effect on the types of influence strategies that children use.

Our contribution is thus twofold. Firstly we seek to better understand the family environments in which children reside; and secondly, to identify the implications that the different family environments may have in relation to each child's choice of influence strategies within their family setting. Our study responds to Cotte and Wood's (2004) and Flurry's (2007) call for research that explores further the purchase influence of children in families, specifically by exploring how the family environment affects the influence strategies that children employ.

Child Influence Strategies: The Research Context

Research over the past forty years has established that "*purchase decisions within the family are not always the outcome of individual choice, but rather, family members influence each other*" (Hamilton and Catterall 2006, p.1032). Examinations of children's influence strategies began with a study of cereal choices which identified that both the child's assertiveness and the mother's child-centeredness were central to mother's susceptibility to their child's requests (Berey and Pollay 1968). In another cereal choice supermarket setting, children were more successful if they told their mothers to buy their preferred cereal, or if they demanded their choice, rather than if they simply asked their mother for it, or requested the item (Atkin 1978).

Another study specifically asked adolescents to write a series of essays entitled "How I get my way with my mother ... father ... best friend". Fifteen influence strategies were identified, sub divided by whether the strategies used were direct or indirect (Cowan, Drinkard and MacGavin 1984). Direct strategies included the use of more overt behaviours (asking, begging and pleading, telling or asserting, reasoning, demanding or arguing, stating importance, bargaining and persistence), whereas indirect strategies are believed to occur when "*the influencer acts as if the person on the receiving end is not aware of the influence*" (Johnson 1976, p. 100). Indirect influence strategies included the use of negative affect (such as the use of crying, sadness and anger), positive affect (including the use of sweetness and innocence), verbal manipulation (often involving telling lies), eliciting reciprocity, using an advocate, evasion and laissez-faire (taking independent action, regardless) (Cowan *et al.* 1984). Adolescents directed more influence strategies towards their mothers than their fathers, and of those strategies directed towards mothers most involved the use of negative affect.

Examining explicitly the mother-child dyad, twelve child influence strategies were identified by Cowan and Avants (1988) which included: ask, bargain, show positive feelings, do as I please, show negative affect, persistence, beg and plead, perform good deeds, reason, cry and get angry. What is significant from this study is that strategies were related to the level of parental resistance that the children expected to encounter: high (anticipating non-compliance strategies e.g. beg and plead, cry) or low (autonomous strategies e.g. tell), and whether or not an equal power relationship existed between the parent and child (egalitarian strategies e.g. bargain and reason).

A study of the power strategies of popular and rejected black South African children identified four dimensions of influence strategies: direct and indirect influence strategies (as identified by Cowan *et al.* 1984), and bilateral and unilateral strategies (Bonn 1995). Falbo and Peplau (1980) had earlier identified the concept of bilateral and unilateral dimensions within influence strategies in their study of intimate relationships. Whereas bilateral strategies require the co-operation and responsiveness of the target (e.g. bargaining), unilateral strategies do not. Bonn (1995), through interviews with children involving hypothetical situations, identified a range of strategies, including persuasion, bargaining and compromise (bilateral, direct strategies); suggesting, ingratiating, and deception (bilateral, indirect strategies); sadness, crying and anger (unilateral, indirect strategies); and asking, threatening and coercion (unilateral, direct influence strategies). Rejected children often used unilateral influence strategies, frequently involving the use of aggression (Bonn 1995).

More recent work on adolescents and their parents identified four classes of influence strategies¹: bargaining, persuasion, emotional, and request strategies (Palan and Wilkes 1997). In a diary study which applied Palan and Wilkes' (1997) influence strategy framework focussing on children's impact on innovative decision-making, children were subsequently found to employ persuasion strategies most often, followed by request and bargaining strategies (Götze, Prange and Uhrovská 2009). In only a few cases were children found to utilise emotion based strategies (Götze *et al.* 2009).

Lee and Collins (2000) and Lee and Beatty (2002), through videotaped recordings of family interactions during a simulated decision-making situation, recognised the potential for coalitions to form within families. Five main influence strategy types were identified: experience strategies (using experience and knowledge as a source of information to influence the outcome of a decision), legitimate strategies (which emphasise positional power and stereotypes), emotion strategies, bargaining strategies and coalition strategies (Lee and Collins 2000). Seven dimensions of children's direct influence strategies, ask nicely, bargain, show affection, just ask, beg and plead, show anger and con, have also been identified (Williams and Burns 2000). More recently the child influence strategies of justifying and highlighting the benefits of purchases, forming coalitions, compromising and remaining persistent, have also been documented (Thompson, Laing and McKee 2007).

Ultimately although we do have a solid understanding of the repertoire of influence strategies that children are believed to use, we do not have an adequate understanding as to *why* children utilise given influence strategies – or indeed whether every child has access to every type

¹ It should be noted that Palan and Wilkes (1997) identified seven influence strategies, although the latter three (expert, legitimate and directive) were strategies solely utilised by parents in response to their adolescent's use of an influence strategy.

of influence strategy identified.

In addition to child influence strategies, a number of studies have also assessed children's influence on family decision processes i.e. their level of ability, and the type of situations in which children employ their influence strategies. The influence of children has been found to vary along the stages of decision-making. Results across studies were consistent in that children's influence was reported to be highest in the problem recognition stage, and significantly lower in the decision-making stage (Szybillo and Sosanie 1977; Belch *et al.* 1985; Lee and Beatty 2002). Recent research, however, particularly in studies involving innovative or technically complex products, suggests that children have much greater influence than previously acknowledged across *each* stage of the buying decision process (Götze *et al.* 2009; Wang, Holloway, Beatty and Hill 2007). Similarly children are believed to exert more influence for products they will use themselves (Beatty and Talpade 1994; Belch *et al.* 1985; Darley and Lim 1986; Shoham and Dalakas 2003).

Demographic factors are also suggested to affect the child's level of influence. Older children are suggested to exert more influence than younger children in family decisions (Jenkins 1979; John 1999), and past research indicated that female children were more influential than were male children in family decision-making (Atkin 1978; Moschis and Mitchell 1986). Recently, however, the moderating effect of a child's gender in relation to influence on decision-making has been called into question (Flurry 2007; Wang *et al.* 2007). A child's birth position has also been related to their ability to influence family decisions, with first born children exerting greatest purchase decision influence (Churchill and Moschis 1979; Flurry 2007). Children who earn income have also been found to have more influence in purchase decisions than those children who do not (Moschis and Mitchell 1986; Flurry 2007).

Other family related factors are also suggested to affect a child's involvement in family decision-making. Children are suggested to have greater influence: in larger families which contain lots of children (Jenkins 1979; Ahuja and Stinson 1993), although debate does surround the link between child influence potential and family size (Ward, Wackman and Wartella 1977); as the number of years their parents have been married increases (Jenkins 1979); when both parents have an income of their own (Foxman, Tansuhaj and Ekström 1989; Hall, Shaw, Johnson and Oppenheim 1995), with parents in dual income families characterised as being busier and feeling guiltier and softer when it comes to their children's requests (Beatty and Talpade 1994; Geuens, Mast and De Pelsmacker 2002); in higher income families (Ekström 2007; Jenkins 1979), although one study did find that children in poor families exert considerable influence on family consumption, to the extent that consumption is often organised around their needs (Hamilton and Catterall 2006); as the education of their parents increases (Ahuja and Stinson 1993); as the family's social class increases (Atkin 1978; Moschis and Mitchell 1986), although Lee and Beatty (2002) question this relationship; and in relation to family type, with children of single parent or stem families suggested to exert considerable influence over family decisions (Ahuja and Stinson 1993; Bates and Gentry 1994; Hall *et al.* 1995; Mangleburg and Grewal 1999).

In terms of the family environment, *family communication pattern* (Carlson, Walsh, Laczniak and Grossbart 1994) and *parental socialization style* (Carlson and Grossbart 1988) have been linked to child influence. Five general parental socialization styles have been identified, *authoritarian, rigid controlling, neglecting, authoritative and permissive* (Carlson and Grossbart 1988), which we argue directly relates to both the extent of a child's influence in family purchase decisions and the types of influence strategy that they can employ.

For example, a child of authoritarian parents, who expect unquestioned obedience and who discourage parent-child communication (Johnson, McPhail and Yau 1994), is not expected to influence family decisions (Hall *et al.* 1995; Ward and Wackman 1972). Authoritarian parents are also likely to view, for example, the use of persuasion or bargaining tactics in a negative light (Johnson *et al.* 1994).

Family communication pattern, "*the frequency, type and quality of communication that takes place amongst family members*" (Carlson *et al.* 1994, p.29), also affects a child's influence in family purchase decisions. Four family communication patterns are identified; *laissez-faire, protective, pluralistic* and *consensual* (see Carlson *et al.* 1994 for a review). Children within families characterised as having a *laissez-faire* family communication pattern, involving limited parent-child communication of any kind (Moschis and Moore 1979; John 1999), are less likely to participate in shaping the family decision-making process, whereas children within pluralistic families are more likely to.

Children appear to make informed choices about which influence strategy they will employ (Williams and Burns 2000). Their decisions are informed by the historical success or failure of utilizing such strategies in previous decision-making situations (Bao *et al.* 2007; Götze *et al.* 2009; Thompson *et al.* 2007). However, relatively little is known about children's choice processes. This study explores how far the family environment has a moderating effect on the types of influence strategies that children choose to use, throwing light on the underlying motivations which children have in relation to strategy employment. Within consumer research, the family environment has been characterised as being a homogenous environment for each child. This assumption about the homogeneous nature of the family environment underpins current work on family communication pattern and parental socialization style studies. However Cotte and Wood (2004) called for further investigation of the "shared" nature of the family environment. This study therefore seeks to explore how children's varying experiences of their family environment facilitates or hinders children's choices of different influence strategies.

Methodology

Phenomenological interviews (Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1989) were conducted with six families living in the North West of England. Following calls for family research which captures the dynamics of family purchase decision-making (Hamilton and Catterall 2006; Tinson and Nancarrow 2005) interviews were conducted with both children and their parents. As many family members as possible were included in the data collection process. In line with other interpretivist studies (see for instance Thompson and Troester 2002) purposive sampling (Miles and Huberman 1984) was used to identify and recruit a range of family types and not just nuclear family forms.

In view of changing family configurations, we explored child influence strategies across a range of family forms (Thompson *et al.* 2007), including a lesbian headed family with both adopted and biological children; a family headed by a cohabiting couple; a family headed by a single mother; and a blended family.² All these family forms represent types identified by Harrison and Gentry (2007a, 2007b) as receiving inadequate research attention. Two nuclear families were also recruited from different socio-economic groups. An emphasis on studying consumers in-depth necessitated a smaller sample size to be used to allow thick descriptions to emerge (Carrigan and Szmigin 2006) which is common for interpretivist consumer research.

² A blended family has been described by Belch and Willis (2001) as a step family; however, Schultz *et al.* (1991) state that blended families have to be complex stepfamilies in which both spouses were parents before the current marriage

The families were recruited partly through personal contacts; partly through placing online appeals for participants in family newspapers and publications; and partly by contacting relevant family organisations in the North West region. The interviews were largely conducted in the family home, usually in the kitchen at the dining table, although one interview was conducted at one respondent's place of work. Each family was visited between three and five times and interviews were conducted over a period ranging from four to twelve months. Respondents were first asked for their consent to participate in the research process, assured of anonymity, told about the purpose of the research and then asked for permission to record the conversations.

Consent was sought from parents and guardians to approach their children in order to then seek the children's consent to be involved in the data collection process (Mandell 1991). Methods by which valid consent can be obtained from children were adhered to (Mason 2004). Recognising that children are potentially vulnerable research participants (Morrow and Richards 1996) the children were interviewed within the family home where an adult was always present, although not necessarily within earshot.

Interviews were tape recorded in full, lasted between 60 and 130 minutes, and were transcribed verbatim. The interviews with family members were conducted over three stages and explored themes such as family history and how family members got their own way. In stage one an interview was conducted with the parents/guardians, although two points are worth highlighting at this stage. In two of the families the fathers chose not to participate in any part of the data collection, and fathers generally had much less involvement than mothers in the interview process as a whole (although every attempt was made to capture their voices, principally by utilizing a male researcher to seek their views). Following this initial interview, stage two involved interviews with the children. Given that children, particularly younger children, may feel uncomfortable in a one-on-one interview situation (Mayall 2001) the children were given the option to have another sibling present during their interview.

Indeed in the second stage of the interviewing process the membership of the interviews was very fluid. Some children preferred to be interviewed individually, whereas in other families the children freely left and returned to the interview as other siblings joined and departed. Accordingly with some of the families one longer style visit was conducted with the children (comprising several shorter interviews with single and multiple children, often with overlapping attendance), whereas in other families the children preferred to have a much more contained interview. A semi participatory researcher role was adopted with the children (Mandell, 1991). Following this stage of interviewing, a final family group interview was conducted at stage three with as many family members as possible present. As with Hamilton and Catterall (2006) a financial incentive was offered to the families to thank them for their participation.

The interpretation of the interview texts was undertaken using a hermeneutical process (Thompson 1991; Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1990) which involved moving iteratively, back and forth between interview texts (within and across family cases) and the literature. Emerging themes in the data drove subsequent reading in the literature (Thompson 1996). Following hermeneutical principles (at the methodological level) a constant shift when reading between individual transcripts and the entire data set enabled a greater emergent understanding to develop in which elements of the part gave further meaning to the whole. Each family case was analysed on an idiographic basis which allowed for categorization of data from which larger conceptual classes emerged. These concepts were then compared across family cases, following Spiggle's (1994) initial steps for qualitative data analysis.

Findings

Across all six family cases, the family stories highlight the significant differences which exist *within* the families studied, and of the different treatment of family members by other family members. Each child did not have the same level of access to influence strategies, particularly in relation to his or her ability to form a coalition with other family members. Similarly the level of resistance to an influence strategy also varied depending on the child's characteristics and unique position within their family's environment. Our presentation, in a similar vein to Thompson (2005), highlights two family cases which illuminate the global themes found across all the families in this study. The family stories of the Baldwin and Jones families are introduced because these family stories emphasise the significant differences in children's experiences within the family environment, and highlight how these different family environments affect the influence strategies which the children employ.

The Baldwin Family Story

Carole and Ray Baldwin have been married for two years, having met following the death of Carole's first husband, Greg, and the unrelated breakdown of Ray's marriage to his first wife, Paula. Both Carole and Ray have children from their previous marriages, and so the Baldwin family is considered to be a blended family (Belch and Willis, 2001). Carole has four children from her first marriage: three grown up non-resident children, George, Kathy and Marie; and one resident child, Jessica (14), who lives with Carole and Ray in their new family home. Ray also has two non-resident children, Jamie and Anthony, who live with their mother. Ray tries to see his sons whenever he can. Carole and Ray have also had a biological child together, Nina (5).

The relationship that Carole and Ray have with Nina and Jessica is markedly different for each child. Whereas Nina is considered to be a good child, Jessica is not, with sibling comparison within families suggested to be common (Schachter and Stone 1985). Whilst Ray spends a great deal of time with Nina he spends little time with Jessica, with stepfathers often finding greater satisfaction in rearing their biological vs. step-children (Thoits 1992). Indeed, it is common for stepfathers to spend little time, and adopt a disengaged parenting style, with their step-children (Coleman, Ganong and Fine 2000). As a result Ray and Jessica do not have a strong relationship, and despite Ray's marriage to Carole, Ray has no intention of adopting Jessica as his own child:

Carole: I said to [interviewer's name] before, that's why we ignore her [Jessica] (..) all of the time that she [Jessica] was sat there rabbiting on, Nina was sat there (.) and, and, she just wrote that [passing Ray a piece of paper that Nina had written on]

Ray: I need a hug?

Carole: That's what she's [Nina] like (..) it's like good child [Nina], bad child [Jessica]

Ray: It's not bad child, it's pain in the arse child

Jessica: But I got good grades

Ray: I'm very pleased that you got good grades (.) but that's for your science, not for your maths

Jessica: Yeah, but if I get another sticker I get a credit card, and then after that (.) after that, if I do good, I get a certificate

Ray: If you do well, not if you do good

Jessica: And then I do a certificate

Ray: So you're not doing very well at English, then, are you?

Jessica is very aware that her parents treat her step-sister in a much more positive manner. Whereas Carole and Ray describe Jes-

sica respectively as “crafty” and “stupid”, Nina is described by Carole as “innocent and sweet”, much to Jessica’s annoyance:

Interviewer: Do you think that Nina gets more [things] than you?

Jessica: I guess so (.) but then she gets little stuff. But they make me pay for my own things now; I have to pay money towards them

Interviewer: Do you think your Mum and Ray give in more to Nina than you?

Jessica: Yes! She’s their little angel (..) I get treated like a right skivvy

The different treatment of the girls affects both the manner in which they attempt to influence the decisions of their parents and their success in doing so. Whereas Carole and Ray believe that Nina doesn’t ask for things, and is happy with what she has, Jessica suggests otherwise. As the following extract suggests, which describes how the girls asked for Christmas presents, Carole believes that Nina hasn’t directly asked for any presents:

Carole: This one [Nina] doesn’t ask (.) you haven’t asked for anything yet

Jessica: Yes she has (..) she’s asked for, she’s about circled all the Argos catalogue

Carole: She’s ticked things; she’s ticked things (.) she’s not actually asked

Jessica: Yeah, but Ray said I can have

Carole: At her age

Jessica: She was asking for things before the Christmas disco

Carole: At her age, they just watch the telly and everything that comes up it’s I want one of them, I want one of them, I want one of them, without particularly realising what it is (..) so I don’t think you’ve actually decided properly, have you, what you want? You’re quite happy with anything (.) aren’t you?

Nina: I’m happy with anything

In the individual interview with Nina she commented “*I want lots and lots of stuff*” and she is aware that she doesn’t have to try too hard to get what she wants. Nina directs emotion based strategies towards her parents, and utilizes her affection to get the things that she wants, most often from her father, as Carole and Ray comment:

Carole: Ray and Nina have a very close bond (.) more so than Ray and Jessica. Nina’s very tactile with Ray, Nina, she’s always hugging him and she doesn’t ask for anything back, but I think she’s building foundations for a big whammy when she’s older (...) she gets up in the morning and she’ll come down, and the first thing she’ll do is, she’ll come and get hold of him, she’ll come downstairs, and she’ll grab his leg and just squeeze him

Ray: She can get away with murder!

Accordingly Nina doesn’t have to try too hard to influence her parents, particularly Ray. As a result she utilizes a limited range of influence strategies, largely using unilateral, positive effect, influence strategies. Jessica, on the other hand, coupled with her perceived parental rejection, tries much harder to influence the decisions her parents make. Carole feels that Jessica’s persistence has hampered her ability to get things from her parents, and it is suggested that the over employment of child influence strategies may lead to parents becoming immune to their influence (Ekström 2007):

Carole: What Jessica tends to do, she’s like a dripping tap (..) and she drip, drip, drip, drips until you get that fed up of it she ends up with nothing (.) and she’s not sussed this out yet. If she doesn’t mither, and she just (..) all she’s got to do is mention it the once ... the minute he walks through the door it’s, Ray? With her there’s a tone (..) it’s a definite, you just hear it

Faced with this high level of parental resistance, Jessica does not direct bilateral influence strategies towards her parents as she lacks their support. Accordingly she uses unilateral influence strategies (Bonn 1995), which often involve the use of negative affect (Cowan *et al.* 1984) and violence. What is interesting to note within this family, however, is that Jessica tries to bolster her own influence potential and success. Recognising the power that Nina holds over her mother and step-father, and the expected parental resistance should Jessica act alone in her strategy employment, Jessica forms temporary coalitions with her step-sister in order to utilize Nina’s influence potential. This would seem to support the notion that children consider the expected level of parental resistance in their strategy selection (Cowan and Avants 1988). One such occasion involved the purchase of an iToy. Jessica wanted this toy which connected to her PlayStation, but she couldn’t afford it by herself. Realising this, and accepting that her mother and step-father were unlikely to purchase it for her, she approached Nina and asked her to contribute some of the money that she had received from Christmas towards the cost of the iToy. Together they could afford the toy, but Jessica was equally aware that she still needed to persuade her parents, as the gatekeepers of her consumption, that this was a sound decision made by both girls:

Jessica: I Knew Mum wouldn’t let me have it (..) so I teamed up with Nina, they’d give her anything. I don’t think Nina even wanted it

Interviewer: But she still paid for some of it?

Jessica: Yeah, but she’s not bothered with it

Carole was concerned about this purchase, and what she considered to be the “bullying” that she felt had gone on between Jessica and Nina. Jessica, faced with the conditions of her position within her family’s ecology, feels that she has little choice but to collude with Nina in order to get the things that she wants. Such coalitions are often very short lived, with Jessica ending the coalition once she has what she wants. The ability to form a coalition has also been linked to the ability to ‘sell’ a proposition (Thomson *et al.* 2007); although we suggest that this alone is not enough. The cause needs to be just, *and* the child needs to hold positive relationships with other family members, particularly their siblings, to be able to form a coalition. It is also unlikely that Jessica could form a coalition with her parents, as Lee and Collins (2000) and Lee and Beatty (2002) suggest is possible for some children.

The Jones Family Story

Debbie Smith and Paul Jones have been living together for just under twenty years. They have four children together who live in the family home: Michael (14), Anna (12), Adam (9), and Tina (7). Again, the children in the Jones family are not treated in a similar way by either their parents or their fellow siblings. Whereas Paul sees Michael as his mother’s “golden boy”, his siblings do not share the same favourable position as Michael in their parents’ eyes:

Interviewer: Who do you give in to the most?

Debbie: Paul would probably say my ‘golden boy’, as he calls him, Michael. I don’t know what it is, perhaps it’s because he’s

my first born, but I suppose he does get away with doing more things. I think partly it's because I feel sorry for him, there's no one around here for him to hang around with, and he's doing well at school and with his drama and with his music (...) he's just a good boy, dead reliable and dependable

In the eyes of his mother at least, Michael's birth position (Lee and Collins 2000) grants him certain privileges in his family. However, this preferential parental treatment is not viewed favourably by his siblings, who are often antagonised by this, as Michael's sister, Anna, comments:

Anna; Michael just gets (...) he gets whatever he wants, just one word with Mum and he's got it. She'll get him anything (...) I don't get anything like he does

Anna in particular feels that there is a great deal of comparison between herself and Michael, with Michael seemingly able to monopolise their mother's time, with Debbie taking an active interest in Michael's leisure pursuits. Michael is a promising young actor, and Debbie pays for him to attend drama classes and often drives him to rehearsals:

Anna; It's always Michael does this, Michael can do that, why don't you be more like Michael? Michael's the one who's doing the best, he can act, he can sing, he's clever at school (...) he's all Mum ever talks about, the rest of us don't get a look in

Such is the tension between Michael and the rest of his siblings, who also view his ability to successfully influence their parents in a detrimental light, that Michael is often excluded and ostracised by his siblings. Although many of the products that Michael owns are relatively expensive and high-tech, purchased through his earnings as a young actor, his siblings do not show a great deal of interest in them. When Anna, however, won an Apple iPod in a supermarket prize draw Adam and Tina were immediately fascinated with it, and wanted one just like Anna's, even though Michael had bought himself one months before:

Michael; Anna's was better (...) better because it was hers, and she's the cool one, so it was just better

Although Michael can, and does, form a coalition with his mother, as the following quote suggests, he would struggle to gain this level of support from other family members (particularly his siblings):

Debbie; He'll [Michael] come round, and he'll put his arms around you (...) and he'll just say you know what I'd really like? ... And then it's up to me to break the news to Paul (...) he wants what? My God! Does he realise how many hours I've got to put in to get that? And then I'll say, well I'll give you my family allowance, and we'll cut down on food, and we'll go to ALDI instead of ASDA [supermarkets].

Debbie also suggests that she tries harder to get Michael the things that he wants in relation to her other children, and as a result Michael simply has to use unilateral influence strategies. Faced with minimal parental resistance Michael uses autonomous influence strategies, including telling and asking (Cowan and Avants 1988) to influence his mother, and subsequently his father. The other children, however, employ a range of influence strategies. Anna, deemed to be a boisterous child by her parents, often makes deals with them, or uses laissez-faire influence strategies. Over the Christmas period

Anna also did not ask for any presents, with not asking proving to be a very effective influence strategy for Anna to use. Recognising her non-demands, Debbie and Paul bought her a range of presents, including an expensive video camera. Such an influence strategy, of not asking, has not been fully recognised within existing child influence strategy frameworks:

Paul; Anna did well out of it [Christmas]. She didn't ask for anything, but she had to have something. We ended up buying her a video camera (...) so she did well

Tina, supporting Kipnis's (1976, p.46) assertion that children can only "*beg, ask, plead or whine in order to influence their parents*", demands items, cries, or plays on their emotions to get what she wants. Adam frequently asks his parents for things.

We also have further empirical evidence from the Jones family story to suggest that the repertoire of influence strategies available to children may be somewhat restricted, dependant on their place within the family environment. As Michael is viewed as being "*dull and boring*" by Tina, and indeed his siblings as a whole, he does not have access to their support. Consequently Michael has little choice but to employ unilateral influence strategies, or form a coalition with his mother. Anna, on the other hand, is well liked by her younger brother and sister, and Anna effectively exploits this. Recognising the high level of parental resistance to her influence strategies, and aware that her mother thinks that Anna "*wants every single week, every single week ... it's all year round with Anna*", Anna encourages Adam and Tina to ask their parents for things on her behalf, or she forms a coalition with them:

Debbie; She's [Anna] quite clever now, she gets the others to put a word in for her so she gets what she wants

Interviewer; So they come to you and say Anna wants this?

Debbie; Adam and Tina, usually (...) she's quite clever, she knows if she really, really wants something that it's no good just asking all the time because I'd get sick of it (...) so what she does is she makes other people ask for the things she wants, you know ... she ends up getting things even though she herself hasn't asked for them ... to her it might look like she's not asking for much, but she has, even if she's not come out and asked me for things.

DISCUSSION

Michael Jones, unlike his siblings, faces minimal parental resistance to his influence strategies, and he is able to garner considerable support from his mother, and subsequently his father. Mothers have been found to work best with sons in coalitions, particularly when the son is the eldest child (Lee and Collins 2000). Nina Baldwin can also easily influence the decisions of her parents, and both Nina and Michael therefore need to utilize only a limited range of autonomous influence strategies (e.g. tell, ask, positive affect).

Birth order, we suggest, is therefore related to a child's influence strategy choice and the subsequent parental resistance to its employment. First born children within the families studied were found to have a greater influence in the decision-making process. Although birth order has been related to a child's success in employing influence strategies (Cotte and Wood 2004; Dunn and Plomin 1990; Lee and Collins 2000), we suggest that disruption in the family can affect this.

Whilst existing literature suggests that it should be Nina Baldwin who is compared with Jessica, with older children often used as a benchmark for younger children (Buhrmester and Furman 1990; Harris 1995), this is not the case in the Baldwin family. Similarly

Jessica should hold more influence in the decision-making process because of her age (John 1999), but her position within the family has been disturbed because of the changes to her family form. As the Baldwin family has changed, so too has the power distribution amongst the resident children. Jessica’s position within her family has been displaced, and Nina (the biological child of both couples) is treated as if she were the first born child who is suggested to hold greater influence. In effect Nina is the first born child of this new coupling, and it appears as if a new, “second” family has been created composed of Carol, Ray and Nina.

A child’s ability to influence the decisions made by their parents relates to how that child is situated within the family ecology, and how they are viewed by their parents (as figure 1 suggests). Michael

Jones and Nina Baldwin are viewed in a favourable light by their parents, and need only use *autonomous* influence strategies to get what they want. They also face limited parental resistance. Anna Jones and Jessica Baldwin, for example, are not held in such high regard by their parents. Consequently both girls need to adopt much more aggressive and *confrontational* influence strategies, and need to fight for what they want because of the high level of parental resistance. Accordingly, as shown across each family, a child does not have automatic access to each influence strategy identified earlier; Anna and Jessica, for example, can not form coalitions with their parents, and they would struggle to effectively utilize the influence strategy of positive affect.

Figure 1: Influence Strategy Matrix

Child’s Position in Family	Strategy Type		
	Lone Influence	Group Influence	
Favourable	<i>Autonomous</i> e.g. Emotion; Positive Affect; Ask e.g. Michael; Nina	<i>Cooperative</i> e.g. Deals; Bargaining; Positive coalitions e.g. Michael and Debbie; Nina and Ray or Carole	Little Resistance
Unfavourable	<i>Confrontational</i> e.g. Demand; Show aggression; Laissez-faire e.g. Jessica; Anna	<i>Collaborative</i> e.g. Coalitions (which involve coercion) e.g. Jessica and Nina	Strong Resistance

With regards to coalition formation, however, both Jessica and Anna recognise their low standing in their parent’s eyes. It has been suggested that “weaker” family members can unite to counter the influence or resistance of a “stronger” family member (Pearson 1989), and so in an effort to boost their own influence potential (and to stand a greater chance of getting the things that they want) the girls utilize a sophisticated series of coalition formation strategies.

Although Jessica and Anna could never form a direct coalition with their parents, they both have the potential to begin by forming a coalition with their siblings in order to exert indirect influence on their parents. In the first stage of strategy deployment Jessica and Anna recruit other siblings to work with them to facilitate their influence strategies. Once this sibling-based coalition is formed then the group as a whole attempts to influence the decisions of their parents in the second stage of this coalition-based strategy. Jessica Baldwin often utilizes this strategy, first influencing Nina to work alongside her, and then both Nina and Jessica work together in a coalition to influence their parents. Alone Jessica could never influence her parents in this way, but she cloaks her influence strategy with the presence of her step-sister. Such a strategy has been termed *collaborative*, as although co-operation is needed to form the coalition, such co-operation may not always be granted by a child’s free volition. Carole Baldwin, for example, believes that often Jessica bullies Nina into working together in this way (with Carole feeling that many of the things that the two girls ask for together are only really wanted by Jessica), and an element of parental resistance is encountered because of this.

What is interesting to highlight is that whilst individually Jessica Baldwin would utilize confrontational influence strategy types (demanding; showing aggression), when she works in coalition with

Nina the strategy types are much less aggressive. We, therefore, have early findings which suggest that coalition formation can affect the types of influence strategy which the group as a whole employs. It is almost as if Nina’s presence, and her success in influencing her parents, dilutes the normally aggressive strategies which Jessica alone employs.

One other form of influence strategy type, termed *cooperative*, was evident which involved the use of less coercion in employing collaborative influence strategies. In such coalitions (such as that of Michael Jones and Debbie Smith; or Nina and Carole or Ray Baldwin) the members freely agreed to work in collaboration with one another to influence others. Due to the coalition membership (which often includes a parent) little parental resistance was encountered.

The familial environments which exist within each family story suggest that it is probably rare for any one family to be composed of a single universal family environment, except possibly in the case of only children. We found little empirical support for the idea of a universal parental socialization style and family communication pattern within a family, although this seems to have been an assumption which has underpinned earlier studies (Carlson and Grossbart 1988; Carlson et al. 1994). Rather, different socialization tendencies exist within the same family. Children therefore appear to have different levels of access to the range of influence strategies identified, principally in relation to their ability to form coalitions with siblings and/or their parents to influence family purchase decisions. A child’s family environment does therefore, we suggest, effect the types of influence strategy which they choose to employ.

As Flurry (2007) and Palan and Wilkes (1997) point out, considerable gaps exist in both our understanding of the influence strategies which children use and in terms of understanding the choices

they make when choosing which influence strategy to employ. Our paper has attempted to fill some of these gaps by suggesting that the family environment can restrict a child's choice of influence strategy. Ultimately children experience their family in different ways, and this has implications for the types of strategy which they choose to use and those that they have access to.

Opportunities exist to explore the influence strategies of children across a greater range of family types, and also to explore in further depth whether children direct different types of influence strategies towards different family members (e.g. siblings, grandparents, step-parents). Similarly opportunities exist to explore multiple family consumption sites (e.g. can children switch strategy use in different family settings, or homes), and families of different cultures, to investigate whether such factors also influence the choice processes involved in selecting which influence strategy to employ.

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