OCCUPATIONAL STATUS WITHIN THE HOUSEHOLD: AN APPROACH TO SEGMENTATION

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Abstract

Women's employment has been researched as a crucial consumer behavior construct, particularly if distinctions between nonworking, just-a-job, and career orientations are maintained. Cultural role changes as well as increased unemployment in some sectors have caused females to adopt coprovider and primary provider status within the household. This suggests that male participation in the labor force as well as degree of commitment to it might also prove of importance to the marketplace. A model of household role structure formation and resulting marketplace tactics will be offered, together with possible areas of investigation within this broadened typology of employment by both spouses.

Introduction

The household has been recognized as the appropriate unit of analysis when studying market acquisition, commodity usage, and related consumption behavior of members in a society (Davis 1976). One area of particular concern due to today's changing households, however, is the effect of women's employment upon family marketing behavior (Weinberg and Winer 1983; Schaninger and Allen 1981; Strober and Weinberg 1977; Anderson 1973). Labor statistics support this interest, as 51 percent "of all American women are now employed outside the home. Moreover, about 43 percent of all married women have jobs. Still more revealing, about 45 percent of all married women with preschool children are working (Schiffman and Kanuk 1983)."

A specific limitation which this paper will address draws from the literature researching and attempting to segment household purchasing decisions by nonworking wife and working wife families. The concern might be raised that the role of "wife" is isolated from the rest of the decision unit with respect to employment effects on marketing-related activities. In other words, the instance of paid work and possible commitment toward it are concerned for the female household member in numerous research efforts (Weinberg and Winer 1983; Neilly 1982; Schaninger and Allen 1981; Strober and Weinberg 1977), with no treatment of possible variation for the husband or interaction of one upon the other.

Consider, for example, research into food consumption behavior of households having career-oriented wives versus non-employed wives. The input of a part-time employed husband to the food production process would be expected to differ from the contributions of a male highly-involved in a career simply on the basis of time available, as well as from interests and skills, in both types of households. In other words, the demands upon both spouses would be anticipated to interact. The aim of this paper is to develop a series of research questions and tentative hypotheses about household decision behavior as it is affected by changing patterns of male and female career commitments to occupational status. To address the needs suggested above, four steps will be followed: relevant literature will be briefly reviewed, the concept of household goal organization will be suggested within a model of household structure, a classification of employment types will be presented, and implications for future research will be outlined.

Background: Variability Within The Household Types

Literature and research investigating women's consumer behavior has tended to follow an evolutionary pattern in its development, recognizing the expansion of opportunities and increased social acceptability for nontraditional female roles. Tradeoffs within this context have considered most specifically typologies of women's time, role pressures, and resultant task allocation (Persber and Birnbaum 1977; Bartos 1978; Neilly 1982), although in some cases little support was found. Strober and Weinberg (1977) and Weinberg and Winer (1983) maintained that wife's labor force behavior was not a significant factor in determining major family expenditures, as are variables such as income and assets which relate more appropriately to the accumulated goal organization of the household as a unit, which reflects the inputs and preferences of all household participants. Neilly (1982) in particular has noted the equivocal, if not contradictory, results of similarly-constructed research, and has suggested that a possible explanation may be failure to include some recognition of time pressures and felt perceptions of time limitations.

Neilly argued that role overload might be a causal link between wife's employment and convenience consumption. This construct measures a type of role conflict that results from excessive demands on the time and energy supply of an individual. This proceeds from the premise that gainful employment outside the home generates demands on the wife's time beyond the comparable demands on the homemaker, resulting in the dual responses of increased ownership of time-saving durables and greater likelihood of convenience foods served. The possible effect of non-employment by other household adults, however, had not been included as an additional moderator of wife's marketplace responses.

A further concern addresses the temporal status of employment at time of survey versus the intention to become gainfully employed. Another misleading impression conveyed by women’s labor force statistics is that all women who are not in the labor force are homemakers. In fact, "nearly five million American women aged 16 and up are not in the labor force because they are going to school (Robey 1984)." This comprises 5.2% of all women over 16, and 6.2% of those of working age.
This would suggest that women's marketing behavior might not only be affected by their immediate status, but also by their plans for temporary exit or reentry of the labor market at some point in time. In support, Bartos (1978) argued for the establishment of a richer market segmentation framework, including four specific subgroups: homemakers having no plans to work outside the home, homemakers planning to return to or to enter the labor force, employed women who regard their status as "just a job," and "career" women.

She further challenged stereotypical assumptions about women, and postulated that broadened segmentation strategies, such as the combination of demographic facts with changing attitudes and philosophies, might equally be applied to men, unmarried, and consumers over 49. This would seem to point to the need to develop a more unified approach on employment variability across both spouses which may relate their goals, their skills, and their time allocations to the process of acquisition, transformation, and consumption of market goods and services. A conceptual framework linking these concerns appears to underlie Bartos' suggestions, which will be considered next.

**The Household Setting:**

Goals, Role Structure, and Decisions

The premise adopted in this work argues that "task allocation in household decision making is clearly related to its role structure (Bonfield, Kaufman, and Hernandez 1984)," and because of this, the study of role effects by one household member must necessarily include some consideration of the other roles which affect it. The roles, or behaviors required of each member, form ongoing patterns of long-term task allocation, purchasing, and home production responsibilities, and become a central part of household structure as shown in Figure 1.

The model proceeds as follows: individuals (in this case, the husband and the wife) form a household structure through marriage, bringing with them established patterns of cultural role expectations, such as employment goals and gender norms, b.) resources, such as educational and occupational skills, and c.) investment in various household decision areas, relative to the preferences of each spouse, following Davis (1976). As the structure evolves through household negotiations, these characteristics interact to enable both income-producing and household labor to be allocated and implemented via selected market efforts. Three closely-related components may be suggested as representing processes which parallel the outcomes which result. The role structure, as described earlier, is partially affected by decision style preferences. Tendencies to share some decision areas, while specializing in others, for instance, play some part in assigning long term, or "usual agent," responsibilities for the work of a household unit. Additionally, the goal organization, or the consensual ranking of members' goals to form household priorities, also reflects the ongoing adjustment of both spouses' balancing of the relative importance of household, training, job, and career. Households may classify themselves as traditionally male-supported, dual-income, dual career, or transitioning through education, for example, and assign tasks accordingly.

It would seem intuitive when studying these behaviors, such as employment status and possible job involvements of the wife, that similar constructs for the other working-age residents (such as the husband), would also be expected to contribute substantially to the purchase, production, and usage behaviors consensually enacted by one or all household members. In other words, it is not enough to recognize variability for only one partner, since it is the juxtaposition of both which partially comprise household structure and contribute to behavior in the marketplace. It is expected that the importance of this interaction would exhibit increasing relevance in the prediction of consumption patterns, as households move from traditional to more varied egalitarian norms. The focus of this work argues that while the adoption of wife's occupational status provides valuable insight into consumption preferences, this measure taps only a portion of the determinants of goal organization.

This is in contrast to the common "episodial" approach, which focuses on isolating marketing activities by product category, rather than recognizing that tradeoffs and negotiated compromises may actually form a more relevant marketing process. The perspective suggested here, however, recognizes an inherent interdependency in household roles, which stems from the longevity of the household structure, the bargaining power of its members, the decision style preferred, and the overall commitment to household and employment goals. Husbands and wives routinely confront a sequence of related choices and as a result, may trade off among decisions made concurrently, as influences by both situational and environmental factors. McCall (1976), for example, found differences in specific patterns of behavior among working wives and non-working wives with respect to food shopping behavior, clothing purchase, services preferred, and media exposures. The differences...