How important are the roles that family members take in decision making as far as the family expenditure pattern is concerned? How do we measure family roles? Are there entire categories of families which have a characteristic role pattern? These are the sorts of questions to which we will address ourselves in this paper in an effort to demonstrate what we know, or need to know, about family interaction that would have relevance to the way in which families consume goods. First, we will take a close look at the variable which is the chief focus of our discussion, family roles.

By role we will mean the total part a family member plays when two or more such members interact with respect to a household expenditure. Clearly there are expenditures made that are individually determined and executed. These fall outside the domain of our present discussion. There are many other expenditures which just as clearly have been determined or influenced by two or more family members. The part a person takes in group decision making can vary from trivial to important by almost any definition of either term, and he can either restrict his role to a certain aspect of the decision making process or play a part at various of the sequence of stages. Already the complexity of investigating family roles in decision making should be apparent.

In analyzing the roles of family members in expenditure decision making, it is useful to use as a model some orderly sequence of actions that occur in the decision making process. Fifty years ago John Dewey spelled out what he termed the "steps in problem solving" to explain the cognitive processes through which an individual goes in solving a problem. While the years have seen many adaptations of Dewey's phases of problem solving, each in essence describes the kind of action that takes place from the stage where it is recognized that a decision is necessary to the stage where a course of action is selected. One such scheme would be as follows:

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1. Recognizing and clarifying the decision that has to be made.
2. Exploring and evaluating alternative courses of action.
3. Choosing and carrying out a course of action.
4. Evaluating the course of action in the light of intended results.

We are assuming that something approaching this scheme of stages in decision making exists to a greater or lesser degree when two or more family members interact with regard to purchasing decisions. Even the so-called impulse buying has definite elements of it. By viewing decision making as a relatively orderly sequence of stages we are able to direct attention, not merely to quantitative differences in the contributions of various family members, but also to the nature or content of their contribution at various levels of the decision making process.

There have been a number of studies which deal in some manner with family roles in decision making. The simplest, and perhaps most widely used, methodology largely ignores the salient features of our foregoing discussion. That is, respondents are simply asked to state who made the decision or who had the most influence in such situations as the last time they purchased a car or when last they went out for an evening. While the method has a seductive simplicity, it contains several important difficulties which should be made explicit: First, it assumes that respondents are able to answer the question; that is, that they understand with sufficient clarity the part that they and other family members played in the given decision situation.

Second, it assumes that the total of a person's role in decision making can be calculated in an additive fashion that ignores, or considers irrelevant, qualitative aspects of his contributions. At best, it seems to assume that respondents, without further directions, are able to weigh and evaluate the qualitative aspects of the roles of family members and arrive at a reliable estimate of the total importance or total contribution.

Third, it ignores, by not directing attention to them, stages in the decision making process. This, in turn, may even lead to a confusion between the total decision making process and one of its aspects, the execution of the decision or the selection of a course of action.

A closer look at these difficulties will at the same time shed light on the complexity of determining family roles in group decision making. To return to the first difficulty with the common methodology, there is at least reason to question whether most people are sufficiently sensitive to the part that they and others play in group decision making to be able to give a reliable report of it. In our early studies of family decision making here at Iowa State University, a number of married couples were given a decision-making problem, the expenditure of a hypothetical gift of $300.

and the behavior of the spouses during the discussion was recorded by a field worker. Previous to the decision-making session itself, the husbands and wives were given simple questionnaires asking which of them would do the most talking, which would have the most influence, which would contribute the most ideas and suggestions, and which would do the most to keep the session running smoothly. After the session, the same questions were asked in the past tense. It was thus possible to relate what the individuals were observed doing, to what they thought they would do, and to what they had done. The results of such analyses were starting and intriguing. In general, the couples studied showed no great ability to judge the several aspects of the roles they would play, about two-thirds even failing to identify accurately the relatively simple matter of who would do more of the talking. More than this, even immediately after the interaction there was no great improvement in the number of accurate judgments. All in all, the couples appeared to be quite unpracticed at even the relatively superficial degree of analysis necessary to recognize the part they play in a simple and structured interaction. What, then, do we really learn when a respondent checks on a questionnaire that the husband usually decides about automobile purchases or the wife decides about household equipment? How valid are these responses?

In addition to the question of validity, there are problems with the completeness of the information received through this method of determining spousal roles in decision making. In other words, is a simple designation of the most influential family member all we would like to know, or need to know, about family roles in decision making? There are ways of describing more fully the part a person plays in a group discussion and we are suggesting that these merit greater consideration than they have heretofore received.

The system that we have used in our experimental decision-making studies is Bales' system of Interaction Process Analysis. Briefly, this consists of a set of twelve categories into which can be placed all behavior to which an observer can assign meaning. The basic division of the categories is

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along two lines, (1) task behavior and (2) social-emotional behavior. In the task area are six categories for behavior which relates in a direct manner to getting the job done, solving the problem, or reaching the decision that lies before the group. Three of the categories in the task area can be characterized as categories for questions, as asking for orientation or information, asking for opinion or analysis and asking for suggestions. The remainder can be thought of as categories for attempted answers, as giving a suggestion, giving an opinion or giving orientation. All behavior that falls within any of the three question or three answer areas can be considered task-oriented behavior. The remaining six categories have to do with behavior relating to the integration and emotional tone of the group. Three categories contain positive actions, as showing solidarity, tension release and agreement, while three are designated as negative actions, as showing antagonism, tension and disagreement.

Bales' system of Interaction Process Analysis allows an objective description of the part a person plays in a joint decision-making session. We have an empirical basis for determining, for example, which person talks most, which gives more suggestions, which disagrees the most and so on. If this system, or one similar to it, could be employed in conjunction with the concept of stages in the decision-making process, our description of family roles in decision making would more nearly approach completeness. We could describe with some accuracy how the various family members behaved when clarifying the decision issue, the parts they played when alternative choices of action were being evaluated, and what and how much each did when it came to choosing among the known alternatives.

Let us, at this point, review our major considerations. We have said that an adequate study of family roles in decision making is a complex undertaking, and we have attempted at least to trace the outline of what an adequate study would entail. In addition, and this is but the other side of the same logical coin, we have criticized simpler methods of assessing family roles and questioned their utility. The more complete role analysis we have suggested is time consuming. It is expensive, and it is difficult to conduct. These features may immediately remove it from considerations for some researchers, and even when it does not, we should reasonably ask, "Is it worth it?" Thus in the area with which we are here concerned, we legitimately should determine whether our knowledge about family expenditures for agricultural products will be sufficiently enhanced through a fairly detailed analysis of family roles in the determination of such expenditures. Would that there were a simple answer to this question. Our approach to an answer to it will be twofold. We will, first, turn to the theoretical importance of family roles in decision making and attempt to set forth some of the kinds of differences in family expenditure patterns we should expect to find associated with various role arrangements. Following this we will turn to research to determine what has been discovered about the effects of family role arrangements and what kind of research needs to be done.
The area of products promotion immediately comes to mind as one which could be affected by decision making roles. Perhaps a homey example could best illustrate the point. Let us assume that in the class, age and income group that constitutes the potential source of purchasers of automatic washers it has been discovered that husband and wife share equally the task role in decision making, particularly at the state of evaluating alternatives. In other words, in decisions such as this, the man and woman would contribute ideas and suggestions about equally, would throw out points to be discussed about equally, and would "question and answer" one another to about the same degree concerning the features of various brands. From my observation, the makers of automatic washers do not believe that such a situation prevails, or at least they do not take it into account in their advertisements. Almost without exception, the advertisements that I have seen have failed to "feed" to the male observer the sort of information in which he could be presumed to have an interest unique from his wife. They do not dwell on the mechanical and electrical intricacies of their product nor on its unique features of an engineering sort. With respect to the product itself, they make it almost impossible to "lift up the hood" in dealer's showroom and peer knowingly at the silent innards. In short, it seems to me, the manufacturers of automatic washers seem to be assuming that women play the major task role when evaluating and choosing among brands. If the role arrangement we have suggested is correct, they are making it difficult for the male in our hypothetical group to play a task role in the decision making. This, in turn, may be reflected in his interest in the product generally and his willingness to discuss purchasing it. Let me remind you that I am not contending that husbands and wives in the group of potential purchasers of automatic washers do share equally the task functions relative to evaluating brands. This is but a hypothetical illustration. I do contend, however, that knowledge of how the task or idea function is typically performed in some universe of families would have a certain relevancy for the ways in which products for this group were promoted.

One other example in the area of product promotion will have to suffice. We are reasonably sure that at upper income levels the decision to purchase an automobile typically is individually made and executed. At middle income levels, by contrast, husband and wife share in this decision even though the husband may have a major role in the execution of the decision once it has been made. Yet manufacturers who hope to sell to middle income families consistently avoid the cheaper, day-time television hours when primarily women are viewing. My own haphazard sample of a stack of women's magazines, furthermore, failed to uncover a single automobile advertisement. It seems to me that both the television and magazine situations illustrate that automobile manufacturers are not fully taking into account the fact that middle-income women have been found to have an important and influential role in decisions on the purchase of an
automobile. Frankly, I have no idea whether day-time advertisements for automobiles would be economically sound. I am suggesting that advertisements directed specifically to them may create in women a greater interest in new automobiles generally and reverse the reported tendency for women to be interested in the less expensive models.6/

We could hypothesize still other ways in which the roles played by family members could affect their expenditures. These hypotheses, furthermore, would flow logically from what we already know about the importance of role arrangements in small groups. Thus the way in which husbands and wives divide up the task and social-emotional functions in joint decision making would be hypothesized to be related to their relative influence. It is possible, too, that expenditures for whole categories of goods, for example, recreational equipment, home furnishings, or children's clothing, are affected by the parts that husbands and wives take when such matters are discussed.

The amount of existing research directly appropriate to our purposes is disappointingly meager. Some work has been done, however, that indicates a more general effect of role arrangements on the performance of the group. Lewin's study of autocratic and democratic groups is an example, for it demonstrates that the role behavior of members of small groups affects the productivity of the group as well as the human relationships.7/ Torrance found that the way in which power is distributed in small groups has consequences for the group's decisions.8/ Strodtbeck reports a relationship between spousal roles in decision making and "winning" a decision.9/

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One of our decision making studies at Iowa State seems pertinent to our present concern, for it attempted to relate spousal roles in an economic decision-making situation to the nature of the decision outcome. Fifty married couples were asked to assume that they had received a gift of $300, with the stipulations that it could not be saved nor spent for anything that previously they had decided to buy. They were then asked to discuss together how the money should be spent and to reach an agreement on items they would like to purchase. The ensuing decision making session was observed by a field worker and a tape record of it was made.

In analyzing the data, couples were classified as "about the same," "husband high," or "wife high" with regard to their total talking, performance of social-emotional actions, and performance of task actions. Their action pattern was then related to the kinds of items they determined to purchase with the gift money. Items were classified according to the user of the item rather than the nature of the item. The scheme was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Typical Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Wife-personal</td>
<td>Clothing of all sorts, jewelry, golf lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Wife-household</td>
<td>Washing machine, dryer, range, cooking utensils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Husband</td>
<td>Books, shotgun, clothing, fishing equipment, watch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Joint family</td>
<td>Furniture, vacation trip, television, car down payment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Children</td>
<td>Play equipment, clothing, toys, furniture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We next computed, for each couple, the percent of all items on their final list that fell into each of the categories and the percent of the gift money used for each category. Let us summarize our findings briefly.

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10/ The description and summary of this study that follows is adapted from William F. Kenkel, "Husband-Wife Interaction in Decision Making and Decision Choices," *Journal of Social Psychology* (in press).
Total talking. In 42 percent of the families the husband out-talked his wife. In such cases, the items chosen were more frequently for the use of the whole family than in the other two types of families. When the husband out-talked his wife, the couple chose more items for the children and for the husband, but fewer household items, then when the couple talked about equally.

The husband and wife did about the same amount of talking in 40 percent of the cases. The difference between such couples and others were apparent in four of the five category possibilities. Due to their small numbers, we cannot do too much with the cases in which the wife talked more than the husband. There was a strong tendency, however, for more of the items to be for the use of the children, more for the wife's personal use and, interestingly, more for the husband's personal use.

The "idea-man" role. The husband contributed more of the ideas and suggestions than did his wife in 60 percent of the cases. Among such couples, the proportion of items in the categories "wife household" and "joint family" was substantially higher than among couples where husbands and wives contributed ideas about equally. These latter couples, constituting 26 percent of the cases studied, were decidedly more likely than any others to choose items to be used by the entire family. When the wife contributed more of the ideas, fewer of the items were for the use to the entire family than in any other case and more were for the children.

Social-emotional actions. For every category of decision choice, there was a noticeable difference between the couples in which the wife was the social-emotional leader and other couples. When the wife played the expressive role, as she did in 72 percent of the cases, the items were less frequently for her personal use and more frequently for the children, for the family as a whole, and for the household, than when the husband was the social-emotional leader. When the wife led in this area, about twice as many items were for her husband's use as were for her own use.

In 20 percent of the households, the husband was the social-emotional leader. Among such couples the proportion of personal items for the wife went up and household items decreased. Perhaps this indicates that the personality type capable of playing this role, a minority among males in this sample, has greater sensitivity to the needs of his wife and thinks first of her personal wishes and then of household items. Not fitting this picture of the sensitive, empathic male, however, are the findings that he himself gets a liberal share of the gift money, even more than when the wife is social-emotional leader, and that the joint family and childrens' uses are reduced. While, in almost every instance, couples who shared
equally the expressive function differed from both types of other couples, there existed too few such couples to permit detailed analysis.

There were, in all, 45 possibilities for differences to occur in the proportion of consumer items selected by the couples with different interaction patterns. Of these possibilities, 32 showed a difference of three percent or more, 19 a difference of five percent or more, and 7 a difference of ten percent or more. This would seem to indicate that the role arrangement in decision making has some bearing on types of expenditures made. At the same time, the relationship does not seem to be strong. If one is accustomed to think of consumer choices being influenced chiefly by objective needs, wants produced by advertising, family goals and values, and the like, then it is indeed impressive that even some relationship was discovered between how couples decide to spend a sum of money and the roles they play in reaching the decision. We can readily assume that families differ with respect to how they allocate their resources according to the use-type categories here employed. Let me emphasize, however, that even if we were able to generalize from our small sample, the family role arrangement would seem capable of explaining only a small part of the variation among families.

**Major Variations in Family Roles**

We have said, to this point, that family decision-making role arrangements are of theoretical importance and that there is some empirical evidence of its relationship to family expenditure patterns. For many purposes, knowledge of this relationship would be useful only if it were possible readily to assess family role arrangements and if broad population aggregates shared a similar or typical family role arrangement. Once again we find, in our research, gaps of uncomfortable proportions. Our theory, supported by some research, suggests that family role patterns should indeed vary according to major characteristics of families. Social status is one such variable, while family life cycle, ethnic background, rural-urban residence, race, and employment status of wife are a few others. These characteristics, furthermore, have two distinct advantages. First, they define and differentiate broad categories of the population which, for some types of consumer goods, can be assumed to have different needs, wants and purchasing abilities. Second, these characteristics are relatively easy to measure.

The important question that remains, of course, is whether or not family expenditure patterns vary sufficiently according to family role patterns to make it worthwhile to investigate major societal variations in family roles. At the present juncture we would conclude that the manifest need is for basic research into the effects of family decision-making roles on family expenditures. Following this, we could turn our research efforts to a
more accurate delineation of families with specified role patterns. As we have indicated, already we are reasonably sure in which direction to search for the broad characteristics that differentiate families with varied role patterns. In other words, if or when the roles that family members take in joint decision making are shown to have a significant effect on expenditure habits, we should be able to move with fair rapidity in furnishing practical assistance to those concerned with the sale of particular products or types of products.