

Children's influence in family decision-making: Examining the impact of the changing American family

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Received 28 February 2005; accepted 21 September 2006

Abstract

Over the past thirty years, the structure of the traditional American family has changed markedly. Significant trends include older parents, delayed marriages, postponed childbearing, single-parent families, and stepfamilies. These profound social changes have had a significant impact on the lives of children and have conspired to change the child influence patterns often cited in the family decision-making literature. Results from two contemporary samples of 1463 families suggest that consideration should be given to the changing structure of the family and the type of product when identifying the characteristics which moderate children's influence.

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Keywords: Consumer behavior; Family decision-making; Child consumers; Children's influence

1. Introduction

Since 1968, several studies have examined how children's influence varies by a number of variables, including type of product, decision-making stages, parental attitudes, and characteristics of the child and the family unit. These studies were largely published in the 1970s and 1980s, making our accumulated knowledge of child purchase influence patterns heavily dependent on studies conducted over two decades ago. Since that time, little attention has been given to determine how current changes in the social environment may have affected these findings.

The lack of recent attention to validation of historical findings is a shortcoming in light of the dramatic changes in the family over the past decades. These changes have been documented and lamented by a large number of diverse authoritative sources. Clulow (1993) predicted some of these shifts from a "traditional" family to a "new" family environment (see Table 1).

In the "new" family, children encounter decision-making at an earlier age and are taking on greater roles and responsibilities in family purchases. Recent research indicates that children's influence extends far beyond what is traditionally thought to

only include areas where children were primary product users. Children have been found to have strong influence on non-traditional areas such as home décor, automobiles, and home electronics (e.g., Meyers, 2004; Roy, 2004). In a Nickelodeon study, nine out of ten parents said their children's brand preferences for technical products carried significant weight in the decision, with 30% indicating that children's opinions were given "major importance" (Miller, 1999). Further, parents in the Nickelodeon study acknowledged deferring to children in areas where the children were considered to be more knowledgeable than their parents, such as sports and beverages. Other research reports that children's influence on parental spending has increased 54% since 1997 (Hunter, 2002), with children influencing 80% of family food spending. Finally, Cooper (1999) reports that in 43% of their purchases, parents requested input from their children.

Another indication of change in the family is that children are increasingly being socialized by agents external to the family. The percentage of children living in homes where both parents are working has doubled over the past 25 years (Francisco, 1999). With women increasingly entering the work force, children spend a large portion of their formative years in out-of-home settings or alone. Children are also faced with an unprecedented technological environment. For example, 47% of children aged 2–18 have a television in their bedroom. These

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Table 1
Changes in families^a

Traditional family	“New” family	Possible implications for child purchase influence
Families as producers	Families as consumers	Children encounter consumption decisions earlier
Multi-member households	Limited member households	Due to the changing family structure (postponed childbearing, single parents, etc.), households are smaller
Hierarchical relationships	Horizontal relationships	Family decision-making is more egalitarian, with children having more equality in the family; children are taking on more decision-making responsibility
Collective values	Individual values	Children form values as a result of external influences
Biological family ties	Social family ties	Families are no longer necessarily biologically related, changing traditional familial roles
Unpaid care	Paid care	Children encounter non-family socialization agents earlier
Differentiated relationships	Fused relationships	Stereotypical family decision-making forms are declining
Rights	Responsibilities	Children are achieving equal-shareholder status
Belonging	Isolation	Children make more decisions autonomously

^a Adapted from Clulow (1993).

children are consuming an average of 5.5 h a day using media such as television, print, and the computer (Dotson and Hyatt, 2005). In fact, the marked pace of technological change and educational development has left many children more knowledgeable than their parents (Francisco, 1999). As a result, children not only have greater input, but their input is being shaped by unmatched access to external socialization agents.

Other changes in the structure of the traditional family have elevated children's decision-making status. For example, in 1998, for the first time in our history, the majority of first born children (53%) were born to unmarried mothers (Eckel, 1999). In fact, single-parent families are growing at a record rate. In 1970, 3.4 million families were single-parent households; in 2000, 17.3 million households were headed by single parents. Forty percent of women who have never married in their 30s have a child. Single parents accounted for \$174 billion in expenditures. Similarly, in 1970, only 10.6% of the total households were single-parent families, compared to 16% in 2000 (Gutierrez, 2002). In these single-parent homes, children are uniquely positioned to be equal participants in family decisions.

Other signs of the decline in the traditional family include divorce and delayed child birth. The number of marriages ending in divorce quadrupled from 1970 to 1998, from 4.3 million to 19.4 million, leaving the population of divorcees at an all time high (Eckel, 1999). Young adults are waiting longer to marry and are delaying child birth, with the median age of first marriage for men averaging 26.8 years in 2000, compared to 23.2 in 1970. Women's median age at first marriage in 2000 was 25.1, compared to 20.8 in 1970 (Gutierrez, 2002). In addition to waiting longer to marry, young adults are cohabitating without marrying. Compared to 1970, cohabitation increased 137% in

2000, increasing from 1.6 million households to 3.8 million households.

All combined, these trends lead to fewer traditional, dual parent households. In 1970, 40.3% of the U.S. households were married with children, compared to only 24.1% of the households in 2000. The evidence of profound changes in families is irrefutable. These changes and implications collectively suggest that in today's family, children are faced with a different decision-making environment. Social forces, demographic shifts, and changes in parents' attitudes have all worked to increase the child's status as an active decision-maker. In fact, children may have more absolute decision-making influence than ever before.

The objective of this research is to examine the degree to which early findings regarding children's influence in purchase decision-making are still generalizable today. To do so, two theoretical frameworks are identified, a review of the literature of children's purchase influence is summarized and hypotheses are generated and tested with two samples, totaling 1463 families.

2. Theoretical frameworks

Resource theory and consumer socialization theory guided the development of the hypotheses in this research (see Table 2 for a summary).

2.1. Resource theory

Resource theory is a conceptual framework for understanding sources of power which may be employed in social interactions. Resources are “anything that one partner may make available to the other, helping the latter to satisfy his needs or attain his goals” (Blood and Wolfe, 1960). Foa (1993) further expounded on resource exchange as the ability of individuals to satisfy their physical and psychological needs via social interaction. He specified the importance of six types of social resources: love (an expression of affectionate regard, warmth, or comfort), services (activities on the body or belongings of a person which often constitute labor for another), goods (tangible products, objects, or materials), money (any coin, currency, or token which has some standard unit of exchange value), information (advice, opinions, instruction, or enlightenment), and status (an expression of evaluative judgment which conveys high or low prestige, regard, or esteem). The amount and value of resources possessed by an individual has a direct, positive relationship with the amount of power possessed by the individual and, therefore, a direct effect on the influence a person may exert in decision-making (Blood and Wolfe, 1960).

In family decision-making, resource theory has been suggested as an explanation for spousal dominance in decision-making. Studies have found that the partner with greater resources (as often measured by education, occupation and income) has the greater power in decision-making (e.g., Blood and Wolfe, 1960). Researchers have also recognized the viability of a resource explanation for the changing role of children in family decision-making.

Table 2
Theoretical frameworks underlying changes in family decision-making

Theoretical framework	Relationship to family decision-making	Contribution to hypotheses development
Consumer socialization	Family members' influence in decision-making process is a function of socialized norms and roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male and female children are socialized to have equal expectations (H1) • Racial/ethnic differences in socialization may impact influence in decision-making (H4) • Parents are exerting less control over their children (H5)
Resource theory	Family members with greater resources have greater decision-making power and can therefore influence the decision-making process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have greater earned income as a resource (H2) • Fewer children being born per family may negate the power of "first-born" children; birth order may no longer be a viable resource (H3) • Families with greater household resources (parental education, income, and occupation) enable children to have greater resources (H6, H7) • Children in single-parent households have greater status, but fewer financial resources (H8a,b) • Fewer children born per household increases the resources available per child (H9)

Resource theory suggests that the greater the comparative resources of children, the more likely children will exert influence in purchase decisions. Resources of children which have been examined in the literature include income contribution, employment status, education, school grades, parental love and affection, and birth order. In addition to these resources, it is likely that children have increasing resources attributed to their knowledge of the marketplace (which as previously discussed may surpass that of their parents in some areas) and their elevated status in single-parent families.

2.2. Consumer socialization

Another theoretical framework which may aid in the understanding of the changing role of children is consumer socialization. Socialization is defined as "processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace" (Ward, 1974). Through participation in family decision-making, children raised in different types of families learn norms, roles, and consumer skills and are thereby able to exert influence on purchase decisions (Mangleburg et al., 1999). Research suggests that differences in children's consumption behavior may be attributed to differing skills learned in disparate socio-economic

backgrounds (Page and Ridgway, 2001), parental child-rearing attitudes (Darley and Lim, 1986; Roberts et al., 1981), and parental communication styles (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988).

Socialization also determines a child's access to market information and impacts a child's ability to effectively utilize this information (Moschis, 1987). The family has long been identified as the primary socialization agent for children; however, recent trends indicate that agents external to the family, such as the mass media and peers, are outpacing the family (Dotson and Hyatt, 2005). Finally, research suggests that the age at which children understand and utilize market information is getting younger. Children in the analytical stage of development (ages 7–11), for example, are more aware of their environment, actively seek information from multiple sources, and utilize this information to exert influence in purchase decision-making (Roedder-John, 1999).

3. Development of hypotheses

Research on the influence of children in purchase decision-making has examined the degree to which characteristics related to the child, the parents and the family unit moderate children's influence. The following sections review the literature in each of these areas and develop hypotheses to examine the changes evident in the contemporary family.

3.1. Child demographics

3.1.1. Child's gender

Past research indicated that female children were more influential than were male children across all stages of the decision-making process (Atkin, 1978; Moschis and Mitchell, 1986). Changes in the contemporary family, such as delayed child-bearing, decreasing household size and fused relationships suggest that the moderating effect of gender may no longer be in effect. In fact, gender role socialization in many aspects is egalitarian. Parents socialize their sons and daughters equally in regard to the amount of time spent with them, discipline, and communication (Demo and Cox, 2000). To investigate the possible change from past research, the following hypothesis is suggested,

H₁. No difference in purchase decision influence will be found between male and female children.

3.1.2. Child's income

Resource theory suggests that money is a valuable social resource. Past research validates this in that children who earn income have been found to have more influence in purchase decisions than those children who do not earn income (Moschis and Mitchell, 1986). Recent studies have found that children have increasing sources of personal income. Children aged 4 to 12 were estimated to have a total income of over \$40 billion in 2002, most of which was spent on products and services for immediate consumption and are expected to spend over \$51.8 billion in 2006 (Dotson and Hyatt, 2005). McNeal (2001) estimates that children have an average income of \$22.68 per

week, almost four times the amount attributed to children a decade ago. McNeal further estimates that even in tough economic times, children's incomes are outpacing that of their parents, with children's income growing at a rate far greater than that of their parents. Thus, past research and present trends support the following hypothesis,

H₂. Children with greater earned income will have more influence in purchase decisions than will children with less earned income.

3.1.3. Child's birth order

Resource theory further suggests that status is an important social resource. In past research, a child's status in the family has been measured by the child's birth order. Churchill and Moschis (1979) first suggested that a child's birth order could be related to a child's participation in decision-making, with first-born children exerting greater purchase decision influence. Sociological trends of the 1990's lend doubt to the notion that birth order should moderate children's influence. Decreasing birth rates mean more households with fewer children and many households with single children. As a result, birth order may have less importance in contemporary family structures. To further investigate the effects of birth order, the following hypothesis is suggested,

H₃. No difference in purchase decision influence will be found due to children's birth order.

3.1.4. Child's race/ethnicity

Finally, one demographic variable that has not received attention in the literature, but has great contemporary relevance, is the race/ethnicity of the child. To date, research on children's influence in purchase decision-making has not addressed whether or not a child's race/ethnicity could moderate his/her influence. This is surprising given that the child population in the United States is more ethnically diverse now than ever before, with a dramatic increase in diversity seen over the past three decades.

Ethnicity could be of particular interest in modern families, as the changes occurring are not uniformly present across all ethnic subcultures in the United States. For instance, 74% of Caucasian children are members of two parent families, while only 36% of African-American children live with two parents (Teachman et al., 2000). The average number of children born to African-American (2.2) and Hispanic-American women (3.1) are consistently higher than Caucasian-American women (2.1), creating larger households and more children competing for the same resources in minority households (Medical Letter, 2002). In addition, African-American and Hispanic families with children are more likely to be economically disadvantaged than Caucasian families with children, regardless of family type. In 1999, 32% of all African-American families and 30% of Hispanic-American families were at or below the poverty level, compared with only 9% of Caucasian-American families. Hence, children in minority families are likely to have less resources and less freedom of choice.

Socialization of children also varies according to ethnic background. Research indicates that traditional role socialization is more common in minority families. Minorities are more likely to socialize their children to value cooperation, interdependence, and sharing (Demo and Cox, 2000). In particular, Hispanic families encourage frequent family interaction across an extensive family network and stress family unity over individual achievement. Similarly, Asian families expect compliance with family authority, value harmony with others and relinquish personal desires in lieu of the interests of the family as a group.

Thus, current demographic trends and socialization theory suggest,

H₄. Caucasian-American children will have more influence in purchase decisions than will children of minority races (e.g., African-American, Asian, Hispanic).

3.2. Parental attitudes

Children's influence on purchase decision-making has also been shown to vary by the child-rearing attitudes of the parents. Roberts et al. (1981) surveyed 1150 mothers and found that children were credited with less influence when their mothers were more traditional or conservative. Darley and Lim (1986) found that external locus of control parents perceived their children to have more influence across product categories and subdecisions than did internal locus of control parents. Similarly, Berey and Pollay (1968) found that the more child-centered the mother was, the less likely she was influenced by the child.

Today's trends indicate that parents are less child-centered and less willing to make sacrifices for their children than their parents were. In part due to ideology and simple prerogative, parents are less controlling of their children and are investing less time with their children (Bruce et al., 1995). This change in socialization implies that children may have more control over their own marketplace decisions and the freedom to exercise their preferences in purchase decision-making. To further investigate these findings in contemporary families, the following hypothesis is suggested,

H₅. Children whose parents have a greater perceived parental locus of control will have less influence in purchase decisions than will children whose parents have less perceived parental locus of control.

3.3. Family demographics

3.3.1. Household income and parents' education levels

Research on the effects of socio-economic status, including household income and parents' education levels, on children's influence has been mixed. Jenkins (1979) found no significant moderating effect of household income on parents' perceptions of children's influence. Where significant effects were found, results indicated that children who were members of middle class and higher income families had more influence in

purchase decisions than children in lower income, lower social class families (Atkin, 1978; Moschis and Mitchell, 1986; Nelson, 1978). Similarly, research suggested that the higher the parents' educational attainment and occupational status, the more that children influenced purchase decisions (Moschis and Mitchell, 1986).

In the contemporary family, the size and availability of resources are likely to have some impact on the integration of the child in the decision-making process. Socialization research indicates that children in lower SES families possess less consumer knowledge, less awareness of the marketplace (e.g., brands, prices, etc.), and are less informed of socially desirable consumption habits. When children have less access to resources, including financial or information, they are less likely to exert influence. Thus, the following hypotheses will be tested,

H₆. Children in households with higher incomes will have more influence in purchase decisions than will children in households with lower incomes.

H₇. Children whose parents have attained higher educational levels will have more influence in purchase decisions than will children whose parents have attained lower educational levels.

3.3.2. Family type

Another family characteristic documented by prior research to be a moderator of children's influence is the family type, or marital structure of the household. Previous research has focused almost exclusively on the traditional family (Ahuja and Stinson, 1993); however evidence shows that single-parent households are an increasing proportion of all households. In fact, statistics show that single-parent households are the fastest growing family type, with births to single mothers constituting 33.2% of all births in 2000 (Anonymous, 2002). Family disruptions such as divorce and out of wedlock birth and child-rearing have resulted in a greater number of children being raised in single-parent, mother-only households. Current trends suggest that more than half of all children born in the 1990s will spend time in a single-parent household (Demo, 2000).

Past research examining family type found that children who live in single-parent households are perceived to have more influence on purchase decisions than are children living in dual parent households (Mangleburg et al., 1999; Darley and Lim, 1986). Ahuja and Stinson (1993) found that children are three times more likely to shop with their family in single-parent households. In addition, children of single parents are also three times more likely to shop alone for the family. This finding could be attributed to children in single-parent households assuming greater independence and responsibilities than children in dual parent households. For example, children in single-parent households have been found to participate more in household tasks, including shopping, cleaning, and food preparation (Ahuja and Stinson, 1993) and in the decision to eat out (Labrecque and Ricard, 2001). In single-parent households, children are often not socialized to have a clear role distinction between parent and child. The status of children is often equal to that of the single parent in the absence of a second

parent (Mangleburg et al., 1999). Another explanation could be that in order to overcome parental guilt, single parents spend more money on their children to make up for spending less time with them. Therefore, the following hypothesis is suggested,

H_{8a}. Children in single-parent families will have more influence in purchase decisions than will children in dual parent families.

One aspect of single parentage that has not been investigated is the origin of the single-parent household. An unfortunate limitation of most research on single-parent families is that all single parents are grouped together, which often obscures the effects of resources and its associated outcomes (i.e., influence) (Demo and Cox, 2000). Although the overall rate of childbirth has decreased in America since 1970, the number of children born to single, never-married mothers is increasing (Rogers, 2001). In fact, millions of children are living with mothers who were adolescents at the time of giving birth. In 2004, 44% of children living with single parents were poverty level compared to only 6.4% of dual parent families (Jeffrey, 2005). Since children born to single, never-married mothers are more likely to be economically disadvantaged, they are less likely to have the resources to exert influence in purchase decision-making. Thus, a need exists to further examine family type in order to determine if the origin of the single-parent family has any effect on children's influence in purchase decision-making. The following hypothesis is proposed,

H_{8b}. Children in never-married, single-parent families will have less influence in purchase decisions than will children in divorced, single-parent families.

3.3.3. Household size

A final family characteristic that has been examined in past research is household size. Results regarding the effect of household size on children's influence have been mixed. Jenkins (1979) found children's influence in purchase decisions to increase with the number of children in the household. Similarly, Nelson (1978) found that children had more involvement in decision-making in larger families and thereby had more influence. In a study of single-parent families, Ahuja and Stinson (1993) also found support for the notion that children's influence increases as the household size increases.

In contrast, Ward and Wackman (1972) found that the size of the household had no effect on children's influence attempts. Further, in a critique of the literature, Mangleburg (1990) questions the positive relationship between household size and children's influence that has been found in past research. Mangleburg (1990) supposes that a negative relationship may be more realistic, where the presence of a larger number of children in the household may mean that children contribute more overall to decision-making relative to the parents, but that each individual child may have less influence.

Current trends indicate that the average family size is declining, with less competition among siblings for resources in the home. This is due in part to women's average age at first marriage and childbirth and women's presence in the labor force

Table 3

Independent variable	Study 1: child product		Study 2: family product	
	<i>F</i> -value (<i>p</i> -value)	Means*	<i>F</i> -value (<i>p</i> -value)	Means*
<i>a Univariate ANOVA results: child's initiation influence</i>				
Child's gender	9.751 (.002)	Male=11.85 Female=11.26	.346 (.557)	
Child's income	7.666 (.006)	High=12.33 Low=11.31	5.887 (.017)	High=12.25 Low=10.51
Child's birth order	4.151 (.042)	First Born=11.77 Later Born=11.34	.774 (.380)	
Race/ethnicity	15.303 (.000)	Caucasian=11.77 Minority=10.99	.017 (.897)	
Parent's locus of control	25.575 (.000)	High=11.08 Low=12.05	1.179 (.281)	
Household income	1.083 (.339)		2.720 (.068)	
Mother's education	7.247 (.001)	High school=11.22 College=11.90 Post-graduate=12.24	3.398 (.035)	High school=9.39 College=10.86 Post-graduate=11.22
Father's education	1.125 (.325)		2.392 (.094)	
Family type	2.483 (.084)		.670 (.513)	
Household size	1.184 (.316)		2.173 (.073)	
<i>b Univariate ANOVA results: child's search and decision influence</i>				
Child's gender	12.910 (.000)	Male=15.13 Female=14.38	2.459 (.118)	
Child's income	7.090 (.008)	High=16.79 Low=15.76	1.55 (.216)	
Child's birth order	3.820 (.050)	First born=14.87 Later born=14.43	11.718 (.001)	First born=13.44 Later born=11.42
Race/ethnicity	5.091 (.024)	Caucasian=14.88 Minority=14.38	18.730 (.000)	Caucasian=11.79 Minority=15.42
Parent's locus of control	8.744 (.003)	High=14.42 Low=15.05	.603 (.440)	
Household income	0.073 (.484)		11.949 (.000)	High income=14.60 Medium income=12.86 Low income=10.90
Mother's education	0.722 (.486)		8.112 (.000)	High school=11.17 College=12.00 Post-graduate=14.65
Father's education	0.454 (.636)		5.018 (.008)	High school=10.72 College=11.89 Post-graduate=13.86
Family type	3.264 (.039)	Divorced, single=16.45 Married=16.01 Never married, single=15.19	3.772 (.025)	Divorced, single=13.45 Married=11.99 Never married, single=16.13

Table 3 (continued)

Independent variable	Study 1: child product		Study 2: family product	
	<i>F</i> -value (<i>p</i> -value)	Means*	<i>F</i> -value (<i>p</i> -value)	Means*
<i>b Univariate ANOVA results: child's search and decision influence</i>				
Household size	5.604 (.000)	One child=15.77 Two children=14.90 Two children=11.53 Three children=14.39 Four children=14.17 Five or more=14.19	4.389	One child=11.89 Three children=12.73 Four children=14.81 Five or more=15.50

*Reported where significant at $p < .05$.

(Bruce et al., 1995). It is also attributable to the decline in average birth rates and the increase in single-parent households (Rogers, 2001). Contemporary research has suggested that smaller families imply improved opportunities for education, occupation and economic viability. In contrast, large families reduce available time and resources parents can provide for each child. Thus, the decrease in the number of children in the household has enabled parents to provide more material wealth to their children and has therefore elevated the child's status in the family. This elevated status should lead to greater influence in purchase decisions. To examine this further, the following hypothesis is tested,

H₉. Children in smaller households will have greater influence in purchase decisions than will children in larger households.

4. Method

4.1. Research design

Two studies were conducted. Both employed a cross-sectional survey research design with random sampling. Mothers of children aged 9–11 were selected as respondents. In the first study, the context was a product for primary use by the child, a toy purchase. In the second study, the context was a product for family consumption, a family vacation purchase. These product categories were chosen because research has documented that children's influence varies by product category, and it was necessary to select two divergent product categories wherein children were expected to exert influence.

4.2. Data collection and sample

4.2.1. Study 1

The sampling population in study 1 was defined as mothers of children who were enrolled in the fourth and fifth grades in public schools located in the northern and central regions of a southern state. A random sample of fifteen schools in these two

regions was selected. Thirteen of these schools agreed to participate in the study. Mothers of children enrolled in the fourth and fifth grades in these thirteen schools were asked to complete a consent form and a questionnaire.

Twelve hundred and eleven usable questionnaire packets were returned from the 2285 distributed, resulting in a 53% response rate. The principal of each school system was sent a questionnaire which requested basic demographic statistics regarding the fourth grade and the fifth grade student populations. These statistics were compared to those of the respondents. No significant differences were found between the sample and the population statistics.

4.2.2. Study 2

The sampling population in study 2 was mothers of children aged 9–11 whose families had recently taken a family vacation. A random sample of households across the United States was selected from a national consumer panel. Mothers were emailed an invitation to participate in the study. Two hundred and fifty two usable responses were obtained, resulting in an 84% response rate.

4.3. Dependent variable measures

The primary dependent variable of interest was children's influence. A 5-point Likert scale was adapted from Beatty and Talpade (1994). Each respondent provided information on two stages of the child's influence: initiation influence ($\alpha_1 = .79$; $\alpha_2 = .83$) and search/decision influence ($\alpha_1 = .76$; $\alpha_2 = .74$).

4.4. Independent variable measures

4.4.1. Child's demographics

The independent variables of the child's gender, child's birth order, child's income and child's race/ethnicity were provided in the demographic section of the questionnaire. The child's race/ethnicity was collapsed into two groups: Caucasian–American and all other minority groups. In study 1, the child's income was derived from summing all sources (e.g., the child's allowance, in-home paid jobs and outside-home paid jobs). In study 2, the mother specified a total amount for the child's income. For both studies, the child's total income was then split at the mean to produce a low income and a high-income group to facilitate comparison.

4.4.2. Parental locus of control

Parental locus of control was measured using a 5-point Likert scale of nine items derived from Campis et al. (1986), altered to specifically address the degree to which parents feel that child-rearing success is within their control ($\alpha_1 = .77$; $\alpha_2 = .71$). For hypothesis testing purposes, groups were split on the mean into high and low parental locus of control groups.

4.4.3. Family demographics

Information regarding household income, parents' education, family type (i.e., marital status), and household size was collected in the demographic section of the questionnaire.

Household income was measured in eight categories in study 1 and 25 categories in study 2. In order to facilitate direct comparison, it was then recoded into three groups: low income (less than \$29,999), middle income (\$30,000–\$59,999), and high income (\$60,000 and above) in both studies. Household size was measured as the number of children in the household in study 1 and the number of members residing in the household in study 2. For comparison purposes, study 2 was recoded to represent only child residents.

5. Results

Univariate ANOVAs were computed to determine statistical significance of each hypothesis at $p < .05$, and these findings are summarized in Table 3a and b.

6. Discussion

When comparing the literature often cited on children's influence and the results of the present study, notable findings emerge. Taken as a whole, the findings are consistent with the picture summarized in Table 1. The traditional American family is changing and the child's role in the family is evolving with that change. Consistent with existing research, this study reveals that children are influential in purchase decisions for the purchase of products for their own consumption and for the family. However, this research suggests that consideration should be given to the type of product (personal or family) when identifying the characteristics which moderate children's influence.

6.1. Child product

Several characteristics were found to moderate children's influence for the purchase of a product for the child's personal consumption. Similar to past research, the child's earned income, birth order, parents' locus of control, and household size continue to affect the child's influence. Children with greater earned income have more influence in the purchase of products for their own use. Expectedly, children who have personal funds to contribute to the purchase process are more likely to be successful in initiating and directing a purchase decision to their preference. First born children had greater initiation and search/decision influence. This may be explained by older children being more likely to voice their interest in and preferences for purchasing products for their own use. In families where the parents exerted less control over child-rearing, children were more likely to suggest or request items for their own consumption and to participate in the search for and decision to purchase these items. Finally, children in smaller households had greater influence in the search for information and decision to purchase a product for their own use. With fewer children in the household, there is less competition for resources, thereby enabling a child more latitude in selecting their own products.

In contrast to past research, no moderating effects were found for child's socio-economic status, as evidenced by their household

income and parents' educational levels. Also in opposition to past research, a reverse effect was found for the child's sex. Male children were considered to have more influence in the initiation and search/decision for products for their own consumption.

Two additional variables examined in this study were the race/ethnicity of the child and the family type, with particular attention given to the source of the single-parent household structure. Findings suggest that Caucasian families attributed greater influence to their children in the purchase of products for the child's personal use. This could be related to the fact that Caucasian–American families have fewer children than other minority racial and ethnic groups and thereby have greater resources per child available for the child's discretion in selecting their own products. **Children in divorced, single-parent families had the greatest influence in the purchase of child products; whereas the least influence in the selection of a child product was found to be children in single, never-married households. Divorced, single parents may be more likely to indulge their children due to feelings of guilt or regret, whereas single, never-married parents may not feel the emotional angst and instead feel the necessity to be strict due to limited resources.**

6.2. Family product

Children's influence in the purchase of a product for the family's consumption revealed interesting findings. Moderating effects were found for children's influence in the search for information and the decision to purchase a family product due to the child's birth order and socio-economic status (household income and parents' education). **First born children exerted greater input in the search for and decision to purchase family products. Parents may be more inclined to consider the input of older children when making family purchase decisions.** Consistent with past research, as the family income and educational levels of the parents increased, children were more likely to participate in the search for and decision to purchase family products. Parents with greater financial and educational resources may place greater importance on incorporating their children in the decision-making process for family products. Finally, children with greater personal income were found to exert greater influence in the suggestion to purchase family products. Although it is unknown if children contribute their own income in the purchase of family products, earned income may provide children greater perceived power to contribute to family decisions.

In contrast to the findings for a child product, children in larger households had greater influence in the search for and decision to purchase a family product. It is plausible that parents may be giving consideration to the total influence attributed to the children in the family when assessing the child's input on family product purchase decisions. If so, children's overall influence relative to that of their parents may increase as the number of children in the household increases. This would be particularly true for a product purchased for the entire family where multiple users are involved.

There were no moderating effects for the child's sex or the parent's locus of control. In addition, children's initiation

influence for a family product was not affected by the child's birth order, race/ethnicity, family type, or household size. Further, children's search/decision influence was not affected by the child's earned income.

Race/ethnicity and family type both moderated a child's influence in the purchase of a family product. In contrast to a child's influence in the selection of a product for their own use, minority children were more influential in the purchase of products for the entire family's consumption. Similar to the findings of household size, minority families tend to be larger than Caucasian families and thereby children may have a greater proportion of influence relative to their number. Children in single, never-married households had the greatest amount of search/decision input in the selection of family products, whereas children in traditional, married households had the least. In single, never-married households, in the absence of one parent, children may have an elevated, egalitarian status and be able to exert greater influence in the purchase of products for the family's consumption. In contrast, in traditional married households, both parents are present and are more likely to limit the input of children in the decision to purchase family products.

6.3. Practical implications

The findings of this study support the notion that children are a viable target market, not only for products for their own personal use, but also for products to be consumed by the entire family. Children 12 and under represent an imposing market force, with estimates of children directly influencing billions of family purchase decisions. Also interesting is that children's influence is now extending past those products considered traditionally child-oriented to include family-oriented products such as home furnishings, automobiles and electronics.

Given that children are influential in the purchases of both child and family products, it is imperative to understand the factors that are useful in segmentation. Overlooked segmentation characteristics such as family type and race/ethnicity may be useful in defining target markets. Marketing designed to target only the traditional family will not be effective in reaching all households.

The growing number of single parent and ethnically diverse households are subject to different constraints and a different decision-making environment. For example, divorced single parents often suffer the financial burden of a sudden decrease in resources and are thereby interested in cost-effective products which provide security and time-savings (Eckel, 1999). In addition, **children in single-parent homes are also often independent decision-makers for the household, making communication directed to children increasingly important.** Finally, minority children are more likely than Caucasian children to have younger parents and reside in a larger family, creating implications for the family's availability and use of resources.

A final implication of this research is that children are receptive to external socialization agents and can be shaped as future consumers. Children are assimilating marketplace knowledge at earlier ages than ever before, putting them in

the unique position of developing brand loyalties at much younger ages. Estimates are that children are requesting products by brand as early as age 2 and making independent purchases as early as age 8. Marketing strategies must be developed to reach this segment. Some recommended strategies include premiums, attractive packaging, and co-branding with licensed characters.

6.4. Suggestions for future research

Corroborative replications and extensions of this and other studies on children's purchase influence are needed. Future research directions are readily identifiable from the limitations of this research. An important issue to consider when evaluating these findings is the composition of each sample. The sample for the child's product was much larger and regional in nature, in comparison to the smaller, national sample for the family product. This limits generalizability in that the product category may be confounded with the area from which the data was collected. The racial composition of the samples also varied due to geographic location. Similarly, the educational and income level of the two samples also varied and may be attributed somewhat to the method of data collection used in each sample, (i.e., drop off survey versus email panel). Finally, the measures used for each study varied slightly, necessitating the recoding of some variables to categorical data.

An interesting avenue of future research would be cross-cultural examinations. The changes outlined herein are reaching across cultural boundaries. Global trends which have been observed include smaller families, delayed childbearing, increasing number of female-headed households, and increasing number of women in the workforce (Bruce et al., 1995). Further investigation of the impact of these changes on children's influence is warranted.

Other areas to consider in the future would be the incorporation of fathers in data collection and an investigation of these hypotheses in a wider age range of children. Some new interesting areas of research are the effects of race/ethnicity and single-parent type on children's influence. These variables could provide useful in targeting children as consumers. Finally, an interesting area to explore in future research would be the interaction of the cost of the product with the type of product (child versus family) on children's influence.

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