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Husbands and Wives in Dual-Earner Marriages: Decision-Making, Gender Role Attitudes, Division of Household Labor, and Equity

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ABSTRACT. The clearly defined work and family roles of the traditional American family model—husbands as breadwinners and wives as homemakers—have been replaced by a model where both husbands and wives are employed, creating the need to re-negotiate family roles. The current study examined: (1) differences in perceived decision-making, gender-role attitudes, division of household labor and perceived marital equity in dual-earner husbands and wives ($n = 233$); and (2) the impact of perceived decision-making, gender-role attitudes, and division of household labor on perceived marital equity. Findings indicated that decision-making, low-control household labor, and high-control household labor differed significantly between husbands and wives. Wives spent more time in household labor and were much more likely to be involved in low-control household tasks. Perceptions of marital equity were influ-

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enced by decision-making and time spent in low-control household tasks for both husbands and wives. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

Marital dyads comprised of men and women who work outside the home constitute 54% of all married couples in the United States (U.S. Census, May, 2000). Although male labor force participation has dropped slightly with each decade since the 1960s (from a high of 89.2% of men employed outside the home in 1960 to 77.5% of men employed outside the home in 1999), a predominance of men continue to be employed outside the home. Women's participation in the labor force has risen dramatically from 37.7% in 1960 to 59.8% in 1999 (Fullerton, 1999) and these numbers are expected to continue to rise.

Juggling the demands of two workplaces with the responsibilities of maintaining a home together require dual-earner couples to face sometimes perplexing dilemmas as wives' participation in paid employment increases (Fullerton & Toossi, 2001). Two sources of family income provide greater economic stability and protection against financial disaster, relieve husbands from the sole responsibility of the family's financial stability, and provide wives with satisfaction derived from work outside the home. However, wives still shoulder primary responsibility for the work of the family and home (Coltrane, 2000), which leads them to face greater conflict from work-family demands than do their husbands. This tends to be true even when husbands and wives hold non-traditional gender role attitudes and husbands contribute more toward household labor (Rogers & Amato, 2000).

Husbands and wives in dual-earner couples have reported a lessening of husbands' influence and an increase of wives' influence in decision-making (Coltrane, 1996; Hochschild, 1997; Pleck, 1997). This changing pattern of decision-making supports the view that the majority of contemporary dual-earner families are couples who share the economic and household management of the family somewhat more col-

laboratively than husbands and wives of the recent past (Barnett & Rivers, 1996).

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine a sample of dual-earner husbands and wives to determine their perceptions of decision-making, gender role attitudes, division of household labor, and perceptions of marital equity. Specifically this study examined two hypotheses. First, it proposed that gender differences would exist on measures of perceptions of decision-making, gender role attitudes, numbers of hours per week spent in household labor, and perceptions of marital equity for dual-earner husbands and wives. Second, it was hypothesized that a model consisting of perceptions of decision-making, gender role attitudes, number of hours per week spent on household labor would be predictive of marital equity among dual-earner husbands and wives. Although marital equity has often been examined as a factor influencing other aspects of the marital relationship (Wilkie, Ferree & Ratcliff, 1998), much less attention has been given to those aspects of the marital relationship that influence perceptions of equity.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Decision-Making

Blood and Wolfe's (1960) classic work on marital power conceptualized power as the "potential ability of one partner to influence the other's behavior . . . manifested through the ability to make decisions." Blood and Wolfe saw the marital dyad as balancing power based on the relative resources that each spouse contributed to the union, with the spouse who contributed the greater resources holding the greater influence in the decision-making process. However, Fox and Murry (2000), in their overview on family research from a feminist perspective, concluded that although couples view their marriages as equal and their family roles as egalitarian, husbands are more likely to maintain an upper hand in decision-making processes, processes congruent with gender inequality. Husbands have been found to use their power in subtle ways to determine the direction of conversations and the discussion of problems in marriages, thereby indirectly influencing decision-making processes by refusing to acknowledge areas of potential conflict not to their own benefit, such as conflicts over the division of household labor (Ball, Cowan, & Cowan, 1995; Thompson & Walker, 1989; Zvonkovic, Schmiede, & Hall, 1994).

Various other theoretical perspectives have been used to describe decision-making processes in marriage. Scanzoni's (1982) application of social exchange theory provided the perspective that men have held greater power (i.e., decision making) in the marital relationship based on their greater economic resources, educational advantages, and occupational prestige. Sprey's (1979) work with conflict theory posited that marriages exist between persons who compete for power and control of resources through negotiation, bargaining, and conflict management. Power, a conceptual focus of conflict theory, is viewed as the individual's ability to control the outcome of decision-making processes (Sprey, 1979). These and other perspectives lead to the conclusion that decision-making influence has been greater for husbands in our society. This conclusion is tempered somewhat, however, by reported increases in the prevalence of equal influence in decision-making processes among dual-earner couples (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Rogers & Amato, 2000).

Decision-making has been endorsed frequently as a measure of relationship equality in the family sociology literature (Rosenbluth, Steil, & Whitcomb, 1998). Findings indicate that equal sharing in decision-making appears to be most beneficial for relationships overall (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983; Lange & Worrell, 1990). However, decision-making in contemporary marriages has been divided along traditional gender lines, with wives making decisions concerning day-to-day details of family life and husbands making the major decisions, such as those concerning career choices and resource allocation (Steil & Weltman, 1991).

Gender Role Attitudes

Gender roles are those behaviors and attitudes prescribed and assigned to males and females by the broader culture solely on the basis of gender. Traditional gender roles dictated the "realms of expertise" that men and women would hold: men hold power in the outside world, and women hold power in the home, and are primarily responsible for the home and its work, the children, and relationship maintenance (Beavers, 1982). Women tend to develop personal relationship-specific resources that are associated with limited alternatives and high degrees of relationship dependence. Men, responsible for financial support of the family, develop the more valued resources of earning power and prestige; this power, combined with their traditional patriarchal position of final authority, allows them exemption from many of the responsibili-

ties of day-to-day maintenance of family and home (Scanzoni, 1982; Steil, 1997).

When the husband's career is considered primary and of greater importance than his wife's career, his position of greater influence in all areas of family life allows his time at his job to be considered as work time for the family and thereby allows him to avoid equal involvement with household labor. The wife's career, on the other hand, is not seen as primary, so she is not allowed to view time spent on the job as contributing to the family in the same way as her husband and is not exempt from involvement in gendered household labor. This view may lead to the significant difference found between husbands and wives in the division of household labor; men are exempt from household labor because their primary work is in the more valued work of the "public sphere" (Okin, 1989; Steil, 1997).

Even today, when 61.2% of women are employed outside of the home, "his" career is still more likely to be considered the primary career. In contrast, "her" career is considered to have lower status, even when it is not a lower status career in the marketplace of occupations (Steil, 1997). This assessment of "his" career as primary is an aspect of gender stratification that not only limits wives' access to valued resources, but also assigns different weights to resources based on whether they are contributed to the family by husbands or wives.

Although gender role differences appear to be decreasing as life experiences of dual-earner couples become more similar, a gap in gender-role ideology is a major and consistent source of stress for working couples (Barnett & Rivers, 1996). Increased stress associated with gender-role ideology occurs when one's entrenched patterns of behavior are in conflict with the conscious ideals one holds about gender equality (Rosenbluth, Steil, & Whitcomb, 1998). Although some studies have indicated that men and women who hold less traditional ideas about gender roles will have a more balanced division of labor (Blair & Lichter, 1991; Greenstein, 1996b; Presser, 1994; Sanchez, 1994), true parity in the division of household labor has not occurred. Blair and Johnson (1992), for example, found a small but significant correlation between gender ideology and division of household labor, indicating that conflict may occur if the division of household labor goes against one's gender ideology. Other research (Kluwer, Heesink & Van de Vliert, 1996) has reported that dividing labor along traditional gendered lines leads to marital distress and conflict. Moreover, Greenstein (1996a) indicated that an inequitable division of household labor would more strongly affect the marital quality of wives who hold

non-traditional gender role beliefs compared to those wives who hold more traditional gender ideologies.

Division of Household Labor

Traditionally, the family and household labor were the domains of women, whereas work in the marketplace was the domain of men. The increased participation of women in the workforce has brought about a reduction in the time available for the work of families and has created the necessity to balance the demands of the workplace with those of family and household labor. Couples have made some movement toward greater sharing of provider responsibilities and household labor responsibilities because several studies have found that dual-earner couples share more family work than male-only breadwinner couples (DeMeis & Perkins, 1996; Fish, New, & Van Cleave, 1992; Greenstein, 2000; Presser, 1994; Starrells, 1994; Sullivan, 1997). However, an important qualification is that this movement toward shared responsibility may be simply an artifact of working wives spending less time engaged in household labor. Specifically, attitudinal data from the National Survey of Families and Households (1988) indicated that husbands (82%) and wives (90%) strongly believed that household labor should be shared equally when both spouses worked outside of the home (Gager, 1998). Despite these egalitarian attitudes, however, the reality continues to be far from an equal distribution in the division of household labor. For example, estimates of husbands who equally share the work of the home with their wives ranges from a low of less than 2% to a high of 12% (Ferree, 1991; Nyquist, Slivken, Spence, & Helmreich, 1985).

Although husbands have increased their involvement in household work (Coltrane, 1996, 2000; Robinson & Godbey, 1997), wives continue to perform about twice as much household labor as do husbands and perform different kinds of household work than do men (see Berado, Sheehan, & Leslie, 1987; Berk, 1985; Blair, 1998; Blair & Johnson, 1992; Blair & Lichter, 1991; Ferree, 1991; Hochschild, 1989; Ross, 1987; Shelton, 1991). In the past, studies found that only about one-third of husbands and wives believe that the division of household labor is unfair (Berk, 1985; Blair & Johnson, 1992; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994; Pleck, 1985; Thompson & Walker, 1989). However, more recent studies have found husbands and wives to agree that a more equal division of household labor would be fair (Grote & Clark, 1998; Reichle & Gefke, 1998). Men do not consider issues of fairness associated with division of household labor as they are not overburdened

(Grote & Clark, 1998). Wives are more disadvantaged in reference to the division of household labor than are their husbands, a pattern that predicts a higher incidence of marital conflict (Hawkins, Marshall & Meiners, 1995; Kluwer, Heesink, & Van de Vliert, 1997). Wives may avoid disputes over the division of household labor simply to avoid marital conflict (Freudenthaler & Mikula, 1998).

Major's (1987) framework of distributive justice suggested that wives do not perceive the unfair division of household labor as unjust, perhaps because they base their perception of fairness on society's rewards and the dominant value system that places higher value on men's contributions. Wives may accept as their due a higher degree of involvement in household work to compensate for their husbands' greater worth in the workplace. Specifically, women may believe that they must do more work at home to feel either equal to their husbands or that they have done their fair share (Major, 1987; 1993). Societal expectations also dictate what constitutes women's work and validates the unequal division of household labor that exists. Moreover, if wives feel that their husbands are not doing less than others, then their own situation is viewed as fitting the norm (Freudenthaler & Mikula, 1998). A study by (Greenstein, 1996a), for example, suggested that women who hold traditional gender attitudes do not consider their extra hours in household labor to be unfair because, from their perspective, women are primarily responsible for the work of home and family.

Himsel and Goldberg (2003) used social comparison theory—we judge our situations by comparing our lives with others—to examine how satisfied husbands and wives were with the amount of household labor they performed. Wives' satisfaction was greater if their husbands performed more household labor than their friends' husbands and when they themselves performed less household labor than their own friends. In contrast, men compared the amount of household labor they did to some self-determined imaginary other who performed less, thus insuring that the amount of household labor they currently performed was adequate (Himsel & Goldberg, 2003).

When hours of household labor are combined with hours worked in paid employment, employed women work on the average of 80 hours per week compared to employed men who work an average of 50 hours per week (Neal, Chapman, Ingersoll-Dayton & Emien, 1993). Hochschild (1989) found that wives spent about 15 hours more per week on household tasks than did their husbands. This "second shift" meant that women worked an extra month of 24-hour days over the course of a year (Hochschild, 1989). Contrasting with this perspective,

however, are the subsequent findings of some researchers that men and women are moving closer to parity in time spent in household labor (Barnett & Shen, 1997; Pittman, Solheim & Blanchard, 1996). Instead of 80% of household labor performed by women versus 20% performed by men (Hochschild, 1989), more recent studies have suggested that 66% was performed by women versus 33% performed by men (Steil, 1997). Although some movement toward equality seems to be evident, therefore, substantial gender disparity continues to exist in the household labor.

The lack of parity in terms of household labor influences other aspects of husbands' and wives' experiences. Bird (1999) found, for example, that an unequal division of household labor contributed substantially to women's depression. Marital discord was higher when the household division of labor was perceived to be unequal and when husbands did relatively little family work (Coltrane, 2000; Rogers & Amato, 2000). Blair (1998) found that perceived unfairness in the division of household labor was significantly associated with wives' lower levels of marital happiness. A study by (Kluwer et al., 1996) found that husbands' lack of participation in household labor led to wives' dissatisfaction and, in a subsequent study, these same authors found that husbands' lack of household labor led to increased discontent by wives (Kluwer et al., 1997). Another study of dual career relationships (Frisco & Williams, 2003) found that both men and women had lower levels of marital happiness when they felt they did more than their fair share of household labor. Moreover, wives who perceived that they were more burdened with household labor than their husbands were more likely to divorce. Domestic task division has been most frequently identified as the context in which relationships were considered equal or unequal (Rosenbluth et al., 1998), with fairness being associated with men's involvement in household labor (John, Shelton, & Luschen, 1995; Sanchez, 1994). One study found that wives' feelings of fairness were enhanced when couples made decisions about the division of household labor together. An associated pattern of this joint decision-making was that husbands also were more involved in household labor in this situation (Hawkins et al., 1995) Other studies found that wives' sense of fairness concerning the division of household labor was positively influenced by husbands who expressed appreciation and concern for their wives' family work (Hawkins, Marshall & Allen, 1998; Hawkins et al., 1995; Mikula, 1998).

Household labor is usually divided into two types of labor that has been referred to in the literature as either traditional female- or tradi-

tional male-completed tasks. Some researchers have defined these tasks as low-control or high-control tasks (Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Barnett & Shen, 1997), with low-control tasks being defined as those traditionally “female” jobs such as cooking, cleaning, doing the wash. The low-control tasks must be done on a daily basis at specific times, leaving the worker with little or no personal control over her work life. This definition includes the understanding that low-control tasks are those that people do as service to others and that others depend on to meet their basic needs.

High-control tasks, in contrast, are traditionally “male” jobs such as making repairs around the house, taking out the garbage, maintaining the cars, doing yard work. Frequently, these tasks are performed at the worker’s discretion, have a definite beginning and end, and lack a specific time frame (Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Barnett & Shen, 1997; Demaris & Longmore, 1996; Meissner, 1977). These high-control tasks do not directly impact another’s basic needs on a daily basis. Moreover, delaying their completion would not tend to impact or disrupt others in the family.

Researchers have found that the number of hours worked in the home did not create difficulty, but the type of tasks being performed did impact one’s physical health (Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Barnett & Shen, 1997; Demaris & Longmore, 1996; Meissner, 1977). Low-control tasks were associated with physical signs of distress, whereas high-control tasks were not associated with these adverse consequences. Researchers also have examined the psychological distress associated with tasks, with the important predictor of psychological distress being the time spent on low-control tasks associated with meeting the basic needs of family members (Barnett & Shen, 1997; Ganster, 1989; Sauter, Hurrell, & Cooper, 1989). Moreover, an interesting pattern was that gender was not a moderating factor. For both men and women, therefore, the increasing amount of time spent on low-control tasks, or those traditional daily “feminine” tasks (e.g., repetitive types of family work) associated with meeting the needs of others, also contributed to lower marital quality (Barnett & Rivers, 1996), feelings of psychological distress (Barnett & Shen, 1997), feelings of inequity (Sanchez & Kane, 1996) and increased marital conflict (Perry-Jenkins & Folk, 1994).

Wives often continue to perform substantially more of the routine low-control household tasks. However, as husbands have increased their involvement in these low-control household tasks, wives have felt that the division of labor is more fair, are less depressed, and have enjoyed greater marital satisfaction (Benin & Agostinelli, 1988; Blair &

Johnson, 1992; Coltrane, 2000; John et al., 1995; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994). Much of the scholarly literature supports the perspective that the perception of fairness rather than the reality of equally shared household labor has the greater influence on marital satisfaction (Blair & Johnson, 1992; Greenstein, 1996a; Hochschild, 1989; Pina & Bengtson, 1993; Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985; Thompson, 1991). However, Mikula (1998) has suggested that researchers should ask participants to describe what equally shared work is so that their conceptualizations of equality can be compared with what they actually do.

Equity

Marital equity has been defined as the perception that rewards and demands are fairly distributed in the marital relationship. Marital partners receive relatively equal gains from the relationship (Traupman, Peterson, Utne, & Hatfield, 1981) and that each partner's relative outputs or contributions correspond to his/her relative inputs or rewards (Demaris & Longmore, 1996). Sabatelli and Cecil-Pigo (1985) defined equity as the degree to which an individual feels that, when all things are considered, the outcomes derived from his/her relationship are proportionate to his/her investment. Marital partners achieve equity when each contributes and participates fairly, with neither party being unfairly overburdened or overworked. During periods of low stress and little conflict, in turn, Grote and Clark (2001) found that, although couples might report or concede a lack of equity, they do not consider this to be problematic. However, during periods of increased stress and conflict, lack of equity caused an escalation in the degree of conflict experienced, which suggested that marital distress might lead to perceptions of unfairness. Such interpretations, in turn, may exacerbate marital distress and lead to even greater feelings of unfairness (Grote & Clark, 2001).

Earlier studies revealed that the perception of equity influenced marital satisfaction. Couples who felt their marriages were inequitable reported greater dissatisfaction with their marriage (Broderick & O'Leary, 1986). Gray-Little and Burks (1983) found that the highest levels of marital satisfaction were reported by more egalitarian couples, with the perception of equity being the crucial element that contributed to greater marital satisfaction.

Certainly, the perception of equity can be impacted negatively by an unequal division of household labor. Such inequality has a greater impact on women who carry the greater burden for family work which in-

cludes supervising the work of other family members and deciding what and when family work needs to be done (see among others Blair & Johnson, 1992; Coltrane, 2000; Frisco & Williams, 2003; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994; Rubin, 1976, 1983). As early as 1985, researchers found that wives felt the inequity of their husbands doing too little family work, and that this inequity was associated with discontent for wives (Pleck, 1985). Women who carry an inequitable amount of the responsibility for household labor reported that their perceptions of fairness and marital satisfaction declined, whereas feelings of depression and incidences of marital conflict increased (Coltrane, 2000; Grote & Clark, 2001). Frisco and Williams (2003) reported that wives who perceived unfairness in the division of household labor were more likely to end their marriages in divorce. However, when husbands participated more frequently, wives were more likely to evaluate the division of household labor as fair, an interpretation that was associated with increased marital quality (Coltrane, 2000; Greenstein, 1996a; John et al., 1995; Sanchez, 1994).

Highly educated, high-status dual-career couples typically report the most egalitarian views and most frequently describe their marriages as equitable when partners share domestic tasks and responsibilities (Rosenbluth et al., 1998). Other studies, however, have indicated that fully half of participants who view themselves as egalitarian actually fail to truly share responsibility for their families. A study by Perry-Jenkins and Folk (1994), for example, examined social class, low-control household tasks (although they labeled these traditionally feminine tasks), and perceptions of equity. Results of this study indicated that, as husbands and wives become more egalitarian in discernable resources such as income and job status, perceptions about equity in household work will become more strongly related to division of labor at home. A study by Ferree (1987), in turn, found that wives who defined themselves as primary breadwinners were more likely to evaluate their husbands' contributions to family work as being less than fair and as feeling entitled to more help from their spouses. As women's monetary contributions have become more prominent and necessary for the family's needs, a sense of inequity may have become more pronounced in family relationships.

Husbands are more likely than wives to be overly benefited and feel satisfied with inequitable relationships that favor them (Thompson & Walker, 1989). Husbands appear more satisfied with their marriages and are less critical of their wives if their wives do more than their "fair share" of housework (Barnett & Baruch, 1987). Husbands do not asso-

ciate fairness/unfairness in the division of household labor with their own feelings of personal well-being or marital satisfaction (Coltrane, 2000). However, Sanchez (1994) found that fairness in the division of household labor is critical to both men's and women's perception of fairness in the marital relationship.

This study was undertaken, therefore, to determine the extent to which dual-earner husbands and wives have revised traditional roles and responsibilities to include provisions for their dual-earner household structure. Since these couples have assumed roles that are distinctive from the work and family roles of the traditional American family model, we would expect to find them moving away from traditional decision-making, gender-role attitudes, division of household labor, and perceived marital equity toward more equitable and more non-traditional ways of thinking and behaving.

METHODS

Participants

The subjects, all residents in a mid-sized metropolitan area in the southern United States, were solicited from five organizations including a university medical center, a clothing manufacturing plant and its management offices, the regional office of a major financial institution, and two suburban Protestant churches. Organizations were selected based on the high numbers of women employed, the variety occupations represented (i.e., technical/skilled, service, managers, professional) to garner a sample with sufficient diversity in socioeconomic status as well as the willingness of the company to allow employees to participate in the study. Potential subjects were given letters at their workplace that described the project. Interested employees were provided with packets containing letters describing the project, a letter of informed consent, two project surveys, and two self-addressed, stamped envelopes for the subjects (employee and spouse) to return the project surveys separately. Subjects were asked to refrain from discussion with their spouses until after the surveys were completed and sealed. Inclusion criteria required that the respondents be heterosexual, married, reside with their spouse, and have at least one child under the age of 18. A key criterion was that both members of the marital dyad must be employed outside the home either part- or full-time to participate in the study.

Some 4,500 letters of introduction and a postcard to return to indicate interest in the project were inserted in paychecks to all employees of the medical center and resulted in a total of 100 postcards indicating interest received from the medical center; 100 packets of survey materials were distributed by mail to those people. A total of 85 packets of materials were distributed personally by the researchers to workers at the clothing manufacturing plant; 15 packets of materials were distributed at the financial institution; and 75 packets were distributed at the suburban churches for a total of 275 packets distributed. After filtering returned surveys through the inclusion criterion, 233 of the returned surveys met our study's criteria.

Respondents ($n = 233$) were 119 husbands and 114 wives. Included in this group were 78 respondents who were married couples. The average age for the total sample was 46 years, with wives averaging 45 years of age and the husbands averaging 48 years of age. The average length of time married for the sample was 21 years. The mean number of hours spent in paid employment for the total sample was 32 hours per week with a range of 0 to 99. Wives worked about 27 hours per week in paid employment (range 0-78), whereas husbands worked about 40.5 hours per week in this capacity (range 0-99).

Respondents' race, income, and educational levels were fairly representative of the community from which they were drawn and over half (51%) of the total sample held bachelor's degrees or above (48.3% of wives; 54.6% of husbands). Census data for this community reported that 82.5% of the males and females over the age of 25 were high school graduates, with 55.3% having completed some college. A total of 29% held bachelor's degrees or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), with almost half of the wives (48%) and the husbands (47%) held professional or technical jobs. Personal pre-tax income of the respondents ranged from less than \$5,000 to over \$50,000, with more than half (55%) of the total sample earning less than \$25,000 per year (74% of the wives; 34% of the husbands). As one might expect, the income disparity by gender was greatest in the lowest and highest income brackets. For persons reporting personal incomes of less than \$5,000 per year, 18.8% were wives and only 2.5% were husbands. The pattern was reversed in the higher income levels: 32.2% of husbands reported earning \$50,000 or more in personal annual income, while only 3.6% of wives could report their annual earnings in this bracket. Lower income level couples were over-sampled to assure that the sample was relatively representative in terms of the social class and occupational status of dual-earner couples

rather than homogeneous nature of dual-career couples that have been characteristic of other studies on work/family issues.

Instruments

Participants were asked to complete four instruments: the Relative Decision-Making Scale (RDMS), the Gender Role Attitudes Scale (GRAS), the Division of Household Labor Scale (DHLS), and the Relational Equity Scale (RES). In addition, participants were asked to provide sociodemographic data through a personal history inventory. Table 1 contains Cronbach's alphas, means, and ranges for husbands and wives on the measures used in this study.

Decision-making. The subjects' perceptions of decision-making were determined using a seven-item Likert-type scale developed by the authors. The Relative Decision-Making Scale (RDMS) was constructed to determine the extent to which individuals perceived their relative influence in the decision-making process in their family. Subjects were asked to report their perceptions of their own influence in decision-making as well as how they perceived their spouse and children would report the extent of their influence in decision-making using a four-point Likert-type scale with responses ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Higher scores on the RDMS represent a somewhat more unilateral view of one's influence in decision-making. For this study, the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient reported for the RDMS was .75 (see Table 1).

Subjects were asked to respond to the following items: *if I know my spouse and I are going to disagree about a decision, I just go ahead and*

TABLE 1. Cronbach's Alphas, Means, and Ranges by Gender on Relative Decision-Making Scale (RDMS), Division of Household Labor Scale (DHLS), Gender Role Attitudes Scale (GRAS), and Relational Equity Scale (RES)

Scale	Alpha	Husbands (n = 119)			Wives (n = 114)		
		Mean	Range	SD	Mean	Range	SD
RDMS	.75	2.84	1.86 - 3.86	.408	2.96	1.86 - 4.0	.458
GRAS	.75	4.19	2.7 - 6.2	.767	4.55	2.5 - 6.7	.86
RES	.90	3.88	2.0 - 5.1	.706	3.68	1.2 - 5.0	.790
DHLS							
High-Control		9.7	0 - 15	8.2	3.9	0 - 9.67	4.04
Low-Control		10.6	0 - 6.83	4.04	3.0	.8 - 18.33	18.75

make the decision and explain it later; my opinion carries more weight in the decisions we make because of my importance in providing for my family's economic well being; if my spouse and I cannot find a way to settle a dispute, I decide; my spouse would say that I have more authority over our household than he/she does; my spouse would say that I have more authority over how we spend our money than he/she does; my children would say that I am the final authority in our family.

Gender role attitudes. Subjects' gender role attitudes were measured by utilizing a ten-item Likert-type scale, Gender Role Attitude Scale (GRAS), modified by the authors from items developed for the National Survey of Families and Households (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988). The authors expanded the measure to include items focused on men's roles and attitudes about gender since they were not included in the original scale. The scores the subjects received on this measure determined their attitudes about gender roles. Subjects were asked to rate their approval or disapproval of behaviors such as "*mothers who work part-time when their youngest child is under age 5*" or "*fathers who do as much housework as mothers.*" Higher scores on the GRAS reflected more traditional gender roles attitudes. For this study, the Cronbach's coefficient alpha reported for the GRAS was .75 (see Table 1).

Division of household labor. The Division of Household Labor Measure (DHLM) was adapted from measures of household labor used in the National Survey of Families and Households (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988). Parenting was not included in this measure of household labor. Husbands have made strides in the time they spend in parenting; however, this study's intent was to determine the amount of time spend in household labor. Subjects were asked to report the approximate number of hours per week that they and/or their spouses normally spend doing nine household tasks: preparing meals, washing dishes and cleaning up after meals, cleaning house, outdoor and other household maintenance tasks (defined as lawn and yard work, household repair, painting, for example), shopping for groceries and other household goods, washing, ironing and mending, paying bills and keep financial records, automobile maintenance and repair, and driving other household members to work, school, or other activities.

The researchers coded these household tasks into two categories: high-control tasks or low-control tasks. High-control tasks allow for a high degree of autonomy and include outdoor tasks and other household maintenance tasks (lawn and yard work, household repair, painting, and so on), paying bills and keeping financial records, and automobile maintenance and repair. Low-control tasks allow for little or no auton-

omy and include preparing meals, washing dishes and meal clean-up, cleaning house, shopping for groceries and other household goods, washing, ironing and mending clothing, and driving other household members to work, school, or other activities. Time spent in these tasks was totaled into measures of total hours per week spent by wives and husbands doing household labor.

Equity. The subjects' perceptions of marital equity were measured by using a ten-item Likert-type scale developed by Sabatelli and Cecil-Pigo (1985). The Relative Equity Scale (RES) was constructed to "examine the degree to which individuals feel that, all things considered, the outcomes they derive from their relationships are proportionate to their investments" (Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985). Sample items of the RES include "*I often feel I put more into our relationship than I get out*" and "*All things considered, my partner and I contribute equally to our relationship.*" Higher scores on the RES represent greater perception of marital equity. Previous research (Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985) indicated an internal consistency coefficient for the scale (computed using Cronbach's coefficient alpha) of .85 for a sample of 301 subjects. For the present study, in turn, a Cronbach's alpha of .90 was obtained (see Table 1).

RESULTS

The first hypothesis stated that gender differences would be found in the five measures utilized in the present study (i.e., equity, low-control household tasks, high-control household tasks, gender attitudes and decision-making) when tested with multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). Statistically significant difference were found between males and females on the combined dependent variables: $F(5,171) = 35.7, p = .0001$; Wilks' Lambda = .49. When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately, the differences that reached statistical significance using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .01 were gender role attitudes { $F(1,175) = 7.69, p = .006$ }, low-control household tasks { $F(1,175) = 87.31, p = .000$ }, and high-control household tasks { $F(1,175) = 34.7, p = .000$ }. Mean scores for the gender role attitudes scale indicated that wives held slightly more traditional gender roles ($M = 4.58, SD = .92$) than did husbands ($M = 4.22, SD = .80$). Mean scores for high-control household tasks indicated that husbands spent more time per week on high-control tasks ($M = 9.87, SD = 8.43$) than did wives ($M = 3.88, SD = 4.16$). Moreover, mean scores for

low-control household tasks clearly indicated that wives spent much more time per week on low-control tasks ($M = 29.85$, $SD = 18.02$) than did husbands ($M = 10.71$, $SD = 7.69$). Thus, gender-role attitudes, number of hours spent per week in low-control household tasks, and number of hours spent per week in high-control tasks differed significantly between husbands and wives.

The second hypothesis stated that measures of perceived decision-making, gender role attitudes, and high-control and low-control household labor would be predictive of perceived marital equity for these dual-earner husbands and wives. A correlation matrix was constructed to show the strength and the direction of the relationships between the variables. Only the correlation between wives' low- and high-control household tasks was higher than .50, indicating that redundancy was not a problem among the measures. The observed correlation for wives did not indicate redundancy, but must be interpreted in the context of how data were reported (number of hours per week spent in household labor in which women were involved in both high- and low-control tasks). For the husbands, correlations between the measures for equity and decision-making were moderate and negative, as was the correlation between scores from the measures for gender role attitudes and decision-making. The relationship between low-control household tasks and gender role attitudes was moderate and positive for the husbands. For the wives, correlations between the measures for equity and decision-making were moderate and negative, with the correlations between the measures for equity and gender role attitudes moderate and positive. The relationship between low-control household tasks and high-control household tasks was large and positive for wives. (See Table 2.)

Although husbands and wives did not differ in their perceptions of marital equity in their marriages, the influence of the predictor variables of decision-making, high-control household labor, and low-control household labor on variations in perceptions of marital equity was of interest. A step-wise regression model was conducted which revealed that the model accounted for 9.4% of the variance in perceptions of marital equity. An examination of Beta weights revealed that decision-making was the most influential variable in the model ($B = -26$; $p < .0001$). Low-control household labor was statistically significant but somewhat less powerful ($B = -19$; $p < .01$), whereas high-control household labor did not enter into the model (see Table 3 for results of the step-wise regression).

TABLE 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients of Relational Equity Scale (RES) with Relative Decision-Making Scale (RDMS), Division of Household Labor Scale (DHLS), and Gender Role Attitudes Scale (GRAS)—Husbands and Wives

Scale	RES	RDMS	DHLS		GRAS
			High-Control	Low-Control	
Husbands (n = 119)					
RES	--	-.27**	.02	-.13	.12
RDMS	--	--	-.10	-.13	-.25**
DHLS: High-Control Tasks	--	--	--	.10	-.08
DHLS: Low-Control Tasks	--	--	--	--	.22*
GRAS	--	--	--	--	--
Wives (n = 114)					
RES	--	-.20*	.02	-.07	.23*
RDMS	--	--	.11	.07	.11
DHLS: High-Control Tasks	--	--	--	.58**	.09
DHLS: Low-Control Tasks	--	--	--	--	-.11
GRAS	--	--	--	--	--

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

TABLE 3. Stepwise Multiple Regression of Relative Decision-Making Scale (RDMS) and Low-Control Household Labor (LCHL) on Relational Equity Scale (RES)

Scale	Standardized Beta	F	s^2 (Unique)	Tolerance
RDMS	-.261	5.726**	.054	.992
LCHL	-.187	3.321*	.03	.992
$R^2 = .084$				
$F = 9.047**$				

* $p < .01$; ** $p < .0001$

Although concerns have been raised about using step-wise regression procedures because variables are entered on the basis of statistical rather than theoretical reasons (Cohen & Cohen, 1983), researchers (most notably Tabachnick & Fidell, 1983) have suggested that step-wise regression procedures are appropriate, especially when model building, as redundant variables may be excluded.

DISCUSSION

Results from the present study supported the conclusion that husbands and wives in dual-earner families differ in terms of influence in decision-making, gender role attitudes, amount of low-control household labor performed, amount of high-control household labor performed, and perceptions of marital equity. An examination of the univariate means revealed that the strongest differences were in the areas of influence in decision-making processes, low-control household labor, and high-control household labor.

Wives reported exerting more unilateral influence than husbands in decision-making processes. The measure of influence used in the present study focused on decision-making within the respondents' households that are somewhat different from earlier measures used primarily to ascertain relative decision-making influence in a broader context. At least in this context, wives appear to perceive themselves as exerting more influence than their husbands. This finding would seem to support the conclusion that wives in dual-earner couples are perceiving themselves as exerting somewhat greater influence in the day-to-day interactions than are husbands (Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Coltrane, 1996; Hochschild, 1997; Pleck, 1997).

In terms of the division of household labor, husbands and wives in these dual-earner families appear to divide tasks along traditional gendered lines. Further, wives appear to be responsible for performing about two-thirds of household labor (primarily low-control tasks) and husbands are responsible for performing about one-third (primarily high-control tasks).

Husbands performed an average 20+ hours of household labor per week, whereas wives performed an average of 34 hours of household labor per week. Such patterns more closely match Hochschild's (1989) model than the closer-to-equality model found by others (Barnett & Shen, 1997; Pittman et al., 1996). For every hour that wives worked, their husbands worked only 35 minutes. However, the husbands did spend about 1/2 asks, or a pattern that does indicate some movement toward equity. Moreover, movement toward equity in low-control tasks will have greater impact on the well-being of wives (Bird, 1999; Coltrane, 2000; Rogers & Amato, 2000).

Although many studies have demonstrated that wives do the bulk of household labor and relatively few feel this is unfair, the results of this research indicate that time spent in low-control tasks did increase wives' feelings of unfairness or inequity. An added element of interest

was that time spent in low-control tasks functioned to increase husbands' feelings of inequity as well.

Wives were more traditional in their attitudes toward gender roles than were the husbands, which may explain why they were willing to be burdened so heavily with the low-control household tasks. They may have accepted the responsibilities for those tasks as part of their roles as wives and mothers. Their husbands, however, reported less traditional gender role attitudes, which may account for their higher participation in low-control tasks than compared to previous studies.

For this sample, perception of equity appeared to be influenced by decision-making and time spent in low-control household labor for both men and women. As partners perceive their household influence as being more unilateral, their perception of their marriage as being equitable decreases. The more unilateral influence that they believe they exert, the less equitable they perceive their relationship to be. Interestingly, wives reported exerting more unilateral influence than did husbands. Such influence in the domestic domain could possibly reflect a sense of being an "overburdened" manager who has influence based on physical presence and an overload of responsibility. As found in earlier research, time spent in low-control tasks seemed to have negative effects regardless of gender.

Hours spent in high-control household tasks, those traditionally defined as masculine household tasks, appeared to have no impact on perception of equity. Another picture emerges for hours spent in low-control household tasks, those traditionally perceived as women's work. These low-control household tasks appear to negatively impact perception of equity in the marriage. In other words, the amount of time spent in low-control household tasks causes one's perception of equity in the marriage to lessen. It is interesting that time spent in the low-control household tasks had the same negative impact on both husbands and wives in their perception of equity.

Gender stratification, or division of household labor along gendered lines, appeared to continue, even for these couples that worked at least 30+ hours of week in paid employment. For this sample, wives spent an average of 33.9 hours per week on household labor, whereas husbands spent only an average of 20.33 hours per week on this work. Wives were much more likely to be involved in low-control household tasks (those tasks traditionally female). Specifically, wives spent an average of 30 hours of their 34 hours per week or 88% of their time completing low-control household tasks, whereas husbands spent an average of 10.5 of their 20 hours per week of household labor (51%) on low-con-

trol household tasks. For this sample, on average, wives labored almost three times as much on low-control household tasks than did their husbands.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings reveal a very slight difference in mean equity scores, with husbands' mean score (3.88) being only slightly higher than wives' mean score for equity (3.68). Considering that women spend three times as much time completing low-control household tasks, one would expect to see a greater disparity between scores for equity between husbands and wives. This finding is consistent, however, with earlier studies on perceptions of marital equity (Benin & Agostinelli, 1988; Berk, 1985; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994; Pleck, 1985; Steil, 1997; Thompson & Walker, 1989). Further research is needed to determine how perceptions of fairness/unfairness are formed. Perhaps a qualitative study is needed in which couples are interviewed about their perceptions of fairness/unfairness and are asked to describe their experiences in detail. Such an approach would be helpful in capturing how these gendered notions of fairness continue to operate in contemporary dual-earner marriages that exhibit such inequitable division of household labor. In addition, although the respondents of this study were fairly representative of the community from which they were drawn, they are a relatively small sample, and may not represent other geographical areas.

Although decision-making has been frequently endorsed as a measure of relationship equality in the family sociology literature (Rosenbluth et al., 1998), decision-making continues to be divided along traditional gender roles, with women making decisions concerning day-to-day details of family life and men making the major decisions (Ball et al., 1995; Fox & Murry, 2000; Steil & Weltman, 1991; Zvonkovic et al., 1994). Practitioners must reemphasize their efforts to stress a more collaborative form of decision-making and lead couples toward an understanding of the benefits of a more collaborative and cooperative paradigm for marriage.

Couples need help learning to negotiate the demands of the household and must develop a system for negotiating the responsibility for low-control household tasks. These strategies are needed so that partners will perceive the marriage as more inequitable. Perhaps couples could learn to focus on what really needs to be done in the home, i.e.,

what are the most important low-control tasks for their particular situation, and then try to equitably divide these tasks so that no one person is adversely affected by an overload of these tasks. Again, communication and negotiation skills are needed if couples are to successfully move toward a collaborative paradigm.

Further studies of household labor may need to include measures of conflict, degree of responsibility for scheduling household labor, and/or supervision of others engaged in household labor. These measures are needed because such actions also may add to feelings of inequity.

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