Income, Power, and Decision Making in Status-Reversal Marital Communication

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INCOME, POWER, AND DECISION MAKING IN STATUS-REVERSAL

MARITAL COMMUNICATION

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of Communication

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of the requirements for the Degree

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

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In the past few decades women have increasingly joined the workforce. Now more than ever women are not only joining the workforce, but they are also achieving higher status jobs in the workplace. As a result a new dynamic in married couples has begun to take place. Status-reversal married couples are becoming more common in society. These couples include those in which females have a higher status job and contribute more income to their home than their husbands. This study investigates how power, decision making, and gender stereotypes are managed and communicated in these relationships. To understand these key areas the study investigates five status-reversal married couples. Through interviews and a questionnaire this study examines several topic areas including how power is distributed and negotiated in the relationship. The study also investigates how married status-reversal couples manage decision making in areas such as finances, household tasks and parenting. In addition the research focuses on how these couples reinforce and/or challenge gender stereotypes that exist in society. The findings are discussed and organized based on trends discovered when conducting a number of comparisons including the following: comparing each couple, each partner, and male verses female responses.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Traditionally, husbands have exercised greater control in marital relationships than wives, and this power has been linked with the income and status that men have provided as the breadwinners. This role of breadwinner has been embedded in our society as a critical role for men. It has aided in the justification of men being the more powerful sex. In recent years however, women have challenged this notion by moving into the workforce and increasing their contributions to the family income. Now that women are more prevalent in the workforce they are also gaining higher status positions and their financial influence has increased (Tichenor, 1999). Some scholars contend that this has caused men to begin sharing in the domestic duties that have traditionally been the responsibility of women (Almeid, et al, 1993). This phenomenon suggests a need to re-examine the influence women have in marital relationships. It also suggests a potential shift in the balance of power. This re-evaluation of the gender roles in marriage could potentially influence society’s expectations and definitions of men and women.

Money management and the division of household tasks are key issues in the study of changing power and decision making in marriage. Past research on marital relationships notes that money is often an avoided topic by couples. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) state that “Money is often a more taboo topic of conversation than sex, and courting couples may discuss their prior sex lives while never raising the question of their economic histories” (p. 51). Thus, money is often the final step of self-disclosure in a relationship even though each partner may hold strong feelings about how money is
handled (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983). If money is rarely discussed prior to marriage, conflict in marital decision making could very easily occur if a couple does not agree with each other’s money management beliefs. Such conflict could be especially prevalent in “status-reversal” couples, in which the wife is the main breadwinner. Tichenor (1999) uses the term “status-reversal” to describe couples in which the wife exceeds her husband’s income and occupational status. This suggests a need for greater understanding in how financial decisions are, and should be made in marital relationships now that more women have gained status in the workforce.

The division of household tasks is also a central issue in the study of marital power and decision making. Now that women are gaining employment and in higher status occupations, one might assume that household tasks are more equally divided. However research provides conflicting evidence of this phenomenon (Almeid, Maggs, and Galmbos, 1993). Moreover, our U.S. culture often assumes that most household tasks should be conducted by women which only reinstates gender role stereotypes and inequality. This information suggests a need to re-examine the roles of men and women in marriage and discover any possible change in the balance of power and decision making management (Almeid, Maggs, and Galmbos, 1993).

The theoretical perspective known as “social construction of reality” suggests that reality is not an objective set of arrangements outside ourselves, but is constructed through a process of interactions in groups, communities and cultures (Littlejohn, 2002). This review of literature examines power and decision making in marital couples, specifically focusing upon couples in which the female makes more money and has a
higher status job position than her husband. By examining these couples one can learn how they face role reversal situations and how they manage in a society that has certain traditional expectations of males and females in marital relationships. This study attempts to understand how couples may be challenging and/or reinforcing cultural gender prescriptions.
Chapter Two

Review of Literature

The purpose of this study was to examine status-reversal married couples and how communication is used to manage power and decision making. The review begins with background research on the increase of women in the workplace and how marital relationships may be changing due to this phenomenon. Married couples, especially status-reversal couples, face barriers with regard to certain expectations from society. Therefore it is important to understand how couples should face this challenge.

Power is key when examining marital relationships. The management and distribution of power may be especially unique in status-reversal relationships. Now that women have gained financial power it is important to re-evaluate how power is handled in these relationships. This review discusses various sources individuals may have at their disposal to gain power. Couples can also use different types of power strategies to influence their partners. Research has shown that due to gender prescriptions, men and women use different sources and types of power (Trentham and Larwood, 2001). It is also important to examine the distribution of power within couples because this distribution will indicate who has higher authority.

The review also investigates the process of decision making within married couples. Research has recognized that men and women use different strategies when communicating with their partners (Lenk-Krueger, 1985). By examining these strategies, one may better understand what strategies are successful. There are two major topics that couples often face when making decisions together including financial decision making
and household duties. By specifically investigating these areas, one may better understand how power and decision making are managed by marital couples. The everyday decisions couples must face play a critical role in the communication in marital relationships and ultimately affect the satisfaction of both partners.

*Background*

Research indicates that there is an increase of women in the workforce (Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber, 1989). Today so many millions of young mothers are in the workforce that dual career families are now common place. Lenk-Krueger (1985) recognizes that “dual career” describes, “a marital structure in which both wife and husband are actively involved in careers and family/home obligations” (p. 126). In 1986 one-half of all American marriages had both spouses employed outside of the home. This figure represents a revolution over a relatively short period of time (Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber, 1989). In 1960 only twenty-five percent of wives with husbands present in the home were employed (Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber, 1989).

The increase of women in the workforce was a reaction to economic demands in society. Edwards (2001) suggests that the economic uncertainty of the times led to young families adopting new work-family arrangements. The dramatic rise of interest in the competing environments of work and family arose in large part from the growth in the number of women combining motherhood with paid employment during World War II. Edwards (2001) recognizes that, “The upward trend among mothers of preschool children was the most surprising of the developments in women’s labor forces participation, and its subsequent acceleration through the 1970s and 1980s” (p. 183). The changes to the
family roles in the 20th century provided a substantial need for research to understand the emotions and conflicts occurring in the work-family relationship. Researchers argue that women's wages, consumerism and changing attitudes have dismantled the male breadwinner system (Edwards, 2001).

Some wives are now enjoying occupational achievements and/or income comparable to those of their husbands. As a result, two partnership patterns have become common. First, as women have assumed the part of the income-producing role outside the home, some wives' complementary position has changed to what one might call "junior partner" status (Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber, 1989). In this pattern the wife is likely to have less power within the relationship than her husband. It is still the husband's duty to be the main breadwinner. The wife simply adds an occupational role to her child-care and household responsibilities. Today the great majority of dual-earner couples follow the "senior-partner/junior partner" pattern. The second pattern that has emerged is the "equal partner" pattern in which there is a stronger commitment to work on the part of both spouses and the production of income is at near equal levels (Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber, 1989). The pattern includes a greater degree of role interchanging with respect to breadwinning and domestic duties and the power relationship. In these marriages women's education, and occupational and income achievements are more likely to be comparable to their husbands' (Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber, 1989).

Though women have made advances in challenging gender stereotypes, certain expectations for male and female roles in the workplace and family still exist (Sapiro, 1999). Sapiro (1999) explains that traditionally the male identity in our culture is
determined by men’s jobs or occupational roles and status and their central interests and motivation in life is their employment and earnings. Men’s primary connection with their families is in their role as economic providers. In contrast women’s relationship to their family, and their sociopolitical attitudes and behavior come from their family roles, status and gender-role socialization. Women’s central interests and motivation in life traditionally revolve around the internal dynamics of family life. This leads society to believe that the most important things to know about a woman is whether she is married and if she has a family. Though women have successfully joined the workforce outside of the home, our culture still makes a clear distinction between masculine and feminine “work.”

The processes of social construction, or the maintenance of social rules, require certain differing expectations from women and men. Our society rewards people who act as expected and punish those who do not. This discourages men and women from performing non-traditional roles both in and outside of the home. Couples are sensitive to these expectations and are aware of violations they make. This forces men and women who adopt non-traditional roles to learn to manage the issues that arise while continuing to be socially accepted (Sapiro, 1999).

Our culture is changing and it is difficult for some couples to adapt to the changing gender roles (Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber, 1989). In our culture occupation plays a key role in one’s function in society and it can play a part in determining power and respect. This can reflect one’s power in a marital relationship as well. The spouses’ relative occupational achievements provide an objective index of status equality or the
lack of it. Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber (1989) recognize that as the achievements become more similar the situation violates the common expectation of male dominance not only in the marriage relationship, but also in the public realm outside the family. Some people are more able than others to tolerate the cost of such nonconformity. This is a situation for which many couples are ill prepared (Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber, 1989). Couples have been socialized to a set of traditional role expectations that do not match their current objective circumstances.

In recent years there has been progress towards equality of occupational achievement both here in the U.S. and globally between women who work full-time and men, though gender inequalities in earnings still exist within certain occupational groups (Arbor and Ginn, 2001). According to Arbor and Ginn (2001) in private households gender inequalities of pay and occupational level between marital partners may be a more persistent source of inequality and can be more influential in maintaining patriarchal power in society. Though it is common for women to work outside of the home they are still taking responsibility for the majority of the domestic and childcare activities. Arbor and Ginn (2001) note that women’s low occupational and wage attainment may be due to their own choice to give their families priority over their paid employment. Both their husbands and society generally place the responsibility for childcare and other domestic work upon women. Their choices are heavily constrained in a way that men’s are not. It is also possible that women are making a rational economic choice to assume the domestic responsibilities because they earn a lesser income (Arbor and Ginn, 2001) It is also important to note that women are more likely to work part-time than men are, which
would also influence their wages, however, it is still possible that women are choosing to focus on domestic responsibilities due to the low wages they are receiving.

Although there has been extensive research examining decision-making and power in marital relationships, there are very few studies that focus upon marriages where females are the main breadwinner in the relationship. Now that women are beginning to gain high powered occupational positions it becomes critical to understand how power and decision making strategies are used. Couples must learn how to cope with the changes in their marital relationship. Though there has been research examining this phenomenon, there are inconsistencies in understanding how to adapt to this change.

Management of Power

There are numerous factors that affect decision making in romantic relationships. One of the major influences is the power balance between the two people and how couples manage power. This section focuses specifically on power resources, types of power, and the distribution of power in marriage. These elements, along with society’s gender expectations, can have a significant effect on how decision making is conducted. It can also play a part in determining the success and satisfaction of a relationship.

Sources of Power

Resource theory. Power resources that are available within a couple can have a large impact on the balance of power in a relationship. Resource control often comes with one’s formal position in a group and can be determined by one’s ability to reward or punish (Wilmont and Hocker, 2001). Tichenor (1999) defines resources as a contribution to the relationship. Resource theory, also known as resource exchange theory, suggests
that the more resources an individual contributes to a relationship, the more power the individual will perceive herself/himself as having (Sprecher, 1985). As noted by Vogler (1998) this theory conceptualizes marriage as a set of exchange relations in which the balance of power rests with the partner who contributes the most resources in the marriage. There are a variety of resources individuals can use to gain power in marital relationships. Research recognizes that men and women use different resources, which may be due to gender role expectations used in society. Researchers argue that resource theory is being challenged now that women are gaining financial power.

**Male and female resources.** In romantic relationships, traditionally, gender has determined power and resources. Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber (1989) recognize that cultural expectations of gender roles are internalized in men and women. Social structure indicates that men hold the significant positions of power in relationships. These social structures are rules of society that are not necessarily intended by individuals. Thus, our culture has taught assertiveness for men and sensitivity for women as a part of each person's self concept (Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber, 1989). This can potentially cause women to have a disadvantage in attempting to influence the decision-making process. Men and women however are not bound completely by gender roles. They have the ability to make individual choices to build their own identity (Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber, 1989). Women may find that by obtaining work outside of the home they are able to gain more assertive skills which allows them to learn how to use power and influence decision making.
Traditionally men have possessed power based on financial status and support. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) recognize that the balance of power in a marriage is affected not only by income, but also by a very central aspect of marriage: the traditional male-provider role. Because of this, husbands are generally accorded more power than wives. According to Sprecher (1985) there are no significant correlations between relative affective involvements and perceived power for males (Sprecher, 1985). Moreover, the more males perceived they contributed to the relationship the more power they felt they had; however, the reverse was true for females (Sprecher, 1985). This may occur as a result of women feeling they put more effort into the relationship than they get back.

The amount of power resources at one’s disposal can pre-determine decision making and the results of conflict (Tichenor, 1999). Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) suggest that men have learned for generations that in the workplace money equals power and they have recreated this “truth” in the home. The researchers found this to be true when examining gay couples and comparing them to heterosexual couples. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) note, “even gay male couples gain advantage over one another when one partner has a high income” (p.55). Therefore, it appears that money may create inequality in couples involving men, whether heterosexual or gay. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) found that money did not effect power in lesbian couples.

O’Connor (1991) suggests that there are limits to the exercise of male power within the family while at the same time arguing that male dominance outside of the family can have implications and/or repercussions on the power within the family.
Bernard (1972) notes that husbands perceive themselves as having more power than they actually have, while wives perceive they have less. Husbands tend to overestimate their power in decision making and wives underestimate their influence. Men showed a quite different pattern however, in situations where money was inherited. In these situations, men with the greater power condition showed patterns of deferring to their partner's wishes (Trentham and Larwood, 2001).

Other power resources also involve social standing within a community. Sprecher (1985) noted that males may be more likely than females to derive power within the relationship from their standing in a wider social network. Sprecher (1985) noted that males have the upper hand in the relationship initiative and are in a better position to use the ability to attract alternative partners as a bargaining power in their relationships. For males the ability to attract alternate partners seems to be an important basis of power.

Physical appearance and affection can also be used as a power resources (Sprecher, 1985). Sprecher notes, "The higher the level of physical appearance the men perceived they contributed to the relationship, the more likely they were to feel powerful" (p. 458). The researcher also notes that, "Males and females also differed in how physical affection contributions were related to power" (Sprecher, 1985, p. 459). In general, the higher the frequency and/or quality of sex, the more powerful males perceived themselves to be. The opposite was true for females.

For women, resource theory does not apply to affective or physical resources. Women have traditionally possessed power resources such as affection and companionship (Sprecher, 1985). However, Sprecher (1999) found that the more
affective resources females contributed relative to their partner’s contribution, the less powerful they perceived themselves to be. Moreover, the more women perceived they loved relative to their partner, the less power they perceived themselves as having. Sprecher (1985) also notes that physical appearance can be a power resource, “However the more women perceived they contribute in physical appearance, the less powerful they perceived themselves as being” (p. 458).

There are alternative resources that can be utilized by women. For instance, a wife can gain power within the marital relationship by being more educated than her husband and by being equally if not more involved in organizations outside of the home compared to her husband (O’Connor, 1991). Now that women have gained more financial responsibility in relationships because they have entered the workplace and are achieving leadership roles, their employment status may be another source of power. Females also seem more likely to gain power if they control the reciprocation of their partner’s love. Thus the bases of power appear to differ for males and females.

Resource theory critics. Tichenor (1999) criticizes resource exchange theory, as it has been applied to marital relationships, suggesting that it reflects “the idealized notion of separate spheres—breadwinning for men, domestic labor for women” (p.2). According to this researcher resource exchange theory fails to explain marital power dynamics in two-earner couples. Tichenor conducted a study examining couples in which wives earn more than their husbands and had higher occupational status, noting that resource exchange theory breaks down when women bring more money and status to the marital relationship. Tichenor (1999) argues that, “As more women have moved into
paid labor, research on marital power has demonstrated that these economic resources have a relatively minimal impact on women’s power in terms of control over money, decision making and the division of domestic labor” (Tichenor, 1999, p. 1). As a result couples face a continual conflict between their current power and resource control and traditional customs. Tichenor (1999) notes that many couples try to avoid this conflict by attempting to minimize the importance of status and income.

This reaction to the increase of resources women have in status-reversal relationships may be due to rules recognized in social construction of reality. Littlejohn (2002) notes that communicators believe they have the power to act yet they may feel somewhat constrained by social roles of action. Rules may be followed or broken, but people are at least expected to explain their actions on the basis of rules or exceptions to those rules. Therefore it is possible that women are not taking the opportunity to gain or exercise power in their marital relationships because they know that it would not be socially accepted.

Types of Power

Researchers suggest a variety of types of power that can be used within marital relationships. To begin to understand types of power strategies, some researchers have organized power into abstract dimensions. Various researchers disagree upon the most logical organization methods for defining types of power.

Komter (1989) begins his research on types of power by identifying three different perspectives on power. The purpose of his study was to focus upon hidden power that exists and sustains inequality of power within marital relationships. The one dimensional
perspective on power focuses on the question of who ultimately makes decisions and controls participation in decision making. The assumption is that power is exercised in a direct, observable conflict over issues recognized as relevant. The two dimensional approach to power focuses on potential issues which remain invisible as a result of non-decision. A non-decision neutralizes or eliminates any latent or overt threat to each person’s vested interests. The three dimensional view of power involves a thorough critique of the two previous views (Komter, 1989).

Komter (1989) found that the first two dimensions of power usually consisted of husbands’ negative responses or negative attitudes to change proposed by their wives, or the anticipation of husbands’ perceived needs and preferences by their wives and their avoidance of conflict as a result. Power tended to work to the advantage of husbands because the status quo of traditional gender roles, beliefs and practices is confirmed as a result. Women were found to need support from their husbands who showed considerable reluctance towards a greater gender equality in marriage. In marriages in which the wife was employed, power was more often equally shared than in marriages in which the wife was a full-time homemaker (Komter, 1989). Komter (1989) also noted specific hidden power strategies used by men and women. Men used sanctioning more often than women. They also more frequently used ignoring. This was used as a reaction to the wife’s discontent or anger. By turning a deaf ear on what she was saying her complaints could be denied. Both men and women used waiting. However, they had different aims in waiting. The women waited to see a change in some respect and hoped it would come about in time; if not they would take action. In contrast, the men were
inclined to be passive, in the expectation that their wives would handle the matter. For example, women waited for their husbands to take an initiative in housekeeping or child care tasks that the women normally performed (Komter, 1989).

In accordance with these three perspectives, Komter (1989) recognizes three types of power which include manifest, latent and invisible power. Manifest power surfaces in visible outcomes such as attempts at change, conflicts, and strategies. Latent power can be at stake when there are no conflicts or changes (Komter, 1989). This can be seen when “the needs and wishes of the more powerful person are anticipated or when the reasons for not desiring or attempting change are refraining from conflict and produce resignation in anticipation of a negative reaction or fear of jeopardizing the relationship” (Komter, 1989, p. 192). Komter (1989) asserts that invisible power occurs as a result of social or psychological mechanisms that are not revealed as overt behavior, or latent grievances. Instead Komter (1989) recognizes that they “may be manifest in systematic gender differences in mutual and self-esteem, differences in perceptions of and legitimations concerning every day reality” (p. 192). The effects of invisible power generally escape awareness of the people involved.

Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber (1989) also used abstract dimensions to further understand different types of power. They suggest two high level types of power identified as social and psychological. At the social level of analysis the source of power can be seen in economic and demographic terms. As the availability of employment increases for women there could be a shift in social roles for men and women. The psychological level looks at emotional power. Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber (1989) note
that women often provide stability by means of emotional expression that is unavailable elsewhere in most men's lives. For example, women have friends, not merely colleagues, and they are content with a quality of friendship that is deeper than those of men (Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber, 1989).

Yukie (1993) recognizes two dimensions of power including direct versus indirect and bilateral (two-sided) versus unilateral (one-sided). These two dimensions allow researchers to categorize power strategies. In an earlier study Falbo (1982) also examined power strategies using similar categories. She found that, “Feminine people and women were more likely to report using indirect and unilateral strategies such as growing silent or leaving the room, while masculine people and men were more likely to report using direct and bilateral strategies, such as bargaining” (p. 399). Research recognizes that bilateral and direct strategies are more commonly used by people who perceive themselves as having more power in the relationship. Likewise, people who perceive themselves with less power use unilateral and indirect strategies (Falbo, 1982).

According to Falbo (1982), masculine people typically have the greater power in relationships. Moreover, strategies typical of feminine people are also typical of those with less power in their relationships.

According to Solomon and Samp (1998), “Dependency power reflects the control that a partner who is less dependent on the relationship possesses in the eyes of the dependent party” (p. 192). Individuals accrue dependency power to the extent that they are perceived by a committed partner to be uncommitted to the relationship and to have relationship alternatives. Partners who are not dependent on their relationships possess
the power to dictate whether the association will continue or dissolve. Individuals whose partners have dependency power may have limited leverage in addressing relational problems (Solomon and Samp, 2001). Solomon and Samp (1998) found that individuals who perceive their partners as uncommitted, were less likely to communicate about their problematic behavior with their partners. The researchers found that respondents' commitment was associated with decisions to communicate when partners were perceived as highly committed. Therefore perceptions of a partner’s commitment exert an enabling effect on the decision to communicate about problems (Solomon and Samp, 1998). In accordance with this research Finkel and Campbell (2001) note that, “commitment level to one’s romantic relationship is a critical predictor of accommodation. Individuals are likely to engage in accommodative behavior to the degree that they intend to persist in their relationship” (p. 267).

O’Connor (1991) notes that although an overwhelming majority of women respondents interviewed in their study were partially if not totally financially dependent on their husbands, only one third felt powerless within their marriage. The researcher argues that feelings of powerlessness are less influenced by a female’s own structural resources than by factors associated with her husband’s economic position and his role within the family. A wife’s power was associated with emotional and economic dependency, as well as degree of a husband’s participation in housework (O’Connor, 1991).

Haunani-Solomon et al. (2004) recognize a theory known as the chilling effect which is based upon dependency power. People accrue dependency power when they do
not depend on the relationship for specific rewards or unique benefits. Within romantic relationships, one’s partner’s dependency power is maximized when one is committed to the relationship, but perceives the partner as being uncommitted and having access to relational alternatives (Haunani-Solomon et al., 2004). A chilling effect occurs when a partner’s control of rewards and costs in a relationship prompts an individual to remain silent about irritating situations. This effect occurs when people withhold complaints from a powerful partner to avoid negative outcomes for themselves and the relationship (Haunani-Solomon et al., 2004). According to the chilling effect an individual is unlikely to express relational grievances to partners who may retaliate with punitive behavior (Haunani-Solomon et al., 2004).

Other researchers recognize rational choice as a type of power strategy, related to dependency, which is based on weighing benefits and costs (Cherry, 1998). This concept focuses upon the price of marriage and measures the excess services one spouse provides to the other. This price includes income, time allocation to household activities and control over forms of intimacy and other positive benefits (Cherry, 1998). Households may gain benefits if each partner specializes in certain activities improving the quantity or quality of the household services. This theory demonstrates that a source of women’s bargaining power is their willingness to withdraw from the marriage market at a given marriage price. Cherry (1998) notes that this does not necessarily mean these women are unwilling to marry, they are just limiting the price they will pay to “buy into” marriage.

Three other types of power are also associated with dependency and weighing costs verses benefits in a relationship. Punitive or coercive power can occur when an
individual increases the costs or negative outcomes another party experiences. This type of power is given to partners who are perceived as likely to engage in physical aggression. Higher use of referent power, which involves trustworthiness and care earned in the relationship, is associated with lower uses of coercive power or punishment while attempting to influence one’s spouse. This has been found to be associated with higher satisfaction on the part of couples (Richmond, McCroskey and Roach, 1997). Use of reward power is associated with low satisfaction levels similar to those of coercive power, but not quite as strong (Richmond, et al., 1997). The research recognized that in relationships where “either partner is clearly dominant, and uses directive rather than coactive communication are associated with substantial marital dissatisfaction” (Richmond, McCroskey and Roach, 1997, p. 424).

The power that women are more likely to have access to is called relational power. This is the influence one person has over another based on the nature of their personal relationship and the individual’s ability to exert authority through the context of the relationship (Blanton and Vandergriff-Avery, 2001). Blanton and Vandergriff-Avery (2001) refer to this as generative power or power that is gained through connection, inclusion nurturance and cooperation. This power strategy is culturally gendered as feminine while positional power is more masculine (Blanton and Vandergriff-Avery, 2001). The relational power allows women to gain influence without violating social rules required for women.

Kranichfeld (1987) has taken another view of power. She contends that most research has heavily focused upon the male and female and the power struggle they have
in families. She argues that rather than focusing on male and female power, research should be focusing on family power. For example, power within the parent-child relationship is more complex and enduring and significant within a family. Kranichfeld (1987) defines family power as “the ability of individual members to change the behavior of other family members” (p. 43). She further notes, “family power involves asymmetry of relations between members with regard to this ability to change the behavior of others” (Kranichfeld, 1987, p. 43). She recognizes that family power reflects family system properties, rather than the attributes of the powerful member. Family power exists because of one’s relationship within the family system, rather than merely because of one’s personal characteristics. Influence, which describes a state in which one person has an impact on the behavior of another, is a broader term than power; influence can be intentional or unintentional, whereas power is the capacity to influence another intentionally in the pursuit of specific goals (Kranichfeld, 1987). Kranichfeld (1987) observes that women often occupy positions at the very center of the family, affectively and structurally. In contrast, men seem to be increasingly isolated from the family, and have virtually no substitute for their essential primary group form. She argues that the kind of power that exists in a family is not economically, or physically based, it is through investment, attention, connection and care that one gains power (Kranichfeld, 1987).

**Distribution of Power**

It is important when examining power and decision making in romantic relationships, to examine the distribution of power amongst couples, because this distribution indicates who has higher authority. Power distribution is often determined by
the amount of resources individuals have at their disposal. However, there are also a number of other determinants of power distribution. Power distribution can be determined by the degree to which one partner depends upon the other.

Many researchers have explained power distribution by distinguishing high verses low power status. Power status is, “the relative extent of one’s power in a given situation” (Trentham and Larwood, 2001, p.3). Expectations concerning power status may include different views of each partner’s individual entitlement, or of each partner’s individual ability and responsibility. Partners with greater power in a situation feel more justified in taking responsibility for causing and resolving an argument than the partners with less power.

Research suggests that, “Men are often perceived to have greater overall power within both dating and marital relationships” (Trentham and Larwood, 2001, p.9). Men are more likely to report that they have more power and they adopt the perspective of one in a stronger position than their partners; whereas, women are more likely to report that power is equally shared. Societal expectations still typically associate power and status more with the masculine role and closeness and solidarity more with the feminine role. Moreover, since men are traditionally considered the breadwinner, “the monetary-related power is typically associated with men’s gender roles” (Trentham and Larwood, 2001).

Women with greater situational power must consider how their male partners, as well as others, may respond to their exertion of power. Women’s violations of societal gender expectations regarding power status may lead to negative results for using forms of power that contradict expectations (Trentham and Larwood, 2001). Trentham and
Larwood (2001) found that, “the monetary-related power is typically associated with men’s gender roles” (p. 10). The types of power that are often associated with women’s gender roles may produce different effects. The author contends that women may have more power in a relationship than they realize. For example, they suggest that men tend to fall in love faster and take longer to overcome a dissolved relationship than do women.

Research has also examined power distribution in couples on a long term basis. Studies have found that couples that are committed to one another for an extended amount of time become emotionally similar. This theory is known as emotional convergence. Anderson (2003), found that “partners with less power in the relationship more broadly changed so as to become more similar to the more powerful partner” (1064). She also found that although men have more power in relationships more broadly, women have more power over some aspects of the relationship (Anderson, 2003). Thus, by examining a couple over time, one may be able to identify power distributions when one partner adapts to become more similar to the other.

According to conflict theory, partners have varying amounts of power and resources in a relationship with differing self-interests to maintain (Trentham and Larwood, 2001). When a disagreement arises that is related to the partners’ differences in power and status, one expects the more powerful partner to win the argument and the less powerful one to defer to other’s wishes. Greater power often means greater ability and accountability for situational problems relevant to one’s higher power status. People with higher power in certain situations will have privileges and rights as well as obligations (Trentham and Larwood, 2001).
Ross (1991) recognizes three perspectives on the ways in which marriage affects the sense of control or power. The perspectives include marriage as a social and economic resource; marriage as a limit to autonomy; and marriage as unequal power for men and women. Marriage directly decreases women’s expected sense of control. According to Ross (1991) married women’s sense of control stems largely from the economic resources husbands provide, whereas men’s control is likely due to their dominant position in the household, a position in large part based on the economic resources they contribute (Ross, 1991). Thus, marriage has trade-offs for women’s sense of control. In one way it increases through household income, but it is also decreased by the probability of decreased autonomy. When household income is held constant, single women have the highest sense of control of any group. For men, marriage has less of an effect on the sense of power or control. People with a high sense of control will take preventative action and avoid dependency (Ross, 1991).

It is clear that power plays a key role in the communication between husband and wife. The balance of power directly effects how decision making is conducted within a relationship. Sources and types of power play a key role in the distribution and negotiation of power in marital relationships. Research has recognized that men and women use different sources and types of power which is largely due to gender roles they have learned in society. Men have traditionally possessed more power due to financial status, however now that women are gaining financial status the traditional distribution of
power seems to be changing. Therefore, it is clear that researchers must better understand what sources and types of power are used in relationships.

**Decision Making**

When looking at both traditional and dual career marriages it is important to examine not only the management of power, but the decision making process. According to Lenk-Krueger (1983) decision making is the “means of getting things accomplished when one or more parties needs to deal with other(s) in coordinating action” (p. 100). Decision making research has often focused upon the distribution of power and its influence on decision outcomes in relationships.

**Decision Making Strategies**

Previous researchers have identified several strategies used by couples in making decisions. Lenk-Krueger (1983) suggests three domains of marital decision making and power consisting of resource, processes, and outcomes. Lenk-Krueger’s (1983) study looked at two dimensions of communication, task and affiliative. Many affiliative categories reflected a positive tone in the decision making process. For example, willingness to accept or offer collaboration or compromise. The participants also did not focus on one topic for an extended amount of time. Marital couples also demonstrated a high level of reciprocity especially in task communication. Couples tended to focus more on topics rather than personalities during the decision making process. The study found very few differences in the types of messages used by men and women.

Yukie (1993) recognizes decision making as indirect or direct, and bilateral or unilateral. According to Yukie power and decision making strategies are ways in which
people attempt to influence others during disagreements (Yukie, 1993). Within the types of power dimensions which include unilateral, bilateral, direct and indirect, there are four categories of power strategies. The direct, bilateral strategies include: bargaining, persistence, persuasion, reasoning, and talking. Hinting and positive affect are indirect-bilateral strategies. Asking, stating, importance, and telling are direct unilateral strategies; and laissez-faire, negative affect, and withdrawal are indirect-unilateral strategies (Yukie, 1993).

The degree of satisfaction each partner has in a relationship may determine the type of decision making strategies that are used and how successful these strategies are. Wilmot and Hocker (2001) note that people who are reasonably satisfied with their long-term intimate relationships consistently use more accommodating or collaborating strategies within those relationship than coercive or competitive strategies (Wilmot and Hocker, 2001). Lenk-Krueger (1985) also recognizes a possible trend that partners who perceive highly satisfying relationships, also perceive egalitarian decision making. For example, highly satisfied couples were found to have a higher agreement rate verses disagreement rate and higher support compared to rejection. In these cases partners all perceive their decision making as meeting their needs and expectations, even though those perceptions may not be shared between partners, or an observer (Lenk-Krueger, 1985).

Researchers have found that couples who are satisfied with their marital relationship use somewhat more positive decision making strategies. Lenk-Krueger and Smith (1982) contend that harmonious couples tend to focus on issues rather than
personalities, and issues oriented conflicts are easier to resolve. Harmonious couples shared a capacity for keeping their conflicts from escalating and used patterns of decision making that tended to be stable over time. These couples rarely differentiated in their decision making repertoire, facilitating quick and efficient decisions (Lenk-Krueger and Smith, 1982).

Richmond, et al. (1997) also focuses on decision making in harmonious couples. They suggest a strategy known as “consult-to-join” which occurs when a spouse makes the ultimate decision only after the problem has been presented to the other person, delegates the decision making to the other spouse, or cooperates with the spouse in making the decision. They recognize that successful relationships are highly dependent on satisfying communicative interactions in decision making and mutual influence between two partners. The research conducted by Richmond, et al. (1997) closely follows the theory of management communication style which states that, “people vary in their general approach to decision making and that the individual’s approach has important, observable impact on their communication behavior” (Richmond, et al., 1997, p. 411). The researchers found that couples had greater relationship satisfaction when they used the consult-to-join communication pattern in decision-making.

Men and women tend to use different strategies during marital decision making due to levels of power and cultural gender roles (Lenk-Krueger, 1985). Lenk-Krueger (1985) examined decision making in dual career couples and marital satisfaction. She found that women seem to guide the process, getting men in effect to make the decisions. Men on the other hand are very much in charge of the decision content; their ideas and
solutions comprise much of the content. Lenk-Krueger (1985) also notes that men direct conversations more often than women by using a variety of means that are accepted and supported by their wives’ responses. They make proposals about procedures, disagree more often, and extend proposals more than women. The contrast between the male and female roles in decision making may be due to couples following socially constructed gender prescriptions (Littlejohn, 2002).

Wilmont and Hocker (2001) recognize that men and women use different strategies when managing conflict and decision making. Men are more likely to use competing while women more often use compromise. This could be associated with cultural gender role expectations as well. The authors note that in “dissatisfied marriages, men are more likely to assume a coercive position in relation to their partner, whereas women are more likely to assume a joining position” (Wilmot and Hocker, 2001, p. 215). They recognize however that it is more likely that the people who perceive themselves as more powerful are more likely to ensue direct or coercive strategies. Lenk-Krueger and Smith (1982) assert that husbands are more pacifying while wives use more emotional pressure.

A couple’s perceptions of their relationship are a significant factor in their decision making. Lenk-Krueger (1983) recognizes that couples often perceive certain decision making strategies are occurring in a relationship when the opposite may actually take place. She recognizes that men may use more forceful tactics in the decision making process, but in describing the decision making process couples insist that it is a joint effort. She asserts that couples often claim to use egalitarian decision making, though
men are seen using command tactics while the female partner accepts. In the same study however, participants reported that if a partner has greater expertise or they are more affected by the decision that person has more to say in the decision making (Lenk-Krueger, 1983).

Lenk-Krueger (1982) explains that a couple creates their own reality of their relationship. Their perceptions of their relationship and decision making are very real to them and apparently satisfying, but they can conflict with what is actually occurring. During this study the researcher examined validation and agreement. The study found that validation involved support and acceptance through expression or tone in conversation. These messages kept the conversation moving to a satisfactory conclusion, but surprisingly when support was requested by a partner it was not always given. In these cases the support may have been rejected or neutral. Couples’ supportive responses were frequent, but they did not always come when requested. Lenk-Krueger (1982) suggests that a common way of getting support was to suggest working together, which prompted support.

Kirchler (1999) found that spouses are aware of making a decision, they concentrate on each other’s preferences for some of the available alternatives, and know which characteristics they themselves and their partners prefer or reject. The researcher noted that though these couples are aware of the decision making process they struggle with knowing each other’s tactics in a joint decision situation and construct what might happen according to their subjective concept of joint decisions. The study found that spouses’ descriptions of each other’s decision making behavior was not reliable. Spouses
are not aware of all of the tactics applied by their partner and they do not accurately remember and report them. Joint decision making processes are difficult to report. Spouses are probably not explicitly aware of what is going on in detail and perhaps do not always know how they work through the decision making process (Kirchler, 1999).

**Topics of Decision Making**

There are various areas of decision making that are involved in the daily life of married couples. Financial decisions and household duties are two areas of marital life that influence and are influenced by power and decision making. This section examines the decision making literature in these two areas. By looking at specific areas of decision making one can get a sense of how power and decision making are managed in a relationship.

Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber (1989) focused on the division of labor in a household. They divided the tasks between child care, housework, money management and income. The first two tasks are traditionally associated with wives, while the last two are considered more common for husbands. Forty percent of the couples agree that both partners should decide how to spend money, but only about one-fourth agreed that earning money should be shared. Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber (1989) found that except for managing money, only about one third of the husbands, by their own report, share any regular household task. Taking care of the house from day to day is the “wife’s business.” However, the researchers recognized that in dual income couples, especially in situations where the wife has a higher education, non-traditional structures in labor are more prevalent. In these cases individuals change their expectations to match the reality
of the situation (Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber, 1989). The study also recognizes that inaccuracies in the perceived expectations for traditional male roles occur most often when wives are less traditional and husbands are more traditional than their partners expect. Wives more often perceive husbands’ expectations about managing money to be less traditional than they actually are. Husbands more often perceive wives’ expectations about both managing and earning money to be more traditional than they actually are (Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber, 1989).

**Financial decision making.** Financial decision making in marriage can reveal a great deal about power in the relationship (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983). Economic factors tend to be involved in every aspect of a couple’s life. Although it is widely accepted that the amount of money available to a couple has a bearing on their happiness and the amount of conflict they experience, this is not the only important financial issue. All couples regardless of the size of income, must face the importance of financial management on a day to day bases. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that money matters are the most commonly discussed issue among married couples. Thus, it is crucial for researchers to learn more about how couples manage and negotiate financial decisions (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983).

There are several ways in which couples can manage money. The couple can pool all finances together; the allowance system in which one partner provides an allowance for the other; or individual savings accounts. It is important to see the relationship between patterns of allocation and patterns of inequality within marriage in terms of social processes which may change over time.
Burgoyne (1990) looked at couples who pool their income and found that although most couples leave the impression that the resources are equally shared, the management of income may not be consistently shared. Rights of ownership associated with having earned the income may remain hidden and lead to patterns of overall control with potential consequences for a non-earning dependent partner. Burgoyne (1990) recognizes that “Pooling money in a joint account may remove the overt labels of ownership, but the source of that money may retain a powerful influence upon the minds of both partners” (p. 662). The researcher explains that this influence may not be consciously admitted, yet it may be reflected in the way both partners treat the joint resource. Perceived ownership of earned income also legitimizes a pattern of control which can disadvantage a partner whose contribution is less visible because it is unpaid (Burgoyne, 1990).

Many couples pool income and one partner manages the money. Vogler (1998) recognizes that when wives manage money, for example, they do so as managing agents accountable to breadwinners who still exercise overall strategic control. When husbands manage money, however, their status as breadwinners means they are likely to have greater control over finances so that their position is akin to that of a benevolent dictator, who is only accountable to himself. Vogler (1998) also notes that wives often restrict their own personal spending from the joint pool because they do not feel entitled to spend money on themselves which they do not see as theirs. In contrast, a prior study conducted by Vogler and Pahl (1994) found that when men control finance it takes the form of housekeeping allowance. They also found that the financial interests of men were
protected more often in comparison with women. This implies that participatory
democracy or equal voice may only be partly successful in offsetting pre-existing gender
notes that couples with joint pooling accounts adopt a system of co-providing which in
turn underpins the idea of equal sharing whereas others, particularly those in
housekeeping allowance households, are more likely to accept the idea of the “male
breadwinner.”

Burgoyne (1990) recognizes that some couples choose to have one spouse strictly
manage finances and provide an allowance to the other; however, the researcher argues
that sharing financial power is more satisfying for most couples. Pahl (1983) suggests
that the allowance system only reinforces inequality between the sexes by increasing the
financial dependence of the wife and the autonomy of the husband and the assumptions
that the allowance system is and should be the norm of society (Pahl, 1983). Thus, the
allowance system reinforces the social construction of reality which defines traditional
gender prescriptions. Research suggests that the ability to assign one’s own priorities for
expenditure without being subject to another’s control is important, not only for women’s
physical and mental health, but also for the well being of any children in their care (Pahl,
1983). Equity of expenditures can aid in redefining societal expectation of gender roles in
marriage.

Pahl (1983) suggests three main variables in determining the allocative systems
adopted by couples. These include income level of a couple, sources of income, and
normative expectation of the culture within which the household is located. The
researcher notes that most commonly couples whose income is low, by comparison with incomes generally in the society in which they live, are likely to adopt the whole wage system, managed by the wife. Higher income levels are associated with the independent management of financial resources and middle income level couples are more likely to adopt either the allowance system or pooling system (Pahl, 1983). In a later study, Vogler and Pahl (1994) found that inequality between husband and wife were least in households with joint control of pooled money and greatest in either lower income households or in higher income households with male control of finances.

Who is bringing home a salary influences household income, and thus the distribution of power and decision making in the marriage. In turn, this can influence decision-making about finances and other matters. According to Tichenor (1999) when women break the tradition in our culture by becoming the main breadwinner in a family, they can also change the power distribution which can effect how financial and other decisions are made. Nieva (1985) explains that married women’s employment status appears to have consistent effects on women’s status and influence on family decision making. The independent financial base provided by employment grants women an increased sense of competence, and gives women more power within the marriage and increases their influence in decision making. Couples in which both husband and wife work are more likely to share decisions about major purchases and child rearing.

In contrast, Tichnor (1999) recognizes that even in situations where wives are the main breadwinners they do not necessarily gain financial decision making responsibilities. Tichnor (1999) supports Vogler and Pahl’s (1994) previous assessment
that pooling earnings and examining who manages the income is a more accurate determinant of decision making control. Tichnor (1999) continues to state that “status-reversal” wives have more access to control over money if they manage the pooled account themselves (p. 12). These women often act as gate keepers of the family’s money. Ironically, stay-at-home fathers and husbands who contribute a smaller proportion of the family income are accorded provider status that is unthinkable for women in similar circumstances (Tichnor, 1999). Wives exercise greater influence when they control the checkbook and when money is pooled. Husbands exercise similar influence when they control the checkbook for a pooled account, though this is less common. A husband with money set aside has the ability to make purchases more privately. Wives’ discretionary spending is tempered by the budgetary needs of the household (Tichnor, 1999).

Stamp (1985) also examined marriages in which the wives were the main breadwinners. She found that these couples were very much aware of power distribution in the relationship. Males believed in egalitarian power more so than their wives. The researcher recognized that many of the women studied admitted to feelings of guilt. Often these women would have preferred staying at home. It was found that wives make an honest effort to equalize the relationship by trying to avoid having too much power. Not only would they not consider taking the extreme position of giving an allowance to their husbands, they also tended to move towards the more egalitarian position. Stamp (1985) suggests that women think they ought to be less powerful than men because of the cultural norms. Paul (1983) attempts to explain this occurrence by recognizing that
normative expectations are embedded in the socialization of husband or wife into a social network of other couples within a local community or through an occupational structure (Pahl, 1983). Additionally Vogler (1998) suggests that the clash between traditional patriarchal discourses of breadwinning and contemporary discourses of equality and individualism may play an important role, especially in households where husbands and wives are both contributing similar levels of economic resources. It was also negotiable in the relationship that husbands’ ideologies have a bigger impact on the nature of the intra-household economy than wives ideologies (Vogler, 1998).

Life-cycle changes such as losing a job or having a child can have a significant impact on the amount of income in the relationship and who may be bringing in the income which can change the financial decision making process (Burgoyne, 1990). Burgoyne (1990) studied life-cycle changes and how that impacts decision making. For instance, the researcher looked at couples in which the female was the main breadwinner for a period of time while her husband looked for employment. She also looked at situations in which the wife stayed at home and let her husband work on his career temporarily while the children were young. She found that these life-cycle changes can have a significant impact on how decisions are made. Often life-cycle changes can cause a major shift in financial control and decision making (Burgoyne, 1990).

*Domestic duties.* It is clearly a difficult undertaking when any employed person with a family is tasked with balancing work life and the needs of the family, but it can be particularly difficult for a dual-career couple. Though domestic duties have stereotypically been labeled in the past as “women’s work,” women are finding it difficult
to balance both domestic responsibilities and work outside of the home. A large portion of marital decision making involves domestic responsibilities. Now that women are spending more time working outside of the home it is important to understand how decision making is managed in this area.

Traditionally our culture has held certain expectations of male and female roles in a domestic relationship; men are expected to be the breadwinner, while women take care of the home and children (Tichenor, 1999). Social rules have taught men that they are exempt from a variety of responsibilities including household tasks. Wives then find themselves engaging in chores regardless of the nature of the task, in part because of the strong expectation that all household labor is ultimately a wife’s responsibility (Fenstermaker-Berk, 1985).

Changes in women’s employment have started to impact division of labor at home to some degree, though societal gender role expectations continue to be a barrier. In the study conducted by Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber (1989) which examined the division of labor they found that participants felt child care was predominantly considered by couples as a shared responsibility. Only about half of the respondents felt that housework should be shared. However half of the wives and almost half of the husbands felt that it should be done by the wife. Both husbands and wives are divided almost equally over whether housework should be shared or done primarily by the wife. Interestingly, more wives than husband believed that it should be the wife’s job. Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber (1989) found that more wives believe that husbands have more traditional expectations than they actually do; they believe that their husbands expect them to do housework and
care for the children when, in fact, many husbands believe these roles should be shared. Although wives perform the more regular household tasks, a number of husbands do household tasks that are less regular or are needed only occasionally. Almost all husbands take primary responsibility for household repairs, yard work, and a large portion of the major purchases. The study consistently found that husbands and wives see themselves as participating more than their spouses believe they participate. Husbands especially are more likely to see tasks as shared while wives see themselves having major responsibility (Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber, 1989).

Now that women have entered the work force they struggle to provide both the financial and domestic needs in the relationship which could cause reallocation of household tasks (Szinovacz, 1977). The gainful employment of a wife typically results in some reorganization of household and childrearing responsibilities by husbands (Szinovacz, 1977). Such adjustments can be achieved by the reallocation of tasks within the family. Another option that is often used is to assign these tasks to someone outside of the immediate family whether it be relatives, friends, neighbors, or hiring paid help and services. The sharing of domestic duties between spouses typically only occurs if help outside of the immediate family is not an option.

Men’s participation in household duties has been studied as a form of support for their wives. Van Willigen and Drentea (2001) examined the division of household duties and the perception of social support. This study focused upon equity theory which states that, “although individuals are motivated to maximize personal interests, they are also influenced by a sense of inter-dependence with others” (p. 572). This study supported the
theory in that sharing housework and decision making power leads to high perceptions of social support. The researchers found that the highest level of social support results when partners contribute equally to household decisions. Additionally they note that when one partner perceives an inequitable portion of housework or feels one’s portion of the work is unfair, low social support is perceived by both individuals. Van Willigen and Drentea (2001) also recognized that those who believe that their allotment of household work is fair perceive themselves to have more social support than do those who feel their household division of labor is unfair. Those who perform the large majority of the housework (mostly women) experience lower perceived social support, especially emotional support, than do those who either are advantaged or in equitable relationships (Van Willigen and Drentea, 2001).

Van Willigen and Drentea (2001) note that men and women have different perceptions of the amount and type of household responsibilities that are appropriate for their gender. Women were also found to have a higher tolerance of inequity than men (Van Willigen and Drentea, 2001). In contrast, Nieve (1985) suggests that although women gain power and contribute to family status, working wives do not obtain significantly more help in household work from their husband than do non-working wives. Rather women tend to add on the employment work load to their household work, although they also tend to reduce the amount of time spent on household chores by half (Nieva, 1985). Pleck (1985) is consistent with this notion by stating, “the division of family work in two-earner couples, deriving from traditional sex role ideology and husbands’ low psychological investment in the family is inequitable, a source of
conscious dissatisfaction to wives and injurious to their well being” (p. 137). This suggests that though women are gainfully employed outside of the home, they fail to gain power and decision making influence.

In the mid 1980s, though women were continuing to bear the majority of the burden in domestic duties, Pleck (1985) discovered an increase in male participation. He recognized that fathers with very young children were spending significantly more time in family roles than they used to while there was little or no change in fathers of older children. Men and women are moving toward convergence in their family time, though it will be a long time before they reach total equity. More of the convergence is due to women’s decrease than to men’s increase though men’s increase is not trivial.

Research has found that the more social support a partner perceives they are receiving, the more satisfied they are in the relationship (Van Willigen and Drentea, 2001). Carlisle (1997) conducted a study looking at partner contributions to the family in dual career couples. The research found that more than one in four of the respondents in the study indicated that their partner shared equally in all areas of responsibility. The level of partners’ actual contribution to child rearing, housework and the women’s career reported by the participants was greater than previous research had supported (Carlisle, 1997). The study noted that is was unclear as to the specific reason for this change. It is possible that women’s expectations and ability to negotiate sharing of duties has improved, or that the partners’ willingness to contribute has changed. The high level of partner contribution may be related to the general positive response to the advantages of dual career relationships (Carlisle, 1997). It is possible that women are able to gain
influence in domestic decision making based on their hours of employment outside of the home, as well as their gain in financial status.

In contrast Almeid, Maggs, and Galambos (1993) conducted a study looking at the relative difference between the amount of household duties shared and the amount of hours a wife works. They found that wives spend more hours in, were more frequently involved in and performed a greater share of both child care duties and household chores than did their husbands. This may be due to gender role expectations of women’s responsibilities for domestic duties. This may also be due to the presumed belief of women having the lower power. The research discovered that wives were more likely to share child care responsibilities with their husbands when wives were employed more hours, but this did not necessarily translate into spending significantly less time with their children (Almeid, Maggs, and Galambos, 1993). For wives, however higher employment hours seemed to be associated with a lower amount of absolute engagement in household chores. When employment places demands on their time and energy it appears that wives make it a priority to invest their time with their children rather than performing household chores. For husbands, wives’ paid work hours were not consistently associated with their absolute levels of family work. A pattern developed which suggests that when wives are employed for more hours, they perform a lower share of child care and may participate less in their household chores (Almeid, Maggs, and Galambos, 1993).

Bailyn (1978) looks at accommodation of work to family for both men and women. The researcher notes that accommodation is the degree to which work demands are fit into family requirements. Then the way each person integrates work and family in
his or her life may be described by the extent to which this integration is accommodative. The researcher uses an example of a male business executive who is highly career committed and follows the demands of his job wherever it takes them. In contrast, a wife and mother in a relatively traditional family situation, who, even when she works, is guided by family needs rather than by job requirements, is typical of someone whose primary focus is on family. The male executive is the most non-accommodative, the traditionally minded female who makes her outside interests secondary is the most accommodative (Bailyn, 1978). There are also those that have chosen to sacrifice career advancement to accommodate the needs of family. Bailyn (1978) recognizes three links in a task management system, wife’s work link, the husband’s work link and the family link. There are several accommodation patterns that can occur using these links. In the first pattern responsibility for work and family is differentially distributed between the partners. Such patterns are based on a specialization of function. Though both partners’ patterns maintain both family and work links, each person has primary responsibility for one area; one is accommodative, the other is non-accommodative. Another pattern is based on equal sharing of responsibilities for work and family. In this pattern both partners share equal commitment for work and family (Bailyn, 1978).

There is contradicting evidence on whether or not women receive more support with domestic and parenting duties if they provide the majority of the income in the household. Tichnor (1999) recognizes that status-reversal wives tend to receive more help from their husbands than conventional wives. During this study the researcher examined some couples in which the husband stayed home full time. In this case the husbands
performed more than half of the household and childcare chores. In all of these cases the couples sat down and made a conscious decision that one parent would be home with the children and because the wife in the family had a greater economic potential than the husband, the husband stayed home. These women earn a great deal more than their husbands and are substantially higher in status as well. Yet they are not able to trade these resources for a similarly substantial reduction in their burden of domestic labor. Wives in all groups also maintained responsibilities for running the household (Tichnor, 1999). Women tend to organize the household, which means that they often shape the couple’s decision making process, but the results also illuminate some limits on wives’ power. Opportunities to exercise decision making can be cut short by the husband’s power to veto his wife’s decision. Due to gender role expectations wives may be reluctant to exercise power for fear the they will appear to be powerful and difficult (Tichnor, 1999).

Decisions with regard to domestic duties and parenting are an important factors in a marital relationship and may be related to the amount of time each partner spends on these responsibilities. Just like income, employment can be a key factor in determining who makes decisions and what types of decisions are made. Blanton and Vandergriff-Avery (2001) found that men often feel powerless, especially in the domain of family. This is especially true for men in extremely successful political or business occupations. They note that not only do husbands sometimes feel powerless in their marriages, but also wives often are aware of their ability to exert influence in the marriage despite having less access to positional power than their husbands. This suggests that a person who spends
less time at home may have less power in domestic decision making than their partner. Therefore, when women continue to contribute a generous portion of the domestic duties, they may also maintain their share of the domestic decision making.

The decision on having children can be affected by careers of each partner as well. A woman’s decreased time in the family follows the long-term trend toward fewer children. Fewer children can also lead to less time needed for childcare and housework, since children generate much of the needed housework (Pleck, 1985). Furthermore, there is an increasing trend in the decision to delay or avoid child bearing, because women are choosing a career first. As women are increasingly entering career tracks they are also choosing to postpone marriage as well as childbearing. This delay is often based upon completing education, obtaining a level of career success, and personal identity (Soloway and Smith, 2001). Heaton and Jacobson (1999) also examined the decision to remain childless as well as the delay of child bearing. They note that because women generally devote more time to child care and men devote more time to earning a living, the impact of the birth of the first child is greater on women than on men. Thus economic variables, a career orientation, and preference of leisure time will have more negative effects on child bearing for women than for men.

Modern couples face a new and difficult set of questions on the division of power and authority, and on the responsibility for making decisions. The communication process in making decisions amongst couples is key to the level of satisfaction each partner has within a relationship. Now that women are gaining higher status job positions couples are dealing with more prevalent gender role reversal situations. This
phenomenon is challenging traditional social prescriptions that have been set for men and women. This could cause problems in a relationship which indicates a need for better understanding of new and improved methods of decision making. By gaining more information about decision making strategies, couples may be able to improve everyday financial and domestic decision making necessary for a relationship.
Chapter Three

Purpose of the Study

As previous research has stated, our culture has an embedded ideology that recognizes men as the breadwinners in a family while women are care-givers in the home. In the past few decades women have increased their presence in the workplace, and they are beginning to break through gender discrimination to gain higher status occupations (Tichenor, 1999). As a wider range of dual career families emerges it becomes more critical for researchers to understand communication processes that may be used to ensure a satisfactory relationship (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1976). Research has recognized a clear link between money, power and decision making processes (Vogler, 1998).

Because males have traditionally brought home the majority of the income, they have also possessed greater power in a relationship. Therefore, it is reasonable to think women’s increased participation in the workplace could affect the balance of power and decision making, especially in status-reversal couples (i.e. couples in which wives exceed their husbands’ income and occupational status; Tichenor, 1999).

This research study investigates the extent to which the traditional power distribution continues to exist, or if women are gaining more power in marriages in which they make more money than their husbands. This study examines the methods used in both power and decision making to reveal whether or not status-reversal couples are using new communication techniques. It focuses especially on any new methods of decision making and power management that are being used in marriage, now that women are gaining financial power. Methods of power management and decision making are
revealed by asking couples how they manage and communicate about everyday activities such as financial decisions, domestic tasks, and parental duties. This study examines all three of these categories of everyday tasks to understand the sources and types of power used by husbands and wives and how power is distributed in various situations.

Looking at these everyday activities provides a sense of power distribution and who might be responsible for decision making in different tasks. Though other researchers have examined dual-career couples and the power and decision making exchange, there are several discrepancies in results. Some research suggests that even though women are gaining higher power jobs, they are still responsible for the same domestic tasks they have always had (Nieve, 1985). Others suggest that husbands are taking on more responsibility (Tichnor, 1999). Still others suggest that household chores are being sacrificed so women can spend more time with family (Almeid, Maggs, and Galambos, 1993). Researchers recognize that with the steady increase in wives entering the labor force there is also decline in the number of hours they spend doing household chores and caring for children. This suggests a need for husbands to share in this type of family work as a result in this change in our culture. Almeid, Maggs, and Galambos (1993) argue that it may only appear in research that men are contributing more at home because women are doing less.

This study, in the process of examining these topics, also investigates whether or not gender stereotypes exist in status-reversal couples. Our culture has taught us certain truisms about gender roles. By examining power and decision making in these couples who challenge the traditional role of the husband as the breadwinner, we can learn more
about how these couples cope with certain societal expectations. Moreover, the study identifies new trends of behavior occurring in our culture now that society must adapt to women in occupations of higher power. This research reveals that status-reversal couples are in some ways challenging traditional meanings of gender by using new behaviors.

In summary, this study attempts to clarify past research, to get a better understanding of the dynamics in status-reversal relationships. By looking at financial decision making, household duties, and parental responsibilities in a couple's relationship, this research reveals new methods of decision making and power management used in marriage now that women are gaining financial power. It also reveals new behavior occurring contrary to traditional gender prescriptions.

Similar to a previous study conducted by Tichenor (1999), this study uses qualitative methods by means of semi-structured interviews and a short questionnaire. By conducting qualitative research, the study investigates the meaning of events, situations, and actions. It allows the researcher to investigate the specific context that status-reversal couples face on an everyday basis. Qualitative research also allows the researcher flexibility in identifying and investigating unanticipated actions or information. This type of research is particularly beneficial in understanding the process by which power and decision making occur (Maxwell, 1996).
Research Questions

RQ1: How is power distributed in married status-reversal couples?

RQ2: How do married status-reversal couples negotiate power?

RQ3: How do married status-reversal couples manage decision making in the areas of finance, household tasks, and parenting?

RQ4: How do married status-reversal couples reinforce and/or challenge gender stereotypes?
Chapter Four

Method

This section summarizes the research method used in this thesis. It describes the participants, procedure and measurements used in the efforts to answer the research questions. This section also explains the rationale for using such methods and why they are particularly helpful to this study. These methods allow the researcher to learn how power, decision making, and gender roles are utilized in status-reversal marital relationships.

Participants

Similar to a previous study conducted by Burgoyne (1990), the researcher chose a small sample of five married, heterosexual couples. Only “status-reversal” couples, in which wives have higher income and occupational status than their husbands, were included in the study. The participants consist of any couples over 19 years of age. This study did not focus on any particular ethnic or racial group. Participants were recruited based on purposive sampling and the snowball method. According to Maxwell (1996) purposeful sampling is used when particular settings, persons or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that cannot be attained as well from other choices. This can ensure proper representation or typicality allowing the researcher to look at couples of various occupations, ages, and couples with or without children. Participants were also gathered using the snowballing method, in which the researcher began finding potential subjects through networking with peers, such as family, friends, and business associates. Snowballing refers to using personal sources who might know
of potential participants that qualify for the study (Berg, 1998). Using the researcher’s personal contacts to recruit participants was helpful because the contacts were able to vouch for the legitimacy and safety of the researcher. This provided a sense of comfort to potential participants (Berg, 1998).

**Procedure and Measurement**

Prior to the study participants were contacted by phone and asked to participate in the study. The researcher presented the study as an exploration of how decisions are made and shared in families and how partners feel about these matters. Respondents were ensured that the information revealed in the study would be confidential. Before conducting the interview and questionnaire, participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix B).

Based on Berg’s (1998) interview guidelines, it was important to conduct interviews in a setting that was comfortable for subjects. As an added convenience for the participants, the interviews were conducted in the respondents’ own homes. The interviews all took place in a room where privacy could be maintained. The interviews were tape-recorded with each partner interviewed separately. The researcher conducted, taped and transcribed all interviews. Participants were asked not to reveal the information from the interview to others. Much like Burgoyne’s (1990) study, the interview was managed by allowing a relatively unconstrained discussion to take place in answer to the researcher’s questions until all of the topics necessary in the interview had been covered to some extent. The average interview time was approximately one to two hours. As suggested by Berg (1998) the researcher began with introductory questions to
allow the participants to feel comfortable discussing the personal topics being studied.

The interviewer used interview guidelines provided by Berg (1998). He suggests spending several minutes talking with subjects at the beginning of the interview to make them feel comfortable. When conducting an interview it is important to focus on the purpose of the interview, while maintaining a natural, relaxed front (Berg, 1998). It is important that the interviewer keep subjects on a track that follows the interview schedule. Berg (1998) also suggests demonstrating aware hearing by using appropriate nonverbal responses. Berg (1998) recommends avoiding simple monosyllabic, or yes-and-no answers. Therefore, probing questions were used when receiving these responses. As suggested by previous researchers, the interviewer practiced interviews prior to conducting the study (Berg, 1998).

The interview questions were developed and organized based on the research questions. Answers to questions varied based on the extent of the respondent’s willingness to discuss each issue. The researcher used a semi-standardized interview style suggested by Berg (1998). This type of interview involves predetermined questions, but allows the interviewer to probe beyond answers to the standardized questions (Berg, 1998). The interview included four types of questions including essential, extra, probing and throw-away questions. Essential questions are specifically concerned with the central focus of the study. Extras are used to clarify or re-work essential questions (Berg, 1998). Probing questions provide interviewers with a way to draw out more complete stories from subjects. Throw-away questions are more general questions used to develop rapport
between the interviewer and the subjects and to gather information that is not necessarily vital to the study (Berg, 1998).

The interview schedule contained three major topic areas including power, gender roles and decision making (Appendix C). Questions were asked based on various themes which are driven by these three major topics including division of housekeeping, financial decision making and parenting.

The interview questions which focus on power included four main areas. The first area involved types of power including direct and indirect, (Komter, 1989), economical and emotional dependency, as well as rational choice and coercive power (O’Connor, 1991). Second, sources of power including resources and gender prescriptions were discussed (Sprecher, 1985). Distribution of power was another area which examined high verses low power (Trentham and Larwood, 2001). Finally, the interview questions asked about the participants’ descriptions of the power strategies they use in the negotiation of power with their partner. The distribution of power and negotiation strategies were examined based on the examples given by participants illustrating daily issues that arise in relationships such as domestic tasks and finances.

The interview questions also asked about constraints couples experience when balancing work and family. Questions for male and female participants included specific questions regarding their feelings about being in a status-reversal relationship. This information revealed conflicts participants had about being in a relationship that is contrary to the society’s expectations of gender roles.
For decision making the interview questions covered four main areas. First, the interviews looked at domestic tasks. The checklist of domestic and financial tasks used in these interviews is similar to those used in a checklist created by Pleck (1985). Second, open-ended questions were used to ask about the strategies couples might use to make decisions such as direct verses indirect and bilateral verses unilateral (Yukie, 1993). More specific strategies used by individuals included, bargaining, asking, withdrawal, or hinting. This type of information was revealed in the discussion of power. Third, questions were asked about money management systems and the process couples use to make financial decisions. Finally, if the couples had children, questions were asked about parental decision making, responsibilities and duties. The examples of parenting duties that were used in the study were also based upon examples used in Pleck’s (1985) checklist.

After the interview, each respondent was asked to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire (Appendix D) was developed based on the format used by Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) and it was composed of items that asked about demographic information, outside employment, domestic tasks and childcare, and finances. The demographic information section included standard questions about age, personal income, education, and number of children living in the household. Questions about professional employment revealed the occupation and job position of each respondent as well as the average number of working hours. Each respondent was also requested to include their occupation and position. The section on domestic tasks and childcare included questions on the number of hours each participant spends on household chores,
helping children and basic childcare. Respondents were also asked whether or not they have hired anyone to assist in the work around the home and how many hours they receive that help. The financial section of the questionnaire included a list of money management options based on the Burgoyne (1990) study. The questionnaire also asked about the types of ways personal income is used. Couples were given a list of types of banking account options and they were asked to reveal what they allocate both for personal and family use. The entire questionnaire was distributed to each participant after the interview. By conducting the questionnaire after the interview, the researcher had the opportunity to talk with each participant allowing them to feel more comfortable answering these questions, which may have resulted in more accurate responses.

*Guidelines for Analyzing Data*

The researcher began the analysis by first reviewing the close-ended survey questions. The information from these questions was used to gather background information that helped the researcher interpret the rest of the data. The information was reviewed during the analyses of the close-ended interview question and again when the open-ended questions were analyzed.

Second, the researcher listened to the interview tapes and took notes prior to analyzing the open-ended questions. This provided an opportunity for preliminary analysis as well as for reorganizing interview notes. The researcher then transcribed all interview data. The transcriptions and additional notes the researcher made during the interview were used to begin the analysis.
Next, the researcher analyzed the data from the close-ended interview questions. The researcher compared the responses of each participant with those of their spouse. The analysis also compared the data of all wives’ responses with that of all husbands’ responses. Trends and/or inconsistencies in the information were recorded and interpreted along with the open-ended responses.

Then, to set the present findings in the context of previous research, a content-analysis was done on the responses to the open-ended interview questions. The content analysis began with the checklist questions. When analyzing the checklists the researcher looked for patterns comparing partners as well as men verses women.

The researcher analyzed the responses of each participant in light of previous research on household financial decisions, domestic tasks, and parenting responsibilities. The content analysis was modeled after Berg’s (1998) methods focusing upon major themes and concepts centered upon by participants in the interviews. The goal of this analysis was to fracture the data and rearrange it into categories that facilitate the comparison of data within and between categories. This aided in the development of theoretical concepts (Maxwell, 1996). Since a full discussion of the data would have probably take the paper far beyond it’s aims, only the issues of interest in the study--power, decision making, and gender roles--were discussed in detail.

The researcher conducted a thematic analysis by examining the questionnaire data and the transcribed interviews. The researcher looked for themes involving power, decision making and gender roles that were revealed through interview topics including finances, household duties, and parenting. These themes took shape by recognizing
patterns of reoccurring words or phrases. For example, a possible theme of guilt could have occurred for female participants who are the main breadwinner and have little time to devote to household duties and parental responsibilities. Throughout the content analysis, the researcher looked for any potential gender stereotypes or instances in which stereotypes were challenged. Comparisons were made among all male partners and also all female partners to identify themes within gender groups. The researcher revealed instances where two partners were consistent and/or inconsistent with one another, so that conclusions could be drawn about the research questions. Patterns of information given by couples were also identified to reveal information about power and decision making used by each partner in communicating with one another.

To assist the interpretation of the data the researcher organized the demographic data into tables similar to a table created by Burgoyne (1990). The first table included the age, education and occupation of each participant (Table 1). The second table examined the number of hours each participant spends on work outside of the home, domestic tasks, and childcare (Table 2). The final table noted the source and level of income as well as the accounts that money goes toward (Table 3). The information gathered from these tables allowed the researcher to illustrate the differences and similarities in all of the participants. They also aided in understanding how various household responsibilities were distributed. Moreover, these tables also helped the researcher learn who carries the majority of the family financial responsibility. By examining these tables the researcher was able to investigate how financial decisions are implemented. By gathering this
information, the researcher was able to learn more about the balance of power in the relationship.

_Rationale for this Approach_

By conducting a qualitative study the researcher used an inductive interpretive approach which focuses on specific situations and people. It allowed the researcher to focus on meanings that are important to the participants in their communication with each other. Investigating a broad set of variables provided structure to the research, while at the same time avoiding restrictions which can sometimes occur in quantitative studies. This approach allowed the researcher to gain richer information through the interview process rather than only using surveys which could be too formal for this sensitive topic. A content analysis enabled the researcher to organize and efficiently capture trends and patterns. A content analysis also provided a vehicle for comparing and contrasting different groups of participants.

This study searched for detail on several areas including, power, decision making, and gender stereotypes. Interviews provide more detailed answers than a questionnaire only would have provided. Participants were more willing to answer relationship questions in the intimacy of their own home in a one-on-one situation rather than in a focus group or other less private method. The brief questionnaire preceding the interview allowed the researcher to gain demographic, factual data necessary to the study in a more timely manner reducing some of the detail required in the interview.

This research approach also had some weaknesses and limitations. It was difficult to schedule interviews with each individual in their home. Additionally, it was difficult
to find couples willing to disclose information. Past researchers have found that the power and decision making strategies people say they use and what they actually practice can be two very different things. This could have reduced the accuracy of the data. However the researcher attempted to counter this problem by comparing partners’ data. For instance, respondents were asked what strategies they use and what their partner uses in decision making. Any inconsistencies in information provided by a couple was identified in the analysis which helped to maintain the authenticity of the data. Despite potential limitations, conducting this qualitative study using a questionnaire and interview allowed the researcher to learn new, valuable information regarding status-reversal couples and their power and decision making practices.
Chapter Five

Results

By using qualitative strategies the researcher examined data from the interviews and questionnaires attempting to answer the research questions which focused upon power, decision making and gender roles in married status-reversal relationships. The study began by focusing on demographic information. This information was used to support the data gathered in the interviews.

Analysis of the questionnaire and interview data revealed common patterns and themes which aided in answering the research questions. This analysis suggests how power was distributed within each relationship and how each participant attempted to negotiate power in the relationship. The researcher also examined how couples determine when joint decision making is necessary and how decision making was managed in these relationships, including the strategies each couple used. By combining the data from all of the questions in the interview and questionnaire, the research also discovered how couples both reinforced and challenged gender stereotypes depending on different situations each participant experienced.

This analysis first examined the information from the sample description which aided in understanding data from the questionnaire and interview. Then the analysis examined the distribution of power in all of the marital relationships. This was revealed by investigating communication styles and the degree of hesitation each participant had in communicating with their partner. Examining financial management and decision making power also aided in understanding the distribution of power. The study also
revealed how power was negotiated in each relationship based on various strategies each participant used in communication with their partner. Another important element in the investigation involved the management of decision making. The data gathered in the interview and questionnaire helped reveal what couples make joint decisions about; how couples manage decision making, and the strategies couples use to make decisions. The final purpose of this study was to investigate gender stereotypes and how they are managed. By examining all of the elements of power and decision making communication the research revealed how gender stereotypes are both challenged and reinforced in certain instances.

Sample Description

The analysis began by focusing on the demographic information provided in the questionnaire. These data were gathered and organized into a table which assisted in understanding key information (Table 1). All participants were Caucasian Americans living in the Midwest. The participants ranged from 25 to 34 years of age and the average age of the participants was 29. The couples had been married for two to eight years. Three of the five couples were parents of young children living in their home. Couples two and four had one child, and couple five had two young children. None of the participants had any prior marriages.

The participants’ occupational positions and status varied (Table 1). All females were either business professionals or managers. Among the males, there were two accountants, one assistant sales manager, one customer service representative, and an electrician. All of the women had at least a four year college degree and all but one
woman had a Masters degree. The men’s educational backgrounds were more varied: two of them had a four year college degree; one graduated from a technical or trade school; one had a two year college degree; and one had a high school diploma. In the questionnaire each participant was asked to self report the amount of hours they spent working on the following: their occupation outside of the home; domestic chores; and childcare. All of the women reported working approximately 41 to 50 hours each week (See Table 2). One of the men reported working outside of the home approximately 35 to 40 hours a week, two reported working 41 to 50 hours outside of the home each week, and the other two males reported working over 50 hours a week. These men mentioned receiving over time pay for anything over 40 hours a week.

Female participants reported bringing home approximately $50,000 to $65,000 each year, while male participants brought home $25,000 to $45,000 (See Table 3). The average pay for the 5 female participants was $55,880, and for the males the average was $36,000. When comparing the amount of income each female made to her husband’s income the average difference was $19,880. The fifth couple had the most significant difference in pay. She was making $65,000 while he was making $25,000 each year.

Distribution of Power

A primary focus of this study was power in status-reversal marital relationships. To understand the distribution of power in the relationships, the study began by analyzing the communication styles used within each couple, as well as any hesitation in communication that might provide evidence of unequal power. The researcher also assessed the salary gap, job status, and education of each participant, which might
influence the power distribution. Finally, the management of finances and expenses was examined to consider their implications on the distribution of power.

*Communication Styles*

To begin the investigation of power and communication in marital relationships the researcher asked participants to explain the communication styles they used. They were asked to describe their own communication styles, as well as their partner’s communication style, and the communication style they used as a couple. By combining the participants’ responses to the closed-ended and open-ended interview questions, the researcher was able to identify clear trends among the women and men as well as within each couple.

*Individual communication styles.* It was clear that all five female participants had direct, assertive and/or aggressive communication characteristics. Four of the five couples agreed that the wives were direct communicators. These characteristics give them an advantage in the balance of power in the relationship. The majority of the couples not only agreed that the wives were direct, but also emotional. Three of the five women also described themselves as emotional.

In contrast, four of the five men were considered to be passive and all five of them also considered themselves compromising. This suggests a power shift to the women in the relationships. Three of the five men indicated that they do not care to share their feelings, or take strong opinions in discussions with their wives. They had a tendency to
hesitate in sharing opinions to avoid confrontation. Among the four men who considered themselves passive, three of their wives agreed.

The researcher compared how the partners in each couple described their communication styles. Couple one was only consistent on one character description. They agreed that he was passive. She described herself as a dominate person. Although he agreed that she was assertive, he also indicated that she can be accommodating and compromising. Couple two agreed with one another by describing themselves as opposites. She was emotional, direct, and assertive and he was more rational, indirect and passive. This couple appears to balance each other out. They both also described themselves as compromising. However she clearly has the dominant style in the relationship. Couple three indicated that they were both independent. However she was clearly dominant with her tendencies to be assertive and direct, while he was considered by both of them to be accommodating. They both also considered him to be rational, which may balance her emotional tendencies. Couple four agreed they were both compromising, but she may be dominating with her direct communication style while he was accommodating. Couple five had different results compared to the other couples in that they both felt he was direct and assertive.

There were also instances in which the married partners expressed inconsistencies. When responding to the closed-ended interview questions, the wife in couple two considered herself compromising, while he viewed her as controlling. This suggests that he feels she has more power. In the open-ended interview the wife also mentioned that she can have a tendency to be controlling, confirming her husband’s
perceptions. When examining the third couple one inconsistency occurred. He considered her to be both aggressive and accommodating at the same time, while she considered herself to be assertive, direct and independent. There were several inconsistencies when comparing the descriptions of couple four. She believed herself to be assertive and emotional, while he felt she was aggressive and controlling, which suggests that she has more power. However, he also considered her to be accommodative and rational. The husband described himself as aggressive, direct, passive, and withdrawn. She felt he was indirect. This could indicate that he chooses to withdraw his opinion most of the time, but when he does share his thoughts he is aggressive and direct. When looking at couple five the husband considered them both to be dependent, while she viewed him as independent. He also described them both as collaborative and compromising. It was also interesting when examining his description of her because he considered her dependent, yet assertive and direct which one would not believe to be a common combination. This inconsistency may be based on the fact that people react differently in various situations or areas of the relationship.

Couple communication styles. The participants also described the communication styles they used as a couple. The majority of the women described the communication in a positive way, as either cooperative or compromising. All five women at one point in the open-ended questions described their communication and negotiation of decisions as compromising. The women also described their everyday discussions with their husbands as using two-way or open communication. Similarly, all five men said that their communication with their wives was open and four out of the five said that they had two-
way communication. Only the woman from the fourth couple described her communication with her husband as being one-way. She explained that she dominates their conversations because he does not open up and share his feelings. The women from couples two, three, and four also said that they have a tendency to be controlling in their communication with their husbands. The men from couples two and four also described the communication as controlling and the men from couples three and four described the communication with their wives as avoiding.

*Communication Hesitation*

During the interview participants were specifically asked about whether or not they hesitated in communicating with their partner, or if they felt their partner ever hesitated. The information from this series of questions lead to a better understanding of the power used in the communication interactions for each couple.

Each participant was first asked if they personally ever hesitated in sharing opinions with their spouse. Four out of the five women indicated that they did not normally hesitate in sharing feelings with their husbands. The wife from couple one indicated that she normally only hesitates when it involves a subject that they often argued about. In contrast, three out of the five men indicated that they often hesitate sharing their opinions with their wives. Moreover, although the husband from couple four said he does not hesitate, he indicated that he has a tendency to avoid communication. This suggests that the men may feel they have less influence in the relationship.
The couples were also asked whether they thought their spouses hesitated sharing their feelings with them. Three of the women were consistent with their husbands stating that they felt their husbands do hesitate. The wife in couple two felt that he may hesitate, but because he was not apt for conversation she wasn’t sure. All five men confirmed that their wives do not hesitate. This suggests that both partners in these relationships may be aware that the women have more influence in the relationships. The husband in couple one was consistent with his wife’s response indicating that she hesitates to discuss topics they often argue about, but he also felt she does not hesitate as much as he does. Four out of the five wives viewed their husband’s hesitation as he did. However, the wife from couple four indicated that she felt he does hesitate, whereas he said he does not. Couple five was inconsistent with the other couples because both said that neither one ever hesitates in sharing their opinions and feelings with each other.

Financial Management

Respondents were asked to explain their system of financial management in both the questionnaire and interview. This information was combined into a table which was prepared prior to the investigation to make the analysis easier (See Table 3). In the questionnaire four out of the five couples said that they had a joint account in which both incomes were pooled. Couple three had individual accounts. Three out of five couples said that they pooled their income into an account and managed it jointly. Couple four said that they pooled their income into an account and the wife managed the bills and daily expenses. Couple five disagreed with one another. The husband said that they jointly managed a pooled account, while the wife said that her husband managed it. It is
possible that he felt they managed it jointly because in the interview they mentioned that they consult one another on large purchases and major financial investments.

When comparing the interview data with the questionnaire, several inconsistencies appeared. Couples one and two noted that they jointly managed a pooled account, however in the interview they both said that the wives managed the everyday bills and expenses and balanced the checkbook. They may have considered it a joint management system because, as revealed in interview, the husbands monitored the account even though their wives managed it on a daily basis. Couple three said that they jointly managed a pooled account, but in the interview they both said that they had separate accounts that they individually managed. They split up the various household bills, so that each was responsible for certain bills, for example he paid the mortgage and she paid for utilities.

Couples were also asked about what their incomes were often used for. The most common answers for the women were the following: mortgage, food and groceries, car payments, insurances, and cable and utilities. The most common answers for the men were mortgage and car payments, and groceries and food. The men were more likely to mention personal expenses such as shopping on Ebay, music, and other entertainment. These extra expenses were mostly mentioned by the husband in couple four who did not manage the finances.

The partner’s responses were fairly consistent with each other. It was no surprise that the husband and wife in couple one mentioned the same expenses. They both said that they managed an account jointly and although she actually paid the bills and balanced
the checkbook it was clear in the interviews that both partners watched the daily expenses very carefully. Couple two also mentioned the same expenses. The only difference was that she mentioned taxes and he mentioned insurance. Couple three had several different responses, but this was most likely due to the fact that they manage their accounts separately and split up the bills. The wife was not responsible for paying the mortgage, perhaps because her husband owned the home before they were married. This arrangement may give her much more financial freedom. For example, she was also the only woman who mentioned personal spending, which was on clothing. This suggests that she has a financial advantage over her husband. When comparing the responses for couple four, she mentioned necessities such as mortgage and car payments, while the expenses he listed were almost all personal. Both partners in couple five mentioned mostly necessities. The differences were, however, that she mentioned day care and he mentioned other bills and entertainment.

In three of the five couples, the wife managed the daily finances. All three of these women agreed that they had some advantages by having this responsibility. They felt that it gave them a better understanding and put them at an advantage in deciding on major purchases. The wife in couple four admitted that because the incomes were pooled and she managed the finances she could potentially spend a substantial amount without him knowing. At the same time, he does not have the same freedom because she is aware of all of the money that he spends. By managing everyday expenses, these women appear to have a power advantage. The wife in couple three also has an advantage over her husband, because she not only makes more money, but she also has control over her own
income. Only one of the five husbands managed the finances for both partner's incomes. This is noticeably inconsistent with traditional customs, and may be due to the non-traditional, status-reversal relationship these couples have. This may also be a sign of the significant power women have in status reversal relationships.

**Decision Making Power**

During the interview, couples were asked which one of them, if either, had more influence in the decision making process. Four of the men said that their wives had more influence over certain segments of decision making, if not over all decision making. Three of the women felt that they had equal influence, or that the influence varied depending on the situation. When comparing the responses of each partner within one another, two out of the couples agreed that the wives had more influence over decisions in at least some situations. This combined information suggests that these women have more power in decision making, but may not always be aware of it.

Couple one agreed that the decision making was equal, but that each may have more influence depending on the situation. She felt that he had more influence over financial decisions because he was more conservative. He felt she had more influence with regards to visiting family. Both partners in couples two and three agreed that she had more influence in decision making because of each partner's communication styles. The husband in couple three felt that she had more influence because she was skilled at debating and supporting her ideas in discussions. She felt that the influence varied based on the expertise each of them had. Couple five was the only couple in which the husband felt he had more influence. However, he noted that his influence was confined to
financial decisions because she was more apt to make big purchases on the spur of the moment. She felt that they had equal influence over decisions because they made all decisions with regards to their family together.

The influence one has in the decision making process can also be dependent upon one’s background knowledge on the subject. For example, a professional landscape artist would probably have more influence on the care of the lawn than his or her partner would because he or she would have the advantage of having knowledge in that area. The couples were asked whether they or their partner had expertise that would influence decision making. The women in couples one, two, and four felt they had an expertise in financial knowledge due to their education and experience. The men in couples one, two, and four also felt they had financial expertise. The men in couples one and two said that their financial knowledge was due to their education and professional knowledge as accountants. Nevertheless, their wives manage the daily expenses and accounts. The husband in couple five felt his financial expertise was based on his knowledge in closely managing all of the finances for his family.

The women in couples one, three, and five felt that their husbands had expertise in home improvements and household maintenance. This could also be evidence of the women attempting to give more power to their husbands in decision making in this traditionally masculine area. None of the men mentioned an expertise in this area, even though they all mentioned being responsible for these tasks around the home. When asked about expertise, the men had very little variety in their responses. They were also
more likely than their wives to be unable to think of an expertise either for themselves, or their wives.

Couples one, two and five are parents of small children, so in the interview they were asked additional questions on parenting. The couples were asked who, if either, had more influence in decisions about their children and parenting. All three men said that their wives had, to some degree, more influence over parental decisions than they did. The men felt their wives either read more about parenting, or had more experience with children which allowed them to have more influence. The husband in couple five felt that although he disciplined their children more, she made more decisions on their care. He felt that women had more natural instincts on the needs of children, despite his report that he stayed home full-time for awhile when their first child was born. All of the women said that they felt the decision making was, for the most part, equal; although the wives in couples two and four felt that they probably had a little more influence in the decisions for their children. Given this information it appears that the women do not necessarily realize or wish to admit the amount of influence they have in parental decision making, which seems to be consistent with other areas of decision making as well.

To examine decision making influence further, the researcher asked each participant how much money they would be willing to spend before consulting their spouse. Three out of the five women, from couples two, three and four, were willing to spend substantially more money than their husbands. In fact the women were willing to spend $200 to $400 more than their husbands. This illustrates the power these women feel they have in financial decision making. In examining all of the responses, the women
were willing to spend anywhere from $20 to $500. In contrast, the men were willing to spend $20 to $100. This is also an indication that the men in these status-reversal relationships experience less freedom in spending money.

When examining the responses of each couple with one another, some differences emerged. Couple one was only willing to spend $20 before consulting one another first. Couple five was unique in that, the wife was actually willing to spend less than her husband. This may be due to the fact that, unlike the other couples, her husband managed the bank account. Couple three, who had separate bank accounts, had the largest difference in comparing the two partners. She was willing to spend $500, while he was only willing spend $100. She has a larger income which means she probably has more spending freedom.

When examining all of the elements that influence the distribution of power, including communication styles, communication hesitation, financial management and decision making influence, some trends appear which suggest who has more power. For couples two, three, and four it seems relatively clear that the women in the relationship have more power. This is partially due to the communication styles. The women seem to be very strong, assertive, open, and clear communicators; while the men in these relationships are more indirect, passive and less willing to share their opinions and feelings. These differences in communication style, along with the patterns of financial management and influence on decision making, suggest the wives’ greater power in the status-reversal, non-traditional relationships these couples are involved in. It also appears that the women in these relationships are not fully aware of, or comfortable with the
power they have. The women in the interviews attributed clear areas of expertise to their spouses and mentioned how they make an effort to try to get their husbands to communicate and share their feelings. However, the discussions with the men indicate that they often allow their wives to dominate. It is also possible that the husbands’ unwillingness to share their feelings may be a strategy they use to gain power in the relationship.

When examining the first and last couple it is less apparent who has more power. For couple one it seems as though she has the more dominant, aggressive communication characteristics, yet she permits his conservative tendencies to influence decisions. The husband indicates that she has more power in the relationship when decisions involve spending time with family. This suggests that the power in this relationship may be segmented to various arenas of married life.

It is also less clear who has more power when examining the fifth couple. They seem to have equal power in several areas. However, in the area of finances it appears as though he has more power. This couple also seems to have the most socially traditional tendencies, which is ironic considering that this couple had the largest difference in incomes.

*Negotiation of Power*

Power in a relationship is not constant; it is continually changing based on several variables. Therefore power is partially determined based on negotiation in a relationship. Power is negotiated through communication. During the interviews participants were asked questions which would help the researcher understand how power is negotiated in
these relationships. They were asked about how they influence their partner and how their partner influences them. The responses were analyzed to identify the power negotiation strategies and other efforts to balance power in the relationship.

During the interview, the respondents were asked about the tactics they would use to persuade their partner to agree to an idea or opinion they felt strongly about. By understanding the persuasion tactics each respondent used, the researcher was able to determine how power was negotiated in each relationship. When examining this information several patterns emerged.

The majority of the women had a clear advantage in negotiating power because they were more direct and assertive than their husbands. All five women, to some degree, used logic, reasoning and rational thinking in expressing and supporting their ideas. However, three of the women also used emotion when attempting to persuade their husbands, which at times, according to the male responses, seemed to outweigh logic and reasoning.

In contrast, none of the men seemed to use emotion in expressing opinions. Four of the five men used logic and reasoning to support ideas. They mentioned presenting factual information to back up their beliefs, or they provided opinions from experts or people who had experience in the topic area. Three of the men were more subtle than their wives in presenting their ideas. If they wanted to make a large purchase or if they had a specific opinion they would bring up the idea periodically in conversations with their wives. Three of the men expressed difficulty and/or unwillingness to express their opinion. In some cases they mentioned that they struggled to share their opinion and
support their ideas. In other cases the men were unwilling to make an effort to share their ideas. This suggests a disadvantage for the men in negotiating power in the relationship. Two of the men also seemed to have a pattern with their wives, where they would find a large item they wanted to buy and they would try to convince their wives to agree to purchase it. This is a significant indication that the women control the finances. One of these men also mentioned having made several purchases in one month without realizing it or notifying his wife, which caused arguments. This could indicate his attempt to negotiate more power for himself in a situation where he would otherwise be at a disadvantage.

When examining how couples influence each other’s opinion it is critical to compare each partner’s response with his or her spouse’s response. In couple one; it seems that she may have an advantage in negotiation through use of persistence and aggression. When asked about attempting to influence her husband’s opinion, she mentioned “harping on him” until a decision was made. He was consistent in mentioning that she will not let an “issue die” until a decision is made. For couple two, the wife may also have an advantage in negotiating power based on her ability to directly state her opinion and his unwillingness to share or stand up for his ideas. Similar to the first two couples, the wife in couple three is also more emotional but also direct, assertive and decisive. However, he may have an advantage based on his ability to use reasoning and logic as well as his expertise in a wide variety of home improvement areas. Unlike these women, the wife in couple four does not appear to use emotion as often in negotiating with her husband; instead she uses reasoning. She uses advice from experienced family
members to support her ideas. Her husband, although he shows an ability to use reason and logic, also shows an unwillingness and inability to share his ideas. Couple five was slightly less consistent in their negotiation tactics. Both said they use logic and reasoning to negotiate power. However she also said that she uses manipulation and “white lies” at times to persuade her husband. This could be due to his apparent control over finances and conservative tendencies. This indicates that she may have more power negotiation skills in the relationship than he is aware of.

When examining the sample of couples as a whole it seems that all five women have an advantage in power negotiation based on their assertive, direct, and in one case, devious communication skills. However, the women’s tendency to use emotion in their thinking and their negotiation may be a disadvantage at times. The men are more apt to use logic and reasoning to negotiate power in expressing and supporting their ideas, and thus, they may be able to get the better of their wives who have emotional tendencies.

*Management of Decision Making*

Another purpose of this study was to examine decision making in status-reversal marital relationships. The couples were asked about the types of decisions they feel they must make together. Common responses were gathered and listed based on very general topic areas. The researcher also looked at the frequency with which each couple felt joint decision making was necessary. Additionally, the study examined the strategies couples used to make decisions. These strategies were revealed by combining the communication styles along with responses to the open ended-questions about the process each partner felt he or she used to determine decisions. Decision making types, frequency, and
strategies were also revealed in the examples couples gave on decisions they had made together in the past.

*Joint Decision Making*

In discussing marital decision making with the couples, three of the five often mentioned that joint decisions were required for anything unusual that was not part of their normal routine. They implied that they do not make an effort to make joint decisions on a daily basis. In contrast, the other two couples mentioned that they make virtually all of their decisions together. These are the same two couples in which it was more difficult to determine who had more power in the relationship.

During the interview couples were asked what types of decisions they make jointly as a couple. The respondent’s answers were rather general and included the following: home improvements; finances and large purchases; family; gifts for others; activities for their free time; anything out of the ordinary; and everything.

It seemed that most decisions made jointly concerned finances. These financial decisions often involved making large purchases. The respondents provided examples of large purchases such as a television, bed, ceiling fan and gym equipment. It is important to note that each participant’s definition of a large purchase could vary. This was evident in the wide variation in the amount of money the participants mentioned they were willing to spend before discussing the purchase with their partner.

During the interview participants discussed many other decision making topics. All of the respondents, at some point of the interview, mentioned decisions on home
improvements. Home improvement decisions ranged from how much money to spend, to what specific improvement needed to be made. These decisions also involved opinions on how to proceed and what to purchase for the home improvement.

Two couples also mentioned joint decisions they made regarding family. Some of these decisions involved deciding on the appropriate amount of time to spend with family, how often to visit them, and in which family events to participate. Additionally, they mentioned balancing time between each other's family. Decisions also had to be made involving how much to spend on gifts for family members during special events such as weddings, holidays and birthdays.

During the interviews couples were asked about the everyday household tasks they were responsible for. Many participants indicated that they did not have specific conversations to decide who would handle certain tasks, suggesting that this is not a part of the everyday decision making process. Instead, the household tasks are coordinated and conducted through nonverbal communication. These tasks may also be assigned through socially implied gender roles. For example, men were more likely to do masculine tasks such as lawn care.

The couples who had children were asked about decisions regarding their care; however two of the three couples with children did not specifically mention many joint decisions. This may be due to the fact that their children are still babies; they may not have to make many joint decisions yet regarding their care. Both of the men in these couples mentioned that they felt their wives made more decisions regarding child care, so it is also possible that they allow the wives to make the decisions rather than making them
jointly. The three couples with children did mention discussing their daycare options.
Two of the three couples discussed the possibility that one of them would stay home. The
husband in couple five stayed home full-time for a while when their daughter was a baby.
The wife in couple two discussed the possibility of her staying at home full-time with
their baby. She said that this decision was something that she and her husband were
making together. The couples also mentioned everyday decisions, such as who will pick
up and drop off their children at their child care provider. Couple five also discussed
making joint decisions regarding discipline for their children. This couple had a child
who was older, which might explain the need to discuss discipline. They were in
disagreement on the best method, so they were trying different tactics to decide what
worked best.

*Decision Making Strategies*

When the couples described the strategies they used to make decisions, some
common patterns emerged. In three of the five couples it was apparent that the women in
these relationships made the majority of the decisions. The husband in couple two even
stated that his wife often had strong opinions in the decision making process; therefore,
he often conceded to her opinion when making joint decisions.

When looking at specific strategies, the couples often described their use of
compromise to make decisions such as making large purchases. For example, both
husband and wife in couple four described a decision they made in purchasing a ceiling
fan. He wanted one, but she was more hesitant about having a ceiling fan in their home.
As a compromise she was able to have more influence on the style of ceiling fan and in which room they would install the fan.

Couples discussed using logical reasoning to make decisions together. For example, couple two described using logic and reasoning as they decided whether or not they could afford for her to start staying home full-time with their baby. They looked at his income and compared it with their monthly expenses to decide if it would be a possible option for their family. Couple three, who had separate back accounts, used logic and reasoning by comparing each other’s incomes and expenses to decide on a reasonable amount of money each could deposit in their savings account each month.

These young couples also mentioned looking to others with more experience to help them make their joint decisions. For example, some couples looked to family for advice. Couples often looked to others for experience when making decisions on home improvements. When contemplating home improvement decisions they sought help from friends, family, and other acquaintances that had experience completing similar home improvement tasks.

Other participants also mentioned using the trial-by-error method. For example, couple five mentioned they were struggling to decide on the best method of discipline for their daughter. Together they decided to try several methods to decide which would work the best. The wife in couple five also mentioned that when making decisions together, her husband has pointed out decisions she made that did not work well, which would then influence her to consider his position on the decision.
Couples often identified cooperation as a communication tool they used in their relationships. In the interview descriptions there was evidence to indicate that the couples use cooperation to make joint decisions. For example, two couples mentioned cooperating with one another when deciding who would drop off their children at daycare and who would pick them up after work. Other examples of cooperation involved decisions on household tasks. Participants mentioned that if their spouse had to work extra hours they would handle more chores around the house, and vice-versa. It didn’t appear as though this was a joint decision they had to discuss at length; instead it was an implied agreement. Decisions involving household tasks were also often determined based on the individual’s preference, which could be considered another form of cooperation. For example, several of the men mentioned that they prefer to work outdoors, so they were responsible for mowing the lawn.

There were also some inconsistencies which occurred when looking at the decision making process these couples used. One inconsistency that appeared was that the majority of the couples indicated that they used open or two-way communication when making joint decisions, yet many of the participants mentioned that the men did not communicate as openly at times and often avoided sharing their ideas. Similarly the men who said they avoid or hesitate in sharing opinions, also indicated in the interview that they have an open decision making process that is fairly positive. The couples’ perceptions that they have open communication and a positive decision making process, appears to contradict the husband’s reluctance to communicate openly.
When looking at the closed-ended questions that focused on the communication styles these couple used, there were several inconsistencies which indicate that the spouses do not agree on the communication styles they use during decision making. For example, in couple two the husband mentioned that they have one-way communication, while she felt they had two-way communication. When asked about their decision making process he described it as follows; she says, “What do you want to do?” he says, “Whatever you want to do.” This suggests that he is content in allowing her to make the decisions. She may feel they have open, two-way communication because she allows him opportunities to share his thoughts in decisions, even though he often does not opt to share them.

There was also an inconsistency in the communication styles each partner described in couple four. She felt they had one-way communication and he felt they had two-way, open communication. In the interview she mentioned that when making decisions she felt like she had to push him to share his opinions. She felt as though she was the only one communicating when attempting to make decisions. In contrast, he said that decisions can get “heated” because they both have strong opinions. However, he speaks less often while she tends to speak more frequently with more content. He may feel that he is being heard often enough, so that in his perspective, decisions are being made using open communication. Although she feels as though the communication is one-sided, both partners described specific decisions they made using compromise which indicates that their communication may be more open than she perceives.
Marital couples use a variety of criteria to determine what requires joint decision making, and some couples make decisions together more frequently than others. This investigation determined that couples frequently make joint decisions on issues such as, large purchases, home improvements, family issues, and activities for their free time. The study also discovered that couples use a variety of strategies in making decisions. This involved strategies including compromise, logic and reasoning, and cooperation. It is clear that these couples use a variety of communication tools in making decisions together. While they were not always consistent in agreeing on how often and how well they communicate, it is clear that these couples make an effort to formulate decisions jointly.

Gender Stereotypes

A third purpose of this study was to examine societal gender roles in status-reversal relationships. The researcher looked at how stereotypes were managed in these relationships and how the participants dealt with them. The researcher examined the tasks each partner took responsibility for in the household and how they related to traditional gender roles in society. In the analysis the researcher noted each time a participant mentioned taking responsibility for a household task that was either traditional or non-traditional based on gender roles. The study also investigated how participants managed gender stereotypes and societal expectations in the status-reversal relationship. This was often revealed during the open-ended questions regarding the couples’ feelings about their relationship. The researcher focused upon instances in which the couples reinforced and challenged the expectations of traditional gender roles in marriage.
Gender Roles in Household Responsibilities

In the interviews and the questionnaires the participants responded to questions relating to the everyday household tasks for which the couples are responsible. When examining this information several distinct patterns emerged. It was apparent that all five couples followed the traditional male and female roles when taking responsibility for household tasks. For example, all five women said that one of their main responsibilities involved cleaning the house. Other tasks considered to be more “feminine” that were often the responsibility of the women were laundry, cooking, and child care. All five men also said that “masculine” tasks such as lawn care and snow removal were their responsibility. Other masculine tasks included household repairs, taxes, and long-term financial management. The participants seemed to justify their preferences for these traditional tasks. For example, some of the women said that they prefer to work indoors and their husbands prefer to work outdoors. These couples may be attempting to maintain traditional gender roles in household tasks to help themselves feel more like they have a traditional relationship or to help them appear to be more traditional to society.

One pattern that occurred, which was not consistent with traditional gender role expectations, was that three of the five women managed the everyday financial responsibilities such as paying the bills and balancing the accounts. That may be due to the extra income the women are able to contribute to the home. The men may be more willing to give up this responsibility due to the women’s income. The women may also feel they have more power and influence allowing them to take this responsibility.
Couple five was probably the most traditional with their assigned household tasks in that he was responsible for all financial issues. Couple three was non-traditional in their management of money, since they had individual accounts they managed on their own.

The women managed the everyday finances, while the men were more likely to share in the responsibilities of long-term financial management. All five couples mentioned that they often make decisions on long-term finances together, perhaps because these decisions impact their lives more significantly. This suggests that these couples are challenging society's gender roles, trusting in the women's ability to influence finances for their family. It is clear that with all five couples the women have a significant amount of power and influence over money, which challenges society's expectations for the role of women.

It also appeared that although most couples assumed traditional gender tasks, the men were more willing to take responsibility for feminine tasks. For example, three of the five men said that they often take care of laundry. Three of the men also said that they often prepare the meals in their home. In contrast, only one of the women said they were willing to take care of the lawn. She only indicated that she would handle lawn care if her husband was unable to do it. These responses suggest that the men are more flexible in handling non-traditional gender tasks than the women are. This appears to reflect their non-traditional, status-reversal relationship. The men may contribute more to the home since their wives are able to contribute more financially.

The study also examined gender stereotypes in parenting responsibilities for the couples who had children. Consistent with the other household tasks, the women took
more responsibility for the feminine role of everyday child care. The men justified this by stating that they felt their wives had more knowledge on what was best for their children. This knowledge was based on personal experience and literature their wives read on parenting. One of the three men with children had a very stereotypical view on parenting. He appeared to believe most strongly in traditional gender roles in the household. He felt that women had a more natural instinct in understanding the needs of children. He also felt that it was his responsibility as the father to discipline his children. Ironically, this husband was the only male in the study who had temporarily stayed home full-time to take care of his daughter when she was an infant. The women also felt that they took more responsibility for child care, but they did not give clear reasoning for it. The women may feel more obligation to take this responsibility due to traditional gender roles.

All three women said that they would prefer to stay home with their children full time. It seemed as though the women felt guilt for not spending more time with their kids. They may desire a more traditional marital relationship and feel guilty leaving their children in someone else’s care for so long. The three men seemed to be aware of their wives’ desire to stay at home. They showed feelings of guilt knowing that their wives felt obligated to work to contribute financially to their home. The men mentioned that they wished they could make more money, so that their wives could stay home with the children. This suggests that the men felt a desire for a more traditional marital relationship as well. The men may allow their wives to care for the children more, knowing the women’s desire to spend more time with their kids. In contrast only one of the three men mentioned that he wished he had more time with his child. He felt like he
was missing time with his child because of the extra hours he was working outside of the home.

*Management of Gender Stereotypes*

Being in a relationship that challenges traditional social rules can be difficult for couples to manage. Therefore it was important to understand how these participants handled these non-traditional roles. During the interview all of the participants said that most of the time they were not uncomfortable being in status-reversal relationships, however during portions of the interview each participant mentioned at least one issue which indicated that they were at least somewhat uncomfortable.

One indicator that these couples were not entirely comfortable in their non-traditional relationships was that several participants made some effort to make the relationship seem more traditional. For example, although in three of the five couples it appeared that the women had more power in the relationship, these women deliberately used tactics to allow their husbands to gain more power. They specifically gave their husbands opportunities to share their opinions and have more influence in decisions. The men also made efforts to create an appearance of a traditional marital relationship. The two men who were accountants allowed people to assume that they were making more money and had a higher status job than their wives. These men said that most of their family and friends were not aware that their wives made more than they did. Based on the perception of others it is possible that these men build an appearance of a traditional relationship to make them feel more comfortable themselves.
Though these couples said that they were satisfied with their non-traditional relationships, it was apparent that they would prefer being able to avoid managing this type of relationship. The three women with children said they would prefer to be at home full-time with their kids. The three men with children also said that they would prefer a traditional situation in which their wives could stay at home. One of the men without children mentioned that he and his wife were thinking about starting a family. He also indicated that he felt guilty knowing that he could not provide enough financially to allow his wife to stay home once they had children.

The men without children also indicated that they wished they could contribute more financially. One of the wives said that she knew her husband wished that their financial contributions were more equitable. Three of the men worked a substantial amount of overtime in their jobs outside of the home. These men may be working overtime to contribute more financially because they feel obligated. The men may also be trying to work harder to gain higher-status positions and more money at work, which would allow them to have a more financially equitable relationship with their wives.

Though these couples do not appear to be entirely comfortable with their non-traditional, status-reversal relationships, it is clear that these couples challenge traditional gender roles in several ways based on the communication within the relationship. For example, all five of the women appear to have assertive and/or aggressive communication styles. These styles may be due in part to the confidence they get from their higher status jobs. It also appears that three of the women have more power and influence in the
relationship than their husbands, especially over finances, which also challenges stereotypical expectations.

The couples also appear to have developed a more equitable relationship in which they cooperate on tasks around the home. In traditional couples, it would be the wife’s responsibility to clean, cook, and take care of the laundry, and although it appears that these couples maintain these traditional roles, the husbands are willing to be flexible and complete any tasks needed in the home regardless of social traditions.

In summary, by combining the data gathered in the questionnaire and interview, the researcher was able to find themes and patterns which aided in gaining a better understanding of status-reversal marital relationships. The data gathered included valuable information regarding power, decision making, and gender roles.

When examining power in these marital relationships it appeared as though the women’s assertive and aggressive styles allowed them to gain a great deal of power. This was particularly true in three of the five couples. The participants used several strategies to negotiate power. Some of these strategies included using their expertise in certain areas and other strategies involved persistence. Persistence was seen when individuals would continually bring up topics they wanted to discuss, or even purchases they wanted to make. When looking at decision making it seemed that the couples used different criteria when determining whether or not a decision needed to be made jointly. When couples made decisions together they used several strategies. Some of the common strategies were compromise and cooperation. When participants were asked about decision making in their relationships, it was apparent that most of the women had more
influence over decisions. In the interview participants often admitted that the wives made most of the decisions in the relationship. During the investigation the researcher also looked for evidence in which couples were either reinforcing or challenging gender stereotypes. It seemed that these couples reinforced traditional stereotypes in certain situations such as the assignment of household tasks. In other ways they challenged stereotypes by allowing the women to have either equitable influence, or more influence, depending on the situation. These results suggest that women in status reversal marriages are indeed gaining relational power and influence in decision making, which challenges traditional gender roles in marriage.
Chapter Six

Discussion

There were several interesting findings discovered in the results of this study examining power, decision making and gender stereotypes in status-reversal married couples. The study investigated three research questions involving power distribution and negotiation, management of decision making and the reinforcement and/or challenge of gender stereotypes. The researcher used interviews and questionnaires to gather data on these topics. Based on an analysis of the information received in the investigation, the research found that women have gained a great deal of power in these relationships. The research also discovered that women have more influence in decision making than they previously have. The study also found that gender stereotypes are both reinforced and challenged in various instances in these non-traditional relationships.

Power Distribution

According to Trentham and Larwood (2001) power distribution is determined by examining who in a relationship has the higher power. To examine power distribution and determine who has greater power this study looked at three major areas: communication amongst the couples; financial management; and decision making. These topic areas allowed the researcher to find out how power was distributed. The results, suggest that communication styles helped determine how power was distributed in the relationship based on assertive or passive strategies used by each partner. The financial management system used by each couple also appeared to influence the distribution of power. In most couples the women managed the finances. In these cases the women
appeared to have more power. The influence each partner had on decisions in the relationship also helped identify power distribution. The wives appeared to dominate the decision making; however the husbands were able to gain power through expertise. All of these elements also appeared to be affected in some way by society’s gender stereotypes. In many ways the women appeared to challenge gender stereotypes by being dominant in their marital relationship.

*Communication Amongst Couples*

Communication is the most important tool in any type of relationship and this tool is used for many things. Power is constructed and distributed through the use of communication. That is why the researcher began by illustrating the communication styles each of the couples used in their relationship. The researcher then investigated the degree to which hesitation occurred in the communication between each participant and his or her partner. This helped gain a clear understanding of who might have a greater amount of power in the relationship.

*Communication styles.* The study examined both individual communication styles as well as the communication styles used by the couples. This aided in illustrating how conversations might be managed in the relationship. The study revealed that the majority of the women used more assertive communication styles than their husbands. In a few cases some of these women also showed tendencies to be controlling. This gave them an advantage in gaining power. This was particularly apparent when considering that the women and men both recognized the assertive communication characteristics they used. It was also discovered that the majority of the men used more passive communication
styles giving them a disadvantage in the distribution of power. These characteristics were again recognized by both husbands and wives. The men appear to demonstrate what Yukie (1993) refers to as indirect power through passive techniques, while the women demonstrate direct power strategies. This contradicts society’s expectations of the styles used commonly by men and women (Yukie, 1993). This suggests that all couples were very aware of the communication advantage the women had in the relationships. It is evident that the women in these status-reversal couples have a power advantage based on their assertive communication abilities.

As Tichenor (1999) suggests, it is possible that these women have assertive tendencies based on the skills they have learned and the confidence they have attained by working outside of the home and accomplishing an education and a successful career. It is also possible that the men struggle with confidence based on the non-traditional relationship. Society has taught men that money equals power and this is true for them both in the workplace and at home (BlumStein and Schwartz, 1983). Therefore they may struggle with feeling inferior to their wives.

*Communication hesitation.* This study also examined the frequency with which couples hesitate in communicating with one another. This revealed the degree to which each participant might be intimidated by his or her partner, and thus who might have more power in the relationship. This investigation was consistent with the communication styles each participant used. The majority of the women did not show evidence of hesitating in communicating with their husbands. All of the men agreed by
noting that they felt their wives rarely, if ever hesitated in sharing their feelings with them.

Three of the men indicated that they had a tendency to hesitate in communicating with their wives. Similarly, the wives of these men agreed that they felt their husbands hesitated sharing their feelings. This information suggests that the couples are very aware of the wives’ power in communication. However, it is also possible that the men are choosing not to communicate in order to gain power. This is supported in considering that the women often mentioned that they felt they had to force their husband’s to share their feelings or opinions when attempting to make decisions in their relationships. Komter (1989) considers this to be a form of hidden power. In this case, the men recognize the power women gain through assertive communication and they choose to use an opposite form of communication to gain power.

It is clear based on the communication styles used by the men and women, as well as the frequency of hesitation, that the women in these relationships have a definite advantage. Contrary to stereotypical expectations, the women appear to be more powerful than their husbands due to their use of assertive tactics.

*Financial Management*

Another important factor to examine in understanding the distribution of power is financial management. Previous research suggests that money is a critical power source. In this study the women managed a joint account for three out of the five couples. Another couple had individual accounts they managed on their own. Only the fifth couple had a traditional system in which the male managed a joint account. According to
resource theory all of these women have a clear advantage because they contribute a higher income than their husbands (Sprecher, 1985). However, the women who also manage the account have an even greater source of power because they can spend money more freely by managing the account on their own, plus possessing the knowledge of all of the finances also gives them an advantage over the men. This is also interesting because two of the men are accountants yet their wives manage the finances. In this situation couples agreed that they make many financial decisions together and they both look at the finances. However it is possible that the women prefer to have control over the finances which also provides evidence of the power they have. This power is extended for the women who also control the finances for the household. The information from this study contradicts Tichenor’s (1999) findings which suggest that resource theory is not consistent with status-reversal couples. He found that women did not gain power when they had the majority of the resources including income and education.

It is clear that the men and women in these relationships do not conform to the traditional male and female power resources. Sprecher (1985) recognized that men traditionally possess power based on financial status and support. Moreover, females typically possess less power in a relationship, but gain power through affection, education and income. In these cases the women have the majority of power resources based on education and financial power.

Decision Making Power

The study also investigated power distribution in decision making situations. To make joint decisions, couples must use power in order to influence opinion. This study
revealed that the women are able to influence marital decisions through their power resources, such as finances and education, as well as their assertive communication skills. The men are able to gain power through expertise they might have in areas such as home improvement. Some of the expertise areas these couple mention however, seem to be somewhat assumed through stereotypical gender expectations.

For these couples it was clear that the majority of the women had a decision making advantage over their husbands. In some cases the men even admitted that they often allowed their wives to make the decisions in the relationship. This may be due to the assertive communication roles these women used. It may also be due to the resources they possessed. According to resource theory, whichever partner possesses more resources in a relationship, also possesses more power (Vogler, 1998). As noted earlier, in these cases the women possess the majority of the resources in terms of money, education, and a higher status job. Evidence of the women’s decision making power was illustrated when the participants were asked about the amount of money they were willing to spend without first discussing it with their partner. The women were willing to spend as much as $400 more than their husbands. This may be due to the amount of income they personally contribute to the relationship, or it could be due to the control three of the women have over the expenses.

Dependency power theory may also explain the decision making power these women have in the relationships. The men may feel they depend greatly upon the financial support their wives provide (Solomon and Samp, 1989). Therefore, they allow their wives to make more decisions in the relationship. This dependency power may be
emphasized when considering the pressure men may feel knowing that they do not
conform to the expectations society places on men and women in marriage. The men’s
apparent willingness to concede power may also be a response to what Sprecher (1985)
described. He suggested that men feel more powerful when they contribute more to a
relationship. Because these men do not contribute as much income as their wives they
feel they have less power. This may be accentuated by society’s expectation that men be
the main breadwinner.

It is important to understand the various elements that influence decision making.
One of those influences is the degree of expertise one might have in a topic area of
decision making. The investigation revealed that the women often had an expertise based
on their education. The men also felt their wives had an expertise in parenting. They
claimed that the parenting expertise was due to having more experience being around
children, or they felt their wives read more research on parenting. This may also be based
on a stereotypical interpretation of women as nurturers.

Men were thought to have an expertise in home improvements. In one case, the
husband was an electrician; therefore, his education and background support this idea.
Another husband was thought to have an expertise in home improvement because he was
raised on a farm and had experienced various home improvement duties. No other
evidence was provided as support for the other husbands’ expertise on home
improvements, therefore it is possible that stereotypical gender expectations were also
being used. This form of expertise however, provided an advantage for men in power
distribution. This is supported when considering that the women said they often trusted their husband’s opinion when making important decisions on home improvements.

*Negotiation of Power*

When examining power it is also important to consider the negotiation of power. Power distribution is not consistent; balance can shift in various situations through negotiation in a relationship. In this study it is apparent that the majority of the women have the higher power the majority of the time, however there are opportunities in which men are able to gain power.

This study found that the majority of women have more power than their husbands do in the relationship. Along with the power resources, the women used assertive communication skills which are associated with masculine characteristics (Falbo 1982). The women also used logic when negotiating power. This was demonstrated when women would use another’s experience as an example in attempting to influence their husbands’ opinion. They also mentioned comparison shopping. Both men and women recognized that several of the women used emotion in attempting to convey feelings to their spouse. It is worthy to note that logic is considered masculine and emotion is more feminine (Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber 1989). It appears as though these women in some instances are challenging gender stereotypes when they communicate with others, yet still have a tendency to use feminine behaviors such as emotional expression. The men used logic and reasoning to negotiate power which is consistent with masculine behavior. This was seen when the men mentioned looking to experts in a topic to make decisions. Men however also used persistence, and hinting which is a more
indirect strategy. This is consistent with Falbo’s (1982) belief that those who feel they have less power will use indirect power strategies.

The women’s control over the finances also played a role in the negotiation of power. They bring home the majority of the income, and three of the five women also manage the finances. By managing the finances they have physical control over the money, but they also have knowledge of the finances which is critical in power negotiation and decision making.

The women find a variety of ways to give their husbands the opportunity to gain power. For example, when asked about their feelings on being in a status reversal relationship, one woman mentioned that the situation might only be temporary and all couples with children mentioned their desire for the wives to be able to stay home full-time with their children, which could also be evidence of their desire for a more traditional relationship. The women felt guilty not being able to spend more time with the children and the men felt guilty that their income was not enough to support the family and allow their wives to stay home. This suggests that all parties involved desired a traditional relationship which was not currently possible. Moreover, these participants appear to value a traditional lifestyle which supports stereotypes for men and women.

The women also provided the men with an opportunity to gain power by trying to motivate their husbands to communicate and share their opinions and feelings with them. The women in most instances had more power in the relationship and as a result they had more influence over decisions. However, all of the women made an effort to allow their husbands to voice their opinion and gain power. Consistent with Stamp’s (1985) study,
this suggests that the women are not entirely comfortable with their higher power in the relationships. They may sense an inconsistency with other couples in society which causes them to desire a more traditional situation. Moreover, Stamp (1985) also recognized that women who are the main breadwinners are very much aware of power in a relationship; therefore they try to make the power more equal in the relationship.

The men also find ways to negotiate power in the relationship. Three of the men mentioned avoiding communication, which can be considered a form of power negotiation (Komter, 1989). The men also attempted to negotiate power by working extra hours. By working more hours some of the men were paid more money giving them additional financial resource power. Attempting to gain resource power, which is thought to be more masculine, allows the men to attempt to make the relationship more traditional and conform to society. The men may also work more hours in an effort to improve their career, which is also an attempt to be more traditional. It is also interesting to note that when two of the men were asked about how they felt about being in a status reversal relationship, they mentioned that they felt most people were not aware that their wives made more money. They seemed comforted by the fact that, as accountants, society may perceive that they are more successful than their wives. This suggests that the social construction of reality theory may be working in this instance. The men have constructed a reality for themselves in which they assume society accepts accounting as reputable career field; therefore society does not assume that they are in a non-traditional, status reversal relationship. In this case the men feel comforted by the fact that their marital
relationships appear to conform to society’s expectations of a traditional marital relationship (Littlejohn, 2002)

**Decision Making**

Another purpose of this study was to investigate how decisions are managed in status reversal relationships. The researcher first examined the criteria couples use to determine if a joint decision is necessary. Participants were asked about various areas of decision making that included household responsibilities. Then the study looked at the types of decisions couples make together as well as the strategies they use to determine a decision.

**Joint Decision Making**

The responses couples provided varied a great deal in determining what required joint decisions. Some couples said they only made decision on issues that were out of the ordinary, others said almost all decisions that impacted their family were made together. During the study couples were asked about decisions regarding everyday household responsibilities such as cleaning and child care duties. Although couples did not appear to decide on these issues jointly it was interesting to note the assignment of these duties to the men and women followed many gender stereotypes. However men appeared to be more willing to handle feminine tasks than previous research has indicated (Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber, 1989). Common types of joint decisions included financial decisions, home improvements, family, and child care. It seemed that the most frequent decisions involved spending money. The women appeared to have the most influence over joint decisions. In fact, in some cases the men admitted that they often allowed their
wives to make the decisions for them. This contradicts the expectations of traditional married couples.

*Household responsibilities.* In the study couples were asked about household duties. For these participants, this was not considered a critical joint decision. Instead the assignment of household duties appeared to be implied. The women most frequently handled cleaning and other chores inside the home, while men handled lawn care. All participants mentioned that they were relatively willing to handle any tasks around the home that might need to be done. This suggests a willingness to collaborate on these necessary daily functions.

The study examined household chores such as cleaning, laundry, lawn care, and managing finances. The researcher noted the responsibilities the men and women took responsibility for and how the couples decided who would take ownership of these tasks. The study found that all of the couples were very consistent in assigning stereotypical tasks for men and women. For example, all of the men said they were responsible for lawn care which is typically considered a masculine task. All of the women said that they were typically responsible for cleaning the house, a more feminine task (Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber, 1989). Though these couples are in status-reversal relationships, they seem to prefer a more traditional lifestyle in the home. Some of the couples mentioned that the responsibility of certain tasks was decided by preference. For instance, the women said they prefer to work indoors, while their husbands preferred to work outside. It is possible however, that what they call a preference could be something they learned from society. Preferring certain gender stereotypical tasks could be socially learned rather than a natural
preference. Thus preferring to take responsibility for gender stereotypical duties may be
evidence of social construction of reality (Littlejohn, 2002). These men and women have
learned to prefer taking care of stereotypical tasks around the home.

It was also interesting to consider that the men seemed more willing to perform
feminine tasks than the women were masculine tasks. This could be evidence that gender
stereotypes are being challenged in this manner. Moreover it is possible that the men
recognize their wives additional contributions to the household income, and are
responding by helping more around the home. This evidence is consistent with Vannoy-
Hiller and Philliber's (1989) study which found that men contributed more to household
duties in marriages where the female had a higher education and higher status job
position. The evidence of men's contribution to household duties that have been
traditionally labeled as feminine demonstrates a potential shift in the male and female
responsibilities in the home when comparing this study with studies such as one
conducted by Almeid, Maggs and Galambos (1993). This previous study suggested that
women in dual-earning couples continue to bear the majority of the burden with regards
to household duties (Almeid, Maggs and Galambos, 1993).

Another interesting factor when considering the result of this information was that
when the participants began listing the tasks they and their partner take care of, many of
the women seemed surprised by the amount that their husbands handle. A couple of
women even discovered that their husbands appeared to do more around the home than
they do. The men were not as surprised by this information, although a couple of them
did mention it in the interview. This supports Vannoy-Hiller and Philliber's (1989) study
which suggested that women often see themselves taking on the majority of household responsibilities while men see these tasks as shared. This provides support of the idea that men in status-reversal couples are contributing more around the home than previous evidence suggests. Moreover, women may not always realize the amount of contribution their husbands are providing.

The study also examined male and female stereotypes in the everyday responsibilities of parenting. The men and women seemed to reinforce stereotypes of parenting. The women were more likely to care for the children. Any decisions that needed to be made with regard to the children seemed to be made by the women. The men mentioned that they felt their wives knew more about parenting. Moreover the men suggested that their wives had more experience being around children and they felt their wives read more on parenting which made them more knowledgeable on this area. It is possible that this is true, but it may also be possible that these men assume their wives know more about this area based on stereotypes they have learned in society. The women agreed that they tend more to the children’s needs and they seemed to be comfortable and even content taking on more responsibility for the children. It is also possible that these women have assumed this responsibility based on society’s expectations of women in a family.

It is interesting to note that all three women with children mentioned that they would prefer to stay home full time. Some of them even mentioned that they had tried to work out their finances, so that they could stay home. The women mentioned feelings of guilt. They wished they had more time with their children. It is possible that they feel
this way because all three were relatively new mothers. It is also possible that the women
felt more comfortable assuming a more traditional marital relationship and a more
traditional role as a wife. This is consistent with Stamp’s (1985) study which also found
that women feel guilty and preferred to stay home. In contrast, of the three men, only one
mentioned that he felt guilty about not being able to spend more time with his son. This
was due to the extra hours he had been spending at work.

Financial responsibilities. Managing the household finances is a major
responsibility for any married couple. Contrary to traditional gender role expectations,
three of the five women managed their household finances. One couple managed
individual accounts, and only one couple had a traditional situation in which the husband
managed the finances. This indicates that these women have a desire to understand and
control how money is managed. As a result of this control these women have gained
power and a greater amount of decision making in these relationships. This is consistent
with Burgoyne’s (1990) study which noted that rights of ownership of the income may be
a factor in determining who controls the finances. Though this right of ownership
remains hidden, especially in situations where the accounts are pooled, it can lead to
patterns of overall control, such as seen in three of the couples in this study. It appears
that the couples, in which the wives manage the money, are challenging gender
stereotypes allowing women to have control over an area which was previously
considered masculine.

Though the wives seem to have the majority of the control over finances, they do
give their husbands opportunities to influence decisions in situations like the men’s
expertise in home improvements. Vogler (1998) notes that when women manage the accounts they act as managing agents and allow men to continue being involved in financial decision making, which is not necessarily true when men manage the finances. This study discovered that the men were more likely to be involved in long-term financial planning. The couples often mentioned that they handle those issues jointly. It is possible that these couples feel that long term planning is more important than everyday financial issues; therefore, they try to manage these issues together and make decisions on these issues together. This suggests a more equal partnership.

**Decision Making Strategies**

When looking at the decision making strategies used by the individuals, the women seemed to dominate the decision making process. This may be due to the higher level of power they possessed. The women seemed to use decision making strategies that reflected direct or higher power such as persuasion tactics and using direct statements (Yukie, 1993). The men’s decision making tactics involved hinting which reflects lower power involving indirect power strategies (Yukie, 1993). This contradicts Lenk-Krueger’s (1983) findings which noted that males often use command tactics in which the female partner accepts. The findings from this study; however proved to be more consistent with a previous study conducted by Lenk-Krueger and Smith (1982) which noted that women tend to use emotional pressure in decision making while men tend to pacify. This is consistent when considering that three of the women had a tendency to use emotion while their husbands used logic and were more pacifying.
This study also examined the various strategies couples used together to make decisions. All of the participants said they felt they had some degree of open communication in their decision making. Some common strategies they used included compromise and cooperation. Couples often used compromise when making financial decisions, such as large purchases. Cooperation was used in handling household tasks and transporting the children to and from daycare. Another approach to decision making was the use of logic and reasoning, such as when shopping for major purchases. Couples also frequently mentioned looking to family and friends for advice when making decisions, and one couple mentioned using a trial-by-error method to decide what was best. This demonstrates an open, rational decision making process. All of these most frequently mentioned strategies demonstrate open communication in decision making. This suggests that these couples may be generally satisfied with their relationship. Wilmont and Hocker (2001) note that people who are reasonably satisfied with their relationships use more collaborative strategies like these than do those in less satisfying relationships.

What was interesting is that although all couples said they had open communication and discussed decision making together, the majority of the couples also mentioned that the men avoided communication. Moreover the men mentioned that they often allow their wives to make decisions, which contradicts the idea of open communication. These findings are consistent with Lenk-Krueger's (1982) study which found that couples create their own reality of their relationship. Couples that are highly satisfied with their relationships also perceive positive, open communication. Moreover
even though their decision making may not be as collaborative as the couple believes it to be, these couples do not necessarily realize this because they are reasonably satisfied with the relationship. Therefore their perception of their relationship and their decision making process is very real to them and apparently satisfying, but they conflict with what might actually be occurring.

One could consider the decision making strategies these couples use as being consistent with what Richmond, et al. (1997) describes as “consult-to-join.” They define this as being when one spouse makes a decision only after presenting the problem to the other person. In the case of this study, the wives present a problem to their husbands and attempt to discuss the issue with them and then make the ultimate decision. Consistent with this study’s findings, Richmond, et al. (1997) found that by using this strategy couple had greater relationship satisfaction.

This study contradicts Lenk-Krueger’s (1985) belief that women guide the process of decision making in effect getting the men to make the decisions. In this study it appears as though women are both guiding and making the decisions. While they continue to collaborate with their husbands, in appears that the women are making more effort in directing the decision making process.

The results of this study suggest that couples have a wide range of criteria they use to determine what requires a joint decision. Decision making occurs in everyday life including household duties, parenting and financial management. Gender stereotypes appear to have a significant impact on the assignment of household duties. These stereotypes also play a role in how decision making is conducted. This study suggests
that the women make the majority of the decisions; however couples appear to be collaborating on decisions to some degree. Though women make most of the decisions the couples are relatively satisfied with the decision making process and feel as though their communication is open.

**Implications**

The focus of this study was to investigate how power, decision making and gender roles are managed in status-reversal relationships. This study is unique in the way that it takes the communication of power and decision making and also recognizes how gender stereotypes are managed. By using a small sample the researcher was able to gain an in-depth understanding of the communication dynamics of each couple, which is less prevalent in previous studies. This study is also unique in that it focuses upon five couples who are relatively young. By examining young couples the researcher achieves a unique perspective that has not frequently been examined when looking at this communication topic.

The results of this research are extremely valuable to the study of communication in marital relationships. This study discovered the extent to which women have gained power in marital relationships. This study suggests that now, more than ever, women are gaining power in marital relationships, specifically in situations in which they have a higher status job with a higher income than their husbands. This was consistent with a portion of Tichenor’s (1999) findings which suggest that women are able to gain power in the relationship through income, education, and status which are key assets in resource power. The power women have gained in status-reversal relationships leaves women the
opportunity for a more equitable marital relationship. Moreover this study also contradicts part of Tichenor's (1999) study suggesting that women in status-reversal relationships are not necessarily limited in the amount of power they can gain. Instead women are showing evidence of gaining power and equality in the relationship based on the increased amount of shared household duties and decision making. This study also contradicts research by Trentham and Larwood (2001) which stated that men usually have the higher power and women gain influence using situational power. In this case the reverse is true. Women had the higher power while men struggled to gain influence through situational power. This suggests that women in status-reversal couples are challenging the traditional expectations society has placed on women in marital relationships.

Unlike other studies this one has found that men and women in status-reversal marriages are using communication styles that are not common, based on gender stereotypes. Women are using assertive communication to help gain power in marital relationships. In contrast, men are using more passive communication tactics which illustrate a lower power. Women are also using decision making strategies that have previously been considered more masculine. They use direct power which involves persuasive decision making strategies. Moreover men are using indirect, power involving more passive decision making influences such as hinting.

Another unique aspect of this study was the information gained by asking participants about the amount of money they were willing to spend without consulting their partner first. The results illustrate the extent to which women have gained power in
status-reversal marital relationships. The fact that men were willing to spend significantly less than women illustrates the amount of influence women have in these relationships.

Women are challenging gender stereotypes by acquiring education and high status jobs, and higher pay in the work place. This education and job status allows them to gain confidence as well as assertive communication skills which aid in achieving power in not only marital relationships, but also potential for power in relationships with members of society.

Though women have made great strides in challenging existing gender stereotypes, some still exist in marriage. Men and women have learned through society how traditional gender stereotypes exist in marriage and roles men and women are supposed to play in these relationships. Therefore couples still struggle with a need to conform to society’s expectations of men having the higher power. Evidence of this exists when considering that these status-reversal couples are not entirely comfortable with the power the women have gained. This is illustrated when considering their desire for a more traditional relationship allowing the women to stay home full time.

This study suggests that women in status reversal marriages have gained a great deal of power and influence in decisions. As a result they are challenging many of the gender expectations society places on marital couples. While this is true, there are instances in which couples continue to reinforce stereotypes. This is particularly true when examining the level of comfort couples have in being in a non-traditional marital relationship.
Limitations

Though this study was successful in examining power, decision making, and gender roles in great detail by focusing on five status-reversal marital relationships, there were limitations to this study. This study only included Caucasian Americans living in the Midwest. The study also included a very limited age range of relatively young participants. Moreover this study only included couples with no prior marriage. This study did not include a diverse range of participants which may have limited the variety of responses to the questions in both the interview and questionnaire. It is also possible that by using a younger age range the participants may have been more accepting of a non-traditional lifestyle.

Additional information may also have been gathered if more probing questions had been asked during the interview. By asking more probing questions and taking more time to interview each participant, the researcher may have been able to get an even more in depth view of the communication in these status-reversal relationships.

Future Research

There is a wide range of possibilities for future research in this area. As more and more women gain high status jobs outside of the home, it will become more critical to understand how marital couples manage non-traditional relationships.

Future research should include a larger number of couples with more diversity including age, ethnicity and number of prior marriages. By using a more diverse collection of participants one may be more likely to receive a wider range of answers and gain a perspective which could more closely match the experiences society is facing.
today. It would be interesting to focus on older couples in status-reversal relationships. Couples that are older may be less willing to adapt to a non-traditional situation. One could also examine couples where the husband stays home full-time with the children. There is evidence of a growing number of families that have chosen this lifestyle. It is possible that power, decision making and gender roles are much different in this situation. Moreover, women may have even more power being the only breadwinner in the family.

It would also be worthwhile to compare status-reversal married couples with traditional couples. Since this study has shown the degree to which women can gain power, it would be interesting to compare the power status-reversal women have with women from traditional couples. It is possible all couples are challenging gender stereotypes by equalizing the power and decision making in marital relationships.

Another possibility would be to use observation in addition to the interview and questionnaire. By observing couples communicating with one another in their everyday life, the researcher would gain a more in depth examination of each couple. It would also allow the researcher the opportunity to confirm whether or not the descriptions couples use to describe their relationship are consistent with observations.

Researchers could also examine couples overtime, specifically examining turning points in their relationship where the status-reversal situation might occur. This would provide information on how relationship dynamics might change and/or stay the same based on who might be contributing more income. This perspective would be relatively unique to the study of communication in status-reversal relationships.

In this study the majority of the women managed the everyday finances. This
study found that this could be a source of power, however it is possible that the participants did not see this task as a power influence, instead they may have seen this simply as more work. For example, it was interesting to consider that the two men who were accountants did not manage the finances. Rather than seeing this task as empowerment, they may have seen it has drudgery, especially since they work with finances everyday professionally. It is possible that some of the participants did not realize the potential empowerment one has in managing this household task. Therefore, it would be beneficial for future studies to examine the perspective couples have in regards to financial management.

Future studies could also focus more narrowly, but in more depth than the present study did. For example researchers could turn away from domestic tasks and focus exclusively on the communication of power and decision making. This could be valuable when considering that in the present study couples did not appear to discuss domestic tasks with one another at length. Moreover, rather than focusing both on power and decision making, one could examine power and gender stereotypes and then conduct a separate study on decision making and gender stereotypes. Though power and decision making closely relate to one another, the two areas of study are very large. By focusing on one the researcher might gain a new and more detailed perspective.

This study allowed researchers to gain a better understanding of how power, decision making, and gender roles are managed in married status-reversal relationships. This study has found that women in these relationships have gained a substantial amount of power and as a result they have a greater influence in decision making. While couples
continue to reinforce gender stereotypes due to the struggle they experience based on society’s expectations, they continue to challenge these expectations in many ways. The study found that women are not hesitant to speak their mind in their marital relationships. This may be due to the confidence and assertive skills they have learned through education and occupational success. This study has shown that couples in status-reversal relationships are willing to change the dynamics of a traditional marital relationship by adapting to non-traditional roles.
References


Littlejohn, S. *Theories of human communication* (7th edition), Wadsworth/Thomas Learning.


Table 1

Demographic Data for Sample
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couple</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couple 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
<td>Business Analyst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Four Year College Degree</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
<td>Customer Service Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Four Year College Degree</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
<td>Customer Service Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Technical, Vocational, or Trade School</td>
<td>Journeyman Electrician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
<td>Accounts Receivable Dispute Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>High School or GED</td>
<td>Sales and Assistant Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Four Year College Degree</td>
<td>Customer Financial Services Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Two Year College Degree</td>
<td>Customer Service Rep.</td>
</tr>
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Table 2

Number of Hours Spent on Work, Domestic Tasks, and Childcare
Table 2. Number of Hours Spent on Work, Domestic Tasks, and Childcare Per Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couple</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Household Chores</th>
<th>Childcare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couple 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>41-50 Hours</td>
<td>3 Hours</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>41-50 Hours</td>
<td>10 Hours</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>41-50 Hours</td>
<td>1 Hour</td>
<td>44 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>41-50 Hours</td>
<td>5-10 Hours</td>
<td>5 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>41-50 Hours</td>
<td>5 Hours</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>More than 50 hours.</td>
<td>4 Hours</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>41-50 Hours</td>
<td>10 Hours</td>
<td>42-45 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>More than 50 hours.</td>
<td>6 Hours</td>
<td>15 Hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Couple 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>41-50 Hours</td>
<td>11 Hours</td>
<td>40 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>35-40 Hours</td>
<td>20-30 Hours</td>
<td>15-20 Hours</td>
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Table 3

Personal Income for Wives and Husbands
Table 3. Personal Income for Wives and Husbands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couple</th>
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<th>Account Type</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
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<td>Joint</td>
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<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>$52,000</td>
<td>Joint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>$52,000</td>
<td>Joint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>$65,000</td>
<td>Joint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A

IRB Expedited Review Letter
June 6, 2005

Erica Weigel
3055 S. 32nd Street
Omaha, NE 68105

IRB # 157-05-EP

TITLE OF PROPOSAL: Power and Decision Making Communication in Status Reversal Couples

SECONDARY INVESTIGATORS: Shereen Bingham, PhD

DATE OF FULL BOARD REVIEW _______ DATE OF EXPEDITED REVIEW 05-04-05

DATE OF FINAL APPROVAL 06-06-05 VALID UNTIL 05-04-06

EXPEDITED CATEGORY OF REVIEW: 45CFR46.110; 21CFR56.110, Category 7

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has completed its review of the above-titled protocol and informed consent document(s), including any revised material submitted in response to the IRB's review. The Board has expressed it as their opinion that you are in compliance with HHS Regulations (45 CFR 46) and applicable FDA Regulations (21 CFR 50, 56) and you have provided adequate safeguards for protecting the rights and welfare of the subjects to be involved in this study. The IRB has, therefore, granted unconditional approval of your research project. This letter constitutes official notification of the final approval and release of your project by the IRB, and you are authorized to implement this study as of the above date of final approval.

Please be advised that only the IRB approved and stamped consent/assent form can be used to make copies to enroll subjects. Also, at the time of consent all subjects/representatives must be given a copy of the rights of research participants. The IRB wishes to remind you that the PI is responsible for ensuring that ethically and legally effective informed consent has been obtained from all research subjects.

Finally, under the provisions of this institution's Federal Wide Assurance (FWA00002939), the PI is directly responsible for submitting to the IRB any proposed change in the research or the consent document(s). In addition, any unanticipated adverse events involving risk to the subject or others must be promptly reported to the IRB. This project is subject to periodic review and surveillance by the IRB and, as part of their surveillance, the IRB may request periodic reports of progress and results. For projects which continue beyond one year, it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to initiate a request to the IRB for continuing review and update of the research project.

Sincerely,

Ernest D. Prentice, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, IRB

EDP/kje

Academic and Research Services Building 3000 / 987830 Nebraska Medical Center / Omaha, NE 68198-7830
402-559-6463 / FAX: 402-559-3300 / Email: irbora@unmc.edu / http://www.unmc.edu/irb
Appendix B

Participant Consent Form
Adult Informed Consent Form

Project Title: Power and Decision Making Communication in Status Reversal Couples

Invitation
You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this consent form is provided to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. If you have any questions please ask.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?
You are eligible to participate because you are 19 years of age or older and involved in a heterosexual marital relationship in which the wife makes more money and has a higher status job position than the husband.

What is the reason for doing this research study?
The purpose of this study is to examine the communication between couples in which wives make more money and have higher status job positions outside of the home. The research will focus on the decision making process couples use.

What will be done during this research study?
If you choose to participate in this study you will be asked to complete a survey and take part in an audio taped interview that will take approximately one to two hours. The interview and survey will take place in the privacy of your own home, or in a public location of your choosing. Your interview will be audio taped for simplicity of transcribing the information you provide.

The questions asked in the interview and questionnaire will involve demographic information as well as information on how you and your partner make decisions in your home. You will be asked about financial decision making as well as domestic duties and childcare.

The interview tape will be stored and transcribed by the principal investigator and reviewed by the secondary investigator. Upon transcription, the tape will be erased.

Subject's Initials: ________
IRB#: 157-05-EP

**What are the possible risks of being in this research study?**

The only people who will have access to your research records (i.e., field notes, questionnaire, and audio tape) are the research study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and any other person or agency required by law. The information from this study may be published to fulfill the requirement of thesis for Erica Weigel, University of Nebraska at Omaha. Your identity will be kept confidential at all times. No appearance of your name will be referenced in the published document.

**What are the possible benefits to you?**

By participating in this study you may become more aware of the communication that occurs in your marriage. You may also become more aware of efforts you make in your relationship, as well as the efforts made by your partner. However, it is also possible that you will find no benefit from participating in this study.

**What are the possible benefits to other people?**

The results of this study may provide society with greater knowledge on communication between marital couples in which wives make more money, and have higher status jobs than their husbands.

**What are the alternatives to being in this research study?**

This study is strictly voluntary, therefore you may choose not to participate.

**What will being in this research study cost you?**

There is no cost to you for participating in this study.

**Will you be paid for being in this research study?**

There will be no monetary compensation for being a part of this study.

**What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?**

Your welfare is a critical concern for this research. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact the principal investigator (Erica Weigel) for this research.

Subject's Initials: ________
IRB#: 157-05-EP

How will information about you be protected?

Steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. The data will be stored securely in the principal investigator's home office. The only persons who will have access to your research records are the principal and secondary investigators for the study, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and any other person or agency required by law. The information may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but your identity will not be disclosed.

What are your rights as a research subject?

You have rights as a research subject. These rights have been explained in this consent form and in The Rights of Research Subjects that you have been given. If you have any questions concerning your rights, talk to Erica Weigel or call the Institutional Review Board (IRB), telephone (402) 559-6463

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?

You can withdraw from this research study at any time before, during, or after the research begins. Deciding not to be in this research study will not affect your relationship with the investigators, or with the University of Nebraska Omaha. You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled. If the researcher gets any new information during this study that may affect whether you would want to continue being in the study you will be informed promptly.

Documentation of informed consent

You are freely making a decision whether to be in this research study. Signing this form means that (1) you have read and understand this consent form, (2) you have had the consent form explained to you, (3) you have had your questions answered and (4) you have decided to be in the study.

If you have any questions during the study you should talk to the principal investigator listed below. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Subject: __________________________ Date: ______________  Time: ____

My signature certifies that all the elements of informed consent described on this consent form have been explained fully to the subject. In my judgment, the participant possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research and is voluntarily and knowingly given informed consent to participate.

Signature of Principal Investigator: ______________ Date: ______________ Time: ____
IRB#: 157-05-EP

**Authorized study personnel:**

Erica Weigel  
402-301-1102

Shereen Bingham, PhD  
402-554-4857

Subject's Initials: _________
Appendix C

Participant Interview Questions
Appendix C: Interview Questions

Breaking the Ice

1. Tell me how you and your partner met.
2. How long have you been married?
3. Tell me about your work.

Communication Style and Character Descriptions

4. Which of the following best describes the communication between you and your partner?
   - One-Way Communication/Two-Way Communication
   - Cooperative/Competitive
   - Open/Closed
   - Accommodative/Controlling
   - Compromising
   - Avoiding
   - Controlling

5. Which of the following descriptions best describes you?
   - Dependent/Independent
   - Emotional/Rational
   - Direct/Indirect
   - Assertive/Passive/Aggressive
   - Accommodative
   - Withdrawn
   - Compromising
   - Controlling
   - Collaborative
6. Which of the following descriptions best describes your partner?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent/Independent</th>
<th>Emotional/Rational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct/Indirect</td>
<td>Assertive/Passive/Aggressive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accommodative</td>
<td>Withdrawn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>Controlling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

_Communication Hesitation_

7. Are you ever hesitant to state your opinion or sharing your feelings with your partner?

If so, can you provide an example of a situation where you felt this way?

Help me understand why you felt hesitant.

8. Do you think your partner ever hesitates to share their opinions or feelings with you?

What do you think is the reason for the hesitation?

_Chores, Responsibilities and Work_

_Household Chores_

9. What chores or tasks do you more frequently take care of around the home?

10. What about your partner?

11. Who if either of you, does more of the chores you or your partner?

What are the reasons why that person does more chores?
12. Based on the list below, choose the tasks you more frequently take care of around the home?

Indoor Cleaning  
Laundry  
Meals  
Taxes  
Basic Child Care (example: feeding small children)

Lawn Care  
Shopping  
Household Repairs  
Financial Management  
Disciplining Children

13. Based on the list below, choose the tasks your partner more frequently takes care of around the home?

Indoor Cleaning  
Laundry  
Meals  
Taxes  
Basic Child Care (example: feeding small children)

Lawn Care  
Shopping  
Household Repairs  
Financial Management  
Disciplining Children

Child Care

14. Who, if either of you, is able to spend more quality time with your children each week, you or your partner (example: playing, helping with homework)?

15. Approximately how much time do you spend with your children each week?

16. Approximately how much time does your partner spend with your children each week?
Work and Home Constraints

17. What constraints might determine who will handle certain household responsibilities, such as chores or taking care of children?

18. Has the amount of hours you or your partner work outside of the home caused problems in your relationships?

   Can you provide an example?

Wives as the Bread Winner

For Male Participants

19. How do you feel about the fact that your wife makes more money than you?

   Has it ever made you uncomfortable?

   If so, can you provide an example of a time when you felt this way?

20. How do you think your partner feels about making more money?

   Do you think she ever feels uncomfortable?

   If so, why do you think so?

21. Has the fact that your wife makes more money ever caused a problem for your relationship?

   If so, can you provide an example of when it has been a problem?

   What did you do to address the problem?

For Female Participants

22. How do you feel about the fact that you make more money than your partner?

   Has it ever made you uncomfortable?

   If so, can you provide an example of a time when you felt this way?
20. How do you think your partner feels about you making more money than him?

   Do you think he ever feels uncomfortable?

   If so, why do you think so?

21. Has the fact that you make more money ever caused a problem for your relationship?

   If so, can you provide an example of when it has been a problem?

   What did you do to address the problem?

   *Decision Making*

22. How would you describe your decision making process with your partner?

23. What types of decisions do you often make jointly?

24. Who do you think has more influence in the decision making process, you or your partner?

   Why do you think so?

25. How do you go about trying to get your way when you disagree with your partner?

26. How do you think your partner goes about trying to get their way in a disagree?

27. What types of decisions do you and your partner most frequently argue about?

   What causes these disagreements?

   How do you address the problem?

28. Can you provide an example of a certain expertise that you have that allows you to take charge of the decision making process?

29. Can you provide an example of a certain expertise that your partner has that allows him or her to take charge of the decision making process.
Financial Decision Making

29. What is the maximum amount of money you would spend without talking to your partner?

30. Tell me about a time when you and your partner have argued about a financial decision.

What did you do to address the problem?

Parental Decision Making

31. How are decisions made about the children?

32. Who, if either of you, makes more decisions with regards to the care of your children?
Appendix D

Participant Questionnaire
Appendix D: Survey

Demographics

1. Date of Birth: ____________

2. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   
   A. High School or GED
   
   B. 2 Year College Degree
   
   C. Technical, Vocational, or Trade School
   
   D. 4 Year College Degree
   
   E. Master’s Degree
   
   F. Doctorate
   
   G. Other (specify) ________________________________

3. How many children currently live in your home?

   ________

Outside Employment

4. What is your current occupation and job position?

   ________

5. Approximately how many hours a week do you work outside of the home?

   A. Less than 20 hours.
   
   B. 20-34 Hours
   
   C. 35-40 Hours
   
   D. 41-50 Hours
   
   E. More than 50 hours a week.
Domestic Tasks and Child Care

6. On the average, how many hours a week do you personally spend on household chores (including cooking, cleaning, laundry, etc.)?

7. On the average, how many hours a week do you have hired help assisting with household and/or child care?

8. On the average how many hours a week are household chores done by children living with you?

9. On the average, how many hours a week do you personally spend tending to your children (getting them ready for school, helping with homework, etc)?

Finances

10. What is your personal take home pay each year?

11. What type of financial account does your personal income get placed in?

   A. Personal Account
   B. Joint Account
   C. Other ________________________________
12. Based on the following options, which best describes your money management system?

A. Husband manages all of the finances which pool both incomes.

B. Wife manages all of the finances which pool both incomes.

C. Both partners jointly manage the finances which pool both incomes.

D. Husband manages all finances and provides an allowance to his wife.

E. Wife manages all finances and provides an allowance to her husband.

F. Other ________________________________

13. List below the 5 expenses your personal income is most frequently used for.

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