LIBRARY
OF THE
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE
OF TECHNOLOGY
WORKING PAPER
ALFRED P. SLOAN SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

SMALL GROUP THEORY AND MARKETING RESEARCH*

Harry L. Davis** and Alvin J. Silk***

Working Paper No. 548-71

June, 1971

MASSACHUSETTS
INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
50 MEMORIAL DRIVE
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139
SMALL GROUP THEORY AND MARKETING RESEARCH*

Harry L. Davis** and Alvin J. Silk***

Working Paper No. 548-71

June, 1971

*To appear as a chapter in Robert Ferber, ed., Handbook of Marketing Research, McGraw-Hill, in press. The authors are indebted to Robert Buzzell, Scott Ward, and an anonymous reviewer for comments on an earlier draft of the manuscript.

**Assistant Professor of Marketing, Graduate School of Business, University of Chicago.

*** Associate Professor, Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This paper was completed while on leave from M. I. T. as a Visiting Research Associate, Marketing Science Institute, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION ......................................................... 1

2. SMALL GROUP THEORY .................................................. 2
   2.1 Interpersonal Influence ............................................. 4
   2.2 Norms ....................................................................... 9
   2.3 Communication ........................................................ 15

3. THE FAMILY AS A SMALL GROUP ......................................... 22
   3.1 Marital Roles in Consumer Behavior ............................... 26
   3.2 Communication Within the Family .................................... 33
   3.3 Discussion .................................................................. 37

4. PERSONAL SELLING .......................................................... 40
   4.1 Selling as Interaction ................................................. 40
      4.1.1 The Salesman-Customer Dyad ................................. 41
      4.1.2 Interpersonal Attraction ........................................ 42
      4.1.3 Salesman-Customer Similarity ............................... 43
      4.1.4 Selling Strategies ............................................... 49
      4.1.5 Implications ....................................................... 53
   4.2 Selling as Interpersonal Influence ................................... 57
      4.2.1 Using Group Pressure to Overcome Buyer Resistance .... 58
      4.2.2 The Influence of Company Reputation on Salesman Effectiveness ..................................................... 61
      4.2.3 Discussion .......................................................... 64

5. CONCLUSIONS .................................................................. 65

FOOTNOTES .................................................................. 70

REFERENCES .................................................................... 72
1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is concerned with the application of behavioral science knowledge about small groups to the study of marketing phenomenon. Our purpose is twofold. First, we attempt to introduce the reader to small group theories and research by indicating what behavioral scientists working in this area have studied and how. Secondly, we wish to illustrate how this knowledge can be used in marketing.

Accomplishing these two objectives poses a formidable problem. A truly massive quantity of literature is available on small group processes. In compiling his *Handbook of Small Group Research* nearly a decade ago, Hare [48] cited almost fourteen hundred references and estimated that articles were appearing at a rate of two hundred a year. Groups are a pervasive element in marketing systems and there is much in this vast storehouse of material that is potentially relevant to understanding the kinds of behavior which interest marketers.

In order to be able to examine in some depth both the promise and limitations associated with the use of small group concepts in marketing research and still confine the discussion to a manageable length, we have chosen to focus on two problem areas where small group research has been shown to have some operational significance: (1) family decision making, and (2) personal selling. The study of family purchasing decisions illustrates a problem area where virtually all small group concepts and measurement techniques can be applied. The relationship
between a salesman and customer, on the other hand, lends itself to study by a smaller number of concepts and techniques. Other types of marketing behavior where small group processes are important include industrial or organizational purchasing and the diffusion of innovations [2, 82]. Both of these topics are covered by separate chapters in this handbook and hence are not considered in any detail here.

2. SMALL GROUP THEORY

Groups are an important focus for study simply because an individual's behavior is influenced by other people. A person's preference for particular foods or certain fashions is influenced to a large extent by what others say is good or appropriate. The transportation needs of a family may require a man to forego the pleasure of a sportscar for the practicality of a station wagon. A computer salesman supplies information to a prospect and in turn gets a contract.

While these examples are obvious descriptions of everyday behavior, what is not so obvious are the dynamics of social influence in specific situations. Social scientists have attempted to identify whether an individual's behavior is subject to social influence. In cases where it is, they have tried to identify which group(s) or individuals will exert influence, in what direction, and over what range of behavior. Generally, the social scientist's interest stops at this point; his objective is to define and explain the process of group influence. The marketing practitioner must take still another step and determine if and how this knowledge can be used to further his own objectives.
It is important to point out that a person can be influenced by several kinds of groups only one of which will be discussed in this chapter. At one extreme are groups that people belong to because they happen to be male or female, married or not married, young or old, high status or low status. Behavior is influenced in these societal groups because roles appropriate to each of these positions have been internalized. For example, husbands may pay the bills because of expectations about the male's competence in financial affairs; a teenager may develop particular tastes in music as a way of identifying with the youth culture. Nonmembership groups can also influence behavior if one wants to join—a good example being the activities of people who are upwardly mobile. In an attempt to gain entrance into a higher class, they may emulate the life style of those who are already members whether it involves their changing political parties, driving a different make of car, or drinking wine rather than beer with dinner. Groups are also used in the sociological literature to refer to more formal associations such as an orchestra or football team.

The focus of this chapter is on social influence within small face-to-face groups. While both societal and primary groups influence a person's behavior and determine how satisfied he will be with his achievements, the small group has at least two additional characteristics. First, group members interact with each other. Second, they have expectations or norms about what is appropriate behavior and attitudes. When these norms center around one individual and specify his rights and responsibilities, they define a role. Group norms along with the network
of communication that link members together determine the nature of group influence over the individual.

In the following sections we will briefly discuss these three important aspects of small groups: (1) interpersonal influence, (2) norms, and (3) communication. It should be noted that this discussion is by no means a comprehensive review of small group theory. All of the research dealing with group productivity and member satisfaction has been excluded since it has little obvious relevance to market behavior.

We should also point out that the small group literature is not without its share of competing (and often untested) theories as well as the use of measures with unknown reliability and validity. For example, the strongly reactive nature of the laboratory and the reliance on college students for subjects pose real problems in generalizing findings to the very different settings of interest to marketing practitioners. One must resist the temptation to overestimate the relevance of small group research to marketing problems and to underestimate the ease of translating and applying this research.

2.1 Interpersonal Influence

That groups exert influence on their members should not be a revelation to even the most casual observer of social life. Expressions of personal preferences are often modified as a result of group pressures to conform. An individual's level of aspiration is influenced by group standards or norms. Groups can influence individual decisions by providing information or by suggesting additional criteria. The real
question, therefore, is not whether groups do influence a person's values, attitudes, and behavior, but rather the way in which this takes place. Why is it, for example, that individuals accept influence from others? How much influence is exerted? Over what range of decisions and activities or in what circumstances can influence be observed?

Social psychologists have found it useful to distinguish between "informational" and "normative" motives for accepting social influence [20]. In the former, members of a group influence each other in establishing a common frame of reference--a social counterpart to objective reality. Sherif's [84] classic study using the autokinetic effect illustrates the way in which a group norm becomes a standard by which individuals judge subsequent events. The more unstructured a stimulus situation (as would be the case with art, fashion, or social customs), the more influence of the group in providing a frame of reference for the individual. Normative social influence, on the other hand, is based upon an individual's desire to conform to the expectations of the group. A good example of this can be seen in Asch's [3] experiment in which a subject was asked to make judgments about the length of a line in the face of unanimous and erroneous judgments from other group members. The degree of conformity was found to be related to the clarity of the stimulus, whether or not the "opposition" was unanimous, the size of the group, and personality characteristics of the subject. Some of those who yielded to group pressures did so simply because they were unwilling to appear different from other group members. Unlike the case
of informational influence, these subjects conformed to group pressure in full knowledge that their judgment was incorrect.

These two motives refer only to the person being influenced. It is also necessary to consider the related question of the group's ability to satisfy an individual's needs. French and Raven [42] have proposed a widely quoted typology which specifies several bases for social influence.

Reward power occurs when a person (P) believes that some person (O) or group will reward him for conformity. What constitutes a reward is varied and could include, for example, instrumental services such as advice or social acceptance. O's decision to give or withhold rewards can influence P's behavior simply because rewards, as valued resources, are desired by others. In much the same way, coercive power can affect P's behavior since punishments, as "negative rewards," are avoided by others. The amount of influence exerted is dependent on the number and magnitude of rewards and punishments controlled by O as well as P's assessment of the probability of being rewarded for conformity or punished for deviance. Necessary prerequisites for the exercise of reward and coercive power are: (1) knowledge of what rewards and punishments are meaningful to P; and (2) the opportunity for surveillance by O.

In the case of referent power, surveillance is unnecessary since P accepts influence based upon his desire to identify with an attractive group or person. Unlike the situation with reward and coercive power in which interaction serves only as a means of gaining rewards or avoid-
ing punishments, O's power is based on the "rewardingness" of the interaction itself.

Surveillance is also unnecessary in the exercise of legitimate power. People tend to share definitions about appropriate attitudes, behavior, or values for various societal and organizational roles—e.g., men, women, husbands, wives, teachers, business executives, foremen, or army sargeants. These definitions are learned and internalized through socialization and are reinforced by a variety of social controls. Legitimate power is based on internalized values in which P legitimatizes O's right to influence P, as well as P's obligation to accept this influence. A wife, for example, may accept her husband's decision regarding a new car because she considers it appropriate for men to make such decisions.

Whereas legitimate power rests upon role expectations that are external to the social relationship, expert power occurs when one group member has skills which are considered by others to be instrumental to their needs. These skills are a source of power since they give one the ability to control the exchange of rewards and punishments. To rely upon a hi-fi "buff" prior to making such a purchase may make good sense if one is interested in obtaining a good buy. An individual's competence becomes manifest through direct observation of P's past success in dealing with tasks or as a result of expectations of competence about various classes of actors such as teachers, politicians, or women.

Closely related is informational power. This takes place when a person (O) or group supplies information to another person (P) that
results in a change in attitudes or behavior. Any change is socially independent of (0) since he simply transmits information as for example, when a teacher gives the right answer to a mathematics problem or a politician introduces new information about a controversial issue. Power is based upon the content of the information communicated; the person who communicates it is not directly relevant to any resulting change in attitudes or behavior.

Having these resources is a necessary but not sufficient determinant of social power. Only if a person is dependent upon a group's or person's resources for satisfying his needs will influence be exerted. Thus, the possession of resources determines the range of potential influence over other group members while the evaluation of these resources in terms of individual needs and group goals defines actual influence. How dependent a person becomes is a function of (1) judgments about whether the group is providing outcomes that are unavailable or better than those that could be attained elsewhere [71, 90]; and (2) individual characteristics such as level of aspiration [53].

These comments regarding interpersonal influence have at least two important implications for research in marketing. In the first place, it is necessary to view the flow of influence as a two-way street --dependent both upon O's resources and P's needs. Discussions of personal selling and word-of-mouth advertising often ignore this fact. Many studies have looked for personality or demographic correlates of good salesmen and opinion leaders. The results to date have been large-
ly inconclusive possibly because little attention is paid to characteristics of those influenced or to the relationship between the influencer and the influencee. ³ Only under the very unrealistic assumption that people subject to influence have needs of similar kind and magnitude would these "one-sided" studies of interpersonal influence be justified. The same orientation also characterizes many studies of opinion leadership as evidenced by measures which emphasize leader-initiated as opposed to follower-initiated influence [86].

A second implication of this discussion for marketing relates to the multiple bases of interpersonal influence. People can influence others to buy or use a particular product for various reasons. In one case someone might simply communicate information that was seen in an advertisement. Someone else might exert influence because he considers himself (or is considered by others) to be an expert. Still another person might be able to coerce someone into buying a new product. Knowing whether influence takes place or not is not sufficient. If marketers are to understand how word-of-mouth advertising works [2] or the range of an opinion leader's influence [75], these alternative bases of social power must be made explicit and measured.

2.2 Norms

Groups develop shared expectations about what is appropriate behavior for members of that group. These expectations or norms often refer to a single individual and thereby constitute his role in the group. A family may agree that it is appropriate for the wife to do
the shopping, the husband to bargain for a lower price with an automobile salesman, and for the children to defer to their parents in deciding where to vacation. A computer salesman may adopt a very low-pressure approach because he believes that this is what customers expect. Or, a purchasing agent generally pays close attention to corporate policy regarding which decisions he can make without consulting others. Secondly, norms relate to the kinds of behavior expected of all group members. A group of bible salesmen, for example, usually develops standards about how many sales constitute a satisfactory or good day's performance. Neighbors who entertain each other for dinner will tend to establish norms about how much drinking is appropriate and how elaborate the menu should be. Finally, norms also exist for attitudes. That is, many of the seemingly personal attitudes that people hold about such things as the desirability of buying goods on credit, preferences for particular foods, or the reputation of certain retailers, are formed and reinforced through group interaction. Whatever the object of a group norm (the individual, group, or objects in the external world), members will be rewarded when they conform to these expectations and punished when they deviate.

In defining the kind of influence that norms can have on an individual, it is useful to distinguish between several structural characteristics. The intensity of a norm (i.e., the extent to which conforming or deviant behavior is rewarded or punished) is perhaps the most obvious of these characteristics. Within any group there will be some
kinds of behavior, typically in areas of vital concern to the group's interest, where feelings run very high. A salesman who drinks on the job or a wife who greatly exceeds her monthly budget are both examples of behavior that is likely to be regulated. On the other hand, when an individual's behavior is not relevant (or only marginally relevant) to the group's purpose, the intensity of norms will be low. A child's respect for parental authority will usually be governed more by group expectations than will his preferences for breakfast cereal. A second characteristic—crystallization—refers to the amount of agreement which exists among group members regarding a given area of behavior. Crystallization is high when members agree in their expectations and low when they disagree. Finally, the range of behavior regulated by norms differs among groups. We would expect norms within families not only to cover many areas of behavior but also to be high in both intensity and crystallization. A buying committee, on the other hand, may have well-developed norms defining each member's responsibility in choosing suppliers but no expectations for members' behavior in other realms.

Much of the discussion and research on group norms has focused on two questions: (1) What function do norms serve for the group and the individual? and (2) What factors determine the extent to which an individual will conform to these norms?

In reference to the first question, norms are instrumental to a group in achieving its goals. A uniformity of attitudes is often a
prerequisite for group action. Certainly if a sales organization is to develop workable plans, the members must agree on the company's objectives and policies. A family is more likely to accomplish all the work associated with buying and furnishing a home if the husband and wife assume responsibility for certain decisions and tasks. These rules become the sources of pressure toward uniformity because they are viewed as helping the group reach its objectives. Group norms also serve to maintain the group. Attending conventions or sales meetings is often a requirement for membership in formal organizations. Accepted traditions such as Sunday dinner with the in-laws or the Thursday night poker game serve the same function in less formal groups.

The norms of primary groups, as reference groups, also have important consequences for the individual. In the first place, norms serve a comparison function--i.e., they are standards against which one can judge his behavior and attitudes. Some reference point is necessary because of the absence of any empirical test for many social attitudes. How, for example, can one objectively determine whether preferences for double-breasted suits and Danish-modern furniture are "right?" As Festinger, Schachter, and Back [40] explain in their classic study of the Westgae housing project:

There are not usually compelling facts which can unequivocally settle the question of which attitude is wrong and which is right in connection with social opinions and attitudes as there are in the case of what might be called "facts."...The "reality" which settles the question in the case of social attitudes and opinions is the degree to which others with whom
one is in communication are believed to share these same attitudes and opinions. (pp. 168-69)

If people value a group, then its norms are likely to provide meanings for the many objects or situations requiring a social reality. Norms also protect individuals from efforts of others to influence them since groups provide strong social support for particular behaviors and attitudes. A person is more likely to be able to withstand criticism for his "radical" ideas about fashion if he belongs to a group or lives in a community where the same clothes are worn by others. A third and final function of group norms for the individual is an instrumental one when conformity is a prerequisite for joining or staying in a group that one finds attractive. Newcomb's well-known study [78, 420-39] of Bennington undergraduates showed that the most well-accepted students tended to adopt liberal political attitudes even though many had come from conservative family backgrounds. Conformity to norms in this case served less as a standard for individual judgments, and more as a way of receiving rewards from others.

A second topic for research has been the extent to which individuals conform to group norms. The Asch-type experiment, discussed earlier, has consistently shown that people sometimes conform to the opinions of others even when they realize that they are going against their own perceptions of the world [3]. Several factors seem to influence the degree to which an individual will conform including such things as the composition of the group, aspects of the situation, and individual differences. At the risk of oversimplifying, let us
briefly summarize what is known about each.

The nature of the group itself affects the strength of pressures on individuals to conform. As the size of the group increases, up to a point, so does the amount of conformity [3, 44]. A large majority having similar norms apparently offers a more convincing definition of reality to the individual than the opinions of one or two other people. Closely related is the amount of agreement within the group--i.e., the extent to which norms are crystallized. When a unanimous majority is broken by one member, the pressure on another individual to conform is dramatically decreased. Another characteristic of groups related to conformity is the expertise and status of the members. If someone feels that the majority knows a great deal about the topic under discussion or views the majority as high in prestige, the more he will value their opinion and adopt it as his own.

Characteristics of the situation are also relevant to conformity. We have already noted that groups will influence behavior in some areas but not in others. Rather than assuming that behavior is subject to group norms simply because one belongs to a group, it is, therefore, important to determine whether and to what extent group influence is operating in specific situations. Another factor is the extent to which a person must "go on record" as deviating from group norms. Not surprisingly, it has been shown that conformity is greater when a group member must publically state his preferences or reveal his behavior [39]. If group members cannot find out how another member feels or acts,
there is little or no risk in his deviating from group norms. This behavior can be observed in a housewife's selection of brands. When the specific brand will not be visible to others (e.g., instant coffee) reference group influence is weak. When the brand is socially conspicuous, as in the case of cigarettes or beer, reference group influence is high [2]. A final factor about the situation, and one of great significance to marketing, is the complexity or ambiguity of the object. Generally, the more difficult the judgment, the greater will be the influence of other group members on a person's "own" judgment. Since product evaluation is often ambiguous (e.g., fashion) or complex (e.g., buying a new car), consumers undoubtedly rely upon informational social influence.

Characteristics of the group and the situation behave in much the same way across individuals. A third determination of conformity is found within the individual. Although the research on this variable is somewhat sparse and inconsistent, a few generalizations have emerged. Women conform more than men [92] presumably because of differences in culturally-defined roles. Intelligence and self-confidence vary inversely with the amount of conformity [22]. Both imply certain task-related skills that an individual brings to a group—skills that are often useful in achieving group objectives or reducing uncertainty.

2.3 Communication

The factors discussed up to this point have been rather static. Only to the extent that people communicate or interact with each other
will interpersonal influence take place.

If one observes a group from the outside, a particular form of communication is apparent. Some people talk a great deal; others say very little. In addition, certain channels or networks are used more extensively than other. Leaders for example, generally say more and communicate more freely than other group members. If one listens to the content of what is said, he will discover that it also differs among the member. Much of what is said in a problem-solving group is task-oriented--i.e., communication that is instrumental to "getting the job done." Another type of communication, however, is directed toward the solution of social-emotional problems that arise during task behavior. It is of great interest that regularities in the form and content of communication can be observed across a wide range of groups--including those that are large or small, composed of strangers or friends, or involved in solving a wide variety of problems. Each of these two dimensions of communication will be discussed below.

Perhaps the most visible component of form is a group's communication network. The purchase of an automobile, for example, may involve a good deal of discussion between husband and wife and limited communication with the children. The more experienced members of a buying committee are likely to direct and receive more communication than other committee members while opinion leaders typically have access to more people than do their followers.

Several factors, including some of those discussed above can in-
fluence a group's communication network. If some person has particular resources (e.g., competence or social contacts) that are useful to the group in satisfying its goals, he will likely assume a more central position in that structure. Doctors, in the well-known drug study [2], who were centrally located in their ties to local doctors were more committed to the profession as measured by visits to out-of-town medical meetings, readership of professional journals, and knowledge of medical developments in other communities. The content of specific roles often includes certain "rights" about who can talk to whom, as for example, in a formal organization where the vice-president typically has access to more people within the organization than the director of marketing research. Communication networks have also been shown to depend upon additional factors such as the size of the group, the relation of members in physical space, and the amount of time available for completing a task [49].

The type of communication network has a major impact on the way in which a group functions. Studies have consistently shown that the more central a person is within a group's network (i.e., the more access he has to all others in the group), the greater his satisfaction [6, 62]. The efficiency with which tasks are performed is also associated with the communication structure although the specific relationship seems to depend on such things as the kind of task to be performed, members' prior experience with solving problems as well as the location and quality of information available. A person who controls com-
munication within a group tends to become the leader. Finally, a num-
ber of studies [19, 64] have demonstrated that the more freedom mem-
bers have to talk, the more effective are attempts to change individ-
ual attitudes or group norms.

Describing a group's communication network only tells us who
speaks to whom. A second dimension of the form of communication is
amount--both in terms of the total amount and its distribution among
group members. The latter has a rather direct relationship to influ-
ence since the most active member in terms of communication generally
becomes the group leader. Active participation is dependent to a
large extent on one's location within a group, but it is also true
that a person can increase his influence simply by talking more [7].
While the relative rates of communication are indicative of a person's
influence within a group, the total amount of communication is a good
measure of a group's influence over its members. Cohesive groups
(i.e., those composed of people who like to be together) have higher
rates of interaction. This provides more opportunities to influence
members' attitudes and behavior and increases the pressure on individ-
ual members to conform to group norms.

As we said earlier, information about the form of communication--
network and rate--is not sufficient to understand the nature of group
interaction. Some analysis of the content of that communication must
also be undertaken.

Just as group members differ in the amount of talking they do, so
they differ in what it is they talk about. The purchase of life in-
surance, for example, may find a husband deeply involved with the salesman in negotiating the most coverage for the least money. At the same time, his wife may interject comments from time to time designed, perhaps unconsciously, to reduce some of the tension generated by this exchange. Several of the participants at a regional sales meeting may spend most of their time informing the others about company sales patterns, competition, or the reaction of consumers to a new product; other participants may focus on formulating plans for the next sales period; and still others will try to deal with the tensions and conflicts that arise during the meeting.

The task of analyzing what is said within a group is obviously more difficult than simply recording who talks to whom and for how long. Fortunately, a number of category systems have been devised by social psychologists that enable an observer to describe a complex communication in terms of a relatively small number of categories. In the most widely used of these, the Bales Interaction Analysis [4], each communication act (usually a sentence) is placed into one of twelve categories: shows solidarity or antagonism; tension or tension release; agreement or disagreement; and gives or asks for information, opinions, or suggestions. For example, consider the following interchange: Consumer A--I think I will buy a used station wagon (gives opinion); Consumer B--You're silly to do that (shows antagonism); Consumer A--Why? (asks for information); Consumer B--Because my cousin bought one that was a "lemon" (gives information); Consumer C--But the one I bought for my
wife has been very dependable (shows disagreement); A—Well, then, how should I go about finding a good one? (asks for suggestion). Six of the Bales categories constitute social-emotional behavior—i.e., the three positive reactions of showing agreement, solidarity, and tension release along with the negative reactions of showing disagreement, antagonism, and tension. The remaining six categories describe task behavior—i.e., giving and asking for information, opinions, and suggestions.

Analyses of small group interaction have demonstrated that there is a marked difference in what is said by the two most active members. One person engages primarily in communication designed to move the group toward its goal. He gives many suggestions and opinions, as well as communicating negative reactions toward other group members ("let's get going," "that's irrelevant," or "you're being unrealistic"). The other active member tries to keep the group running smoothly. He asks questions frequently and makes supportive statements such as "that's a good idea," "you did a good job," or "it's fun to work together." The latter role is generally referred to as the socioemotional leader and the former as the task leader. When groups begin to interact with no prior differentiation of roles, which members will eventually assume these two leadership roles is likely to depend upon certain personality traits, the possession of relevant problem-solving skills, or both. In other groups, leadership behavior may be built into culturally-defined roles as in the family where husbands tend to be more task-oriented than
wives, and wives more emotionally-oriented than husbands.

Our discussion up to this point has considered only the verbal component of communication. Indeed, the Bales Interaction Analysis is designed specifically to score overt behavior and to ignore other nonverbal messages that are exchanged between members. Yet it is clear that nonverbal communication cannot be overlooked if one is to understand how influence works. A housewife, for example, may be more influenced by seeing a new chair in a neighbor's livingroom than by any verbal effort of that neighbor to influence her. Certainly many wives have learned more about their husband's attitude toward buying new carpeting from his facial expression or from what he did not say rather than from what he did say. It is also true that salesmen rely heavily on the nonverbal feedback from prospects to alter their sales presentation. While these more subtle aspects of communication pose serious measurement problems relative to those involving verbal interaction, efforts need to be made to collect such data. In marketing applications where the primary interest centers on on-going groups (e.g., the family, neighborhood or kinship groups, and organizations) rather than on one-time laboratory groups, the importance of nonverbal communication is likely to be great. To the extent that a group has been interacting over a period of time, roles and norms tend to become well-defined thereby requiring less verbal communication to achieve its objectives and maintain satisfaction among the members. When communication does take place, nonverbal messages will often suffice.

Having discussed those individual and group characteristics that
help to explain interpersonal influence, we will now examine their application in two problem areas of interest to marketers—family decision making and personal selling.

3. THE FAMILY AS A SMALL GROUP

References to the family in the study of consumer behavior are infrequent. This apparent disregard for the family is surprising since the fundamental unit for the study of demand is often a family unit as opposed to an individual. Major items of consumer spending such as food, shelter and transportation are often jointly "consumed." Even preferences for products individually consumed are likely to be influenced by feedback from other family members. What limited discussions and data that are found suggest two very different orientations.

On the one hand are economic studies that view the family as a consumption unit. 7 The research in this tradition has considered such questions as: What percent of disposable income will be spent; what percent of spendable income will be allocated to various disbursement categories such as clothing, food, or shelter, and how do income and demographic characteristics affect expenditure patterns between families?

There are virtually no ties between this research and small group theory since the "family" in this literature displays none of the characteristics of a small group described earlier. In the first place, the research is largely concerned with family consumption in aggregate terms. As Ferber [37] notes, many economists purposely avoid investi-
gating the consumption function for individual families because"... the importance of erratic factors is so great for individual households as to obscure more basic relationships" (p. 20). Not only is it questionable whether relationships uncovered for groups of households are equally appropriate to the individual family unit, but it is also likely that predictions about consumption within individual families require an understanding of these so-called "erratic" factors. Second, the way in which income is typically measured (i.e., total family or household disposable income) makes some seemingly unrealistic assumptions about family behavior. For example, it assumes that families spend their incomes as a family unit—an assumption requiring either a dictator or unanimous committee. The measurement of family income also overlooks the impact of number and sources. Since, in the main, economists would not predict any differences in consumption between families in which either the husband or wife is the provider and those in which both spouses contribute equally as long as total family incomes were the same. The family in this literature thus bears a striking resemblance to the economist's model of an individual consumer.

A second orientation, and one having a much closer tie to the small group literature, is to view the family as a decision making unit. Some of these studies have described the allocation of decision making responsibility between husband and wife; others have examined the division of labor between family members [70, 83, 96]. Given the com-
mercial nature of much of this research, these studies have tended to concentrate on decision making about particular product categories—automobiles, appliances, liquor, and supermarket purchases. Marketing strategies require information about the relative participation of men versus women in various purchase decisions as a basis for selecting advertising media and appeals.

Whether it is because of this commercial orientation or the frequent disregard for explicit theory which characterizes much of the research in marketing, these studies when taken as a whole contribute little to our understanding of the family as a small group. Similar to the economics literature discussed earlier, researchers seem to retain their long-held preoccupation with individual rather than group behavior. For example, the Fawcett study [70] found that husbands decide about what make of automobile to buy in 61% of the families. Husband and wife were found to make this decision together in another 38%, while the wife decided in the remaining 1% of the families. The following conclusion is drawn: "The husband, as the family 'authority' on mechanical matters, decides upon the make of the new family car" (p. 59). But notice that this conclusion as a directive for advertising could be very misleading if husband-wife influence is related to income, geographic location, life cycle or other social or demographic characteristics. One could conceive of the extreme case in which a firm's (or brand's) market segment was composed entirely of couples who made this decision jointly. To appeal only to husbands in this case would clearly be ill advised.
The fact is that researchers have made few attempts to employ concepts that are central to small group theory, and what illustrations can be found often reveal extreme oversimplifications. As a case in point, generalizations about the roles of wife, husband, and children are often made without regard to the specific decisions and activities being investigated or to various family characteristics such as the life cycle or social class. Discussions based upon these absolute views of family roles have yielded a number of apparent contradictions especially in terms of conclusions about whether the husband's (or wife's) influence is increasing or decreasing. One marketing text describes the growing involvement of women in family decisions [8]. These authors ascribe the wife's increasing influence to her gainful employment outside the home and related advancements in political and social status. According to the authors, the implications of this change are clear:

Today, marketing executives think of the housewife as the family producing agent. ...It is generally recognized that women exert a profound influence in the purchase of much merchandise even though the actual buying may be done by men. Merchandise must appeal to women, publicity must be adapted to their motivation, and the place of sale must be adjusted to their needs, whims and fancies (pp. 66-67).

Other marketing textbooks, however, describe a seemingly opposite trend—the growing involvement of men in family decisions. For example, Phillips and Duncan [80] observe that a rising percentage of purchases are now made by the husband alone or by the husband and wife jointly. The reasons include week-end and evening shopping hours at many retail
outlets and the increasing use of mechanical products in the home whose purchase requires the mechanical expertise of the male. It is both interesting and disturbing that the implication for marketing strategies is directly opposite to that reached by the previous authors.

   Although the figures still emphasize the importance of women as buyers, they also indicate that many retailers must appeal to both men and women. Neither the manufacturer nor the middleman can overlook the implications found in the growing importance of men as buyers.... (p. 68)

   Although few marketing researchers have studied the family as a small group, there have been some developments in recent years that deserve discussion. One area concerns the study of husband and wife roles in consumer decision making—another study of product-related communication within families.

3.1 Marital Roles in Consumer Behavior

   In the previous section on small group theory we defined roles as expectations or norms that center around a position within the group. The study of the family leads itself particularly well to role analysis given the regularities often associated with the roles of husband, wife, and children. In contrast to the somewhat more fluid role definitions characteristic of other social groups, family roles (including prescriptions about task responsibility, power, and attitudes) are learned during childhood socialization and reinforced over time by a variety of societal controls.

   Sociologists frequently employ two "ideal" types as a means of classifying families along a continuum from "tradition-bound" to "com-
panionship." Those holding a traditional definition of marital roles are characterized by large authority differences between husband and wife (as well as between parents and children) and a highly differentiated division of labor. A sharp distinction is made between concepts of masculinity and femininity. A democratic or companionship definition of roles, on the other hand, prescribes a high degree of joint participation in tasks and decisions.

In the case of a traditional ideology, the particular distribution of authority within the family is built into the roles themselves and one gains power by ascription rather than achievement. The basis for the husband's influence in major family decisions is based upon members' acceptance of culturally-defined norms (i.e., legitimate power) rather than upon any particular decision making resources controlled by the husband. When a couple holds companionship norms, on the other hand, the personal resources of family members become an important base for social influence. A husband may help his wife prepare dinner each night because he both likes to cook and spend time with her. His wife may learn how to play golf so that they can spend more of their leisure time together. In both examples, companionship norms reinforce these behaviors by legitimating the right of each spouse to do whatever he or she wishes in the pursuit of "togetherness."

If families within a culture conform to either of these two ideologies, predictions can easily be made about which spouse has various task and decision making responsibilities. In the first place, roles
would be differentiated along a small number of dimensions. Assuming a unidimensional structure, families could then be classified simply as "patriarchal" or "companionship." Or, a researcher might assume two power hierarchies by making a distinction between "instrumental" and "expressive" roles [79] or between "policy" and "routine" decisions [35]. In either case predictions about roles in consumer decisions would be quite straightforward. Under a traditional ideology, for example, we would expect husband dominance in important decisions such as the choice of housing, the purchase of automobiles, life insurance, or major appliances, as well as in decisions about the family's financial management. Brand decisions about most household products, being "routine," are properly delegated to the wife as homemaker. Conformity to either ideology also implies a small variance in marital roles across families. That is, decisions made by a husband in one family would be much the same as those made by other husbands. Information about the role (rather than about the person who occupies it) is sufficient to predict "who decides."

Unfortunately for ease of prediction, the few studies that have investigated the dimensionality of marital roles and the uniformity of these roles across families suggest a more complex structure than that which is implicit in either "ideal" type. Davis [28] studied the relative influence of husbands and wives in 12 automobile and furniture purchase decisions. Using a clustering technique to group decisions together in terms of their similarities on relative influence, two
bases for role differentiation were apparent. The first was the product itself—decision roles in the purchase of an automobile were not related to decision roles in the purchase of furniture. Simply stated, knowing the roles played by a husband and wife in buying a car provides little or no information about who makes furniture purchase decisions in the same family. The study also showed that roles were differentiated on the basis of the type of decision being made. Within each product category, relative influence in "product-selection" decisions (what model, make and color to buy) was unrelated to relative influence in "allocation" or "scheduling" decisions (how much to spend and when to buy the car). Although this research needs to be replicated using a larger and more representative sample as well as extended to include other product categories, the evidence suggests that family authority roles in consumer decisions are more differentiated than the unidimensional or bidimensional structures hypothesized by many sociologists.

Another study [29] casts doubt on the uniformity of husband-wife roles when considered across families for the same purchase. A sample of 211 French-speaking, Catholic families living in and around Quebec City, Canada provided information about the relative influence of husband and wife in seven automobile purchase decisions—when and where to purchase the car, how much money to spend, and what make, model, color, and accessories to buy. Although one might have anticipated husband-dominance in all (or certainly most) of these decisions given the traditional culture of the area studied, the data showed considerable variability between the "husband decided" and the "we both de-
cided" categories. Families fell about evenly into these two categories for several of the decisions. None of the decisions could be satisfactorily described as husband-dominated or joint. Even for the most highly skewed decision (i.e., what color of automobile to buy), such a statement would be incorrect for over 20 percent of the couples. Interestingly, an analysis of the factors accounting for differences in relative influence among families showed situational rather than person or family-related characteristics to be the most important. Wives had more influence in buying the family car when they had a driver's license, drove the car as much as their husbands, shopped for the car with their husbands, and perceived themselves as being competent to make such decisions. From the many family-related characteristics described by sociologists [27], only three were found to be significant predictors of relative influence—socio-economic status, family size, and the family's orientation to the wife's relatives.

This finding illustrates the limitations of behavioral science concepts when applied to marketing research. Real world applications require the marketing researcher to employ whatever factors (family or situational) that account for differences in decision making influence for specific products. The sociologist, given his use of questions about purchasing decisions only as a proxy measure of authority, has not developed an adequate framework to explain how the requirements of tasks or decisions influence roles. Small group research is therefore just a starting point for practitioners who are interested in predicting influence for specific products.
A pilot study carried out by Jaffe and Senft [56] is one of the few attempts to apply sociological theory to help understand the nature of husband-wife roles in purchasing decisions. They hypothesize that household consumption requires several roles at different points in time. Throughout the decision process someone must gather information via people and the media. One person plays the role of the initiator—suggesting the need for a new product purchase. Several roles are evident at the purchase phase: (1) suggester of brand requirements within a product class (e.g., type or style); (2) suggester of brand; (3) the budgeter—the one who specifies an acceptable price level; (4) the shopper; and (5) the purchaser. At the consumption phase someone may convert the product into useable form; someone else may actually consume the product and evaluate the extent to which it satisfies the needs. Finally, someone serves as process validator—evaluating what was either right or wrong about the decision process and suggesting whether it should be changed the next time. Jaffe and Senft document the variability of husband-wife roles at different stages in the consumption process by analysing in-depth purchase histories for several convenience foods, household items, and appliances.

Although this framework has received little attention by marketers, it does have at least two important implications for the study of family purchase decisions. In the first place, the study demonstrates that roles are remarkably multidimensional even for routine purchasing decisions. In the case of coffee, for example, the percentage of hus-
bands who actually purchased coffee (29 percent) considerably underestimated the percentage who initiated the purchase or who suggested a particular brand (41 percent). In the same way, a relatively small percentage (16 percent) of husbands initiated the purchase of pet food, yet 40 percent of the husbands suggested what brand of pet food to buy. Thus, it seems to make little sense to talk about how much influence the husband has in a product category; the correct reference is his influence in particular sub-decisions leading to the purchase. Second, each family purchase is viewed as a complex series of activities (including search behavior, evaluation, decision making and consumption) taking place over time. Viewing purchase decisions as part of the larger problem of consumption management avoids the now-common practice of oversimplifying how decisions are made. Consider, for example, a number of families who report that the "wife decided" about what new piece of furniture to buy. In some of these families the wife decides because husbands are not interested. Decisions regarding the home may have been delegated to the wife. Another group of these families discuss furniture prior to the time that the wife decides what piece to buy. Still another group has disagreement about what furniture to buy. If wives "win," they have (in a sense) made the decision. All of these examples yield the same results in terms of a straightforward question about who made the decision. Yet, it is quite clear that the authority relationship and the resulting implication for marketing communication differ between the three. The framework proposed by Jaffe and Senft is
responsive to these subleties in decision processes.

A quite different application of data about marital roles is seen in the life-style research of Wells and Tigert [94]. Wanting to find out more about product or brand users than is provided by the usual demographic profile, the researchers assembled a large number of questions on activities, attitudes, interests, values, needs, and opinions. A number of these relate to actual role performance within the family—"I spend a lot of time with the children talking about their activities, friends, and problems," or "I take care of the money and pay the bills." Other questions measure the extent to which the respondent (usually the housewife) agrees with traditional or companionship definitions of marital roles—"A woman's place is in the home," "The father should be the boss in the house," or "Men should not do the dishes." Such information is of value to marketers (particularly copywriters) since it describes the consumer in ways that suggest specific advertising appeals.

3.2 Communication Within the Family

Knowing the roles that people occupy in a family tells us more about the potential for social influence than it does about what actually takes place. As our earlier discussion of communication suggested, the particular form and content of what is said is crucial for understanding how decisions are made. The available research on this topic is very sparse. What few studies are relevant focus on one of the following three questions: (1) To what extent are brand preferences
known and similar within families? (2) To what extent are specific
product requests made by husbands or wives? and (3) What is the
nature of communication during joint purchasing decisions?

Representative of studies directed toward the first of these quest-
ions is Coulson's [24] pilot research on wives' awareness of the brand
preferences of other family members. Awareness was found to vary a
great deal by product class. Housewives were more aware of family pref-
erences when the brand name was clearly visible in use (e.g., beer,
cigarettes, deodorant, candy bars, chewing gum, and cold cereals), less
aware when the brand was not visible (e.g., canned peas and spaghetti),
and even less aware when there was a substantial change in the product
prior to use (e.g., cake mix or margarine). Related to the same ques-
tion are two studies undertaken by Nowland and Company for Life Maga-
zine [33,34]. Questionnaires were administered separately to husbands
and wives to ascertain their brand preferences for 15 food items. A
pantry check was then made to determine which brands had actually been
purchased and were in the home at the time of the interview. When hus-
bands and wives agreed about their preferred brand it was in the kit-
chen an average of 86 percent of the time. When couples disagreed, the
brand preferred by the wife was in the kitchen on the average of only
53 percent of the time. In addition, the nonconsensus families were
twice as likely to purchase store and special-price labels.

Unfortunately, these studies tell us very little about the nature of
product-related communication within families since the measures of
both awareness and consensus do not require any information about whether husbands and wives discussed brands or when these discussions took place. In the case of the two Nowland studies, for example, it is possible that husbands' responses to questions about brand preferences are actually measures of brand awareness under the following kinds of logic: (1) "I know what brands my wife buys since I see them on the table and in the cupboards, or (2) "I have seen ads for instant coffee on TV and it's a good thing to have preferences when filling out questionnaires." To the extent that these reasons operate, it makes little sense to match husbands' and wives' responses. Consensus could imply discussion, no discussion, real preferences, or no preferences!

A study of 936 housewives conducted for the National Opinion Polls Limited [76] illustrates research addressed to the question about specific product or brand requests. Data were obtained from wives about whether their husbands asked them to buy specific brands, and if so, whether these requests were honored. The percentage of husbands who asked their wives to buy particular brands ranged from a low of eight percent in the case of desserts to a high of 18-20 percent in the case of cheese, pickles, cereals, meat, toothpaste, and biscuits. The study showed that over half of the housewives did in fact buy what their husbands requested.

A much higher estimate of the husband's influence in the purchase of many of these same packaged goods is reported in a study by Learner Marketing Research and Development for Life Magazine [30]. Data about
the frequency, recency, and importance of the husband's brand comments for specific products were obtained from both spouses in 1005 families. Among users, the percentage of wives who reported that their husband's brand comments were very important to them in making brand decisions ranged from 26 percent for peanut butter to 98 percent for dog food. Other products for which a majority of wives considered their husband's comments important included soft drinks, headache remedies, cereal, beer, and shampoo. Husbands consistently rated lower the importance of their own brand comments (ranging from 6 to 25 percentage points).  

Studies investigating the nature of family communication during purchasing decisions are virtually nonexistent. Kenkel [59] has made use of the Bales Interaction Analysis to study marital and family roles in simulated problem-solving sessions--typically involving the allocation of money received by the family as a gift. He argues that the kind of information obtained from interaction studies (e.g., who suggests ideas, has information about alternatives, and leads the discussion) would be more useful to advertisers than knowing only who made the decision or the actual purchase. Another discussion of family interaction is contained in a recent paper by Sheth [85]. He argues that when disagreements arise during joint buying decisions due to differences in evaluative beliefs or buying motives, couples can use several means of resolving conflict. Perhaps the most common is problem-solving in which differences of opinion about the details of a purchase (e.g., what color or model of automobile to select) lead one or more family members
to search for additional information. Sometimes conflict can be resolved by persuasion—the attempt to convince someone of the inconsistencies in their reasoning. Sheth uses the example of families trying to dissuade a husband from buying a new car at a time when the family is already heavily in debt. Bargaining represents a third means of conflict resolution. Employing notions of distributive justice or equity, a husband may be "allowed" to go on a fishing trip with the boys in return for letting his wife buy a new dress. Sheth describes politics as a final strategy whereby coalitions are formed (e.g., the wife and children against the husband) for the purpose of forcing one member to conform. Systematic research designed to study these four alternative strategies in the context of family purchasing decisions has yet to be undertaken.

3.3 Discussion

There is little doubt that a better understanding of family purchasing decisions would be helpful to marketing practitioners. Media could be selected more efficiently if buyers had a better idea of which household members to reach with that message. This information could better guide the creation and testing of copy. And, the validity of attitude surveys and product tests depends on whether the right respondent has been studied. As a way of dealing with some of these issues, we suggested the applicability of small group theory and research. Unfortunately, an examination of the marketing literature shows that few such applications have been made. Family roles are often viewed in
overly simplistic terms in the face of contrary evidence showing a good deal of differentiation by type of decision and activity. There has been very little attention given to the interrelationship between roles and decision processes. That is, researchers have generally overlooked how families arrive at decisions being content instead to identify which spouse decided or did the actual purchasing.

Further developments in the study of family decision behavior can benefit from small group theory and research in at least four important ways.

1. Purchase influence within the family should be viewed in a larger framework than role theory. Empirical research has shown that the roles of husband and wife are quite variable across families and that predictions based on cultural stereotypes about these roles are likely to be inaccurate for any given purchase situation. Legitimate power, to use the French and Raven [42] terminology, is at best a partial determinant of decision making influence. Other bases of social power frequently studied in the laboratory—competence, information, attraction, the ability to reward or punish—need to be incorporated.

2. Small group research has shown that relevant aspects of the situation have a major impact on the influence exerted by group members. In terms of family purchasing decisions this means that careful attention must be paid to characteristics of the product and of the situation surrounding its purchase. We would hypothesize, for example, that joint purchase decisions are positively related to such product
characteristics as economic and social importance, risk, use by several family members, and visibility during consumption. Factors surrounding the purchase, such as who does the shopping or the amount of time pressures, are also likely to influence decision making. Without adequate controls on the type of decisions studied, the research carried out will represent very little accumulated knowledge.

3. Small group researchers frequently use behavioral measures to assess interpersonal influence—who talks the most, gives suggestions, or engages in socio-emotional activities. In contrast, much of the existing research on purchasing influence makes the implicit assumption that people can accurately report "who decides." But this assumption overlooks the often invisible nature of social influence. Even if a wife, for example, wanted to tell someone how she ended up with a new brand of TV dinner she would probably find it difficult. One way around the problem is to lean more heavily on behavioral measures as additional indicators of influence. Information about who within the family shopped, was exposed to media advertising, or talked with the neighbors are all examples of such measures. They have two major advantages. Respondents can readily and accurately answer questions about "who did something" than they can about "who decided to buy something." In addition, behavioral measures serve as a criterion for researchers in deciding which measures of purchase influence are performing well (i.e., are predictive).

4. Finally, the laboratory experiment which characterizes much
of the small group research should be used more extensively by market researchers. We described earlier how little is known about the process of decision making within families, the emphasis having been placed on group structure rather than interaction. Laboratory experiments using real families may offer a relatively cheap way of obtaining the kind of data that is necessary for understanding how family purchase decisions are made.

4. PERSONAL SELLING

4.1 Selling as Interpersonal Interaction

A criticism sometimes made of behavioral science research is that after cutting through the specialized lingo and complex methodology, one finds in barely recognizable form, little more than an affirmation of what was already "obvious" to everyone--mere "truisms, platitudes, and tautologies." Thus the observation that the most fundamental aspect of personal selling is the "interaction" that goes on between a prospect and a salesman may well appear as yet another example of befuddling the commonplace with fancy verbiage. While it may seem self-evident that selling involves interaction, such a description implies a somewhat different view of the selling process than that which is generally stressed in the vast literature of this field. More importantly, some empirical studies of personal selling as interaction have begun to appear which offer some fresh insights of practical significance into a number of thorny issues of long standing.
4.1.1 The Customer-Salesman Dyad

The person primarily responsible for stimulating the current interest in salesman-prospect interaction is Franklin B. Evans. Examining a sampling of the abundant and diverse writings of practitioners on the subject of selling, Evans points out that "invariably these deal with only the salesman's point of view" [31, p. 76]. The customer is certainly not ignored in these conventional writings but the emphasis is, understandably, on how to sell and the typical discussion places the customer, at least implicitly, in a somewhat passive role. In prescribing such things as the personal characteristics required of the "successful" salesman, means of diagnosing and adapting to customers' needs, persuasive techniques, etc., salesmanship authorities naturally focus on how the salesman's behavior affects the outcome of a sales contact. As a consequence, analysis of the influence of the prospect on the process tends to be neglected.

A similar imbalance characterizes most past empirical research on personal selling which is also voluminous. As Miner has observed, "There is little question but what the salesman is one of the most extensively studied men in the business world" [74, p. 6]. The focus of attention has been on the prediction of some measure of salesman performance from information about the salesman's background characteristics and a variety of personality, interest, and ability factors measured by psychological testing instruments. The results of these attempts to discover criteria useful for recruiting and selecting
salesman have been quite mixed—sizable correlations have been reported for certain sales occupations while in numerous other studies, few of which are ever published, no meaningful relationships have been found [88]. Even for its limited intended purpose (i.e., to aid in making personnel decisions) the value of this work remains highly controversial and, as has been noted by others [74], it has contributed very little to our understanding of why or how a salesman becomes effective. In attempting to predict sales performance, this research has concentrated almost entirely on the characteristics of salesmen and has failed to take explicit account of who the salesman interacts with in attempting to make a sale. The assumption tacitly made is that differences among salesmen with respect to the types of prospects they contact are minimal, and hence variations in performance must be due to differences among the salesmen themselves. As we shall discuss below, such an assumption seems tenuous for many if not for most types of selling. In contrast, Evans argues that the unit of analysis in personal selling research should not be the salesman alone but rather the interaction dyad—the salesman-prospect pair involved in a sales encounter. He summarized his position as follows:

...the sale (or no sale) is the result of the particular interaction situation, the face-to-face contact of the given salesman and his prospect. The result of the contact depends not on the characteristics of either party alone, but how the two parties view and react to each other [32, p. 25].

4.1.2 Interpersonal Attraction

Given such an orientation, what can behavioral science suggest
about the nature of a prospect-salesman interaction and the chance of a sale being made? One source of relevant ideas is research on "interpersonal attraction" [10]. The general question motivating work by social psychologists and sociologists in this area is: why is a person attracted by certain individuals and repelled by others?

There is a considerable body of evidence to suggest that the answer lies in how "similar" the two individuals are. It has been repeatedly demonstrated in a long list of both experimental and correlational studies of such phenomena as friendship formation, mate selection, and survey interviewing that a strong positive relationship exists between interpersonal similarity and liking [12]. Various dimensions of similarity have been investigated including background characteristics (e.g., race, age, status, ethnicity), attitudes, interest, values, and personality. The proposition that similarity leads to liking can be derived from several theoretical positions such as those involving models of cognitive consistency [51, 77], and social exchange [53, 90], but most emphasize the notion that interacting with others who are similar to, or agree with oneself provides rewards or need satisfaction.

4.1.3 Salesman-Customer Similarity

Drawing upon these ideas, Evans hypothesized that "the more similar the parties in the dyad are, the more likely a favorable outcome, a sale" [31, p. 78].

Evans tested this hypothesis in a field study of life insurance selling. The latter was chosen because it represented an area where
the salesman (rather than the product offering and/or other promotion) appeared to be the critical factor determining whether or not a sale is made. A group of 86 experienced male agents were selected from three insurance firms. From records of all the face-to-face contacts they made during a four week period, a random sample of 168 sold and 183 unsold prospects was chosen. Personal interviews were conducted with the sample on the average of eleven weeks after the date of the salesman's visit. Care was taken to minimize the chance of respondents' making a connection between the sales call and the interview. Sold and unsold prospects responded to a questionnaire which covered the following classes of variables: attitudes and knowledge of life insurance and life insurance salesmen in general; attitudes and perceptions of the "last" insurance agent who had called on them; management of personal finances; demographic, background, and physical characteristics; and personality needs. Essentially the same instruments were administered to the salesmen except the agents rated themselves on scales similar to those prospects had used to describe the salesmen who had contacted them.

In general, the results supported the similarity hypothesis: the insurance agents were found to be more alike the sold than the unsold prospects. Evans demonstrated that whether or not a prospect would buy insurance from a particular agent could not be predicted in any straightforward manner solely on the basis of knowledge of the prospect's attitudinal personality, and demographic characteristics. As groups, the
sold and unsold prospects were essentially similar in all individual respects. However, when the three groups were compared to one another, the salesmen appeared to be more alike the sold prospects than the unsolds. To illustrate, the difference in mean ages between the salesmen and sold prospects was 1.2 years while that for the salesmen and unsold prospects was 2.5 years. The same pattern of results manifested itself when similar comparisons were made over a wide range of variables ranging from background and physical characteristics through personality needs. Furthermore, not only did "objective" measures of the variables indicate that the salesmen were more similar to the sold than the unsold prospects, but as well, the sold prospects tended to perceive the salesmen as more like themselves than the unsolds did.

The basic notion underlying Evans' research was that the more similar a salesman and prospect are, the greater will be their mutual attraction which, in turn, enhances the likelihood of a sale being made—i.e., the more a prospect likes a salesman, the greater the chance that the latter will be able to influence the former. The findings summarized above indicated that the probability of a sale occurring was related to salesman-prospect similarity. In addition, Evans also investigated the intervening variable, liking. As expected, sold prospects evaluated the salesmen more favorably than did the unsolds. Evans describes the differences between the sold and unsold prospects' reactions to the salesmen as follows:

The successful salesman is seen by sold prospects as (1) an
expert in insurance, (2) similar to themselves in outlook and situation, (3) as a person they'd like to know better, and (4) interested in them personally, not just as a source of revenue [32, p. xii].

The sold and unsold prospects held a common and quite negative stereotype of the "typical" insurance salesman as an aggressive, fast-talking, untrustworthy type. However, the two groups did not share the same view of the particular agents who had contacted them. Compared to the unsolds, the ratings of the particular salesmen made by sold prospects were more positive and closer to the salesmen's own evaluations of themselves. This would suggest that salesman-prospect similarity facilitated the development of a friendly, relaxed interaction. Inasmuch as Evans' study is basically a correlational one utilizing data obtained after the salesman-prospect contact had taken place, whether the sold prospects' greater liking of the salesmen preceded or followed the sale cannot be determined. Clearly, the similarity-attraction hypothesis would suggest that liking was the antecedent condition and the occurrence of the sale, the consequence. On the other hand, for a variety of reasons one would expect prospects to evaluate a salesman from whom they had bought an insurance policy more positively than one from whom they had declined to buy. For example, there is evidence that individuals tend to like persons who have influenced them [68, p. 276].

A related question about causal priorities might also be raised concerning the relationship Evans observed between perceived prospect-salesman similarity and the occurrence of a sale. Although it has been
frequently demonstrated experimentally that similarity leads to interpersonal liking, there is also a large body of evidence which indicates that persons tend to perceive others whom they like as similar to themselves [68, p. 290ff]. Thus an association between perceived similarity and attraction could reflect causation in either direction. However, Evans found that not only did the sold prospects perceive the salesmen to be more similar to themselves than the unsold prospects, but in fact they actually were when compared with respect to "objective" measures (i.e., self-description) of enduring attributes such as physical and personality characteristics which would remain unchanged before and after the sales transaction.

If one accepts the basic notion that salesman-prospect similarity affects the likelihood of a sale being made, then the practical question that naturally comes to mind is: with respect to what attributes is similarity critical? Two additional studies have been reported which provide some further support for Evans' views and are relevant to this question. Another study of life insurance selling, carried out by Gadel [43], suggests that age may be a key factor. An analysis of some 22,000 policies revealed that agents' sales tended to be concentrated among persons who were in the same age group as themselves. This concentration was greatest for young agents and tended to decrease with years of experience. If salesman-prospect similarity affects sales success, salesmen are likely to develop an awareness of this condition. To the extent that insurance agents have some latitude in choosing prospects,
one would expect them to seek out prospects similar to themselves. Clearly, their ability to do so is limited by what they can ascertain about a prospect before making a sales contact. Given the ways agents learn about prospects initially, it is probably easier to obtain a rough indication of the prospect's age and use that as a screening criterion rather than attempt to assess other personal characteristics. Of course, agents may well use more than one criterion.

A quite different aspect of customer-salesman similarity was investigated by Tosi [91] in a study of middleman selling. Here attention was focused on the extent to which customer and salesman share the same conception of the salesman's role. A group of 40 wholesale drug salesmen and 103 retail pharmacists whom the former contacted regularly were asked to indicate their perceptions of the "ideal" and "actual" behavior of salesmen on a set or predetermined scales. Difference between the salesman's and customer's responses on the "ideal" scales were taken as a measure of "role consensus"—the extent to which the salesman and customer agreed as to what the salesman's behavior should be. Discrepancies between the ideal and actual ratings given by either the salesman or the customer were used as indicators of "expectation level"—the degree to which the salesman's actual behavior was perceived to differ from that which was considered desirable.

Tosi hypothesized that both role consensus and expectation level would be related to sales performance. Two indices of the latter variable were employed: (1) the share of a given customer's business placed
with the salesman's firm and, (2) the number of other suppliers also serving the customer. Contrary to the first hypothesis, no statistically significant relationship was found between role consensus and either measure of sales success. However, the buyers' expectations levels were shown to be related to the number of suppliers they purchased from but not to the share of business the salesmen obtained. That is, the less the discrepancy between buyer's conception of the "ideal" behavior of a salesman and his perception of how the particular salesman actually conducted himself, the fewer other suppliers the customer tended to deal with. Thus it appeared that agreement between the customer and salesman as to how the salesman ought to behave did not have any bearings upon the latter's effectiveness, but the closer the salesman came to meeting the customer's expectation regarding how he should function, the fewer the number of competitors he would have to contend with.

4.1.4 Selling Strategies

The studies of Evans, Gadel, and Tosi described above dealt primarily with the relationship between salesman-prospect similarity and sales performance. All three were correlational investigations based on data obtained after the sales contacts had been made. As such, they were not well suited to uncovering much about exactly what transpired between the salesman and prospect in the course of their encounters. The interpersonal attraction theory referred to above would suggest that salesman-prospect similarity is conducive to an amicable exchange between the two parties, thereby making it more likely that the salesman
will be able to influence the prospect to buy.

Willett and Pennington [95] made a detailed study of the content of customer-salesman interactions occurring in retail stores in connection with the purchase of certain appliances. The interactions were tape recorded in a seemingly unobtrusive way and content-analyzed using the Bales Interaction Analysis [4]. Comparisons were drawn between "successful" and "unsuccessful" transactions involving 132 customers and 14 salesmen. The interactions that resulted in immediate purchases appeared to be characterized by more suggestion-seeking and giving and fewer displays of negative feelings than those interactions that were not culminated by a purchase. Although salesman-customer similarity was not examined, these data do provide evidence that interactions preceding a sale tend to be friendlier, more free-flowing exchanges than those which do not produce a purchase.

From a managerial standpoint, the important question about sales interactions is, of course, how the salesman's behavior affects the outcome. What can the salesman do to shape the course along which an interaction proceeds? Are certain selling strategies and techniques more effective than others in this regard? Consider the following problem. In selling paint to consumers, who will be more successful: the salesman who appears to customers to be more knowledgeable about using paint than they are, or, one whom customers perceive as having about the same amount of experience (or lack thereof) as themselves? At first glance most would probably opt for the prediction favoring the salesman who appeared more knowledgeable than his customers—i.e., the
more experienced a salesman is perceived as being with respect to his product, the more likely it is that he can influence a customer to buy. Besides its commonsense appeal, this proposition finds support in numerous experimental studies of communications source credibility which have demonstrated that the effectiveness of a given message in changing attitudes varies according to the amount of expertise attributed to the source of the message [54, Chapter 2]. However, application of the salesman-customer similarity hypothesis discussed earlier to this situation leads to just the opposite prediction! The amount of experience a salesman claims to have had with the product could affect the customer's perception of their similarity. For the typical consumer who is only an occasional painter, the more painting the salesman indicates he personally has done, the less similar he will appear to the novice buyer and hence, the less influence the salesman will have with the buyer.

The efficacy of these two competing factors, salesman expertise and customer-salesman similarity, was investigated in a field experiment conducted by Brock [14]. Over a five month period two part-time salesmen in the paint department of a retail store attempted to influence customers to purchase paint at a different price level than that which they initially selected. After a consumer indicated that he wished to buy a given amount of some variety of paint at a particular price, the salesman tried to alter his choice by delivering one of two predetermined appeals. Half the time the salesmen represented themselves as being similar to customers by emphasizing that the magnitude of their
own recent paint consumption was the same as the amount being purchased by the customer. For the other half of the cases the dissimilar or "expert" condition was applied by having the salesmen portray themselves as having just used twenty times the quantity of paint the consumer planned to buy. Attempts were made to influence some customers to buy at higher prices and others at lower prices than they originally intended. The results indicated that similarity was more important than expertise. While the dissimilar salesman was presumably perceived as more knowledgeable about paint, he was less effective than the salesman who identified his own paint consumption as being similar to that of his customers. The differential effectiveness of the two approaches held up over attempts to persuade consumers to buy higher as well as lower priced paints.

Central to the view of selling as interpersonal interaction is the proposition that the more a prospect likes a salesman, the greater the influence the salesman will have on the prospect. This would imply that ingratiating consumers should be an effective selling tactic. Farley and Swinth [36] performed an experiment bearing on this matter. The main purpose of the study was to compare the impact of two different sales messages for a roll-up yardstick. One message, dubbed the "product pitch," emphasized a description and demonstration of the product's features. The other, a "personal pitch," featured a favorable personal discussion of the customer's role and stressed how the product was compatible with it. A group of 87 females served as subjects—about a third
were undergraduates and the remainder were housewives. After hearing one of the presentations, subjects chose between the product and an equivalent sum of money ($0.75) and then rated the product and the salesman on a number of scales. The percentage choosing the yardstick over the money was slightly greater for the group hearing the personal rather than the product pitch. However, the difference was not statistically significant.

Paradoxically, subjects exposed to the product pitch evaluated both the product and the salesman more positively than those receiving the personal pitch. Regardless of which sales presentation they heard, those selecting the product had more favorable attitudes toward the product and the salesman than those who chose to take the money. Here again, the design of the study did not permit the direction of causal relations between attitudes and choice to be untangled. As Farley and Swinth note, the results suggest that an effective sales appeal alters the buyer's perception of the attractiveness of the product and the salesman and, hence, both considerations require attention in designing sales messages.

4.1.5 Implications

We began this section by suggesting that personal selling might be fruitfully viewed as salesman-prospect interaction. One stream of research from the small groups field was identified as being especially relevant to the problem of understanding the determinants of effective salesman performance—that dealing with the subject of interpersonal
attraction. Applying the core idea of this work to personal selling suggests that the greater the similarity between a salesman and a prospect, the more the prospect will like the salesman and, therefore, the greater the salesman's influence. We then reviewed a handful of empirical studies that embrace the interactionist view of selling within the framework of this proposition. While the number of investigations available is limited and various kinds of methodological questions can be raised about them, significant relationships between several aspects of customer-salesman similarity and buying have been reported with considerable but by no means total regularity. Much remains to be learned about why and under what conditions this relationship occurs. For example, it would be useful to consider how not only similarity, but also complimentarity between salesmen and customers is related to sales success. While the old adage that "birds of a feather flock together" seems plausible enough, is there not also something to that other oft-repeated maxim about "opposites attracting?" In pursuing such questions the available behavioral literature should prove useful as a source of ideas for conditional propositions which can be tested so as to refine our knowledge about where a certain relationship does or does not hold. A theory of interpersonal congruency has been proposed which suggests that under certain circumstances attraction will be facilitated by dissimilarities as well as similarities [72, pp. 629-631].

Research has scarcely begun on the question of how and to what
extent the salesman can influence and/or control the direction a sales interaction takes. Nonetheless, Brock's provocative experiment dealing with customer-salesman similarity with respect to product experience is indicative of how a nonobvious relationship involving an important control variable suggested by the similarity-attraction hypothesis can be studied in a natural sales setting.

An intriguing question raised by Brock's study is in what types of selling situations will it be more effective to stress salesman-customer differences rather than similarities with respect to product expertise? Here again, the behavioral literature can offer some relevant insights. Recently a review has appeared which attempts to integrate research on interpersonal similarity and attraction with that bearing on source credibility and attitude change [87].

Having discussed research on sales interactions at some length, we may now consider what practical implications it may have. This work is relevant to several aspects of sales force management.

1. Sales Force Recruitment, Selection and Manpower Planning

Evans has pointed out that the notion that the outcome of a sales contact depends on customer-prospect similarity casts doubt on the usefulness of much research and practice in the area of salesman recruitment and selection which is aimed at identifying a successful "sales type" [32]. If a firm's potential customers are appreciably more heterogeneous than its sales force, it may be effectively excluding itself from penetrating certain market segments. Gadel [43] has described how
simple models of the size and composition of a sales force can be structured for manpower planning purposes to assure that the sales force will be matched to the markets they serve with respect to key characteristics.

2. Sales Training

Training for salesmen should focus on helping them develop the special skills they require to be effective in interacting with prospects [93]. For example, a familiarity with existing knowledge about how we develop perceptions of others might enable salesmen to discriminate better among prospects. That there is much room for improvement in this area is suggested by data reported by Granbois and Willett [46]. They found that salesmen failed to perceive as ready to buy, 69 percent of appliance shoppers who had previously indicated that they had definite purchasing plans. Salesmen might be taught more reliable procedures for identifying the prospect status of shoppers.

3. Allocating Salesmen to Customers

Evans has made a number of suggestions as to how a closer match between the characteristics of salesmen and prospects might be effected in the life insurance field. For example, a salesman who uncovers a prospect quite unlike himself could turn over the lead to another salesman who is more similar to the prospect and would have a better chance of making a sale. The notion that salesmen should be "compatible" with the customers they serve is certainly not new [88] but knowledge of what dimensions of similarity and differences are critical in particular types of selling might lead to improved matchings.
The research reviewed above was primarily concerned with customer-salesman interaction and sales performance. We next consider some work in which selling is viewed as a process of influence and an attempt is made to apply behavioral knowledge about this phenomena to problems of personal selling.

4.2 Selling as Interpersonal Influence

Influencing others via verbal communications is the salesman's basic stock in trade. At the same time, the study of communication and persuasion has long represented one of the major areas of interest to social psychologists. In light of this, one might expect to find that the large body of behavioral science theory and research findings on this subject would have found considerable use in dealing with problems of personal selling. While general discussions of "selling as communication" are readily available [93], and so-called "principles of persuasion" are sometimes presented in sales training programs (1), the diligent reader of the marketing literature would be hard pressed to come up with a very extensive list of systematic applications of behavioral science knowledge about influence to issues of real concern to practitioners in the field of personal selling. Rather than belaboring the reasons for this state of affairs, we prefer to accentuate the positive. Fortunately, some examples of the productive utilization of behavioral science research on influence processes are available and an examination of some of this work will serve to illustrate what behavioral scientists have to say about persuasion and how these ideas
can be brought to bear on selling problems.

4.2.1 Using Group Pressure To Overcome Buyer Resistance

The most sophisticated and creative application of behavioral research on influence processes to personal selling that has come to our attention is a program developed by Jacoba Varela, a consultant in Uruguay. The selling problem tackled was that faced by an upholstery firm in marketing fabrics to retailers. The firm's sales objectives conflicted with the established buying habits of both consumers and retailers. The product being promoted was ready-made curtains. Traditionally however, Uruguayan housewives had their curtains custom made. The firm's efforts to sell retailers in the fall also ran contrary to the latter's customary practice of selecting new fabrics only in the spring. Furthermore, economic conditions were extremely adverse. Severe inflation had led to stringent government policies to curb consumer spending. To deal with this difficult set of circumstances Varela designed a very elaborate and extensive selling program based on a number of concepts and propositions borrowed from social psychological research on influence. A few aspects of this work can be described here.

One phase of Varela's program made use of the results of Asch's classic experiments on group pressure and conformity referred to earlier [3]. Such an experiment would surely seem to be a prime candidate for the "interesting buy irrelevant" category as far as suggesting anything applicable to personal selling. The subjects
(college undergraduates), setting (artificial and highly controlled), and task (judging line length) bear little resemblance to selling curtains. Yet, the sales situation was skillfully manipulated so that it essentially became a simulation of Asch's laboratory setting. Rather than have the company's salesmen sell the retailers in their stores, prospective buyers were invited to the company's offices. Buyers came in small groups. In the firm's own showroom, various facilities could be used which enabled the product line to be presented far more effectively than would have been possible in the retailer's stores. As an item was being presented, the salesman made an assessment of how favorably impressed each of the prospective buyers was with the product. The salesmen had been trained to scan buyers' facial expressions and look for other cues that might reflect evaluations of the product. The buyer appearing most favorable was then asked for his opinion of the product and encouraged to explain why his reaction was positive. By this process the buyer was led to commit himself gradually and finally asked to place an order.

In the meantime, the salesmen had been on the alert looking for indications of how the other buyers were reacting. The buyer identified as being next most positive was asked to express his views and the whole process was repeated. Thus, the salesmen proceeded from the most to the least positive buyer and thereby taking advantage of the opportunity of bringing to bear on those initially unfavorable the pressure of their peers with more positive attitudes. In line with Asch's
experimental results, a large percentage of resistant buyers are reported to have been successfully converted by this approach.

What has been described above represents only one phase of a much larger program developed by Varela which involved the ingenious use of numerous facets of social psychological knowledge about influence. For example, attention was given to the nontrivial persuasive task of convincing the retailer to come to the firm's showroom in the first place. To reduce their opposition, an approach referred to as the "foot-in-the-door technique" was used. Freedman and Fraser [40] demonstrated in two field experiments that once a person has carried out a small request, he is more likely to comply with a larger one. Hence, before inviting the retailers to the showroom, Varela had the salesmen ask the retailers to display a small sign in their stores. If they agreed to this small favor, when the salesman returned a week later he asked them to come to the showroom. Having once made a small commitment to the salesman, the retailer was more likely to take the next, larger step on the path leading to a sale that had been carefully laid by Varela. The last phase of the selling strategy was aimed at developing their long-run loyalty. Techniques suggested by research on "immunizing" persons against counterpersuasion [73, pp. 258-265] were employed in an effort to reduce the retailer's susceptibility to the promotion of competitors. From all indications the total campaign developed by Varela was highly successful. Large sales increases were realized despite unfavorable economic conditions.
4.2.2 The Influence of Company Reputation on Salesman Effectiveness

An example of a somewhat different use of research on communication and influence processes may be found in Levitt's experimental study of the role of company reputation in industrial selling [63]. The basic issue studied by Levitt was whether the evaluations of a new product made by those involved in the purchase decision process of industrial organizations are influenced by the general attitudes they hold toward the producing firm. Industrial marketers have long debated the value of expenditures on such activities as media campaigns undertaken for purposes of building a favorable corporate image. One rationale sometime put forth in support of such programs is that they make buyers more receptive to the firm's salesmen. Implementing the elaborate kind of experimental design needed to measure such an effect would be extremely difficult in an industrial market—especially in the absence of a model of the process to help guide the researcher in deciding what effects to look for. Levitt developed a framework for analyzing this problem using concepts suggested by communications research on the influence of source credibility on communications effectiveness [5]. He then carried out a laboratory experiment which enabled him to achieve the degree of control required to study the problem.

As we noted in the earlier discussion of salesmen-customer similarity, it has been shown in a number of experiments that the same message will produce more attitude change when it is ascribed to a source of high rather than low credibility. Competence and trustworthiness
are the components of credibility that have been manipulated in these studies [73, pp. 182-187]. Levitt suggests that the effectiveness of an industrial salesman will be influenced by the general reputation buyers hold of the firm he represents much in the same way that source credibility affects the impact of an impersonal communication. In the parlance of communications research, the salesman is the communicator, the presentation he delivers is the message, and the firm for whom he sells is the source. A second factor considered by Levitt was the quality of the salesman's presentation. He was interested, for example, in the question of whether a high quality sales presentation made by a salesman from a lesser known firm could be as effective as a lesser quality sales promotion made by a salesman from a better known firm. The final factor examined was the recipient of the sales effort.

Levitt reasoned that persons in various management roles who became involved in the purchase decision process (purchasing agents and technical personnel) would evaluate a new product from different frames of reference and hence might be differentially affected by a given message from a given source. Thus, the overall impact of the salesman was hypothesized to be dependent upon the source he represents (company reputation), the quality of his sales presentation, and the type of audience he deals with (technical versus purchasing personnel).

The experimental test of these ideas involved exposing subjects to one of four versions of a ten minute filmed sales presentation for a fictitious but plausible new product (a paint ingredient). In one
version the salesman gave a careful, professional ("good") presenta-
tion while in the other the same salesman delivered a less polished
("poor") presentation. Company reputation was manipulated by varying
the name of the firm which the salesman was identified as representing.
A significant feature of the study was that experienced business per-
sonnel were used as subjects. A group of 113 practicing purchasing
agents and 130 engineers and scientists participated in the experiment.
Immediately after viewing the film and again five weeks later, subjects
filled out a questionnaire which asked, among other things, (1) whether
they would recommend that the product be given further consideration
by others in their organizations, and (2) would they favor adoption of
the product if such a decision were theirs to make. Levitt suggests
that the decision implied in the second question involves more risk
than that connected with the first. The expected effects of company
reputation and quality of the sales presentation were observed with
regard to the willingness of both the purchasing agents and the tech-
nical personnel to recommend the product to others. However, for the
riskier choice of whether or not to adopt the product, the pattern of
results was more complex. The intriguing finding that emerged was that
company reputation influenced the propensity of technical personnel to
adopt the product but not that of the purchasing agents. Levitt offers
two possible explanations for this unexpected result. It is possible
that as a result of being frequently exposed to salesmen, purchasing
agents become sophisticated in judging products from sales presentations
and learn to "discount" the effect of company reputation. Alternatively, it may simply be that the purchasing agent wishes to encourage competition among his suppliers and in so doing may tend to favor less well-known companies. The principal implication would seem to be that a seller's reputation makes a difference to a salesman in getting a favorable first hearing for a new product with both purchasing and technical personnel but when it comes to making an actual purchase decision, the advantage of a good reputation only obtains with technical personnel.

4.3 Discussion

The above examples serve to illustrate two of the ways in which behavioral research on influence processes can be useful in dealing with selling problems. Levitt's study represents the kind of application which results in a better understanding of a previously ill-structured problem. The findings bearing on the differential responsiveness of the purchasing and technical personnel are examples of the kind of suggestive new insights which such efforts may produce. Follow-up research is needed to test and refine these ideas further. In Varela's work, we saw an application of a different order. There behavioral concepts were used to develop specific, operational selling procedures that apparently worked. This type of immediate and direct application rarely occurs. In assessing the applicability of behavioral science research findings to practical problems a question frequently asked is whether the results produced in the comfort and control of a psycholog-
ical laboratory can be extrapolated to the complexity of the real world. Perhaps the lesson worth remembering from Varela's work is that we should also consider what opportunities there may be to arrange our real world problem situation so that it begins to resemble the laboratory setting where our knowledge is more certain.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In the beginning section of this chapter, we attempted to convey to the reader what the term small group means to behavioral scientists and indicate how they have approached the subject. Attention was focused on the kinds of structural properties and processes with which behavioral science research on small groups has been concerned. We described how interpersonal influence depended on both the resources controlled by the influencer and the needs of the influencee. The multiple bases of social power were also discussed. Two components of small groups were then reviewed. The first of these—norms—relates to shared expectations about the appropriate behavior for each individual and for all group members. When norms relate to things in the outside world they serve as a social support for individual attitudes. A second component—communication—was discussed in terms of both form (who talks to whom) and content (who says what).

Following this overview of the small group field, we then examined how such knowledge has been used in marketing. Two areas of application were discussed at some length: family purchase decision making and personal selling. Viewing the family as a small group, we saw how
concepts borrowed from sociological research have been used to analyze and investigate the relative influence of husband and wife in purchase decisions. The available research indicates that the answer to this seemingly straightforward question is quite complex: it depends on several factors—the product, the particular stage in the decision process, and certain characteristics of husbands and wives. The immediate implication seems to be that of discouraging marketing strategies based upon gross generalizations about which spouse decides. Developing more positive recommendations, such as some type of segmentation strategies based upon family influence types, will require much additional work in the areas of modeling, data collection, and analysis in order to evaluate the practical feasibility of different approaches.

The discussion of personal selling indicated the possibility of bringing knowledge about small group processes more directly to bear on specific operating problems in marketing. Research on interpersonal similarity and attraction suggested a set of variables and relationships that not only appear relevant to understanding variability in salesman's performance but also have some immediate implications for policies with respect to the selection, training, and allocation of salesmen. Examples were also given where concepts borrowed from social-psychological research on influence processes had been used to analyze problems pertaining to selling strategies and to develop operational methods for solving them.

For what types of operating problems is small group research rel-
evant? In the broadest sense, it is useful to marketing in those situations where the particular behavior or outcome of interest involves group processes. Simply recognizing that the appropriate unit of analysis is a group rather than an individual or a complex influence process rather than a socially-isolated purchase decision, can be of substantial help in formulating marketing strategies. For example, we earlier stressed the importance of viewing the family as the relevant decision making and consumption unit for many consumer goods. This is particularly critical when considering questions of market segmentation. Often attempts have been made to relate measures of purchasing behavior, which in fact reflect family activity, to information about the attitudes and characteristics of individual family members. Failure to maintain consistency in this regard is probably one of the major reasons for the disappointing results produced by so much of this work. These considerations are also germane to industrial marketing problems. Here again, the typical emphasis has been on determining who in a customer's organization "influences" and who "decides" purchases. As has been the case in the consumer field, little systematic attention has been paid to the multidimensional nature of industrial purchase decision making or to the dynamics of the process. Finally, the area perhaps most amenable to small group analysis is that of personal selling. Interpersonal interaction and influence are the very essence of selling and these are processes which behavioral scientists have focused their attention on in studying small groups. The previous discussion attempted
to show how a small portion of this work could be used to deal with a variety of selling and sales force management problems, including manpower planning, recruitment, selection, and allocation, and the development of specific selling methods.

How can the real potential of this research be realized in marketing? While small group theory offers marketers a certain amount of material that is potentially useful to them, the utilization of such knowledge is not a simple task. As a first step, marketing research studies need to incorporate small group research considerations on a continuing basis. In order to accomplish this successfully, marketing reasearchers must recognize two critical ingredients. The first are the skills and knowledge of what Guetzkow refers to as a "social engineer or middleman"—"someone who knows how to transform basic knowledge into usable forms" [47, p. 77]. An unusual combination of talents is needed to perform this role effectively. On the one hand, such a person must have the training and background that gives him a firm grasp of a broad range of behavioral science subject matter. On the other hand, he must be of both a creative and practical bent if he is to be able to interact with management personnel and identify their problems. The other element needed is the kind of problem oriented, programmatic approach to applying behavioral science notions to real world problems which Ray has proposed with reference to advertising [81]. To assure relevance, the starting point is a search for applicable behavioral science knowledge. The key variables of the problem must be identified
in theoretical terms and a model selected which interrelates them. Insofar as possible, the latter should take the form of conditional propositions (or "microtheoretical notions")—statements which not only describe relationships between variables but also specify qualifying or limiting conditions. Following that stage comes empirical testing and estimation and this involves a gradual movement from highly controlled (e.g., laboratory) to more natural (e.g., field) research settings. The final steps are prediction, implementation, and monitoring of results. Difficulties encountered at any stage require a recycling of activities. By such a systematic approach one hopes to avoid the failures and disappointments which plague efforts to transfer knowledge from the realm of behavioral science to the real world.

Most of the applications described in this chapter (with the exception of Varela's work) represent efforts at the beginning or middle stages of Ray's scheme. The task ahead is to carry forward through the subsequent stages those promising ideas that appear to have some practical payoff.
FOOTNOTES

1 The word group is commonly used in a statistical sense as, for example, when respondents are grouped together on various demographic characteristics. Since these groupings usually do not possess a "consciousness-of-kind" [11] and hence do not have any direct influence on the individual, they have been excluded from this discussion.

2 Of course, such work is relevant to problems of marketing management involving organizational considerations. See [71].

3 For an example of an exception to this statement, see [60].

4 This discussion is based on a scheme developed by Jackson [55].

5 Continuing to add group members to the majority rapidly reaches a point of diminishing returns once more than a few group members have unanimously stated a position. In fact, larger groups are more likely to have subgroups, with the possibility of norm conflict and less conformity to the larger group.

6 The distinction between form and content was first set forth by Hare [48].

7 For a comprehensive review article on household spending behavior, see Ferber [37].

8 It is possible that biases in the questions asked account for some of the discrepancy between the Learner and N.O.P. studies. For example, what woman considers herself to be a good wife would want to admit that her husband's brand comments are not important to her? In the same way, husbands who view themselves as being responsible for important decisions (either real or imagined), may not admit that they are concerned with the choice of such "mundane" things as brands of peanut butter and shampoo.

9 See, for example, Henry [52]. For an opposing view on this issue, see Lazarsfeld [61].

10 For a recent review of some of this work, see [23].

11 One of the methods for evaluating salesmen reported to be highly successful many years ago was a mechanical device (the "interaction chronograph") which recorded the time pattern of responses of a subject as he interacted with an observer in a standardized interview. Measurements obtained in this fashion were found to correlate highly with sales of
department store and industrial sales personnel [17, 18]. Interestingly, the interaction chronograph was viewed as a method for measuring personality characteristics.

12 Extensive reviews of various aspects of this literature are available. See [13; 15; 66; 68, esp. pp. 496-509; 72, esp. pp. 621-637].

13 Only a brief, preliminary account of this work has appeared in the literature [31]. An extensive report of the study's details and results are found in a lengthy monograph which regrettably has yet to be published [32]. We have relied on the latter source here.

14 The salesmen's expectation level was also significantly related to the number of suppliers but in a nonlinear manner.

15 A number of short, highly readable accounts of this research are available. See [9, 57, 97]. Undoubtedly, the best and most complete review of the field is McGuire [73].

16 This discussion is based on descriptions of Varela's work given in [38 and 97, pp. 114-122].
REFERENCES


25. Cox, Donald F. ed., Risk Taking and Information Handling in Consumer Behavior, Division of Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, Boston, Mass.: Harvard University, 1967.


63. Levitt, Theodore. Industrial Purchasing Behavior, Boston: Harvard University, Division of Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, 1965.


67. Lombard, George F. *Behavior in a Selling Group*, Boston: Harvard University, Division of Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, 1955.


