



Accounting at home: some interdisciplinary perspectives

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Abstract *The paper explores the potentialities for accounting research on the household, individual and family. It is suggested that the home has not been construed in accounting as an arena worthy of academic study due to the preoccupation with concerns in the glamorised and professional world of the "public". Yet, the social and behavioural implications of the practice of accounting in the home are potentially as profound as they are in institutions which inhabit the public domain. The paper presents a series of vignettes of the manner in which issues pertaining to accounting and accountability have engaged practitioners in other disciplines. It attempts to reveal interfaces between accountants and students of the home drawn from history, law, personal finance, economics and statistics, and sociology. Argues that the accounting academy has a significant contribution to make in the "explosion" of research activity on household-family systems in their contemporary and historical perspectives. Such participation would also enrich our understanding of accounting as a social and institutional practice.*

Introduction

In romanticist literature home is where the heart is. Home is a haven, a place of repose, and the scene for the enjoyment of the pleasures of family life. But the home is also a *locus* of production and consumption, of the exercise of power and the scene of conflict. It is a place where the simplicity of the romantic ideal co-exists with the practicalities of resource generation and distribution, of making ends meet and dealing with social relationships between family members. Given the complex realities of managing a household it is not surprising to discover that the home is a place where we may locate the performance of rational practices such as accounting, and where we may identify manifold structures of accountability.

As a site where social and reproductive, as well as economic functions are performed accounting at home assumes a distinctive character. This was recognised at the opening of the twentieth century by Charles Waldo Haskins, President of the New York State Society of CPAs and Dean of the School of Commerce, Accounting and Finance at New York University (Haskins & Sells, 1984, p. 4). In 1903 Haskins wrote a popular work entitled *How to Keep Household Accounts*. In this book Haskins recognised that his subject-matter could not be confined to a treatise on calculative techniques. Given the site in which household or "fireside accounting" was practised, accounting at home

necessarily embraced not only domestic economy, finance and management, but also “the other sciences of social life” (p. v).

Unlike most of his contemporaries Haskins recognised that accounting and finance were not exclusive to the public or “exterior” world of political economy. These subjects were also essential features of that “interior” home life which sustained “important relations to welfare” and sustained contemporary morality (pp. 9-10). However, such observations have not induced more recent generations of accounting scholars to investigate the practice and behavioural implications of accounting in the home. Despite the periodic exhortations of commentators such as Fagerberg (1954), who argued that it was “high time . . . that a rationale and philosophy be developed concerning the accounts of individuals” (p. 355), the application of accounting technologies by individuals and families in the private realm of the household has been subsumed by the preoccupation with accounting in public organisations. This is despite the engagement in the public arena of those who inhabit the home and the fact that the management techniques and accounting systems which are prescribed for the domestic scene are invariably emulative of those practised in business (Allen, 1977, p. 23; Allen, 1973, p. 16; Clark and Swaine, 1981, p. 10; Crary *et al.*, 1980, pp. 30, 40; Franklin, 1980, p. 14; Grimshaw, 1970, p. 9; Norling *et al.*, 1989, p. 52; Phillips and Lane, 1980, p. 29; Wiley, 1986, p. 3; Worth, 1974, pp. 9, 18; Wright, 1988, p. 20).

The authors of works on money management place accounting and finance at the centre of household arrangements and implicate their practice in the preservation of family cohesion and domestic tranquillity. As will be shown in this paper, expense budgeting is commonly advocated for use in the home along with the calculation and monitoring of personal and familial net worth. Yet, the impact on family relationships and spousal accountabilities of budgetary controls, participation in the budgeting process, financial planning, the compilation, use and interpretation of primary financial statements, and the determination of financial targets, continue to receive little attention from the accounting academy.

This limited attention to the home by accountants is at variance with the concerns of those in related disciplines. Once perceived as a “black box” (Pahl, 1989, p. 4; Wheelock, 1990), the household is now established as a major site for research activity among social scientists. It is recognised that the control and management of financial resources in the home are central to understanding the household economy, gender roles, and the distribution of power between spouses (Morris, 1990, p. 21). Despite the obvious interfaces with their own subject-matter accounting scholars have displayed little interest in the household. Since the early nineteenth century there has been an enormous output of didactic literature on accounting in the home. Yet, the accounting practices prescribed therein are accorded little significance in the production of knowledge in academic accounting.

Not all subscribers to the accounting academy have disregarded the home. Students of social accounting encounter the household though their concern

with that institution is relatively peripheral. Micro-social accounting, for example, focuses on measuring, reporting and evaluating the impact of corporations on the environment. Those who investigate micro-social accounting tend not to descend below the “entrepreneurial” level of analysis. Macro-social accounting has traditionally been preoccupied with the measurement and disclosure of the “state of the nation” and of evaluating governmental performance. The home is usually encompassed within macro-social accounting systems due to the need to capture household production in national accounts (Juster *et al.*, 1981). Gambling (1974, pp. 177-83) has elucidated a hierarchical model of societal accounting which integrates the “mini accounts” of households into micro accounts, which, in turn, feed into macro accounts. It is argued in the current paper that the “mini” arena in which accounting is practised is deserving of distinctive academic scrutiny as opposed to comprising a “satellite” of a more grandiose schema of calculation.

There are some recent indications that accounting scholars are becoming alert to the potential for examining accountings and accountabilities in the home. Hopwood (1994) suggested the greater investigation of accounting in everyday life and culture. Miller (1995) focused attention on accounting as social and institutional practice. The household is an obvious site for research into the manner in which accounting is constitutive of, and is implicated in, social practices and daily routines. This theme provided the inspiration for work by Llewellyn and Walker (1997) and Walker (1998). In her contribution on accounting and the self-employed Boden (1999) has also urged the pursuit of micro-level analyses by making “a plea for the individual” in accounting research.

These initiatory contributions reveal that even if the household under advanced capitalism is not the scene for the emergence of technical innovation in accounting, the craft is prescribed in sites where the social and behavioural implications of its usage are potentially as profound as they are in the institutions which occupy the public world. The literature surrounding this hitherto invisible accounting, though often buried in personal finance and domestic management manuals, may have been as voluminous as the instructional texts prepared for students aspiring to enter the public vocation of accounting. It is also notable that questions pertaining to accounting and accountability at home have tended to occupy the attention of parties outside the accounting academy, rather than those engaged in the *métier* itself.

The object of this paper is to illuminate some cognate interfaces between accounting and other disciplines where the domestic arena and its inhabitants are established as significant *loci* for research. The potentialities for accounting research are revealed by presenting a series of vignettes of how accounting in the family and household features in history, the law, personal finance, economics and sociology. The paper attempts to reveal how practitioners in these disciplines encounter issues in accounting. Although most of the illustrations presented here are drawn from the UK experience, this is not intended to suggest that research on accounting at home be confined to this or

other mature industrial societies. Indeed, forms of accounting in both literate and pre-literate, developing and developed countries are likely to display considerable variety given their foundation in the diversity of economic, moral, cultural, legal and social structures and practices of communities and nations.

Prior to embarking on an exploration of these interdisciplinary perspectives, some further observations are offered on the comparative neglect of accounting at home.

Perceptions of the household as a private, non-contributory arena

The interests of accounting academics have traditionally been conditioned by the need to affirm the legitimacy of their presence in schools of advanced learning. This has involved displaying the accounting discipline as fundamental to the workings of the modern economy and emphasising its vocational relevance. The application and consequences of accounting techniques in the public domain serve to enhance the achievement of the desired persona. For most of the twentieth century a concern with the trivialities of the micro setting was unlikely to enhance claims that accounting was a rigorous discipline within the business, economics and law faculties of academic institutions.

As Fagerberg recognised in 1954, personal accounting has been relegated because accountants have “been preoccupied with measuring the capital and income of the producing unit, the business enterprise” (p. 355). The research concerns of academic accountants and the content of the curriculum have reflected accounting as performed by the profession and its practice in the most visible sites of productive activity. The professionalisation of accounting is pertinent here due to the equating of “public practice” with professional practice. Despite the involvement of earlier generations of accountants in work such as trusts, executries and estates which necessarily engaged practitioners with the private domain (Walker, 1993), histories of practice have traditionally emphasised forms of work, such as audit, insolvency and the provision of services to management, which suggest the utility of accounting in the public economy. Before the First World War in particular, the stature of cost accounting suffered from the fact that its practitioners performed tasks as employees inside the factory (Loft, 1986). Such attitudes are still prevalent in the vocation today. The acquisition of a high profile clientele reflects on market strength and the professional qualities of the successful firm. Compare the differential allure imparted on the practitioner and his firm by corporate as opposed to personal taxation work, the audit of the listed company compared to that of the sole trader, the award of lustrous receiverships and liquidations relative to personal bankruptcies.

Not unrelated to these points but on a more esoteric level, the neglect of accounting in the micro arena can also be understood in the context of an assumption that the modern household is not a scene of productive activity. This implies that household accounting practices are marginal and outside the realms of “proper” accounting. While accounting at home remains beyond the

boundaries of academic concern the constitutive power of the calculation performed there goes unrecognised. Non-economic thinking about the household on the part of the accounting academy (and more widely in society) also ignores the contribution of the household to the modern economy. The extent to which the home is marginalised in accounting as part of the private sphere of existence and is assumed to be a site of consumption rather than production is at variance with the attention it receives in the popular literature on personal finance, and among historians, lawyers, economists and sociologists.

Personal finance, accounting and rationalism in everyday life

Prescriptive literature on household accounting and personal finance invariably advocate accounting as an aid to betterment and the construction of an orderly and composed existence. Money management systems are often advanced for individuals and families as “part of the art of living” (Allen, 1973, p. 16). As Fagerberg recognised, and Haskins before him, personal accounting has a pervasive social and behavioural significance in everyday life. Its practice serves “to strengthen economic morality, self-reliance and discipline. The greatest social contribution of personal accounting ... is that it symbolises Social Rule No. 1 to Unit No. 1, which is: First, put your own house in order” (1954, p. 364).

Home accounting techniques

The instructional literature offers a variety of accounting prescriptions. Almost all texts stress the importance of defining personal or family objectives as the precursor to the pursuit of a strategic approach to finance. This is enabled by the construction of a balance-sheet, the statement of current net worth of the individual or family (de Haas and Lovejoy, 1994, p. 15; Jennings, 1996, p. 16; Norling *et al.*, 1989, p. 84; Pridham, 1988, p. 7; Worth, 1974, pp. 18-30). Financial and personal tangible assets are to be stated in the net worth statement at realisable values and when their total is added to expected lifetime earnings a measure is gained of “the total sum of economic value available to that individual for personal financial planning” (Crary *et al.*, 1980, p. 20). Annual (or more frequent) statements of net worth are prescribed in order to perform periodic “wealthchecks” (Jennings, 1996, p. 16). These statements of financial position comprise “a barometer of wealth-building progress” (Wiley, 1986, p. 5; Phillips and Lane, 1980, p. 37).

The preparation and composition of personal or family balance-sheets raises questions about asset recognition and measurement, subjects which more commonly occupy the attention of accountants concerned with corporate financial reporting:

It is interesting that the tangible possessions of a family are traditionally listed on a net-worth statement, but the most important assets of the family are not, namely the human resources. Should the lifetime earning potential of workers and the value of the services rendered within the home be included in the net-worth statement of a family? (Nickell *et al.*, 1976, p. 283).

Budgeting is the most commonly prescribed accounting technique for the household. Budgeting is advocated in order to plan and control spending, to identify where excessive expenditure has occurred, to "make ends meet", to discourage impulse buys, to alert the household manager to the possibility of sinking into debt, to reveal the scope for savings and investment, to foster the management skills of family members, and, to ensure that short-term income and expenditure patterns are congruent with the achievement of long-term goals (Bremner 1988, p. 496; Crary *et al.*, 1980, p. 693; Dibben, 1984, p. 8; Gundry, 1975, p. 9; Hancock, 1979, pp. 9-10; Munnion, 1969, p. 1; McGlone and Metland, 1984, p. 207; Nickell *et al.*, 1976, pp. 319-20; Potter, 1972, p. 11).

The systems of budget administration prescribed in instructional texts range in complexity. At their simplest, they comprise the recording of weekly incomings and outgoings on postcards (Gundry, 1975, p. 10), in exercise books (Baws, 1983, p. 10), in diaries (*Good Housekeeping Diary and Account Book* 1996, 1995) or "budget books" issued by banks or credit unions (*Budgeting*, n.d.; Franklin, 1980, p. 19). More sophisticated systems of personal finance and household management encompass the identification of expense categories (selected from lists provided) (Phillips and Lane, 1980, pp. 37-50), the preparation of annual budgets, the rigorous analysis of monthly receipts and payments, the collection and analysis of time use data on the performance of household tasks (Oppenheim, 1976, pp. 94-105), regular bank reconciliations (Parry, 1992), the preparation of annual income statements (Tolfree, 1986, p. 140; Wiley, 1986, pp. 8-11), actual-budget comparisons (Hancock, 1979, p. 11), the monthly and annual review of spending patterns, and the determination of budget revisions (Jennings, 1996, p. 160, Whitehorn, 1983, pp. 30-33). For such purposes 16-column cash books, personal finance packs or spreadsheets are deemed appropriate.

In recent times the owners of personal computers have been able to supplant their manual systems of household accounts by home finance software. Applications such as *Microsoft Money* and *Quicken* offer new dimensions to household accounting and the relationships between those family members who input and use financial data (*The Times*, 23 July 1997). The sophistication of computerised accounting packages expands the bounds of accounting in the home. Their capacity to perform transactions processing, conduct complex analyses of data and generate a myriad reports on spending patterns, cash flows, movements in net worth, forecasting, investment planning and the achievement of financial goals, suggest new incursions by accounting into the home. This electronic interface for domestic accounting offers new potentialities for inter-spousal accountabilities, conflicts and co-operation. The possibility of differentials in computer literacy among family members where household accounting is performed via electronic media is suggestive of new gendered and knowledge-based sources of power and control over domestic financial management. These are subjects which merit the attention of accounting academics.

The virtues of accounting at home

Budgeting is frequently advocated as “an essential part of everyday life” (*Budgeting*, n.d., p. 1): a technique which facilitates control over the financial destiny of the individual or the family (*Budgeting*, n.d., p. 20). Financial planning, the control and management of family assets, and the domestic budgetary process are construed as participatory and an important element in the achievement of collective family goals (Nickell *et al.*, 1976, p. 274; Oppenheim, 1976, p. 131). In these ways budgeting is considered to facilitate homely tranquillity and companionate marriage. Conversely, the absence of domestic accounting and money management may result in intra-family conflict due to the consequences of the pursuit of diverse and uncoordinated financial strategies by family members. The rational planning of domestic resources is perceived in the personal finance literature as a preventive against the disruption and emotional trauma which is associated with personal insolvency:

Sometimes, a person must learn that budgeting is wise and necessary. This is seen through the depths to which some families have fallen for lack of budgeting. There are persons whose poor money management has driven them so far into debt that they are threatened constantly by irate creditors and landlords. Financial difficulties often lead to ulcers, loss of friends, and divorce (Phillips and Lane, 1980, p. 36).

The role of accounting at home as a panacea for domestic ills centres on the premiss that “financial matters can be the crab grass in the lawn of life” (Norling *et al.*, 1989, p. 6; Jennings, 1996, p. 17). An inability to control money “often leads to difficulties, anxiety and even illness” (Hancock, 1979, p. 10): “disputes over money are said to figure more prominently in marriage breakdowns than problems of sex” (Gundrey, 1975, p. 21; Allen, M., 1977, p. 21). Recent studies seem to confirm that money is the principal source of conflict between spouses in the UK, particularly in low income households (*The Times*, 12 February 1998).

By contrast, sound financial management has long been deemed pivotal to emotional wellbeing and marital stability (Wyn, 1974). One guide to personal finance written in 1925 noted that social workers had discovered “That the making of a family budget and the keeping of simple household accounts by the woman of the home makes for all-round contentment and happiness” (Russell, 1925, p. 8). In 1983 the Marriage Guidance Council issued a “lifeguide” on Money and Marriage which advocated the regular keeping and review of household accounts to avert marital discord (Baws, 1983, p. 4).

Rational planning, management and accounting for family finances are perceived in prescriptive literature as virtuous practices which reduce uncertainty and take the emotion out of domestic money matters (Allen, 1977, p. 26; McGlone and Metland, 1984, p. 207; Norling *et al.*, 1989, p. 7): “Good budgeting leads to a new way of thinking . . . to personal satisfaction . . . and to a lot fewer pressures” (National Savings Committee, n.d., p. 22). The authors of these texts advocate accounting for its encouraging a dispassionate approach

to the financial effects of those unstabling events (such as marriage, the birth of children, divorce, mortality and unemployment) which may transform life-courses and afflict domestic and personal serenity.

Participatory budgeting

Most instructional texts on personal finance concur that all family members should participate in the budgeting process (Hancock, 1979, p. 14; National Savings Committee, n.d., p. 9). Budgeting is perceived as encouraging a collective focus on the achievement of defined familial objectives and the rational pursuit of projects for social advancement (Allen, 1973, p. 16; Crary *et al.*, 1980, p. 44). One early twentieth century manual also suggested that the resultant accumulation of accounting records should be considered an heirloom, to be handed down to descendants as a guide on how familial advancement had been achieved (Russell, 1925, pp. 10-11). The construction, maintenance and critiquing of family budgets are seen in such guides as providing opportunities for strengthening collective bonds and for fostering greater honesty, understanding and trust between the spouses (Anderton, 1984, p. 37; Franklin, 1980, p. 31; Wyn, 1974, p. 15). Through its encouragement of shared experiences and co-operative behaviour, budgeting is about both "human development and financial management" (Nickell *et al.*, 1976, p. 312):

Probably the major achievement of the budgeting process is the attitude that the participants acquire toward each other and toward wise selection among expenditure items. Many hidden issues are resolved when expenditures are out in the open and the wishes of each member of the family are weighed by the others. Exorbitant expenditures and buying for spiteful reasons, or spending just to "get one's share," become obvious. The family conference, or even an informal discussion between the family's senior members, may resolve many personal animosities and revise many estimates of the importance of certain desires in relation to the need of the entire group (Phillips and Lane, 1980, p. 38).

The involvement of children in budgeting is also advocated as a contribution to the generational transmission of good practice, and to nurturing financial literacy and awareness of the value of money (Hancock, 1979, p. 14; Norling *et al.*, 1989, p. 56; Cash University, 2000):

Because budget considerations and reviews are an educative process, nearly every member of a family should participate in them. If Johnny wants a pet dog, for example, he should enter into the consideration of the dog's original cost, the expenses involved in its feeding, shelter, medical care, license, kennelling expense when the family is away, and costs of probable damage to rugs and furniture. If Johnny must be told that he cannot have the dog, he deserves to know the reasons why. If the dog is to become a household pet, Johnny's education will not be complete until he is aware of its costs and of the family's responsibility for meeting them (Phillips and Lane, 1980, p. 45).

As the foregoing reveals, advice manuals on household management and personal finance locate accounting at the centre of those practices which are designed to ensure the effective utilisation of domestic financial resources. Accounting techniques are presented as devices which are conducive to the

attainment of an improved quality of life. Some discern less obvious benefits such as rationalising one's approach to charitable donations. One's level of giving can be limited while retaining a clear conscience:

An enthusiast has pointed out this benefit to be derived from household account-keeping:

A collector in a charity drive stops at your door.

"Of course," he says, "you are going to help us to go over the top for the new hospital."

Your answer is, "I'll be glad to help, but you see my home is run on the budget plan. I'll have to see how much I have to spend this year for charity."

You then refer to your family account-book and find that the amount allotted for such expenditures shows a surplus that has not yet been fully spent, so you may contribute, if you like, \$5.00, and still have a surplus remaining for the next charity. If, on the other hand, you have spent the full amount allotted, you can send the [charity] solicitor away convinced by your records that you are a public-spirited citizen, even though you do not contribute to his cause (Russell, 1925, p. 11).

Accounting at home in history

Traditional constructs of the home as a secluded and non-contributory place of residence are at variance with the centrality of the household in pre-industrial, agrarian societies.

The household as a locus of production

Until exchange economies supplanted subsistence economies, homes were primary sites of productive activity and a foremost unit in politico-social systems (Coleman, 1996). One of the earliest and most influential prescriptive works on domestic economy, Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* (c. 370 BC), cited the *oikos* (estate, household or family) as the fundamental unit of production, consumption, and social organisation in ancient Greece (Pomeroy, 1994, p. 41). In his discourse on the *oikos*, Xenophon revealed the Greek household as an occupant of both the public and private spheres and whose proper management necessitated record keeping. Orderliness and budgeting within the "interior" household were recognised as being as significant to the enhancement of the worth of the estate as the generation and measurement of the profits derived from transactions with the "exterior" (Pomeroy, 1994).

de Ste Croix related how, in addition to estate accounts, ordinary Greeks retained notes of debtors and creditors. Wealthy Romans kept "special accounts" such as "a master's private account, an account as between guardian and ward, or husband and wife" (1956, p. 45). Harvey has alluded to the importance of the household and its accounts to landed estate management in Medieval England. He argues that "manorial accounts give only half the financial picture; they show us the income-producing side of the organization, of which the other half, the expending side, was the household" (Harvey, 1994, p. 98; Ochinsky, 1956, p. 95). Household accounts are an important archival

source for students of the medieval economy and society. They may be used to investigate the relative importance of consumption and disbursement to the fortunes of the lordship, the relationship between the household and the estate, the development of accounting and auditing techniques, and changes in the principal function of accounting systems (from the recording of consumption to cash management) (Myatt-Price, 1956; Woolgar, 1992, pp. 3-65).

The dispossessed are invariably silent in these early accounting records, though the content of household accounts is suggestive of the vast inequalities between the exploited and their masters. Although surviving examples of household accounts seldom permit analyses below the middle orders in the social scale, documents from medieval and later periods (in the form of diet and wardrobe accounts in larger establishments) are also increasingly utilised by historians for the investigation of a number of phenomena. These include: everyday domestic administration and governance, family structures, patterns of consumption, price levels and the interface between the household and the wider economy (Labarge, 1980, pp. 53-70; Lochhead, 1948, pp. 23-33; Weatherill, 1990, pp. xi-xxix; Wood-Legh, 1956, pp. ix-xxxvi). The manner in which domestic and private expenditures were recorded in business accounts during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the manner in which private and business records later became disentangled offer scope for accounting scholars to investigate the emergence of notions of entity, proprietorship and the character of relations to capital (Weber, 1962, pp. 21-22; Yamey, 1959).

The home is also a place in which productive functions have been (and continue to be) performed by remunerated house workers and carers. From the eighteenth century increasing numbers of men and especially women were employed as domestic servants in bourgeois and upper class households. Some domestics, such as butlers and housekeepers, performed accounting, control and management functions in the home (Walker, 1998). Forms of accountability in the domestic arena have reflected the stigmatised nature of domestic labour and have served to intensify multiple inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, race and class which have long been associated with household workers (Colen and Sanjek, 1990).

Accounting, Christian observance and gender

Under traditional Protestantism the mere act of keeping accounts was evidence of adherence to religious precepts and contemporary values such as orderliness and thrift. In advanced capitalism personal accounting is associated with domestic financial management. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries personal accounting had a discernible role as a form of accountability to self and to divine authority of a kind analogous to disclosing one's conduct in a diary. Indeed, in some instances, the two records, one narrative, the other quantitative, were integrated in a single document (Boden, 1999; Boys, 1995; Wesley, 1909-1916). Weber, who was primarily concerned with bookkeeping as a characteristic practice of the pursuit of profit in capitalist enterprises, also referred to the "moral bookkeeping" of everyday life and the keeping of

“religious account-books in which sins, temptations, and progress made in grace were entered or tabulated” (Weber, 1962, p. 124). He noted that in Catholicism such accounts were associated with the confessional while in Calvinism they served as a record of virtuousness and adherence to the faith in the pursuit of salvation (Weber, 1962). According to Hunt (1996, pp. 174-5) accounting was a central feature of daily existence among the middle classes in Britain during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In addition to its practice, accounting metaphors of debtor and creditor were frequently employed to explain one’s relation to God. Thus “involvement with accounting was deeper and more all-pervasive in trading families. In some of these families the keeping of accounts became a sort of consecrated collective activity, akin to, and perhaps actually replacing, family prayers” (Hunt, 1996, p. 59).

The accounting prescriptions for the encouragement of personal discipline and rational expenditure which abounded during proto- and early industrialism are less in evidence in more recent times. The acquisitive consumerism of post-industrial society, together with attendant changes in attitudes towards property ownership, money and debt (Dodd, 1994, pp. 105-26), imply a shift of emphasis in the function of household accounting away from prudent budgeting towards “personal finance” and the measurement of capital accumulation (as exemplified by statements of net personal or familial worth) (Wiley, 1986).

Of particular interest to social historians is the manner in which accounting in the household has both instituted and confirmed social structures and relationships, especially in relation to gender. Under the patriarchal constructs of ancient Greece housekeeping was prescribed as a wife’s responsibility. Xenophon compared the wife to a “queen bee” who was the guardian and manager of her husband’s wealth. She tracked household possessions and finances, maintained records of domestic stores and budgeted for their consumption. The performance of such duties was also considered to be enabling in that the husband respected his wife’s competency and she was rewarded by gaining greater influence over him (Pomeroy, 1994, p. 59).

Following the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* became a popular instructional text on household management in England (Pomeroy, 1994, pp. 68-90). Given the centrality of marriage and the close definition of spousal roles in Protestantism, *Oeconomicus* was one of an increasing number of works on domestic conduct which prescribed the duties of a wife in the government of the household (Powell, 1917, pp. 101-46; Erickson, 1995, p. 34): “The ultimate sources of all these books were the New Testament (especially the teachings of St Paul), the classics, and the church fathers” (Powell, 1917, p. 102).

Later religious movements grounded in traditional Protestantism also tended to construct household accounting as a female pursuit. The nineteenth century witnessed an outpouring of instructional manuals inspired by Evangelicalism and the attendant cult of domesticity. The Protestant affirmation of the primacy of the Bible offered a source of divine authority for

prescribing the domestic realm as feminine and household management as the rightful province of women. Most commonly quoted was *Proverbs* (xxxii, 10-31): "She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness". However, in the advancing capitalist economy, with its rigid and gendered separation of the production-centred place of work from the consumption-orientated home, the wife's domestic labours went unrecognised and unrecorded in domestic accounts. In the middle class Victorian home, household accounting confirmed and helped sustain the economic, legal and social foundations of private patriarchy (Walker, 1998). The manner in which accounting interfaced with contemporary religious teaching and morality as part of the governance of everyday conduct during the nineteenth century and earlier periods is deserving of greater attention by the accounting fraternity.

Accounting at critical junctures in the life-course

Accounting features in the significant transitional events of human existence and their attendant rites of passage. Issues pertaining to financial management, planning and the disclosure of personal financial assets and liabilities emerge on co-habitation, marriage and procreation. A manual on money management in the 1940s urged couples to be "very honest and frank about money" at the outset of their relationship (Lord, 1943, p. 24). An earlier work advised: "For a newly-wed, the account-book is the foundation of prosperity" (Russell, 1925, p. 10). The identification, measurement, distribution and supervision of one's personal estate is most obviously actualised on mortality. As the death of householders usually involves the transmission of property, accountings necessarily emerge.

Accounting at divorce

In recent times, with the possible exception of taxation, many of the micro-level accountings which are created at pivotal junctures of the life-course fall within the vocational preserve of lawyers and legal academics as opposed to accountants. One area where this is particularly the case is the financial consequences arising through the deconstruction of marriages and households following divorce and separation. Forty per cent of marriages entered into in the UK are likely to end in divorce. The preface to a major UK text on family law has alluded to the limited participation of accountants in matters of matrimonial finance. Its author notes that, although divorce is increasingly a "battlefield of finance" . . . There is insufficient recourse to the accountant who has an important role to perform in this sphere" (Smith and Newton, 1996, p. vii).

Uncertainties about definitions of spousal property and questions concerning the valuation of assets on divorce occupy the attention of the legal fraternity and elicit periodic calls for the application of concepts drawn from accounting (Levy, 1989). Of particular concern to legal academics are the following: the determination of the assets available for distribution at marital dissolution, the recognition and measurement of intangible assets, and the

valuation of human capital. On the subject of valuation the interests of family lawyers parallel those of accountants. The classification of assets as personal or marital, valuing the career sacrifices and investment in human capital of the at-home partner and determining the contribution of a supporting spouse to the success of his/her partner, are issues with obvious accounting connotations (Cohen and Hennessey, 1989; Hauserman, 1983; Parkman, 1995). However, in the accounting academy the identification, recognition and valuation of human resources are primarily construed as issues in corporate financial reporting.

A foremost concern in family law is the recognition and measurement of the economic losses suffered by marital partners whose participation in the labour market has been prevented due to their performance of home work. This issue has also excited the attention of feminists and economists and has culminated in calls for the application of human capital theory to financial settlements on divorce. According to Singer it is these paradigms, not accounting, which have “combined to demonstrate that traditional definitions of marital property fail to account for a substantial portion of the assets accumulated during most marriages” (Singer, 1997, p. 122).

The judgemental character of the aforementioned “quantification” issues may be illustrated by reference to the practice of family law in the UK. Under English and Scots Law the courts have wide discretion when making orders for the financial provision of a spouse (Bond *et al.*, 1996, p. 69; Clive, 1992, pp. 468-70; Cretney and Masson, 1997, p. 408; Thomson, 1996, pp. 120-26). In determining the amount of divorce settlements it is the judge who assesses the worth of a wife’s non-financial contribution to the marriage. In making provisions for a wife the “one-third rule” formerly predominated in England as representing a wife’s share of the matrimonial assets (Smith and Newton, 1996, p. 166). In determining the value of orders it is also the judiciary which evaluates the future reasonable financial needs of the claiming spouse and dependent children. The arbitrary manner in which such valuations appear to be determined was evident in the recent highly publicised and landmark case of *Conran v. Conran* (1997). Mr Justice Wilson considered that Lady Conran’s “outstanding” contribution as a housewife, mother and her role in the achievement of her husband’s success merited an award of £2.1m (*Family Law*, August 1997, pp. 571-2; *The Times*, 4 July 1997).

The measurement of household production

Another area where the accounting academy has a contribution to make to the study of the household is the measurement of productive activity performed in the domestic arena. One of the dominant features of industrial society is the separation of the workplace from the home. The household in advanced capitalism remains, however, a site for the production of goods and services, though this is based on unremunerated labour (Goldschmidt-Clermont, 1987). The home is also the location for the reproduction of the future labour force and the scene for the provision of support services for those who engage in paid work in the public domain. The contribution of the household sector is even

more marked in the subsistence economies of the developing world (*Women in a Changing Global Economy*, 1995). The significance of the household as a site of production and value-added has been recognised in the “new home economics”. This discipline “views the household as a little factory whose output includes meals, physical and emotional health, and socialized children whose inputs are the labor of household members and capital goods bought in the market” (England and Farkas, 1986, p. 73).

Making the contribution of the home worker visible

Despite the productive processes which are performed in the home the absence of monetary exchanges has meant that the unremunerated labour of the homemaker – predominantly women’s labour – has traditionally gone uncounted (Waring, 1989, pp. 88-90). During the era of private patriarchy it was assumed that “Home-makers are won by no wages except love” (Terhune, 1889, p. 15). It was considered that there was no need to impute any value to the labour expended in the domestic realm. In the wake of their contribution to winning the First World War, some demands were made for estimating the “value of the housewife”. Such measurement would serve to reveal the full role of wives in the socio-economic fabric and encourage a greater appreciation of it:

“Women’s work” has been despised and, therefore, its value unknown because, and only because, women for long ages have themselves been considered inferior to men in law and custom as perpetual minors . . .

The economic value of the competent housewife is felt only when she dies, and the cost of her hired substitutes shows the manual worker with young children that he “must marry again” because he “can’t afford to do without a wife” (Spencer, 1925, pp. 160-63).

Until recently attempts to measure the worth of goods and services produced in the home and make “the invisible occupation” visible were “infrequent, inconsistent, and inaccessible” (Hauserman, 1983, pp. 43-4). This applies particularly to the measurement of the productive contribution of individual homeworkers.

At the micro level some improving manuals for women urge the use of calculative techniques and time management to help secure individual advancement and enhanced self-worth. Readers of *Woman Time*, for example, are asked to determine “What are you worth per hour?” (Silcox and Moore, 1982, p. 43). Having placed a price on their time, women are considered better able to make rational decisions about its optimal use and whether to perform a task themselves or buy-in services: “Think of it this way: a Saturday with our children is worth the \$30 it costs to have a housekeeper one weekday per week” (Silcox and Moore, 1982, p. 44).

Giving visibility to the homemaker through remuneration is offered by some authors as a means of internalising the notion that the housewife has a “real job”: “Home managers should realise they have status in a similar way that they would in business and are entitled to a salary package” (Brazenor, 1987, p. 45). Having discussed the merits and demerits of the market cost,

opportunity cost and replacement cost approaches to determining the home manager's salary, Brazenor has contended that the salary obtained was likely to exceed the household income. The remuneration of the manager of the "family company" is ultimately dependent on the "gross profits" of the business: the income of the salary earner. Hence within the home, the economist's methods have little practical relevance: it is only feasible to set a "realistic wage":

The first step is to have a business meeting. Write the gross weekly income of the business, which is the partner's wage. Then list all expenses and deduct them. Plan future expenses, such as investments, holidays, then determine the available net income each partner is able to draw as "take-home pay" (Brazenor, 1987, p. 50).

According to this prescription the home manager's salary "package" also comprises half of the goods and services acquired for the household, and "a little private spending power, for which she is not accountable, in order to maintain her independence and self-respect" (Brazenor, 1987, p. 55).

Another means of giving visibility to the production of goods and services in the household is to credential homeworkers. This involves conducting functional analyses of the unpaid tasks performed by the home worker, measuring and recognising competencies developed, and identifying skills which may be transferred to paid employment (Leigh and Butler, 1994).

Measuring the hidden economy

During the 1980s a number of macro studies were conducted in Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Norway and the USA which revealed that unpaid household production contributed from 30 to 60 per cent of GNP (Castles, 1990, p. 17; 1994, p. 20). Such studies confirmed that housewives' services were "the largest single item missing in national accounting" (Goldschmidt-Clermont, 1982, p. 3) and resulted in greater demands for governments to include the aggregate value of unpaid production in national economic statistics. Feminist economists such as Waring argued that the collection of national accounts represented a "statistical conspiracy" against women and a component of institutionalised patriarchy (Waring, 1989, pp. 115, 224). Groups such as the International Wages for Housework Campaign vilified the fact that housework was not "counted" despite its being counted on "by every individual and institution" (James, 1994, p. 173).

In November 1985 the United Nations General Assembly ratified paragraph 120 of *Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women*. This called for member states to quantify the unpaid contribution of women in agriculture, food production, reproduction and household activities and to include the resultant values in calculations of GNP. The limited progress made after 1985 towards actualising this declaration resulted in more activity during the 1990s. The campaign was invigorated by further studies which revealed that unremunerated work contributed a major component of total productive

activity. The United Nations estimated that the value of unpaid housework alone amounted to 10 to 35 per cent of GDP (*Women in a Changing Global Economy*, 1995, p. 58).

In June 1993 the European Parliament reinforced demands for the implementation of Paragraph 120 by adopting the recommendations contained in *The Valuing of Women's Unremunerated Work*. Further, within the UK, in March 1995 a group of Opposition Labour MPs presented a parliamentary Bill which proposed that government departments should include a calculation of the unremunerated work of women in GDP and Satellite Accounts[1] (Valuing Women's Unwaged Work Bill, 1995). Though unsuccessful, this measure, together with demands for the quantification of unremunerated work made at the World Social Development Summit and the UN World Conference on Women in 1995, galvanised the Office of National Statistics in the UK into action. A paper was published on measuring the "hidden economy" and the use of satellite accounts in national accounting (Neuburger, 1996). The Office of National Statistics has since estimated that unpaid housework in the UK is worth £739 billion, an amount which exceeds the contribution of the "productive" economy.

Attempts to include household production in national accounts are important not only to make unremunerated work visible. As James (1994) has explained, the act of counting itself is as significant as the results obtained:

Statistics shape and reflect a hierarchy of social values by the categories into which people, their activities and their products are placed, and by what is being measured – and not measured. Statistics about women can only reflect their needs by accounting for their entire working day and what they gain from it (p. 176).

Nor is this issue only one of gender. Demands have been made for the quantification of unpaid homework performed by children. The measurement of unremunerated work is also part of a wider agenda of recognising the full extent of the unpaid labour which is performed in developing countries and their contribution to the global economy (James, 1994).

Despite the fact that "the need to devise methods of accounting for women's full role in production and the subsidy their labour contributes to the economy has been recognised by the ILO and several other international agencies", decisions to quantify homework open a host of questions about the application of appropriate theoretical approaches, measurement techniques and valuation bases (Goldschmidt-Clermont, 1982, p. 4; *Women in a Changing Global Economy*, 1995, pp. 53, 58). For example, at the UN World Conference on Women in 1995, it was reported that the delegates clashed over how to measure unpaid work (*Financial Times*, 12 September 1995, p. 4). So far as they relate to national accounting these issues have primarily engaged economists and statisticians rather than the accounting community despite the obvious concern of the latter with value concepts and methods (Belkaoui, 1984, p. 5; Goldschmidt-Clermont, 1982; Jones, 1998).

In the UK it was the Office of National Statistics which produced a discussion document on time use data, time budgeting and the problems of

imputing money values to unremunerated work (Neuburger, 1996). Economists such as Goldschmidt-Clermont (1987) have suggested ways of measuring household production based on volumes of inputs and outputs. Castles summarised the principal methods as individual function replacement cost, housekeeper replacement cost, gross opportunity cost and, net opportunity cost (1994, pp. 8-12). Reviews of the relative merits and demerits of these valuation methods and the collection of appropriate bases of input data (such as time use and wage rates) are to be found in family law journals and the marketing material of insurance companies rather than the accounting literature (Hauserman, 1983, pp. 49-53; "Value of a Mum", 1996, 2000; *The Express*, 8 May 1999).

Financial management and the distribution of power in family-household systems

The household is a dynamic institution whose occupants are engaged in complex power relations. The allocation of responsibility for financial management within the home has received considerable attention from sociologists of the family and marriage. This work is predicated on the importance of the control of monetary resources for the distribution of power and the maintenance of gender inequalities in the household[2] (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1991; Pahl, 1983; Rose and Laurie, 1991; Wilson, 1987a).

Home accounting and gender accountability

According to Pahl "money can be seen as a 'tracer', reflecting lines of inequality at the same time as it reinforces inequalities" (Pahl, 1983, p. 251). The keeping and scrutiny of records of flows of intra-household resources, whether in the form of bank statements or cash books, implicates accounting in domestic power relations. Accounting records become reference points for accountability between the spouses. The author of a "humorous" advice book for husbands urges his readers:

For openers, you handle the finances. I don't give a damn if you're a football coach and your wife's a CPA who works as a financial planner. *You* handle the finances. Remember, whoever controls the purse strings controls everything else . . .

Consider the opposite approach . . . the one where your wife handles the money. Not only is she in a position to embezzle all the more freely, but she knows what happens to every penny you get. Buy a round of drinks for the boys and she knows it. Lose a bit at golf and you get a lecture on the evils of gambling. Take a comely colleague to lunch and she gets the credit card receipt (Kelihar, 1990, p. 56, emphasis in original).

By contrast, the author of *How to be a Professional Housewife* advises that accountability is implicit in the performance of the role of home manager. The professional housewife is expected to report to an executive committee (herself and partner), assumes supervisory responsibilities and has six "accountability areas" (maintenance of home, clothes maintenance, catering, child development, partnering, self-development) (Brazenor, 1987, p. 54).

Pahl's influential studies of financial arrangements in marriage distinguishes between the "control" (decision making), "management" (allocation) and "budgeting" (spending) of money. Pahl's typology of allocative systems between spouses identifies the "whole wage system", "the allowance system", "the shared management system", and the "independent management system" (Pahl, 1980, 1983, 1989, 1991; Oakley, 1974, pp. 143-5; Vogler and Pahl, 1994). The operation of a particular system varies according to factors such as social class, ethnicity, stage in the life cycle and the relative contribution of spouses to household income, and each is potentially attended by different structures of accountability.

Continuity and change in gender accountability

Students of the family-household system have discerned a number of changes in the social fabric with implications for the operation of gendered accounting and accountability in the home. As shown earlier, in patriarchal societies the sexual division of labour was invariably enshrined in the spatial separation of public (male) and private (female) spheres. The household and its management was constructed as the preserve of woman. However, the "epochal" social changes which have occurred in the last quarter century offer the likelihood of a more complex picture than the hierarchical accountability of the bourgeois home of the nineteenth century (Abercrombie and Warde, 1992, p. 1; Losh-Hesselbart, 1987, p. 558). Among the changes identified are: the greater financial independence of women based on their greater participation in the paid workforce; shifts in the domestic division of labour; a more egalitarian balance of power between spouses; increased rates of pre-marital cohabitation and divorce; greater fluidity and diversity in family composition; more complex patterns of familial decision making; and altered notions of domesticity (Gershuny, 1992; Gershuny *et al.*, 1994; Morris, 1990, p. 1; Stanley, 1992). The prospect exists of encountering a myriad changing structures with the potential for complex patterns of accountability.

Despite the existence of such discontinuities in the socio-economic structures and relations of everyday life, some commentators maintain that the family-household system remains the primary site for the oppression of women in advanced capitalism (Barrett, 1980, p. 211). Further, household operations continue to be performed within male defined constructs of social normality such as the notion of the dependent wife (Evans, 1994, p. 171; Morris, 1990, pp. 17, 101-02, 189-90). Continuity is also evident in the fundamental assumptions which underpin household accounting prescriptions. Hence, "spending decisions involving large amounts of money are taken by men, whilst day-to-day budgeting tends to be the responsibility of women" (Morris, 1990, p. 193). The tendency of husbands to shroud some aspects of household finance from their wives remains a component of patriarchal domination at home (Wilson, 1987b). Constancy is also discernible in the notion that domestic accounting and management are woman's natural sphere. This indigenous trait may be exploited to allow women to excel in the public domain:

Women are natural housekeepers and, as such, the City is an excellent theatre for our innate talents. Every time we stock up our shelves with tins or bottle jam in the autumn we are responding to an ancient impulse to hedge bets against the coming winter. Jam-making is basically a kind of risk management and managing risk is what handling money is all about (You, p. 46, *Mail on Sunday*, 2 March 1997; see Buchan, 1997, p. 73).

Given the emphasis in the sociological (and prescriptive) literature on issues of power, responsibility, allocation, control, decision making, management and budgeting in household finance, it is surprising that concepts and methods drawn from accounting and accountability feature so little. Here then, is an arena in which accounting can inform and enhance social study. There are a number of areas where accountants have a particular contribution to make in enhancing understandings of the domestic division of labour, familial relationships and gendered practices in the home. These include: the nature of accounting systems operated in the home and the allocation of responsibility for record keeping; the application of “mental accounting” procedures; the character and significance of the “audit” of household accounts; disclosure issues relating to spouses’ earnings and the content of household accounts; the potential significance of revenue and capital classifications in the allocation of responsibility for money matters between spouses; the practice of budgeting; the application of stewardship concepts; and the analysis of accountability structures.

Conclusions

The household has been the subject of an “explosion” of research activity in the social sciences during the last 25 years (Morris, 1990, p. 68). The recognition of the significance of the home for understanding larger socio-economic structures and relationships has largely bypassed the community of accounting scholars. This is surprising given that accounting has long been prescribed as a feature of everyday practice, one which is intrinsic to wider social and cultural phenomena.

A number of possible explanations for the comparative dearth of accounting studies of the home during most of the twentieth century have been offered in this paper. It is suggested that the household has been regarded as a site of consumption as opposed to production and has been marginalised accordingly. It has also been contended that the household has been ignored as trivial by accounting academics concerned with enhancing the legitimacy of their presence in centres of advanced learning. Professional accountancy has traditionally been constructed as a vocation which is pursued in the public world by practitioners whose most illustrious clientele comprises the owners and managers of large scale, “visible” organisations.

The paper has sought to offer a number of insights into the way in which the popular literature on personal finance and household management, together with the members of other academic communities, encounter issues which relate to accounting and accountability in the home. These are subjects in which the accounting academy clearly has a significant contribution to make. It

has been shown that the household is an important site for the study of accounting in pre-industrial and industrial societies. Accounting features at critical junctures in the life-course but the attendant issues occupy the attention of lawyers rather than accountants. Accounting has long been advocated as integral to the pursuit of a rational existence and as part of "the art of living". The manner in which accounting achieves (or otherwise) these capabilities and the impact of new media (such as information technology) on their achievement has not excited the interest of the accounting fraternity.

Accountants have a significant role to play in the development of measures and techniques which give visibility to the vast amount of productive labour which is expended in the home but is not quantified and thus hidden. The performance of domestic management and accounting has long been associated with the sexual division of labour and the intra-household distribution of goods and services. Historical and contemporary studies are beginning to expand our knowledge of the manner in which accounting contributes to the maintenance of patriarchy in the site in which it is primarily practised: the home. The role of accounting and the complexion of gender accountabilities are likely to be responsive to the economic, social and cultural changes which impact on the household and the relations between its inhabitants. Issues of financial management and control are recognised by sociologists as fundamental to understanding the distribution of power and the maintenance of inequality in the household and beyond. This is a field in which the accounting community ought to have a voice.

At the start of the twentieth century luminaries in the accounting firmament such as C.W. Haskins wrote works of direct import to the theory and practice of their vocation. Such commentators also felt sufficiently compelled to direct their attention to an arena of accounting activity which was to be bypassed by their successors. The time is ripe to resurrect the interest of our forebears such as Haskins in accounting at home. In doing so, not only will we enlighten our own understandings of accounting and accountability but also enrich the literature on the household and family which has flourished in the social sciences without us.

Notes

1. "Satellite accounts" are "accounting statements which are separate from, but consistent with, the existing national accounts" (Castles, 1994, p. 4).
2. The relationship between money and power in the family has been noted outside the sociological tradition. A wartime pamphlet prepared by a Catholic organisation argued that "in dealing with money, we are dealing with power. When we as members of the family share money with others, we are sharing power" (Lord, 1943, p. 8). The author urged an allocative system which did not vest too much control in the husband.

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