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A Comparison of the Attitudes and Behaviors Of Men and Women in their Roles as Primary Household Food Shoppers

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Men are becoming an increasingly common sight in supermarkets. A study was conducted in which the primary food shopper for the household was interviewed. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents were male and 73 percent were female. There were a number of significant differences between male and female shoppers. Men were less likely to be married and came from smaller households. They were also less price conscious, less interested in preparing food, less concerned about nutrition, and less likely to read information about food items, shopping, or food preparation.

The trade and mass media have recently discovered that men are doing food shopping. The following are some examples of headlines heralding this discovery: "Cooking, Cleaning, and Shopping - The Manly Thing to Do" (Johnson, 1983); "Lots of Men Now Shop for Food" (Fritschner, 1983); "New Men" (Prescott, 1983); and "The Male Customer" (Johnson, 1981). While we may think that men buying food is a new phenomenon, Comish in a 1958 survey of food shoppers in Seattle, Washington concluded, "The surprising factor brought out by the survey is that in almost one-fifth of the households (18 percent) the men and women shopped together, and in 14 percent

the man did the shopping alone. This is probably the result of the shorter work week and the persuasive nature of the female" (p. 98). Given Comish's findings, why did it take 25 years to discover that men were in supermarkets? Part of the answer is the demographic changes in U.S. households.

Both men and women are waiting longer to marry for the first time. The median age for the first marriage for men climbed from 22.8 years in 1966 to 24.8 years in 1981 (Norton, 1983). Partially as a result of this delay, the number of male non-family households (no children present) also rose in the 1970 to 1982 period from 6.4 to 11.3 percent of total households. This trend is expected to continue into the future with the projection that between 1981 and 1990 male headed households either with or without children will be the fastest growing type of household with over a one-third increase during the period (Glick, 1984). Thus, one reason men are and will be prevalent in grocery stores is that if they want to eat at home, they have to do their own food buying. But not all the men in supermarkets are single.

Married men are also shopping at least partially as a result of their spouse's employ-

ment. Women's role in the work force has been well documented. Between 1950 and 1982, women's labor force participation grew from 34 to 50 percent. Not only were more women working--they were also working more hours. The proportion of women working full-time, year-round, increased from 37 percent in 1960 to 45 percent in 1981. Finally, the labor force participation rate of married women with children was 66 percent in 1982 (Spain and Bianchi, 1983).

While it is not exactly clear what men are doing for the household, it appears that they are doing more household work (Prescott, 1983), and if they have a choice they appear to prefer to make repairs, take out the garbage, or go *grocery shopping* rather than to mend or do the laundry (Walsh, 1982). In another survey of women, husbands of these women employed outside the home preferred doing *food shopping* over all other homemaking tasks with about one-third of the employed women reporting that their husbands regularly shopped for food (Franco-American, 1983). At this point what do we know about these male food shoppers?

Men as compared to women are less interested in food buying. It is not an important task to them. They tend to spend less time in a store and fewer dollars on each trip. Perhaps as a result of this men do less planning, use fewer information sources, and are less likely to engage in economizing behaviors (Zeithaml, 1985; Gigges, 1984; Johnson, 1983).

Objectives and Hypothesis Of the Study

Results of previous research seem to indicate that the expectation of adequately explaining food shopping behavior of male food shoppers would require a closer look at *primary* food shoppers as opposed to *all* male food shoppers. Previous researchers had interviewed any man who was food shopping. Thus, men who were infrequent or occasional supermarket patrons were included with men who were the primary food shoppers for their households.

It is possible that if male and female food shoppers are different, those differences might be a result of differences in demographic variables such as employment status, income, family size, education, age, or marital status. Again, previous research had indicated that these demographic variables might contribute to food shopping differences. While male shoppers as a group tended not to clip coupons as frequently as women, married male shoppers were more likely to use coupons than were single males (Robey, 1983). Also in their study of female food shoppers, Roberts and Wortzel (1979) found some correlation between age of shopper, household income and shopping orientations and behaviors. As might be expected, food shopping expenditures also vary according to household size (Rogers and Green, 1978). Thus it is hypothesized that when compared to females who are the primary food shoppers for their household, male primary food shoppers will have different attitudes towards and behaviors associated with food shopping and preparation even when the demographic differences between the two types of shoppers are controlled.

Methodology

Data were collected during April 1983 in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). A proportionate stratified sample was selected with the strata being the city and suburbs of the MSA and the proportions being based on the areas' populations. This study was limited to one geographic market to control the possible regional variations in food shopping behavior (Rogers and Green, 1978).

The questionnaire was administered via telephone interviews. Half of the telephone numbers were obtained from a telephone street address directory. The other half were obtained using a variation of the plus one technique. The last digit of a randomly selected directory number was dropped and a random number was substituted. This technique was used as a convenient method of reaching unlisted and newly issued telephone numbers.

Partially as a result of the random number replacement technique the response rate was 46 percent. The reason for this rate was due to non-working and business numbers (20 percent), non-contacts (19 percent) even with 3 callbacks in the evenings and on the weekend, and refusals (15 percent). If the non-eligible numbers are deleted from the response rate computation, the rate becomes 57 percent (n = 339).

The person who responded to the questions was the individual in the household who was primarily responsible for food shopping. Seventy-three percent of the respondents were female and 27 percent were male. Respondents had no difficulty in determining the person who was primarily responsible for food procurement. There were no significant differences between the respondents and the 1980 Milwaukee SMSA census population on the basis of age (18 and over) and income (both at the .1 level). However, respondents to this survey did have significantly higher levels of education (.001 level).

The Survey Instrument

The intent of this study was to investigate both food shopping attitudes and behaviors. We believed that food shopping orientation would be partially influenced by food preparation attitudes and behavior. Namely, the more interested a person was in cooking the more likely he/she would also have a more favorable attitude and behavior related to food procurement. Thus, statements related to both cooking and food purchasing were necessary. Roberts and Wortzel (1979) developed a series of statements concerning these activities.

A number of modifications were made to the statements. The statements that dealt most directly with food preparation or shopping were selected. Then instead of using the original neutral response scale (5 point) a forced choice response scale (6 point) was used.

During the first pre-test it was found that respondents had a difficult time respond-

ing to the behavior statements as they were originally scaled using strongly agree to disagree choices. The responses were therefore changed to always, most of the time, some of the time, occasionally, rarely, and never. The statements were again pre-tested and this change greatly enhanced their usability.

The thirty attitude and behavior statements were factor analyzed using a varimax rotation. There were nine factors with eigenvalues of one or greater. The nine factors explained 59 percent of the total variance; however, the first five accounted for 42 percent of this variance and thus they are the ones reported in Table 1. Only those statements that loaded at .40 or above on a factor are reported in the table (Hair, et al., 1979, p. 234). Seventeen of the thirty statements are represented by the five factors. Factor 1 represents preference for generic products, factor 2 concern about nutrition, factor 3 interest in cooking, factor 4 concern about price, and factor 5 preference for food shopping. Cronbach's alpha, when considering all responses, ranged from a high of .83 for the generic factor to a low of .61 for the price oriented shopping factor. Given that the scales contain few items, 3 or 4 statements, the reliability of the scales appears to be good (Nunnally, 1978, pp. 243-246).

Results

Demographic Analysis

Female primary food shoppers were more likely to be married than male food shoppers (70 versus 47 percent, Table 2). This is the probable reason that women were more likely to shop for larger households.

Over half of the female grocery shoppers' highest level of education was a high school diploma. This was the highest level of education for less than half of the men. Both sexes were about as likely to have attended or graduated from college. However, men were more likely (16 percent) than women (6 percent) to have had graduate education.

Table 1

Factor Analysis of the
Cooking and Food Shopping Attitude and Behavior Statements

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Generic labeled food products give good value for the money	.83				
Generic labeled food products are of comparable quality to name brands	.83				
I purchase generic label paper products like68				
I purchase generic label food products	.86				
I worry about nutrition		.69			
I use label information to decide which brand to buy		.74			
I compare labels to select the most nutritious food		.75			
Winning praise for cooking is important to me				.73	
I have better ways to spend my time than in cooking				.61	
Cooking is very creative				.66	
I read magazine and newspaper articles for new food ideas and recipes				.54	
I use unit price information in stores in order to select the most economical brands					.55
I use coupons I receive in the mail or get from newspapers					.83
I shop for specials in food					.61
Food shopping takes up too much time					.76
The quicker I get my food shopping done, the better					.63
I dislike food shopping very much					.82
Cronbach's alpha	.83	.65	.66	.61	.65

Table 2

**Comparison of Male to Female Shoppers
on Demographic Variables**

	<u>Male</u> (n=91)	<u>Female</u> (n=248)
A. Marital Status		
Married	47%	70%
Not married	<u>53</u>	<u>30</u>
	100%	100%
$x^2 = 13.09$ Significance = .000		
B. Family Size		
1 person	28%	15%
2 people	29	33
3 people	21	18
4 people	15	20
5 or more people	<u>7</u>	<u>14</u>
	100%	100%
$x^2 = 11.13$ Significance = .025		
C. Education of Respondent		
High School or less	45%	53%
Some college	22	24
College graduate	17	17
Graduate education	<u>16</u>	<u>6</u>
	100%	100%
$x^2 = 12.92$ Significance = .012		
D. Occupation *		
White collar	36%	58%
Blue collar	45	25
Retired	15	14
Other	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>
	100%	100%
$x^2 = 11.86$ Significance = .008		

*Thirty-two percent of the female respondents said they were homemakers while none of the male shoppers stated this occupation. This occupational grouping was deleted from the significance test.

Table 2 (continued)

	<u>Male</u> (n=91)	<u>Female</u> (n=248)
E. Age of Respondent		
18 - 24	36%	58%
25 - 34	32	27
35 - 44	19	17
45 - 54	9	15
55 - 64	10	18
65 and over	<u>17</u>	<u>16</u>
	100%	100%
$x^2 = 11.13$ Significance = .025		
F. Household Income		
\$10,000 or less	13%	20%
\$10,001 - \$20,000	24	24
\$20,001 - \$30,000	32	26
over \$30,000	<u>31</u>	<u>30</u>
	100%	100%
$x^2 = 1.96$ Significance = .58		
G. Average Weekly Grocery Bill		
\$25 or less	17%	9%
\$26 to \$50	40	44
\$51 to \$75	27	31
\$76 or over	<u>16</u>	<u>16</u>
	100%	100%
$x^2 = 4.9$ Significance = .18		
H. Frequency of Grocery Shopping		
More than once a week	64%	60%
About once a week	32	33
Less than once a week	<u>4</u>	<u>7</u>
	100%	100%
$x^2 = 1.7$ Significance = .44		

For respondents working outside of the home, there was a significantly higher likelihood of women being employed in white collar (58 versus 36 percent) and men in blue collar occupations (45 versus 25 percent). Thirty-two percent of all female respondents reported they were homemakers while none of the male respondents mentioned this occupation.

There were no significant differences (.1 level) between the sexes of shoppers based on their ages, household incomes, size of food bill, or frequency of food shopping.

Analysis of Food Shopping Behavior Statements

There were significant differences (F-test, .05 level) between the two sexes of shoppers on 8 of the 17 attitude statements, 4 of the 13 behavior statements, and 3 of the 5 factor derived scales (Table 3). Men seemed to be less interested in food shopping activities than women (even when the effects of the demographic variables, marital status, size of household, age, education, and income were removed). They were less fussy about the food they bought, less concerned about nutrition or finding new food items, and less likely to read food labels. Men were also less price conscious since they were less likely to budget carefully for food expenditures, or to use coupons. But they had a greater tendency to buy ready prepared foods and meals. Finally, men were not as interested in cooking. Winning praise for their cooking was relatively less important for men and they thought they had better ways to spend their time than in preparing meals. On the other hand, women were more likely to think cooking was creative and read newspapers for new food and recipe ideas.

As presented in Table 3, there were significant differences on three of the scales, concern about nutrition (women were more concerned), interest in cooking (women were more interested), and concern about price (men less concerned).

Age was the covariate most likely to make a significant reduction in the variance

in the statement responses (Table 3). Its contribution was significant for 10 of the 35 statements and scales. Interestingly, its impact was most frequent on the generic product and price awareness attitude and behavior statements and scales. Income made a significant reduction on 7 of the statements. Its contribution was most likely to occur on the price awareness statements. Marital status also most frequently led to a reduction in variance on the price oriented statements. Education and size of household were relatively unimportant covariates.

Recommendations

Men are more likely to have a lower interest in food shopping and cooking and to be less interested in shopping on the basis of price. In general, appeals based on nutrition, meal preparation, and price will have less impact on men than on women. It is possible that men are more likely to see "food as fuel" and appeals to convenience and quickness of service may have a greater impact on them.

Promotions featuring ready prepared meals at the delicatessen or in the meat department seem appropriate. Also, efforts to eliminate long lines especially in the late afternoon and early evenings also are worth considering. But the greatest challenge may be delivering these messages to male shoppers. They do not read the food pages. Thus, radio ads during drive time and television commercials during the evening news may be necessary. Also, the use of home delivered advertising flyers, especially where there are concentrations of single males may also be more effective than newspaper ads. Even if men do not read newspapers, at least the food sections, they may glance at their mail.

Men as consumers in supermarkets are not a passing phenomenon. In this study, single males were asked about their food shopping plans if they married. One-third thought they would continue to shop alone. Fifteen percent thought they would shop with their wife and one-quarter were undecided. But this means that only one of four men thought they would definitely stop shopping if they

TABLE 3
Male and Female Shopper Responses to
the Attitude and Behavior Statements

L. Attitude Statements ¹	Male X(s)	Female X(s)	F-Value Test	Level of Signif.	Respondent's:				
					Marital Status	Size of Household	Age	Education	Income
Food shopping takes up too much time.(r) ³	3.5(1.6)	3.6(1.6)	1.09	.30	X**	X			X
*I'm very fussy about the food I buy.	2.2(1.4)	1.7(1.1)	7.25	.008			X		
The quicker I get my food shopping done the better.(r)	4.5(1.6)	4.4(1.7)	.28	.60	X				
Generic labeled food products give good value for the money.	2.9(1.6)	3.2(1.7)	.71	.40					
*I think men can do as good of a job of food shopping as women.	1.8(1.3)	2.8(1.9)	12.93	.000					
I prefer meals that can be prepared quickly.(r)	3.9(1.6)	3.8(1.7)	.38	.54			X		
*I worry about nutrition.	2.4(1.4)	1.7(1.1)	22.60	.000					
I feel I am very competent at selecting food to buy.	1.8(1.1)	1.5(.9)	3.30	.07					
*I carefully budget my food expenditures.	2.9(1.8)	2.4(1.6)	3.67	.056			X		X
I dislike food shopping very much.(r)	3.5(1.5)	3.0(1.7)	.06	.81				X	
*Winning praise for my cooking is important to me.	3.4(1.7)	2.4(1.5)	24.47	.000					
*I look for different products to serve my family.	2.7(1.4)	2.2(1.3)	5.92	.016					
*I have better ways to spend my time than in cooking.(r)	4.5(1.5)	3.6(1.7)	5.55	.019				X	
I watch for the lowest possible prices when I shop.	2.6(1.5)	2.5(1.5)	.07	.79	X				X

¹Responses were 1 = strongly agree to 6 = strongly disagree
²This variable had two levels, married or not married.
³Reverse scaled items (r).
 *Significant differences (.05 level or less) **The x indicates that the covariate explained a significant amount (.05 level or less) of the variations in the dependent variable (statement mean values).

TABLE 3 (continued)

I. Attitude Statements	Male X(σ)	Female X(σ)	F-Value Test	Level of Signif.	Respondent's		
					Marital Status	Size of Household	Age Education Income
*Cooking is very creative.	2.7(1.5)	2.0(1.3)	10.83	.001			
Generic labeled food products are of comparable quality to name brands.	3.4(1.7)	3.7(1.7)	.04	.85			X
For people who are married, the wife should be mostly responsible for food shopping (r).	2.9(1.7)	3.3(1.9)	.29	.59			X

II. Behavior Statements ⁴	Male X(σ)	Female X(σ)	F-Value Test	Level of Signif.	Respondent's		
					Marital Status	Size of Household	Age Education Income
I buy the highest quality food available.	2.8(1.2)	2.7(1.2)	1.99	.16			X
I notice when products I buy regularly change in price.	2.4(1.2)	2.2(1.3)	.36	.55			X
I use label information to decide which brand to buy.	3.2(1.5)	2.8(1.5)	2.23	.14			
*I read magazine and newspaper articles for new food ideas and recipes.	4.1(1.6)	2.7(1.4)	51.52	.000			X
I purchase products in the supermarket that I hadn't planned to buy before I went to the store.	3.3(1.5)	3.0(1.5)	1.78	.18			
*I buy ready prepared foods and meals like frozen TV dinners and meals from the delicatessen.	4.4(1.3)	4.7(1.3)	5.77	.017			X
I use the unit price information in stores in order to select the most economical brands.	3.0(1.4)	3.1(1.5)	.00	.96			

⁴Responses were 1 = always, 2 = most of the time, 3 = some of the time, 4 = occasionally, 5 = rarely, 6 = never.

TABLE 3 (continued)

II. Behavior Statements	Male X(σ)	Female X(σ)	F-Value Test	Level of Signif.	Respondent's:		
					Marital Status	Size of Household	Age Education Income
*I use the coupons I receive in the mail or get from newspapers.	3.1(1.8)	2.3(1.4)	10.21	.002	X		
I purchase generic label food products.	3.9(1.6)	4.0(1.6)	1.21	.27		X	
*I compare labels to select the most nutritious food.	3.5(1.5)	2.9(1.5)	7.06	.008			
I shop for specials in food.	2.8(1.5)	2.3(1.3)	3.58	.06	X		X
I purchase generic label paper products like paper towels and tissues.	3.7(1.9)	4.2(1.8)	3.32	.07		X	
I use a list when shopping for food.	2.6(1.9)	2.4(1.7)	.02	.90			

III. Scales	Male X(σ)	Female X(σ)	F-Value Test	Level of Signif.	Respondent's:		
					Marital Status	Size of Household	Age Education Income
Preference for generics (4-24) ⁵	13.8(5.3)	14.0(5.6)	1.70	.19			X
*Concern about nutrition (3-18)	9.2(3.1)	7.4(3.3)	12.1	.001			
*Concern about price (3-18)	9.0(3.5)	7.7(3.2)	3.8	.052	X		X
Preference for shopping (3-18)	11.02(3.4)	11.2(3.9)	.88	.35			
*Interest in cooking (4-24)	14.6(4.3)	10.7(3.9)	40.8	.000			X

⁵Range of scale values is equal to the number of items in the scale times the minimum and maximum value for each item. The lower the mean score, the more positive the orientation.

married. Interestingly, about two-thirds of the single women thought they would continue to shop for food when they married. Of course, this also means one in three women planned on having at least some help with this activity.

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