

SHOPPING IS WORK: AN INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY  
OF GROCERY SHOPPING

BY

C2009  
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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Sociology and the  
Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy.

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OF GROCERY SHOPPING

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

"An infant born through the new 'test tube' technology or womb implant, or a child raised in an institution are considered 'products.' Those who bring the foetus to term in the laboratory or who care for the child in the orphanage or juvenile facility are seen as workers. They are economically active. But a mother, daily engaged unpaid in these activities, is 'just a housewife.'"

-Marilyn Waring, UNPAC website

Grocery shopping, especially when my kids were young, was an on-going weekly or even twice a week activity. To get ready to shop I would look to see how much we had in the checkbook and what we had on the shelves, sometimes make a list (but often lose it in the process) and try to mentally plan what meals I could make for the next couple days. I would then load the kids up in their car seats, make sure they were fed and diapers changed and head off to the supermarket. Trudging around with my cart and my kids, shopping was the least fun of my household activities, leaving me exhausted both mentally and physically. It sure felt like a lot of work.

Marxist and socialist feminists in the 1970's and 1980's agreed that grocery shopping and other unpaid activities like cooking, cleaning, and even volunteering should be considered work (Secombe 1973; Oakley 1976, Hartmann 1979; Molyneux 1979). They defined this activity as reproductive labor, non-wage work that was outside the market but necessary to reproduce the next generation of people.

Although women were not making clothes or growing food as they once did before industry took over the production of these products (Strasser 1982; Swartz Cowen 1982), women were now buying goods and services and the work of purchasing these products and integrating them into the household was part of the housewife's job

(Hartmann 1981; Kessler-Harris 1982; Oakley 1974; Vanek 1980). Women as consumption agents became a bridge between the public sphere of retail capital and the private sphere of the household. Luxton (1980) recognized that the work of consumption activities such as grocery shopping involves “juggling household income, commodity prices, household needs and various preferences of family members (170).”

Sociologists have researched grocery shopping as one aspect of the work of feeding the family. British sociologists Murcott (1982) and Charles and Kerr (1996) studied the work women did in feeding their households and Marjorie DeVault’s (1991) classic *Feeding the Family* showed how women use food work to produce family life and in the process cemented their subordination in the family. However, these researchers did not specifically focus on the economic dimensions of shopping. Anthropologist Daniel Miller (1995, 1998) researched grocery shopping as an act of consumption and concluded that the consumer drives the political economy with her choices. Recently academics in cultural studies situate the grocery store and shopping as a prime example of the changes in the political economy in the last 50 years (Humphry 1998; Dixon, 2001). Nona Glazer (1993) was one of the few sociologists who have researched grocery shopping as economic labor, concluding that the grocery store added to women’s unpaid labor in the shift to self-service.

Although today women make up nearly half of the labor force (U.S. Department of Labor 2007), they are still working the “second shift” (Hochschild 1989) at home. Current research suggests that although women have decreased the

number of hours they work in the home, they still perform at least two-thirds of the household labor (Bianchi et al.2000; Gershuny 2000; Gershuny, Godwin, and Jones 1994). Men are picking up more of the household labor, especially child care but their work has not compensated for women's decline nor reached parity with women's time. Hook (2006) studied the distribution of household labor in 20 countries between 1965 and 2003; in no country were men performing more than 37 percent of all housework.

Jacobs and Gerson (2001) found that changes in household work are a reflection of changes in family composition, and especially growth of dual earner couples. Men's work commitments have remained stable and their domestic involvement has not increased sufficiently to offset women's rising work commitment. "Thus, single parents and parents in dual-earner couples face not only a shortage of time but also increasing expectations during that limited time, both on the job and at home (Jacobs and Gerson 2001: 61). They argue that the stalled revolution has left men shouldering less than an equal share at home. Orrange, Finebaugh and Heck (2001) also found that wives in dual-earner households remain the managers of the households.

But should consumption activities such as grocery shopping only be conceptualized as reproductive labor? When I buy food to feed my family, I am also performing labor that closes the production-consumption loop. Farmers have grown food that they sell to manufacturers, who use this food to produce products that they sell to retailers, who then sell it to me. At each stage money is exchanged for

products; the food industry as a whole, which includes agricultural production, processing, distribution, as well as retailing, accounts for between 10-13 % of the total gross domestic product (GDP) in the United States (Boland and Schmaker 2005). According to the U.S. Consumer Expenditure Survey, households spent an average of \$6,133 on food purchases in 2007, \$3,465 of this for food they will use in the household (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2008). This represents 12.5 percent of the average total household expenditure, or \$750 *billion* annually.

In 2003, household consumption accounted for roughly 60 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and consumer spending is considered the main employment generator (Heilbroner and Thurow 1994; Tossi 2002). However, economists state quite pointedly that “...*the essential characteristic of consumer spending as a whole is its dependable, predictable, passive nature* (italics theirs)...consumption spending—the broad flow of household expenditure that buys up two thirds of GNP—is not *a driving force in our economy, but a driven one* (Heilbroner and Thurow 1994). Even though consumer spending is essential for a healthy economy, economists do not include the work of purchasing consumer products in statistics such as the GDP because consumers are not paid to perform this service, thus rendering this work as “passive”.

Is my grocery shopping labor productive or is it merely a labor of love? The bigger issue is who gets to decide what counts as economic labor. Feminists have detailed the efforts made in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century social thought to separate the private household from the public market (Cott 1977; Boydston 1990; Folbre 1991; Sprague

1997). This dichotomy between the public and the private spheres, between production and consumption, between paid and unpaid labor, permeates how we conceptualize both the larger economy as well as individual economic activity. Economists view the work that individuals do in households for people they have intimate relationships with as altruistic with little regard for self-interest, whereas market behavior is based on narrow self-interest and conducted with little interaction and no outside influences (England 2003; Nelson 1993). And of course market labor counts more than household labor: market labor is somehow more productive (c.f. Waring 1999 for the exclusion of women's unpaid labor in national accounting) as well as a subject worthy of academic research.

It would seem logical grocery shopping would fall under the purview of economic sociology, a sub-discipline that purports to “socialize” this narrow conception of the economic and economic action as merely individual self-interest by situating the economy in its social context. In the introduction to *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*, the “textbook” for the discipline, Smelser and Swedberg define economic sociology as “*the application of frames of reference, variables and explanatory models of sociology to that complex of activities which is concerned with the production, distribution, exchange and consumption of scarce goods and services* (Smelser and Swedberg 2005: 7 italics in original).” Scholars in this tradition have investigated how economic action is both facilitated and constrained by social relationships in networks, social groups and institutions.

However, Zelizer (2002) argues that economic sociology has accepted the explanatory priority set by the field of economics, which focuses its explanations on individual choice within constraint as well as maintains the boundaries between market and non-market labor, between production and consumption. Although consumption is considered part of the economic cycle, and the question what is and what isn't work "is one of the central questions of economic sociology (Abbott 2005:308)", gender and consumption are ignored or considered epiphenomenal for economic sociologists (Milkman and Townsely 1994, England and Folbre 2005, see Zelizer 2002 for full discussion).

Zelizer (2002, 2005a, 2005b) maintains that economic sociologists generally fall into two separate camps, either "hostile worlds" (separate spheres)" or "nothing-but" paradigms. In the "hostile worlds" paradigm, economic activity takes place in the public sphere while the private sphere involves intimate relationships; intermingling between the two creates disorder and contamination. The "nothing-but" paradigm designates that economic activity and personal relationships are "nothing but normal economic activity, nothing but a form of cultural expression, or nothing but an exercise of power (Zelizer 2005b)." While the nothing-but scholars do point out that economic activity, power, and culture all play a significant role in economic activity, this reductionism does not cover the range and variation of relationships. Zelizer (2005b: 44-45) pushes for an alternative conception of the economic that expands the definition of work, recognizes that economic decisions involve multiple social relationships, looks at the actual content of transactions and

locates cultural content within economic relationships rather than as external to these social ties.

### Grocery Shopping as Economic Activity

How can we incorporate the work of grocery shopping back into the economy? One alternative approach consistent with Zelizer's recommendations would be to conceptualize shopper's labor as work, and to begin our inquiry into the economic relationships from the standpoint of these workers. Dorothy Smith (1987, 1990, 2005) offers an innovative methodological approach in institutional ethnography, an approach that trains our lens on the actual work being done in our everyday/everynight lives. Instead of reifying or creating a "virtual reality" out of concepts such as "the economy", Smith argues we must ground our inquiry in the actual activities of actual people (Smith 2005).

Smith broadly defines work as "anything done by people that takes time and effort, that they mean to do, that is done under definite conditions and with whatever means and tools, and that they have to think about it (Smith 2005: 152)." This "generous" conception of work allows researchers to take seriously the activities of daily living as well as to learn from people's experiences what they actually do, how their work is organized and how they feel about it (Smith 2005:155).

Starting with the work of people on the ground, we have a unique opportunity to view the economy in action. Combining an ethnomethodological approach that views the social as the concerting of people's activities with Marx's concept of social relations as the coordinating of people's activities from multiple sites not necessarily

by people known to each other, Smith argues that to understand how our social world is put together we must begin our investigation in the actual work people do in their everyday/everynight lives and use that information to discover the social relations that shape our local experiences (Smith 1987, 1990).

Increasingly, this work is organized by abstract and objectified relations of ruling through the use of texts (Smith 1987, 1999, 2005). Smith's conception of text includes "the association of words or images with some definite material form that is capable of replication (2005: 166)." The material form of texts include print, film, television, audio, electronic media, all of which have the ability to be replicated in exact form in many different places. Institutions use these texts to coordinate and standardize the work of many people in many different locales; thus, texts "coordinate the work done by different people not only in that setting but in other settings so that the work done in one place is coordinated with that done elsewhere and at other times (166)."

Texts transmit discourses that constrain or organize what people can say, think or do. Smith borrows from Foucault's understanding of discourse as "conventionally regulated practices of using language that formulate and recognize objects of knowledge in distinctive ways (Smith 224) to define discourses as the local practices of translocally organized social relations (Griffin and Smith 2005). " But Smith also stresses that discourses not only regulate and control, they also provide means of action (Griffin and Smith 2005). People participate in discourse and their participation reproduces the social relations of production. Discourses are not

determinate: people can chose to ignore these discourses in their actions and thoughts, but they are still ultimately socially accountable for the knowledge transmitted.

For example, Luken and Vaughn (2006) interviewed women in depth about their mothering practices in relation to “the Standard American Home”, a discourse that linked proper childrearing practices and home environments with the marketplace for housing, household goods, and services. Organizations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century such as the Children’s Bureau, the Own Your Own Home campaign and the Better Homes in America movement produced a textual discourse that shaped women’s expectations about their housing choices, including prescriptions such as giving each child a separate room, decorating rooms differently according to age and gender, and owning a home instead of renting. In-depth interviews with women whose experiences spanned this time illustrate how their housing practices were directed toward the discourse. Even when they rejected or chose other alternatives to the Standard American Home discourse, their narratives were structured by this discourse (Luken and Vaughn 2006: 327). Thus, these women were aware of the discourse and were ultimately accountable for their action or non-action.

Institutional ethnography is a method of inquiry that maps these social relations and makes visible the work of people in institutions who manage, coordinate, and control our local settings. The researcher begins with the standpoint of the people whose experiences provide the starting point of the investigation and seeks to identify some of the institutional processes that shape this experience (Smith 2006). Institutions are not conceptualized as particular types of organizations but

rather are meant to instruct the researcher to coordinated and intersecting work processes that take place in multiple sites (DeVault and McCoy 2007). When looking at health care as an institution, for example, researchers find not just a specific organization but a vast network of work processes and courses of actions at different sites of action, including hospitals, homes, doctor's offices, elementary schools, medical schools, nursing homes, pharmacies, media, advertising agencies, insurance agencies, and government departments (Diamond, cited in DeVault and McCoy 2007: 17). Institutions are thus "functional complexes" (Smith 2006).

The goal of Institutional Ethnography (IE) is to explain the process by which our lives are put together by the work of people in these extra-local sites in ways that we cannot know, which points to relations beyond the local lived experience but which begins in the everyday work of people. IE employs a two-stage logic to ethnographically describe and map everyday life as coordinated by relations beyond the individual. The first stage involves interviewing individuals about their everyday work, the actual activities they engage in and what it means to them.

### Methodology

For the first step in the institutional ethnography process I interviewed 20 grocery shoppers who shop at three different retail settings, two suburban and one rural, about the work involved in grocery shopping. These informants do not constitute a sample in the traditional sense, but rather an entry point to a common set of organizational processes (DeVault and McCoy 2007) and were used to open a window into how people participate in an institutional order and thus how this order

could be investigated (Griffith and Smith 2005). I chose different retail sites to account for different organizational settings: for example, one suburban store is independently owned, the other is part of a regional chain of stores, and the rural store is independently owned but part of a retail cooperative. I hypothesized that different retail configurations may have different approaches to organizing shopping work based on the level of corporate involvement but will conclude that the process of grocery shopping is standardized across different organizational settings.

In order to ethnographically describe the work of shopping, I interviewed shoppers who performed at least 50 percent of the grocery shopping and had minor children in the household. After obtaining permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I used a snowball method to locate shoppers who fit these criteria, and did expand the sample to include one single individual as well as two retired shoppers, all who had no children in the household as a contrast. I was not attempting to produce a representative sample. The goal of talking with people is to start in their work and find an entry to map the social relations that organize this work. Smith (personal communication, 2005) advised me to tap into a reasonable range of variation in the forms of grocery store participation that would orient my “gaze” to those extra-local forms of organization that shape this work.

It became clear, however, that shopping for other individuals, including spouses and especially children, significantly increased the level of physical work and administration of grocery shopping. All shoppers were women, except for one man. I attempted to use the snowball technique to identify male shoppers who fit the

criteria, but could not locate fathers who performed most of the shopping work independent of their spouses. The shoppers in my study, for example, acknowledged that their husbands did perform some of the shopping but often with a pre-made list or if they were asked to “pick up some milk” on their way home from work.

All shoppers in my study were white. This was not an intentional oversight but a product of the larger demographic of the areas involved. The rural area is almost 95% white, while minorities comprise only 15% of the population of the suburban areas (2000 US Census). My informants were evenly divided between the rural and suburban areas. Eleven shoppers worked full-time, three worked part-time, four identified as stay-home moms, and two were retired. Eight informants (forty percent of the total) had household incomes below \$45,000, two informants (ten percent) had incomes above \$100,000, and the remaining ten (fifty percent) fell between \$45,000 and \$90,000. Thus, many of these shoppers fall into the working and lower middle classes and provide a good entry point to understand the experiences of mainstream America.

The demographics of the shoppers are listed in Table A. The interview was semi-structured (see Table B for interview schedule) and usually lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. I asked shoppers about grocery shopping in general and allowed the shopper to guide me through their work routine. I transcribed these interviews and analyzed them for common themes as well as processes that shape what shoppers say they do. All names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

As the retail store is also one of the shoppers' work sites, I also interviewed six store managers about their work, attended industry trade shows, and conducted participant observations at the retail sites. Of these six, I interviewed three managers at their stores about various aspects of their work, including store organization, price setting, and the best consumer practices. I also interviewed three section managers while I attended a Food Show, which included over 120 vendors showing thousands of new products to store owners and managers, including Proctor and Gamble, Kraft, and Con-Agra. I also interviewed one corporate sales manager at the corporate headquarters.

In order to understand how texts and discourses created at extra-local locations coordinate this work of shopping, I then analyzed the texts that shoppers and managers consider relevant to their work. These texts included women's magazines (*More*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Real Simple*), morning and evening news shows (*The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*), diet programs (i.e., *Weight Watchers*), government publications (i.e., United States Department of Agriculture, Health and Human Services), advertising texts and retail trade publications (*Progressive Grocer and Supermarket News*).

In analyzing these texts, I searched *More*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Simple Living* and *Weight Watchers* for articles related to shopping and nutrition published in the last four years. Articles specifically on grocery shopping were only written sporadically, but health and nutrition were topics in nearly every issue. In these cases I looked for articles that had some connection to products that one should buy for

individual or household health. Large multi-media corporations own and publish many related publications and thus much of this content was standardized. For example, the Meredith Corporation, which publishes *More Magazine*, also owns *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Family Circle*, *Fitness*, *Parents*, *Country Home*, and *Midwest Living*. The Hearst Corporation owns *Good Housekeeping* as well as *Cosmo*, *Country Living*, *House Beautiful*, *Marie Claire*, *Redbook*, and *Seventeen*. Time owns *Real Simple* and *Cooking Light*, *Health*, *MyRecipes.com*, *Sunset*, and *All You*.

Managers indicate that they read trade industry publications, especially *Progressive Grocer* and *Supermarket News*, general marketing newsletters printed by organizations such as the Food Marketing Institute, specific corporate newsletters, food and beverage magazines as well as business newspapers such as *The Wall Street Journal*. I analyzed these publications for articles on consumers and consumer management.

The chapters that follow are meant to be read as a map of the social organization of grocery shopping. In chapter two I build up an account of the work of shopping from the experiences of the shoppers themselves, including what they do, what they know and where they get their information about shopping. In chapters three and four I discuss two discourses that shape their work, the efficiency and the nutrition discourses. In chapter five I turn to the managers' work and discuss two discourses that orient their work vis-à-vis the grocery shopper. All of these discourses ask the shopper to think and act differently, and direct us to significant

contradictions in these discourses as well as suggest the need for a broader understanding of the economic, as I present in the conclusion.

## Chapter 2: The Work of Shopping

When I asked my shoppers how they felt about grocery shopping, I got one of three responses. More than half expressed some interest in shopping; it got them out of the house, they saw people they knew, or they enjoyed the act of choosing products. Karen Calhoun told me

I like to shop. I don't mind shopping. Since I'm not working it's more pleasant. I'm not in as big a hurry. And doing it during the day, the stores are more laid back than in any of the stores than after 4:00 and everybody's off work and its rush, rush, rush.

Mary Wirth said "I very much enjoy grocery shopping. It puts me in a different place mentally and for me I see it as relaxing and I see it as an opportunity to get out of the house."

Some decidedly did not like grocery shopping:

I don't like grocery shopping. We are always in a hurry. For a grocery store trip if I can get in and out in 15 minutes I'm really happy. And I don't like to go to stores where I don't know where things are, if they are rearranging the store because I don't have time and so I'll get annoyed with a particular store if they rearrange too much (Jessica Pierce)

But almost all of the shoppers I talked with echoed this sentiment in some way: "It's [grocery shopping] just something I have to do (Jackie Engle)."

Although more men are doing some of the housework, including grocery shopping (Coltrane 1998), industry analysts conclude that grocery shopping is still women's work, with 65-80 percent of all grocery shopping for households done by women (Dixon 1999; *Progressive Grocer*, June 1, 2005). In this chapter I explore the

work of grocery shopping as the shoppers understand and experience it, and from their descriptions I show how we can begin to map the social organization that coordinates this work.

In order to grasp the distinctiveness of the contemporary work of shopping, it is useful to put this work in an historical context. Until the mid-1850s, food procurement depended on the geographical region. For those in rural areas nearly self-sufficient farms were the norm; food grown at home was bartered or traded for coffee, tea, sugar and salt at the general store. At the same time, many households on the East coast depended on the public marketplace as their primary retail food source (Mayo 1993). Women shopped open-air stalls in the center of town; eventually these gave way to enclosed public market houses, such as the Northern Liberty Market in Washington, D.C. built in 1870 measuring 130 feet by 320 feet and 75 feet high where shoppers could find butchers, fishmongers, baked goods and produce.

These public marketplaces were located in urban centers and relied on local patterns of trade. Household shoppers, mainly women, would have shopped everyday as the markets were located within walking distance from their residence. Thus food was fresh and locally produced but somewhat limited in choices such as fruits and vegetables as they were easily perishable. Culinary culture was based on food availability, tradition and ethnic patterns. Personal relationships were made with vendors, who were either producers (farmers and fishermen) or processors (butchers and bakers) (Strasser 1982).

The distinction between rich and poor, urban and rural actually determined what level of labor was necessary for provisioning the family. For more affluent urban women, procuring food and provisioning involved shopping first at the public markets for a wider variety of food choices and a greater level of nutrition as well as hiring domestic labor for cooking. The working-class urban family still produced a significant amount of their food: pigs, chickens and goats and still lived in Manhattan in the 1860's and gardens still flourished in industrializing cities (Strasser 1982). Fresh produce was scarce and nutritional deficiencies plagued these neighborhoods; most families subsisted on bread, potatoes, crackers, salt pork and blood pudding (Cowan 1982). The possibility did exist however, for working class and poor shoppers to buy unsold fruit and vegetables at lower prices later in the afternoon (Zukin 2004).

Rural households were mainly self-sufficient and produced most of the food they would eat. These families ate monotonous diets which were dependent on the staples of their region. The limitation of seasons, ineffective storage and the lack of a cash economy limited what can be grown and eaten. These households, however, could forage from the land for wild greens and berries but mainly ate bread, butter, coffee and bacon, the standard fare of many rural dwellers (Strasser 1982).

Either on the rural farm or in the urban market, all food raised or bought had to be prepared: the fish bought had to be de-scaled, the chicken killed and plucked, oatmeal had to be soaked overnight (Strasser 1982). The work involved in food shopping and preparing was never-ending and labor-intensive, especially before the

advent of electrification and refrigeration. However, food provisioners had an intimate relationship with the foods they were preparing, and had an immediate knowledge of food. Provisioning did not involve making choices about what to eat or whether it was “good”: getting enough food was a main concern. Shopping also involved relationships: between shoppers and producers, and between shoppers and the larger community.

Small locally-owned grocery stores existed in addition to public markets, usually as general stores that sold non-perishables such as tea, sugar, and sweets. In both the market and the general store there existed distinctions between upper classes who were allowed to shop first at the market and were able to afford the general store products, and the working classes and poor who were left to shop at the end of the market time and who received not only inferior foods but also suffered from nutritional deficiencies (Mayo 1993).

The grocery store developed as people started moving outside urban cores and as smaller towns were able to receive a steady supply of goods (Mayo 1993). The independent mom-and-pop store, the quintessential food retail outlet prior to WWII, were small stores with limited inventory whose survival was predicated on a loyal base of shoppers, personalized attention and service and high mark-up (Humphry 1998). In the rural town in my study, six small grocery stores once served a population of 1,000 people in the late 1930s. Grocery shopping itself was a relatively uncomplicated process. Charles O’Donnell Sr., the son of the founder of one of the six grocery stores ran a store roughly 700 square feet that provided staples like bread,

bulk flour and beans and an assortment of brand-named canned goods. What was shopping like for the consumer? “They didn’t do anything but stand there and pay for it.” Charles elaborates:

Shoppers didn’t have any grocery buggies to put them in. They would bring the list of what they wanted and they would tell you and you would fill their order and put it on the counter right there and they paid for it and boxed it up. If they had more than they could carry we would carry it out for them but usually they would carry their own groceries out. Behind the counter there was tall shelving with canned goods on it and you had a grabber and you could take any can off that you wanted. And some of them had a rolling ladder that you could crawl up the ladder and get it off, you know. But they put the order up and they would pay for it right there and take it out. They would wait while you got their order ready.

Family labor made this and the other grocery stores in town viable. Charles’ father worked with his wife and two children for many years, eventually hiring one extra employee later on. When Charles Sr. took over the store in the 50’s, he worked with his wife and children in the same manner. The hours were long: set hours from 8-6 and then several hours of inventory after closing. He remembers being somewhat irritated when his customers would leave their grocery order with him on Saturday nights and come back, sometimes as late as midnight, after they had gone to the theater down the street.

When asked what the main differences were between then and now, he recalls that the store owners knew each customer personally as well as their children’s names and what family they came from. People tended to shop in the same store because they had credit at the store, and many farm families would pay once a year. The labor of shopping was not only mostly done by the family who worked the store but was

also integrated into the life of the community. Much of the food sold was locally or regionally produced, arriving usually by train or later truck from Topeka.

Scholars have noted that tensions existed in this type of organization between customers and owners, especially in urban areas with greater diversity (Deutsch 2002). In some stores prices were not marked on the items so bargaining and haggling was common. Some owners charged more for their richer customers but also had difficulty collecting from some of them (Greer 1986). Ethnic tensions arose in larger cities as African-Americans and immigrants faced discrimination in white-owned grocery stores. Women as well found their purchases controlled and scrutinized by male shop clerks and owners and “every transaction meant implicit and explicit statements of women’s fitness as wives, mothers, shoppers and homemakers (Deutsch 2002: 157).” Deutsch (2002) argues these racialized and gendered relationships contributed to the rise of chains stores, especially in larger urban areas.

Although women have always been responsible for feeding the household, the work itself has changed drastically in the last century. Technological changes such as household electrification, central water and heat, and new appliances had one of the most significant impacts on household labor: while these technologies did not decrease the overall amount of work that was required, they did change the nature of the work (Cowan 1983). Food preparation previously was labor intensive and took many hours of the day; women would have performed this arduous labor on a daily basis as storage and refrigeration were not well developed until the turn of the century (Strasser 1982). We tend to forget that even in 1940, one in three households had to

carry their water inside in buckets, only half of all households had refrigerators, and one third of households were still cooking with wood and coal (Cowan 1983).

However, those in the middle classes before the WWI did have more human help than housewives do today. A majority of households had some domestic help, if not a full time maid than at least some help with laundry and cleaning, as well as services such as food delivery (Cowan 1983). As more women went to work in factories and fewer immigrants were allowed into the US, the decline in domestic help meant that the housewife was expected to perform most household labor herself. Appliances proliferated after 1945 such that housewives would be washing clothes in machines, cooking on stoves, and refrigerating leftovers. Scholars conclude that labor-saving devices did not save any time for women in the household, as they lost the help not only of domestic servants but also men and children who were at work or at school and whose labor was replaced by the dishwasher or washing machine (Cowan 1983; Vanek 1979).

These changes in technology and household labor changed the way shopping was done. The refrigerator, for instance, meant that housewives could buy in smaller quantities than the volume shopping that was done previously (Cowan 1983). The personal automobile replaced the delivery car of the grocery store. Many stores delivered food as a service to their customers, but as stores moved further into the suburbs and as customers were expected to shop for themselves, delivery ceased to be part of the store's service. Expectations for more elaborate meals were raised as the

amount of manual labor involved in cooking decreased and the variety of foodstuffs available increased (Cowan 1983).

Mass distribution and mass production also changed the way American housewives cooked. Prior to mass production, food was bought unprepared into the household requiring, processing and cooking. Mass distribution included the rail system and mass production included the factory, which produced breakfast cereals and canned fruits and vegetables as early as the 1880s. These changes in distribution and production transformed the heavy manual labor of household work where women made food and engaged in productive activities; housekeeping was less labor-intensive and new household appliances and public utilities made some of the jobs in the house easier (Glazer 1993). Much of household labor shifted to consumption and the housewife to a new status of “consumer”.

Grocery shopping until roughly the 1960s consisted of the housewife buying commodities in a supermarket, using prepackaged food but otherwise cooking meals at home. Self-service, arguably the most significant feature of the retail grocery store, flourished in this environment where the work of shopping was one aspect of women’s household labor. Thus, while women’s work of provisioning became physically easier, it became less visible as work. Consumption assumed the status of “housework”, the invisible labor women performed which was necessary to the operation of the economic system but not included in the accounting of economic activity.

One of the most significant changes of the last thirty years for women's unpaid household labor is the number of women engaging in waged labor. According to the US Department of Labor, women comprised 46% of the total U.S. labor force in 2002 and are projected to account for 47% of the labor force in 2016. A record 68 million women were employed in the U.S.--75% of employed women worked on full-time jobs, while 25% worked on a part-time basis (US Department of Labor 2007). In 1950, only about a third of women over the age of 16 were in the labor force (U.S. Department of Labor 2000). Women are now engaging in the "second shift" (Hochschild 1989), working full or part-time in the labor market as well as performing unpaid household activities. While it is unclear whether the changes in the production, distribution and retail of food (producing more processed food for example) allowed women to work outside the home (Wells 1998), or whether working women demanded changes in food, including processing and "fast food" (Goodman and Redclift 1991), women's wage labor has significantly impacted not only the food system but also how the work of shopping is done.

### Work of Shopping

While women are working at historically high levels, they are still performing much of the household labor. Although DeVault (1991) and Dixon (1999) include a discussion of shopping as part of the work of feeding the family, their discussion did not look specifically at work as economic production. DeVault (1991) describes grocery shopping as a continual process of adapting and adjusting. She found that grocery shopping is more than a simple matter of buying a few things that one needs,

because “needs” grow out of a routine that develops over time. This is not to say that every shopping event is the same, but that what is bought at the store is a matter of how the household needs have developed. This routine is based on what family members like to eat or must eat, family schedules, and household financial constraints; in other words “decisions are linked to the resources and characteristics of particular households and features of the market (DeVault 1991: 71).” Although every family has their own routine and every shopper negotiates the work somewhat differently, there are many similarities in how women “do” grocery shopping in general.

Most of the shoppers I interviewed discussed their work of shopping in a chronological fashion, describing the preparation work first which included meal-planning and list-making. Next came the trip to the store, and then usually the after-store work of bringing in groceries and putting them away. I will discuss how they describe their work and suggest we can begin our inquiry into the social organization of this activity.

#### Planning:

Shoppers do not go into the store and just pick food out randomly; the shopping trip is the tip of the iceberg in terms of the work involved in feeding families. Food provisioning generally involves a planning phase, which includes making meal plans, knowing what meals and foods the household members will/can eat, and scheduling meals and shopping trips around the household members.

Shoppers engage in different levels of planning; for some planning for the shopping trip may be as elaborate as sitting down on Sunday night to plan out the week's menu, or it may be as hasty as jotting a few items down on a sticky note to get that night after work. For the shoppers in my study, those with more time or those who need to save money usually spend more time planning their shopping trip. Jane Smith, a part-time city worker with six kids, regularly makes meal menus. She says:

I let the kids pick once a week, they get to pick their own dinner menu and the only rule is no macaroni and cheese and no hot dogs. I usually buy the things they pick for the week. I make a week menu or otherwise I go "what am I gonna cook?" and I don't have the things I need to cook and we don't eat or we order pizza and we can't afford to eat out. So we try to make a menu and stick to that menu (Jane Smith).

Many shoppers begin their planning by consulting the grocery advertisement:

The path is from the Wednesday supplement that comes out with the ads, then I make my list, and then I make my menu and then I go to the grocery store and then I buy this stuff and I even like taking it home and putting it in my refrigerator. And then the meal production so the cooking, you know it is really time consuming (Kay Worthington).

I got the pen, the paper, and the latest grocery ad because I went shopping this morning. I usually make a list for at least a couple days worth of meals (Karen Calhoun).

We get the ads on Wednesday and I make a list of what is on sale and I really plan it around kind of what's on sale, if it's stuff we like, that sounds crazy but I'm pretty thrifty. Or we attempt to do that. A lot of times we just wing it though, it gets to be dinner time and we're like "aghhh". I mean honestly we're like "what are we going to have?" (Jackie Engle)

Jackie also tries to include other members of the family in making the list with limited success:

I have trained my two oldest, meaning my husband and first born daughter, to write down things we run out of. Now if we run out of salt they are not going to tell me but if it's something they like or their cereal they will write it down. [Do you have a specific list?] Well we just have a piece of paper we throw over by the phone and they just write it on there. But who's fault is it when they run out? Mom. Because I was supposed to know that they were going to get diarrhea and we were out of Imodium? Who knows, it's just like "how is this my fault? It would probably do me good to occasionally just wig out and go "this isn't my problem".

Planning may even occur at the moment of shopping in store but there is some underlying knowledge of what is available at home, what everyone will eat, based on past experience:

I kind of get into a rut of making the same things over and over. So I get to the store and decide what we are going to have based sometimes what's on sale and we have a deep freeze so sometimes if meat and things like that are on sale then I buy more of that kind of thing then go by what is in the deep freeze. [Do you make an inventory?] No, I just kind of remember (Lisa Corbin).

Stacey Ostrander had just switched from part-time work to full-time employment at the time we talked. This shift has changed the way she plans for shopping:

I spend more time organizing because I go to the store less. I will do a big shop on the weekend and I used to avoid it on the weekend because everybody else was already there and then I would do it in the afternoons. Now, I plan what I am fixing for the week so I know what I need to stock up on and then if I run back into the store it is once, maybe twice. So I actually go to the grocery store less but I have more planning because I sit there and plan out the meals more.

Working mothers in my study have different planning issues. Rather than spend time planning for the week, the meal menu or item list is done at work or in the store or is perhaps solved by eating out. I usually began the interviews by asking shoppers to remember the last time they went to the grocery store as a prompt. One working mother pulled out her palm pilot and was trying to recall the last time she went shopping based on the “other events in my life at that moment in time” and then elaborated:

Shopping is not on the schedule so it just happens when it happens so I have to put it in terms of what else happens that day....Let's see, it was after work, I just had to figure out which day after work. Because I don't schedule it, it happens when I think that maybe there are some things that need to happen at home. So it's not like I plan a menu and go and grab things, its more like “is there something at home? No, probably not” so I probably ought to get something that could possibly turn into a meal that evening. [do you plan for several meals?] I would probably try to plan for a couple of meals but it sometimes it's a daily, just go to the store grab for something that evening. I'm there a lot, probably more than if I would plan a menu and carry through but I don't do that (Jessica Pierce).

Another working mom on her last shopping trip:

I had a list, a little sticky note with just a couple of things. Just a couple things I wanted: some baked chicken already made because I knew I wouldn't have time to cook tonight and toilet paper. That's really typical. I usually have about 5 things unless I'm planning for some weekend or something. But yea, I usually don't buy many things at one time. I also don't do a lot of cooking. I encourage the kids to go to breakfast at school and lunch so really I only have to plan one meal (April Malloy).

I used to be a meal planner. I used to have a weekly menu written out so everybody could look and know what we were having every day and it was all written out and I would shop for that menu when I was in Topeka all of the time. And I would say in the last two years since my job in Topeka changed last year and it was just a different type of position, in the last couple years, I

have gotten away from that planning and shopping once a week. [Because of the change in your job?] I think so. I think part of it, especially this year, is the hours I put in. I am putting in so much time, through most of the winter I wouldn't even leave work until 6. So it was just kind of like, I'd go home, you know it was like, what do I have on hand? What can I quick stop and get? I wasn't near as organized about it (Mary Wirth).

Colin Moore, who shops jointly with his wife, stated that they try to plan, but when both of their schedules are too busy they just make routine dishes, which makes planning much easier:

We used to plan out the whole week or at least plan we are going to make six meals this week and get stuff for that. And then sometimes though we kind of have a set list of meals so you can go to the store and know what to get. I usually open the cabinet, open the fridge, see what's there or not there, and then go to the store to fill in the missing spots.

Although few people could give me an exact dollar amount they spent on groceries (three-fourths of the respondents said they spent \$100 a week on food regardless of the number of people in the household), shoppers believed that by planning the shopping trip they would be saving money at the grocery store. I will discuss this issue of planning in order to save money or time in a subsequent chapter as an example of an institutional discourse and show how institutions use this textual discourse to shape how shoppers think about and perform their work.

But even for the provisioners who don't spend much time on meal planning, managing schedules and taking into account when people will be able to eat and when they can get to the store is a significant task. The mom who has meal planning down to one meal still has to plan around her kids' schedules and when they will be in the car:

When they have ball practice in Topeka maybe I'll fix some sandwiches for them to eat on the road up there and then when I come back I'm going to have a salad or something like that. And Reggie can fend for himself or when I get back he'll eat whatever I make him, you know at 8:00 or 9:00. Last night was pizza because we had tumbling in Topeka and I brought home a pizza, left it there in the frig for Reg to eat whenever he did, which was when he came back in around 10:00 from working outside and the girls had a pizza on the way up to Topeka. (April Malloy).

Planning around family schedules becomes quite tricky for all mothers as the kids get older and more involved in activities. Stacey Ostrander does her 'big' shopping on Saturday but goes once a week to pick up items like milk, bananas or orange juice. She has to work around her child's schedule:

I usually stop at [the supermarket] Thursday afternoons because Gerilyn has a ½ hour piano lesson, and I drop her off at the piano less and I have 30 minutes and I've got to be back after those 30 minutes to pick her up so it can't be a long trip. And you can't get caught in a long line. It has to be efficient, it has to be a short trip and it has to be very specific things that I need and I have to know which things they are. That's usually when I do it because it works out the best. G is so tired, when she gets done with everything it will be 5:15, 5:20 and she's been at school since 8:00. She is ready to come home--she isn't ready to do a grocery shopping trip on the way home from work.

Even for one mother who is staying at home, taking care of her elderly mother and three teenage daughters and husband is enough to keep her busy all day:

I usually make dinner about 1:00 in the afternoon because then I have grandma to feed and Jackie will come home next and she'll eat then Sydney will come home next and she'll eat and then Doug comes home at 7 or 8 at night and then he eats. Nobody eats together, we all eat in shifts (Karen Calhoun).

## Household Needs

When doing the planning, provisioners must keep in mind the food needs and desires of members of household. While studies from the 1980's and 1990's found that food providers often deferred to their husband's wants and needs (Murcott 1983; Charles and Kerr 1986), recent studies find that now children's needs are just as salient. Dixon argues that "children are as potent a boundary setter for what food comes into the house as is deference to men (Dixon, 1999: 63)." But altogether food provisioners are constantly juggling what other members of the household need.

One mother in the study tries to add a little variety to the usual list of meals but will jettison meals that the kids don't like (even though she and her husband liked it):

I just tried a new recipe last night. It wasn't very good. Jerry liked it, the kids hated it. It was an enchilada casserole. Jerry and I thought it was really good but the kids were like "mom, this is gross." So I don't think I'll make it again (Jane Smith).

They can have a peanut butter and jelly sandwich if they don't like dinner and that works great for the younger two but Laurey hates peanut butter so it's a real issue for her if she doesn't like it. Because if you don't have ham or something to make a sandwich or something like that it's harder for her to find alternatives (Jackie Engle)

I have to have choices at every meal which is probably why I shop daily too. Evan has a bit of a regurgitation issue. At will. And if today he wants broccoli, he'll eat broccoli but if he wanted green beans and I served broccoli, he can regurgitate his whole meal in about one second. Because that's not what he wanted.... So partially you have to shop daily to get his choices (Jessica Pierce).

Tim doesn't like casserole type-things, he doesn't like things that are out of the ordinary. Ronnie will eat anything. So there are lots of night if I just say I'm making this then Tim will have to make a choice and he is really willing to try and he has actually surprised himself "Oh I do like this". But then if he doesn't there will be an occasion where he will just have to make a sandwich or do those things. My husband says I cater too much to the kids. But I tell him, if I don't like something I don't make it, so I feel like my kids should have some opinion and some choice (Mary Wirth)

[Do you plan meals around what your husband wants to eat?] No, definitely not. I pick what I want to eat and if he likes it, fine. He'll let me know if he doesn't like something. I have to admit he's pretty flexible. If I say tonight's potatoes, he'll say fine. He'll eat anything I make, he really will. He'll tell me if he doesn't like it but he will eat whatever I give him. I know what the kids won't eat. I might fix us vegetables and them not, you know the kinds they won't eat (April Malloy).

For some children or family members with medical problems or food allergies, choosing the appropriate food is a significant issue:

We use frozen vegetables because Marney has kidney stones and she can't have all that salt from canned vegetables. Unless the canned vegetables are on a really good sale, it is mostly frozen (Jane Smith).

I don't do much prepared foods because of Gerilyn's allergies. Some things we have to look for in food, with the allergy, nothing with a nut warning or nothing with a peanut warning. Peanuts or tree nuts, but there are cookies that are made with peanut flour, plain sugar cookies, so someone can't hand me a sugar cookies oh it's a sugar cookie, its fine. I need to see a label, because there are sugar cookies in Hy-Vee that are made with peanut, I can't think of the names but some that you throw in the oven to bake are made with peanut flour. So that's what you have to look for, even though it doesn't specifically say nuts it made on the same equipment that nuts. (Stacey Ostrander)

Several provisioners not only had to worry about their own children, but also extended family members and other non-related children. Karen Calhoun works around her mother's food needs:

Grandma gets so confused that she might be eating supper at 2 in the afternoon so I have to have something ready for her plus now she adds a new dimension to the grocery shopping because she's very, very finicky--now I have to pick and choose things that she will eat as well. Week by week changes because she has forgotten what she likes the week before. Like this week she does like fish, she does like chicken, she will not eat anything that is mixed together like spaghetti, casseroles, anything like that she won't eat, so you have to keep everything separate. Her needs are probably 90 percent of the grocery planning because my family will eat anything so I have to cook things that she will eat (Karen Calhoun).

Jackie Engle runs an in-home day care which adds another layer of complexity to shopping:

I've got day care in my house about 20 days a month so I've got to do the fruit, vegetables, and the main course that we're having since I have to keep up with regulations. So I'm always getting those things and being up on those and then I have to consider my family (Jackie Engle)

### Division of Labor

How do these shoppers negotiate the household shopping labor? Most of the shoppers in my study indicate that grocery shopping is *their* responsibility because their partners do not have the skills and knowledge necessary knowledge to perform this work. April Malloy, for instance, states that her husband is a shopping liability: "He will start seeing things [in the store] and it's like (sigh). He's terrible. He's very

spontaneous and wants things as he sees them. It doesn't matter if they are on sale or not."

Some shoppers feel they have to be the primary shoppers because their partners cannot control their impulses and would only buy junk food. Jane Smith, when asked if she did most of the shopping replied,

Yes, I'd say I do 90%. If I send John to the store to get hamburger we get ice cream, chips, more ice-cream. He likes Oreo cookies, I never buy those. He's a fiend for junk food. He will go willingly [to the store] but he doesn't do well with staying on my list...it's just easier to do it myself. You think you're going to make tacos but you don't have any cheese but you have a lot of ice cream (Jane Smith).

Lisa Corbin said that her husband was not capable of doing the shopping. When asked why, she replied:

he wouldn't get the right kind of apples, or he wouldn't get the right kind of string cheese, or we don't really need that. (the right kind? That your kids like?) Yes, the kind that my kids like, or like just the wrong brands maybe, or he would just determine that we don't really need that or skip that thing. He's never shopped, never been a shopper, it's a difficult thing shopping for a family of six.

Jackie Engel attributes the fact that she is in charge of the household labor to innate differences in men and women:

I mean the reason women do most of the work is that they can multi-task I can be working and think "oh I have to get milk for tomorrow" and just jot it down real quick whereas my husband if he's doing whatever he's doing I don't care if he's hammering a nail into the wall or watching a football game that's what he's doing. He doesn't have those trailing thoughts "we've got to get salt for the softener" like I do.

Some shoppers even articulate that it is difficult for them to share this work with their partners. Tracey Kennedy's family goes shopping together but she wouldn't think about "letting" her husband go on his own:

I don't mind the shopping most of the time. I feel like I'm in control, I'm making the decisions for the family. I don't like it when Mark wants to do the shopping by himself--it freaks me out. I can't tell if the right decisions are being made.

Yes, although you know what most of our lives even when I was working and even when I was going to school full-time I did the shopping. Probably that is for two reasons: one is he probably has no interest in doing it at all and two I was, I am really controlling over what gets bought. There is some power for me. It's very scary for me to send someone to the grocery store not knowing what they are going to bring home. Because I may say apples and they buy the wrong kind....I guess I have my ideas of what is best (Kay Worthington).

Even households in which both partners shop for food, women express a greater concern with nutrition and the overall connection between food and health. This issue will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter but Jessica Pierce hints at the problem when she said:

He [her spouse] used to cook when he stayed home with our daughter but in order for the children to eat healthy you go ahead and fix the meal for them.

Only a few spouses refuse to participate in the shopping process. When I asked April if her husband went shopping, she replied:

Maybe once a month when I've gone on strike and don't want to go shopping and he is finally starving enough to get out there but yea but not unless there is nothing to eat. He thinks that it's my job and my purpose in life to bring the groceries in.

She told the story recently about going on a shopping strike when they were out of toilet paper. She was waiting for her husband to go to the store to buy the toilet paper, but when the standoff lasted for several days she finally broke down and bought it herself.

Many of the spouses did shop in some capacity, although most were there to get specific items or were provided lists arranged by the primary shopper.

When asked if her spouse did any of the shopping, Stacey Ostrander stated

Once in a while. Not very often. If I ask him to stop at the grocery store on the way home it is for something very specific. It isn't to say please go shopping, it's to say, please pick up a gallon of skim milk and a dozen eggs.

Mary Wirth said:

I do all the planning, I do all the thinking of what we need. I will call him and say "can you pick up a couple things and if it's more than two then it has to go on a list because you don't remember". But he will go pick up a few items but if the list gets too big then he doesn't want any part of it. He does not like the grocery experience at all. He doesn't like shopping experience at all. He wants to go in and grab the milk and leave.

Karen Calhoun sends her husband with a list so he can shop after work in the larger town:

Dan goes shopping once I make out the list and tell him exactly what to get and then he checks it off when he gets that item. But he does a fine job of it. He does my Aldi's list because he is in Topeka so the things that I know that I can get cheaper and Aldi's we like their fresh produce and stuff and milk is a little cheaper and he does the Aldi's run.

### At the Store:

Grocery shopping at the supermarket is a very standardized process. Almost all stores first require an automobile, unless the store is on a bus route or shoppers have an alternative means to get there. Once the shopper is parked in the large parking lot, she walks in through the automatic doors, grabs a grocery cart and then is expected to follow the layout of the store (first produce, then meats/dairy, grocery, breads), chose products from the shelf, place in cart and eventually take these items to the cash register. Some stores require customers to bag their own groceries or even use self-check out. However, within this standardization of the shopping experience there are variations in how individuals experience this process.

For the three shoppers who didn't have children or were retired, the work of shopping was much more flexible. They spent much less time planning meals, and expressed less anxiety about feeding issues when only one or two people were in the household. They also had more flexibility in timing their shopping trip; they had fewer schedules to work around, were not required to make meals at a certain time, and could even decide to eat out more often.

Jill Burnett, a single woman with no children, describes her shopping trips as "getting what I need and what I like. She rarely makes a list and spends less than 20 minutes in the grocery store on her way home from work. One of her most pressing shopping issues is buying the right amount of food:

I don't buy a bag of potatoes I buy a couple potatoes because I won't even eat them up before they are no good. You know a bag of chicken breasts I have to think long and hard whether I'm gonna will they go bad before I eat them up. Or it will get dried up with freezer burn or whatever. So I typically don't

buy large quantities of things like that. I'll buy a couple chicken breasts. I think about a package of hot dogs I'm never gonna eat the whole package before it so I do throw away food because it will go bad in my fridge.

On the other end of the spectrum is the stay at home mother of two who spends the most time shopping of anyone in the study. Karen states that food is very important not only for health but also for connection:

I try to incorporate everybody as much as I possible can, I try to eat the food, I try to grow my own food, I try to show the kids where the food is coming from as much as I can so if I can have interaction with the farmer or if I can have interaction with the baker that we do, and still furthermore because what we eat is so important we kind of go as a family. Um, that's a big part of our lives, probably one the major parts of how I raise my kids or how our family connects.

She shops in many different venues as well as maintains a garden in the back yard.

There is no separate "grocery trip"; purchasing food is part of their weekly routine:

We normally go to the farmers market on Saturday and then on Sunday we go shopping, either Sunday or Monday we go shopping at the Merc (local health store) and then I do, because the Dillons (supermarket) is only a couple blocks away, then we go over there, probably every other day or something. We don't do a big shopping, we get our bread at the bakers and we'll ride our bikes to the bakers once a week probably. So food buying is a huge part of what we do (Karen Jones).

She does acknowledge, however, that if she were working full time, her shopping work would be different. She states, "It would be real different, I would think. I would not be going all the time. But because I'm home and can do that, I do it."

Even the physical act of shopping is much more difficult for some shoppers than others. The no-frills or discount store is a warehouse box store that is designed for large shopping trips. For some shoppers, including the single mother with kids or

the elderly, this configuration requires extra physical work including walking from the huge parking lot in front of the store, getting kids into the cart or keeping them occupied, having to walk through much of the store even if for a few items, sacking your own groceries, and carrying them out and loading them into the car.

The experience of shopping is also different depending on how many people the shopper must take with her. Negotiating kids and shopping is a frequent topic of discussion. Jackie Engle said

I try to escape my three children. And try to go without them. Honestly because if I take my kids I spend \$10 more just because they all have an opinion about what they want. But there were days when they were tiny and Ron was coaching, I had three kids in car seats, not just booster seats, with coats in the winter and you might only need two things but you still had to take them all and that's the hard stuff.

I asked Lisa Corbin if she takes her kids shopping with her. She replied:

yea, my kids are always with me. I try to make them help. I ask them to pick out a couple of good apples, pick out the macaroni and cheese that we want, that kind of thing, but the baby is the worst. (Have you found any strategies for him?) No, I just let him scream. I used to think how could mothers let their kids scream like that? But now I am that woman. I let him scream...It's an exhausting experience, physically and mentally.

Colin Moore usually goes with his spouse and child. He says she usually rides in the cart and he "hands her stuff and she reads the names of it and puts it in the cart." If he doesn't give her something to do she would be "eyeing stuff and saying "I want this, I want that".

Karen Jones believes that a huge part of her shopping effort is to manage her two year old and four year old during the shopping trip. She said:

When we are at the [supermarket] they get a book or hold a toy or be engaged in some kind of eye spy game. There is something going with them so they are engaged or playing with me. Occasionally S will help me shop by going down the aisles and getting whatever it is I need. In the cart, E is a toddler isn't old enough to play those kinds of games and I have to keep her entertained as much as I can, which is a large part of what I do at the store.

For the single mother in my study with a two year old and a six year old who uses a wheelchair, shopping becomes a marathon. To negotiate the store itself, Peggy uses one hand to push the cart and the other hand to pull the wheelchair. Because she is on a strict budget, she sometimes takes a calculator and stops after each product is put in the cart to calculate the total amount. After she loads all her products on the conveyer belt, she then bags her own groceries and then has to negotiate the parking lot. She tries to park near a cart corral, because she doesn't like to leave the kids in the car while she takes the cart back. This is her description of getting both the groceries and the kids in the car:

sometimes if it's not real bad out I will sit there and I will leave the kids sitting outside and I will load everything and I will push the cart and pull Teddy and I will take the cart up there and then carry Ken on my hip and push Teddy's wheelchair back to the van because I don't like leaving them sit there."

At the end of a shopping trip she is "totally exhausted".

## Conclusion

Food provisioning has long been considered women's work, often requiring women either to grow their own food, employ other women to shop and cook in their stead or to procure it on the market. Changes in transportation, energy use, and residential patterns have all contributed to the contemporary nature of grocery shopping. The physical work of food provisioning, once a visible and daily activity, is now confined mainly to the grocery store. However, much invisible work is also necessary for this activity to occur, including menu planning and list making, accounting for household needs and schedules, negotiating with partners, and knowing what is available and what is good to eat.

We also see that grocery shopping is still a gendered activity. Although some shoppers shared the cooking and shopping with their spouses, all women in my study assumed management for the shopping and cooking work. How these shoppers accomplished the tasks of shopping and cooking depended on their relationship to wage work. Women who worked full-time spent much less time planning and cooking and used greater convenience foods such as eating out or prepared deli meals to feed their families. However, they still assumed responsibility for getting that food home and arranging schedules. Women who worked part-time or stayed at home spent more time planning, making meal plans and cooking at home, as well as shopping.

We also hear in the words of the shoppers a certain knowledge of “how” to shop that is culturally and historically specific and which shapes their activity of shopping and provisioning their families. These shoppers complain that they cannot send their spouses to the store because they will often buy “junk” foods or foods that only they will like; they rarely shop with the household or children’s nutrition in mind and they are often unaware of the necessity of strategies of shopping that will save money. In the next chapters I identify two institutional discourses, one regarding how to shop efficiently and another about what kind of food is good for their families, that shape how shoppers approach the work of grocery shopping. In these chapters I discuss what these discourses entail and map out specific institutional agents who create and disseminate this information.

### Chapter 3: Individual Responsibility for Nutrition

In the last chapter we saw that shopping involves many activities and skills. Starting in the work of these shoppers and the language they use to describe it, the next two chapters work upward to investigate how this work is organized by texts and discourses that originate in the work of others in the institutional food complex. In this chapter I will give examples of one textually-based discourse and investigate how this discourse affects the choices of working class and middle class shoppers in different ways. Ultimately, the discourse that standardizes the knowledge of nutrition, which I call the individual responsibility for nutrition, makes all shoppers accountable for the health of the individuals in their household. This individual-level response ignores the larger community and societal factors that contribute to health, and makes it possible for corporations and governments to maintain their claim of non-responsibility for human reproduction (Acker 2006).

Many shoppers, especially middle class shoppers, expressed significant concerns about nutrition and the health of their families in relationship to the work they do in grocery shopping. Jackie Engle told me:

I do try to cook stuff that's low fat and stuff like that. I'm not a big sugar worrier and I should be more. My kids can have Post Toasties with sugar and something else on it and I don't even care. I should, I should worry more about that but they are eating and they are having milk and you know. My kids are not real vegetable people and that's my fault because we didn't probably push them enough when they were little. I should have really shoved the vegetables at them so it would be better.

Jackie “knows” that her family should not eat sugar or fat and eat more vegetables and is implicitly referring to some kind of institutional knowledge about what is “good” and “healthy”. But she lets her kids eat sugared cereal, she only buys certain fat-free foods and does not require her children to eat vegetables. She doesn’t experiment much with the family meals but does realize that she is accountable for her children’s nutrition and thus their health-- when she states “it would be better” she means that she would be fulfilling her responsibility as food provider if she lived up to these standards and her kids would somehow be healthier.

Tracey Kennedy “knows” that her family is supposed to eat more fruits and vegetables but encountered this dilemma over broccoli:

Should you put the fattening Ranch on it to get them to eat the vitamins? I don’t know what the answer is. I guess I know what we are doing to get the vitamins from the broccoli and at least cultivate some getting it down them versus no vegetable at all. I’m ambivalent but that’s what we are going with. And here we use a lighter ranch with reduced fat and again I don’t know what the long term consequences of those things are (Tracey Kennedy).

Her ambivalence is related to her connection with expert nutrition knowledge that stresses low-fat foods and high intakes of fruits and vegetables. But what about the dislikes and desires of the individuals who are eating the food? It is the shoppers’ responsibility to reconcile their local relationships and experiences with this nutrition information.

Maggie Waggoner has battled her weight for many years and worries that her kids will have the same issues. One of her biggest nutritional concerns is the amount of fat in her family’s diet. She gives these examples:

I am really into watching the nutrition value of food and I do watch what kinds of food we have. Walmart's got this really good brand of breaded chicken breasts, they are frozen and are all ready just to microwave them or whatever, and I justify buying them is that they are like 7-8 grams of fat per chicken patty, well, most brands are like 30 grams of fat. I get chicken rings that are like 2 grams of fat per serving. We do a lot of frozen French fries because you have to check your brands some have 8-10 grams of fat per serving but then there are those that have 2-3. And so we throw them on the George Foreman about twice a week, my kids love it. My husband is like, these kids eat too many French fries and I'm like, two grams of fat? A baked potato is going to have more grams of fat because you are going to be putting butter and whatever on them.

She does try to have fresh fruit on the table every night and most nights also a fresh vegetable. While she does try to keep "healthy" food in the house, she also confesses that she also buys "junk": "You know last night I brought home Oreo cookies."

Since she also tries to limit calories, she drinks diet pop. Her kids also drink diet soda, due to weight concerns and cavity issues. But even this causes concern as she states:

But there are people who are looking at me and go 'you should not be giving kids diet pop.' But they get one diet pop a day, one artificial sweetener a day. And that's another one of my things, what's better for you? Is sugar any better for you than sweetener?

While food safety is another significant issue for her, overall, it is her kids' diet that she is most concerned about. She spends time shopping and preparing the foods she thinks are important for her kids to eat, and expends emotional energy thinking and worrying about what they eat. She states:

I would never have worried about all that [nutrition] before the kids....I don't think I was always such a worried, obsessive person about when it comes to food, but I think I've always been that way when it comes to my kids.

## Nutrition Knowledge

Shoppers do not see, smell, or taste fat, calories or sugar grams; these concepts are not known from experience but are based on knowledge disseminated through discourses that are created at extra-local institutional sites. For institutional ethnographers, this signals an institutional knowledge that goes beyond the everyday lived experience; shoppers did not know these terms intuitively, they had to acquire this knowledge from outside their experience. The second step in IE is to identify texts that influence the work of shopping. My shoppers identified and referenced texts such as women's magazines (*More, Simple Living, Good Housekeeping*), television news shows (*Good Morning America, Today Show,*) local news shows, newspapers, government agencies (United States Department of Agriculture, Health and Human Services), medical brochures and store advertisements as sources of information about food shopping and nutrition.

Analyzing these sources for shopping information, I identified a discourse I term "individual responsibility for nutrition". This discourse is science-based; it reduces nutrition into constituent nutrients, for instance into fat, proteins and carbohydrates, antioxidants (even flavonoids!), and assumes that the individual will acquire this information, thus holding the individual accountable for this knowledge and the consequences for not using it correctly. This reductionist approach to nutrition began in Progressive Era changes to standardize the American diet in the face of increasing numbers of immigrants (Levenstein 1997).

Between 1880-1930 W.O. Atwater, a chemist and the first director of the USDA's Office of Experiment Stations, discovered that food can be broken down into constituent parts, i.e., proteins, carbohydrates and fats (Roth 2000). Dubbed the "Father of American Nutrition", Atwater viewed the body as a machine and food as fuel for that machine (Mudry 2006). From this mechanistic perspective, chemists and scientists who worked for the United States Department of Agriculture began to break food down into its constituent parts—calories, fat, protein and carbohydrates. Home economists with the USDA borrowed this discursive understanding of food to create food buying guides as early as 1917 and taught the public about proper eating using numbers (Mudry 2006). Industrial food founders such as John and William Kellogg (the inventors of Corn Flakes) and Sylvester Graham (who invented the graham cracker) incorporated this perspective on nutrition into their food production processes and established a firm link between discourse and industry practice (Roth 2000).

Atwater directed his prescriptions to eat more protein to the working classes but it was actually middle-class housewives who began to learn the vocabulary of protein, fat, and carbohydrates (Levenstein 2003). Home economists helped spread the nutrition discourse in their work of educating women on the basics of maintaining households in a consumer economy. As women became food purchasers rather than growers, and found the number of choices rising at the supermarket, they needed information on how and what to purchase. While the food industry developed new marketing practices as a means to direct purchases, these institutional "experts"

stepped in to provide information on how to be a good household consumer. Thus, one of the extended social relations dedicated to food purchasing that connected the local household to the extra-local relations of ruling was the home economics profession. Using the language of science to create a more rationalized consumption system, home economists became mediators between industry, government and consumers and played an important role in shaping consumer products and their usage (Goldstein 2006).

Ironically, home economics developed as an academic and practical discipline because many educated women, shut out of the mainstream professions, carved out a niche in the academy through domestic sciences. Ellen Richards, one of the founders of the American Home Economics Association, was the first woman to receive a degree from MIT in chemistry. Turned down for private chemistry positions, she eventually became an instructor in “sanitary chemistry” and applied science to everyday problems for women in their households (Stage 1997). Rather than confining women to the home but without directly challenging the cult of domesticity, Richards envisioned a place for women in the larger community based on their domestic skills. She was the chief nutritionist for the New England Kitchen in 1890 that sold soups, stews and puddings to the working classes to be taken home for dinner as well as one of the founders of the Boston School of Housekeeping which certified women in domestic service (Stage 1997).

But the larger economic ethos of the time was caught up in the efficiency movement. Taylor was developing scientific management techniques to rationalize

the factory and the home economics movement mirrored that shift. The household became the site of women's "job" and home management experts used methods taken from time and motion studies in industry to streamline household tasks such as food preparation, dishwashing, and laundry.

Christine Frederick, an early advocate of Taylor's efficiency studies and home engineer, declared that housewives must become purchasing agents for the household: "[E]very woman running the business of homemaking must train herself to become an efficient "purchasing agent" for her particular family or firm by study, watchfulness and practice (Strasser 1982)." Scheduling and planning were crucial to efficient household management: meals should be planned one or two weeks in advance with every ingredient needed on a "purchasing sheet" (the forerunner to our modern list). Planning would not only keep material and financial waste down but also reduce the effort expended on food preparation. For example, one type of cooking should be used in every meal to economize on effort, whether it be boiled, baked, or fried, and any food that is left should be incorporated into future meals. In this way, the "left-over" becomes a "planned over" and waste is minimized (Strasser 1982: 214). But the overall goal of household efficiency was to save time for other household tasks such as helping the husband with his business or working with the kids.

Trained home economists in the 1940's and 1950's were usually well-educated women who were writing and teaching other women to become good household managers. These women sought to educate the public through courses

taught in schools, colleges, and extension services and through articles in popular publications. As more women entered the paid workforce, less time was available for housework, and many women were interested in learning how to manage time effectively. Also, as new consumer products such as dishwashers and washing machines came on the market, consumers were eager for advice about how to select and use these items (Stage and Visconte 1997).

Although home economics went through a decline in the 70's and 80's, most of the content now fits under the rubric 'family and consumer science'. The College of Home Economics at Kansas State University, for example, has been renamed the College of Human Ecology and those who complete the B.S. in Human Ecology are employed as educators in high schools and middle schools, or as Family and Consumer Science agents or 4-H youth programs with the Cooperative Extension Service (Karen Pence, Assistant Dean of College of Human Ecology, personal communication 5/9/07). Programs in dietetics, nutrition, public health, family studies and human services are available at these institutions (usually land grant) and many majors also go on to work as registered dietitians and nutritionists. The Bureau of Labor Statistics data indicate that the professions of dietitians and nutritionists are overwhelmingly female; thus, the historical trajectory of female professionals directing female consumers continues into the twenty first century.

#### Contemporary Nutrition Discourse

Nearly all contemporary shoppers are familiar with the basics of nutrition knowledge, having been introduced either to the four food groups or the food pyramid

in both its early 1980's manifestation and the newer MyPyramid version. The antecedent to the food pyramid, the four basic food groups, was the basis of US food policy until the mid 1970's (Nestle 2002). This policy instructed individuals to eat from the four basic food groups-milk, meat, vegetables and fruits, and breads and cereals-to ensure that they are getting the right balance of nutrients (Nestle 2002).

Nearly all mainstream nutrition and dietary information is directly based on federal recommendations delineated in "The Dietary Guidelines for Americans" a joint publication of the US Department of Health and Human Services and the US Department of Agriculture. The report states that it "provides science-based advice to promote health and to reduce risk for major chronic diseases through diet and physical activity (U.S. Dept.of HHS, Dietary Guidelines, 2005)." The USDA's food pyramid is based on this scientific evidence and is one of the basic building blocks of nutrition discourse. The government's MyPyramid, which recently replaced the "one-size-fits-all" food pyramid, calls for Americans to "make smart choices from every food group, find your balance between food and physical activity, and get the most nutrition out of your calories (USDA 2005)." Individuals are instructed to make food choices based in terms of ounces or cups (rather than number of servings, as in the old food pyramid).

One of the main recommendations from the current food pyramid for the average adult on 2,000 calories a day is to "consume a variety of nutrient-dense foods and beverages within and among the basic food groups while choosing foods that limit the intake of saturated and trans fat, cholesterol, added sugars, salt and alcohol

(US Department of Health and Human Services Guidelines 2005).” More specifically, Americans should consume 2 cups of fruit and 2.5 cups of vegetables a day, 3 ounces or more of whole-grain products, and at least 3 cups of milk or equivalent milk products a day. No more than 10 percent of food should come from saturated fat, with total fat intake between 20-35 percent of calories, less than 2,300 mg of salt, and limit alcoholic beverages. There are specific requirements for older, younger and special needs but these are the basic guidelines. Exercise at some level of intensity is also recommended.

The nutrition discourse also advises individuals to avoid foods. A wide range of sources (from USDA publications to women’s magazines (Stamos 2007) advise individuals to cut back on sugar, especially from soda and fruit drinks. These sources state that sugar provides calories but no nutrients; people who consume foods with added sugar tend to consume more calories than people who consume fewer added-sugar foods. Trans-fat is another nutrient to be avoided. According to the US Food and Drug Administration, *trans* fat is made when manufacturers add hydrogen to vegetable oil in a process called hydrogenation. Hydrogenation increases the shelf life and flavor stability of foods containing these fats. Researchers have found that trans-fats raise LDL (bad) cholesterol in the blood.

Thus, these experts argue to be healthy individuals must educate themselves by learning nutrition information and reading labels at the grocery store. Experts suggest that to become a smart shopper one must first know what nutrients are good (iron, fiber, vitamins, etc.), what nutrients are bad (saturated, trans fats), what

amounts one should eat of the particular nutrient (i.e., 5 percent or less of daily value of sodium), and what certain terms mean (low calorie, for example, means less than 40 calories per serving) (ADA 2006). This expert knowledge is rather extensive and quantifiable; but the implication is that individuals are responsible for this knowledge and the consequences for following this expert advice.

### Institutional Agents

This discourse has powerful agents who support and disseminate this information. The United States Department of Agriculture is the leading governmental organization for nutrition information and includes several agencies that propose and support nutrition research, policy and education, including the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP), the Food and Nutrition Service, and the Cooperative State Research and Education (CSREES) agency. The CSREES, for example, is also connected to land-grant institutions and the extension offices that operate under these universities. Cooperative extension offices are county agencies that are staffed by “experts” who “provide useful, practical, and research-based information to agricultural producers, small business owners, youth, consumers, and others in rural areas and communities of all sizes (<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/>).” The “experts” employed at these agencies have degrees in agriculture and family and consumer sciences education, which also includes diet and nutrition.

The US Department of Health and Human Services also has a stake in grocery shopping advice, especially as it relates to health. One aspect of this department’s mission is “protecting the health of all Americans,” and services include health and

social science research, preventing disease, including immunization services and assuring food and drug safety ([www.hhs.gov/about/whatwedo.html](http://www.hhs.gov/about/whatwedo.html)). Under the HHS umbrella are the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The HHS publication, *A Healthier You: Based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, is based on nutrition policy developed under the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion at the USDA and is a joint publication between HHS and Office of Disease and Health Promotion. The main message in several of their publications is that “Healthy eating is associated with reduced risk for many diseases, including the three leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, and stroke ([www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/nutrition/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/nutrition/index.htm)).” These agencies base their nutrition information on the food pyramid, while also emphasizing the connection between food and disease.

The American Dietetic Association (ADA) is another institutional agent in the dissemination of health and nutrition information. Comprised of registered dietitians and nutritionists, this organization’s shopping and food information is based on the food pyramid and has cross references to the USDA and CNPP websites. Their mission statement states that “the ADA serves the public by promoting optimal nutrition, health and well-being. ADA members are the nation's food and nutrition experts, translating the science of nutrition into practical solutions for healthy living and well being ([www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)).”

Many of the ADA’s publications for consumers are also sponsored by large agro-food companies. For example, the “Nutrition Fact Sheet: Dietary Fats:

Clarifying an Age-Old Issue” is sponsored by the Promise Institute, an organization under the umbrella of Unilever (the company which makes Promise Buttery Spreads). The nutritional message from this publication is that “To maintain heart health, the best choice is to reduce both saturated and trans fat by replacing butter, lard, and shortening and hard stick margarine with unsaturated fats such as soft, non-hydrogenated margarine and vegetable oils like olive, canola, sunflower and soybean oils (eatright.org).” Interestingly, the Promise Spread happens to fit these guidelines.

But, if the consumer did have more questions, they can go to the Promise Institute website and send an email message to a staff dietician. Unilever is also introducing an Eat Smart logo to “help customers make healthier choices amongst our products. Because shoppers are so busy and reducing the amount of trans fat, saturated fats, sugars and sodium is so important to health and overall well-being, Unilever has made it easy to choose food items that “meet specific Unilever criteria which are based on U.S. Dietary Guidelines ([www.unilver.com](http://www.unilver.com)).”

Other food industry corporations are involved in promoting the nutrition discourse. Wendy’s, the fast-food restaurant chain, sponsors a Fact Sheet on the ADA website titled “Eating Better Together: A Family Guide for a Healthier Lifestyle” in which a section of the two page brochure is devoted to tips for choosing a restaurant when “on the go”. One of the bulleted points is to “select colorful fruits and vegetables like spinach, tomatoes and mandarin oranges.” At the time this fact sheet was published in 2005, Wendy’s was the only fast food chain to include fruit,

specifically mandarin oranges, in their children's meals. Wendy's also has a website titled "Mom~RD" that connects moms with registered dietitians.

Retail stores are also promoting the government's guidelines on food and nutrition in several ways. Albertson's, a large supermarket chain, is offering personalized MyPyramid information on making "healthy choices for their families" by having shoppers punch in their age, weight height and level of physical activity at store kiosks (standing computers). This information can be used to purchase food items based on these recommendations. Aisle markers and shelf tags are color-coded to help locate specific categories in their personal food pyramid (Supermarket News 2007). Retailers are also adding dietitians to their staff, who can offer customers "practical nutrition and healthy lifestyle information" (Progressive Grocer 2007). Hy-Vee has dietitians at the corporate level who customers can contact on their website with particular health and wellness questions.

One dietary research firm believes that supermarkets can take dietetic information "to the next level" by designing supermarket carts with computers that would remember the shopper's demographics as well as his/her nutritional needs. This cart could then recommend recipes and meals as well as provide coupons to fit the shopper's demographic and nutritional profile. The receipt at the check-out could provide not only the total, but also the dietary needs met by the purchased products (i.e. daily amount of calcium provided) (Brown 2003)

But the official government guidelines that shape most of the official nutrition policy have not been immune to pressure from industry groups representing particular

food sectors that attempt to make sure the guidelines will not harm their marketing potential. For example, the Cattleman's Association was opposed to any recommendations in the 1980's food pyramid that suggested decreasing consumption of meat. The food pyramid guidelines thus read "choose lean meat" instead of eat less meat as a result of their lobbying efforts (Nestle 2002). The current MyPyramid uses ounces as the recommended measure of how much food to eat in each category but never instructs individuals to eat less of any product.

Activists have also demonstrated other institutional connections between the USDA and agro-food organizations. Prior to her selection as G.W. Bush's Secretary of the USDA, Ann Veneman (2001-2004) served on the board of biotech company Calgene (later taken over by Monsanto). Many of Veneman's aides and the heads of various USDA agencies spent much of their career prior to government service working for agribusiness companies and trade associations. For example, Veneman's chief of staff also served as legislative liaison for National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) (Mattera 2004). Thus, we find powerful institutional actors with multiple connections creating and disseminating scientific-based nutrition knowledge.

### Critiques of Nutrition Discourse

The scientific approach to nutrition is not without critics. Crotty (1995) argues that the shift from food groups to dietary guidelines in national nutrition policy turned from selecting food for health promotion to selecting food to reduce the prevalence or delaying of certain kinds of disease, especially heart disease. The main

message of this expert knowledge is that if you don't eat "right", you will end up "diseased" in some way. This discourse ties nutrition not only to health but to disease. If we are not eating the correct combination of foods and nutrients, we are more likely to be sick or ill. The discourse identifies what you should eat-- fruits and vegetables, whole grain products, and milk—in addition to certain amounts of vitamin, minerals and other micro-nutrients. If don't get these, you won't be healthy.

Critics of this "expert" nutrition point out the reductionism and institutional interest inherent in this textually-based discourse. Both Dixon and Banwell (2004) and Pollan (2007) discuss the growing trend for food to be reduced to its constituent nutrients, for food to be equated with health but to be driven by industry and science. Dixon and Banwell's term, nutritionalization, encompasses "the growing dominance of nutrition and health considerations in all facets of dietary discourse and of the food supply itself (119)" culminating in a diets-making complex (DMC) of government agencies, science firms, and nutritionalists. In a similar vein, Pollan (2007) writes about nutritionism or "the widely shared but unexamined assumption that the key to understanding food is the nutrient...since nutrients are invisible it falls to the scientists to explain it to us. We need lots of expert help."

Marion Nestle (2002) also points out the methodological problems in a science- based nutrition research that relates diet to disease. First, applying lab-based results to real populations of people can only establish associations but never causation between dietary factors and disease. Not only is it difficult to people to actually remember and document what exactly they ate, placebo effects are also

difficult to separate from true nutrient effects. While researchers are good at isolating nutrients, they have a much more difficult time analyzing the how nutrients interact with each other. For example, iron is absorbed better when eaten in conjunction with vitamin C.

An example from *Good Housekeeping* titled “The ABCs of Vitamin D” provides a good illustration of nutrionalization, which reduces health to the consumption of individual nutrients based on scientific knowledge:

Take a close look at the label on your multi: Unless the vitamin D is listed as D3 (or cholecalciferol) you’re getting shortchanged. Some bills contain D2 (ergocalciferol) once thought to be equivalent to D3 but now proven to be “substantially less potent”, says Reinhold Vieth, Ph.D., director of the Bone and Mineral Laboratory Mount Sinai Hospital. Low Vitamin D blood levels have been linked to a host of health problems, from osteoporosis to several cancers. Many experts advise all adults to get about 1,000 IU of D daily, whether from supplements or fortified foods, including milk and yogurt (Hammock, 2007).

Another example of the issue of fruits and vegetables that speaks to the dilemma of the mother listed above is found in Parade Magazine. The article asks “why is it so important to eat more servings of fruits and vegetables?” The answer:

Fruits and vegetables are full of good stuff-such as fiber, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals-that helps to reduce your risk of certain cancers and many chronic diseases, including diabetes. Unfortunately, more than 90% of us don’t get t recommended average of 10 servings of fruits and vegetables in our daily diets. Here are a few examples of single servings from the Department of Agriculture: a medium fruit (such as an apple or banana); a half cup of chopped, cooked or canned fruit or vegetables; or 4 ounces of juice (O’Shea, 2007).

Even the local food cooperative advertisement includes information on the nutrients in their food. This advertisement features acai, a type of fruit juice grown in the Amazon rain forest. The ad states

it has a rich berry-cocoa flavor, is packed with more antioxidants than blueberries or pomegranates, and contains loads of healthy Omega fats, protein and dietary fiber (*The Coop Advantage* May 2008).

Thus, the nutrition discourse is a science-based approach to eating that breaks food down into constituent parts and makes it the individual shopper's responsibility to choose these nutrients wisely. This standardizing approach to nutrition also standardizes the work of shopping which ignores the real-life constraints that many shoppers face. All shoppers now must be familiar with this knowledge and shop toward its dictates. Starting with the work of the shoppers, and listening to how they describe what they do, forces us to see all the work that is involved in trying to satisfy the demands of this discourse with their real-life experiences.

#### Shopping for Nutrition

All the shoppers in my study indicated some knowledge of the nutrition discourse, but middle-class shoppers intimately connected with nutrition texts expressed a much higher level of anxiety concerning the food they were buying for their family than my working class shoppers. This finding parallels other research (DeVault 1991; Dixon 1999) that shows working class shoppers draw on experience and tradition for their nutrition knowledge, whereas in the professional middle class, science and style are prized over experience (DeVault 1991: 221).

My working class shoppers, those who had attained at least a high school diploma and some who had taken college courses, acknowledged some familiarity with the nutrition discourse but didn't express serious concerns about nutrition and even downplayed some of the "expert" information. Jane Smith is a mother of six who works part-time at a city position. One of her daughters has kidney stones and she used to read labels to watch for sodium. But now Jane states "we don't worry too much. If I'm making tacos, you know, whatever is in it, is in it."

She does acknowledge aspects of the nutrition discourse but then rejects it using the efficiency discourse. She says:

We probably should be reading labels, I think we'd all be healthier for it. But I figure if you need sour cream you need sour cream. Why pay a dollar more for something that says "fat free" and then you find out that the fat free thing gives you cancer anyway. Just give me the fat and we'll call it good.

She also points out what to her seem like absurdities:

I saw on the news last night if you eat enough vitamin D you won't get cancer. But you have to drink a gallon of milk a day to get the benefits. Now, I thought "who is going to that? Who is going to drink a gallon of milk every single day to not get cancer?"

Another working class mother, Karen Calhoun, fixes traditional casseroles for her three girls and her husband, many of the same dishes that she grew up with. She is caring for her mother with Alzheimer's in her home and now that her mom cannot have any food touching (which precludes casseroles), Karen has had to branch out into meatloaf or chicken dishes or even fish. She tries new recipes from *Taste of Home*, which features recipes sent in by readers and are what Karen calls "tried and true, the best for families". In terms of "healthy foods" like whole grains she states

that “stuff like that might be better but it’s costlier too because anything that is healthy for you they always jack up the price of it. I don’t get that technical.” She does read labels sometimes but “more times its stuff that is new and I’m sure it would be quite an eye opening experience to read the stuff we normally get. But you are always in a hurry, always busy and before you know it you are off to the next thing.” Overall, although she does acknowledge some acquaintance with nutrition information, she is not convinced enough by its efficacy to alter her eating or shopping patterns.

When I asked Peggy Fiske, a single mom with two kids, if she had any food concerns, she stated that she had read something on Walmart.com about the bird flu and she was worried because she had just bought a whole turkey and didn’t want to have to throw it away. She knows that there are guidelines to keep people from getting sick, but she stated that when she buys fresh vegetables and stuff like that “I clean them before I fix them” and she makes sure that she doesn’t buy any produce with cracks in them to let in bacteria.

One of Peggy’s main concerns is her son getting “real” food to eat. His doctor and a nursing company advised her that he have at least three cans of Pedia-sure a day, the amount of which they raised at some point to six cans a day. In terms of the health benefits, Peggy says that he has to have the Pedia-sure “to make sure he’s gets enough nutrients and that’s calories and I don’t know.” I asked why he was had to have the Pedia-sure and she said

He had a problem with reflux. And then they kept raising the amount of Pedia-sure he was getting and you know first he was getting sick every time

he ate and then he didn't even have an appetite because he was getting 6 cans a day of Pedia-sure and he was about three years old, so basically I'm having to re-teach him how to eat and trying to remind him you know "you used to love this". And so its kind of trying to rebuilt his palate I guess because I don't want him on a liquid diet forever.

She is worried less about the specific nutrients, but has to contend with the experts that are telling her how many cans of Pedia-sure he has to have:

We used to have a nursing company that gave him two or three cans a day and they were wanting him to gain like two pounds a week. I was like you know if he continuously gains two pounds a week he's going to be overweight very quickly and he was holding steady at his weight. And they were just "he's not gaining any weight we need to raise the number of cans." And they really pushed for it and I was being overridden and so the doctor wrote up the order. You know nobody was wanting to let me get my two cents in.

Finally, she got his doctor to agree to decrease the number of cans as long as his weight holds steady, which it has for several months.

Lisa Corbin has a bachelor's degree and is currently working part-time from home. When she talks about shopping for her husband and four children she does acknowledge a familiarity with nutrition, but felt that since her kids were home with her she could control what they ate. She said,

Nutritionally I wish I made things more from scratch because I know that packaged food is very fattening. But we eat wheat bread, I try to get calcium in a lot of our food, because a couple of my kids don't drink any milk at all, they don't like it. So I try to make sure they are getting enough calcium in other things, fortified orange juice, and I look for frozen waffles that have calcium. We don't eat sweets a lot, so the snacks that we have are granola bars and yogurt not candy. We never go to the store and buy just candy. We eat healthy cereal, we don't buy sugar cereal (well I shouldn't say never, probably once every couple of months we buy Fruit Loops or something but otherwise we eat Wheaties and Cheerios). So I'm not terribly, terribly concerned because I just try to only buy chips about once a month. That means that I'm really not concerned a lot about what they are eating because I

know that what they are eating is mainly good for them. Then I figure that as long as they are active, I'm not really concerned about the fat in food, because I think that kids need some fat anyway and I just think that if they are active enough they will be fine.

Middle class shoppers with higher levels of education (especially professional) and who are committed to expert discourses about food express significantly more anxiety about what they are eating and especially what they are buying for their kids. They have higher "standards" for what food they want to eat and emphasize the health issue of food as a strong variable in their food selection (as well as the ability to pay for it). Kay Worthington states that she

would never buy something that we wouldn't normally eat. Like any of the ready-made, like Kraft macaroni and cheese, or something like that, we don't eat that kind of stuff and I wouldn't even buy it if it was 10 cents a piece because I would worry about the nutritional aspect. I worry about this constantly. Every facet of it.... I mean honestly the end point of the whole nutritional discussion is that you will die or get sick if you don't eat the certain healthiest stuff. I believe it in my gut.

Kay spends almost \$900 a month on food, making sure she buys the freshest and most healthful products and is the primary household meal preparer. She goes shopping every couple days because she worries about produce like staying fresh and losing its nutrition if it is in the refrigerator over too many days but will not compromise on price over taste and nutrition.

Other shoppers explicitly seek out information on nutrition, and read articles and books on the alternative discourses about nutrition. They discuss eating organic and pesticide-free foods and they emphasize local foods. Those with time and money can translate this knowledge into action and employ a variety of different food

provisioning strategies, including growing food, farmers markets, buying from bakeries, and visiting local farms.

For Kelly Jones, a stay-at-home mom with a Master's degree in social work, shopping is an on-going event:

I normally go to the farmers market on Saturday and then on Sunday we go shopping, either Sunday or Monday we go shopping at the local health food store and then I do, because the Dillons is only a couple blocks away, then we go over there, probably every other day or something. We don't do a big shopping, we get our bread at the bakers and we'll ride our bikes to the bakers once a week probably. So food buying is a huge part of what we do.

She considers it her duty as a parent to shape what her kids are eating:

it's [food provisioning] such a huge part of our job. It's also something I feel like I have the most control over. What my kids eat-that I can shape. Somehow help shape their bodies and their well-being. I think that what you put in a person's body affects how they grow, their health....I can't really influence, at the end of the day, different influences on their lives but what I can say is that I'm in charge of what we eat in this house. I think that actually is a really big thing.

While Kelly says that her husband is as involved with the kids as she is, the work of food shopping is still not quite evenly split because

I get the final word on what we are going to eat or not. It's probably more important to me what goes inside the kids, not that he doesn't want to have healthy food but he's not going to be as neurotic about the ingredients in everything they eat as I am.

She does confess, though, that although she enjoys staying at home with her kids, she is scared of trying to get back into the job market after a long hiatus, and admits that if she were working, she would not be able to shop and feed her family in this

manner. One of the main reasons she stayed home in the first place was her concern about breastfeeding:

And I think that the nursing thing, is really part how, more than anything, I ended up staying home. Now looking back on it, it seems kind of silly to me but at the time, when you are that new mothering and a couple months went by and she still wasn't taking a bottle, still nursing and I couldn't see, I just couldn't in my head figure out how she was going to eat while I wasn't there. Now if another mother would talk to me about it I would be probably be able to tell her rationally, it will work out, a couple week adjustment but you will figure out a way. But at the time I couldn't figure out, I felt kind of panicked about it. It wasn't worth it to me and again I was in a situation where I could make that choice with Jerry's help but everyone can't choose to do it.

Colin Moore said he usually doesn't think about health concerns when purchasing food but acknowledged that his wife does. "Meg thinks more about buying organic food; for instance, over time she is getting organic carrots instead of the regular ones." Meg corroborated his response with this story. She signed up for a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) subscription in order to get organic food for her family. It was difficult for her to justify the price and when her husband found out he was somewhat shocked. "If I'm without him and I'm shopping I feel more freedom to buy stuff that's more expensive because he just gets more edgy about it." He does support what she is doing but is not as concerned about "healthy" food. She states that "Colin thinks about food a lot but not in the same way. Its not so much we need to buy local or we need to buy organic, its like just different methods of cooking or different things to do that he hasn't thought of before....We are talking about someone who eats hot dogs and bologna."

Meg was reading more about the nutritional value nutritional value of the food her family ate as well as the larger state of the food system. After she became pregnant a second time, she began questioning the larger food system:

Food travels thousands of miles to get to the dinner table - not sustainable at all! And it makes no sense. Yet, I just bought squash at my local grocery store that came from Michigan when I know full well that there is local squash at the farmer's market - which I never have time to go to because they have such limited hours. That made me feel bad, knowing I was participating in a destructive system.

So she searched on the internet for local grains, cheese and other vegetable growers and found herself going to many different stores, including the supermarket for non-local foods, the farmers market on Saturdays, the local co-op, and several local farms for fresh produce. After she went back to work, this type of shopping abruptly stopped. She states:

I stopped feeling guilty about buying produce at the grocery store when I realized that it is NOT possible. Supporting sustainable agriculture is not sustainable in our society. Now I still get my few things at the local health food store but just get the rest from the supermarket. I bake quick breads every other week, but not bread-bread. I just don't have the time. I feel like I don't have much of a choice anymore but to just participate in the system. It basically sucks.

But while some mothers explicitly seek out these foods, some simply have to make choices within the constraints of their time. Jessica Pierce, a professional mom with two children expressed significant anxiety over the pesticides in the food that her kids eat and believes conventional food to be “chock-full” of hormones and pesticides. She expresses guilt over not putting more time into food shopping but she finds that organic food costs significantly more and she doesn't have time to cook

from scratch. The farmer's market, for instance, is open only twice a week during her work hours. But as her work can last until 8 PM on some nights, many times she is just focused on getting her kids fed before they go to bed, and cannot count on her husband to help her:

One time when I got home at 9:00, my 5 year old son said that he was hungry. When I asked him what he had for dinner he said 'nothing'. My husband said 'oh yea, I forgot to feed them.' I don't worry so much about my 11 year-old daughter who can fend for herself, maybe find a frozen microwaveable dish in the freezer and heat it up, but my five year old can't.

Thus, while working class women express some knowledge of this discourse, they give little credence to its dictates, perhaps due distrust of authorities in general, but also because they have to contend with how to feed their families on a limited budget. Fresh fruits and vegetables are expensive and in the rural store they are also not readily available or of low quality. Middle class women, especially professionals, are very familiar with this discourse but in keeping with the culture of intensive mothering (Hays 1996), tend to spend a great deal of emotional and physical labor trying to live up to its standards.

#### Individual Responsibility for Nutrition Discourse

Even though nutrition is "done" differently, and has significant consequences for the shopper and the replication of social class, one aspect of the institutional organization of food and nutrition information is the construction of nutrition as an individual household responsibility, and by extension the responsibility of the shopper. The "obesity epidemic" is a prime example of constructing disease as an individual dysfunctional relationship to food. Determined by calculating an

individual's body mass index (BMI), which is weight in kilograms divided by square of height in meters, the number of obese people have doubled between 1980 and 2000 (National Center for Health Statistics 2003.) The government estimates that 65 percent of Americans are now overweight or obese; more than 61 million adults are obese, and about 16 percent of children and teens are overweight (US Dept of Health and Human Services).

Those extra pounds are linked to heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, cancers, and other chronic conditions. The USDA, NIH and HHS began a national policy campaign that targets two main institutions with regards to childhood obesity: the school and the household. Healthier lunch choices and mandatory physical education have been touted as the answer to combat obesity in schools; in the home it is the parents' responsibility to create good family eating habits and encourage physical activity. One government brochure, for example, states that one small step families can do is "put a bowl of fruit on the kitchen counter and making a family agreement not to have chips or other high-calorie snacks in the house (US Dept. of HHS, 2005).

Health experts recommend eating at home as a main method for combating the obesity epidemic, especially in children. These experts assume that someone is cooking a meal, not getting take-out from the grocery store, coordinating schedules to make it possible to eat together, and has the time to shop for fresh foods. One magazine article stated:

One way around the ‘obesogenic’ environment is to eat at home, where you can control both portion sizes and the content of meals. Families who eat out a lot tend to consume fewer fruits and vegetables, nutrition researchers at St. Louis University found (RealSimple 2007).

Research from the Harvard Medical school on the relationship between family meals and obesity is often cited: eating dinner at home is associated with more healthful dietary intake patterns, including more fruits and vegetables, less fried food and soda, less saturated and trans fat (Family Dinner and Diet Quality Among Older Children and Adolescents Arch Fam Med. 2000;9:235-240. ) NEED CITE Recently, the Osage County extension office distributed a pamphlet from The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University called “Family Day” that offers scientific studies to show that not only are family dinners more “healthy” they also reduce children’s risk of substance abuse.

A 2007 study investigated the effect of watching TV on dietary intake of adolescents. While watching TV is associated with poorer dietary quality, boys and girls who watched TV during regular family meals were more likely to report a healthier diet than those who ate alone. The authors of this report gave several possible explanations. Families who eat together are more likely to try to prepare well-balanced, nutritious meals; or parents have more opportunity to observe dietary behaviors and correct them. Overall, “study findings provide clear evidence for the role of the family meal in enhancing dietary quality among adolescents (Feldman, et.al. 262).”

Women are still responsible for the family meal and thus are responsible for their kids' weight. In one Pennsylvania school district, children are measured at school and their BMI numbers are sent home with their report card because "families do not generally have an accurate perception of the issue" (Kantor 2007). Parents are responsible for their children's BMI score in the same way that they are for their grade card. A recent AP on nutrition education states that the forces that make kids fat are really strong but parents have the greatest influence over what their kids eat. Parents then, especially the mother, are to blame if kids are fat. Taking this to the next level, the article quotes Dr. Robert Trevino of the Social and Health Research Center in San Antonio who states "If the mother is eating Cheetos and white bread, the fetus will be born with those taste buds. If the mother is eating carrots and oatmeal the child will be born with those taste buds (Mendoza, 2007)."

Meg F., one of my shoppers, has to fill out a health grade card every week for her school-aged child. She has to calculate how many fruits and vegetables her child ate each day and how many minutes of exercise she got. If the parent fills out the card each week, the child will get a prize at the end of the month—a little shoelace ornament. Kids then collect these as they go through the year and Meg states that she feels a lot of pressure to turn in the card, because her child is embarrassed if she doesn't have as many ornaments on her shoes as her classmates. Meg also feels inadequate when she is filling out the cards because her child rarely gets 5 servings a day of fruits and vegetables, even though she feels that they eat healthy.

## Individual Responsibility Ignores Social Context

It is difficult to argue that individuals should not share responsibility for their health. It is axiomatic that individuals should eat food that is good for them and that adults should feed their kids healthy food. However, if individuals can be made ultimately responsible for their “choices”, it is easier to mask the larger social context of food provisioning. A recent study by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research (April 2008) extends obesity research to look at the influence of community factors on health. Their findings highlight the significance of the community environment: people who live near grocery stores are more likely to eat the recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables and less likely to be obese or have diabetes. Conversely, people who live near fast food restaurants and convenience stores compared to grocery stores have a higher prevalence of obesity and diabetes.

Although the highest incidence of obesity and diabetes are found in lower income neighborhoods with higher numbers of fast food restaurants, individuals in higher income neighborhoods with fewer grocery stores and more fast food places also experience higher levels of disease compared to neighborhoods with healthy food environments. Instead of focusing on individual choice, the study recommends providing incentive for retail store development and improvement and promoting retail innovations, including smaller-scale markets selling healthy foods.

Food deserts and food insecurity are issues in both urban and rural areas. Studies in Philadelphia (The Food Trust, 2003) found the same relationship between disease and shopping geography as the UCLA study. The data in this report show a

strong association between poverty, poor health, and lack of access to fresh food from supermarkets. Furthermore, reduced access to supermarkets corresponds to higher levels of consumption of take-out food and decreased consumption of fruits and vegetables. The same relationship exists in US nonmetropolitan areas. Individuals living in food deserts (areas with few or no supermarkets) pay higher prices for groceries and have fewer choices of healthy food, such as fruit and vegetable markets. This translates into lower levels of nutrition: In Mississippi, researchers found that residents of food deserts are 23.4 percent less likely to consume five or more servings of fruits and vegetables than residents of non-food deserts, after controlling for age, race, gender, and education (Blanchard and Lyson, 2003).

Ignoring societal causes of chronic diseases obscures policy solutions. Other research suggests that major illnesses are higher in states where participation in civic life is low, racial prejudice is high or a large gap exists in income between rich and poor and men and women (Glasner 2007). The lead investigator states:

We still labor under the myth that somehow we are on our own and as individuals we can make these choices to prevent heart disease... Policies that appear to have little to do with health, like macroeconomic policies to reduce the level of income inequality, can have a major impact on driving down the rates of illness in society (Glasner 2007).

Thus, those with the fewest resources have the least access to the essential components of a healthy diet. A concerted effort to improve access to fresh food for the most vulnerable populations could have an important effect on public health concerns stemming from poor diet. Preliminary results from a study in the UK

suggest that improving access to full service grocery stores does improve residents' diets (Wrigley, et.al. 2002)

These findings have significant policy implications as well as individual ramifications. First, these findings suggest that throwing money into education will not be efficacious if individuals do not have access to supermarkets or money to purchase good foods. Second, a nutrition discourse that individualizes responsibility hides the work of the shopper to procure and provide this food for their households. The labor of shopping and emotional labor/administrative labor involved in food provisioning is rendered invisible by discourses that promote an individual-level responsibility for food and nutrition. With "experts" constructing health as a consequence of what nutrients get ingested, the individual who is putting those nutrients in their bodies or their kids' bodies is responsible for the outcome. The social context of food provisioning is easily ignored.

The discourses discussed in the next chapters, the efficiency discourse and the food industry discourse, cement this individual responsibility and even make it more difficult for women to provision households due to often conflicting information.

## Chapter 4: The Efficient Housewife

In the past two chapters we've seen that food shopping involves household relationships, and negotiating a nutrition discourse that makes providing healthy food an individual responsibility. This chapter will focus on another aspect of food shopping: shopping as a process of household financial management. Food purchases comprise 6-10 percent of the average household expenditure depending on income level (United States Department of Labor 2006), which is an historically low number per household but translates into an aggregate expenditure of \$750 billion for food eaten at and away from home. When I asked shoppers about budgeting and how much money they spent on food, only two could give me an exact amount. Two-thirds of my shoppers, from a wide income range, said they spent \$100 a week. This seeming discrepancy can partially be explained by the routine nature of most shopping trips: most shoppers tend to get roughly the same items every week, or have a set of basics that they know they need to have on hand and thus spend about the same amount every week whether or not they are aware of the amount.

But what explains the widespread focus on saving money as a bedrock principle of grocery shopping? Sue Brown, a mother of three kids and home day-care owner, starts her food shopping when the ads come in the Wednesday mail. She has a mental idea of what kind of food her family will eat and plans out the weekly menu by what is on sale. She writes the list according to the store layout ("in case someone else will be shopping" she laughs) meaning she lists grocery items starting with

produce, then dairy, meats, and grocery items by aisle. She explains her planning rationale like this:

If I were in the store everyday I would spend \$30. That would be \$900 a month! It's worth your time, do your menu, buy everything you need and I don't care if you had to invest 6 hours doing it—if you made a weekly menu and knew exactly the stuff you needed—you would spend less because you wouldn't be at the store all the time and we all tend to go when we're hungry when we spend more.

Kay Worthington, a student and mother of a teenager, also plans her meals around the Wednesday sale ads. When the ad comes in the mail, she takes out her large leather planner and plans her meals around what is on sale. She tries to have several menu ideas for certain days but then leaves open other days thinking she can either serve leftovers on that day or if she has some extra time she may run by the grocery store. Writing her list on a notepad in her planner, she flips through the ad several times to make sure she has not missed anything. She showed me her most recent list: asparagus, spiral ham, pineapple, Barilla pasta, and tuna. She explains that these items are on sale this week and she will make meals from these items, but she would never buy things that her family would not normally eat since they may not like it.

She feels like she is being an economical shopper this way and would “just die if I bought something and later it was on sale. I would feel like a failure, like I should have known better and bought it when it was on sale because it is the right thing to do.” She feels that she is helping with the family bills by reducing the household grocery costs.

Stacey Ostrander told me a story about her husband and junk food. He once went to the store and bought potato chips at the regular price, something that Stacey just couldn't live with. She said:

Gary is the snack food person, and I've tried weaning him off snack foods, I didn't buy any and I let it run out. But that didn't work because when I buy them I buy them on sale 3/\$5.00. Well when we ran out he just went to the store and paid full price! Its like you just paid 3.45, I paid 1.60. We have carrots in the house, we have bananas in the house, there are grapes in the house, there are apples in the house, there is always fresh fruit and veggies in my house. Eat something healthy! So I gave up and just started buying it again because I can save money that way. You feel funny when you are walking out with six bags of junk food, but if it's on sale for 3/\$5.00 and you are going to eat it...

Spending time to save money, being an economical shopper--shoppers indicate that they are being good shoppers when they save money at the grocery store. Sue and Kay indirectly articulate that their work preparing for shopping is the "other side of the paycheck (c.f. Weinbaum and Bridges 1986)"; they are contributing to the household purse and supplementing their spouse's and their own wages by shopping efficiently.

. In the 20 interviews I did with the main household food provider, I heard many shopping strategies: plan meals in advance, always shop with a list, buy on sale, shop at night without kids, don't allow husbands to shop alone. Everyone "knows" that making a list contributes to saving money and time in that it keeps the shopper focused on buying only products that are needed and shortens the time necessary to spend in the store.

But on what advice are these shoppers basing their strategies? What does being a "good" shopper mean? Where do shoppers get their information about

shopping strategies? Although many stated that it was just common-sense, when pressed they suggested that they did get some information on shopping from the morning talk shows and news shows, women's magazines such as *Simple Living*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Country Living*, the Weight Watchers program, and internet searches. While shoppers are not reading or listening to all these programs, they are aware that there is a "good" way to shop that is promulgated by the experts through these media outlets.

### Efficient Housewife Discourse

I have identified a discourse that shoppers used to discuss their work of shopping that I term the "efficient housewife" or efficiency discourse for short. The efficiency discourse has historical roots in the home economics movement (see discussion in chapter 3), is contemporarily administered by federal institutions such as the USDA and its extension services and has filtered into media outlets such as television news shows, the internet, and women's magazines. There is a contradiction between the ubiquitousness of this discourse and the demographic changes in household composition and women working outside the home; it is still based on the traditional household configuration because it assumes a housewife to manage the household but also is updated in some ways that it presents information on how to be an efficient housewife in addition to being a wage-laborer. I will lay out the main tenets of this discourse and then discuss how it structures shoppers' work.

The efficient food consumer is one who plans meals out in advance of the actual shopping trip, creates a list of products based on these meals plans, makes sure

she is getting the best deal for her money, avoids buying things she doesn't need, uses coupons and shops the "sales". The experts who write and produce these texts include nutritionists, dieticians, extension officers, financial advisors, corporate representatives, among others. One of the main themes of this discourse is that the efficient housewife should be organized, disciplined to withstand impulse buys, stay in the budget, and make "rational" choices.

#### Pre-Shopping Strategies:

Planning meals for the week is the first step in the process of being an efficient shopper. Stephanie Nelson, the "coupon mom" and ABC correspondent, advises:

Plan meals for the week before you make your shopping list. Make sure you have the basics on hand to create a week's worth of meals. Write the meals planned on a piece of paper and post it on the refrigerator to remember (Nelson 2007).

The United States Department of Health and Human Services advises "Think ahead about the meals you plan to make and write a list of what you'll need to buy (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services 2006). The American Dietetic Association reminds the shopper when making a list to keep in mind

which days you will have time to cook from scratch and which days you will be pressed for time to put dinner on the table. Organize the list, checking menu options against the food guide pyramid (ADA 2003)

Experts also advise shoppers to write the list to correspond to the aisles in which the store is set out. Phil Lempert, the self-proclaimed "supermarket guru" and NBC Today show correspondent describes his suggested list:

use your old receipts and cross off all the items you didn't need. Then look in your refrigerator, cupboards and freezer to see what you are missing, and add these products to the list. 2) write any additional items that you will need in the aisle order. 3) Under the additional items draw a horizontal line for each of your "allowed" impulse items. Keep the number of impulse items fixed from week to week - don't vary it. That wastes time and money. (Lempert 2007).

An article on organizing from *Real Simple*, a middle-class women's magazine, adds several steps to the list making process:

Make a list, grouped by aisles. Add all items you stock your shelves with that you don't need to buy this time. Take this list to the store. As you shop, write down the aisle number next to each item on the list. When you get home, type up the list according to the aisle numbers. Print several copies and stick on the refrigerator. Superglue mini magnets to a pen and a small stapler and keep both on frig next to your list. When you run out of an item, use the pen to check it off, Staple coupons to the list and write C next to items for "double insurance" (Humphreys 2004).

The main reason for the list is to keep the shopper from buying any items or products she does not need, or in other words "impulse items". The list also keeps the shopper on-task and thus in the store the least amount of time as possible, and thus away from temptation. The shopping list is not only about saving money but will "save trips and help avoid buying items you don't need (Human Nutrition Information Service Home and Garden Bulletin No.232-10.). According to K-State Extension Service professionals, the average shopper spends 40 percent more on impulse purchases when shopping without a list (Heck and Higgins 2006).

Efficient housewives also favor thriftiness over convenience. Shoppers should cook and bake more from "scratch" in order to save money on convenience foods. For example, instead of frozen chicken breasts, the shopper should buy a

whole chicken and cut it into pieces (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2005). The “Shopping on a Shoestring” author extends this advice to suggest we learn how to butcher and use all the parts of a chicken as the first steps to “real economy” in the kitchen (Friedman 2007). Shoppers should also do batch cooking and freeze some for future meals, as well as “assemble healthy snacks at home in small baggies” rather than buying pre-packaged snacks (American Dietetic Association 2003). Consumer Reports tells shoppers to “shred it yourself and save: a 1 pound bag of Dole whole carrots in New York cost 99 cents while a 10-ounce bag of Dole shredded carrots costs \$1.99 (Consumer Reports 2006)”.

Your meals are planned, your list is made. What other strategies will save money? The advice on coupon use is mixed. Coupons, when used for products you need or regularly buy, can definitely save money. Consumer Reports reports that coupons save \$30 billion dollars a year. However, coupons can also entice you to buy products you may not need or may be unhealthy. Shoppers are thus encouraged to be judicious in their use of coupons.

If you were to use coupons correctly, you may be able to whittle your food bill to nothing. The “coupon mom” Stephanie Nelson has written an entire book dedicated to shopping with coupons. Many of her advanced saving strategies involve a detailed understanding of retail coupon policies as well as retrieving and managing coupons once you get them. She states that she saves more than \$50 a week with coupons, as well as \$50 a week just on sale prices. This management system takes time to organize, however. For example, she suggests using the Virtual Coupon

Organizer, an interactive database listing all the grocery coupons that have come out in the newspaper. To use this site:

Create a “best grocery deals” list for an unlisted store and sort the list alphabetically to create your own best deals. When you see an item you need on sale, you can quickly see if a grocery coupon is available for the item. Check the boxes to display your list. Once you have your printed list of coupons needed at your store, you can sit down with your collection of saved circulars and cut out only the coupons needed. Sort the list by expiration date, to make sure you take advantage of coupons that will be expiring soon (Nelson, 2007).

You should also plan to shop in more than one store for the best buys. A

Women’s Day article states that

shoppers who hit two stores in one day saved \$15 on average, compared to those who shopped in only one store. Make it a habit to shop at another store besides your favorite supermarket, and that’s close to 800 dollars in savings a year. Go first to one or two bargain stores, then buy whatever else you need from your primary grocery store. Buy as many items as possible in bulk at shopping clubs (Costco, Sam’s Club)” (Steele, 2000).

Always make sure you use the store’s shopper card. “The time it takes to register for one may be well worth it” (Gibbons, 2007). Many experts are now advising people to shop online to save time.

Another important strategy in resisting temptation and being efficient is to leave the kids at home. According to the experts, grocery shopping with children can add \$100-\$400 to your grocery bill (Steele 2007). Stephanie Nelson advises shoppers to leave the kids at home, if possible to avoid *their* impulse purchases. But if you can’t, you should set up a reward system like a fun activity or a free cookie at the bakery if they don’t ask for anything (Nelson 2007). Other experts suggest shoppers

should go to the store when the kids are busy because shopping is faster if you go alone. “Plan grocery store forays when the kids are at school or music lessons, or have your spouse mind them while you shop (Weinstein and Scarbrough 2007).” If you have to take your kids, shoppers should have something for them to do, perhaps a game or even have them practice shopping. A *Women’s Day* article gives this advice:

“Train little shoppers. Grocery shopping with children can add 100-400 dollars a month to your bill. With kids spend more time in store but also “kids are masters of impulse buying. If you can’t go solo, turn the kids into smart shoppers. Give them choices or have them use real money for anything not on the list (Steele 2007).

What should you do with your kids? An overwhelming majority of the experts emphatically recommend shopping sans children as a method of saving money. Even if you can discipline yourself to buy only what is on your list, your kids’ impulsiveness will add anywhere from \$100-400 per month. A USDA pamphlet advises shoppers to “Leave your child with a friend or sitter if you need to. Stores put many foods that children like, such as candy and products with prizes, where they can see and reach them (Nibbles for Health USDA, Food and Nutrition Service). Weight Watchers advises shoppers to plan to shop when the kids are busy because shopping is faster if you go alone. “Plan grocery store forays when the kids are at school or music lessons, or have your spouse mind them while you shop (weightwatchers.com).”

If you must take your children, find something constructive for them to do.

“If you can’t go solo, turn the kids into smart shoppers. Give them choices or have them use real money for anything not on the list (Morano, 2006).” The American Dietetic Association advises us that

an enjoyable grocery shopping experience with children is possible! Use it as an opportunity to give your kids a lesson in color, smell, and names of new foods. Engaging them in the food selection can turn a trip to the store into a great teaching tool about nutritious food choices (JADA 103.3).

The last issue to consider before you enter the store is your mood. One of the most universal recommendations is to make preparations to be in the right frame of mind before shopping. Avoiding temptation in the face of the myriad “choices” in the marketplace is a central theme throughout this discourse. Shoppers should make sure to eat before going grocery shopping, so they are less tempted to buy too much or the wrong kind of food. Shoppers should not be “stressed” out either; the expert shopper is always on guard to resist supermarket strategies. “Everything about the supermarket is designed to prolong your trip” (Consumer Reports 2006).

The “supermarket guru” Phil Lempert advises shoppers to

Never shop when you're hungry. You'll end up with all kinds of impulse items in your cart. Another rule is not to shop when you're stressed out. The crowds and lines will only make you more frustrated. Some people, however, find the supermarket to be therapeutic. Figure out which type of shopper you are, and shop when it suits your mood.

A Weightwatchers article advises shoppers:

Shop on a full stomach. If you shop when you are hungry, you’re subject to spur-of-the-moment cravings and impulse buys. To manage the lifestyle you want, shop after lunch or dinner (Weinstein and Scarbrough 2007)”.

Christine Palumbo, a registered dietician (R.D.) states that “when you are hungry, everything looks good so don’t go hungry. Likewise if you are frazzled or feeling down, save the trip for later when you are less vulnerable to impulse buys” (Hennen 2006). An article in *Health* advises shoppers to “make sure you’ve eaten and go shopping when you are in a calm, stable mood. Hunger and stress make you more susceptible to temptation (Haspel 2006).”

Shoppers should also make plans to shop on the same day every week and at times when few shoppers will be in the same store. Janis Jibrin, RD, advises: “Shop on the same day if possible and spare yourself aggravation by avoiding the busy times: weekday evenings or weekends (Jibrin 2007).” One of the worst times to shop in terms of crowds, under-stocked shelves and over-worked employees are weekdays between 4pm and 7pm; one of the best times for highest efficiency is early Friday afternoon, before the weekend rush but after the store is stocked (Associated Press, 2008).

### In-Store Strategies

After all the planning is done, the kids are at the sitter’s and the shopper has eaten a light and healthy snack, what are the most efficient ways to shop once in the store? Most experts advise the shopper to stay on the “perimeter” of the store. The produce, bakery, meat and dairy aisles provide the healthiest and freshest food. But try to avoid the big outside aisle, known as “the race track” where the shopper is encouraged to browse good sales or delicacies like imported cheeses (msnbc.msn.com). Consumer Reports even advises shoppers to ignore the standard

store set-up and shop clockwise, which encourages the shopper to spend less time in the store and therefore save more money (Consumer Reports 2006).

The shopper should be aware of the strategies managers use to encourage purchases. Managers stock their most expensive brands or their private labels at eye-level so shoppers are should look at the highest and lowest shelves for generics and specials. Buy store brands or generics that are often placed higher or lower on the grocery shelves (US Dept of Health and Human Services 2005). “Buy one, get one free” sounds good, but often the “one” is marked up to begin with. Managers will also use “loss leaders” such as a brand name cereal that they are willing to sell at cost or less to attract customers who will buy other products while in the store, so shoppers should be wary of shopping at a store for a certain sale (Weaver 2005).

The shopper should read and compare labels. Unit prices are displayed on the store shelves below the foods; shoppers should use these to compare the cost on different sized packages (Foods and Nutrition Education, Cooperative Extension Service). Some experts advise to buy in bulk (nutrition.gov); but sometimes bigger packages may not be more economical. The shopper should then use unit prices to make a decision, especially when one size is on sale (Consumer Reports 2006). Shoppers should also compare prices in different parts of the same store. Sometimes cheese, for instance, is more expensive in the deli than in the dairy case.

Shoppers should also think about buying seasonal and local to save money on the shipping (Friedman 2007). If you can't get fresh produce, some frozen fruits and vegetables are fine to buy frozen, including peas, broccoli, corn kernels and berries

(weightwatchers.com). More experts are advising shoppers to buy organic fruits and vegetables, although this advice is only found in magazines, not from government agencies.

Shoppers should avoid convenience foods which are of course more expensive. For example, since individual packets of oatmeal are more expensive the shopper should buy a large container and adding fruit (LINC-Meal Planning and Shopping). Bagged lettuce costs considerably more than a head of iceberg lettuce (Consumer Reports 2006). The shopper should privilege money over time when making the choice to buy convenience foods. Shoppers should cook and bake more from “scratch” in order to save money on convenience foods. For example, instead of frozen chicken breasts, the shopper should buy a whole chicken and cut it into pieces (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2005). The “Shopping on a Shoestring” author extends this advice to suggest we learn how to butcher and use all the parts of a chicken as the first steps to “real economy” in the kitchen (Friedman 2007). Shoppers should also do batch cooking and freeze some for future meals, as well as “assemble healthy snacks at home in small baggies” rather than buying pre-packaged snacks (American Dietetic Association 2003). Consumer Reports tells shoppers to “shred it yourself and save: a 1 pound bag of Dole whole carrots in New York cost 99 cents while a 10-ounce bag of Dole shredded carrots costs \$1.99 (Consumer Reports 2006)”.

## Notes from Real Life

The efficiency discourse assumes a household with a housewife--someone who has the time and inclination to assume the role of efficient purchaser. This discourse is especially relevant for households where saving money is important; in my study this discourse was more salient for women who were not working for wages outside the home, who were working part-time, or who had only one wage-earner in the household. A study published by the Agricultural Research Service finds that food shoppers can be divided into two groups based on participation in labor force: one third report working over 50 hours a week and one third report part time or part of a year. From this food shoppers can be roughly divided into two broad groups: those with lower incomes who are “economizers or price conscious” and the “convenience-oriented” who are looking for ways to save time (Kinsey and Senaur 1996).

The work of shopping is different for these two different groups. For example, using ads is rarely a concern for full time wage workers. In fact, none of the working mothers I interviewed used the Wednesday ads regularly, if at all. One working mom summed it up: “I used to do all that: cut coupons, look at the ads. I used to spend a \$100 bucks a month on food. I would go to Food 4 Less in Topeka and I would get all these things and that’s when I used to stockpile when the kids were babies. I was very efficient.” What asked what changed she replied

Time. I don’t have the time to go through and look at all the prices and try to find the best deals and spend the time looking for all that. I think it’s just the time factor-I’ve got 15 minutes and I need to pick up supper and I’ve got to zoom through here....I just don’t want to spend my time doing that. I need to

be on the road doing other things like taking the girls to ball and tumbling (April Malone).

Jessica Pierce, another working mom who as an assistant director of a large non-profit puts in long hours, states

I don't use coupons or ads because that would require me to go several stores and have a lot more time devoted to that than probably what we would devote to it, or than I would like to devote to it. I mean if something is on sale and it's something I want I would consider myself lucky that night I suppose.

So there is a tradeoff between time and money. The mothers who work for wages have the luxury of spending money on full price items (and not spending time cutting coupons or comparison shopping) but are squeezed for time both in terms of shopping as well as preparing the meal. Another working mother loves to shop and cook but when she gets off work at 5:30 and needs to have meals on the table at 6:00, she does not have the luxury of spending much time in the grocery store. In terms of making dinner she will

either go home, and look around thinking what do I have on hand or think about what can I quick stop and get on my way home? I'm not near as organized about it as I used to be when I wasn't working as much (Mary Wirth)."

For some working mothers, the organization and planning of shopping takes on a larger role the more hours they work outside the home. Two mothers in the study had just experienced transitions from working part-time to full time. They found that they had to be more efficient in order to get both the wage work and the shopping work done and spent a considerable time on the weekends planning meals

for the week, as well as creating lists and planning when they could actually do the shopping. Their shopping was much more leisurely when they had more time to devote to it.

Eating out was a more frequent strategy for full time wage workers and more than one working mom assuaged their guilt of eating out by taking their kids to Subway instead of McDonalds. But I surmise that eating out was also underreported. When asked how many times they would eat out, shoppers would state not very often. But when asked for specific meals they had made over the course of a week, many would report eating out at least once a week, if not more. Although I didn't probe at the time, I believe that eating out still carries a stigma of not being a good food provider.

Almost all part-time workers report knowing and using some form of the efficiency discourse. Karen Calhoun states that "I go through the ad and look for the things we normally use, anything that's on sale that I might want or that sounds good, I open up the pantry, open up the cabinets, ok, what are we low on, and make my list from there." She does report that she is constantly tempted by things that are not on her list or that look good in the store, even if they are pricy. However, she always stocks up on products that her family will use if they are on sale. For instance, during her last grocery visit Best Choice Vegetables were on sale for 29 cents, and she bought the maximum limit allowed (6).

Melissa Long, whose children are now out of the house, remembers how she used to shop when her four kids were young: "With the kids, I actually looked at ads

and made lists. And when I was a stay at home mom I went once a week in Lawrence so I had my whole menus for the week planned out and what I needed and I just shopped that way and of course we raised so much of our own food at that time.” She used to look at the ads and compare what was on sale. She used to cut coupons and made a detailed list. Now, with just her and her husband at home and with her full time salary, she shops whenever she wants or is out of something. She states: “I very seldom shop like I used to. I’m one of those, if it’s frozen and it microwaves real good, I know. You know how I do my cinnamon rolls (she uses Rhodes rather than make them from scratch). I think it’s because of the way I work. You know, when I get home at night, I’m tired and Harold’s tired and hungry and I need something that cooks fast and quickly and a lot of times our suppers consist of some type of meat, vegetables and a salad.”

Many part-time wage workers could list prices from memory. Jane Smith remembers that Tide with Downey is \$6.47 for 100 oz. at WalMart; if the local store is selling it cheaper she will pick up a bottle or two. Her husband, however, figures in the amount of gas and time that is spent to go to Walmart, and determines it is cheaper to buy it locally. Even though is not fond of WalMart, she states “you just can’t beat the price”. Another shopper, Sue Brown, who also uses price as a main factor in her decision-making process, states that chicken tenders at Aldi’s are \$6.89, whereas they are \$8.99 at the local store. Karen Calhoun knows that the price of milk is 20 cents higher at the local store than one of the discount grocery stores. But price is a very tricky issue. In the US, food production is subsidized by the

government for billions of dollars a year so a true open market price is rarely accountable. Also, the ads that many shoppers use as a foundation to their weekly shopping are controlled by the major industries subsidies to the retail stores, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Kelly Barnes, a single mother of three school-aged children, makes \$40,000 a year as a junior high school teacher. This is how she describes her preparation for shopping:

I don't put much thought into it, I really don't. I don't make menus, I don't make lists, I just think about what we need. It's very rare that I don't have to go to the store two, three, four times during the week. Honestly that's because we just kind of get through a day, or two.... I just kind of fly by the seat of my pants.

She recognizes that if she were more organized, she could save herself money and buy better food to eat.

As a single mom who does struggle from paycheck to paycheck, should I be on a budget, should I look at ads and all that sort of thing, it makes sense, yes, I probably should. But I just don't have the time or inclination. I just really don't have a budget for anything. I just pay what I can pay, I mean, seriously. I mean, usually I can make it from paycheck to paycheck and most of the time I'm sweating by the end and that's just the way it is. I'm really bad about that. I know if I was a better budgeter or if I spent my money better that I wouldn't be sweating at the end of the month, but if I'm going to eat it I want it to taste good.

Kelly's kids are getting old enough that they can walk to the store to get some ingredients and cook some basic meals, like spaghetti. But usually their schedule is so busy they end up eating sandwiches, or some kind of frozen dinner, or what they are selling at the concession stand at the school activity.

Sometimes I get home 4:15, 4:30, sometimes I don't get home until 5:00 or 5:30 so that just depends. There is extracurricular stuff a lot of times too so if I get to come home and just get to worry about dinner then that is one thing but usually there is other stuff going on. Like everyday this week we have other stuff going on, there's no time. I'm even thinking ok, taco salad may wait until next week because if we are out and it is late, its 7:00, 7:30 or 8:00 when we get home, I don't cook dinner. And usually the girls are getting ready for bed or finishing up homework and taking showers, I mean we just need to eat and move on.

She feels guilty about not cooking "I think I'm supposed to cook for my kids because I am the mom", but she just doesn't have the time, and when she gets home from work and coaching, she is so tired she just wants to sit down and relax.

And I feel guilty and especially after teaching junior high I don't like what I do and it's stressful every single day. Sometimes it's more stressful and then I come home and the kids are fighting and doing whatever and sometimes I think to myself "I don't want to eat with you guys, I just want to be by myself." And I do feel guilty about that. And especially because Maggie will say "eat at the table mom."

Kelly recognizes that if she were more organized, if she spent more time planning menus and clipping coupons, she could save money and not live paycheck to paycheck. But she also has very little discretionary time to plan after working a full day and then caring for three children. She also values eating what tastes good to her, not what is "on sale", or in other words, what she is supposed to buy under the tenets of the efficient housewife. She is not willing to deny herself what tastes good to her to buy a cheaper substitute even though she cannot afford it. One small example she gives is her taco sauce, Spanish Gardens, a more expensive brand that she has always eaten and tastes better than cheaper sauces. Another example she gives that illustrates her rejection of the efficiency discourse is generic versus name brand drugs. Kelly

said, “Sometimes I’ll buy generic pills but I won’t buy the generic in the liquid because it tastes gross and then the kids won’t take it.”

Peggy Fiske does not have the luxury of ignoring the efficiency strategies; her household’s survival depends on her success at being an effective shopper. She receives \$363 a month from food stamps to feed herself and her two children. She is proud that she can feed her family on this amount and her strategies include using coupons, store discount cards, and making a list and finding the best sales when she is at the store. She can’t really stock up on these sales since her freezer is very small and she doesn’t have extra space in her small apartment. She can’t afford a newspaper subscription so she doesn’t get the larger store’s advertisements to plan from. She does, however, take a calculator with her and adds up her purchases as she goes along. If she forgets a calculator, she says “sometimes I’ll just sit there and I’ll write every thing up and I’ll keep track on like the side my list how much I’ve spent”.

She does spend money on packaged foods like Hamburger Helper (which she doctors with extra seasoning) and the Homestyle Bakes with everything in the kit because it makes it so much easier for her to cook with two small children in the house: “The quick stuff comes in very handy and there are times when I am just exhausted and I don’t I don’t feel up to making a big meal but I have to cook something.” They rarely eat out, because it is too expensive and it is difficult to maneuver her son’s wheelchair in a restaurant. If they eat out, it is fast food, perhaps Taco Bell where they can get “filled up” for a reasonable amount of money.

She tries to look for sales on rice and other staples that she can use to “stretch” foods, but sometimes her older son will eat really well one meal and refuse to eat it another time. She coordinates meals not only so she will not waste any food but also so the kids won’t get tired of eating the same things repeatedly:

One night I’ll make a roast and then ...sometimes it’s beef, sometimes it’s pork, depends on what looked good or what was on sale. And then the next night I’ll make pork and noodles or I’ll make beef and noodles, and I use the broth that I’ve got from baking the roast because my broth always comes out really, really rich and just so much better than if you’d get a can of broth to cook your meals in. And I’ve used the broth and sometimes I’ll make mashed potatoes I will eat until my stomach hurts. And you know it’s a way to get the stuff used up but the kids don’t realize so much that they are having leftovers.

Peggy was thrifty enough to manage the small amount of money she receives and feed her family. She also receives assistance through the free/reduced school lunch program, as well as private programs like Kid Screen. Families receiving food stamps also receive monitoring on whether they are using these programs effectively, and if not will often be referred to agencies such as the USDA’s Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). This agency provides food resource management training to identified families and posts “success stories” on their website, stories of shoppers who successfully incorporated the efficient housewife strategies in their work of grocery shopping.

The underlying theme is that by teaching efficiency skills, the household not only is better off but manages the state’s money more effectively. One “success story” is about Sue in Iowa. She never had any money left over at the end of the month, and the EFNEP nutrition assistant worked with Sue for three months to set a

budget and plan for grocery shopping. Sue now can keep track of her income and expenses, she plans her meals two weeks in advance, and shops according to a grocery list. She is also catching up on other bills (USDA 2006). Another mother in Illinois learned how to construct a weekly budget, gets the newspaper to check for sales and coupons, and plans weekly meals. “The success the mother got from improving her diet gave her the security she needed to improve the rest of her life. She now has a settled living arrangement and is exploring her job prospects.”

These mothers have made the successful transition to efficient consumer, but we also do not see all the work that is involved in the process. A local newspaper food editor Jill Wendholt Silva took the Food Stamp Challenge and attempted to feed her family on \$129.50 per week, which is the maximum amount a family of four can receive on food stamps. What strategies did she utilize to make sure she could feed her family? Her approach read right from the efficiency discourse: make a menu for the week, check the weekly food ads, make a shopping list and stick to it, be a “smart shopper” by comparing prices, know the store layout, and shop at more than one store. However, it is her reaction to this experience that is instructive. She wrote

I spent nearly every moment I was not at work thinking about or preparing food. I constantly feared I would run out of food. It was exhausting to shop three times in one week to get the best deals. Even though I stayed on a budget, our entire family lost the freedom to choose what to eat and when (Silva 2007).

She was also skeptical that anyone who works a full-time job could actually pull off this kind of planning week after week.

Retailers and grocery stores also benefit from shoppers adopting efficient food shopping strategies. Contrary to conventional wisdom about higher profits on convenience foods, retailers report that an efficient consumer is more profitable for their stores. For example, marketing research indicates that customers whose main shopping goals are to care for their families, shop efficiently and use smart budgeting strategies account for almost half of all supermarket trips and almost 63% of total supermarket spending (Coca-Cola Retailing Research Council of North America 2008). With the rise in fast foods and restaurants, grocery stores, supermarkets must contend with competition from already prepared food and take out restaurants. Making a meal from scratch to eat at home usually costs more than buying a prepared meal, and those consumers who make meals at home are usually more loyal customers. One corporate sales manager explained:

Great shoppers make a list and they come to the store prepared. They're great shoppers in the fact that they organized and they still eat at home, you know that is not always the case anymore. There's a lot of people that fly by the seat of their pants, they run in the store, they don't plan anything, they run in the store everyday, they are good shoppers too....Mrs. Brown who makes a list and comes once a week usually has a nice big order one time. We know that she is a regular customer and everybody else kind of flies by the seat of their pants. Although they might be regular customers, but they might be just as apt to pull into Hy-Vee because they are over there and getting something from them. Usually I think there are people that lay out all of the ads and go to all the store because they have nothing else to do but that is a dying breed. So we like the people that still have family dinner and still eat at home.

Interestingly, he also connects ethnicity and efficiency:

As a side note, the Hispanic trade has been our savior. In the stores that have a Hispanic trade because they still cook from scratch. They still buy the core ingredients and build meals from scratch. And they are really good customers, it's like it used to be. America's kind of got away from

that...hurry up and eat. It's not dining anymore, it's just like fulfilling a need and moving on with your busy life (Mike Schultz).

### Conclusion

What we hear in my shoppers' descriptions of their work is a certain kind of knowledge about how to get food from the store shelves into their homes that derives from the emphasis on efficiency that prevails in our modern economic system. How and why do we learn that "getting a bargain" or shopping the sale means being a good shopper or provisioner? Learning and remembering prices, comparison shopping, clipping coupons—all of these activities take time and involve certain knowledges based not so much in the needs of the family but based on the dictates of the political economy of the food system. A certain kind of rationality is necessary for being a successful food shopper, a rationality of efficiency. A recent NYTimes op-ed mirrors this message: "It turns out that making up a precise list beforehand and getting the errand done as quickly as possible is the best way to save money. Cutting time cuts costs, as well (Stein 2009)."

While being an efficient shopper may save time in the grocery store, it does not necessarily mean less work for shoppers. The efficiency discourse instructs the shopper not only to save money but to discipline herself against the onslaught of choices at the supermarket. The shopper must spend time making lists and meal plans, comparison shopping, checking the ads, and arranging child care. In the store the shopper must fight her impulse to buy the wrong product or too much of a product; she must exhibit self-discipline to balance economy with nutrition. In this

way she will save her household money, stretch the wage dollars that come in, and allow for the purchase of other consumer goods.

Full-time wage earning shoppers from two-earner households in my study were aware of the efficiency discourse, but were less likely to follow these strategies because of time constraints and the ability to pay for food and services. Working class shoppers and part-time workers usually were trying to save money through shopping and used the efficiency strategies such as planning meals, comparison shopping, etc which took extra time to accomplish and became part of their job of saving money for the household.

The contradiction between the efficient housewife discourse and the experiences of real life shoppers is especially sharp for those shoppers who do not fit the necessary structural characteristics of the housewife, especially having the luxury of time or money to fulfill the efficiency tenets. The two single mothers in my study had the most difficult time managing both time and money. Managing jobs, money and children (in one case a disabled child) was a balancing act that involved many strategies including shopping at low-price stores like Walmart, using federal subsidies and child support payments, and even alternative financial strategies such as floating checks. Acker (2006) argues that this structural reality for some women reflects the class structure in the United States, defining class broader than income, education and status to include “unequal power and control over, and access to, the means of provisioning....this disadvantage is most evident in the case of those who have low-paying jobs or who have no family (husbands) to provide money (Acker 2006).”

Larger social institutions in the complex of the relations of ruling have a significant interest in the consumer becoming a successful household manager. Grocery shopping is a specific form of economic activity that is crucial not only to the household's survival strategy but also for the functioning of larger social institutions. Economists are now worried that higher food prices will mean less money spent on discretionary items like clothes and entertainment, those goods and services that have driven the "consumer society" since after WWII. Keeping the grocery dollar to a minimum means more dollars circulating elsewhere.

Not only does the economy in general depend on consumer spending, but other social institutions have a stake in how households spend their food dollar. The federal government, through agencies like the USDA and HHS, is concerned not only with providing information on food and nutrition but also educating shoppers on how to be efficient with their money, since many of the shoppers they are educating are on federal subsidies such as food stamps, TANF and WIC. An inefficient shopper not only deprives their family of food, but also costs taxpayers money.

Finally, efficient shoppers also spend more money in the grocery store. Managers indicate that efficient shoppers are better for the store's bottom line because they buy more at one time, are more likely to shop at one store, and are more likely to eat meals at home rather than restaurants (their main competition). However, while managers and store owners prefer "good" shoppers, the retail discourse discussed in the next chapter instructs them in practices to encourage particular buying habits, including impulse shopping and buying new products.

## Chapter 6: Retail Organization

“In the market system the ultimate power, to repeat, is held to be with those who buy or choose not to buy; thus, with some qualifications, the ultimate power is that of the consumer. Consumer choices shape to the demand curve. As the ballot gives authority to the citizen, so in economic life the demand curve accords authority to the consumer. ...Belief in a market economy in which the consumer is sovereign is one of our most pervasive forms of fraud. Let no one try to sell without consumer management, control.”

John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Economics of Innocent Fraud* (2004)

I have shown how institutional agents influence and standardize the work of grocery shopping through discourses transmitted in such diverse texts as advertisements, news shows, women’s magazines, and government brochures. The efficiency discourse extols self-discipline and rational planning to minimize wasted time and money at the store and to keep the household budget balanced and family time maintained; while the nutrition discourse places responsibility for the household nutrition on the food choices the shopper makes at the grocery store.

The physical environment of the grocery store is also important in how shoppers accomplish their work. The supermarket strategy is a particular retail organization that standardizes both the physical structure of the store and relies on marketing and advertising to encourage shoppers to buy increasingly standardized products. Managers and owners are central to this strategy and their work is also shaped by extra-local discourses that operate to support the supermarket strategy. In this chapter I will first present the contours of the retail discourse that shape how

managers administer both the store and the customer's work in it, and then illustrate how this discourse takes material form in the ways the store is set up, the ways the shelves are organized, and the way the ads are constructed. I argue another discourse operates simultaneously, a consumer sovereignty discourse that employs a mainstream economic conception of supply and demand to justify the power of the consumer but actually serves to cover the power relations that are evidenced by the managers' practices. Finally, I use my shoppers' perspectives to show that consumer wants should not necessarily be equated with what they buy.

### Supermarket History

Throughout much of history, individuals ate food that they grew or was produced not far from the household, although trade was not uncommon for spices or other luxuries especially in more commercial centers (Zukin 2004). If individuals obtained food outside the household, they transacted directly with the producer or the merchant. Although more people are currently engaging in these more direct forms of food procurement, such as shopping at farmers' markets or growing their own food, one model of food provisioning has been preeminent in the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first: the supermarket. The distinctive features of the supermarket model include volume-selling, cheap prices, a wide variety of goods sold, stores as part of a chain or cooperative buying agency, a specific management strategy including shelf-arrangement, store design, display techniques, and impulse-buying, and perhaps most importantly self-service (Humphries 1998; Lawrence and Burch 2007).

The rise of chain stores in food retailing and manufacturing led to the decline of both public markets and family-owned grocery stores. Although chain stores like A&P (The Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company) and Kroger opened their stores as early as 1890's and eventually adopted all the tenets of the supermarket after WWII, they pioneered a new economic strategy to food sales. Chain stores offered lower prices as they were utilizing economies of scale through bulk buying and dealing directly with food manufacturers, which meant that product turn-over was essential to sustain volume sales (Mayo 1993). Owners had to shift their business design from small inventories with high mark-ups and direct service to designing strategies for moving products faster and lowering overhead costs.

One strategy to achieve a higher sales volume was to standardize all facets of the store, including design, layout, management practices, and customer service. Instead of selling to individuals in communities, stores were now selling products to the masses. Where products were once stocked from floor to ceiling on the outer walls requiring clerks to retrieve the goods in the independent stores, the new supermarket strategy involved rearranging store design to put the product and the consumer in immediate contact with each other. One retailing strategist in 1935 stated: "As far as possible every square inch of the eyes' range of vision, from the top of the shelving down to the floor, wherever the customer stands, wherever she looks, should display merchandise (Dipman, 1935, quoted in Bowlby 1997). The counter was eliminated and the shelves were low enough that the customer could reach for any item she wanted. Customer movement also had to be regulated to maximize

purchases; managers had to train their workers in customer service. All stores in the chain had to be uniform in both layout and service. Management also used new techniques for managing product turn-over and began monitoring the volume of certain sections of different shelves throughout the store (Mayo 1993).

But the most successful organizational change and the basis for the new supermarket economic strategy was to eliminate the clerk and allow customers to choose products themselves. Clarence Saunders, the owner of Piggly Wiggly, in 1915 introduced the first self-service grocery store in which the customer could select her own merchandise from display counters and pay cash (Zimmerman 1955; Bowlby 1997; Humphries 1998). This store also featured the first check-out stands, prices marked on all products, and a full line of nationally advertised brands. Supermarkets were eventually larger and had a more diverse range of food products, but the main feature was self-service. By 1953, self-service had become the norm: over 90 percent of all supermarkets had complete self-service dairy departments and prepackaged produce departments were found in 44 percent (Mayo 1993).

The supermarket form and logic were firmly entrenched in the retail market by 1960 when supermarkets sold nearly 70 percent of all of America's food (Humphrey 1998). The supermarket expanded rapidly due to a growing post-war economic prosperity, increasing suburbanization, and the widespread use and ownership of the automobile. The contemporary evolution of the supermarket is the hypermarket, a large-scale format that combines the features of the supermarket and the department store into a one-stop shopping trip (Lawrence and Burch 2007). Also

convenience store models, where a few items are on display in a much smaller, more “convenient” venue but at a higher retail cost (Mayo 1993).

In the last twenty years the supermarket strategy has extended in both directions--to larger hypermarket-type stores with over 50,000 items offered on one end to convenience stores with a small assortment of grocery items on the other (see Table 2 for breakdown). This has created a very competitive market for retailers; in addition to the wide variety of store configurations, the increasing number of fast food and restaurant outlets has also increased the competition for the food dollar. In 1970, 69% of food was eaten at home, whereas in 2003 this figure had dropped to 53% (USDA 2003). This increased competition has led to retail consolidation and concentration (Lawrence and Burch 2007). Dixon (2007) argues that supermarkets have capitalized on these trends and positioned themselves as food authorities who can significantly shape the choices and lifestyles of their consumers.

But even as the supermarket evolves, self-service is a pre-requisite of its form. Self-service was the essential feature of mass merchandising as it decreased labor costs and facilitated volume consumption. Self service transferred the labor from the clerk to the individual shopper and in many ways brought a new autonomy to women. Where the clerk was once the intermediary between the product and the shopper, shoppers now had immediate contact with the product and management encouraged them to look, touch, smell and otherwise “squeeze the Charmin”. Many women welcomed this new autonomy in food shopping; they were no longer at the mercy of male clerks and enjoyed the larger selection, lower prices, better lighting and cleaner

stores (Bowlby 199; Deutsch 2002; Humphreys 1997 for the Australian context).

For those shoppers who began moving to the suburbs as early as the 1920's, they had no choice but to learn the new strategy as chain stores were disproportionately located in the suburbs and independents could not compete with the cost savings enjoyed by bulk buying.

In addition to saving labor costs, another consequence of this shift to self-service was an unprecedented rise in impulse (or unplanned) purchases. Market research indicated that between 1949-1965 almost three-fourths of all supermarket food purchases were unplanned (Levenstein 2003) and today industry analysts estimate that at least half to two-thirds of purchases are a result of impulse buying (Underhill 1999). During the early period of the supermarket, established manufacturers were alarmed by this trend because it allowed new products to be directly chosen by customers without the intervention of a clerk; thus packaging and marketing for these products became even more important than ever. One industrial designer wrote "In the modern supermarket women are no longer cajoled into buying a particular brand. As a result, an entirely new kind of package design has developed...the ladies who trundle their little shopping wagons among the shelves and tables need packaging to entice them to read products (Egmont Arens, 1950, quoted in Levenstein 2003)." Paul Willis, an early president of the Grocery Manufacturers of America, emphasized the importance of marketing:

When grocers had store clerks, they could influence what consumers purchased. By eliminating the store clerks, self-service gave consumers an uninterrupted opportunity to make their own choice. By displaying the manufacturers' products instead of hiding them behind the counter,

supermarkets gave branded products an opportunity to be chosen (Willis quoted in Greer, 1986).

### Marketing Discourse

As marketing became an integral aspect of the supermarket model, marketing strategists focused less on selling specific products and more on influencing the consumer to make a purchase (Dawson 2003). The Grocery Manufacturers of America's current definition of shopper marketing is direct: food marketing is about leading the shopper to make a purchase which includes "all marketing stimuli, developed based on a deep understanding of shopper behavior, attitudes and emotions, designed to build brand equity, designed to engage the shopper (i.e. consumer in 'shopping mode') and lead him/her to make a purchase (Risom and Balkenburgh 2008)." This retail and manufacturing marketing discourse directs managers and manufacturers to single out individual customers based on demographic information, and discusses how to alter the shopping environment to allow customers to accept new products or increase the number of products included in the shopping cart (Dawson 2003: 52). Marketing is about managing the customer before, during and after the shopping event.

In 2000 marketing expenditures by food companies, which included advertising and discount incentives (coupons, slotting fees), totaled \$33 billion (Nestle, 2002). The USDA figures for 2004 are even higher: marketing amounted to \$171 billion (USDA-Economic Research Service). The advertising budget for Kraft

alone in 2007 was \$1.55 billion (msnbc.com). Seventy percent of the total was spent marketing convenience foods whereas 2.2 percent was for fruits, vegetables, grains and beans (which constitute the bulk of acceptable foods on the food pyramid) (Nestle 2002). Thus, shoppers encounter the work of marketers (which includes advertising) as an important institutional factor in how they perform their work of grocery shopping.

I interviewed six managers for this study, the head manager of the no-frills suburban store, the assistant manager at the full-service suburban store, the owner and two managers at the rural store and a sales manager at a corporate office. These managers indicate that they read trade industry publications, especially *Progressive Grocer* and *Supermarket News*, general marketing newsletters printed by organizations such as the Food Marketing Institute, specific corporate newsletters, food and beverage magazines as well as business newspapers such as *The Wall Street Journal*. I analyzed the two leading trade publications for articles on consumers and identified at least two different themes related to consumers and how they shop: the importance of “knowing” your customer and building “relationships”. We see, however, that these practices are not designed to contribute to shoppers’ ability to feed their families but rather to manage the shopper.

#### Know Your Customer

“Knowing your shopper” to manufacturers and retailers means gathering as much information as possible about the demographics of their customers, what their customers are buying, and what their customers shopping practices are. One main

avenue that marketers use to “know their shoppers” is through the information gleaned from loyalty cards, the cards that customers sign up for to get discounts on purchases in the store as well as on other goods such as gasoline. Retailers designed these cards to track consumer purchases and their responses to new promotions. Marketers and retailers also purchase information from companies that compile data based on UPC purchasing (tracked with bar-code technology) as well as conduct their own consumer research through surveys, focus groups, online consumer panels (Karolefski, 2007).

Retailers, one article states, are working harder to know what their customers’ needs and then tailor promotions accordingly. How do they understand what the shopper needs?

Retailers analyze loyalty card data and sending color-coded coupon offers to different shoppers depending on their spending behavior. Shopper insights help us understand what a customer is doing in the store. Retailers can then use targeted marketing to “build customer relationships” (Moses 2005).

Why is knowing your customers and what they “need” so important?

According to America's Research Group, Charleston, S.C., it costs three to four times as much to attract new customers (using advertising, marketing and promotions) as it does to retain an old one (Moses 2005). So creating “relationships” is an important marketing strategy to keep customers in the same store.

In an increasingly competitive retail market, marketers state that knowing and rewarding their most loyal customers is very important. Retailers should identify their best customers and market specifically to those people. Some retailers are doing

this through closed-network TV systems, while others do it with sampling or on-site events. Retailers should be marketing their stores to hold onto these loyal customers and actually increase their spending by targeting promotions to them (Hamstra and Zweibach 2005).

Large retailers are also connecting with manufacturers to provide promotions through the loyalty card. For example, customers can download Unilever coupons directly onto the Kroger store card and use these coupons at the checkout line. Krogers' corporate loyalty vice president views "coupons as a way to build customer loyalty by saving them time and money (Angrisani 2008)."

Marketers do not conceptualize their customers as individuals with needs but by "types" of shoppers. One article states that consumers have four "shopping modes" as they cruise the aisles: auto-pilot, variety-seeking, buzz, or bargain hunting. In understanding these particular shopper "modes" the retailer can "disrupt" consumer behavior by advertising, new offers, price and promotions. "Marketers can leverage this brief window of opportunity to trigger change by understanding which hot buttons to push (Progressive Grocer August 16 2007)." Another marketing manual breaks the consumer up into nine consumer "need states" ranging from "caring for the family", to "stocking up", to "smart budgeting" to "immediate consumption". Using this information the store manager is expected to determine what "need state" they want to target and then brand the store and brand the image (Coca-Cola Retailing Research Council 2008). Another marketing study divides organic consumers into six categories: health enthusiasts, organic idealists,

unengaged shoppers, hogwashers, bargain shoppers and distrustfuls. The key to reaching this consumer is to then target promotions and signage to the different consumer types (Progressive Grocer July 2008).

Marketers tout technology as one of the keys to “serving” customers. Loyalty cards are very important as they give the retailer an opportunity to monitor food purchases while also tailoring sales. Kroger uses loyalty card data to tailor promotions based on what the consumer buys. Through a partnership with Dunnhumby, a British loyalty marketing firm, these companies analyze frequent-shopper data, segment its best shoppers into different categories, and send them relevant offers and information (Angrisani 2005).

Retailers are using stand-alone counters, known as kiosks, to individualize marketing strategies. One article suggests that retailers should add kiosks throughout the store where the shopper can scan her loyalty card and can see her cumulative savings, as well as receive targeted coupons and specials. These offers are for the products the shopper most frequently purchases and related items and are only available through the Shopping Solutions kiosk. The kiosk is one of a series of promotions, however. Once the shopper gets her coupon, she then is treated to 42-inch digital plasma screens, in departments like produce and meat/deli, and also audio programming. The marketing manager states that “We also use the emotion of video and the immediacy of point-of-purchase to bring awareness of products and promotional services.” One store that featured this multi-pronged approach to

introduce a new product experienced a 131.3% increase in sales versus only 86.5% at the regular store (Garry 2006).

A chain of stores in San Francisco tried using finger-scan biometric identification instead of digital loyal cards to provide instant offers at the checkout line to customers as well as make payments. This scanning information was used along with customer email and cell phones to send them targeted sales promotions. Although the technology didn't take off, the goal of the promotions was the same: "By increasing relevancy, we will encourage shoppers to buy more. If you like Pepsi and I like Coke, we can both shop at the same store because discounts are available for both products (Garry and Mercado 2005)."

While technology is touted as a means to increase sales it also increases the work of the shopper in the store. Not only are self-check lines common in most stores, but coming down the pike are hand-held scanners that customers use as they shop. However, retail management states that this added work will benefit shoppers by speeding up the checkout process in addition to allowing shoppers to keep a running tally of their purchases which "...reassures shoppers on a fixed budget. Indeed, those shoppers may be empowered to spend more than they would without knowing their total (Garry and Mercado 2005)." Supermarkets may also have a scale that "allows" shoppers to weigh their own produce and make bar codes by entering price look-up numbers.

The ultimate goal of retailers is is not only to reward loyal shoppers but also to shape their behavior, because understanding consumer behavior also allows stores

to develop strategies to maximize profit. “Through case studies and examples, a deep understanding of consumer shopper behavior will result in the right promotions to maximize lift (sales) (Progressive Grocer, July 27, 2007).” One study titled “Data Mining for Precision Consumer Marketing” examines how retailers' frequent shopper data can be analyzed to pinpoint everything from how loyal a family is to a specific laundry detergent to how often they purchase macaroni and cheese. The study describes how an effective data collection partnership between manufacturers and retailers could potentially increase annual brand sales more than 10 percent, while significantly improving the store’s bottom line in general and in certain product categories (Grocery Manufacturers of America 2000). This study states in no uncertain terms that consumer data is directly connected to increased profits.

### Build Relationships

Marketers and retailers use consumer research information in an attempt to know who their customers are and provide them with the products, services and promotions that they “need”, in effect building a loyal customer base. Understanding what customers want is one way to build relationships. According to one marketer, customers want healthy food at low prices but they are also fickle: “Retailers will be in a stronger position to consistently satisfy the American shopper's constantly changing tastes and buying preferences...(retailers) should form a stronger relationship that goes beyond price (Lempert 2008).” But where do they get their changing tastes? Much of this originates in marketing campaigns.

One retail and manufacturing strategy to satisfy needs and “build relationships” is branding. Branding is a standard marketing term that describes the process by which a good or service is associated with a certain brand name. Once the consumer connects the product with a name brand and prefers this brand over others, a relationship has been established. A good example is found in an article in *Supermarket News* that encourages supermarkets to boost their hair care sales by better catering to consumers' needs. Instead of listing what those needs are, the article recommends resetting shelves and including “branded hair care centers” (such as Redkin) with special signage, lighting or shelving (Gates 2008).

Marketers encourage retailers to make a connection with their customers to keep them coming back by building relationships through branding the store image as well as individual products. One marketer stated “Brands are powerful commodities. The best of them represent more than a product or service—they inhabit those parts of our brain that connect to basic feelings of self-worth, comfort, power, and attractiveness (McLeod, 2008).” This marketer advises retailers to create the right kind of shopping experience for the customer to brand their store image.

Walmart is trying to reposition itself as a good source of healthy products for families. They have introduced a new branding campaign that connects Walmart with an iVillage.Inc website called momtourage.com, a networking group that offers expert advice around mothering issues. Through this marketing campaign Walmart hopes to connect its image with the knowledge of mothers to brand the store as not only the choice for good products but for products that are endorsed by mothers. In-

store displays and recorded messages featuring parenting tips will help reinforce the branding message (Gallagher 2008).

Many stores are using the current concern with the environment to create customer loyalty as well as brand stores with a green image. One marketer advises that stores need to win the loyalty of environmentally conscious shoppers now because soon “ecologically friendly attributes will be a given”. The benefits to environmentally conscious branding are significant:

Retailers hoping to make connections with socially minded consumers can most effectively do so by maintaining transparency while communicating the “tribal” benefit of a particular product. “It's going to be very important that the brand empowers and enables our joining a community of like-minded people that share our values,” said Mitch Baranowski, founding partner of BBMG, a New York-based marketing firm (Hamstra 2008).

Many stores are now eliminating plastic bags and providing cloth bags for purchase. Although one executive suggested that their stores cloth bags were an effort to do the right thing, offering the bags also “helps burnish the company's image in the area of environmental sustainability (Hamstra 2008).”

Branding also allows retailers to make a connection between the customer and the product. Marketers advise retailers to make some kind of emotional connection with shoppers, to

...meet their needs through signage, layout and ambiance. Bundle products by theme---say barbequing---and present them with strong imagery. Entice shoppers to buy store brands by offering samples to taste (Moses 2007).

Retailers should use emotional branding as a way to make people feel better about themselves. “People are not going to be buying products just for functional value.

They're going to look at products that make a difference in their lives (Angrisani 2005).”

Branding should begin as early as possible to hook consumers. In response to media reports on the rising obesity epidemic, supermarkets are connecting with marketers to “brand” fruits and vegetables with licensed cartoon characters from Disney and Nickelodeon such as the Incredibles, Dora the Explorer, and SpongeBob SquarePants on the packaging. This campaign is designed to promote healthy eating choices for children by increasing the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. But the article ends with a quote from a marketing executive on the benefits of this strategy to the manufacturing companies:

If you can get that young child to eat broccoli, for example, you'd hope you're developing a long-term broccoli consumer... We need to make sure we're getting kids hooked on fruits and vegetables as early as possible so we do not only give them a better chance at learning in school and growing up strong and healthy, but also, we're going to build consumers for life... somebody who will be eating your products for 60, 70, 80 years," Michelle Poris, director of quantitative research for Just Kid Inc., a Stamford, Conn.-based market research company said (Sung 2006).

The retail and marketing discourse, in essence, standardizes the shopper. Instead of embodied individuals with specific needs, the marketing discourse describes customers as certain demographics and instructs retailers to “know” their customers and “build relationships” not with individuals but as a demographic whose needs they can shape.

### Consumer Sovereignty

As this sample of the marketing discourse attests, manufacturers and retailers should gather as much information as possible on their customers in order to shape

what and how they shop. This process creates a closed feedback loop--customers buy what they are marketed. However, when I asked the managers in my study about how they decide what products to sell, all began by saying it is the customer who really decides what gets on the shelves.

O'Donnell, the rural store owner, states that customer wants drive what he buys; he has been in the business long enough to know what the people in his community want and will buy. For example, his customers (and customers in general) want grapes all year round, even when they are out of season so he makes sure he always has a shipment of grapes even if they have to come from Mexico. His customers like skinless chicken breasts rather than pork chops, which sell better in the next town.

The manager of the discount store states that his customers expect low prices and that desire shapes how the store is organized. He states

We are not about image, we are about cheap groceries, low food prices. We are a case-cut store, we cut the tops off the cases and cut out the front. They hand stack stuff so a case of vegetables has three cans and I get three cans in there where they can stack one row and their section can be three times smaller and have the same amount of product. Our customers want and expect low prices.

So his job is to give the customer what they want: low prices.

The assistant manager of the full service store is much more specific about what drives their product selection. The emphasis of this particular store is customer service. Customer service to the assistant manager means

Giving the customer the best price, the best quality of the products that they buy, and the freshness of the products that they got. It is being sure that the

folks that greet them at the door are pleasant with them and doing every thing to go above and beyond everything that a customer would expect out of a 16 year old sacking groceries or a gentleman in the meat department serving something over the counter. And basically how I understand it is that you are not going to let anyone leave the store unhappy, no matter what you are going to have to do to make them happy, that's what you are going to have to do.

And making customers happy means providing the customer with everything they want (while at the same time maintaining an 8-10% profit margin). The manager repeatedly stated that product selection is mostly based on customer demands.

This same message is found in many texts that managers read or that are part of the industry literature. The Food Marketing Institute, one of the largest organizations promoting information and programs for retailers and wholesalers in the U.S., often reinforces the basic message of the consumer sovereignty discourse: “The singular force driving the [food] revolution is the consumer. The consumer’s market power is growing strong and ingrained (FMI 2005).” Royalty is not even an accurate description of the consumers’ role: “An old industry truism holds that “the consumer is king. Food retailers today would update saying to “the consumer is dictator” (Food Marketing Institute 2007).”

These texts connect customers’ power with the economic laws: “Consumers come out ahead, because of the laws of supply, demand and competition almost always favor the customer (Progressive Grocer, April 2000).” “Overall, the entire food system is in a very dynamic period...changes are being driven by fundamental shifts in consumer wants and needs (Kinsey and Senaur 1996).”

This discourse seeps into popular media:

In the end, there are a couple things these die-hard competitors all seem to agree on. In a country where so many people are looking for such different things, the mass in mass marketing is probably a thing of the past. And who wins from all that competition? The consumer of course (“No Ordinary Trip to the Market, Nov. 20, 2005-CBS).

The marketing discourse even states that its goal is to satisfy consumers:

“Successful marketing is customer driven: it addresses customer needs and desires (Churchill and Peter 1995).”

This belief that consumer demand controls what is produced I term the consumer sovereignty discourse. Consumer sovereignty attributes consumer satisfaction as the ultimate economic goal of markets, which means that the economy is fundamentally ruled by consumer desires. Consumer sovereignty, part of the liberal economic tradition that assumes that consumers’ needs and wants determine the shape of all economic activities, is best symbolized by the classic supply and demand curve. If consumers want a product, the supply of that product will increase. If consumers don’t buy a product, the manufacturer will cease producing the product.

Consumer sovereignty is one of the core beliefs of the consumer society.

Thomas Princen (2005: 150) summarizes the logic of consumer sovereignty:

producers respond to consumer demand by producing the goods the consumer wants and at a price the consumer will pay. If the consumer doesn’t buy the product, producers don’t make it. Governments do likewise; they intervene in the economy to serve the consumer...[S]overeign consumers are entitled to have their desires satisfied, to have ever more goods, and to do so all at low, low prices.

The consumer sovereignty discourse emphasizes that the individual knows best what they want to buy, and there should be no interference between the consumer and their product from markets or governments.

Ultimately, consumer sovereignty supposedly reflects a kind of economic democracy: the consumer is voting with their dollar, making “choices” about what products should make it into their homes and what shouldn’t. The consumer sovereignty discourse doesn’t discriminate or rank between choices; the larger test of these choices is whether they increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Galbraith 2004). The market doesn’t discriminate between Coke or bottled water, so long as consumers are still buying products. If consumers are buying Coke, for example, that must be what they really want.

But how do managers know what consumers want? Are consumers actually a part of the process of determining what gets sold to them? Looking at actual retail practices, we see that managers use the consumer sovereignty discourse while in practice follow the marketing discourse of using strategies to control what and how the shopper buys. How *do* products get chosen to be on the shelves? How do managers decide how to configure the store? Although some of the store and marketing practices may seem trivial in and of themselves, the motivation behind these practices is not to help the consumer get their families fed but to shape their behavior.

#### Retail Practice

Product placement is one such issue that turns out to be less than straightforward and in large measure determined food manufacturers and distributors. Manufacturers order, stock and shelf several sections of the grocery store, which is otherwise known as direct store delivery (DSD). Pop, bread and snack sections are examples of these types of DSD where the manufacturer monitors the shelves, decides where to place the products he delivers, and sets the prices for the products. The store manager has little control over what is on the shelves or how the products are shelved but does benefit by the reduced labor costs of stocking the shelves. Manufacturers benefit from this arrangement because they can not only place products but introduce new products without going through the retailer's warehouse.

Manufacturers also get their new products on the shelves through slotting fees. Slotting fee allowances are one-time payments a supplier makes to a retailer as a condition for the initial placement of the new product on the retailer's shelves or space in the retailers warehouse (Federal Trade Commission, 2003). Suppliers can spend up to \$2 million in slotting fees for a new product and this amount makes up a large fraction of the revenues earned by some products in their first year. Frozen food distributors (where shelf space is limited in the freezer and new product introductions are more common) are more likely to pay more and higher slotting fees. Suppliers state that slotting fees are paid on between 80-90 percent of all new products (FTC 2003).

Distributors assign a sales representative to a geographic region for all new product lines and even established branded products. These representatives visit

stores in their region, ask for their items to be placed on certain shelves and in certain places, as well as introduce new items to the managers. Chris Morris, the no-frills store manager said he always has sales representatives coming up to him and asking “is there any way I can get this on? Can we work this in?” The sales reps are always pitching him for new products for a certain demographic. Each item is always going to be represented by a salesman of some sort:

The salesman from Crossmark, a brokerage firm, represents everything from Pillsbury cake mix, Crisco oil, to Hefty plates. They also have independent brokers that come in they will have, like one guy works for Shrowd and he has Malto-Meal cereal and I buy 10 pallets at a time. He gets a commission off of that somehow. Then you know Proctor and Gamble they have Tide, Era, Cheer, Bounty, Charmin, and 40% percent of the non-food, he comes to see me and that’s all he does is Proctor and Gamble. So I buy from him, he sets me up on deals and stuff like that. It’s rare that do we not see a salesman walk through the door every day (Chris Morris).

Sales representatives influence where managers place products on the shelves. When asked how he determines product placement and if a section is doing well, Craig Wallace first says it is customer driven but in the next sentence contradicts himself:

Proctor and Gamble or Kraft or someone that owns a huge portion of an item spread in a section may come out and say ‘we are running this campaign’ or ‘this is what works best for your demographic let’s set it up this way’. Look at our room freshener section which would be the Glade candles and plug-ins and things like that. These companies wish it would get bigger; I have 8 feet in the store for it and there’s probably 5 or 6 new items that come out each week that I’m trying to fit into this 8 foot section. If you look at it, it’s overwhelmed with 15 different flavors of apple-blossom plug-in and so at that point you say do I have to carry Ocean surf and Ocean mist or can I just have one of those?

Suppliers have also convinced the managers to introduced TVs at this store that air ads for their new products, and Craig is puzzled by the negative comments he's received about the TVs. He asked, "Why wouldn't consumers want more information about products?"

Managers also use strategies to increase sales at the retail level. If an item is not selling well, one manager has found that if they take it away for a time and then bring it back, customers will be more likely remember the product and it will sell quickly after that. Signage is also extremely important. Managers report that if they put out a sign that says "new item", people are more likely to look at it. A sign that looks like a sale but is really a marked-up price is also effective in catching shopper's eyes. The frozen foods manager at the rural store puts a sign on Banquet dinners that states "5/\$5 on everyday low price", which is actually an 18 percent mark-up, fooling people into thinking they are getting a sale. Signs that state "10 for \$10" also confuse people as customers think they have to buy 10 of them.

Where managers place products on the shelf also influences what people buy. When he is "merchandising" his store, Wallace bases where he places products on the shelf on the average female height, which is about five feet five inches. People are more likely to buy what they see, and by putting the products with the store brand at eye-level is most profitable for the store retailers are able to gets the store's name onto people's home pantry shelves. Some sections are tailored to specific clientele. Managers "demograph" (Craig Wallace's term) the cereal, candy and fruit snack aisles for a 3 foot person; retailers place the best selling vitamin and over-the-counter

medications on higher shelves so senior citizens don't have to bend down to pick up items.

At the store level, several managerial and industry practices are designed to influence shoppers' work. The layout of the store is not accidental. Food that provides the largest profits for the store are found at the perimeter of the store, which includes the produce, deli, and meat sections. The grocery section (the aisles in the middle) has the least turnover and lowest profit margins. The organization of the store encourages, almost forces, shoppers to enter each of these sections. The organization of the store also encourages shoppers to make their trips as long as possible by routing them to all the different sections which means that shoppers are more likely to make unplanned purchases. How much a customer buys is directly related to the amount of time they spend in the store (Underhill 1999), so practices that extend shoppers' trips are significant.

#### Advertisement production

Many shoppers in my study said they used the weekly grocery store advertisement to make their list for their grocery store trips. Since they identified this text as important to their work, I traced the process by which this text was created starting with the rural owner who was part of the advertising management team to the corporate sales department to the food show where the managers select the products that will go in the advertisement.

I'll describe the process of making one representative ad from the rural cooperative. The text I'm discussing is about 20'' by 12'', four pages long with sales

of perishables on the front and back page in big, bright colors (soda ads are in black and white, due to a commitment with Coke and Pepsi to alternate weeks when these sodas are on sale). O'Donnell, the rural store owner who is also on the advertising committee, explains that the advertisement is for all the franchise stores and each store is thus required to have these products on hand. Individual managers can set the prices for products on the front page only. Occasionally they put a loss-leader on this page, which is a product that they are selling for less than wholesale cost in order to bring people into the store. The advertising department makes these ads up to three months in advance using a holiday or seasonal tradition as a theme. The ad that I am describing has a NASCAR theme and the tag line is "Race in For Huge Savings"!

O'Donnell explained that for each item listed in the ad, the supplier pays a marketing fee to the supplier in order to get their product listed as well as offered a lower wholesale cost to the retailer. The larger ads at the top cost more, and get less expensive as you go down the page. There is some margin built into the inside ads, so that the store doesn't lose as much as they do on the front page ads.

I next interviewed Mark Sullivan, the sales manager for the franchise corporate headquarters on how an ad is assembled at his level. First, he said, when they create the ad they try to include products from all the departments to entice the customer to shop the entire store; items from produce, bakery, meat, frozen/dairy, grocery, health and beauty and even floral will appear in every ad. The sales department also attempts to coordinate products so that shoppers will buy more to make a complete meal. For example, if spaghetti sauce is on sale, the logic is that

shoppers will also buy spaghetti or if ground beef is on sale, they will also buy buns. Most ads are made at least twelve weeks in advance, based on an industry-wide food show (discussed below).

While he'd like to say that the ad is based on what the customers want, in actuality "these manufacturers pay us to be in the ad, so a lot of it is based on what the manufacturer wants which pays for us to print this ad, so it's vendor driven. Our whole marketing division functions by selling these spots in this ad." The manufacturer will not only offer a certain deal to the retailers, for instance, three dollars off a case of Frosted Flakes, but will also pay the marketing department a fee to place their product in the advertisement. The company is making profit on almost every item that is in the ad, anywhere from 5 % to 30 % to 40% profit. "If it's in the ad, the manufacturer lowers the cost, we lowered it to the retailer, we lowered the ad retail so everybody wins. We sell groceries, the store sells groceries and the consumer gets a better price."

#### The Food Show

The Food Show is a regional food exposition that allows manufacturers to showcase their new food items. These Food Shows are held roughly four times a year; the particular show that I attended was held at a convention center and featured over 200 vendors, including big manufacturers like Con Agra, Kraft, Nestle, Proctor and Gamble, and Kellogg's, as well as a few regional suppliers. I attended the show with owner of the rural store, as well as the frozen foods, produce and meat managers of that store. The store owner estimated that each company paid thousands of dollars

per table to be a part of the expo, and some companies like Kraft had ten tables alone. He commented that if companies would eliminate this step they could pass the savings onto the customer. But the frozen food manager commented, however, that it was important for him to see how items would look on a shelf. Each table was decorated with signage and had a representative dressed in corporate attire in front handing out free samples. At this show were some of the 20,000 new products that are introduced every year, and representatives were very anxious to get the managers to try their new items.

The dairy manager I was with was eager to put new items on his shelf. He stated that while people do like to try new things, new items are also significant because managers can set the price as there is no prior reference price for comparison. Regular mark-up (the difference between wholesale and retail price) on groceries is 15 percent. On meat and produce the mark-up is 35 percent, due to shrinkage (they factor in perishables arriving spoiled or going bad on the shelf). With new grocery items you can get mark-ups of 20-25 percent. Another reason the food show is important to the retailers is that they are eligible for an early buying allowance, which means if they buy from the show they will get an additional discount from the manufacturer for pre-booking it at the food show. This is one way manufacturers deal with risk in the market, but the process also squeezes out smaller manufacturers and distributors who cannot offer these discounts.

Managers sampled a wide variety of products, including fruit juice energy drinks, processed cheeses, meats, BBQ pork, Mt. Olive Kosher Dill pickles, and

Harley Davidson Beef Jerkey. Each time they discussed whether or not the product would sell in their particular store. At every stand they asked will people buy this? Can I sell it? They passed right by the organic section (the rural clientele is meat and potatoes, they said). As an observer, I was struck by the fact that these people are my purchasing agents, and how little of what is available I as a consumer actually get to see or “choose” from on my supermarket shelves.

### Notes from Real Life

According to the consumer sovereignty discourse, consumers live in an economic democracy where they signal what they want by what they buy. But reality shows consumer sovereignty to be a fiction in two ways. First, in many cases consumers buy what they are marketed. A good example of how marketers create “needs” is illustrated in an article in *Supermarket News*. Three groups, a marketing company (The Perishables Group, “an independent consulting firm focused on innovation and creating value for clients in the fresh food industry” ([www.perishablesgroup.com](http://www.perishablesgroup.com)), a corporate interest group (the United States Potato Board) and a particular supermarket (which was not named in the article) worked together to devise a new method to increase potato sales. The goal of this partnership was to get customers to think differently about potatoes. Their solution was to add kiosks next to the produce section with over 100 recipes using potatoes. Sales of potatoes went up 10 percent without having to offer discounts. While these groups may have been responding to customer need, the express reason for the campaign was to “drive sales up in a mature category” or in other words, create a demand that didn’t

exist before for an established product (Supermarket News Vol.55, No 31; July 20, 2007).

Although one could argue that selling more potatoes is an innocuous example, it is the disjuncture between the discourse and the lived experience of shopping that is significant. Based on actual retail practices, the customer is certainly not driving the process of grocery shopping. Products on shelves are supported by manufacturing ‘subsidies’—manufacturers pay to get their product on shelf, they pay to get in ads, and they employ a large staff of sales people who stump for their product. The physical organization of the grocery store is not designed to make it easier for shoppers to get food on their tables but rather to force shoppers to go through the entire store even to buy a few items. “Convenience” stores are one option to mitigate a supermarket trip, although there is a price premium for this service.

Often, the goals of the supermarket, the message of institutional discourses and the needs of the provisioner are contradictory; for example, the supermarket encourages shoppers to stay in the store as long as possible to encourage impulse buying, exactly what the efficiency discourse warns shoppers to avoid. Avoiding extra sugar for kids is a message in the nutrition discourse, but in practice supermarket managers’ shelf placement of sugared cereal is at eye-level of a three foot person who pressures the shopper for these products.

The second example of the disconnect between the discourse, retail practice and the shoppers’ experience lies in the nature of individual wants. What do consumers really want? If consumer needs/wants were truly driving the food system,

what would it look like? Unfortunately, I didn't ask all consumers this question and when I did most could not think of a different way of obtaining food. This lack of imagination of alternatives in food provisioning speaks volumes to the institutional power of our current system.

But when I did ask shoppers how they liked shopping or what they wished were different, it was not the choice of certain products that they identified, but rather the work process of shopping that was discussed. Several shoppers half-joked that they would like someone to do the work for them but then added that really they would like some kind of respite from the on-going work of feeding and provisioning their families. Several shoppers talked about using a meal preparation service where for a fee all the ingredients are bought, chopped and presented in a store where the shopper becomes the assembler; one or two weeks worth of meals are frozen for later use. Lisa Corbin said that if she were working and had more money she would go to one of those places:

they make up your food for you and then you can freeze it and have it. I would probably do that. I'm too cheap to do it now. I would have somebody else prepare it so I'm not constantly eating out or my kids aren't always eating out and they are still having good food that is not always just frozen processed food.

Kelley Barnes also expressed an interest in this type of meal making as an alternative to

grocery shopping:

It's like \$200-\$300 dollars and you have enough meals for a month, maybe like 3-5 meals a week for a month, you cook them all and then you freeze them. That would be worth it, that would be awesome to be able to do that.

Other shoppers wanted more time for shopping and cooking. As a professional working mother, Jessica Pierce said

I don't like to shop. I do enjoy cooking but right now I don't have time for either. I would definitely spend more time cooking and shopping if I had the time.

April Malloy, another working mother, wants more balanced meals with vegetables and a little variety. She finds the meals she makes boring and said

I would have more variety if I had more time to spend in the kitchen or spend at home. More time to julienne my vegetables or to make a side dish with our pasta (AP).

Stacey Osterstrand had just switched from part-time to full-time employment when I talked with her about shopping for her household. When she was working part-time, she was able to shop during the day and spent less time on planning; now she plans meals and does shopping trips on weekends and after work. This shopping time (and other household responsibilities) now took the place of spending time with the family. She told me (with her voice wavering) that

We used to play games in the evenings; the errands were done, dinner was earlier and after dinner we would have time to sit around and play cards or play a board game. And that has really fallen by the wayside because we get home later, dinner is later, she has to practice piano for 20 minutes, she has homework, and then its bedtime. And I miss that, I miss the board games, I miss the card games, that's the fun stuff. I feel like we get everything done but that's a fun thing I really miss.

Another group of shoppers identifies the organization of shopping as something they would like to change. Colin Moore, for example, finds shopping to be a chore. For him, shopping at a traditional market where you knew the people you were buying your food from would make it more meaningful. He would also like regional food: “What you ate would be from mother nature, now you can get tomatoes all year round. It’s convenient, but is it right?” When I asked if he tries to eat locally, like going to the farmers market, he stated “No, we you don’t have time, everybody has careers and 50 hour workweeks, even kids who have school and after school programs. So instead we have Applebees drive-thru.”

Jill Burnett finds shopping to be a hassle trying to fight the crowds at the end of the work day. She would love to give someone her list and have them shop for her but more realistically she would like a small market in her neighborhood, somewhere she could walk to. Not only would it be smaller and more convenient, it would also be more personable. She offers:

Maybe you would know the people that work there and have them know you. It would be a better experience. I don’t think I’d be listening to the sacking people at Dillons talk to each other and bicker which I have heard. I just think it would be a better experience.

One shopper was not happy about the choices she was presented with in the supermarket and took the “250 Mile Challenge” to eat foods that were grown within a 250 mile radius of her household. She researched where she could get food from farms in the area, attended several different farmers markets, spent time deciding what food she must keep in her diet (oats and cheese were important), made all her food from scratch. Although this cost more money than she was used to spending,

she justified the price by saying she was helping the environment, helping local farmers and eating better.

She also shopped at the local health food store where she would buy fairly traded shade-grown coffee, organic oats, local pecans, organic beans, local handmade soap, and organic body products. She did have to shop at the supermarket for products she couldn't get at these other places. About this process she said:

Shopping this way was a TON of work. I started this experiment when I was working part time and my only child at the time was in full time school. When I started working again it was over. I couldn't do it anymore. The guilt of buying produce at the supermarket slowly diminished over time and I realized that it is NOT possible. Supporting sustainable agriculture is not sustainable in our society. Now I still get my few things at the health food store but just get the rest from [the supermarket]. I bake quick breads every other week, but not bread-bread. I just don't have the time...I feel like I don't have much of a choice anymore but to just participate in the system. It basically sucks.

### Conclusion

Grocery stores are designed to keep shoppers in the store as long as possible, because the amount of time shoppers spend in the store is directly correlated with how much money they spend in the store (Underhill 1999). Retail industry discourse, based in the science of marketing, instructs managers and owners to collect as much demographic information on their customers as possible in order to shape their behavior at the grocery store. Managers should "brand" the store and certain items through marketing campaigns, disrupt the customer through various marketing and store tactics and encourage impulse buying.

The managers with whom I talked all state that it is the customers' needs and wants that drive what they do but their practices show they draw heavily on the industry discourse. First, retailers design the store so that short trips for a couple items are not possible; in order to get a gallon of milk shoppers are required to walk through the entire store. Managers use confusing signage to disorient the consumer as to the comparative price of items, place items on the shelf for impulse purchasing, and reward loyal customers with special sales.

The practices of managers at the grocery store work in contradiction to both the efficiency and the nutrition discourses. Shoppers must work harder in the planning phase of shopping in order to subvert the retail practices that encourage over buying and impulse purchasing. The sheer amount of non-nutritious choices that are given prominent shelf-space makes it more difficult for shoppers to resist, especially if they have to take their children with them. But the consumer sovereignty discourse makes the thought and work that goes into the purchase of the shopper and the practice of the manager invisible by equating the needs of the shopper with what they buy.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

As I write this chapter, two momentous events have occurred. One, of course, is the election of our first African American president. The second is the worst economic collapse (possibly) since the Great Depression, a downward spiral in housing, credit and consumer markets brought about by decades of lax regulatory controls. The unwavering neoliberal consensus that market forces are the catalyst for economic growth created the environment in which policies and decisions that were good for business were also good for the economy. But even Alan Greenspan (NYTimes 10/23/08) grudgingly admits he had put too much faith in the self-correcting power of free markets and failed to anticipate the power of unregulated business practices (specifically mortgage lending).

Since the summer of 2008 we've seen petroleum prices spike to unprecedented rates (\$160 a barrel of oil!) only to fall to below \$50. Even though the price of oil has come down, food prices have remained high. Stories on how to save money at the cash register have been flying on network television shows and newspapers. Couple these high prices with rising unemployment, it is clear that families are straining to feed themselves. Requests at food pantries outstrip supply, and the rush on baby formula at the beginning of the month suggests that people have to wait until the next paycheck to buy necessities.

What we don't see or hear about is the invisible work behind the scenes to feed these households and families. We've seen that grocery shopping involves a great deal of mental and manual labor, including planning meals and menus, making

lists, doing budgets, arranging schedules, sacking groceries and loading them into the car, and unloading at home. Among the people I talked with, feeding work is important to identity. Mothers are still responsible for much of the nurturing of children and men and nothing is more nurturing than feeding bodies.

Although women comprise more than half of the workforce, the breadwinner/homemaker dichotomy is still part of the structural logic of our political economy. Listening to how shoppers describe their work practices, I identified two discourses organizing their work, both of which are still predicated on an unpaid household laborer who cares for the children and men in the household.

The “efficient shopper” discourse is a creation of the home economics profession that survives in consumer economics curricula and is used by nutritionists, dieticians, and other consumer science educators who work in government agencies, for the food industry and who are often featured in media publications. These institutional agents, through textually-based discourses, instruct the grocery shopper to make rational decisions for the economic stability of her household; she must not only balance the household budget and save money through shopping but also exhibit certain personality characteristics of self-abnegation and strict discipline. This discourse instructs shoppers to make lists, plan meals in advance, comparison shop, eschew convenience over cost savings, clip coupons and find someone to watch their children so they can negotiate the store alone. Saving money and time through efficient shopping, the housewife is the CFO of her household.

The efficiency discourse is especially relevant for those shoppers who have few resources. Shopping on a fixed budget is very difficult for single parents and low-income households and demands a great deal of skill and knowledge in order to feed a household. Institutions such as the state and the retail store depend on this work, however, to accomplish their goals; spending tax-payer money wisely for the former and accumulating more money for the latter.

This housewife is also in charge of the nutrition of the household and the health of the family becomes her responsibility. Shoppers must contend with the nutrition discourse, a discourse that demands a certain knowledge of food, a knowledge steeped in the scientific tradition of reducing food to its component nutrients and exhibited as a form of nutritional literacy. Food becomes an equation to be solved: grams of fat, sugar, carbohydrates, plus calories equal the right food. Shoppers must know the difference between monounsaturated, saturated, hydrogenated and trans fat, and look for the right kind in the food they buy. Thus, this discourse stresses a certain nutrition knowledge that is used in reading and deciphering nutrition labels. Separating “junk” from “health” or bad from good food is the goal of the shopper.

The nutrition discourse creates much anxiety for those shoppers who are familiar with it or chose to abide by it; making sure they are feeding their families the “right” food adds to their shopping work. But ultimately the nutrition discourse makes individuals responsible for this information and shifts the responsibility to the shopper to make the right “choices” at the grocery store. The obesity debate is a

prime example of the nutrition discourse: mothers are instructed to feed their children the “right” food in order to combat childhood obesity.

The work of grocery shopping is not only gendered but is also mediated by class. Working class and lower middle class women were more likely to pay attention to price; nutrition was mentioned usually in relation to weight loss and some basic knowledge of food groups. As DeVault (1991) and Dixon (1999) also found, meals are based in tradition rather than novelty; shoppers feed their families foods that they are familiar with and what they were raised on. These women do not often seek out additional information about food and nutrition outside what they read in the newspaper, see on TV or already know.

Middle class professional women express concern about what they are feeding their kids and are more likely to seek out organic or natural food (and can also afford it). However, many of these women are working a full-time job or have a career and cannot devote the time they want to shopping and cooking. But the anxiety over what they are putting in their kids’ bodies is unmistakable in their discussions of food and shopping; the anxiety over whether Johnny should eat Ranch dressing so he will also eat his broccoli is part and parcel of the way shopping discourses structure our relationship not only to shopping but also to food.

Single mothers are faced with the added difficulty of provisioning the family on one income (even if it is supplemented by state aid or child support) and without another adult in the household (both of which theses discourses assume). Provisioning a family on \$323 a month takes significant planning and usually

involves other sources than just the grocery store such as food banks or free school lunches. Buying Kraft Macaroni and Cheese and adding a hot dog for your kid's lunch is more logical from this perspective: protein and carbohydrates fill a belly up faster and you've only spent \$2.50. Being efficient as a single mom when working 40 hours a week requires taking time to plan, prepare, cook and clean up and also means less time with your children. In this situation, ordering a take-out pizza makes more sense.

These discourses are often in contradiction. Efficient shopping isn't necessarily healthy (i.e., more "convenience" foods that women can make in a short amount of time such as Hamburger Helper) and shopping for healthy food is not necessarily efficient or cost-efficient (making several stops for different foods like shopping at farmers markets for local vegetables or paying higher prices for organic or whole wheat products). The dilemma that Stacy Ostrander faced illustrates this contradiction: does she buy the potato chips that she knows are junk when they are on sale so her husband doesn't buy them at full price? Why won't her family choose the fruit she puts on the counter instead of Lays Barbeque chips?

Moving up to the next level of the institution and listening to how grocery retailers talk about their work, I encountered two more discourses operating, once again in contradiction: the discourses of Consumer Sovereignty and of Food Marketing. Managers talk about their work as though they are merely responding to customer needs and wants. Underlying their expressed understanding of the shopping process is a discourse of consumer sovereignty which attributes consumer satisfaction

as the ultimate economic goal of markets. Expressed in terms of supply and demand, the consumer sovereignty discourse assumes that the economy is fundamentally ruled by consumer desire.

But as I examined managers' practices I found a contradictory discourse operating. These practices included misleading signage, higher mark-up on new products, targeted shelf placement, and particular product placement, and overall sensory overload that is designed to either mislead the customer or to control their behavior. These practices are a product of a retail marketing discourse, found in industry trade journals and newsletters, that instruct managers to glean more information about their customers in order to shape their behavior in ways that benefit the store, not to make it easier for the shopper to accomplish her work and are often in conflict with the efficiency and nutrition discourses. Retail strategies that encourage impulse purchasing are directly contrary to the efficiency discourse, and the focus on low prices discourages some shoppers from purchasing more healthy (and often more expensive) alternatives.

This study has limitations. In making the choice to focus on households with children, I have left out single-person households which make up a growing number of the households in the United States (Hayden 2002). Marketers are increasingly designing products for this demographic and an interesting research question would be whether and how the social organization of shopping is different for these households.

The lack of people of color is also a limitation of this study. Race is a significant structural factor that impacts the work of feeding families. 68% of all births to African American women are to single mothers (U.S. Census, 2001) and the poverty rate for all African Americans was 24.3 percent. In poor urban African American neighborhoods, individuals often have less access to fresh and affordable food (The Food Trust 2003). Shopping under these conditions can be extremely difficult, as my two single mothers' experiences attest to. Culturally variable food patterns would also impact food shopping. Anecdotally, when I discussed food shopping with several Latina mothers at a church camp our daughters were attending, they commented that making traditional Hispanic food requires several trips to different grocery stores and specialty shops to get the full range of ingredients, which adds extra shopping work in addition to cooking from scratch. Mainstream grocery stores are, however, stocking more of these products, especially in towns with a large Latino/a population.

Another limitation was the lack of men represented in this study. Are men actually doing more shopping work and if so are they doing it the same way? What sources of information do they draw from for their understanding of food?

Although the supermarket model standardize shopping in many ways, a next step for this research would be to start with the work of women of color and male shoppers and investigate whether different shopping practices exist for different communities and whether the mainstream shopping organization supports these shopping practices. Another interesting empirical question is whether alternative

discourses exist that may mitigate the individualizing effects of the mainstream shopping and nutrition discourses.

### Gender and Economic Sociology

I was able to illuminate social relationships that we participate in but may not be aware of only because I took seriously activities that are normally considered “passive” or “unproductive”. The work of shoppers is vital to the functioning of the food system. Thus, the dichotomy that supports the hierarchical relationship between private and public, between consumption and production, between paid and unpaid is a false and misleading social construct. My research suggests that to remedy this we need to expand the boundaries and widen the conception of the economy; broadening our conception of work to include activities that support daily life is a good place to begin. Feminist economists have been working on this project for many years (Ferber and Nelson 1993, 2003; Folbre, Strober 1994; Strassman, Powers 2004). Julie Nelson’s (1993:32) definition of economic activity as “the provisioning of human life which involves the commodities and processes necessary to survival” is particularly useful in reconceptualizing economic labor. Instead of economy as a fight over scarce resources, Nelson’s definition of economic activity begins in the work of reproducing people and includes provisioning and care-taking as central to the economic process.

Feminist sociologists have also been grappling with dismantling the production/consumption dichotomy (Glucksmann 1995, England, 2003, Zelizer 2005b, Acker 2006. Zelizer (2005b) propounds a new conception of the economic as

a relational world, understood as a continuum from intimate to impersonal relationships rather than a dichotomy between personal and market relations.

Economic activity occurs at every step along the continuum and this activity actually supports and reproduces the relations and settings along the continuum. Power is always a part of these relationships, not because personal relations are mixed with economic activity but because individuals and groups use power in unjust and improper ways.

Once we determine that consumption is both a relational and an economic activity, research on grocery shopping offers new insights into the nature of economic life. Mainstream ‘economic man’ assumes an individual who is not influenced by outside forces, and individuals in households are assumed to be entirely altruistic. I have shown, however, that choices shoppers make are neither one nor the other but rather relationally constructed. Shoppers orient their work to their relationships with people in the house and try to satisfy both individual and household concerns. Economic activity is neither entirely altruistic nor completely egoistic; our choices and behaviors depend on our relationships with other individuals and the larger social institutions in which we are enmeshed.

Economic decisions are also made in relationship to cultural texts and discourses. I’ve shown how discourses, disseminated through a wide variety of texts including popular media (television, magazine, and internet), brochures, pamphlets, advertisements, and even store signage shape the work of shopping. Thus, the government, institutions of higher education, professional organizations and the

media are all important economic actors in their ability to shape knowledge and meaning and are thus intrinsic to the functioning of the larger economic system.

Some economic actors are positioned more advantageously in this system. Individual men have historically benefitted from women's work in the household; larger corporate and government institutions also benefit from women's unpaid labor of choosing and transporting food from the store to the household. Power is intrinsic to this system. If we ignore the power dimension of economic life, we obfuscate the consequences for individuals. If we ignore the relational elements in economic processes we also risk making misguided policy decisions. For Zelizer (2005b: 306) policy questions should start with "which arrangements actually enrich participants' lives?"

Mapping the social organization of grocery shopping through institutional ethnography illuminates the social relationships that organize our lives in often invisible ways. Institutions attempt to standardize our everyday/everynight work in order to meet the needs of these institutions, rather than meeting individual and community needs. Local relationships are thus increasingly controlled by extra-local forms of relations of ruling in a more corporate capitalist system. The people who know our families do not make the decisions that determine the organization of our everyday lives. Instead, institutions such as work in corporations, governments, professional settings, and organizations, universities, public schools, hospitals and clinics, determine what gets produced and how it gets distributed. Smith (2006) elaborates:

The relations and organizations in which these individuals are active are also those that organize our lives and in which we in various ways participate. Watching television, reading the newspaper, going to the grocery store, taking a child to school, taking a mortgage out for a home, walking down a city street, switching on a light, plugging in a computer—these daily acts articulate us into social relations of the order I have called ruling as well as those of the economy; what we pick up when we are shopping will likely have been produced by people living far away from us whom we'll never know....The functions of 'knowledge, judgment and will' have become built into a specialized complex of objectified forms of organization and consciousness that organize and coordinate people's everyday lives (Smith 2006: 18).

The shoppers in my study attempted to navigate the frequent inconsistencies or even conflicts in the organization of their relationships with the individuals in their families, with food and industry discourses as well as the material environment of the grocery store. Looking at the social organization of food shopping from the experience of the shopper suggests that grocery shopping is not organized to benefit shoppers. The larger food institution, which includes government, media, food manufacturers and retailers, depends on the work of shoppers. However, this institution does not include shoppers in making important decisions about what kind of food is produced and how it is grown, how food gets distributed and put on the shelves, or even fundamental questions like whether the supermarket strategy is the best way to produce healthy individuals.

When we start with the experience of people on the ground, policy solutions to social problems are likely to shift from individual-level responses to reorganizing at group levels. For example, in the case of obesity, the current focus on more nutrition education might shift to regulating the number of fast food restaurants in certain neighborhoods or regulating the production of high fructose corn syrup or

even instituting shorter work days so people can spend more time preparing food or engaging in leisure activities. Instead of blaming mothers for their overweight children, this perspective suggests that we must question the social context of food production and distribution that gives us industrial food and the frenetic pace of life that doesn't allow for healthy food practices.

Someone asked me whether my research has changed the way I shopped. In many ways it hasn't. I still go to the grocery store about once or twice a week, I buy mostly the same ingredients, and I still have to squeeze the work in to my hectic schedule. However, my orientation toward food has changed. I was once a very efficient shopper and food was merely the means to the end of avoiding hunger. As I became aware that my approach to food and shopping was a product of a particular social organization that encourages this more functional relationship, I found myself questioning not only what I eat but how I thinking about eating. I now enjoy preparing food *and* eating it. I have also come to believe that change in this system must come from below and outside, from consumers and alternate food producers, and from academics who challenge economic conceptions that leave out the work of reproduction. I hope that I have contributed to this effort.

Table A: Interview Demographics

Name	Age	Occupation	Education (Years)	Income (Household)	# of Children in Home	Marital Status	Community Type	Employment
J.E.	33	Day Care/ Dental	12+	60,000	3	M	Rural	In-home
H.K.	32	Receptionist	12+	45,000	6	M	Rural	Part-time
K.C.	48	Stay at Home	12	20,000	3	M	Rural	Stay at Home
P.G.	28	Stay at Home	12	12,924	2	S	Rural	Stay at Home
C.B.	39	Dept. of Education	18	40,000	3	S	Rural	Full-time
M.W.	42	Educator	18	90,000	2	M	Rural	Full-time
A.M.	41	Accountant	18	90,000	2	M	Rural	Full-time
J.F.	39	Asst. Director	18	95,000	3	M	Suburban	Full-time
M.F.	31	Student	18	65,000	1	M	Suburban	Part-time
K.M.	45	Stay at Home	18	100,000	3	M	Suburban	Stay at Home
K.J.	33	Stay at Home	18	70,000	2	M	Suburban	Stay at Home

M.S.	30	Accountant	18	65,000	1	M	Suburban	Full-time Dad
J.B.	35	V.P. Bank	16	35,000	0	S	Suburban	Full-time Single
L.C.	32	Part-time Editor	16	40,000	4	M	Suburban	Part-time
M.L.	50	Office Mgr.	12	85,000	0	M	Rural	Full-time
L.K.	65	Retired Teacher	16	65,000	0	M	Suburban	Retired
J.M	82	Retired Homemaker	16	40,000	0	Widow	Rural	Retired
S.O.	50	State of KS Employee	16	90,000	1	M	Suburban	Full-time
S.Z.	32	Paraprofessional	12	45,000	2	M	Rural	Full-time
S.V.	39	Nurse	16	100,000+	2	M	Suburban	Full-time

## Table B. Sample Interview Schedule

Open-ended and semi-structured interviews to understand all the work involved in shopping for food:

### A: Planning:

- How do you usually decide what food you are going to buy? (lists, recipes, menus, tastes). What kind of meals do you make? Do you eat out?
- Do you have a particular store you shop at? Do you ever go to other stores and if so, why? (variety, quality, size, price)?

### B: Financial/Budgeting:

- How much money do you spend on food purchases in a week? A month? Do you have a set amount that you spend on food?
- How do you pay for your groceries (cash, credit card, debit)? Do you take money out of a checking account or out of a paycheck? (joint checking account? Whose paycheck?)
- What do you do to keep your grocery bills under control (coupons, sales, bulk-buying)?

### C: Buying Practices:

- How often do you shop? How much time does it generally take you to shop for groceries? How do you get to the store?
- Do you take children with you? Do you ever make purchases that you wouldn't have when your children are present?
- Do you ever read labels to purchase foods? Do you buy brand names or generic? What are the most important characteristics you are looking for when purchasing food (price? quality of product? convenience?). Are there any particular products you will not buy?
- Do you sack your own groceries? How do you get the groceries home?

### D: Post-shopping practices:

- Who puts the groceries away? Who cooks the meals?

### E. Where do you get information about shopping or nutrition?

Table C: Post-Interview Survey of Demographic Information

1. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. What is the highest grade you completed in school? \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. How many adults live in your household? \_\_\_\_\_  
How many children? \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. How many hours a week do you work outside the home? \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. What is your total monthly income? \_\_\_\_\_ Yearly income? \_\_\_\_\_

Table D. Type of Retail Store and Market Share, Food Marketing Institute, 2004

Type of Retail Store	Characteristics	Number of Stores / Market Share (2004)
Conventional Supermarket	Carries 15,000 items, including a full line of groceries, meat and produce, with at least \$2 million in annual sales	14,690/ 12.4%
Superstore	Carries more than 25,000 items and more nonfoods such as health and beauty items	8,225/20.1 %
Combination	Superstore and full-line pharmacy with general merchandise and health/beauty accounting for at least 15% of sales	14,690/ 14.1%
Supercenter	A large food-drug combination store and mass merchandiser. These average more than 170,000 square feet and have more than 40% of store to grocery items (i.e., Kmart, Super Target, Wal-Mart)	2,293/12.4%
Convenience	Offer a small selection of dry groceries, beverages, nonfoods and ready-to-eat foods.	26,259/2.4%
Convenience with Gas		111,946/13.7%
Wholesale Club	a retail/wholesale hybrid that offers a limited selection of food and non food products. These measure about 120,000 square feet.	1,050/6.7%
Mass	A large store selling primarily clothing and electronics but also grocery items	4,170/6.6%
Drug	A pharmacy that sells at least 20 percent of sales from grocery and other health and beauty items	18,500/4.4%
Super Warehouse	Carries more than 50,000 items and full range of service departments	520/1.7%
Dollar	A traditional format that sells 20-80 percent of groceries at discounted prices	18,000/1.5%
Other Traditional Outlets	Strong emphasis on natural/organic	9,5000/1.4%
Natural Food	Small family-owned or ethnic stores	762/0.6%
Military	Commissaries run by the DoD	181/0.5%

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