

Homemakers Alias Families and Consumers

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Abstract

An apple is an apple is an apple—to paraphrase Gertrude Stein in her statement about a rose. Maybe you think an apple is an apple, too. That it's refreshing to eat and gives you good food value for the money. But that's not necessarily the way the HOMEMAKER audience sees it.

Homemakers Alias Families and Consumers

NELLIE R. McCANNON*

AN APPLE is an apple is an apple—to paraphrase Gertrude Stein in her statement about a rose. Maybe you think an apple is an apple, too. That it's refreshing to eat and gives you good food value for the money. But that's not necessarily the way the *HOMEMAKER* audience sees it.

I've chosen to broaden that term, *HOMEMAKER*, so have added an alias of "families and consumers." Let's look at this audience of many faces who is the target for communications messages which leave your editorial office.

The Traditional Homemaker

There is the traditional homemaker, neither too young nor too old and not too rich nor too poor. Over the years we've been trying to reach her with our homemaking, gardening, and family oriented information.

In the early 1960's, when several surveys were taken, extension club members were expressing choices for topics which they wanted to learn about (7). Most often mentioned was, "ways of doing my housework easier." Other topics, in order, were also what you might describe as home oriented. Ranking second was "using color and design to decorate my home attractively." Then came, "preparing more nutritious meals," and "laundering wash-and-wear." Working and high income mothers were wondering about their "teen-agers having charge accounts."

By the late 1960's, when one county in Indiana asked their extension homemaking members and also a group of potential members about their interests, the picture had changed somewhat (6).

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They also polled past county leaders and other VIP's and the state specialists.

When asked which of 56 choices were most important "to know about to fulfill my role in my home and in my community," one stood out. It ranked in the upper 10 per cent for all the groups, "coping with tensions and pressures in everyday life." Members ranked it first, non-members put it second, and specialists perceived it as fifth in interest to homemakers.

This topic was followed by "development of new interests or talents for personal use," and then, "managing time." The other two were food topics. Besides learning that dealing with daily pressures was of importance to women today, the results note one other thing, perhaps as important.

Maybe We Aren't in Tune

The study suggests that specialists and university staff aren't exactly in tune with their audience. The first three topics which specialists rated as most important weren't in the top five for members. First, as the specialists perceived needs, was "physical, mental, social, emotional development of children." Certainly, homemakers aren't "not interested" in this subject, for they rated it eighth. Specialists next perceptions were "influencing family food habits," then, "managing family resources"—again, not in the top five for the clientele.

It appears that homemakers' interests do change, even over a few years time. In these studies, the change was from the home-making skill topics to the mental health aspect of their daily lives. Also, it seems that specialist's may not be in touch with their family-consumer audience as much as we might like. Perhaps we need to be surveying, or listening more, to county extension home economists, or to the homemakers themselves.

Communication Pattern

From an audience which is older than the general population, where a third have had four or more years of college and two-thirds are high communicators, different interests are shown (8). Their communication pattern is read a daily newspaper and five magazines, listen to the radio two hours a day, and watch television more than two and one-half hours.

Half of this audience listening to a university "Accent on Liv-

ing" radio program, designed to expand the horizon of homemaker listeners, rate book reviews as the most interesting program. About a fourth of the listeners are interested in health and medical programs. Remember, they are older, with few children living at home.

The next two topics were in a tie—for family relations and gardening. Rural families and those with children preferred the first of these topics, and the middle aged and older listeners were the gardeners. The middle-aged listener who wasn't employed brought the foods and nutrition topic into the next ranking.

These studies, as I mentioned earlier, have to do with traditional members of extension homemaker groups, or non-members who live in the same community, both urban and rural. They have high school educations, are middle income, have moderate housing and home furnishings.

Other Families and Consumers

But there are other families and consumers. Let me introduce you to a few. We met them when filming a documentary on the nutrition program (1).

—Two Blom brothers, in their 80's, living on the home farm where they were born, and their 86-year-old housekeeper. She was taken to an old folks home, but ran away back to this farm with no electricity and no running water.

—A divorced mother of six who lives in an old schoolhouse. She planned her garden for daily use and for canning for the winter. But the kids ate the vegetables as fast as they ripened so none are left to can.

—The Wisconsin Indian family who lives in a trailer on the reservation. This homemaker is learning how to use powdered milk.

—High school girls in a home-bound study group who were forced to leave school temporarily due to pregnancy.

—Three children who live with their grandparents who've moved here from Southern hill country. The oldest girl asked the program assistant to teach her how to make a cake so she could observe her 12th birthday.

—Pat, 15, who cooks for her 12 brothers and sisters, and a cousin who sometimes lives with them. With her parents at work, she plans meals, does the shopping and keeps the family fed.

—A 23-year-old slow learner who gets help on her cooking

which her mother could never give. For she, too, is retarded. Father is out of work. In their 100-year-old house, they burn coke boxes in the wood cook stove to keep warm.

Pressures for Families

Remember, that in the 1968 study, COPING WITH TENSIONS AND PRESSURES OF EVERYDAY LIFE was the most important need for the traditional family and consumer.

What are the added tensions and pressures for these newly introduced families? They have food concerns, some of them have health needs, both mental and physical, and some have housing needs.

Add on the pressure of the Vietnam war, which calls up an unequal number from the poor. Or drug abuse, which is reaching into every community, and now is war-related with the returning veteran.

Add on, also, the pressure caused from lack of jobs, not only for the unskilled but also for thousands of highly educated, technically trained, able bodied young or middle aged. So, economic pressure is on all family groups.

Add on a few more pressures—those environmental issues which bring on threat of polluted water and air. Homemakers, alias families and consumers have a part, whether it be sorting household waste for recycling, or teaching the kids not to throw empty soda cans in the lake or along the road.

Add on confusing or even threatening credit policies which may allow 36 per cent interest. Or those contracts which are sold to a second party who won't stand behind a warranty when your car or an appliance breaks down. Or be faced with labels that lie and prices that confuse. And, then try to understand the legislation which may deal with these situations—or make them worse.

We've tried this past year to give special coverage to legislation through releases which we label "Consumer Action." Each deals with a state or federal law or code being considered. It urges the reader to write to the Federal Trade Commission or a state or U.S. congressman, and gives addresses for doing so.

Minority Repression

Earlier, we mentioned minorities. But there's one other minority repression—that of women. An archaic law which allows only a male parent to sign for a son's driver's license is perhaps only

annoying because of the inconvenience it causes when father is off in the steaming jungles of Brazil.

But, if your wife works, federal social security laws can cost you money. A working couple may both pay the maximum into social security, yet take out at the time of retirement no more, and sometimes less than if the wife had never paid anything in.

In our state there are differences, too, for men and women on state teacher's retirement. Then, there may not be equal pay for equal jobs. No one in this room, of course, is paying equally educated, equally tenured women on your staff lower pay than men in similar jobs. Surely not. Reviews are now being made at universities across the country—Michigan and Wisconsin were early schools. So, if inequalities are happening, perhaps they soon won't be.

The Population Explosion

A recently introduced fear, with worldwide implications, is that of the population explosion. At the same time there is fear of or lack of knowledge about abortion, the pill, or other family planning measures. Part of the concern about having more children lies in the aspirations that families have for the education of those children, the job opportunities they'll have, their relationship and communications with them.

Perhaps those are enough tensions to throw into our description of **HOMEMAKERS**—alias families and consumers.

But what are we learning about reaching these audiences? What do we know about their knowledge, attitudes, and practices that will help us to better communicate with them?

Let's start with family planning.

From surveys done at the Community and Family Study Center at the University of Chicago, we learn that 87 per cent of non-white women in a sample and 77 per cent of white women either "approve" or "strongly approve" of limiting family size (2), Table 1.

TABLE 1. PER CENT DISTRIBUTION OF NON-WHITE AND WHITE WOMEN APPROVING OF FAMILY LIMITATION

	Non-white	White
	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Approve strongly.....	48.4	25.2
Approve.....	47.5	51.4
	87	77

TABLE 2. PER CENT DISTRIBUTION OF REASONS FOR APPROVAL OF FAMILY PLANNING, BY COLOR

	Non-white	White
	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
To avoid poverty.....	56	44
To provide better non-material care for children.....	13	19
To preserve mother's health-general.....	11	18

Reasons given for planning families are in the same order for both white and non-white families, even though the percentages aren't the same. "To avoid poverty," ranks as the first reason, especially for the non-white family. The second reason given is "a chance to provide better non-material care of children." This might be just having enough time to give attention to a child. "Preservation of a mother's health" is the third reason mentioned, Table 2.

Since both white and non-white have similar attitudes toward planning family size, the fact that blacks have higher fertility rates is **not** based on attitudes, the study says. That leaves two unanswered questions—knowledge and practices.

Based on experiences related by our students from several countries, they say that if they want to reach a family in an ejido, a barrio, or an el rancho that they try to influence the man in the family—no matter if it be to change an agricultural practice or a homemaking skill.

So, how are men in this country reached with family planning information. They surely are an important audience. From further Center studies, we see that "there are three major sources that provide birth control information to males—wife, friends, and reading. Then comes relatives, and after that is radio and television. . . . What information they get on radio and television teaches least of all." Note that males learned most from their wife and from reading, Table 3.

The study says that three-fourths of the males expressed will-

TABLE 3. SOURCES OF OBTAINING BIRTH CONTROL KNOWLEDGE BY MALES

Source	Best information source	
	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Ranking</i>
Wife, 81 %.....	35	1
Friends, 74 %.....	22	3
Reading, 68 %.....	26	2
Relatives, 49 %.....	6	
Radio, TV, 43 %.....	2	

ingness to learn more about birth control. They suggested that it is a joint responsibility and that both marriage partners should be given instructions at the same time. When limited resources are available, it appears that inter-personal communications is most important in any effort to reduce birth rates.

In our effort to keep current, our department gave a course on family planning communications this past semester. Evaluations from the 13 students indicate a need for this course. Also, three masters research projects are being done in this field.

Food and Communication

Family planning issues relate to both low and high income. So does hunger. With those who spend enough money, it may be hidden hunger; with low income it may be lack of money to spend.

Remember, I said that an apple is an apple, but not necessarily to all people. In fact, to low income homemakers an apple appears to give high food value for the money spent. But not to the high income homemaker (3). This finding comes from a study which developed an instrument for learning the connotative meaning of food. That's the implied meaning, not necessarily what is expressed.

Terms were tested to find out several perceptions such as an economic one. For example, which foods are perceived as being the best buy for the money, or being high cost. Then, convenience—such as being easy to use. Health aspects were explored, too, such as “foods which are needed for general health.” Foods were perceived to have status, or sensory qualities. They taste sweet or sour, good or bad. Also, some foods cause a communication reaction such as “would like to read more about it.”

Contrary to any thoughts we might have about low income being apathetic toward foods information, they are more interested than high income in information on the foods which were studied (in talking about, and in reading and hearing about them).

Thus, we ask, has relevant and understandable information been available to the low income audience through channels which they would use?

Before this study ever started, the researcher had to delete words from her adjective pairs which were not understood, for she tested both high and low income families. Such words as

monotonous, ceremonial, sophisticated, economical, and laborious did **not** convey meaning to the lower educated.

“Certain findings of the study suggest areas for content of messages directed to low income,” the researcher says. “These subjects found all foods studied to be less ‘safe’ than did high income. What accounts for this differential in meaning for the two groups? Is it a reflection by low income homemakers of quality of food available?” Perhaps, in the grocery stores where they shop. Do they lack information on purchasing, storage and preparation? Or does it mean that they lack storage facilities at home and foods spoil quickly?

Because economic perceptions relate to the messages we often deal with, let’s look at a few. They might lend direction for some of the communications on nutrition we’re doing these days. For example, the apple that appears as high food value for the money to the low income respondent doesn’t hold true for high income. Both the Wisconsin dairy farmer and the Florida orange grower may be interested to see that their products are rated of high value, Table 4.

But to the nutritionist, it may be more disturbing to find that low income perceive powdered milk as giving **LOW FOOD VALUE** for the money. Not only that, but in another adjective pair, powdered milk is perceived by both high and low income as a “poor food buy.” This says something to nutrition educators and to communicators who for years have been trying to sell the value of powdered milk, Table 5.

TABLE 4. ECONOMIC PERCEPTIONS: HIGH/LOW FOOD VALUE FOR THE MONEY

	Low income	High income
High food value.....	Egg Fresh milk Dairy products Fruit Apple	Egg Fresh milk Dairy products Orange juice Chicken
Low food value.....	Cake Powdered milk Chicken	Cake White bread Steak

TABLE 5. ECONOMIC PERCEPTIONS: GOOD/POOR FOOD BUY

	Low income	High income
Good food buy.....	Chicken Milk Vegetables	Chicken Milk Dairy products
Poor food buy.....	Powdered milk Cake Steak	Powdered milk Cake Steak

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 TABLE 6. ECONOMIC PERCEPTION: HIGH/LOW COST FOODS

	Low income	High income
High cost foods.....	Fruit Cake Steak Meat	Fruit Cake Steak Meat Orange juice
Low cost foods.....	Chicken Eggs White bread Powdered milk Green beans Vegetables	Chicken Eggs White bread Powdered milk Green beans Vegetables

For you Florida orange producers, you're going to have to do something with those high income folks who think orange juice costs a lot. Notice that both groups see the same foods as low cost—here powdered milk is considered low cost. So are poultry and eggs, and vegetables, Table 6.

Comparing only part of the foods tested, we see that low income homemakers view fruit and orange juice as more slimming than do high income (9). Both groups see white bread and cake as fattening, Table 7. Other foods that have slimming perceptions are powdered milk and green beans for both income groups.

What Media Should be Used

As we think about reaching low income on nutrition or any issue, we need to consider where to put that message. The poor are not media poor. In fact, the poor are just as likely to own and have in working order a television set as is the general population—only three per cent of either group does **not** have one (5). However, the general population is more likely to have other types of media available—newspapers, radio, and phonographs—than is the low income. Of course, this suggests the relative importance of television within the media-environment of the low income person.

TABLE 7. HEALTH DIMENSION, SLIMMING . . . FATTENING

Food concept	Low income	High income
	<i>Scale</i>	<i>Scale</i>
Fruit.....	2.3	2.8
Orange juice.....	1.8	2.7
Apple.....	2.3	2.2
Chicken.....	3.3	1.8
Eggs.....	2.8	2.0
White bread.....	6.3	5.7
Cake.....	6.1	6.9

One out of four low income people do not have home-delivered newspapers. But in the general population, only 14 per cent do not. And, if you look at low income blacks and whites, you discover that low income whites have a newspaper-use pattern like that of the general population. But the blacks do not.

Low income differ considerably from the general population's use of media, too; especially on television viewing time. The general population may spend two hours a day while low income spend more than five hours. In fact, one out of four low income spend half of their day, that is more than eight hours, watching television.

That's why one of our extension home economists puts her money management and other information on one minute tapes which get used between television soap operas throughout the day.

Use of Terms

Let's look at one other issue important to our homemaker, family-consumer audience. One aspect related to the environment is the use of pesticides. When giving advice on such topics it's important to know if your audience understands terms used on home and garden pesticide labels are confusing to major users—farmers and homemakers (4).

Note the percentages in Table 8. Farmers in two areas of our state and extension homemakers were tested. On every term the higher score was made by the homemakers. On 10 out of 25, less than three-fourths of the farmers answered correctly. Consider the risk involved if these percentages would be representative of the farm population. This researcher suggested possible substi-

TABLE 8. PER CENT CORRECT CHEMICAL TERMS KNOWN BY FARMERS AND HOMEMAKERS

Terms	Farmers	Homemakers
	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Herbicide.....	22	34
Fungicide.....	32	80
Wettable powder.....	46	67
Infestation.....	56	61
Fumigant.....	66	88
Toxic.....	66	100
Residual spray.....	68	93
Antidote.....	69	96

tute terms in his study such as “weed killer” for herbicide and “can kill both insects and people” for the term toxic.

Home Economics Jargon

Another study, just finished, looks at home economics jargon. Using terms from our 1969 news releases which specialists felt would be used frequently, 18 of them were tested with county extension home economists and with a city directory sample of Milwaukee homemakers (10).

Half or more of the homemakers answered 10 of the 18 multiple choice terms correctly. Only two terms were properly identified by more than three-fourths of the homemakers. “Specials” were noted as foods offered at lower than usual prices by 88 per cent. “Hangtags” were identified as removable information labels by 91 per cent of the homemakers. County extension home economists predicted that 80 per cent of the homemakers would know the meaning of this term.

Is there a percentage-correct figure where you no longer consider a term “jargon”? If half the audience knows, do you feel a definition isn’t needed?

How do **you** make a decision on the terms you use in your environmental, agricultural, youth development fields on which you write or broadcast?

In this study, extension home economists consistently underestimated the homemakers understanding of these terms. They were inaccurate in their predictions on 10 terms, saying that only two would get a 50 per cent or over correct response. In fact, nine were answered correctly by more than half of the homemakers.

The extension home economists were accurate predictors of only those terms answered correctly by **less** than half of the homemakers—behavior pattern, resilient floor covering, wales, self identity, credit plans, male role, wall space, and piers. In other words, they understand what their audience does **not** know, but aren’t too familiar with what they do know.

It would have been helpful if this study could have included all of the jargonese found in those news releases. We now know that the professionals with whom we work aren’t good predictors of homemakers knowledge.

Today, we’ve considered the comprehension of terms used in our messages, looked at how our audience perceives one topic—

foods—and looked at the relevance of topics for the homemaker audience.

There is a lot to know about **HOMEMAKERS**, such as whether an apple is the same apple for all ages, income levels, and ethnic groups of our **HOMEMAKER** audience, alias families and consumers.

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