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Children's influence on family food purchase decisions

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Children's Influence

On

Family Food Purchase Decisions



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and
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Children's Influence On Family Food Purchase Decisions

BY DOROTHY DICKINS AND ALVIRDA JOHNSTON

Several studies have suggested that children play a role in family food decisions but none have defined the role or its importance. There is little, if any, direct research in this area. It is the purpose of this pilot study to learn (1) where the child hears about foods requested, what foods he requests, and whether or not requests are granted; and, if not, why not; and (2) what appeals are effective with young children. Such information is not only needed by educators but also by the food industry.

Scope and Methods

The study included 220 boys and girls of 9 and 10 years of age attending public schools located in Lowndes and Clay Counties, Mississippi. Children were selected from one rural school in Lowndes County (New Hope School) and from three urban schools in West Point, Clay County, (East Side Elementary, West Side Elementary, and West Point Junior High)¹.

Nine and 10 year old children were selected for this study as this age child is old enough to participate effectively in an interview with a stranger and have influence on food purchases.

The eligibility of the child was determined from an interview with the teacher or in the principal's office by filling out the child's record sheet. To be eligible the child (1) must be either 9 or 10 years of age; (2) must live with parents; (3) must have parents who were both born in the USA; and (4) must be of the white race.

Other basic data obtained at the school included the last grade completed in school and the kind of gainful occupation of each parent, as well as place of residence, whether urban or rural.

An attempt was made to get an equal number of rural and urban children, of boys and girls, and of 9 and 10 year old

children. All of the 100 children attending New Hope school lived in rural areas; 20 of the 120 attending urban schools lived in rural areas; and the remaining 100 lived in urban areas. One hundred and ten of the children were boys; 110 were girls. One hundred of the children were 10 years of age; 120 were 9 years of age.

Description of Families

Most of the parents of the 220 children included had a high school education or more, as is shown:

Schooling	Fathers Percent	Mothers Percent
8 grades or less	20	11
9-11 grades	22	24
Finished high school	39	54
College (1 or more years)	19	11

Forty-four percent of the mothers had some sort of gainful work. The most common type of work was semi and unskilled wage work, usually factory work and white collar work such as managers, clerks, and kindred workers. Forty-four percent of those with gainful work had work of the former type; 38 percent, of the latter type.

Skilled wage work was the kind had by more fathers. Thirty-seven percent had this type of work, while 21 percent had semi and unskilled wage work, and 20 percent white collar work. Only 8 percent were farmers.

Eighty percent of the families had 4-6 members. Fifteen percent of the families had more than 6 members. About one-third of the children included were their mother's first child.

Collection of Data From Children

The children were interviewed at school one at a time in a private room, usually a room not in use during certain periods, such as the library, clinic, or a music room. All interviewing was done by Mrs.

¹Fifth and sixth grade children attended this Junior High School.



Figure 1. Picture of a boy named John whom the interviewer and girls talked about.

Alvirda Johnston, junior author of this report. The study was presented as follows: "I am trying to learn more about the way children and their parents decide about foods to buy. I am going to ask you some questions about food, what you like, and what new things you like to have your

mother buy and fix for you. The answers you give me will help me learn about families and the things I should teach mothers and daddies and children about food. Will you help me?"

After the child had volunteered his cooperation he was asked about the number of people in his family and his position in the family — whether he was mother's first child, second child, etc.

Before launching on the discussion of foods the child was shown a picture of a boy or girl (depending on his particular sex) and told: We are going to talk about a boy named John (or a girl named Jane). Here is his (or her) picture. The child is shown the picture. See Figures 1 and 2.

Knowledge of Nutrition

Before asking the child about requests to buy food, several questions were introduced for the purpose of determining the child's knowledge of nutrition. These questions were: (1) What foods do you think John (Jane)² should eat each day? Are these the foods you eat every day? (2) John's (Jane's) mother has promised him (her) a dinner party for his (her) birthday and has told him (her) to make a list of the foods he (she) wants to serve. What foods do you think will be on the list?

The foods in the first questions were checked as to whether or not the child mentioned one or more foods in each of the four basic food groups. These are: (1) the milk group; (2) the meat group; (3) the vegetable-fruit group; and (4) the bread-cereal group.

As will be noted in Table 1, foods in the vegetable-fruit group were named most often as foods John or Jane should eat each day and as foods you (the interviewee) eat each day.

Bread and cereal were named least often. There was a tendency for a larger

²Schedule blanks and pictures used with girls referred to girls and Jane; those used with boys referred to boys and John.



Figure 2. Picture of a girl named Jane whom the interview and girls talked about.

percentage of girls to mention foods in specified groups than of boys. However, differences were not statistically significant.

Relationships were studied of kind and number of basic food groups named that John (or Jane) should have each day and those you (the interviewee) eat each day, to education of mother, occupation of father, size of family, whether or not mother worked away from home, and location of child's home and school. In no case were statistically significant relationships found. However, relationships in location of child's home and school (whether urban or rural) and food groups named approached significance. Urban children more often named foods in the milk, meat, and vegetable-fruit groups than rural children. Rural children on the other hand more often named foods in the bread-cereal group than urban children.

How did replies to the question about foods John (Jane) should eat compare with replies to the question about foods you eat every day? (Table 1). As will be noted, John and Jane would get better diets than the child interviewed. In other words, these children knew more than they put into practice.

As will be noted (Table 1) the biggest difference in the food for John and Jane and in the food the child interviewed ate very day was in the meat group. More said John (Jane) should have foods in the meat group than ate meat everyday themselves. Most of those not eating meat mentioned "not served" and "don't have" as their reasons for not eating. Only 4 children mentioned disliking meat.

Table 1.—A comparison of foods John (Jane) should eat each day with those you (the interviewee) eat each day.

Basic groups	Percentage naming one or more foods			
	Boys		Girls	
	For John	What you do	For Jane	What you do
Milk group	76	72	87	79
Meat group	74	51	76	61
Vegetable-fruit group	95	91	97	88
Bread-cereal group	50	49	56	55

Table 2.—Percentage of boys and girls naming foods in one or more groups that John (Jane) should eat each day and those you (the) interviewee eat each day.

Number food groups	Percentage naming foods in one or more groups			
	Boys		Girls	
	For John	What you do	For Jane	What you do*
1	6	16	4	10
2	24	31	14	20
3	37	28	45	39
4	33	25	37	29

*Two percent mentioned foods in none of the four groups.

Table 3.—Number of foods named in each of the four basic groups by boys and girls which they would serve at a dinner party on their birthday.

No. foods	Boys				Girls			
	Milk	Meat	Vegetable- fruit	Bread- cereal	Milk	Meat	Vegetable- fruit	Bread- cereal
0	26	16	5	41	35	23	9	28
1	56	73	24	51	43	69	30	65
2	15	10	28	6	21	6	21	7
3	3	1	27	1	1	2	26	0
4	0	0	16	1	0	0	14	0

Children in this study had a knowledge about the kinds of foods needed. Seventy percent of the boys and 82 percent of the girls named foods in 3 or 4 of the basic groups John or Jane should have each day (Table 2).

Another question designed to determine the child's knowledge of nutrition concerned his list of foods to serve at a dinner party on a birthday (Table 3).

As will be noted in Table 3, the majority of children (both boys and girls) selected one milk product, one meat and one bread or cereal for a dinner party for the birthday dinner. Most children named 5 — 6 food items (44 percent of the boys and 50 percent of the girls) for the birthday dinner. Types of vegetables and fruits named varied greatly, but more named this food group than any other.

In no case were statistically significant relationships found in sex and choice of food for a birthday dinner. However, urban children mentioned meat more often than rural children. The four meats most often mentioned for this dinner party by both boys and girls were fried chicken, hamburger, steak, and ham.

Thirty-four percent of the boys and 40

percent of the girls did not name a dessert for their birthday dinner; but 41 percent of the boys and 37 percent of the girls named 2 or more desserts³. Only 20 percent of the boys and 23 percent of the girls named a caffeine drink such as coffee, tea, coca cola.

When asked about what his mother would say about this list of foods for a dinner party on his birthday, the child of the more educated mother more often thought his choice would be acceptable than the child of the mother with little schooling. The less educated mother was more likely to say, "Too little; you should add something else".

In comparing the foods named when the child was questioned about foods he eats every day and foods he wanted for a birthday dinner, we found that more boys and girls mentioned foods in the meat and bread-cereal groups for the birthday dinner. On the other hand, fewer girls mentioned milk products in connection with the birthday dinner than as food eaten every day. With all these

³Included sweet drinks such as powdered drinks, soft drinks.

Table 4.—Kinds of food requested when child went to grocery with parent and kinds of food purchased.*

Kinds of food	Boys		Girls	
	Requested	Mother bought	Requested	Mother bought
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Material for cooking	3	3	3	3
Snacks	20	15	32	25
Canned foods	14	14	13	13
Frozen foods	8	6	7	7
Dairy products	17	15	28	25
Cereals	28	25	24	20
Fruits & vegetables	40	38	40	38
Bakery products	5	5	12	11
Meats	29	26	40	38
Miscellaneous, such as olives, catsup, chocolate syrup	8	3	8	5

*Adds up to more than 100 percent as some named more than one kind of food.

tests there seemed to be a keen recognition on the part of children of foods in the vegetable-fruit group.

Requests of Child to Buy Food

As has been mentioned the main purpose of this study was to learn where the child hears about the foods he requested, what foods he requests, whether or not the requests are granted, and if not, why not. Sources of information studied included grocery stores; prizes, premiums; school lunch dishes; dishes served in homes of friends and relatives; television; radio; foods for you to fix; and other.

Grocery store shopping: The child was asked: "In the past few weeks have you been to the grocery store with your mother?" Eighty percent of the boys and 81 percent of the girls replied, "Yes". Twenty percent of the boys and 13 percent of the girls said they had not asked mother to buy any kind of food on these visits to the grocery store. This means that 60 percent of the boys and 68 percent of the girls asked her to buy one or more foods.

There was not a significant difference in boys and girls asking mother to buy foods (Table 4). But differences in requests of urban and rural children for canned foods (such as canned soup, apple sauce) was significant at the 5 percent level. More urban than rural children made such requests.

The 67 boys and 74 girls asking mother

to buy food asked her to buy the following:

	Boys Percent	Girls Percent
Asked to buy 1 food	28	25
Asked to buy 2 foods	34	35
Asked to buy 3 foods	28	16
Asked to buy 4 foods	8	12
Asked to buy 5 or more foods	1	9
No report as to number of foods	1	3

The three most important reasons for requesting the foods when grocery shopping with mother were (1) Like it, it's good; (2) To eat at recess, or as a snack; (3) For health; it's good for you. Three times more girls than boys mentioned needing the food, that they were out of it at home. Foods most often requested but not purchased were cereals, snacks, foods in the miscellaneous group, meats, and dairy products (Table 4). Most frequent reasons given for not purchasing the foods requested were: have it at home; don't need; can't afford; too many sweets.

Prizes, premiums: Each child was asked, "Have you ever sent a box top or coupon from some kind of food package to get a gift?" (in most cases, cash payment must accompany the coupon.) Thirty-seven percent of the boys and 36 percent of the girls replied, "Yes". In practically all cases the child reported the box top or coupon was from a cereal box. Eighty-three percent of the boys and 80 percent of the girls so reported.

Three-fourths of the boys and two-

Table 5.—Kinds of food child had eaten in school lunchroom and requested, and which of these mother had prepared.*

Kinds of food	Boys		Girls	
	Requested	Mother prepared	Requested	Mother prepared
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Main dish	38	29	38	23
Fruit, vegetable, salad	42	33	31	30
Desserts	18	13	21	18
Cereal, breads	2	2	2	2
Other dishes, as soups and sandwiches	7	5	8	5

*Adds up to more than 100 percent as some named more than one food.

Table 6.—Kinds of food child had eaten in home of friends and relatives and requested, and which of these his mother had prepared.*

Kinds of food	Boys		Girls	
	Requested	Mother prepared	Requested	Mother prepared
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Main dish	46	38	39	28
Fruit, vegetable, salad	13	13	23	17
Milk or milk products	2	2	6	3
Breads	3	3	4	1
Cereal dishes	3	0	1	0
Pies & other desserts	28	23	27	18
Other	7	7	8	7
Don't remember	2	—	1	—

*Adds up to more than 100 percent as some named more than one food.

thirds of the girls received some type of toy, game, book, or record for this box top or coupon. Other things the child got from sending off a coupon or box top were: Tableware; money; discount on more of the product; personal items such as finger nail clippers, necklace; and foods, such as candy, peanut butter.

School lunch dishes: Every child was asked four questions about food eaten in the school lunchroom: "Have you ever eaten a food at the school lunchroom that you had never had at home and liked it so well that you asked your mother to fix it? If yes, what was it? If yes, did she fix it? If no, why not?"

Fifty percent of the boys and 53 percent of the girls stated that they had eaten a food at the school lunchroom not eaten at home and liked it so well that they had asked mother to fix. Table 5 gives the types of foods requested and the percentage of mothers who had prepared the food requested.

Main dishes requested by a number of the children were Spanish rice cooked

with meat; pinto beans; chili; meat; and fish salads. In the vegetable-fruit group a number requested a dish quite popular in school lunchrooms, sweet potatoes cooked with raisins. Desserts requested included banana pudding, rice pudding, gelatin dessert, sweet potato pie, cookies.

Most dishes requested by children were prepared by their mothers. Reasons most often given by the child when his mother did not prepare were: Mother doesn't know how; doesn't have ingredients that go in the dish; doesn't have time; hasn't gotten around to it; will fix someday; I don't know why she doesn't fix.

Dishes served in homes of friends and relatives: Fifty-six percent of the boys and 64 percent of the girls reported they had asked mother to fix something never served at home but eaten at the home of a friend or relative.

Table 6 gives the kinds of these foods requested of mother and the kinds she prepared. As will be noted, main dishes were the type most often-requested as well as the type in which requests were less

often granted.

Persons most often mentioned in connection with dishes eaten at homes of friends and relatives were:

Persons	By Boys	By Girls
	Percent	Percent
Grandmother & grandfather	41	39
Friend, neighbor, preacher	30	39
Aunt and uncle	18	23
Cousin	8	4
Sister	3	1

The most important reasons given for their mother not fixing dishes eaten in homes of friends and relatives were: Mother doesn't know how; she doesn't have the recipe; doesn't know what I'm talking about- tried to, but bought wrong thing. Other types of reasons given include: Don't have ingredients; will try sometimes—hasn't gotten around to it.

Television: The children were asked a number of questions about food advertising over television: "Have you watched TV in the last few weeks? If yes, have you heard some food advertised? Did you ask your mother to buy any of these foods you saw advertised? If yes, what foods? Which did she buy?" Then, there were two questions which were designed to show whether or not the child connected the food advertised with a specific television program. These questions were: "John (Jane) has been getting low grades at school. H's

(her) folks say he (she) can watch only two TV programs a week. What programs will he (she) watch? What foods will he (she) see advertised on these programs?"

Ninety-five percent of the boys and 97 percent of the girls said they had watched television in the last few weeks. Of those who had watched television 72 percent of the boys and 66 percent of the girls stated they had heard some food advertised and had asked mother to buy. Table 7 shows kinds of food they asked mother to buy and those which she bought.

Cereals, meat dishes (such as lunch meat, canned pork, bacon, meat pies), and bakery products were those advertised over television which the child most often asked mother to buy. Included under bakery products were cookies and mixes, frozen and ready-prepared.

Requests for cereals and snacks were granted less often than requests for other foods (see Table 7).

When asked about two television programs they would watch, the children mentioned 80 different programs. Those mentioned by more than 10 children, ranked according to the number mentioned, were (1) The Lucy Show (including the Lucy Comedy Hour and I Love

Table 7.—Kinds of food which child had heard advertised over television and requested, and which of these his mother bought.*

Kinds of food	Boys		Girls	
	Requested Percent	Mother bought Percent	Requested Percent	Mother bought Percent
Cereals	23	19	28	18
Drinks	9	9	7	7
Desserts	6	6	6	3
Soup	14	13	9	9
Macaroni & spaghetti dishes	1	1	3	0
Peanut butter	3	0	3	1
Syrup, fruit sauce	1	1	4	3
Fruit, including fruit gelatin	7	7	16	15
Bakery products	9	7	22	19
Meat dishes	23	20	13	13
Vegetables, including green salads	11	10	7	7
Candy	1	1	1	0
Other snacks, such as potato chips, freeze-pops, Fritos	23	7	6	3
Can't remember	6	—	0	—

*Adds up to more than 100 percent as some named more than one food.

Lucy); (2) Beverly Hillbillies; (3) Saturday Cartoons; (4) Red Skelton; (5) Gunsmoke; (6) Andy Griffith; (7) Rawhide; (8) Roy Rogers; (9) Deputy Dawg; (10) Danny Thomas; (11) Lassie. The urban child most often mentioned Beverly Hillbillies, Andy Griffith, Danny Thomas, The Lucy Show, and Red Skelton. The rural child most often mentioned Deputy Dawg, Gunsmoke, Rawhide, and Roy Rogers. Lassie and Saturday Cartoons were equally popular with both groups.

Television stations in the area were contacted about the type of advertising on the programs viewed by the children. These data were checked against reports given by children of the foods they saw advertised on their two favorite programs. Table 8 shows to what extent the child was correct about the foods advertised on specific television programs.

In about one-third of the programs the children were correct as to the food advertised on a particular television program. Slightly more girls than boys could give this information, but differences were not significant. Neither was there a significant difference found in abilities of ur-

Table 8.—Child's correctness about food advertised on the two TV programs he would watch if only allowed to watch two programs a week.

Item	Boys		Girls	
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Child correct about food advertised	28		35	
Child incorrect about food advertised	43		33	
Don't know or don't remember	21		25	
Doesn't look at TV	5		3	
No information obtained about item advertised	2		3	
Child reported on advertising of one program only	1		1	
Total number of programs	220		220	

Table 9.—Kinds of food which child had heard advertised over the radio and requested, and which of these his mother bought.*

Kinds of food	Boys		Girls	
	Requested	Mother bought	Requested	Mother bought
Main dishes, meat, fish, poultry, other	31	31	33	33
Bread, rolls, buns, cereals	15	15	33	33
Desserts	31	31	33	22
Snacks & relishes	0	—	22	22
Canned goods, unspecified	8	8	0	—
Vegetables, fruits, salads	15	15	11	11
No reply	15	15	0	—

*Adds up to more than 100 percent as some named more than one food.

ban and rural children to identify foods advertised on TV programs.

Radio: Seventy percent of the boys and 66 percent of the girls said they had listened to the radio in the last few weeks. Of those listening to the radio the vast majority (83 percent of the boys and 88 percent of the girls) said they had not heard food advertised; or, if they had, they did not ask mother to buy. Only 13 boys (12 percent) and 9 girls (8 percent) asked mother to buy any of the foods heard advertised over the radio.

The few requests for foods advertised over the radio were usually granted (table 9). Only in case of desserts asked for by girls was there a number of refusals of mother to buy.

Foods for you to fix: Every child was asked: "Have you ever requested mother to buy any foods for you to fix; and if yes, did she buy them?"

The replies of the boys and girls to this question might be summarized as follows:

	Boys	Girls
	Percent	Percent
No, I did not ask	70	35
Yes, I asked and she bought	30	60
Yes, I asked and she did not buy 0		5

There was a highly significant relationship between sex of child and requests for foods for child to fix. As will be noted, such requests were much more popular

Table 10.—Food and/or material mother bought for child to fix.*

Kinds of food	Boys		Girls	
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Bakery products, not sweet	9	8		
Sweetened bakery products	18	61		
Fruits, vegetables, salads	3	9		
Meat, chicken, fish, dry beans	15	14		
Dairy products	3	3		
Other desserts and candies	21	17		
Bacon and eggs	12	2		
Snacks	15	3		
Sandwiches, soup	12	6		
Other (rice)	3	0		

*In some cases mother had bought more than one kind of food.

Table 11.—Sources from which children learned about foods which they asked mother to buy for them to fix.

Sources*	Boys		Girls	
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Mother	39	47		
Home	21	11		
Television	15	15		
Sister	3	8		
Grandmother	3	8		
Scouts	9	2		
Recipe on box or package	3	8		
Father	6	2		
Recipe book or cookbook	0	8		
Friend or neighbor	0	3		
Magazine	3	0		
Made it up	3	0		
Maid	0	2		
4-H Club	0	2		
Other (trip to Mexico)	0	2		

*Some children had used more than one source.

Table 12.—Kinds of "other" foods requested and which of these his mother bought.*

Kinds of food	Boys		Girls	
	Requested	Mother bought	Requested	Mother bought
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Main dish, as meat, fish, hot dogs, baked beans	45	17	38	17
Cereals and breads	18	7	13	5
Fruits, vegetables, salads, juices	39	15	21	7
Desserts and candy	27	9	23	9
Snacks, potato chips, peanuts, popcorn	5	2	10	3
Soup	2	1	6	3
Milk products	7	3	0	—
Other, as pickle	2	1	0	—
No report	0	—	2	0

*Adds up to over 100 percent as some children named more than one kind of food.

with girls than with boys.

Table 10 gives the kinds of food mother bought for child to fix. There was a highly significant difference between purchase of sweetened bakery products and sex. Sweetened bakery products included cake and cookies, mixes, refrigerated products and "other", such as cinnamon toast.

In Table 11 are given sources from which children learned about foods which they asked mother to buy for them to fix. As will be noted, the parental family (home, mother, sister) was the main source from which the child learned about fixing food. Television was likewise an important source.

Other: Each boy and girl was asked about "other" foods they had asked mother to have which they had not told us about. Forty percent of the boys and 43 percent of the girls remembered other foods.

Table 12 shows the "other" foods requested and which of these mother bought. As will be noted, mother was less likely to buy foods classified in this category. It may be that the child had already told about most of the food requested that mother had bought and when he was questioned on this point could think mostly of the foods mother did not buy.

As will be noted in Table 13, liking the food was the main reason given for wanting these other foods requested. Liking the food was an especially important reason

with boys. In fact, the difference between boys and girls was highly significant. Boys gave it more often than girls.

Appeals Effective With Young Children

Two techniques were used in studying effective appeals with young children. In the first technique the child was shown a photograph of a boy (John) at the cereal counter of a grocery; or if a girl, a picture of a girl (Jane) at the cereal counter. (See the two pictures on the front cover of this bulletin.) He or she was shown the picture and asked what kind of cereal John (Jane) bought and why he (or she) picked out this kind.

In the second technique the child was handed a card with appeals for four kinds of cereals (W, X, Y, and Z). He (or she) was told: "John's (Jane's) mother has told him (her) to choose the cereal he

(she) wants. John (Jane) has trouble deciding which kind of cereal to buy." The appeals to boys used in each of the four kinds of cereal were: "For three box tops the company making cereal W will send John a set of pictures of National League baseball players. Cereal X is advertised to contain food values that make strong muscles, helping a boy to become an athlete. Cereal Y, his mother says, is best for boys. John really likes the taste of cereal Z."

The appeals to girls used were: "For three box tops the company making cereal W will send Jane a book on how to make friends and be popular. Cereal X is advertised to contain food values that make a beautiful skin and a good figure. Cereal Y, her mother says, is best for girls. Jane really likes the taste of cereal Z." Boys

Table 13.—Why child wanted mother to buy these "other" foods.

Why wanted*	Boys	Girls
	Percent	Percent
Like it; fixes so good; they're good	120	71
Saw at store	0	8
Saw on TV, looked good in advertisement	5	6
Want for morning recess, snack at school, dinner	7	4
For refreshments, for friends, party, company, for Brownies, Cub Scouts	2	6
Out of it at home	2	2
Good for you, makes strong, lots of vitamins	5	8
Ate at restaurant or friend's house	0	4
Other ('cause Dad wanted; heard about from sister; for quick meal; on special; thought I could fix)	2	6
No reply, just did	2	2

*Some children gave several kinds of foods and a reason for wanting each. Percentages add up to more than 100 percent.

Table 14.—Reasons given by boys and girls for picking out the cereals.

Reasons for picking out*	Boys	Girls
	Percent	Percent
Like it; my favorite	60	63
Healthy; makes grow strong; nourishing	23	20
Habit; because I have them	8	7
Have baseball cards; have football trading cards	6	0
Has corn; corn is good for you	0	3
Has raisins; I like raisins	12	5
Has more sugar; already sweet; can put as much sugar as you want on this kind	2	3
Shape and color of cereal	0	3
What I would buy	0	3
More in box for money	1	1
Saw advertised on TV	0	1
Curiosity; sounds good	0	1
Other (they go with all kinds of fruit, come from Alaska)	2	2
Just would; don't know	1	1

*Some children gave two reasons for choosing a specified kind of cereal.

were asked which cereal John, girls which cereal Jane, would choose.

A total of 27 kinds of ready-prepared cereals was named in connection with the first technique in which the child was asked the kind of cereal John or Jane bought. However, there were only two kinds of cereal named by more than 7 percent of the boys or girls. These were cornflakes and raisin bran. Thirty percent of the boys and 47 percent of the girls mentioned cornflakes. Twenty-eight percent of the boys and 17 percent of the girls mentioned raisin bran.

The reason usually given for picking out the cereal was: Like taste; they look good; I like and believe he or she would; she looks like she would like; they are good; my favorite; most boys and girls like. (Table 14). The second reason in importance was: Healthy; gives energy; good food value; need to be strong; for pep; low in calories; makes grow strong; it's got vitamins; iron and minerals; they are nourishing.

Reasons for picking out raisin bran took third place and included the fact that "it has raisins, I like raisins." Habit took fourth place and included statements such as: I'm used to it; most everyone buys; because I have them; that's what I or we get or have or buy or eat.

The following cereals each with a different appeal were selected by boys and girls:

Cereal and appeal	Boys Percent	Girls Percent
W—For boys: pictures of ball players For girls a book on making friends and being popular	15	3
X—For boys: food value that makes strong muscles For girls: food value that makes good skin and figure	40	28
Y—Mother says it's best	21	38
Z—Like taste of this cereal	24	31

Cereal X, advertised to contain food values that make strong muscles and help a

boy to become an athlete, was the cereal most often chosen for John. Cereal Y, which her mother says is best for girls, was the cereal most often selected for Jane.

This finding would seem to indicate that appeals of food for children should not be directed altogether to the child. What mother says is important, especially to girls. According to a study made by *The Ladies Home Journal*, including depth interviews with 70 of their subscribers, mothers do not by any means accept and buy the cereal sold to their children on television⁴.

Some of the comments made by boys and girls of this study concerning the cereal mother thought best were: He wants to do what his mother wants; Because mother knows better than I do; Her mother knows more about cereals; I always like to do things mother wants me to do; Her mother would know better than her; Most of the time mothers know more about things to eat than children do; Because she's the boss and she's the one to tell you what you should eat; If I pick what I think is best, I'm afraid I would get the wrong kind of food; His mother knows the kinds he needs; Because before I started to like corn flakes mother said the sweet cereal wasn't so good for me. She said I would like cornflakes better and I do; Because you are supposed to do what your mother says; Because her mother would keep telling her it was best and encourage her to get; I like her and wouldn't want to break up our good relations when we like each other so well; Her mother has probably studied it and knows best; She could take her mother's advice 'cause mothers are right and girls wrong about all the time; Mothers know best about children and what they say is what you should do; She knows that her mother knows what's good; Mothers ought to know the needs of children more

⁴Readers Reaction Bureau, *Ladies Home Journal*, 1961.

than children themselves; She looks like she would do what her mother says is best for her.

In both techniques used in studying effective appeals, health aspects and liking the taste of the product were relatively important. More boys than girls, however, responded to the health appeal in the second technique. Greater response is no doubt related to type of illustrations used. Boys 9 and 10 years are definitely interested in strong muscles and becoming an athlete, but girls at this age are not thinking too much of complexion and figure.

Taste of the product is an appeal that might well be used more often. After all, food is eaten for enjoyment, a fact sometimes overlooked by processors and retailers.

Trading cards, books, or other premiums seem relatively unimportant as an appeal.

The question might well be asked about factors related to appeals. Significant differences were not found in any factors examined except in education and occupation of the father. However, differences approached significance in kinds of appeals and education of mother.

There was a highly significant difference in education of father and in selection of cereal Z (like taste) and of cereal Y (mother thought best). Children of fathers with more education more often chose cereals mother thought best. Children of fathers with less education more often chose cereal which John or Jane really thought tasted best.

Children of managers, clerks and kindred workers more often selected the cereal mother thought was best than children of semi and unskilled laborers. More children of farmers than of managers, clerks, and kindred workers selected health appeals (strong muscles, good complexion and figure). These differences were highly significant.

Summary and Conclusions

It was the purpose of this study to learn (1) where young children hear about foods requested, what foods they request, and whether requests are granted; and if not, why not; and (2) what appeals are effective with children.

The study includes 220 white boys and girls 9 — 10 years of age (120 rural and 100 urban) in Clay and Lowndes Counties, Mississippi. Data were obtained from teachers or from files in the principal's office and from interviews with each child.

When asked about what John and Jane should eat each day, the majority of children named one or more foods in each of the four basic food groups. The percentage naming was, however, higher for urban than for rural children. More children said John and Jane should have these foods than reported that they themselves ate those foods each day. The reason given most often for not eating was "not served", "don't have".

When told that John's or Jane's mother had promised him a dinner party for his birthday and asked for a list of foods to serve, the majority of boys and girls listed one or more foods in each of the four basic groups. Urban children mentioned meat more often than rural children. The child of the more educated mother more often thought his choice would be acceptable than the child of the mother with little schooling.

In both types of tests there seemed to be a keen recognition on the part of children of the importance of foods in the vegetable-fruit group.

The greatest percentage of the children requesting that mother buy or cook specified foods, resulted from television programs, visits to grocery stores with mother, eating the food at homes of friends or relatives or at the school lunchroom and wanting to fix the food themselves (especially girls). Hearing foods advertised over radio and sending off labels

or coupons for prizes and premiums was much less important than the other sources.

In about one third of the TV programs the children were correct as to the food advertised on a favorite program. Foods requested varied with the source. In grocery store shopping more children requested cereals and snacks. Foods eaten at the homes of friends and relatives which they wanted mother to prepare were more often meat dishes and desserts. The six types of foods most often requested by young children were: meats or main dishes, fruits and vegetables, cereals, snacks, desserts and bakery products.

Most requests made by children were granted. Reasons given for not satisfying requests differed with foods. Reasons given for refusal to buy foods involving little preparation such as seen at grocery stores included: Have at home; don't need; can't afford; too many sweets. Reasons for refusal to buy foods involving more preparation included: Mother doesn't know how to make; mother

doesn't have recipe; doesn't have ingredients.

Appeals found most effective with young children were: (a) Like flavor, taste; (b) Healthy (makes strong muscles, good skin and figure); and (c) Mother says it's best.

From this study it would seem that: (1) Today's children are on the whole well versed in the basic four. They know somewhat more than they can actually put into practice. (2) The child learns about food from many sources and experiences. No one source or experience can do all the work of informing. (3) Requests of child to buy food are usually granted. Children do have a great deal of influence. (4) The child requests every type of food, some foods more under one source or experience than another. This indicates need for varied sources and experiences by the child. (5) The role of mother should not be underestimated. In this study her influence seems to be important to both boys and girls though apparently greater with girls who perhaps identify with the mother more than do the boys.