

Food Preparation and Attitudes

Presented by PAUL KAHN

The author discusses the attitude of homemakers and how these affect a woman's performance and feelings about the meal preparation process.

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While the primary purpose underling this exploration of food preparation and attitudes is descriptive (to provide understanding of the present state of these activities), a secondary expectation is that the material might lead to the conceptualization and development of new products.

Such new product ideas might emerge in response to the unearthing, through the research, of activity-areas in which no acceptable products now exist or where existing products can be improved or modified to effect still better and more acceptable solutions.

The exploration among homemakers focused on:

1. Learning the processes involved in food preparation and storage, and their general sequence and rationale.
2. Determining the equipment, supplies and products presently used in the performance of various food preparations and storage activities.
3. Revealing the network of homemaker concerns, frustrations and problems experienced in each of the different activities.

The study was highly qualitative in character, comprising both focused group discussions and individual in-depth interviews. The interviewing was conducted in four waves, each phase drawing on the insights developed through preceding waves.

In all, 125 housewives participated in the study, selected from the middle class and including working women, women with large families and housewives in all age categories. Interviews were conducted in Northern New Jersey and in Omaha, Nebraska.

A. Meals Involve a Ten-step Process

1. Planning menus
2. Shopping
3. Initial storage
4. Precooking preparation
5. Cooking
6. Post-cooking
7. Preparation/clean-up
8. Serving
9. Final cleanup
10. Final storage

B. Emotional Climate of Meal Preparation

1. Few women consider they have critical problems in these areas.
2. Because of habitual procedures, women view preparation and storage of food as a complicated and time consuming activity but not one that presents major difficulties.

Range of processes and foods is so wide, homemakers can pick and choose those within their abilities thereby eliminating potential problems.

3. Housewives state their menu tends to be somewhat limited primarily due to family preference and the degree to which they are easy to prepare.
4. Basic repertoire is broken only for special occasions. (Entertaining, major family events.)
5. However, menu is in a constant state of minor revisions.

C. Nine Attitudinal Issues

These issues bear on how individual women actually perform and feel about the ten steps in the meal preparation process.

1. Aesthetics

Some women give major consideration to the way the food looks when served. (Arrangement on platter, color, texture, etc.)

Others, more compulsively, are concerned about aesthetic appearance of kitchen. Cupboard, refrigerator, freezer must be excessively neat and pleasing to the eye at all times.

2. Space Saving

Most women complain they do not have enough space. They would like appliances/devices to take up as little space as possible.

3. Time Is The Key

Most women want to prepare a meal which takes as little time as possible.

The housewife who spends the entire day preparing dinner has almost disappeared from the American scene.

4. The Gourmet Issue

This usually involves moderate alteration of basic foods so that they are slightly different and satisfies the housewife's need for creativity.

5. Housewives' Organization

The degree to which a homemaker has organized the food preparation process has great bearing on the type of food she will serve.

The more organized, the easier to prepare the more complicated recipes. On the other hand, those homemakers who are more compulsively organized tend to avoid recipes which are "messy" to prepare.

6. *Convenience Foods*

The introduction of convenience foods has helped to change America's eating habits. To many women they are responsive to the key issues of space, time, desire for "gourmet" foods, and the need for organization.

The American family today can have a wide variety of dishes available with a minimum of preparation time.

7. *Timing of Steps*

This is a critical consideration in food preparation. There are women for whom it is a simple task to

have eggs, bacon, coffee and toast ready simultaneously for breakfast. For others, it is a constitutional impossibility.

8. *Nutrition*

This has major implications in terms of specific foods prepared at any one time as well as its extension to areas of weight control, cholesterol, etc.

Homemaker attitudes range from near faddism to almost total unconcern.

9. *Variety*

The desire to avoid family boredom with her specific repertoire leads to some alteration of menus from time to time.

A basic dish will be modified or a new equivalent substituted so that over a long period of time actual menus have undergone a complete change — slowly and without fanfare.