

# **CHILD INFLUENCES, ATTITUDINAL AND BEHAVIORAL COMPARISONS BETWEEN SINGLE PARENT AND DUAL PARENT HOUSEHOLDS IN GROCERY SHOPPING DECISIONS**

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Female-headed single parent families are the fastest growing family type in the United States. Using a mail-out survey this study tests several hypotheses that differences exist between this family type and two parent families on grocery shopping attitudes and behaviors. Single mothers and married mothers hold similar attitudes toward grocery shopping. It is the behavior of the children and the interaction of the parent with the children that represents the major source of difference between the two family types. Family shopping is three times as common for single parent families, and children of single parents shop alone for the family at three times the rate of children raised in dual parent households. Potential marketing implications are discussed.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Marketing research on decision making processes of the single parent family is in its early stages; consequently, little is known about the purchase or consumption patterns of this family type. The 1990 census indicates there are 92 million households in the United States, with 70 percent considered family households and 30 percent considered non-family households (Edmondson 1992). Of the 64 million family households, approximately 11 percent are headed by females

alone, compared to 5 percent in 1970. Female-headed single parent families represent the fastest growing family type, up 36 percent since 1980 (Waldrop and Exter 1990).

Comparatively, too much marketing research has concentrated on the two parent family structure, and too little on the single parent family form, especially the female-headed household. Eighty-one percent of all single parent families with children less than eighteen are headed by

women (Edmondson 1992). Therefore, female-headed single parent families are particularly worthy of additional study.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Families with children spend more on food, compared to other types of families and nonfamilies (Exter 1992); therefore, they represent a valuable market niche to grocery marketers. Children, especially teenagers, are spending an increasing proportion of family income on groceries rather than CD's or movies (Leonhardt 1996). Grocery stores, in an attempt to provide families with value for their food and nonfood expenditures, have become increasingly competitive. Grocers seek to find new market niches to serve, and new products and services to offer.

The research objectives for this study were to make comparisons between the two household types in two major areas: (1) the mothers' attitudes and behaviors in grocery shopping and (2) the childrens' grocery shopping patterns. Comparisons were made with respect to a market behavior performed by every family unit, that of food and nonfood grocery shopping.

## BACKGROUND

As the basic purchase and consumption unit, the family, in all of its forms and stages of evolution, needs continuous study by marketers to aid in explaining and predicting market behaviors. This section examines: (1) research on the single parent and dual parent family household unit, (2) research on the grocery shopping attitude and behavior measures used in this study, and (3) research on the product categories chosen for use in this study.

### Research on Family Lifestyles and Decision Making

Zeithaml (1985) pointed out that the psychographic profiles of the traditional household, comprised of a working husband and a nonworking housewife-mother, are well researched and delineated. However, the profiles of the new demographic segments, such as the single parent family, are not as clearly defined. Many researchers have noted that the role of children in the decision making process is not well understood (Berey and Pollay 1968; Turk and Bell 1972; Ward and Wackman 1972; Dunsing and Hafstrom 1975; Davis 1976; Szybillo and Sosanie 1977; Mochis and Moore 1979; Filiatrault and Ritchie 1980; Kourilsky and Murray 1981; Olshavsky and King 1984; Osborne and Robbins 1984; Taylor, Glynn, and Taylor 1985; Taylor, Moore, and Glynn 1986; Beatty and Talpade 1994).

In fact, commenting specifically on the role of children in single parent households, Roberts and Wortzel (1984, p. XIX) observed that "The role of children in marketing decisions is not fully understood, especially in light of factors

such as single parent households and two parent households in which both parents work." Table 1 lists seventeen studies specifically addressing the issue of parent-child interactions in the decision making process. Most studies have been on multiple products and covered many decision areas.

Several observations can be made regarding the major findings of these studies dealing specifically with parent-child interaction in the decision making process. First, several researchers conclude that the level of child influence is product-specific (articles 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17). Second, child influence varies according to the stage in the decision process (articles 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13). Third, child influence varies according to decision areas (e.g., where and when to go and the make, and model, and brand to buy). Fourth, children in single parent families appear to have more influence in the decision making process than those in two parent homes (articles 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). Fifth, only two studies used a national probability sample (articles 1, 2) and five studies sampled single parents (articles 1, 2, 5, 6, 7).

### Grocery Shopping Attitude Scale and Behavior Measures

The scales used to measure the mother's grocery shopping attitudes and behaviors were originally used by Gultinan and Monroe (1978, 1980) and Zeithaml (1985). Gultinan and Monroe (1978) adopted these scales from prior store patronage studies (Stephenson 1969; Bucklin 1971; Darden and Ashton 1974; Reynolds, Darden, and Martin 1974;) and from the psychographic inventory of Wells and Tigert (1971).

### Product Category Research

Ahuja (1993) found that more than 57 different types of products have been studied by family researchers investigating parent-child interactions in purchase decisions. The research reported in this paper concerned a large portion of the grocery product domain, and included products that, a priori, children have been shown or were hypothesized to exert discernible levels of influence.

There are two basic reasons why grocery products (food and nonfood) were chosen to study the market behaviors of the female-headed single parent family. First, grocery shopping is a marketplace function that they must do on a regular basis. The repetitiveness of this phenomenon will facilitate the study of the purchase and consumption patterns of the two family types. Second, very little is known about the grocery shopping behavior of the mother-only family, though the grocery shopping habits of two parent families have been well researched, especially regarding the changing behavior given a working wife (Zeithaml 1985).

**TABLE 1**  
**PARENT-CHILD INTERACTION LITERATURE IN MARKETING: A SUMMARY REVIEW**

Author(s) and Date	Respondent Type	Products	Decision States <sup>1</sup>	Decision Areas <sup>2</sup>
1. Ahuja (1993)	Single mothers, Married Mothers	Multiple	Many	Not applicable
2. Ahuja, Stinson (1992)	Single mothers	Multiple	Many	Multiple
3. Beatty, Talpade (1994)	College students of married parents	Multiple	Many	Multiple
4. Foxman, Tansuhaj, and Ekstorm (1989)	Married parents Adolescents	Multiple	Not applicable	Multiple
5. Darley and Lim (1986)	Married parents Single parents	Leisure activities	Many	Multiple
6. Taylor, Moore and Glynn (1986)	Married parents Single parents	Multiple	Many	Not applicable
7. Taylor, Glynn and Taylor (1985)	Married parents Single parents	Multiple	Not applicable	Multiple
8. Belch, Belch, and Ceresino (1985)	Married parents	Multiple	Many	Multiple
9. Jenkins (1979)	Dual parents	Multiple	Information collection	Multiple
10. Nelson (1979)	Dual parents	Eating out	Many	Some
11. Atkin (1978)	Observe family units	Breakfast cereals	Not applicable	Not applicable
12. Mechrotra and Torges (1977)	Female members of Consumer Mail Panel	Multiple	Not applicable	Not applicable
13. Szybillo, Sosanie and Tennenbein (1977)	Married mothers	Restaurants	Many	Multiple
14. Szybillo and Sosanie (1977)	Married mothers	Restaurants and Family outing	Many	Multiple
15. Ward, Wackman, Wartella (1975)	Mother and child pairs, Father Children	Multiple	Not applicable	Not applicable
16. Ward and Wackman (1972)	Mothers of 5-12 year olds	Multiple	Not applicable	Not applicable
17. Berey and Pollay (1968)	Mothers and 8-12 year old children	Breakfast cereals	Not applicable	Multiple
1. Decision Stages may include: Initiation, Search, Evaluation, Final decision.				
2. Decision Areas may include: Where and when to go, Amount of money child spends, Types of store shopped, Styles, Colors, Restaurant type, etc.				

## HYPOTHESES

This study made comparisons between the two family types with respect to the mothers' attitudes and behaviors regarding grocery shopping and on the children's grocery shopping patterns. Family structure (female-headed single parent versus dual parent), age of the oldest child, the number of children, the employment status of the mother (employed, not employed), served as the explanatory measures while selected attitudinal and behavioral measures served as response variables. Both sets of variables are discussed below.

Comparisons were made in seven areas. The areas include (1) the mothers' attitudes toward grocery shopping, (2) the mothers' shopping behaviors, (3) the family's weekly grocery expenditures, (4) shopping frequency, (5) types of grocery stores shopped, (6) the percentage of shopping done for the

family by the children, and (7) the number of times the mother shops alone, the children shop alone, and the entire family shops together at grocery stores.

### Mothers' Attitudes and Behaviors Toward Grocery Shopping

Zeithaml (1985) hypothesized single individuals (with or without children) would plan less, economize less, use less information, and hold fewer positive attitudes toward grocery shopping than married people. Similar expectations were made for this study. Most single parents operate under severe time constraints, trying to balance the needs of their families with the needs of their employers. Given the time constraints, it was expected that the single mother, especially the employed single mother, would report less positive grocery shopping attitudes, and more limited shopping behavior.

H1: Single mothers should hold less positive attitudes toward grocery shopping compared to married mothers.

H2: Single mothers should plan less, economize less, and use information less compared to married mothers.

Since the husband in the two parent household also shops for the family (*Progressive Grocer*, 1992), it is reasonable to assume that the single mother would be shopping more frequently than mothers from a two parent family.

H3: Single mothers should shop at a greater number of grocery stores in a week and make more weekly trips than married mothers.

It is known that supermarket retailers are facing increasing competition for the family's food expenditures (Edmondson 1993). It has been established that most consumers do their weekly planned grocery shopping at supermarkets; however, no research exists specifically delineating the female-headed single parent family's expenditures and dependence on supermarkets. Therefore, this project included measures on the percentage of weekly shopping done at supermarkets and the amount of weekly expenditures. Given the time pressures faced by the single mother, the convenient hours of most major supermarkets, the wide assortment of food and nonfood items available, and the relatively low prices compared to other types of grocery stores, it was expected that single mothers and married mothers would perform a similar percentage of their weekly grocery shopping at supermarkets.

H4: There is no difference between single mothers and married mothers regarding the percentage of shopping performed at a supermarket.

Single parent families maintained by mothers have the lowest income of all family groups (Lino 1995). Given the budgetary constraints the single mother faces and the differences in family size, it was expected that she would spend less at supermarkets.

H5: Single mothers should spend less money at supermarkets compared to married mothers, this pattern should hold when adjusted for household size and household income level.

### Children's Shopping Behaviors

Children in single parent families participate more in daily household tasks, such as food shopping and food preparation, than do children in dual parent family structures (Weiss 1979; Taylor, Glynn, and Taylor 1985; Peters 1985). Ekstrom, Tansuhaj, and Foxman (1987) proposed that a child's

influence varies according to family structure. Colletta (1983) found that divorced mothers working full time lacked the option of leaving their children home alone, and often took them along on shopping trips (she did not define the type of shopping done). Given the results of past empirical studies, it was expected that children in female-headed single parent households would participate in grocery activities at a greater level compared to their counterparts in two parent families.

H6: Children in single mother homes should perform more of the family weekly shopping and go grocery shopping alone more often than children in two parent homes.

H7: Single mothers should shop more frequently with their children compared to married mothers.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sampling Procedures

An ex post facto research design with cross-sectional survey data was used for data gathering purposes. Two independent random samples were taken from two populations. The two populations consisted of (1) female-headed single parent families formed by divorce, separation, or widowhood, with at least one child 18 years old or younger living with the mother and, (2) dual parent families with at least one child 18 years old or younger living at home. Since single mothers heading families completed the survey instrument, questionnaires mailed to dual parent families requested that the mother complete the survey.

### Description of the Sample

The sampling frame consisted of single mother households and married mother households taken from the 1988 national membership list of the Market Facts, Incorporated's Consumer Mail Panel (CMP). Given this is the only national probability sample directly comparing female-headed single parent households to dual parent households, and given the data collected by the U.S. Department of Commerce as part of Consumer Expenditure Survey does not separate out female- vs. male-headed single parent households, the authors believe the data reported here is meaningful and the statistical patterns observed in the shopping differences between the two household types contain useful information for other researchers and marketers targeting these households.

The CMP is representative of the geographical divisions in the United States, and it is broken down, within these divisions, according to census data with respect to the characteristics of U.S. households such as age of the panel member, household size, and household income. A total of

850 surveys were mailed out, 380 to mothers heading families alone and 470 to married mothers. A total of 521 surveys were returned, 210 from the single mothers (a 56 percent response rate) and 311 from the married mothers (a 66 percent response rate); resulting in an overall response rate of 61 percent. This overall response rate was slightly below an expected rate of approximately 70 percent. Market Facts offered the opinion that the lower than expected response rate may have been due to the length and complexity of the survey instrument.

A comparison among all sample members and respondents with respect to the age of the panel member (36 years old) and household size (3.52 persons) indicated that the means of the respondents closely resembled those of the mail out sample members. A comparison among all sample members and the respondents with respect to the distribution of incomes in each group indicated that the distribution of incomes represented by the returned surveys closely resembled that of the original Market Facts mail out sample (which was representative of the two family types for the United States). Lower income and higher income groups appear to be slightly under represented compared to the mail out, and middle income groups are slightly over represented. Since all differences between the mail out sample and respondents were small, the respondents were representative of all sample members with respect to age, household size, and the distribution of incomes in each group.

#### **Data Gathering Approach**

A mailed, self-administered questionnaire was used to gather data from both the female-headed single parent and married households. Both instruments contain many of the same questions, allowing for direct comparisons between the two family structures. The single parent survey contained additional questions relevant to this household type. Revisions were made to the questionnaire following two pretests of the instrument conducted in locales in a southern state. Certain data, e.g., household size, household income, the number of children, the employment status of the mother, and the age of the oldest child were provided by Market Facts.

#### **Validity and Reliability of Grocery Shopping Behavior Measures**

Three psychographic constructs, 1) extent of planning, 2) extent of information usage, and 3) extent of economizing were used to measure a mother's grocery shopping behaviors.

These scale items, factor loadings, and standardized Alpha coefficients are presented in Table 2. The constructs were judged to have content (face) validity because they had been used before and each had theoretical justification. A principal-components analysis with varimax rotation was used to examine the appropriateness of each scale item used in forming the three constructs.

Zeithaml (1985) found the reliability of the extent of planning scale to be high ( $\alpha = .85$ ), while this study found the reliability to be very low ( $\alpha = .41$ ). One item dealing with planning was dropped from the scale because of low correlations with the remaining items and a high cross loading with the extent of economizing scale. Zeithaml found the reliability of the extent of information usage scale to be high ( $\alpha = .88$ ), while this study found the reliability to a low ( $\alpha = .55$ ). All three of the original items in this scale were left in during the statistical analysis because none of the cross loadings were deemed to be significant. Zeithaml found the reliability of the extent of economizing scale to be adequate ( $\alpha = .75$ ), which is similar to the finding in this study ( $\alpha = .78$ ). There were however, two notable exceptions regarding the extent of economizing scale. First, the item dealing with the planning of the shopping list that was in Zeithaml's extent of planning scale loaded heavily on the extent of economizing and was included in this latter scale. The second exception dealt with the item "I found myself checking grocery prices even for small items," which loaded heavily on the extent of information usage scale. However, due to the obvious face validity, it was left in the extent of economizing scale.

### **RESULTS**

#### **Hypothesis 1: Mothers' Attitudes Toward Grocery Shopping**

Comparisons of female-headed single parent and two parent households with respect to attitudes toward grocery shopping are presented in Table 3. Hypothesis one was rejected. There were no statistically significant mean differences between the two household types when compared on these variables, even when consideration was given to the employment status of the mother.

A comparison of the means for each attitudinal variable indicated the directional tendencies for both household structures. Regarding the statement that grocery shopping is fun, the means for both groups of mothers were in the neutral to slight disagreement range, with employed mothers (whether single or married) showing more disagreement than unemployed mothers. Regarding the statement that grocery shopping takes too much time, the means for both groups of mothers were in the neutral to slight agreement range. The means for both groups indicate that the mothers tend to agree that grocery shopping was an important task for them to perform. One reasonable explanation of the similarities in attitudes between the mothers in the two household types may

**TABLE 2**  
**INFORMATION OF SCALE VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY<sup>Y</sup>**

SCALE ITEMS	LOADINGS	LOADINGS	LOADINGS	ALPHA
<b>FACTOR 1: Extent of Planning</b>				
Before I go shopping I prepare a shopping list	.76609	.09498	.06121	
I budget a certain amount to spend on groceries each week	.73598	.09765	.17737	.4143
<b>FACTOR 2: Extent of Information Usage</b>				
I use unit pricing to compare prices of products	.07779	.73239	.04680	
I use product freshness dates which are stamped on some grocery products	.25220	.70436	.00319	
I use nutritional labeling that is included on some grocery packages.	.02052	.61770	.26042	.5482
<b>FACTOR 3: Extent of Economizing</b>				
I look for grocery specials in the newspaper.	.10148	.03964	.87353	
I plan my shopping list around items mentioned in newspaper ads.	.13725	.00289	.78590	
I shop a lot for store specials.	.02153	.35333	.62609	
I find myself checking grocery prices even for small items.	.01694	.48196	.59516	
I redeem coupons to reduce the price I pay for grocery products.	.34546	.08030	.54821	.7829
1. Items scaled: (0) Disagree to (6) Agree.				

**TABLE 3**  
**MULTIVARIATE SUMMARY TABLE OF THE MOTHER'S ATTITUDES TOWARD GROCERY SHOPPING: COMPARISONS OF FEMALE-HEADED SINGLE PARENT AND TWO PARENT HOUSEHOLDS**

Dependent Attitudinal Variables	Means <sup>a</sup>						
	Single Parent			Two Parent			
	One-Way	Two-Way		One-Way	Two-Way		
	Emp <sup>1</sup>	Un <sup>1</sup>		Emp <sup>1</sup>	Un <sup>1</sup>		
1. Shopping is Fun <sup>2</sup>	4.72	5.00	4.14	4.88	5.14	4.54	
2. Shopping takes too much time	3.82	3.79	3.89	3.51	3.30	3.79	
3. Shopping is an important task <sup>4</sup>	2.78	2.94	2.45	2.64	2.85	2.35	
n	204	138	66	304	175	129	
<b>Multivariate Tests</b>							
One-way MANOVA: marital status only.....Hotelling's T <sup>2</sup> = .00892 p = .19							
Two-way MANOVA: marital status and employment.....Hotelling's T <sup>2</sup> = .00491 p = .48							
a. Means represent response to seven point scales from 1 (agree) to 7 (disagree). 1. "Emp" stand for employed mother, "Un" for unemployed. 2. Complete Item: Grocery shopping is a fun way to break out of a normal routine. 3. Complete Item: Grocery shopping takes too much time. 4. Complete Item: Grocery shopping is an important task for me to perform.							

be due to the similarities in their working status. Sixty percent of the married mothers and sixty-eight percent of the single mothers were employed.

**Hypothesis 2: Mothers' Behaviors with respect to Planning, Organizing and Information Use**

Table 4 provides summary information regarding the statistical tests with respect to the three constructs used to

compare the grocery shopping behaviors of single parents and married mothers. None of the three shopping constructs, extent of planning, extent of information usage, and extent of economizing behavior, resulted in statistically significant differences between the two household types. Therefore, hypothesis two was rejected. Both groups of mothers reported somewhat high levels of planning, usage of information while grocery shopping, and economizing behaviors.

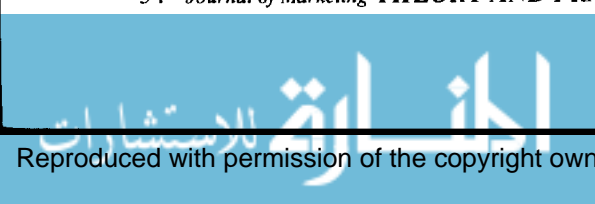
**TABLE 4  
MULTIVARIATE SUMMARY TABLE OF THE MOTHER'S GROCERY SHOPPING BEHAVIORS: A COMPARISON OF FEMALE-HEADED SINGLE PARENT AND TWO PARENT HOUSEHOLDS**

Means			
Dependent Shopping Variables	Single Parent	Two Parent	Hotelling's T <sup>2</sup>
1. Extent of Planning <sup>1</sup>	8.68	8.46	.00488 <sup>a</sup>
2. Extent of Information Usage <sup>2</sup>	13.14	13.04	
3. Extent of Economizing <sup>3</sup>	22.10	22.63	
n	206	302	

<sup>a</sup>p-value =.48.  
<sup>1</sup>Scale formed by summing two items, 1) Before I go shopping I prepare a shopping list, 2) I budget a certain amount to spent on groceries each week. Scores range from 0 to 12, with 0 indicating the lowest and 12 indicating the highest amount of planning.  
<sup>2</sup>Scale formed by summing three items, 1) I use unit pricing to compare pricing of products, 2) I use product freshness dates which are stamped on some grocery products, 3) I use nutritional labeling that is included on some grocery packages. Scores range from 0 to 18, with 0 indicating the lowest and 18 indicating the highest amount of information usage.  
<sup>3</sup>Scale formed by summing five items, 1) I look for grocery specials in the newspaper, 2) I plan my shopping list around items mentioned in newspaper ads, 3) I shop a lot for store specials, 4) I find myself checking grocery prices even for small items, 5) I redeem coupons to reduce the price I pay for grocery products. Scores range from 0 to 30, with 0 indicating the lowest and 30 the highest level of economizing behavior.

**TABLE 5  
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE RESULTS: NUMBER OF WEEKLY GROCERY SHOPPING TRIPS AND THE NUMBER OF GROCERY STORES VISITED WEEKLY**

Means				
Shopping Activity	Single Parent	Two Parent	F statistic	P-value
1. Number of grocery stores visited weekly	2.03	2.00	.127	.72
2. Number of weekly shopping trips	3.31	2.32	3.273	.071
n	210	311		



### Hypothesis 3: Number of Stores Visited and Number of Trips

A comparison was made between the family types with respect to the number of stores shopped each week and number of weekly shopping trips (see Table 5). Regarding the number of stores shopped each week, the data did not support hypothesis three and indicated there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups. However, a weak statistical relationship ( $p$ -value = .07) was found relative to the number of weekly shopping trips, with single mothers making one more trip per week than married mothers.

### Hypotheses 4 and 5: Supermarket Shopping Frequency and Expenditures

The Anova test results given in Table 6 indicated no statistically significant mean differences between the family types with respect to the proportion of grocery shopping done at supermarkets. Therefore hypothesis four was accepted. Single mothers and married mothers did the majority of their grocery shopping at supermarkets, a finding that is consistent with grocery shopping patterns across the nation (Progressive Grocer 1992).

**TABLE 6**  
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE RESULTS: FEMALE-HEADED vs. TWO PARENT HOUSEHOLDS AND PERCENT OF WEEKLY SHOPPING THE MOTHER DOES AT A SUPERMARKET

Household Type	n	Mean Percent of Weekly Shopping at a Supermarket	F statistic	P-value
Single Parent	210	87.22	2.16	.14
Two Parent	311	85.85		

**TABLE 7**  
ANALYSIS OF COVARIANCE RESULTS: A COMPARISON OF FEMALE HEADED SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES AND TWO PARENT FAMILIES WITH REGARD TO THE HOUSEHOLD'S WEEKLY DOLLAR EXPENDITURES IN SUPERMARKETS ADJUSTED FOR HOUSEHOLD SIZE<sup>1</sup> AND INCOME<sup>2</sup>

Store	Mean Dollar Expenditure		F statistic	P-value
	Single Parent	Two Parent		
Supermarkets	59.61	82.47	45.71	.000
	(64.79)	(77.29)	(8.98)	.003
	[61.26]	[80.82]	[30.472]	.000
	210	310		

1. Numbers in parentheses show adjusted means when household size was a covariate.
2. Numbers in brackets show adjusted means when income was a covariate.



Table 7 compares the two family types on their mean weekly dollar expenditures at supermarkets. Statistically significant mean differences were found via an ANCOVA test. The univariate F-tests indicated, on average, married mothers spent more money than single mothers in supermarkets (\$82.47 versus \$59.51). When household size and income were held constant, the mean differences between the two family types remained statistically significant.

**Hypotheses 6 and 7: Family Members Who Do the Actual Shopping**

Comparisons were made between the two family types with respect to the shopping performed by various family members. Respondents were asked to indicate the percentage of grocery shopping for the family that they, their husband (if a two parent family), and their children did in a typical week. Table 8 indicates that there was a statistically significant difference between the two family structures relative to the

percentage of weekly grocery shopping done for the family by the children, supporting hypothesis six. Children in a female-headed single parent household perform 7.3 percent of the family shopping, while children in married homes do 2.8 percent of the shopping.

However, when the data were analyzed with consideration for the employment status of the mother, the age of the oldest child, and the number of children in the household, only the age of the oldest child resulted in statistically significant differences between the two family types. An analysis of the significant two-way interactions revealed that the oldest child in the single parent family does significantly more shopping (9.20 percent) for the family compared to the oldest child in the two parent household (3.19 percent). It appears children reared by single parents are asked to perform this task more often than their counterparts in married households.

**TABLE 8**  
**ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE SUMMARY: PERCENTAGE OF GROCERY SHOPPING FOR THE FAMILY PERFORMED BY THE CHILDREN IN A TYPICAL WEEK ACCORDING TO MARITAL STATUS, EMPLOYMENT OF MOTHER, AGE OF OLDEST CHILD, AND THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN**

Source of Variation	Mean Percent of Shopping by Child for Family	n	F-value	P-value
<b>Main Effects</b>			7.29	.00
Marital Status				
Single parent	7.30	209		
Two parent	2.79	310	16.29	.00
Employment of mother				
Employed	4.38	317		
Unemployed	4.96	202	2.43	.12
Age of the oldest child				
10 or under	1.99	179		
11 to 18	5.98	340	12.36	.00
Number of children				
One	5.04	176		
Two or three	4.45	310		
Four to six	3.73	33	.21	.81
<b>Significant Two-Way Interactions</b>				
Marital Status, Age of Oldest			7.45	.01
Single Parent	1.41	51		
10 or under	9.20	158		
11 to 18				
Two Parent				
10 or under	2.23	128		
11 to 18	3.19	182		



Table 9 presents the frequencies of shopping performed by the various family members. A univariate F-tests revealed that children from single mother homes shopped alone more frequently at supermarkets than do children from two parent homes. In addition, a difference was found between the two family groups relative to the incidence of the entire family shopping together. Single parent families tended to shop together more often when compared to two parent households, supporting hypothesis seven.

## DISCUSSION

Comparisons were made between the attitudes and behaviors of the female-headed single parent households and the two parent households. Comparisons were conducted in two major areas: (1) the mother's attitudes and behaviors in grocery shopping and (2) the children's grocery shopping patterns. The two family types are remarkably similar with respect to most of these comparisons. Both groups of mothers hold similar attitudes toward grocery shopping, economize, plan, and use information the same, shop nearly identical percentages at supermarkets, make a similar number of trips per week (single mothers made one more but this was not statistically significant) to the grocery store, and shop a similar number of stores.

When differences were detected between the two family structures, the differences most often revolved around the influence of the children. Compared to married mothers, single mothers spend less at supermarkets, shop more often with their children, and their children shop alone for the entire family more often compared to children in two parent households. It can be concluded from this study that children

from single parent families are given more grocery shopping responsibilities than their counterparts from two parent families. Differences and similarities between the two family types are discussed in more detail below.

## Mothers' Attitudes and Behaviors with Respect to Planning, Organizing and Using Information

It was hypothesized (H1) that single mothers should hold less positive attitudes toward grocery shopping compared to married mothers and (H2) that single mothers should plan less, economized less, and use information less compared to married mothers. The findings indicated that the two family types were not significantly different with respect to the mother's attitudes toward grocery shopping nor for most comparisons involving the mother's grocery shopping behaviors. This finding was somewhat different from what would be expected given Zeithaml's (1985) earlier work. Zeithaml found that married respondents considered grocery shopping to be more important than did single shoppers. She also found that married respondents planned, economized, and used information more than single individuals.

The results of the study reported in this paper indicated that single mothers and married mothers were quite similar regarding their attitudes toward grocery shopping, and in their planning, economizing, and information usage behaviors. While these findings were different compared to Zeithaml's results, perhaps consideration should be given to what was actually measured in both of the studies. This study included a comparison of families with at least one child 18 or younger living at home and Zeithaml's work did not include a measure for the presence of children in either family type investigated

**TABLE 9**  
**ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE RESULTS: COMPARISON OF FEMALE-HEADED SINGLE PARENT HOUSEHOLDS TO MARRIED HOUSEHOLDS WITH RESPECT TO THE NUMBER OF SHOPPING TRIPS IN A TYPICAL MONTH<sup>1</sup>**

Shopping Trip Situations	Mean Number of Trips		F-statistics	P-value
	Single Parent	Two Parent		
1. Mother to Supermarket Alone	5.79	5.38	.80	.372
2. Children to Supermarket Alone	1.41	.55	15.21	.000
3. Entire Family to Supermarket Together	3.33	1.02	68.12	.000
n	2.10	3.10		

1. Mothers were asked to indicate the number of shopping trips made in a typical month for a variety of shopping situations.

(single or married respondents). The presence or absence of children may have affected a respondents' attitudes toward grocery shopping and the respondent's grocery shopping behaviors.

In addition, both studies used questionnaires where the respondents were reporting their perceived levels of planning, economizing, and information usage behaviors. Actual usages were not measured in either study. Therefore the results of this study may indicate that single and married mothers are reporting similar perceptions that involve their concerns about planning for grocery purchases, economizing on these purchases, and using information to assist in the planning and economizing behaviors.

### **Mother's Shopping Patterns**

It was hypothesized (H3) that single mothers should shop at a greater number of grocery stores in a week and make more weekly shopping trips compared to married mothers. It was also hypothesized (H4) that there would be no difference between single mothers and married mothers regarding the percentage of shopping performed at a supermarket. Lastly, it was hypothesized (H5) that single mothers would spend less at supermarkets compared to married mothers and that this pattern would hold when the data was adjusted for household size and income level. The findings for each of these hypotheses are discussed next.

**Types of Stores Shopped and Expenditures.** The mothers reported similar percentages for the amount of weekly shopping done at supermarkets. The similarity of this percentage was hypothesized and makes sense given today's modern and highly competitive grocery environment. Supermarkets offer a large variety of items in both the food and nonfood sections, they offer a variety of food preparations with some providing extensive carry-out items available at in-store delicatessens and salad bars. Supermarkets also offer variety in the prices charged by having many options for most product categories (e.g., national brands, store brands, etc.) and maintain convenient hours with many stores open twenty-four hours a day.

Differences between the two family structures were found relative to the amount spent weekly on groceries. On the average, married mothers spent more in supermarkets than did single mothers (even after adjustments for household size and income levels were made). The greater dollar expenditures by two parent families at grocery stores may be better understood when consideration is given to the types of grocery items bought by the mother or father, or if consideration is given to the consumption patterns of the husband. For instance, as Weiss (1979) pointed out in his study of the changes in consumption patterns for divorced women, "...savings were made possible for single parent

households by the departure of a major food consumer from the home---the husband and father---and by the purchase of less expensive food." Therefore, we may assume that the husband in the two parent household may consume a disproportionate amount of the grocery items bought. In addition, his presence and monetary contribution to the family income level, may permit the purchase of more expensive items, such as more expensive cuts of meat, snack products, or even nonfood items available in supermarkets (e.g., hardware, car accessories, lawn items).

**Number of Stores and Number of Trips.** Unexpectedly, the two groups of mothers were similar regarding the number of grocery stores visited each week and the number of weekly shopping trips. Both groups of mothers visited on the average two grocery stores each week. Single mothers made approximately three shopping trips per week and the two parent mothers made two weekly trips. These differences were not found to be statistically significant (assuming an alpha of .05). Greater differences between the family types were expected. Potential reasons for the lack of significant differences may involve the greater participation of children from single parent homes in grocery shopping activities.

### **Children's Shopping Behaviors**

It was hypothesized (H6) that children in single mother households would perform more of the family's weekly shopping and go to the grocery store more often than children in two parent homes. In addition, it was hypothesized (H7) that single mothers would shop more frequently with their children compared to married mothers. The findings for each of these hypotheses are discussed next.

It is in the area of children's shopping behaviors that the two household structures differed significantly. The oldest child in the single parent family does significantly more shopping (9.20 percent) for the family compared to the oldest child in the two parent household (3.19 percent). While these mean percentages are relatively small for both family types, children in single parent homes, especially homes in which the oldest child is between the ages of 11 and 18, shop for the family at three times the rate of children in two parent homes.

It is possible that some of the shopping done by the husband in married families is performed by the children in single parent homes, thereby reducing the frequency with which the single mother must shop.

While the percentage of total shopping done by children for the family may be small, the actual number of trips children made to the store, either alone or with their mothers, was significantly higher for children in single mother homes. Both groups of mothers made a similar number of trips to the supermarket in a typical month (5.79 for single mothers and 5.38 for two parent mothers, as given in Table 9). However,



children in single parent homes made an average of 4.74 trips a month (alone 1.41 plus with mother 3.33) compared to 1.57 for children in two parent households. Children in female-headed single parent homes shop alone or with their mothers at three times the rate of children growing up in two parent families.

The differences between the two family types in the shopping patterns of children may explain the lack of statistically significant differences in the number of trips and number of times per week the single mother must shop. Single mothers, unable to ask the spouse to grocery shop and sometimes unable to leave the children at home, take the children with them. While on these trips with the entire family, the single mother may be able to deal with her children's request at the store, thereby reducing her need to shop alone.

It can be concluded that the single mothers similarities with mothers in two parent households is due in part to the adjustment strategies she undergoes to logistically and efficiently accomplish the grocery shopping task. Every family must buy groceries, regardless of the presence or absence of a father. Since women in family households do the majority of grocery shopping, the single mother coordinates this task by taking her children with her or by depending upon the older children to shop for her.

### MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Female-headed single mothers and married mothers hold similar attitudes toward grocery shopping. However, grocers must be not be misled by this finding. It would be a mistake to conclude as a spokesperson for Procter and Gamble did that "...single parents are not much different from married people as far as our product categories are concerned --- everyone uses detergents and toothpaste (Cecere 1985, p. 21)".

It is the behavior of the children and the interaction of the parent with the children that represents the major source of difference between the two family types. Everyone may use detergents and toothpaste, but it is in the way that the products are purchased and the sources of influence that different family members exert on the purchase that may affect brand choices and consumption behavior. Real marketing potential can be unearthed when manufacturers and grocers study differences in the purchase behaviors of mother-only and two parent families.. Michael Sansolo (1991, p. 5), former editor of *Progressive Grocer*, noted that "...there are many different kinds of shoppers with many different kinds of needs that require many different strategies from supermarkets."

The female-headed single parent family requires different marketing strategies compared to the mothers in two parent

households. These mothers are shopping more frequently with their children in tow and depend on their children to do shopping for the family. Family shopping, which is three times as common for single parent families, implies that the supermarket needs to offer an environment more conducive to children. Perhaps child care centers for handling infants and toddlers while parents shop, shopping carts with improved safety devices for seating children, and more assistance with the loading of groceries into the car are things that supermarkets should consider to appeal to the growing segment of single parent families.

Supermarkets might improve marketing efforts by offering product displays that enable children to more easily locate and price items. In fact, more displays probably need to be developed that appeal to children on a promotional basis. Awareness of the "children alone" shopper may prevent in-store accidents through increased vigilance and improved interior store design.

Two specific tactics are suggested to assist the grocery retailer in developing marketing strategies to better meet the needs of this family type, (1) demographic analysis, and (2) store-specific marketing research. A thorough demographic analysis of the store's trading area should be conducted to determine the size of the single parent market segment. It may be that a sizable population of single parents live in the store's trading area and may even shop the store regularly. This type of analysis should be performed periodically to discover changes.

Second, if this family type represents a sizable portion of the store's customer base, conduct marketing research to determine customer attitudes and preferences. The food retailer could conduct consumer surveys or focus groups with women heading families alone. This store-specific marketing research could assist the manager in finding better ways to merchandise to single parents and their children. For example, if the manager were to find that children in single parent homes shop alone more often compared to children in two parent households, then products used frequently by children (e.g., cereals, snack food, candy, soft drinks, health and beauty aids, etc.) could be displayed in such a way that the children could easily make decisions.

Also, since single mothers often take their children grocery shopping, a store manager may want to develop activities that give the children something to do. Examples of activities that appear to work can be found in the trade publications. A Kroger store in Marietta, Georgia established a story hour at 11 a.m. every Tuesday where mothers could leave their children while they shopped.

Manufacturers also should respond to the changing demographics and shopping patterns of families.

Manufacturers of grocery products might find it fruitful to aim more advertising at children for "mainline" grocery products. Traditionally children have often been the target market for cereal advertisements. However, with their increased responsibilities, particularly in single parent families (a rapidly growing segment of our population), perhaps the time is right for an expansion of the types of products that are advertised toward children. At the very least more of the advertisements for grocery products, sponsored

by the manufacturer, should include children in the advertisement.

In conclusion, children are important family members, they have considerable influence in determining what is purchased and where it is purchased. In short, grocery product marketers need to recognize the importance of children, especially in single parent families, and gear more of their efforts toward satisfying this element of the market.

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