

Mothers' Decision Making in Food Choices for Their Preschoolers

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Introduction

Objective:

The goal of this project is to investigate the decision-making processes associated with what mothers feed their preschool children, and to determine how these processes may be affected by individual differences (such as parenting style and health beliefs) and cultural traditions.

Background:

Any type of decision is ultimately made after consideration of various factors. In the case of mothers deciding what to feed to their young children, such factors may include the short-term and long-term goals the mother has for both her child and herself, perceived risks of providing or not providing a certain type of food, and situational/environmental factors that impinge upon the situation. While parental goals, attitudes, cultural and situational factors have all been studied in conjunction with parental feeding behaviors, there is little research that investigates these factors within a decision-making framework.

Method:

The proposed study includes two phases. Phase I will be a small scale qualitative study to generate a list of ecologically valid consequences related to mothers' decisions regarding food choices. This phase will also be used as an opportunity to pilot the proposed paper and pencil questionnaire. Phase II will be a larger scale quantitative study that will collect data on the multi-attribute utility model components and predict mothers' decisions regarding food choice for their children.

Interviewing Mothers:

Measures for Phase I include demographic variables and an interview script including 3 scenarios that tap mothers' perceived consequences of the food they choose under different situations.

Situation 1: It is a regular weekday and a mom has prepared dinner for her preschool child. The dinner includes something from each of the food groups, like some chicken or meat, a fruit or vegetable, some bread, and some milk.

Situation 2: It is a regular weekday and a mom has prepared a dinner for her preschool child that doesn't include all the food groups and includes some foods like chips or soda.

Situation 3: It is a regular weekday and a mom doesn't have time to cook dinner, so she takes her preschooler out to a fast food restaurant for dinner and lets the child order what he/she wants.



Behavior Decision Making Model (Edwards, 1954)

The model describes individual differences in three different dimensions related to food choices that mothers make for their children:

1. The mother's evaluation of the consequences (positive and negative) of food choices (e.g., vegetables, pizza, etc.) for their preschoolers.

Examples for food choices:

- Pizza—tasty and satisfying, but fatty
- Vegetable and fruit—healthy, but still hungry after the meal
- Fish and lean meat—healthy, but expensive
- Cooking at home—control over healthy food but time consuming

2. The mother's estimate of how likely the consequence is to occur feeding their preschoolers with certain food they choose

Examples for food choices:

- How likely does a mom think it is that her child will become healthier if she/he eats vegetables at this meal?
- How likely does a mom think it is that her child will gain weight if he eats pizza for dinner while the mom has no time to cook for 2 days?
- How likely does a mom think it is that her child will be happy with her if she gives her child a cookie as snack instead of an apple in a certain day?

3. The mother's view of how important is the consequence of certain food that she chooses for her child

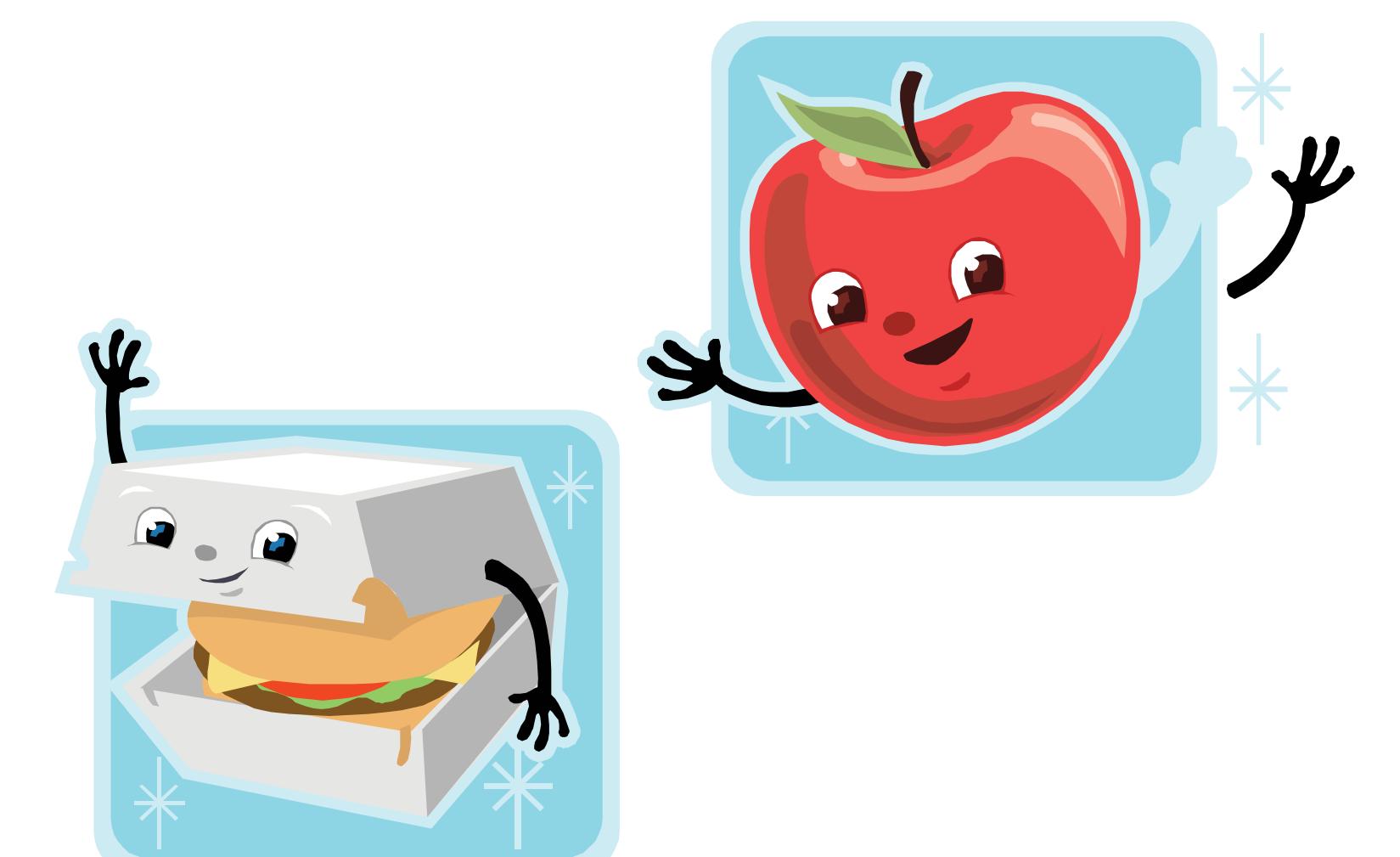
Examples for food choices:

- How important is it for a mom to feed her child veggies right now?
- How important is it for a mom to please her child with cookies right now?



So Many Decisions To Make

Inexpensive food	vs.	More expensive food
"Happy" food	vs.	"Healthy" food
Quick & easy	vs.	Higher prep
Traditional recipe	vs.	Healthier recipe
Less healthy food	vs.	Healthier food



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