

Clothing and food purchasing trends among U.S. ethnic groups: 1980 to 2003

Diana Saiki, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Fashion Merchandising

Jayanthi Kandiah, Ph.D., R.D., C.D.

Professor, Nutrition

Ball State University
Department of Family and Consumer Sciences
150 AT Building
Muncie, IN 47304

Telephone: 765-285-2293

Fax: 765-285-2314

desaiki@bsu.edu

Abstract

Since 1980, the United States has become more diverse, and targeting ethnic minority audiences has become increasingly important (U.S. Census Bureau 2002). The purpose of this study is to update previous research that assessed food and clothing expenditures by minority groups in the United States using the 1980-81 Consumer Expenditure Survey. Results from the 2003 Consumer Expenditure Survey revealed that Hispanic-Americans spent more money but not significantly differently for food at home than European-Americans while African-Americans spent significantly less on food away from home than European-Americans. When compared to European-Americans, Hispanic- and African-Americans spent more money on clothing. In conclusion, unlike the 1980-81 data, in which distinct differences in eating and clothing purchases were exhibited in minority groups, these differences were not significantly different in the 2003 data. This suggests that there has been an assimilation of minorities into mainstream America.

Keywords: clothing, food, spending, ethnicity, Consumer Expenditure Survey

Introduction

The United States is moving from a homogenous society to a very diverse heterogeneous population with different ethnic groups. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2002), since 1980 there has been a rise in the number of minorities, particularly Hispanics, living in this country. Professionals such as Extension educators are faced with new challenges to assist minorities in managing issues such as marriage, family relationships, finances, child care, health, and dietary needs (Skogrand 2004). To better understand culturally diverse populations, strategies recommended by researchers to Extension educators include reading newspapers, keeping abreast of research through refereed publications, attending cultural events, visiting cultural locations frequented by the targeted ethnic audiences, and referring to cultural experts for their guidance. A database that has been useful in understanding different cultural trends is the Consumer Expenditure Survey published by the U.S. Department of Labor (2004). This survey identifies expenditures of household members based on gender, education, occupation, ethnicity, and region. In addition, expenditures are categorized by housing, food, clothing, and other living expenses.

Using the 1980-1981 Consumer Expenditure Survey, Wagner and Soberon-Ferrer (1990) investigated the relationship between ethnicity (African-, European-, and Hispanic-Americans, and other) and expenditures (related to clothing and food, at home and away from home). Researchers followed the Engel curve analysis derived from the classical consumption theory and used expenditure as a proxy for income. Multiple-regression analysis revealed expenditures varied by ethnicity. Hispanic-American households spent more than European-American households on food at home. There was no difference between Hispanic-American and European-American households for expenditures on clothing and food away from home. When compared to European-Americans, African-Americans spent more money on clothing and food away from home. However, there was no significant difference between the two ethnic groups for expenditures for food at home. Interestingly, there was no significant difference between European-Americans and the other ethnic groups in expenditures related to food and clothing.

With the changes in trends for eating out, dressing down, and an increase in minority population, the objectives of this research were to (1) compare the 2003 Consumer Expenditure Survey to the results of the 1980-1981 research study and (2) examine the influence of ethnicity and expenditures on food (food at home and away from home) and clothing between these two time periods.

Thus, the following research questions were investigated:

- (1) Will there be a difference in expenditures for food (at home and away from home) in 2003 among African-, European- and Hispanic-Americans and other ethnic groups?

- (2) Will there be a difference in expenditures for clothing in 2003 among African-, European- and Hispanic-Americans and other ethnic groups?
- (3) Will there be a difference in expenditures for food (at home and away from home) and clothing from the 1980-81 and the 2003 data among African-, European- and Hispanic-Americans and other ethnic groups?

Methods

The 2003 Consumer Expenditure Survey was purchased from the U.S. Department of Bureau of Labor Statistics (<http://www.bls.gov/cex/home.htm>). This survey data was similar to the 1980-1981 data except that it included updated expenditure information (since 1980-81) and included other variables such as rural populations and different regional definitions for the United States. For the purpose of the current study, comparisons between the 1980-81 and 2003 data were made using similar variables.

The sample was similar to the 1980-81 data in that household information was limited to twelve consecutive months or four quarters (Wagner and Soberon-Ferrer 1990). As with the previous study, households reporting family size greater than nine and expenditures greater than \$75,000 were excluded from the research. Thus, 863 households comprised the sample.

Independent variables included in the original study were ethnicity, family type (marital status and head of household), occupation, education, home tenure, and region. In the 1980-81 study, origin is synonymous with ethnicity; therefore, the origin variable was used for data analysis in the present study. Hispanic-Americans included all households of Spanish, Mexican-American, Mexican, Chicano, Puerto-Rican, Cuban, Cuban American, Central or South American, or other Hispanic descent. The European-American category included people of German, Italian, Irish, French, Polish, Russian, English, Scottish or Welsh, Dutch, Swedish, or Hungarian descent. The African-American category was composed of people of African ancestry. There was a category titled "Other" that consisted of all other ethnic groups. The dependent variables were food (at home and away from home) and clothing. Food at home expenditure was money spent on food consumed at home, while food away from home was expenses at all types of restaurants. Expenditures for clothing included footwear, accessories, clothing materials, and clothing services. (U.S. Department of Labor 2004). Like the original research, in the current project, expenditure was assumed to be a proxy for income.

A multiple regression analysis was calculated for each independent variable to compare food expenditures (at home and away from home) and clothing. A dummy variable was used as a reference for analysis related to ethnicity, family type, occupation, education, home tenure, and

region. In the ethnicity category, European origin was used as the dummy variable. A log transform was performed because the regression required the raw data to be normally distributed. As such, a natural log was formed to transform the distribution into normal distribution. Thus, the regression was done using the log transform. However, the coefficients were based on the log transforms and could only be interpreted as anti-log. Significance level was established at $p < 0.05$ which was similar to previous research.

Results

Using 863 households, multiple regression analysis revealed some distinct differences in expenditures related to food and clothing from the previous (1980-81) and the current data. To be consistent with the work published by Wagner and Soberon-Ferrer (1990), the findings from the current research will be presented in a similar manner to include other social and demographic information. Each table includes comparisons of African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans to European-Americans. As the dummy variable, the results for the European-American category were always equal to 1. Numbers more than 1 indicate that more was spent by the ethnic group when compared to European-Americans. Furthermore, the amount of variance in percentages can be interpreted from the data. For example, Hispanic-Americans with a result of 1.12 spent 12 percent more for food at home than European-Americans. The 1980-81 and the 2003 data can be similarly compared. For example, expenditures by Hispanic Americans of food at home increased 4 percent during the 20 years (Table 1). Significance level indicates how distinctly different the populations were from each other. In the present study, results to the research questions were as follows:

(1) Will there be a difference in expenditures for food (at home and away from home) in 2003 among African-, European- and Hispanic-Americans and other ethnic groups?

In 2003, it was found that there was no significant difference between European- Americans and Hispanic-Americans in expenditures for food at home. Although a similar observation was noted between European- Americans and African-Americans, there was a tendency for expenditures to differ in that Hispanic-Americans spent 12 percent more than European-Americans and 7 percent more than African-Americans on food at home. As observed in Table 1, there was a significant association between food purchased at home and some of the sub-categories related to family type, occupation, home tenure, and region.

Table 1. Comparison of expenditures for food at home: 1980-81 and 2003 data

Variables	1980 -1981	2003
Ethnicity Hispanic-American	1.08**	1.12
African-American	1.03	1.05
Other	0.98	1.01
European-American (dummy variable)	1.00	1.00
Family type Marriage	1.18**	1.67**
Female head	1.02	0.99
Unmarried/male head (dummy variables)	1.00	1.00
Occupation Professional manager	1.01	1.23**
Clerical/sales	0.98	1.06
Operator/service	1.00	1.03
Not working (dummy variable)	1.00	1.00
Education College	0.89	1.07
High school	0.97	1.03
Grade school (dummy variable)	1.00	1.00
Home tenure Mortgage	0.98	1.30**
Owner with no mortgage	0.99	1.13**
Renter (dummy variable)	1.00	1.00
Region Northeast	0.92**	0
Northwest	0	1.05
Midwest	0	0.96
North-central	0.92**	0
West	1.00	1.12**
South (dummy variable)	1.00	1.00

**p<0.05

In 2003, when compared to European-Americans, African-Americans spent significantly less money (32 percent) on food away from home. Even though Hispanic-Americans spent more (2 percent) than European-Americans for food away from home, this was not statistically significant. There was a significant relationship in purchases of food away from home within other sub-categories, such as family type, occupation, education, home tenure, and region (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of expenditures for food away from home: 1980-81 and 2003 data

Variables	1980 -1981	2003
Ethnicity Hispanic-American	0.92	1.02
African-American	0.57**	0.68**
Other	0.93	0.99
European-American (dummy variable)	1.00	1.00
Family type Marriage	0.79**	1.38**
Female head	0.81**	0.89
Unmarried/male head (dummy variables)	1.00	1.00
Occupation Professional manager	1.37**	1.96**
Clerical/sales	1.68**	1.55**
Operator/service	1.42**	1.35**
Not working (dummy variable)	1.00	1.00
Education College	2.19**	1.94**
High school	1.79**	1.50**
Grade school (dummy variable)	1.00	1.00
Home tenure Mortgage	0.97	1.57**
Owner with no mortgage	1.23**	1.27**
Renter (dummy variable)	1.00	1.00
Region Northeast	0.89	0
Midwest	0	0.81**
North-central	1.28**	0
West	1.09	1.10

South (dummy variable)	1.00	1.00
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**p=<0.05

Will there be a difference in expenditures for clothing in 2003 among African-, European- and Hispanic-Americans and other ethnic groups? In the 2003 data, there was no significant difference among the various ethnic groups and European-Americans for clothing expenditures. However, it must be noted that Hispanic-Americans spent 24 percent and African-Americans spent 22 percent more than European-Americans on clothing. As observed in Table 3, in the sub-categories there were statistically significant relationships for clothing expenditures between family types, occupations, education levels, and home tenure categories.

Table 3. Comparison of expenditures for clothing: 1980-81 and 2003 data

Variables	1980 -1981	2003
Ethnicity Hispanic-American	1.10	1.24
African-American	1.19**	1.22
Other	0.95	1.04
European-American (dummy variable)	1.00	1.00
Family type Marriage	1.21**	1.55**
Female head	1.11**	1.01
Unmarried/male head (dummy variables)	1.00	1.00
Occupation Professional manager	1.23**	1.88**
Clerical/sales	1.28**	1.42**
Operator/service	1.14**	1.24
Not working (dummy variable)	1.00	1.00
Education College	1.32**	1.56**
High school	1.23**	1.36**
Grade school (dummy variable)	1.00	1.00
Home tenure Mortgage	0.78**	1.72**
Owner with no mortgage	0.76**	1.40
Renter (dummy variable)	1.00	1.00

Region Northeast	1.09***	0
Northwest	0	1.17
Midwest	0	0.98
North-central	1.14**	0
West	0.97	1.19
South (dummy variable)	1.00	1.00

**p=<0.05

Will there be a difference in expenditures for food (at home and away from home) and clothing from the 1980-81 and the 2003 data among African-, European-, and Hispanic-Americans and other ethnic groups?

When comparing the 1980-81 data reported by Wagner and Soberon-Ferrer (1990) with the 2003 data, it was found that there was an increase in expenditures for food at home by Hispanic-Americans (4 percent) and African-Americans (2 percent) (Table 1). This shows that from 1980-81 to 2003, incomes of Hispanic-Americans and African-Americans have risen, resulting in these ethnic groups spending more money for food at home. In spite of this increase in expenditures and income, results revealed that a significant relationship existed for only the Hispanic-Americans in the 1980-81 data. In the 1980-81 data there were only two (i.e., family type and region) categories that exhibited significant relationship. However, in the recent data several factors, namely family type, occupation, home tenure, and region influenced expenditures for food at home.

Results in the 1980-81 study were very similar to the recent analysis. As observed in Table 2, in 1980-81 there was a significant difference between African-Americans and European-Americans for food away from home. This relationship is still prevalent in the 2003 data, with African-Americans spending 11 percent more than what they used to in 1980-1981. Although not statistically significant, in 2003, Hispanic-Americans spent 2 percent more than European-Americans for food away from home. When comparing the 1980-81 data, Hispanic-Americans spent 8 percent less than European-Americans for food away from home.

Although in the past 20 years there has been an increase in income among Hispanic-Americans and African-Americans, they consistently appear to spend less on food away from home. Overall, all ethnic groups had an increase of expenditures for food away from home. Similar observations were noted in 1980-81 and 2003 in that significant relationships existed in all categories for expenditures on food away from home.

In 2003, when compared to European-Americans, there was no significant difference between Hispanic- and African-Americans for expenditures for clothing (Table 3). However, in 1980-1981 there was a significant difference between African- and European-Americans in clothing expenditures. Among Hispanic-Americans and other ethnic groups, there appears to be a trend for purchasing more clothing in 2003. These results suggest that since 1980-81, both ethnic groups have more income to spend on clothing. Like 1980-81, the 2003 data showed significant relationships in expenditure for clothing existed among most of the sub-categories.

Discussion

The relationships between food (at home and away from home) and clothing, and associations to ethnicity, were the primary emphasis of this research. Since food and clothing are symbols of a culture, these variables need to be investigated to enhance the quality of life for minorities both in the workforce and at home.

In looking at ethnicity and eating at home, results from the analysis of the 2003 data revealed that when compared to European-Americans, Hispanic-Americans spent 12 percent more money on food at home. Even though this comparison was not statistically significant it must be noted that for the most part, Hispanic-Americans still maintain their cultural norms of eating at home. Wagner and Soberon-Ferrer (1990) reasoned that Hispanic-Americans are family oriented, so they tend to eat at home, and that Hispanic-Americans tend to pay more for brands and quality in foods than European-Americans. Comparisons from the 1980-81 and 2003 data reveal that a closer relationship is developing between the two ethnicities in terms of eating at home. Factors that may be contributing to these trends are the rise in Hispanic population and this population's assimilation into mainstream America. Because expenditure is a proxy for income, another explanation is that the income of Hispanic-Americans is gradually increasing and becoming more similar to European-Americans.

The 2003 data demonstrated that Hispanic-Americans and European-Americans had similar expenditures for food purchased away from home. When African-Americans were compared with European-Americans, the amount of food purchased away from home was significantly less in 2003. These findings were congruent with the 1980-81 results of Wagner and Soberon-Ferrer (1990). According to these researchers, the decline in food consumption away from home was attributed to factors such as discrimination in eating establishments and preference of leisure activities other than dining out. An interesting observation noted in 2003 was a dramatic increase (11 percent) among African-Americans in food consumption away from home. This may be associated with greater economic stability among African-Americans and a decline in discrimination toward African-Americans in eating establishments. Additionally, other researchers like Block, Scribner, and De Salvo (2004) found that low-income African-American

neighborhoods had a higher prevalence of fast-food restaurants, which may entice neighborhood residents to eat out.

Wagner and Soberon-Ferrer found that a significant relationship existed between expenditures for clothing between African-Americans and European-Americans. According to the authors, in 1980-81, African-Americans spent 19 percent more than European-Americans, and this was linked to clothing use for self-expression of cultural values, social status, and to enhance distinct physical characteristics (e.g., body structure and skin color). While African-Americans purchased slightly more (3 percent) in 2003 than in 1980-81, this relationship to European-Americans is no longer significant. A possible explanation could be European-Americans' interest in cross-cultural dressing and acceptance of creative designs by African-Americans. Findings from Lewis's work regarding African-American fashion showed that mainstream fashion is becoming more inclusive of ethnic sub-cultures (Winter 2004).

Like African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans are also an expressive culture, which resulted in them purchasing more clothing (24 percent) than European-Americans. This relationship was not significantly different, demonstrating European-Americans' acceptance of clothing styles from other cultures. Furthermore, Hispanic-Americans spent 14 percent more on clothing in 2003 than in 1980-81. A possible explanation could be an increase in disposable income, purchase of clothing to increase social status, and a rise in the number of Hispanic-Americans since 1980.

Since the 1980s, there has been a trend to dress casually in the United States (Tortora and Eubanks 2005). Unlike European-Americans, when compared to 1980-81, in 2003, minorities spent more on clothing. This increase may be attributable to their interest in expressing their identity and the need or desire to enhance their social status.

The information gathered from the analysis of this research will be beneficial to professionals developing programs for various populations. For example, expression of African-American culture through clothing could be addressed in community programs. Such programs will enable integration of multiculturalism in the workforce, thereby provoking greater tolerance of cultural uniqueness in dress. As Hispanic-Americans tend to eat out, programs could be developed to educate them in selecting healthy foods when dining away from home. To encourage eating at home, cultural themes (e.g., Hispanic Week) that incorporate simple home cooking strategies may be integrated. This would keep with the norms of the Hispanic culture and encourage eating at home. Because there is an amalgamation of ethnic groups, programs could incorporate ways to effectively communicate and better understand other cultures. Through the development of community workshops (such as budget planning), marketing, and preparation of bilingual educational materials, these goals could be achieved.

Conclusions

Our research shows that ethnicity influenced clothing and food purchases in 2003. These findings will be of tremendous value to Extension agents and other professionals who develop educational programs for minorities. For example, in this study, understanding the trends in dietary practices among ethnic groups will be beneficial in the development of culturally sensitive nutritional resources for various populations. Knowing that ethnic groups express their cultural identity through clothing suggests a need to develop programs to embrace and educate others about cultural diversity. Further research about trends in food and clothing expenditures using the Consumer Expenditure Survey may encompass analysis of spending on specific types of food and clothing (i.e., relationship between food groups and clothing services), and the influence of age, social economic class, and geographical location. Further research may include analyzing the relationships between expenditures of food and clothing as found in Consumer Expenditure Survey database and other data such as body size, marketing, and peer pressure. Qualitative in-depth interviews with various ethnic minorities may further explain the influence of ethnicity on clothing and food purchases.

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