

Why Do Women Still Do Most of the Grocery Shopping?

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Features

Men are doing more household work than ever before. But when it comes to grocery shopping, women still tend to be the primary shoppers in households with more than one adult.

We've seen indications that women are the primary shoppers at Good Eggs, too.

Our data analyst, Kelly Cook, regularly conducts customer surveys to help inform our grocery assortment team about what products we should carry. In a recent survey soliciting feedback from our customers about Home & Health products — things like hand soap, laundry detergent, sponges, and toothpaste — 89 percent of respondents were women. Another survey about meal kits saw 88 percent of responses from women.

"We're always contacting a random subset of people who shop with us," Kelly told me. "It's a very valid indication that most of our customers are women, or at least that women are the primary holders of the account."

Why? In a world where we can buy groceries on an app — while standing on a BART platform, in between meetings at work, during the ten minutes before a workout class, in the wee hours of the morning as the coffee brews — why are women disproportionately taking on the task of stocking the fridge?

I sat down with four of Good Eggs' VPs, each of whom leads one of the company's core pillars, and *all* of whom are women (an anomaly in the food industry, where only 26% of VP positions are held by women), to ask them this very question.

Here's what I learned.

The data is spot on: men are taking on more.

All of our four female VPs happen to be in relationships with male partners. And all four mentioned that, when it comes to household tasks, the work is pretty evenly split.

"We trade off," Anne Mercogliano, our VP of Growth, told me. "Whoever doesn't cook does the dishes. One gives our daughter a bath and one gives her snuggles."

"He'll do 90 percent of the dishes and I do 70 percent of the laundry," Tess Frugé, our VP of Operations, said. "But when you look at tasks overall, it's an equal split."

Jamie Nessel, our VP of Assortment, also takes a similar approach to chores at home. "I'm the head of the dishes committee and Cang does the laundry. But I am the head of the folding committee. And he runs our social calendar."

Meet Our VPs

It wasn't always this way for these women, and they all admit it took a lot of hard work and many conversations to achieve equality in the execution of household tasks.

In fact, Anne's husband was quoted a few years ago in a *New York Times* Upshot piece — "Stressed, Tired, and Rushed: A Portrait of the Modern Family" — as saying, "I think we're dividing pretty equally," when asked about how he and his wife split up the household work.

To this, Anne replied, "I'd say I do more. He was like, 'When are we going to run out of these night diapers?' and I was like, 'We've already reordered those six times.'"

When it comes to household management today, Anne says, "It's not exactly a fine-tuned system; it's more like jazz." But they have a rhythm.

Now, every Sunday night, she sits down with her husband, Sean, to compare calendars. She says that, since the *New York Times* piece — when they had abruptly transitioned from being a career-driven power couple just trying to keep a dog alive to a new-parent duo caring for a baby — they're much more in sync.

It's certainly inspiring to hear about how these women have consciously (and successfully!) equalized household work with their male partners.

But the data misses a key point.

"In my home, we actually split up tasks the way I do at work, which is leading by strength," Betty Fletcher, our VP of People, shared. "We optimize based on who is good at what. It's very genderless. The thing is, the task load is totally fair, but I still carry the mental load."

Ah, the mental load. Betty was referring to a viral comic published by the French graphic artist, Emma, in 2017: [You Should've Asked](#).



The illustrator tells the story of going to a female coworker's house for dinner, and showing up to a scene of total chaos — her coworker dashes about the kitchen, simultaneously prepping for an adult dinner *and* a separate kid-friendly meal for her

children. She flies about the kitchen attending to about 17 different things all at once and it's not until a pot of water boils over onto the floor that her husband says, "You should've asked! I would've helped!" [Face palm]

The point of the comic is to illustrate the trend that, even as men take on more and more household tasks, women are still often expected to take on the role of project managing the household — the husband in the comic sees it as his wife's responsibility to tell him what to help with, instead of just helping out in the first place. This is what is called the "mental load" — the responsibility of having to remember. Not only to execute on tasks, but to remember that they have to be done. It's the difference between being the one who buys the baking soda, and being the one who knows that you're running low on baking soda, so it needs to be bought.

Anne brought up the mental load, too.

"I'm the person who realizes that the olive oil is low and we should probably order it," Anne told me. "He's the one who realizes there's literally no fruit in the house and places the same day Good Eggs order. He'll get us the 'oh crap' stuff during the week."

And so did Tess. "My husband," Tess said, "he takes care of everything, he *does* everything. He takes the baby to the doctor, takes the car to get serviced, owns the relationship with the nanny share, but there's a lot that I'm kind of reminding him about. I am the household manager, and he's the household executer."

Is the mental load why so many women are still managing the grocery shopping?

As it turns out, Anne, Betty, Jamie, and Tess are all the primary grocery shoppers for their households.

Grocery shopping by nature involves the mental load. You've got to know exactly how much milk and cheese you need to last you through to the next grocery trip (or delivery!). You have to remember to add in the vanilla extract that's not top of mind, but is almost out. And don't forget about dinner each night (except for that evening when you won't be home because of so-and-so's birthday party). And, of course, you want your dinners to be balanced dietarily-speaking, so make sure you plan for different types of protein (that everyone will eat!) and avoid defaulting to pasta every other night. Plus there's lunch for everyone, and breakfast. Oh, and coffee. Of course. And milk. Did you remember the milk?



You can't get to grocery execution without grocery planning. That's the mental load. And it happens every week. Maybe multiple times a week.

"The thinking-ten-steps-ahead is what I'm doing," Betty said. "When my husband goes to the store, he gets a block of cheese and some iced tea — yes, we need this, but none of it makes Thursday dinner."

Jamie, similarly, said, "I do the meal planning and he does the execution."

The thing is, I was surprised to find that all four women I talked to were more than happy to be the designated grocery shopper in their household. This was unexpected.

Online grocery delivery makes shopping easier... but the mental load still exists.

With full-time jobs and kids, convenience is key to making grocery shopping a little less of a chore. One reason that Betty, Tess, Jamie and Anne all shop primarily on Good Eggs is because it saves time.

“I would much rather be responsible for food than certain other tasks,” Tess told me. “Much more than taking the car in to get serviced or taking out the trash. Assign me ‘food’ as a task and I can shop from work. Good Eggs makes it so easy to not have food become a whole separate thing in my life. It becomes something I can do in between meetings, at my desk.”

Betty reiterated this.

“Going to Whole Foods will sink 45 minutes of my day,” she said. “It means I won’t be home in time to get the kids into bed and I won’t be able to watch my show tonight. When I put in my Good Eggs order, I figured out how to get everything done tonight.”

Betty, Anne, Tess, and Jamie may be outliers because they all *work* at Good Eggs and *love* food, so that could explain why they are the primary grocery shoppers in households in which their male partners are taking on at least half of the household tasks.

But the data still suggests that somewhere between 70 and 80 percent of Good Eggs’ shoppers are women, and the trend holds true nationally.

Because online grocery shopping is so easy from an execution standpoint, I’d argue that the mental load is the reason why women are still disproportionately in charge of this task. It’s easier, but it’s not magic. You still have to remember the milk. And even if you *subscribe* to a weekly milk delivery so that you don’t have to remember to buy it each week, you still have the mental load of remembering to cancel the milk delivery when your family is out of town.

“I’m putting salsa in the cart on Tuesday, but I know I’m not getting it delivered until Thursday,” Betty said. “That’s the mental load. I think, overall, women are still carrying the load because, as a society, we still expect that.”

What can Good Eggs do to lighten the mental load?

Since my conversations with Jamie, Tess, Anne, and Betty, I’ve been asking myself and my colleagues this question, which has led to some inspiring discussions.

Maybe Good Eggs could send push notifications to a customer a couple days before they usually reorder a product, like eggs, to remind them they might be running low, essentially doing the “remembering” of the mental load for them. Or maybe we could ask our customers to share their partner’s email address with us so we can send their partner a link to [download the Good Eggs app](#) — did you know you can be logged into the same account from multiple apps? About 80 percent of Good Eggs accounts are linked to only a single device, but you *can* be logged in across multiple devices to share the mental load of placing or adding to a Good Eggs order.

However, I think that on a deeper level, we’ll see the same trends in online grocery until we see more men owning the mental load.



It's why, as the Marketing Manager at Good Eggs, I see it as my responsibility to make sure we're empowering men to shop, too. We've begun to introduce more men into our lifestyle photography. We're careful to use gender-neutral language. We're making sure to be intentional about whose voices tell what stories — it's no coincidence that our blog post on "[Green Cleaning Products that Work](#)" was written by a man. We've been interviewing both men and women in user research as we evolve our digital products, to learn how we can better design our experience to meet the needs of *all* shoppers. These are small things, and we can always do better, but ultimately the stories that we tell shape the world we want to see: one that is less gendered and more equal, in grocery shopping and beyond.

We'd love to hear what you think. How do household tasks get split up in your home? Who does the grocery shopping? What can Good Eggs do to help families who are trying to equalize the load? Email me at heidi.hirvonen@goodeggs.com or leave a comment below to share your story.