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The Man of the House

More men than ever are cooking, cleaning and caring for kids -- so why aren't household brands targeting them?

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When Tom McNulty got divorced, household chores turned out to be an unexpected challenge. When talking with a friend, also recently divorced, he realized his experience was hardly unique.

"He said he had put regular dish soap in the dishwasher and got suds all over the kitchen, and I did that once too," recalls McNulty, a copywriter who lives in Minneapolis. "And I said, 'Maybe there's a cleaning guidebook for guys.'"

Turns out there wasn't. So McNulty researched and wrote one himself: *Clean Like a Man: Housekeeping for Men (and the Women Who Love Them)*. It considers no task too basic, even offering this tidbit about changing sheets: "Don't wait until you can actually see that your bedding needs washing."

While the annual number of divorces has been on the decline since the 1980s, men (like women) are less likely than ever to get married to begin with: the percentage of married men dropped from 67 percent in 1970 to 56 percent in 2006, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Men are also getting married later, with the median age rising to 27 in 2005, up from 23 in 1970, according to Census data. And when they do take the plunge, men have less of an excuse to shirk housework because their wives increasingly work full-time: Between 1996 and 2006, the number of dual-income families increased by 31 percent, from 25.5 million to 33.4 million families, according the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

While women still do the majority of work in the home, numerous studies indicate that men are more involved than in past decades. Scott Coltrane, a sociologist who studies family dynamics and dean of the University of Oregon College of Arts & Sciences, says that compared to the 1960s, the portion of housework done by men in couples has doubled, with men who once performed 15 percent of the housework now doing 30 percent. Men have also tripled the amount of childcare they do since the 1960s, Coltrane reports.

In the kitchen, meanwhile, a recent study by The NPD Group found that more men than ever are preparing dinner -- 18 percent of dinners in 2007, compared to 14 percent in 2003 -- and not just outside on the Weber. Some of those men are no doubt watching the Food Network, which draws 40 percent male viewership during prime time, with some shows drawing an audience that's half or nearly half men, according to Nielsen data (numbers that have been fairly consistent since the network's launch).

And home network HGTV is drawing more men, with the audience having surged 15 percent among males 18-49 during prime time in this year's second quarter over last, according to Nielsen.

A BIGresearch survey in June that asked consumers what products they buy at least once a month found men trailing only slightly behind women in a number of categories, including household cleaning products (54 percent vs. 56 percent, respectively), dairy products including milk (88 percent vs. 93 percent) and baby products (13 percent vs. 14 percent); for laundry products, men tied women, with 53 percent.

While marketers traditionally have dismissed men when it comes to household goods, some industry observers are rereading the tea leaves. A study for Edelman conducted by StrategyOne, "Pride in My Home: A Perspective From Today's Men," found that among men who live alone or in a couple (opposite- or same-sex), 76 percent reported being primarily or partly responsible for buying groceries, and 63 percent reported being primarily or partly responsible for purchasing both cleaning products and laundry supplies.

Howard Pulchin, an evp at Edelman, says the firm commissioned "Pride in My Home" not for a particular client, but to chart a paradigm shift.

"We felt that men were playing a much more involved role in the home than was being portrayed in society," he says. "You see a lot of marketing directed toward mothers, but we felt there's an increasing role that men are playing in families."

While a few home-oriented brands and retailers target men in their advertising or PR efforts -- like Dyson (for its vacuums), Nautica Home and the retail chain Design Within Reach -- the vast majority focus on women.

That's a mistake, says Jack Essig, publisher of Rodale's *Men's Health*, which produced a newsstand-only special issue, *Men's Health Living*, last winter, and is planning a second for December. Essig believes there's a gender-based blind spot in home brands today that is the inverse of one by car companies a couple decades ago.

"Ten or 15 years ago, car companies were speaking primarily to men and assuming men were making the majority of car-purchasing decisions, only for research to show that women were really weighing in," Essig says. "I think the same is true for a lot of home decor and other home brands when it comes to speaking to men. They want their home to reflect their personality as well."

Some of those men may identify themselves as "metrosexuals" -- the term popularized by trendspotter Marian Salzman, now CMO at Porter Novelli, to describe straight men's growing affinity for face lotions and spa treatments. The term became part of the lexicon five years ago, after metrosexuals were the subject of a *New York Times* article, and Salzman still marvels at how much the concept ended up reshaping the men's personal care and fashion industries.

"It should not have been a big 'wow' that men were embracing their feminine side in 2003," Salzman says now. What seems equally obvious to Salzman today, yet receives scant attention from retailers or brands, is that men frequent supermarkets en masse, pushing carts alongside dairy cases and aisles of cleaning products and packaged food whose advertising is almost exclusively directed at women.

"If you go to the supermarket on the weekend, it's 40 percent male and they're buying comparable goods to women," Salzman says. "There's been a blurring of gender roles over the last decade and we have to think of who the 'homemaker' is; 25 years ago the homemaker was June Cleaver, but today it could be anybody. ... We have to appeal to him or her. That's the starting point and I don't think any brands are necessarily talking about the new homemakers."

Chairman of the floorboard

A survey this spring by the Soap and Detergent Association, a trade group, found that 86 percent of women and 68 percent of men said they would undertake spring cleaning. But Brian Sansoni, a representative for the group, says that when it comes to targeting men specifically, "you're generally not seeing that at all for advertising." Men are targeted by products for outdoor jobs, like cleansers for cars and boats, "but the mass messages are targeted at women," Sansoni adds.

But while men are ignored, cleaning products marketed as time savers for women end up having the added value of being idiot-proof for men, says author McNulty. Products like pre-measured dish-detergent tabs and Swiffers are marketed to women as being more convenient, but for men may actually remove a barrier to entry, cleaning-wise.

"We're intimidated by cleaning because we don't know how to do it," McNulty says. "If you demystify it and ... we think we can do it faster and easier, we're on it."

At Swiffer maker Procter & Gamble, representative Susan Baba declined to provide specific data, but did say that "we have seen across all of home care that the male consumer is increasing in prevalence, [and] ease-of-use" products like Swiffers are particularly popular with men.

Because it's seeing men's numbers growing among its customer base, P&G is making small yet unprecedented adjustments in its PR strategy, such as sending samples of products like Mr. Clean not just to women's magazines, but to some men's titles as well, Baba says. She adds the company's advertising and marketing strategy remains decidedly female-centric.

"We talk about 'size of prize' -- where are the largest consumer groups that we need to target? And we really find that the women consumer is boss. For the most part we think that women are making -- or influencing-purchasing decisions," Baba says.

Representatives from two other major detergent companies, Unilever and Church & Dwight, also acknowledged seeing a bump among male consumers, but said their advertising and marketing still focus on women.

Even if they're not targeting them, however, cleaning brands might also be drawing men in inadvertently with their scent.

Sarah Etzel, marketing manager in the home-care division of International Flavors & Fragrances, the century-old scent developer for both cosmetics and household products, says that last year's best-sellers in men's cologne shared notes of "citrus mixed with green notes and a watery, fresh impression." (Citrus -- think orange, grapefruit, bergamot -- is also popular in today's women's scents, but so too are notes of so-called white florals, like jasmine and gardenia.)

It turns out, says Etzel, when it comes to trends in men's cologne, "that story is really echoed in last year's fragrance launches in cleaners. There's a very similar fragrance story in men's fine fragrance and many of the new citrus scents in cleaners."

Until contacted for this article, Etzel says she had never noted the parallels between scent trends for men's cologne and cleaning products, and stressed that no cleaning companies had asked IFF to design scents to appeal to men.

"You could make deductions on your own, but in studying the category we would not say we're seeing

activity that specifically speaks to casting the net for cleaning products beyond women head of households to include men," Etzel says. "However, that being said, there are these mega trends out there in the world that are totally gender neutral that are certainly hitting the cleaner category," where female-friendly floral scents also are less popular than ever, she noted.

Kash Shaikh, a P&G representative who works on Gain and other laundry brands, says the only P&G laundry product that has to some degree been marketed to both genders is Tide to Go. The stain-removal pen was advertised during the last Super Bowl, the first time the company ever advertised a detergent product during the game. (The 30-second spot, which earned Saatchi & Saatchi New York a silver Lion at Cannes, featured a man on a job interview whose shirt stain seemed to be talking.) The company also hands out Tide to Go samples at "big stain-making occasions" like barbecue and other food festivals that draw men, Shaikh says.

Two ads for Gain detergent that ran recently featured men, but were targeted to women who like the smell of the product, says Shaikh. In one, women huddle close to a commuter in an otherwise empty bus to sniff his shirt; in another, a crossing guard rapturously sniffs a man and then swats him on the butt with her stop sign.

"Men are definitely buying laundry detergent," Shaikh says. "I'm a single guy and I do. They're definitely a demographic that we're aware of and watching, but the lion's share of the shopping within this category is being done by women head of households, and even if she's not out there buying it, she's a key influencer on the men in her life."

Homme decor

While cleaning companies may eschew advertising to men, some, especially high-tech cleaning gadgets, occasionally pitch their products to men's magazines for features. A PR effort by Ketchum landed Dyson vacuums in several men's publications, including *Men's Health*, the now-defunct *For Him Magazine (FHM)*, and a Father's Day special issue of *AutoWeek*. Articles tend to rhapsodize about both the vacuums' technological features and how men using them don't look girly.

Meanwhile, *Men's Health Living* is making the case for being the advertising vehicle for a category many might dispute even exists: the men's home decor market.

The inaugural issue was not subtle about trying to depict the home category as one appropriate for James Bond types. One cover line beside a woman with a come-hither look teased an article about "A home she'll want to come to." The cover also highlighted articles that help men "Be the king of your kitchen" and posited, "Even tough guys know where to put the ottoman."

Articles inside -- Freudians, take note -- included a roundup of the best 7- to 10-inch knives, a drill that "packs 400-inch pounds of torque into a 4-pound package," and an overview of which wood is the best for grilling meat.

Rose Cameron, trendspotter and self-described "man expert" at Leo Burnett USA, says such a masculinizing approach to the home "is what we call 'permission to play' in new categories for men." She notes that where marketing to women may focus strictly on a product's (or service's) sensory attributes, "it's very much in the realm of performance to get men to buy."

With products for the home, adds Cameron, "you can't necessarily talk about thread count the way you can with women and get men to buy the sheets. It might be telling men that they want the 200-thread count so they can get the size-2 girl."

"What we want to do is give men more permission to care about this stuff," says David Zinczenko, editor-in-chief of *Men's Health*.

Among the inaugural issue's advertisers were Calvin Klein, Nautica and Armani, all of which advertised their home collections.

Maria Vicari, president of global licensing at Nautica, says its Nautica Home ad in *Men's Health Living* marked its first advertisement in a men's magazine (it advertises primarily in shelter magazines), even though the line is largely designed with men in mind. Because Nautica's "heritage is with menswear," the designs are masculine or at least "neutral in their appeal" and rely heavily on tan, nutmeg, cream and brown, Vicari says.

Even when men cohabit with women, their days of sleeping on a bed with froufrou sheets are numbered, because couples now are "creating an environment to live in together," Vicari says.

With its modern, non-frilly designs, Ikea is popular with men, but a representative from the company declined to comment on how men figure into their advertising or marketing strategies, or what percentage of their customers are males.

Design Within Reach, the furniture and housewares retailer with 65 stores, recognizes its customer base is largely male and advertises in general interest publications like *The New York Times*, but not in women's magazines like *Martha Stewart Living* or *O, the Oprah Magazine*, according to Kimberly Oliver, a representative for the company.

Oliver describes Rob Forbes, who founded the company a decade ago, as a "proto-metrosexual" who couldn't find a store that suited his own taste toward modern furniture classics like the Eames chair. Oliver said that stores with suburban locations skew female, but that urban locations like New York are "pretty evenly split," partly due to their popularity with gay men.

Even as the company branches out into bedding and towels, as it is now, it adheres to a neutral color palette and simple, modern designs that tend to be "man friendly," Oliver says. "We don't do frilly -- we don't do pastels."

A man, a pan-but no marketing plan

While men traditionally have far outnumbered women as professional chefs, cooking in the home has of course been an entirely different matter, with men occasionally firing up the grill, but keeping their distance from the kitchen. But that, too, is shifting.

In 2007, men prepared 18 percent of dinners, compared to 14 percent in 2003, according to an NPD study. The study found that younger men were the most likely to don the oven mitts: 67 percent of men under 25 will prepare at least one of his next 10 dinners, compared to just 43 percent of men aged 55-64.

"The pace is changing most among younger men," says Harry Balzer, a food and beverage researcher with NPD. "Children of the '70s and '80s are coming to their household formation stage and the landscape is much different. Those younger men have come to accept that there are jobs that they have to do as a household, like cooking, cleaning and housework, and that those things will be shared."

Hugh Rushing, evp of the Cookware Manufacturers Association, says part of the reason cooking is gaining in popularity among men is that it "is no longer seen as an emasculating thing to be in the kitchen." While Graham Kerr, who had the popular *Gallopig Gourmet* series in the 1970s, "was seen as a bit effete and appealed much more to a female audience," popular TV chefs today appeal much more to men, Rushing says.

"Obviously, Emeril Lagasse is a big, burly masculine guy," he adds, "and there's nothing effeminate about his approach to the kitchen, and I think that's an empowering thing for men to see."

Still, Rushing says he knows of no cookware manufacturers in his association that are targeting men. What he says he hears from members anecdotally, though, is that men tend to gravitate to upscale cookware like Calphalon and All-Clad (which has an Emeril-branded line).

At Sur La Table, the upscale cooking store with 60 locations, one-fourth of its customers and registrants for its cooking classes are men, according to a rep, who added this has been true historically for the 36-year-old company. (Williams-Sonoma declined to comment because the retailer "doesn't share specific demographic information," according to a representative.)

A Harris Interactive study commissioned by publisher Rodale found that 65 percent of men grocery shop regularly, and more than one-third do 75 percent of their household's grocery shopping. As for meal preparation, 65 percent of men prepare at least one meal a week for others in the household.

That would include, of course, fathers cooking for their kids, but Greg Allen, who publishes Daddytypes.com -- a four-year-old blog for fathers -- and has worked as a blogging and dad-market consultant for GM, VW, Mattel, Disney and Johnson & Johnson, says the fact that he's just as likely as his wife to cook for his daughter seems lost on marketers.

He points to a popular 2006 McDonald's 60-second TV spot from Burnett, "Dad's Making Dinner," which featured children worldwide excitedly telling one another in their native languages that "dad's

making dinner!" The spot closes with various fathers arriving home with bags from McDonald's for their ecstatic progeny.

"So the only time dad makes dinner is when he goes to McDonald's," says Allen. "That commercial was like the lingua franca of 'dads don't cook.'"

While it smirks at men's kitchen skills, the spot, a McDonald's brand manager at the time told *Chicago Business*, far from degrading fathers, depicts them as "heroes" for bringing them dinner.

Allen says fathers are invisible not just when it comes to marketing for food, but also for kids' products.

"'Parents' are 'moms' to market researchers and ad agencies," Allen says. "There's a giant sort of infrastructural bias against men as consumers in a number of different family-related and household products."

In a recent blog post about the launch of the Gap's babyGap Home Web site, Allen writes that the "relentless, greeting card cuteness, combined with an overriding brightness of color and patterns tells me dads are just guests in babyGap Home." Then Allen quotes the press release announcing the launch, where Pamela B. Wallack, a Gap evp, writes, "Today's mom stays on top of the latest trends-she wants her baby to be current and stylish," and, "Our goal is to be a trusted editor, providing moms with everything they need and want in an aesthetic and sensibility that's unique only to babyGap."

"We would never want to intentionally upset or leave out a gender," responds Olivia Doyne, director of public relations for the Gap. "The reason we say 'mom' is because when we did the online customer research before we created the home line, we asked both genders to participate, but the majority of people who got back to us were mothers."

But while men may snub the Gap's researchers, they have tripled the amount of time they spend providing childcare compared to the 1960s, according to a number of sociological studies.

Honey, I'm home!

It would be nice to think men are being more active in the home because they are fair-minded and enlightened, but surely some of it is enlightened self-interest. With more women working full time and their incomes rivaling or eclipsing their husbands', the days are long gone when a husband was the sole provider who could expect the missus to be waiting at the door with his pipe and slippers.

"It's not the 19th century -- they don't need us in some fundamental ways, so we have to step up," says Coltrane, the sociologist. "Marriage is more fragile, and if men want to have kids and stay married, they have to pick up the slack."

The division of household labor is even a primary determiner of matrimonial accord.

In a 2007 survey by the Pew Research Center that asked respondents to rate factors important to a successful marriage, 62 percent rated sharing household chores as "very important," 15 percent more than thought so in 1990. Respondents thought sharing housework was more important than factors including "adequate income," "good housing" and "children"; it trailed only "faithfulness" and "happy sexual relationship."

The psychologist Joshua Coleman, author of *The Lazy Husband: How to Get Men to Do More Parenting and Housework*, cites studies that reveal men doing housework can have an aphrodisiacal effect on women, who report heightened sexual interest when their husbands start washing the dishes.

Single men, meanwhile, may find their dates less impressed with their grasp of microeconomics than home economics.

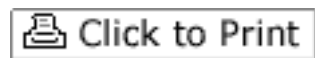
"If you're courting young women, it's a good idea to say that you cook," says Balzer, the NPD researcher. "You'll get two people in your corner -- the woman and her mother, who'll say, 'He cooks -- he's a keeper.'"

That may sound like a pretty good storyline for a cookware or groceries ad targeting men, but nobody seems to be taking that approach yet. Still, Cameron, of Burnett, says it's only a matter of time before home-oriented brands wake up and smell the coffee -- and see that the man of the house brewed it.

"It's hard for these brands to recognize the male audience because they don't see them as a primary audience -- they see them as a blip," says Cameron. "But I would argue that men have now popped over from an emerging market to a mass market."

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