

NORTHWEST UNIVERSITY

Kirkland, Washington

**On Guard at the Grocery Store: The Impacts of Cultural Traditions and Marketing on  
Young Adults Vulnerable to Binge Eating Habits**

An undergraduate thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for completing the Northwest University Honors Program

by

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February 2024

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## **Abstract**

Going shopping for groceries, whether a beloved task or a despised chore, is a common element of daily life for most people. It is a well-analyzed fact that consumer psychology and economic decisions both influence a grocery store's marketing strategies, and that young adults are particularly susceptible to these subconscious strategic decisions. The way in which grocery marketing may impact a consumer's mental health, however, has yet to be discussed to an impactful degree. This thesis begins to bridge the gap between psychology and marketing theory to reveal how Kroger grocery stores in western Washington employ linguistics, spatial awareness, and material rhetoric in order to reinforce emerging binge eating habits in young adults. Although it is likely that Kroger is not aware of this impact on a vulnerable population of its consumers, young adults who are already at an emotional and mental risk for disordered eating practices must be aware of the external cues they will encounter in a grocery shopping environment.

## **Definition of Terms**

### **Young Adult**

For the purposes of this thesis, a “young adult” is defined as anyone within the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. This range is taken from a diagnostic study performed by the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. The results of the study allowed physicians and psychologists to compile and create a median age of onset for the three eating disorders most recognized by clinicians (anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder). Erik Erikson’s research on life stages defines “young adulthood” as anywhere between the ages of eighteen and thirty-nine, but the more commonly accepted range for medical, psychological, and societal uses today remains eighteen to twenty-five (Erikson, 1975).

### **Binge Eating Disorder**

Binge eating disorder, as explained by the DSM-5, is characterized by “recurrent episodes of binge eating that must occur, on average, at least once per week for three months” (DSM-5, 2013). This is defined alongside bulimia nervosa, where a person will significantly overeat during a selected amount of time, only to immediately get rid of the food via laxatives or vomiting. Bulimia nervosa is an inflamed iteration of binge-purge disorder, where periods of obsessive overeating are followed by intense purging or prolonged periods of fasting (DSM-5, 2013). Binge eating disorder was first officially recognized in 2013, but identifiable cases were recorded as early as 1959 (Connolly, 2021). Binge eating disorder is as much a mental issue as it is a physical craving; several of its diagnostic symptoms include statements directly related to emotional health and well-being, and it is associated with impaired life satisfaction and increased risk for weight gain (APA, 2013; DSM-5, 2013).

## **Disordered Eating Practices**

A young adult who already suffers from an eating disorder, especially one that incorporates bingeing patterns like bulimia nervosa or binge eating disorder, will most likely engage in their negative habits regardless of the advertising strategies of a grocery store. Someone who is dealing with an eating disorder should seek professional help as they begin the journey to recovery. This thesis will focus only on the developmental stages of binge-purge practices, not the motivations behind continuing them or the methods of overcoming them. Some of these practices, then, are as follows:

- Eating when full or not hungry
- Eating unusually large amounts in a short time frame
- Eating alone or secretively
- Feeling distressed or ashamed of eating
- Frequently dieting
- Frequently fasting
- Distorted body image
- Extremely restricted eating (APA, 2013; NIMH, n.d.)

A person does not have to be diagnosed with an eating disorder to experience any one or multiple of the above symptoms, or to unintentionally create habits out of these experiences. This is where marketing plays a crucial role.

## **Methodology**

To best illustrate the way in which American traditions and cultural influence impacts the eating habits of young adults, it is important to analyze grocery stores at multiple points in the year. The researcher traveled to two Kroger stores in the Kirkland-Bellevue area, both three times over the course of the 2022-2023 holiday season. Collecting data three separate times removes the possibility of bias from marketing for any one particular holiday. On the other hand, collecting data over the course of three holidays magnifies the impact of cultural semiotics in the context of supermarkets. In the following notations, the visits will be labeled as:

1. Cultural Change One: Feast– December 2022
2. Cultural Change Two: Famine– January 2023
3. Cultural Change Three: Feast Again– February 2023

The three cultural changes, which will be analyzed in greater depth alongside the appropriate material rhetoric for each one, mirror the destructive binge eating cycle.

### **Resource Collection**

While in the store, the researcher collected photos of the advertising strategies used to promote certain foods. Photo examples of aisle end-caps, banners, promotional signage, aisle labels, and product spotlights were gathered, compiled, and coded. Much of the decisions surrounding the placement of certain brands are made by the advertising budget and revenue of the brands themselves, but the decision for further Kroger-designed promotional material is up to the discretion of the stores, so it was worthwhile to analyze for any potential insight.

### **Coding and Analysis**

When coding, the researcher analyzed elements such as color of signage, choice of words, placement of signs in relation to surrounding food items, and placement of displays in

relation to the greater context of the store layout. Swahn’s tenets of marketing rhetoric– sensory science, marketing science, and linguistics– were present and influential guides while coding each piece of data (Swahn, 2011). Figures 1.1 and 1.2 are examples of coded data from among the fifty photos collected.



Figure 1.1

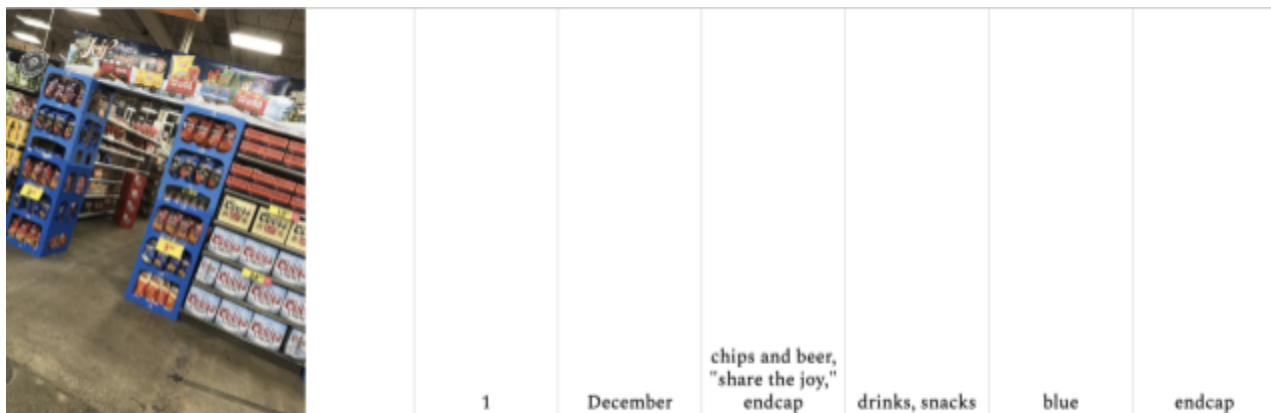


Figure 1.2

## **Literature Review**

Although grocery shopping is an experience which takes a significant amount of preparation and attention in daily life, it does not always receive an equal ratio of attention in the academic world. Marketing scholars have analyzed the impact of advertising decisions on the consumer— of course, no sales-related decision would be made without a thorough understanding of a customer and what choice would be effective in making them a consumer (Aitken et. al., 2008). There is no doubt that any given store is curated with intentionality, and that the person who enters the store is, even before setting foot inside, susceptible to the advertising implicit throughout the building. A store's ultimate aim is to create an environment where people are influenced towards loyalty and relationship with the store's brand— whether aware of the marketing strategy or not, the ideal consumer is the one who continues to consume.

What happens, then, when the act of consuming a product is physically or mentally harmful to the consumer? Is it the corporation's responsibility to change their marketing strategies in order to protect the well-being of their customer base, or is it the shopper's responsibility to be aware and on guard against the potentially negative side effects of the marketing? This paper seeks to answer this question by separating a grocery shopping experience into two major components: the vulnerable consumer and the profit-driven company.

### **The Vulnerable Consumer**

Grocery stores— which, for the purpose of this thesis, will be used as a blanket term that refers only to Kroger supermarkets like Fred Meyer, QFC, Harris Teeter, and Dillons— cater to a staggering variety of consumers. The most reliable way to narrow down the demographics of a store's potential customer base is by borrowing the demographic information of the store's geographic location. No matter the location of a grocery store, though, it is all but guaranteed



that a portion of their consumer base fall into the category of “young adult” (Rodgers, 2023). Both Statista and Drive Research’s data on the average Kroger customer places their age between twenty-three and thirty-one, which overlaps with the conventional eighteen- to twenty-five- year old category that is currently considered “Gen Z”. In fact, surveys as recent as 2022 show that younger generations “seem to enjoy grocery shopping more than their older counterparts... 49 percent of Generation Z and millennials enjoyed grocery shopping, while for boomers and the silent generation the share of respondents was at 31 percent” (Ozbun, 2022). Younger generations, Gen Z specifically, are in the process of becoming primary shoppers for their households, as either they take on more responsibility within their nuclear family or they become a solo member of their own newly-established household.

This “young adult” age range, praised for its social awareness at the same time as it is lamented for its apparent gullibility, faces dramatic life changes that might naturally have an impact on both their physical and their mental health. Dr. Caroyln Pearson asserted that transitions both into and out of eating disorders during this time of life are “relatively common,” which in turn raises the questions of what can be done to prevent the negative transitions and promote the transitions back into full health– or even what might lead a young adult to become a self-proclaimed dieter in the first place (Pearson et. al., 2017). While not every dieter struggles with disordered eating, dieting, which is a helpful tool, can be misused. In the article “A descriptive analysis of factors contributing to binge eating,” the authors explained that strong emotions are a necessary antecedent for disordered eating, whether that be bingeing, starving, or bulimic actions (Stickney, Miltenberger, and Wolff, 1999).

Articles such as “The impact of emotion upon eating behavior” and “Early experience with food and eating” compared the emotional turbulence associated with young adulthood with

the equally turbulent eating habits of the same age group (Meyer and Waller, 1999; Fisher and Birch, 2001). Dr. Anita Jansen, in “A learning model of binge eating: Cue reactivity and cue exposure,” attempted to explain this turbulence through the idea of external cues. She argued that binge eating, like many other addictions, is cue controlled, and these external cues play a significant part in “excessive food intake” of binge eaters (Jansen, 1998). Jansen then proposed that “cue exposure and response prevention” could be integrated into treatment procedures as effective ways to treat binge eating disorder.

These existing studies support the clinical assertion that diagnosable eating disorders often take hold of the patient because of a season, or multiple seasons, of mental and emotional vulnerability, and it raises the important question of whether or not young adults who are experiencing this inevitable mental growth could be shielded in any way from the potential of physical repercussions.

### **The Profit-Driven Company**

The second of these two elements at work in a young adult’s grocery shopping experience is the store itself. Researchers have collected and analyzed invaluable data on the consumer’s response to certain food advertising strategies (Cook et. al., 2009; Smith and Burns, 1996). Cook, Reed, and Twiner found that the “poetic, vague... emotive” language that is most often used to promote organic, “healthy” foods actually garners more consumer resistance than standard advertising rhetoric does (Cook et. al., 2009). As advertisements become more self-aware, people, feeling patronized and manipulated, resist them even more. To develop a better understanding of discourse analytic methodology as it relates to food politics and consumer psychology, one might turn their focus to the “receiver as the key actor in the

advertising communication process” (Aitken et. al., 2008). Recent years have seen a consumer-first shift in the philosophy of marketing techniques, coinciding with greater awareness of consumer culture theory, but this change in mentality has yet to make its way to the shelves (or marketing offices) of grocery stores.

Much of the advertising at work in a grocery store is done by the producers of the food being sold, not the store itself. Johan Swahn, a Swedish food science scholar, observed “the importance of labels and descriptions in relation to consumer decision making in a grocery retail store,” proving that “sensory description of food products could affect consumer choice” (Swahn, 2011). Swahn compares customer reactions to three different types of apples, with a different sensory marketing techniques at work in portraying each apple, and his findings revealed that descriptive sensory language has a notable positive impact on consumer behavior, regardless of product placement, price, or brand association. Produce brands, or any company looking to promote their product to a consumer, need not look far to find a multitude of sales and advertising ideas just as compelling as Swahn’s.

In the same way as the producers of the products being sold– whether produce or pastry, canned foods or carved meat– stores themselves are understandably more focused on making a profit than on cultivating a holistically healthy consumer (Verplanken et. al, 2005). Stores are not necessarily trying to create a healthy consumer, but a consistent one. The scope of this paper does not discuss the moral or ethical ideals of grocery stores but instead operates from the optimistic assumption that corporations are interested in the mental well-being of their consumers and may be receptive to change in order to help sustain this well-being.

The same concepts Swahn uses to analyze consumer response to the language used on the labels of apples can be applied on a broader scale to the consumer’s reaction to the environment

of the entire produce section, or the grocery store itself. A trained eye can read a building like a book— or read a product placement like a rhetorical argument. There is plenty of potential for a positive change in food advertising. Dr. Anita Jansen researched external cues for binge eating, arguing for “cue exposure and response prevention” as both a treatment for binge eaters and a useful habit for people to engage in to be proactive against binge eating tendencies (Jansen, 1998). Many therapists and clinicians acknowledge that a grocery store is one of the most intimidating places for a person who engages in disordered eating, so there is certainly room for improvement to best protect young adults who are vulnerable to these disorders. This paper will conclude with a call to grocery stores and brand executives for a change in rhetoric, shift in product placement, and potentially even a radical redefining of cultural semiotics surrounding the way the grocery industry appeals to consumers— not with the intention of taking away business, but instead with the intention of creating a mentally positive environment for an even greater variety of healthy, hungry consumers.

## Results and Analysis

### Pragmatics

#### *Rhetoric*

If buildings can be read like books, reading a grocery store aisle is certainly not an unattainable aspiration. “Spaces— and the things within spaces— matter: their materiality acts upon us even as (or before) we cloak them in symbolism” (Kornfield 2021). The reasoning behind holiday-themed advertisements— their connotations, rhetorical situation, and affect on consumers— is the overarching topic that guides this entire thesis and the associated research questions. Before detailing the results from the lenses of both linguistics and semiotics, it is first imperative to discuss the implications of these results. Affect, in the context of material rhetoric, refers specifically to the “effect that thoughts and emotions have on your body” (Kornfield, 2021). This is the primary goal of marketing strategists: to build a compelling rhetorical story, use the story to change the audience’s thoughts and emotions, and use that change to impel a person to action.

What, then, is the rhetoric at work in the aisle of a local Fred Meyer— the “text” under critical review? The following section will seek to answer this question through three angles: firstly through pragmatics, a branch of linguistic study that focuses on how context provides meaning, secondly through an analysis of the products being advertised themselves, and finally through an examination of the proximity and influence of location on the overall rhetorical situation. Each of these three angles will explore how an average Kroger grocery store leverages spaces of attention and the rhetorical sensorium of the consumer to encourage excessive or unplanned purchases.

### *Linguistics*

Linguistics, broadly, is the study of the literal words used in a language, their grammar, and their syntax. The data collected from both Kroger stores during the 2022-2023 holiday season, unsurprisingly, leveraged short phrases and attention-grabbing keywords to promote each product. Phrases such as “fresh baked” and “sweet memories” both appeared only on bakery or dessert-related products, but other words with positive connotations made up the remainder of the advertising verbiage. “Share the joy,” above an endcap display of beer and chips in mid-December, implies that these particular products will allow the consumer to do so; “Seasonal favorites” associated only with tables of baked goods (when the term is sufficiently generic to apply to almost any seasonally-themed item in the store) promotes the idea that a consumer who refuses to purchase a tray of red and white frosted cupcakes will be missing out on a part of the holiday season.

Many of these keywords are simple, subtle, calls to action, without relying much on complex linguistic formations like semantic prosody or subjectification, both of which tools marketing strategists employ effectively in other contexts. Cognitive dissonance, a natural byproduct of semantic prosody— where a word with negative connotations is paired with a positive-sounding word to make a stronger point or share an underlying message— only harms the goal of the grocery store aisle.

### *Semiotics*

The word “favorites,” along with terms like “joy,” “naturally,” “sweet,” and “fresh,” have almost no inherent rhetorical aim— for example, the simple act of sharing a third party’s favorite color has no necessary impact on the thoughts and actions of the intended audience— and yet they

carry a great persuasive weight. The focus of cognitive semantics is on “how we understand and process words mentally, and on the correspondence between word meaning, concepts and referents in the extra-linguistic world” (Swahn, 2011). A concept called frame semantics argues that words gain meaning, and meaning gains importance, through the existence of the surrounding rhetorical elements– words, colors, designs, and contexts. These semantic frames allow language to grow in complexity and in persuasive affect. This affect is displayed, for example, in the difference in meaning between a standard aisle marker sign (intended to be a simple, clearly accessible, pseudo-background piece of signage), and a bakery table popup sign with a faux chalkboard design. Both are black and white, but the semantic frame– font choice, sign placement, repetition throughout the store, among an innumerable amount of other contextual elements– conveys a unique meaning for each. Figure 2.1 becomes an unobtrusive fixture of the store layout itself, while Figure 2.2 invokes persuasive feelings of familial warmth, a local bakery and pure ingredients, and a timely encouragement (if they’re not purchased and consumed soon, the cookies will go stale).



*Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2*

## **Product**

When analyzing the data collected, it was first important to separate the products being advertised into distinct categories. Immediately upon coding the data, a number of interesting trends stood out among what the stores chose to highlight during each one of the three aforementioned Cultural Changes. The researcher only coded data that was clearly differentiated from any other product in the store— every piece of data from each of the store visits had to have a particular qualifier that made it stand out in its unique season (i.e. a Christmas-themed graphic next to a display in December; a football reference or Valentines’ Day pun used to promote a certain item in February). Products that were objectively neutral, in terms of Kroger’s additions to the product’s pre-existing marketing strategy, were not photographed and thus not coded as data.

In December, as one might expect, dessert products were the highest advertised, making up forty percent (fourteen out of thirty-five) of the photos collected during that month, seven of which were pre-made, easy-to-serve desserts such as boxed chocolates or brand-name cookies, and seven of which were bakery items that had been packaged in store. In February, however, desserts were less advertised than drinks, such as sodas and beer, which accounted for forty percent (six out of fifteen) of February’s data. The dessert category still applied to twenty-six percent of the remaining themed advertisements, focusing more on pre-made confections.

The product types that were paired with culturally themed advertisements the least, and thus were the least documented in data collection, were produce and protein-related items. Figure 3.1 shows quantitative totals for each category, as described above.



Product Category	#	Dominant Color	#	Location	#	Key Rhetoric
Dessert	18	Yellow	16	Table	15	“Fresh baked”
Drinks	11	Red	7	Endcap	13	“Low price”
Breakfast	10	Green	7	In-aisle	11	“Sweet memories”
Snacks	4	Blue	6	Wall display	2	“Fresh favorites”
Produce	3	Black	5			“Double the joy”
Protein	2					“Seasonal favorites”
						“Live naturally”
						“Enjoy great taste”
						“Make memories”

Figure 3.1- Total figures for each category analyzed.

### Proximity

Kroger stores, like the majority of Western grocery stores, use a standard grid layout to organize products. Refrigerated aisles are kept along the perimeter of the store; produce and bakery occupy a far third; the rest is composed of aisles of prepackaged goods. Stores are incentivized to keep customers engaged for the longest amount of time, creating decision fatigue and leading to impulsive or overextended purchases. Conventional customer flow theory suggests that people can be ushered further into the store by putting higher-necessity items (dairy, eggs, meat) as far opposite the main entrance to the store as possible.

This layout was present in both Kroger stores where data was collected, as was a product display tool colloquially known as “speed bumps”-- the practice of displaying certain products on tables directly in the aisle or in the middle of otherwise transitional space. Speed bumps “slow down the customer flow and attract attention to a product. They encourage shoppers to stop and

browse, preventing them from speeding through the store” (SPC Retail, 2021). The clear majority of all themed holiday-related advertising at each time between December and February was found on or around these speed bumps– labeled as “Table” under the “Location” section of Figure 3.1. Desserts were more frequently found on these tables, and at a total of eight individual occurrences across fifteen total tables, “Desserts/Table” became the highest combined category across all descriptors analyzed. This frequency is likely due to the Kroger bakery section being both within a customer’s eyeline from the front entrance and also being intentionally structured as a transitional space and free-flow zone. “Most shoppers enter a store, turn right, [and] walk through the space in a counter-clockwise direction” (SPC Retail, 2021). If a customer enters a Kroger store, turns right, and walks through the space in a counter-clockwise direction, the first department that they will encounter will almost certainly be the bakery. Placing bakery items on waist-high tables, not in tall, imposing aisles or trapped in wall displays, makes them both eye-catching and accessible, especially when paired with culturally-themed messaging such as “Double the joy” and “Fresh baked for sweet memories.”

Proximity-based analysis of aisle organization and endcap display turns more towards an examination of business deals and profit margins than an analysis of rhetoric and cultural messaging. Much of Kroger’s in-aisle layout is determined by the amount that each food manufacturer pays to have their product placed in a certain location, or have their brand take up a certain amount of space. Endcaps are highly contested retail in grocery stores. Although they make up the second highest category of location for advertising in the data collected, these decisions are almost entirely economic and thus difficult to analyze as a conscious marketing decision (Figure 3.1).

Since 2018, a number of Kroger stores, including many Fred Meyers in Western Washington where this data was collected, have reorganized the store layout to place “health” or specialty diet foods in a separate section of aisles, sometimes referred to as a

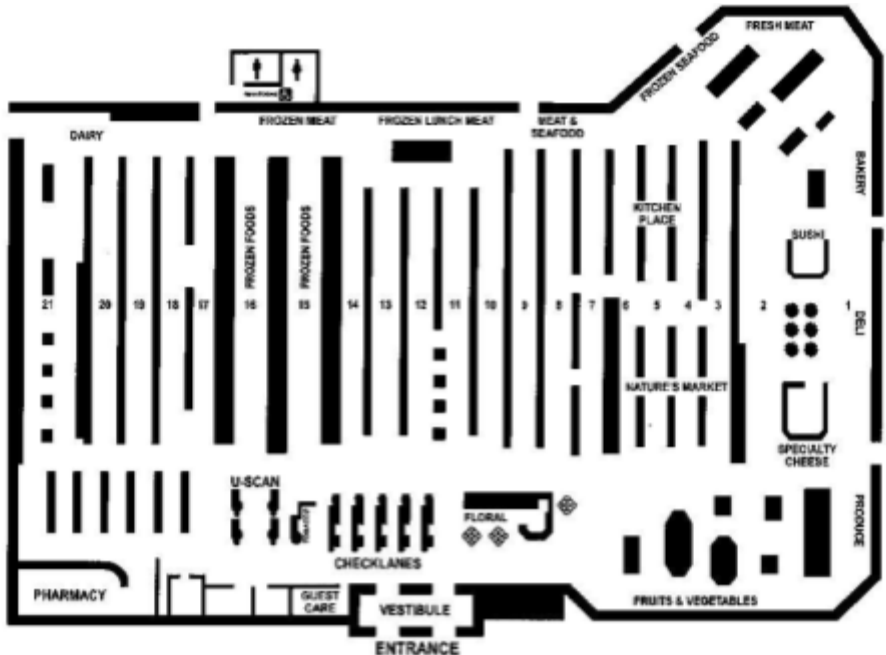


Figure 3.2- One of several Kroger store layouts, with “Nature’s Market” items separated

“Nature’s Market” bay. Figure 3.2 illustrates an example of this layout.



Figure 3.2- Division between “Live Naturally” items within an aisle

Other stores, as was the case in the second of the two represented through this data, integrate health and specialty foods into the regular aisles. In recent years, with the introduction of the Fred Meyer “Live Naturally” campaign, specialty or alternative products are denoted within the aisle through a green banner or a green sign, creating a health halo and distinguishing the alternative option from the more generic option.

Figures 3.2 and 3.3 illustrate a variety of integration methods present in the shelves of a Kroger store. In their brand statement on the “Live Naturally” campaign, Kroger says: “We make it simple to discover our growing selection of natural and organic items...just look for the Live Naturally leaf throughout our aisles!” (2024).

Integrating products within the aisles is beneficial both for the company and for the consumer. In a store layout where specialty foods are separated, a person with shopping habits fueled by disordered eating might feel either limited, where they can no longer see the variety of foods they are used to and therefore begin to feel trapped among



Figure 3.3

the “health” foods that they aren’t interested in (potentially leading to a detrimental cycle of self-restriction), or released from any consequence, where they trick themselves into thinking that the products they see are automatically nutritious and beneficial for their individual body and dietary needs simply because of the product’s location in the store.

Integrated products, however, allow for consumers to easily compare their options, and consumers shopping with or without a disordered eating influence may be convinced to purchase a more expensive item— thereby helping the store and the manufacturer raise profits as well. This concept also benefits the person who is recovering from disordered eating habits. Foods no longer need to be classified as “off-limits” by means of location, and as food freedom grows, so will comfortability in, and familiarity with, the regular shopping aisle.

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendations for Informed Consumers**

For a person who experiences binge eating disorder or related symptoms, recovery and return to food freedom and health is attainable, but the process can be inhibited by external factors that pressure one to succumb to old habits. The primary recommendation that this paper would like to make for vulnerable consumers is to become informed consumers instead. Understanding the strategies used in each element of a grocery store and the impact of advertising on the decision-making power of the shopper makes any consumer much more equipped to recognize– and avoid– these strategies in daily life. For a young adult who is beginning or continuing to shop for themselves amidst the mental and physical changes that may put them at a higher risk for disordered eating, the recommendation remains the same. Seek out further resources to stay informed, and be aware of the rhetorical persuasiveness of the shopping environment.

Both financial planners and licensed dietitians recommend that shoppers create a list or detailed plan before entering a grocery store (HealthyPlace Mental Health, 2020; National Alliance for Eating Disorders, 2022). Whether it be for budgetary or dietary reasons, though, the underlying logic behind this suggestion is the same: to reduce impulsive purchases, which later lead to impulsive consumption for people who binge. The more time spent in a store, the greater the influence of decision fatigue, leaving unguarded consumers much more prone to advertising- (or convenience-) influenced impulse purchases (Verplanken et. al, 2005).

It is important to be aware of the external cues that young adults encounter, in order to possibly prevent unhealthy recessions into disordered eating as a byproduct of this formative time (Pearson et. al., 2017). Marcella Stickney, Raymond Miltenberger, and Gretchen Wolff

examined in depth the antecedents and consequences of binge eating behaviors. After analyzing the questionnaire results from a sample of undergraduate females, they came to the conclusion that the most common antecedent for binge eating is negative emotion, and the most well-reported consequence is relief from the same negative emotion, followed by a reluctance to eat (Stickney, Miltenberger, and Wolff, 1999). One recommendation to draw from this study is simple: avoid grocery shopping when experiencing negative emotions or emotional turmoil, and avoid shopping while already hungry or craving a particular food. Many people recovering from disordered eating turn to grocery shopping alternatives like grocery pickup, delivery service, or shopping with a friend or family member instead of alone (Khosravi, 2020). The act of gamifying an unpleasant task can also help to shift the focus away from the food itself, and back onto the customer's predetermined plan. Turn a grocery shopping trip into a scavenger hunt for particular items, a timed challenge, or a game show-style price-guessing game. Above all, enter the grocery store with knowledge of the potential influences at work, and leave with another errand complete, not with a mental weight added.

### **Opportunities for Future Study**

While this thesis composed a detailed look into the design and impact of Kroger marketing on consumers, specifically young adults who are vulnerable to disordered eating practices, there is much room for further research. Interviews with Kroger marketing executives, detailed analysis of a larger sample size of stores, photos collected from over a wider range of dates and locations, and even expanded data collection to include examples from other brands entirely, are only a few ideas of ways in which this topic could be further examined. Future study, both into the impact of marketing and cultural traditions on binge eating habits, and into the way that this impact intersects with the grocery shopping experience, is encouraged and

necessary. If given the opportunity, the researcher would recreate the informal study using a similar but expanded methodology, taking photos and coding the data from every aisle, endcap, and speed bump display from multiple Kroger stores once a week for the duration of a year. This would allow the data to more accurately reflect the greater cultural pressures of America, specifically western Washington, and allow for more thorough analysis of its potential impacts on consumers at large. It would also be beneficial to contrast the rhetorical message of stores that give free samples to guests as opposed to stores where food is off-limits before payment. Any or all of these further study recommendations would be useful in expanding the current knowledge on how marketing strategy impacts disordered eating practices.

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## Personal Note and Acknowledgements

It has been an honor and a joy to work on this undergraduate honors thesis. Thank you to Professor Lenae Nofziger for her continued support and encouragement as I went through the rollercoaster of dreaming, planning, and writing this paper. Thank you to Dr. Kim Lampson for her guidance and revision assistance as my thesis advisor. Thank you to my wonderful roommates (see Figure 4.1), boyfriend, coworkers, and student leadership team for listening to me talk ad nauseam about speed bumps and the rhetorical meaning of the green “yogurt” sign at our local



Figure 4.1

Fred Meyer. Thank you to my honors cohort— six students strong!— whose presence and perseverance always encouraged me to continue. Lastly, thank you to Dr. Clint Bryan and Dr. Will Thompson for their leadership of the NU Honors Program during my tenure as a student here.

When writing this thesis, many people would ask how I came up with the topic and why I was (and remain) so passionate about grocery store marketing and its relationship to disordered eating. I always thought that the answer was obvious, but instead it has led me to a number of invaluable conversations with peers that have strengthened relationships and expanded comfort zones in wonderful ways. As a former employee of two different grocery stores, working first in the in-store coffee shop and next in the store’s bakery department, I often encountered guests who would speak in derogatory or negative terms about the bakery or coffee products. I could not count the number of times a guest asked me how I stayed thin around so many baked goods,

or joked about how they needed to leave the department as soon as possible so they didn't cave into their impulses and buy a dessert. At the same time, I was working through mental issues with my own worth and my body image, and I fell into binge-purge habits that were separate from (but fueled by) my work experiences and access to food.

I have always been fascinated by marketing and consumer psychology, and doing research into proactive ways to change my mental processes surrounding food was instrumental in my recovery from disordered eating. I wrote this thesis as an attempt to further educate myself on the topic, and bring awareness and knowledge to any interested parties who would like to retrain their habits and minds so their grocery shopping experience– and experience with food in general– can be, if possible, a little less guarded.