

Types and Characteristics of Fish and Seafood Provisioning Scripts Used by Rural Midlife Adults

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To examine rural New York State consumers' cognitive scripts for fish and seafood provisioning.

Design: A cross-sectional design with in-depth, semistructured interviews.

Setting: Three rural New York State counties.

Participants: Adults ($n = 31$) with diverse fish-related experiences were purposefully recruited.

Phenomenon of Interest: Scripts describing fish and seafood acquisition, preparation, and eating out.

Analysis: Interview transcripts were coded for emergent themes using Atlas.ti. Diagrams of scripts for each participant were constructed.

Results: Five types of acquisition scripts included quality-oriented, price-oriented, routine, special occasion, and fresh catch. Frequently used preparation scripts included everyday cooking, fast meal, entertaining, and grilling. Scripts for eating out included fish as first choice, Friday outing, convenient meals, special event, and travel meals. Personal values and resources influenced script development. Individuals drew on a repertoire of scripts based on their goals and resources at that time and in that place. Script characteristics of scope, flexibility, and complexity varied widely.

Conclusions and Implications: Scripts incorporated goals, values, and resources into routine food behaviors. Understanding the characteristics of scripts provided insights about fish provisioning and opportunities to reduce the gap between current intake and dietary guidelines in this rural setting.

Key Words: fish, midlife, script, cooking, rural, Dietary Guidelines for Americans, restaurant (*J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2017;49:535-544.)

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INTRODUCTION

The US Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend eating ≥ 8 oz of fish and seafood per week because they are a rich source of nutrients, notably the fatty acids eicosapentaenoic acid and docosahexaenoic acid.¹ Sufficient eicosapentaenoic acid and docosahexaenoic acid intake are protective against a variety of maladies, including cardiovascular disease, mild cognitive impairment, and some psychiatric illnesses.²⁻⁵ Yet less than one quarter of adults in the US met the minimum recommendation of 8 oz/wk.⁶ The gap between intake and recommendations suggests a need for research and intervention. Constructivist psychology offers concepts for under-

standing ideas and behaviors related to routine choices. This analysis examined how scripts, sets of procedural steps,⁷ are used as cognitive tools in provisioning fish in rural areas.

In rural food environments, limited commercial infrastructure may exist alongside a plethora of natural resources. Rural areas have higher food prices, fewer healthy food options, and lower access to full-service supermarkets.⁸⁻¹¹ However, some rural adults engage in activities that may provide their own food, including gardening, raising livestock for home consumption, hunting, and fishing.^{12,13} These conditions suggest that rural areas are unique settings for fish and seafood provisioning (which includes acquisition, preparation, and eating out).

Midlife adults are positioned to benefit from health preventive behaviors, such as eating fish, that are associated with better cognitive and physical health outcomes. Midlife adults reported increasing their effort dedicated to health-related behaviors (both managing chronic conditions and preventative behaviors).¹⁴ Furthermore, midlife adults often experience family, career, and health-related changes such as retirement or altered family roles¹⁴ that offer opportunities for dietary changes. In the US, the fish consumption of groups who may be at high risk from seafood contaminants were examined, such as anglers¹⁵ and pregnant women,¹⁶ and dietary intake data sets.⁶ The fish consumption and provisioning of midlife adults has not been studied in detail although they may be positioned to benefit and take action using cognitive skills, including adaptive strategies and planning skills.¹⁴

Individual cognitive processes involved in seafood provisioning were neglected in scientific investigations in the US, although they were studied in Europe and Australia.¹⁷⁻¹⁹ Cognitive processes develop within the context of a broader

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culture, so some components may be universal whereas others may be culturally specific. Outside the US, research found that seafood consumption was negatively affected by a lack of selection and preparation knowledge,^{18,20,21} household and personal taste preferences,^{18,21} food safety concerns,¹⁵ and taste or texture dislikes.^{20,21} Convenience, habit, store availability, health concerns, and pleasure were reported to be associated with fish provisioning in other nations.¹⁷ One approach to organizing cognitive factors used the concept of scripts.

A script describes knowledge as a set of ordered or unordered procedural steps that provides predictability and simplifies decision making.⁷ Frequently practiced scripts may become automatic.⁷ Scripts are primed (initiated) when the context suggests the script is appropriate. Sets of scripts create a script repertoire from which an individual accesses the desired script when it is needed. Script and script repertoires have different types of characteristics, including scope, flexibility, and complexity. Scope describes the length, or the number of steps from beginning to end, in an individual script.²² Scripts with more steps have a broader scope. Flexibility describes the alternate options, or the variations available within a repertoire of scripts.²² A script repertoire with many initial options or with individual scripts that branch into multiple options is more flexible. Complexity describes script repertoires with paths between individual scripts that allow transfer from 1 script to another. In other words, more complex script repertoires have many connections between individual scripts and steps that are used in different scripts.

The purposes of this study were first, to examine the fish and seafood provisioning scripts held by rural midlife adults; second, to identify the values leading to the construction of fish and seafood provisioning scripts; and third, to develop an understanding of how script scope, flexibility, and complexity relate to fish and seafood choice.

METHODS

Setting

The researchers selected 3 rural New York State counties for recruitment. Each county had a small county seat

(capitol) plus a number of small towns and hamlets. Retail food outlets included at least 1 supermarket or discount retail store with a grocery department (often called big-box stores or hypermarkets) as well as discount chain stores that sold nonperishable food. Public fishing was readily accessible (with a purchased fishing license) in the 3 counties from lakes, streams, and ponds.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited between July, 2014 and March, 2015, using ads and flyers. Eligibility criteria included being aged 50–70 years, having eaten fish or seafood in the past year, preparing $\geq 50\%$ of meals eaten at home, and having no severe illness preventing food consumption or consent (ie, dependence on tube feeding, dementia). Purposeful sampling was used to seek participants with varied fish-related experiences (consumption frequency, preparation frequency, experience fishing, and degree of preference). A total of 31 participants were recruited, which was congruent with most in-depth interview study sample sizes.²³ Upon reviewing the interview transcripts and field notes, the authors judged that sufficient data saturation²⁴ in study topics appeared to have been met, and ended recruitment.

Study Design and Data Collection

A cross-sectional design was used. Each participant completed a brief form to collect personal characteristics before engaging in an in-depth interview. One interviewer conducted all interviews and took brief field notes afterward. The interviews followed a semistructured interview guide using questions related to fish procurement (locations, preferences, barriers, and supports for different items), preparation (what, when, how, and why different items were prepared), and topics known to influence food choice (cooking experiences, cultural background, upbringing, and more). Most interviews lasted about 40 minutes and included member checks.²³ All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Participants provided written informed consent and received a small honorarium. The Cornell University Institu-

tional Review Board approved the research protocol.

Analysis

Analysis was guided by a grounded theory approach that identified themes and processes.²⁴ The research team discussed the field notes and transcripts to identify emergent themes and processes as data were collected. A codebook was developed using a focus on processes to label the concepts identified in the data. Transcripts were iteratively coded in Atlas.ti 7.1 software (Scientific Software Development GmbH, Berlin, Germany) using a constant comparative approach, with each transcript reviewed for concepts that also emerged in later transcripts.²⁴ Throughout the analytical process, relationships between the concepts and themes were discussed by the research team and developed.^{24,25} Emergent concepts and themes were then compared with existing script theory. Acquisition, preparation, and eating out script diagrams were prepared, discussed, revised, and compared. The emergent types of scripts were labeled. Script characteristics of scope, flexibility, and complexity were also examined. Peer debriefings and an audit trail were used to enhance credibility.^{24,25}

RESULTS

The [Table](#) reports participant characteristics. The sample was predominantly white; all had a high school education or higher (8 had a graduate or professional degree) and most reported being financially “comfortable with extras” (20 of 31 participants). Acquisition, preparation, and eating out emerged as the most widely considered stages of food provisioning in these data. Analysis revealed several fish and seafood script types for acquisition, preparation, and eating out, with varying script characteristics of scope, flexibility, and complexity. These are presented subsequently.

Acquisition

Four major acquisition script types emerged in the analysis: quality-oriented, price-oriented, routine, and special occasion. [Figure 1](#) illustrates each major script type. One other script type,

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