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## Family mealtimes: Topics associated with the adolescent's academic standing and self-esteem

Deborah Ann Vandenboom

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FAMILY MEALTIMES: TOPICS ASSOCIATED WITH THE ADOLESCENT'S  
ACADEMIC STANDING AND SELF-ESTEEM

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Deborah Ann Vandenboom

June 2002

FAMILY MEALTIMES: TOPICS ASSOCIATED WITH THE ADOLESCENT'S  
ACADEMIC STANDING AND SELF-ESTEEM

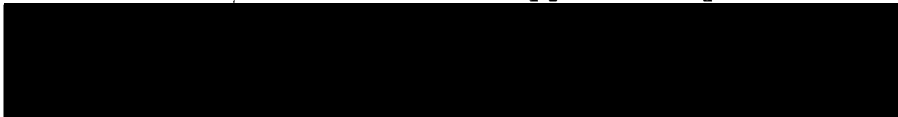
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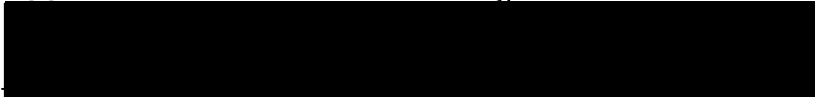
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by  
Deborah Ann Vandenboom  
June 2002

Approved by:

  
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5-21-02  
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## ABSTRACT

A total of 327 suburban adolescents ranging in age from 13 - 18 years participated in this study demonstrating a positive relationship between self-esteem and grade point averages with the number of mealtimes adolescents have with their parents in a week's time. In addition, adolescents ranked the topics they would like to discuss and this information was compared with what is presently being discussed at mealtimes. This study demonstrated that adolescents prefer to discuss school, friends, and family members. In addition, adolescents ranked feelings 6th as a topic they would like to be discussing, yet this top ranked 16th as a topic adolescents are actually discussing during family mealtimes. Overall, it appears that the family mealtime ritual is positively correlated with self-esteem and academic success and social workers can use this as a worthwhile intervention or as a preventative measure.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a great privilege to acknowledge those individuals who have encouraged and influenced me along this journey. Academically, I would like to thank Dr. Rosemary McCaslin for going the extra mile in working with the Institutional Review Board on my behalf; Dr. Ray Liles who encouraged me to think outside the box and to discover the unknown variable and supervised this project; and Dr. Janet Chung for her insight.

This project would not have been possible without the support of Dr. Infusino, Deputy Superintendent, Chino Valley Unified School District and the cooperation of Ms. Rosenthal at Chino High School, Ms. Wendell at Magnolia Junior High School, and all the students and parents who consented to participate in this project.

In addition, Laura Baldonado deserves a special thank you for editing this project and for always being there for me. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, family and friends for all the wonderful support they have shown me during these last couple of years (and then some).

DEDICATION

To my daughter, Ashley Colwell

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Problem Statement .....	1
Policy Context .....	3
Practice Context .....	5
Purpose of the Study .....	7
Significance of the Project for Social Work .....	8
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
Introduction .....	10
Types of Families .....	10
Family Rituals and Mealtimes .....	12
Communication .....	15
Adolescent's Self-Esteem And Conduct Disorders .....	17
Academic Achievement .....	19
Human Behavior in the Social Environment - Theories Guiding Conceptualization .....	20
Summary .....	24
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	
Introduction .....	25
Study Design .....	25
Sampling .....	26
Data Collection and Instruments .....	26
Procedures .....	28

Protection of Human Subjects .....	29
Data Analysis .....	30
Summary .....	30
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	
Introduction .....	32
Presentation of the Findings .....	32
Subjects .....	32
Self-Esteem Scale .....	33
Family Mealtimes .....	34
Topics Discussed .....	36
Qualitative Results .....	37
Summary .....	40
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	
Introduction .....	42
Discussion .....	42
Limitations .....	44
Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research .....	46
Conclusions .....	48
APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE .....	51
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENTS .....	57
APPENDIX C: DEBRIEFING STATEMENTS .....	62
APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHICS .....	66
APPENDIX E: QUALITATIVE RESPONSES .....	68
REFERENCES .....	80



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The content of Chapter One presents an overview of the project. The problem statement, policy, and practice context are discussed followed by the purpose of the study and context of the problem. Finally, the significance of the project for social work is presented.

#### Problem Statement

Families lose the ability to communicate with one another in today's hurried lifestyle with members off to various sports practices, activities, or varied schedules leaving less time for the family to spend together as a unit (Neumark-Sztainer, Sotry, Perry, & Casey, 1999). While some of these activities can be beneficial to a child's development, we must question whether or not families lose valuable connections or cohesiveness when families sacrifice rituals such as the family meal in favor of these various activities. In addition, the structure of families has changed over the past decades, with two parent working families and single parent families the norm, resulting in many families stretched between the demands of the work place (often requiring 10-12 hour work shifts) and the demands of the family.

Wright-Edelman (1993) suggests that children at risk are a national problem and the statistics she cites are phenomenal considering these events occur every day.

Currently in the United States:

- One child drops out of school every 16 seconds
- Children run away from home every 26 seconds
- A teenager has a baby every 67 seconds
- A child is arrested for drug related offenses every 7 minutes
- A child is arrested and charged with drunken driving every 30 minutes

These facts led Wright-Edelman (1993) to conclude that Americans must invest in their children.

These statistics demonstrate the fallout from this chaotic structure and indicate what today's adolescents and children are dealing with. Left unaddressed these problems result in children who are at an increasing risk for conduct disorders, depression, school dropouts, early parenting, and substance abuse (APA Monitor, 1997; Dupper, 1993; Frey, Hirschstein, & Guzzo, 2000).

One way to invest in our children is the family meal. This daily ritual is a biological necessity that brings the family together on a regular basis to communicate problems, desires, and daily living. However, currently in

America less than one-third of families surveyed in 1995 ate dinner together (Doherty, 1997). Bowden (APA Monitor, 1997) concludes that teens that had at least five meals a week with adults were better adjusted compared to teens that had just three meals a week with adults.

The current literature demonstrates a correlation between the family meal, parenting styles, and how it affects the adolescent; however, there is not enough information describing what goes on during the family meal that creates the positive correlation between the family meal and adolescents' self-esteem or academic standing. Therefore, a study is needed to examine what topics are discussed during the family meal and find out what topics are important from the adolescent's perspective. From this information we can also study the value adolescents place on this ritual and see if family mealtimes are correlated to self-esteem and academic standing. This information can then be used in the therapeutic setting as well as giving parents a tool to enhance their family functioning.

#### Policy Context

Many families today are either two parent working families or single parent families. With the priority shifting from the family to the work place, many people struggle with 10-12 hour work shifts leaving little time

to spend with their families. The financial necessity of trying to make ends meet may result in less time left for having family meals together.

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (2001) has recognized the importance of the family meal and launched an annual event titled, "Family Day - a Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children" in an effort to a) acknowledge the significance of the family meal b) emphasize the importance of parental involvement and c) encourage all Americans to dine as a family on a regular basis. Currently 33 states have proclaimed September 24th Family Day (National Center on Addiction, 1996). As a nation we must look at the long term benefits a connected family has to offer society and begin to look at policies that can encourage family rituals in order to avoid the disturbing statistics that Wright-Edelman addresses.

In addition, Hirsch, Barton, and DuBois (2000) suggest that communities may have to organize places for youth to gather to create a home-like setting if this need is not available for them at home. This need was recognized back in 1978 by the Task Panel on Community Support Systems of the President's Commission whose conclusion was that community mental health services

should work to strengthen natural networks, i.e. the family (Keltner, Keltner, & Farren, 1990).

### Practice Context

Currently social workers and family therapists intervene on a regular basis to help families diffuse dysfunctional cycles and patterns. Unfortunately many families enter therapy already in a state of crisis. Using family systems theory that promotes looking at all members in the family, not just the identified patient, interventions such as the family meal can reap many rewards for both the family in crisis as well as the family seeking early prevention.

For instance, social workers need to look at communication patterns (or lack of) and look at how often the family sits down together and has a meal. This can help the social worker determine not only how often members of the family communicate, but determine whether a particular family is an intentional, regulated, closed, or open family.

While social workers look at the overall family system and family dynamics they must also be cognizant of the treatment time constraints that managed care will pay for as today many Health Management Organizations (HMO's) limit mental health visits to 12 hourly visits. Not only

does managed care limit the amount of treatment they will pay a health care provider, managed care also places constraints regarding the types of presenting problems they will pay for. For a family in crisis this means that treatment will be provided only if a set criterion or diagnosis is met such as depression or bipolar disorder. As social workers and therapists struggle with the recommended 12-week treatment timeframe, utilizing the family ritual or mealtime is an intervention that can be suggested in the first session and can continue to be measured not only by the number of meals a family has together but the topics discussed.

Furthermore, school social workers are usually the first to see acting out behaviors in children and can offer the first opportunity for intervention. The school social worker also has a better opportunity to provide information to a mass audience of parents via the school newsletter that can suggest preventative ideas to parents as well as offer parenting classes. Prevention is less time consuming and less expensive compared to intervention.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate family mealtime dynamics from the adolescent's perspective and explore what topics are discussed compared to what topics they would like to discuss, and to examine the association among mealtimes and the adolescent's academic status and self-esteem.

If a well-adjusted adolescent is more likely to achieve academic success and interact in socially appropriate ways by having meals with their parents on a regular basis then we as a society need to promote this concept nationwide. Minuchin (1993) concludes that using the family as a resource is economically sound, efficient, and more expedient, yet overlooked.

The findings of this study will hopefully validate other studies that demonstrate using the family mealtime as the focus of a positive intervention to build communication and help the adolescent deal with the multitude of changes during this vulnerable time. However, while the literature demonstrates a correlation between the family mealtime and the adolescent's academic achievement, it does not reveal what families are or are not discussing at family mealtimes. Nor does the current literature reveal what dynamics are occurring during the

family mealtime that makes this ritual appealing to some adolescents.

In order to determine what topics are discussed during the family mealtime and are of importance to the adolescent, a survey administered to adolescents, ages 13 - 18 years of age was proposed. Published measures were used to assess self-esteem and family routines, and open-ended questions measured the topics discussed.

#### Significance of the Project for Social Work

The significance of the project for social work is to broaden our understanding of family mealtimes and rituals. Findings from this study will help social workers to advise and/or recommend to families that eating meals together or creating rituals that have specific meaning to the individual family will result in positive benefits for the adolescent and family in general. Being able to advise families that a study has demonstrated that adolescents prefer to discuss some topics over others could be more powerful and more likely to result in improved communication.

In addition, this study will help parents to have a better understanding regarding the importance of their role in relationship to communication skills with their



adolescents. Also, parents may have to examine the trade-off of busy lifestyles today, compared to long-term deficits of their children and evaluate what type of family they are or want to become. While the open family that mirrors chaos may be functional today parents may need to consider whether or not their children will be losing either self-esteem or academic success, by not having the family mealtime as a daily ritual.

This study hypothesized that a positive correlation exists between the number of family mealtimes the adolescent has with his/her parents and the adolescent's academic success and self-esteem. In addition, this study examined the topics being discussed during the family mealtime and measured whether or not the topics discussed ranked similarly to the topics adolescents would like to be discussing.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Chapter Two consists of a discussion of the relevant literature. Specifically, the types of families that appear to be incorporating family rituals, a definition of family rituals and mealtimes, communication patterns, and the adolescent's self-esteem, academic achievement along with various conduct disorders will be discussed.

#### Types of Families

Doherty (1997) defines five types of families seen in the last 100 years. The institutional family is defined as the traditional family based on familial and community ties along with economics, and the father is the authority figure. The goal of family life was stability and security. The psychological family replaced this family structure in the 1920s with the goal on personal achievement and happiness. The two-parent family was the norm and close emotional ties were the focus along with good communication and partnership with regards to child rearing in a nurturing environment. Males in the psychological family dominated the work place, while women were experts in the home environment (Doherty, 1997).

The pluralistic family replaced the psychological family in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. A wide variety of family configurations evolved demonstrating flexibility, yet the psychological family emphasis on personal happiness remained constant (Doherty, 1997). The intentional family promotes creating a doable plan for maintaining and building existing family ties. The intentional family creates rituals that they can carry out the best way possible. Doherty suggests that by becoming an intentional family the nuclear system will avoid becoming an entropic family where the nuclear system will slowly lose its identity and unity over time (Doherty, 1997). Doherty suggests that families have evolved over the last century, yet one should look at these definitions on a continuum as today a therapist could still come in contact with a family such as the institutional family.

Reitz and Watson (1992) discuss the regulation of families along a continuum. A closed system is highly predictable with the expectations of family members very specific, leaving no room for spontaneity. The closed family will have a designated time for family meals and all members will be expected to be present. On the other end of the continuum is the open family that is extremely chaotic with no one really knowing where anyone is. The

healthier balance lies in the middle where a family has expectations, yet can be flexible to the developmental needs of the family members. The open regulated family implements the stability of the closed family and the spontaneity of the open family (Reitz & Watson, 1992).

Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994) discuss four family types derived from McLeod and Chaffee's 1972 research. The pluralistic family is high on conversation, yet low on conformity, while the protective family is low on conversation, and high on conformity. The consensual family is high on both ends of the continuum, while the Laissez-Faire family is low on both ends of the continuum.

#### Family Rituals and Mealtimes

Wolin and Bennett (1984) define the family ritual as symbolic communication that family members experience positively and consistently over time. Through rituals family members solidify an individual identity that develops from the family identity. The family ritual educates and regulates members' behaviors in addition to providing structure.

According to Wolin and Bennett (1984), there are three types of family rituals. Family celebrations include religious and secular holidays, rites of passage, and are

very organized in addition to being standard across many types of families. Family traditions include vacations, birthdays, family reunions, and are more distinctive to each individual family. Daily rituals include interactions that are patterned, routine, frequently enacted and changeable over time like the family mealtime (Baxter & Clark, 1996; Fiese & Hooker 1993; Schuck & Bucy, 1997; Wolin & Bennett, 1984).

Fiese and Hooker (1993) state that family rituals are powerful organizers of social behavior within the nuclear family system, and serve as a protective function for the child when coping with stressful conditions such as parental alcohol abuse. They found that children coming from alcoholic homes were less likely to develop alcoholism if a family ritual was practiced on an ongoing routine.

Shuck and Bucy (1997) demonstrated that siblings of mentally retarded children were associated with higher levels of problem behavior if they experienced fewer rituals in the home setting.

Mackey and Greif (1994) suggest when social workers work with parents in the school setting regular family mealtimes should be promoted. They also extend this ritual to include rules establishing who makes the dinner, and

who sets and clears the table. Taking this concept one step further children could also be involved in deciding the menu and help with the shopping. Encouraging children to be involved with the day-to-day decisions can eliminate some of the stress and strain on parents.

One of the simplest family rituals is the daily ritual that Wolin and Bennett (1984) note, i.e. the family meal. Mealtimes are a biological necessity yet as Doherty (1997) notes the family mealtime has become a casualty of sport practices, music lessons, work burdens, and the temptation of a favorite television program.

Bowden (APA Monitor, 1997) concludes that adolescents who eat five meals or more with an adult per week are more likely to be well adjusted. Bowden and Zeisz studied 527 rural adolescents who were measured for substance use or abuse, depression or hopefulness, academic motivation and peer relationships. By examining the number of mealtimes these adolescents spent with adults, researchers were able to predict the 176 adjusted youths from the 351 non-adjusted youths (APA Monitor, 1997). These figures are similar to Galinsky's findings that suggest one-third of American parents with a child between the ages of 13 and 18 have a meal with their child four times a week or less (Galinsky, 1999).

Therefore, family rituals provide the family with a feeling of stability, provide the family with an identity, promote family culture, and is a way for the family to socialize (Baxter & Clark, 1996; Fiese & Hooker, 1993; Mackey & Greif, 1994; Shuck & Bucy, 1997; Wolin & Bennett, 1984).

#### Communication

Communication during the family mealtime is difficult to operationalize because different people have very different subjective ideas defining communication. For some families, communication can be idle conversation, for others it can be a detailed discussion of the world's current events. Or as Doherty (1997) notes, unfortunately, the family mealtime can lead to arguments especially when this time is used for disciplinary measures. Therefore, promoting conversation by having members relate something about their day and having other members ask a question, can facilitate good communication and listening skills while promoting empathy versus having family members dread mealtimes due to conflict and disciplinary issues.

Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994) studied 169 families by utilizing the Relational Dimensions Inventory and the Revised Family Communication Patterns instrument. They

concluded that families do share a schema regarding communication and that children who share the same communication schemata with their parents report the same level of desires for traditionalism, sharing, and conflict avoidance in their future relationships.

Likewise, Baxter and Clark (1996) questioned 250 university students using the Revised Family Communication Patterns instrument and the Family Ritual Questionnaire for both Asian American and Euro-American populations. They concluded that family rituals were positively correlated with communication patterns. They also suggest that cohesive families are more likely to engage in high conversation, enjoy spending time with one another, and children are encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings.

However, Kremar (1996) argues that it is the perception of the parent and child that differ regarding communication that can lead to conflict. Parents tend to view communication as information sharing; conversely children see this openness as a parent not offering many commands. This perception difference mirrors Ritchie's (1990) conclusion that adolescents are more sensitive compared to their parents concerning supportive communication.



## Adolescent's Self-Esteem and Conduct Disorders

Nielsen and Metha (1994) define self-esteem as a multidimensional and evaluative dimension of how one views oneself. They also note that most researchers have the same opinion that there is a positive correlation between parental affection and support and the adolescent's self-esteem. Lackovic-Grgin and Dekovic (1990) concur that self-esteem is related to the parental relationship, but includes friend and teacher relationships. In addition, for both boys and girls, the mother's opinion was significantly correlated with self-esteem; yet friend's opinions also had a significant impact on self-esteem during adolescence.

Noack, Kerr, and Olah (1999) posit that the psychosocial bond that unites parents and adolescents is beneficial when parents are supportive in relationship to an adolescent's growing sense of autonomy.

Gauze, Bukowski, Aquan-Assee, and Sippola (1996) conclude that feelings of adequacy and well-being are associated with family and peer relationship experiences. They also suggest that the "ideal family" is associated with satisfactory levels of adjustment (Gauze et al., 1996, p. 2213).

Likewise, Filozof and Albertin (1998) suggest that an adolescent's self-esteem can be improved if parents contribute in the enrichment efforts. In addition, they also suggest an improvement in the academic setting is essential to offset low self-esteem that is related to conduct disorders.

Blake and Slate (1993) concur that self-esteem is related to perceptions of acceptance from significant others. When adolescents do not have this perception of being accepted they are more likely to be at risk for depression, suicide, loneliness, and academic failure which is correlated to dropping out of school. Blake and Slate (1993) conclude that adolescent self-esteem levels are significantly related to the quality of parental communication as professed by the adolescent.

With regards to conduct disorders, Mackey and Greif (1994) state that stressful situations present themselves daily in the educational system with an increase in school related violence. Divorce and distressed neighborhoods all correlate to the difficulty some children have with learning. For some children this will manifest in acting out behaviors, loss of self-concept, affect their sense of safety, and limit their concentration abilities.

Using a systems-behavioral approach when working with status offending delinquents, Stern and Reid (1999) discovered a positive correlation between changes in family interactions and outcome as measured by recidivism rates. Stern and Reid concluded that adolescent problem behavior could be changed in conjunction with parenting improvements.

Keltner, Keltner, and Farren (1990) state that conduct disorders are the largest mental health problem among adolescents. However, family routines offset this problem by enabling the individual to cope with psychosocial stressors. Adolescent girls were less likely to run away from home if they frequently ate dinner with their family compared to girls who did not eat meals on a regular basis with their family.

#### Academic Achievement

With regards to academic achievement or success Snodgrass (1991) concludes that parents are instrumental in the learning process and their participation is positively correlated to children's overall development. Thus, the home environment is significantly related to a child's academic success throughout the school years. Unfortunately, while research demonstrates that family

involvement is important to the positive development of adolescents', educators report that parents neglect their parental responsibility as their child matures into adolescence (Snodgrass, 1991).

Morse, et al (2001) posits that parents are detached and drop out versus the students. As schools are being held accountable for state testing, educators feel that parents should be held accountable also. Morse, et al (2001) discuss Joyce Epstein's suggestion that it is not the family's educational background that can predict a child's academic success, but rather the parental involvement in a child's education.

Parental involvement can include participation in the local Parent Teacher Association (PTA), working in the child's classroom, and simply asking how your child's day was at school. This question and many others can be asked during the family mealtime ritual.

#### Human Behavior in the Social Environment - Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Doherty discusses the types of families and how they have evolved over time. Likewise, using social theory one can see how family rituals, the meaning and reasoning behind them, have evolved over time as well.

Social theory looks at the structure of the family and the concurrent zeitgeist to identify the changes and needs of the family ritual. For instance, before the industrialization of modern times, family rituals were defined by the economic ties and the interdependence that was necessary for the individual and family structure to survive (Cheal, 1988). However, as society became industrialized the family ritual changed from economic need to social engagement enabling members to identify with a group and express their feelings of attachment (Cheal, 1988).

Therefore, Cheal suggested that the family ritual is something learned from birth with participation expressing the individual's identity within the family unit. Yet as an individual matures, participation can be voluntary and a choice made whether or not the family ritual will be continued in further generations. Either way the family ritual is learned or created in a social context.

In addition, Cheal (1988) discusses family rituals based on the structural-functional theory, the constructionist theory, and the mobilization theory. The family ritual according to structural-functional theory stabilizes the family during periods of rapid change and

is also a way for the family to manage tension or reduce strain in susceptible relationships.

For example, the family that comes together in a state of crisis is serving a function for the good of the family. One can see this in the family that perhaps does not communicate with each other, then an adolescent tries to commit suicide or gets in trouble with the law, and the family goes to counseling or seeks help to maintain homeostasis. Structural-functional theory views the family ritual as a way of dealing with tension, unfortunately this view posits that there must be a crisis to be managed in order for the family to work together.

Constructionist theory suggests that ritual symbols are employed to justify established relationships. Everyday common practices are followed and can be taken for granted with little thought. Family rituals according to the constructionist theory are continually developing, or being reconstructed (Cheal, 1988).

Using this view suggests a family going through the motions without any feeling attached to the gesture. For example, the family that gets together for a specific holiday because they've always done things this way, but have forgotten the true meaning behind the event. Cheal (1988) also suggests that the constructionist theory looks

at the ritual of gift giving, i.e. giving a gift because one "should" not because one "wants" to. Thus, after time the ritual becomes hollow and taken for granted.

Mobilization theory suggests that family rituals occur in large get togethers. How members are recruited is the emphasis of mobilization theory. Therefore the repetitive interactions encourage networking that creates the authenticity of the larger structures. Also the idea of social relationships being emotional versus cognitive is a principal force behind this theory. It is the emotional identification that links the family members together (Cheal, 1988).

For example, the family reunion gives families an opportunity to reconnect and bond with extended family members. It's a time for children to know their roots and to identify with a group. While some families often experience a reunion when a crisis happens, i.e. death, the family according to mobilization theory gets together not to manage tension, but rather for a need to connect on a regular basis.

Social cognitive theory looks at how socioenvironmental factors affect behaviors (Neumark-Sztainer, et al 2000). This interrelationship between the individual, thoughts, and social factors can

be applied to the family ritual because each variable can influence behavior, determine whether a member participates in the ritual, and guides their perception of the ritual.

For example, individual members of the same family may have different perceptions of the same ritual that influences their decision to participate or not participate in the ritual. One sibling may thoroughly enjoy going to Grandma's house on Christmas, an older sibling who perhaps by nature is less social may not mirror the same thoughts or feelings. These same feelings could continue as years pass.

#### Summary

The literature important to the project was presented in Chapter Two. The types of families are significant because this offers insight to the social worker as to whether or not a family is likely to incorporate family rituals. Family rituals are directly correlated to communication and the adolescent's self-esteem; conduct disorders, and academic standing. The gap in the literature is what topics are discussed during the family mealtime that adolescents perceive as important.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

Chapter Three documents the steps used in developing the project. Specifically, the study design, procedures, sampling, data collection and instruments utilized will be discussed.

#### Study Design

This research employed a questionnaire survey design utilizing self-administered questionnaires. Data was collected at two Chino Valley Unified School District (CVUSD) schools by the researcher. Questionnaires were administered to 327 adolescents attending either Magnolia Junior High School or Chino High School that had both parental and participant consent forms completed. In addition, this study was in compliance with section 51513 of the California Education Code. Study participants were recruited from either the 8th grade science classes or the high school family education classes and students were offered a homework pass for participating. However, participation was voluntary and was not a reflection of the student's grade in either of these classes.

### Sampling

The study sample consisted of approximately 600-800 adolescents ranging in age from 13 to 18 years. Chino Valley Unified School District was asked to participate in this study because this district has a wide variance in ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Magnolia Junior High School and Chino High School both agreed to participate in this study.

### Data Collection and Instruments

Data was collected by means of a self-administered questionnaire that took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The researcher and the teachers at Magnolia Junior High School high school school and Chino High School administered the questionnaire. Information collected included the adolescent's demographics, GPA, self-esteem, family routines, and the topics discussed during family mealtimes.

Independent variables included living arrangements (whom the adolescent resides with), grade point average (GPA), and the number of mealtimes the adolescent eats with his/her parents in a week's time. Dependent variables included the adolescent's self-esteem and GPA.

a. Self-Esteem

Self-esteem was measured utilizing the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) created by Rosenberg.

This is a 10-item Guttman scale originally designed in 1962 to measure the self-esteem of high school students. This scale has one dimension and was originally conducted on 5000 students representing various ethnicities and has since been administered to college students and adults. The internal reliability of the RSE is .92 with test-retest reliability correlations of .85 and .88. This indicates that the RSE has both internal consistency and stability.

Research has demonstrated that the RSE also has concurrent, known-groups, predictive, as well as construct validity in correlation to the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (Corcoran & Fischer, 1987).

b. Family Mealtimes

Family mealtimes were assessed using a revised Project EAT survey designed by Newmark-Sztainer, Story, Ackard, Moe, and Perry (2000). This survey includes 11 items utilizing a Likert-type 4 point scale, and two questions asking how many

times did the family eat together and if the parent(s) were present. The original study population included 5000 adolescents from Minnesota. Test-retest reliability values range from 0.54 to 0.74. Validity values are not available.

c. Topics discussed during family mealtimes

Closed-ended and open-ended questions covered the topics discussed during family mealtimes and the adolescent's perception regarding the importance of these topics (see Appendix A). The purpose of these questions was to discover what families talk about during family mealtimes.

### Procedures

The researcher contacted Dr. Infusino, Deputy Superintendent at the Chino Valley Unified School District in August requesting permission to survey adolescents at Magnolia Junior High School and Chino High School. Permission was granted after Dr. Infusino read the initial project proposal.

The next step involved receiving permission from principals and the involved teachers at both sites. Upon receiving approval from Magnolia Junior High School and

Chino High School principals and teachers, a draft of the questionnaire and human subjects form was submitted to Dr. Infusino and the teachers at both schools. Written approval of the project was obtained on November 19, 2001.

Finally, the project was introduced to students at both sites requesting that parental consent and individual consent forms be signed before questionnaires were administered. The project was introduced to coincide with the science projects junior high school students were currently involved in. Thus, the students had an opportunity to participate in a study using the scientific method that they were currently learning. For high school students, the family mealtime would be studied later in the year.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

The confidentiality and anonymity of the study participants was a primary concern of this researcher. For sake of protecting the participants' anonymity and inputting the data, a numbering system was utilized. None of the participants' names were used and data was kept in a locked file cabinet that only the researcher had access to. Teachers had an attendance list to check off the return of both consents and hand out the questionnaire.

Consents and questionnaires were kept separate from each other and shredded upon completion of data entry.

Study participants and their parents were asked to sign informed consents before they participated in the study and were told they could stop at any time during the study (See Appendix B). The participants were given explanation statements with the names of the researcher and the advisor along with a phone number to contact the researcher if they had any questions regarding the study. In addition, the explanation statement advised students to visit their school counselor if any part of this questionnaire was upsetting to them (see Appendix C).

#### Data Analysis

Data analysis was descriptive and explanatory. Descriptive analysis included univariate statistics such as frequency distribution, measures of central tendency such as mean, median, mode, and measures of dispersion. Bivariate statistics such as Pearson's correlation coefficients were utilized to evaluate the association between two variables, along with one-way ANOVA's.

#### Summary

The study examined the relationship between the number of family mealtimes and the adolescent's GPA and

self-esteem. This was evaluated by employing the RSE and revised questions from the Project EAT survey along with closed and open-ended qualitative questions concerning the topics discussed. By using a fairly large population, 327 adolescents in a diversified socio-economic and ethnic background, these results can be generalized to the greater adolescent population.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

Included in Chapter Four is a presentation of the results, both the qualitative and quantitative data, along with demographic information. The Chapter concludes with a summary.

#### Presentation of the Findings

##### Subjects

Three hundred and twenty seven junior high school and high school students were recruited from an eighth grade junior high school school science class and a high school family education class in Chino, California. The students received a homework pass for participating in the project. A homework pass is an opportunity for the student to present the homework pass to the teacher in lieu of turning in one homework assignment, and can be used at the student's discretion. The homework pass has no monetary value.

The subjects ranged in age from 13 to 18 years (mean = 15.22). The sample included 206 females and 116 males. Five individuals declined to state their gender. The sample was 42.5% Hispanic, 34.7% Caucasian, 10.3%



Biracial, 5.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3.1% African American, 3.1% other, and 0.3% Native American.

With regards to the adolescents' living arrangements, 67.5% live with both biological parents, 12.7% live with their mother, 9.3% live in a stepparent family, 6.2% share time with both their parents, 2.2% live with their father, 1.5% live with their grandparents, and 0.6% stated an other arrangement.

The majority of the participants were 8th graders (53.1%), followed by 10th graders (17.0%), 9th graders (16.0%), 11th graders (8.0%), and 12th graders (5.9%). The grade point averages (GPA) ranged from 1.30 to 4.80 (mean 3.10).

#### Self-Esteem Scale

The participants ranged from 10 - 40 on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale with a 10 strongly feeling very good about oneself and a 40 feeling very poorly about oneself (see Appendix E; Table 1). The majority (56.2%) scored between 10-19, followed by 38.4% who scored between 20-29, and 5.4% who scored between 30-40.

The majority (82%) of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement asking if they are satisfied with themselves; while 40.3% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "At times I think I

am no good at all." Yet 83.1% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they have a number of good qualities and this is congruent with the 83.7% who strongly agreed or agreed that they can do things as well as most other people.

Only 24% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they do not have much to be proud of while 35.1% feel that they are useless at times. The majority of the respondents (82.2%) feel they are persons of worth compared to 45.5% who wish they could have more respect for themselves. Only 18.5% think they are failures, while 80.6% take a positive attitude toward themselves.

#### Family Mealtimes

The participants ranged from 13 - 44 on the revised version of the Project EAT survey with a 13 strongly agreeing that the family mealtime ritual is important and a 44 strongly disagreeing. Cumulatively more than half (58.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that it is important for the family to eat at least one meal a day together (see Appendix E; Table 2). The majority (62.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they are too busy to eat dinner with their family, while the majority (56.7%) strongly agreed or agreed that different schedules

don't permit the family to eat meals together on a regular basis.

The overwhelming majority (82.8%) of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they enjoy eating meals with their family, and the majority (70%) strongly agreed or agreed that eating brings people together in an enjoyable way. In addition, the majority (66.7%) strongly agreed or agreed that dinnertime is more than just about getting food, it is a time when they have a chance to talk with each other; and 64.4% strongly agreed or agreed that mealtime is a time for talking with other family members.

The majority (65.9%) of the respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that mealtime is a time when people argue. However, the majority (58.2%) of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that during mealtimes they are watching TV. With regards to rules at mealtimes the majority (63.5%) strongly disagreed or disagreed that they have any rules that they are expected to follow. Yet, the majority (57.3%) of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that family members have specific chores to perform during mealtimes.

With regards to how many times a week an adolescent eats with their family the majority (25.2%) responded that they eat 1-2 times a week with their family, followed by

21.5% eating 3-4 times a week, 19.9% eating 5-6 times a week, 11.7% eating more than 7 times a week, and 8.9% eating 7 times a week. However, 12.9% never eat a meal with their family.

Parents were in the room when the adolescent was eating every day 32.5%, 1-2 days 22.4%, 5-6 days 18.7%, 3-4 days 17.8%, and never 8.6%.

#### Topics Discussed

Participants were asked to checkmark all of the topics they discussed during family mealtimes and then rank the top five of these same topics as topics they would like to be discussing at family mealtimes (see Appendix E; Table 3). Overall, the participants indicated that talking about school is the number one topic they are talking about (n = 257) and this was equivalent to the importance students placed on this subject as talking about school was ranked number one (n = 250). Talking about friends was the second topic of choice, followed by family members (see Appendix E; Table 3).

However, there were a few inconsistencies regarding what families are discussing and what adolescents would like to be discussing. While talking about their parents' work situations are discussed (n = 175) only 59 participants would like to discuss this. Feelings ranked

16th as a topic actually discussed at family mealtimes (n = 88); yet ranked 6th as a topic adolescents would like to discuss (n = 106).

### Qualitative Results

Participants were asked, "If your family does eat meals together and has discussions, and your schedules changed and you weren't able to have meals together would you miss it?" Out of a total of 327 participants, 150 responded yes to this question. If they answered yes, they were asked, "What would you miss? Please specify."

Responses to this question could be broken down into four types of responses: talking with the family (n = 100), time spent with family (n = 73), emotional support and feelings (n = 23), and food (n = 13). Some answers overlapped two or more categories.

The following are examples of typical verbatim responses to this question:

- "I would miss just talking to my parents."
- "The talks about sports, like football, motor racing."
- "Yeah, because that's the only time you get to talk with your family and appreciate things."

- "I would miss having our bonding time at the dinner table because it's the only time in the day when we get to spend time with each other."
- "I would miss my family they make me feel much more comfortable and more loved than friends."
- "The closeness, just being there with each other."
- "The food."
- "Eating a good home cooked meal with everyone."

Complete responses to this question are detailed in Appendix E.

The number of meals adolescents are having with their families was correlated with the adolescents GPA and self-esteem using Pearson's correlation coefficients. There was a moderately strong relationship between the number of times an adolescent eats meals with their families and his/her GPA ( $r = .20$ ,  $p = .01$ ) and a moderate relationship between the number of times an adolescent eats meals with their families and his/her self-esteem ( $r = .21$ ,  $p = .01$ ). This suggests that as the number of meals the adolescent has with their parents increases so does the adolescent's GPA and self-esteem.

Also, the number of meals adolescents are having with their families and whether or not the adolescent would

miss mealtimes if their schedules changed and they would not be able to have a family meal was examined using Pearson's correlation coefficients. There was a strong relationship between these two variables indicating that the more meals an adolescent has with his/her family the more likely they would miss this family ritual ( $r = .43$ ,  $p = .01$ ), and a substantial relationship between the number of meals an adolescent has with his/her family and the value adolescents place on the family mealtime ritual ( $r = .53$ ,  $p = .01$ ).

In addition, the relationship between the adolescent's living arrangement, GPA, self-esteem, and if the adolescent would miss family mealtimes was conducted using Pearson's correlation coefficients. There was a slight relationship between the living arrangement and the number of family meal times ( $r = .12$ ,  $p = .05$ ) and with their GPA ( $r = .16$ ,  $p = .01$ ), suggesting that adolescents living in a two parent household are more likely to have family meals on a regular basis and have a slightly higher GPA compared to those in a single parent household or other living arrangement. No relationship existed between the adolescent's living arrangement and his/her self-esteem.

However, a moderate correlation suggesting that the adolescent's self-esteem increases as his/her GPA increases was determined by Pearson's correlation coefficients ( $r = .23$ ,  $p = .01$ ).

In addition, there was a statistically significant relationship between the adolescent's self-esteem and the number of meals the adolescent has with his/her family between those adolescents who never have a meal with their families compared to those who have 5-6 meals a week ( $r = .44$ ,  $p = .05$ ) and those who have 7 meals a week ( $r = .48$ ,  $p = .05$ ) using one-way ANOVA's. Again, this suggests that the more meals an adolescent has with his/her family, the higher his/her self-esteem will be. However, no relationship exists between the adolescent's GPA and the number of meals the adolescent has with his/her family using the same statistical measurement.

While some of these findings are significant, caution must be employed when interpreting this data as the within group variables were not identical.

#### Summary

Chapter Four reviewed the results extracted from the project and confirmed the hypotheses that mealtimes are positively correlated to adolescents self-esteem and



academic standing. Adolescents having regular family mealtimes would miss this ritual if disrupted by a change in schedule, and those adolescents also place a high value on the family mealtime ritual. While there is a slight relationship between the living arrangement and the adolescent's mealtimes and their GPA, none existed between the living arrangement and their self-esteem.

Statistically significant relationships also exist between the adolescent's GPA and self-esteem. There is also a difference in self-esteem between those adolescents that have 5 or more meals with their family compared to those who state they never have a family meal.

In addition, consistencies and discrepancies existed between what adolescents are talking about during the family mealtime with their parents and what they would like to be discussing.

Finally, the qualitative data demonstrates that some adolescents do appreciate the family mealtime for a variety of reasons including time with their family, opportunities to talk with their family, feel emotionally connected to their family, and of course the food itself.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

Included in Chapter Five is a presentation of the conclusions discovered as a result of completing the project. Further, the recommendations extracted from the project are presented. The chapter concludes with a summary of suggestions for future research and the implications of this study for social work practice.

#### Discussion

The conclusions extracted from this project follow:

1. The number of family mealtimes is positively correlated to the adolescent's self-esteem. This confirms the current literature that posits family mealtimes as a positive intervention enabling families to maintain communication and foster well-adjusted children.
2. Adolescents participating in regular family mealtimes are more likely to miss this family ritual if their schedules changed and they would not be able to have a family meal.
3. There was a slight relationship between the adolescent's living arrangement and the number

of family mealtimes and his/her GPA, while no relationship existed between his/her living arrangement and his/her self-esteem.

4. A positive relationship exists between the adolescent's self-esteem and his/her GPA.
5. A significant relationship exists between the adolescent's self-esteem that has five or more meals with their family compared to those adolescents who never have a meal with their family.
6. Topics discussed during the family mealtime demonstrate consistencies as well as discrepancies. Adolescents are talking about school and friends, and rank these topics very high in importance. However, some adolescents would like to be discussing their feelings during family mealtimes and it would appear that feelings are not addressed as much as topics such as parent's work situations are addressed.
7. Adolescents who would miss family mealtimes state that they would miss talking with their family, the time spent with their family, emotional support and feelings, and of course, the food.

## Limitations

The following limitations apply to the project:

1. The researcher did not present this project to the students before the questionnaire was administered. The researcher believes that if the project were introduced in person perhaps there would have been more participation as the researcher had access to approximately 1000 students. This study could also have been mentioned in the school newsletter. Relying on various teachers to promote the survey did not lend itself towards consistency, as some teachers were more interested in this study compared to others. For example one teacher neglected to remind her students to bring in the consent forms resulting in very few participants; other teachers were more diligent and had more than a 50% response rate.
2. While it could be argued that participation would have increased if the questionnaires were administered after the winter holiday versus before, this is difficult to determine as a good argument could be posited for either situation. However, surveying adolescents after the winter

holiday could easily skew the results, i.e.

family get togethers could result in an above average number of family mealtimes.

3. Using one school district limits the study as it does not include inner city, rural, home schooled, or private school adolescents.
4. There was a large Hispanic population and the researcher should have provided the information letter, consent forms, and questionnaires in Spanish to provide better communication.
5. To make this study more precise the sample population should have included parameters such as equal numbers of adolescents living in the same type of arrangement and age group. A better measure of the sample population could mean that these results could be generalized to a larger population.
6. GPA's were self-reported and not always verified by the teacher. Therefore, the GPA's might or might not be entirely accurate.

## Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Social workers can utilize this information and suggest to families not only to participate in a family ritual such as the family meal, but also to discuss the adolescent's feelings in addition to topics such as school, friends, and family members. This message can be sent to all parents via the school newsletter advocating for family mealtimes.

In addition, social workers can discuss the advantages of family mealtimes during a PTA meeting or the school could have a family mealtime event at the school. Class assignments could also focus on family mealtimes by having adolescents discuss various family rituals and mealtimes.

School social workers could be a driving force to implement this policy by suggesting in the school newsletters various topics to discuss each month during the school year along with easy to prepare recipes. School social workers could also work with adolescents at risk of failing by exploring the family's rituals or lack of rituals. Families who currently utilize mealtimes as a ritual could be encouraged to strengthen this ritual by

either increasing the number of family mealtimes and increase the family communication.

Likewise, the social worker can work with the families who do not utilize mealtimes as a ritual by first examining what dynamics are preventing this from occurring and helping the family overcome any challenges such as time management. The social worker can also educate the family regarding the importance of communication and work with the family to increase this dynamic.

Minuchin (1993) concluded that using the family as a resource is economically sound, efficient, and more expedient, yet overlooked. While the United States does have a national family day called "Family Day - a Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children" this researcher argues that one day out of the year is not enough. As social workers we need to heed Minuchin's (1993) suggestion and promote the family mealtime as a reasonable intervention that can increase the adolescent's GPA and self-esteem.

Finally, future research should evaluate whether or not parents are discussing topics such as drugs and alcohol, smoking, and sex with their adolescents. In addition, a study comparing the adolescent's responses with the parent's responses would be helpful to understand the communication dynamics of both groups.

## Conclusions

The conclusions extracted from the study confirm what Doherty (1997) discusses regarding the intentional family. Rituals promote creating a doable plan for maintaining and building existing family ties. Eating is a necessary biological function that can be utilized as a family ritual to prevent the family from becoming entropic, but will also enhance the adolescent's academic standing and self-esteem as demonstrated by this study.

Reitz and Watson (1992) suggest that the open regulated family implements the stability of the closed family while still mirroring the spontaneity of the open family. This study confirmed that family mealtimes are important on a regular basis, it does not have to be precisely every single day; yet it does suggest that at least 5 meals a week will produce significant results and improve the adolescent's GPA and self-esteem. This would also confirm what Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994) discuss regarding the consensual family being high in conversation and high on conformity.

The study also confirmed Fiese and Hooker's (1993) research that demonstrated the value of family rituals as powerful organizers of social behavior and serving as a protective function for the child when coping with



stressful conditions. Today the adolescent is faced with stressful conditions at school such as violence and drugs, to say nothing of the stressful conditions they have at home with divorce, etc. Therefore, if an adolescent's GPA and self-esteem increases, as does the number of family mealtimes, it would behoove parents to increase the number of family mealtimes they have with their adolescent and to let adolescents know they care by asking the adolescent how they feel.

This study also confirmed Bowden's 1997 study demonstrating that adolescents who eat five meals or more a week with an adult are more likely to be well adjusted (APA Monitor, 1997). However, this study demonstrated that 59.5% of the adolescents are having four or less meals a week with their parents compared to Galinsky's (1999) finding that one-third of American parents with an adolescent have a meal with their child four times a week or less.

With regards to communication during the family mealtime this study confirmed Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's (1994) study suggesting that children share a schema with their parents. This was demonstrated by the positive relationship between the number of family mealtimes the adolescent has correlated with the value they place on

this ritual; i.e. as the number of family meals the adolescent has with their family increases so does the value they place on this ritual.

While Baxter and Clark (1996) suggest that cohesive families are more likely to encourage their children to express their thoughts and feelings, it would appear that adolescents in this study are not discussing their feelings as much as they would like.

In summary, Wright-Edelman (1993) suggested that children at risk are a national problem and yet the family mealtime as an intervention is recognized one day a year with "Family Day" and social workers are in a position to change this. We must take Minuchin's (1993) suggestion seriously and promote the family mealtime as a reasonable intervention that this study demonstrated can positively increase the adolescent's GPA and self-esteem.

APPENDIX A  
QUESTIONNAIRE

## PART I: SELF-ESTEEM AND LIFE SATISFACTION

I would like to ask a few questions about how you feel about yourself. Please answer whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement.

- 1 = Strongly Agree
- 2 = Agree
- 3 = Disagree
- 4 = Strongly Disagree

Circle the answer that best describes how you feel:

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A1.	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	1	2	3	4
A2.	At times I think I am no good at all	1	2	3	4
A3.	I feel that I have a number of good qualities	1	2	3	4
A4.	I am able to do things as well as most other people	1	2	3	4
A5.	I feel I do not have much to be proud of	1	2	3	4
A6.	I certainly feel useless at times	1	2	3	4
A7.	I feel that I am a person of worth	1	2	3	4
A8.	I wish I could have more respect for myself	1	2	3	4
A9.	All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure	1	2	3	4
A10.	I take a positive attitude toward myself	1	2	3	4

## PART II: FAMILY COMMUNICATION

I would like to ask a few questions about what you and your family discuss during family mealtimes.

B1. What topics does your family discuss during family mealtime? Please check all that apply.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. School                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 10. Discipline                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Homework                 | <input type="checkbox"/> 11. Family Members                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Teachers                 | <input type="checkbox"/> 12. Your parent(s) work               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Friends                  | <input type="checkbox"/> 13. School clubs, activities          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Sports                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 14. Current events                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Church                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 15. Best part of your day             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7. Movies                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 16. Worst part of your day            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8. Feelings                 | <input type="checkbox"/> 17. Funniest part of your day         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 9. Your day-to-day problems | <input type="checkbox"/> 18. Most interesting part of your day |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> 19. Other: _____                      |

B2. Please rank in order of importance the "Top 5" topics that mean the most to you.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. School                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 10. Discipline                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Homework                 | <input type="checkbox"/> 11. Family Members                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Teachers                 | <input type="checkbox"/> 12. Your parent(s) work               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Friends                  | <input type="checkbox"/> 13. School clubs, activities          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Sports                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 14. Current events                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Church                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 15. Best part of your day             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7. Movies                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 16. Worst part of your day            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8. Feelings                 | <input type="checkbox"/> 17. Funniest part of your day         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 9. Your day-to-day problems | <input type="checkbox"/> 18. Most interesting part of your day |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> 19. Other: _____                      |

B3. If your family does eat meals together and has discussions, and your schedules changed and you weren't able to have meals together would you miss it?

- ☐ 1. Yes  
☐ 2. No

B4. If you answered yes, what would you miss? Please specify.

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### PART III: FAMILY MEALTIMES

I would like to ask you some questions about your family mealtimes. Please respond to the following questions by answering whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement. Circle the answer that best describes how you feel:

- 1 = Strongly Agree
- 2 = Agree
- 3 = Disagree
- 4 = Strongly Disagree

Circle the answer that best describes how you feel:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
C1. In my family, it is important that the family eat at least one meal a day together.	1	2	3	4
C2. I am often just too busy to eat dinner with my family.	1	2	3	4
C3. In my family, different schedules don't let us eat meals together on a regular basis.	1	2	3	4
C4. I enjoy eating meals with my family.	1	2	3	4
C5. In my family, eating brings people together in an enjoyable way.	1	2	3	4
C6. In my family, dinnertime is more than just about getting food, it is a time when we all have a chance to talk with each other.	1	2	3	4
C7. In my family, mealtime is a time for talking with other family members.	1	2	3	4
C8. Mealtime has often been a time when people argue in my family.	1	2	3	4
C9. In my family, we often watch TV while eating dinner.	1	2	3	4
C10. In my family, there are rules at mealtimes that we are expected to follow.	1	2	3	4
C11. In my family, members have specific chores such as setting the table or doing dishes.	1	2	3	4

C12. During the past week, how many times did all or most of your family living in your house eat a meal together?

- ☐ 1. Never
- ☐ 2. 1-2 times
- ☐ 3. 3-4 times
- ☐ 4. 5-6 times
- ☐ 5. 7 times
- ☐ 6. More than 7 times

C13. On how many of the past 7 days was at least one of your parents in the room with you when you ate dinner?

- ☐ 1. Never
- ☐ 2. 1-2 days
- ☐ 3. 3-4 days
- ☐ 4. 5-6 days
- ☐ 5. Every day

#### PART IV: DEMOGRAPHICS

Finally, I'd like to ask some questions about you.

- D1. What is your gender?  
☐ 1. Female  
☐ 2. Male
- D2. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ years
- D3. What is your ethnicity?  
☐ 1. African American  
☐ 2. Asian Pacific Islander  
☐ 3. Caucasian/White  
☐ 4. Hispanic/Latino/Chicano  
☐ 5. Native American  
☐ 6. Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ 7. Biracial
- D4. What grade are you in?  
☐ 1. 8th grade  
☐ 2. 9th grade  
☐ 3. 10th grade  
☐ 4. 11th grade  
☐ 5. 12th grade
- D5. Which of the following best describes where you live?  
☐ 1. I live with my real (biological) mom and dad.  
☐ 2. I live in a step-parent family  
☐ 3. I live with my mom  
☐ 4. I live with my dad  
☐ 5. I share time with my mom and my dad  
☐ 6. I live with my grandparents  
☐ 7. Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_
- D6. My current Grade Point Average (GPA) from last semester was, specify \_\_\_\_\_.



APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENTS

## **INFORMED CONSENTS**

Dear Parent(s) and or guardian(s):

As a student at California State University, San Bernardino I am in the process of obtaining data for my master's thesis regarding adolescents and family mealtimes. The Chino Valley Unified School District has granted me permission to survey students at both Magnolia Junior High School and Chino High School and your child has been asked to participate. This project has also been approved by the Institutional Review Board at California State University, San Bernardino and complies with section 51513 of the California Education Code.

Measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity once the survey has been administered and data has been entered into the computer system. Once the data has been entered into the computer, only an identification number will identify your child's information. The results of this survey will be available after June 1st and a copy of the results will be available at both schools and the Chino Valley Unified School District.

If you have any questions or concerns you can contact me or my faculty supervisor, Ray E. Liles, DSW at California State University, San Bernardino, the Department of Social Work, 5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, California 92407 or call (909) 880-5557. In addition, a copy of the survey is also available at Magnolia Junior High School and Chino High School.

If you agree to have your child participate in this survey please sign the attached parental consent form and have your child return this to school the following day. Participation is voluntary and your child will receive a homework pass as remuneration.

Thank you,

Deborah A. Vandenboom

## **“Family Mealtimes: Topics Associated with the Adolescent’s Academic Standing and Self-Esteem”**

### **Informed Consent**

I am asked to participate in this research study that is designed to examine family mealtime topics between adolescents and parents, as well as adolescent’s academic standing and self-esteem. Deborah A. Vandenberg, in the Masters of Social Work program at California State University, San Bernardino, is conducting this study, under the supervision of Professor Ray E. Liles. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino, and the Chino Valley Unified School District. This study also complies with section 51513 of the California Education Code.

In this study, taken during my health education or science class, I will be asked about my family’s mealtime routines, self-esteem, GPA, and topics discussed during the family mealtime. It will take 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. I understand that my name will not appear on the questionnaire and my answers will be put into a computer with a lot of others’ so that I will not be identifiable by name. All of my responses will be kept anonymous, and no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent.

I understand that my participation in this study will be totally voluntary. I can refuse to participate in, or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I also understand that I do not have to answer any question that I may not wish to answer. When I complete the task, I will be given an explanation statement describing the study in more detail. I also will receive a homework pass as remuneration for participating in the study.

If I have any questions about the study, I can contact Deborah A. Vandenberg or her faculty supervisor, Ray E. Liles, DSW at California State University, San Bernardino, the Department of Social Work, 5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, California 92407 or call (909) 880-5557.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and that I understand, the nature and purpose of the study, and I freely consent to participate.

---

Student Signature

---

Date

**“Family Mealtimes: Topics Associated with the Adolescent’s  
Academic Standing and Self-Esteem”**

**Informed Parental and/or Guardian Consent**

Your child has been asked to participate in this research study that is designed to examine adolescents’ academic standing, self-esteem, and family mealtime topics. Deborah A. Vandenboom, in the Masters of Social Work program at California State University, San Bernardino, is conducting this study, under the supervision of Professor Ray E. Liles. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino, and the Chino Valley Unified School District. This study also complies with section 51513 of the California Education Code.

In this study your child will be asked during his/her health education or science class, about his/her family’s mealtime routines, self-esteem, GPA, and topics discussed during the family mealtime. It will take 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

I understand that my child’s name will not appear on the questionnaire and his/her answers will be put into a computer with a lot of others’ so that he/she will not be identifiable by name. All of his/her responses will be kept anonymous, and no information that identifies my child will be released without my separate consent.

I understand that my child’s participation in this study will be totally voluntary. He/She can refuse to participate in, or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I also understand that my child does not have to answer any question that he/she may not wish to answer. When my child completes the task, he/she will be given an explanation statement describing the study in more detail. My child also will receive a homework pass as remuneration for participating in the study.

If I have any questions about the study, I can contact Deborah A. Vandenboom or her faculty supervisor, Ray E. Liles, DSW at California State University, San Bernardino, the Department of Social Work, 5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, California 92407 or call (909) 880-5557.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and that I understand, the nature and purpose of the study, and I freely consent for my child to participate. I also acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

---

Parental and/or Guardian Signature

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Date

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Child’s Name (Please Print)

**“Family Mealtimes: Topics Associated with the Adolescent’s  
Academic Standing and Self-Esteem”**

**Informed Teacher Consent**

Your students have been asked to participate in this research study that is designed to examine adolescents' academic standing, self-esteem, and family mealtime topics. Deborah A. Vandeenboom, in the Masters of Social Work program at California State University, San Bernardino, is conducting this study, under the supervision of Professor Ray E. Liles. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino, and the Chino Valley Unified School District. This study also complies with section 51513 of the California Education Code.

In this study your students will be asked during their health education or science class, about their family's mealtime routines, self-esteem, GPA, and topics discussed during the family mealtime. It will take 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

I understand that their name will not appear on the questionnaire and their answers will be put into a computer with a lot of others' so that they will not be identifiable by name. All of their responses will be kept anonymous, and no information that identifies my students will be released without their separate consent.

I understand that my students' participation in this study will be totally voluntary. They can refuse to participate in, or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I also understand that my students do not have to answer any question that they may not wish to answer. When my students complete the task, they will be given a debriefing statement describing the study in more detail. My students also will receive a homework pass as remuneration for participating in the study.

If I have any questions about the study, I can contact Deborah A. Vandeenboom or her faculty supervisor, Ray E. Liles, DSW at California State University, San Bernardino, the Department of Social Work, 5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, California 92407 or call (909) 880-5557.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and that I understand, the nature and purpose of the study, and I freely consent for my students to participate. I also acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

---

Teacher Signature

---

Date

APPENDIX C  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENTS

## **"Family Mealtimes: Topics Associated with the Adolescent's Academic Standing and Self-Esteem"**

### **Explanation Statement**

The study you have just completed was designed to investigate family mealtime topics amongst adolescents and parents. In particular this research study examined what topics are important to adolescents and how these topics relate to grade point average and self-esteem. In addition, this study examined the adolescent's perception of the family mealtime routine and topics discussed.

Thank you for participating in this study and for not discussing the contents of the questionnaire with other people. If you feel uncomfortable or distressed as a result of participating in the study, you are advised to contact your school counselor. If you have any questions about the study please feel free to contact Deborah A. Vandenberg or her faculty supervisor, Professor Ray E. Liles at 909-880-5557. If you would like to obtain a copy of the findings of the study, please contact Deborah A. Vandenberg at 909-880-5557 after June 1, 2002.

**“Family Mealtimes: Topics Associated with the Adolescent’s  
Academic Standing and Self-Esteem”**

**Parental and/or Guardian  
Debriefing Statement**

The study your child just completed was designed to investigate adolescents’ academic standing, self-esteem, and family mealtime topics. In particular this research study examined what topics are important to adolescents and how these topics relate to grade point average and self-esteem. In addition, this study examined the adolescent’s perception of the family mealtime routine and topics discussed.

Thank you for permitting your child to participate in this study and for not discussing the contents of the questionnaire with other people. If your child becomes uncomfortable or distressed as a result of participating in the study, you are advised to contact the school counselor. If you have any questions about the study please feel free to contact Deborah A. Vandenberg or her faculty supervisor, Professor Ray E. Liles at 909-880-5557. If you would like to obtain a copy of the findings of the study, please contact Deborah A. Vandenberg at 909-880-5557 after June 1, 2002.



**"Family Mealtimes: Topics Associated with the Adolescent's  
Academic Standing and Self-Esteem"**

**Teacher's Debriefing Statement**

The study your students just completed was designed to investigate adolescents' academic standing, self-esteem, and family mealtime topics. In particular this research study examined what topics are important to adolescents and how these topics relate to grade point average and self-esteem. In addition, this study examined the adolescent's perception of the family mealtime routine and topics discussed.

Thank you for participating in this study and for not discussing the contents of the questionnaire with other people. If you feel your students become uncomfortable or distressed as a result of participating in this study, you are advised to have your student contact their school counselor. If you have any questions about the study please feel free to contact Deborah A. Vandenoorn or her faculty supervisor, Professor Ray E. Liles at 909-880-5557. If you would like to obtain a copy of the findings of the study, please contact Deborah A. Vandenoorn at 909-880-5557 after June 1, 2002.

APPENDIX D  
DEMOGRAPHICS

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b> (N = 322) Mean = 1.36		
Female	206	64.0%
Male	116	36.0%
<b>Age</b> (N = 321) Mean = 14.18		
13 years old	134	41.7%
14 years old	81	25.2%
15 years old	51	15.9%
16 years old	29	9.0%
17 years old	22	6.9%
18 years old	4	1.2%
<b>Ethnicity</b> (N = 320) Mean = 3.50		
African American	10	3.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	19	5.9%
Caucasian/White	111	34.7%
Hispanic/Latino	136	42.5%
Native American	1	.3%
Biracial	33	10.3%
Other	10	3.1%
<b>Education</b> (N = 324) Mean = 1.98		
8th grade	172	53.1%
9th grade	52	16.0%
10th grade	55	17.0%
11th grade	26	8.0%
12th grade	19	5.9%
<b>Living Arrangement</b> (N = 323) Mean = 1.77		
Live with real mom and dad	218	67.5%
Live in a step-parent family	30	9.3%
Live with mom	41	12.7%
Live with dad	7	2.2%
Share time with mom and dad	20	6.2%
Live with grandparents	5	1.5%
Other	2	.6%
<b>GPA</b> (N = 305) Mean = 3.10		
1.30 - 1.99	18	5.9%
2.00 - 2.99	86	28.2%
3.00 - 3.99	170	55.7%
4.00 - 4.80	31	9.5%

APPENDIX E

QUALITATIVE RESPONSES

1. "I would miss my family they make me feel much more comfortable and more loved than friends."
2. "Having family time and eating together."
3. "I would miss just talking to my family and being caught up in things in their lives."
4. "I would miss just talking to my family."
5. "I would miss the togetherness my family has and not getting to talk to them about my day."
7. "Talking with my family."
8. "I would miss how my parents day went. I would miss what they were thinking."
9. "The time to talk about things."
10. "Because family are together when they which make it more interesting."
16. "The conversation."
18. "I would miss not being there with them."
20. "I would miss the together time and the ableness of sharing about our day."
21. "I would miss being with my family all at one table and having our discussion."
22. "When we sit down to eat, we are all together and usually that is the only part of the day we are all together."
23. "I would probably miss spending quality time everyday with my family."
27. "The talks about sports, like football, motor racing."
30. "The closeness, just being there with each other."
31. "I would miss knowing everything about my family member's day because that is the only time I can hear about it."
35. "I will miss the plans that my parents will have."
36. "I would miss the discussions of the family trip."
37. "I will miss the talking, with out it no one will no how I feel."

- 42. "Because that's really the only time we're really altogether and we could all talk."
- 44. "I would miss sitting down and resting and talking."
- 47. "Because my schedule change might be more important than a family meal."
- 49. "I would miss spending time with my family."
- 50. "Talking with them."
- 53. "Talking with them."
- 56. "Talking together with my family members."
- 58. "I would miss it because I would not be able to talk to my parent."
- 59. "I would miss talking about what happen in the day or who was there day at work."
- 61. "I would miss my grandparent's voices."
- 63. "I would miss them being there with me."
- 64. "Talking to my family because this is the only time we are all together."
- 72. "I would miss the good feeling when I talk to them."
- 73. "The time we would have together since every one has to work and go to school."
- 77. "Being with my family."
- 78. "The discussions."
- 79. "The togetherness and careness of my family. We always discuss our problems."
- 80. Talking, like just saying how I feel about things."
- 81. "The family meal because sometimes I would go someone and they would eat or I just won't feel like eating when they do."
- 83. "I would like miss the talks we have with each other."
- 92. "Yeah, because that's the only time you get to talk with your family and appreciate things."

- 93. "Yes I would miss it because I would not know what is going on with my family."
- 95. "I would miss talking to my family about events and what happened at school that day."
- 96. "The way we all were together talking, not fighting."
- 100. "I would miss spending time with my parents."
- 101. "Maybe the time we spent together."
- 103. "Being there with my family."
- 110. "Nothing, we don't sit down and eat. I don't have a real family."
- 111. "Being together as a family at least once a day. We're all off doing are own thing, dinner is the only time we're all together."
- 113. "I would miss the talking and the funny things that my dad says."
- 114. "Talk with one another, the companionship."
- 115. "Just talking with my dad."
- 121. "I would miss just talking to them and see what is going on in their life."
- 127. "Talking to my parents. I would also miss the good meals."
- 128. "Talking about how our days were."
- 129. "Eating as whole family, only time to talk."
- 134. "Spending time with my family."
- 136. "I haven't had dinner with my parents for a long time. I don't know what their doing."
- 139. "I would miss that we weren't able to spend that while together, but I still know that we'll get together later and talk while we're doing other stuff."
- 140. "I would miss discussions with them in general."
- 142. "Because we only get to do these things once in 1 lifetime!"
- 143. "I would miss having a time to talk with your family."
- 146. "The food."

149. "Well everybody in my family is really busy, so dinnertime is just a time to spend with my family. That's what I would miss."
156. "The part of the sports!"
157. "Miss being with my family and talking to them all together."
158. "My father is in Vegas for 9 months, and I miss having him around the table."
160. "I would miss every body because I am already used to sitting down at the table with them."
161. "Everything that we would talk about."
166. "Being with my family."
169. "I would miss hearing about what everyone else did that day."
171. "I would miss talking to my family at dinnertime cause dinnertime is a very rare time where your whole family is unified."
178. "The closeness that we had and the openness we shared with each other."
182. "I would miss it because my parents have work so the most time I can spend with my family I would like to."
183. "I would miss having our bonding time at the dinner table because it's the only time in the day when we get to spend time with each other."
184. "The company my family members provide and emotional support they give without using words."
185. "Spending time with my mom."
191. "I would miss talking to each other and being a happy family."
193. "I would miss my family talking because that's the only time we all have to talk."
194. "I wouldn't miss anything important just what happened to them during their day."
195. "Spending time with my family, because I don't get to see them all day."
196. "I would just miss dinner."
197. "I would miss spending time to stop and talk, laugh, and have fun."



198. "I think both I would miss being together and talking, but sometimes I don't miss that."
200. "I would miss talk to them, telling them what I did and other stuff."
202. "I would miss the talking and the laughter."
203. "I would miss having conversations with my parents, and I would miss seeing them."
204. "Being around my family."
205. "I would miss just being around my family (miss talking to them.)"
207. "I would miss the fact that dinner is the only time we're together."
208. "I would miss the fun conversations and my family at dinner time."
211. "I would miss talking, and eating with my family."
217. "The family, the communication."
221. "I like sharing things about my day and my feelings."
222. "I just like communicating with my family."
223. "Not eating with the people I most love."
224. "Yes and no because I would miss the talk but then I really wouldn't mind."
227. "I would miss talking to my family. Especially my sisters."
228. "I would miss the time of being with my family."
229. "Well yes and no. I would miss the family conversation."
232. "I would miss being able to talk about my day with my family."
235. "I would miss my family."
236. "The time we had together as a family."
237. "I would miss talking to them about stuff and we'd probably not be as close as we are now!"
238. "Talking on the table about our day."
244. "I would miss all that my family has to say about their day and work."
245. "Eating a good home cooked meal with everyone."

- 246. "Not telling my parents about my day."
- 250. "I would miss the part of being together with my family. It gives us a time to share and sometimes that's the only time we have to be together."
- 251. "Cause we don't usually sit and eat we eat when we want."
- 252. "I would miss just talking together instead of alone."
- 255. "Eating at the table, talking about our lives. Instead of two dinners."
- 256. "Eating as a family together and discussing our issues."
- 257. "I would miss the laughter and just the talking together about things."
- 265. "Being together with my family."
- 271. "Talking about how life is going and what's going on in it."
- 272. "I would miss being together with my whole family because that's like the only time we are all together."
- 274. "I would miss being able to share my feelings and opinions."
- 275. "I would miss the time with my family, that we have to talk to each other at."
- 276. "I would miss being able to sit down and spend time with my family."
- 277. "I would miss the conversation and the scheduled family time."
- 278. "I would miss just having small conversation, knowing what happened for my family, and sitting together as a family."
- 279. "I would miss the bonding, sharing of each others feelings, and transferring advice/my opinion on the subject."
- 280. "If our schedules changed, dinner is really the time my family spends together, so I wouldn't spend quite as much time with my family."
- 281. "Talking with my family, conversation."
- 282. "At a family meal time, I'd miss sharing my feels and healing other people's feelings."
- 283. "I would miss the company that my family gives me."
- 284. "I would miss talking to my family about sports."

285. "I would miss having a time when everyone can sit down and talk."
286. "I would miss talking to and bonding with my parents. I really enjoy spending time with them and I would miss that."
287. "My family time and the things I can talk to them about."
288. "I would miss having a good meal with my family."
289. "I would miss spending time with them and just talking."
290. "I would miss being able to relate to all of my family at the same time."
295. "I would miss the fact that we're not together."
298. "Talking to my dad about sports."
303. "I would miss the times I have good conversation with my family and I can share my feelings especially in school."
305. "Because it's a time to eat and spend time together."
310. "There wouldn't be as much talking."
311. "The talks we had."
312. "I would the part of just being with my family and having a nice talk with them."
313. "Just being with my family and the things we talk about. I love being with them."
315. "I would miss my mom or dad and I would miss learning my family views."
316. "I would miss the way we could always discuss what happened during the day."
317. "I would miss just talking to my parents."
320. "Cause then you would have nobody to talk to."
322. "I would miss being able to spend time with my family, and finding out how each others days went."
325. "I would miss the talking to my family."
327. "I wouldn't miss it too horribly I guess, but I would miss what I heard was happening in my family."

Table 1

## Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N
A1.	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	96	169	50	8	323
A2.	At times I think I am no good at all	30	101	121	72	324
A3.	I feel that I have a number of good qualities	136	135	39	16	326
A4.	I am able to do things as well as most other people	120	153	45	8	326
A5.	I feel I do not have much to be proud of	21	57	94	153	325
A6.	I certainly feel useless at times	26	88	105	106	325
A7.	I feel that I am a person of worth	115	153	49	9	326
A8.	I wish I could have more respect for myself	63	84	96	80	323
A9.	All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure	16	44	94	170	324
A10.	I take a positive attitude toward myself	126	136	48	15	325

Table 2

## Family Mealtimes, Revised from Project EAT Survey

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N
C1.	In my family, it is important that the family eat at least one meal a day together.	81	109	89	48	327
C2.	I am often just too busy to eat dinner with my family.	34	87	125	80	326
C3.	In my family, different schedules don't let us eat meals together on a regular basis.	81	102	74	65	326
C4.	I enjoy eating meals with my family.	145	125	35	21	326
C5.	In my family, eating brings people together in an enjoyable way.	84	145	62	36	327
C6.	In my family, dinnertime is more than just about getting food, it is a time when we all have a chance to talk with each other.	96	121	64	44	325
C7.	In my family, mealtime is a time for talking with other family members.	79	131	79	37	326
C8.	Mealtime has often been a time when people argue in my family.	27	84	106	109	326
C9.	In my family, we often watch TV while eating dinner.	89	100	59	77	325
C10.	In my family, there are rules at mealtimes that we are expected to follow.	29	89	111	94	323
C11.	In my family, members have specific chores such as setting the table or doing dishes.	92	95	72	67	323

During the past week, how many times did all or most of your family living in your house eat a meal together?

	Frequency	Valid %
Never	42	12.9%
1-2 Times	82	25.2%
3-4 Times	70	21.4%
5-6 Times	65	19.9%
7 Times	29	8.9%
<7 Times	38	11.7%

On how many of the past 7 days was at least one of your parents in the room with you when you ate dinner?

	Frequency	Valid %
Never	28	8.6%
1-2 Times	73	22.4%
3-4 Times	58	17.8%
5-6 Times	61	18.7%
Every day	106	32.5%

Table 3  
Topics Discussed During Mealtimes  
Vs.  
Topics Ranked In Order of Preference

Rank	Topics Discussed	N(%)	Topics Ranked	N(%)
1.	School	257(79%)	School	250(76%)
2.	Friends	200(61%)	Friends	242(74%)
3.	Parents Work	175(54%)	Family Members	198(61%)
4.	Homework	166(51%)	Homework	123(38%)
5.	Family Members	162(50%)	Sports	117(36%)
6.	Current Events	162(50%)	Feelings	106(32%)
7.	Sports	144(44%)	Church	96(29%)
8.	Best part...day	139(43%)	Current Events	71(22%)
9.	Funniest part	135(41%)	Daily problems	70(21%)
10.	Movies	124(38%)	Movies	67(20%)
11.	Interesting	124(38%)	Parents work	59(18%)
12.	Daily problems	121(37%)	Best part...day	52(16%)
13.	Worst part...day	106(32%)	School, clubs	47(14%)
14.	School, clubs	102(31%)	Funniest part...	46(14%)
15.	Teachers	99(30%)	Interesting	44(13%)
16.	Feelings	88(27%)	Discipline	36(11%)
17.	Church	82(25%)	Worst part...day	30( 9%)
18.	Discipline	66(20%)	Other	29( 9%)
19.	Other	44(30%)	Teachers	27( 8%)

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