

WITH OR WITHOUT THE TABLE, WE GATHER: REINFORCING INNATE
RESILIENCIES IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY

By

Jessica Lynn Stevens-Eddy

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

Liberty University

2023

WITH OR WITHOUT THE TABLE, WE GATHER: REINFORCING INNATE
RESILIENCIES IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY

By

Jessica Lynn Stevens-Eddy

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

Liberty University

2023

APPROVED BY:

Jacqueline Wirth, PhD, EdS, NCC, NCSC, Committee Chair

Richard Stratton, PhD, MDIV, BCCAPC, Committee Member

ABSTRACT

This quantitative study aims to determine whether food-sharing (gathering to eat) can be considered a suitable medium to facilitate increased cohesion within African American families. This study focuses on informal food-sharing as an extension of formal meal-sharing. Previous research links consistent formal meal-sharing to positive and secure identity development, better familial attachment, and improved family cohesion. These practices leave a lasting, detrimental impact on the African American family model. Additional barriers to some African American family meal-sharing practices include working extended and atypical work hours, food insecurity, and poor familial communication. There is a lack of research concerning the impact on African American families and food-sharing. Food-sharing, as defined in this study, is gathering to share food but not sharing a meal. This study will contribute to the relationship between the collective sharing of food and African American families. This study could be beneficial in developing culture-specific approaches to improving the quality of family communication and interactions during food-sharing to help strengthen, maintain, and repair the African American family unit.

Keywords: African American families, food-sharing, family cohesion, communication

Dedication

This research is a contribution to the necessary work of highlighting protective factors in the African American community and reaffirming the significance of the African American family.

Acknowledgments

A special thanks to all my loved ones who offered their support and encouragement throughout this process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	3
Dedication	4
Acknowledgments	5
List of Tables	9
List of Figures	10
List of Abbreviations	11
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	12
Overview.....	12
Background	12
Historical.....	12
Social.....	14
Problem Statement	16
Purpose Statement.....	17
Significance of Study	17
Research Questions	18
Definitions.....	19
Summary	19
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	21
Overview	21
Conceptual Framework	23
Review of Related Literature	27
African American Family Culture	27

Family Cohesion29

Family Communication30

Protective Factors.....34

Barriers.....37

Behavioral Implications38

Summary42

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS44

Overview.....44

Research Design.....44

 Gaps in Literature45

Research Questions45

Hypotheses.....46

Participants and Settings.....47

 Demographics47

 Setting47

 Recruitment.....47

 Exclusionary Criteria48

Instrumentation48

 Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES-IV).....48

Procedures.....49

Data Analysis50

 Variables50

 Testing.....50

Summary	51
Chapter Four: Findings	52
Overview.....	52
Descriptive Statistics.....	52
Demographic Statistics	52
Socioeconomic Statistics	52
Family Cohesion, Communication and Satisfaction Levels	53
Preliminary Analytics	54
Regression Analytics	57
Results.....	59
Hypotheses.....	59
Significant Findings.....	60
Summary	67
Chapter Five: Conclusions.....	69
Overview.....	69
Discussion.....	70
Implications.....	71
Limitations	72
Recommendations for Future Research.....	73
Summary	74
References.....	76
Appendix A: IRB Approval.....	92
Appendix B: Permission to Use FACES-IV.....	93

List of Tables

Table 1. Demographic Results of All Completed Surveys	54
Table 2. Correlations between Family Cohesion, Communication, Satisfaction, Food-sharing, Meal-sharing and Socioeconomic Variables	56
Table 3. Linear Regression for DV Family Cohesion	58
Table 4. Linear Regression for DV Family Communication.....	59

List of Figures

Figure 1. Model of Independent and Dependent Variables and Moderator	51
Figure 2. Household Income Frequencies	62
Figure 3. Level of Balanced Cohesion Frequencies	63
Figure 4. Level of Family Communication Frequencies	65
Figure 5. Frequency of Food-sharing.....	66
Figure 6. Frequency of Meal-sharing.....	67

List of Abbreviations

Dependent Variable (DV)

Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale IV (FACES-IV)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Independent Variable (IV)

Parent-child Connectedness (PCC)

Promoting Strong African American Families Program (ProSAAF)

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This quantitative study was designed to determine whether food-sharing can be a protective factor for African American families by encouraging family cohesion and facilitating opportunities for quality communication. Social determinants such as external time demands and societal disparities have undermined the stability of the African American family unit (Miller, 2018). Previous research has yielded promising results in favor of positive correlations between increased family meal-sharing practices, improved family dynamics, and more acceptable behaviors in children and adolescents (de Wit et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2012). Research has also held food-sharing as a hallmark of civilization (Davies & Evans, 2019). Applying the results of meal-sharing studies to the practice of food-sharing within minority family dynamics and the effects of socioeconomic determinants remains an area in need of additional research, hence the need for this study.

Background

Historical

Passing plates and sharing laughter is often a hallmark of media portrayals of family gatherings, complete with loved ones gathered around a table (Bacon, 2018). The meal, a staple to the survival of the human condition, is generally a daily indulgence. Family mealtimes are commonly described as family members dining together around a table in the family home (Smith et al., 2020). For those suffering from food insecurity, it may not be a daily indulgence. Dennard et al. (2022) define food insecurity as the “lack access to enough food for an active and healthy lifestyle for all household members” (p. 3). Exposure to food insecurity without adequate coping strategies can increase the likelihood of poor social outcomes (Jehlička et al., 2019).

Differentiating between meal-sharing and food-sharing is imperative. Meal-sharing is common language found in previous research to indicate a formal meal shared at a standard time, such as breakfast, lunch, or dinner. For this study, meal-sharing refers to formal seated meals such as breakfast, lunch, and dinner. In contrast, food-sharing, which lessens the parameters around the formality of a planned, seated meal, refers to instances such as sharing a drive-thru meal in a car, sharing marshmallows at a campfire, or simply sharing a bag of chips while standing around. Part of the reason for this research is to remove the added pressure of a formal, seated meal enjoyed at a specific time and allow for an equally beneficial informal, communal experience of sharing food with the family, be it sharing a bag of chips or a full meal. Kinser's (2017) study highlighted the heightened expectations that increased meals place on mothers as the default preparers of said meals.

Earlier research into meal-sharing or mealtimes focused on families of European descent and less on families of African descent (Jarrett et al., 2016). Previous studies have found support for meal-sharing as a protective factor for families. Studies have shown that increased meal-sharing enhances academic performance in children and adolescents (Jarrett et al., 2016). Adolescents were less likely to engage in risky behaviors and more likely to engage in appropriate decision-making (Bacon, 2018).

Few studies have explored the positive or negative impacts of socioeconomic determinants, such as low-income levels, on the home environment of African American families. Many unknown internal and external factors definitively influence how functional African American families operate. Some known socioeconomic factors include poor maternal functioning and engagement (Baker & Iruka, 2013) and relationship barriers in two-parent African American families (Barton et al., 2018). History does not support healthy family

functioning for the African American family (Miller, 2018). There is a "cycle of poverty and deprivation" left in the aftermath of slavery, and those constraints trickle down intergenerationally (Miller, 2018, p. 1588). Miller indicates the reconstruction of the African American family after centuries of attack has been challenging.

Social

Each family unit's unique communication style may differ drastically from other families (Alm et al., 2015). Depending on the communication style of the parents, various topics may be off-limits for discussion, such as what foods to eat during a meal (Alm et al., 2015). It is important to note that communication between family members can be impacted by variables other than family cohesion and the ability or desire to communicate (Alm et al., 2015). Alm et al. explore the types of communication between parents and children during traditional dinner or the last meal of the day before bed. Of the three daily mealtimes, dinner generally has the most indulgent food options. This meal is typically when parents and children are most likely to come together (Alm et al., 2015, p. 112). Bacon (2018) found that the concept of family meals has seen some decline. The proponents of having frequent mealtimes are primarily based on middle-class Caucasian families (Jarrett et al., 2016). Researchers found better cohesion between family members and improved child development in the participants in their study. Other studies found this in lower socioeconomic and lower-middle-class families (Jarrett et al., 2016). Though the context surrounding family meals has evolved, family mealtime is still efficacious (Bacon, 2018). There is limited research into the concept of frequent mealtimes and food-sharing of African American families. Additional research may help determine which family food practices encourage and optimize the benefits of improved communication between family members and increased family cohesion.

The focus on ethnically diverse food-sharing practices is essential to this study and lays the foundation for more broadly applicable research in the future. Baker and Iruka (2013) suggest that cultural socialization has served as an indicator of children who experience academic success at an early age. Family gathering practices, such as family reunions, often give African American kindred a chance to "maintain family connections, to preserve and pass down memories within families, and to sustain relationships" (Edge, 2017, p. 343). Food, historically, has been a staple of African American culture, a reason to have large family gatherings and cement an ongoing family tradition of cooking together, feeding each other, and communicating with one another (Edge, 2017).

Current social norms do not support healthy family functioning for the African American family (Miller, 2018). The collateral damage from relational discord between parents, such as lack of support, poor co-parenting, and ineffective communication patterns, can have a lasting impact on the home environment and how frequently collective family activities like food-sharing occur (Barton et al., 2018). This study is a beginning step toward future studies to unearth practical ways African American families can continue rebuilding, enriching, and fortifying family cohesion and communication within African American family reconstruction.

The family unit or family group is a "fundamental structure" within the African American community (Range et al., 2018, p. 288). When social trauma destabilizes that structure, the collective response in the African American community manifests as emotional distress, risky behaviors, violence, and abandoned, displaced families (Range et al., 2018). A home devoid of structure can contribute to the development of common mental disorders (Agathao et al., 2021). Mass social trauma can have a generational trickle-down effect, and disparities in social environments contribute to destabilization and disorganization in African American families

(Miller, 2018). This destabilization and disorganization present the need for restoration (Range et al., 2018) and prompted motivation for this study to begin to find accessible ways, such as food-sharing, to facilitate the restoration that will resonate with the culture and history of the African American family.

Problem Statement

African American families tend to experience a disproportionate number of social, economic, and healthcare disparities, which progressively take their toll on the overall health and culture of the family unit (Kamdar et al., 2019). Food insecurity (Kamdar et al., 2019), single-parent households (Miller, 2018), minimal parental engagement (Green et al., 2013), increased likelihood for exposure to trauma (Bocknek, 2018), and demanding work schedules (Jarrett et al., 2016) are all barriers impacting many African American families. Dennard et al. (2022) found that in 2019 African American families experienced food insecurity at a higher rate than other households across the nation. Previous research has reported that minorities such as African Americans are twice as likely to experience ongoing food insecurity (Myers et al., 2019). A practical and accessible way to reinforce healthy communication and family cohesion to support improved family dynamics can benefit families whose livelihoods are heavily impacted by disparities. There needs to be more research into whether increased opportunities to share food and informal meals in a family environment can increase family cohesion and improve family communication in African American families. Eating together is a typical experience of cohabitating people, particularly during dinner meals (Alm et al., 2015). It is plausible that increased time spent sharing food with family members may serve as a protective factor for African American families. This study examined if increased time spent sharing food amongst family members increased feelings of togetherness and allowed family members to show

compassion. It also examined whether increased food-sharing encourages healthy family communication, which includes facilitating space to discuss current issues and model acceptable social behaviors.

Purpose Statement

This quantitative study aimed to identify food-sharing as an opportunity for African American families to enhance quality family communication skills and bolster family cohesion. This study assessed how often participants eat collectively with family, whether they value family cohesion, and whether food-sharing facilitates communication. Another benefit of this study is focusing on the nuances of food-sharing and meal-sharing pertaining to African American families. Some previous research into family meal habits and benefits have relied on a sample that is majority Caucasian, which may limit applicability to minority populations. The survey data collected identified differences within African American family structures and food-sharing tendencies and yielded some direction for future research that applies to a broader audience.

Significance of Study

One of the most important memories from the researcher's youth centers around a family food-sharing experience. Decades later, those moments are astoundingly clear. Food-sharing was spontaneous. It was impromptu. There was no table to gather around to enjoy a meal. It was often sharing food in the car on the go. It was a time to laugh at how the day was going and recall some fun times together. It was perfect family cohesion. This memory birthed the passion for this present study. Meal-sharing experiences were not consistent, and neither were communication patterns. This study was a first step in understanding factors found in food-sharing that may contribute to strengthening and affirming African American families and their

home and community environments.

Research Questions

This quantitative study used the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale IV (FACES-IV) (Olson, 2011) survey composed of 62 questions using a Likert scale to collect data for analysis. The survey questions gauged food-sharing frequency, family cohesion, and communication. The method of administration was an online survey via a link posted on a social media platform that directed participants to a survey-hosting website. The target population for this study is African American participants. The target sample size was $n = 250$. Basic demographics were collected to assess participant gender, age, ethnicity, family structure, and various socioeconomic variables.

This study was designed around the following assumptions:

RQ1: Family structure and socioeconomic variables have a statistically significant effect on family cohesion in African American families.

RQ2: Food-sharing moderates the effect family structure and socioeconomic variables have on family cohesion in African American families.

RQ3: Family structure and socioeconomic variables have a statistically significant effect on family communication in African- American families.

RQ4: Food-sharing moderates the effect family structure and socioeconomic variables have on family communication in African American families.

Previous research has yielded promising results favoring meal-sharing as a protective factor. This study hoped to reinforce those findings and remove limitations for future findings on food-sharing to be applicable across ethnicities and socioeconomic statuses.

Definitions

To assist in a clear understanding of terms used throughout this study, please consider the following definitions:

Meal-sharing/mealtimes: A formal meal such as breakfast, lunch, dinner, or brunch, typically prepared by and shared amongst close individuals, commonly while seated at/around a table for its duration (Thompson et al., 2016).

Food-sharing: Any collective eating between two or more people, regardless of the type of food (i.e., a shared bag of chips is just as meaningful here as an entire plate of food). Food-sharing does not require participants to be seated at a table and is a broad term to allow for more inclusion in informal occasions when food is shared among individuals (Davies & Evans, 2019).

African American: Ethnic group of Black Americans with origins in various parts of Africa (Miller, 2018).

Family/family unit/family group: Individuals collectively living together and functioning as members of the same family in a traditional or nontraditional structure. A biological link is not necessary for this definition of family, but rather the nature of an intimate connection among individuals with the assumption that more frequent interaction between said family members carries a heightened amount of influence (Sharif et al., 2017).

Food Insecurity: Households facing a lack of access to enough food for an active and healthy lifestyle for all household members (Dennard et al., 2022, p. 3).

Summary

The aim of this study was to determine whether food-sharing within family units is a protective factor that can facilitate better family cohesion and improve communication between family members. Previous related research has focused mainly on formal meal-sharing, such as

breakfast, lunch, and dinner. This focus on these three meals, breakfast, lunch, and dinner, did not recognize informal food-sharing as a protective factor.

The following chapter includes a literature review of related research demonstrating the positive correlations between consistent meal-sharing amongst family members and the likelihood that children and adolescents perform better academically and socially and exhibit more constructive decision-making skills. Additional chapters include a detailed overview of the study's methodology, survey administration, data analysis from the survey responses, and a thorough summation of the research process and the resulting findings and applicability of this study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A classic depiction of the American family revolves around a family dinner, complete with two parents, kids, and a bountiful meal ready to be shared (Bacon, 2018). Family meals have been a part of traditional family practices since before the sixties (Sharif et al., 2017). For example, vintage holiday media depicts a mother in an apron serving food to her family, joyfully seated around a big kitchen table. Communal eating among family members is integral to group living (Harbec & Pagani, 2018). Eating with family in American culture has been held as an iconic cultural practice within many media platforms (Skafida, 2013). Jarrett et al. (2016) suggested the culture of the American family is much more complex, with increased amounts of time given to out-of-home obligations and less to quality family time. Skeer and Ballard (2013) indicated that the percentage of children eating five or more meals a week with their parents was 58%. Since the 1970s, the amount of time women spend on family food preparation has decreased by nearly half, while the amount of time men spend on family food preparation has seen minimal change (Appelhans et al., 2014).

Research studies on family meals have increased from less than 10 a year to more than 40 annually after 2010 (Dallacker et al., 2018). Researchers have conducted studies on predominantly homogenous populations of White Americans with middle-class standing with limited to no information on minority families, creating a disproportionate focus on dinner time meals shared between biologically related families with two parents and adolescent children (Jarrett et al., 2016). Previous studies found that children with higher socioeconomic status (SES) are more likely to routinely share family meals (Harbec & Pagani, 2018). Studies have also shown that specific groups such as "younger adolescents, part-time or stay-at-home parents,

families with married parents" have higher occurrences of family meals (Kornides et al., 2014, p. 406). In order to shift this focus, additional research is needed into atypical meal structures during non-dinner mealtimes amongst more ethnically diverse families and more diverse family structures.

Meal-sharing positively impacts communication skills in children (Kok et al., 2019; Lawrence & Plisco, 2017), improves family cohesion (Jarrett et al., 2016), and contributes to appropriate decision-making in adolescents (Ho et al., 2016). More positive decision-making, especially regarding drug use, was positively correlated with at least four family mealtimes a week (Lora et al., 2014). Meal-sharing also helps family members adjust to social stressors (Miller, 2018). Social stressors can negatively impact the mental and emotional well-being of parents, which can negatively influence parenting habits, creating an unhealthy environment that "can impede children's social, emotional, biological, and intellectual development" (Murry et al., 2013, p. 301; Murry, 2019). Family meal-sharing patterns can influence child and adolescent mental health (Agathao et al., 2021). Communal food-sharing helps shape children socially (Harbec & Pagani, 2018), and reframing social stressors in favor of a more hopeful outlook encourages positive familial outcomes (Murry, 2019). Harbec and Pagani (2018) found that "The home environment remains the primary vehicle for the socialization of children" (p. 136). More mealtimes also allow parents to model healthy eating habits (Luesse et al., 2018).

Meal-sharing taps into the innate resiliencies in families to connect and align with their loved ones (Brown et al., 2019). Consistent meal-sharing can set the stage for parent-child communication, building comfort and trust as parents show interest in their children's everyday lives (Skeer & Ballard, 2013). Family meals also allow parents to monitor any concerning changes and strengthen the parent-child bond (Skeer & Ballard, 2013). Missing these

opportunities can lead to feelings of disconnection among family members (Kok et al., 2019). Miller (2018) indicates that meal sharing offers a glimpse into current events while seizing opportunities to offer guidance and support to family members when necessary. Jarrett et al. (2010) categorize sharing meals as a "survival strategy" often employed by African American families, especially when extended kin are a part of the household (p. 322). Meal-sharing is a form of "resource pooling" in impoverished neighborhoods, along with related domestic tasks such as obtaining food for the home and preparing it, which allows the family to share the financial load and prevent challenges like hunger (p. 322).

Interactions during mealtimes can introduce and reinforce "social order and boundaries within families" (Skafida, 2013, p. 907). Mealtimes facilitate bonding (Kniffin et al., 2015). Additional studies have refined parameters to discover more specific implications for meal-sharing as a protective factor for African American families living in minority communities (Beach et al., 2014; Brown et al., 2019; Cullen et al., 2017; Miller, 2018). Food-sharing and mealtimes are needed to help usher in a culture of dedicated family time, more communication, and more impactful positive parent-child interactions.

Conceptual Framework

Bacon (2018) hints that images portrayed by popular media depictions of family meals of a large table piled with an abundance of food passed from person to person, with people talking and laughing, may not be relatable to numerous families. The family meal has been portrayed as a staple of the American dream (Bacon, 2018). Among today's diverse families, family meals may have different looks and meanings (Middleton et al., 2020). When parents work outside the home, it can be more challenging to have frequently shared mealtimes with family (Kornides et al., 2014). Families have fewer opportunities to dine together in such a boisterous fashion than

previous research has indicated (Bacon, 2018). Other researchers have indicated that parents show a preference for family meals but may encounter numerous obstacles in facilitating them (Middleton et al., 2020). The home environment, in general, can serve as a point of intervention for family members, even on topics such as food culture and eating habits (de Wit et al., 2015). Kornides et al. (2014) report that "family meal frequency may be a marker of overall attentiveness to family health needs" (p. 409).

Family time has shifted under the demands of work, extracurriculars, and social commitments, keeping family members out of the home throughout the day (Lawrence & Plisco, 2017). A topic with academic, social, and behavioral importance, family meals are considered beneficial, and researchers have begun to study the positive impacts of increased quality time with family members on children and adolescents (Barton et al., 2018). Positive relational developments between family members have also been linked to increased meal-sharing (Barton et al., 2018). Harbec and Pagani (2018) indicated that increased shared meals correlate positively with increased family bonding.

Children are more likely to have successful outcomes, such as fewer risky behaviors, enhanced academic performance, and better self-confidence, when there is positive engagement from fathers (Beach et al., 2014) and consistent affection and involvement from mothers (Baker & Iruka, 2013). The more families come together in a confident, affirming manner, the more likely their family relationships will improve, with the potential to ultimately improve the overall quality of family life (Ho et al., 2016). When parents have positive regard for the benefits of family meals, such as better communication, cohesion, and familial support, they are more likely to prioritize regular family meals (Kornides et al., 2014). Such improvements continue to impact a family if meal practices are passed down from generation to generation (Ho et al., 2016).

Potential barriers to frequent family meals are competing work schedules, scholastic activities, internal and external stressors experienced by family members, food insecurity, and constraints on finances and space to enjoy meals together (Watts et al., 2016). Preparing a family meal may seem impractical for families with time constraints, especially in larger families with working parents (Bacon, 2018). Neumark-Sztainer et al. (2013) reported that children and adolescents that reside in a lower socioeconomic area tended to have less frequent family meals than children from homes in higher socioeconomic areas. Parents with lower SES may need to work shifts that are long or during peak family gathering times, limiting their options for meal preparation and family meals around the table (Bacon, 2018).

Many children reside in households with only one parent, with higher instances in African American families (Miller, 2018). Providing food for families is often a task attributed to mothers (Skafida, 2013). A study in 2012 reported that 55% of African American children versus 21% of Caucasian children lived with only one parent (Miller, 2018, p. 1589). African American youths are at least twice as likely to live in a home without at least one of their parents than Caucasian youths, a trend that has existed since the late 1800s (Miller, 2018). Even with such differences in access to resources, families with lower SES still agreed that meal-sharing positively impacted family development. Still, they attempted to prioritize sharing meals despite confounding time constraints (Jarrett et al., 2016).

The home environment impacts a youth's emotional and social development and can also be vital for one's diet. Consistent meals shared with family encourage members to emotionally connect (Berge et al., 2012). Chaotic home environments with higher levels of stress and minimal structural practices, such as family routines, may be linked to higher instances of childhood obesity (Dallacker et al., 2018). Previous research has seen a family's food culture

shaped by the availability of food resources and cultural food practices such as communal food-sharing (de Wit et al., 2015). Meals shared in the community allow for acquiring new knowledge (Dallacker et al., 2018). Parents may select healthier food options when partaking in frequent family meals (Berge et al., 2012). Such things can influence eating habits and guide how a family functions regarding meal preferences and the impact shared mealtimes have on meaningful interactions between family members (de Wit et al., 2015).

Berge et al. (2015) studied whether family meals could reduce the incidence of adolescent obesity in the United States of America and found that as few as one to two family meals a week were a proactive factor, even after a decade, citing a more significant impact in African American families than Caucasian families. This study also acknowledged previous findings that suggest the family meal can serve as an apparatus to demonstrate healthier eating habits and proper regulation of self and emotions and offer a supportive environment for younger family members to mimic those positive behaviors (Berge et al., 2015).

Consistent family meals can also impact the quality and amount of food consumed by family members (do Amaral E Melo et al., 2020, p. 2). Their research also suggested "meals should be regular and not hurried, and consumed in appropriate locations, in a calm and comfortable environment, and, whenever possible, together with family, friends, or colleagues" (do Amaral e Melo et al., 2020, p. 2). The SES has been presented as a determinant for how parents focus on meals; wealthier families generally have the luxury to focus on the quality of food and healthy eating habits, while families in lower SES may be focused on ensuring there is food to eat (Skafida, 2013). The home environment also sways the frequency of shared family meals and can display a range of parent-modeled behaviors (Cullen et al., 2017).

A positive association was found between frequent family meals and increased emotional

health (Trofholz et al., 2018). The profound benefits of meal-sharing are not just on familial development but can impact emotional and mental health (Miller, 2018). Cullen et al. (2017) found that the opportunities presented by family members sharing meals in proximity were beneficial. Such opportunities that facilitate open communication include information gathering, modeling appropriate behaviors (Harbec & Pagani, 2018), and responses to various happenings. These opportunities for modeling acceptable behaviors can influence the development of self-regulation in children and adolescents, which indicates their resiliency (de Wit et al., 2015).

Skafida (2013) indicates meal preparation and provision as a part of motherhood. This study did not assume that only mothers are responsible for meal preparation but that any family member can initiate food-sharing. Paternal involvement in meal preparation and modeling healthy food behaviors was positively correlated with improved consumption and healthier food intake among adolescents (Baltaci et al., 2021). Involving children in the preparation of food to be shared with family can encourage healthier eating habits and more enjoyment of family meals (Flattum et al., 2015).

Review of Related Literature

African American Family Culture

Kelly et al. (2013) detail a harrowing history of slavery and subsequent decades of social and political oppression with detrimental effects on the structure and function of the African American family. Disparities in education, healthcare, housing, and general discrimination have encouraged a system that positions African American families in distress and African American children in educational systems with few resources for quality education (Kelly et al., 2013).

For many families in African American communities, the typical American family mealtime is not a practical model (Bacon, 2018). Kelly et al. (2013) identify meal-sharing

barriers that disproportionately impact African American family functioning compared to the typical American family mealtime model. Such barriers include systemic racism, low SES, increased work schedules, atypical work schedules, one-parent homes, and limited time at home. A 2013 study focused on the eating habits of African American men found that dinner was the most common meal shared with family members and that common barriers were time and access to food (Griffith et al., 2013). Some may have grown up with one or both parents working conflicting shifts and spending dinner and other family meals without an adult present (Miller, 2018). Age can also be a factor, with younger children eating meals with parents more often than older children (McIntosh et al., 2010).

In contrast, Kelly et al. (2013) found protective factors within the African American family. These protective factors include general respect for adults, extended family connections with biological and non-biological individuals, community social support in response to socioeconomic stressors, and religious practices (Kelly et al., 2013). Families with low SES were found to have conflicts with the emotional closeness between members and reported lower quality of life and poorer social support (Mansfield et al., 2013). The African American community can be a protective factor for African American families, especially in times of increased collective traumatic experiences, such as police brutality and highly publicized killings of African American men (Range et al., 2018), women, and children. Previous research has not focused much on African American families' social and emotional development (Baker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2014). Such development can stem from family interactions, namely parent-child interactions (Baker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2014).

Religious practices and spirituality are hallmarks of the African American community and serve as another protective factor, with previous studies showing that religious practices of

African Americans can promote healthier relationships between family members (Kelly et al., 2013). Religion, in general, can also positively influence family structure, encourage marriage and support better relationship quality (Kelly et al., 2013). The Bible demonstrates the significance of sharing meals in the depictions of Jesus feeding the multitude, having dinner with various individuals throughout the Bible (Meijers, 2019), and the imagery and symbolism of communion. Shared meals that are positive and constructive can serve as a conduit for teaching life skills in addition to meal preparation techniques and contribute to better social and emotional regulation (Lawrence & Plisco, 2017).

Family Cohesion

Regarding family cohesion, a sense of shared family identity is foundational. Edirisingha et al. (2015) identify "shared family interactions" as a critical influence in developing a cohesive family identity, including who is considered a member of the family unit and their core values (p. 479). Family cohesion, communication, and flexibility define family functionality (Lin et al., 2019). Cohesion refers to the "emotional bonding" that can take place between family members (Lin et al., 2019, p. 2702). Family cohesion can be assessed by the degree of enmeshment and engagement between family members, their flexibility in their roles and responsibilities, and their ability to communicate (Lin et al., 2019, p. 2702).

Parenting style is also a complex determinant of family meal frequency, referring to how parents monitor and control behaviors and offer comfort and support to their children (Melbye et al., 2013). Amongst the many benefits of shared family meals are the "habits, routines, and preferences" that define and shape shared family tasks and collective beliefs (Edirisingha et al., 2015, p. 480). These collaborative experiences surrounding preparing and consuming a shared meal also contribute to "a sense of bonding, love and caring between family members"

(Edirisingha et al., 2015, p. 480). These communal times can also allow younger family members and children to gain autonomy in expressing their preferences for certain foods (Skafida, 2013). Ethnic identity protects against depression and other mental health concerns amongst ethnic minorities like African Americans (Hurwich-Reiss et al., 2015).

Cultural norms may heavily influence family meal routines (Laurier & Wiggins, 2011). Factors such as the types of food provided, how the food is prepared, and how much food is served and expected to be consumed are based on family norms (Laurier & Wiggins, 2011). Research has uncovered a comparison between unstable and "chaotic" family meals and overly strict or "rigid" eating regimens in that they both can have a detrimental effect on the mental health of a child (Laurier & Wiggins, 2011, p. 55). Families in higher wage brackets may prioritize the seated family meal more, but studies have found that lower-income families may share food more frequently despite time constraints (Lindsay et al., 2021). Still, the family meal is a fertile ground to encourage socialization amongst family members, as well as family bonding, planning of familial events, setting behavioral norms, and navigating areas of familial concern (Laurier & Wiggins, 2011). Because the home environment can be either a risk factor or protective factor for adolescents experiencing mental health problems, family celebrations and predictable rituals like the family meal can be very impactful (Malaquias et al., 2015).

Family Communication

The most common meal for a family to share is dinner, which often allows more time to communicate (Alm et al., 2015). Shared meals offer additional chances to share important happenings of the day, converse on various topics, problem-solve, comfort one another, make plans, bond, learn and enjoy each other's company (Lawrence & Plisco, 2017). Research found that "more open and less hostile communication may help reduce family conflict, improve

collaborative problem solving, or foster trust between parent and child" (Manczak et al. 2018, p. S510). A positive home atmosphere is another factor that can lead to improved communication among family members (Lawrence & Plisco, 2017). Communication is crucial in developing the family environment, defined as "the global images people form about their families through repeated experience with family members" (Hesse et al., 2014, p. 115). A study on adolescent life satisfaction recognized that "parent-child communication is a greater predictor of life satisfaction than family structure and affluence" (Levin et al., 2011, p. 301).

Healthy, positive home environments encourage healthy social and emotional functioning, while negative, hurtful home environments foster maladaptive social and emotional behaviors (Hesse et al., 2014). Studies show adolescents and children want positive, healthy relationships with their parents and guardians (Brown et al., 2019). Additional time together allows parents to establish a better connection with their children through positive communication and more opportunities to teach them and learn from and about them (Brown et al., 2019). Additional research also found that "the intimacy of eating is fundamentally intertwined with the deepening of social ties among people eating together" (Kniffin et al., 2015, p. 284). A 2014 study of co-parenting intricacies experienced by residential and non-residential African American fathers found that the co-parenting and communication habits of parents create the home environment which becomes a model for children (Doyle et al., 2014).

Family cohesion can be influenced by the self-regulation and conflict resolution tendencies modeled in the parenting relationship, which vary by makeup (unmarried, married, divorced, co-parenting) (Doyle et al., 2014). Kids who could share at least five weekly meals with their parents reported fewer reckless behaviors than children who had one or fewer meals with their parents weekly (Miller et al., 2012). In fact, programs like the Promoting Strong

African American Families Program (ProSAAF) were designed to improve communication practices between parents and reinforce healthy co-parenting practices within African American families (Beach et al., 2014). ProSAAF was created to boost parental engagement to reduce the likelihood of risky adolescent behaviors (Kogan et al., 2015). ProSAAF focuses on households with younger adolescents of middle school age (Kogan et al., 2019). Collective mealtimes allow parents additional opportunities to monitor their children and inventory current events in their child's lives and family dynamics (Miller et al., 2012).

In African American families, mealtimes are also impactful in the relationship between heterosexual parents, as studies have found that women tend to influence the dietary habits of their male partners (Allen et al., 2013). The food intake patterns of parents are also influential in the development of the food intake habits of children and adolescents in the home (Skala et al., 2012). A 2012 study of low socioeconomic status families shows that surveyed African American families had a higher likelihood of consuming family meals while enjoying television than surveyed Hispanic families (Skala et al., 2012). Viewing television during meals has previously been linked to poor diet and a higher likelihood of obesity (Roos et al., 2014).

African American mothers are also more likely to be employed full-time and have inflexible work schedules and unfavorable working conditions than Caucasian or Latino women (McLoyd et al., 2008). Such employment conditions and atypical working hours may adversely affect family routines (McLoyd et al., 2008). A key consideration in developing interventions for food habits in families is the family's ethnicity (Skala et al., 2012).

These mealtimes can also allow parents and children to develop open communication and behavioral modeling skills that encourage social skill development and influence general decision-making, even down to making healthier food choices (Lytle et al., 2011). Beach et al.

(2014) also found that meal-sharing is impactful in elevating the closeness of family ties between children and parents and enhancing overall communication. Bocknek (2018) identifies risk factors commonly experienced by younger children in poorer communities, including high trauma exposure and irregular emotional development. At such a crucial time in their development, children are heavily influenced by patterns of behavior, routines implemented by parental figures, and social norms and boundaries modeled in the home (Bocknek, 2018). Said routines can aid in the formation of coping skills for young children to manage distress (Bocknek, 2018). Language development can also be influenced during family meals, and such interactions can affect reading skills and vocabulary development (Miller et al., 2012).

Chang et al. (2020) found that adolescents have a different perception of parent-child relationships and reported experiencing less family cohesion and communication than reported by parents and guardians. Other variables, including the social habits of adolescents and parents, other home environment stressors, and communication styles, can also contribute to the differing perceptions (Chang et al., 2020). Caregiver stressors like household duties, limited self-care, and sleep may also hinder family cohesion and communication (Budescu et al., 2018). Additional research highlights external distractions, such as the use of electronic devices during mealtimes, that have a negative impact on the development of an emotional connection during shared meals and the dietary choices of adolescents (Romano et al., 2021). Parental influence impacts more than just communication and cohesion. El-Sheikh et al. (2014) found that family experiences and exposure to family stressors such as marital discord can affect intellectual ability (p. 892). Parental food selection and acceptable eating behaviors are also modeled during mealtimes. Studies of middle school children have revealed correlations between home food practices and children's eating habits, with parental figures influencing their relationship with food via

modeling and access (de Wit et al., 2015).

Protective Factors

Consistency was previously mentioned as a protective factor for meal-sharing families with younger children (Bocknek, 2018). Family structures where the mother prioritizes regular meal-sharing are more likely to yield children who believe sharing consistent family meals is a priority (McIntosh et al., 2010). Well-adjusted African American youth tend to come from households that include engaged parents, active nurturing and monitoring, clear and direct behavioral expectations, coping skills to manage social stressors, and positive ethnic identity development (Kogan et al., 2015). Research has shown that shared meals give parents an opportunity to model such coping skills (Franko et al., 2008).

Family mealtime can improve communication between family members and potentially increase protective factors such as family cohesion and parent-child connectedness (PCC) (Brown et al., 2019). Involving children in meal preparation, including meal planning, acquiring the food, and cooking it, has been viewed as an opportunity for parent-child bonding and communication and positively impacts the child's self-esteem (Callender et al., 2021). Embracing children's food preferences can help encourage their participation in family meal preparation (Thompson et al., 2016). Involving children in this way also facilitates additional opportunities for conversation and connection (Leech et al., 2014). In African American families, this is vital as African American youths engaged in risky behaviors may be subject to harsher consequences for their behaviors than Caucasian youths engaged in the same behaviors and experience more impact on their social and emotional health (Kogan et al., 2019).

Studies have shown that frequently shared family meals have contributed to a lower likelihood of suicidal behaviors in adolescent girls (Franko et al., 2008) and a lower likelihood of

disordered eating amongst adolescents (Loth et al., 2015). Family dynamics and stressors continue to be identified as factors in adolescent substance use, and community intervention programs such as ProSAAF help lessen the likelihood of engaging in such behaviors (Kogan et al., 2019). Parents may experience conflict between societal and cultural ideals of family meals and what is realistic for their families (Thompson et al., 2016). Additional concerns may arise from power struggles between family members during meals (Persson Osowski & Mattsson Sydner, 2019).

A family's level of functioning can be assessed by the frequency of conflict and level of family cohesion reported by family members (Chang et al., 2020). Other key elements of a functional family unit include the family's emotional health, ability and willingness to communicate, family leisure habits, willingness to help one another, and parental engagement (McCreary & Dancy, 2004). Extended family connections or networks can also support healthy family functioning by sharing family roles and resources (Jarrett et al., 2010). Family cohesion may be viewed differently among parents and children, which may be heavily influenced by the attachment types in the family structure (Chang et al., 2020).

When there is a higher level of PCC in a family unit, enhanced connectivity lowers the likelihood of deviant behaviors in children and adolescents that could adversely affect their health and livelihood (Brown et al., 2019). Lower PCC levels can predict more unsavory behaviors exhibited by youths in unhealthy or disjointed family environments (Brown et al., 2019). Previous research found that, as a protective factor, family meals deterred negative emotional states and problem behaviors while encouraging positive emotional states (Utter et al., 2013). Additional research has found that while the historically idolized seated family dinner continues to be an international standard of family socialization, contemporary and diverse

families have adopted more informal mealtimes in the face of various social and familial barriers to food-share without external and internal pressures (Lindsay et al., 2021).

Programs exist to support the improvement of familial relationships, communication, and coping skills within lower SES families (Barton et al., 2018). Increasing meals to at least once a week is commonly viewed as beneficial (Bacon, 2018) and can support family cohesion. Adolescents are more likely to cite communication with parents as a household concern and are more likely to report less family cohesion (Chang et al., 2020). Family cohesion can help alleviate the burden of internalizing problems, a plight common in adolescent females who identify mothers as some of the only people capable of being relied on for help when experiencing difficulties (Flink et al., 2014). Dunbar et al. (2017) found that children are more likely to have adaptability in their emotional regulation development when in a "warm and supportive" family environment (p. 19). Family meals can be a conduit for the parent-child bond to grow and strengthen with more frequent two-way communication (Utter et al., 2013).

Additional programs to address the issues brought on by external factors such as atypical work schedules and lack of resources to support meal-sharing and food-sharing would be essential to offering minority communities support. Information on creative ways to make meal-sharing and food-sharing part of a family routine to accommodate work and academic schedules and available resources would help families integrate or reinforce these practices. Kamdar et al. (2019) clarify that food insecurity is a disadvantage faced by minority communities at a higher instance than white communities. African American and Hispanic families are more likely to experience trouble obtaining enough food to sustain themselves (Sweeney et al., 2021). Initiatives geared toward improving dynamics and access to resources amongst African American families are encouraged to be mindful of common barriers such as food insecurity and

childcare needs (Kogan et al., 2019). These suggestions for additional community support apply to any busy family with little time together and fewer resources.

Barriers

Systemic societal issues have constantly separated parents from their children via imprisonment, county and state custody of children, and a workforce that does not often provide a living wage (Miller, 2018). Kelly et al. (2013) report that these psychosocial stressors can profoundly impact identity development, especially among African Americans, and how their cultural identity is internalized. Bradley (2019) sheds light on social determinants and their impact on the mental and physical health of African Americans. Meal-sharing helped foster an improved home environment and was conducive to families forming more supportive bonds, which is a social determinant of physical and mental health (Bradley, 2019). Sharing food also gives kids an opportunity to share important or sensitive information with their parents and family members (McIntosh et al., 2010). Meal-sharing and food-sharing can be collaborative. Children and adolescents are more likely to participate in family meals and engage if they are involved in food selection and preparation (McIntosh et al., 2010).

Additionally, Tumin and Anderson (2015) found that employment was negatively correlated with family meal frequency, and marriage had a positive correlation with family meal frequency. African American and Hispanic families reported that some barriers to obtaining better quality food to cook at home included food costs and transportation (Sweeney et al. 2021). The study revealed that 80% of surveyed Hispanic families reported eating family dinners together at least five times a week; however, only 37.5% of African American families ate dinner together more than five times a week (Sweeney et al., 2021).

Systemic oppression has laid an unstable foundation for the adequate formation of

African American families (Miller, 2018). Sharing food can be a practical intervention to begin the process of reaffirming the African American family unit by interjecting simple, meaningful practices that can strengthen a family's resilience. Managing scheduling conflicts and addressing issues such as food insecurity play a significant role in the practicality of increasing family mealtimes. Budescu et al. (2018) found that families and caregivers with limited resources and financial strain may even view time away from work as stressful. Stressors such as inadequate or unstable housing, low income, and limited access to other material necessities may also lead to poor life satisfaction for caregivers and have a negative impact on their relationship with their children and parenting capabilities (Budescu et al., 2018). To facilitate lasting change, programs designed to support these positive family life changes are needed to offer resources to help families manage barriers to consistent meal-sharing.

Behavioral Implications

Increased meals shared with family members produce more positive outcomes among children (Bacon, 2018). Previous surveys revealed that a third of families in America reported consuming less than three meals a week together (Bacon, 2018). de la Torre-Moral et al. (2021) clarify that it is not merely eating food together but enjoying that time shared with family and friends, or conviviality, that facilitates feelings of cohesion and community. Family meals can be the carrier for establishing and fortifying a positive home environment conducive to more favorable child and adolescent behaviors inside and outside the home (Brown et al., 2019). Baker and Iruka (2013) found that the home environment and the quality of the maternal relationship with a child can indicate the level of school preparedness in African American children. Baker and Iruka's (2013) research also found a positive correlation between healthier maternal mental health and positive maternal bonding with better academic performance in younger children. In

essence, when the mother is functioning better and has a healthier mental status, the ensuing maternal involvement and bonding support better scholastic effort (2013). A healthier home environment correlates with healthier behaviors exhibited by children and adolescents (Brown et al., 2019).

Norms for communicating and socializing, child nutrition, and essential factors in child development are all influenced by meal-sharing with family (Lawrence & Plisco, 2017). Food-sharing with family members facilitates opportunities for socialization and observational learning (Nicklas et al., 2001). Improved academics, social skills, and emotional development are positively impacted by increased meal-sharing (Lawrence & Plisco, 2017). The home environment allows parents to demonstrate healthy dietary habits that may support better health outcomes and combat common food-related ills such as obesity (Skala et al., 2012). Poor parental involvement increases the likelihood that adolescents will exhibit negative decision-making and negative behaviors (Green et al., 2013). Adolescents are also less likely to engage in problem behaviors such as self-injury and illicit drug use and have better family satisfaction in correlation with more frequent meals with family (Lawrence & Plisco, 2017). Other reckless behaviors that lessen with more parent-child contact include promiscuity and violence (Levin et al., 2012). These findings were more strongly associated with young females than young males and children in homes involving both parents (2012). Another study revealed that adolescents are more likely to suffer from depression when exposed to precarious "structural factors" such as "low parental supervision" (Green et al., 2013, p. 109). Wallace et al. (2020) report that food-sharing at mealtimes outside of familial settings may also benefit children.

In a study on the efficacy and general health outcomes amongst school-aged children enrolled in food garden programs, Davis et al. (2015) found that encouraging the children to

participate in various aspects of food preparation was beneficial in developing autonomous life skills. The study also recognized that encouraging children to sit and enjoy the prepared food together was influential in facilitating a safe atmosphere for them to experiment with different fruits and vegetables without the pressure to eat specific things (Davis et al., 2015). Another study found that more and more children are dining alone due to various circumstances, such as homeschooling and parental work schedules (Lee et al., 2016). Furthermore, parental/guardian involvement and engagement were encouraged in several of the studied programs, highlighting the importance of the family dynamic in shaping children's food habits and suggesting that such practices in children may influence how parents eat (Davis et al., 2015).

De Vos and Leclair (2019) studied the impact of food skills groups on adults in an inpatient mental health setting. They deduced that participation in occupational food skills groups supported recovery efforts and fostered a sense of cohesion. Participants were also able to identify the importance of meal preparation skills and how their cultural heritage and memories of time spent with family and loved ones connected them to food (De Vos & Leclair, 2019). Family patterns, in general, can connect one generation to the next. Various patterns in functionality, such as relationships between parents and parent-child relationships, can heavily influence subsequent generations and their relational and social habits (Gray et al., 2013). Even in extended care environments for the elderly, eating with family members or in family meal-type settings has been a protective factor in combatting malnutrition and poor socialization (Tsai et al., 2020).

Child development, including self-identity and secure attachments, can all be positively associated with meal-sharing. Regarding psychological functioning, child development progressed better amongst young people who shared more positive mealtime experiences with

family members (Harbec & Pagani, 2018). Ho et al. (2016) also found evidence of enhanced psychological health amongst younger family members in addition to better communication in homes with more frequent meal-sharing. Increased family cohesion has also been attributed to more parent-child quality time around meals (Jarrett et al., 2016). Another important element in repairing the state of African American families is the need for consistency. Family traditions can extend through generations and are passed down through the consistent practice of family rituals, which can serve as protective factors for younger children on the way to increased social awareness and identity formation (Bocknek, 2018).

Beach et al. (2014) focused on the impact of communication between parental figures on adolescents and determined that negative communication in front of children was negatively correlated. Further evaluation of the ProSAAF revealed that interventions designed to improve the quality of communication between parenting partners or spouses were more impactful for women, and changes in the maternal figure's communication heavily influenced changes in the paternal figure's communications in front of their children (Beach et al., 2014). Adjusting communication patterns between parenting figures had implications for improved family functioning over time (Beach et al., 2014).

Other interventions include encouraging families to dine together for meals at least weekly (Bacon, 2018). Lawrence and Plisco (2017) describe an active family life with busy work schedules and social obligations that may detract from family time. Historical representations of families, especially African American families, typically include large meals at least one day a week. Such evidence of the efficacy of even one or two weekly family meals may eventually impact policies and work schedules, and locations in support of families having additional time together for such things as family meals (Berge et al., 2015). The famous "Sunday dinners"

linked to African American culture served as a spiritual reminder to gather together and replenish on a consistent, weekly basis.

Kelly et al. (2013) highlight the centrality of spirituality to the African American community. Fruh et al. (2018) point out that church involvement and religious traditions are priorities in African American communities; food is historically associated with African American church gatherings as well. Jarrett et al. (2016) also reiterated the ability of family gatherings to present opportunities to reconnect, exhibit pro-social behaviors, and handle any domestic issues. Increased family cohesion can also help remedy some of the health disparities faced by minority community members (Bradley, 2019). Even in globally challenging times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, resources such as online food blogs have helped families find new, healthier ways to create family meals and enjoy eating with their families while spending increased time at home (Spaccarotella & Gido, 2022).

Summary

Though research has been conducted on various aspects of meal-sharing and positive family impact, additional research is needed to help make new and previous findings operational. The efficacy of incorporating regular family meals into family life has been indicated in numerous studies. Younger children are more likely to develop more secure attachments, exhibit better psychological functioning, and have better vocabulary and academic performance when meal-sharing is a consistent part of their home life. Adolescents also benefit from frequent meals with their caregivers. Though some studies deduced that other maturation concerns occurring during adolescence might impact the influence of family meals, adolescents are still less likely to engage in problem behaviors or make poor life decisions when multiple meals are shared with parents throughout the week, and positive communication accompanies those meals.

Given the previous research, additional studies could focus on minimizing the time constraints that interfere with family food-sharing opportunities and the benefits of more informal food-sharing as a companion to meal-sharing. Instilling the importance of the links between sharing food, family communication, and family cohesion can be a proactive measure in repairing family functioning. Addressing food insecurity is also paramount in supporting families and minimizing potential stressors associated with coming together to share food. Allocating resources to programs and initiatives that improve access to better food for families is a worthwhile area of research (Sweeney et al., 2021). Removing stigmas around who is responsible for initiating or coordinating family meal plans can encourage an atmosphere of collective responsibility for sharing food on a consistent basis. Restoration begins by making lasting changes in family culture. Increasing opportunities for families to gather and meet a few basic human needs is a fitting way to lay the framework for such change.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This research was an inquiry into whether increased opportunities to share food and meals in a family environment can lead to increased family cohesion and improved family communication in African American families. This chapter describes the research methodology into the protective and restorative attributes of food-sharing in the African American family. The research design, working research questions, ideal number and demographics of participants, a plan to recruit participants, and the preferred method of distribution of research measures are included. Additional information on the referenced measures and the internal, external, and statistical validity of the measures were also considered and discussed.

Research Design

Upon submission and approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), this study utilized a quantitative method featuring a correlational research design complete with random sampling to obtain a minimum of 250 completed surveys. The survey, comprised of 62 questions, assessed family communication and cohesion, family functionality and adaptability, and the frequency and impact of family meal-sharing and food-sharing. Correlational research designs seek to outline the traits of select variables and identify the nature of the correlation between said variables (Curtis et al., 2016). The variables in this study did not undergo manipulation. Therefore, this study was non-experimental. A correlational research design was appropriate for this study as it sought to subjectively demonstrate that the independent variables (IVs), family structure and socioeconomic variables (family size and household income), affect the dependent variables (DVs), family communication and family cohesion, and whether that effect is moderated by the frequency of sharing food with family members.

This survey was made available to participants via a direct link posted to a social media website, Facebook. The link was active and available for four months until 250 surveys were submitted for analysis. The survey was designed to rate participant responses on a Likert scale. This survey allowed the collected data to be analyzed to yield the statistical significance of food-sharing frequency within families. The collected data was analyzed for statistical significance and summarized in writing to demonstrate significant research findings.

Gaps in Literature

Parameters revealed in previous studies into the impact of meal-sharing on families included lower applicability to families living in minority communities or identifying with a minority cultural background. Kelly et al. (2013) highlighted the disparities that African American families face regarding education, healthcare, and relational and family outcomes. Lawrence and Plisco (2017) shared that meal-sharing with family members positively impacts children. Additional studies found that risky behaviors are less likely when adolescents share more family meals (Sharif et al., 2017). This study focused on the implications of increased meal-sharing and food-sharing for improving the quality of communication and cohesion in African American families.

Research Questions

This study focused on the implications of increased family food-sharing (moderator) in African American families as a protective factor against poor social outcomes, such as engaging in risky behaviors and low familial involvement. The present study sought to identify a correlation between the IVs, family structure and socioeconomic variables (family size and household income), and the DVs, family cohesion and familial communication.

The proposed research questions for this study were:

RQ1: Which family structure and socioeconomic variables have statistically significant effects on the family cohesion of African American families?

RQ2: Does food-sharing moderate the effect family structure and socioeconomic variables have on family cohesion in African American families?

RQ3: Which family structure and socioeconomic variables have statistically significant effects on the family communication of African- American families?

RQ4: Does food-sharing moderate the effect family structure and socioeconomic variables have on family communication in African American families?

Hypotheses

The null hypotheses for this study were:

H₀₁: Family structure and socioeconomic variables have no relationship with family cohesion.

H₀₂: Food-sharing does not moderate the relationship between family structure, socioeconomic variables, and family cohesion.

H₀₃: Family structure and socioeconomic variables have no relationship with family communication.

H₀₄: Food-sharing does not moderate the relationship between family structure, socioeconomic variables, and family communication.

The alternative hypotheses for this study were:

H_{a1}: Family structure and socioeconomic variables have a relationship with family cohesion.

H_{a2}: Food-sharing will moderate the relationship between family structure, socioeconomic variables, and family cohesion.

H_{a3}: Family structure and socioeconomic variables have a relationship with family communication.

H_{a4}: Food-sharing will moderate the relationship between family structure, socioeconomic variables, and family communication.

Participants and Settings

Demographics

Participation in this study was voluntary. Adults aged between 21 and 75 years were invited to participate. Online distribution occurred via a dedicated link posted on Facebook. Participants were free to complete the online survey in any appropriate setting. As this study sought to show that family food-sharing impacts cohesion and communication, especially in African American families, data was collected from African American identifying participants. The gender of the participant is not significant; however, data was collected to determine if any significant results are found across genders and for potential use in a future related study.

Setting

Since this survey location was online, the researcher expected a higher likelihood that participants may reside in several states in the United States. Geographic location is not a significant factor in the present study. The most suitable participant will have lived in a family unit during childhood and adolescence.

Recruitment

Participants needed to only be over the age of 21 and under the age of 75 in order to focus on active adults who were living independently. When the survey link was posted to Facebook, a brief post accompanied the link to educate potential participants about the purpose of the study, the length of the survey, and what to expect once the link was clicked to participate

in the survey. A survey platform, Qualtrics, was used to create and host the survey. Potential participants were directed to the survey-hosting website via a link posted on Facebook.

Exclusionary Criteria

Participants who requested their answers be removed from the study were excluded. Only surveys with complete demographic information and complete survey responses were analyzed. Any participant under 21 or over 75 was excluded from this study in order to focus on active adults who were living independently. Additionally, participants who did not dwell with their family unit during their upbringing were excluded from the study.

Instrumentation

Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES-IV)

Comprised of 62 questions to be answered via a 5-point Likert scale, the FACES-IV survey is the most recent version of this familial self-report. This family assessment tool captures responses on family cohesion, flexibility, communication, and satisfaction. The first portion consists of 42 comprehensive questions related to family cohesion and flexibility. Ten additional questions assess family communication while the remaining 10 questions assess family satisfaction. Participants are expected to be 12 years of age or older to complete the assessment and are advised to complete it independently.

Reliability and Validity

This study was anticipated to have higher generalizability among African American communities due to a more diverse sampling. The electronic distribution allowed the participant to complete questions in their natural surroundings. It was not timed, allowing participants to take their time and thoroughly consider their responses. The FACES-IV includes “two balanced and four unbalanced scales” and was found to have high concurrent, construct, and discriminate

validity” (Olson, 2011, p. 64). Heppner et al. (2015) noted the additional cultural considerations needed to administer a culturally competent survey. The language and level of questioning are unambiguous, and none of the questions appear to be culturally offensive. The sample was more specific to African American families than previous studies, as is the point of this study to increase the applicability of the results and customize interventions to utilize meal-sharing and food-sharing as healing tactics for families.

Researcher-made questions were included to assess the frequency of food-sharing and meal-sharing. The two researcher-made questions included "how many weekly meals did you share with your family of origin?" and "how often did you food-share with your family of origin?"

Administration

The survey was electronically administered to voluntary participants. Heppner et al. (2015) shared the difficulties associated with having participants submit surveys. It is hoped that the online administration of this survey will encourage a higher completion rate than if surveys were mailed or physically turned in. The participants completed an informed consent form prior to beginning the survey. The informed consent reiterated the purpose of the study, reaffirmed the confidential nature of the survey responses, and explained their rights and the process for debriefing if needed. Demographic information was collected at the start of the survey to help identify and compare the results of families from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Once that information was gathered, the participant was able to answer a series of questions featured on the survey to assess family communication, cohesion, meal-sharing, and food-sharing.

Procedures

Upon submission and approval by the IRB, this study utilized a quantitative methodology

featuring a correlational research design complete with random sampling. Due to the nature of this study and the need to (1) diversify the sample for increased applicability of research findings and (2) obtain responses from a large sample of African American participants to determine if the variables are protective factors in the African American families, data was collected via an online survey. The survey was available on Facebook for four months until the desired number of participants ($n = 250$) was reached.

The survey of choice for this project was FACES-IV (Olson, 2011). The selected questions assessed family cohesion, communication, routines, relationships, and adaptability. Once all surveys were collected and checked for completeness, appropriateness, and void of exclusionary criteria, the data was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Once the correlation coefficients were obtained, and statistically significant correlations identified, the data was displayed via graphs and tables. A written summary of the statistical findings was drafted and presented.

Data Analysis

Variables

A correlational research design was utilized in this quantitative study. The IVs (see Figure 1) were family structure and socioeconomic variables (family size and household income), and the moderator was the frequency of food-sharing opportunities within a family unit. The DVs were family communication and family cohesion.

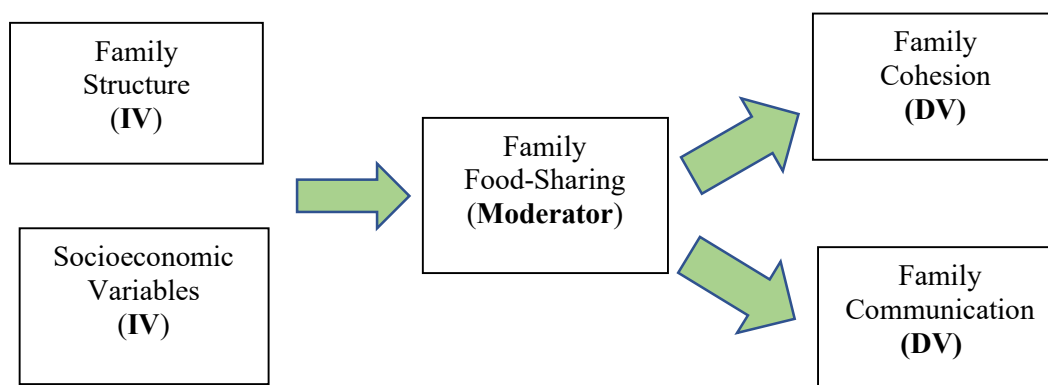
Testing

Once surveys were collected, the data collected from correctly completed surveys was input into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). A bivariate analysis was completed for the IVs and each DVs to determine any significant statistical relationships. Implications were

inferred from the scoring of each measured category on communication, food-sharing, family cohesion, and connectedness. Data was displayed via graphs comparing responses from various family structures and socioeconomic variables on the frequency of meal-sharing/food-sharing opportunities, quality of family communication, and levels of family cohesion.

Figure 1

Model of Independent and Dependent Variables and Moderator



Summary

The premise of this study held that increased food-sharing and mealtimes in African American families can serve as a protective factor for youth and encourage improved communication and family functioning, foster more positive familial relationships, and enhance the overall quality of family life. This study was designed to determine if family structures and socioeconomic variables impact family cohesion and communication. These research findings were designed to show if food-sharing benefited the adult participants by moderating the impact of those variables.

Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

This chapter reports the statistical findings for this research study into whether increased opportunities to share food and meals in a family environment can lead to increased family cohesion and improved family communication in African American families. Included in this chapter are descriptive statistics, alternative and null hypotheses accompanied by the results of related statistical analysis, and a synopsis of the purpose and results of this study.

Descriptive Statistics

Demographic Statistics

Of the 143 analyzed survey responses collected (see Table 1), 108 participants were female (76%) and 35 were male (24%). 143 were Black or African American (100%). Most participants were between 31-40 years old (62 participants or 43%). 29 were between 21-30 years old (20 %), 27 were between 41-50 years old (19%), 19 were between 51-60 years old (13%), five were 61-70 years old (4%), and one was between 71-75 years old (one percent).

Socioeconomic Statistics

In regard to family structure, 58% lived with their nuclear family, 13% lived with extended family, 17% were raised in single-parent families, 11% grew up in blended families and one percent lived in non-nuclear families including foster care and group homes. 26% had a household size of two-three people, 52% had a household size of four-five people, 17% had a household size of six-seven people and five percent had a household size of eight or more people. 12% reported a household income of \$0-\$29,999 per year, 15% reported a household income of \$30,000-\$44,999 per year, 22% reported a household income of \$45,000-\$59,999 per year, 18% reported a household income of \$60,000-\$74,999 per year, 16% reported a household

income of \$75,000-\$99,999 per year, and 17% reported a household income of \$100,000 or more per year.

Family Cohesion, Communication and Satisfaction Levels

On the Balanced Cohesion Scale, 9.1% of participants were somewhat connected, 44.2% were connected, and 46.7% were very connected. On the Family Communication Scale, 26.1% scored very low, 10.3% scored low, 9.7% scored moderate, 31.5% scored high, and 22.4% scored very high. On the Family Satisfaction Scale, 37.6% had a very low level of family satisfaction, 22.4% had a low level, 9.7% had a moderate level, 20% had a high level, and 10.3% had a very high level of family satisfaction.

Table 1*Demographic Results of All Analyzed Surveys*

		Black or African American	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	108	76%
	Male	35	24%
Age	21-30 years	29	20%
	31-40 years	62	43%
	41-50 years	27	19%
	51-60 years	19	13%
	61-70 years	5	4%
	71-75 years	1	1%
	Family Structure	Lived with Nuclear Family	83
Lived with Non-Nuclear Family		1	1%
Extended Family		19	13%
Blended Family		16	11%
Single Parent Family		24	17%
Household Size	2-3 people	37	26%
	4-5 people	75	52%
	6-7 people	24	17%
	8 or more people	7	5%
Household Income	\$0-\$29,999	17	12%
	\$30,000-\$44,999	22	15%
	\$45,999-\$59,999	32	22%
	\$60,000-\$74,999	25	18%
	\$75,000-\$99,999	23	16%
	\$100,000+	24	17%

Preliminary Analytics

Exclusionary criteria for this research indicated that participants needed to be between the

ages of 21 and 75 years and identify as Black or African American. Due to those parameters, 22 of the completed survey entries were excluded from further analysis, one for age, one for age and ethnicity, and 20 for ethnicity. In total, there were 143 viable surveys that were complete and appropriate for further analysis.

A correlation analysis (see Table 2) revealed the following significant correlations at the 0.05 level (2-tailed): frequency of meal-sharing and level of family satisfaction ($r = .180$) and frequency of food-sharing and balanced cohesion level ($r = .199$). At the 0.01 level (2-tailed), the following correlations were significant: family structure and household income ($r = -.460$), balanced cohesion level and household income ($r = .257$), family communication level and household income ($r = .308$), family satisfaction level and household income ($r = .224$), frequency of food-sharing and frequency of meal-sharing ($r = .405$), balanced cohesion level and frequency of meal-sharing ($r = .260$), family communication level and frequency of meal-sharing ($r = .267$), family communication level and frequency of food-sharing ($r = .292$), level of family satisfaction and frequency of food-sharing ($r = .253$), family communication level and balance cohesion level ($r = .612$), level of family satisfaction and balance cohesion level ($r = .570$), and level of family satisfaction and family communication level ($r = .741$).

Table 2*Correlations between Family Cohesion, Communication, Satisfaction, Food-sharing, Meal-sharing, and Socioeconomic Variables*

		Family Structure	Household Size	Household Income	Frequency of Meal-sharing	Frequency of Food-sharing	Balanced Cohesion Level	Family Communication Level	Family Satisfaction Level
Family Structure	Pearson Correlation	1	.042	-.460**	-.158	-.063	-.075	-.128	-.114
	Sig. (2- tailed)		.614	<.001	.060	.453	.375	.129	.175
	N	143	143	143	143	143	143	143	143
Household Size	Pearson Correlation	.042	1	-.047	-.034	.124	-.046	-.142	-.133
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.614		.574	.688	.140	.582	.090	.114
	N	143	143	143	143	143	143	143	143
Household Income	Pearson Correlation	-.460**	-.047	1	.106	.069	.257**	.308**	.224**
	Sig. (2- tailed)	<.001	.574		.290	.411	.002	<.001	.007
	N	143	143	143	143	143	143	143	143
Frequency of Meal-sharing	Pearson Correlation	-.158	-.034	.106	1	.405**	.260**	.267**	.180*
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.060	.688	.209		<.001	.002	.001	.032
	N	143	143	143	143	143	143	143	143
Frequency of Food-sharing	Pearson Correlation	-.063	.124	.069	.405**	1	.199*	.292**	.253**
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.453	.140	.411	<.001		.017	<.001	.002
	N	143	143	143	143	143	143	143	143
Balanced Cohesion Level	Pearson Correlation	-.075	-.046	.257**	.260**	.199*	1	.612**	.570**
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.375	.582	.002	.002	.017		<.001	<.001
	N	143	143	143	143	143	143	143	143
Family Communication Level	Pearson Correlation	-.128	-.142	.308**	.267**	.292**	.612**	1	.741**
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.129	.090	<.001	.001	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	143	143	143	143	143	143	143	143
Family Satisfaction Level	Pearson Correlation	-.114	-.133	.224**	.180*	.253**	.570**	.741**	1
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.175	.114	.007	.032	.002	<.001	<.001	
	N	143	143	143	143	143	143	143	143

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Regression Analytics

A linear regression analysis was completed to assess whether food-sharing moderated the relationships between family cohesion (see Table 3) and socioeconomic variables (family structure, household size, annual household income) and family communication (see Table 4) and socioeconomic variables. The regression was statistically significant ($R^2 = .094$, $F(3,139) = 4.817$, $p = .001$), with food-sharing as a moderator for the relationship between family cohesion and household income ($\beta = .336$, $p = .001$). The regression was not statistically significant for food-sharing as a moderator for the relationship between family cohesion and family structure ($\beta = .023$, $p = .815$) or the relationship between household size and family cohesion ($\beta = -.063$, $p = .588$).

The regression was statistically significant ($R^2 = .150$, $F(3,139) = 8.154$, $p = <.001$), with food-sharing as a moderator for the relationship between family communication and household income ($\beta = .437$, $p = <.001$). The regression was not statistically significant for food-sharing as a moderator for the relationship between family communication and family structure ($\beta = .067$, $p = .482$) or the relationship between household size and family communication ($\beta = -.113$, $p = .315$).

Table 3*Linear Regression for DV Family Cohesion*

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.307 ^a	.094	.075	.623	.094	4.817	3	139	.003

a. Predictors: (Constant), HouseIncomeFood, FamStructureFood, HouseholdSizeFood

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.613	3	1.871	4.817	.003 ^b
	Residual	53.995	139	.388		
	Total	59.608	142			

a. Dependent Variable: Balanced Cohesion Level

b. Predictors: (Constant), HouseIncomeFood, FamStructureFood, HouseholdSizeFood

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	2.108	.109		19.285	<.001
	FamStructureFood	.003	.013	.023	.234	.815
	HouseholdSizeFood	-.011	.021	-.063	-.543	.588
	HouseIncomeFood	.033	.010	.336	3.346	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Balanced Cohesion Level

Table 4*Linear Regression for DV Family Communication*

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.387 ^a	.150	.131	1.404	.150	8.154	3	139	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), HouseIncomeFood, FamStructureFood, HouseholdSizeFood

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	48.211	3	16.070	8.154	<.001 ^b
	Residual	273.943	139	1.971		
	Total	322.154	142			

a. Dependent Variable: Family Communication Level

b. Predictors: (Constant), HouseIncomeFood, FamStructureFood, HouseholdSizeFood

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	2.267	.246		9.210	<.001
	FamStructureFood	.020	.028	.067	.705	.482
	HouseholdSizeFood	-.047	.047	-.113	-1.009	.315
	HouseIncomeFood	.099	.022	.437	4.486	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Family Communication Level

Results

Hypotheses

The null hypotheses for this study were:

H₀₁: Family structure and socioeconomic variables have no relationship with family cohesion.

H₀₂: Food-sharing does not moderate the relationship between family structure,

socioeconomic variables, and family cohesion.

H₀₃: Family structure and socioeconomic variables have no relationship with family communication.

H₀₄: Food-sharing does not moderate the relationship between family structure, socioeconomic variables, and family communication.

The alternative hypotheses for this study were:

H_{a1}: Family structure and socioeconomic variables have a relationship with family cohesion.

H_{a2}: Food-sharing will moderate the relationship between family structure, socioeconomic variables, and family cohesion.

H_{a3}: Family structure and socioeconomic variables have a relationship with family communication.

H_{a4}: Food-sharing will moderate the relationship between family structure, socioeconomic variables, and family communication.

Significant Findings

Family cohesion was found to have a significant relationship with household income, a socioeconomic variable. Family cohesion was not found to have a significant relationship with family structure or household size. Family cohesion was also found to have significant relationships with frequency of food-sharing, frequency of meal-sharing, family communication, and family satisfaction. Food-sharing did moderate the relationship between household income and family cohesion. Food-sharing did not significantly moderate the relationship between family structure and family cohesion or household size and family cohesion.

Family communication was found to have a significant relationship with household

income. Family communication was not found to have a significant relationship with family structure or household size. Family communication was also found to have significant relationships with frequency of meal-sharing, frequency of food-sharing, family cohesion, and family satisfaction. Food-sharing did moderate the relationship between household income and family communication. Food-sharing did not moderate the relationship between family structure and family communication or household size and family communication.

Household income was found to be one of the most significantly correlated variables in regard to family structure, family cohesion, family communication and overall family satisfaction. Food-sharing was found to moderate the relationships between household income, family cohesion and family communication. Household income had an inverse correlation with family structure. Frequency of food-sharing and frequency of meal-sharing were highly correlated. Strongest correlations were found between family communication and family satisfaction, family cohesion and family communication, and family cohesion and family satisfaction.

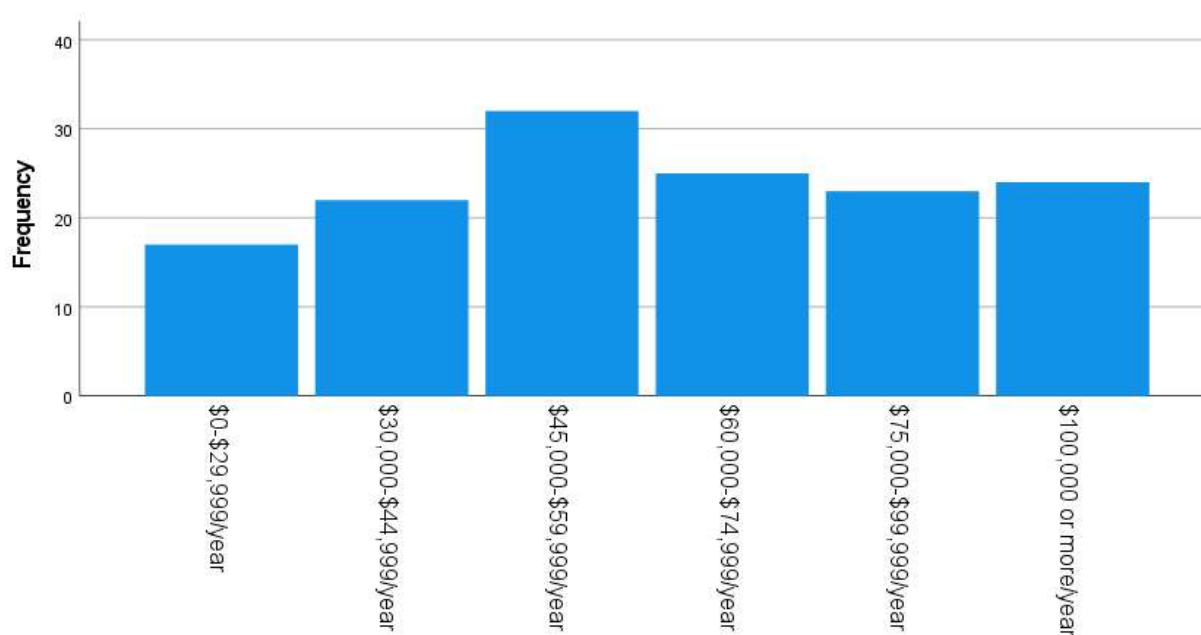
Household Income

Most participants reporting an annual household income (see Figure 2) for their family of origin of \$0-\$29,999 also reported sharing three to four family meals weekly, food-sharing one to two times weekly, and expressed feeling connected to their family members but with very low levels of family communication. Participants reporting \$30,000-\$44,999 yearly most frequently reported three to four family meals weekly, food-sharing one to two times weekly, and feeling connected to family members with very low communication levels. Household incomes of \$45,000-\$59,999 were most frequently correlated with three to six family meals weekly, food-sharing one to four times weekly, feeling connected/very connected, and the highest responses

tied for both very low and high levels of communication between family members. At the \$60,000-\$74,999 annual household income level, participants most frequently reported five to six family meals weekly, food-sharing one to two times weekly, and feeling connected with the most responses for very low communication. An annual household income of \$75,000-\$99,999, participants most frequently reported five to six family meals weekly, food-sharing one to four times weekly, feeling very connected, and having a high level of family communication. Those participants that reported a family of origin annual household income of \$100,000 or more reported having one to two family meals weekly, food-sharing one to two times weekly, feeling very connected, and had high to very high levels of communication between family members.

Figure 2

Household Income Frequencies



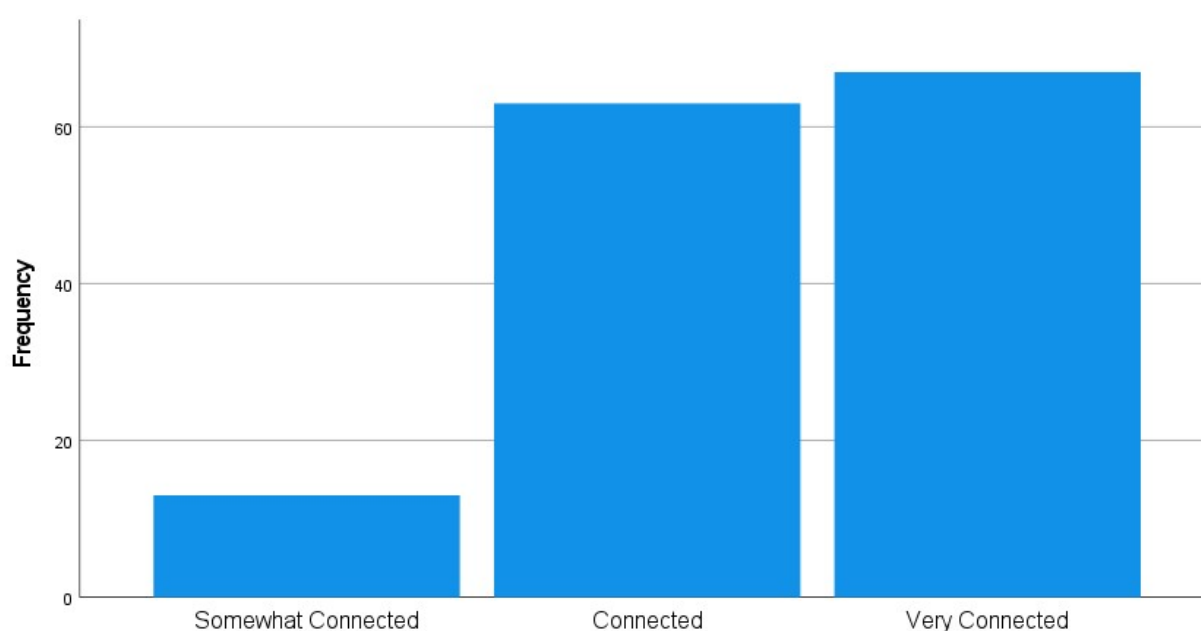
Family Cohesion

Those who reported having a *somewhat connected* level of family cohesion (see Figure 3) most frequently reported annual household income of \$60,000-\$74,999, sharing one to two

family meals weekly, no food-sharing and very low levels of family communication. Participants who felt *connected* were most commonly grew up in households with an income of \$30,000-\$59,999 per year, ate three to four family meals weekly, food-shared one to two times weekly, and had very low communication between family members. A balanced cohesion level of *very connected* was most frequently correlated with household incomes of \$75,000-\$99,999 a year, ate five to six meals weekly, food-shared one to two times weekly, and reported a high level of family communication.

Figure 3

Level of Balanced Cohesion Frequencies

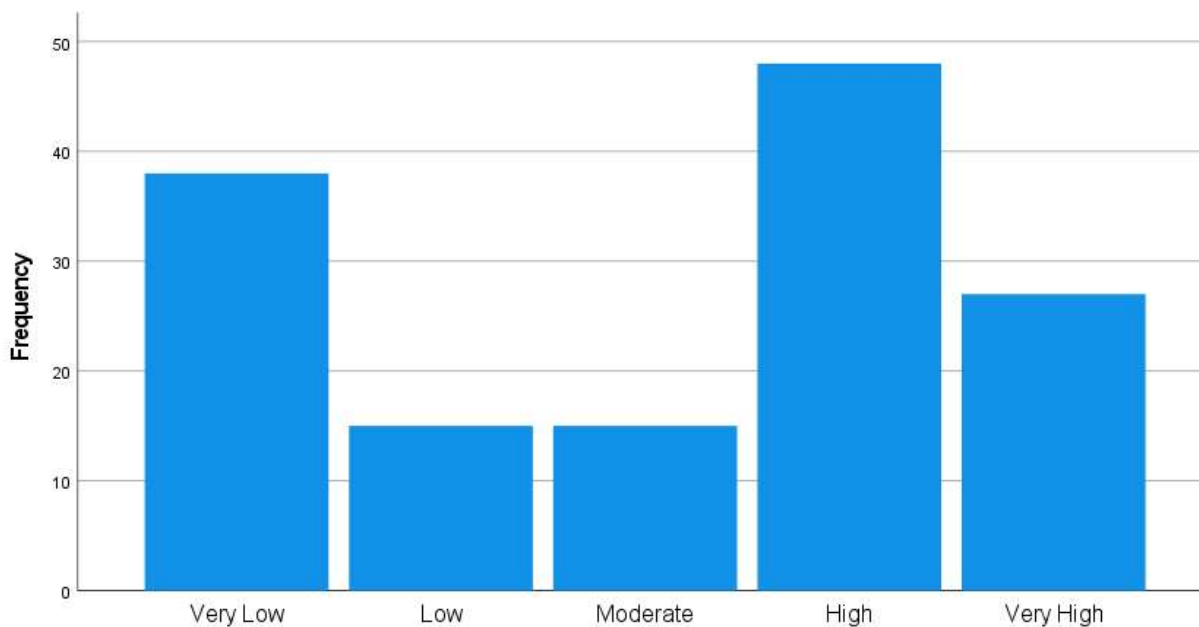


Family Communication

On the FACES-IV questionnaire that was administered, participants answered 10 questions related to family communication. Participants scored their responses to these questions on a five-point Likert scale with responses ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Scores were categorized into five categories based on calculated percentages: “*very high*”, which

is characterized as family members feeling positive about the way they communicate and how often they communicate; “*high*”, where family members are generally satisfied with the way they communicate and do not have many issues with communication; “*moderate*”, the family has a good outlook on their communication with more concerns; “*low*”, there are many concerns about the way the family members communicate with each other; and “*very low*”, there are plenty of issues and concerns about the frequency and way the family members communicate with each other (Olson, 2011).

Those reporting a *very low* level of communication (see Figure 4) were most frequently correlated with household incomes of \$30,000-\$59,999 a year, ate one to two meals weekly, food-shared one to two times weekly, and reported feeling connected. Participants reporting a *low* level of communication were most frequently correlated with household incomes of \$0,000-\$29,999 a year, ate three to four meals weekly, food-shared three to four times weekly, and reported feeling connected. Those reporting a *moderate* level of communication were most frequently correlated with household incomes of \$60,000-\$74,999 a year, ate three to four meals weekly, food-shared one to two times weekly, and reported feeling connected. Participants reporting a level of *high* communication were most frequently correlated with household incomes of \$75,000-\$99,999 a year, ate five to six meals weekly, food-shared one to two times weekly, and reported feeling very connected. Those reporting a *very high* level of communication were most frequently correlated with household incomes of \$100,000 or more a year, ate five to six meals weekly, food-shared one to two times weekly, and reported feeling very connected.

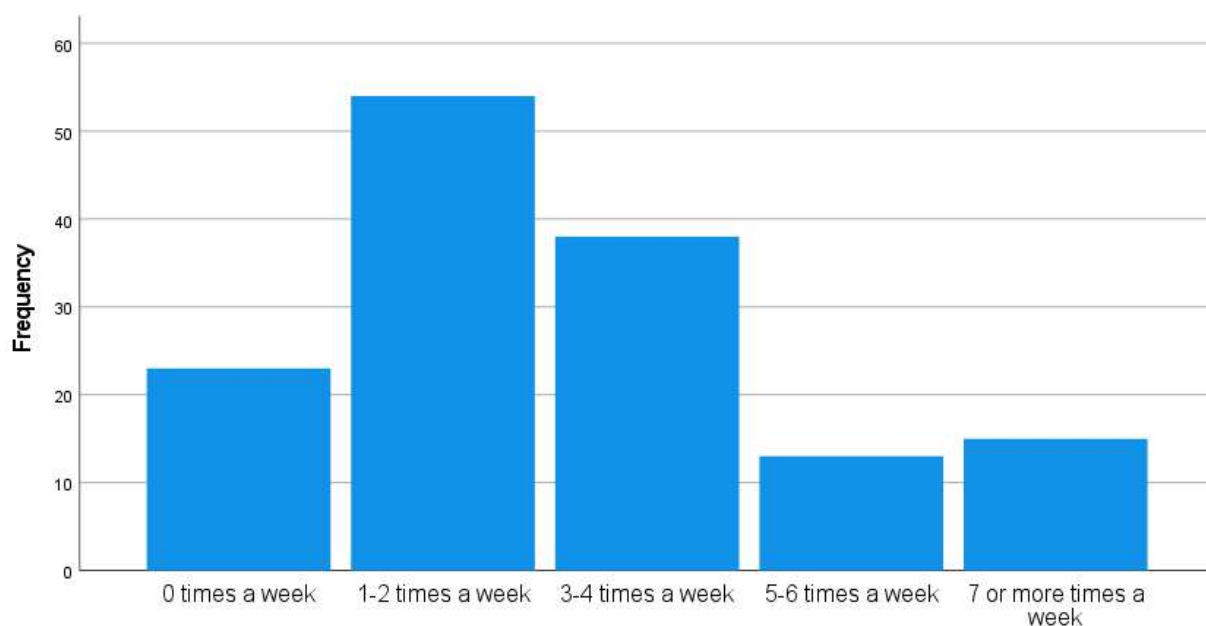
Figure 4*Level of Family Communication Frequencies****Food-Sharing***

Participants that reported food-sharing (see Figure 5) zero times weekly were most frequently correlated with household incomes of \$45,000-\$59,999 a year, ate one to two meals weekly, reported very low family communication, and felt connected. Those participants that reported food-sharing one to two times weekly were most frequently correlated with household incomes of \$30,000-\$44,999 a year, ate three to four meals weekly, reported high family communication, and felt connected to very connected. Participants that reported food-sharing three to four times weekly were most frequently correlated with household incomes of \$45,000-\$59,999 and \$75,000-\$99,999 a year, ate three to four meals weekly, reported high family communication, and felt very connected. Those participants that reported food-sharing five to six times weekly were most frequently correlated with household incomes of \$45,000-\$59,999 and \$100,000 or more a year, ate five to six meals weekly, reported high family communication, and

felt very connected. Participants that reported food-sharing seven or more times weekly were most frequently correlated with household incomes of \$75,000-\$99,999 a year, ate seven or more meals weekly, reported very high family communication, and felt very connected. As a moderator, participants that reported lower annual household incomes still frequently reported higher levels of family communication and cohesion when more food-sharing was present.

Figure 5

Frequency of Food-sharing



Meal-Sharing

Participants that reported sharing family meals (see Figure 6) zero times weekly were most frequently correlated with household incomes of \$45,000-\$59,999 a year, food-shared zero times weekly, reported very low family communication, and felt somewhat connected to connected. Those participants that reported sharing family meals one to two times weekly were most frequently correlated with household incomes of \$100,000 or more a year, food-shared one to two times weekly, reported very low family communication, and felt connected. Participants

that reported sharing family meals three to four times weekly were most frequently correlated with household incomes of \$30,000-\$59,999 a year, food-shared one to two times weekly, reported high family communication, and felt connected. Those participants that reported sharing family meals five to six times weekly were most frequently correlated with household incomes of \$60,000-\$99,999 a year, food-shared one to two times weekly, reported high family communication, and felt very connected. Participants that reported sharing family meals seven or more times weekly were most frequently correlated with household incomes of \$45,000-\$59,999 a year, food-shared seven or more times weekly, reported high family communication, and felt connected to very connected.

Figure 6

Frequency of Meal-sharing



Summary

A disproportionate amount of socioeconomical disparities are inflicted on African American families, indicating a need for restorative practices (Kamdar et al., 2019). African

American parents in low-income households are more likely to have employment that requires atypical hours, constricting time typically spent sharing meals with their family units (Bacon, 2018). The purpose of this quantitative study was to identify food-sharing (gathering to eat) as a medium for African American families to enhance quality family communication skills and bolster family cohesion. This study was designed to determine if family structure (nuclear, non-nuclear, blended, extended, single-parent) and socioeconomic variables (household size, income) have a statistically significant effect on family cohesion and family communication and whether eating collectively with family moderates those effects.

Overall findings from the study confirmed that a relationship does exist between a socioeconomic variable (household income) and family communication and family cohesion. Findings also reaffirmed that with increased family meal-sharing there are higher levels of family communication and family cohesion. A positive correlation between increased meal-sharing and increased food-sharing exists. Food-sharing was found offer some moderation to the relationships between socioeconomic variables and family cohesion and family communication. Food-sharing was highly correlated with very high levels of family communication and feelings of being very connected to family members.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

Overview

The notion that African American families may need growth-oriented support and fortification due to disparities resulting from systemic racism and socioeconomic oppression is evident in previous studies (Kamdar et al., 2019). The culture of abuse and deprivation that characterizes African American history has overtly impacted the structure, functioning, and communication norms of African American families (Kamdar et al., 2019). When the norm for centuries has been the separation and destruction of the African American family unit (Miller, 2018), there is a need for support to help facilitate healthy family functioning and the development of protective factors such as food-sharing. Uprooting and dismantling the African American family were historically tactics used to assault the very heart of African American people (Miller, 2018). Generational trauma plagues an entire culture of people whose family identities were shattered due to unimaginable cruelty, such as watching forced separations of children pulled from their parents to be abused and enslaved, and from terrorism, segregation, over-policing, unjust mass incarceration, ongoing brutality, and lack of social policy to even assign value to the African American life (Miller, 2018).

One way to facilitate increased family time spent around mealtime is to involve children or other family members in the house in preparing meals which can encourage feelings of empowerment (Alm et al., 2015). Spending this additional time together may also interject some positivity into the home (Alm et al., 2015). Meal-sharing can also be a rich tradition to hand down through generations of families that gather together to connect (Bockneck, 2018). Such traditions can serve as protective factors for family members in minority communities (Bockneck, 2018). Bacon (2018) encouraged programs designed to address the need for

increased family meals to shift focus to innovating approaches to reach diverse households such as single parent homes.

This study built on the need for a diverse sample for studies on family communication, family cohesion, and family protective factors by polling participants from African-American families. An important focus of this study was identifying how family structure and socioeconomic variables impacted family dynamics reported by African American adults as they relate to the meal-sharing and food-sharing practices of their families of origin.

Families may need to come together to collectively decide on a routine that works best for them. Personalized mealtimes for each family is a practical approach. Every family has different scheduling demands. The goal is to establish a meal-sharing routine that suits each family's unique scheduling considerations and maximizes the amount of time spent together. Food-sharing is a way to support family cohesion and communication without the formalities of a typical mealtime, such as breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Other potential areas where this study may be applicable is polling whether or not current families are interested in resources that help improve familial communication and cohesion, aim to encourage more frequent meal-sharing, food-sharing, and/or offer additional support in the formation of positive parenting practices.

Discussion

The focus of this study was food-sharing of the African American family. History has positioned the minority family structure in a constant state of vulnerability. This study sought to identify food-sharing as a potential path to increasing family cohesion and family communication. The research findings supported the initial hypotheses in showing that relationships exist between household income, a socioeconomic variable, and family communication and cohesion. This research also confirmed that food-sharing did moderate the

relationship between that socioeconomic variable (household income) and family cohesion and communication. The research also showed that family structure and household size did not have significant relationships with family cohesion and communication within this sample.

At the highest level of family cohesion, participants reported high levels of communication and were typically eating five to six family meals a week with at least one to two instances of food-sharing a week, and an annual household income of \$75,000-\$99,999. At the highest level of family communication, participants reported feeling very connected to their family members and were typically eating five to six meals a week with at least one to two instances of food-sharing a week, and an annual household income of \$100,000 or more. Those that reported food-sharing seven or more times weekly with their families also reported very high family communication, a very connected level of family cohesion, an annual household income of \$75,000-\$99,999, and sharing family meals seven or more times a week. Participants that reported meal-sharing seven or more times weekly with their families also reported high family communication, connected to very connected levels of family cohesion, an annual household income of \$45,000-\$59,999, and food-sharing seven or more times a week with family.

Implications

Increased food-sharing, in addition to meal-sharing is highly correlated with higher levels of family cohesion, communication, and satisfaction levels. The less family meals and food-sharing opportunities reported, the lower levels of family communication reported. Those participants reporting no food-sharing had very low family communication and only ate with family once or twice a week. Food-sharing increased as reported number of family meals increased. The level of family communication increased as the levels of meal-sharing and food-sharing increased. Household income seemed to be one of the biggest indicators of family

communication levels, with the lowest levels of family communication being reported with lower household incomes. Those participants reporting the highest levels of family cohesion had the highest levels of family communication. Those reporting very high family communication also reported feeling very connected to their family members, had more frequent family meals and food-shared more often.

Limitations

Skafida (2013) points out that several previous studies are based on assessing frequency of family meals and not what parts of a family meal allow it to be beneficial. While the findings of this study reaffirm that higher instances of family meal-sharing are positively correlated with heightened family cohesion and communication, it does not identify which aspects of meal-sharing are most beneficial.

Of the 270 questionnaires that were submitted, 165 of them were complete and appropriate for analysis. According to Qualtrics analytics, this survey had an 83% response rate with a presumption that three completed surveys and seven incomplete surveys were duplicates. Of the 165 completed submissions, only 143 of those met all criteria to be considered appropriate for analysis for this current study. A smaller sample size than initially desired may result in limited applicability of research findings. Delimitations of this study were that individuals under the age of 21, over the age of 75, and who did not identify as African American were excluded.

Other variables in a family dynamic may be more meaningful indicators of a healthy family structure than family communication and cohesion at any given time. A family dynamic is not static and members of a family are constantly exposed to stimuli from a variety of sources and in a variety of settings that may influence their level of cohesion and ability or desire to have meaningful communication with family members.

Recommendations for Future Research

Throughout the limited research on the efficacy and development of African American families, there is an apparent need for restoration on both the familial and communal levels. The available body of studies demonstrate the prevalence of lower family cohesion, increased risky behaviors engaged in by adolescents (Bacon, 2018) and poorer academic performance in children from homes with less parental involvement (Jarrett et al., 2016). Increased mealtimes were positively associated with better outcomes for children, adolescents and family units in terms of development and general familial well-being (Bacon, 2018).

Additional studies are needed to assess the quality of communication, eating, and communication patterns in single-parent households and blended families for a more representative sample (Alm et al., 2015). The adequacy of existing programs designed to encourage family meals is limited (Bacon, 2018). Research participants from previous samples in studies have not included very much diversity. A diverse sampling, including responses from people from many races, would be beneficial to highlight any similarities and differences the frequency of family meals has across different races in a future study. Further study is needed into protective factors to promote overall familial well-being and to support family cohesion and communication in more culturally diverse representative groups including African Americans (Lawrence & Plisco, 2017). Baker and Rimm-Kaufman (2014) suggest additional focus on hands-on parenting within minority communities with younger children and its impact on their social and psychological development. Studies that are rooted in more diverse sampling in order to apply findings to children of various cultural backgrounds are also warranted (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2013).

Identifying whether common food practices in the African American community and

inherent residency traits is also vital to determining if meal-sharing is a practical beginning to reaffirm and rebuild the African-American family (Edge, 2017). Kamdar et al. (2019) suggest more research into programs that help minimize food insecurity may help lessen barriers to increased mealtimes. Beach et al (2014) encourage development of and studies into programs targeting supportive strategies for couples to overcome economic stressors and enhance parenting techniques. A shortage of unbiased literature on the frequency of mealtime and corresponding outcomes among children is also present (Miller et al., 2012). Family meals may shift in the amount in significance as children age, but further studies into an average number of weekly family meals that offers positive impact and mitigates the likelihood of risky behaviors can be helpful for developing future interventions in family and parent support programs (Miller et al., 2012).

The review of the literature indicates that it is also imperative to assess the bounds of effective meal-sharing. Previous studies have not specified an ideal number of weekly meals to render the routine impactful for those in attendance. Previous studies have also lacked direction in whose attendance would be most beneficial. It would also be enlightening to identify whether there is a difference in the impact of just a mother or father having dinner with their children. For instance, knowledge of whether the presence of one parent or both, or another guardian is equally impactful and efficacious in determining positive effect on development and communication is needed. Additionally, identifying what elements of meal-sharing and food-sharing is the most efficacious in encouraging family cohesion and communication.

Summary

Future research needs to clearly define parameters of family meal research such as what constitutes a family meal and who can be included as “family” (Skeer & Ballard, 2013).

Similarly, a broader definition of “family” may be more favorable in assessing minority families with a diverse make-up (McCreary & Dancy, 2004). Assessment tools designed for Caucasian families living in specific socioeconomic status may not be appropriate to assess African-American families in similar or different socioeconomic classification (McCreary & Dancy, 2004). Additionally, measures that are designed to investigate specific key aspects of family meal occurrences that lead to it being a protective factor would better inform future research (Skeer & Ballard, 2013). Finally, a look into how food-sharing can continue to compliment the benefits of meal-sharing can be helpful in offering families insights into practical ways to improve family dynamics and strengthen cohesive bonding and positive communication.

References

- Agathao, B. T., Cunha, D. B., Sichieri, R., & Lopes, C. S. (2021). The role of family meal frequency in common mental disorders in children and adolescents over eight months of follow-up. *PloS One*, *16*(2), e0243793-e0243793.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0243793>
- Allen, J. O., Griffith, D. M., & Gaines, H. C. (2013). She looks out for the meals, period: African American men's perceptions of how their wives influence their eating behavior and dietary health. *Health Psychology*, *32*(4), 447-455. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028361>
- Alm, S., Olsen, S. O., & Honkanen, P. (2015). The role of family communication and parents' feeding practices in children's food preferences. *Appetite*, *89*, 112-121.
<https://doi:10.1016/j.appet.2015.02.002>
- Appelhans, B. M., Waring, M. E., Schneider, K. L., & Pagoto, S. L. (2014). Food preparation supplies predict children's family meal and home-prepared dinner consumption in low-income households. *Appetite*, *76*, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2014.01.008>
- Bacon, T. (2018). Framing the family meal: A comparison of social marketing campaigns and parents' views. *Journal of Family Issues*, *39*(1), 78-103.
<https://doi:10.1177/0192513X15596196>
- Baker, C. E., & Iruka, I. U. (2013). Maternal psychological functioning and children's school readiness: The mediating role of home environments for African American children. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *28*(3), 509-519.
<https://doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2013.02.004>
- Baker, C. E., & Rimm-Kaufman, S. E. (2014). How homes influence schools: Early parenting predicts African American children's classroom social-emotional functioning. *Psychology*

- in the Schools*, 51(7), 722-735. <https://doi:10.1002/pits.21781>
- Baltaci, A., Alvarez de Davila, S., Reyes Peralta, A. O., Laska, M. N., Larson, N., Hurtado, G. A., & Reicks, M. (2021). Adolescent-reported Latino fathers' food parenting practices and family meal frequency are associated with better adolescent dietary intake. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(15), 8226. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18158226>
- Barton, A. W., Beach, S. R. H., Wells, A. C., Ingels, J. B., Corso, P. S., Sperr, M. C., Anderson, T. N., & Brody, G. H. (2018). The protecting strong African American families program: A randomized controlled trial with rural African American couples. *Prevention Science*, 19(7), 904-913. <https://doi:10.1007/s11121-018-0895-4>
- Beach, S. R. H., Barton, A. W., Lei, M. K., Brody, G. H., Kogan, S. M., Hurt, T. R., Fincham, F. D., & Stanley, S. M. (2014). The effect of communication change on long-term reductions in child exposure to conflict: Impact of the promoting strong African American families (ProSAAF) program. *Family Process*, 53(4), 580-595. <https://doi:10.1111/famp.12085>
- Berge, J. M., MacLehose, R. F., Loth, K. A., Eisenberg, M. E., Fulkerson, J. A., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2012). Family meals. associations with weight and eating behaviors among mothers and fathers. *Appetite*, 58(3), 1128-1135. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2012.03.008>
- Berge, J. M., Wall, M., Hsueh, T., Fulkerson, J. A., Larson, N., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2015). The protective role of family meals for youth obesity: 10-year longitudinal associations. *The Journal of Pediatrics*, 166(2), 296-301. <https://doi:10.1016/j.jpeds.2014.08.030>
- Bocknek, E. L. (2018). Family rituals in low-income African American families at risk for

- trauma exposure and associations with toddlers' regulation of distress. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 44(4), 702-715. <https://doi:10.1111/jmft.12293>
- Bradley, R. H. (2019). Home life and health among Native American, African American, and Latino adolescents. *Health Psychology*, 38(8), 738-747. <https://doi:10.1037/hea0000776>
- Brown, S. L., Teufel, J., Birch, D. A., & Abrams, T. E. (2019). Family meals and adolescent perceptions of parent-child connectedness. *Journal of Family Studies*, 25(1), 34-45. <https://doi:10.1080/13229400.2016.1200115>
- Budescu, M., Sisselman-Borgia, A., & Taylor, R. D. (2018). Perceptions of adequate personal time and wellbeing among African American families with adolescents. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 27(6), 1763-1773. <https://doi:10.1007/s10826-018-1014-7>
- Callender, C., Velazquez, D., Adera, M., Dave, J. M., Olvera, N., Chen, T. A., Alford, S., & Thompson, D. (2021). Perspectives of black and Hispanic children living in under-resourced communities on meal preparation and grocery shopping behaviors: Implications for nutrition education. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(22), 12199. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182212199>
- Chang, C. J., Ohannessian, C. M., Krauthamer Ewing, E. S., Kobak, R., Diamond, G. S., & Herres, J. (2020). Attachment and parent-adolescent discrepancies in reports of family functioning among suicidal adolescents. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 29(1), 227-236. <https://doi:10.1007/s10826-019-01566-7>
- Cullen, K. W., Thompson, D., & Chen, T. (2017). Outcome evaluation of family eats: An eight-session web-based program promoting healthy home food environments and dietary behaviors for African american families. *Health Education & Behavior*, 44(1), 32-40. <https://doi:10.1177/1090198116643917>

- Curtis, E., Comiskey, C., & Dempsey, O. (2016). Importance and use of correlational research. *Nurse Researcher*, 23(6), 20-25. <https://doi.org/10.7748/nr.2016.e1382>
- Dallacker, M., Hertwig, R., & Mata, J. (2018). The frequency of family meals and nutritional health in children: A meta-analysis. *Obesity Reviews*, 19(5), 638-653. <https://doi.org/10.1111/obr.12659>
- Davies, A., & Evans, D. (2019). Urban food sharing: Emerging geographies of production, consumption and exchange. *Geoforum*, 99, 154-159. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.11.015>
- Davis, J. N., Spaniol, M. R., & Somerset, S. (2015). Sustenance and sustainability: Maximizing the impact of school gardens on health outcomes. *Public Health Nutrition*, 18(13), 2358-2367. <https://doi:10.1017/S1368980015000221>
- de la Torre-Moral, A., Fàbregues, S., Bach-Faig, A., Fornieles-Deu, A., Medina, F. X., Aguilar-Martínez, A., & Sánchez-Carracedo, D. (2021). Family meals, conviviality, and the mediterranean diet among families with adolescents. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(5), 2499. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18052499>
- De Vos, G., & Leclair, L. (2019). Food skills group value, meaning, and use with inpatients in a mental health setting. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 82(6), 326-336. <https://doi:10.1177/0308022618823660>
- de Wit, J. B. F., Stok, F. M., Smolenski, D. J., de Ridder, D. D. T., de Vet, E., Gaspar, T., Johnson, F., Nureeva, L., & Luszczynska, A. (2015). Food culture in the home environment: Family meal practices and values can support healthy eating and self-regulation in young people in four European countries. *Applied Psychology: Health and*

- Well-being*, 7(1), 22-40. <https://doi:10.1111/aphw.12034>
- Dennard, E., Kristjansson, E., Tchangalova, N., Totton, S., Winham, D., & O'Connor, A. (2022). Food insecurity among African Americans in the United States: A scoping review. *PloS One*, 17(9), e0274434. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0274434>
- do Amaral e Melo, G. R., Silva, P. O., Nakabayashi, J., Bandeira, M. V., Toral, N., & Monteiro, R. (2020). Family meal frequency and its association with food consumption and nutritional status in adolescents: A systematic review. *PloS One*, 15(9), e0239274-e0239274. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239274>
- Doyle, O., Goldston, D. B., Dzirasa, E., Fontes, M., Estroff, S., & Burriss, A. (2014). "You gotta have a 'good help mate": African American fathers' co-parenting experiences. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, 15(4), 377-386. <https://doi:10.1037/a0034732>
- Dunbar, A. S., Leerkes, E. M., Coard, S. I., Supple, A. J., & Calkins, S. (2017). An integrative conceptual model of parental racial/ethnic and emotion socialization and links to children's social-emotional development among African American families. *Child Development Perspectives*, 11(1), 16-22. <https://doi:10.1111/cdep.12218>
- Edge, T. (2017). "Who do you think you are?": Examining the African-American experience in slavery and freedom through family history television. *Journal of American Culture*, 40(4), 341-354. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jacc.12806>
- Edirisingha, P. A., Ferguson, S., & Aitken, R. (2015). From 'me' to 'we': Negotiating new family identity through meal consumption in Asian cultures. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 18(4), 477-496. <https://doi:10.1108/QMR-09-2014-0086>
- El-Sheikh, M., Tu, K. M., Erath, S. A., & Buckhalt, J. A. (2014). Family stress and adolescents'

- cognitive functioning: Sleep as a protective factor. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 28(6), 887-896. <https://doi:10.1037/fam0000031>
- Flattum, C., Draxten, M., Horning, M., Fulkerson, J. A., Neumark-Sztainer, D., Garwick, A., Kubik, M. Y., & Story, M. (2015). HOME plus: Program design and implementation of a family-focused, community-based intervention to promote the frequency and healthfulness of family meals, reduce children's sedentary behavior, and prevent obesity. *The International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 12(1), 53. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-015-0211-7>
- Flink, I. J. E., Beirens, T. M. J., Butte, D., & Raat, H. (2014). Help-seeking behaviour for internalizing problems: Perceptions of adolescent girls from different ethnic backgrounds. *Ethnicity & Health*, 19(2), 160-177. <https://doi:10.1080/13557858.2013.801402>
- Franko, D. L., Thompson, D., Affenito, S. G., Barton, B. A., & Striegel-Moore, R. H. (2008). What mediates the relationship between family meals and adolescent health issues? *Health Psychology*, 27(2S), S109-S117. [https://doi.org/10.1037/0278-6133.27.2\(Suppl.\).S109](https://doi.org/10.1037/0278-6133.27.2(Suppl.).S109)
- Fruh, S. M., Mulekar, M. S., Crook, E., Hall, H. R., Adams, J., & Lemley, T. (2018). The family meal challenge: A faith-based intervention to empower families. *Journal of Christian Nursing*, 35(3), 191-197. <https://doi:10.1097/CNJ.0000000000000503>
- Gray, A. C., Shafer, K., Limb, G. E., & Busby, D. M. (2013). Unique influences on American Indian relationship quality: An American-Indian and Caucasian comparison. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 44(5), 545. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.44.5.589>
- Green, K. M., Fothergill, K. E., Robertson, J. A., Zebrak, K. A., Banda, D. R., & Ensminger, M. E. (2013). Early life predictors of adult depression in a community cohort of urban

African Americans. *Journal of Urban Health*, 90(1), 101-115.

<https://doi:10.1007/s11524-012-9707-5>

Griffith, D. M., Wooley, A. M., & Allen, J. O. (2013). "I'm ready to eat and grab whatever I can get": Determinants and patterns of African American men's eating practices. *Health Promotion Practice*, 14(2), 181-188.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839912437789>

Harbec, M., & Pagani, L. S. (2018). Associations between early family meal environment quality and later well-being in school-age children. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 39(2), 136-143.

<https://doi:10.1097/DBP.0000000000000520>

Heppner, P. P., Wampold, B. E., Owen, J., Wang, K. T., & Thompson, M. N. (2015). *Research design in counseling* (4th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Hesse, C., Rauscher, E. A., Roberts, J. B., & Ortega, S. R. (2014). Investigating the role of hurtful family environment in the relationship between affectionate communication and family satisfaction. *Journal of Family Communication*, 14, 112-128.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2013.866453>

Ho, H. C. Y., Mui, M., Wan, A., Ng, Y., Stewart, S. M., Yew, C., Lam, T. H., & Chan, S. S.

(2016). Happy family kitchen: A community-based research for enhancing family communication and well-being in Hong Kong. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 30, 752-

762. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000233>

Hurwich-Reiss, E., Rienks, S. L., Bianco, H., Wadsworth, M. E., & Markman, H. J. (2015).

exploring the role of ethnic identity in family functioning among low-income parents.

Journal of Community Psychology, 43(5), 545-559. <https://doi:10.1002/jcop.21701>

Jarrett, R. L., Bahar, O. S., & Kersh, R. T. (2016). When we do sit down together: Family meal times in low-income African American families with preschoolers. *Journal of Family*

- Issues*, 37(11), 1483-1513. <https://doi:10.1177/0192513X14547417>
- Jarrett, R. L., Jefferson, S. R., & Kelly, J. N. (2010). Finding community in family: Neighborhood effects and African American kin networks. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 41(3), 299-328. <https://doi:10.3138/jcfs.41.3.299>
- Jehlička, P., Daněk, P., & Vávra, J. (2019). Rethinking resilience: Home gardening, food sharing and everyday resistance. *Revue Canadienne d'Études Du Développement*, 40(4), 511-527. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2018.1498325>
- Jones, D. J., Zalot, A. A., Foster, S. E., Sterrett, E., & Chester, C. (2007). A review of childrearing in African American single mother families: The relevance of a coparenting framework. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 16(5), 671-683. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-006-9115-0>
- Kamdar, N., Rozmus, C. L., Grimes, D. E. & Meininger, J. C. (2019). Ethnic/Racial comparisons in strategies parents use to cope with food insecurity: A systematic review of published research. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, 21(1), 175-188. <https://doi:10.1007/s10903-018-0720-y>
- Kelly, S., Maynigo, P., Wesley, K., & Durham, J. (2013). African American communities and family systems: Relevance and challenges. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice*, 2(4), 264-277. <https://doi:10.1037/cfp0000014>
- Kinser, A. E. (2017). Fixing food to fix families: Feeding risk discourse and the family meal. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 40(1), 29-47. <https://doi:10.1080/07491409.2016.1207001>
- Kniffin, K. M., Wansink, B., Devine, C. M., & Sobal, J. (2015). Eating together at the firehouse: How workplace commensality relates to the performance of firefighters. *Human*

- Performance*, 28(4), 281-306. <https://doi:10.1080/08959285.2015.1021049>
- Kogan, S. M., Bae, D., Lei, M., & Brody, G. H. (2019). Family-centered alcohol use prevention for African American adolescents: A randomized clinical trial. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 87(12), 1085-1092. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ccp0000448>
- Kogan, S. M., Lei, M., Brody, G. H., Futris, T. G., Sperr, M., & Anderson, T. (2015). Implementing family-centered prevention in rural African American communities: A randomized effectiveness trial of the strong African American families program. *Prevention Science*, 17(2), 248-258. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-015-0614-3>
- Kok, C. M., Torquati, J., & de Guzman, M. (2019). The family mealtime study: Parent socialization and context during family meals. *Journal of Extension*, 57(3).
- Kornides, M. L., Nansel, T. R., Quick, V., Haynie, D. L., Lipsky, L. M., Laffel, L. M. B., & Mehta, S. N. (2014). Associations of family meal frequency with family meal habits and meal preparation characteristics among families of youth with type 1 diabetes. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 40(3), 405-411. <https://doi:10.1111/cch.12078>
- Laurier, E., & Wiggins, S. (2011). Finishing the family meal. the interactional organisation of satiety. *Appetite*, 56(1), 53-64. <https://doi:10.1016/j.appet.2010.11.138>
- Lawrence, S. D., & Plisco, M. K. (2017). Family mealtimes and family functioning. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 45(4), 195-205. <https://doi:10.1080/01926187.2017.1328991>
- Lee, H. J., Lee, S. Y., & Park, E. C. (2016). Do family meals affect childhood overweight or obesity?: Nationwide survey 2008-2012. *Pediatric Obesity*, 11(3), 161-165. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijpo.12035>
- Leech, R. M., McNaughton, S. A., Crawford, D. A., Campbell, K. J., Pearson, N., & Timperio,

- A. (2014). Family food involvement and frequency of family dinner meals among Australian children aged 10–12years. Cross-sectional and longitudinal associations with dietary patterns. *Appetite*, 75, 64-70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2013.12.021>
- Levin, K. A., Kirby, J., & Currie, C. (2012). Adolescent risk behaviours and mealtime routines: Does family meal frequency alter the association between family structure and risk behaviour? *Health Education Research*, 27(1), 24-35. <https://doi:10.1093/her/cyr084>
- Levin, K. A., Dallago, L., & Currie, C. (2011). The association between adolescent life satisfaction, family structure, family affluence and gender differences in parent–child communication. *Social Indicators Research*, 106(2), 287-305. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-011-9804-y>
- Lin, Y., Washington-Nortey, P., Hill, O. W., & Serpell, Z. N. (2019). Family functioning and not family structure predicts adolescents' reasoning and math skills. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 28(10), 2700-2707. <https://doi:10.1007/s10826-019-01450-4>
- Lindsay, J., Tanner, C., Leahy, D., Supski, S., Wright, J., & Maher, J. (2021). The family meals imperative and everyday family life: An analysis of children's photos and videos. *Critical Public Health*, 31(1), 77-89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2019.1684443>
- Lora, K. R., Sisson, S. B., DeGrace, B. W., & Morris, A. S. (2014). Frequency of family meals and 6-11-year-old children's social behaviors. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 28, 577-582. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000014>
- Loth, K., Wall, M., Choi, C., Bucchianeri, M., Quick, V., Larson, N., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2015). Family meals and disordered eating in adolescents: Are the benefits the same for everyone?: Family meals and disordered eating in adolescents. *The International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 48(1), 100-110. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.22339>

- Luesse, H. B., Paul, R., Gray, H. L., Koch, P., Contento, I., & Marsick, V. (2018). Challenges and facilitators to promoting a healthy food environment and communicating effectively with parents to improve food behaviors of school children. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 22(7), 958-967. <https://doi:10.1007/s10995-018-2472-7>
- Lytle, L. A., Hearst, M. O., Fulkerson, J., Murray, D. M., Martinson, B., Klein, E., Pasch, K. & Samuelson, A. (2011). Examining the relationships between family meal practices, family stressors, and the weight of youth in the family. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 41(3), 353-362. <https://doi:10.1007/s12160-010-9243-z>
- Malaquias, S., Crespo, C., & Fransisco, R. (2015). How do adolescents benefit from family rituals? Links to social connectedness, depression and anxiety. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24, 3009-3017. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-014-0104-4>
- Manczak, E. M., Donenberg, G. R., & Emerson, E. (2018). Can mother-daughter communication buffer adolescent risk for mental health problems associated with maternal depressive symptoms? *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 47(1), S509-S519. <https://doi:10.1080/15374416.2018.1443458>
- Mansfield, A. K., Dealy, J. A., & Keitner, G. I. (2013). Family functioning and income: Does low-income status impact family functioning? *The Family Journal*, 21(3), 297-305. <https://doi:10.1177/1066480713476836>
- McIntosh, W. A., Kubena, K. S., Tolle, G., Dean, W. R., Jan, J., & Anding, J. (2010). Mothers and meals. The effects of mothers' meal planning and shopping motivations on children's participation in family meals. *Appetite*, 55(3), 623-628. <https://doi:10.1016/j.appet.2010.09.016>
- McLoyd, V. C., Toyokawa, T., & Kaplan, R. (2008). Work demands, Work–Family conflict, and

- child adjustment in African American families: The mediating role of family routines. *Journal of Family Issues*, 29(10), 1247-1267.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X08320189>
- McCreary, L. L., & Dancy, B. L. (2004). Dimensions of family functioning: Perspectives of low-income African American single-parent families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(3), 690-701. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00047.x>
- Meijers, E. (2019). Come and eat: Table fellowship as a fundamental form of diakonia. *Diaconia*, 10(1), 85-111. <https://doi:10.13109/diac.2019.10.1.85>
- Melbye, E. L., Øgaard, T., Øverby, N. C., & Hansen, H. (2013). Parental food-related behaviors and family meal frequencies: Associations in Norwegian dyads of parents and preadolescent children. *BMC Public Health*, 13(1), 820-820. <https://doi:10.1186/1471-2458-13-820>
- Middleton, G., Golley, R., Patterson, K., Le Moal, F., & Coveney, J. (2020). What can families gain from the family meal? A mixed-papers systematic review. *Appetite*, 153, 104725-104725. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2020.104725>
- Middleton, G., Golley, R. K., Patterson, K. A., & Coveney, J. (2022). The family meal framework: A grounded theory study conceptualising the work that underpins the family meal. *Appetite*, 175, 106071-106071. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2022.106071>
- Miller, D. P., Waldfogel, J., & Han, W. (2012). Family meals and child academic and behavioral outcomes: Family meals and child outcomes. *Child Development*, 83(6), 2104-2120.
<https://doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2012.01825.x>
- Miller, M. C. (2018). Destroyed by slavery? Slavery and African American family formation following emancipation. *Demography*, 55(5), 1587-1609. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524->

[018-0711-6](#)

- Murry, V. M., Simons, R. L., Simons, L. G., & Gibbons, F. X. (2013). Contributions of family environment and parenting processes to sexual risk and substance use of rural African American males: A 4-year longitudinal analysis. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 83(2pt3), 299-309. <https://doi:10.1111/ajop.12035>
- Murry, V. M. (2019). Healthy African American families in the 21st century: Navigating opportunities and transcending adversities. *Family Relations*, 68(3), 342-357. <https://doi:10.1111/fare.12363>
- Myers, N., Sood, A., Alolayan, Y., Broussard, B., Fox, K., King, K., LoGalbo, E., Thompson, L., & Compton, M. T. (2019). Coping with food insecurity among African American in public-sector mental health services: A qualitative study. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 55(3), 440-447. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-019-00376-x>
- Neumark-Sztainer, D., Wall, M., Fulkerson, J. A., & Larson, N. (2013). Changes in the frequency of family meals from 1999 to 2010 in the homes of adolescents: Trends by sociodemographic characteristics. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 52(2), 201-206. <https://doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2012.06.004>
- Nicklas, T. A., Baranowski, T., Baranowski, J. C., Cullen, K., Rittenberry, L., & Olvera, N. (2001). Family and child-care provider influences on preschool children's fruit, juice, and vegetable consumption. *Nutrition Reviews*, 59(7), 224-235. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-4887.2001.tb07014.x>
- Olson, D. H. (2011). FACES IV and the circumplex model: Validation study. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 37(1), 64-80.
- Persson Osowski, C., & Mattsson Sydner, Y. (2019). The family meal as an ideal: Children's

- perceptions of foodwork and commensality in everyday life and feasts. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 43(2), 178-186. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12495>
- Range, B., Gutierrez, D., Gamboni, C., Hough, N. A., & Wojciak, A. (2018). Mass trauma in the African American community: Using multiculturalism to build resilient systems. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 40(3), 284-298. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-017-9449-3>
- Romano, K. A., Heron, K. E., & Everhart, R. S. (2021). Family meals, positive versus negative emotion suppression, and emotional eating: Examining adolescent–parent dyadic associations. *Eating and Weight Disorders*, 27(4), 1491-1504. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40519-021-01292-4>
- Roos, E., Pajunen, T., Ray, C., Lynch, C., Kristiansdottir, Á. G., Halldorsson, T. I., Thorsdottir, I., te Velde, S. J., Krawinkel, M., Behrendt, I., de Almeida, Maria Daniel Vaz, Franchini, B., Papadaki, A., Moschandreas, J., Ribič, C. H., Petrova, S., Duleva, V., Simčič, I., & Yngve, A. (2014). Does eating family meals and having the television on during dinner correlate with overweight? A sub-study of the PRO GREENS project, looking at children from nine European countries. *Public Health Nutrition*, 17(11), 2528-2536. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980013002954>
- Sharif, M. Z., Alcalá, H. E., Albert, S. L., & Fischer, H. (2017). Deconstructing family meals: Do family structure, gender and employment status influence the odds of having a family meal? *Appetite*, 114, 187-193. <https://doi:10.1016/j.appet.2017.03.032>
- Spaccarotella, K., & Gido, J. (2022). Food blogs to family meals: A brief evaluation of blogs as resources for home cooking during COVID-19. *Computers, Informatics, Nursing*, 40(5), 350-355. <https://doi.org/10.1097/CIN.0000000000000903>

- Skafida, V. (2013). The family meal panacea: Exploring how different aspects of family meal occurrence, meal habits and meal enjoyment relate to young children's diets. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 35(6), 906-923. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.12007>
- Skala, K., Chuang, R., Evans, A., Hedberg, A., Dave, J., & Sharma, S. (2012). Ethnic differences in the home food environment and parental food practices among families of low-income Hispanic and African-American preschoolers. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, 14(6), 1014-1022. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10903-012-9575-9>
- Skeer, M. R., & Ballard, E. L. (2013). Are family meals as good for youth as we think they are? A review of the literature on family meals as they pertain to adolescent risk prevention. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 42(7), 943-963. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-013-9963-z>
- Smith, S. L., Ramey, E., Sisson, S. B., Richardson, S., & DeGrace, B. W. (2020). The family meal model: Influences on family mealtime participation. *Occupational Therapy Journal of Research*, 40(2), 138-146. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1539449219876878>
- Sweeney, L. H., Carman, K., Varela, E. G., House, L. A., & Shelnett, K. P. (2021). Cooking, shopping, and eating behaviors of African American and Hispanic families: Implications for a culturally appropriate meal kit intervention. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(18), 9827. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18189827>
- Thompson, C., Cummins, S., Brown, T., & Kyle, R. (2016). Contrasting approaches to 'doing' family meals: A qualitative study of how parents frame children's food preferences. *Critical Public Health*, 26(3), 322-332. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2015.1089353>
- Trofholz, A. C., Thao, M. S., Donley, M., Smith, M., Isaac, H., & Berge, J. M. (2018). Family meals then and now: A qualitative investigation of intergenerational transmission of

- family meal practices in a racially/ethnically diverse and immigrant population. *Appetite*, 121, 163-172. <https://doi:10.1016/j.appet.2017.11.084>
- Tsai, M., Tsai, H., Tsai, Y., & Liao, F. (2020). “Tailoring homely meals”: Family members’ motivations underlying nursing home visits during residents’ meals. *Japan Journal of Nursing Science*, 17(4), e12341-n/a. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jjns.12341>
- Tumin, R., & Anderson, S. E. (2015). The epidemiology of family meals among Ohio’s adults. *Public Health Nutrition*, 18(8), 1474-1481. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980014001773>
- Utter, J., Denny, S., Robinson, E., Fleming, T., Ameratunga, S., & Grant, S. (2013). Family meals and the well-being of adolescents. *Journal of Pediatrics and Child Health*, 49(11), 906-911. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpc.12428>
- Wallace, R., Lombardi, K., Backer, C. D., Costello, L., & Devine, A. (2020). Sharing is caring: A study of food-sharing practices in Australian early childhood education and care services. *Nutrients*, 12(1), 229. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu12010229>
- Watts, A. W., Loth, K., Berge, J. M., Larson, N. & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2016). No time for family meals? parenting practices associated with adolescent fruit and vegetable intake when family meals are not an option. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 117(5), 707-714. <https://doi:10.1016/j.jand.2016.10.026>

Appendix A: IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 19, 2023

Jessica Stevens
Jacqueline Wirth

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY22-23-1271 WITH OR WITHOUT THE TABLE, WE GATHER: REINFORCING INNATE RESILIENCIES IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY

Dear Jessica Stevens, Jacqueline Wirth,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: May 19, 2023. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: Permission to Use FACES-IV

PREPARE  ENRICH

Permission to Use FACES IV Package

Jessica Lynn Stevens-Eddy

3/31/2023

We are pleased to give you permission to use the **FACES IV Package** in your research project, teaching or clinical work with couples or families. To use FACES IV, you must use the entire FACES IV Package which contains 62 items.

You may either duplicate the materials directly or have them retyped for use in a new format. If they are retyped, acknowledgement should be given regarding the name of the instrument, the developers' names, and PREPARE/ENRICH, LLC.

In exchange for providing this permission, we would appreciate a copy of any papers, theses or reports that you complete using the **FACES IV Package**. This will help us to stay abreast of the most recent developments and research regarding this scale. Also, we are requesting that you provide us with a *set of your data* so that we can build a large and diverse norm base. We will acknowledge your contribution to the master database. We will not use your data for individual studies on your topic or any topic. We would appreciate it if you used the format we have provided in an Excel spreadsheet (Microsoft). We thank you for your cooperation in this effort.

In closing, we hope you find the **FACES IV Package** of value in your work with families.