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Title: Development of Emotion-based Nutrition Education Messages to Promote Family Meals

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Abstract: It has recently been suggested that using emotion-based nutrition education messages may be a better way to influence behavior change than traditional nutrition education messages, but this has not been well tested. Producing emotion-based messages is a multi-step process that begins with exploring subconscious barriers to behavior change rather than more obvious and typically reported barriers. The purpose of this project was to uncover low-income mothers' subconscious feelings toward family and family meals to lay the foundation for the development of emotion-based nutrition education messages for use in Extension programming.

Five focus group interviews were conducted with 51 low-income African American (n=28) and white (n=23) mothers. Their feelings toward family, family meals, and effective messages for promoting family meals were assessed using metaphorical techniques such as allowing a participant 30 seconds to select a photograph that describes their essence of family or creating a collage that describes their ideal family meal. Discussions were video-taped, transcribed, and manually analyzed using a content-driven, immersion/crystallization approach to qualitative data analysis.

Results showed that some mothers felt family mealtime was merely obligatory, and described mealtime as stressful. Some reported a preference for attending to their own needs instead of sitting down with their children, while others felt that mealtime should be used to interact with and educate children, and felt guilty when they were not able to provide family meals.

Based on results indicating what would encourage mothers to provide family meals, we concluded that the following are recommendations for an effective emotion-based message: Choose racially-diverse and non-traditional families whenever people are included in graphics; use an image of a child dining alone at a table with a guilt-evoking message such as "Do you take the time for family meals?"; include a brief, educational message on the importance of family meals, such as "Children who eat fewer family meals may be more likely to become overweight."; and use large, bold, and colorful lettering. Data obtained in the current study are being used to develop innovative, emotion-based messages that will be tested for effectiveness in promoting family meals.

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