Correspondence Between My Child at Mealtime and Observed Parent Behaviors During Mealtime

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Background
- Interventions targeting obesity in young children increasingly include parenting behaviors as a target for change.
- Higher rates of child obesity in low-income children increases the need for efforts tailored to the unique needs for low-income, ethnically diverse families.
- Parent Feeding Styles and Parenting Quality. Parenting Dimensions Inventory, shortened

Procedure
- Parents completed the MCMT and a parenting quality survey as part of the larger study. Within 2 months, participants and the target child were filmed during a mealtime in their home using the following criteria:
  - A meal that their children regularly eat at home during a time their parent is present;
  - A meal that the majority of family members typically participate in;
  - A meal that occurs on a fairly regular basis across a typical week.

Measures
- Parent Feeding Styles. MCMT (26 items). Subscales: Parent-centered ("I struggle with my child to get her to eat") and child-centered ("I let my child serve himself") feeding. The items can also be combined to create Responsiveness and Demand/Directness dimensions that parallel the CSQG (Hughes et al., 2005).
- Parenting Quality. Parenting Dimensions Inventory, shortened edition (PDI-S) (Power, 2002). Subscales: nurturance (6-items, "My child feels safe and secure") and inconsistency (4-items, "There are times I just don’t have the energy to make my child behave as he (or she) should").
- Mealtime Behavior. Video tapes of mealtimes coded by two independent coders using a modified version of the BATMAN procedure (Klesges et al., 1983). Counts of behaviors adjusted for mealtime length resulting in rates per minute (rpm) for each behavior. Behaviors were combined into scales for analyses:
  - Parent-centered behaviors (physical manipulation, feeding child, negative/neutral statements about food, verbal directives/demands, verbal discouragement, and bargaining)
  - Child-centered behaviors (positive statements about food, general conversational turns, modeling, and child serving self).

Objective
Assess the correspondence between parent MCMT responses and observed behaviors during a videotaped family mealtime in the home.

Method
Participants
- Sixty mothers and their preschool aged children (M age = 4; # = boys) were drawn from parents and children participating in the Healthy Kids project (N=214).

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Correspondence Between My Child at Mealtime Scores and Observed Behaviors

### Bivariate Associations between My Child at Mealtime Scores and Observed Behaviors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>My Child at Mealtime</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent Centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowed Parent Item</td>
<td>258*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowed Child Item</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturance</td>
<td>-108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistency</td>
<td>547***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results
- Consistent pattern of associations between parent responses to MCMT items and Parent-centered behaviors observed during mealtime.
- Limited associations between parent responses to MCMT items and Child-centered behaviors during mealtime.
- Parent-Centered MCMT subscale scores were significantly associated with observed parent centered behaviors during mealtime and to parent reports of inconsistency in parenting.
- Child-Centered MCMT subscale scores were significantly associated with parent reports of nurturance in parenting, but not to observed behaviors.
- Responsiveness scores derived from MCMT were negatively associated with observed parent centered mealtime behaviors and parent reported inconsistency in parenting.

Conclusions
- Parent responses to MCMT items are reflective of behaviors demonstrated during a typical mealtime.
- Stronger validation is demonstrated for parent-centered than child-centered behaviors observed during mealtime.
- Child-centered behaviors measured in MCMT may be more observable at times other than the mealtime itself (e.g. meal planning).
- Parent responses to the MCMT child-centered feeding items were associated with their responses to general parenting quality items indicating the responses tap into similar underlying constructs.
- Reponses to child-centered MCMT items specifically may be associated with more general parenting behaviors demonstrated away from the table and may be difficult to observe during the mealtime.
- Positive parenting may create functional systems of interaction, resulting in stable, fluid interactions across a variety of contexts without having to rely on specific parenting behaviors to be demonstrated in every situation.
- Future work should include parent-child interactions across a variety of activities, not just mealtimes, to assess whether general parenting quality demonstrated across situations underlies child-centered feeding behaviors.

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