Name:_____

Child Psychology
Exercise: Identifying Methodological Challenges

"The average family meal lasts barely 20 minutes, but few other settings in family life have such potential to influence children's behavior and development. Sharing a meal regularly, research suggests, can boost children's health and wellbeing… Shared family mealtimes have been associated with such diverse outcomes as reduced risk for substance abuse, promotion of language development, academic achievement, and reduced risk for pediatric obesity." (SRCD Report, 2008)

Question: Does sharing meals as a family promote healthy development for children?

What are the methodological challenges involved in answering this question?
Write in complete sentences, and be sure to make your answers specific to this case.

MEASUREMENT
What difficulties do you foresee in measuring shared family meals?

1) How might defining "shared family meals" be difficult?

2) What are some possible methods of collecting this data (on the meals), and what biases might result from each?

3) What are the possible comparisons? What are kids who are not "sharing meals" doing instead? Which of these would be better or worse than sharing meals?

GENERALIZABILITY

What concerns do you have about generalizability? Are there some scenarios where sharing meals as a family might promote healthy development, and others where it might not?

4) In what situations might sharing meals be especially important? In which might it be unnecessary, or potentially even harmful?

5) For which children might shared meals be most helpful? For which children could it be ineffective or negative?

6) How might nonlinearity be an issue? Could you conceive of a threshhold in this case, or a happy medium? State where and why.

CAUSALITY
What pitfalls do you foresee in interpreting causality?

7) What kind of evidence would convince you of direct causality? (How exactly would you like to see a study designed?)

If all the evidence you see is of the type quoted on pg.1, what alternative interpretations are possible? **Suggest multiple mechanisms** *for each path (for example, how excatly might shared meals cause healthier development?).*

8) Direct

9) Reverse

10) Lurking variable