

# Lived Mothering

How Daily Care-Giving Affects  
Women's Health Perceptions and  
Practices

---

Tracy R. Nichols, Ph.D.  
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

# Research Team

- New York
  - ◆ Amanda Birnbaum, Ph.D.
  - ◆ Sara Birnel, BA
  - ◆ Nicole Miller, MPH
  - ◆ Karen McCready, MA
  - ◆ Sarah Timmons-DeGregory, MPH
- North Carolina
  - ◆ Danielle Durham, BS
  - ◆ Yalonda Miller, BS
  - ◆ Neda Padilla, BS
  - ◆ Regina Pulliam, MPH
  - ◆ Alicia Sowisdral, MA
  - ◆ Harmony Waller, BA

Study supported, in part, by Cornell University's *Bronfenbrenner Life Course Center Innovative Research Program Award*; UNCG's *OSL CBR Grant* and the Center for Women's Health and Wellness at UNCG

# Household Production of Health

- Health occurs in the day-to-day practices within the home
- Families have a shared sense of meaning for daily routines
  - ◆ Families create and refine definitions of health; learn about health and respond to health issues through these routines
- Women are the primary healthcare providers and decision-makers for their families
  - ◆ Home is still considered a “woman’s domain.”

# Mothers as Healthcare Providers

- Denham's studies on family health
  - ◆ Even within families where fathers hold power over all other decisions, mothers dominate healthcare
  - ◆ Mothers frequently place health care concerns of family before their own well-being
    - “Family first before anybody else/Take care of them before I take care of self” (“It’s A She Thang” - Salt N Peppa)

# Motherwork

- Eichler (2008) Carework vs Housework
  - ◆ Participants had difficulty distinguishing between the two
    - Carework associated with an ill dependent; housework associated with cleaning
    - Participants requested household work
  - ◆ Some included mental, emotional, and managerial tasks as both housework or carework
  - ◆ Healthwork embedded in household work

# Division of Labor

- Not-So-Nuclear Families
  - ◆ Men more prevalent and instrumental in care-giving than literature would presume, yet in all but one family women are doing managerial tasks
- Divergent Families
  - ◆ Fathers can choose when they are involved in childcare and under what conditions their caregiving occurs
    - Report less time thinking/planning and more engagement in sports and homework
    - Gift versus responsibility

# Question

- How do women who are actively mothering their children, perceive their daily lives and how their daily life relates to their health?
  - ◆ How do mothers understand the concept of health and their own health-related practices?
  - ◆ How does the context of mothers' daily lives affect their perceptions of health and health-related practices?

# Listening to Mothers

- Two qualitative studies conducted:
  - ◆ BRIGHT [Building Relationships Involves Growing Healthy Together]
    - Interviews with women and their adolescent daughters on the meaning and experiences of health and mother-daughter relations
  - ◆ Women's Ways, Women's Days
    - Interviews with mothers on their daily routines and health
    - Mothers complete PDA surveys - 3x/day for 10 days
- All interviews audiotaped, transcribed, reviewed, & entered into Atlas.ti for coding and analysis

# Participants

- **BRIGHT (N=12)**
  - ◆ 6 from NYC, 6 from Greensboro
  - ◆ 9 Black/African American; 1 Dominican, 1 Caribbean & 1 Panamanian
  - ◆ Late 30s to Late 40s
  - ◆ 5 currently married
  - ◆ No. children ranged from 1-12
- **Women's Ways, Women's Days (N=15)**
  - ◆ 5 from NYC, 10 from Greensboro
  - ◆ 6 African American, 4 biracial, 2 Caucasian, 1 African
  - ◆ 20's to late 40's
  - ◆ 10 married or co-habiting
  - ◆ No. children ranged from 1-6

# Coding Process

- Codebook development
  - ◆ Open coding
  - ◆ Identify common codes across projects
- Two coders
  - ◆ PI and Graduate Assistant
- Reliability
  - ◆ Overlap coding
    - Discussion entered directly into Atlas.ti
    - Meetings to address and resolve disagreements

# Analysis

- Open coding/Memoing
- Compare and contrast method used both within and between transcripts
  - ◆ Examined health codes with expectations and time
- Emerging themes
  - ◆ Strategies/Self-Blame/Women's Work
  - ◆ Checking for salience within all transcripts

# Relevant Code Definitions

- Health Definition
  - ◆ What health is, descriptions of being healthy or unhealthy; also includes what health is not
- Health Concerns
  - ◆ Worries, issues, maladies, diseases, risk associated with health
- Habits
  - ◆ Practices that are done on a daily basis that promote well-being or detract from well-being

# Health Definitions: Holistic

To feel good, uhm, as a whole person. To wake up in the morning and want to get out of bed. To look forward to what your goals are for the day and to feel physically motivated to do them

So what I'd define it as is a way of living rather than an end result

Physically they should be fit...mentally...I think on a daily basis just getting information and just keeping abreast of certain things or at least keeping the mind active, and as far as spiritually of course also having a uh relationship with God.

# Health Definitions: Physical

...you've been to the doctor, you like do the necessary things like take a shower, brush your teeth, comb your hair, you're just conscious of what needs to be done in order for you to feel good.

I eat all my meals. I drink my water. I drink my milk. Uh, I brush my teeth. I bathe. Those are healthy ~~things~~ I guess.

Uhhh, getting exercise everyday, which is something I don't do or something like eating healthy which I know that I don't do...and [laughing] having some time to yourself

Well I try to maintain, like uhm exercises, like toning...keep the body functional.

# Health Definitions: Emotional & Spiritual

So another thing about being healthy to me is like, to say good morning to the kids and like kiss them, to me that's like a healthy start to the day emotionally

The stress isn't good you know, so I think ... that... stress is...really part of my health, one of the big big parts

The closeness I have with God. That makes me [healthy] the more close I am to him. Being there..for people even if I ...don't know them. ...We all need to be there for each other 'cause you never know...That's spirituality for me.

# Health Concerns

- Eating/Weight Issues
- Lack of exercise
- Sleep deprivation
- Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Hypertension
- Hearing/Sight Loss
- Family History
- Diabetes
- Breast Cancer/Colon Cancer
- Death

# Relevant Code Definitions

- Expectations
  - ◆ What one feels they should do or are responsible for; what a person wants or tries to accomplish; areas of responsibility
- Time
  - ◆ Issues related to how the day is spent, schedule, hours/minutes in activities, fitting activities into the day or week, descriptions of when activities occur and/or how long they take

# Expectations

You have to be able to listen you have to give them time... although I'm a busy person I'll always find some time. I will call them...to check homework "Mommy I have a project to do. Mommy can you help me? Mommy can you get me this? Can you do this?" I do that because I think its important.

I'm trying to be this new person ... I'm trying to work with them because this is her grandson and ... his son so I'm trying to be someone they can work with. ... I can't worry about me no more I have to worry about him now and he's gonna have to be involved in his other side of his

I don't really think about me. ...I've been sick for a month with a cold, but... the doctors' appointments have been ... not convenient. I'd rather be home when the girls get home. ... so it's a cold and I'll shake it off... so in my head.. the doctor's visit doesn't become a priority. Me being home when they come home to talk to and to have dinner, that becomes more healthy for me and that makes me feel better.

family

# Women's Work

it doesn't sound like its time-consuming to keep track of the fact that this one has that picnic and this one has this that has to happen and that one has to, but in fact it is. And the follow-up of it and the reminding different people and making sure if we're doing this for that, that somebody else knows they have to make their own dinner ...

For women [chuckles] you have to deal with so many things between their husbands or their boyfriends or their children [laughs] work and family life and everything sometimes pile up on you and and there's no escape...

just feeling overwhelmed because I'm just doing this, doing that, because at work I'm always doing what they need me to do there and then come home and cook and clean and wash clothes and then "Mom can you help me with my homework?" and then my husband "just come do this for me" or "can you find this for me?" and it's like ugh it's crazy.

# Effects on Health

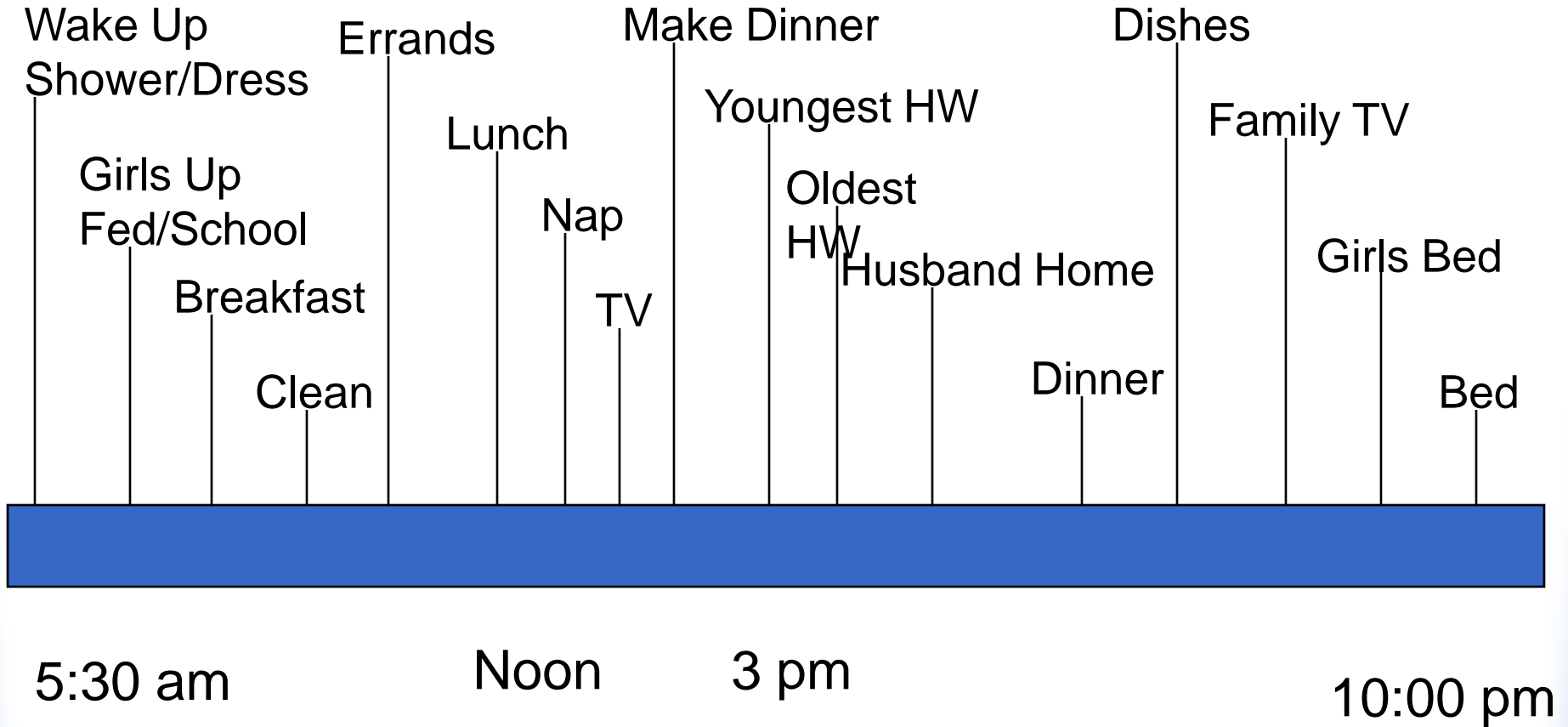
- Eating is rushed, skipped, or unhealthy
- Exercise is not a priority
- Sleep deprivation
- Stress
- Feelings of inadequacy and guilt
- Isolation

# Case Study

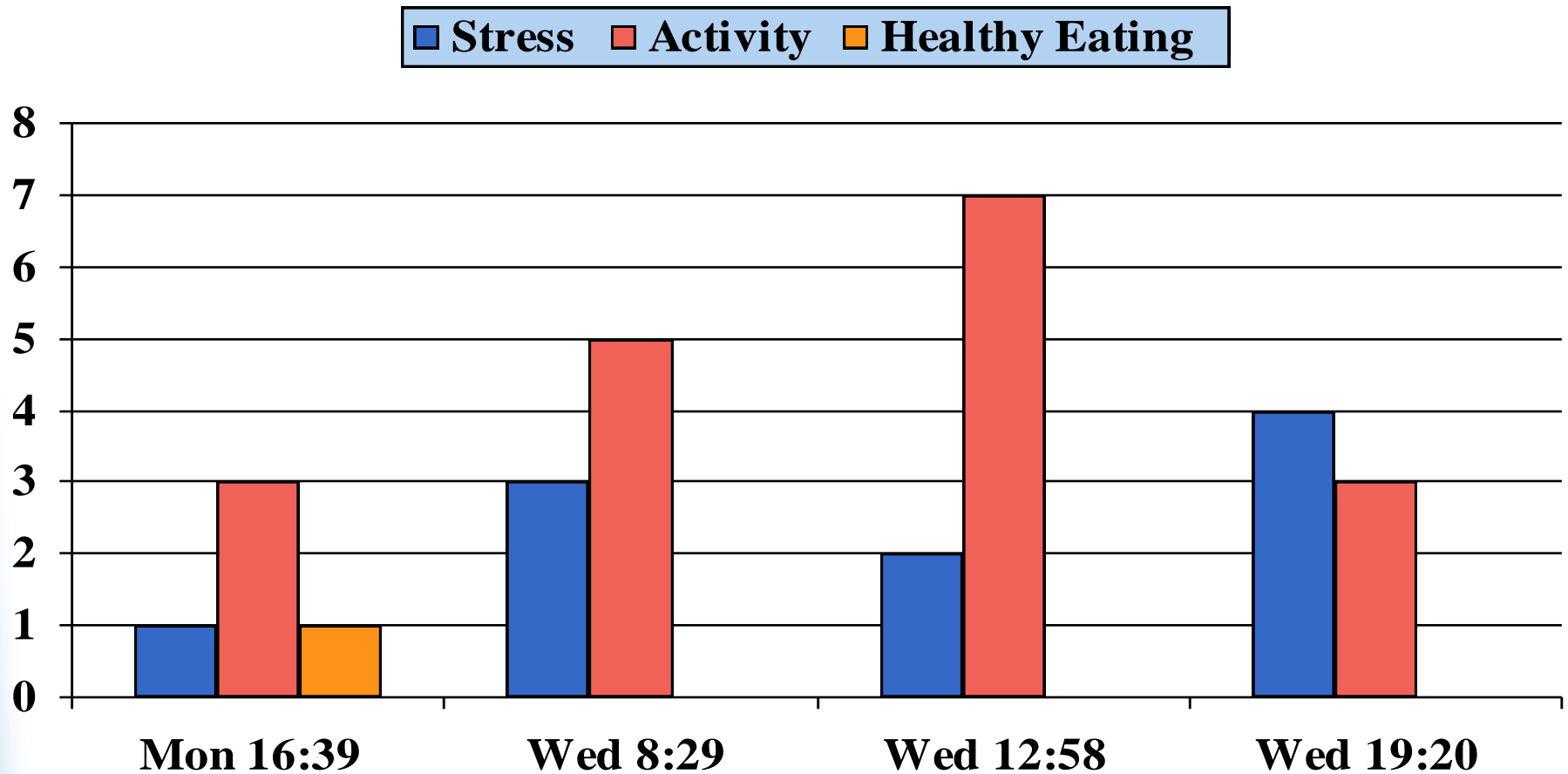
Thirty-three yr old Black woman; mother of 11 and 13 yr old girls; married; substitute teacher not currently working; college student on summer break; on medication for high blood pressure; currently preparing for a move to a new house, sleeps well and easily, interacts primarily with kids during the weekday and family (extended – usually husband's) during the weekend

Health concerns include eating, exercise & stress. She is supposed to be on a diet but is having difficulty sticking with it and she feels stressed easily

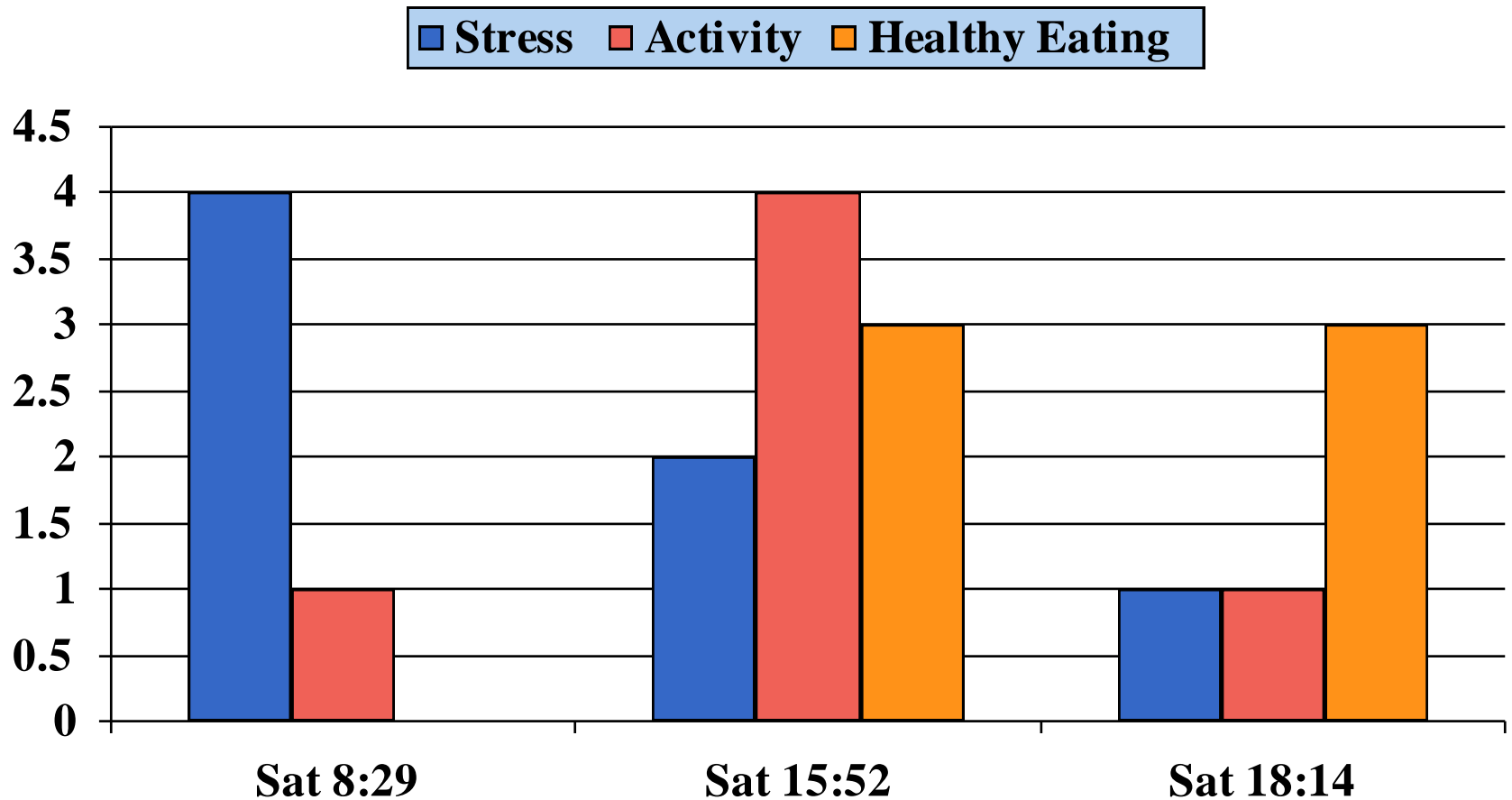
# Theoretical Day



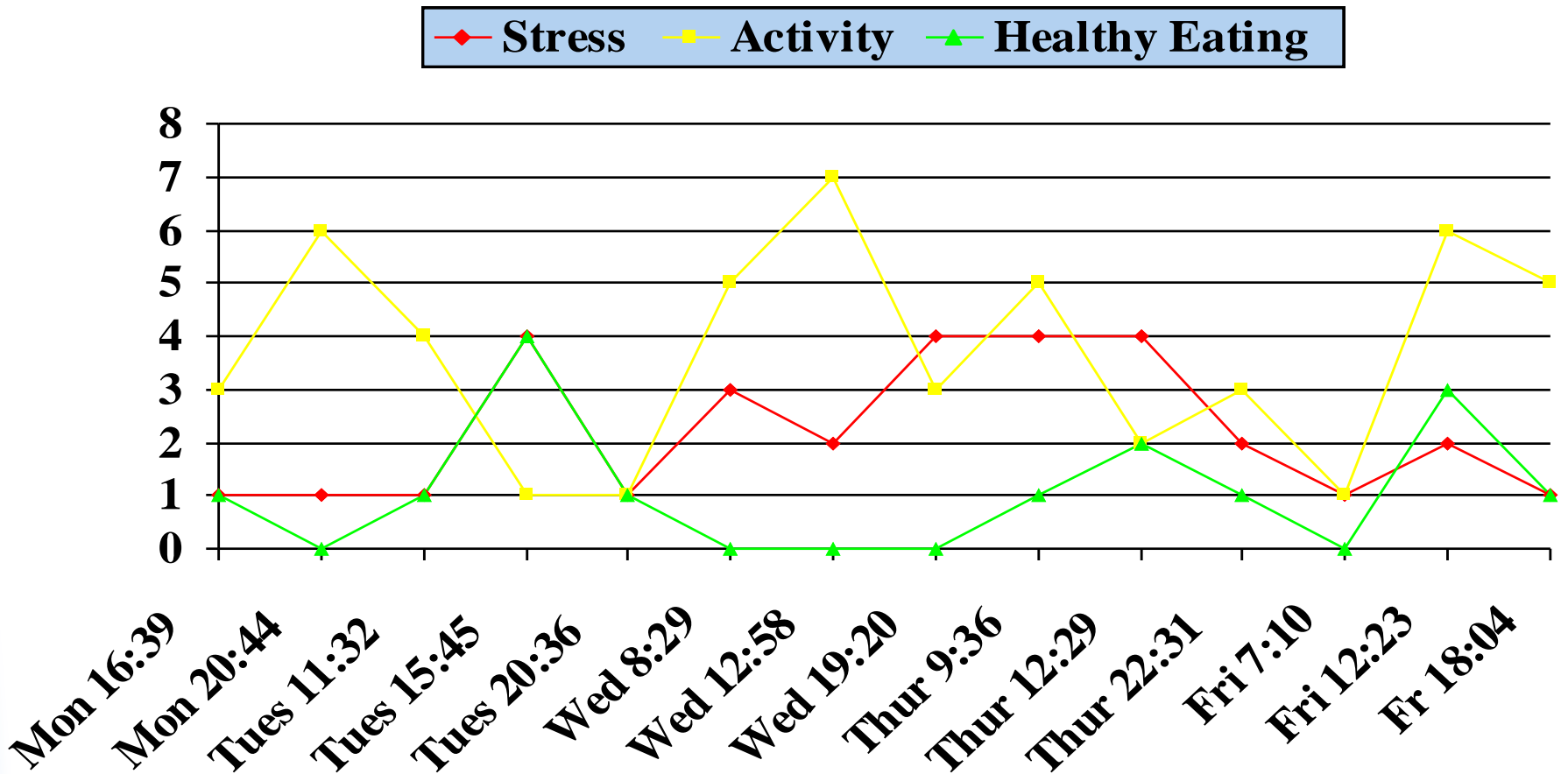
# Actual Day



# Actual Day



# Weekly Timeline



# Strategies

- Reliance on children for support
- Attempts to delegate
  - ◆ Nagging and interruptions
- Standing firm
  - ◆ Being “mean”
  - ◆ Giving up family time
  - ◆ Dealing with complaints
- Altering schedule
  - ◆ Personal goals, i.e. education, free time

# Conclusions

- Mothers perceive health holistically but focus on physical health in their daily lives
  - ◆ Little confidence in ability to affect change
  - ◆ Self-blame
- The Perfect Storm
  - ◆ Time challenges collide with expectations of women as mothers to create high stress, little support, and unhealthy practices

# Community Interventions

- Moms For Moms Group
  - ◆ Ongoing pilot feasibility
  - ◆ Small group of 4-6 mothers
  - ◆ Support sessions around healthy practices
    - Cooking
  - ◆ Larger community events
    - Spa Day/Real Talk!/Community Meals
- BRIGHT
  - ◆ Pilot feasibility study starts tomorrow!
    - Mothers & Adolescent Daughters together
    - Linking mothers w/ mothers

# Technological Interventions

- Interest expressed in social networking, buddy systems and mentoring
  - ◆ Technology offered as a way to fit into mothers' day
- PDAs seen as an intervention
  - ◆ Personalized feedback and tailored messaging

# Motherhood Scholarship & Resources

- Association for Research on Mothering
  - ◆ Mother Outlaw Groups
- Encyclopedia of Motherhood
- Motherhood Movement
  - ◆ Moms Rising
    - Building a more family-friendly America
  - ◆ Mothers Acting Up
    - Prioritizing children in corporate & social policies
  - ◆ The Mothers Movement
    - Open source for information relating to the well-being of mothers