

Not a Piece of Cake: Understanding the Food Rituals at Birthday Parties in New Zealand



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ABSTRACT

The development of Type 2 Diabetes, a global issue with no cure, has a potential link to excessive indulgence of junk food. We worked with the Child Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes Prevention Network to investigate food rituals at children's birthday parties. Our research, based on 22 in-depth interviews, focused on the motivations, expectations, and significance of the foods served at children's birthday parties in the Greater Wellington Region. We found that the expectation for unhealthy food was ingrained into both children and adults because of tradition, convenience, and cost. We recommend that the Network create a social marketing campaign geared towards teaching parents to talk to their children about healthy choices and how parents can create healthier birthday parties.

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AUTHORSHIP PAGE

Sean Amos, Amanda Baltazar, Julie Mazza, and Alino Te all put a great deal of effort into this research project and contributed equally in conducting the research and report writing. Below is a summary of the completed tasks:

Sean Amos was primarily responsible for the formatting of each submission. He combined sections and ensured that everything fit well together. He contributed mainly to the Background, Findings and Analysis, and Conclusions chapters. He primarily edited the Introduction, Background, Methodology, Findings and Analysis, and Conclusions chapters.

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None of this would have been possible without the teamwork and great dedication and effort of each member.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Diabetes

Diabetes is a disease that is becoming a worldwide problem for people of all ages. It is the leading cause of kidney failure, blindness, and lower limb amputations worldwide (The New Zealand Institute of Health and Fitness, 2014). Factors such as smoking, obesity, high blood pressure, unhealthy diets, and genetic predisposition may increase the likelihood of developing the disease. The current number of diabetes cases within New Zealand is over 240,000 diagnosed and is expected to be substantially higher.

Sponsor

During our time in New Zealand, we worked under the Child Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes Prevention Network, which consisted of various doctors, nurses, and other professionals across New Zealand. The goal of this organization, established in March of 2013, is to ensure that research continues into the increasing prevalence of the disease and that awareness is strengthened. The information found within this project could be used to form a foundation for a social marketing campaign; it can be used to influence food practices at birthdays, better understand how entrenched unhealthy eating is at birthday parties, and identify opportunities for change to healthier eating practices. However, if the campaign takes into account the cultural and health needs of a population, then the campaign may have a higher chance of succeeding.

Children's Culture

To begin a social marketing campaign, an organization must initially understand how to approach the intended audience. Within this project, we focused on learning more about the meanings of food in society, specifically on food within children's birthday celebrations. Food practices form at a young age, creating a 'children's culture' around food that is different from adults. Children's culture is described as the "values, concerns, routines and activities that children develop and share with their peers in an attempt to control their own lives" (Albon, 2007: 413; Corsaro, 1999).

Ritual

Birthday parties are an example of a celebratory food ritual. Rook defines the concept of a ritual as an "expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed,

episodic sequence, and that tend to be repeated over time” (1985, pg. 252). According to Rook (1985), a ritual can be grouped into four main parts: ritual artifacts, ritual scripts, performance roles, and ritual audience.

METHODS

The goal of this project was to determine parents’ reasons for serving unhealthy food, how children influence food choices, and under what conditions healthy foods might be substituted for unhealthy foods at birthday parties in New Zealand. We accomplished this by fulfilling the following objectives:

- Understand the activities associated with birthday parties and the role of food in these activities.
- Identify parental expectations and attitudes around birthday parties to determine why certain foods are served and their entrenchment.
- Understand how children’s expectations of birthday parties impact the way they view food.

In order to explore this subject, we conducted in-depth interviews with parents or legal guardians with children between the ages of one and fourteen. We also incorporated a participant observation of a birthday party. The initial pool of interviewees was collected from personal and professional contacts of research supervisors. From there, we employed the snowball sampling method to expand the interview count to a total of 22. We recorded the interviews, then transcribed the audio and ended with over 300 pages of transcripts. Finally, we pulled out pertinent information after performing an open coding on the transcripts.

FINDINGS

Young children consume junk food both at home birthday parties and at school birthday celebrations

Between the ages of four and six, children attend kindergarten, known as kindie in New Zealand, where birthdays are celebrated in school. If the teacher allows, the birthday child can bring in a snack for morning or afternoon tea such as cake, marshmallows, popcorn, or ice blocks (popsicles) to share with his or her classmates. Many parents celebrate a child’s birthday at home with their entire class of 25 to 30 children where cake and lollies are provided. If children attend all of their classmates’ birthday parties and participate in the school celebrations, the frequency of eating ritualized junk food can be as high as 50 to 60 instances per year.

At birthday parties, parents often transgress their values about eating healthy food, and provide junk food to children, justifying it as a matter of convenience, cost, and tradition.

Although parents told us that they typically feed their children healthy food, they admitted to serving unhealthy foods at their birthday parties. Parents typically justified serving these foods because of the amount of time and money they saved buying food rather than preparing it themselves. Another justification that parents gave for serving junk food was tradition; parents realized some of the foods they served at their children's parties were foods they ate at their childhood parties. The adults frequently mentioned 'cheerio' sausages and 'fairy bread' as traditional birthday snacks. However, not all foods are passed on in tradition.

Birthday cake, serving as an exemplar of junk food, is firmly established as the centerpiece of the party.

Throughout our interviews, nearly every parent mentioned how their children's birthday parties had a cake. The interviewees all seemed to agree that a birthday would not be a birthday without a cake. The presentation of the cake typically followed the routine of: guests gathering around the birthday child and cake, the singing of the birthday song, the blowing out of the candles, and the cutting and eating of the cake. Some parents believe that it was the presentation of the cake, rather than the cake itself, that was the centerpiece of the birthday party.

Children learn from birthday parties to expect treats as rewards in their everyday lives.

The concept of the treat is not reserved for food rituals; it spills over into and from everyday life. Our interview data suggested that children learn to view treats as rewards. A major example of treats as rewards at birthday parties was loot bags given to children who attended. In addition, parents sometimes use treats, for example to get their children to eat vegetables or go to bed. Treats are being used to encourage behaviors that parents want to see.

CONCLUSIONS

A child's birthday is a reminder, to the parents, of the day that their child came into the world. However, the birthday and the food rituals associated with it not only celebrate the child, but also can be seen as a celebration of family. Parents frequently served traditional food at birthday parties because of the memories associated with those foods. Children prefer junk foods at birthday parties because it is a way of rebelling against the norm; by eating junk food, they are in control of their own food choices. Children choose foods forbidden or restricted outside their daily food because it makes them special and in control.

Parents, especially mothers in particular, want to serve healthy foods at birthday parties to prove that they are ‘good parents’ while wanting to fulfill their children’s demands for junk food. If children want junk food at their parties, mothers feel the need to serve it to please their children on their special day. These opposing views create stress for the parent.

This opportunity to show appreciation towards their children also causes stress on the parents because of commercialization. Children frequently attend parties and come home talking about the store-bought foods present and the themed activities played with their parents. With commercialization within today’s society and media encouraging the idea that an extravagant, costly party is typical, parents may feel pressured to meet the expectations brought about by socialization.

Since children are continuously socialized to expect unhealthy food at birthday parties, we concluded some of these food habits would be hard to change. Children’s associations are determined by the frequency of the items at birthday parties; the more often an item is at a child’s birthday party, the more likely they will be to associate the item with birthday parties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Parents: Changing Children’s Expectations about Food

- We recommend that parents serve healthy food in enticing and fun ways at birthday parties.
- We recommend that parents cook with their children.
- We recommend that parents talk about food with their children.
- We recommend that parents provide alternatives to lollies in loot bags.

For the Network: Creating Alternative Birthday Food

- We recommend that the Network creates a social marketing campaign targeting parents to raise awareness about the nutritional value of birthday foods and the frequency at which children are exposed to them.
- We recommend that the Network provides recipes for healthy, fun food.

Future Research Questions:

We recommend that the Network further explores the role that ethnicity plays in the types and function of food served at birthday parties.

- How does the food expected at birthday parties of different ethnicities differ?
- What common ingredients are used in the dishes provided?
- How much of the celebration revolves around food?

- What rituals are associated with food at the celebration?

We recommend that the Network further investigate the different food practices surrounding birthday parties hosted by people of different socioeconomic levels.

- How does food at birthday parties of lower socioeconomic level families differ from food at upper class birthday parties?
- How does the nutritional value and quantity of the food provided vary between socioeconomic levels?
- How do the perceptions of party food change amongst children of different socioeconomic levels?
- How does the food portion of the celebration take place? i.e. Do they eat whenever they are hungry, or all at once? Do they sit down, or snack and walk around? Is it buffet-style or one plate for each guest? Are seconds frowned upon or encouraged?

We recommend that the Network further investigate children's perceptions and expectations surrounding birthday parties.

- What are children's opinions of birthday food?
- What birthday food do children look forward to and expect?
- What birthday food do children feel is necessary at a party to ensure it is a proper birthday party?

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Diabetes is a disease that is becoming a worldwide problem for people of all ages. It is the leading cause of kidney failure, blindness, and lower limb amputations worldwide (The New Zealand Institute of Health and Fitness, 2014). Factors such as smoking, obesity, high blood pressure, unhealthy diets, and genetic predisposition may increase the likelihood of developing the disease. Biological and behavioral factors are not the only contributors to the disease, however; social factors including poverty, socioeconomic status, education level, and depression have all been associated with higher rates of diabetes (Everson, et al., 2002). As of 2014, there were 384,000 diagnosed cases of Type 2 Diabetes and a predicted 207,000 undiagnosed cases in New Zealand citizens ages 20-70 (IDF Diabetes Atlas, 2014). The incidence of the disease has increased in New Zealand by 0.7% between 2007 and 2013, totaling an additional 31,500 diagnosed adults (Ministry of Health, 2013). Forty million NZD was spent towards fighting all types of diabetes in 2013 (Coppell, 2014). It has been predicted that the percentage of healthcare costs spent on Type 2 Diabetes will continue to increase (Stock, 2014).

Body weight is considered one of the greatest contributing factors to the development of Type 2 Diabetes (Everson, et al., 2002). Studies have found that Pacific Islanders and Maoris are most at risk for developing the disease. As of late 2012 in New Zealand, 29.3% of European, 48.3% of Maori, and 68% of Pacific Islanders were obese; between the years 2006 and 2012, the rates of obesity increased 18% over the entire population of New Zealand (Ministry of Health, 2013). These higher levels of obesity may be traced back to food practices. Food plays an important role in many rituals, such as birthdays, weddings, graduations, or holidays (Mintz, 2002). Since food is a key element in the culture and identity of a society (Liburd, 2003), food rituals that contribute to unhealthy consumption practices may lead to higher rates of obesity.

In response to the growing prevalence of Type 2 Diabetes and obesity in New Zealand, the Child Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes Prevention Network was established in March of 2013 in Wellington. The goal of this organization is to provide research information to other organizations to create health campaigns, which may lead to actions that will mitigate the disease. While the Network continues to focus on children, they have expanded their scope to help people of all ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic levels.

The Network tasked us with exploring food rituals in New Zealand culture, specifically children's birthday parties. The birthday party is an understudied food ritual where indulging in

excessive junk food seems to be justified. The goal of this project was to determine parents' reasons for serving junk food, how children influence food choices, and under what conditions healthy foods might be substituted for unhealthy foods at birthday parties. We investigated the food that adults expect at children's birthday parties, food that adults think their children expect, and the attitudes towards the food.

Through our in-depth interviews with parents or legal guardians, we learned about what foods are served at children's birthday parties and why they were provided. We discovered that birthday parties seemed to present an opportunity for parents to show they are a 'good parent.' In terms of the birthday child, the party allows for an opportunity to show his or her strength and capability. We found that parents are regularly breaking their values of healthy eating and those of their children by serving and eating junk food at birthday parties. For outsiders, children's birthday parties provide an opportunity to adopt Kiwi birthday traditions and slowly blend into the Kiwi culture. These findings, conclusions, and recommendations have been made available to the Network for future use.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

2.0: INTRODUCTION

The aim of this project was to examine the eating practices associated with children's birthday parties in the Greater Wellington Region; our hope was to illuminate expectations and behavior around the food served at children's birthday parties and the meanings attached to these practices. The eating practices of these children can affect their behaviors around food for their entire life, potentially leading to obesity and as a consequence, diabetes. In this chapter, we cover the growing problem of Type 2 Diabetes and the approaches being employed to reduce the prevalence of the disease in New Zealand. After current approaches are listed, we discuss an anthropological perspective on food and birthday parties, which serves as a basis for the methods deployed for this project.

2.1: THE GROWING IMPACT OF TYPE 2 DIABETES IN NEW ZEALAND

Diabetes is present in various forms worldwide and it is becoming a major health concern. There are several types of diabetes about which many people are unaware. Types of diabetes include Double Diabetes, Type 3 Diabetes, Steroid-Induced Diabetes, Diabetes Insipidus, Secondary Diabetes, Diabetes LADA, and Diabetes MODY. The three most common types include Gestational Diabetes, Type 1 Diabetes, and Type 2 Diabetes.

Gestational Diabetes is typically diagnosed when a woman is 24-28 weeks pregnant as a result of the changing hormones during the second and third trimesters. During these trimesters, the fetus has growth needs that require an increase of insulin to help convert sugar into energy. If the mother's body does not have enough insulin, sugar becomes more concentrated in the blood and causes high blood sugar, leading to diabetes.

Type 1 Diabetes is a type of diabetes mellitus, which is simply the medical term for all types of diabetes. It is most common in children, but is not restricted to them, which is why it is no longer referred to as Juvenile Diabetes. When someone has Type 1 Diabetes, the beta cells of the pancreas, which produce insulin, are destroyed by the patient's immune system and the body is no longer able to make insulin on its own. As a result of the inability to produce insulin, Type 1 patients must monitor and manage their insulin intake carefully. Type 2 Diabetes is a result of hyperglycemia, which is when there is an excess of glucose in the bloodstream; it is a metabolic disorder that involves the body being inefficient at using what insulin it has produced, or not being able to produce enough. Type 2 Diabetes can be treated with medication or insulin to help keep blood sugar

at a healthy level. Symptoms that doctors and medical practitioners look for when trying to diagnose a patient with Type 2 Diabetes include being excessively tired, losing muscle, hunger, thirst, and excessive urination. One of the major differences between Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes is that Type 1 is a genetic disease while Type 2 is developed based on a multitude of factors. Exercise and healthy diets can lessen the risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes.

Many risk factors that contribute to the likelihood of developing Type 2 Diabetes include obesity, smoking, unhealthy diets, immediate relatives with the disease, having high blood pressure, or being of certain descent, especially Maori or Pacific Islander. The percentage of Pacific people that have diabetes is 15.4% whereas the percentage for other ethnic groups is 6.1% (Coppell, 2013). This could be due to differences in the genetic makeup of certain ethnicities. In 1962, geneticist James Neel proposed the controversial 'thrifty gene hypothesis'. The hypothesis asserts that when men were mainly hunters and gatherers, humans developed and evolved to be able to store food in the form of fat for longer periods in an effort to increase survival rates in times of famine. However, people are eating and storing food for a famine that will not come. Today's society has a plethora of food, suffers through no famine. The idea believes that although the genetic alteration is no longer necessary, we still have the modified genetic makeup encouraging our bodies to store fat. With the ease of fat storage and increased intake of calories through food, people believe this could contribute to the increased obesity and Type 2 Diabetes rates (Beil, 2014). In the 1980s, Neel refuted his proposal because of mathematical proof against the paper's central claim that "obesity was historically advantageous and hence under positive selection pressure" (Speakman, 2008).

Opposition to the thrifty gene hypothesis encouraged the 'drifty gene hypothesis', created by John Speakman in 2007. He accounts for the question that can arise after hearing the thrifty gene hypothesis: Although some people are obese, why do others remain lean? Many people try to diet and simply cannot get the desired results. Additionally, some people consume more food than others do yet they do not seem to gain weight. The drifty gene hypothesis argues that some people are truly predisposed genetically to be lean or overweight. The hypothesis claims that a genetic drift in genes occurred that caused the obese phenotype to become more prevalent. His reasoning for the drift states that millions of years ago, larger humans were often prey, just as larger animals are prey presently. When the hunting of humans ceased to exist, these humans could reproduce and keep their genetic line growing without fear of death. With this, the genetic phenotype for larger humans continued to live on, thus increasing rates of people that are obese (O'Rahilly, 2011).

In addition to the biological and behavioral factors, certain social factors seem to contribute to the likelihood of a person developing Type 2 Diabetes. Though less typically emphasized, some of the factors include poverty, socioeconomic status, and levels of depression. A study conducted in 2002 searched for evidence regarding the relation between socioeconomic status and depression, obesity, and diabetes. It compiled previous studies and found that depression is becoming one of the highest causes of disability and that obesity rates have increased dramatically coincident with Type 2 Diabetes. Figure 1 compares education and income with percentages of depression.

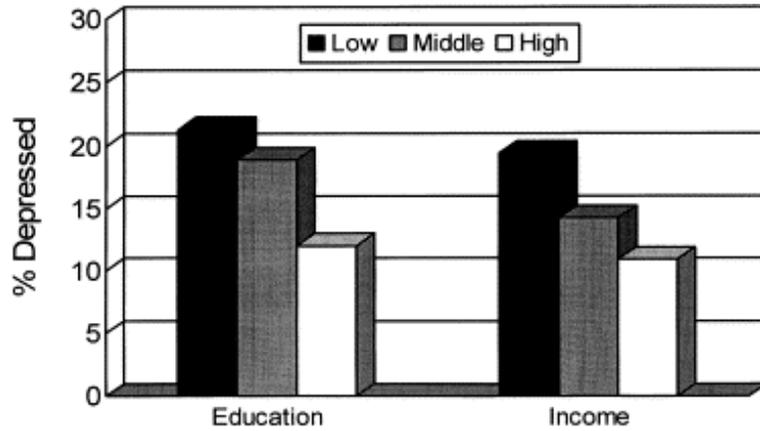


Figure 1: Prevalence of depression by levels of education and income: Alameda County Study 1965

The data was obtained from 700 adults from the Alameda County California area, studying psychological, social, and well-being factors (Everson, et al., 2002). Education levels include less than a high school diploma, a high school diploma, and a high school diploma and college degree. Depression was measured in this study with a questionnaire; depression was present if at least five symptoms of depression were present. The right hand side of the graph show that low income can contribute to increased levels of depression as well. Figure 2 compares the percentage of prevalent diabetes, which is the percentage of those with the disease, with the incident diabetes, which is the percentage of newly diagnosed cases.

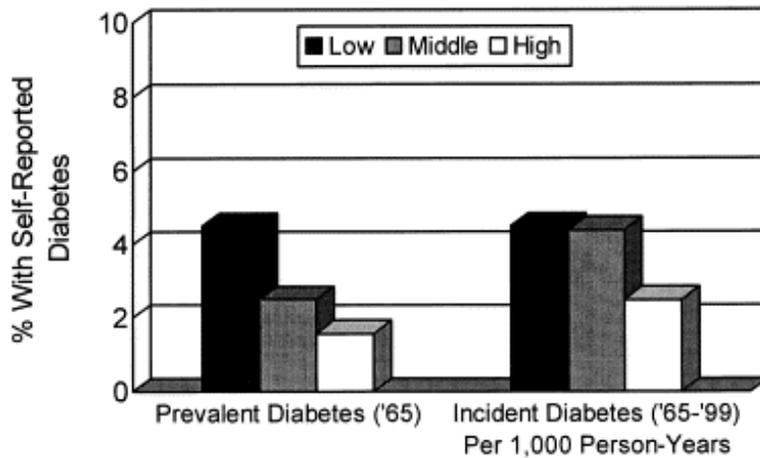


Figure 2: Baseline Prevalence and 34-year cumulative incidence of diabetes by level of education: Alameda County Study, 1965-1999

By looking at the Figure 2 above, we can see that people of lower socioeconomic status had higher levels of diabetes, similar to the trend that the depression data concluded. Figure 3 shows data for obesity percentages within three levels of education as well.

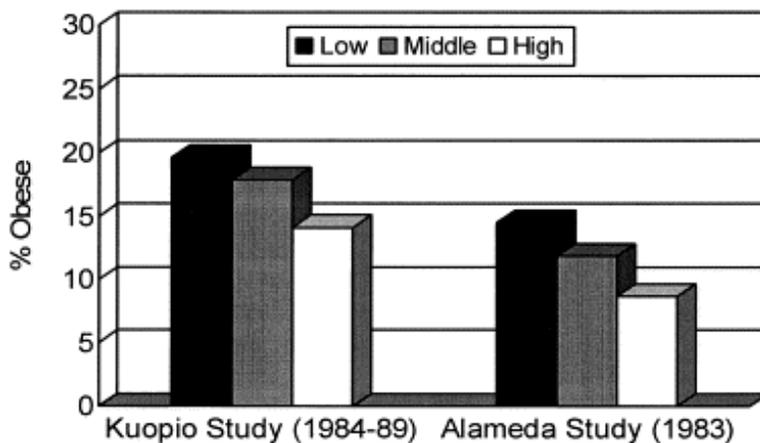


Figure 3: Prevalence of obesity by level of education

By looking at this data, one can see the same trend: people that are more educated report lower depression, obesity, and diabetes rates. This particular study demonstrates that depression, obesity, and diabetes are associated with socioeconomic levels and that unfortunately, the least well off endure the consequences. Increased depression can lead to overeating, excessive drinking, and high blood pressure. All of these can be factors that contribute to the increased likelihood of developing Type 2 Diabetes. This unfortunately makes the disease a cyclical process. The poorest are more likely to get Type 2 Diabetes and then bear the burden of adverse outcomes (Everson, et al., 2002). This could be a possible explanation on why New Zealand has the fourth highest obesity

and fourth highest standardized rates of Type 2 Diabetes out of all the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries (IDF Diabetes Atlas, 2014).

In addition to high rates of obesity, New Zealand has high rates of depression. It has been found that high rates of depression among New Zealand people can be partially contributed to alcoholism and childhood adversity, such as poverty or abuse, both in adolescent depression and later in life. A BMC Medicine study compared eighteen countries using various measures of depression; it found that New Zealand was in the top 25% of prevalence rates for diagnosed cases (Newton, 2011). In addition to high depression rates, New Zealand has high rates of domestic violence. A study conducted in 2011 found that from 2000 to 2010, physical partner violence was reported from one third of New Zealand women. When around 2,100 New Zealand children were interviewed, 27% reported that they had been witnesses to adult violence, mainly in the home (NZPA, 2011). This may also contribute to depression rates in New Zealand that lead to other health issues such as Type 2 Diabetes.

According to the International Diabetes Federation Atlas, one in twelve people globally have some form of diabetes, of which one in two do not know they have it. Furthermore, every seven seconds, a person dies from complications caused by diabetes. Often times, diabetes is taken lightly, but 4.9 million deaths occurred worldwide in 2014 due to diabetes related issues (IDF Diabetes Atlas, 2014). Type 2 Diabetes is the most prevalent in the world and is responsible for 90% of all diabetes cases (WHO, 2013). Specifically, Type 2 Diabetes currently affects over 347 million people in the world. By 2030, it is predicted that it will be seventh highest cause of death worldwide (WHO, 2013). Diabetes can lead to death because of related complications such as heart disease and restricted blood flow. These complications can lead to ulcers in legs and feet, kidney failure, and even retinopathy, which results in vision impairment and possibly complete loss (WHO, 2013). These complications can lead to loss of employment and income and can even cause household disruption due to the premature death of loved ones. Unfortunately, poor people tend to lack the money and information that is needed to prevent the development of Type 2 Diabetes.

As of December 2013, 243,000 people were diagnosed with diabetes in New Zealand, most of which were Type 2 Diabetes. It is believed that another 100,000 New Zealand people have it and are unaware (Ministry of Health, 2013). According to the World Bank, in 2013, the population of New Zealand was 4,471,000 people, 5.44% of which are diagnosed with diabetes. Inclusive of the potentially undiagnosed, the number could be upwards of 7.67% prevalence of diabetes in New Zealand (Ministry of Health, 2009). To compare this, if the global averages for rates of diabetes were

found in New Zealand then only 200,000 people would be diagnosed with a further 90,00 potential cases (IDF Diabetes Atlas, 2014).

The increased prevalence of diabetes in New Zealand is an important financial issue for a multitude of reasons. Healthcare costs are expanding and social costs can be extremely detrimental to one's wellbeing and quality of life. In a 2014 Treasury report, it stated that, "New Zealand's publicly funded spending on healthcare had more than doubled as a share of GDP over the past 60 years. If the trend continued, spending will rise from 6.0 percent of GDP in 2009 to 10.7 percent in 2050" (Stock, 2014).

Current Approaches to Address Type 2 Diabetes in New Zealand

In response to the overwhelming costs and rates of obesity, the Ministry of Health in New Zealand developed a plan called *Healthy Eating – Healthy Action*, or HEHA. This plan focused on fulfilling three out of the thirteen priorities in the New Zealand Health Strategy, a platform created by the Government that identifies the main focus areas for healthcare (Ministry of Health, 2000). These three priorities - improving nutrition, increasing physical activity, and reducing obesity – generally overlap one another, which justified creating one multi-dimensional plan (Ministry of Health 2003). It is common that reducing obesity will result in plans to improve nutrition and increase physical activity as well. The strategy focused on developing ways to create a supportive environment and society for healthy eating and physical activity. Collaborative, multi-level interventions created by the HEHA plan promoted "positive attitudes around health and the prevention of obesity" and assisted in the development of life skills (Ministry of Health, 2008). Public health messages placed a focus on eating more fruits and vegetables instead of fatty foods, eating a variety of nutrition-packed foods, breastfeeding infants for at least six months, participating in some type of physical activity for at least 30 minutes every day, and promoting the development of environments that support healthy lifestyles (Ministry of Health, 2003b). By 2008, HEHA developed community action programs for Maori and Pacific peoples and increased awareness and knowledge of nutrition within New Zealand schools (Ministry of Health, 2008). The National Party discontinued funding for HEHA initiatives in 2009 due to funding cuts for the Ministry of Health. The Party believed that the funding should "go to other worthy parts of Health" such as improving hospital services (Ryall, 2009).

2.2: THE DIABETES PREVENTION NETWORK

One of the organizations researching a health campaign focused on Type 2 Diabetes is our sponsor, the Child Obesity & Type 2 Diabetes Prevention Network. This Network was formed in 2012 to unite people and organizations working to fight the increased rate of diagnosed obesity in New Zealand. Their first meeting as a group was held in March of 2013. The founders began by specifically focusing on children, but are now expanding to all demographics regardless of age, race, ethnicity, and gender. The goal of this organization is to provide research information to other organizations to create health campaigns, which may lead to actions that will mitigate the disease. The Child Obesity & Type 2 Diabetes Prevention Network is comprised of doctors, nurses, and other professionals across New Zealand. Linked to this organization is the Healthy Future Families Trust that raises money for various organizations that promote healthy lifestyles of children in New Zealand. The Healthy Future Families Trust provides some funding to the Network so that research can be continued.

The Network formed a unit composed of volunteer marketing researchers to provide the information necessary for creating a social marketing campaign encouraging healthy eating habits at birthday parties. Social marketing is “the application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences in order to improve their personal welfare and that of their society” (Andreasen, 1995). Social marketing has been successful in promoting wellness and creating interventions; this has been accomplished by understanding the unique characteristics of a certain culture and developing responses that are sensitive, sensible, and informative (Thackeray & Neiger, 2003). We explored the meanings behind and behaviors and attitudes towards these foods along with the expectations and motivations for certain food. The information we found could be used to form a foundation for a social marketing campaign; it can be used to influence food practices at birthdays, better understand how entrenched unhealthy eating is at birthday parties, and identify opportunities for change to healthier eating practices.

2.3: ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES OF FOOD AND RITUAL

To begin a social marketing campaign, an organization must initially understand how to approach the intended audience. In the case of a campaign for Type 2 Diabetes and obesity prevention, research must be conducted into peoples’ interactions with food. We used an anthropological approach to understand the complex relationship between children, parents, and food. Within this project, we focused on learning more about the meanings of food in society, specifically on food practices within children’s celebrations.

Food practices form at a young age, creating a ‘children’s culture’ around food that is different from adults. Children’s culture is described as the “values, concerns, routines and activities that children develop and share with their peers in an attempt to control their own lives” (Albon, 2007: 413; Corsaro, 1999). Food surrounding children’s culture can be complex, especially when considering sweets. Albon recommends viewing sweets “under the broader umbrella of children’s culture as opposed to purely food, as sweets seem to occupy a space between play artifact and food” (2007: 413). Sweets do not fall into a food category such as a meal but fall into a role of ‘rebellious’ eating (2007). Sweets are made into a ritual artifact by children and play an important role in children’s lives that differs from that of adults (2014).

A Case Study on School Lunches

We looked upon an ethnographic research project to see an example of a study on children and food. The study by Carla Rey Vasquez (2012) used the participant observation approach to understand the deeper meanings behind the school lunches that children ate. She used a mixed method approach that incorporated discussion with teachers, interviews with parents, focus groups with children, and at its heart, participant observations at three primary schools for a total of two months. To lessen her adult appearance and gain the children’s trust, Rey Vasquez participated in school activities, avoided adult responsibilities, and “partially followed and copied” children’s behaviors and vernacular (pg. 10). During her data collection, she would also note apparent class and estimated demographics based on the clothing, food, vocabulary, and responses to questions from parents and teachers interviewed.

Rey Vasquez’s first finding was the concept of a typical ‘Kiwi’ lunch. She found at the cornerstone of this lunch lies the sandwich. More specifically, she found that the sandwich was the “dominant component of the lunchbox that mutually constitutes nutritional ideals, social class and ethnic tropes, practices and values” (pg. 7). Ethnic tropes are unique motifs that allow differentiation between cultural and national identities. The sandwich exudes New Zealand identity and can be considered the ethnic trope that differentiates this culture from another culture.

She also found that children associate sandwiches being a healthy food. At schools, the food exists in a dichotomy of healthy and unhealthy.

“Healthy food” is associated with being good, skinny, normal, behaving properly and achieving well at school, having energy and feeling well. In contrast, eating “junk food” is associated with being bad, fat, weird, not being able to perform well or play, becoming silly and feeling sick (Rey Vasquez, 2012: 43).

Sandwiches, and any other healthy associated foods, become linked to the children being good. Any lunch without the sandwich, the core of the meal, according to Rey Vasquez, is seen to be unhealthy. Children are encouraged by other children and the schools to use sandwiches for lunch regardless of ethnic background.

Many New Zealand parents remember that they too had sandwiches and pushed their children to eat what they considered a proper lunch. Rey Vasquez concludes that the sandwich can be used as a tool to display identity as a Kiwi. Students who bring in food that is not built around the sandwich are teased and if the food is considered too unhealthy, the teacher might consult the child's parents. In this sense, regardless of ethnic background, the sandwich is used to solidify the student as a bona fide Kiwi. Despite the sandwich being a tool for belonging, it still allows for some room for cultural and socioeconomic distinction. Ethnic flavor can be displayed if it masquerades as a sandwich, as was the case when a student had Indian chicken as the filling for the sandwich. The quality, and to some degree the luxuriousness, of the food changes among the socioeconomic levels; the higher a family's socioeconomic status, the more luxurious the child's sandwich.

Children also show these distinctions during a special event, called 'shared lunch' that the teachers or the schools use as a way to reward students. The general practice is that children bring food from their ethnic background for the entire class to eat. In one sense, this is the reversal of the typical lunch where other children often discourage the display of such ethnic food. Rey Vasquez found that children, though reluctant at first, "openly tried and enjoyed the different foods" after a certain time (p. 82). She claims that the "ethnic diversity is celebrated, exhibited, consumed and engaged via truncated 'pockets of diversity' (e.g. food, song, prayer) that emphasize and reinforce the dominant hegemony" (pg. 83; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009). Despite these small "pockets of diversity," which do effectively introduce young children to ethnic food that they would normally not desire, the sandwich remains the symbol of a unified national Kiwi identity.

Within these lunches, shared or not, existed the concepts of a 'treat.' As with the sandwich, a 'treat' was usually found in the standard Kiwi lunch. This treat tended to be something akin to a cracker or a small cake. These foods, both in and outside the lunchbox, were considered a reward for some effort. Rey Vasquez found that despite the attention paid to eating healthy, "consumption of the treat in many ways disrupts the edicts of healthy food consumption" (pg. 25). In the case of the lunch, the simple matter of having a balanced diet warrants the treat. This concept of treat is not exclusive to schools lunches; it used as a means of reward throughout the rest of life. For example, Rey Vasquez found the use of fast food restaurants as a treat and as a birthday venue. This became a

spectacle amongst the children as to who would be invited to the party, giving a sense of the importance of the birthday parties in the age groups that we investigated. In the case of treats, Rey Vasquez employs social theory to explain that treats differ from junk food. A treat refers to a food warranted only under certain circumstances, marking its “distance from necessity” (Rey Vasquez, 2012: 51; Bourdieu, 1984).

Ritual Framework and Cultural Identity

The circumstances surrounding the consumption of a treat can be viewed as part of a ritual. Rook defines the concept of a food consumption ritual as an “expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and that tend to be repeated over time” (1985, pg. 252). Different types of events, from more complex religious holidays to a simple routine children’s lunch, are considered rituals under this definition. For the purposes of this study, we will focus on children’s birthday parties as rituals because of their prevalence amongst families, regularity in occurrence, levels of emotion evoked in those involved, and meanings behind the actions and objects.

According to Rook (1985), a ritual can be grouped into four main parts: ritual artifacts, ritual scripts, performance roles, and ritual audience. The ritual script is the sequence of events that make up the brunt of the ritual. The performance roles are the roles that an individual takes on within the scope of the ritual and its script. The ritual is performed for the group of people known as the audience. On many occasions performance roles and audiences can overlap with each other. Ritual artifacts are defined as any food, ceremonial garb, certificates, or anything that is used specifically within the context of the ritual. Applying this model to children’s birthday parties the artifacts would be cake, party food, and presents, the ritual script would include the presentation of the cake, singing of Happy Birthday, and blowing out the candles. The performance role would highlight the child, and the audience would be any other children or adults present (Otnes et al, 1995).

Rituals imbue food with greater meaning than simple sustenance; food is used as a way to convey deep and personal ties between people. In many small cultural microcosms, friends and family produce food. Others acknowledge the effort the producer exerts in making food. This deepens and expands the bonds between the two people (Meigs, 1997). In the Andean culture, for example, “food is a medium of nonverbal communication used to express status and social relationship” (Corr, 2002, pg. 5). One particular paper looked at the ritual of children’s birthday parties within the confines of kindergartens in Israeli’s Jewish state educational system. Through the use of foods and cake at the parties, kindergarten children strengthen their bonds with both their

parents and peers. The parents provide the food and cake, but the child is the one to distribute it, with the aid of the mother. Furthermore, the child is the one to cut the cake, though under certain circumstances the first slice only. These two actions highlight the growing independence of the child, who is now able to “provide” the food to the other children. These acts, along with the placement of the child at the head of the table and the use of a garland, help to individualize the child. The child gains temporary social capital because he has authority over the proceedings of the party and the handing out of both the food and the ‘going home’ goodies, which included “wafers, snack food, popcorn, sweets, lollipops or chewing gum” (Weil, 1986, p. 331). By giving these away the birthday child solidifies a slight social capital gulf over his peers. The food also serves as means to include everybody into a single unified coterie since everyone is eating the same varieties of food (Weil, 1986).

The distinct set of meanings of food for a group of people defines, at least in part, a culture. The food served during a kindergarten birthday celebration and the ritual surrounding it stays constant throughout particular portions of Israeli culture, creating a cultural rite of passage (Weil, 1986). In American culture, the candles and the cake at birthday parties help highlight the individual’s birthday, which relates to the emphasis Americans put on individualism and the individual instead of the group (Klein, 1981). “Cultural differences emerge in how food is produced, prepared, and served, among other things” (Corr, 2002, pg. 163). In this sense, food becomes a key component in understanding the aspects of a culture. If an outside source, such as a health campaign, tries to push against what a culture considers normal, there will be resistance to or possibly rejection of it, despite the intentions and benefits of such a campaign. However, if the campaign takes into account the cultural and health needs of a population, then the campaign may have a higher chance of succeeding.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0: INTRODUCTION

The goal of this project was to determine parents' reasons for serving unhealthy food, how children influence food choices, and under what conditions healthy foods might be substituted for unhealthy foods at birthday parties. Our analysis has been made available to health practitioners and others for use in potential future outreach strategies for those who are at risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes. The following objectives were used to achieve our goal:

- Understand the activities associated with birthday parties and the role of food in these activities.
- Identify parental expectations and attitudes around birthday parties to determine why certain foods are served and their entrenchment.
- Understand how children's expectations of birthday parties impact the way they view food.

In this chapter, we will elaborate upon the reasoning behind the objectives and the methods that were used to explore these objectives.

3.1: UNDERSTAND THE ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH BIRTHDAY PARTIES AND THE ROLE OF FOOD IN THESE ACTIVITIES.

Children's birthday parties follow the consumption ritual framework defined by Rook (1985). This framework is composed of four parts: the ritual artifact, the ritual script, the ritual performance roles, and the ritual audience. Figure 4 explains the components of Rook's framework in relation to children's birthday parties.

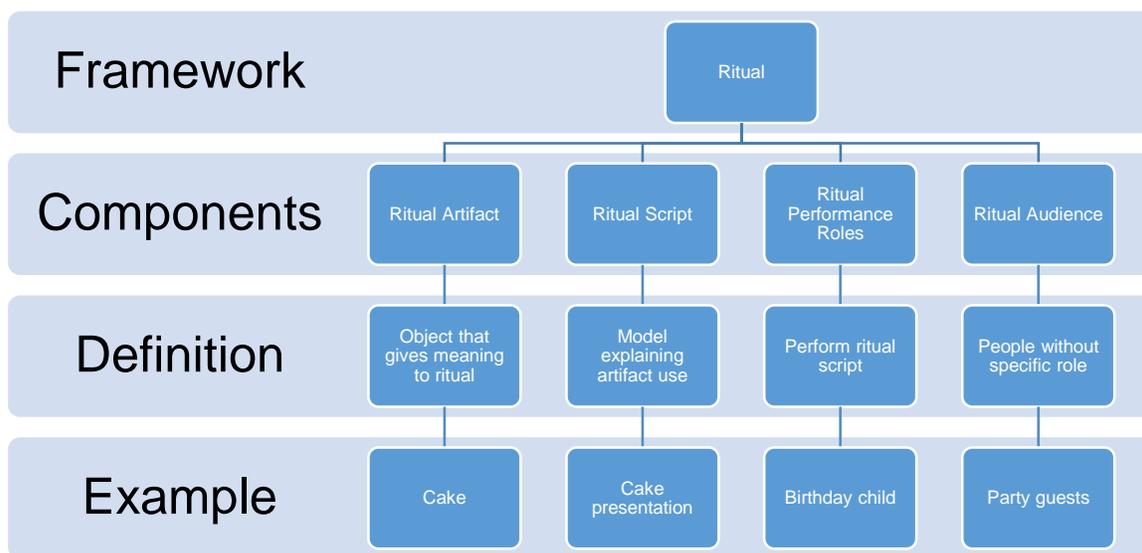


Figure 4: The components of Rook's consumption ritual framework

We used the components of this framework to identify themes found at children's birthday parties in the food, order of events, and people attending the parties. By doing this, we came to better understand what constitutes typical Kiwi food and activities at birthday parties.

Identify common occurrences of food within New Zealand birthday parties.

We conducted 22 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with parents or legal guardians who had organized birthday parties for their children between the ages of one and fourteen years old. These parents or legal guardians were recruited voluntarily through contacts of the Child Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes Prevention Network and snowball sampling. Prior to participating in interviews, the parents or legal guardians were presented with the Participation Information Sheet (Appendix C) in both hard and soft copies. We presented the parents or legal guardians who agreed to be interviewed with the Consent Form for Interviews (Appendix B). We used the Outline for Interview Questions (Appendix D) as a general guide for the interviews. As part of the interview process, we were provided with copies of photos of children's birthday parties to elicit further details and were given permission to use them in our project. We recorded the interviews on a digital audiotape and fully transcribed them.

Through the interviews we identified certain foods that frequently appeared at children's birthday parties in New Zealand and the role these foods played in the context of the ritual. We considered the following questions in our interviews:

- What foods were served at birthday parties?
- Were the foods served store bought or homemade?
- Is a birthday cake always present at a birthday party?

Identify common order of events at birthday parties.

In our interviews we identified the ritual script of birthday parties by determining what occurred at birthday parties and the common order of these events. We considered the following questions:

- What events occur at birthday parties?
- When do birthday parties normally occur?
- Is there a particular order to the events?
- How does the structure of a birthday party change with age?

By understanding the common structure, we determined the extent to which birthday parties revolve around food.

Identify the common ritual performance roles and audience at birthday parties.

We identified the common ritual performance roles, such as the birthday child and the party planner, and the common ritual audience, such as children and other parents, at children's birthday parties. Through interviews with parents or legal guardians, our team determined who planned and who typically attended the parties. We examined the following inquires in our interviews:

- Who planned the birthday party and how long did preparation take?
- Who was invited to the birthday party?
- Do parents typically stay with their children at birthday parties?

We considered how much effort and planning went into birthday parties and its impact on the party planner.

3.2: IDENTIFY PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS AND ATTITUDES AROUND BIRTHDAY PARTIES TO DETERMINE WHY CERTAIN FOODS ARE SERVED AND HOW THEIR ENTRENCHMENT.

In addition to our interviews, we observed the birthday party of a child whose parent we had interviewed. At the party, we observed interactions among children during the birthday activities and as the food was being served. We conducted the observations by standing alongside the other parents who remained at the party, so as to avoid disrupting the children's activities. We photographed the foods and their placement on the tables, the party favors, and the lollies given to the children after completing a game.

Learn about New Zealand birthday traditions to better understand their significance.

Through our interviews, we learned more about family traditions relating to birthday parties by exploring the following themes:

- What are some traditions families have for birthdays?
- How did these traditions start?
- What were birthday parties like when the parents were children?

Identify children's expectations of foods at birthday parties.

In our interviews and observation, we also sought to learn more about how children influenced what food was served at birthday parties and what factors shaped the children's expectations about appropriate birthday food. By understanding this, we can determine where children's desire for unhealthy food at birthday parties begins. We asked the following questions:

- What foods do children expect at birthday parties?

- Who influences children’s expectations of birthday party foods?

Understand adults' motivations for serving foods at birthday parties.

To identify why parents served certain foods at birthday parties, we interviewed parents or legal guardians. Our team was interested in investigating why parents served unhealthy and healthy food at birthday parties and how they justified this practice. To better understand parents’ motivations, we considered the following questions:

- Where do parents get ideas for the foods served at birthday parties? From other parents, magazines, websites, etc.?
- To what extent do children influence foods served at birthday parties?

3.3: UNDERSTAND HOW CHILDREN’S EXPECTATIONS OF BIRTHDAY PARTIES IMPACT THE WAY THEY VIEW FOOD.

We explored how children’s knowledge of birthday parties impacted their attitudes towards food and celebration. We wanted to determine how food rituals at birthday parties became a norm for children and parents and how these expectations influenced the choices children and parents made about food. To do so, we investigated the concept of a treat in our 22 interviews with parents or legal guardians. We looked at the following research questions:

- What foods are reserved for special occasions?
- What is the significance of a cake?
- What is defined as a treat? Under what circumstances are children given treats? How often are children given treats?
- How do themed parties influence what foods are served?
- How do food rituals at birthday parties become a norm for children and parents?
- How do these expectations influence choices children and parents make about food?

Birthday parties are generally considered a time for treats. Typically, parents provide children unhealthy foods, which are seen as “treats”. Through our interviews and observation, we learned about the circumstances when parents give children treats, when children expect treats, and how this exchange is likely to become part of everyday eating.

3.4: QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS FOR INTERVIEWS

After transcribing each interview, we analyzed our data by coding the transcriptions using an open coding method (Bazeley, 2007). We went through each transcript in NVivo and assigned

chunks of text various codes. We started with broad codes such as healthy expectations, influence of other children, and emphasis on the birthday child; we then identified more specific codes such as foods that were provided at birthday parties, activities that occurred at birthday parties, outside party venues, allergies of children, and negative opinions of parents about unhealthy food at birthday parties. We also coded common features such as presenting the birthday cake and loot bags at parties. We used the codes created from the first set of interviews to code the rest of the interviews, while also adding new codes as we reflected on the data. We grouped these codes to answer our research questions.

The themes that emerged from our data included parents’ and children’s expectations of food, significance of the birthday cake, family traditions, parents’ convenience as a factor, the concept of a treat, and the commercialization of birthdays. These themes helped us create claims for our findings. Figure 5 shows an example of our use of coding.

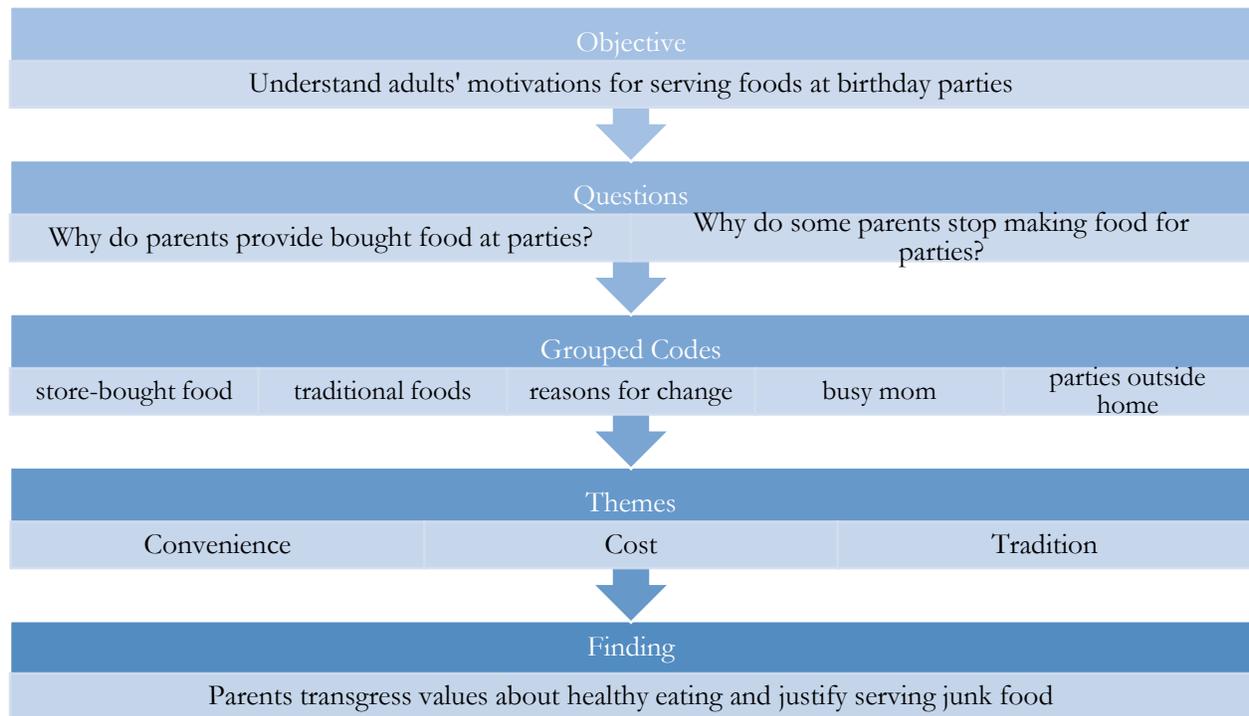


Figure 5: Example of the process of coding

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.0: INTRODUCTION

During the four weeks of our fieldwork, we interviewed 22 parents or legal guardians within the Greater Wellington Region about the foods provided at their children's birthday parties and everyday meals. The names of the parents or legal guardians and their children were removed to keep their identities anonymous.

4.1: UNDERSTAND THE ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH BIRTHDAY PARTIES AND THE ROLE OF FOOD IN THESE ACTIVITIES.

Birthday parties are a common feature in children's lives where children learn the traditional structure of birthday events and foods served.

Most birthday parties are well-ordered events. The majority of parties for children of all ages were held on Saturdays or Sundays during morning tea, around 10:00 AM in the morning, or during afternoon tea, around 2:00 PM in the afternoon. The parties typically lasted two or three hours in order to have enough time for the activity or party games, food, and the presentation and eating of the cake. Up until the age of five, the activities included different party games and unstructured playtime. Children's birthday parties were hosted at the family's house or at a venue to accommodate the large number of children, parents, and family friends who attended. The number of guests highly varied from the immediate family of four to the extended family of around twenty. In extreme cases, parents invited a combination of friends and extended family, totaling to seventy guests. Because of the children's ages, other parents tended to stay to supervise their own children. After the age of five, children's birthday parties tended to center on a structured activity of the child's choosing, such as laser tag, go-karting, rock climbing, and swimming. With less room available at home, parties typically took place at venues. Parents of children attending the party would simply drop their children off. However, relatives such as grandparents would occasionally help the parents with organizing the event and preparing the food.

At most parties, the host parents designated a time for children to eat, usually after the activity was over. The foods served most frequently included junk food such as chips, French fries, and candy. Junk food is defined as "food that is low in nutritional value, often highly processed or ready-prepared, and eaten instead of or in addition to well-balanced meals" (junk food, 2014). Many parents referred to junk food as something that was not natural, something that contained ingredients they could not pronounce, or something that was highly processed.

Junk food is prevalent at parties for good reason. Moss (2013) has argued convincingly that large food processors purposely churn out an array of heavily processed foods that he claims is a legalized type of narcotic. Potato chips, for instance, which is “the largest weight-inducing food,” is addictive because of the “coating of salt, the fat content that rewards the brain with instant feelings of pleasure, the sugar that exists not as an additive, but in the starch of the potato itself – all of this combines to make it the perfect addictive food” (Moss, 2013).

Children are rewarded with lollies at party games to blur the distinction between winner and loser.

Based on our interviews, we have found that many games and activities for young children are centered on lollies, also known as candy. A common party game that parents mentioned was Pass the Parcel, which has evolved to include lollies. Pass the Parcel involves a gift of some sort, possibly a chocolate bar or small toy car, wrapped in many layers of wrapping paper or newspaper. Children sit in a circle and pass the gift around while a parent controls the music. When the music stops, a child removes one layer of wrapping paper and receives the gift under that removed layer. This continues until one child unwraps the last layer and wins the final prize; typically the birthday child ends up winning the prize. Parents recalled that when they were younger, there would only be one gift and one winner. Nowadays, parents often rig the game by ensuring that every child wins a prize. To do this, parents will wrap the gift with enough layers so that each child receives a lolly. Two other activities that some parents said that their children partake in included hitting a piñata and Lolly Scramble, both of which involve children receiving lollies.

Interviewee: Sometimes a piñata, but when they were little we used to do piñata pretty much every um so lollies everywhere and Lolly Scramble is a traditional Kiwi thing. I don't know if you guys know about that. That's a [laughs] that's a Kiwi very Kiwi thing and um even at fairs or but especially at kids' parties and at Christmas time if, whoever is dressed as Santa or even if you go somewhere they often have a Lolly Scramble for the kids and yeah...

Baltazar: Do they try to eat it all then? Or do they save it?

Interviewee: Well this is it. This is the big parental problem isn't it is making sure that they do ration those and you know eat them over time but I have to say they do often, my kids anyway, who do have sweet teeth, and that's probably our fault because we do as well, my husband and I, um and you know they do. They probably do eat them too quickly

Figure 6 shows examples of lollies that have been provided at birthday parties.



Figure 6: Examples of typical lollies found at birthday parties

The birthday party that we observed included an obstacle course ending with popping a balloon that contained a lolly or two inside. Figure 7 shows the end of the obstacle course where the balloons were hung.



Figure 7: String where balloons were hung

Once the children had popped their respective balloons, they grabbed the lollies and ate them without hesitation. Once they realized there were lollies in the balloons, some of the children went back in line to have a second opportunity to go through the obstacle course and pop another balloon. Figure 8 shows the wrappers of the lollies the children ate after popping the balloons.



Figure 8: Empty lolly wrappers left on the floor

Lollies keep the peace amongst the children during birthday parties. One mother said, “Seriously, if a kid doesn’t get something, even at the end you’ll have a kid cry, ‘ahhh, I didn’t win!’ And you’re like, ‘No but you got your lolly!’” By giving lollies out during party games, parents ensured that all the children remained momentarily happy.

Young children consume junk food at both home birthday parties and school birthday celebrations.

Between the ages of four and six, children attend kindergarten, known as kindie in New Zealand, where birthdays are celebrated in school. If the teacher allows, the birthday child can bring in a snack for morning or afternoon tea such as cake, marshmallows, popcorn, or ice blocks (popsicles) to share with his or her classmates. One mother explained what she did for her child’s birthday at school:

Interviewee: [I]t’s like a tradition in his school where he always asks me a day before his birthday to buy some lollipops for his friends or like small chocolates I guess. So. But the lollipops are cheaper so that’s what I, yeah I normally buy him lollipops from the dairy and then he just brings it in and gives it to all his friends.

Sometimes teachers allowed the class to take home lollies provided by the birthday child. One mother mentioned that she rarely purchases lollies, yet her children frequently come home with sweets: “Sometimes they’ll come with lollies. But we don’t really buy a lot of lollies. Most of the lollies that we have at home are actually given to us by other people.”

Many parents celebrate a child’s birthday at home with their entire class of 25 to 30 children where cake and lollies are provided. If children attend all of their classmates’ birthday parties and participate in the school celebrations, the frequency of eating ritualized junk food can be as high as 50 to 60 instances per year. However, some parents have complained about the frequent distribution of treats and some schools have made efforts to put a halt to it.

Interviewee: Yeah um, actually my son has changed schools in his primary year. I know in his first school there would be bags of lollies or little chocolate bars would come home and it was so and so’s birthday. I think someone complained and we got a notice that “We don’t do that” but that was school policy. But in his new school, they have cupcakes or treats.

Despite these complaints, schools continue to allow children to provide unhealthy food to their classmates for birthdays.

Parents expect to provide more food and incur more costs for boys’ birthday parties than girls’ parties.

From our research we found many noticeable differences between girls' and boys' birthday parties. After the age of five, gender played a larger role in the parties. Parents thought boys wanted more active birthday parties, such as go-karting and laser tag, whereas girls were found to want more social birthdays, such as sleepovers and spa days. Because active birthday party events require parents to host the parties outside of the home, these activities tend to be more expensive. As the price of the activities rise, it seems that the quality of food degrades because the outside venues do not often allow food to be brought from home. At the cost of the activity and the catered food, some parents are forgoing the loot bag for the guests.

Interviewee: So I guess, so, but now the boys won't have any favors, so that's kind of just, yeah, dwindled off, because you're paying for the activity, and it's just kind of like, so go-kart is kind of an expensive activity. I guess kind of figure that if they want to take a piece of cake home then they can. Uhm, but, yeah, that's probably the other thing, the other key thing that's changed, I think, yeah.

Since boys are participating in more active birthdays, parents believe they need extra energy to keep playing. One mother discussed how she provided filling food for the boys:

Interviewee: I might serve the boys a wee bit more carbohydrate-y stuff but sometimes I will get um, I will order hot chips, I might do the boys a bit more substantial stuff. Sometimes, but generally I think they're the same. The girls will be chatting away doing more social things and the boys are racing around and fueling up. Yeah. A lot of those, I mean a lot of those places provide food you know that so.

Typically, boys get this extra energy for birthday activities through the food they consume at the parties. It was noted that a person can provide more volumes of food if the food was not as healthy because junk food is often cheaper.

Non-native Kiwis adopt some New Zealand birthday party norms while keeping their cultural birthday traditions.

We interviewed mothers from Samoa, Tonga, and Tokelau. We found that birthday parties varied across this group; while Samoan and Tongan birthday parties are extravagant and hold more importance in their culture, Tokelauan birthday parties are humble and hold less cultural importance. For example, the Samoan woman explained how she recently threw a relatively small birthday party compared to a typical Samoan birthday celebration:

Interviewee: It was small. It wasn't a typical Pacific birthday where you might invite family and the neighbors. I think we just did a cake. I bake the cake. I – since my older son was 6th birthday I've decided to bake the cake myself at home because I know what's going into the cake. And we just had the normal sausages. Uhm, Saturday's we just did it at home.

She said it contrasted from a typical Pacific birthday party in that “a typical Pacific birthday, it’s quite massive. You invite pretty much your whole extended families, you have it at a hall sort of thing.” She did stress that she had put a lot more money and effort into her child’s first birthday, as that is significant within her ethnicity. However, she decided to discontinue hosting elaborate birthdays:

Interviewee: But we’re more – I’m not big on birthdays, in terms of splashing out. I think my son’s first birthday we had it at Laugh A Lot, which is one those indoor entertainment sort of playground. And all the food was catered there. It was because it was his first birthday. And the food was all unhealthy but it was – we thought it would be a treat for everybody and the kids were running off the sugar and all that. But for the second one we decided to go small and especially now because we’re defiantly more aware because that’s what I preach with families that we work with.

She justified moving away from cultural practices as a compound of constrained budget and health concerns.

The Tongan woman introduced us to the unique cultural celebrations and rituals that occur during significant birthday years. For a female, significant birthday years include 1, 16, and 21 and for a male, 1, 18, and 21. Our interviewee discussed the differences between her child’s first and second birthdays and the extent to which they were celebrated. When describing her child’s first birthday, additional measures took place to make it a traditional Tongan celebration:

Interviewee: The first birthday is a lot more involved because, uhm, we always, we always have to get, uhm, gifts for the aunties, so that’s, uhm, the father’s sister. She plays a really important role in our culture, the Tongan culture. So where she is kind of the queen or so, uhm, in our culture. So the birthday girl always has to, and the family always has to provide tapa cloths and mats and monetary gifts and things like that that has to be given to the auntie and the minister who also blesses it. They also have to be given tapa cloths and mats and monetary gifts and things like that as well.

However, the second birthday aligned more closely with traditional Kiwi party structure but still incorporated the essential blessings and certain rituals.

Interviewee: So her birthday last year was a lot more simple than her first birthday. Just because with our culture, like, the first birthday is usually a lot more complex and it’s got its traditions and things like that. Uhm, I always try and keep it [laughs] as simple as possible. Uhm, but uhm, last year, uhm, what we did was we just tried to keep it to really close immediate family members...And we just went out to Valentine’s, uhm...we just celebrated her birthday there. Uhm, but before that, early in the morning, uhm, because we had Valentine’s dinner, we had, my parents decorated our house with uhm, tapa cloths and the mats and things like that. So it’s, uhm, always have to do the blessings. So my dad does the blessings and we sing hymns and read chapters from the Bible and, uhm, we sing happy birthday and things like that. And so, we sing Happy Birthday again [laughs] at Valentine’s when she blew out the candles on the cake.

On the contrary, the Tokelauan woman described how birthday celebrations are not as essential within the Tokelauan culture. Although the Tokelauan people find extravagant celebrations unnecessary, a cake was most often present on her child's birthday due to Kiwi influences. However one year she decided to throw one of her children a birthday party:

Interviewee: The fourth one (child) he is the spoiled one...with the fourth one there were like nearly 60 people. Because there was my married husband. He wanted to celebrate it in an island way! Which is, he is from Somoa, I'm from Tokelau, so we don't celebrate birthdays that much in Tokelau, but because it was his first son.

Te: He wanted a huge birthday?

Interviewee: Yeah! And that was it, and I said from there 'Okay, that's it! We're just going to go less and less, and we'll just get a birthday cake and celebrate it at our normal meal in the evening and that's it.

This mother stressed that she would not have thrown a large party and did not for her other children until her husband, who is Samoan, insisted on it.

4.2: IDENTIFY PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS AND ATTITUDES AROUND BIRTHDAY PARTIES TO DETERMINE WHY CERTAIN FOODS ARE SERVED AND HOW THEIR ENTRENCHMENT.

At birthday parties, parents often transgress their values about eating healthy food, and provide junk food to children, justifying it as a matter of convenience, cost, and tradition.

Although parents told us that they typically feed their children healthy food, they admitted to serving unhealthy foods at their birthday parties. One parent talked about the differences between what was served for food at a birthday party and during a normal lunch:

Interviewee: In fact a lot of the time I'll just make the children's boxes out of what we put in the lunch, the children's lunch boxes, 'cause then I know that it's kind of a little bit safe, cause you know what the other children around kindie are eating as well. But obviously there's, there'll be more emphasis on party food. ... There's a bit more of the sweet stuff than there would usually be.

The same parent mentioned how these party lunches contained more chips, lollies, and other packaged foods than normal lunches. Parents typically justified serving these foods because of the amount of time and money they saved buying food rather than preparing it themselves. One parent mentioned, "try[ing] and you know do[ing] things that are really easy as well if it's sandwiches or sausage rolls or pizza" for food at birthday parties. Another parent talked about serving a desert at parties because it "is a big favorite and it's really easy because I can buy it and it's premade and it won't be a disaster in the oven." A third parent bought lollipops for a birthday party because "the lollipops are cheaper so that's what I, yeah I normally buy him lollipops from the dairy."

Other parents found it more convenient to have outside venues hosting the party prepare the food. One parent explained “[outside venues] normally provide food, and then you just pick what you want and they give it to you so that’s all that you have to pay for.” Another parent discussed the ease of planning a party with these venues:

Interviewee: Or um, if he goes to, ‘cause sometimes we do go to um like a, what do you call it, Junglerama? Where they provide food for the kids so um there will be a list of what the kids would like to have on that day so we give that out to the parents and ask them what you know if the kid would prefer a sausage or chicken nuggets or what else is the choices there, um, yeah fish nuggets, something like that and um maybe pies, like little pies and what drink do they want, do they want juice, soft drinks or yeah. They normally give us, give me the information and then I order it for them.

A third parent explained the convenience and low cost of one child’s birthday party by having it at a restaurant instead of at home:

Interviewee: Because that birthday party yeah, I think it cost, I think I paid about \$120 bucks all up for this [Middle child] and six mates to do fish and chips plus their drinks and then picked them up and came home for birthday cake. So I think all up you’ll be looking you know. Whereas to do a birthday party at home, you know uh I just know from all the birthday parties I’ve done at home, you spend a lot more money doing something at home than you know you would doing something like that.

Another justification that parents gave for serving junk food was tradition; parents realized some of the foods they served at their children’s parties were foods they ate at their childhood parties. The adults frequently mentioned 'cheerio' sausages and 'fairy bread' as traditional birthday snacks. Cheerios are small cocktail sausages served with tomato sauce, known as ketchup in the US. Figure 9 shows an example of how parents serve cheerios at birthday parties.



Figure 9: Cheerios

Fairy bread, as show in Figure 10, is white bread covered with butter and sprinkled with pralines; fairy bread is often cut into shapes to make the pieces of bread more appealing to the children.



Figure 10: Fairy bread

Although these foods fall under the rubric of junk food, parents continue to serve them because of their association with birthday parties. However, not all foods are passed on in tradition. A potential way for certain foods to become tradition is to repeat the food in successive years and for those traditional foods to be made by other families and so on and so forth. It may also be helpful to have an emotional attachment to the food served to solidify its' place in birthday traditional food. Nearly all parents justified serving cheerios and fairy bread at their children's parties because they considered it "traditional Kiwi party food." They could give no further explanation beyond this, demonstrating a sense of culturally pressured automation. One interviewee justified serving cheerios saying, "Um so the kids still would have the sausages with the sauce because that's a Kiwi tradition." In another interview conducted, a mother told us that her husband is "always impressed if there are those little cheerios sausages" and still "actively looks for cheerios at adult and children's birthday parties." A third parent planned on serving fairy bread at parties in the future "because we had lovely birthdays with my own mum making lovely food for us. But I haven't done a while traditional sprinkles, hundredths and thousandths on white bread ... maybe I suppose when she is a bit older." This third parent especially wanted to pass on the love associated with the foods. She specifically recalled her mother putting a lot of effort and 'love' into the foods at her birthdays. This mother hasn't created fairy bread and other such food for her daughter yet, but intends to do so as she grows older to keep the memory of her mother alive. It seems as if she wants to pass on the tradition of loving effort onto her own daughter. This interviewee may not be unique in that she was the only one that wanted to pass on the tradition, the other interviewees just didn't make this point

as explicit. The passing on of the love associated with the traditional food could be a fundamental reason as to why certain traditions are passed on and others are not.

Parents prepare junk food for birthday parties under the assumption that children associate such food with party food.

A common belief between parents interviewed was that “children seem to have an expectation that there’s going to be not everyday, you know, not everyday food, when they come to a birthday party.” The parents interviewed mentioned that children generally expected party foods at birthday parties. When asked to define party foods, one parent defined party food as “lollies, chippies, popcorn, uh this is for the kids’ party food, club sandwiches, sausage rolls, little cheerios, it’s quite standard in New Zealand I think ... but [the food above] seems to be standard party food.” Another parent said that party food included: “chips, fairy bread, and those cocktail sausages, the red ones.” One parent believed unhealthy foods packaged into small portions were ideal party foods:

Interviewee: A little packet of, I am a sucker for packaging so if there’s little packets of lollies with cars on them, or packets of, if I’ve got a color theme going on I’ll slide that in there. Because it’s like the whole party. Because if you give them packets, and the parents don’t want them to have them that day, they can stash them away for another day. Or give them away yeah. Yeah so probably for me, packaging, or the things the little packets are party food to me.

Not many parents put the effort into serving healthy food because the children tended not to eat them. One parent who served a “mix of healthy stuff and [unhealthy] stuff” recalled how “the healthy stuff just didn’t get eaten.” Another parent remembered having only leftover fruit at the end of a party:

Interviewee: We had chips probably as in crisps. Um, but I can’t remember anything like I can’t remember lollies if figuring and I can’t remember uh you know massive amounts of you know deep fried food or anything like that. So it was probably more healthy and you know little sorts of fruit on a plate or things. I made these fruit kebabs and we brought them all home! I mean I forced them actually on some of them. I said no you’re going to have these. ‘Cause I mean they were nice. They had watermelon and grapes and stuff on them.

A third parent decided to only provide unhealthy food because she assumed children at the parties would not eat healthy food:

Interviewee: I don’t tend to do a whole lot of handmade stuff for parties. Because really they don’t appreciate gourmet food. They just want party food. And at the end of the day, like with [Son] I gave him the choice. Just go get anything within reason that you want and so what it was the chips and the um uh lollies and stuff that he just wouldn’t normally get.

The same parent noted that “[the children] may well have a bit of an issue with the party food that was all basically healthy you know healthy fruit and vegetables and things like that.”

4.3: UNDERSTAND HOW CHILDREN’S EXPECTATIONS OF BIRTHDAY PARTIES IMPACT THE WAY THEY VIEW FOOD.

Birthday cake, serving as an exemplar of junk food, is firmly established as the centerpiece of the party.

Throughout our interviews, nearly every parent mentioned how their children’s birthday parties had a cake. The interviewees all seemed to agree that a birthday would not be a birthday without a cake. Whether the cake was purchased or homemade, the presentation of the cake took precedence over the entire birthday party. The presentation of the cake typically followed the routine: guests gathering around the birthday child and cake, the singing of the birthday song, the blowing out of the candles, and the cutting and eating of the cake. One interviewee stated that the birthday cake was the cornerstone of the party:

Interviewee: You’d be killed. [if the child didn’t get a birthday cake] You’d be annihilated. [Laughs] The cake is the – you know it is just a cake and it is just a normal cake, but it was certainly in my experience in my childhood and certainly my children the cake is this focal point that you get to have this cake. Even though it’s just a cake you can have everyday... If you didn’t have a cake it wouldn’t be a party. Not in New Zealand anyway.

Another parent mentioned how “turning into the cake as a centerpiece is unofficially turning into a bit of a ceremony.”

Some parents believe that it was the presentation of the cake, rather than the cake itself, that was the centerpiece of the birthday party. One parent stated that the cake didn’t even have to be there so long as some semblance to a cake was present. She stated that if the faux cake was presented as if it was cake, the party would still feel like a birthday party:

Interviewee: I don’t think it would feel like a party. A birthday if there wasn’t a cake or a candle being blown out. It wouldn’t necessarily need to be traditional cake but the singing of the happy birthday and the blowing out the candles.

Although children do blow out the candles, we found that half of our interviewees mentioned that making a wish while blowing out candles is not a tradition in their families.

The practice of having cake at celebrations was forged long before the modern birthday. The cake was employed as the spectacle of the birthday dating back to medieval times; a sugar sculpture similar to a cake was served at celebrations to show that the host can afford luxurious commodities such as sugar (Risson 2013; Mintz 1986, p. 78-99). Even in the fourteenth century, wealthy

Europeans employed cake-like sugar architecture to signify their affluence through food. The presentation of these sugar sculptures expressed the higher standing of the host in the social hierarchy. According to Risson (2013, p. 64), “Scholars agree that subtleties (elaborate sugar sculptures) endure in a diminished form in modern day ceremonial cakes” (Lees 1988, p. 29; Mintz 1986: 122). Modern day cakes have a similar effect but are subtler. Some hosts may be showing social standing subconsciously. The history from elaborate sugar sculptures to modern day decorated cakes shows that cakes and celebrations, in this case birthday parties, are deeply entrenched in society.

Growing commercialization sets new standard for birthday parties and the foods provided.

During our interviews, we noticed a growing sense of commercialization of children’s birthday parties. Commercialization is the mass producing and selling of products for profit. Children wanted to have themed birthday parties and the parents accommodated them, often times by using products made available by commercialization. This concept seemed to be a relatively recent development. None of the interviewees recalled having themed birthday parties as children.

Interviewee: I mean nobody sort of thought about what sort of theme are we going to have? Or you know, is it going to be super heroes today? Or what or princess party or whatever. Um, yeah it was just a birthday party and you walked on up, you played a few kids’ games, had some food, and then went and climbed up a tree or you know um and that and that was it.

The interviewees described the simplicity of their birthdays and how they wanted to be more creative with their children’s parties by having themes. Common birthday party themes that our interviewees mentioned were of Frozen, cars, super heroes, and princesses. Often times, the birthday child picks the theme for the party and the treats, birthday cake, and loot bags follow the theme. To accentuate these themes, most parents bought mass marketed products. In one instance, a mother organized a pool party and each guest received a water gun. Another mother explained what was provided for her son’s car themed birthday party:

Interviewee: Usually, well with my son because he’s all about cars, it’ll be car stickers a pencil, a rubber [eraser], um probably a car lolly or something car themed, car biscuit, or yeah. Just it’s all cars for him.

The food served at themed parties is different in some aspects than those at a normal un-themed party. One mother said she decorated the foods to follow the theme of the party her child wanted saying she provided, “an iced biscuit (frosting decorated cookie), um, usually around the theme.”

The essentials, such as fairy bread and cheerios were present, but cut into special shapes or given different names to match the theme like 'Yoda juice' or colored dyed fizzy drink.

Cakes are often more extravagant nowadays and are typically decorated with various childhood role models such as characters from their favorite movies because it is usually representative of what the child admires or is infatuated with most at the time (Risson, 2013). For example, one child of an interviewee decided he wanted a Star Wars themed birthday party. Figures 11-14 are examples of the treats, birthday cake, and loot bags that went along with the party theme. In this case, there was a decorated cake, marshmallows, and biscuits, but would have been undecorated in a birthday party that did not follow a theme.



Figure 11: Storm trooper marshmallows



Figure 12: Light saber biscuits



Figure 13: Star Wars themed cakes



Figure 14: Star Wars themed loot bags

Another year, the same child wanted a superhero party. Figure 15 shows an example of a superhero cake the parent made for the party.

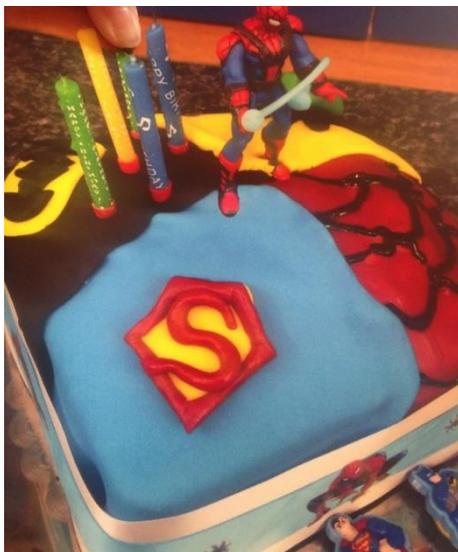


Figure 15: Super hero themed cake

The commercialization of children's birthday parties shifted the focus away from the taste of food; in addition to picking the flavor of the cake, the parents and children also picked the appearance of the cake. If the cake was store bought, then the focus was also taken away from the nutrient quality of the cake and shifted towards the appearance. One mother mentioned, "I do say to my children, 'What kind of cake would you like?' and then they say, 'We want a Spiderman cake or a Frozen cake.'" Another interviewee mentioned her children "will pick a theme [of cake] and they love that! I think they love that more than the cake." A third parent discussed the differences in the taste and the appearance of cakes in the past thirty years:

Interviewee: Some of the Frozen cakes that I saw this last year were really impressive. They must've cost megabucks you know because there were some where they looked like they had just come out of the ice palace with all the decoration and you know castles and everything on them. You know the whole shebang and the icing was just unbelievable. I think the trend has been that they're uh, more and more people are buying a commercially produced cake rather than actually making the cake themselves and decorating it which also means that I must say the cakes that I eat at a birthday party now, 'cause uh there's always something for the parents. They're pretty bland and fluffy and you know to get something that's got a bit of guts to it like cakes say 30 years ago where if you had a chocolate cake it was good, proper chocolate cake whereas now chocolate cake, it's sort of very light and airy. And you know that it's being mass-produced because it's so perfect when you cut through it. Yeah.

Children learn from birthday parties to expect treats as rewards in their everyday lives.

The concept of the treat is not reserved for food rituals; it spills over into and from everyday life. Our interview data suggested that children learn to view treats as rewards. Parents viewed treats as a "once in a while food." One parent expressed her children's view of treats at birthdays:

Interviewee: We treat birthdays like actually you can have this treat food at a birthday because we don't have it most of the time. So our children know that lemonade is a birthday food a birthday drink. Oh my goodness it's somebody's birthday you're going to have lemonade.

Another parent described these treats as "something that's either high in fat... chips or burgers or something like that, or high in sugar, so a big slice of cake would be a big treat." In the case of the birthday child, the treats he or she receives serve as a celebratory reward for surviving another year. The other children attend to mark the occasion as guests. A major example of treats as rewards at birthday parties was loot bags given to children who attended. The adults interviewed rarely recalled having loot bags for their childhood birthdays. Now, children are receiving loot bags as a reward for

attending a birthday party instead of attending out of friendship. One of the interviewees mentioned that children would get upset if they did not get anything as a prize at the end of the day:

Interviewee: Seriously, if a kid doesn't get something, even at the end you'll have a kid cry, ahhh, I didn't win! And you're like, no but you got your lolly! So I think you know we don't want to upset children and we live in a culture where you know everyone's a winner and that's how they're all brought up aren't they? In sports teams everyone gets a certificate.

By receiving treats as rewards, children make the association between treats and good behavior that transfers to daily eating. One parent even noted that there was a transition from a treat as a reward to a treat as bribery. The interviewee said, "Whether they're mine or somebody else's is nothing works better than a bribe when you want something done. Works fantastically with that one and it doesn't have to be a big bribe. It can be really you know. One square of chocolate is all that it needs." Another parent admitted to using bribery to entice good behavior by "you know giving [the child] a lollipop one time to generate a huge, huge desire. What we do is kind, kind of awful, but occasionally use it as bribery. You know when you really need her to be good." Whether a parent is trying to get their children to eat vegetables or go to bed, treats are being used to encourage behaviors that parents want to see.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

A child's birthday is a reminder, to the parents, of the day that their child came into the world. But the birthday and the food rituals associated with it not only celebrate the child, but also can be seen as a celebration of family. The existence of a practice provides the basis of appropriateness and the meanings that come to be attached reinforce it (Charsley, 1987). Parents frequently served traditional food at birthday parties because of the memories associated with those foods. Traditional food reminds parents of their childhood birthday parties and the effort their parents put into making those foods, thus creating a good feeling that is associated with birthday parties. Keeping these traditions is a way to keep their childhood memories alive and express their devotion and gratitude towards their parents.

Children prefer junk foods at birthday parties because it is a way of rebelling against the norm; by eating junk food, they are in control of their own food choices. Children have little say in daily food matters because of the control parents place over these decisions. Parents view their children as passive recipients of food and remove them from the tasks and decision-making that involve food (Albon, 2007; Grieshaber, 1997). Some parents, however, accept their children's input regarding food on special occasions such as their birthday to treat them. Children choose foods forbidden or restricted outside their daily food because it makes them special and in control. Therefore, children use eating junk food as a method of resistance against their parents' authority (Albon, 2007).

Parents, especially mothers in particular, want to serve healthy foods at birthday parties to prove that they are 'good parents' while wanting to fulfill their children's demands for junk food. Women believe it is important to control the amount of sugar in their children's diet because it is non-nutritious and poses a threat to their maternal authority (Albon, 2007; Fischler, 1986). By feeding their children healthy food, parents solidify their parental authority over their children because they keep their children under control, showing others that they are good parents. However, for mothers, feeding their children also involves pleasing them (Albon, 2007). Because the birthday is particularly child-focused, the happiness of the birthday child becomes paramount (Jennings & Brace-Govan, 2013). Therefore, if children want junk food at their parties, mothers feel the need to serve it to please their children on their special day. These opposing views create stress for the parent.

This opportunity to show appreciation towards their children also causes stress on the parents because of commercialization. Parents aimed to “weave their abiding care into the party to express something special for the child without material excess;” they believe that homemade food and decoration, rather than elaborate and extravagant food and activities, makes birthday parties special for their children (Jennings & Brace-Govan, 2013). However, children frequently attend parties and come home talking about the store-bought foods present and the themed activities played with their parents. At this point, parents may feel obligated to plan a birthday party that is just as materially extravagant for their child, as to not let him or her down. With commercialization within today’s society and media encouraging the idea that an extravagant, costly party is typical, parents may feel pressured to meet the expectations brought about by socialization. It seems there is a growing trend for people to appreciate the superfluous because the essentials can be bland.

Because children are continuously socialized to expect unhealthy food at birthday parties, we concluded some of these food habits would be hard to change. Children learn a ‘skeleton’ of the expectations and behaviors around food at birthday parties through socialization and act accordingly to these guidelines. Therefore, their associations are determined by the frequency of the items at birthday parties; the more often an item is at a child’s birthday party, the more likely they will be to associate the item with birthday parties. Items such as birthday cake would be difficult to change due to the deep associations between cake and birthdays. Because every child’s birthday party has a birthday cake, children learn these associations early in life. Foods such as lollies or soda seem easier to change because these items tend to vary between children’s birthday parties, making it harder to create their associations with birthdays.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our research we have developed the following recommendations:

For Parents

Changing Children’s Expectations About Food

We recommend that parents serve healthy food in enticing and fun ways at birthday parties.

We found that many parents do not try to expose their children to healthier options because they assume they will not eat them. Parents can provide healthy food for their children in certain ways to promote healthy food choices at birthday parties. The parents could serve fruit by cutting it into shapes such as a hearts, flowers, or spaceships using cookie cutters. The parents could also use a

combination of fruit and marshmallows and thread a skewer through them. This would compel the child to eat the snack and also provide healthy portions. Even putting fruit or veggies in an attractive case could entice the children to eat the healthier food. By making healthy food appealing, children will be more likely to eat it because of its similarity to ‘fun foods.’

We recommend that parents cook with their children.

Through the interviews, we found that children involved in the cooking process were more apt to try new foods and understand the nutritional values of their meals. Based on this, we suggest that parents include their children in the cooking process for not only birthday food but also daily food. This could involve any part of the process from shopping for and preparing the ingredients to cooking and serving the dish. By including the children in the process, they can better grasp how to make food and identify the separate ingredients that they eat on a daily basis. In the case of unhealthy foods, they may realize that the components lack nutritional value and stay away from such food.

We recommend that parents talk about food with their children.

As a means to ensure that children understand the importance of food in their development, parents can talk to their children about the role it plays within their life. Things discussed could be about the necessary components of a balanced diet, the types of food that are unhealthy, why they are unhealthy, and how healthy foods can also be used as a treat. Parents can also introduce more complex food and the vocabulary necessary to characterize these beyond words like ‘gross’ and ‘good.’ Children able to accurately describe the taste and characteristics of food can depict the types of food and flavors that they enjoy. By teaching them to appreciate taste, children will opt to remove the bland, unhealthy food served just as a means to ensure that they eat.

We recommend that parents provide alternatives to lollies in loot bags.

We found that children eat a lot of lollies during birthday parties, and are then sent home with more lollies in loot bags. Many parents dislike this part of the birthday party; parents find it difficult telling their children that they cannot have any more lollies. However, they realize their children have had enough, putting parents in a difficult situation. To prevent this, the parents that do give out loot bags could avoid giving out bags full of lollies to children at the end of a birthday party. We found that parents do not appreciate their children coming home with little, cheap plastic toys as well. An alternative to both of these options would be to give the children that attend the party a pot with a plant or seeds for fruit or flowers. This can teach children how to plant and care

for a living creature of their own. Another alternative could be providing the children with jump ropes, promoting physical activity.

Addressing Allergies

We recommend that parents ask if children have allergies on their invitation.

We found that in today's society many children are allergic to a multitude of food, herbs, spices, etc. With all of these allergies prevalent, parents found it difficult to offer certain foods at birthday parties without hesitation. To ensure a child will not have an allergic reaction, the parents can have an extra note in the RSVP section of the invitation to let them know if any children attending have allergies. This can make planning what food will be offered a much easier process. It will also allow for the host to make an accommodating meal or avoid using an ingredient if necessary so that a child will not be hungry or left out.

We recommend that parents provide pre-portioned food for children's birthday parties.

One alternative to offering a buffet, free-for-all styled party, would be to prepare pre-portioned food prior to guests arriving. By providing individual portions of food to each child, the potential for cross contamination is significantly lowered. Within that, the foods can be child specific to ensure that they eat food that they enjoy or that their allergies allow. The portions also serve as a way to curb the amount of food that children eat ensuring that they do not overindulge in any particular sweet or type of food.

For the Network

Creating Alternative Birthday Food

We recommend that the Network creates a social marketing campaign targeting parents to raise awareness about the nutritional value of birthday foods and the frequency at which children are exposed to them.

Through the interviewees, we found that the foods served during birthday parties tended to be unhealthy and considered 'junk food.' We also recognized that children would attend multiple celebrations throughout the year. The Network could raise the awareness about the quality of the food served during the parties. As part of this campaign, the frequency in which children attend parties could be brought up. In conjunction, the two concepts could serve as a way to show parents the amount of unhealthy food that their child consumes as part of one specific ritual.

We recommend that the Network provides recipes for healthy, fun food.

We found that parents with easy to make, cheap, healthy recipes tended to make these instead of buying pre-made food. The Network could create a repository for healthy alternatives to the food currently at birthday parties, as a portion of a social marketing campaign or as a stand-alone project. This could reach the parents who may want to serve healthy foods, but do not have the knowledge to make such foods. Along with alternative recipes, the Network could provide suggestions to parents about how to make healthy food appealing to children.

Future Research Questions:

We recommend that the Network further explores the role that ethnicity plays in the types and function of food served at birthday parties.

- How does the food expected at birthday parties of different ethnicities differ?
- What common ingredients are used in the dishes provided?
- How much of the celebration revolves around food?
- What rituals are associated with food at the celebration?

We recommend that the Network further investigate the different food practices surrounding birthday parties hosted by people of different socioeconomic levels.

- How does food at birthday parties of lower socioeconomic level families differ from food at upper class birthday parties?
- How does the nutritional value and quantity of the food provided vary between socioeconomic levels?
- How do the perceptions of party food change amongst children of different socioeconomic levels?
- How does the food portion of the celebration take place? i.e. Do they eat whenever they are hungry, or all at once? Do they sit down, or snack and walk around? Is it buffet-style or one plate for each guest? Are seconds frowned upon or encouraged?

We recommend that the Network further investigate children's perceptions and expectations surrounding birthday parties.

- What are children's opinions of birthday food?
- What birthday food do children look forward to and expect?
- What birthday food do children feel is necessary at a party to ensure it is a proper birthday party?

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – GANTT CHART

Below is a Gantt chart, which shows the timeline for completing events throughout the project.

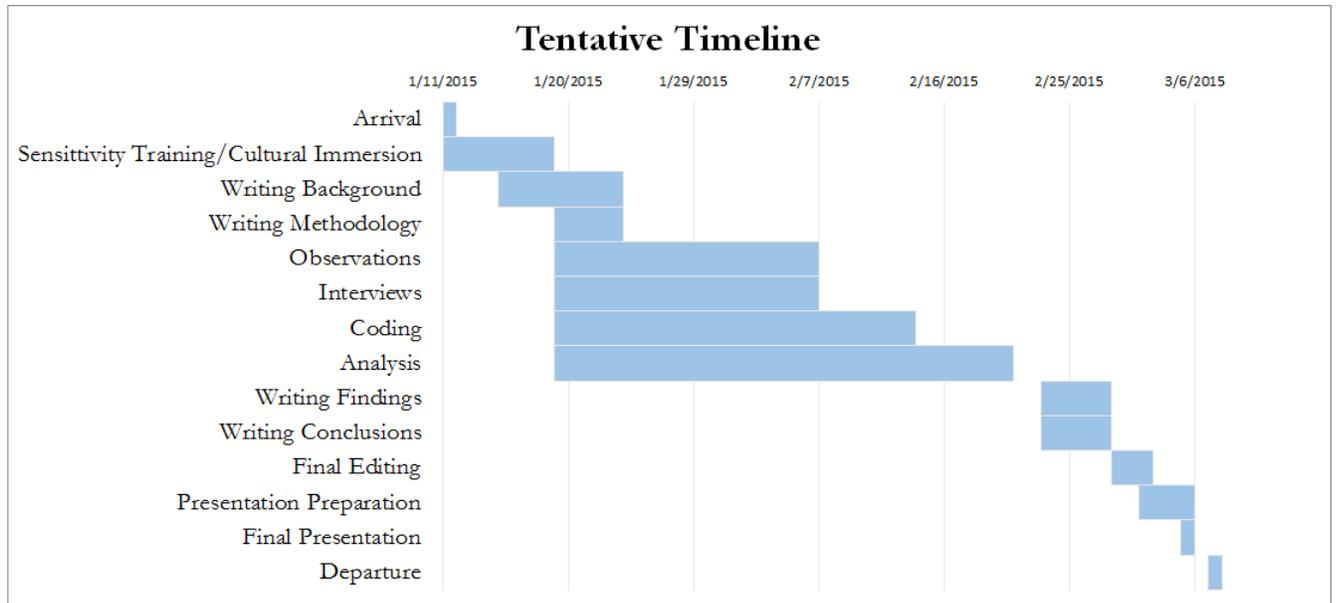


Figure 16: Timeline

APPENDIX B – CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

- I have been provided with adequate information relating to the nature and objectives of this research project,
- I have understood this information and have been given the opportunity to seek further clarification or explanations,
- I understand that I will be participating in a recorded interview,
- I understand that I may withdraw from this study up to seven days of completing the interview, and any data that I have provided will be returned to me or destroyed,
- I understand that the student researchers and supervisors will have access to the raw data but my name will be changed beforehand to maintain confidentiality,
- I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential and reported only in an aggregated/non-attributable form,
- I understand that the results will be used for publication in a health report and academic journals, but that my name will have been changed, and no identifiable information that is traceable to me will be included in the report,
- I understand that when this research is completed the raw data obtained will be stored securely for 5 years and then destroyed by January, 2020.

I **DO NOT** give permission for the researchers to use direct quotes from my interview in their study with my name redacted.

Signature of participant

Date: _____

Name of participant

APPENDIX C – INFORMATION SHEET FOR INTERVIEWS

Student Researcher:

Sean Amos, Amanda Baltazar, Julie Mazza & Alino Te

Supervisors:

Dr. Janine Williams, Dr. Jayne Krisjanous, Moira Smith

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you do decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to take part, thank you for considering our request.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT?

This study is being carried out by students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts, USA, as part of a technological and societal intersection study. The purpose of this study is to explore the effect of children's birthday parties on immediate and long-term food consumption practices. The data obtained from this study will inform health promotion activities and direct future research by the Child Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes Prevention Network and Victoria University of Wellington. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Pipitea Human Ethics Committee.

WHAT WILL YOUR ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES BE IF YOU TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

Participation from you would involve being interviewed once in a place of your choosing. The audio-recorded interview would take approximately 45 minutes but will only begin with your consent, and it can be terminated at any time, without providing reasons. You can withdraw from the study up to seven days after the interview, and any data provided by you will be destroyed or returned to you.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE INFORMATION YOU GIVE?

This research is completely confidential. Your name will not be used in the report or article, a pseudonym will be used instead, and any information traceable to you will be excluded from every analysis. The raw data will be reviewed by the student researchers and the supervisors. Your name will be changed before the student researchers and the supervisor review the raw data. The interview transcripts, summaries and digital recordings will be securely stored in such a way that only the student researchers, supervisors will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the research project this data will be stored securely for 5 years and then destroyed.

OUTPUTS OF THE PROJECT

Information will only be reported in an aggregated/non-attributable form (written report and presentation). You can be reassured that your name will be kept confidential, and that any information or opinions that could be traceable to you will not be reported in the article or written report.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS, WHO CAN YOU CONTACT?

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APPENDIX D – OUTLINE FOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Include relevant demographics and how often there would be birthday parties to attend for the children

- How many kids do you have?
- How old are they?
- (Clarify which birthday)
- How many birthday parties does your child attend?
- For your child’s birthday, do you send food for the entire class?
 - Are there any special foods you give your child for school lunch during his/her birthday?

| Question | Theme | Obj. # |
|--|---|--------|
| 1. Please describe for me what a children’s birthday celebration is like in your family a. Could you walk me through the preparation and event? | Cultural norms for celebration/ practices | 1 |
| 2. What food do you serve and why? a. Did you buy or make most of the food in the party? b. If you did buy your food, where did you buy it from? c. If you made your food, what kinds of ingredients and what types of preparation were necessary? | Cultural role of food Quality of food Ideology of food role Subjective view of the Generalized role of food | 1 |
| 3. How important is the food to the party? a. Why is this? | Centrality of food | 1 |
| 4. Do adults typically stay at the children’s parties? a. If so, what types of food are provided for them? | Adults at parties | 1 |
| 5. What was a typical birthday party like when you were a child? a. How have party foods changed since you were a child? b. If you could have decided what was served at your childhood birthday party, what would it have been? c. Has your opinion of food at birthday parties changed since you have become a parent/legal guardian? | Changes over time | 2 |
| 6. What influences do you have on your children’s eating habits? a. Are you concerned about what your children eat during birthday parties? b. Have you heard of any parents that object to allowing their children go to birthday parties because of food or location? | Parental influence Parental concern | 2 |
| 7. (Unhealthy)What would happen if you brought different food? (Healthy)Have you always served healthy food or is it a recent change? | Resistance to change | 3 |
| 8. How does the food at your birthday parties differ from the food consumed everyday? a. Are there any types of food that they only receive during the birthday celebration? b. Where does your child usually get lunch (i.e. homemade packed lunch, bought lunch) i. Do other children’s eating habits affect your child’s eating habits? c. What does your child usually eat for food? | Differences in food Normal eating habits | 3 |
| 9. As your child has grown, how has his/her tastes changed? a. Are there any allergies that affect your child’s eating habits? | Changes in taste | 3 |