Reviewer's report

Title: Children eat their school lunch too quickly: an exploratory study of the effect on food intake

Version: 2 Date: 1 October 2011

Reviewer: Julie Lumeng

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Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The paper as presently written is difficult for this reader to understand. The opening paragraphs of the introduction make a clear case for studying rate or speed of eating. However, the presentation would be significantly strengthened by closing the Introduction with a specific statement of each hypothesis being tested in this paper, and exactly which gaps in the existing literature testing each of these hypotheses fills.

2. The division of the methods section as currently presented is confusing to this reader. It would be helpful to divide it into "Study 1", "Study 2", etc, and under each study have consistent headings such as "Participants", "Methods", etc. With the current presentation, it is difficult to separate the different studies and therefore understand exactly what was done. It would be very useful to open the presentation of each Study in the methods with a sentence such as, "In order to test the hypothesis that....". This would make it clear what the study was intending to do, and easier for the reader to follow.

3. Please clarify in more detail the procedure for timing the children's lunch. Did a single observer measure the length of the meal for 10 students simultaneously? This seems impossible to do reliably. In addition, please clarify how the start and end of the meal or eating was defined, exactly. It is not clear to this reader why the outline of the lunchroom is relevant to this study and I would suggest Figure 1 be omitted.

4. This reader could not get the link to the video (citation 15) to work. The website it seemed to be linking to did not seem to have any information about the technology and the website was in a different language from that of this reader.

5. Please clarify this sentence, which seems to be absolutely central to the reader being able to understand this study: "The children ate using Mandometer® following the curve of cumulative food intake that each child had generated in the unrestricted meal." What exactly were children trained to do and could they be successfully trained to do it? I think this manuscript really needs to be able to stand alone without the reader needing to do a lot of background reading to understand the methods. As presently written, it is not clear what this sentence means.

6. How was satiety rated? What was the question asked of the children?

7. It is very difficult for this reader to follow the statistical analysis section. It
would be tremendously helpful for the authors to present the statistical analysis section in the same manner as the close of the introduction and the methods: articulating step by step, "To test the hypothesis that... we used ANOVA to compare x and y."

8. Please articulate the hypothesis underlying the sex differences and why this was being examined.

9. Please clarify in the results, "7 minutes were spent eating". Was this measured from "the first bite" to "the last bite"? Or, was there some other marker for starting and finishing eating? What if the child took 2 bites at 11:48am, talked to friends for 5 minutes, and then took 2 more bites at 11:55am. Was that considered 7 minutes? Or was it considered 45 seconds (i.e. the amount of time to chew and swallow the food?). Please clarify.

10. The finding that the children ate much faster in a group in the cafeteria than in a quiet room by themselves is very fascinating. However, more detail is needed about the scale mechanism and exactly how this was used to calculate speed/rate of eating.

11. This reader is finding it difficult to follow what the "5 conditions" were, and what they were designed to evaluate. This is again where clarity regarding the hypotheses would be extremely helpful.

12. This reader is struggling to understand this sentence, "Maintenance of the unrestricted speed of eating had no effect, suggesting that the experimental procedure did not affect food intake non-specifically." Please clarify.

13. The authors should consider in their discussion the literature that animals (and humans) eating in groups surrounded by other members of their own species tend to eat more and faster than when eating alone.

14. It would again be very helpful to frame the conclusions around, "Our first hypothesis was/was not supported.....there are several potential reasons that we believe we did not find support for our hypothesis." Or, "Our first hypothesis was supported. This is consistent/not consistent with prior literature in the following ways...."

15. The conclusions need to include a paragraph regarding "limitations of this study."

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.