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Eating at the Desk: Human Encounters with Workplace Food

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EATING AT THE DESK:
HUMAN ENCOUNTERS WITH WORKPLACE FOOD

by

CHINELO ARINZE

Under the Direction of Jennifer Patino, PhD

ABSTRACT

This manuscript is an analysis of human encounters with workplace food. The analysis draws on an ethnographic field project in a Downtown Atlanta, Georgia business office to illustrate that project participants operated food to facilitate specific social processes of agency, affect, cultural movement, participation, and exclusion. Commensality at the project site was a common thread for each social process. I demonstrate that project participants' experiences with food intersect rapid workplace changes. In presenting workplace food in the function of a cultural lens as a focus of anthropological inquiry, the analysis argues the importance of workplace as a cultural context for understanding human engagement with food. I argue that workplace is an important cultural site because of the intense time and involvement that many have with it. Implications for workplace food include commercial and organizational management uses.

INDEX WORDS: Food anthropology, Foodways, Food and culture, Food geographies

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CHINELO ARINZE

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2015

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2015

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Food is a cultural element that occupies many exchanges and activities of the everyday. Cultural exchanges and insights about food derive not only from ordinary human transactions of the everyday, but through a spectrum of discourse over many areas of critical focus. Food is commonly granted serious philosophical discussion (Kaplan 2012). Cultural psychologists employ food to explain human social evolution (Schaller et al. 2010). Furthermore, food discourses echo in feminist scholarship; feminist studies have paid particular attention to the role of food in capitalism and women's oppression. Prominently, feminist scholars have situated food as an instrument of patriarchy and capitalism (Avakian and Haber 2005). The cultural importance of food is also pinpointed in food geography which examines the cultural places of food and ways of food consumption (Feagan 2007).

In anthropology, food is frequently used for critical evaluation of cultural patterns and cultural developments. For example, Carole Counihan (1992) analyzed the way that food is used to mediate and read cultural norms. For Counihan, food is essential in facilitating processes of genderization within Western societies. Moreover, anthropologists have employed food to study historical cultural accounts (Levi-Strauss 1966; Mintz 1985). Levi-Strauss evaluated that the meanings associated with methods of food preparation in some cultures served as a form of communication within some societies (Levi-Strauss 1966). Mintz (1985) used food to pinpoint the genealogy of British mercantile success. The existing work in food anthropology opens a wide area of potential for greater anthropological attention to the role that food plays in cultural processes. In this light, it is practical to conduct anthropological examination about food through various contexts of culture. Workplace, an important domain

of culture because of the extensive time that many people spend there, is a compelling context for investigation about food. This analysis contributes to a growing area of anthropological focus on food by developing a critical interpretation of how people encounter and make sense of workplace food. I argue that workplace food can serve as a social instrument to facilitate specific social processes within the workplace.

Notwithstanding the important cultural and political examinations that derive from food dialogues, food remains a subject of conversation that is operated by the ordinary. People talk about food in their homes; people discuss food in formal and informal social circumstances such as celebrations, ceremonies, and work; and significantly, people conduct communication about food in censored settings such as exchange in an institutional establishment. Food is frequently the focus of television shows, books, blogs, journalism -- even this manuscript rests on the subject of food. Our world economic and social systems revolve around food and, in the most granular sense we not only interact daily with conversations about food, but we are produced and sustained by food. Food is an important focus of cultural inquiry not only because of its functional attributes, but food is important because of its social and political implications. In some form, food is connected to the function of every natural life force known to humans. Consequently, food offers strong propositions for power and ultimately human survival. Pinpointing food's cultural role in society might offer insight about the human experience. Although cultural food studies are numerous, examining food from the cultural context of workplace has received little attention. Yet, because the workplace occupies a significant cultural role for many societies, it is imperative to understand how the workplace may shed light about how human encounters with food connect with much broader social conditions. The importance of the workplace is derived from the numerous hours that many people spend there.

The social interactions and the essence of survival that the workplace provides for many is another factor in the cultural importance of workplace.

In this study, I explore study participant's encounters with workplace food and the essence of such encounters in order to connect workplace food with broader social implications. The aim of the study is to use ethnographic information to understand the experiences that study participants have with workplace food at the project site. My fieldwork findings are informed by concepts in food anthropology literature in order to link existing theoretical concepts with information which developed from my research. To solidify some of the findings that resulted in this project, the investigation is also informed by a pilot study that was conducted at the research site prior to the commencement of the study. The research for this project was conducted in an Atlanta, Georgia business office. The participants at the project site embraced social encounters through food in order to adapt to a changing workplace under pressures of urban conditions. In the framework of urban conditions, the project site experienced rapid structural changes that were aligned with neoliberal practices. Neoliberal practices dictate creative destruction and the production of technocratic space in the pursuit of maximizing the rate and scope of market transactions and value (Harvey 2005; also see Brenner and Theodore 2005). The selected Atlanta business office field location for this project was a company that experienced commercial takeover by a multinational organization. The takeover organization reflected a model of neoliberal traditions through aggressive company rescaling following business takeover, outsourcing, employment of unimaginative business and social policies, and a profound focus on technology development in order to expand profits. Workplace commensality was vital in the response and adaptation to changing workplace conditions by employees who were subjects of the commercial takeover. Accordingly, food arose as that

which facilitated specific social processes and that which helped create a sense of place for workers. This thesis looks at participants' encounters with workplace food in order to illuminate how participants experience workplace food in a setting of rapid change.

The conceptual development for how participants encountered workplace food is organized through such themes of agency, affect mediated by organization management, change, participation, and exclusion. Specifically, I located workplace food as something that participants used to organize and sustain social tradition at work. Particularly, participants planned commensality activities in order to resist the descent of company produced occasions of shared eating. Organization management at the field location paid particular attention to the role of affect that food played for employee morale. Consequently, in the wake of rapid workplace change, organization management used food to induce a harmonious and productive work atmosphere. Social changes at the project site were an outcome that could be read through specific developments in office food occasions. Specifically, dwindling attendance of office food occasions revealed the trajectory of social tradition for the office. Participants achieved social participation through workplace commensality activities. Alternatively, commensality became an experience of exclusion for some participants.

1.2 Summary of Thesis Chapters

The discussions for this manuscript are presented through two chapters following the project overview and discussion of food anthropology perspectives provided in chapter 1. To this end, the remainder of the manuscript will explore existing concepts in food anthropology, engage ethnographic data to illustrate how empirical information is reflected in the themes developed through this project, and consider the broad impact of qualitative workplace food research.

Chapter 2 ties together empirical evidence with critical concepts and theories explored in Chapter 1 and provides an ethnographical account of information collected in the study. Here, I draw on my fieldwork to explore ethnography about how people encounter workplace food. Multiple theoretical concepts emanate through my investigation, which I expound upon in this chapter. Finally, chapter 3 delivers an argument about applied uses of the research collected through this project. This work shows how anthropological investigation about food might offer practical solutions for multiple applications.

1.3 Food Exchanges: Perspectives in Food Anthropology

In this discussion, I outline how the cultural role of food is evaluated within existing anthropological scholarship. Preceding anthropological food studies have focused on the cultural symbolism and cultural readings that derive from food, yet I seek to highlight how cultural readings from food can illuminate social conditions in the context of workplace. Foodways reliably change over time and space as society changes. Necessarily, our understanding of how humans engage with food in society must advance in order for scholarship to extract knowledge about how food connects with broader political themes and patterns of society. Recurrent dialogue and inquiry about human engagement with food is necessary to stimulate development of knowledge about the social implications of food. Anthropologists have focused on understanding human interaction with food over various social contexts. Nonetheless, there has been little focus on the workplace as a setting for anthropological investigation about human engagement with food. Because workplace is a cultural pinnacle in many societies as many human social activities unfold at work, workplace represents a significant cultural site for studying human engagement with food. However, more frequent studies in food anthropology have thoroughly analyzed the critical and relational

aspects of food such as food as identity, food as cultural preservation, food as a gauge for societal issues, and food as power. Among some of the prolific investigations in food anthropology are the works of R.S. Khare, Anna Meigs, Joan Brumberg, Marvalene Hughes, David Beriss, William Roseberry, Anne Allison, Stephen Mennell, Sidney Mintz, and Carole Counihan. In order to build on the current literature in food anthropology, I engage such works to support themes that emerge in my investigation of workplace food.

1.3.1 Food, Identity, and Cultural Preservation

Food is not merely a functional material. It is the fabric of human social condition. This aspect makes food vital cultural material and an important component in the creation and preservation of culture. In R.S. Khare's (1992) investigation of the meanings of food in Hindu society, food is identified as a pillar for which Hindu ideology and practice is established. As Khare suggests, food is connected to the formation of a Hindu's inner being. Khare posits that the essence of Hindu culture is sorted out through Hindu food norms. Khare's argument is a practical means to recognize how food both constructs and preserves culture. Again, food's role in constructing culture emerges in the ethnographic account of the Hua people of the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea by Anna Meigs (1987). Meigs theorizes that food is a vital component in the construction of culture. She argues that food constitutes important meaning and drives the development of identity among the Hua people. Meigs' goal is to demonstrate that food is tied to the identity of a people and thus the construction of Hua culture.

Food framed as identity is important for understanding how food facilitates cultural preservation. Food is a vehicle for social reproduction and subsequently a way to make connections to the past. Hughes (1997) recognized how food facilitates cultural preservation. In her study, she uncovered that food offered geographically dislocated peoples - those

distributed from Africa to the United States for colonial slave trade - a way to maintain ties to their heritage. Hughes also revealed that, for these dislocated groups, food represented a coping method and a strategy for sustaining identity. Again the importance of food in preserving cultural identity is cultivated by David Berriss (2012). In his account of conditions in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, Berriss ascribed red beans as an emblem of heritage for New Orleans. He noted that the symbolic meaning of “red beans” helped New Orleans recognize its cultural distinction from other cities within the United States and became a way for the city to express an identity connected to the heritage of cuisine (Berriss 2012). Prominently, Berriss pointed out that through the heritage of red beans cuisine, New Orleans grounded its membership as a significant place in US society. These anthropological analyses about food construct useful insights about how food facilitates and sustains culture. However, my research develops this analytical construction further by considering how workplace food might play a role in workplace identities and cultural preservation in the workplace.

Human capability to preserve culture through food is a method for human resistance against cultural identity loss. Resistance against cultural identity loss through food models a form of agency. Chiefly, resistance allows passive empowerment and an effective way for people to preserve social traditions and sustain cultural identities. A prominent account of the use of food as resistance against cultural identity loss is illustrated via Sidney Mintz’s (1996) analysis of power in Caribbean slavery societies. Mintz reveals that those enslaved in the Caribbean incorporated pieces of their cultural identity into ways of preparing food. Mintz recounts that although the enslaved found new ways to bear conditions of transition from freedom to enslavement, they maintained distinct styles of food preparation which became a way of eating and a way to resist loss of heritage ties. The passive form of power that the slave

classes in the Caribbean achieved through their distinctive foodways presents food as agency. The work of urban geographer Colin Mcfarlane provides support that inanimate objects such as food may be employed by humans to exercise agency. Mcfarlane (2011) challenges scholars to rethink forms of agency and resistance. Fundamentally, Mcfarlane's insights about inanimate forms of agency are grounded in his findings about the use of "quasi-objects", such as public phones, wires, and stones, by informal settlement dwellers in Mumbai, India to incite resistance against government demolition projects. Given this focus, food can be interchanged with agency. In my investigation of human encounters with workplace food, participants used food to preserve cultural traditions and to sustain workplace's identity that was grounded in the meaning of office traditions and which frequently meant camaraderie to participants. Food was key in permitting participants to realize a form of agency in order to resist loss of cultural customs and identity.

1.3.2 Gauging Cultural Movement

More generally, food anthropology studies have taken a look at how the essence of culture can be parsed through food. In particular, food offers explanations about social phenomena and specific cultural conditions. For example, Joan Brumberg (1997) mapped food practices to specific cultural contexts to emphasize how food can be used to understand social issues. Brumberg reasoned that anorexia nervosa is socially rooted in food practices of the Victorian era and subsequent societal imaginations of femininity such that young woman and girls, particularly of Western middle class societies, find a way to express societal visions of feminine identity through restriction of food. Brumberg fastens her argument to the concept that food can offer a lens for cultural movements. Similarly, William Roseberry (1996) underlined that food can be used as a cultural lens. Roseberry detailed that coffee marketers'

ambition to restore demand for coffee, following gross coffee demand slumps in the 1980s, corresponded with coffee marketers' tactics to instigate a coffee consumption movement by tying coffee to the imagined identity for targeted consumer bases of coffee. Roseberry argued that coffee marketers' ability to successfully situate coffee into the identities of targeted consumer bases provides a foundation for cultural patterns that originated via the coffee consumption movement. Roseberry likened his analysis to Sidney Mintz's (1985) analysis of sugar in to convey that changes in coffee consumption patterns in the United States signaled a much larger shift in culture.

The magnitude of reading culture through food is visible through Carole Counihan's (1984) study of change in social relationships in Bosa, Italy following the introduction of bread production technology and market economies. Counihan argued that in Bosa, Italy, where social ties were once established around the communal production system of bread, the introduction of market exchange systems in Bosa, diminished the social system established around bread cultivation and in turn, initiated individualism in Bosa. Counihan described how the trickle-down effects of market power were revealed in Bosan culture, namely supply and demand. Specifically, where wheat cultivation and bread making practices once required shared activities and dependence on others, collective activities were no longer necessary once bread became available through a market exchange sphere such as a bakery. The introduction of bakeries forced the reduction of demand for bread making at home for Bosans and ultimately a reduction of collective activities for bread making (Counihan 1984). Counihan's readings into culture through food serve as a gauge for how the path of culture in Bosa might be interpreted. Given this form of analysis that can be attained through food, I reason that food can provide a gauge of how to interpret structural and relational shifts in the workplace. Not only can shifts in

direct food practices provide insight about relational shifts, but indirect food practices including changes in celebration of food and communication about food provide a way to evaluate structural and relational shifts in the workplace. The cultural shifts at the project site for this study could be read through the fallen attendance numbers at office food occasions. Namely, Birthday Wednesday food celebrations at the site provided a marker of rescaled staff size and a signal that receding cultural traditions were to follow in light of the large absence of employees who would not be present at the office site to practice and reproduce old office traditions.

1.3.3 Political Economy and State Power

Mintz's (1985) analysis of sugar provides an even clearer picture of how food delegates insight about societal issues. Key to Mintz's argument about sugar is his concern with how increased consumption of sugar relates to power in the English state. Mintz demarcates that the increased use of sugar in English society meant the ascension of power for the English state. Particularly, sugar brought a mechanism for social status in English society and grew in demand among the working class who used sugar to attain social capital and physical energy. Sugar was a guiding force for restructuring of labor systems and culture for working classes in English society (Mintz 1985). The changes in English society that were instigated by increased sugar consumption led to dependency on sugar by working classes and the subsequent growth of power for the English state which included the expansion of its colonies and its presence in the transatlantic slave trade (Mintz 1985).

Evaluating the use of food in political agendas and social order is an important focus of food anthropology. State institutions prescribe social order through food in specific ways. Anne Allison (1996) captures the ways that food reflects state institutional power in the production of Japanese obentos. Allison argues that an obscured form of structural power is

symbolized in the ritual of obento preparation and consumption. The practice of obento, a systematic and detail approach to lunch preparation by Japanese mothers for nursery children in Japan, involves intricately designed lunch meals and an enforced consumption of the entire lunch meal for nursery children (Allison 1996). Allison makes the case that obento convention is more than just lunch making. It represents Japanese state power cloaked in ideology that guides the obento practice. Allison illustrates that the practice of obento is colored by an elective notion (of an optional practice), yet she distinguishes the elective notion of obento practice from hidden social obligations that obento infers. In this manner, Allison illuminates that the practice of obento is an obligation that involves a detailed system of codes which communicate aspects of Japanese culture. Allison cites that Japanese mothers' commitment to the elaborate ritual of obento preparation unveils the hidden cultural obligation of the practice and a symbolic channel for which the Japanese state makes its way into the early indoctrination of children. Through this notion, Allison perceives the obento practice as a cultural training process. As Allison pinpoints, cultural training through the practice of obento commences with cultural expectations, norms, and gendering that Japanese mothers reproduce through their commitment to the obento practice. This serves as an example for children to model through their commitment to eat the obento in its entirety (Allison 1996). In this analysis, Allison offers a useful illustration of how food can be an effective political power to shape social order.

Equally demonstrative of how state power is exhibited through food is Stephen Mennell's (1987) analysis on civilizing processes of the appetite. Mennell's ideas on civilizing the appetite are influenced by Max Weber's theories about rationalization. Mennell attributes civilizing of the appetite to processes that rationalize specific food tastes. Such civilizing processes of appetite are rooted in historical practices of state powers to influence tastes that

serve state power agendas (Menell 1987). Appetite, Menell argued, is distinguished from hunger; hunger is an influence of necessity and appetite is a result of tastes, which derives from cultural influences (Mennell 1987). Mennell reasoned that tastes coincide with social pressures stemming from social codes for ways of imagining the body, ways of realizing an ideal body, and ways of functioning in a specific class (Mennell 1987). In this framework, Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) theory of habitus can help explain tastes in the civilizing process. Tastes are cultural productions that become a means for social distinction and status (Bourdieu 1984). In the course of cultural production, cultural producers inevitably interpret socially constructed tastes as immanent and natural; hence, the impulse for reproduction (Bourdieu 1984). In this manner, appetite, through taste conforms to the notion of habitus. Mennell's goal is to communicate that appetites are the result of habitus, a construction indirectly employed by political powers to establish social order. My research reveals that organization management at the field site exploits food in order to produce social order among employees. Organization management produced food occasions for office workers in order to produce a positive social and productive work environment and ultimately worker morale. I argue that organization management attempted to achieve morale among workers through the affective utility that food delivers. Richard and Rudnycky (2009) offer an analytical framework, economies of scale, to illuminate how affect is an effective way to manage conduct and social conditions. Affect, they argue, is the practice of power that permits conduct to be influenced and behavioral outcomes to be conditioned. Organization management at the project site attempted to employ food celebrations to affect the behavior of workers in favor of a positive work atmosphere.

1.4 Methodology

The research question that guided my research is “how do people experience workplace food and how do people make sense of such experiences”? I addressed this inquiry by exploring people’s encounters with workplace.

The specific qualitative research methods that were employed for this study are participant observation, in-depth interview, and content analysis. Each qualitative method employed for this study offered specific advantages for the project. Participant observation ensured that I was able to experience conditions at the workplace site firsthand in order to circumvent superficial interpretations of events at the research site. Data that I collected from in-depth interviews supplemented my observations by providing research participants an opportunity to explain social rituals and behaviors that I observed during participation in events at the research site. Finally, content analysis allowed ethnographic information to be interpreted from documents, objects, and public mediums within the research setting.

1.4.1 Participant Observation

My role as employee at the research site provided me an insider status at the research site. An insider status for me permitted ease of observation and an enhanced data collection process for the study by the advantages of familiarity and acceptance that were established between employees and me at the research site before the study began. Through the daily activities as an employee at the site, I conducted intensive observations through daily encounters with staff as well as company sponsored staff social events. Daily encounters with staff included communication with office members about job tasks, project collaborations, and regular camaraderie and exchanges with staff members. Company sponsored social events included collective office meals, parties, lunch meetings, and recurring celebrations. My

participant observations were limited to the research location where the study was conducted. To record data collected during observations, I employed an electronic journal to record notes. Journal entries included notes and specific dates of notable events. Notable events ranged from planned events to unplanned events such as collaborative activities or conversations that yielded important information about people's expressions, remarks, reactions, and interactions about food or that may have provided contextual information about the research environment.

The organization leadership at the research site approved the research for my project. In order to facilitate observations at the research site, I developed a protocol for conducting observation. The protocol that I developed was an informational letter for workers at the site to announce the research activities for the study. This letter outlined observation data collection methods that were employed at the research site during the study as well as instructions for opting-out. Employees were given the choice to opt-out of being included in analysis of observations. There were no employees at the site who opted-out of the study.

1.4.2 In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews for my project were conducted via open-ended, informal conversation. In order to circumvent potential dilemmas associated with representation, I interviewed eight informants at the research site— that represented a range of male/female, administrators/non-administrators, and various racial groups. I decided that a total of eight informants were suitable for providing a balanced scope of informant feedback for this project in light of the relatively modest office staff size at the research site. I recruited a total of 12 informants for the study. Yet, I achieved interview with eight informants. Although initially planned, group discussions for the study were cancelled in light of scheduling constraints for informants.

In-depth interviewing for the study was open to all employees at the research site. Informants were recruited by oral invitation only. I identified informants through contacts that I established through repeat encounters with workers at the research site and by those who were within access at the research site. "Within Access" refers to employees at the research site that I made contact with without realizing a significant deviation from work activities or loss of productivity (for either the employee or myself). A significant deviation from work activities implies engaging in non- work activities for several minutes while in the workplace and not on authorized break. The individuals that I invited to participate in the study were not limited to those that I interacted with daily within the workplace; however, in the interest of viability, recruitment was targeted to those that were "within access" and those for whom I established a rapport with. To avoid coercion of informant participation in interviews, invited informants were provided a consent form. Each informant was invited to participate in interview no more than twice; yet informants were permitted to voluntarily participate in more than two interviews. I held not more than two interviews with a single informant. Interviews took place at a public location including café, restaurant, and workplace break room. A public space was selected to conduct interviews because it presented a neutral place for both the informant and me, and prevented either party from being placed in an environment that may have created discomfort, which otherwise may have occurred from meeting in a personal space.

Interviews were conducted over a conversation period of 30 – 45 minutes. Voice recorders were used to record conversations from in-depth interviews. Recordings from interviews were transcribed. Transcriptions of interviews were used to build themes and patterns from informant responses.

The real identities of each participant and informant in the study have been concealed. A pseudonym is employed to replace the names of each informant in this study.

1.4.3 Content Analysis

Content analysis is the final qualitative method that was used for this study. Content analysis offered the opportunity for interpretation of inanimate objects such as documents, texts, and visual mediums (such as photos). In my examination, representational messages were reflected through email and other electronic sources of communication and provided important ethnographic information. I drew interpretation of content from examination of particular communication at the field site such as company interoffice email and wiki postings by cultural actors at the research site. Specifically, I examined these forms of content with a specific focus on how language was framed. Photos were taken for this study however, in light of confidentiality terms for this study, photos were modified to obscure and exclude human identities.

1.4.4 The Research Site

The research site selection for this study was determined based on feasibility. Particularly, the research site for this study was identified as viable due to my familiarity with the setting and the multiple social ties that I established at the research site over an extended period of time before commencement of the study – as a result of my role as employee. This relationship to the research site presented me an insider status and facilitated acceptance and participation with staff members at the research site. In addition, through my social involvement at the research site, I recognized the vast opportunity to collect rich cultural data specific to food as a result of the numerous activities and events that featured food at the research location. Because I was an employee at the site during the study, I was able to be

present and immersed in the research environment. This allowed me to avoid participation constraints that otherwise may have emerged in a non-insider access environment.

1.5 Reflexivity

My dual role as researcher and participant observer is a rational reason for me to reflect on the impact of my position in this study. As an employee at the research site, I was an insider and subsequently able to bypass resistance that an outsider may have encountered. Because I was an insider at the research site, I looked at circumstances in the research setting with an emic view. Despite having an insider status, at the onset of my project proposal, I was apprehensive about obtaining approval to conduct the study at the research site from organization management who might have seen my research as a conflict of obligation. However, this concern was overcome by the organization's approval for me to conduct study at the research site. Specifically, my boss granted approval for the project under the condition that the investigation did not detract from the productivity of employees at the office site. A great concern of mine at the start of the study was whether I would attain the study minimum of interview informants. This concern stemmed from my awareness of calendars that remained full and inundated with activities. I was majorly concerned about the potential imposition that my research activities may have imposed on the schedule of individuals that already experienced limited time. However, I defeated this concern by recruiting a larger number of informants than the number of informants that I actually intended to interview. Over recruitment was done as a result of my anticipation of participant dropout by some study informants. I reason that this allowed me to attain the study number objective of eight interview informants.

What attracted me to organize this study is my interest in the many ways that people engage with food. Through my critical observations of society, I reason that human engagement with food has many social implications. My attention for this project is a product of my own lived experience, which involves encounters with food as difference. Particularly, my childhood involved my practice of a vegan diet which resulted from my childhood family's lifestyle. This created a significant source of social dissimilarity for me as a child and an adult in many cultural settings. Through my encounters with food, I recognize food as a critical factor in social acceptance or rejection. Consequently, I conceive food as something that is political. For example, my experience with workplace food as difference was a source of social exclusion for me at work. This difference ultimately resulted in marginalization of my food consumption practices in the workplace. Particularly, many of my food choices were relegated by my colleagues as undesirable for workplace eating and largely unaccepted as ideal for workplace commensality. This factor excluded me from participation in many food gatherings at work. In the light of the political nature of food, I thought it would be consequential to delve into a structured analysis of understanding the social processes of food in a contained cultural setting such as workplace. I considered it meaningful to use workplace as a setting to conduct such an analysis because I have spent most of my awoken hours as an adult in the workplace, and naturally, I identify with the significance that workplace may represent in the lives of many people. This position allowed me to approach my research with a sensitized idea of what I intended to investigate and to remain open to new concepts. Approaching my research with a socially sensitized concept permitted me to obtain direction of a general idea of what to study while considering the opportunity for new information in the field (Puddephatt et al., 2009 ;Van den Hoonaard 1996). The initial concepts that I employed to approach this study were revised

according to information that I collected over the course of the study. I found that some of the ideas that I initially grasped about people's encounters with food in the workplace did not provide a rich source of data or were not attainable to investigate for the scope of this project. Examples of such initial concepts include information sharing, affect, competition, and criticism. While these ideas did emerge during the study, they did not evolve to become the focus of my analysis.

Finally, my status as an employee at the research site provided a strength and a weakness. Specifically, my role as employee made those who I interacted with comfortable talking with me. In an extreme sense, I suspect many at the research site forgot that I was a researcher. This ensured natural interactions between employees and me. Conversely, during interviews I discovered some instances of response from informants which I perceived were motivated by informants' impressions of what was a fashionable response or socially desirable. This is noted as social desirability bias in social science research. Social desirability bias is an inclination for respondents to answer questions in a way that will appeal favorably to others. Social desirability can pose a weakness for data quality. I do not take a committal position about whether my relationship as a colleague to informants prompted socially desirable responses as such responses could have been produced by a general desire of informants to create a positive self-image. Nonetheless, to work around this weakness in my investigation, I established open-ended questions that were designed to exhaust responses by informants. For example, when informants submitted responses that described their feelings or thoughts, I followed such responses with questions such as "why do you feel this way?", "what does this feeling mean to you?", or "what does this thought mean to you?"

1.6 Limitations

Over the course of the project I encountered informant scheduling constraints. Specific constraints involved informants' unavailability to commit to interview scheduling due to calendar conflicts. I mitigated these limitations by offering flexible scheduling that encompassed both weekday and weekend scheduling. I also over recruited because I anticipated that some informants might not be able to maintain interview commitments. This provided a safeguard for my interview number objective. Other constraints relate to study period timeframe. This study was executed over a period of six months in light of the amount of time allotted between the approval date for the study - August 2014- and development of the thesis analysis for the study. This was initially a concern in light of the quality of data that I thought might be omitted from the study in the face of such a short study period. Despite this limitation, I drew from experience that I attained at the research site before the commencement of the project in order to inform and enhance data collected for this project.

2 ENCOUNTERING FOOD IN THE WORKPLACE ETHNOGRAPHY

Thanksgiving Breakfast. Photo by Author.



Birthday Wednesday Celebration. Photo by Author.



Staff Member Wedding Celebration. Photo by Author.



Team Potluck Feast. Photo by Author.

Figure 2.1 Collage of Office Food Celebrations

In this chapter I illustrate how workplace food was operated to facilitate social processes at the project site. The ethnographic material from my research is examined to demonstrate how the overarching themes from the project connect with empirical information.

2.1 The Field Site Context: Workplace Change

In the Omni Dome district of Downtown Atlanta- Georgia, the Atlanta business office is situated in an office building that comprises 36 floors. Business for the Atlanta business office site is conducted from two office space floors within the building, the 35th and 36th floors. The business office site is part of a global business organization that markets a complete range of

business intelligence data products to hospitality segments: hotel, car, and air. The organization, although headquartered in New York, New York, USA, had either presence on the ground or virtual presence in six continents in 2014. In 2014, the organization sustained a competitive advantage in its market primarily because its product offerings were not matched by any of its competitors. This business aspect provided the company a unique competitive position. In addition to the company's competitive advantage, the company generated value organically and inorganically. The company attained organic growth by increased business volume such as an uptick in product sales. Alternatively, the company accomplished inorganic growth through acquisitions such as the purchase of small profitable companies. The Atlanta business office site is a reflection of this acquisition process. In 2010, the business office site in Atlanta was acquired and absorbed by the global company that it belonged to in 2014. The acquisition marked a major intersection of polarized cultures. The pre-acquisition Atlanta business site was the face of neo-enterprise, innovation, and liberal culture.

The pre-acquisition Atlanta office site was certainly the epitome of new enterprise culture in a fashionable sense. One emblem of such culture was a Ping-Pong table planted in a break area of the office where employees could freely play Ping-Pong with one another. Ping-Pong in office break-out spaces symbolized a cultural practice among global start-ups in the 21st century. Another feature of the Atlanta office prior to the acquisition was its relatively small staff. The office maintained fewer than 200 employees and everyone within the organization was acquainted with one another either through established personal ties or non-personal in-office familiarity. Personal ties usually extended beyond the office where workers were involved in the personal lives of co-workers. Frequently, workers with ties to one another spent time together outside of business in activities such as travel, shopping, and family events.

These sorts of activities made ties important and work an extension of home. Those with non-personal ties were no less engaged (as a whole) with the company. The company offered ample opportunities for all employees to participate in elaborate celebrations. While granted concrete measures of autonomy and freedom to work uninhibited from things such as time clocks, metrics, and activity reporting, the staff in the Atlanta office was productive. The productivity of the staff was vivid through the company's profit success. The company regularly hosted gatherings with full course meal caterings to reward its workers. The Atlanta office site even provided its employees perks such as annual bonuses and paid monthly parking, a savings that amounted to roughly \$100 monthly for employees. What made the Atlanta site unique prior to the acquisition was that which provided incentive for its sale. It was the single most profitable business of its size and product niche. Before its acquisition, it was the proprietor, developer, and only marketer of the comprehensive line of business intelligence data products that it marketed. This comprehensive line of business intelligence products included agency and distribution systems reporting, applications for business demand projections, and a host of other business strategy building tools. The staff talent of the office added to the success equation for the Atlanta office. The staff was a fusion of software developers, programmers, data analysts, database engineers, sales, and product support. Ultimately, the synergistic elements that were present among staff in the Atlanta office were probably the glue that held the company in a position of success.

Following the acquisition of the Atlanta business office in 2010, the founders of the Atlanta organization departed from the company over the course of the successive four years. Departure by additional key leadership personnel also occurred during this period. More changes developed for the Atlanta office following acquisition. Namely, the takeover company

employed cuts largely an inevitable practice that the takeover company implemented to resolve its acquisition expense and increase profits. Briefly after the acquisition, the post-acquisition culture emerged in the Atlanta office. This culture brought with it the standards and aspirations of the takeover company. The takeover company employed over 1000 employees globally and was characterized by capitalistic industrial military governance. The takeover company's leadership style was less innovative, flexible, and liberal than the Atlanta office's leadership had been. In addition, Atlanta workers regularly criticized the takeover company's distant New York corporate center. During the two subsequent years following acquisition, the Atlanta business office culture turned over in concrete ways. First, many of the traditional employee benefits such as parking, bonuses, and generous vacation were discontinued for new employees and phased out for existing employees. The acquisition introduced productivity metric systems, activity reporting, close monitoring, and provisioned in-office time for many. Staff cuts continued to emerge to the point of fear among workers in the Atlanta office. Meanwhile, during this period, the takeover company developed a mega operations center in Orlando, Florida that, in the eyes of the Atlanta office staff, represented labor that would eventually replace the Atlanta site - in the name of cheap labor. Nonetheless, the Atlanta office remained in operation due to its vital functions and knowledge which organization government perceived as non-transferrable. One of the most destabilizing actions that the post-acquisition Atlanta office site experienced was announcement from leadership of the takeover company that another company sale was in the near future for the organization. This projection further incited ambivalence and fear among employees at the Atlanta office site. Along with cultural changes of the post-acquisition period were new office politics and a new worker attitude. While social gatherings in the workplace were still active during post-acquisition, they occurred less

frequently and in less elaborate ways. Complaints among workers of excessive workloads became a mantra. In addition, unrealistic production goals, and very little compensation growth for employees - in immediate years following the acquisition- fueled an exodus for the Atlanta office site.

In the Atlanta office, the post acquisition environment was symptomatic of urban conditions. Urbanization as a process of capital explains the commercial value driven momentum of the takeover company. David Harvey (1985) engaged Marx's theories of capital accumulation to situate urbanization as a process of capital where capitalist invariably seek new ways to expand profit and accumulate capital through cheap labor, technology, and innovation. In Harvey's analysis of urbanization, urbanization is a cycle in the process of capital that allows surplus capital to be circulated in and out of built environments in order for capital accumulation to be safeguarded. The cycles of accumulation are revealed through commercial activities that include acquisitions, organization reductions, layoffs, and outsourcing (Harvey 1985). For the Atlanta office, capital movements were vivid through post acquisition events of division and budget cuts, layoffs, and outsourcing. Office workers in the Atlanta office met such processes of capital with reasonable uncertainty, but importantly, office workers greeted urban conditions with dedication and commitment to preserving office traditions. During the transitional period following the acquisition, I was brought on board to the company – in 2011– to work with data and product team operations. I spent my introductory activities engaged in a migration process, which epitomized some of the major changes brought by the acquisition. I was effectively brought into the company in time to greet the new climate and give my farewell to the old culture as it exited the organization. I can remember that at the time that I joined the company, I received employee benefits such as expense compensation for costs incurred for

commuting to work (i.e. public transportation, independent transportation, etc.). Less than six months after I joined the company, this benefit ceased for me under the adopted policies of the takeover company. Those who were employed with the Atlanta office before the acquisition lost major benefits. New benefit policies under the takeover company significantly reduced company contributions to retirement and health insurance for each employee. From the many conversations shared in the office about the benefit changes, these changes were seemingly important to many employees. Despite the changes that accompanied the inception of the new company climate, many stayed on board and maintained a doubtful yet pleasant disposition. The encounters that I had with staff while working in the Atlanta office were mainly friendly and welcoming exchanges. Although employees were expressive about discontent with new policies adopted through the takeover company, the general atmosphere in the company remained considerably collaborative and synergistic.

2.1.1 Assembling through Food

Collaboration in the office frequently involved celebrations that featured food. Roughly one year after I joined the company, a social committee was created within the Atlanta office to inspire participation and engagement among staff. The committee was led by the Atlanta office manager and took initiative for planning and hosting collective events in the office. All of the events hosted by the social committee were centered on food. One of the things the committee executed for planning was surveying among staff. Surveying facilitated a democratic process that included obtaining and incorporating ideas from staff members about developing elements for an ideal office event. This process allowed staff to fully participate in office events from production to consumption. Input from staff comprised suggestions about food, namely food procurement (i.e. specific food vendors or food selections to be provided for specific events).

On occasion, I participated in an office-wide email circulated request for menu and food vendor suggestions for a planned event. Announcements for planned office gatherings were typically disseminated by email. Such announcements communicated event details of regularly planned gatherings such as monthly birthday celebrations as well as less frequent events such as *Oktoberfest*.

Oktoberfest, a short-lived production by the social committee, embodied office workers' commitment to tradition of celebration through food and social interaction. In 2013, I participated in the first office held Oktoberfest event, an occasion that involved hors-d'oeuvres, tributes to German folk culture (imagined and real), and tastings of various beers that were the contributions of participants of Oktoberfest. The event was kicked off by German musical tracks and staged dancing by members of the social committee who wore clothing for props (such as green Don an Alpine hat, either red or green suspenders, red or green breeches, and dark tone *shoes*) to recognize a perceived tradition of Oktoberfest. A notable element of the Oktoberfest event was that it was a production of collective contribution from office workers such that food and beverage provided at the event was a condition of participant contribution rather than company budget contribution. This made the event a production of worker action and less vulnerable to being ceased as a result of unavailable budget support. In one email announcement for the Oktoberfest event, the manner in which the event would be approached was communicated:

“Atlanta Office!”

“Next week on October 24th, we are going to have an Oktoberfest celebration. It will be located on the 35th floor in the boardroom between 4:00pm and 5:30pm.”

“This Oktoberfest is going to have beer tastings and food done in potluck style.”

The planned potluck style of the occasion signaled that workers would seize food as a way to control the production of the event and thus the opportunity to come together for celebration. In this mode, food intersected with the social capacity of office workers to produce action. This scale of action performed by office workers coincides with Colin McFarlane's (2011) argument of critical assemblage. McFarlane cites assemblage as organization which unfolds at the everyday scale that is allocated through social and material forms such that both animate and inanimate objects become used to exercise agency. McFarlane provides ethnographic evidence of how animate and inanimate forms of agency operated for city dwellers of informal settlements *in* Mumbai, India. Through his fieldwork findings in Mumbai, McFarlane reveals that informal settlement dwellers facing displacement due to state demolition plans of informal housing, employed inanimate objects such as railway tickets, wires, and stones to enable protests and demonstration in order to resist the state's demolition tasks. In the Atlanta office, the workers exercised agency by employing food and gathering in order to resist dwindling opportunities for workplace social interaction. By creating a participant organized and supported system for office events the office workers lessened the impact that budget reduction had on the production of office food gatherings. Resistance through agency, a notion exemplified through the office workers' production of Oktoberfest, is an idea that is grounded in the work of Sidney Mintz (1996). In his analysis of agency and resistance among Caribbean enslaved peoples, Mintz conveys that those who were enslaved in the Caribbean adapted their culture to the conditions of slavery in order to survive the transition from freedom to enslavement. Enslaved peoples of the Caribbean resisted loss of cultural ties to their past by transferring long cultural traditions to their circumstances of enslavement (Mintz 1996). Mintz argued that the capacity of those that were enslaved to bring old traditions to conditions of

slavery created meaning through experience; and consequently, empowered themselves to maintain ties to their past through food.

The action by office workers at the project site to establish Oktoberfest allowed workers to sustain a connection to old traditions and it also demonstrated that office workers were adjusting to budget reductions by collectively sponsoring office food gatherings. The first 2013 Oktoberfest event was not followed by another Oktoberfest event in 2014. The event's discontinuation resulted largely from loss of key committee members in 2014 that were responsible for planning the first event. Nonetheless, the spirit of determination that unfolded in the production of Oktoberfest continued to be reflected in the attitudes of workers following Oktoberfest.

During another occasion of planning for an event that would take place in the office, I convened with a colleague of mine, Amme, who had designated herself responsible for organizing the event. Amme's reason for organizing the event was to celebrate the marriage engagement of an office employee, Al, who worked as a member of the same department as Amme and I. As Amme and I talked about how the event would unfold, Amme made a statement about the planned event that revealed the impact that such an event had on her perception of social interaction in the Atlanta office, when she stated:

“I think this is a good way for us to take a break from what we do...we don't get together often anymore...”

Amme's remarks were a direct indication that holding gatherings in the office was a way for office workers to take initiative toward effecting social interaction. As I convened with Amme to collaborate about the details of event planning she continued to express how the event that she was organizing was a much needed relief for office workers. As Amme continued with her expressions, my thoughts reverted to a previous conversation between Amme and I where

she emphasized to me that the Atlanta office played a significant role in her life in light of the number of years that she spent working with the office. Amme was a mother of two in 2014 and had been with the Atlanta office for eight years in 2014. Amme communicated that despite the tough workplace circumstances that she perceived in the Atlanta office, the idea of departing from the organization to start over was difficult and an idea that she would rather replace with the decision to ride out tough times with people with whom she had developed strong bonds. Amme shared that when she joined the Atlanta office she didn't have any children, yet she became a mother of two while with the Atlanta office and expected her third child in 2015. From Amme's comments, her perception of the Atlanta office's importance in her life was critical in her decision to stay with the Atlanta office. As Amme and I continued to pull together the strings of the planned event, she indicated to me that the event would be much more elaborate than she had originally imagined. Particularly, what she imagined for the event was a simple potluck within our department, yet the scale of committed participation within the Atlanta office became so great that Amme realized that the event would be a celebration by the entire office rather than a celebration limited to our unit when she stated:

“...Initially, I thought that this could be something small for AI just to celebrate her engagement, but Tap's team is bringing something and I think Enterprise is too...Naj is buying a pretty large cake and she's doing some more shopping...”

Amme expressed that she thought the occasion would be a good opportunity for our department to share comradeship. She made further remarks that she thought it was a good idea for Naj to be involved with contributing to the event at the scale in which she did, as she mentioned:

“I think it's a good thing that Naj is doing what she's doing for AI because I think it will help mitigate tension between AI and Naj...”

Amme's statements were a reflection of how the office workers took advantage of an opportunity to create social interaction in the office. An event that was imagined as a small potluck by Amme evolved into an office-wide celebration as multiple units within the office signed on for participation. Amme's comments also revealed how important social gathering could be for solidifying interpersonal relations. Specifically, Amme suggested that there existed hostilities between Al and Naj that she conceived could be lessened by Naj's gesture to cater to the planned celebration through generous contribution. Naj served as immediate command for the department for which Amme, Al, and I were members. Through Amme's perception, Al and Naj established a turbulent relationship over the history of their membership with the department. Naj's gestures were a signal of atonement. Although my exchanges with Amme did not transpire through formal interview – in light of scheduling difficulties – the exchanges that Amme and I shared were largely in depth and frequent. Through Amme's statements, the occasions such as the event that she planned for Al were a product of worker initiative to recreate some of the old traditions of the Atlanta office that featured camaraderie and relationship building.

The spirit of holding on to food gathering tradition by office workers was pinpointed frequently in various creative forms. Such an instance is illustrated through interoffice email communication, which was prompted by a celebration that first took place in an affiliate office located in Schaumburg- Illinois. The email communication illustrates how an idea that commenced as a contained idea evolved into an open opportunity for celebration and participation from the entire Atlanta office. With the subject line of the initial email correspondence reading “mmmmmmmmmm.....” what followed was a string of communication which eventually developed into a staff-wide event for the Atlanta office:

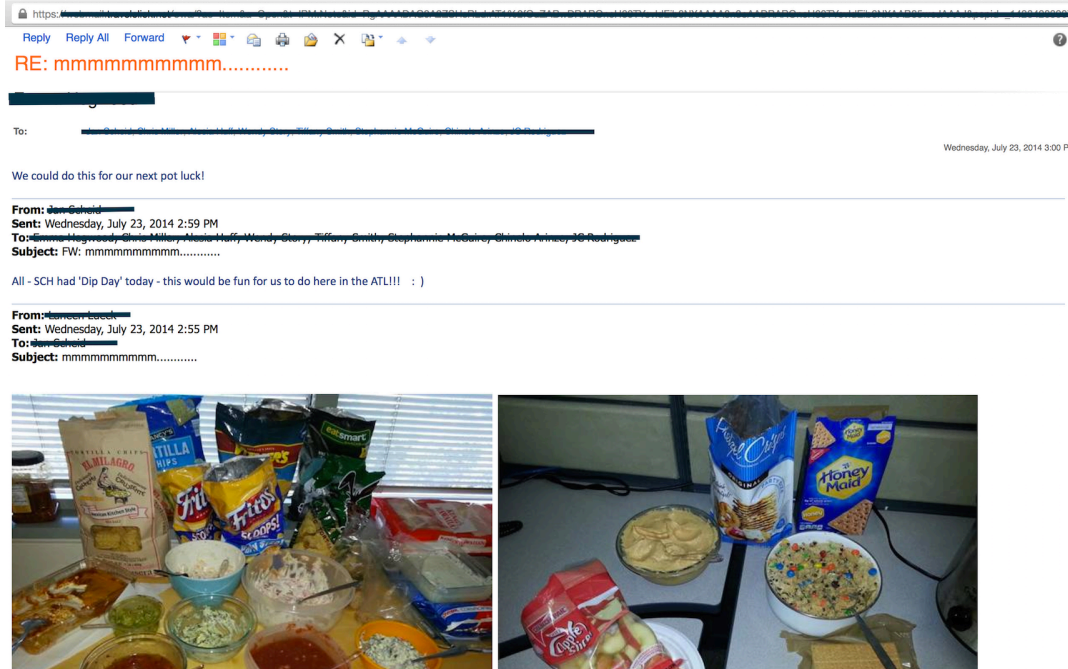


Figure 2.2 Interoffice Email Correspondence

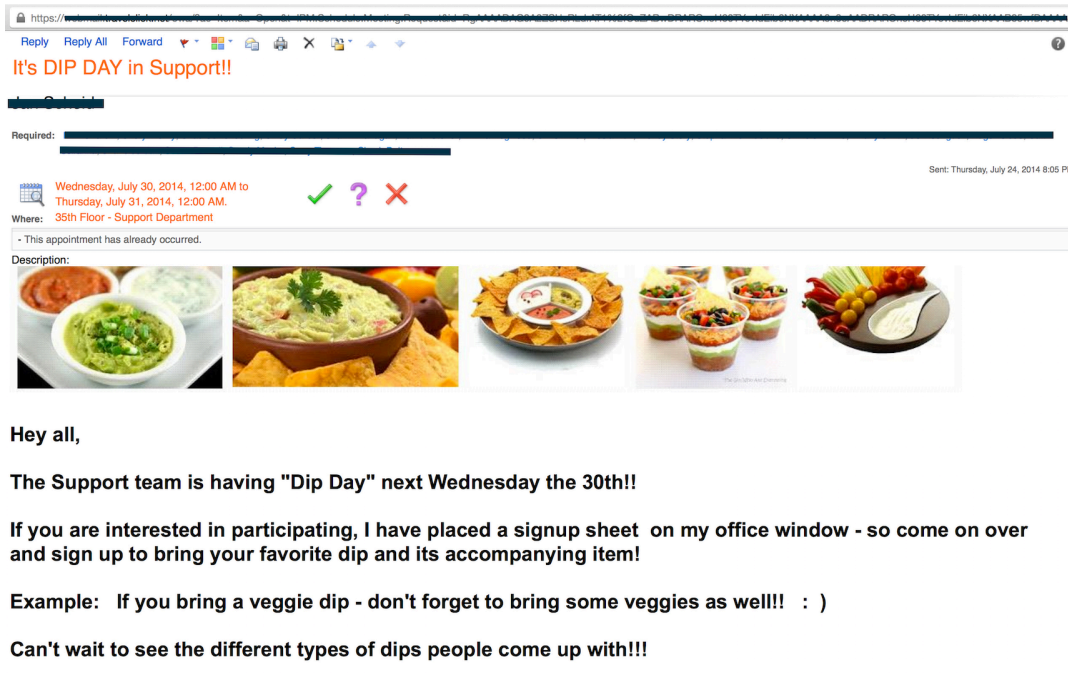


Figure 2.3 Interoffice Email Correspondence

The email conversation threads for the planned event revealed intervention at the bottom. This intervention by office workers inspired social interaction for the Atlanta office. The name created for the event, DIP DAY, was coined by Naj and constituted an official event in the office that provided a way to support the long Atlanta office tradition of social exchange among employees. Through the assigned name for the event, the event received significance as part of the Atlanta office social lineup. Naj, who served as a leader in the Atlanta office, communicated on several occasions in the office that she perceived events such as DIP DAY and other social gatherings in the office an important ingredient for positive morale. Importantly, Naj made repeated statements on numerous occasions that suggested her commitment to driving forward social gatherings in the office in order to sustain positive morale among her team. Naj had over 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry when I met her in 2011 and was a veteran of the Atlanta office – of over 10 years in 2014. Naj had witnessed - through a bird's eye view- the affects of the Atlanta office transition from the pre-acquisition climate to the post acquisition climate.

Through the time that I spent working in the Atlanta office I developed an awareness of the intimate friendships that Naj developed with many in the Atlanta office. Primarily, Naj, who described herself as single and without children, recounted frequently of the out of office time that she engaged in family activities with the family of the Atlanta office manager. Naj and the Atlanta office manager maintained a close friendship. The office manager as well as two other office staff members for which Naj car pooled to work with daily were those that Naj frequently described through her activities conducted during out of office time. Naj also recounted how she cherished her participation in office activities with office peers during historical celebrations in the Atlanta office. Naj's narratives provided evidence that she

perceived her ties and connections with peers in the workplace as an important aspect of her life. Like Amme, Naj invested a great deal of her life in the Atlanta office and it was apparent that the Atlanta office and its traditions had significant meaning to Naj. To Amme and Naj the office meant a place where they established important friendships, a place where they celebrated and ate food together with friends, and a place where a significant portion of their life was spent.

The many office food gatherings in the Atlanta office during the post acquisition period occurred from the bottom, appropriately, gatherings received the blessings of organization management with the proviso that such gatherings were not tied to the support of corporate budget and that such gatherings did not rival productivity. The celebrations and social gatherings that took place in the Atlanta office were not only an opportunity for people to consume food, but celebration and gathering produced the Atlanta office as place for office workers. Amidst circumstances of rapid change and uncertain workplace conditions, food facilitated agency for participants in the Atlanta office. Specifically, food was a way for participants to navigate change by holding on to office traditions that allowed workers to ground a sense of cultural identity and place in their workplace. Participants' agency mutually produced and developed from community within the Atlanta office and became security against prevailing structural changes that were present in the Atlanta office. Richard Sennett (1977) argues that community develops through a sense of shared identity among groups of individuals, and functions as a guard against deterioration of social networks. Community among participants in the Atlanta office reflected the shared social identities which was participants' collective desire to practice office traditions. The community among workers established dual value for the Atlanta office. Particularly, it not only permitted workers to

recognize common social identities, it also permitted a shift in production of office food gatherings from the accountability of organization management to the worker community. For the post-acquisition Atlanta office, this shift was a manifestation of neoliberal tradition in the transfer of institutional liabilities to the individual (Harvey 2005).

2.1.2 Beyond Food

Beyond the use value of food, food offers affective consequences that provide implications for important management value. Rousset et al (2005) theorized that food's ability to prompt emotional response positions food as an instrument for influencing human behavior. Moreover, foods that generate liking are more likely to accomplish positive behavioral response in people (Berridge 2003). Foods that are widely accepted as foods of gratification such as sweets, sweet beverages, and salty snacks conceivably stimulate liking. Such foods were routinely provided at company sponsored food gatherings in the Atlanta office.

Those who led the Atlanta office recognized the importance of creating gratifying experiences through food for workers' morale. The company hosted celebrations on multiple occasions including President's Day, Easter, and Christmas, yet Birthday Wednesday celebrations were a hallmark of recurrent celebration and office tradition that became fortified in the face of post acquisition pressures. Christmas parties were also a recurrent celebration, but became substantially downscaled in the face of the post-acquisition period budget reductions. Birthday Wednesday became an important element of social participation and morale for the Atlanta office. For this reason Birthday Wednesdays became a highlight of my observations about how people celebrated and made sense of food in the Atlanta office. The use of 'food for morale' became apparent to me during a conversation that I had with the Atlanta office manager during a pilot study that I conducted in the Atlanta office. In my conversation with the office

manager, I inquired with her about the tradition of Birthday Wednesday, an event which was convincingly the pinnacle of food gatherings in the office. Birthday Wednesdays was an event that recognized the birthdays of employees for a given month by featuring those celebrating birthdays at these events. During the time that I spent working in the Atlanta office, Birthday Wednesdays progressed from a company sponsored event that featured only cake to an event that featured cake and a meal in addition to an employee appreciation segment. Meals that were provided at Birthday Wednesday were procured from (but not limited to) a spectrum of commercial kitchens and restaurants including Hudson Grill, Corner Bakery, Chick-Fil-A, Papa Johns, and Moe's. In addition, the office manager periodically asked staff members for feedback about foods to serve during birthday Wednesday occasions.

I ritualistically participated in Birthday Wednesdays in order to gain a sense of the character of the event as well as the activities that unfolded at the event. Frequently at birthday Wednesday celebrations, I engaged in conversations with many staff members of the Atlanta office. As I joined Birthday Wednesday gatherings I learned much from hearing a variety of conversations from others as I participated in the celebration. Many of the conversations that I over heard by others ranged from humor and individual workers' circumstances unique to working in the Atlanta office to non-work related personal circumstances. During my talk with the Atlanta office manager, she imparted that Birthday Wednesdays was an office tradition that supportively impacted morale during the pre-acquisition period and had become an important way to help keep workers socially engaged in the organization in the midst of rapid workplace changes during the post acquisition period. She communicated that it was important for staff to remain engaged with the organization in order to drive a positive atmosphere in the office and ultimately morale among workers. The office manager revealed that Birthday Wednesdays was

significant because it represented a popular event among staff and a connection to the pre-acquisition office culture. As she explained it, Birthday Wednesdays was a custom of the pre-acquisition office environment that was well embraced and that stimulated social cohesion among staff of the Atlanta office.

Through the expressions of the office manager, I recognized that Birthday Wednesdays were a way for management to impact the emotions of workers and incite unity among office workers. These gatherings were part of the old office culture and were once effective in positively impacting morale and could once more be effective. Through an interoffice email announcement that I first investigated through a mock study at the research site, I gained a sense of the importance of office customs for Birthday Wednesdays through the written statements, “let’s bring pizza back to the Birthday nosh”. This statement was generated by Notlad, one of the last remaining senior leaders present in the Atlanta office during the time that I spent working with the Atlanta office. Notlad’s statements were an emailed response to the office manager’s interoffice email Birthday Wednesday invite to the entire office. The essence of Notlad’s statements was to resurrect past office customs. His statements reflected how office tradition in the Atlanta office was desirable. Perhaps a sense of loss had affected those who experienced the transition from the old organization to the new organization. Bringing pizza back to the office social gathering was an attempt to recover a piece of office legacy that was lost, nonetheless missed.

The sentiment expressed through Notlad’s remarks was an opportunity for management to recognize the social importance of Birthday Wednesdays. Through exchanges about Birthday Wednesdays such as that produced by Notlad and the attendance numbers for Birthday Wednesdays that I observed over the course of time that I spent working with the Atlanta office,

I understood that the occasion constituted an important meaning for staff members. It meant a connection to an earlier point in the office which employees may have cherished. As I reflected on my conversations with the office manager as well as the sentiments that existed surrounding Birthday Wednesday, I conceived that organization management recognized the sentimental value among employees that Birthday Wednesday incited. Organization management operated the sentiment that Birthday Wednesday served for employees in order to deliver a production that could facilitate positive emotion among employees. In this sense, organization management sought to affect social order through the production of Birthday Wednesdays. In the analytical framework of economies of affect, Richard and Rudnyckyj (2009) argue that affect is that which instigates conduct and helps facilitate political and economic transitions. At the project site, organization management used the affective quality of food to mediate positive morale among employees. Importantly, building morale among employees served the company's need to transition from the old to the new with the support of employees.

Social interaction at Birthday Wednesdays was the showpiece of the office staff coming together. I observed that Birthday Wednesday celebrations incited a mood of enjoyment and gratification among office staff over many occasions of the event. This mood seemed to govern Birthday Wednesday events. My observations at Birthday Wednesday events persistently included noticing attendees return for seconds and thirds of servings, a few attendees harmlessly and jokily guarding declared favorites on serving tables such as specially catered desserts, socializing among the entire staff of the company including local management of the office and non-management mixing and socializing, and collective sounds of human voices which filled the space where the event was hosted. On three separate occasions of interview, I asked three informants Yroc, Archie, and Oguh to describe what Birthday Wednesday celebrations meant to

them. The informants' responses provided a glimpse about what Birthday Wednesday celebrations incited for them:

Yroc:

"...Could be a way of soothing us...I mean, you know, if you take stuff away from people, they have to come back and give you something..."

Oguh:

"I mean it builds team morale...it does build morale because you come together...we don't interact with other departments, so I think it helps if we are encouraged to interact with other teams..."

Archie:

"I think overall, I think it's a good thing...People eat, sit down and talk to each other for a little, uh, outside of the work frame. People are coming they're having a good time. I know some people who avoid it...I can think of a few people, I'm not going to name names..."

I found the responses provided by Yroc, Oguh, and Archie to be a force for greater inquiry. I was particularly interested in understanding more about each informant's responses about their perceptions of Birthday Wednesday. To this end, I probed Yroc, Oguh, and Archie for explanation about their comments.

In my talk with Yroc, I uncovered what she meant when she communicated that Birthday Wednesdays "could be a way to sooth us". Yroc explained that her comments reflected her idea that Birthday Wednesdays was a way for the company to appease workers in light of the unwelcomed changes that arrived to the Atlanta office following company acquisition. Yroc expressed that she comprehended that food had been an effective practice of social sharing in society for all groups of people. In this sense, she considered Birthday Wednesday a reasonable morale token from the company given what was lost, namely office traditions, amidst post acquisition cultural transition for the office. Yroc suggested that while she thought Birthday

Wednesdays were a welcomed gesture, the present day Birthday Wednesday event did not balance the scale of food gathering events hosted in the pre-acquisition office environment. Yroc was an enterprise service analyst and a veteran employee in the Atlanta office at the time that I interviewed her in 2014. She worked with the company nine years in 2014 and like those who were a part of the pre-acquisition office, she had observed radical social changes in the office following the acquisition. From my conversation with Yroc, I grasped that Birthday Wednesdays were a much different scale of production in the post acquisition office environment than it had been in the pre-acquisition setting. Yroc realized this as a form of loss, yet she perceived Birthday Wednesday as an imperative production for the company to manage the social morale climate during the post acquisition period.

When I asked Oguh what Birthday Wednesdays meant to him, he responded that Birthday Wednesdays were an ideal opportunity for team building. Oguh explained that he perceived that the Atlanta office was largely a segregated environment where office members generally only interacted with those that they encountered in day-to-day tasks. In Oguh's perception, segregation in the office was justification for Birthday Wednesdays. Oguh suggested that the mix of social interaction and food at Birthday Wednesdays made it an ideal setting for team building. Oguh was a product channel specialist for the Atlanta office and had worked with the Atlanta office less than three years when I interviewed him in 2014. Because Oguh was a fairly new employee in the Atlanta office when I talked with him, it was important, in his perception, for him to build relationships within the Atlanta office. Birthday Wednesdays offered Oguh the opportunity to develop relationships.

Archie worked as a data analyst in the Atlanta office and had been with the office for less than three years at the time of my interview him in 2014. In my discussion with Archie, he

expressed that he conceived that because food is an important feature in driving social interaction, Birthday Wednesdays were an expedient managerial tool for sustaining a positive social environment in the office, yet Archie mentioned that some in the office avoided Birthday Wednesday celebrations. I asked Archie to communicate why he perceived that some in the office avoided Birthday Wednesday. Archie explained that he perceived that some of his peers avoided Birthday Wednesday for various reasons. He cited that “personality” was a rationale for avoidance by some while others avoided Birthday Wednesday because they were discontented with workplace conditions in the Atlanta office. Archie maintained that Birthday Wednesdays offered office workers a chance to get away from unpleasant conditions of the office and to tune out of what might make one discontent in the office. Archie’s statements offered me insight that he appreciated Birthday Wednesday celebrations as a spirit lifter for office workers. Because Archie did not experience the pre-acquisition setting in the Atlanta office, I recognized that he offered conceptions of Birthday Wednesdays that were not gauged by pre-acquisition social gatherings and that he offered an optimism that I had not observed when exchanging with those who experienced the pre-acquisition office setting.

Birthday Wednesdays was more than just food, it was a process that served a dual function. Birthday Wednesdays offered leadership the possibility to operate the climate of morale in the Atlanta office while offering workers optimism. Participants recognized Birthday Wednesdays as a way to become engaged with the organization and to find a positive light in the organization. Concurrently, management recognized value in the payoff that Birthday Wednesdays offered productivity. Birthday Wednesday food guided social order for a positive work atmosphere. I interpret the use of Birthday Wednesday by organization management as a form of organization power that was facilitated through affect. Aside from the focus of social

ritual derived from state ideology which was the center of argument for Anne Allison's (1996) analysis on obentos, Allison illustrated that social order can be indirectly erected through state power. In the Atlanta office, Birthday Wednesdays were an indirect power that office management employed in order to ensure positive social outcomes in the service of productivity.

2.1.3 Gauging Change

"...Every year it gets smaller. It went from like two rows of names when I started to only five names... September used to have the largest number of names...Now it's only these five" – Enahs

The turnover rate for the Atlanta office could be observed through the shift in the difference of present and absent bodies in the office, but moreover the turnover rate was measurable through the mere reduction of attendance numbers for Birthday Wednesday celebration and the corresponding changes in names outlined in monthly Birthday Wednesday interoffice email correspondence. The monthly birthday interoffice email correspondence was a mechanism that charted the birthdays of each office member of the Atlanta office. The interoffice correspondence for monthly birthdays was a recurring invitation to each member of the Atlanta office to participate in Birthday Wednesday celebrations.

Enahs, an informant that I interviewed, conveyed that he recognized the content of the September 2014 monthly birthday interoffice email correspondence as remarkable. Particularly, Enahs pinpointed that the number of birthdays listed for September were significantly reduced from a year-over-year time frequency from 2012 to 2014. From what Enahs detailed, the number of names reflected for September was only five. As I investigated stored monthly birthday interoffice email correspondence that was circulated to me over the course of the time that I spent working with the Atlanta office, I noted that the depiction that Enahs provided was

accurate according to what I uncovered through my investigation. In 2014, the listed birthdays for September reflected five names. This number represented under a fourth of the names that were projected via the monthly birthday interoffice correspondence for September in 2012.

This shift became a trend throughout 2014. During my interview with Enahs I asked him how he perceived changes which were communicated via both attendance numbers for Birthday Wednesday celebrations and the monthly birthday email correspondence. He communicated:

“I think it’s a signal for where the company is headed. People are jumping ship because they want a job that is secure. They won’t get that here because this company just wants to increase value”

Enahs’ statements resounded prominently through staff attendance for 2014 Birthday Wednesday events - namely during the second half the 2014 year. Particularly, I observed the attendance of the celebrations become significantly reduced from 2012 – 2014 due to several staff members who were no longer onboard the company. In a previous pilot study that I conducted at the Atlanta office, I noted nearly 80 employees were generally present to participate in the recurring Birthday Wednesday celebrations held in the Atlanta office. In 2014, the number of visible participants that participated in each monthly birthday celebration dipped to an average of roughly 50 -55.

The attendance numbers for the Birthday Wednesday events were strikingly small enough to beckon jokes from staff members about the direction of the company. On one occasion I was brought into a conversation between Amme and two other office workers. One of Amme’s comments during the conversation was, “unless we hire new staff, we’ll probably be skipping next January’s birthday Wednesday”. What followed Amme’s comments was chuckling from both office workers who participated in the conversation and a supportive reply from one worker, “yeah, it’s going to be interesting”. Amme’s remark, although witty, was a

sincere implication that with only one staff member's birthday featured in January 2015 and given the trend of staff reduction for the Atlanta office during the post acquisition period, it was conceivable to imagine no staff birthdays featured for the coming January 2016.

The scale of participation for birthday Wednesday celebrations 2014 was a marker for changing organizational conditions in the Atlanta office. From exchanges with office colleagues and observation, I understood that changes in Birthday Wednesday celebration attendance numbers was perceived by some in the office as a signal of uncertain workplace conditions.

Cultural conditions are signaled through the nuances of cultural elements. This is supported by anthropological compositions that look at food to understand cultural circumstances. In Sidney Mintz's (1986) analysis of sugar in the British Empire, he plotted the increased demand and use of sugar with the emergence of transatlantic slavery and the development of the labor class under the British Empire. Mintz delineates that sugar could be used to gauge the cultural and political shifts for the British Empire. In the Atlanta office change was communicated in a nuanced manner. The changes in staff attendance at Birthday Wednesday celebrations during the post acquisition period for the Atlanta office signaled to office workers that they faced uncertain workplace conditions. The drop in attendance numbers for Birthday Wednesday celebration was a subtle indicator that the old culture for the Atlanta office was leaving the company. As staff membership from the pre-acquisition period descended, the cultural producers who facilitated reproduction of office tradition were leaving the company and dissolving traditions with their exit.

2.1.4 Food as Participation

“It's a corporate world. You come in, you come out, you work, you're sitting in meetings...people know you as a person who does a particular task. There is no personal aspect of that, that is a professional aspect...right. But, when we have a food event and you bring something that's out of your personal

choice, you're sharing a little bit more than just your person as a professional"
 - Yram

Notwithstanding new politics in the Atlanta office, food was a persistent marker of participation for workers in the Atlanta office. Participation through food provided workers in the Atlanta office a way to feel like they belonged to a family. When I interviewed Yram, a director for product development within the Atlanta office, she asserted that food gatherings in the office meant togetherness and participation to her. She mentioned that food gatherings in the office made finding a new home in the United States - as a fairly recent migrant from India, a pleasant task. Yram explained that celebrations that took place in the office, such as Birthday Wednesday's, were more than just eating, but a way to take time to stop and appreciate employee contribution and for staff members to celebrate one another. Yram mentioned that social gatherings in the office meant the only structured time that office staff members had a chance to join at one time to bond and build friendships. I understood that this aspect of office food gatherings was important to Yram when she expressed:

"If the events were all about food then maybe it would be let's eat and be happy and go home, but, then, our events are not always like that in the office...it's always we're sharing something...and, sitting at a table I'm learning something about somebody that I didn't know, right"

To Yram, food gatherings in the office meant sharing and participating in peer bonding that otherwise would not take place outside of office food gatherings. This was important to Yram because this provided an opportunity for her to get to know her colleagues.

Yram's perceptions of participation that office food gatherings provided also resonated with the meanings that other employees assigned food gatherings in the office. Particularly, I talked with Archie about what participation in the office meant to him. Archie acknowledged office food gatherings as an opportunity for staff members to gather, relax, and have a good

time in the midst of the workday. These statements by Archie were followed by my question to him about why participation was relevant to him. Archie indicated that although many of the people in the office are individuals that he spent several hours working with, many he did not know and would not know without the intervention of events such as the food gatherings in the office. Office gatherings offered him a way to socialize with workers of the entire organization. This was evident through his statements about food gatherings in the office.

“...You sit you talk, you eat and you have fun...I think it’s a good thing because people sit down and talk to each other for a little outside the work frame...people are coming together to have a good time...”

Archie’s ideas about office food gatherings were akin to Yram’s perceptions about food gatherings. Particularly, Archie recognized that office food gatherings in the office were a rare opportunity for office workers to interact with one another and to participate and share in eating.

Food as a way of participation seemed to be a consistent theme among my informants and those whom I interacted with in the Atlanta office. Yet, more prominently, food as participation was a way for management to employ team building. Elinor Ochs and Merav Shohet (2006) considered food a way to effect unity. In their work on food and socialization, eating in a collective manner is commensurate with a way to develop strong ties such as ties developed in a family unit. The director of services for the department for where I spent my time working in the Atlanta office frequently insisted that I share in eating at team lunch meetings. I met the director’s insistence with disinclination to share in eating of catered foods on many occasions as a result of a menu that I perceived did offer me a desired dietary value. This prompted the director to learn why I did not participate. I offered the director an explanation for why I did not participate and this prompted her to make accommodations for food selection items that I accepted. The director’s management intent was to create team

building and cohesion among her department. To her, this team building and cohesion required participation in eating from everyone. Through the director's persistent suggestions that I should not be left out of sharing of eating, I recognized that her insistence could be a way for her to affirm her role of authority. But significantly, I understood that my sharing of eating to her meant participation, a path to team building and cohesion under her leadership.

2.1.5 Food as Exclusion and Difference

The food gatherings that I participated in through the Atlanta office while conducting fieldwork for this project compelled me to reflect on my own encounters with food in the workplace. Particularly, celebrations which were intended to create participation in the workplace sometimes created exclusion. For a significant portion of my life, my individual food practices have been a source of difference for me. This difference stemmed from my childhood vegan diet, which was what my childhood family household considered part of a holistic lifestyle. Today, I am neither a vegan nor a vegetarian, yet many of the food habits that I practiced in my childhood are incorporated into my current food habits. Importantly, although many of the food practices which were a part of my childhood family household might be found to be ubiquitous in various societal settings (increasingly Western societies) of the 21st century, a great sense of difference still hangs over my head upon events of specific food gatherings where I am confronted with the expectation of consumption participation. This difference for me emerged frequently as I joined many food gatherings in the Atlanta office and declined to share in food consumption at such gatherings.

My decision not to share in consumption of many of the foods that were customarily featured at gatherings in the office was driven not by an unwillingness to participate, but by my cautiousness surrounding what I perceived to be the content of many of the foods served at

these gatherings. Principally, through a general experience engaging in societal conventions in American society, namely the United States, I have approached a common understanding about widespread food conventions that are practiced in the United States. My understanding of such food conventions is that food consumption practices in American Society are largely centered on foods that appeal to convenience, taste, and affordability rather than nutrient composition. Robert Albritton (2009) attributes the conventions of food consumption practices in the American food system to capitalism. He contends that the large share of common food in the American food supply system is produced with the intent of economic value. Consequently, common foods are produced without nutritional value as producing foods with high nutritional value would undercut the economics of food production (Albritton 2009). Albritton supports the notion that an illusionary sense of choice in the American food system gives consumers a false impression that substantial difference exists among commonly available commercial foods even those in categories such as health food. He argues that the illusion of choice is the result of misleading consumer programming and widespread messages about the nutritional content of many foods. In this vein, numerous foods that structure conventional food practices in American society pervade American food markets including health food categories. For this reason, I consider that many of the foods served at office gatherings in the Atlanta office fit into the scope of foods that are a part of American conventional food practices - even those that were offered as a healthy alternative. I recognized such foods as presenting an absence of nutritional value and not ideal for my consumption.

Despite my approach toward food consumption and my openness with my office peers about my approach, many of my peers perceived that by not sharing in consumption I was merely opposed to participating in eating of foods that were made available at office gatherings.

One example of such a perception was exemplified by the comments of the office manager for the Atlanta office, who commented to me “you need to branch out”, upon my conveying to her that I would not be receiving a plate of food at one of the planned events in the office. The office manager’s comments followed a series of events in the office where I participated in social gathering, but elected not to have a plate of food while participating. The office manager was responsible for planning and organizing company sponsored social events for the Atlanta office, consequently, she regularly asked me whether I would participate in planned gatherings as she routinely gathered a head count of workers in the office who anticipated attending planned gatherings.

The office manager’s comments suggested that she perceived I was prohibiting myself from full social participation by not ‘at least’ trying some of the foods made available at many of the office gatherings. The office manager’s perception represented a gap between the motivation for my frequent decisions not to share in eating at office gatherings and her understanding of why I did not participate in consumption. Similarly, another office colleague, Pets, demonstrated her perception that my consistent decision not to participate in eating of foods regularly provided at office gatherings signaled my unwillingness to be fully socially participatory. Pets and I worked for the same department. On a particular afternoon as our department prepared for a group lunch meeting Pets asked me whether I planned to share in eating lunch that was catered by a fairly prominent commercial kitchen for our department. As I communicated to her that I planned to eat lunch that I packed and brought to the office for the day instead of lunch that had been catered for our department, Pets replied:

“...Maybe you can try something new...there’s something vegetarian on the menu...”

I addressed Pets' comments by explaining to her that despite the absence of meat from the lunch menu, I had chosen not to share in eating the catered lunch as a result of what I perceived to be food options that were likely prepared with ingredients that did not conform to my grasp of dietary value. I further explained to Pets that dietary value is one criterion that I consider important when making a decision about food consumption. This encounter with Pets was one of multiple exchanges between Pets and I where we exchanged about my decision not to participate in consumption at food gatherings in the office. Like the office manager, I perceived that Pets considered that my regular decision to withhold from participating in food consumption during office gatherings was a limitation that restricted my full participation in social interaction. In this sense, the office manager and Pets likely recognized my decisions not to participate in consumption during office gatherings a breach to the premise of coming together which was the intended purpose of food office gatherings for the Atlanta office.

Coming together was an important notion in the aim of office food gatherings for the Atlanta office. This notion influenced the imagination of some whom I interfaced with repeatedly in the Atlanta office. The remark "we've got some choices without meat" by the office manager on one occasion, and Pets's comments, "there's something vegetarian on the menu", and occasional suggestions by peers during gatherings that non-meat options were available for my consumption illustrate an imagination by some that my choice not to participate in consumption of foods customarily provided at office gatherings meant that my objective for food consumption was to consume foods that did not contain meat. I understood these imaginations to be a product of perceptions that were shaped by a general desire of those in the Atlanta office to come together for camaraderie by including everyone in sharing through eating at office gatherings. The proposed 'vegetarian' and 'non-meat' food options were an

imagined way to include me in food gatherings. I comprehended these imaginations to be informed by difference that might have been perceived through my food practices, which were often observed by colleagues in the office. Specifically, my office workspace was arranged in an open configuration such that my person and any object that rested at my workspace desk were readily visible to passersby. The open position of my workspace helped prompt amusement for foods that were frequently present at my office desk. Here at my desk, it became clear that my food selections were a source of difference for me in the perceptions of some in the office. Social interchanges such as “what did you bring unique today?” as my colleague, Lime, uttered to me as he passed my workspace unit on one workday occasion; on a unique workday, another colleague, Enahs’ comments to me that he shared with his girlfriend the unusualness that he perceived about the food varieties that he often discovered at my desk; and, yet multiple occasions in the office where office peers rhetorically asked whether I ate meat after observing me consume food in the office that visibly displayed the absence of meat, were instances that influenced my understanding that my food choices might be a source of uniqueness in the perceptions of some in the office. In my perception, foods that I customarily brought with me to work such a dish that included fish, beans, or even rice were quite normal. Nonetheless, uniqueness may have been attributed to the food options that I often carried with me to the office because these food options were generally distinct relatively to food options made available at office food gatherings.

The foods that I consumed in the office informed how some who I interacted with in the office made sense of my election not to participate in consumption of foods regularly provided at office gatherings. Particularly, it seemed as though some that I interacted with in the office worked out a perceived notion that my reserved approach to consumption of foods at office

gatherings was attributable to difference that was pinpointed in the food choices that were regularly visible at my desk. Importantly, in the perception of some, this perceived difference equated to food habits, which implied non-meat food consumption. This factor became the center of perceptions surrounding my limited participation in food consumption during office gatherings. This led to an accepted idea by some whom I interacted with in the office that my participation in consumption of foods at office gatherings would be determined by availability of non-meat food options. I likened such perceptions to an imagination that difference in food habits implied food habits that were specific to consumption of non-meat food options. As the office manager on numerous occasions made great effort to make non-meat options available in light of her perception that non-meat food options accommodated difference and might ensure inclusion of everyone in the office, this imagination was a factor that regularly prompted exclusion for me, due to what I recognized as misconception, as I declined to consume non-meat food options at food gatherings that did not offer what I perceived as dietary value. In addition, persistent ritual of examination that I met during office food gatherings from office peers about why I elected not to share in eating grew to become a discouragement for me to look forward to participating in office gatherings. Although I continued to be present at office food gatherings, the sentiment of wanting to avoid questioning provided an incentive for me to exclude myself. Simultaneously this provided some a perception that I was limiting my full participation in social activity. The sentiment that I experienced was shared by two other members in the Atlanta office, Hen and Venu, who I interviewed and who maintained food habits that placed them in a position of difference.

Hen, an enterprise service delivery manager for the Atlanta office, described herself as a health conscious individual who aimed to practice a diet that reduced her risk of experiencing

health ailments related to heredity health conditions. Hen expressed that, to her, health consciousness meant being aware of and practicing a diet that allowed her to avoid health ailments, namely colon cancer and high cholesterol that she understood as hereditary for her family. While interviewing Hen, she told me that her health consciousness was a product of her childhood that consisted of a diet that was centered on favorable health practices geared towards avoiding disease and sickness. Largely, Hen was conditioned at an early age by her mother to practice a healthy diet. Hen explained that one illustration of the nutritional focused dietary practices in her childhood household included her mother's substitution of red meat with ground turkey meat and her mother's allowance of limited sugar and snack foods, such as chips or soda, into her diet. Hen indicated that her conditioning during childhood evolved into her health conscious attitude in 2014. Although I conducted a formal interview with Hen, I also interacted with Hen in the office regularly and observed Hen participating in many food gatherings in the office over the course of multiple years. A notable pattern that I noted while observing Hen is that she regularly limited her participation in consumption of many of the foods that were customarily made available at the office gatherings. From various conversations that I had with Hen in the office, I was aware that she maintained a largely non-red meat diet and made great effort to ensure that her diet consisted of foods that she perceived to be supportive of a healthy body. During interview with Hen, I asked her to explain how she perceived her experience participating in office food gatherings as someone who oftentimes doesn't participate in consumption of a large part of what is customarily on the menu at office food gatherings. Hen's response suggested that a large part of her experience at office food gatherings involved negotiating participation and difference. Particularly, Hen perceived her participation in office food gatherings as a constructive opportunity for social interaction, yet she also recognized that

alienation at office food gatherings belonged to difference in food habits such as her own. Hen recounted her experience of such alienation at office food gatherings when she remarked:

“I know I’m going to get the questions of like ‘is that all you’re eating...is that it...is that all you like?’ ...”

I invited Hen to reflect on her remarks and asked her to describe how her experience made her feel:

“Um...Sometimes I rather not even deal with it you know, it gets to be a drain, you know because you’ve got all these croc pots full of you don’t know what, you know and you’re coming out with a plate of carrots, chips, and salsa or something and it’s like ‘that’s it’...or...and then sometimes I wonder whether, are people offended like well ‘you didn’t even try...I don’t have any meat in my dish’ I’m like yeah but you’ve got tons of cheese dripping off of whatever is in there, you know...and...just like...you know the dairy I have to watch how much is in there it’s a very fine balance...so, you know...sometimes I’m just like, got a call... not going to be able to make it...uh... but, yeah, most times I’m just getting you know small dish even when they have the monthly birthday parties, you know it got to a point where [the office manager] was asking me...you know... to give suggestions of what we could have...’what do you think everyone would like?’...and, you know...still no matter what it was, if it was Chick-fil-A, well I don’t eat Chick-fil-A, well they’ve got the salad, ok...and I think I was the only one that would get a salad and everybody else, go for what you know...um...you know...but, it...it was a challenge... it got to a point...even if I’m going out in a group setting, again work related, I try to downplay - and I know you do the same thing – it’s like, don’t make a big deal of ‘oh I don’t eat that’ then it’s like the whole mood changes like ok ‘now we got to accommodate this one person, what can we do’ it shifts everything and I think it detracts from the meaning of getting together and I don’t want that so I usually don’t even voice like ‘oh I don’t eat meat, I don’t eat cheese’... it’s just like ‘oh my gosh, what do you eat’, you know, so I just downplay...I will just find a side item...I will make up my own dish and be quiet about it.”

Hen’s responses about her experience with food in the office pinpoint her encounter with exclusion through difference and exclusion through misreading by others of what her perception of a healthy diet means. Hen comprehended that her office peers’ understanding of what she considered nutritional were superficial and led

to a form of isolation for her during office food gatherings. She perceived that her food practices were indirectly criticized through scrutiny that she regularly confronted in office gatherings. These experiences she met with a willingness to engage in office social interaction with peers by forfeiting public exhibition of her difference.

Anthropologists have considered ways in which food consumption socializes human's beliefs and establishes social order. Stephen Mennell (1987) argues that food is situated in construction of social order and plays an important role in the socialization of humans. Mennell's points can be extended to the Atlanta office where cultural norms were established around consumption of specific food items that were routinely provided at office food gatherings including conventional sweets and dishes enriched with dairies and meats. Hen's food practices disturbed accepted norms of diet patterns in the Atlanta office, which challenged a social order in the Atlanta office that surrounded ways of eating. This challenge was revealed through the encounters that Hen described during my interview with her.

I understood Hen's sentiments of exclusion to be shared through the perceptions of another office worker, Venu, a product development manager in the Atlanta office. Venu's childhood took place in a household that practiced a vegetarian diet as a part of Hindu tradition. Venu told me that over the full course of her childhood she experienced severe food allergies, which prompted her for a lifelong trajectory of dietary caution and restriction. Venu explained that such dietary restraint requires that she exclude various foods from her diet including many foods that were customarily provided at office food gatherings. When I interviewed Venu she communicated that as a result of her dietary practices, participating in occasions of

office food gatherings regularly leaves her with a sense of exclusion. When I asked Venu to describe her experience of exclusion when participating in office food gatherings she responded:

“At, you know, parties, you know, we have people asking ‘ok’... you know... ‘aren’t you going to have some wine?’...that kind of thing, but...uh..yeah...but, I just kind of don’t give in...yeah.”

I wanted to understand how Venu experienced the sort of encounters that she described through her comments; accordingly, I asked Venu how did it make her feel when people asked her questions such as ‘aren’t you going to have some wine?’

“Uh, well it does, um, make me feel out of place because, uh, everyone else is drinking wine and the worse part of it is especially I remember the first time I was here at Thrive, uh, you ask them for fruit juice and they’re like ‘juice’ like as though...as though it’s something that you shouldn’t be asking for...so that kind of makes me feel a little weird...”

Venu’s expressions reveal that her food choices granted her a feeling of exclusion during office food gatherings. Venu informed me that not being able to ‘fit in’ socially through food consumption was at the core of her feeling of exclusion. Her described encounters with food in the office project how difference might summon exclusion. Largely, the food celebrations in the Atlanta office were premised on camaraderie. Foods that commonly produce gratification and liking such as desserts or snack foods were routinely featured at office gatherings and conceivably a contributing factor to camaraderie among workers at these gatherings.

Berridge (2003) argued that the liking of food is likely to produce positive behavioral consequences in humans. The idea of liking and gratification through specific foods at gatherings in the office was captured through the statements of my

informant, Archie. Archie expressed that he perceived that events that provided food of enjoyment such as food gatherings in the Atlanta office were effective at creating camaraderie for workers. As I talked with Archie during interview I asked him to tell me what his perceptions were about the meaning of office food gatherings, Archie explained:

“...Generally, they’re not like your better eating situations...food’s free...uh, paid for I should say...so, I mean most of that stuff is not going to be...it’s a celebration, right and people don’t tend to...at least in my experience, when you have celebrations...don’t tend to choose the best foods for you...more fun foods...and you eat stuff that’s not good for you.”

To understand Archie’s comments about fun foods, I asked him to explain what he meant by fun foods. Archie summarized:

“The whole idea is to sit down and eat and socialize, so you don’t necessarily bring food that’s healthy which is considered less tasteful, right. People are looking at it as things that are very tasteful...tasteful usually has sweet or something that attracts you to want to eat more, you eat a lot of it and that’s what it is...you want to eat and have fun...that’s the whole idea...So, they want something that people want to enjoy for the most part, uh, that’s kind of like how I see it. So, yeah, I would tend to say that the food tends to be less healthy because you want people to really sit down and chow down and enjoy the atmosphere, versus, you know, healthier salads...You want to get a salad?’...I don’t know if people want to sit there and eat a whole bunch of salad and talk for 20 minutes.”

Archie’s comments provide an unblemished perception that foods that gratify are those that appeal to taste and foods that appeal to taste may not be healthy as he noted. However, tasty foods generated camaraderie, which was “the whole idea” of office food gatherings, as Archie put it.

Archie’s views resonated with my observations of social interaction during office food gatherings. Particularly, I observed that many of the foods

characteristically featured at office gatherings were sweets, salty snacks, or meals that were widely accepted as junk foods such as pizza, hamburgers, and deep-fried dishes. The foods served at gatherings seemed to stimulate great interaction among workers in the office. Yet, these were foods that Hen and Venu regularly avoided. From Venu's description, this factor of avoiding that which was generally available at office gatherings made her feel as though she was not fully participating socially in the office gatherings and thus excluded. Equally, Hen expressed that her decision to circumvent participation in eating of many of the foods served at office events was an exclusionary factor. The Atlanta office employed commensality as a tradition. Because of the strong tradition of commensality in the Atlanta office, the office manager and many workers in the Atlanta office attempted to understand difference in order to ensure participation in commensality from all employees in the office. Yet, through misinformed perceptions of difference, workplace food remained a driver in the process of exclusion for some employees.

3 CONCLUSION: TOWARD PRACTICAL USES FOR FOOD ANTHROPOLOGY RESEARCH

At first glance, one might envision food as merely a necessity that facilitates human survival. However, food receives its significance and meaning not only through its functional value, but through its cultural relevance. In order for the cultural role of food to be thoroughly understood, food must be investigated through significant social contexts. I have proposed that workplace provides a useful cultural context for the investigation of food in light the intense involvement that many people have with the workplace. In this project, I explored participants' encounters with workplace food in order to understand the

social significance of workplace food at the field site. Through empirical support, this project demonstrated that workplace food was operated as a social instrument that facilitated social processes of agency, affect, change, participation, and exclusion. In my conceptualization, workplace food empowered participants to organize and sustain ties to cultural traditions through employee planned meals and potlucks. Yet, workplace food also presented organization management an opportunity to implement morale through affect. Organization management sought to induce positive emotion among employees through food celebration in order to achieve constructive morale among employees. Foods of liking were foods that were served at company sponsored celebrations and that which was likely to elicit positive emotion for employees. To the extent of measuring shifts in organization structure, workplace food allowed changes in staff attendance of office food occasions to be grasped as a signal for cultural changes. Workplace food elicited participation among participants. Particularly, participants practiced commensality to experience closeness among their colleagues. Closeness facilitated a sense of unity which ultimately guided constructive relationships among employees. Some participants experienced workplace food as an exclusionary factor. Workplace food as exclusion was a social pressure for workplace commensality. Staff members responded to the social pressure of exclusion by attempting to include everyone in eating by accommodating difference.

In this investigation, I sought to study workplace food in order to produce culturally relevant information that can expand anthropological focus of the role of food in social processes. To realize this goal, I drew on a rich analytical discourse about food. Existing anthropological concepts about food allowed my findings to be interpreted through critical theories surrounding state power, cultural identity, and cultural preservation. The work

from this investigation contributes to anthropology by expounding the ways in which food is conceptualized. Future ethnographic work about food might explore the ways that food connects with human emotion to elicit affect for deliberate social outcomes.

In considering how future anthropological research about food might be used, I illuminate two applications that present practical use for qualitative research about food: organization management and business strategy management. Workplace food research can be used to inform business organization management strategy to help organizations employ social programs that support organization productivity. Equally, the industrial value of workplace food research can be realized through business strategy management. Customarily, commercial strategists seek to develop knowledge about human lifestyle and to understand driving forces of human behavior in order to create the right consumer products. Qualitative research conducted about food in the context of workplace can provide in-depth information about people's lifestyles and behavioral influences.

3.1 Organization Management

Business organizations continually look for ways to facilitate capital flow. At the heart of the process of capital are those that provide services and labor in exchange for wages. Like the products that they market, business organizations must find new ways to reinvent their value in order to entice labor to constantly buy-in to the notion of aiding business growth. A useful way for organizations to manage such processes of growth is for organizations to understand how favorable attitudes and behaviors develop that might lead to productivity among employees. Such understanding can derive from qualitative investigation on food in the workplace and be employed to facilitate favorable managerial decisions that ultimately drive internal motivation for workers to support commercial

growth. Arnaud and Wasieleski (2013) maintain that organizations have a necessity to implement social programs and work atmospheres that drive productivity. They argue that a supportive work environment that presents workers a sense of self-motivation, individual determination, trust in leadership, and organization loyalty promotes internalization of organization values among employees, and subsequently productivity among workers (Arnaud and Wasieleski, 2013). Dumbravan (2011) conveys that worker productivity can be managed through employees' emotional capacities. Through this notion, Dumbrava asserts that work performance is largely impacted by emotional intelligence, and that emotion helps regulate specific individual qualities such as the ability to exercise determination in challenging situations in order to work out diplomacy when interacting in a collective environment. In this regard, organizations can understand emotion as a social management device that can be employed to prime motivation and behavior (Dumbrava, 2011). To this end, Dumbrava underscores that no establishment can afford the expense of overlooking the importance of emotion in the workplace for several reasons: emotions guide workplace relationships; emotions are at the core of employee engagement and motivation; emotions are crucial to creativity and innovation to advance organization growth; emotions are integral to learning at work; emotions are embedded in people; and emotions provide a signal about whether people care about the workplace and the success or failure of the organization.

Food generates various emotional responses that comprise liking, aversion, pleasure, and even distress (Rousset et al 2005). The use of food in the workplace can effect relatedness, friendship, celebration, and provide constructive exchanges in the workplace. Compellingly, people's ability to make sense of food is influenced by

emotional response. Steiner et al (2001) uphold that as early as infancy food elicits emotional feedback in humans. Foods that evoke liking in humans are liable to produce favorable attitudes and behavior in people (Berridge, 2003). With the many consequences related to human emotion, organizations might be compelled to make decisions that are socially favorable for worker morale. Consequently, it can be the aid of organization management to understand how people perceive and make sense of food in the workplace in order to pursue answers about how to plan a social atmosphere that enables favorable attitudes, behavior, and ultimately productivity among workers. Critical analyses about the use of food to effect discipline among labor have been offered in works such as Allison (1996) and Mintz (1985). Such analyses articulate an analytical view about the social abuses that are imparted through political and state control of food. I respond to this by recognizing the narrow boundaries that exist between misuse and development. Given the humanistic ambition of anthropology, I reason that anthropological investigation can yield findings that may lead to solutions that serve both the profit bottom line for business and the welfare of workers. Organizations can achieve such goals through information collected by qualitative investigation about workplace food.

In my research, I have shown how organization management can utilize the affective value of food to elicit positive emotion among employees in order to produce positive worker morale. Namely, organization management at the project site forged a social program through food celebration. Organization management sought to serve foods at food celebrations that compelled workplace commensality and social interaction among employees. To achieve this task organization management engaged employees to offer suggestions about foods to be served at food celebrations. Project participants described

the foods that were served at organization hosted food occasions as foods of liking and foods that created a desirable social atmosphere. Organization management considered that providing employees the opportunity for commensality through office food gatherings was a strategy that could ease tensions of rapid workplace change and support productivity.

3.2 Business Strategy Management

This project also reveals implications for market strategy development. Marketers develop products around the lifestyle and behaviors of consumers. Businesses must thoroughly understand consumers in order to appropriately tailor products to the lifestyle, preferences, and perceptions of consumers. In light of workplace's significant cultural role (Steenkamp and Basson, 2013), qualitative research conducted about how people encounter food in the workplace can be useful in informing market strategy for businesses that seek to market products directly or indirectly related to food. Qualitative investigation about food in the workplace can contribute to answers about people's consumption attitudes and behaviors that might be influenced in the workplace. Because perception and cognition frequently precede behavior, businesses must try to find in-depth data about processes that drive behavior in order to develop sound commercial strategy. Marketers rely on being able to accurately pinpoint consumer cognitive and affective responses to specific stimuli in order to frame strong product branding (Peter and Olson 2010). Qualitative research can yield explanatory – and sometimes otherwise imperceptible - information that offers answers about social processes that drive people to make decisions. This extent of research can be beneficial for product planning because qualitative information can fill gaps and generate insight about driving forces for people's behavior- where alternative research approaches cannot.

In my study, participants exhibited social practices that might be useful for informing specific business strategy development. For instance, the agency that participants expressed through organized potlucks and office meals might offer strategists a way to understand the important role of food and agency in human adaptation in light of unwelcomed change and thus an understanding of how product development might incorporate concepts that complement self determination. Correspondingly, the importance of commensality that emerged in my research could also be instrumental to help strategists target product development concepts that target important social values such as eating together.

In conclusion, our understanding of food cannot be limited to its functional attributes. Food is a critical tool for evaluating social conditions; thus, it offers possibilities for how cultural insights might be unpacked. Through the ethnographic information collected in this study, I have illustrated that participants operate food to facilitate specific social processes. A setting of rapid workplace change influenced the cultural actors of this study who expressed encounters with food through agency, affect, change, participation, and exclusion. While this research develops important analytical ideas about food anthropology, future food anthropology research might assert that the underlining value associated with the cultural significance of food is pinpointed in human emotion.

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