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Birthday Celebrations Social Impact. What Can We Lear From Children's Experiences?

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Forewords

The idea of looking into birthday celebrations were introduced to me right at the beginning of my masters and I could not let go of the idea. This thesis is independently executed by me, with supervision of my supervisor associate professor Monika Abels. I would like to dedicate my first and biggest thank you to her. Monika, you inspired me to creative thinking when ideas had to change and change again. You let me take my time and you believed in me, my process, and my work even when I at times have found it unbelievable. You have been standing steady through all the bumps in the road, and they have been many. You also deserve the biggest thank you for the person that you are. I have appreciated all the conversations we have had during these years. You have taught me so much more than just academia and psychology.

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Sammendrag

Barns bursdagsfeiringer er en sosial begivenhet som inkluderer ulike sosiale aktiviteter og bursdagsritualer. Siden tidligere forskning viser at ritualer kan forbedre samholdet mellom rituelle deltakere, antok vi at feiring av bursdager kunne ha etablert medlemskap i inn- og ut-grupper blant barn i en allerede konstituert gruppe. Med denne studien er målet å få en bedre forståelse av hvilken innvirkning bursdagsfeiring har på barns sosiale relasjoner til hverandre, spesielt barns opplevelse av utenforskap og samhold. Gjennom åpne intervjuer med barn fra Nord-Norge i alderen 7-9 år, ga vi innsikt i barns egne opplevelser av temaet. Våre resultat indikerer at barn både kan forbedre forholdet til andre, samt risikere ekskludering i forbindelse med bursdagsfeiringer. Både bursdagsritualer og ikke-ritualistiske aktiviteter påvirker barns forhold i bursdagsfeiringen. Feiringens innvirkning på sosiale relasjoner oppleves som relativt liten, og barn regner med allerede etablert vennskap etter festen.

Nøkkelord: Bursdagsfeiringer, sosiale relasjoner, ritualer, samhold, utenforskap, barn

Abstract

Children's birthday celebrations are a social event including different social activities and birthday rituals. As previous research show rituals to enhance cohesion amongst its ritual participants, we assumed in-group and out-group memberships could be established at birthday celebrations between children in an already constituted group. With this study we aim to gain a better understanding of birthday celebrations' impact on children's social relations amongst peers, especially ostracism and cohesion as perceived by children. Through open-ended interviews with children at age 7-9, from northern parts of Norway, we provided insight to children's own experiences of the topic. Results indicate that children may both improve their relations to others, as well as risk exclusion in the context of birthday celebrations. Both birthday rituals and non-ritualistic activities impact on children's relations in the birthday celebration setting. The celebrations' impact on social relations is perceived as rather small, and children rely on already established friendships after the party.

Keywords: Birthday celebrations, social relations, rituals, cohesion, ostracism, children

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Today, birthday celebrations are usually seen as a rite of passage executed to heighten the status of the individual, putting most of the concentration on the person celebrating the birthday. By bringing gifts and congratulations to the birthday child (Otnes et al., 1995; Redlich, 2020), the participants distinguish the celebrant from the rest of the group making him/her the center of attention. Again, less attention has been given to birthday celebrations' impact on social relations, even though birthday parties typically occur in a social context. In addition, birthday party's impact on children's social relations is a rather common topic in Norwegian popular media (Langset & Simonnes, 2013), and schools and kindergartens create different policies and measures in the hope of reducing possible negative effects (Scott, 2008). Yet, empirical knowledge is still needed around this theme. The current study is therefor set to gain a better understanding of birthday celebrations and how they might impact on social relations amongst children in lower school age years, by considering children's own perspective.

Although birthday celebrations are rather commonly occurring and celebrated across cultures (Redlich, 2020), the research done on birthday celebrations are quite restricted and the research existing varies in type of focus and themes. Consequently, the research on birthday celebrations' impact on social relations is quite understudied.

Different fields of research have on the other hand taken an interest in rituals and their impact on cohesion, a group's ability to think and act in unity (Dragolov et al., 2016). Rituals, which are described by Hobson et al. (2017) as predefined, symbolic acts that lack instrumental purpose, may be seen in most birthday celebrations. For instance, the cake and candles ceremony, is to many a symbolically valued, given action occurring during birthday

parties (Redlich, 2020; Scott, 2008). This action is however quite meaningless and lacks an instrumental purpose.

Since birthday celebrations tend to contain ritualistic elements, it is possible to assume it has a positive impact on the participants' cohesion. However, one might also argue its impact on ostracism, as exclusion from these ritual constituencies may lead to outgroup status (Wen et al., 2020). The present study is set to examine birthday celebrations' perceived impact on children's social relations, especially cohesion and ostracism. This is done through open ended interviews with children at age 7 – 9. Before providing the children's experiences of birthday celebrations impact on social relations, different possible connections between birthday rituals and cohesion will be reviewed, as well as its possible impact on ostracism amongst children.

Birthday Celebrations as Cohesion Fostering Events

Being part of a group has throughout history been of great importance for human survival (Brewer, 2007). This is due to the fact that other people may contribute with greater security, promote one's understanding of the surroundings, as well as providing helpful knowledge about oneself and one's behavior (Williams & Nida, 2017). Thus, it is not surprising that humans have a great need for belonging and a tendency to be cohesive (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). By using social tools like rituals, humans may enhance the cohesion existing within their group. Research on the subject show for instance that ritualistic elements, which indicate group belonging, demonstrate group commitment (Singh et al., 2020; Watson-Jones & Legare, 2016; Wen et al., 2016) and communicate values and norms (Dragolov et al., 2016; R. Fischer et al., 2013; Páez et al., 2015), may enhance the cohesion between the participants of the ritual.

This tendency may as well be seen amongst children. A study conducted by Wen et al. (2016) found that children's affiliation with a group increased to a greater extent after they

participated in a ritual compared to when they participated in group activity alone. The

children participating in the ritual expressed having greater preference for other children

engaged in the ritual and indicated having greater expectancy for inclusion with the ritual

group. As children's birthday celebrations often are characterized with social ritualistic

elements (Scott, 2008), we should expect birthday celebrations to increase the in-group

cohesion between participants just the same.

Celebrations Indicate Inclusion

By explicitly expressing unity and group inclusive behaviors, a group may enhance its

cohesion, creating a positive social outcome (Dragolov et al., 2016). Rituals may be useful in

this sense, guiding and clarifying to people whether a person is a group member or not. When

reading the literature existing on children's birthday celebrations, the party and its rites are at

times demonstrated as such an expressive tool. By sharing rather scripted birthday rituals, the

child may reaffirm his/her group fellowship with peers, family members or even the society

(Weil, 1986). For example, Bruckermann (2020) 's study, conducted at the countryside of

rural China, showed senior kin using different birthday rituals to assert their tie towards the

celebrant child. Another example would be parents from Northern America, describing

birthday parties as possible occasions for teaching their children inclusive behaviors (Otnes et

al., 1995).

The shared use of attention and joint relationship towards symbols may also be effective

ways to express unity during collective events, like rituals (Páez et al., 2015). Clothes, for

instance, highlight in-group unity when worn in a ritual setting (Smith & Stewart, 2011), and

as birthday parties occasionally require a certain attire like a costume or classy clothing

(Clarke, 2007), clothes may be perceived as such a symbol in the birthday setting as well.

Another example could be the cake and candles ceremony, where a collective attention might

be created as the ritual participants follow the birthday child, while they blow out candles

placed on top of a birthday cake (Rancew-Sikora & Remisiewicz, 2020). As all children are dressed alike or as all participants' attention are set the same, a feeling of unity may surface, and the participants relationship may improve.

By assimilating a group's physical and psychological experiences, an increase in the perception of oneness may occur and enhances the will for cooperation (Páez et al., 2015; Wiltermuth & Heath, 2009). Synchronic actions and shared emotional expressions are useful in this sense. Synchronic rituals are relatively common during birthday celebrations. One example would be the "Happy birthday"- song, typically sung to the birthday child during the celebration (Good & Beach, 2005; Redlich, 2020; Scott, 2008). Another, less known example would be dancing, possible to witness during children's birthday parties in Israel (Weil, 1986). Likewise, emotions may be synchronized during birthday parties. Good and Beach (2005) observed that joint emotional reactions appeared between the participants at a birthday gathering during the gift opening ceremony. At this occasion, the parents present at the party worked as models for the children, presenting appropriate responses at gift openings. In short, ritualistic scripts and symbols used during a birthday celebration may help determine participants relationships and improve the groups unity.

Celebrations Demonstrate Commitment

To achieve cohesion, it is a necessity that in-group members may distinguish between those who are genuine in their actions towards the group and those who are so called "free riders", only exploiting the benefits of being a group member. Rituals are in the free rider context excellent group markers, as they usually imply costly behavior (Hobson et al., 2017; Watson-Jones & Legare, 2016). These costs however may differ depending on culture and rite. Some may be physically difficult or dangerous for the participant to perform, while other rites may cost in other type of manners (Xygalatas et al., 2013). By engaging in a ritual, group

members can present their sincerity towards the rest of the group and improve the trust between each other.

Commitment done prior to a rite, signal to the group a willingness and readiness to strive towards the group's goals and intentions (Singh et al., 2020). In the context of birthday celebrations, children are expected to make sacrifices of their own. These sacrifices are usually woven into the time and effort spent on the birthday party but can also be seen as material sacrifices. In a study presented by Otnes et al. (1995), parents reported multiple arrangements needed to be set before the start of the birthday festivities. There were themes and games to plan, guests to invite, cakes to prepare for and decorations to put up. In these different preparation stages, mothers explained encouraging their children to partake, making the children understand the intentions with the celebration, at the same time the children displayed commitment towards the guests.

It is not only the birthday celebrant that can express sincerity towards the group through birthday rituals. The guest of the party may just as well make sacrifices for the sake of the celebration. For instance, in many cultures' gifts are a part of the birthday party script. These gifts can be everything from store bought toys (Clarke, 2007), to more traditional gifts, e.g., the Chinese gift *hangbao*, which is money presented in a red envelope (Bruckermann, 2020). To appear with a gift, guests are required to set aside both money and time in advance of the party. The gift might also be sacrificial, as some children might give away gifts, they themselves have taken a liking for. As Good and Beach (2005) explain, this transforms the present, making it a symbol for commitment and relational bond.

Guests are also required to set aside time during the day of the celebration. Participants ought to attend the party at the set-out time, ensuring nothing else is planned out for that specific timeframe. In a study conducted by Scott (2008), participants described both rushing from leisure time activities as well as dropping them all together to ensure participation at the

birthday celebration. In another study conducted amongst mothers in Northern London, the mothers explained feeling ashamed when their child at last minute refused attendance at a party. Instead, they found it necessary to apologies for the absence (Clarke, 2007), showing a will to reestablish the relationship with the party host.

Celebrations Communicate Values

To create cohesion, members of a group need to display thoughts and behaviors that are resembling (Dragolov et al., 2016). This may be achieved by shared values and accepted group norms. For many parents, both the preparations prior to and activities during, as well as undertakings after the birthday party, may function as great opportunities for teaching their children values and norms they themselves, as well as the community find important. For example, by planning birthday games where all children receive a price, mothers from Northern America expected to instill sportsmanship and cooperation amongst the children, rather than competition (Otnes et al., 1995). The gift opening ceremony may also be used as a platform where children learn normative behaviors, like gracious acceptance of gifts (Clarke, 2007) and ways to express thankfulness subsequently to the party (Otnes et al., 1995). In Norway, full inclusion is seen as an ideal principle, and many schools encourage children to implement this behavior in connection to birthday celebrations. Scott (2008) discusses this being anchored in the Norwegian societal values of equality and sameness, and so children may learn and implement this valued behavior through the birthday celebration. By using the birthday setting and rituals to institute values and norms, parents and schools may enhance the cohesion amongst the participating children.

Birthday celebrations may also be used to enhance already established norms and values, without any teaching process. For example, synchronic movements which increase the feeling of oneness, may in turn contribute to strengthening group values and prosocial behavior amongst those involved (Fischer et al., 2013). By implying this knowledge, birthday

synchronic rituals (like dancing or some birthday games) should enhance participants shared values and increase their prosocial behavior just as well, and thereby strengthen the birthday participants cohesion. Cohesion between participants may also be established by meeting normative expectations existing around the execution of the birthday celebration. For instance, low-income mothers described, going far and beyond to try and uphold the community's birthday expectations, making sure their child would feel happy and "normal" (Lee et al., 2009).

Through the knowledge established on rituals, as well as children's birthday parties, we can imagine that birthday celebrations have a positive impact on children's social relations. By demonstrating inclusion, signaling commitment, and communicating values and norms, we interpret that birthday parties strengthen the cohesion amongst its participants. However, this might not be the whole truth, and so it is important to switch the coin examining the possible downsides with the party, as well.

Birthday Celebrations and Ostracism

Even though humans have a great need for belonging and a tendency to be cohesive, ostracism – being ignored or excluded by others (Williams, 2007) – is a common, everyday phenomenon present in most cultures (Nezlek et al., 2012; Williams & Nida, 2017). Research on children show that the understanding of ostracism and the practice of exclusion emerge at a quite early age (Song et al., 2015) and are according to evolutionary theories, motivated by the thought that humans through exclusion protect their in-group from individuals who may pose a threat towards the group and its unity (Hales et al., 2017a). As ritualistic events (like birthday rituals) create ritual constituencies amongst its participants (Baumann, 1992), who through indication of inclusion and demonstration of commitment may become cohesive and united, the children not present at the ritual hold a larger risk of out-group status (Wen et al., 2020). This might implicate negative consequences. For instance, research done by Wen et al.

(2016), showed that out-group children become less preferred and receives fewer privileges after a ritual event, compared to regular group activity. It is therefore important to ask whether birthday celebrations may impact on division and exclusion within a constituted group.

Indicating Exclusion

Ritualistic arenas like birthday celebrations are potential platforms to display social relationships. Just by distributing invitations, the host communicate a message about inclusion to the recipients while non-invitations are expressive way to manifest exclusion. For many, non-invitation to a birthday party is experienced as rather hurtful (Scott, 2008). Further, some children use non-invitation as a threatening tool when playing (Crick et al., 2004; Otnes et al., 1995), suggesting that exclusion from a birthday setting is perceived as a social threat. According to Williams' (2009) temporal need-threat model, the perception of pain surfaces already at an early stage of exclusion and is set as an alarm clock, as exclusion throughout history have implied danger for the individual survival. For example, by using fMRI-pictures, Eisenberger et al. (2003) showed that the same brain area which are activated when experiencing physical pain, is activated when excluded. Similar results have been provided in research with 12–13-year old's exposed to exclusion, showing increased activation in the brain area anterior insula, which is an area activated during direct or observed pain (Decety et al., 2008; Masten et al., 2010). Interestingly, the research done on the experience of pain in excluding situations show that pain may surface not only when humans are excluded by the in-group, but when excluded by out-group members too (Gonsalkorale & Williams, 2007) and when the exclusion is to one's advantage (van Beest & Williams, 2006). In the birthday party setting, this suggest it be possible for children to experience social pain although excluded form a party hosted by e.g., someone outside the friend group or by someone disliked.

In addition to feeling pain, researchers discuss potential impairment of fundamental needs – like self-esteem, belonging, control and meaningful existence – as consequences of exclusion. Research for instance show that 8–9-year-olds experience a significant reduction in self-esteem after exclusion, indicating that non-invitations may have a decreasing effect on children's self-esteem (Abrams et al., 2011). According to Williams (2009), most people will, as a response to these unpleasant consequences, repair the situation by implementing either pro-social or anti-social behaviors. For instance, school-age children were shown to increase their lexical alignment after experiencing exclusion in an online ball tossing game called *Cyberball* (Hopkins & Branigan, 2020). Contrary, Nesdale and Lambert (2007) found that children acted more anti-social when believed to be rejected by their teammates for a drawing competition, compared to peers who believed themselves be accepted by their teammates. Another possible response to exclusion, less expressed in the literature, is withdrawal and solitude seeking (Ren et al., 2016).

In his model, Williams (2009) suggests that loss of belonging produce more pro-social actions, while a sense of lost control produces aggression. As non-invitations may be an expressive tool to clarify exclusion, it is imaginable that the feeling of belonging is reduced when not invited, which in turn elicit more pro-social behaviors, as the excluded will attempt to re-unite with the group. However, research done on religious ritual settings shown that out-group members may experience both physical and social barriers towards ritual settings and ritual groups (Draper, 2021), making it more difficult entering these types of coherences. Even though birthday celebrations are secular ritualistic events, it is imaginable it is set up the same.

Again, Wölfer and Scheithauer (2013) found when comparing different responses to ostracism that around 45% of the children partaking in the study had either an anti-social or withdrawing reaction to lost belonging and ostracism, indicating that exclusion form a

birthday celebration might lead to both aggressive behaviors and solitude seeking amongst children. According to their study, children with low perspective-taking and low anger control were most likely to act out aggressively because of exclusion. This is of importance, since exclusion is often seen used as a tool to contain certain unwanted, deviant behaviors (Hales et al., 2017), like aggression or provocation (Barner-Barry, 1986; Underwood et al., 2004) and are noticed in the context of birthday celebrations, as children with higher temperament are at larger risk for exclusion from birthday parties (Scott, 2008). Further, both aggression and withdrawing behaviors may lead to further ostracism in themselves, which may create a vicious circle of ostracism within the birthday celebration setting (Gazelle & Rudolph, 2004; Rubin et al., 2006). This may jeopardize the non-invited children's physical, but mostly mental health as prolonged ostracism may lead to a sense of worthlessness, helplessness, and feelings of depression (Barkley et al., 2012; Hawes et al., 2012; Salvy et al., 2011; Williams, 2009).

To reduce the risk of negative consequences in association with birthday celebrations, some people try to keep the celebration a secret from the excluded child, in hope of lightening the feelings of rejection. Others implement policies, like quantity balances between invited and non-invited children, with hope of erasing ostracism (Scott, 2008). These approaches may work to some degree but come with their own difficulties. For instance, by following the policy of creating a quantity balance, some children might never get invited. As an example, children with strabismus are found to have lower chances of getting invited to a birthday celebration, compared to their orthotropic peers (Mojon-Azzi et al., 2011). Other researchers have seen children with disabilities (Woodgate et al., 2020) at larger risk for exclusion from celebrations, making these children more vulnerable and prone to experiencing ostracism.

Communicating Non-Commitment

To avoid exclusion completely in birthday party settings, some hosts choose to follow a fully inclusive principle. In Israel for example, birthdays may be celebrated in the kindergarten where all children are present (Weil, 1986), which should reduce the risk for exclusion within the kindergarten group. In Norway, schools and kindergartens tend to implement fully inclusive policies in hope of reducing exclusion around birthday celebrations. However, by following a fully including principle, deviation and ostracism may be present through non-participation instead. For instance, when the celebrant distributes invitations it comes with an expectation of a response from the recipient (Scott, 2008). If the invited child does not attend the birthday party, he or she communicates a lack of commitment towards the group, which may impact the child's status towards the in-group (Watson-Jones & Legare, 2016). For children, whose family custom is to not participate in birthday celebrations or for children who are not able to go due to other more permanent causes (like economy or health) (Scott, 2008), this principle may lead to out-group status and ostracism as they are not taking part and committing to the birthday rite.

In another way, the fully inclusive policy may enhance the risk for exclusion of the birthday child. In popular media as well as in research, stories are told about birthday celebrations with zero attendance (Pemberton, 2021; Scott, 2008). In Scott's study, children described an incident where a classmate had invited all boys to his birthday party, with no one showing up for the celebration. The children discussed the possible explanation that the birthday boy was less "important" amongst the classmates, and the fact that all other boys were rather indifferent towards his party, not realizing no one else was going. This incident did however proclaim the birthday boy's status towards the rest of the class, making him excluded.

Since birthday celebrations are reported as potential socialization platform where children may learn different social behaviors through the rituals executed (Otnes et al., 1995;

Weil, 1986), even participation in birthday rites may bring risk for ostracism. Söderberg and Fry (2016) discuss the likelihood of deviant individuals being present within a socialized group. These individuals risk exclusion as the group attempts to modify the individual's behavior. If a child partakes in a birthday activity but act against the group's norms or values (e.g., refuses to eat the birthday cake), these deviant behaviors may provoke excluding behaviors amongst the other children enhancing the deviant child's risk for ostracism.

In conclusion we see that birthday celebrations may have an impact on the division within a constituted child group (like a school class), as non-invitation and non-commitment communicate the child's status towards the birthday in-group. Since the participating group members may become more cohesive, the children left out of the birthday party or the child less accustomed with the birthday rites, may encounter a larger risk for ostracism. It is therefore of importance to investigate this relationship further, empirically.

The Aim of the Study

Birthday celebrations may be seen as social ritualistic events, that might enhance both cohesion as well as ostracism within an already constituted group (like a school class). This indicates that children's birthday celebrations might impact both positively and negatively on peer relationships amongst children. As the research on the subject is rather limited, we find it important to establish a better understanding of this theme, since knowing and identifying arising problems like ostracism is of importance in the process of further prevention (Zambo & Davidson, 2013). The main purpose of this study is to investigate how birthday celebrations impact children's social relations amongst peers. Through open ended interviews with children at age 7-9, the study aims to present children's own experiences on the subject.

Method

Study Design

To gain a better understanding of birthday celebrations impact on children's social relations, a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach were applied. Since our main goal for the study was to explore children's own experiences around the subject, the phenomenological approach was seen as suitable, as it helps with the understanding of: "… several individual's common or shared experiences of a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). Through this approach we acknowledging children as experts on their own experiences and the execution of semi-structured interviews allowed the children to be heard on the subject, as well as enrich our understanding of the birthday celebration impact   (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; O'Reilly & Dogra, 2016).

The semi-structured, open-ended interview questions were collected in a pre-established interview guide developed by the researcher. The interviews were design to keep a focus on the relevant topic, which enabling comparing of similarities in experiences, as well as allow new themes and observations to be brought to light by the participating children (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Recruitment and Sample

After executing test interviews before recruitment, a decision to recruit children at the age of 7 – 9 was made, as these were perceived as the most appropriate target age based on development stage and social setting. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic the study utilized multiple sampling strategies. The main body of participants were recruited through teachers at schools and SFOs (*Skolefritidsordningen*/ after school) in Tromsø, Norway. In addition to these recruitments', information about the study and a request for participation was posted on UiT, The Arctic University of Norway's BabyLab homepage and Facebook page as well as were implemented through snowballing. The BabyLab homepage and Facebook page provided no recruits.

Recruitment Through Schools and SFOs

Schools and SFOs were contacted through phone calls and e-mails. Through these e-mails and phone calls the project was explained, and the offer for participation in the study was given. 10 schools or SFOs answered either the e-mail or phone call and 6 accepted participation.

All schools and SFOs who approved participation were given consent forms (see Appendix A), which were distributed by the teachers amongst all parents of children at the age of 7 – 9, currently enrolled at the school or SFO. The consent forms were either distributed physically as paper forms or electronically. The same consent form was provided in either physical format or electronic format, and the parents received the same information about the study either way.

Out of the accepting schools and SFOs, three provided recruits. Children whose parents had given their informed consent were asked if willing to participate in the interviews during the day of the interview.

Recruitment Through Snowballing

10 children were recruited trough a snowball sampling method. Acquainted to the researcher were asked if willing to spread the information about participation to known families with children at the suitable age of 7 – 9. Willing families were later contacted by the researcher, who presented more detailed information about the project, as well as coordinated a suitable time and place for the interview if the parent and child accepted participation.

Study Sample

The study sample consisted of 38 participating children. Out of these three participants were excluded from the analysis due to the child's wish to terminate the interview. The final participation number were 35 (N = 35). Out of these 19 were girls and 16 boys, mean age of the interviewees were 7,85 (SD = 1,1). Three interviews were incomplete due to the child's need for finishing early as they got pick up by a parent at the SFO. The main body of the

sample lived in Tromsø, Norway. Three participating children lived outside of Tromsø, in other Norwegian areas.

Data Collection

All data in this study was collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were held at the participating school or SFOs premises, online or through private arrangements convenient to the participant. 12 children completed their interviews in groups of two or three, as the children found it most comfortable. The interviews lasted between 15- and 30 minutes. The interviews were collected in the time frame February 2022 until May 2022. All interviews were carried out by the researcher.

Interview Guide

The interview guide (see Appendix C) used in the study were developed by the researcher through existing literature as well as contributions from supervisor and consultative research group members. The questions asked were revised after test interviews conducted prior to recruitment and alongside new emerging findings. The interview guide revolved around themes such as relationship towards birthday celebrations, experiences of invitation and non-invitation as well as socialization around the celebration. The questions were developed to suite the children's own understanding level. The children were encouraged to express their own thoughts and feelings around the subject by assured them no right or wrong answers existed to the questions.

School and SFO Interviews

Throughout the interview day at schools and SFOs, children with parents' permission were asked if willing to participate in the interview, either during school hours or sometime during their hours at the SFO. Children without permission or children who did not want to participate carried out their day as usual.

Before the start of the interview, information was given to the child about the theme of the project and the execution of the interview. The researcher explained the child's rights to not answer a question if not willing, as well as their right to withdraw at any moment during the interview without consequence. It was ensured that the participating child understood the meaning of participation, and that the child still wanted to proceed the interview. The interview lasted between 15 till 30 minutes. The interviews were recorded as audio files and notes about the interview situation were carried out alongside by the interviewer, both with the permission from the child. All participating children gave their own informed assent verbally before the start of the interview. All participating children received a signed diploma as a thank you for their participation after the interview been carried out.

Online Interviews

Due to the ongoing pandemic the alternative to participate online was given to any participant. Parents to children participating online received a consent form (see Appendix B), information about the project and a link to the online meeting platformer before the interview occasion and were asked to fill in and return the consent form in advance and to log in at the link during the set time for the interview.

At the beginning of the interview occasion parents were given information about the study and given the opportunity to ask for clarifications of the consent form if felt needed. The children were asked about previous understanding of the set occasion. The children were then informed about the interview and the interview execution, as well as informed about their rights during the interview. It was ensured that the participating child understood the meaning of participation, and all participating children gave their own informed assent verbally before the start of the interview.

All online participating children were accompanied during the whole interview by a parent, who stayed present in the room for supervision and digital support. Parents were not

encouraged to participate in the interview, however some delivered clarifications either during or after the interview when experienced needed. The interviews were with the permission of the child recorded by an audio recorder placed beside the computer speakers, as well as through personal notes caried out by the interviewer. The participating children were sent a signed diploma as a thank you after the interview.

Private Arranged Interviews

A small body of interviews were carried out at private arranged locations suitable for the participant. The participating child met up together with a parent at the agreed location at the set time for the interview. The parents were then asked to read through the consent form and sign if agreed upon. The parents were encouraged to ask questions if needed.

The interviews were then carried out with the parent in the room next door. The children were asked about previous knowledge around the interview occasion and then given information about the interview theme, execution, and their rights during the interview. The children gave their informed assent verbally before the start of the interview as well as permission to use an audio recording and the researcher rights to take notes of the conversation. The children received a signed diploma for their helpful participation in the study.

Data Analysis

All data was recorded as audio files during the interviews and transcribed and anonymized to a separate document as interviews were conducted. Separate notes carried out during the interview was anonymized and transferred to the software used for analyzing NVivo alongside the interviewing. The data was analyzed through systematic text condensation, examining meanings, creating categories and later identifying themes surfaced in the interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The data was analyzed through five different steps.

The analysis started with a listen through and verbatim transcription of the recorded

data. This transcribed and anonymized data were then read through once to create a holistic

view of the information surfaced during the interviews. Thoughts and ideas surfaced during

the readthrough were recorded by the researcher in the analyzing software NVivo. The

interviews were then read through more thoroughly and divided into different meaning units.

These units were thematically described with a short, summarizing text and suitable thematic

words as well as coded in NVivo. All codes got revised, where some codes got eliminated due

to irrelevance and some got combined into bigger thematic units. After revising the codes and

themes, all condensations were compiled into meaningful concepts and useful representations

for the report. Useful citations were selected, rendered and translated from Norwegian to

English to highlight the points uttered in the rapport (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Results

We wanted to investigate how birthday celebrations impact peer relations amongst

children, as knowledge on the subject is rather limited. Three main themes were detected

during the analyzes of the transcribed data. The children discussed positive social effects from

birthday celebrations, negative social effects from celebrations, and social outcomes from

celebrating birthdays with peers. In total, 9 different sub-themes were identified in this study.

Themes and their respective sub-themes are presented in table 1. In the following we will

break down these separate themes. Quotations from the children have been translated from

Norwegian to English and are provided to assist the reporting of the findings.

Table 1

Overview of themes and respective sub-themes

Theme	Findings
Positive Social Impact	- Celebrations Demonstrate Commitment - Invitations Signal Amity

	• Celebrations Bring Opportunity to Interact
Negative Social Impact	• Celebrations Signal Dislike
	• Celebrations Omit Children
	• Celebrations Divide into Different Social Groups
	• Celebrations Create Social Pressure and Friction
Social Outcomes	• Group Preferences After Celebration
	• Social Constellations Post Celebration

Birthday Celebration Positive Effect

When the participating children discussed their experience with birthday celebrations, they described how the celebration produce positive effects on their peer relations. They described how the birthday provide them with opportunities to show commitment, how the invitation signal amity, express their will to meet expectations and make others happy, as well as the celebrations tendency to provide opportunities to interact socially.

Demonstrate Commitment

The participating children expressed a commitment towards other children's feelings during the celebration by following valued norms and by adopting a rather complaisant behavior towards other birthday participants, determined to make them happy. Participants also reported committing to the celebration and birthday group by highlight the occasion with symbolic use and clothing making sacrifices both prior to and during the party. However, this was not presented as equally important.

Following Birthday Norms. The participants indicated different social ideas and norms that are followed by them and their fellow celebrants during birthday celebrations. The children described inclusion at the birthday party, prioritizing of the celebration, as well as thankfulness towards sacrifices and gestures as valued normative behaviors. The participants

demonstrated commitment towards these norms and values, and these values lay in the background influencing other themes discovered during the analysis. By committing to these normative behavior's children show awareness of other children's feelings and willingness to avoid hurting others during the celebration.

Inclusion. Inclusive thinking was presented by children in scenarios both before, during and after the celebration. This type of thinking was by most children presented as a given and they described the celebration as a happening organized for everyone to join. Most participants stated their school class or gender group as their birthday celebration in-group, referring to inclusion within one of these groups. However, some children informed that they include children from other social groups, like leisure activities or neighbors, as well. By including everyone children try to avoid excluding others or make others sad. One child said when asked about her birthday party, "[I invite] The whole class. Because everyone deserves to be part of the birthday party." (Girl 3). Another child said, "… [I'll invite] maybe all the girls in our year. (…) it gets a bit mean if you just invite some in a class and then others don't get to attend." (Girl 19)

The inclusive thinking is demonstrated as well during the birthday celebration. Children saw the birthday activities as something for everyone to join, and they explained different ways in which they ensure inclusion at the celebration. One child told, "From time to time, some tend to think it's far too loud. Then they're allowed to sit somewhere else, where they can listen to the others without it being so loud." (Girl 18).

Priority. When invited to a celebration, children are expected to prioritize the birthday event. Being absent from a celebration is explained to require a good reason. Most children said they would priorities birthday celebrations over hobbies and other activities, experiencing presence at the birthday event as more important. One child explained, "Because you have to show respect, that you want to come. …" (Girl 7).

Thankfulness. The participants expected others to be thankful for different undertakings at the party, like gifts and food, and knew that it was expected of them as well. Even if they receive a gift they do not like, they still try to show appreciation towards the gesture. One of the children said, "And I think a little like, I got it from my friend, and I should probably say that it was a nice gift even if it might not have been exactly what I wanted." (Girl 16). One of the participants said when talking about giving birthday presents, "And if they don't like the gift, they don't really say it." (Boy 15).

External influence. These norms existing around the birthday celebration seem to some extent be established by external influencers. For instance, participants described how both parents and schools foster them to be inclusive when inviting children to their birthday celebrations, encouraging them to commit to the peer group values. One girl shared:

> "My little brother, he wanted to invite only the boys, since there was only one girl. But mum and dad said he couldn't have a birthday if he didn't invite her. So, we have to, I have to invite everyone in my class. But I don't feel like just having a girl's birthday or just a boy's birthday." (Girl 8).

Being Complaisant. For most participating children the highlight of birthday celebrations were gifts, food, and games. The participants demonstrated an understanding for other child's experiences of these birthday elements and communicated a commitment towards the other children, wanting to make them happy. One of the girls exemplified this when talking about her decision on a birthday card for her friend. She said:

> "Because of the last birthday I was at, I got a bit tired of just doing the usual and just making my own [card]. And anyway, I saw at the store, because we were at the store, and then I saw a very nice card. So, she loves cats, and then I saw a very cute card with a cat on it, so I thought I just have to take it." (Girl 9)

To make others content and satisfied with the birthday celebration, participants described putting a lot of thought and care into appreciated birthday elements. The children displayed a willingness to go the distance, doing the little extra to make sure their friends were pleased with the party. One of the participants reported taking friends into account when preparing the birthday food:

Boy 9: "But if they don't like any of it, I have sometimes bought something beforehand for the birthday. Like a friend of mine doesn't like chocolate cake. And she's in my class."

Interviewer: "So, you are trying to have something else prepared for her?"

Boy 9: "Yes."

Another child revealed making a personal sacrifice for the sake of the birthday child when she talked about a birthday present made for her friend:

"Yes, but once when I gave a gift to a friend, on that birthday, I made a really nice drawing that I thought was really great. I didn't want to give it. … I thought it was just so nice. … It went well, but I thought it was a bit unfortunate. … She was like WOW!! … because it was a lynx. And she loves lynxes." (Girl 11).

Making everyone happy and content at a birthday celebration is rather difficult and demanding. To avoid issues with other children and their contentment with the celebration, participants describe applying different measures to ensure satisfaction amongst their fellow celebrants. Participants describe asking peers about their preferences towards gifts and food, other children reveal the common use of different safe cards, resorting to simple solutions that resonate with almost everyone. Two children discussed:

Girl 7: "… chocolate cake is very good to have, almost everyone likes that."

Girl 6: "And it's also very good to have pizza, because quite many like that too."

Two other children said:

Girl 7: "I sometimes give money."

Girl 8: "Yes, almost everyone gives money."

Girl 7: "But it's also a bit smart because then you can buy something that you really like instead of getting something you don't really want."

Highlight the Birthday Occasion. The interview children expressed highlighting the birthday, using symbols like decorations, food and clothing making the surrounding resonate with the occasion. Highlighting the birthday require effort from the children, and the participants described both preparations prior to and different undertakings during the celebration both as guests and party hosts. One girl said when talking about preparing for her birthday:

"Yes, on my birthday we use to hang up, where it says happy birthday, and lots of balloons and stuff like that. Pink flowers on the table. (…) Because we like to decorate. We like to decorate and think it's nice when someone else has a birthday and decorate a little. And say now you have become that year, right." (Girl 14).

The use of birthday symbols and the efforts made for the celebration was to some extant expected by the children. For some children the undertakings prior and during the birthday was more demanding and the highlighting turned into a sacrifice. One of the girls said when asked about her birthday preparations, "I just put on some nice clothes. ... I don't really like wearing them." (Girl 2).

Again, participants expressed how some traditions of symbolic use seem to vanish over time as new form of celebrations take place. For instance, the use of nicer clothing become less frequent when children's birthday celebrations contain activities not suitable for the use of fine clothing, like at playlands where nice clothes are inconvenient. One of the girls said:

"Or if you're in an indoor area where you're going to slide or something like that, then I think it's better with just a t-shirt and pants. Because if you have a dress, it might get torn or something." (Girl 9).

At the same pace, the expectations set on the highlighting seem to have been diminished in meaning and some participants expressed a rather indifferent attitude towards the symbolic use at birthday celebrations. One girl said, "Sometimes they haven't really dressed up themselves, but I still think they look nice. Even if they haven't dressed up that much." (Girl 19). Another girl said when asked if decorations were important, "No, not really. I just think that, like it's kind of nice when you get big days like that." (Girl 16).

Signal Amity

Participating children described recognizing amity through distributed birthday invitations. By receiving an invitation, children both identify their present relationship status towards the birthday child, as well as the possibility to develop a future one. Even so, the participating children expressed that current inclusive mindset executed around celebrations may diminish the meaning of the invitation.

Manifest Existing Positive Relation. Receiving a birthday invitation is substantial for most children and the study participants indicated experiencing positive feelings when receiving an invitation, getting happy and excited, really looking forward to the celebration. These positive emotions origin as the invitation obtains meaning. Some participating children recognize the birthday invitation as an affirmation of friendship and an appreciation for their presence in the group. One participant expressed it this way when asked about receiving birthday invitations, "[It is] Nice! Yes. Because then they show that they are your friend." (Girl 15). Another child said when asked about receiving birthday invitations, " I think it's nice that people think of me and invite me to a very nice thing." (Girl 19). Alike, the participants described recognizing appreciation for their presence when receiving an

invitation from a less acquainted peer. One participant said when considering this type of invitation, "First of all, they would be happy to see me [at the party]. And get to know me. And then we could become friends." (Girl 3)

Signal Social Opportunity. Being invited implies being present at a fun event and partake in activities the child less frequently encounters. In addition, birthday celebrations enable children to experience these fun events and activities together with other children. As the quote above state, receiving an invitation demonstrates a social opportunity for the future. The participants interpret the birthday invitation as an indication of a possible future relationship. A participant expressed when asked about the appreciation for receiving birthday invitations:

> "Yes, it's nice to be invited. … Because then you can play a lot. For example, if someone who doesn't have any friends, and you get invited to a birthday party, and someone wants to ask if you want to play, then one could become happy." (Boy 17)

> One child explained, "She invites me to a birthday party. ...I don't usually play with her that much. Then I'll be invited. Then we play more with each other afterwards." (Girl 15).

This demonstrate how birthday invitation have an important role in the declaration of friendship between peers, whether it is a present friendship or a future relationship. However, the participants value inclusion in the birthday celebration. Therefore, some children feel that the current inclusive mindset diminishes the meaning of the invitation. One of the children expressed when asked about birthday invitations from less acquainted peers:

> "…it's kind of, okay. But it's not quite like when my best friends invite me. We maybe, the best friends are somehow more like that, they invite *me*. While the others may only invite me because they have to invite me." (Boy 2).

Bring Opportunities to Interact

Participants described how birthday celebrations positively impact their peer relations by providing social opportunities through organized birthday rituals and games, as well as presenting random opportunities to interact with acquainted and less acquainted children.

Organized Opportunities. The participating children described different birthday rituals and games being executed during birthday celebrations. These activities provide a platform where all participating children gather to interact with each other. "We tend to sing the birthday song when the cake arrives. …['Do everyone sing?']… Yes." (Girl 16). "Oh yes! Everyone has played together at one time or another. We play the gift game and lots of stuff like that." (Boy 16).

These organized activities executed during the birthday party bring opportunities for children and impact positively on their social relations. Participants reported feeling closer to their peers after participating in birthday celebrations, as they provide socialization in a different environment then their everyday life. One child said:

"And I've noticed that every birthday you get a little bit better acquainted. Because then it's not just schoolwork or yeah, there's also, then we can kind of play and more of us get a little bit more acquainted." (Girl 6).

"It was fun ... that I made a new friend at the birthday party. Dad invited someone I don't usually play with that much. We became friends and then we played for example, and it was so much fun. (…) We played birthday games as you called it." (Girl 15).

Birthdays are also a good platform for children to go beyond their comfort zone and practice new kinds of social interactions. Through these organized birthday activities children get to explore new social situations and feelings while presented in a rather safe space. One participant told:

"Once we played Truth or Dare with kissing and then we all took dare and everyone had to kiss. … I had to kiss someone I was in love with!" (Girl 8).

Coincidental Opportunities. Interview participants discuss how birthday celebrations improve their peer relationship by providing moments of interactions presented more spontaneously. These incidents give children the opportunity to become more acquainted with peers whom they otherwise would not spend time with. One child talked about her interactions in a group of four:

"I remember that time, it was at someone's birthday, I was at one of those playlands (…) And then two of us wanted to go on one of those big slides, but there was a very long queue there. So, then we went and jumped in a bouncy house me and the other girl. And then we got to know each other a little better." (Girl 16).

One of the other children said, "Yesterday I was at a birthday and then I was driven by someone who I don't usually spend much time with. It was actually quite fun. Because I don't use to be with them that much." (Boy 1).

Participants described the birthday celebration as a platform providing opportunities for encountering strangers. They expressed utilizing coincidental opportunities at birthday celebrations to approach strangers and become better acquainted with children they yet have not met.

"Yes, one time my friend and I were not friends at a birthday party. Then I hadn't met her before that. So … then I saw, oh she's also alone and I've actually never seen her before. And then I walked over to her and said, 'Shall we play together?'." (Girl 17)

Birthday Celebrations Negative Effect

Participating children discussed their experience with birthday celebrations and described how birthday celebrations generate negative outcomes on their relationship with peers. They described how birthdays may be used to signal dislike, how it may omit children both prior to, during as well as after the celebration and how the celebration may create social pressure and create friction between the children.

Birthday Celebrations Signal Dislike

The participating children described recognizing dislike when left out of a birthday celebration. Alike, the children take a no show in birthday celebration and birthday activities as a sign of dislike or irritation. Children fear that non-participation will impact peer relationships negatively.

The Signal from Non-Invitation. In relation to the positive effects birthday invitations have on children's peer relations, participants expressed feeling sad and disappointed when meeting the opposite by not being invited. The negative feelings surfaced as children recon there to be a reason behind the non-invite. Participants explained interpreting the non-invitation as a social signal of dislike, seeing it as a message of irritation or anger. One of the children said, "You can also feel that the person does not like the person who is not invited. That you feel that there is something wrong with you." (Girl 7). In addition, the participating children contemplated reasons for not inviting someone to their birthday celebration, admitting irritation and dislike as a prominent cause. One child said, "The reason [for not inviting]. It would probably be if I didn't like them or was mad at them ..." (Girl 2).

As most children seem to persist an inclusive mindset around the birthday celebration, participants recon a non-invitation enhances the message of dislike. One child reflected, "… they probably think that I don't like them that much and, even if you don't like them, you tend to invite them and then they probably think that I really, really, really don't like them." (Boy 2).

As exclusion from birthday celebrations generate hurt and sadness amongst children, they express making responsive actions towards the birthday host. Some children admit wanting to act with aggression, trying to inflict hurtful feelings on the excluding child. One child said, "Yes, if it was allowed, I would knock all teeth out ... But I would never do it though." (Boy 13). Another child said when contemplating being left out of a celebration, "I'd

get sad. And wouldn't invite him or her to my birthday. (…) Because they should know what it's like." (Girl 4).

On the other hand, around half of the children formulated a pro-social response when considering being left out from a birthday celebration. Participants perceived this as the right thing to do, while hoping for inclusion later. One child reflected on this during the interview, when considering being excluded from a birthday party:

"No [I would not invite] ... regardless of whether it was one of my friends who hadn't invited me. Because you should do that [invite them] ..., or maybe I should [invite them]. But I had only invited them because then they might have allowed me the second time." (Girl 13).

Another child stated, "If it's their birthday and they still haven't invited you, you can give them a present anyway." (Girl 18).

The Signal from Non-Participation. The interview children explain that participation in a birthday celebration is understood as a priority. If a child misses a birthday celebration without reason, children interpret the reason to be dislike. One of the participants said when discussing someone missing a birthday celebration without a motivation, "Then I think they are a bit rude. … Because that, maybe it was that they didn't want to be with someone they didn't like, maybe." (Girl 19).

However, with the expectation that peers will priorities the birthday celebration, participants expressed a belief that absence from a birthday celebration without reason most likely is a misunderstanding. The participants talked about going to the non-participant after the celebration, giving them a chance to explain the situation. One participant said:

"… I would have felt that they didn't like me. But I had asked the next day at school if there was something they had to do or something like that. Or if they didn't get there or

something. Yes, maybe there was something they couldn't do or that they had a visit that was unexpected, which they just had to attend to..." (Girl 15).

The interview children expressed being concerned that non-participation will cause friction between them and the birthday child, understanding the absence could be interpreted the wrong way. The participants explained being scared that the birthday child would be angry with them or wanting to write them off. One of the children shared, "… I think how it's going to trouble me, to meet the guy who had his birthday. (…) No since because he gets annoyed. And just like, 'Why didn't you come to my birthday?'." (Boy 9). One of the girls said when considering options for participating at a birthday party, "If I don't go, they might not want to be friends with me anymore." (Girl 15). As the children expect others to priorities a birthday celebration, non-participants seem to have an urge to explain themselves, trying to clear the air between them and the birthday child. One of the children said, "Then I say, 'Sorry I couldn't come to the birthday.'. ... Yes, and I would have given them a present." (Boy 15).

Non-participation may also occur at the birthday party. Since children expect others to participate in the program organized for the sake of the celebration, the interview children indicated that non-participation in the birthday program may be used to make a statement on the disliking of others. One of the children shared:

"And the last birthday she just sat under the table. I didn't care about her. She just sat under the table when we were going to sing the song and then she was just mean to me and said ugly things even though I hadn't done anything to her." (Girl 14).

One of the boys said:

"There are several people who have become a bit irritated in the past and then they don't bother to join in on anything. (…) In a way, it's a bit stupid, because they probably

really wanted to join, but... they're kind of trying to get some attention. But I think

they're just a bit sad really." (Boy 2).

Birthday Celebrations Omits Children

Participants experience that birthday celebrations impact negatively on their peer

relations, as they can exclude children who are not present at the party. Participants describe

feeling separated from the birthday group when missing out on a celebration or when not

invited to the birthday party. Being absent might isolate the child from the birthday group and

the child will lack insight in the birthday conversation. On the other hand, participants

acknowledge that attendance do not guarantee inclusion as children may fail or struggle to

find company at the birthday party.

Non-Invitation Omits Children. The interview children express feeling sadness and

disappointment when being excluded from a birthday celebration, as they know they are

missing out on a fun, social event. Participants perceive non-invitation as excluding, since a

non-invited child cannot take part in the celebration experience. One participant explained, "I

don't know, because everyone else is talking about it. That they are going. ... [You feel

excluded?] ... Yes." (Girl 4).

Again, participants do not feel as bad when excluded from a birthday celebration

arranged for a child they dislike. In that case participants express relief, as they dodge a social

bullet. One of the children explained, "I would be fine with it. Just, bye bye, I don't like you!

… Well, because I don't want to go to party with my enemy." (Girl 3). Another child shared,

"... it would have been perfectly fine, because maybe it's just some of the guys ... there are

some of the guys I don't actually like. … Because someone has hit me so many times." (Girl

13).

Even though children may feel relief over missing a birthday, exclusion may be

experienced as members from their main social group are likely to attend and be preoccupied

with the birthday party. Participants reveal feeling lonely and bored sitting home while friends and classmates attend a birthday celebration. One of the children shared, "She invited all my friends and hers to her birthday except for me. So, I didn't have anyone to play with for two hours. So, I was very bored because I had no one to play with." (Girl 8). Another child said when contemplating being left out of a birthday celebration, "Then I would have been quite upset. Because maybe some of my friends had been invited. Then I had to stay at home and not be with anyone." (Boy 1).

Non-Participation Omits Children. If not able to participate in a birthday celebration, participants express concerns about returning to school afraid of being excluded. Since celebrations may have a positive impact on children's social relations by making peers better acquainted, non-participants fair they be isolated from the group. One of the children said:

"Oh! It would have been a bit stupid because if the whole school would have been invited, like only the whole class, and then I was the only one who couldn't come, and then only because of that they all played together and then I could have felt left out or something." (Girl 12).

In addition, participants explain feeling left out as they miss insight on the birthday and cannot take part in the conversation around the celebration. Two of the participants said when discussing returning to school after a missed birthday party:

Girl 8: "[It is] A bit stupid because others will always be talking about it."

Girl 6: "Yes, maybe I was a little bit sad, while they were talking about it. Then I might not have joined them."

To avoid being omitted from the birthday group, participants explain trying to re-establish their relationship with the group by asking about the birthday. In that way they can take part in the conversation even though they missed the celebration. One of the children

said, "I would've said... 'Tell me about it, because I want to know what happened'. And then it feels like I was there because, if I wasn't there I just ate good food at home. (Girl 3).

Participants express feeling bad for friends who are unable to attend a birthday celebration, knowing they will miss out on a fun, social event. The participants demonstrated empathy for these children. One of the boys shared:

"Once there was someone who started crying because, it was a guy who invited all the boys in the class up to his cabin. And then there was someone who couldn't join. …he really wanted to be with all the boys. I really felt sorry for him." (Boy 2).

Other children try to include their friend afterwards, in hope of making them feel less excluded. One of the children said: "Most of the time, after that day and when I meet them at school, I bring candy and give it to them. Because they didn't get to go to the birthday party." (Boy 13). Another child said: "But I must have saved a cake! I could do that, so they can come and visit the next day and get some too." (Girl 15).

Separate Play Omits Children. Children have a rather inclusive mindset regarding birthday celebrations. On the other hand, participants describe birthday arrangements and activities that separate the birthday group during the party. For instance, celebrations in public places, such as playlands, are popular and common amongst the children. There the main activity is to run around different stations, jumping on trampolines and sliding down big slides. Separation seems to appear in some extent as well around organized play. Being invited might therefore not automatically include you with the birthday group. One of the children shared, "[We celebrate]… mostly at this playland I think. … We go in bouncy houses or in some kind of slide. (…) Actually, I mostly play with the birthday child and the ones I always tend to be with." (Boy 16). One of the other children explained, "Yes. So that if someone wants to play Tag, they go and play Tag. And if someone wants to play Hide and Seek, they go and play Hide and Seek. That's how it usually goes." (Girl 18).

Since playing separately is common at children's birthday celebrations, some participants express feeling nervous beforehand. Participants worry about how the interactions will turn out and if they will have someone to play with at the party. One of the participants said, "I use to prepare myself like, that maybe there will be many children here, but you will find someone to play with ..." (Girl 16).

Participants also acknowledge that loneliness is part of the birthday celebration, and multiple children admit having felt left out and alone at a birthday party. Since children play separately and participate in activities that attracts them, children might find themselves without company for their chosen entertainment or find themselves alone when their friends choose to play with someone else. One of the boys shared:

"I have felt alone. It was that birthday when I had to play football alone and felt left out. ... Because I like playing football and there is no one else in the class who likes it except two of the boys." (Boy 6).

Another child shared her experience with sharing her birthday celebration with other children. She said:

"Yes, I think there was a time when we all celebrated. Or like three other girls and me. … But in a way they [birthday participants] wanted to be with someone else, the ones [the others] who had a birthday. But those who had a birthday they didn't ignore me, but like some of the others did." (Girl 6).

Again, participants reveal that children get ignored or avoided at celebrations. If a child is not wanted at the birthday party or if they have ended up in an argument children turn to their closest friends, not interacting with the undesired child. One of the children said when discussing the subject:

"Then I would have just said, "Hey, can I have my gift." and then they had said "Yes.".

And then I would have just put it on the table and then I would have run off to play with

the ones I wanted to play with." (Girl 14).

Birthday Celebrations Divide Peers into Different Groups

Seeing that children value inclusion and seem to follow the inclusive principle,

participants describe problems with whom to invite. For many families' inclusion seem to be

limited due to lack in space or capacity to throw a birthday party for a large group of children.

Again, some participants mention wanting to include more children in their birthday

celebration. One participant said:

"… it has happened to me a few times that I wanted to invite many people but then my

mother said, 'No, we only have room for a few.'. Then I had to choose from many that I

wanted to invite to the birthday party. So, it was a bit difficult and then I also got a bit

sad." (Girl 12).

Since schools and parents to various degrees encourage it, most participants have their

school class or class gender group as their birthday-group, including all members of that

specific group in their birthday celebration. However, due to the mentioned limitations,

children may have to exclude friends and acquaintances who do not belong to their class or

class gender-group. Participants mention excluding old friends form their time at the

kindergarten and friends from leisure activities as they do not belong to the set birthday-

group. Others try to fix the problem by arranging multiple celebrations. One of the children

mentioned, "I usually invite the whole class, but I tend to have two birthdays. For example,

first I invite the whole class and then I have a birthday afterwards where I invite others who

live in the neighborhood." (Boy 11).

Most participating children stated that their respective class gender-group act as their

birthday-group. This is appreciated by most children as they have a sense of belonging with

their own gender group. However, some participants talk about having to exclude friends from celebrations due to their friend's gender belonging. One of the children said:

"It used to be, actually it used to be all the girls in our grade. But I have guy friends too. But it might be a bit much to invite all the boys and all the girls. (…) Because, for example, it might be a bit difficult to find out who you should invite and so on. And then it tends to be like that, if you invite your guy friends it might be a bit of a shame for the other boys if they also really wanted to come. (…) So, then it's wise to just leave all the boys so that for example, only the girls come or something like that." (Girl 16).

Since participating children adheres to birthday in-groups and illustrate inclusion within that group, they divide their social circle into sections, keeping their different acquaintances apart. Including someone from a different group can be perceived as strange. However, some children explained trying to mix their friend groups, including an out-group member in the birthday celebration. One of the children shared:

"I usually invite my class. But the birthday, when I turned eight, I also invited a girl who came, who is my neighbor. ... Yeah, it went well, but I was just a little afraid that she wouldn't think it was so much fun because she didn't have people, she doesn't know my class. So, I was a little afraid that she wouldn't have so much fun. But I think she said, I can't remember, but I think she said that she thought it was really fun." (Girl 11).

Birthdays Celebrations Create Social Pressure and Friction

Children are rather complaisant towards their fellow peers in the birthday celebration setting, showing commitment towards the other celebrants by trying to maintain their birthday expectations. As a result, some interview children indicate feelings of social pressure to perform and do right, both as the party host and as the guest. Children state concern over gifts, birthday activities and food, afraid of making mistakes. One of the children said when talking about going to a less acquainted friends birthday party, "[It's]… A bit difficult. Because in a

way you don't know what they have or what they want." (Girl 9). Another child explained his feelings of pressure, "It had been a little stressful. ... if I had been a bit late and forgot the gift and everything ... ." (Boy 17).

Children want to make other children happy at birthday celebrations and tries to meet the expectations. When failing to do so participants indicate feeling sad and disappointed. One child said when discussing a failed gift, "Then I think I should have taken another one." (Girl 4).

Again, children expect others to be grateful for efforts made for the sake of the celebration. If a child act against this and express complaints towards some part of the party, the interview participants express experiencing anger and resentment towards that peer, as he or she humiliated them and fail to appreciate the efforts made. One girl shared:

> "Some may hassle, some may not like the food there. (...) [It feels] Bad, I'm
>
> embarrassed. Because, like, everyone hears that nobody likes the food and then it's
>
> like... I don't know, it just gets embarrassing. (…) [I think] They're bad people." (Girl
>
> 2).

This in turn may impact the relationship between the children negatively, as some children choose to answer by acting out towards that peer. Participants admit feeling concerned over their friends later reactions, afraid their outburst will have negative consequences for them socially. One of the participants shared when talking about the birthday food:

> "Then I would have said, 'But then you could just not come to the birthday party. And
>
> that was pretty rude.' Because then you've paid a lot of money so that someone won't
>
> get good food. And they say it's not good. Then I would have gone to them and talked to
>
> them. (…) [Afterwards it'd be] A bit embarrassing perhaps. Because it could be that
>
> they are mad at me. And he has told many people. And some of them are laughing.

Because it happened and stuff. Then you can get a little embarrassed and red in the

face." (Boy 5).

Other participants explain trying to make up for their negative reaction, trying to make a

mends and apologies. One of the children said when discussing non-participation in birthday

activities, "Well, then I'd say, this is bad because we are going to play it anyways. Because

it's my birthday. (…) [After]… I would have said sorry. Sorry I didn't mean to scream at you.

Even though I didn't scream." (Girl 3).

Birthday Celebrations Social Outcome

Participating children discussed their experience with birthday celebrations and how it

impacts on their social relations after the party. The children revealed their group preferences

and discussed their will to include out-group members in their company. In addition, they

clarified who they tend to interact with after the celebration.

Group Preferences After Birthday Celebrations

The interview children experience participation in a birthday celebrations positive

impact on their social relations as it provides them with insight and social opportunities. On

the other hand, they see that the celebration may impact negatively on their relations if they

miss out on a party. Being part of the birthday in-group may therefore be of importance for

children's social relations. Some children express a preference for the birthday in-group after

the celebration, describe rather engaging with an in-group member before an out-group

member. One of the participants said, "The third graders use to come and want to join. Then

we ask if they can go, and they are kind enough to do so." (Girl 8).

However, most children seem to expand their inclusive thinking outside the birthday

celebration spectrum. Participants describe involving out-group members with the in-group,

either by changing the course of the in-group hang-out or by providing the out-group member

with insight to the in-group scoop. One child said when considering including an out-group

member, "Then I would have said yes. And then I had chatted with those who wanted to talk [about the birthday], and then we just stopped talking about it." (Girl 19). Another child said, "Then I would have just said, 'Yes, we can play'. And then I had said, 'You know, I was at a birthday party yesterday, I had a birthday yesterday'." (Girl 16).

Social Constellations Post Celebration

Even though participants illustrate that they receive new friendships at celebrations, get better acquainted with old friends, as well as perceive difficulties with their relationships in relation to birthday celebrations, most participants do not demonstrate any differences in relations after the execution of a birthday celebration. Instead, they reveal going back to their closest friends, playing with the ones they usually play with. One of the boys explained when discussing his interactions after his last birthday celebration:

"It was my best friend and a neighbor who goes to the same school. My neighbor was in 4th grade. (...) [We play] Maybe because we are very similar. We are very similar, do the same things and stuff and are someone we can trust. And we are very kind. (...) I prefer to play with my best friend and my neighbor." (Boy 2).

Another child said, "After that day at school? I play with my friends. I don't play with anyone but my friends." (Boy 13).

Discussion

For many children, celebrating birthdays with peers are a significant part of life. The purpose of this study was to investigate how birthday celebrations impact on children's peer relations, especially from the perspective of cohesion and ostracism. Our study presents several ways in which birthday celebrations may affect children's peer relations in a positive way. By communicating amity, providing social opportunities and express dedication towards others and the birthday groups mutual values and norms children describe birthday celebrations improving individual relations as well as their group relations. However, children

describe several ways in which birthday celebrations have a socially negative impact, as they engender risk for omitting or dividing children, proclaim dislike or create resentment between peers. These positive and negative influences indicate that the execution of birthday celebrations matters in the context of children's peer relations and may increase the chance of improvement of children's relationships as well as increase the risk of ostracism amongst children. However, our study demonstrated that birthday celebrations do not present a permanent impact on children's basic social interactions or social preferences and therefor point to a weaker social impact from birthday celebrations than expected for children in lower school age.

Birthday Celebrations a Positive Social Tool

It is documented through previous research that group cohesion may improve through demonstration of unity, inclusion, commitment towards other members and dedication towards similar values and norms. Rituals may be used in this regard as a tool to impact positively through these above stated elements (Fischer et al., 2013; Páez, 2015; Singh, 2020; Watson-Jones, 2016; Wen, 2016). The current study shows that relations between children improve through similar elements in the birthday celebration setting. Participants describe celebrations to signal positive status between them and other involved peers, they express dedication towards others at the celebration and appreciation for mutual values at the party. The positive impact of birthday rituals reported by the children was less than we expected. Instead, we see other, less ritualistic elements impact in the birthday celebration setting. This may not be too surprising as group cohesion have been seen to increase around group activities other than ritualistic ones, like practice of sport (Kao, 2019). However, as rituals are present in the birthday celebration setting (Scott, 2008) it is in our opinion quite noteworthy. Our findings indicate that other less ritualistic gatherings may provide similar results, and that the positive impact not specifically come from the birthday celebration and its specific

birthday rituals. It is therefore important to clarify the different elements in the birthday celebration setting which provides positive impact on children's social relations and how this is.

The Affirmation of Inclusion

Previous research discuss that expressed inclusion and unity may enhance cohesion (Dragolov et al., 2016). Our results show how birthday celebrations may be used as such an expressive tool. Especially the party invitation is by children experienced as a clarification of group belonging. Participants describe the invitation to both assert their tie towards other children by affirming existing friendship or clarify to them that their group membership is appreciated by others. Participants also find the invitation to signal appreciation as well as experienced promise for future relations when the host is a less acquainted peer. In line with (Scott, 2008) thoughts, we argue that our results point to the birthday invitation being an expression of a child's solidarity with the constituted group. This is important as it show the birthday invitations possible impact on enhancing an individual's experience of belonging with a group.

Even though most interview children describe recognizing belonging through received invitations, the inclusive behavior, that was seen as the norm, were by some participants experienced to diminish the meaning of the invitation. This points to the importance of genuineness behind children's inclusive actions and indicates that it is not only about being invited, but rather about the authentic will to include someone, that may enhance a child's feelings of belonging. Children who interpret their invitation as a social obligation may lack the experience of critical friendship developing components like amity or genuineness and may therefor experience the relationship status to be rather nominal (Hall, 2011; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995). This is important as inclusive policies are rather common around the birthday

celebration setting in Norwegian schools, with hope of enhancing children's experience of

belonging (Scott, 2008). Our results show however a risk of a decrease in this desired effect.

Expressed Commitment to the Group and its Members

The current study show that children demonstrate commitment towards both individuals

and the birthday in-group during celebrations. Prior to the celebration children make efforts

and sacrifices to meet group members expectations of the use of birthday symbols.

Participants describe decorating the celebration space and putting on clothes for the occasion.

With research suggesting that cohesion may be enhanced through commitment to groups'

ritual goals (Singh, 2020) one could assume the dedication towards, and use of birthday

symbols would indicate the same. However, some participants describe a decline in the

symbolic use during celebrations and their relation to birthday symbols are expressed as

rather indifferent. The interview children do not perceive the lack of symbolic use as a sign of

non-commitment towards the birthday in-group. Having a symbolic occasion did not seem to

be the main purpose for the birthday celebration and so demonstrating commitment to

birthday symbols may not serve to enhance the children's cohesion in the same extent as

expected.

Instead, our results show participating children commit to the birthday group and its

individuals by following group norms and acting complaisant towards other participants. The

norms expressed and the deeds made by the children are socially focused with the aim of

respecting other children's feelings and birthday celebration experiences. The participants do

not reflect upon the normative actions when upheld but they express them to be strongly

established and acted upon when not. Committing to the group norms and values

communicate sincerity towards and unity with the group and its line of thought, which may

enhance the cohesion amongst the children (Dragolov et al., 2016). The expressed norms at

the celebration may also reaffirm the values established in the group, which indicate birthday

celebrations may enhance valued behaviors and attitudes (like respect) amongst the participants. Again, the interview children pointed out parents and schools' encouragement and impact on the normative behaviors executed in the context of the birthday celebration. We argue this display communities and society's ability to implement valued social behavior amongst children, using birthday celebrations.

A Platform for Interactions

Participants described the birthday celebration as a platform for interaction. These interactions are both organized and spontaneous but differ from children's peer interaction in everyday life. Organized interactions at the birthday celebration are mostly birthday rituals (like singing the Happy Birthday song) or different birthday games. As everyone are set to participate in these activities children get to interact with peers they rarely socialize with at school. Our results that participants find these activities to enhance their cohesion with the other children are consistent with earlier research pointing out rituals to enhance affiliation to a larger extant than regular activities (Wen, 2016).

On the other hand, we see that more spontaneous interactions at the celebration have a similar positive impact on the participants experience of relational improvement towards peers. These interactions are mostly non-ritualistic, and so the ritual aspect may not be the prime reason for enhanced affiliation amongst children at birthday celebrations. Instead, we see that the new environment and difference in interaction style may be an enhancing factor. Previous research with youths shows that engagement in different unregular activities is perceived to enhance the groups cohesion (Eys et al., 2009). Similarly, we find birthday celebrations to work as such an unregular activity amongst children.

Again, birthday rituals and organized play during the celebration ensures interaction to a greater degree than spontaneous interactions, as spontaneous interactions are described to largely depend on chance. Our results also point to the importance of organized activities

since they can contribute with a safe space for exploring of new feelings and social situations.

By interacting in rituals and different birthday games, children learn new socialization skills

together with the rest of the group (Otnes, 1995). We therefore find the birthday celebration to

have a larger impact on children's social relations than other unregular social occasions since

it to some extent contains organized activities (like distributing presents or playing games)

where all children are set to interact together.

Birthday Celebrations a Social Risk

Being ignored or excluded by others is a rather common experience amongst humans

(Nezlek, 2012; Williams, 2017) and present in children's lives (Song, 2015). Birthday

celebrations as social gatherings are not a dispensation from negative social encounters and

participants describe both negative individual and group outcomes due to celebrating peer

birthdays. These negative influences are based both in children's desire to protect the in-group

(Hales et al., 2017), but also in a peers received out-group position. In addition, the

participants describe external influencers that increase the risk of negative social relationships

amongst children. Being aware of the social risks that comes with children celebrating

birthdays and how these risks appear is helpful knowledge and important if wanting to

optimize children's birthday celebration experiences.

Birthday Celebrations Impact Exclusion

The study demonstrates that birthday celebrations may impact on ostracism and

children's experience of exclusion. This becomes apparent as children reveal feeling hurt

when non-invited, which is presented as an alarm in connection with risked ostracism from a

group (Williams, 2009). We see birthday celebrations enhance the risk further as the half part

of the participating children express acting in anti-social actions as a response of a non-invite,

which we argue may lead to further ostracism both around birthday occasions – as

participants communicate a reluctance to include aggressive children in the celebration – and everyday settings (Buhs et al., 2006).

Likewise, participants describe feeling disliked because of a non-invitation or a peer's non-participation. This may impact the child's self-esteem negatively, as they receive a negative evaluation of the relationship to the other peer (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003). Again, previous research show that low self-esteem is negatively related to ostracism and loneliness (Sakız et al., 2021), indicating that non-invitations or a peer's non-participation at a child's birthday celebration may enhance the risk for the child being further ostracized.

Further, we find it important to ask ourselves why these feelings of dislike are generated around birthday occasion? We argue our results point to the inclusion policies and participation norms having a negative impact. Since following these norms are so expected by the children, going against them are interpreted by the children to have an underlying cause. When children do not find an external cause for the situation they turn inwards, interpreting themselves to be the problem. Like previous research we see children utilize this knowledge (Crick et al., 2004; Otnes, 1995). By using non-participation (and arguably non-invitation) children may signal their dislike of a person. Creating policies around birthday celebration may have a positive impact (Scott, 2008). At the same time, they may enhance the risk for exclusion and experienced ostracism.

Birthday Celebration Impact Around Victimization

Our results demonstrate how birthday celebrations may impact negatively in relation to victimization of children. This becomes apparent as participants communicate a relief when un-invited by an aggressor or disliked peer, which contrasts with previous research stating that exclusion to one's advantage still generate negative feelings (van Beest, 2006). Participants also describe how being invited may lead to ostracism at the celebration, as the celebration commonly implies separate play. Consequently, loneliness may be experienced at

parties and unwanted children are at larger risk of being excluded as participants admits ignore them at birthday occasions. Through these results we see that birthday celebrations may function as a platform for victimization of children already at risk of ostracism or bullying. We find it important to question whether inclusion in these cases produce more harm or benefits for the victimized child?

Birthday Celebrations Create Social Barriers

The study shows that exclusion from or unattendance at a birthday celebration may generate feelings of *FoMO* or a *Fear of Missing Out* amongst children, meaning children fear others to have an enriching experience together in their absence (Przybylski et al., 2013). Participants describe feeling excluded and bored as everyone else is preoccupied at the celebration, they fear the others will become more affiliated at the party and they expect they will lack insight to the peer conversation afterwards. Alike previous research on FoMO, children expect the birthday participants experiences to be superior to their own, that birthday participants will be more included and that their absences is a threat to their group status (Neumann, 2020). The fact that participants describe feeling empathy for children missing out on a birthday occasion points to the same results.

As previous research find FoMO related to a person's connectedness with friends and peers (Neumann, 2020), we see children who misses out on a birthday celebration may feel a loss of connection to the children participating in the birthday. For instance, participants reporting of missed insight to conversations due to non-participation point to a loss of connection towards the child's peers. This loss of connection might arguably become a social barrier, as the child might find it difficult to entering the birthday group, and consequently feel left out.

However, participants still describe trying to re-establish their position with the birthday group both after a non-invitation as well as a non-participation. Children act pro-socially

towards the host and asks for details about the celebration in hope of renewing the relationship and lower the social barriers towards their peers. Again, in-group children describe trying to include peers unable to attend the celebration by including them in the conversation or provide them with for instance cake or candy from the party. These results points to a rather low social barrier in the birthday celebration context and indicate that the exclusion from the group may primarily be a subjective experience of loneliness (Bekhet et al., 2008). We argue that the established norm and policy of inclusion might as well have an important impact in this regard.

Birthday Celebrations Impact on Social Friction

The study show how birthday celebrations may initiate friction between children. Participants describe the discord to engender as birthday norms (like participation or thankfulness) are broken. These results follow the thoughts of previous studies indicating that deviant members in socialized group will risk rejection (Christensen et al., 2004; Evaldsson, 2007; Söderberg, 2016).

Interestingly, our results show how children fear backlash if acting out when birthday norms have been broken. In these situations, we argue two possible explanations. First, acting aggressively is shown to enhance the child's risk for exclusion (Barner-Barry, 1986; Underwood, 2004), meaning children who act out when birthday norms are broken may be perceived as aggressive and therefore risk become excluded themselves. The other possible explanation is the expressed importance of shown respect during celebrations. We argue that the birthday norms implemented at celebrations to a large extent are behaviors that ensures and teaches children respect towards peers and the peers' feelings and birthday experiences. By acting out, children display incomprehension of the other child and their feelings. In agreement with this explanation participants display an understanding when norms are broken for a good reason.

Birthday Celebrations Impact on Group Division

The study demonstrates how the formation of birthday celebrations and the inclusive policies executed around the party may impact on division amongst children and their different social groups. Children discuss trying to follow the inclusive norm and policies appreciated around birthday celebrations, but capacity may limit the children's abilities to include all desired peers. Instead, they are encouraged to create different birthday in-groups, which for many consist of classmates while other acquaintances from other social settings are excluded from the party or celebrated with at another birthday occasion. By categorizing friends in this manner children create a perception of in-group and out-group memberships around the birthday celebration (Smith et al., 2015). In addition, participants express concern over combining members from different social groups at birthday celebrations. Previous research state that younger children are less likely to include out-group members in an in-group interaction (Toppe et al., 2020), which could explain why children are concerned over an out-group friend's participation at a celebration with in-group peers, as the in-group children might stick to their own group.

Most participants describe celebrating birthdays with classmates of their respective gender group. Classmates of a different gender is excluded due to limited capacity and a will to respect other children. However, participants appreciate interaction with their gender as they have a sense of belonging with that group (Barbu et al., 2000). Again, past research has found that early gender segregation may form biases which further may lead to exclusion, increased gender stereotypes and enhanced gender typical behavior (Halim et al., 2017; Martin & Ruble, 2010; Rutland et al., 2010). We see that the gender segregation at birthday celebrations may be a contributing factor for children's further gender perceptions.

Birthday Celebrations Impact on Established Groups

Although our study demonstrate how birthday celebrations may impact both negatively and positively on children peer relations, participants describe going back to playing with their closest friends after the party. The impact of birthday celebration on children's social relations seems therefore to be smaller than expected. However, previous research shows existing age differences amongst children and their understanding of friendships. For instance, at preschool age, children base friendship to a greater extent on propinquity, while children already at school age find loyalty as a more prominent element in friendships (Liberman & Shaw, 2019). In addition, earlier research concludes that friendships become more fixed with time (Bateman, 2012; Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003), and so we argue that birthday celebrations impact may be more distinct in newer established groups or groups with younger children, where friendships and group dynamics are less established. This however need more insight from future research.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was designed as an interview study, aiming to present children's own experiences and perceptions of peer relations in the birthday celebration context. It is therefore crucial to read the results as the perspective of children. We find it possible that children during interviews presented answers themselves thought to be expected. Especially with the strong inclusive principles presented by the participants around birthday celebration settings, is it possible children interpret inclusion to be the right perspective of a discussed situation. We also contemplate the possibility that children's memory of celebrations was limited during the interview, especially since some children had not celebrated birthdays for some time due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our interview sample is also a possible limitation. Our sample are to a large extent based in the northern parts of Norway. It is possible that participants from other areas had contributed other experiences around the theme. However, the small part of the sample

representing other areas of Norway presented rather similar experiences as the main sample body. We therefore expect our results to be fairly generalizable amongst other children in other parts of the country.

We found that children struggled with expressing and explaining feelings and experiences of unity and cohesion, especially around the ritual aspect of birthday celebrations. This limits our ability to analyze the birthday celebrations impact on children's group cohesion. It is possible that older children would present a better understanding of the concept and be able to present more detailed answers around the subject. However, like earlier presented, we see older children possess more established relations, which in turn may influence the experience of birthday celebrations impact on cohesion. Therefore, we suggest observations as a possible method for future research on the subject, as observation may enable insight to actual changes in group dynamics around birthday celebrations. Observations may also enable research amongst even younger children, who's relations may be less established.

Implications

The use of inclusive policies is rather commonly executed in Norwegian schools (Scott, 2008). Using policies in the work against ostracism is seen as an effective tool (Nida & Saylor, 2016) and the current study show how inclusion at children's birthday celebration may provide feelings of belonging. In addition, children's inclusive thinking is plainly noticeable in our study results. We therefore argue there to be a valuable impact in adopting inclusive policies around birthday celebrations at schools or other institutions closely working with children. We also like to encourage mix-gender inclusion or inclusion between different social groups when possible as this may prevent biases, stereotyping and prejudice between different social groups (Killen et al., 2022; Martin & Ruble, 2010; Rutland et al., 2010).

Yet, the results demonstrate social difficulties which may arise with inclusive policies in the birthday setting, like further victimization or signaled dislike. We find it important to ensure teachers, administrators, parents, and others who closely interact with children have knowledge and a greater understanding of ostracism, victimization and how birthday celebrations may impact negatively around these problems (Nida & Saylor, 2016). Knowledge and methods are needed for teachers and others interacting with children, to faster and easier recognize destructive patterns around children and their social behavior in connection to birthday celebrations.

Though our results points to no impact difference between ritual versus non-ritualistic activities on children's experience on cohesion, we argue they still provide an important element of organized group interaction at the celebration. The birthday rituals and the organized group activities arranged at celebrations limits the possibilities for ostracism and loneliness amongst the participating children, and so we encourage parents and birthday organizers to implement group activities like rituals at the celebrations to prevent the negative risks of exclusion during celebrations of children's peer birthdays.

Lastly, the goal with our study were to provide a better understanding and insight into birthday celebrations impact on children's social relations. Our results are therefore valuable knowledge for further research on the subject or close related themes, as it provides insight into children's own perception of birthday celebrations in connection with social relations, which previous have been rather limited.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to gain a better understanding of birthday celebrations impact on children's social relations, especially in context of cohesion and ostracism. Based on interviews conducted amongst children at age 7-9 it can be concluded that birthday celebrations both may have a positive as well as negative impact on children's social relations

by improving belonging and personal relations as well as enhance the risk of ostracism. However, these results indicate that the impact is rather small and that established relations as well as inclusive behaviors impact on the final peer interactions.

As research on rituals present ritualistic actions to enhance cohesion within a group to greater extent than regular activities (Wen, 2016), we assumed birthday celebrations and its rituals to enhance cohesion amongst children and their peers. Our results however state that birthday rituals provide to the same degree as other non-ritualistic activities improvements in children's relations in the birthday celebrations setting, and so these results contradict the importance of birthday rituals in this context. However, we argue utility of birthday rituals as they ensure group interactions at the birthday celebration.

Seeing that this study illustrates a rather small impact on children's social relations due to firmly rooted friendships and inclusive normative behaviors amongst children in early school age, it raises the question whether birthdays have a larger impact in settings where group dynamic is less established. Based on these conclusions future research should consider implementing research amongst children in newly established groups.

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Appendix A

Consent Form SFO Interviews

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet
Bursdagsfeiringer og barns sosiale relasjoner?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg og ditt barn om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å *få en bedre forståelse av barns opplevelse av bursdagsfeiringer og dets påvirkning på barns sosiale relasjoner*. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for barnet ditt.

Formål
Dette prosjektet vil se på barns opplevelser av bursdagsfeiringer og dets påvirkning på demmes sosiale relasjoner. Mer spesifikt er vi interessert i hvordan barn opplever bursdagsfeiringer, invitasjon/ ikke invitasjon, samt hvordan de opplever bursdagsfeiringer påvirker demmes sosiale relasjoner. Dette er et masterprosjekt innom psykologi ved Norges arktiske universitet, UiT. Datainnsamlingen skjer under vårsemesteret 2022.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?
Instituttet for Psykologi, Norges arktiske universitet, UiT er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du og baret ditt spørsmål om å delta?
SFOer i Tromsø har blitt kontaktet om deltagelse i prosjektet gjennom telefonsamtaler. Deres SFO har gjennom dette gitt samtykke til å utføre studien hos dem og gitt oss tillatelse til å kontakte alle aktuelle foreldre. Derfor blir dere nå kontaktet. For nå distribueres all informasjon gjennom di ansatte ved SFOen.

Hva innebærer det for barnet ditt å delta?
Hvis du og ditt barn velger å gi samtykke til deltagelse i prosjektet vil barnet ditt få mulighet til å delta i et intervju, som vil ta plass i den aktuelle SFOen under vårsemesteret 2022. Barnet ditt vil i intervjuet få mulighet til å svare på noen spørsmål som omhandler relasjonen til bursdagsfeiringer, invitasjon til bursdagsfeiringer samt noen spørsmål om sosiale relasjoner rundt bursdagsfeiringer. Utover svarene i intervjuet vil vi registrere barnets alder, kjønn, nasjonalitet samt hvor lenge barnet har levd i Norge. Intervjuet vil bli registrert gjennom lydopptak og gjennom notater på papir. Intervjuet vil ta ca. 30 min. Deltagelse i intervjuet er frivillig og hvis dere velger og ikke gi samtykke vil barnets dag i SFOen forløpe som normalt. Som forelder har du mulighet at se den intervjuguide som vil bli brukt under intervjuet. Dette gjørs gjennom å kontakte oss på den e-post eller telefonnummer som finnes nederst på dette papir.

Det er frivillig å delta
Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du og barnet ditt velger å gi deres samtykke, kan dere når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle ditt barns personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg eller barnet ditt hvis dere ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke samtykket.

Ditt barns personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker opplysninger
Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om barnet ditt til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.
  • Bare veileder og den aktuelle studenten for prosjektet vil ha tilgang til de opplysninger som blir registrert utover prosjektets gang.
  • All rå data vil tas opp på en lydopptaksenhet og på papir. Vi vil anonymisere all data under transkripsjon. Rå data vil vare adskilt fra anonymisert data og vil bli lagret med tofaktor- autentisering på institusjonens eksterne lagringstjeneste (Office 365 Sharepoint).

Hva skjer med ditt barns opplysninger når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?
Opplysningene anonymiseres under transkripsjon. Ved prosjektslutt, noe som etter planen er 30.9.2022, vil all data bli oppbevart internt ved behandlingsansvarlig institusjon på institusjonens eksterne lagringstjeneste, Office 365 Sharepoint. Data vil oppbevares til integritetsformål for eventuell publisering i opp til 5 år. Deretter vil all rå data slettes.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om barnet ditt?
Vi behandler opplysninger om barnet ditt basert på ditt og ditt barns samtykke.
På oppdrag fra Instituttet for Psykologi, Norges arktiske universitet, UiT har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettigheter
Så lenge barnet ditt kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har dere rett til:
  • innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om barnet ditt, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
  • å få rettet opplysninger om barnet ditt som er feil eller misvisende
  • å få slettet personopplysninger om barnet ditt
  • å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av ditt barns personopplysninger

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:
  • Instituttet for Psykologi, Norges arktiske universitet, UiT ved:
    Amanda Smeds, e-post: asm030@uit.no eller telefonnummer: +358 50 5369796 eller Vegleder **Monika Abels**, e-post: m.abels@uit.no eller telefonnummer: 77645343

  • Vårt personvernombud: Joakim Bakkevold, e-post: personvernombud@uit.no eller telefonnummer: 776 46 322 og 976 915 78

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til NSD sin vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt med:
  • NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS på epost (personverntjenester@nsd.no) eller på telefon: 53 21 15 00.

Med vennlig hilsen

Monika Abels   *Amanda Smeds*
(Veileder)   (Student)

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet Bursdagsfeiring og barns sosiale relasjoner, og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

☐ at barnet mitt deltar i *intervjuet*
Jeg samtykker til at mitt barns opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

Barnets navn og alder:

(Signert av forelder/, dato)

Appendix B
Consent Form Online and Private Interviews

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet
Bursdagsfeiringer og barns sosiale relasjoner?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg og ditt barn om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å *få en bedre forståelse av barns opplevelse av bursdagsfeiringer og dets påvirkning på barns sosiale relasjoner*. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for barnet ditt.

Formål
Dette prosjektet vil se på barns opplevelser av bursdagsfeiringer og dets påvirkning på demmes sosiale relasjoner. Mer spesifikt er vi interessert i hvordan barn opplever bursdagsfeiringer, invitasjon/ ikke invitasjon, samt hvordan de opplever bursdagsfeiringer påvirker demmes sosiale relasjoner. Dette er et masterprosjekt innom psykologi ved Norges arktiske universitet, UiT. Datainnsamlingen vil vare i perioden januar til februar 2022.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?
Instituttet for Psykologi, Norges arktiske universitet, UiT er ansvarlig for prosjektet.
Hvorfor får du og baret ditt spørsmål om å delta?
Vi rekrutterer barn i alderen 7-9 år via SFO i Tromsø, sosiale medier eller som snøballs urvalg. Derfor blir dere nå kontaktet.

Hva innebærer det for barnet ditt å delta?
Hvis du og ditt barn velger å gi samtykke til deltagelse i prosjektet vil barnet ditt få mulighet til å delta i et intervju, som vil ta plass enten fysisk i Tromsø eller digitalt i perioden mellom januar og februar 2022. Barnet ditt vil i intervjuet få mulighet til å svare på noen spørsmål som omhandler relasjonen til bursdagsfeiringer, invitasjon til bursdagsfeiringer samt noen spørsmål om sosiale relasjoner rundt bursdagsfeiringer. Utover svarene i intervjuet vil vi registrere barnets alder, kjønn, nasjonalitet samt hvor lenge barnet har levd i Norge. Intervjuet vil bli registrert gjennom lydopptak og gjennom notater på papir. Intervjuet vil ta ca. 30 min. Deltagelse i intervjuet er frivillig.
Som forelder har du mulighet at se den intervjuguide som vil bli brukt under intervjuet. Dette gjørs gjennom å kontakte oss på den e-post eller telefonnummer som finnes nederst på dette papir.

Det er frivillig å delta
Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du og barnet ditt velger å gi deres samtykke, kan dere når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle ditt barns personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg eller barnet ditt hvis dere ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke samtykket.

Ditt barns personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker opplysninger
Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om barnet ditt til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.
- Bare veileder og den aktuelle studenten for prosjektet vil ha tilgang til de opplysninger som blir registrert utover prosjektets gang.

- All rå data vil tas opp på en lydopptaksenhet og på papir. Vi vil anonymisere all data under transkripsjon. Rå data vil vare adskilt fra anonymisert data og vil bli lagret med tofaktor- autentisering på institusjonens eksterne lagringstjeneste (Office 365 Sharepoint).

Hva skjer med ditt barns opplysninger når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?
Opplysningene anonymiseres under transkripsjon. Ved prosjektslutt, noe som etter planen er 2.5.2022, vil all data bli oppbevart internt ved behandlingsansvarlig institusjon på institusjonens eksterne lagringstjeneste, Office 365 Sharepoint. Data vil oppbevares til integritetsformål for eventuell publisering i opp til 5 år. Deretter vil all rå data slettes.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om barnet ditt?
Vi behandler opplysninger om barnet ditt basert på ditt og ditt barns samtykke.
På oppdrag fra Instituttet for Psykologi, Norges arktiske universitet, UiT har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettigheter
Så lenge barnet ditt kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har dere rett til:
- innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om barnet ditt, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
- å få rettet opplysninger om barnet ditt som er feil eller misvisende
- å få slettet personopplysninger om barnet ditt
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av ditt barns personopplysninger

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:
- Instituttet for Psykologi, Norges arktiske universitet, UiT ved:
  Amanda Smeds, e-post: asm030@uit.no eller telefonnummer: +358 50 5369796 eller Vegleder **Monika Abels**, e-post: m.abels@uit.no eller telefonnummer: 77645343

- Vårt personvernombud: Joakim Bakkevold, e-post: personvernombud@uit.no eller telefonnummer: 776 46 322 og 976 915 78

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til NSD sin vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt med:
- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS på epost (personverntjenester@nsd.no) eller på telefon: 53 21 15 00.

Med vennlig hilsen

Monika Abels   *Amanda Smeds*
(Veileder)   (Student)

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet Bursdagsfeiring og barns sosiale relasjoner, og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

☐ at barnet mitt deltar i *intervjuet*
Jeg samtykker til at mitt barns opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

Barnets navn og alder:

(Signert av forelder/, dato)

Appendix C

Interview Guide

« Hei! Mitt navn er Amanda og jeg er her for å snakke litt om bursdagsfeiringer med deg.

Dine foreldre sa at du kunne snakke med meg, har du lust til det? Jeg kommer å stille noen

spørsmål som jeg stiller alle barn jeg snakker med, og du skal bare svare så riktig og sant

som du kan. Her er det ikke noe rett eller gale svar, uten jeg vil vite hvordan du opplever det.

Jeg kommer å spille in hva vi sier på en lydopptaker og kanskje skrive ned noen ting på

papiret her, går det fint for deg? Sen hvis du ikke skjønner et spørsmål eller hører hva jeg

sier, så skal du bare si ifra ... at "nu hørte jeg ikke hva du sa" eller "jeg skjønte ikke hva du

mente med det". Og hvis det er sånn at du ikke har noe svar på mitt spørsmål så går det også

helt fint, da skal du bare si at det har jeg ikke noe svar på eller det vet jeg ikke. Du kan også si

at du ikke vil svare hvis du ikke har lust å svare på et spørsmål. Høres det greit ut? Har du

noen spørsmål før vi begynner?»

Tema	*Spørsmål*	*Tilleggsspørsmål*
Introduserende spørsmål	Hvis du hadde tegnet et bilde av en bursdagsfeiring, hvordan hadde det bilde sett ut?	
Relasjon til bursdagsfeiringer	Har du vart på en bursdagsfeiring i det siste?	
	Hva pleier dere å gjøre på en bursdagsfeiringer?	Fortell om hva som skjer når dere leker?
		Fortell om hva som skjer når dere spiser?
	Pleier du å feire din bursdag?	Hvor?
	Hvordan pleier du å forberede innfor din bursdagsfeiring?	Pynte? / Hvorfor?

		Lage mat? / Hvorfor?
	Hvordan pleier du å forberede før en venn sin bursdag?	Gi gave? / Hvordan er det å gi gave?
		Hva om noen gav deg en gave du ikke likte?
Invitasjon til bursdagsfeiringer	Hvem hadde du hatt lust å invitere i din bursdag?	Hvorfor?
	Når du feirer bursdag, hvem pleier du å invitere?	
	Har du noen gang måtte la vare å invitere noen du egentlig hadde lust å invitere? Hva skjedde?	
	Vet du om skolen har noen regler for hvem man burde invitere? Ex: alle gutter/jenter?	Hva syns du om det?
	Hvordan hadde du følt det hvis du måtte invitere noen du ikke hadde lust til å invitere?	
	Hvordan er det å bli invitert til en bursdagsfeiring?	
	Hvordan hadde de vart å bli invitert til noen som du ikke pleier å leke så mye med?	
	Hvordan hadde du følt det hvis en klassekamerat sa at du ikke var invitert til hans/hennes bursdagsfest?	Hva hadde du gjort da?
		Hva om personen som sa det var noen du ikke liker?
Sosiale relasjoner rundt bursdagsfeiringer	Hvis du hadde andre planer det tidspunktet som en bursdagsfeiring var, hva hadde du gjort da?	

	Sist du var på en bursdagsfeiring, husker du hvem du lekte med på bursdagsfeiringen?	Hva om den du ville leke med ikke var tilstede på bursdagsfeiringen?
	Har du noen gang følt deg alene på en bursdagsfeiring?	
	Har du noen gang blitt uvenn med noen på en bursdagsfeiring?	
	Har du noen gang fått en ny venn på en bursdagsfest? / blitt bedre kjent med noen? Hva skjedde?	Lekte du med dem etterpå i skolen?
		Er dere fortsatt venner?
	Har du noen gang endret mening om noen på en bursdagsfeiring?	
	Hva hadde du tenkt hvis noen du ikke pleier å vare sammen med ville leke sammen med deg på bursdagsfeiringen?	
	Fortell om en gang under en bursdagsfeiring når alle inviterte var sammen?	
	Hva hadde du tenkt hvis noen på bursdagsfeiringen sa at di ikke likte maten som dere spiste / ... syntes at lekene dere lekte var kjedelige?	Hva hadde du gjort da, når di sa det?
		Hvordan hadde de vart å møte dem på skolen dagen etterpå?
	Hva tenker du om de som ikke kom i bursdagen i det hele tatt?	
	Husker du sist du var på bursdagsfeiring, hvem lekte du med etterpå i skolen?	

	Pleier dere å snakke om bursdagsfeiringen på skolen etterpå?	Hvis dere snakka om bursdagsfeiringen dagen etterpå i skolen og noen som ikke var til stede på feiringen kom og spurte om du ville leke, hva hadde du gjort da?
	Hvordan pleier det å vare å komme tilbake til skolen hvis du har gått glipp av en bursdagsfeiring?	
Avsluttningsspørsmål	Hva er det beste med å feire bursdag?	
	Er det fortsatt noen ting du har lust å si om bursdagsfeiringer?	

«Tusen takk for at du svarte på spørsmålene mine! Er det noe du tenker på nå etter at vi ha snakka sammen? Ellers er vi klare her.»