

Background

The federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act signed March 23, 2010 includes a mandate that fast food and chain restaurants with over 19 outlets clearly display calorie content of all menu items.

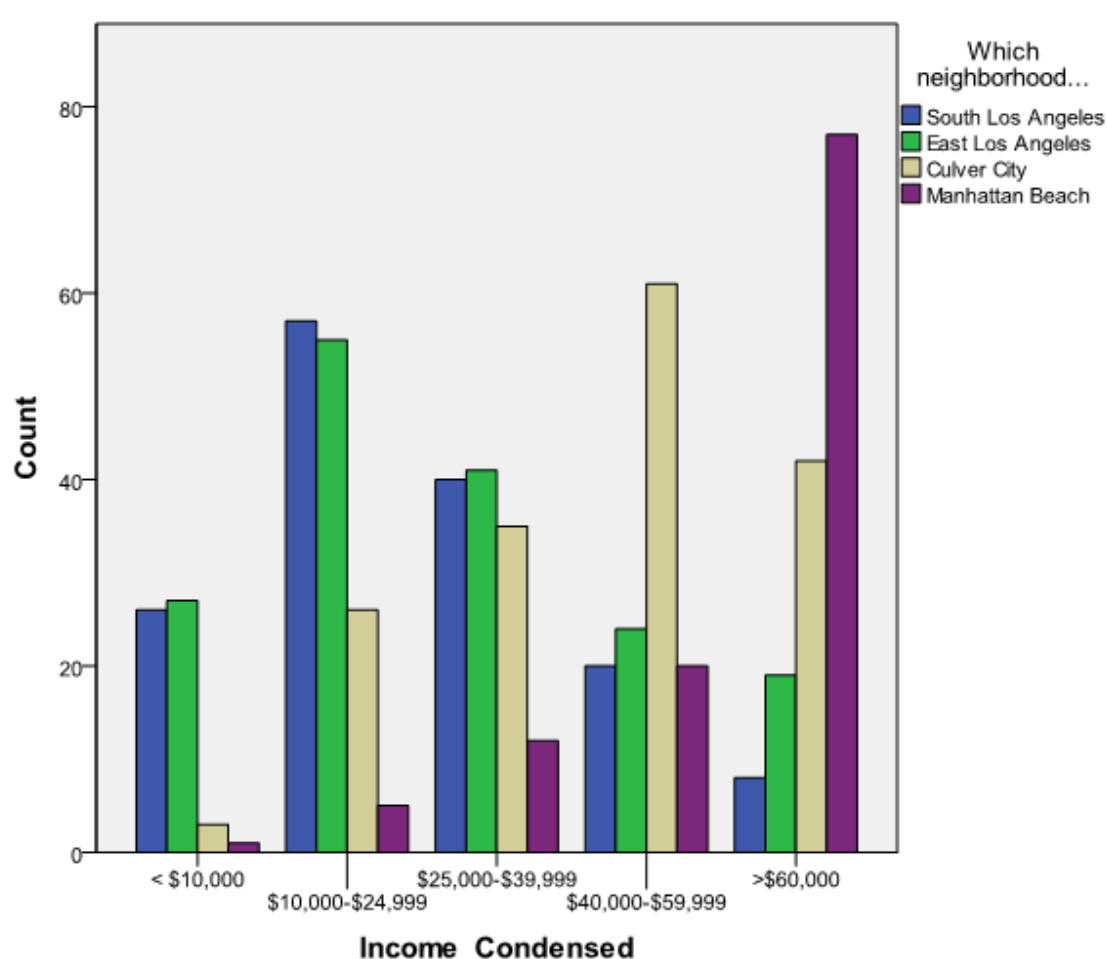
It is not clear what impact calorie menu labeling might have on consumers' choices, especially in low-income urban communities that are more likely than wealthier communities to have limited access to healthy food options, high rates of overweight and obesity, and pressing financial or social reasons for relying on inexpensive fast food as a key source of daily food intake.

Methods

A mixed-methods study using focus groups and venue exit surveys assessed the impact of menu labeling on consumers of three fast food chain restaurants in four diverse socio-demographic Los Angeles County communities (South Los Angeles, East Los Angeles, Culver City and Manhattan Beach).

Survey Sample Characteristic

	Total Sample (717)	South LA (186)	East LA (209)	Culver City (193)	Manhattan Beach (127)
Gender	M - 26.2% F - 69.9%	M - 23.1% F - 72.6%	M - 24.9% F - 69.9%	M - 29.0% F - 69.9%	M - 31.5% F - 66.1%
High school graduate or higher education	63.2%	54.4%	48.8%	70.0%	89.8%
Racial/Ethnic Group					
Non-Hispanic White	17.6%	0.5%	2.9%	24.4%	56.7%
Black	12.7%	37.1%	1.4%	8.3%	2.4%
Asian/Pacific Islander/Samoan	5.1%	0.5%	-	7.8%	16.5%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.5%	1.1%	1.4%	1.6%	2.4%
Hispanic/Latino	58.0%	52.7%	87.6%	52.8%	26.0%
Other	5.3%	6.5%	5.7%	5.2%	2.4%
Born outside of US	44.5%	41.9%	49.3%	51.8%	29.9%



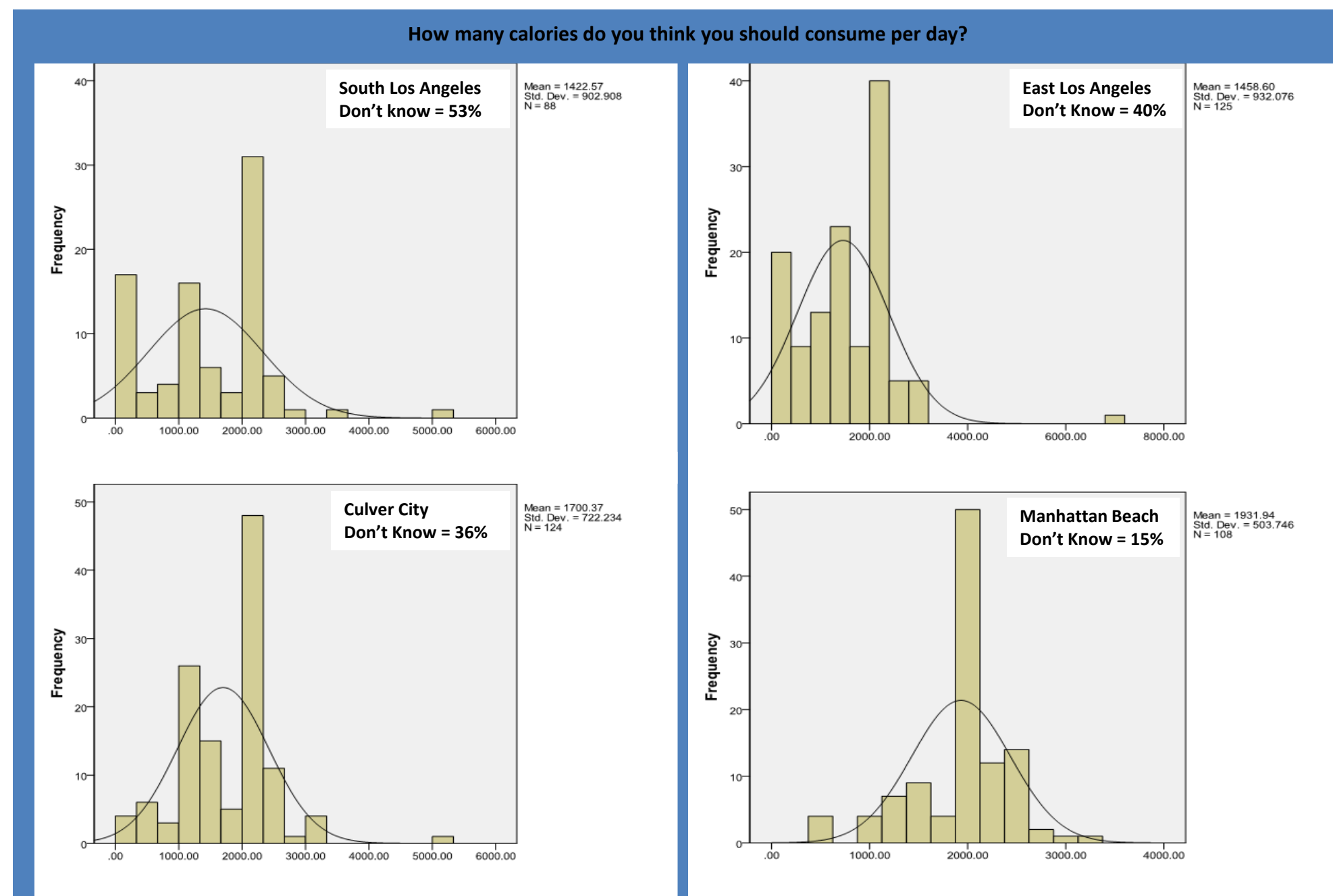
Key Survey Findings

The majority of parents (55%) did not notice menu board calorie postings. Of those who did, 16% found the information confusing. Only 16.7% made an attempt to lower calorie intake. However, focus group respondents from high income communities indicated they would attempt to lower calorie intake at a later meal. Families from low-income targeted communities reported far more limited access to healthy restaurant options. Families from all communities most frequently reported "convenience" as influencing their choice to patronize fast food venues. The mean caloric intake was not significantly different for the 38% who regarded their food purchased a snack compared to the 57% who considered their purchase a meal (496 vs. 675 for adults; 465 vs. 542 for children, respectively). Fewer respondents from the two communities with lowest socio-economic status (South LA - 24% and East LA - 32%) offered accurate knowledge of daily recommended calorie consumption compared to respondents from middle and high income communities (Culver City - 40% and Manhattan Beach - 67%).



Did you notice calorie or nutritional information posted in the restaurant?					
	Total Sample (717)	South LA (186)	East LA (209)	Culver City (193)	Manhattan Beach (127)
Yes	43.4%	44.6%	37.3%	44.0%	50.4%
No	55.1%	54.3%	61.7%	56.0%	50.4%
Total	99.7%	99.5%	99.5%	100%	100%
Was the calorie or nutrition information confusing? (* of respondents answering Yes)					
	Total Sample 311*	South LA 83*	East LA 76*	Culver City 85*	Manhattan Beach 64*
Yes	16.4%	15.7%	19.2%	14.1%	17.2%
No	83.0%	84.3%	79.5%	84.7%	82.8%
Total	99.4%	100%	98.7%	100%	100%

How many calories do you think you should consume each day?					
	Total Sample (717)	South LA (186)	East LA (209)	Culver City (193)	Manhattan Beach (127)
Median	2000	1500	1500	2000	2000
Mean	1634	1422	1458	1700	1932
Don't Know	37.9%	52.7%	40.2%	35.8%	15.0%
Range	{5 - 7000}	{5 - 5000}	{10 - 7000}	{6 - 5000}	{500 - 3200}
How many calories do you think your child should consume each day					
	Total Sample (717)	South LA (186)	East LA (209)	Culver City (193)	Manhattan Beach (127)
Median	1000	800	1000	1000	1200
Mean	1133	903	1034	1204	1354
Don't Know	53.6%	65.1%	54.1%	53.9%	34.6%
Range	{4 - 4000}	{4 - 3000}	{5 - 3000}	{5 - 4000}	{200 - 3000}



How often do you eat fast food?					
	Total Sample (715)	South LA (186)	East LA (209)	Culver City (193)	Manhattan Beach (127)
<3 times per month	29.4%	23.7%	14.4%	43.0%	41.7%
Once per week	26.3%	27.1%	27.8%	24.9%	24.4%
Twice per week	24.3%	23.1%	29.2%	21.2%	22.8%
3-6 times per week	15.7%	20.4%	21.5%	8.3%	10.2%
Daily or more	4.3%	5.4%	7.2%	2.6%	.8%
Total	100%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

When thinking about the meal you just ate, would you say it represents the main source of food for the day?					
	Total Sample (717)	South LA (186)	East LA (208)	Culver City (193)	Manhattan Beach (127)
Yes	24.8%	32.3%	33.0%	19.2%	8.7%
No	74.5%	67.2%	65.6%	80.8%	90.6%

When thinking about the meal you just ate, would you say it represents...					
	Total Sample (717)	South LA (186)	East LA (208)	Culver City (193)	Manhattan Beach (127)
Only meal for the day	7.9%	10.2%	14.8%	3.1%	0.0%
Snack in between meals	31.0%	33.9%	25.4%	34.7%	29.9%
One of several meals	60.3%	54.3%	58.4%	62.2%	70.1%

When thinking about the meal your child just ate, would you say it represents the main source of food for the day?					
	Total Sample (717)	South LA (186)	East LA (208)	Culver City (193)	Manhattan Beach (127)
Yes	13.9%	15.6%	19.1%	10.9%	7.9%
No	85.2%	83.3%	79.4%	89.1%	91.3%

When thinking about the meal your child just ate, would you say it represents...					
	Total Sample (717)	South LA (186)	East LA (208)	Culver City (193)	Manhattan Beach (127)
Only meal for the day	3.5%	4.3%	7.7%	0.5%	0.0%
Snack in between meals	30.0%	39.2%	29.7%	25.9%	22.8%
One of several meals	65.6%	54.8%	61.2%	73.6%	76.4%

Conclusions

Calorie postings do not appear to significantly impact purchasing behavior. Limited knowledge of appropriate calorie intake likely impacts the meaning of posted calories. More calorie education and clearer posting is needed to adequately inform consumers.

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