Reverse Freshman Fifteen: A Qualitative Study

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Reverse Freshman Fifteen: A Qualitative Study

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Results

After analyzing the data from the interviews, we found three themes which stood out as common among our participants.

1. An Active Lifestyle in High School
   - Of the 15 participants in our study, 13 of them said they played sports in high school.
   - While they were active in sports in their younger years, they were not highly motivated to develop healthy habits and behaviors.
   - Being active in sports did not contribute to the participants developing healthy eating habits during this time in life.
   - After a change in environment (coming to college) and a change in routine, many of them experienced a decrease in physical activity.

   "I ate whatever I wanted. It was really bad, really bad. I ate a lot. So much. I pretty much just played sports and practiced."

   "I just only did things during that (sports) season. So I was active for like a third of the year."

2. Availability of Resources
   - Participants experienced a change in availability of food and resources when coming to college.

   "When I moved to school, it was actually something that helped me because here I have more freedom to make my own decisions and more options, like in the cafeteria. I have a choice of what I’m eating every day."

   - They reported that the dining hall on campus at Cedarville, as well as the gym, had an influence on them developing new habits at school.

   - 13 of the 15 participants specifically mentioned the dining hall as a positive tool to promote healthier eating habits.

   - 11 out of the 15 mentioned the gym as a helpful tool.

   "The gym has been the biggest help. That, and the healthy choices in Chucks (dining hall). It’s funny ‘cause there really are healthy choices. The gym that’s free to use for students is really nice, and they have so many options there. I mean, everything."

3. Family Health
   - Most participants reported their family’s overall health awareness as average. The families seemed to have some awareness of health issues, eating habits, etc. but did not always act on their understanding.

   - Many participants told us of members of their families who had health issues, including problems with weight management, allergies, and heart attacks.
   - Several participants expressed a fear of being overweight in the future like older family members. They had specific people in mind whose lifestyle choices they do not want to follow.

Results (cont.)

"One of my great aunts was very big and she died in her 60s I think. She had diabetic neuropathy… I just remember seeing that and going ‘I don’t want to look like that some day.’"

- Most of them that told us of a healthy lifestyle change in their family reported that the changes started after the participant made changes.
- They now say that they are healthier than their families overall.

"My parents saw the effect it had on me so they actually started getting into more exercise and adapting their eating habits and stuff."

Conclusions

- A vast majority of our participants played a sport and were physically active. Their knowledge of how it felt to be active contributed to their desire to make a healthy change.
- Our participants felt the available resources on campus, such as the dining hall and gym, were useful tools. The convenience of these resources was a motivating factor for these women.
- Through questioning, it was clear that most participants viewed the health awareness of their family as average, and several expressed the fear of becoming like family members, in reference, to negative health habits.

Limitations & Future Studies

Limitations:
- We had a limited sample consisting of a small group of participants who were all female college students.
- Researchers led participants through the questions and had to sometimes push for answers/more information from them, instead of participants openly talking about their lifestyle changes.

Future Studies:
- To obtain a broader sample with greater validity, more participants would be used in future studies, using both males and females with a range of ages and races.
- A more in-depth study could be done with participants who intentionally lost a substantial amount of weight through lifestyle changes.