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Understanding the journey: A phenomenological study of college students' lived experiences during the weight-loss process

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**Understanding the journey: A phenomenological study of college students'
lived experiences during the weight-loss process**

by

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A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I started my educational journey as a first generation college student. Coming to Iowa State University three years ago, I had little prior knowledge about what I was getting myself into or even if I could complete a Ph.D. Along the way though, I met amazing people who inspired me to keep going and who truly changed my life.

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ABSTRACT

Although numerous studies have focused on understanding various aspects of the science of weight loss and weight gain in college students, understanding how the weight-loss process affects college students psychologically and behaviorally may help administrators and student affairs professionals to better work with students on their campuses. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of college students in the weight-loss process. Three models—Transtheoretical, Stages of Change, and Health Belief—were used as guiding frameworks and foundations to understand where the students are in the weight-loss process. The data from this study yielded four significant themes: (a) separating the stages of change processes; (b) the need for support to be successful in the process; (c) the stresses of being a student and how they affect the weight-loss process; and (4) the physical environment of the university and its effects on weight loss. In addition, conclusions, limitations, implications and recommendations for future research are presented in this study.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the American College Health Association (2011), approximately 35% of college students are currently overweight. In addition, this prevalence has doubled over the past 10 years (ACHA). With the increase in the number of individuals who are overweight, there has been an increase in the number of students who are starting to try to lose weight (Anderson, Lundgren, Shapiro, & Paulosky, 2003; Racette, Deusinger, Strube, Highstein, & Deusinger, 2008). In addition to those who acknowledge they are overweight, other students on campus may view themselves as being overweight even if they do not meet the medical criteria to be considered overweight (Byrd, 2007; Ousley, Cordero, & White, 2008). This focus on weight gain has ties to the change in media's portrayal of showing thinner more fit individuals (Brylinsky, 1990; Swami & Smith, 2012). The idea of being thinner is required to meet societal views of acceptable increases the number of students who are trying to lose weight on campus. Some studies (Eaton, Lowry, Brener, Galuska, & Crosby, 2005) have found that the students' perceptions of weight may be more significant than actually being overweight. These perceptions could also lead to other issues such as increased anxiety, fear about belonging, and peer pressure perceptions that can affect the students' experiences in college (Aibel, 2003; Byrd, 2007, Jaffe, 2008).

Many studies have focused on the "freshmen 15", a term used to describe weight gain during college students' first year in college, although the term may not accurately indicate the amount of weight that is actually gained by students (Lloyd-Richardson, Bailey, Fava, & Wing, 2009; Racette et al., 2008). Approximately 75% of students gain weight in their first couple years on campus (Lloyd-Richardson, Bailey, Fava, & Wing, 2009). While no one

specific reason has been found to the cause of the weight increase, stress, unhealthy eating, erratic sleeping patters, and unhealthy exercise habits could factor into the weight gain (Gropper, Simmons, Gaines, Drawdy, Saunders, Ulrich, & Connell, 2009). Most students only gain five to seven pounds (Gropper et al., 2009; Hoffman, Policastro, Quick, & Lee, 2006) in their first years, but many others fear gaining weight (Johnson, 2012). Crosnoe (2007) noted that students reported the fear of stigmatization that accompanies being overweight. The process of losing weight can affect students behaviorally, psychologically, and academically. The current research study was conducted to explore the experiences and changes college students reported while they were on their weight-loss journey.

This study used a constructionism epistemology framed with an interpretive theoretical perspective. Epistemology is defined as the way we know what we know (Crotty, 1998). In a constructionism epistemological study, Crotty noted, the researcher believes that there is no universal truth waiting to be discovered; that truth lies with individuals and their experiences in the world. This study is a basic interpretive phenomenological fieldwork research study. According to Merriam (2002), phenomenology helps the researcher understand and interpret the life experiences of individuals and the meaning they assign to those experiences. To complete this research study, semi-structured interviews and observations were completed, analyzed, interpreted, and reported.

The study focused on several areas of research that are explored in greater depth in the literature review: the psychological and behavioral effects of excess weight, the effects of the "freshmen 15" on college students, and effects of weight-loss. Each of these areas informed my research. Nevertheless, this is a heretofore unexplored phenomenon. There are limited studies that have sought to understand the experiences of students' losing weight

during their college years. The existing literature was basically conducted to understand the effects of weight on students, whereas the current study was carried out to expand existing research and understand the effects of the weight-loss process.

Statement of the Problem

Within the literature that focuses on weight-loss, there is a gap in what is known about the actual lived experiences of college students in the weight loss process. Furthermore, there is very limited research based on the university's effects on weight loss. There are studies that currently explore the how weight affects self-image, college performance, and weight gain in college, commonly called the freshmen 15 (Gropper et al., 2009; Hoffman, Policastro, Quick, & Lee, 2006; Lloyd-Richardson, Fava, & Wing, 2009; Racette et al., 2008). Other studies have explored body image and eating/image disorders (Field, 2002; Gillen, 2006; Lyter, 1997; Watkins, Christie, & Chally, 2008). Research has also been published regarding how college administration has taken an active role in intervening in weight issues (Ashburn, 2009; Harding, 2009; Lyter, 1997; Nelson, Kocos, Lytle, & Perry, 2009; Riley, 2009).

If administrators heed the call to start being more intentional in creating strategies and policies to address the health concerns of students, more students will start to lose weight and be affected by weight-loss. However, understanding the experiences of college students in the weight-loss process has not been studied and published in much detail, thus limiting the amount of knowledge that college administrators have to understand and support students during their time of weight loss. Understanding the level of challenge and support needed to

ensure student development and success is critical to helping students succeed in their personal and academic endeavors (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of college students who were in the process of losing weight. The study also focused more specifically on the behavioral and psychological processes and changes the participants experienced while in their weight-loss process. Another focus was on what factors affecting the participants' success with their weight loss. The participants of this study included five purposefully selected students of different gender and various ethnicities. The overall goal of this research was to add to the paucity of literature in this area and attempt to engage student affairs and academic professionals in conversations about how to best help and support students through their weight-loss journeys.

This study was designed to provide information that can be used in educating and advocating for additional resources for this population of students. Additional findings from this study may be used to educate and advocate for the necessary resources needed for this population of students.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study focus on the behavioral and psychological changes that college students face while in the weight-loss process. Since the goal of the study was to understand the experiences of the participants in this study, the research questions are general enough to allow their voices to come through in the study. Two research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How do students describe their experiences with weight loss?

2. How do students describe their behavioral and psychological changes associated with weight loss?

Delimitations and Limitations

In order for this study to address the research questions, several delimitations were established. The scope of this study was limited to a very specific population—college students at least age 18, who were in the process of losing weight for at least six months. All the students in the study were considered overweight in their eyes but not necessarily by any other measure. The students were recruited from a diverse population without regard to race, gender, sexual identity, or weight. I limited the study to a maximum of seven participants in order to ensure the richness of the data over what could have been collected by having a larger participant pool. In addition, this study did not attempt understand any other students on a college campus or anyone outside of a college campus.

What this Study *Is Not*

This study was not conducted to provide a discussion about the development of body image disturbances. My focus was on the experiences of students during the weight-loss process, not on weight concerns or on the prevalence of overweight or obese students on campus. This study was not conducted with the intention to discuss any triggers or reasons students are obese on campus. This study did not seek any information about body image disturbances or any eating disorders or dieting techniques, although participants discussed general nutrition. This study did not attempt to investigate how the participants compare to

students who do not identify as overweight or compare the college students' development from overweight to normal weight.

Finally, no attempt was made in this study to contribute to the research and practical application regarding weight interventions for college students. Rather, the study intended to provide a basis for understanding the experiences of students who identify as overweight in their weight-loss journey and how student affairs professionals can be of assistance to them on their journeys.

Significance of the Study

There is a need for student affairs professionals to understand the experiences and struggles that students go through when trying to lose weight. Looking at a student holistically, when one aspect of the student's life changes, it could affect other aspects of life. Thus, as students start to lose weight or to struggle with weight loss, it could impact their social and academic habits as well. In addition, self esteem and body perception issues could be a major factor in students' decision to lose weight. This could also affect students' college experiences and success. The findings from this study may be used to educate student affairs professionals and to advocate for the resources needed by this population of students, such as access to personal trainers, nutritionists, and counselors trained to help students during this time of change.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined for use in this study:

Health Belief Model: A model that looks at the willingness individuals to make healthy decisions and changes in their lives based on their assessment of risk and outcomes of not implementing the healthy choices.

Processes of Change (POC): The 10 processes that individuals employ to adapt a healthy behavior. These are divided into two subgroups: (a) cognitive processes, and (b) behavioral processes. The five cognitive processes are: consciousness raising, dramatical relief, self-reevaluation, environmental reevaluation, and self-liberation. Behavioral processes are: Helping relationships, counterconditioning, reinforcement management, stimulus control, and social liberation.

Stages of Change (SOC): A five step process that identifies where an individual is in actually making a life change: (1) Precontemplation – The individual is not considering making any changes; (2) Contemplation – The considering making changes in the near future but has not made any step to do so; (3) Preparation – The individual is making plan and/or small steps to changing within the next 30 days; (4) Action – The individual is actively making changes, but less than a six month timeframe; and (5) Maintenance – The individual has been actively making changes for six months or greater.

Transtheoretical Model (TTM): Framework of change that focuses on the stages of change. The model is used in counseling, psychology, and in health related fields.

Summary

This study explored the experiences of college students in the weight-loss process. Based on current literature, there is a gap in the research that explores the lived experiences of college student in the weight-loss process. The approach used in this study was phenomenological, which is a form of qualitative research. This method enabled me to explore the experiences of the college students and how the weight-loss process has affected them psychologically, behaviorally, and academically.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Greater numbers of students are arriving to college already overweight and wanting to lose weight (Anderson, Lundgren, Shapiro, & Paulosky, 2003; Racette, Deusinger, Strube, Highstein, & Deusinger, 2008). The number of overweight students has nearly doubled over the last 10 years (ACHA, 2011); thus, there is a need for college administrators to look not only at the trends of weight gain among college students, but also of the weight-loss process. A study by Pedersen and Ketcham (2008) revealed that college student health professionals reported an increase in the number of overweight students and students with high blood pressure and high glucose levels). Although numerous studies have been conducted about weight and weight loss among various populations, very few have focused on the weight-loss process in college students. This literature review focuses on four specific areas regarding weight: (1) body image and psychological aspects of weight; (2) weight gain research; (3) changes in behaviors; and (4) higher education attitudes and responses to weight.

Body Image and Psychological Aspects of Weight

Psychological effects about the weight loss process have been studied (Foster, Wadden, Kendall, Stunkard, & Vogt, 1996; Jasper, 1992; Wadden, Steen, Wingate, &Foster, 1996; Wadden, Stunkar, & Leibshutz, 1988). Body image has been described as "a person's mental image and evaluation" of one's physical appearance and "the influence of these perceptions and attitudes on behavior" (Rosen, 1995, p. 369). Expanding on the other definitions, Priya, Prasanna, Sucharitha, and Vaz (2010) described body image as "the mental picture we have of our body's measures, contours and shape; and our feelings related to these characteristics and to our body parts" (p. 316). Although body image research has been

conducted for years (Fallon, 1990), the 1990s were a pivotal decade that advanced this field (Pruzinsky & Cash, 2002).

The main aspect of body image that I addressed in the current study is negative body image since most of the research in the field about overweight students has aligned with negative body image. Not all overweight individuals have a negative body image, but the research related to body image among overweight individuals is predominately about negative body image. Negative body image, or body dissatisfaction, has been shown to occur in higher numbers within women who are currently in the weight-loss process (DeBate, Lewis, Zhang, Blunt, & Thompson, 2008). Negative body image, or body dissatisfaction, is defined as the difference between and individual's perceived reality and what the individual defines as ideal (Ogden, 2004). Ogden posited three ways that this dissatisfaction occurs are when individuals: (a) see their body as bigger than actual size; (b) experience a difference between perceived looks and ideal image; and (c) have negative feelings about their body.

Having a negative body image, or body dissatisfaction, has ties to mental health concerns (Peterson, Grippo, & Tantleff-Dunn, 2008). Concerns might include depression, stress, and decrease academic performance (Peterson et al., 2008). Women who perceive themselves as being overweight have higher ties to depression and anxiety (Quinn & Crocker, 1998).

Body image and self-esteem is becoming and ever growing issue on college campuses as well as society as a whole. In a study conducted by Sanftner, Ryan, and Pierce (2009), over half of the female participants reported having a negative body image. Another study revealed that the students' perceptions of weight may be more significant than their actually being overweight (Eaton, Lowry, Brener, Galuska, & Crosby, 2005). These perceptions

could also lead to other issues such as increased anxiety, fear about belonging, and peer pressure perceptions that can affect the students' experiences in college (Aibel, 2003; Byrd, 2007, & Jaffe, 2008; Quinn, & Crocker, 1998).

High school girls' negative self-image is linked to the difference between their actual or perceived weight and their ideal weight (Crosnoe, 2007). Some of these shifts could be linked to media and societal views on weight (Brylinsky, 1990). According to Brylinksy, societal ideals of beauty started to shift trends in the 1960s regarding women's figures, with a focus in images and media on thinner women. Brylinksy posited this change caused an increased dissatisfaction among women and their body image. Swami and Smith (2012) revealed that women who were exposed to media images that portrayed women with thinner figures experienced more negative body image as compared to who were not.

Being overweight and having a negative body image

A study by Milkewicz and Cash (2000) revealed that women who are or have been overweight experience greater levels of negative body image than women who have never been overweight. This finding is contrary to previous studies (Cash, 1994; Foster, Wadden, & Vogt, 1997). Additionally, overweight people are forced to live in a world that is not made or conducive for their size (Longhurst, 2005). When individuals seem to have to squeeze to fit into every aspect of life—from seats, seat belts, cubical, bathroom stalls, and changing rooms, it has an negative effect on them and sends a message that the environment is not meant for them or accepting of them (Crepezzi, 2007; Longhurst, 2005). This alienation could lead to the feeling of inadequacy and depression. For college students who

are overweight, starting classes and worrying if there will be desks that they can sit in or if they will be able to use the bathroom in a building can add to their anxiety and level of stress.

Crosnoe (2007) studied 11,000 high school students and found that students who had more negative body image perceptions had higher levels of class failure rates and were less likely to try academic endeavors. In addition, the psychosocial factors and the stigma of weight and being overweight led to "psychological and behavioral responses that interfere with college matriculation" (p. 241). Crosnoe also found that overweight girls enter college at a lower rate than non-overweight girls. Although this finding might be tied to negative body image, Crosnoe found no difference in male college enrollment based on weight.

Body image has been linked to academic achievement in college (Harring, Montgomery, & Hardin, 2010; Lounsbury, Huffstetler, Leong, & Gibson, 2005; Miles, 2009). A study by Miles (2009) revealed a more positive body image was linked to a better grade point average in female students. Harring, Montgomery, and Hardin (2010) found that women who were overweight reported higher levels of stress, which had an impact on their academic performance and success. Overweight women reported higher levels of marginalization from stigmatization by peers and were less likely to complete their college education than women who were not overweight (Glass, Haas, & Reither, 2010).

Negative body image not only affects graduation rate in women, but it also can result in a lack of motivation in college students and affect self-esteem and academic performance, leading to withdrawal from courses (Knightly & Whitelock, 2007). According to Knightly and Whitelock, "…there is a negative correlation between self-esteem and academic stress, meaning that those with higher self-esteem suffer less academic (and personal) anxiety.

Individuals with higher self-esteem may be better able to make use of social resources and employ more effective coping strategies." (p. 227).

Body image, specifically negative body image, can affect students' experiences in college, both psychosocially and academically. It can also affect personal areas of people's lives can be affected by weight. Fikkan and Rothblum (2012) noted that overweight females have fewer opportunities to date than thinner counterparts. Halpern, King, Oslak, and Udry (2005) found that teenage women who increased in body weight and Body Mass Index (BMI) decreased their chances at being in a romantic relationship. For every one-point increase on the BMI scale, the chances of being involved in a physical relationship decreased by approximately seven percent.

It is important to note that there is little to no difference at relationship statuses in males in the same age range (Pierce, Boergers, & Prinstein, 2002). When the aforementioned studies were conducted with college students, the results were similar (Sheets &Ajmere, 2005). It is interesting to note that Sheets and Ajmere found that women who were not in a dating relationship weighed more than those that were in a relationship. Findings for men were nearly the same, but men who were not dating actually weighed less than men who were in relationships. Sheets and Ajmere also studied relationship satisfaction and revealed:

> Weight was also inversely related to relationship satisfaction in women, but significantly positively correlated with relationship satisfaction in men, which suggests that these biases may extend into a couple's relationship and affect the behavior of partners in ways that impact their relationship satisfaction. Together, these findings imply that romantic partners may be a source of college students' weight concern and body dissatisfaction. (pp. 7-8)

It is also interesting to note that overweight female students have been judged by their male peers as well as less sexually attractive (Chen & Brown, 2005; Fikkan & Rothblum (2012); Regan, 1996).

Weight gain

Many studies focus on the "freshmen 15", which is a term used to describe weight gain during college students' first year in college and may not accurately indicate the amount of weight that students actually gain (Lloyd- Richardson, Bailey, Fava, & Wing, 2009; Racette et al., 2005). According to these studies, approximately 75% of students gain weight in their first couple years on campus (Lloyd-Richardson et al., 2009). However, most students only gain five to seven pounds (Gropper, Simmons, Gaines, Drawdy, Saunders, Ulrich, & Connell, 2009; Hoffman, Policastro, Quick, & Lee, 2006). Many college students fear gaining weight (Johnson, 2012). Foster and Metz (2002) noted that, if someone loses weight, regaining the weight partially reverses the improvements in negative body image. This weight gain can be small but could still have big effects on a person's negative body image. Rosen (2002) and Sobel (2005) studied how body image or perceived weight affects certain life decisions or behaviors such as partnering or becoming friends.

While weight gain and the "freshmen 15" has started to become commonly accepted in literature and across campus, the effects of gaining weight can lead to serious consequences among students. The effect on the students' self image could, in turn, affect their behaviors and academic success. One way that students combat weight gain is to start losing weight. The Transtheoretical Model and the Health Belief Model, which are explored in the next section, can explain the process of the student's decision to become healthier.

Weight regain is an area that is feared by many people in the weight loss process (Jasper, 1992). This fear stems particularly from the positive attention that is received when individuals loses weight; thus, individuals fear the opposite reaction to weight gain (Jasper, 1992). According to Jasper, these people actually fear "displeasure, censure, and even ridicule"(p. 421). Despite this finding, it is important to not that some studies do not support the finding that weight regain cause depression or other mental distress (Foster, Wadden, Kendall, Stunkard, & Vogt, 1996).

Weight acceptance

Numerous authors are beginning to research weight acceptance and individuals who accept being fat. Crepezzi (2007) wrote about herself using the following description:

> To preface, I call myself a fat woman, because I find the word *fat* to be least offensive and most descriptive of the possibilities. …I am not big-boned, or curvy, or Rubenesque, or over-weight, or chubby. I am fat, and this is my word of choice. The use of this word is strategic, political, radical, and accurate. (p. 60)

An area Crepezzi (2007) suggested that may help in the acceptance of weight is forming group membership with being fat:

> Without a sense of group membership, fat people deny themselves a positive group identity, which can result in a more complete sense of self and healthier self-esteem. Since fatness is not considered to be a permanent state of identity, individuals are not often willing to classify themselves with obese others due in part to the social stigma attached to other fat people. (p. 64)

Research has been conducted about group acceptance and formation (Crandall, 1994; Creprezzi, 2007; Quinn & Crocker, 1998). Quinn and Crocker (1998) noted that there is a hesitation to form group acceptance because weight is seemed as something temporary and can be altered, unlike race and other groups identities. Being fat does not mean a change in

the anti-fat attitudes and judgments towards others that might belong in the same category (Crandall, 1994; Quinn & Crocker, 1998).

Changes in Behaviors

The Transtheoretical Model (TTM) focuses on the stages an individual goes through when deciding to change a behavior or lifestyle. Prochaska and Norcross (2001) identified the Stage of Change (SOC) in the Transtheoretical Model as Precontemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action, and Maintenance. Starkin, Johnson, Prochaska, and Prochaska (2001) defined the stages as follows:

1. *Precontemplation:* The individual has not started to think about changes in the behaviors or is not thinking about starting changes within the next six months.

2. *Contemplation:* The individual is starting to think about changing and has decided to start the change within the next six months but not within the next 30 days.

3. *Preparation:* The individual is thinking of starting the change within the next 30 days. Individuals may have begun to make some small steps towards the change.

4. *Action:* The individual has successfully made the behavior change but within six months.

5. *Maintenance:* The behavior change has been implemented for six months or more.

The Transtheoretical Model has many advantages when looking at behavioral change. Redding et al. (2000) posited that the Transtheoretical Model has several advantages over other models. One advantage is that TTM looks at change as a process and not just an event. Looking at the change process in stages allows practitioners and researchers to study the variables associated with the stage, and then identify what interventions can be implemented

in the stage. It is important to realize that individuals don't necessarily move through the

process in a linear fashion, however they can recycle back to stages before moving forward

(Redding et al.).

The Transtheoretical Model builds upon the Stages of Change with the Processes of

Change. The Processes of Change describe how people change (Fischer & Bryant, 2008)

The processes are strategies that an individual or practitioner can use people use to change

behavior (Fischer & Bryant, 2008): Consciousness Raising, Dramatical Relief, Self-

Reevaluation, Environmental Reevaluation, Social Liberation, Helping Relationships,

Counterconditioning, Reinforcement Management, Stimulus Control, and Self Liberation.

Redding et al. (2000) defined the processes as follows:

1. Consciousness Raising: Finding and learning new facts that support a healthy

   change.

2. Dramatical Relief: Experiencing a negative emotion that are associated with

   unhealthy behaviors.

3. Self-reevaluation: The realization that the healthy change in behavior is important to

   one's identity.

4. Environmental Reevaluation: Realizing the negative impact of unhealthy behaviors

   (likewise the positive of healthy behavior) on one's social and physical environment.

5. Self-liberation: Making the commitment to change.

6. Helping Relationships: Seeking and using social support for the health behavior

   change.

7. Counterconditioning: When you substitute a healthy behavior and/or thought for the

   unhealthy behavior.

8. Reinforcement Management: Decreasing rewards with negative behaviors and increasing for positive.

9. Stimulus Control: Adding reminders to participate in healthy behavior and removing reminders of negative behaviors.

10. Social Liberation: Realizing that social norms are changing to support the healthy behavior change.

There is a separation of grouping of processes that split the 10 processes. These groupings are based on behavioral and cognitive strategies (Marcus, Pinto, Simkin, & Audrain, 1994; Nigg & Courneya, 1998). During the precontemplation, contemplation, and preparation stages, the techniques suggested to use are consciousness raising, dramatic relief, self-reevaluation, environmental reevaluations, and social liberation. These are the cognitive strategies (Marcus et al., 1994; Nigg & Courneya, 1998). Moving forward in the preparation, action, and maintenance stages the techniques suggested are: helping relationships, counterconditioning, reinforcement management, stimulus control, and self liberation (Table 2.1). These are the behavioral strategies (Marcus et al., 1994; Nigg & Courneya, 1998).

The next section of the Transtheoretic Model is decisional balance. Decisional balance informs why people choose to change (Fischer & Bryant, 2008). Fischer and Bryant (2008) described this section of the model as:

> Decisional balance and self-efficacy describe why people change. Decisional balance refers to the perceived benefits (pros) and costs (cons) of engaging in a particular behavior. The greater the perceived benefits and fewer the perceived costs, the more likely the person is to engage in the activity. (pp. 369-370)

When the pros outweigh the cons, the person is likely to make the change. Progression through the stages of change and stages of processes move as the pros increase in number

Table 2.1. Transtheoretical Model (TTM) description

Constructs	Description
Stages of Change	
Precontemplation	No intention to take action within the next 6 months
Contemplation	Intends to take action within the next 6 months
Preparation	Intends to take action within the next 30 days and has taken some behavioral steps in this direction
Action	Has changed overt behavior for less than 6 months
Maintenance	Has changed overt behavior for more than 6 months
Decisional Balance	
Pros	The benefits of changing
Cons	The costs of changing
Self-efficacy	
Confidence	Confidence that one can engage in the healthy behavior across different challenging situations
Temptation	Temptations to engage in the unhealthy behavior across different challenging situations
Processes of Change	
Consciousness Raising	Finding and learning new facts, ideas, and tips that support the healthy behavior change
Dramatical Relief	Experiencing the negative emotions (fear, anxiety, worry) that go along with unhealthy behavioral risks
Self-reevaluation	Realizing that the behavioral change is an important part of one's identify as a person
Environmental Reevaluation	Realizing the negative impact of the unhealthy behavior, or the positive impact of the healthy behavior, on one's proximal social and/or physical environment
Self-liberation	Making a firm commitment to change
Helping Relationships	Seeking and using social support for the healthy behavior change
Counterconditioning	Substitution of healthier alternative behaviors and/or cognitions for the unhealthy behavior
Reinforcement Management	Increasing the rewards for the positive behavior change and/or decreasing the rewards of the unhealthy behavior
Stimulus Control	Removing reminders or cues to engage in the unhealthy behavior and/or adding cues or reminders to engage in the healthy behavior
Social Liberation	Realizing that social norms are changing in the direction of supporting the healthy behavior change

Source: Redding et al. (2006), p. 186.

(Biddle & Nigg, 2000). The final piece to TTM is self-efficacy, which is judgment of the

perception of being successful in the behavior (Bandura, 1986). It is the assessment of the

change in behavior that will get the desired results (Bandura, 1997).

The Health Belief Model (HBM) focuses on the ways to predict if an individual will

engage in action to prevent illness (Redding et al., 2000). The willingness to change depends

on people's assessment and perception that "they are personally vulnerable to the condition; the consequences of the condition would be serious; the precautionary behavior effectively prevents the condition; and the benefits of reducing the threat of the condition exceed the costs of taking action" (Redding et al., 2000). The authors noted that the perception of these four factors works in conjunction with the individuals' perception of the severity of illness and potential outcomes.

Rosenstock (1974) discussed the actual change process and how likely the change will occur. According to Rosenstock, if the willingness to change is high and the obstacles /barriers preventing change are low, then behavior changes are very likely to occur. If the willingness is low but the obstacles/barriers are high, then behavior change is unlikely to happen. Tension comes when both the willingness to change and the obstacles/barriers are high. After the participants consider all the factors, their assessment of those factors directly influences performing the healthy behaviors.

The Transtheoretical Model and Health Belief Model are useful to understand someone's willingness to engage in healthy behaviors. Individuals can decide to start making health decisions, losing weight, and becoming healthier on their own. Some researchers are asking college administrators to start taking a more active stance to address health concerns and overweight issues on campus. The next section presents the literature on making the call to become more intentional with services and policies that address health issues.

Higher Education Attitudes and Response to Weight

Numerous studies have focused on higher education professionals' attitudes and responses to weight issues (Crandall, 1995; Lyter, 1997; Nelson, Kocos, Lustle, & Perry, 2009; Pedersen & Ketcham, 2008; Riley, 2009). Pedersen and Kecham (2008) investigated weight bias in an on-campus student health clinic. Their study looked at health care providers' attitudes toward and treatment of overweight clients. The researchers also looked at the physical barriers that may make treating overweight clients difficult. Their findings indicated that professionals expressed no obvious anti-fat attitudes in the focus groups, but they did express concern about the increased number of students who presented with excess weight and related health problems. Additionally, the professionals identified an increase in the number of students who had poor or unhealthy eating habits regardless of their weight. Although the health center made strides to make the physical environment more accommodating to overweight students, there was a lack of appropriate equipment to treat severely overweight students.

Other studies have focused on college administrators' involvement in developing policies to address the increasing number of overweight students on campus (Ashburn, 2009; Hardy, 2009; Lawson, 2009; Lyter, 1997; Nelson et al., 2009; Riley 2009). According to Johnson (2012), students' health has been a focus of college administrators through offering health services, extracurricular wellness activities, and health and wellness courses in colleges, demonstrating their concern. With the increased number of students entering college who are overweight or gain weight while in college, Johnson noted that colleges are starting to implement new programs and services to promote healthier lifestyles and fight obesity.

Nelson et al. (2009) suggested that college administrators need to take a more active role in addressing obesity and to start designing and implementing programs and policies that are intervention strategies that address weight-related issues. In a study of student behaviors related to weight, the authors interviewed 50 freshmen and sophomores about their behaviors directly related to weight. Students reported unhealthy food options on campus, a high level of alcohol-related and late-night eating, and eating to address boredom or stress. Although they recommended that campuses should start to combat the causes of weight gain reported by students, and make recommendations for students' behaviors, there was no mention or focus on the psychological causes of being overweight or how to address these psychological causes.

Health is becoming an increasing concern for universities in the areas of retention and academic success of students (Lyter, 1997). Twenty-five students at Lincoln University, in Missouri, were not allowed to graduate because they entered college with a Body Mass Index (BMI) of over 30, the threshold to be clinically considered obese (Epstein, 2009). Lincoln University required the students to either lose weight and have a BMI under 30 or take a class designed to educate the students on weight, nutrition, and exercise. Lincoln University adopted the policy to inform students that they are overweight and unhealthy and saw this as a professional responsibility to the students. One student at the university reported that the university made overweight students feel excluded from the university community (Lawson, 2009). Students also held a protest to fight against the policy that delayed their graduation (Matheson, 2009; Riley, 2009). The university changed its stance on the policy after the debates and protests (Ashburn, 2009). Ashburn reported that all new entering freshmen had

to take a health class in which the professor would assess the health of the students and could make a recommendation for the student to take an extra one-credit class.

Campus administrators and student affairs professionals should remember and advocate for overweight individuals on their campuses (Creprezzi, 2007; Hopkins, 2011). According to Creprezzi (2007):

> It is important for average-sized administrators and fat allies to take into account the special needs of fat students who may be embarrassed or ashamed to vocalize their own needs. Because fatness is an openly stigmatized position, it is all the more important to form campus advocates for size acceptance. When groups order t-shirts it may be necessary for good advisors to step in and advocate for larger sized options in order to be inclusive of all people. (p. 66)

Hopkins (2011) compared the being fat with other injustices in society today. He wrote about a need for all professionals to start considering the changing the politics and stigmas about being fat:

> Just as matters of inequality, injustice and exclusion associated with race, gender and sexuality have been increasingly mainstreamed into public policy thinking as well as academic geography, it is now time for the stigmatisation and marginalization associated with body size to be given serious consideration both within policy and practice as well as within the discipline. (p. 1,242)

Campus Services and Weight Loss

College counseling centers have been the place where students can get assistance with psychological and developmental issues during their college years (Sharkin, 1997). When it comes to body image issues, the most highly recommended resource that has been suggested to be used on campuses is group therapy (Duba, Kindsvatter, & Priddy, 2010; Steese, Dollette, Phillips, Hossfeld, Matthews, & Taormina, 2006; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

Group therapy is a support technique that involves treating more than one person at a time (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Group sessions often focus on topics such as romantic relationships, resiliency practice, social support, and training of skills (Steese et al., 2006). Steese et al. also suggested having gender specific groups so this can increase social support and self-efficacy.

Another suggestion is the use of narrative therapy with college students (Duba, Kindsvatter, & Priddy, 2010). Narrative therapy is

> …a narrative group approach to addressing the problem of unnatural expectations for body image is advantageous in that it facilitates the formation of a united community…that can identify and question the subtle but influential values and ideals that exist within the dominant culture that support this problem. (Duba et al., p. 115)

Both group and narrative therapy could be presented in a counseling center as resources on college campuses.

Some campuses offer student the services of personal trainers to their students (Fischer & Bryant, 2008). The National Council for Certified Personal Trainers (NCCPT) defined a personal trainer as:

> a) Student /empathetic teacher of the movement and functions of the human body and the internal and external forces that act upon it, who professionally motivates, plans and monitors the benefits of fitness, exercise and nutrition as they relate to their clients' health-related goal. b) A protector of health and well being. A guardian to the "gate of health". (p. 7)

McAuley and Courneya (1993) purported that the trainers have the potential to influence mastery experiences, social modeling, social persuasion, and physiological or emotional states, which are four sources of self-efficacy. They also noted that trainers are able to increase the amount of regular exercise an individual takes.

Fischer and Bryant (2008) studied college campuses' use of personal trainers as a tool to help students lose weight and learn about fitness. They noted that:

> Another way some colleges and universities promote physical activity is by providing exercise trainers, such as certified personal trainers, to assist students in developing and safely engaging in exercise programs and to educate students on the benefits of engaging in regular exercise. (p. 370)

The college where Fischer and Bryant's study took place provided free personal training services to all students enrolled who chose to use the services. The authors found that the group of students who selected to use the personal trainers' services reported a more positive pattern of exercise behavior than the group who did not use the services. Additionally, the study partially supported that the group that did not use the services reported decrease exercise over the semester.

Summary

With the increase of individuals who are overweight and/or gain weight while in college, there is a correlation in the rise in the number of students attempting to lost weight (Anderson et al., 2003; Racette et al., 2008). Body image, specifically negative body image, is a concern with individual because it has been tied to depression, anxiety, and fears of belonging (Aibel, 2003; Byrd, 2007, Jaffe, 2008; Quinn, & Crocker, 1998). Research focusing on academic trends of overweight students has revealed lower grade point averages, academic aspirations, and matriculation rates compare to their thinner counterparts (Harring et al., 2010; Lounsbury et al., 2005; Miles, 2009). There is a need for college student administrators to look not only at the trends of weight gain on college students but also on the weight-loss process. Health professionals on college campuses reported that the number of students presenting to college with weight related disorders and disease has increased in

recent years (Pedersen, & Ketcham, 2008). Although there is significant research on weight

related to body image, academic achievements, and weight-loss, there is limited research

exploring the experiences of college students in the weight-loss process. There is also

limited research on how the university has helped or hindered their weight-loss process.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

There is little known about the experience of students in the weight loss process on our campuses. Some studies have indicated that negative body image issues could lead to poor academic performance and lower graduation rates in overweight students. Additionally, overweight students could be struggling with depression, increased stress levels, and other mental health related issues related to weight and their weight loss journey.

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of undergraduate college students in the weight-loss process. This research adds to the limited literature in this area in hopes of engaging student affairs and academic professionals in the conversations on ways to support and help students that are in the weight-loss process. The findings from this study may be used to educate higher education professionals and to advocate for the necessary resources needed for this population of students, including those of health education, resources that should be available on campus, and how to assist students with the their psychosocial changes.

Thus chapter describes in detail the methodology I used to address the research questions. First, I justify the use of a qualitative research design and, more specifically, I defend my rationale for use of a phenomenological approach. Next, I describe my methods to find research participants. Then I provide an overview of the research process, including the literature review and the Institutional Review Board approval process to conduct the study. Finally, I describe data collection, data analysis and synthesis, and any ethical considerations related to the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of limitations of the study.

Research Questions

The goal of the research was to understand the experiences of college students in the weight-loss process. The desired outcome of the research was to make some recommendations for college administrators to consider when they are working with college students in the weight-loss process. The following research questions were addressed in this study to better understand college students' experiences with weight-loss:

1. How do college students describe their experiences with weight loss?

2. How do college students describe their behavioral and psychological changes associated with weight loss?

The research questions in this study attempt to illuminate what it means to be a college student who is in the process of losing weight. For this reason, a qualitative research approach was considered best suited to understand the experiences of the participants. According to Crotty (1998), phenomenological studies seek to understand the subjective, holistic truths of the participants. Additionally, phenomenological studies seek to comprehend the essence of the experiences of the participants (Moustaka, 1994). A phenomenological approach was determined to be best approach for this study to attempt to understand the experience of being a student in the weight-loss process,

Study Design

The primary goal of research is to seek more information about a specific question or questions of interest. Based on the research questions in this study, a qualitative research design was best suited to examine the research questions. Qualitative research focuses on the socially constructed meaning of individuals and how those individuals develop meanings of

their experiences (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative researchers look beyond the basic understanding of social phenomena and search for the deeper meaning (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). The focus of phenomenological research is "describing the 'essence' of the phenomenon from the perspectives of those who have experienced it" (Merriam, 2002, p. 93). Additionally, phenomenological research describes what the participants have in common with their experiences (Creswell, 2007). Glesene (2006) posited that "qualitative research methods are used to understand some social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved, to contextualize issues in their particular socio-cultural-political milieu, and sometimes to transform or change social conditions" (p. 4). Lichtman (2006) described qualitative research as holding no universal truths, but rather reality is woven into the world by the participant and researcher. More specifically, qualitative research that uses a phenomenological approach focuses on that woven reality and describes the realities and experiences from the participants who have experienced them (Merriam, 2002).

A qualitative research approach best aligned with the goals of this study, specifically a phenomenological approach. A phenomenological approach to this study was essential to obtain the rich descriptions of each of the participants' lived experiences and thoughts, and to discover their experiences with the weight-loss process. An examination of these experiences will allow student affairs professional and administrators the opportunity to understand the students on college campuses and better help serve these students. Crotty (1998) described phenomenological research as trying to capture the holistic and subjective experience of the participants. Creswell (2009) noted that phenomenology is best suited for describing "the essence of a lived phenomenon" (p. 78). My research focused on understanding, in depth, how the weight-loss process affects students, especially as weight-

loss on campus is a phenomenon that has not been fully understood. Phenomenology is useful for exploring topics in depth and understanding events and individuals, not just revealing that an event happened (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Creswell (2009) described a phenomenological written report as one that focuses on "describing the 'essence' of the experience" (p. 79). My study was carried out to understand more fully the entire weight-loss experience through the students' voices. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological qualitative research tries to illuminate the experiences of the participants and provides detailed descriptions. Crotty (1998) suggested that the goal of phenomenological research is to gather and reveal the participants' holistic and subjective experiences.

Moustakas (1994) described phenomenology as "a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for reflective structural analysis that portrays the essence of the experience" (p.13). Hence, a phenomenological design enables me to illuminate and comprehend the experiences of college students in the weight-loss process. Merriam (2002) described phenomenologists as being concerned with the multifaceted meanings that participants develop as a direct result of their experiences.

When conducting a phenomenological study, Creswell (2009) suggested using a modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method that starts with the researchers describing their personal experiences with the phenomena that is being studied. Patton (1990) and Merriam (2002) noted that researchers have to try to put aside their personal or shared experiences and focus on the participants' experiences of the phenomena. According to Merriam (2002), once the researcher puts aside his experiences, "consciousness itself becomes heightened, allowing the researcher to intuit or see the essence of the phenomenon" (p.7).

Theoretical Framework

The Transtheoretical Model (TTM) and Health Belief Model were used as the basic theoretical frameworks in this study. Both models focus on the changing process and ways to identify if an individual is going to start to change in their behaviors and the TTM goes to explore interventions that could be used to help participants in the stages to move further in the change process.

The Health Belief Model (Figure 3.1) focuses on the actual likelihood of an individual changing any negative behavior into a more positive behavior. There are several factors that lead individuals to change their behaviors. The individual has to perceive the susceptibility of an illness or disease and he must assess the severity of that disease. Simply stated, the model is described as "The perceived Benefits of healthy behaviors minus the perceived Barriers to the healthy behavior determine the likelihood of an individual taking preventative action." (Kim, Ahn, & No, 2012, p. 552)

The Transtheoretical Model (TTM) focuses on the Stages of Change. As people move through their decision process to change negative behaviors to more positive ones, or to begin healthy behaviors, the process is divided into five stages of the Stages of Change. The TTM also presents the Processes of Change, or ways individuals go about changing their behaviors. There are ten processes that individuals can use to change their behaviors. Decisional Balance is the third part of the TTM model. This part basically is the weight of the pro and cons of creating the change. Much like the Health Belief Model, when there are a stronger number of pros, the more likely the change will occur, and the more one will advance in the processes and stages of change. The final section of the TTM is the Self-

THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS OF THE HEALTH BELIEF MODEL
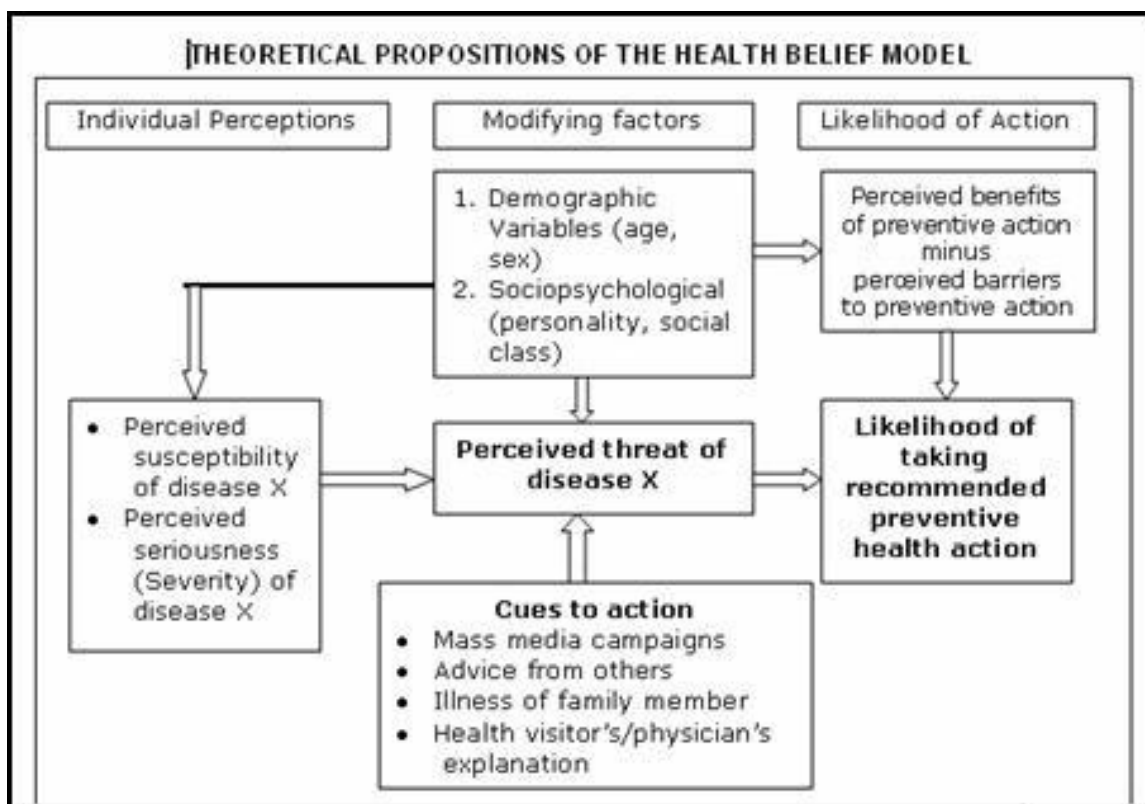
Source: http://currentnursing.com/nursing_theory/health_belief_model.html

Figure 3.1. Health Belief Model

efficacy part, which is an evaluation of the confidence and temptation levels that the change
can be effective.

Research Design

After successful completion of my capstone project, I started working on the design
for the research study. The first step in completing this process was to seek the approval of
the Institutional Research Board (IRB) for this study. After IRB approval (Appendix A), I
recruited participants who signed consent forms to agree to participate in the study
(Appendix B), and then I conducted interviews with them about their experiences (Appendix

C). After the completion of interviews, the interviews were transcribed and I analyzed the data. There was special emphasis on making sure that the standards of goodness and trustworthiness was maintained in this project as well.

Institutional Review Board approval

One of the greatest responsibilities of the Institutional Review Board is protecting human subjects who may be involved in research conducted at the university. I received approval from the IRB on October 15, 2012 before conducting any of this research (Appendix A). No contacts were made with potential subjects prior to obtaining the approval of IRB to start recruitment and data collection for this research project.

Sampling procedure

Participants were chosen via purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a method that is used in qualitative research that focuses on choosing participants strategically in order to get specific information about an experience that would not be ascertained by talking to other individuals (Glensne, 2006; Maxwell, 2005). I looked for individuals who were or had been overweight that is in the weight-loss process. If I had interviewed students who had not been overweight, then their experiences would not have reflected the purpose of the study. The reason for purposeful sampling is to gather rich descriptive data that allows the researcher to understand many issues that are relevant to the study (Patton, 2002). Maxwell (2005) outlined the four most important reasons for using purposeful sampling as follows:

1. To achieve and illuminate representativeness or typicality of the settings, individuals, or activities selected.

2. To sufficiently capture the heterogeneity in the population, hence ensuring that the conclusions sufficiently represent a range of the entire variation.

3. To intentionally examine cases that are crucial for the theories that are used at the beginning of the study.

4. To establish comparisons that highlight the reasons for differences between the selected settings or individuals in the study.

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of the participants in the weight-loss process and how that process affects them in their life journey. When talking to participants, if they knew other people who would have been a good fit for this study, I asked them to pass along the information in hopes to gain more participants a technique is known as snowball sampling (Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2002). In addition to snowball sampling, I advertised in the on campus gym by putting up flyers in free posting areas. I also provided a flyer to the personal training staff at the local community gym and spoke with several trainers on campus to see if they had knew of any participants with whom they could share the research. A copy of the flyer appears in Appendix B.

Participants for this study were included only if they met the following criteria:

1. University students who are classified as current full-time students.

2. The students have been considered overweight at some point during college enrollment.

3. The students have been active in trying to lose weight for at least six months.

4. The students were willing to be interviewed for this study.

5. The students had to be age 18 or older.

There are various reasons for limiting participants to the selected criteria. This research is focused on full-time students at a Midwestern university. The selected institution is a public, land-grant institution located in a medium sized city located in a Midwestern state. The university enrolls over 30,000 students who have numerous degree options. This university has a large athletic department and belongs in a division I collegiate conference. The main reason for selecting this institution was based on my location in the Midwest and on the resources available to the students on the campus. Many students have access to both on-campus and off-campus health resources and gyms. Additionally, I have developed connections within the university and the local community that enabled me access to students who may participate in the study.

The second criterion to qualify for the study was having been overweight sometime in college. While I believe that any weight-loss is important, by limiting the study to individuals who have been overweight, I hoped to gain richer and thicker details about the continual process of weight-loss and the journey that students go through as part of this process. Additionally, I believe that having been overweight, the students may have gone through a dramatic process, either due to time spent in the weight-loss process or to the dramatic change in physical appearance after weight loss.

The third qualification to take part in the study was that participants had to be actively trying to lose weight for at least six months, preferably putting them in the maintenance stage according to the Transtheoretical Model. Setting this criterion of being in the maintenance stage was intended to get deeper descriptions of experiences about the process and to enable the participants to provide greater insight about the weight-loss process. While being in one of these stages for two weeks is important, the participants probably would have not gone

through the same number of experiences as someone who has been in the process longer. In order to attain an abundantly rich and descriptive qualitative study that enables the participants to tell their valuable stories (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002), it was important that the students understand their process and be able to reflect on their experiences, and someone just entering the action stage may not be able to completely do that reflection. The last two qualifications were that the participants voluntarily agreed to be interviewed for this research study and were at least the age of 18 or older.

Researcher and Positionality

The topic of physical fitness is very important and salient in my life. Throughout my childhood and undergraduate years, I was always overweight. While I was studying for the master's degree and working full time after receiving it, I continued to gain weight and became Morbidly Obese according to the Body Mass Index (BMI) and my body fat percentage. All of the locations where I have lived prior to starting my doctoral program of study were locations that relied heavily on cars and public transportation, and not so much on physical exercise and active lifestyles. I had worked at a summer program every year since high school. At the end of the two-week program, we took a staff photograph that is mailed to the each of us shortly after camp has ended. Receiving this picture in the mail was a continual wakeup call for me about my weight. I looked at the picture and I did not see myself in the picture, so I had to remember who I stood on either side of me which enabled me to see myself to become. I had gained so much weight that I didn't recognize myself in the camp photo. That was when I decided that I could not continue to gain weight and I had to take control of my life.

During the past couple of years since entering my Ph.D. program, I lost 92 pounds and became more physically active in my life. As a result my weight loss, I noticed that I started to become more active in social activities (e.g., shopping, going out at night, going to events) and physical activities (e.g., biking, running, playing sports). I feel like I have more energy and the ability to do things that I had never been able to do previously. My weight-loss journey has not been completely without issues. I have experienced many emotional and physical challenges throughout this journey. I have dealt with many self-esteem issues that I had previously pushed aside. When I was heavier, people would talk about how nice I was or how great of a person I was, but no one verbally judged my appearance. I noticed while I was losing weight that everyone started talking about how I look, and that was a new issue that I had to address. I started to feel pressure to look a certain way, or to look more fit or slim so that I wouldn't disappoint them and the comments would continue. Feeling this pressure to look a certain way was very stressful for me.

Another emotional setback was when I hit plateaus and did not lose weight for a week or months. Losing weight became almost like a tool for measuring my success. When I didn't do it, I felt like I had failed that week. In the process, I also experienced physical setbacks. I had to see a physical therapist due to knee and ankle tendinitis, which is common when starting to work out when overweight. Before I began to work out, the stress of the weight on my joints and lower back had caused me issues for a long time. However, after starting to run and work out, my body had to withstand a little more pounding and impact. Having worked through these issues, I understand what other individuals might be experiencing in their weight-loss process.

Throughout my weight-loss journey, I worked out at a gym and used the services of a personal trainer, and I participated in group-fitness classes. I worked out with my trainer two to three times a week, depending on the goals I had at the time. Having a trainer helped me during this process with motivation and dealing with emotional and physical issues that arose during that time. My trainer was available for me whenever I needed him. From the beginning, I have been able to e-mail or text him with questions I had about fitness, nutrition, or just issues that I faced during the process. He has been a positive force in my health and in my life. My trainer also taught me much about fitness, and now several of my friends ask me about fitness and working out, and some of them have even said that I should become a trainer myself. Considering my position as a researcher in this study and my positive experience with my trainer, I admit that I feel that everyone, regardless of age and fitness goals, should seek a trainer's assistance and services in their fitness journeys. I have said many times to people that I believe I will have a trainer for the rest of my life and, therefore, I recognize that I have a positive bias towards trainers and losing weight.

When it comes to nutrition, I have had my struggles learning what to eat. Being from the South, I like what is considered Southern soul food. I was raised on fried food and sides that were very high in carbohydrates (i.e., potatoes, rice, pastas). I still enjoy these foods, but I now understand what I am putting into my body and that I cannot afford to eat certain foods as much or as often as in the past. I still go through struggles when it comes to diet and my eating habits. My struggles with eating and with injuries have led to me to regain some weight in recent months, which has been another struggle and issue that I am currently addressing. Understanding a little of my background will help with understanding the insider/outsider statuses that I assumed in this research.

Insider/Outsider Status

I acknowledge my insider status as part of this community. Schwandt (2007)

described the insider/outsider status as follows:

> An internalist or insider perspective holds that knowledge of the social world
> must start from the insider or social actor's account of what social life means.
> To know the world of human action is to understand the subjective meanings
> of that action to the actors. In contrast, an externalist or outsider perspective
> argues that knowledge of the social world consists in causal explanations of
> human behavior. (p. 152)

Griffith (1998) provided further exploration regarding insider/outsider status:

> Where the researcher enters the research site as an Insider – someone whose
> biography (gender, race, class, sexual orientation and so on) gives her a lived
> familiarity with the group being researched – that tacit knowledge informs her
> research producing a different knowledge than that available to the Outsider –
> a researcher who does not have an intimate knowledge of the group being
> researched prior to their entry into the group (p.361)
> .

I brought to this study my personal experiences with weight loss. The ability to relate

and my insight are particularly valuable for understanding some of the experiences of my

participants. Having struggled with weight and the weight-loss process may enable my

participants to open up to me a little more since they realize that I have been through the

process and I am not judging them on their journey. I am also an insider by virtue of having

struggled with my weight for many years, including childhood, high school, college, and into

my adult life. Being an insider has both advantages and disadvantages when collecting data.

Being an insider may enable the participants to open up more, but insiders can sometimes

bias the data by interjecting their perspectives and not fully understanding the participants'

perspectives (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Despite my insider status in many areas, I claim potential outsider status as well.

While I began this weight-loss process as obese, now I would categorize myself as being

overweight. I am able to perform a variety of physical activities that many obese people may not be able to perform. In addition, I have had the luxury of being able to hire a personal trainer throughout my weight loss, and many people may not be able to have this luxury. Since this study was not limited to any one gender, race/ethnicity, or sexual identity, I may not share the same identities of my participants, which would make me an outsider in those respects. Another area that may make me different is that I did not go through the weight-loss process during my undergraduate years; I was in my doctoral program before deciding to lose weight. Therefore, I did not experience being an undergraduate student going through the weight-loss process.

<center>**Data Collection Methods**</center>

This section provides an overview of the methods of collecting data to understand the experiences of college students in the weight-loss process. I used interviews and follow-up conversations to collect data, and kept journals/analytic memos about the interviews and conversations to gather more data about the interviews.

Interviewing

There are four basics methods for collecting data: interviews, observations, document analysis, and audio and visual analysis (Creswell, 2009). In phenomenological research, interviews are considered the main method of collecting data (Creswell, 2007; Moustaka, 1994). Janesick (2004) described interviewing as two people meeting to exchange information through conversation and questions and answers. Maxwell (2005) described interviews as meeting with the participants, asking questions, and using audio recording and note-taking methods to collect the narratives of the participants. According to Janesick

(2004), these data-collecting methods ultimately result in a "joint construction of meaning about a particular topic" (p.72). Rubin and Rubin (2012) noted that interviewing helps researchers understand experiences that they might not have lived or gives them a different perspective on an experience. They also posited that interviewing is the best way to explore issues that might be personal or sensitive in nature. Talking about one's weight and weight-loss process could be considered sensitive and conducting interviews was the best approach to collect data in this research.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) identified three elements that are critical for researchers to understand when completing qualitative interviews. The first is to accept that "understanding is achieved by encouraging people to describe their worlds in their own terms" (p. 2). The second is "that interviewing involves a relationship between the interviewer and interviewee that imposes obligations on both sides" (p. 2). The last component deals with ethics: the humanity of the interview, and the importance of the written portion the research. "This philosophy helps define what is interesting and what is ethical and helps provide standards to judge the quality of the research, the humanity of the interviewing relationship, and the completeness and accuracy of the write-up" (p.2).

In addition to Rubin and Rubin's (1995) elements, Krathwohl (1998) offered four key points to interviewing that are important for any researcher conducting interviews:

1. Identify yourself and do your best to make the participant feel comfortable.
2. Mirror your reactions to those of the participant. If you are pleasant, this will be reflected by the participant.

3. Use motivations and reinforcement cues for more in-depth answers, such as nodding your head or letting the participant know that the information they are giving you is good.

4. Learn to probe for more in-depth answers to your questions. Asking follow up questions or simply asking for the participant to tell you more about the topic can help probe more.

I conducted one or two face-to-face interviews with participants to gain as much insight as possible about their weight-loss process and experiences. Both interviews were semi-structured and occurred at a time that was convenient to the participant. Semi-structured interviews enable the interviewer to follow the lead of the participant being interviewed (Esterberg, 2002). In addition, the interviews were conducted in a private location that minimized the risk of distractions and interruptions, and ensured confidentiality of the participants. A copy of my interview protocol appears in Appendix C. All interviews were audio recorded, and I noted verbal and nonverbal communication throughout the interviews. After each interview, I audio-recorded an analytic memo with my observations about the interview. The interviews and analytic memos were fully transcribed as soon as possible to ensure having time to analyze each interview before conducting a follow-up interview. In the follow-up interviews, the focus was on ensuring the accuracy of my understanding of the participants' stories in the previous interview. Conducting these member checks is important to make sure that I fully understood and accurately reported the experiences of my participants. In addition to performing member checks, the follow-up conversations and interviews gave me some time to see if there were any other experiences

that the participant wanted to share about their weight-loss journey. Each interview lasted from 30 to 60 minutes.

The initial interview with the participants took place in three phases. Phase one, which occurred at the beginning of the interview, consisted of a review of all informed consent information and allowed the participants to get any clarification that they may have needed about their rights as participants. Then I gathered demographic and background information with each participant and built a rapport with the participants (Lichtman, 2006). Only after the initial stage had been completed did I start the next phase of the interview. The second phase of the interview consisted of asking open-ended questions related to the study, and allowed the participants to answer and tell their stories in their own words. I asked for clarification as needed to make sure that I understood the participants' stories as fully as possible. The questions and conversation revolved around the following areas: life before losing weight, the reason why the participant decided to lose weight, what methods the participant used to lose weight, what successes and struggles they had encountered on their journey, what life was like since starting the weight-loss process, and how being on a college campus had helped or hindered their weight-loss process. Additionally, there were some questions about how professionals on campus supported or could support the participants.

In the last phase of the interview, I allowed the participants to include anything that they had not had the opportunity to share that they felt should be included in the interview that was missed in phase two. I also had the opportunity to conduct any final check for understanding before concluding the interview.

After the interview, I immediately audio-recorded any thoughts and observations that I noticed in the interview, as well as recording a thick, rich description of the participant for my records. After the interview and analytic memo, I took time to transcribe the interview. After each interview was transcribed, I completed a full data analysis, starting with using basic open coding to analyze the interview. Open coding is described by Esterberg (2002) as a process that enables the interviewer to make sense of the data by going line by line of the transcript and making notes of the meaning of the lines. Focused coding generally follows open coding, and is the process of looking for the most common themes or ideas. After completing the two processes of coding, I scheduled some time to talk with the participants about their interviews to make sure that my themes and analysis was true for the participant. In addition to the follow-up conversations, each participant was offered the opportunity to read the transcript from their interview as well as the final dissertation if they desired. All identifying information of the participants, such as their names, unique physical characteristics, etc., were omitted in the transcripts and dissertation to grant participant confidentially. All audio recordings were deleted or erased after they were transcribed.

Follow-up interactions

In addition to the interviews, I had at least five follow-up interactions with the each of the participants, except one. These conversations enabled me to maintain constant contact with the participants and to see what areas they were struggling in and working on over months of progress. These conversations were held in informal locations that were convenient to participant as to not take too much time out of their day, since the participants reported be very busy during different times over the study period. I initiated many of

contacts; however, on a couple occasions, participants reached out because they wanted to share their struggles and successes with the process with me. A couple of the participants expressed that they felt that I was one of the only professionals on campus who cared about their success in weight loss and/or understood their journey. After each of the interviews, I wrote notes in my journal about the conversations in order to keep track of the events that occurred and the topics discussed thus creating an audit trail and documenting the conversation topics.

Journaling

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested maintaining a reflective journal during the research process. I kept a journal to help keep track of my thoughts, impressions, and reactions throughout the research process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Journaling enabled me to be aware of my own feelings and thoughts as a result of conducting the interviews. It also helped me to keep my own feelings and thoughts out of the participants' stories. Journaling helped me additionally to reflect on my personal journey throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is an ongoing and continual process that is focused on making sure that the participants' stories and voices are reflected in the report. Creswell (2009) used the analogy of "peeling back the layers of an onion" (p. 183). He also described the overall activities of qualitative data analysis:

> It is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing memos throughout the study. I say that qualitative data analysis is conducted concurrently with gathering data,

making interpretations, and writing reports. While interviews are going on, for example, the researcher may be analyzing an interview collected earlier, writing memos that may ultimately be included as a narrative in the final report, and organizing the structure of the final report. (p. 184)

Merriam (2002) also reflected on the ongoing process of qualitative data analysis, suggesting that data analysis should start with the very first interview. Qualitative data analysis is also described as the process of analyzing, interpreting, and making meaning of the data and putting them into the researcher's own words (Adler & Clark, 2008). Adler and Clark (2008) stated that, "interviewing qualitatively generates a great deal of text and the process of analyzing such data is typically more inductive than deductive . . . the most common approach is to read with an open mind" (p. 292). Data analysis also offers a "comprehensive description that provides the basis of reflective structural analysis that portrays the essence of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p.13).

In order to structure this qualitative study, I used the six steps that Creswell (2009, pp. 185-190) suggested:

- Step 1: Organize and prepare the qualitative data for analysis. This can include transcribing interviews, typing field notes, or sorting and arranging data based on the different sources of information.
- Step 2: Read through all the data. The purpose of this step is to obtain a general sense of what the data is meaning. Initially focusing on the tone of ideas, the general ideas expressed, and the impression of the overall depth, credibility, and use of information helps with working with the data in this stage.
- Step 3: Start comprehensive analysis by coding the qualitative data.
- Step 4: Use the coding to produce a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis.
- Step 5: Describe how the description and themes will be represented in the report.
- Step 6: Make an interpretation of the meaning of the qualitative data.

Saldaña (2009) described a code as "most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a

portion of language-base or visual data" (p. 3). I coded most of the interviews and memos by hand, and also used the assistance of NVivo to look for additional codes that I may have overlooked. The NVivo software helped me organize, search, and link the data in a more efficient way than simply coding by hand.

Goodness and Trustworthiness

When conducting research, it is imperative that the researcher pays close attention that the study can be reproduced and that the findings align with the research data. This is described as reliability (Merriam, 2002). Since the researcher plays a vital role in interpreting, synthesizing, and reporting the data collected in interviews and observations, it is important that proper steps are taken to ensure interpretations and reporting made by the researcher are accurate and true for the participants. Merriam (2002) refers to this concept as validity. Arminio and Hultgren (2002) suggested that Merriam's terms be changed to goodness and trustworthiness when applied to qualitative research. Goodness requires that the meaning making process is clearly presented and data collection and analysis are clear for anyone to understand and follow (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). For any qualitative research study, the standards of goodness and trustworthiness have to be met to make sure the research is ethical and accurate. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that the three most common ways of ensuring trustworthiness in a qualitative study are credibility, transferability, and dependability.

Credibility

Creditability simply addresses whether the researcher's perception and written report matches what the participants think is accurate (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Several techniques that Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) suggested to ensure creditability are: clarify any biases, conduct continual checks to ensure interpretations are correct, triangulate the data, ensure member checks of transcripts, conduct peer debriefing, and present any discrepancies in the study. I made sure to conduct member checks in follow-up interviews and conversations, and I allowed the participants to read the transcripts if they elected to, in order to ensure that they accurately reflected their thoughts. Additionally, I conducted peer debriefing with two other researchers to make sure that I was accurately understanding my data. I triangulated the data whenever possible by preforming member checks, follow up interactions, journaling, and reviewing the interview transcripts.

Dependability

Dependability focuses on the ability of others to track the overall process and procedures used in collecting and interpreting the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The two main ways to ensure dependability are to provide a detailed and thorough explanation of how the data were collected and analyzed and to request that other researchers code the interviews (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). In this study, I made sure that the processes or collecting and analyzing data was very clear and easy to follow. I checked with my committee and other researcher to make sure my explanations were clear. I also had another researcher analyze my codes to ensure they were accurate and that I did not omit any areas. This process is known as an external audit. The researcher who audited my transcripts provided good

feedback, suggesting that the themes of time and money might be combined as one major theme based on the college lifestyle, since they seemed to go hand-in-hand in many ways.

Transferability

The last way to ensure trustworthiness is transferability. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) explained transferability as the fit between the context of the research and the other contexts as judged by the consumers of the research. The two ways Bloomberg and Volpe suggested to ensure transferability were to ensure thick, rich descriptions of the data, and to give as much detail as possible regarding the background and context of the study. I ensured that I provided thick, rich descriptions of the participants, the interviews, and the data collection. I also made sure that my positionality was clearly available for the readers to understand my worldview.

Ensuring credibility, transferability, and dependability of the finding increases the goodness and trustworthiness as a whole. My responsibility as a researcher was to strengthen these three areas to ensure that this study is considered good and trustworthy.

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Delimitations

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The scope of this study was limited to a very specific population; current college students at least age 18, who have been considered overweight, and have been actively trying to lose weight for at least six months. I chose to focus on students who met these criteria due to their experiences and unique perspectives on the issues of weight on college campuses. This study does not attempt to highlight the weight-loss process for any other students on a college campus.

Limitations

This study was limited due to the subject nature. Due to concerns about finding enough participants who qualify for this study, I limited the total possible number of participants to seven, and ended with five who agreed to participate. I also chose to focus the study at one university so the students would have the same resources on campus and in the community.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations should be at the forefront of any research study, and researchers should be aware of these issues and make sure that they have a high respect for the participants and their research sites (Creswell, 2009). Merriam (2002) noted that various ethical issues can arise in the data collection process. I took appropriate steps to ensure that informed consent was clear and understood by the participants from beginning of their participation in the project (Esterberg, 2002). One major area in the informed consent was that participation is voluntary and the participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any point. This withdrawal could happen at any point in the research process. In addition, the participants had the option not to answer any questions in the interview that they were uncomfortable answering. I reviewed the option to withdraw at the beginning of every interview in which they participated. Ensuring that confidentiality was maintained at all times was a major priority. Weight-loss and topics that may arise from it can be very sensitive issues, so I masked the identity of all the participants of the study. This means that any identifying information such as names, majors, jobs, organizations, or characteristics could be changed to ensure confidentiality. I informed participants that I would keep their

information confidential during the initial consent discussion. In addition, the descriptions used to introduce the participants in the dissertation were emailed to the participants for them to review and make sure they felt their story was properly portrayed and that their confidentiality was preserved. In informed consent document will be signed by the researcher and participant and the participants will be provided with a copy of the informed consent.

Summary

This chapter outlined the general methodology and methods used for this research. The purpose of this study was to understand the weight-loss process and how it affects college students. The best design for this study is a qualitative research design. Phenomenology seeks to capture the holistic and subjective experience of the respondents (Crotty, 1998). This research approach aims to illuminate the experience of the participants in the weight-loss process and provides a detailed description of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Participants were selected if they were current college students who have been considered overweight and have been in the maintenance phase of the weight-loss process according to the Transtheoretical Model. This chapter provided a general map of the overall research process that was best suited for the study.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the weight-loss process and how it affects college students. This research sought to understand the experiences weight-loss has had on the student emotionally, behaviorally, and academically. This study used the Transtheoretical Model (TTM) and the Stages of Change as basic frameworks to understand the college students' processes of weight-loss and their mindset about losing weight. The two main research questions that guided the study were:

1. How do college students describe their experiences with weight-loss?

2. How do college students describe their behavioral and psychological changes associated with weight-loss?

Data were gathered by conducting in-depth interviews with the study's five participants. The participants had to self-identify as overweight while in college and actively trying to lose weight for at least six months. They also had to be enrolled at the large Midwest university where this study was conducted. Five students participated in the study: Chris, Ashley, Carla, Jason, and Traci. Chris, Ashley, and Traci were undergraduate students, while Carla and Jason were working on graduate degrees. There were three females and two males in the study. Jason was the only participant who identified as a person of color. Table 4.1 provides a description of the participants and their characteristics.

Table 4.1. Description of the participants

Name	Age	Sex*	Enrollment status	Class	Stages of Change	
					Nutritional status	Exercise status
Chris	Early 20's	M	Undergrad	Senior	Maintenance	Pre-Contemplation
Ashley	Mid-Late 20's	F	Undergrad	Senior	Contemplation	Contemplation
Carla	Mid 20's	F	Graduate	2nd year	Action	Action
Jason	Late 20's	M	Graduate	3rd year	Maintenance	Maintenance
Traci	Early 20's	F	Undergrad	Junior	Maintenance	Maintenance

*Sex refers to gender expression and not necessarily the biological sex of the participant.

Four major themes were derived from the in-depth interviews. The four themes are identified and described briefly as follows:

1. The need to consider the weight-loss process as multiple processes that are working simultaneously, rather than considering not just unitary process. Participants talked about their diet and physical exercise as two different processes, sometimes describing two different levels on the Stage of Change model.

2. The role of support when it comes to successful weight loss. Support, whether from friends or personal trainers, is essential for the participants to be successful in the weight-loss process. All of the participants alluded to being more successful when someone was helping and encouraging them in the process.

3. The stresses of being in college and how it affects the weight-loss process. Time, money, and certain relationships are major barriers to being healthy and are factors that lead to struggling with the weight-loss process.

4. The physical environment of the university can help or hinder the weight-loss process and was seen as supportive or oppressive.

In this chapter, I present the findings of the study. First I will present brief campus and community background information to help identify where the participants lived and the resources and service that were available to them. Then I provide an introduction of the participants, followed by a discussion of the four themes with quotations and supporting evidence. In addition, I attempt to offer the reader a rich and thick description of the experiences of the participants to convey a comprehensive understanding of the participants and their experiences (Merriam, 2002). The purpose for providing thick, rich descriptions is to provide a background of the origin of the themes, thus supporting the level of goodness and trustworthiness of the research. The goal is accomplished through illustrative quotations from the interview transcripts, which illuminate the experiences and voice of each participant and their experiences in the weight-loss process.

The University

According to its website, the university is a large, public, four-year institution that is situated in a mid-size town in the Midwest. The University is a doctoral-granting research institution. The total enrollment of students reached over 31,000 students in 2012, with over 25,500 comprised of undergraduates. The campus is very large and located on approximately 2,000 acres of land. There are seven academic colleges in addition to the graduate college on the campus where students are offered 100 Bachelor's degree programs, 115 Master's programs, 83 PhD programs, and one professional degree option. With over

800 recognized clubs, 50 Greek chapters, and 16 varsity teams, there are many ways to get involved on campus.

Campus life

The Division of Student Affairs on the campus has 11 subdivisions that are comprised of: Housing, Dean of Students Office, Campus Dining, Enrollment Services, International Student and Scholars Office, Financial Aid, Campus Union and Student Activities, Registrar, Student Counseling Center, Student Health Center, and Learning Communities Program. The basic functions for several of these areas are presented to provide a more comprehensive picture of the campus environment.

Residence Office

The Residence Office has a variety of housing options that include traditional, suite-style, and apartment living options to residents. Over a third of the campus population lives on campus at this institution. The residence halls and apartments are staff by undergraduate Resident Assistants, Graduate Hall Directors, and full-time Hall Directors who currently hold Master's degrees. The university housing office prides itself on the campus experience and offers hundreds of leadership opportunities to its residents.

Dean of Students Office

The Dean of Students Office houses many programs that are focused on student success and connections on campus. This office houses an academic success program that offers tutoring, supplemental instruction classes, and academic coaching. This office also has cultural and identity program offices that help students connect and navigate the campus, and become involved with people of their culture. These offices include a Multicultural

Center, a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Center, a Women's Center, and a Disability Resources office. The offices of Judicial Affairs and Student Assistance are also located in this division. Judicial Affairs oversees the adjudication of student code of conduct violations on campus. The office of Student Assistance is dedicated to helping students when they are in crisis or need help with their success in college. Their goal is to "help students succeed." Students can go to the office when they have questions, do not know where to get help, or just are experiencing difficulties in their personal or academic life.

Another area that the Dean of Students Office oversees is Recreational Services. Students pay a recreational fee as part of their tuition; therefore, most services are free to them to use anytime. In the gyms on campus, there are over 25 basketball courts, 15 volleyball courts, 12 racquetball courts, two squash courts, three weight rooms, 3 swimming pools, two rock walls, and four indoor tracks. There are also numerous free group exercise classes including aqua fitness, cardio class, yoga, and fitness dance classes that students can join at any time. Other services that are offered by the campus gyms are group training, personal training, and exercise incentive program. The group and personal training options are offered at a nominal cost to the students. In addition to campus gyms, recreational services houses intramural sports that host over 40 sports in which individuals and teams can get involved. Sports include volleyball, basketball, broomball, curling, softball, ultimate Frisbee, dodge ball, and bowling. There are also some non-physically demanding activities that are available as well including Texas hold'em, table tennis, billiards, hearts, and bag toss game. Teams can join intramural leagues for a small fee and each member on winning teams in the intramurals divisions get a championship t-shirts. These shirts are highly coveted on campus.

Campus Dining

There are several dining options on the university's campus. There are four residential dining halls, three restaurants/food courts, nine café options, and three convenience stores in which students can get food on the campus. The dining website highlights the commitment to nutrition, eating healthy, local products, and sustainability areas that are some of the department's focus.

Counseling Center

The university Counseling Center offers many free services to the students. In addition to the traditional individual and group counseling services, the counseling center offers services to students for eating disorders, substance abuse, and couples counseling. There are also quick start groups that people can join before they can get into individual or group counseling, as well as a free service related to stress and stress management that students can utilize.

Surrounding Community

The university is located in city with a population of approximately 60,000 residents (which includes student enrollment). The community has been ranked as a Top 100 place to live in the United States. The community has many public resources that are available to the students of the university. One major benefit of the town is that it has a public transportation system that is included in each student's tuition bill, so each is free to hop on a bus and ride to the different areas in town. The city has over 35 parks within its limits. The city also offers adult recreational sport leagues that are similar to intramural sports on the university campus. There are fewer than ten sports that the city sponsors but teams of adults can get

together and play sports together for a cost. The community houses several swimming pools, including an outdoor waterpark. The city has a gym that has weights and some basketball courts in it. The gym offers personal and group training packages for its clients that sign up for the services. There are also fitness classes offered at different facilities across the city. All services are available for a fee through the city.

In addition to all of the city-operated opportunities, several fitness market businesses are located around town for clients to join for a fee. There are at least four private gym companies that run operations within the city. One of the companies bears the city's name in its title and has a large number of students who work at one of its three locations; other students get free memberships with certain apartment leases. In addition to actual gym, there are several companies that specialize in weight loss though a series of classes or circuits. Two fitness companies—Kosama and Curves—have businesses in multiple states. A couple other companies that focus on this type of training are locally owned and operated. The city also has a local co-op store and outdoor seasonal markets where individuals can buy local and organic produce.

The city hosts multiple walks and runs in which individuals can participate. There are multiple 5k and 10k races throughout the year in which both residents and non-residents can participate. Within 50 miles of the city, there are other major events such as mud runs, obstacle runs, and 5k, 10k, half marathons, and marathons in which individuals can participate. In addition to running activities, there is an annual biking event in which the participants bike across the state.

Participant Profiles

A total of five participants met the required criteria to participate in this study. All of the participants were fulltime, undergraduate or graduate students who self-identified as being overweight in college. In addition, these participants had to identify as being active in the weight-loss process for at least six months. The participants represented various gender, ethnicities, ages, class standings, sexual identities, and degree specializations at the time this study was conducted. In this section, I will provide an introduction to each participant. In addition, there will be a section in which I discuss my impression and assessment of the participant. This section describes how I identified the participants' stage in the Stage of Change process and any areas that seem to stand out to me in our interviews and conversations. I have also added some of my reflexivity statements in an effort to be transparent about my struggles.

Chris

Chris is a white male in his senior year as an undergraduate student majoring in a technology-related field. He is over six feet tall, with medium-length brown hair. He is a large guy who carries his weight in his mid-section. Chris was wearing a green t-shirt and jeans with tennis shoes when I interviewed him. Although he seemed to be laid back during the interview, he was very direct and to the point. Chris was involved on campus in a club related to his major and as a member of other campus clubs. He also was a student leader in the residence halls on campus in the fall semester. Fall semester was going to be his last semester living on campus because he had decided to move out and live with some of his friends in an off-campus apartment. Chris could be seen at many of the campus's sporting

event, and described himself as an extreme fan of the university's athletics. Chris was not afraid of dressing up to cheer on his beloved sporting teams to victory. When Chris was not at athletic events, he was in his residence hall with other residents or playing video games.

Chris reported that he was very active in sports, particularly basketball, until the end of his junior year of high school. After his junior year, he decided that he hated the basketball coach, whom he referred to as *"kind of a dick,"* and quit the team. Chris reported that he went from early morning weightlifting and after-school practices to doing no physical exercise at all. During his senior year of high school, Chris gained a significant amount of weight and went from being athletically built to overweight. Chris expressed being apathetic about the weight gain, and did not really want to work out or try to prevent the weight gain. Chris had gained the majority of his weight before entering college. Chris said that he simply lacked the motivation to work out anymore because, *"I don't like it."* He said that when he works out, he thinks, *"This sucks. What am I doing? This is awful!"* and does not do physical exercise unless he is playing a sport or doing something with a goal involved.

Chris has come to accept his weight at the current level. He said, *"Yeah, I'm pretty fat, no big deal."* He reported that he did try to lose weight for a while but just ended up on the weight-loss roller coaster where he would lose and gain it back, and now he has decided to just try eating healthier and not drinking soda. Chris talked about watching a video online in which an overweight man ran long-distance marathons but was still very overweight, and according to Chris, *"he is still really healthy, but he's still a pretty fat guy."* Chris said he desires to be like the man in the video, *"because obviously if I could lose a bunch of weight I would, but that's not my goal."* However, he said that he was not really sure what his goal was, other than to "live healthier" and to make *"little changes that he can stick with."* He

figured, *"if I can make little changes that I can stick with, then eventually I will get in better shape."*

Chris had a positive opinion of his college campus. Chris thought that the campus was accepting to people who are overweight. However, he mentioned that he is not *"super overweight or anything, I don't think."* He said that the staff at the university had been really accepting and nothing but supportive of him. Chris mentioned that some of the desks can be tight in the older buildings and that people were *"skinnier back then."* He also mentioned that there are people who have to sit in front of the class or at a table because they are too big for a desk, and he feels bad for them when that happens. Chris had a positive outlook on the services that the university has to offer. He spoke very highly of the dining halls and thought that they offer a variety of healthy foods. He said that he eats much healthier because of the on-campus dining options. Chris also thought that having the gym on campus was a good resource, although he does not use the gym at all.

Impressions and assessment

Chris appeared to be back in the pre-contemplation stage of the Stages of Change regarding physical activity, based on his views about starting to exercise and becoming healthier the following semester when he was planning to move in with his friends. He hoped that living with one of his friends, who was very involved and motivated about fitness, would help him go to the gym and become healthier in his food choices. His friend had gotten all of Chris's other future roommates to eat healthier and hoped that he would have the same influence on him. Chris hoped that his friend's eating and exercise habits would rub off on him as well and help him become a little more fit. Based on his timing of moving into

the new apartment, he was a couple months away from making the exercise change, thus the classification of his exercise in the pre-contemplation stage for exercise. Chris seemed to make some strides in advancing his nutritional health with the dining halls on campus, but he stated that, when he buys his own food, he tends to buy unhealthy food. He reported that he had been trying to eat healthier for some time. This is why he was classified in the maintenance stage for nutrition.

I felt frustrated with Chris at times. At first, the interview triggered many of my past feelings. I remember myself saying many of the excuses, or what I thought were excuses, that Chris said, and I used to not put in the effort to lose weight. I had to really work through these feeling and process them with a mentor. I had even considered removing Chris from the study since he was not in the action/maintenance stage of the Stages of Change. However, he did meet the maintenance requirement for dieting, which was his current focus, and I had to come to terms that it was my bias that exercise was required to actually lose weight and not a reflection on him and his personal journey. Connecting with Chris was not as easy as it was for me to connect with the other four participants. Chris was more reserved and less forthcoming during the interviews. I was unable to tell if this was because Chris was nervous, if he was just a little uncomfortable talking about his weight, or if it was just his personality not to add extra details. Chris was the first participant whom I interviewed, and maybe my nervousness or inexperience could have affected my perception of the interview or the interview itself.

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Ashley

Ashley is a white, female senior in her early to mid-twenties studying an engineering-related field. Ashley jokes that she is a senior, although she had another year of schooling left. Ashley is very punctual and was one of the only participants to beat me to our meeting location. Ashley showed up to our initial meeting wearing jogging pants, a jacket, and had her shoulder-length hair pulled back into a ponytail. Ashley weighed about 360 pounds, based on her interview and, at her heaviest, weighed 400 pounds or more. Ashley was the participant who weighted the most. Ashley was a member of several organizations on campus and she held a leadership position of one of the organizations. In addition to her studies and organizational membership, Ashley had just secured a job that she was very excited about and thought would be fun. However, the job required Ashley to learn and memorize many new policies, procedures, and organizational structures, which added to her stress.

Ashley reported that she was big as long as she could remember. She always felt that she was heavier and taller than most of the girls. At the age of twelve, Ashley started to try drugs and drinking alcohol. Ashley recalled, *"I decided I was going to start doing meth and pot and drinking and being ridiculously stupid. I actually got really skinny, not skinny-skinny, but like I was at 160 pounds."* Ashley remembered that as the only time in her life when she felt that she was not overweight. Ashley continued this behavior until the summer before ninth grade, when she decided to quit using drugs. She reported that she just decided, *"Screw it. I don't want to do this stuff anymore."* Ashley saw this cold-turkey approach as being both good and bad:

So I just kind of quit. I quit doing drugs and quit meth and all this. And, well, it was a bad deal. Seems so weird to say that that was a bad thing, because my thyroid died and so over the course of high school, and was in high school for 3 years, my weight went from 160, 180 to 340 pounds. Like, I blew up because I had like basically no metabolism anymore.

Ashley reported that she was able to get through her three years of high school because she was able not to take PE, except during her freshmen year, due to feeling embarrassed in gym class. Her gym teacher was very insulting and would make fun of her in front of the class because she was not fast enough for his standards. She had made a good connection with the school counselor and nurse. She said, *"him [the school counselor] and his wife [school nurse] were actually like my mentors in high school, quite extensively."* After the gym incident, she went to them to tell them about it and said that she could never go through that embarrassment and hurt again. Ashley was allowed to take an eighth class to make up for not taking a PE class. This added to her course load, which contributed to some weight gain as well. Ashley said, *"I went to school for, you know, whatever, 8, 7 or 8 hours a day, and then I would come home and I was literally doing 8 classes worth of homework every night, you know So I had to work really hard at it, but I was sitting on my butt all the time."* After high school, Ashley went to a community college close to her hometown and she wanted to become a nurse. In order to get the nursing degree, she had to complete two physical education classes: a circuits class and a physical education class. When remarking about the physical education class, she said, *"it was such a joke and you could totally fudge your way through it and so when things got tough you totally did, you know, like you could just go sign in and leave. Besides, nobody was watching you."* Ashley started to work while she was in college because she had to support herself. Eventually, Ashley dropped out of

college to work full time. At this point, Ashley had not gained any more weight, but she said that she did not lose any either.

After leaving school and starting to work fulltime, Ashley broke her leg, which left her unable to do most physical activities for about four months. Ashley said that she became depressed because she was physically helpless, and she turned to food to help address her depression. After healing from her injury, Ashley got a job in a warehouse and, working in that fast-paced manufacturing job, she lost 50 pounds or more. Ashley later received a promotion that allowed her to become more sedentary at work, so the weight slowly started to come back. She worked nights at her job, so she slept most of the daytime, which made it harder for her to exercise.

Ashley quit that job and moved to another state and found a job that she loved that gave a significant discount at a gym in the area. The gym was located right next to her house, so she joined and went to the gym when she was bored because, she said, *"I had nothing better to do, and I wanted to do it (exercise)."* However, two months after joining the gym, she was laid off. Ashley was unable to find a job in the area, so she went back to her hometown and decided to go back to the community college to try another major. This time, she met a friend who was, *"like super, you know, exercise freak at the time."* Her friend held her accountable and helped motivate her to get active. She remembered, *"He encouraged me a lot, you know. I was like 'I don't want to go today.' And he was like, 'Get your ass up. We are going.'"* Additionally, she had to take another wellness class. She recalled that maintaining a healthy diet was difficult because she did not really have the money to pay for groceries. Before her friend graduated from the community college, she had lost close to 80 pounds. He graduated and left, and her progress and motivation slowed.

She said, *"He left me and so my progress stopped. I mean, my other friend tried to encourage me, but it just wasn't the same. I mean, I just didn't have it in me anymore. And so I gradually kind of slacked off more and more until I fell off the wagon again."* After getting her Associates Degree, she enrolled at her current college.

The chaos of changing schools, locations, routines, and making new friends just threw another obstacle into her progress. At her current school, she first moved into an apartment complex that provided a membership to the local gym, in addition to the on-campus gyms. However, she was not able to take advantage of the gyms due to the difficulties she had adjusting to the changes of transitioning into her new school, and trying to get a job so she could pay her bills. Then on New Year's Day, she realized that she had reached a weight of over 400 pounds. This was an eye opener for Ashley. Ashley decided to make a New Year's resolution to lose weight. She signed up for My Fitness Pal (MFP). Ashley describes MFP as *"like an online diary and, kind of like Facebook for fat people. It's pretty sweet. It's a really positive environment and I really like it."*

Ashley was an active member of MFP and posted updates or video blogs about her progress. One of Ashley's main goals at the beginning of the year was to complete a 5k race. She completed four to five 5k walks over that summer. Ashley lost about 40 pounds up to that point. Then her sister moved away and she was left trying to pay for an apartment on her own. The fall semester of classes totally overwhelmed her again, thus leading Ashley to stop exercising. Additionally, Ashley was suffering from shin splints and got a staph infection, which made her unable to work out. Ashley had also disconnected from MFP during this time. With her body issues, Ashley said, *"I feel like there's breaks in my feet, like I'm just, I am too heavy,. I know this, and I am too old. I am getting too old, I think, for my body to just*

withstand it anymore." Ashley decided to keep trying to lose weight even though she had not fully recovered from all her injuries.

Ashley said that students at her campus are very healthy, and that it is rare to see someone who is overweight. When she sees someone who is overweight she thinks, *"Oh my God, he's overweight. Go workout!"* She then feels bad about those thoughts, but they are just a natural reaction on a very healthy campus. Ashley feels that if she has these judgmental thoughts, others have the same thoughts and probably judge her for being overweight as well.

Impression and assessment

Ashley seemed to thrive when she set goals and had support in achieving them. When her friend was nearby and she was fully involved in her MFP community, she was successful at losing weight, but when those supports were lacking, she gained weight back. Ashley was in the maintenance stage of the Stages of Change until August, based on her exercising and trying to get fit for her 5ks and trying to eat healthier. Ashley reported that she was making a conscious effort to try to eat healthier, even though it was hard to do on a limited budget. Because of her injuries and illness, she was not in the maintenance phase anymore and probably was in the pre-contemplation to contemplation stage. I decided to leave her in the study based on her desire to lose weight and to eat healthier and her limits were due to some injuries.

Ashley was very easy to listen to because her story was unique. She was the only participant who reported drug use and having negative physical side effects from quitting drugs. Ashley was also someone who had reasons for not losing weight, and I am not sure

how many of her reasons were valid and how many were crutches or attempts at trying to explain the struggles and weight regain. However, she seemed to be very truthful and was open and blunt about anything that came up throughout the interview. Ashley's interview was probably the easiest to conduct because I would raise a point or question and she was very forthcoming with information, and then she discussed other topics that I was planning to cover.

Ashley was the second person whom I interviewed. I interviewed her and Chris in a library office on the university campus. The rooms were very small. Ashley came into the room and immediately said, *"That chair is not going to work. It would not be comfortable."* I offered her to sit in the chair without the armrest or to find another location, and she took the chair without the armrest. This made me aware of how uninviting my space was for interviewing. I arranged for future interviews to be in a new environment where a couch and comfortable chairs without sides were available. The space was also more open and welcoming to the participants.

Carla

Carla is a white female graduate student in her early to mid-twenties. She is majoring in an education-related field. Carla presented herself well dressed, still in her work clothes from the day. She wore black dress pants and a nice dress shirt. She had dress shoes on and had slightly curly, shoulder-length hair. Carla is a large female who carries most of her weight in her midsection. Carla is very busy in graduate school. She balances a 20 hour-per-week graduate assistantship, a full class load, a practicum experience, involvement in student organizations, and two part-time jobs. Carla describes herself as a *"non-stop workaholic,"*

who is involved in many activities on campus. Carla has worked with several programs that she is passionate about and even served as a coordinator for one of the programs.

Carla talked about struggling with weight for as long as she could remember. She recalled even with her fluctuating weight, she remained in the same pant size since high school. Carla indicated that she was large for a while, but she gained more weight when she was depressed. Her parents went through a divorce in high school, causing some depression and subsequent weight gain. One of Carla's struggles was learning how to eat healthy and exercise. Carla talked about trying several diets that were ultimately unhealthy for her and she would end up being sick or almost blacking out. Carla expressed some frustrations about the exercise process and not knowing how to exercise properly. Carla reported knowing that she was supposed to walk or ride a stationary bike, but no one explained that her heart rate should be at a certain level for maximum results, or that she should exercise in intervals to vary her exercise routine to get better results. She said, *"I didn't know I was supposed to do that! Where did everyone else learn this?"* Carla had made a commitment to use the community gym, which cost her an extra $35 a month. In addition, for a couple months, Carla paid for a personal trainer at the gym. Carla said that her trainer was amazing and that he knew a great deal of information and that he helped educate her about the fitness process while still being very supportive of her current fitness abilities. She expressed that her trainer provided her not only with education, but also with accountability and motivation to work out and to eat better. She even said that she wanted to get a bracelet that said *"WWAD? "* meaning "What Would [trainer's first name] Do?" Meeting with her trainer helped her learn how to eat better and made her feel more comfortable in the gym. In the little time working with her trainer, Carla reported that she had lost ten pounds, and what took her an hour to do

during her first session took her less than 20 minutes to complete on her last session. Carla was unable to continue with her trainer because it was very expensive for her. In our follow-up interview, Carla reported that she started meeting again with her trainer because she had gained her weight back and was unsuccessful without him, so she needed more time with him. She told me that she talked to someone from the gym about more cost effective training options and she decided to work out with him a couple days per week for only 30 minutes at a time rather than for an hour once a week.

Carla struggles with peer and societal perceptions and judgments when it comes to weight and weight-related issues. Carla talked about people really supporting her losing weight, but sometimes she wondered what others' motives were in offering their support. She wondered what people think about her when she is not in the weight-loss progress. When people post comments on her Facebook wall about looking good while she is losing weight, it makes her contemplate why they feel the need to say this and what they were thinking but not saying before she losing weight.

Carla also talked about dating and how being overweight affected her dating. She talked about special websites and matching services for overweight people. Her friends often comment about her not being in a relationship. They make statements like, *"I don't understand, you are such a great person."* Carla reported that she responds, *"It's my body size, like you don't want to admit it but you know that's the reason."* Carla expressed that she knows that others think that about her and her body size but they do not express it at all. She stated that her body size is why she thinks that others are overly supportive and making comments when she loses weight. She strives to help educate others about sizeism and discrimination when it comes to physical body size. Carla has worked on her campus to

bring programs that will educate others about sizeism and to try to enlighten others on her campus and make it a more accepting place.

Carla did not feel that her current campus was very welcoming to larger individuals on campus. She expressed that it was very hard to be on one of the *"fittest campuses in the nation."* Carla reported that her campus *"has walks [like 5k], and get active walks and all that. There's a lot of privilege here and people just don't recognize."* She explained that she felt it was a slap in the face that a campus that is very concerned about social justice issues doesn't even talk about the privilege and inequality in events that might not be accessible for everyone on campus.

In addition to university sponsored walks and runs, the campus gym was a place of great pain for Carla. During her first visit to the gym, Carla asked an employee where the treadmills and stationary bikes were located. The desk assistant told her that the equipment was upstairs. Carla asked the assistant where the stairs were located, and the assistant looked at her and responded, *"The elevator is over there."* Carla responded, *"I didn't ask for the elevator. Where are the stairs?"* The desk assistant told her that the stairs were behind her, and were located closer than the elevators. Carla felt that, based on her size, the employee assumed that she did not want or have the ability to climb the stairs. During another visit to the gym, Carla was on a stationary bike and when she looked up, a young male student was looking at her laughing, and he called his friends over, pointed directly at her, and said something, and they all laughed. After those two experiences, Carla decided that she was not comfortable working out at the on-campus gym. That is when Carla decided that she wanted to work out a community gym and pay the extra cost for the gym membership. Additionally,

Carla said that some of the classroom spaces had really small desks or tight chairs and that she was not able to sit comfortably in the desks or in the chairs.

Impressions and assessment

Carla was in the action stage in the Stages of Change. She had been working out at the gym and monitoring her nutrition for at least six months. Carla thinks frequently about social justice issues and how sizeism is often left out of conversations about discrimination on her campus. Through her process of getting healthier, she has become a stronger advocate of educating and supporting others when it comes to sizeism. I believe that Carla is still trying to work through some of the body image issues of her own and what they mean. Carla observed that if she meets a potential romantic interest, he either want her to lose weight or to maintain her current weight, whereas she wants to get healthier, but never wants to be *"skinny."*

I connected in many ways with Carla. Carla was a graduate student, and she was trying to lose weight in her graduate education, much like me. She had also sought the help of a trainer and found success in working with a trainer. Carla had started the work to become an activist and advocate for sizeism and to educate others about body shape and size. Similarly, it was only because I have been in the weight-loss process that my dissertation topic is focused on understanding the experiences of students in the weight-loss process. My goal is to make recommendations to college administrators on how to work and help students in the weight-loss process, essentially being an advocate for students. Connecting with Carla was easy with her laid back, calm attitude and approach to life. It was very easy to tell when

Carla was passionate about a subject because her face seemed to brighten up. Carla had a very dry sense of humor and we laughed often throughout our conversations and interviews.

Jason

Jason is an African-American male in his mid-to-late twenties and a graduate student. Jason is working on his master's degree in a human relations and a business-related field. Jason often talked about his home state in the southern region of the United States. Jason presented as a well-dressed, well-groomed male. He was still dressed up from his classes that he had that night, and had short hair and facial hair. Jason spoke with a southern drawl and spoke often of his love of football and which teams were doing well and would become national champions. His favorite team was in the running for the national championship, and he could be seen watching football all weekend. Jason's only involvement outside of classes and working was attending sporting events. Jason was a sports addict and mentioned sports frequently. Jason played football when he was younger, but eventually his weight inhibited him from continuing his involvement in the sport.

Jason remembers being overweight for a long time. Jason talked about *"soul food"* that he grew up eating. Jason said that holidays were a big deal in his house

> *It's not like people think of Thanksgiving. My mama would have turkey, ham, roast beef, for dinner. There would be collards, macaroni and cheese, homemade fried corn bread, candied yams, and fried chicken. Then there would be banana pudding, pineapple cake, pineapple upside down cake, the chocolate cake, and sweet potato pies, homemade. Everyone got an individual one (pie) for themselves.*

Jason went on to say that even if it was not a holiday, there were still huge dinners every Sunday. *"That's what we do in the south!"* Jason said the cooking was *"good, and by that I mean it wasn't good for you. If we are going to talk about weight, we need to talk*

about food and what I was socialized to do." Jason continued his eating habits in college. He reported that he lived on campus and ate in buffet-style dining halls, and he would just *"pig out all the time. I would try everything and always had a big juicy burger and more."*

Jason said that he was very self-confident, but as an undergraduate he noticed that he was getting too big to participate in some activities with his friends. Jason recalled, *"I remember going to a fun park one time. There was a rollercoaster and I could not fit into the seat on the ride, and that was embarrassing."* Jason reported that he was going on a trip, and he had to ask for a seat belt extender on the plane. Those two incidents really triggered him to start to reflect on his life choices, and he decided to get healthy. He turned to a friend who was very fit and buff. He asked this friend for help getting fit and the friend took him to the gym and started working out with him and eating better. Jason reported that he lost over 40 pounds in a year, but he was still at a very healthy weight for him. After losing the weight, many people made comments that made him quit working out. Jason remembered, *"People said things to me like, 'are you sick?', 'You have lost way too much weight,' and 'You are starting to look weird.'"* Prior to these comments, Jason reported being very happy with his physical appearance, but he started to think that maybe he was too thin and stopped working out and trying. Slowly, the weight started to come back on. After his undergraduate schooling, he worked full time in his field for a few years. During this time, he continued to gain weight and not even realize how big he was getting. He surpassed his initial weight, and seat belt extenders were just a common occurrence on plane trips.

Right before coming back to graduate school, Jason was out celebrating his acceptance to graduate school with a co-worker at one of his favorite places to eat, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC). He received a call from a friend who had some bad news about

another friend *"Lily."* Lily was one of Jason's best friends in the city where he lived after college. Lily and Jason used to go out to eat together and then *"lay hands on some Krispy Kreme doughnuts, a dozen a piece with milk. She was a big girl just like I was a big boy."* Jason said that Lily had died, in his words, *"She just fell out dead! She just died of her weight and the stress on her."* When coming back to grad school, Jason realized that he had to change his actions and become healthier. When Jason moved to his new college, he made the decision to start working out. After his new roommate, also an overweight male, moved in, they both decided to lose a little weight. They started to work out together and then his roommate tried a free session with a personal trainer. Jason said, *"My roommate came back and said, 'Yeah, I think I am going to find the money. The trainer is worth it, and he can help us. I think you should get one too!'"* So Jason tried a session and signed up for training sessions as well. Together with their trainers and holding each other accountable, the two roommates started to lose weights Jason joked, *"Yeah it was great. He held me accountable and I held him accountable. We pushed each other. If he went to the gym, I knew I had to get my ass off the couch and get in the gym. I couldn't let him beat me!"* Although Jason has expressed changes in diet, he still talked about how hard it was to change his eating habits, and that he still gets cravings for that food, especially when he misses home or when he is depressed or sad about something that is going on.

Jason expressed the positive and negative influences of his campus on his weight-loss process. He said his campus is a *"big ass campus. I don't care what anyone says. You have to walk or ride your bike everywhere."* Jason said that this has helped him become a little healthier. Jason talked about wearing tennis shoes when he is walking across campus so that he can navigate the campus faster and keep his feet from hurting. Jason decided that he was

not going to work out much on campus though. Jason had a bad experience with one of the gyms on his campus. He went to the on-campus gym one time and there were people who kept watching him and seemed to be making fun of him, so he did not go back there anymore. He decided to get a gym membership at the community gym, which is where his trainer works. Jason said that he swims at another gym on campus and thinks that is fine for him. Jason also liked that once he was a fulltime student, he could take extra credits at no additional cost, so he had tried to add in a physical activity class each semester. He has taken swimming, tennis, and plans to take more classes to help him stay fit. He also says that all the professional staff and his fellow graduate students have been really supportive of his goals to lose weight and he gets many comments about how good he looks, and there have been no negative comments like he experienced as an undergraduate.

Impressions and assessment

Jason seemed to thrive in his weight-loss when he had the support of his roommate and a trainer. Having a very blunt *"wakeup call,"* as he put it, with his friend passing away because of her weight caused him to get dedicated quickly. Jason was in the maintenance phase of the Stages of Change, both in his nutritional and exercise processes. This is based on his exercise and dieting habits that have been in effect for over a year now. Jason has embraced the life change and has tried to incorporate exercise and fitness into his daily routine again. I worry what will happen when Jason's support goes away and if someone makes a negative comment about him losing weight. Jason's roommate graduated and moved out in between semesters, and during the following up interview with Jason, he

reported that he was finding it harder to make healthy food decisions without the support at home.

I connected with Jason in many ways as well. Being a graduate student who moved to a new location from my home state, I understood his process of transition and adjusting to a new lifestyle all at once. Jason and I also were both raised in the south, albeit from different states. We shared stories about growing up southern and southern soul food's role in our lives growing up. We both had a roommate and a trainer who were around us for support. We often joked that after our roommates moved out, we should have moved in together for support. Connecting with Jason was very easy and natural, since he was very personable and able to maintain the conversation well.

Traci

Traci is white female in her early twenties who is an undergraduate student who is majoring in a social science. Traci has brown hair about chin level, and looks very fit. Traci was dressed very well during the initial interview because she was going to a friend's house after the interview for her birthday. Traci lives on campus and is active in various organizations and with work. Traci holds a leadership role on the floor of her residence hall. Traci is very involved in a Christian organization on campus and wants to get a master in divinity once she graduates from her current university. After getting her masters of arts in seminary, she hopes to open a center where youth of all ages can come and get involved and feel welcomed.

Traci's story with weight and weight-loss started when she was in elementary school. Traci talked about her childhood when she was at a private school and taking dance. Then

her parents got divorced and she had to leave the school, where she felt included and popular, for a new school. Additionally she had to quit dance and then she decided that she was going to stay home and eat like her brothers. However, unlike her brothers, Traci started to gain weight. Traci recalled, "I started to gain weight, and I just kept gaining weight, and gaining weight, and all of a sudden like, before I knew it, I was the bigger girl." Traci said that she tried turning to sports to help her lose weight in middle and high school. She joined the swim team and played soccer. Traci's mom was a track club coach, so she decided to join the track team in high school. Traci talked about how frustrating her weight was for her. After hitting puberty and participating in sports, she had lost some of her "chubbiness" but she still was not satisfied. She said, "I still was in that overweight range of BMI, and just not understanding and frustrated." She had reduced her weight in high school, but she still wanted to reduce it more.

Traci graduated high school and came to college. Traci decided that she wanted to focus on school and wanted to make good grades. This led Traci to stop working out, and Traci gained 30 pounds during her freshmen year. Traci said, "I put on 30 pounds, and it was, you know, people were like, 'Oh, we couldn't really tell,' but I was like 'I can feel it.'" No matter what Traci tried to do to lose weight, she was unable to successfully do so, and the weight just kept increasing. She went to her doctor who suggested checking her thyroid, and the test revealed that she had hypothyroidism. Traci started taking medication for the condition, and she noticed that she was able to successfully lose weight. Once her weight started to decrease, Traci began to enjoy exercising more. Traci said, "I got this going, I ran outside, and even when I was like 'I hate running,' I secretly love running." Traci had a

close friend, who eventually became her boyfriend, with whom she started going to the gym and working out. Traci commented on her weight loss:

> I was on the medication about Thanksgiving time and by my birthday, which is at the end of January, I had already lost so much that I was, like, my pants were so big, that it kind of looked like I was wearing, like, the pants the way a guy would, not a girl, like I was sagging.

Traci now loves working out and even feels better about the progress that she has made since beginning the medication:

> I went from the girl who absolutely hated running—my mom, like had to buy me an elliptical to try and get me to work out, you know? I get running with my mom, marathon runner, my little sister, who is way into running, always has been, cross country, very skinny and lean, and I can totally kick their butts, on every single run! I went from not being able to run a mile without stopping—where most of my miles were, like, 13-minute miles, because I had to stop and walk, because I couldn't do it—to running 7 miles straight, at a good pace, in about an hour and a half.

Impressions and Assessment of Traci

Traci is very dedicated to fitness and losing weight. Traci said that when her boyfriend broke up with her, she turned to exercise and running as a release. Traci is in the maintenance stage of the Stages of Change when it comes to nutrition and exercise. This assessment is based on the fact that Traci has been exercising almost daily and on a strict diet for over a year now. Nutritionally, Traci has a strict regimen that she sticks to daily. She is now a vegetarian and eats carbohydrates only in the earlier parts of her day.

Traci is probably the participant who is the most active and who has not reported quitting or decreasing her exercise routine. She talked about having some issues with joint problems from an old soccer injury, so she has started doing yoga and other forms of exercise with her current roommate. Traci seemed to have the most support around her when

it came to living a healthy lifestyle. Her roommate and friends are supportive, but her family

also lives in the same town where she attends college, so even though she lives in on-campus

housing, she is able to go home and be supported more frequently than all the other

participants. Traci is full of energy, is very positive, and has a bubbly personality. She

seemed a little nervous during the interview and had a pillow in front of her belly the whole

time she was talking to me, but I am unsure if it was for comfort or if she was intentionally

hiding her stomach.

Summary

    There were five participants in this study: Chris, Ashley, Carla, Jason, and Traci. The

participants varied in age from early twenties to late twenties or maybe early thirties. There

were two graduate and three undergraduate students. Four participants were Caucasian and

Jason was an African-American/black male. There were two males and three females in the

study. The participants varied in their Stages of Change statuses. I began research with the

expectation that the participants had to be actively trying to lose weight for at least six

months, which in theory would put them in the Maintenance stage of the Stages of Change

Model. However, many of the participants experienced injuries or they chose to focus only

on one area of fitness, thus resulting in a different level in the Stages of Change.

    Chris chose to focus on eating only healthy food, and he was not very concerned

about exercise. Therefore, he was labeled as being in the maintenance stage in his nutrition

and the pre-contemplation stage in exercise. Ashley had suffered some injuries and was just

starting to think of how she would start working out and eating healthier again, thus she was

in the contemplation stage in both nutrition and exercise. Carla worked out with a trainer for

a while and then quit because it was too expensive. She then began neglecting her exercise and nutrition. She has started working out with her trainer again for about 2 months, thus she is in the action stage for both because she has reported eating healthier now as well. Jason and Traci have been working out and making healthier nutritional decisions for over six month, although Jason reported some setbacks, thus they are labeled as being in the maintenance stage.

Themes and Analysis

The analyzed data from this study yielded a total of four significant and frequently discussed themes in the participants' stories: (1) the need to look at weight-loss as two separate Stages of Changes Processes; (2) the important role that support plays in the weight-loss process; (3) the stresses of being a student and how it affects the weight-loss process; and (4) the importance that the environment and people on a college campus play on the individuals in the weight-loss process. These themes are explored more in detail, with participant data in a subsequent section in this chapter.

Separating the Stages of Change Process

I would say there are two parts to losing weight. There is the, obviously, like, the working out and lifting weights and stuff. What people don't realize is the food is the hardest part of the change. My trainer always says that, "You can't exercise away a bad diet." - Jason

Listening to the participants talk about their weight-loss process, it became obvious that the two major factors of losing weight were exercise and nutrition. The participants shared about their weight loss and their successes and struggles. When discussing their nutrition and exercise levels, it became clear that both areas were not necessarily in the same

stage of the Stages of Change process. Take Chris, for example, as he talked about his diet

and exercise routines:

> *Basically, I can't just like work out anymore because I don't like it. When I used to go lift weights and stuff in the morning, it was because all my friends were there and we were hanging out lifting. I really need like something... I can't just be working out just to work out. I've got to be having fun, or have a goal. I live next to a gym, and this semester, I was going and running on the track and I was going, "This sucks. What I am doing? This is awful." So it's not really specifically doing it to lose weight. It's like I want to play volleyball or do something fun. I would rather be doing something fun that is active than just going to work out because that's boring.*
>
> *For a while, it was like I'm trying to lose weight and work out and stuff, but now it's just like okay. I'm going to eat healthier and just not eat so much crap and just am lazy all the time. It's not like actively trying to lose weight all the time, it's more like I'm okay with this, I'm just not going to eat junk food all the time and drink pop anymore. I don't drink pop anymore, which is good, except for Mountain Dew Game Fuel, which is out right now for Halo 4, and that is so delicious, but I've not really had any of that this year though.*

Jason further commented on his experiences first trying to lose weight:

> *So working out was very, very good! It was nothing going to the gym and going to a cardio class or working out with my trainer. I would even jump in the pool and swim. I had just taken swimming lesson so I could learn how to swim. However, it was a struggle in terms of food, but we do it, you know, and it's still a struggle to the very day. Starting out, I thought I could eat the same with some minor changes. I still went to Pizza Ranch and had fried chicken, but I just added a salad and barbecue chicken in there too. I learned over time that I can't have that anymore. There are times that I want my mamma's soul food so bad. I miss fried chicken and macaroni and cheese, and I love sweets! I love a good dessert! But I just have to say no, it's not worth it!*

Carla expressed that she can learn to work out with her trainer but she has no one around that

tells her how to eat and diet, so she still struggles with that:

> *I don't know, like how people know these things and, like I have heard people tell me that I should be looking for trans-fat and I have people tell me I should be looking for calories and looking for carbs. Like what do you look at? There's always these different things in the food you eat, like how do you know which one are you supposed to follow and then how do I know—OK if,*

like, they base your diet off like a 2000 calorie diet, is that right for everyone? Should I be going with 1700 calories instead if I really want to lose a lot of weight, or should I be going with less than that? Should I be going with 2200? Like, how do you know these things? Like, you can look it up online but it's going to be different for everyone. So without someone who tells you, like without having a nutritionist or without having your trainer, which, in turn wasn't even like trained to be doing nutrition stuff. He was just trying to help me, like if, without those things, like, how do you know?

Carla's comments about nutrition contrast with her ideas about exercise, illustrating a drastic

difference in the stages:

I am going to go to the gym. I am going to get on a treadmill. While I don't think about things like what my heart rate should be and like how should I be walking at that heart rate and whatever, but like my trainer would tell me these things, like: "OK, you need to be on a treadmill at this heart rate for this long," and gave me like three different intervals to be at and I noticed the difference in myself. I keep on walking across campus, like, I wouldn't huff and puff or whatever as much.

Comparing the differences in Carla's confidence level and knowledge that she has about

exercise versus nutrition, it become clear that exercise and nutrition can be at two different

levels in the Stages of Change.

Ashley talked about her diet and exercise regime over the summer compared to what

she is doing now. She talked about her diet and exercise parts separately, hence the break in

the two paragraphs:

I love the way my body feels when I do it [exercise]. That's what irritates the crap out of me. I just wish I could do it so much more often. What I would typically do is dietary. Yeah, like I said, I was on MFP and I would log my food. I was eating right around 2000 calories, give or take, maybe a little bit over, because I am bigger so they gave me like 2200, so it would be somewhere in there, thereabouts, lots and lots of vegetables. Chicken is essentially the only meat I would eat. I even went on a little bit vegetarian kick for a little while, where I wasn't eating any meat, only dairy proteins. It was pretty much a high fiber, high protein diet and, you know, that's a lot of food to eat and with 2300 calories, so you know the grocery bill is kind of high, especially when it's that food. I would eat fiber 6 times a day, small like two- to three-hundred calorie meals. I wasn't eating anything processed and

I wasn't going out to eat. I think if maybe I did, it was once a week, you know, like a cheap day, but not a lot really, because I spend all my money on groceries. I eliminated sugar, at least real sugar; I guess I was substituting with fake sugar. I don't know which is better. So mostly sugar free, high proteins, high fiber and lots of foliage, and herbs and vegetables, and all that fun stuff, so that was the diet and the exercise routine, when I first started, you know. As a bigger person, you can't do a lot right out of the gate.

I absolutely hate treadmills. They suck. It never fails, my legs just get really, really, really sore. They hurt my knees. I would do an elliptical quite a bit, you know, I think anywhere from, when I first started, 20 minutes to 45 minutes-ish. I wanted to start lifting, I love lifting, when [best friend] and I would go work out, we were lifting all the time. I loved it. I didn't, I, care that gentlemen were always busy in there and the weights are for them. It's just really intimidating to try to lift with all the other people around. I started doing 5ks. I would try to walk a mile or two on the tracks. When it really was nice over the summer, I would just walk outside. I wouldn't even get to the gym. I just go walk outside. I would plan like a 5k route and go walk it, did quite bit of that over the summer. I think that's… Lots and lots of water, lots of water. That was pretty much my diet.

Traci talked about her regimented diet and how she started to watch her diet more

now that her exercise levels have decreased due to classes and joint issues.

I have started to focus even more on watching what I eat, focus a lot on portion sizes. Also eating, you know, getting enough protein, because I am intolerant to meat, so I am vegetarian, though I am not a vegan. I still eat eggs. I eat my cheese. I love my dairy products. I make sure I get, you know, I will eat nuts, or I'll have eggs, or I'll have something, but I, I really do structure the way I eat, so I try and clunk my carbs all, you know, between breakfast and lunch, and in there. And then after lunch I try not to eat as many carbs, and eat more, well not complex carbs, but eat more simple carbs, fruits and veggies. And so, but I focus on my portion size, and I have actually started to eat, you know, just watch a lot of the things, like, you know, what kinds of grain I take in. Because whole grains are important, but if you are taking in heavily on the gluten side or the wheat side it kind of clogs up your intestines. So I try and balance my wheat, and my protein, and my dairy. So I will have cheese, and will have yogurts, for the probiotics, and milk, and then I will go between nuts and eggs, and all balance. You know, I will have some wheat, but then I will make sure I get rice, or something else, so…

Traci also discussed her need to be stricter about her diet in order to maintain losing weight,

or to remain at a healthy weight, reinforcing that exercise and diet are tied together in the

weight-loss process. However, nutrition and exercise are two separate elements that make up

a successful weight-loss program.

Need for Support to be Successful in the Process

> *[Friend's Name] is really diet health freak nutty, it's insane. He did the juicing and turning everything into juice, just drinks juice for an entire month, and he always has weird random crap that he's doing. So I'm going to be following in his footsteps, but like I said, small steps maybe. – Chris*

Support seemed to be a key focus of conversation in all of the interviews. From

roommates to boyfriends, from friends to personal trainers, each participant talked about

someone who has helped them in their process. Several of them talked about struggling

when their support structure left or went away. The supporter was very significant for many

reasons, including holding the participants accountable, helping them feel comfortable, and

educating the participant about how to properly exercise or how to eat healthier.

Accountability

Carla talked about how her trainer (whose name starts with the letter A) has held her

accountable not only with exercise, but with nutrition as well:

> *It's been a struggle. Like, I need someone there to tell me, like, "You shouldn't have eaten that." Like, I almost need a, like, WW, what is that, AD, like what would he do deal. So I constantly think about it because it's just, it's in a back of my mind right now, you know? Like, I need someone there to tell me, like, "Should you really be eating that?"*

Carla went on to talk about the questions that she asked her trainer when she first started.

\She said that he helped her in all of these areas:

> *So how do you help me incorporate this more into my life and make it easier for me to get into the gym and make it a part of my lifestyle? Like, I need that accountability and, like, you to make it fun for me or make it something that is a part of my everyday routine so that I can continue it once I get into that routine.*

Carla had stopped meeting with her trainer due to financial reasons a month before her first

interview with me. She talked about what it was like without her trainer:

> *Because I just don't have him there to hold me accountable and I am not*
> *eating those same things and I am not getting in the gym, because, you know,*
> *he is not checking on me as much, because that's, you know, I am not his,*
> *technically his client anymore. So, yeah, I would say that's been my*
> *experience so far, and it's a struggle.*

Jason talked about how his trainer and his roommate served as accountability partners

for him in both nutrition and in exercise:

> *Yeah, between my roommate and my trainer, you just can't cheat. I mean, if*
> *my roommate heads to the gym and I haven't been, he's going to give me hell.*
> *And then he sees my trainer so my trainer asks him if I have worked out. You*
> *know what? That jerk will tell him that I am at home sitting there! Can you*
> *believe that? Well I guess that it's a good thing, but still you better believe if*
> *he does something wrong I'm letting his trainer know about it. Anyway, I*
> *don't want to do something that my trainer might be disappointed or upset*
> *about. If I eat something that I shouldn't and I tell him, I can tell that he is*
> *disappointed and then I feel bad. So at first, I tried to think about that at my*
> *meals, about what I should eat or not so he would be happy. Then I realized,*
> *he's not disappointed at me, he is disappointed for me, because when I choose*
> *to eat something bad, I am hurting myself and my progress, so I am*
> *disappointing myself and he feels that.*

Jason shared a story about how his roommate had "betrayed" him one time and "ratted" him

out to his trainer.

> *As I have said before, I have a sweet tooth. I love desserts and sweets. It's a*
> *weakness for me, and I know it. So my roommate and I would grocery shop*
> *together to make sure we picked out healthy food. I always had to get*
> *something sweet because I needed that crutch and he always had to get*
> *crackers or something more salty because he struggles with that. So I got*
> *these 100 calorie packs of cookies. These packs are way better than I used to*
> *do because I used to get big packs of Oreos or ice cream before. There were*
> *10 or 12 packs in a box. We went shopping on like a Saturday night. Well*
> *without thinking about it by Sunday night I had eaten all the packs of cookies.*
> *Well my roommate saw the box and it was empty and started to question me*
> *about it. Well I didn't really realize that I ate them all so I said that I didn't*
> *get them all and they must be somewhere or he had to have some. Well he*
> *lectured me about how many calories I ate and how much sugar was in the*

packs. I dismissed him and he said he was going to tell my trainer, which I didn't believe. Monday morning we worked out with our trainers at the same time so we were warming up and my trainer came up first, and my roommate said "Jason has something he needs to tell you!" Well I wasn't going to admit to it so I said, "I am so excited about our workout! I really need it." Then my roommate ratted me out to my trainer and told him! I was so upset with him! I called him a snitch for a month at least. However, that really helped open my eyes to how much of a food problem that I had.

Other participants talked about how others have helped them stay accountable. Traci talked about her friends, saying, *"I know just, obviously, my group of friends and people I know on campus have helped me. They have also pushed me just to keep, keep at it. But then, you know, the, we have a relatively active campus."* To Ashley who talked about her best friend, saying:

My best friend, he encouraged me a lot, you know. Like I don't even know. I mean, I was like, "I don't want to go today.' And he was like, 'Get your ass up, we are going." And I think it worked for him just as much as it did for me, so, you know. Like, but the both of us, and so while I was going to school and he was still there, we went to the gym five days a week at least and I mean when we were working out on weights and cardio and, I think eventually we even got into spinning, which really hurts. You know, but I was making serious progress easily and he was watching my diet. He was like making sure I was eating good, too!

Ashley described a website that she used for community and to keep herself accountable with her diet and to post video blogs, or vlogs, about her progress:

Last New Year's, I kind of made this resolution. I decided that I was going to video blog and try, you know, and I was on this website MFP, My Fitness Pal. It's like an online diary and, kind of like Facebook for fat people. It's pretty sweet. It's a really positive environment and I really like it. But, so last spring I was in the, I was really, really trying to do this. I was trying to be really dedicated to it. At the same time I picked up a job at [name]. I was working like 10 or 15 hour a week, and I still had coursework, and I think I actually had like 15 credits last semester, so it was kind of busy semester, school wise, and, you know, making these videos took out at least an hour or two of my time every day, because I wanted to do a daily video, you know. It took quite a bit of extra time to do all of that and I know I was kind of

wavering a little bit the first chunk of this semester. By spring break, I started hitting it really hard.

I said I was on MFP and I would log my food. I was eating right around 2000 calories, give or take, maybe a little bit over, because I am bigger, so they gave me like 2200, so it would be somewhere in there.

Ashley talked about how she wishes she could get a personal trainer to help her be accountable, but the vlogs were a suitable substitute:

It would nice to be able to do it. I think a physical trainer, like, would be amazing for me. At least to keep me motivated, you know, put me in position of accountability, you know, which was kind of what my videos have been doing, is making me more accountable, because I felt like I needed to do it for everyone else.

Feeling Comfortable

Feeling comfortable in the gym and with their diet was a big factor in participants continuing their healthy behaviors. Carla talked about the negative incidents that she had at the on-campus gym, which led her to working out at a community gym:

I signed up for that gym either at the end of August or the beginning of September. And it's not through the school, because at the school I did have experiences that were negative. So the first time I went to the gym here on the campus, I remember asking how to get to the bicycles and the treadmills, and the employee told me it was up on the top floor and I was like, "OK, where are the stairs" and the employee told me where elevators were. I was like, 'OK, that's great. I didn't ask for the elevator.' So just assuming that I would want that [the elevator]. And then another time, I was on the bike and just riding it by myself. All of a sudden, I look up and this guy is laughing at me, has his friends, you know, he motions for his friends to come over and points to me and they all start laughing. I mean the gym is here for people to lose weight, so knowing that that's the environment that has been created here, I decided to go to a gym off campus. So I signed up for that. It was a pretty expensive fee to get in to that gym and it's an additional $35 a month.

I asked Carla in what ways she felt the campus could support someone in the weight-loss process. She talked about the above experiences and ways to stop that from happening to anyone else:

> *I guess one thing would be, maybe, some education to some of the workers at the gym, because like I said, the whole elevator and stair incident, that was one of the student workers at the gym. So the other one was by someone who was just using it [the gym]. But I think just education about what the weight-loss process is and just creating an inclusive environment within the gym, so like this is for people who are trying to, you know, lose weight and how to make that encouraging, maybe somehow, I guess not shove it in people's faces so much that necessarily that they have to, but provide a resource.*

Ashley talked about how her best friend would make it feel "ok" that she was working out and not feel alone:

> *I wanted to start lifting. I love lifting. When [best friend] and I would go work out, we were lifting all the time. I love it. I didn't, I, care that gentlemen were always busy in there and the weights are for them. It's just really intimidating to try to lift with all the other people around. ... It, [gym name] in [city name], we would pick a pretty optimal time to lift, when it was really not busy or I think the fact that [best friend] and I were there together, like, it helped us, kind of, feel better about it, or okay. You know? Like, it didn't matter who else was around. So like going by myself, all I do is think about how terrible I look, you know, and how the people are judging me all the time. I just, I know it in my gut, you know, like, it's [the people in the gym] probably not okay with this. I mean, I don't even pay attention to anybody in the gym so I am sure they [are not] ... It's just a mental thing. Yeah, I am self-conscious.*

Ashley shared experiences that happened in high school as well. This is not in a college setting, but it illustrates how not feeling comfortable could lead to someone not working out:

> *I would have gym teachers, you know, that would make fun of me and, you know, out me in the middle of the class and that actually happened in my freshman year, because my freshman year I took one, I took one semester worth of PE, my first semester, because it was like required and then we had to do these tests. I don't know if you remember, like, or had these, but we had to do these tests where you do sit ups and push-ups and pull ups and run a mile and all this crap and I about died trying to run a mile. I never was able to do it very well, probably still take me for a forever. I couldn't do it now at*

all, but it never went under an hour. Like, I just, I couldn't do it, you know, and so, like, he freaked on me in the middle of class in front of, like, everybody because I was too slow and I was taking up too much time of the class, because he wanted to get all of the testing done in the one period. So he figured everybody can run a mile in like half an hour and then everybody can do their sit ups for a minute, pushups for a minute, pull ups for a minute, do all these for the minute or two that you need to do it and that it be done. Well, here I am still running around the gym, you know, and he was freaking out because I wasn't, I was holding up the whole class. Anyway, so I decided that I was going to talk to the counselor… What was his name? I guess he was a student counselor. He was the one that organized our classes and let us schedule and everything and, him and his wife are actually like my mentors in high school, quite extensively. And so, his wife was the school nurse, and I got completely off subject and ramble here. …. I went to him and I said "I can't do gym anymore, because I am not going to deal with that ever, again, like, no."

Jason talked about how his trainer has helped him feel comfortable in the gym:

Well, starting out I was not sure that I wanted to go to the gym. I have never felt comfortable in the gym. You see, I jiggle and one of my friends used to describe the way I walked as a waddle, so I felt that others would judge me or watch me while in the gym. When I started out, I worked out only at the [community gym] because it had a lot of older people in there and that is where I got my trainer. They give you a free session with a trainer and I was unsure about it. I thought, if everyone was already watching me, having this Jillian Michaels-type trainer yelling at my fat ass would only bring more attention to me. So, honestly I did not think that I was going to get a trainer at all. I went to the session reluctantly, to appease my roommate, and much to my surprise, the session was great. No screaming and yelling, no Jillian Michaels. Just a nice, calm, and supportive guy that was pushing me, but not having to scream to do it. I loved it and at the end of the session I couldn't even tell you if anyone else was in the gym. I forgot there were others there; it was just me and my trainer. That made me feel comfortable, and I knew that everything I was doing was correct because my trainer was educated in fitness and was teaching and watching me.

Education

Several of the participants felt that they were uneducated when it came to working out and nutrition. They talked about the important role of educator that their support systems have played for them. This was especially apparent for Carla and Jason. Traci talked about

her family members helping her as well, noting that her mom tried to instill in her good

values about health and nutritional and to be active:

> As a kid I was, kind of, like, "Uh, I want to eat the junk food and drink pop." And that wasn't really something that I grew up with. I grew up with, like, you would have your glass of milk and then mom was like, "No, you had one, you get tap water." And so just growing up, that was, kind of, you know, how it was. And I was very actively involved in dance when I was younger. My, one of my relatives actually owns one of the dance centers from where I am from, and he just really got us involved. And so at the beginning of my childhood I was, you know, healthy, active.

Traci went on to talk about her mom trying to help her lose weight when she was getting

discouraged and depressed about her weight loss. At the end of the interview, she talked

about her mom doing research on diets to try to help her lose weight when she was frustrated

and depressed:

> In high school, my mom was a club track coach, and I was like, "Alright, I will do track as well," and was a sprinter and a hurdler. But still even as active as I was and, you know, growing up in healthy household, I still didn't eat the junk food or the pop. It was really frustrating, because I was, my BMI was always in that, "You are overweight, verging on obese." And as a swimmer, who burned thousands of calories each practice, and as a soccer player, I would just go and I would run until I couldn't run anymore because my muscles were like seizing up and I would just sweat, and, you know, it is really frustrating. My mom was just like, "Well, you can maybe try this," and we try about every single weight-loss program we could, and really my mom got to the point where she would just try absolutely everything because I was so frustrated and upset.

Carla talked about how her trainer helped educate her about both nutrition and

exercise:

> I worked with him from probably about the middle of September until probably the middle of November. And so I would meet with him Monday mornings and Friday mornings and then in between I would go to the gym by myself, just trying to do some of the things that he had taught me. Now I was eating better, you know. He had me fill out a food log of things about I was eating and, you know, even though I might think it's healthy, he is like, "Why are you eating this? You should not be eating this." And so he helped me

understand what I should be eating, give up pop for a little bit, because only water was a lot better for me.

For me it would always be like, "I am going to go to the gym. I am going to get on a treadmill." While I don't think about things like what my heart rate should be and like how should I be walking at that heart rate and whatever, but like my trainer would tell me these things, like, "Okay you need to be on a treadmill at this heart rate for this long," and gave me like three different intervals to be at and I noticed the difference in myself. I keep on walking across campus. Like I wouldn't huff and puff or whatever as much, you know. I am also like, "Okay, this guy knows what he is talking about." It's little, like, those types of things, but when I am on my own, I don't know how to do, well I mean, I think I had the training. I know there's a certain point where you have to, like, move up once you get to where you need to be. Now I'm thinking, "Okay, I don't know when I am supposed to move up and I don't know when I am supposed to increase my weight when I am lifting weights."

Carla talked about being frustrated with the lack of knowledge she had and wanted to know where people learned how to work out:

Absolutely, absolutely, when you think about it, like, I know a lot of people who start a, like, couch-to-5k plan and whatnot. Like people need something specific to tell them what to do, when to do it, how to do it, and like that's not given to people. So if I am just like, "Okay, I am going to go walk at the gym," well where do I start out my heart rate at? Like how long do I do it? If I walk slow and I walk for 30 minutes, is that still as much as I am going to get out if I have gotten my heart rate a little bit higher? I don't know, like how people know these things and, like I have heard people tell me that I should be looking for trans-fat and I have people tell me I should be looking for calories and looking carbs, like what do you look at? There's always these different things in the food you eat. Like how do you know which one are you supposed to follow, and then how do I know? Okay, if, like, they base your diet of off, what like a 2000 calorie diet, is that right for everyone? Should I be going with 1700 calories instead if I really want to lose a lot of weight, or should I be going with less than that? Should I be going with 2200? Like, how do you know these things? Like you can look it up online but it's going to be different for everyone. So without someone who tells you, like without having a nutritionist or without having your trainer, which in turn wasn't even like trained to be doing nutrition stuff, he was just trying to help me, like, if without those things, like, how do you know?

Jason discussed the progress that he has made with his trainer when it comes to

working out, and making exercise and eating really "doable:"

Starting out, I can say that I knew very little about exercise! I mean, I thought I knew a lot, and that it was common sense, but you don't realize that some of the stuff they teach in you in [middle and high] school and you see other people do, is wrong and causes problems with your body that can lead to bigger issues. I mean, everyone tells you to do sit ups! My trainer helped me learn that sit ups hurt your lower back because of the pressure it puts on it and that it increases your forward flection of your shoulders, which can lead to your shoulders hunching over. I have learned a lot from my trainer. I have also come to learn from my trainer that I don't have to punish myself. I don't have to not eat something that I enjoy. It's okay to do those things, but you have to do it in moderation! And I also have understood working out doesn't have to be painful. Working out doesn't have to be a chore. It can be really fun! So we play racquetball and we play a game called towel wrestling and we go outside and do jogging and we ride bikes and, you know, we'll lift weights and, you know, there's cardio classes and just all these fun things and we will do those things together and some of those things I will do on my own. So he has been really, really great! [Trainer name] has been really, really great, in terms of a support person for me when it comes to the weight-loss. Learning stuff from him makes me think that losing weight is doable and that I can be successful losing weight and keeping it off!

Stresses of Being a Student and How it the Affects the Weight-loss Process

It's a privilege to be able to lose weight. Like, think about the financial aspect of it and the knowledge that comes along with it. People study that for a living. Like why would you have them go to college to learn that stuff if we didn't need it. – Carla

One of the major topics that the participants talked about was the basic stress of being a student. From academics, money, working, and relationships, the student lifestyle either helped or hindered their success in the weight-loss process. For this section, I break down the theme into three subsections—time, money, and relationships—and I present participant comments that illustrate how each topic affects the weight-loss process.

Time

Many participants talked about the stress of trying to balance their time. When they were busy with academics or work, working out and fitness was quickly neglected.

Carla talked about her life as a graduate student and how she had no time for working out:

I had someone holding me accountable and I think that's really what I need, someone to tell me, you know, you should be eating this type of thing, you should be doing this much exercise and making sure that I am actually going to the gym. Because with my crazy schedule, like, you know, working at one point four jobs, throughout semester, going to school full time, having to be able to pull good grades, that's, the gym is always the first thing to go for me. And I don't know how to move it up [on her priority list].

Ashley's comments provided an insight into how busy she was and why she was having a hard time fitting working out into her day:

Probably in my deepest, darkest corner of my soul, I am so addicted to working out and eating right. I love the way it feels. I love how good I feel. I have energy, you know? But I just don't have time. I don't know where I could fit it in, you know? I could, a typical day for me is I work anywhere around 6 or 7 in the morning into noon some days, and then I turn around and come here and I am in class until 5, 5:30 and then I am doing homework and class work, and projects, studying all the time! I mean, in the beginning of the year it wouldn't be so bad, you know? Because procrastination can take hold, but right now it's crunch time. There's no room for procrastination. ... last semester, it was easy. I mean, I was able to get to the gym a day or two [per week] last semester, I don't know what it was, just set of classes, didn't have projects I take or something, I don't know. It was not nearly as insane.

Traci commented on having a full course load and work caused her to have to watch what she eats as well because she cannot go to the gym as much. She has turned to yoga to help manage stress:

I actually have got into yoga. Just that's also regulating stress is really important, and that's been the thing that's gotten a little bit hard, especially being a junior now. And last semester I was taking 19 credits, and working

16 hours, and involved in extracurricular, so I have been just trying to maintain my stress. I have started to focus even more on watching what I eat.

Traci also talked about maximizing her time when she could. She would take books and study materials to the gym with her:

> *[Name] gym is a huge benefit. I was there, like, probably, at least, you know, four or five days out of the week and I would be there for a good hour, and I loved it. I would take my textbook. I would read on the stationary bikes, so I got like, "I am working out and studying at the same time, yes!"*

Chris also expressed that time was a deterrent to working out and that he might start to work out again when his schedule was a little more open:

> *I mean, part of it is that I just don't have enough time to get a good work out in. And again, maybe next semester... it's always next semester. Really though, maybe next semester, because I won't be a [student leader], and fifteen credits isn't that bad. So it's kind of, I'm just trying to psych myself up for success, and then if I do it, it's like oh well, I set myself up for this success and then I didn't do it.*

Chris further commented that he is not even sleeping the proper number of hours a night because of his academics and stressors:

> *Like, right now, I slept five hours a night all this week, and it sucks. If I don't get my eight hours of sleep I'm a little cranky sometimes, but I had tests and a heap of big projects and crap that were all due this week. So you go to class, and it's hard to pay attention when people are just droning on about databases and stuff like that. So I don't know if working out is the direct cause, or if it's more that I have more free time to work out, and I have more time to sleep, but I think there's definitely a correlation.*
>
> *It's partially academics. This semester, I have four group projects in four different classes, and it sucks. Finding time to meet with the group and get stuff done, plus tests and stuff like that, so yes, it does get in the way. But some of it is other stuff like being a [student leader], and running clubs and stuff ... it all just piles up and it ends up that any free time that I have, I don't want to work.*

Chris went on to express that he focuses on his diet and nutritional intake, *"because then stuff like that isn't a time commitment, it's a life change."*

This reinforces the idea that time is a major deterrent for some participants to actively engage in working out.

Jason spoke about his time management and how he had struggles to adjust his schedule as first:

> *You know, it was a little difficult, like, at first, really. It was, you know, difficult to just get all this into my schedule with grad school and working and all. Working out was just a little difficult to fit in there. It's not just the time at the gym that you have to plan on, you know? I mean, it's like the time it takes to get to the gym, the workout, then it's the time after if you talk to anyone or see someone you know, and I see a lot of people at the gym now. Then you gotta travel back home and shower and get ready for the day or night or whatever. At first, I just worked out at night so I didn't really have anything I would be late for, but I discovered that I liked to start my days working out. You just gotta get into that schedule. And its automatic and it just really makes it easier when I do have a routine. If I don't have a routine, God knows I don't have an idea what things would look like, because it would just be so sporadic. But I try to plan my classes, and work, and gym, and even, you know, my relaxing time, all in a routine. And I also think it's important to let you know that I plan time to relax just as much as I plan time to go to class, and to work out. Like, I have to have some down time, and so that's just as important for balance. And so I plan time I am going to sit down and watch this movie and enjoy that. Netflix is my best friend. And so you know, if that's what I want to do that's what I am going to do. Then I will go to, like, the movie theater oftentimes or, you know, have friends over, have some drinks and things of that sort, so I kind of, I have, I plan those things out.*

Money

One significant factor in participates' lives was money. This came to affect their health in several ways. Participants reported that lack of money caused them not to eat properly, to take part time jobs that decreased their time to work out, and to be unable to afford a trainer.

Ashley spoke frequently about money in her conversations with me. She talked about how not having a job, or having a low paying job, has made her eat poorly:

wanted because his parents would buy 'em. But I am not in that boat. So, well, I get kind of stuck with cheapo dollar Rice-A-Ronies and stuff, you know, because it's what I can afford.

Ashley talked about being on medication to help her thyroid. She said that being on

medication would cause her to have to pay to see a doctor and for the medication, and

although it would be nice, she just could not afford those expenses so she did not take any

medication:

> *At the time when I was in high school, she even put me on Synthroid or something to try and counteract it [the thyroid], but about the time I turned 18, I was no longer sure and I could afford it. I don't know if it's still a problem. I don't go to the doctors, so I don't know. I was told that that was something that doesn't just heal itself so I don't know. I don't know if it's okay. I don't know if it's bad, good, I don't know… But I am not being treated because I don't have health insurance and I can't afford it, so, you know, I prefer to eat than pay for medical bills so, you know, I really don't go to the doctors and stuff like that, so I just can't do it.*

Ashley brought up the fact that she would love having a personal trainer and nutritionist, but

due to lack of money, she would not be able to afford the services:

> *I have been told about, like, nutritionist on campus and a personal trainer. These are things that cost money and I don't have extra money, so it's not very, I just can't waste money on that. So, you know, for that it's kind of pointless. I mean, like I am not in the position where I feel some other students are wealthy and they have expendable finances, you know? So I don't have parents that can, you know, give me money. My mom, she tries her best. She gives $20 for food here and there, but like that's it. So, you know, I just, I can't spend extra money on stuff like that. It's just not feasible. So although it would be nice, I mean, it would nice to be able to do it, I think a physical trainer, like, would be amazing for me.*

Carla discussed the expenses that are associated with losing weight and becoming

healthier. She acknowledged that a gym on campus is good, but if students do not feel

comfortable using it, it does not matter that it's free:

> *I think that that's a good thing for schools to have this, you know, that free membership for students, and that [money] being difficult. Weight-loss is very*

expensive, so once you start losing weight, you have to get rid of your clothes, right? So you have to go buy new ones. You have to get rid of your old ones. You can't get rid of all of your old ones just in case you go back up, which is what has happened to me. Like I have a couple of different size pants and I am like, "Okay, I am going to keep these, because if I gain weight again, I have them and I don't have to buy new ones." Which is sad that I would have to think that way but this has been a real struggle for me. And then I found a place online where I can sell my clothes to other people, so that was a good thing, you know. I was getting money for my clothes that I was trying to sell, but then turning around and having to buy clothes, which probably people think their clothes are more expensive anyway. But not as expensive as big people clothes. It's more fabric whatever! But the cost is just unreasonable for clothes. And you can go and buy them from like consignment stores and Goodwill and whatnot, but I can't always find things in my size. I feel like it's for a lot smaller people, when I go there, especially with, like, shoes and whatnot. So let's see, my feet, like I have wide feet right now, let's say I [inaudible] in my feet, you know, like you could never just go easily find size 12 shoes. So if I am in size 12 wide, like I am pretty much always online to find shoes, and then just 12 in general, like even 12 regular, I probably wouldn't be able to find those either and still be online, so what that would look like, having to get rid of all my 12 wides for 12 regular. It's just a lot to think about.

A lot of the healthier food is more expensive as well, so that's another thing. And especially like when I go to eat or whatnot, like, even some of the salads and stuff really are more expensive things on the menu. Or like the 550 calories and under, like, those are more expensive, like, probably because there's more preparations to go into it to make sure the calories are lower. What else? The gym membership, like I said was expensive and I even got the discount on that $500 training. So normally for 10 sessions its $600. I'm like, "Okay, I am a grad student trying to live here, like this isn't realistic." Trying to have those health shakes and stuff, if you do those, which I don't know if it's always recommended but that's once a month or two, like try to get 6 shakes for like $12 or $15, like that's not realistic either! Like, you know, especially as a graduate student, when I am not getting help from my family, like I am completely independent, trying to pay my loans. I have all these jobs, like it's really hard. Then you have to go and buy your workout clothes if you don't have them.

Carla talked about how it is a privilege to lose weight. This idea is a topic that I will also

discuss further in Chapter 5:

Like, it's a privilege to be able to lose weight. Like, think about the financial aspect of it and the knowledge that comes along with it. Like, people study

that for a living. Like, why would you have them go to college to learn that stuff if we didn't need it? So for the first time, I am like, 'What am I supposed to do if I can't get those resources? How am I supposed to be doing the weight-loss training and how am I supposed to be helping and feeding into everyone's, you know, pressure? Well, how do you know how easy it is to lose weight? Like, you have been skinny your whole life. Like you never had to deal with this. Like, you do not understand my story. And that's really frustrating.

Traci also talked about how losing weight has caused her to buy new clothing. She

said that she was wearing clothing too big for her because jeans, in particular, were

expensive:

I went on the medication about Thanksgiving time and counting, you know, my birthday, which is at end of January, I had already lost so much that I was, like, my pants were so big, that it kind of looked like I was wearing, like, the pants the way a guy would, not a girl would. Like I was sagging. And, you know, he [her boyfriend] made fun of me; he was just like, "You really need some new pants. Like, these do not fit, at all." And I was just like, "I know, but jeans are expensive," and so I got new jeans probably February, and then just kept working out, all that stuff. And you know, I just continued to, like, lose weight healthy, and not necessarily lose weight but trim down. So now I have lost about 50 pounds, give or take, on the day since the last actual recorded weight. I could have been a little bit higher than that at any given time, and I have actually had to replace my jeans yet again. But, so that's just kind of been how it was.

Chris talked about how the dining centers on campus have helped him eat healthier

because when he was buying his own food, he would buy the unhealthy food because it was

cheaper:

I would say the dining centers keep me eating healthier, because they have lots of fresh fruit and salads. Spinach salad is now awesome, and I never used to eat salad ever. Last summer, I lived up in Minneapolis during an internship and I ate like crap because I was buying my own food and I was buying cheap stuff and cheap stuff is really bad for you. I could buy apples, but that doesn't really make up for it. I would say being in college was probably bad because I don't work out as much as I used to, but working on campus was good, because there were just healthier food options.

Jason was the one exception to the money issue when it came to weight-loss. Jason was also the only person who had a full-time, white-collar job for several years before entering into graduate school. Jason talked about coming to terms with paying for a trainer. He said that it was an expensive investment, but he considered it worth it so he did not have medical bills in the future. Jason did his own cost-benefit analysis when it came to the decision of paying for a trainer:

> *Well, it's not that I can't afford the trainer. It's more along the lines of I struggle with spending the money because I am cheap. I don't know if that's the word about to say it, but I don't like spending a lot of money. But I mean, I can afford it, and I have the means. I have the resources, you know. I have, I get, I have money that I have saved up from when I was working and then my family is well in terms of money that they give me, so finances is not an issue. It's just that I have always been very fiscally conservative. But the way that I look at this is, by living cheap now and not investing in my health, I am going to end up spending more money later. So why don't I go ahead and spend a little bit of money now, so get healthier to be happier versus having to spend a hell of a lot of money later for medications and all this other bullshit stuff that I don't want to have to deal with when I get older. And so, you know, financially it's not really that big of a deal because I am very fortunate and not everybody is in that position. And I acknowledge that, and I am very happy about that, and that just make things much, much easier for me. Now that doesn't mean that I don't negotiate, because I am always going to negotiate everything. And my gym very much knows I negotiate everything that I pay for. But that's just something I have always done. And so I get ahead by negotiating, you know, my package deals, and, you know, my sessions, and any specialized things that I want to do because when I negotiate those things, they know that I am paying cash up front. They are much more willing to give me more bang for my buck. So that's what I do a lot, and that makes a really huge difference.*

Relationships

Not every participant talked about romantic relationship, but most of them did. They mentioned how their relationships or search for a relationship factored into their weight-loss process.

In Traci's case, her relationship helped her in the weight-loss process. Her boyfriend actually helped her start to work out:

> *I lived on campus, so I was like, "Yeah, it's right there, I can just go to the gym." And I had another friend who lived in dorm right by me. He lived in [building name], and, you know, we started hanging out a lot, became best friends. We started dating, and so we go to the gym every day, and that and my thyroid. I just, like, my weight started to, like, plummet. Like, it just dropped really fast. Like, not unhealthful fast, but I just feel the changes.*

Traci also commented that unwanted attention from others has increased, which has not been her favorite consequence of losing weight.

> *I mean, middle school, high school, were definitely, probably the worst. I mean elementary school is kind of bad, but elementary school is like, "Ooo, everyone has cooties." But middle school and high school, it was hard. Junior and senior year, high school got a little bit better, and in college, you know, it was interesting. But at the same time, you know, there are some people who are just like, even before I started to lose weight, they were like, "Dang, you are attractive! Let me, like, get with you." And I was like, "Aw, heck no." Now when I started to lose weight, like, it, maybe it hasn't changed or anything. Or maybe it has gotten more, but I definitely noticed more and I am just like, "Please stop objectifying me." But it's just, it's made me, you know, I want to be healthy so even when people are objectifying me, it's because they are like, "Oh, she looks, "you know, healthy."*

Jason talked about a negative experience that his roommate had, which caused them to realize that weight-loss might be something they need to talk about:

> *I got to the car one day and picked up my roommate, who was a really good friend of mine, and he looked at me and he was like, "You know, we need to make a change, because this shit ain't working for us." Then I look at him and I am like, "What the hell do you mean?"and he is like, "Well, take a look at us. You know, we are both overweight, and this is having a negative impact on us. We need to do something." And I looked at him and asked, "Well what happened for you to even have that come to your mind?" And he said, "You know, I was talking to this girl that I had interest in, and she looked at me and she said, 'You know, you are just not attractive to me because you are so heavy.'" And so for him it was like, "Oh wow, okay." So it was kind of a stunner for him. So I looked at him like, "Well, first of all, that's shitty. But, you know, if we were going to do this, it shouldn't be because of some, some bitch, but it should be because, you know, we really want to be healthy for*

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ourselves and do this for ourselves." And so we looked at each other and we made a commitment.

Jason talked about his dating history in the past as well, and how he views people who would

not consider dating him because of his size:

> *I never really had a problem finding a date off a website or off a system and stuff. It ain't like I was ever bad looking. I was just fat. So yeah I think that I might have lost out on some dates. Or after someone met me, they didn't want to date and such. But I was kind of like, "Fuck you if you don't want me. I have a great personality." Then I realized that attraction is attraction and that I would remember to give everyone a chance when I got smaller, as long as health is important to them. I guess that I have, like, gone on more dates now that I have lost the weight, but whatever. I mean, I still ain't skinny now and some people still judge me and won't give the time of day. That kind of pisses me off though. I am dedicated to fitness and being healthy and I guarantee that I will get smaller, and when I do, they better not come step my way because they will get shut down.*

Carla talked about her friends not understanding why she is single, although she

knows it is because of her weight:

> Boys don't always approach and hit on me or something. Like, I'm always like an outsider with my friends, too. And they are like, "Why, I don't understand! You are such a great person!" And I am like, "It's my body size. Like, you don't want to admit it, but you know that that's the reason." And it's just like I wish people would open up and say these things, because I am tired of people just trying to, like, protect me and saying that I am such a great person or whatever. Like, and I am like, "I have to go out and seek people who don't mind that [being overweight]." Or like I recently joined a dating site that was for overweight people, like, some people like that, you know. You just have to find your match and it's, people just don't want to admit, they are biased on size, or like that's the reason why you are not being successful [finding a date]. Because it is. Like, there's so many different forms of discrimination that come along with it, that people just don't want to recognize it.

Carla later told me about a guy whom she is talking to and how that has added some stress in

her life as well. Carla spoke about how he didn't want her to lose weight, and now she feels

pressured not to lose weight, although she really wants to lose weight for herself.

Effects of the Physical Environment of the University on Weight-loss

> *We have great recreational facilities. It's just, it's really helped, you know, keep me into, I mean wanting to exercise. I mean, I am sure I could do it on my own. But now it's just like, "I love it!" It might otherwise be like, "Oh it's such a drag!" – Traci*

The participants talked about how the actual physical environment of the university has played into their weight-loss or how it has affected their experiences on campus. There were many sources of support on campus and participants reported benefited from being on campus. There were some barriers to weight loss on campus as well. This section presents positives and negatives of the campus environment.

Positives Aspects of Campus

Many participants talked about the positive aspects of the campus. All of the participants commented about the on-campus gym as being one of the most positive aspects of campus.

Ashley talked about having the membership to the gyms on campus.

> *I would have to say I haven't like actively sought out a lot of the different resources. However, I mean the fact that we get to go to the gym or two of the gyms, three...Is it three? I think there are a couple of pools and two gyms are, you know, it's very helpful, the ability, you know? I mean otherwise, like, my apartment now doesn't have any free [gym name] membership. I mean, I could go to [gym name] if [friend's name] let me in, which he would totally do, but you know, that's irrelevant. Like, I wouldn't have a way to do gym,* right now, if it wasn't for that. So that in itself is amazing.

Traci commented on the gym on campus and how she used it to help her at the beginning of her workout process:

> *I mean, obviously at the very beginning, [name] gym is a huge benefit. I was there, like, probably, at least, you know, 4 or 5 days out of the week and I would be there for a good hour, and I loved it. I would take my textbook. I*

would read on the stationary bikes, so I got like, "I am working out and studying at the same time, yes!"

Traci went on to say that many people she knows use the gyms and that helps her go to the

gym as well:

> *We have a relatively active campus, I think. And so, you know, you will just hear people, they are like, "I am going to the gym after this." And you are like, "Oh, I should go to the gym." You know, how active this is and the fact that it is beautiful, you walk everywhere. We have great recreational facilities. It's just, it's really helped, you know, keep me into, I mean wanting to exercise. I mean, I am sure I could do it on my own. But now it's just like, "I love it!" It might otherwise be like, "Oh it's such a drag!" Whereas, you know, you know, so many people who are, like, you are passing them and you are like, "Oh hey, where you off to?" And they are, kind of, in their gym clothes, like, "I am going to the gym." And you are like, "I should really go do that." And it's just, it's so accessible, and you know, it is a decent walk from here, but it's still, you know, it's not that bad.*

Jason shared that he used the campus gym facility in addition to the community gym.

He enjoys using both facilities because they offer different services that meet his different

needs:

> *I do both. I use the gym on campus because it is new. I think it has only been open for, like, a year, year and a half. It's a very nice facility, and, you know, I am paying for it so, hell, why shouldn't I use it, you know? So I love using the treadmills in the walkway, and the pool, and doing some exercise classes in the pool, and then the weight lifting area that they have. And then also enjoy going over to the other building and using the racquetball courts there. And there's a steam room there that I can kind of hang in sometimes and, kind of, just de-stress and rest.*

> *I also use one of the community gyms. It's where I go, and so I can use that as well. And so I kind of get, you know, double back and forth, if that makes any sense. And my trainer is actually through [community gym name], which is where I see him more often and then on off days I will go to campus recreation center and kind of work out there. So, you know, it's all about convenience, it's all about looking at where I am at and what's going on. But those are two facilities that I use.*

Both Carla and Chris mentioned the gyms on campus as resources that are available for students, but they both admitted to not using the gyms. Carla mentioned that she did not use the gym because of the negative experiences that she had there, and Chris just did not like working out. Chris, however, mentioned on-campus dining and how that has helped him:

> *I would say the dining centers keep me eating healthier because they have lots of fresh fruit and salads. Spinach salad is now awesome, and I never used to eat salad ever. Last summer, I lived up in Minneapolis during an internship and I ate like crap because I was buying my own food. And I was buying cheap stuff and cheap stuff is really bad for you. I could buy apples, but that doesn't really make up for it. I would say being in college was probably bad because I don't work out as much as I used to, but working on campus was good, because there were just healthier food options.*

Traci mentioned that she discovered some of the healthier options at a convenience store. She could use her meal plan there instead of going to the all you can eat dining hall facilities:

> *I didn't really discovered [the convenience store] as much my freshman year. We always ate in the, you know, just the [dining hall]. So, all you can eat and that at first was really bad thing. I am sure that didn't help my thyroid problem because, you know, instead of gaining the usual—like, six months, I gain like 5 pounds, I was, like, six months, I gain, like, 30. But just discovering that there were those other options. You know, they are there. Being a vegetarian, options are not so great all the time. I mean, they do make fabulous salad at [the convenience store]. Their salads are awesome. They are made with actual lettuce, so I just did that dining that is offered. And it's, you know, it's been helpful and good. Like, [the convenience store] or the [student union], or even in, you know, [smaller dining hall] on Sunday night. So that changed the ability that this campus has provided me to, you know, get my entrée and three sides. Then I eat my entree then, save my sides for when I am actually hungry, and just have a little snack. That's been great about campus.*

The other participants, except for Carla, did not have meal plans and eat on campus. Carla reported eating in the student union and described the food options offered there as

being less than desired. Other positive comments about the university, and its effects on the

weight-loss process pertained to the physical campus. This large mid-western university has

a a great deal of green space. There are many trails and paths that lead through breathtaking

scenery. Traci described the campus and her sense of safety and the community around her

campus in her interview:

> *But it's just, you know, if I was like, "I am going to go run outside," there are*
> *a lot of places to go. The campus is beautiful. And, you know, obviously any*
> *community is dangerous, but just the [town name] community is a little bit*
> *more conducive to [safety]. I mean, obviously you just want to watch yourself,*
> *but there's not really as sketchy areas to avoid here. If, you know, I want to*
> *go for a run and it's not necessarily the best hours, or I want to go someplace*
> *that isn't right of campus, I can really. It's been nice.*
>
> *Campus is so beautiful and actually great, but if you are in a central campus,*
> *even if you are going just from the one side to the other, it's a long walk, but*
> *it's [the bus] not going to get you there. The campus is so beautiful, so it's*
> *encouraged me to, you know, walk a lot more places. And you don't realize*
> *how much you walk in a day, until you are like: "My shoes are wearing down,*
> *and my legs actually hurt right now, at the end of the long day."*

Jason talked about how big the campus was and the amount of walking he has to do

on campus. This has helped his efforts to become more physically active:

> *Well, first of all, we have to acknowledge this is a big ass campus. And I don't*
> *care what anybody says. You have to walk everywhere, or ride your bike.*
> *And the snow doesn't help either. Being down from the south, I don't like the*
> *snow but I am not going to complain. It's going to be all right. But I, you*
> *know, it's a big campus and so we have to walk everywhere. There's stairs all*
> *over the place, and I don't think the campus is as handicap accessible as it*
> *could be. But part of that is that's been good for me because it forced me to*
> *take the stairs. It forced me to do things a little more healthier, versus taking*
> *the easier way out and taking the elevator for everything. And so I do a lot of*
> *walking, in between classes, my job, to the parking lot, you know. If I need to*
> *go to the student union, I have to walk everywhere, you know? I don't have a*
> *magic pole or scooter I can just hop on and off it. We don't have parking*
> *available in front of every building on campus, so you can't, you know, be*
> *lazy and pull up in front of the building. It's like, I just don't have those sorts*
> *of thing, so I have to, I have to walk my fat ass everywhere. And so it's just*
> *one of those things where I have to walk, and I have to walk, and I'm going to*

lose weight. And so I have to have good tennis shoes to be able to wear
because I can go through, you know, tennis shoes every 4 to 5 months just
from the all the walking. We have to get around big ass campus.

Chris and Ashley mentioned a couple other programs on the campus that helped them

become healthier, even if they did not use the services. Chris talked about an orientation

program that he was a leader for during his second year. He talked about playing volleyball

and tennis with others until late at night during that program:

We do a lot of orientation work, and it was basically like 8 am to 10 pm every
day, working. But part of that is late night at the [gym name]. So every night,
I was playing volleyball with these high schoolers, who have way more energy
than me, and playing volleyball every night, that's something. Then I started
playing tennis and some more athletic stuff, so that's something. I'm trying to
stay healthier, not entirely successful.

Ashley mentioned the training and nutritional services on campus and how they are present,

even if she cannot afford them:

I have been told about, like, nutritionist on campus and a personal trainer.
These are things that cost money and I don't have extra money, so it's not
very, I just can't waste money on that. So, you know, for that it's kind of
pointless. I mean, like I am not in the position where I feel some other
students are wealthy and they have expendable finances, you know? So, I
don't have parents that can, you know, give me money. My mom, she tries her
best. She gives $20 for food here and there, but like that's it. So, you know, I
just, I can't spend extra money on stuff like that. It's just not feasible. So
although it would be nice, I mean, it would nice to be able to do it. I think a
physical trainer, like, would be amazing for me.

Negative Aspects of Campus

Participants mentioned some negative aspects of being on their university's campus.

Some of the negative comments were about dining and gyms on campus, about which

positive comments were discussed above, while other comments were, focused more on the

physical environment of the campus. Traci mentioned in her comments about dining above

that she gained weight in the dining hall facilities due to a lack of good food.

Carla additionally made comments about the student union food options:

*This is really frustrating when I go to the union trying to find food that's
healthy to eat. Like, yes, I can go to Subway, but that gets expensive as well.
But like within the little dash-and-dine services, there's not much that healthy
stuff. I mean when you think about, it's burritos, pizzas, spaghetti, pasta type
stuff, chicken sandwiches, French fries. And even like the tortilla little wraps
and whatnot, if you look at the calories on those, they are not exactly the most
healthy. So that's frustrating. All, you can get grapes and you can get fruit,
like apples, bananas, but, like ,what healthy choices are you offering to
students who are supposed to be on this weight journey? So that's been
frustrating, as well as trying to buy into this culture and trying to do what my
trainer is telling me. But, yeah, I can't do that when I am always on campus
and eating at places where the not healthiest choices has been given to me.*

Jason shared similar comments about the student union food court:

*I used to try and go to the food court because it was near my office when I was
working. I just can't eat there anymore. There is not a damn thing to eat
healthy there, you know? Ok, they have, like, the sub place, ummm Subway,
yeah, but you can only eat there so much. And my roommate loves that place,
so we are eating there whenever we eat out anyways. So I ain't trying to go to
no Subway. Besides that, it's all the food I used to love to eat: pizza, pasta,
some fried chicken strips and sandwiches. There are fries, actually like three
or four kinds of fries. To top it all off, you gotta walk by a Chinese place to
get into the food court. I can tear me up some Chinese food, you know? So
yeah, my trainer and I talked and no more food court for me. You know how
much trouble I would get into if I ate there? Nope, can't do it. There is not a
damn thing good about that food court, you know? I mean they do offer a
salad, but it's expensive, or you gotta get this little dinky side salad with
iceberg lettuce. I think that's all there is on the salad bar too. No thank you.
I drink my water, I don't need that water lettuce. Can't they get some spinach
or romaine in there? Maybe I would eat there if I could make it past the
Chinese and if they had a good salad bar.*

There were also comments about the gyms on campus and how different individuals

did not feel comfortable using the facilities. Carla's experience about the worker and student

in the gym was told earlier, but she added the following comments about the experience:

I guess one thing would be, maybe, some education to some of the workers at the gym. Because, like, I said the whole elevator and stair incident. That was the one of the student workers at the gym. So, the other one was by someone who was just using it. But I think just education about what weight lost process is and just creating an inclusive environment within the gym. So, like this is for people who are trying to, you know, lose weight and how to make that encouraging. Maybe somehow, I guess not shove it in people's faces so much. Not that necessarily that they have to, but provide a resource. I don't know how realistic this is on a large campus, but I do know there are universities that like have an activity hour. So they don't hold classes at this one particular hour every day of the week so that, like, student organizations can meet, so I don't know if, like, you could do that. Or just have, like, a student group that always meets at a certain time every week or every day for people to get together and work out. Just lots of supportive atmosphere and maybe that it's kind of built into the culture, but not so in your face that you necessarily have to do it.

Ashley talked about her experiences at the gym as well, and how being self-conscious

has affected her use of the gyms:

So, like going by myself, all I do is think about how terrible I look, you know, and how the people are judging me all the time. I just, I know it in my gut, you know, like, it's [the people in the gym] probably not okay with this. I mean, I don't even pay attention to anybody in the gym so I am sure they [are not]… It's just a mental thing. Yeah, I am self-conscious. So I went back to lift more, but mostly it was just cardio.

I ended up having my first panic attack ever in the gym, like, well, since like high school. I was just so freaking busy and I froze. I couldn't do anything. I couldn't function. I could barely breathe. And I don't do that. I don't have panic attacks. That's weird. I just freaked out. So I guess that was one bad experience. But I think [gym name 1] was so busy because [gym name 2] wasn't open yet. And so I haven't been to [gym name 1] because it now holds bad memories and it's clear on the other side of campus that I never go to so you know [gym name 2] much more convenient, however [gym name 2] is generally busy too. And that ends up causing issues for me with focus because I am always so worried what everybody else is thinking.

Ashley also reported that personal training and other services that cost in the gym were not

conducive to her using the services:

You know, the fact that stuff cost money, you know? I can't do the physical training. I can't do, you know, nutritionist. Although I really don't think I need a nutritionist, because I think I understand how to eat well. I just don't, you know, I can't afford to, and there's a difference there, you know? If you

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can't afford to do it, then you can't do it. So I just, you know. Of course, when I am not eating well, I don't work out, and vice versa. When I don't work, I don't eat well, you know. And that's a vicious cycle. When I am working out, I feel more in tune with working better on eating good. So, I don't know… It's all the mental cycle.

Jason talked about his process of using the gym and how it's changed over his

weight-loss journey:

I struggled to go to the on campus gyms at first. When I first got here and was at my highest weight, I went into [gym name 1] because [gym name 2] was being remodeled and things. I was like, "Oh hell no! This place is packed and it's hot and humid." The gym was jammed packed with all these little young, buff college students walking around. And here I bring my fat ass into the gym and try to exercise with these fools. Nope, I went straight to [community gym] and signed up for my membership there. At [community gym] I felt, like, more, like, accepted. Well maybe not accepted, but I didn't feel judged or like I was being made fun of or whatever. These are just my opinions of the on-campus gym, take them or leave them. Now I do go to the new gym. It's really nice! I have lost some weight and I feel more comfortable now with my working out skills. So I am all like "bring it" to these young guys.

The last aspect that participants brought up was the physical space available in some

of the classroom buildings. Chris brought up how some of the classrooms were not friendly

to bigger people:

Some of the classrooms that are really, really old, you can tell that back in the day people were skinnier because the desks are really, really small. You see sometimes there are people who are really overweight, and they have to sit in front or at a table because they just can't get in the desk. I feel bad for them when that happens, but it's not hugely common. In [building name], the desks are tiny, even not fat people have trouble getting into them. In general, I think it's pretty good. I live on the fifth floor, so I walk a lot of stairs. It's my pseudo-workout, I take the stairs all the time, so there's that. I'm not like super overweight or anything, I don't think. It's not a huge problem for me at least.

Carla talked about some of her experience in the classrooms and building on campus:

But it was just that I didn't know how to deal with all this, you know, the privilege around me. Not being able to fit in desks in one of the classrooms. Or one of the buildings that I had a class in, every time I went to bathroom,

the stalls were always touching me on both sides. Like, you know, it's for a thin person. I cannot fit in there and there wasn't a handicap stall in that particular bathroom. So it's just really felt frustrating. Just the small things that people don't think about, don't have to think about. But they think that I can control it when I lose weight, so that's just, it's been really hard, especially here.

Jason mentioned the campus classrooms as well:

I was lucky that all the rooms I had classes in had tables and chairs that pulled out. I have seen some of these classrooms that the undergrads are in— man are the desks crammed in the classroom! And it's the desk that I would have had to prop my belly on the writing part or had the desk shoved into my belly all class. I know that there are tables that people can sit at in those classrooms, but who the hell wants to in front of the class because your fat ass can't fit into a desk? Really? Not me! I would not do that. I would rather drop the damn class than be that person. More power to those students that have to do that, but come on [university name], You can do a little bit better now.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the five participants and their weight-loss stories and experience on campus. I also provided the impressions, assessments, and reflectivity pieces were added to each of the participants' profiles. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed for themes. The four major findings were presented: (1) separating the stages of change process; (2) the need for support to be successful in the process; (3) the stresses of being a student and how it affects the weight-loss process; and (4) the effects of the physical environment of the university on weight loss.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research study was conducted to understand the experience of college students in the weight-loss process. A basic phenomenological approach was used to understand the phenomena of weight-loss and the stories of the participants in the research. There were five participants in the research study: Chris, Ashley, Carla, Jason, and Traci. An interview was conducted with each participant, with a member check and follow-up interactions to gain the full experiences of the participants and to check their progress and struggles over time.

The selection of these data-collection methods was in direct response to the research questions that framed this study. The two research questions addressed in this study were:

1. How do students describe their experiences with weight loss?

2. How do students describe their behavioral and psychological changes associated with weight loss?

This chapter will review the basic models used to frame this study: (a) Trantheoretical Model's Stages of Change; and (b) and the Health Belief Model. After a brief review of those models, the four major themes from the study and their sub-themes will be reviewed, followed by limitations, implications for practice and recommendations, as well as a review of the role of the researcher and reflexivity.

Framing Models

The Trantheoretical Model (TTM) focuses on the stages an individual goes through when deciding to change a behavior or lifestyle. This model was broken down into the Stage of Change (SOC). The Stages of Change stages are precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination. The stages are defined below:

1. *Precontemplation:* The individual has not begun to think about making a lifestyle change.

2. *Contemplation:* The individual is thinking of making a lifestyle change within the next six months.

3. *Preparation***:** The individual is planning to start their lifestyle change within 30 days. Small changes may be observed in this stage.

4. *Action:* The individual has successfully made the behavior change but is within the first six months of implementing the change.

5. *Maintenance:* The behavior change has been implemented for six months or more.

The Health Belief Model (HBM) focuses on the ways to predict if an individual will engage in action to prevent illness (Redding et al., 2000). The willingness to change depends on the individual's assessment and perception that the risk of not changing is greater than the effort it takes to change (Redding et al., 2000). The authors noted that the perception of these four factors above works in conjunction with the individuals' perception of the severity of illness and potential outcomes. After the participants consider all factors, their assessment directly influences the performing of the healthy behaviors.

The Stages of Change and Health Belief Model are useful in understanding someone's willingness to engage in healthy behaviors. Individuals can decide to start making health decisions, losing weight, and becoming healthier on their own. These models were helpful when looking at the stages of the participants.

Findings

There were four major themes that were presented in this study. The themes all had subthemes which divided the major theme into smaller sections and to understand the participants' experiences. All of the themes help to answer the research questions, shedding light on the participants' experiences and their struggles and successes of weight-loss. Each of the themes and subthemes helped me understand my research questions. Table 5.1 provides a brief overview of the themes and subtheme and what research questions that the theme helped address.

1. Separating the Stages of Change process

When entering into this research, I thought about the weight-loss process as one Stage of Change process. After the participant interviews, it became obvious that both nutrition and exercise were important factors in the weight-loss process. However, the participants could be placed in two different stages in the Stages of Change model. It was important to look at nutrition and exercise as two separate processes that work together to help in the weight-loss process.

The participants reported issues with nutrition and exercise. For the most part, the participants talked about having more issues with nutritional aspects, whether the issue was not knowing what to eat or not being able to afford healthy food. When the participants spoke about exercise, some topics that presented were learning how to exercise, fitting exercise into their lives, and not enjoying exercise.

Literature on the Transtheoretical Model and Health Belief Model were used to examine the change in lifestyle behaviors (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). Looking at weight-loss as a single process was really my mistake as a researcher. Weight-loss is a combination

Table 5.1.   Overview of themes based on the research questions (RQ)

RQ	Theme	Sub-themes	Basic description
	1. Separating the Stages of Change process		Viewing the weight loss process as two separate processes, nutrition and exercise. Each process has its own stage of change level.
1&2	2. Need for support to be successful in the process	Accountability	Participants reported the need to have someone to hold them accountable for the weight loss process.
		Making participant feel comfortable	A major way of supporting the participant was making them feel comfortable in the gym and not feeling like they stand out for being overweight. This tied into body image and self-esteem at times.
		Educating the participant	The need and desire for education about weight-loss, exercise, and nutrition was evident when talking to the participants.
1&2	3. Stresses of being a student and how it the affects the weight-loss process	Time	All the participants were taking full time course work, working at least one job, and involved on campus. This caused a significant balance to get to the gym.
		Money	Participants reported not having a lot of money and working extra jobs to pay for basic needs. These jobs affected their ability to get to the gym at times. Also lack of money did not allow for certain participants to use services that cost money.
		Relationships	Participants reported dating or trying to date as a stressor in their life.
1	4. Effects of the physical environment of the University on weight-loss	Positive	Positive factors on campus were the "free" gym, campus environment, and dining services.
		Negative	Negative factors on campus were the gym environment, unhealthy dining options, and classroom and physical spaces.

of many behaviors, and each behavior would could with their own Stage of Change and

Processed of Change (Redding et al., 2000). My findings that the nutrition and exercise

processes were not in the same Stage of Change, would confirm the existing research that all

behaviors are separate processes.

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2. *Need for support to be successful in the process*

Support was a major theme that participants mentioned in their interviews. Support came from friends, boyfriends, personal trainers, roommates, and family members. The topic of support was often talked about in three subtopics: accountability, making the participant feel comfortable, and educating the participant.

Most, if not all, of the participants mentioned the word "accountability," or a variation of the word. Participants mentioned that having their friend or trainer at the gym kept them coming to the gym and motivated them to do better. From friends that said, *"get your ass off the couch, we are going to the gym,"* to trainers at the gym checking in with them, participants said they were most successful when there was an accountability factor in place.

Feeling comfortable in the gym was a subtheme that focused on some of the self-consciousness that an overweight person might have when trying to lose weight. Some participants reported that working out with someone helped them feel less self-conscious and more comfortable at the gym. Participants also mentioned that if they felt discriminated against or made fun of at the gym, they did not go back, and they found somewhere else where they felt more comfortable working out.

Education was a supportive factor that participants said they wanted and valued having in the process. Some participants spoke of not knowing how to eat healthy or what kind of "diet" they should be on, while others talked about not knowing how to work out since they had never done it before. When someone took on the role of educator, the participants were thankful and appreciated the education they received. Also, feeling more knowledgeable led some participants to feeling more comfortable in the gym.

Fischer and Bryant (2008) examined individuals who worked out with a personal trainer and compared them to individuals who did not use trainer's services. The research found that the individuals that did use the trainers had a more positive pattern of exercise than those who did not. Only two (Carla and Jason) of my participants reported using a trainer during their time in the weight-loss process. Carla and Jason reported working out more often and eating healthier than Chris and Ashley. Traci however exercised as much, sometimes more than Carla and Jason. Additionally, Carla stopped using the trainer over the time of the process and her exercise and nutritional habits started to regress in progress, so she hired the trainer again. Once with the trainer she started making progress again. While my finding somewhat supported the finding of Fisher and Bryant (2008), the link was not the focus of my study.

3. *Stresses of being a student and how it the affects the weight-loss process*

Being a college student, either as an undergraduate or as a graduate, had its effects on the weight-loss process. The participants mentioned some of the stresses that being a college student brought to them. Some of the stressors were time, money, and relationships. The participants mentioned that the campus facilitated good health and that was something that was really good about being a college student and trying to lose weight.

Time and money seemed to go hand-in-hand in many ways. The participants talked about balancing academics, jobs, and other life activities. They mentioned that trying to fit working out into their busy schedules was a challenge and that when they were busy; working out or going to the gym was often the first activity to fall from the schedule. Another stressor was being on a strict budget and not having the money to pay for healthy

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food, a nutritionist, or a trainer. Not having money led the participants to get a part-time job, which further limited their time to work out.

Relationships were mentioned as a support and as a stressor. One participant had a boyfriend who helped support her going to the gym and working out. Others had negative experiences when trying to date or felt like people were not interested in them because of their weight. This factored into their process as well, with some worrying about how losing weight could affect potential relationships and current romantic interests.

There was little connection to the literature with this theme. There is limited research focused on the stressors of college life on the weight-loss process. Some of the conversations tied in areas of body image and negative body image. Carla, Traci, and Ashley talked a little about body image and how it might affect their relationships and lives. I noticed that Carla and Ashley were working through understanding their body image and

Traci reported increased satisfaction in body image being thin but still had times she worried about her body. She would support the ideas of being thinner makes her happier (DeBate et al., 2008; Ogden, 2004; Sanftner et al., 2009). In addition, all three female participants reported having some kind of depression or depressive-like state in the past, involving weight as the crux or mitigating factor to the depression. This connects with some of the literature of Peterson et al. (2008), and Quinn and Crocker (1998).

Carla, Ashley, Jason, and Chris specifically talked about how they have each grown to accept their body size, with Chris going as far as saying he would be okay with being fat for the rest of his life. Carla and Ashley added that they wanted to lose weight but never wanted to be really skinny. This would negate the aforementioned literature and support more of Crepezzi's (2007) ideas about being fat and accepting and appreciating themselves.

In addition, the studies regarding overweight people not doing as well academically (Crosnoe, 2007; Harring, Montgomery, & Hardin, 2010; Lounsbury et al., 2005; Miles, 2009) would not be supported by my findings. My participants were very successful at their universities. Two participants were working on their graduate degrees, one participant planned on an additional degree after graduation, one had a fulltime job waiting for him after graduation, and the last was the president on a student club related to her major.

4. The Effects of the Physical Environment of the University on Weight-loss

The physical environment helped or hindered the progress of the weight-loss process. The participants mentioned that the campus was a big, beautiful campus. This helped them when it came to walking around or making them want to run around campus. Additionally, the gyms on campus were mentioned as a positive resource that the campus offered. Participants often referred to these gyms as *"free gyms"* since they did not have to pay monthly memberships. All students at the university pay for the gym in their student fees that are assessed at the beginning of the semester.

The campus also had some negative aspects that were mentioned by the participants. One of the major factors was having desk that may not be accommodating for larger people. The university substituted the smaller desk with tables in the front of the classrooms that larger people could sit at; however, the participants reported feeling sorry for the people who sat at the table or that they would not sit there. The participants also reported a couple of negative experiences in the on-campus gyms that stopped them from working out in the gyms.

With some of the negative experiences there were conversations about body image and how having desk and bathroom stalls that participants cannot fit into was at time

discouraging and effected their body image and self-esteem. Longhurst (2005) noted that overweight people having to live in a world that is not made for their size and how this could make them feel unwelcomed and belittled. Some of participants would support Longhurst's research. There is limited research on college campuses and their effect on weight-loss.

Limitations

As with any study, this study has various limitations. There were a total of five limitations that are notable in the study. The first limitation was the small number of participants in the study. The themes and experiences of this study are uniquely tied to the five participants in the study. My goal was to have five to seven participants so that I could more fully understand their stories while still ensuring richness of data.

The second limitation was the recruitment of participants. I wanted to make sure that I advertised to different types of people who were in the weight-loss process. My first instinct was to advertise in the on-campus and community gyms and to talk to the trainers in the gyms. An advertisement was posted in the on-campus gym on a community posting area; however, the community gym did not allow any posting in their facilities. I was able to send my advertisement to the trainers at the community gym, and I talked to several of the trainers at the on-campus gym as well. I received no participants from these advertisements. Additionally, my program of study committee wanted to make sure that I was reaching out to other potential participants who did not use the gym. In order to achieve this, I was able to send advertisements to the residence hall staff to share with their students about the study. I received two participants from this recruitment method. One of the major ways that participants were found was through talking to people who gave me names of people whom I

should contact. The last three participants were identified with this method of locating participants.

The third limitation of this study was that the sample was obtained only at one Midwestern university. In order to get broader data on the experiences of the weight-loss process, more campuses could be included in future studies about the topic. This study highlighted only the experiences of these participants to understand these phenomena from their points of view.

The fifth limitation of this study involved the extent to which the participants were being fully honest in their responses and in telling their stories. The topic of weight-loss and associated behaviors can be uncomfortable at times, especially for the participants who were relapsing from their healthy behaviors. I believe that all five participants were open to the process and shared their experiences. I feel that they were honest and willing to admit the areas in which they were not doing their best.

The last limitation of this study was the homogeneity of the participants. The participants were each in their early to mid-twenties and four of whom identified as white, with the remaining participant identifying as a person of color. This study did not seek to explore race, gender, or sexuality in the experiences; however, this is an area that can be looked into for future research studies.

Implications for Practice

The implications for practice in student affairs are numerous. Based on this study, I have identified four groups of professionals to whom I would make recommendations. The needs of students who are in the weight-loss process are important and often overlooked

because they may not entail a large percentage of the university population. To address the needs of this marginalized group, one must consider a multilayered approach that addresses the holistic student. In addition, one must also consider the context in which these recommendations are made and acknowledge that they cannot be universal, especially since every institution is different and has varied missions, priorities, and levels of support. Therefore, some of the recommendations may already be in place at other institutions. The groups to whom I would make suggestions are: the gym and recreational staff, the campus facilities and management, dining staff, student affairs professionals, student affairs graduate faculty, and campus administrators.

Gym and recreational staff

One of the areas that received the most praise and also criticism was the gym and its staff and services. There are four suggestions I will make to the gym and recreational staff. The first recommendation would be to make sure all staff receive sensitivity training and are informed about the weight-loss process. Such training would have prevented the negative experience that a participant had with a front desk staff worker. The staff should also be trained to confront behavior that is not inclusive, such as when a patron is making fun of another person who is working out.

The second recommendation is to evaluate the cost for hiring trainers and nutritionists on campus. I am unsure if these services could ever be entirely free; however, I believe personnel with appropriate background experience should be considered for advising students who are in dire need of losing weight. When students need to lose weight because they are morbidly obese and do not have sufficient finances, cost represents an additional

barrier for them to receive the assistance they need. Offering group classes is not sufficient because such groups are not personalized to address persons with atypical needs and could lead to injury or embarrassment as well as the likelihood these people would not use the gym.

The third recommendation I would make is directed to trainers and group fitness staff. I recommend that, when working with clients, they remember the important role of support in people's success at losing weight. It is imperative that the training relationship be based on education, thus increasing the students' knowledge of how to work out properly and feel comfortable about what they are doing. There has to be a good relationship between the trainer and the student to enable the student to feel comfortable in the gym. The participants in this study said that working out with people they knew and trusted made them feel secure in the facility and eliminated some of their self-consciousness in the gym. Regardless, trainers should make sure that they are holding their clients accountable both nutritionally and physically.

The fourth recommendation is to create an active community group for people who are overweight and trying to lost weight. This could be a group that meets together and attends classes designed for people in the weight-loss process. This way, no one feels singled out in their workouts, enabling them to feel more comfortable in classes as well as working out together. Having classes or spaces where these groups can meet privately could increase the comfort levels and success rates of group attendance on campus.

Campus facilities and management staff

The participants talked about the actual environment and facilities of campus as presenting both support and challenges to losing weight. The three recommendations that I

am making to this group build on the supportive aspects and require action to address the negative aspects of the campus. The first recommendation is to make sure the campus is visually pleasing and diverse. The participants described their campus as beautiful and as having a variety of areas and environments that encouraged students to walk around and enjoy the scenery.

The second recommendation is to identify some running and walking routes around the campus that students can easily follow and train for races, or simply measure the distances they can walk or run on campus. Having this information available might encourage students to stay on campus to work out instead of seeking other areas of town. This could also help multiple students to take part and enjoy their beautiful campus who might not otherwise see all the areas of campus.

The last recommendation is to do an inventory of all the physical classroom and public areas on campus. In this inventory, areas where larger individuals cannot fit into desks or bathroom stalls should be noted and action should be taken in these areas. Participants expressed that these environmental limitations have negatively impacted them and made them feel that they are not a welcome part of the university community.

Dining staff

Dining on campus is very tricky and the participants' campus has taken many steps to help students in the weight-loss process. The recommendations to the dining staff build upon the areas that are positive and give some areas to research. The first recommendation is to offer online tools that can help the student plan meals that are offered in the dining halls and

to publicize those resources. The campus was already doing this, but the concept could be further developed, such as offering a smart phone application.

The second recommendation is to make sure that there are healthy and appealing options available at all of the dining facilities. Participants mentioned having difficulty finding healthy options at the main student union food court. Having salad bars that offer an expanded variety of greens (e.g., spinach) to make the salads healthier can help students meet their goals of eating healthier. Making small changes can also help, such as labeling healthier options for people who may not know what they should be eating.

Student affairs professionals and faculty

The last group I would like to address are those who are working with students. This could include faculty, staff, and support staff. The major recommendation is to create an environment where students can feel comfortable talking to others about their struggles with weight loss. Knowing resources on campus is important and can help students who may not have looked into the resources on campus. By knowing what resources are available, such as dining facilities, the campus gyms, and any training and nutritional help, university employees can help students become connected to resources on campus that can help them in their weight-loss journey.

The second action I believe faculty and staff can take is to become advocates for larger people on campus. Locate the rooms that have small desks and bathroom stalls and report them, and ask that changes be made on campus. In addition, advocate for something better than a table placed in front of the room, which singles out individuals who needs to use the table because they cannot fit into a desk. The goal of this is not to increase the

acceptance of overweight people, but to help those in the weight-loss process feel more confident and not singled out so that they may feel more comfortable at the gym and being active on campus.

There were many services that were untapped by the participants in the study. Only one participant used the counseling center for weight-related issues. One of the focuses of the counseling center is eating disorders and body disorders, if needed, or even general counseling through the weight-loss process. When asked why they did not use the counseling center, some answers were not having time or not thinking their "issue was severe enough" to go to counseling.

Student affairs graduate faculty

I suggest two major actions should be taken by student affairs faculty members: (a) provide additional counseling and addictions courses in their graduate programs; and (b) increase knowledge of resources on campus. The Transtheoretical Model and Health Belief Model are applicable to any student who is trying to make a behavior change. Behaviors changes that students may go through during their college years could include weight-loss, diet changes, quitting alcohol or other drugs, or even changing other bad habits. Student affairs professionals are primary contacts and support systems for many students on campus; therefore, being more knowledgeable about the change process would benefit them when helping students.

Graduate faculty should provide information about campus resources as well as how to connect with campuses in their graduate program. Teaching future professionals how to explore and utilize resources on their campuses would increase their abilities when they

become fulltime professionals working with students. In addition, expanding the information about the resources on campus and including some kind of marketing and advertising experience in their programs would help market the resources on campus.

Campus administrators

Living a healthy lifestyle should be an option for everyone on a college campus as well as in the surrounding community. Campus administrators should be dedicated to ensuring that everyone on campus is able to live a healthy life if they choose to do so. This means reducing some of the barriers that hinder healthy behaviors and increasing access to healthy options. Reducing barriers on college campus could include supporting free nutritional support, providing access to personal trainers, or offering a class that introduces trainers to students. Increasing access would include such activities as bringing more healthy events on campus or increasing the number of programs that are available on campus that support healthy behaviors.

Another action area is to ensure collaborative relationships are established with community organizations to enable students to have access to services outside the university if they feel that is the best option for them. This can be established and maintained by working with local gyms and recreational services to reduce membership costs for students, especially those who may not feel comfortable using the facilities provided on campus.

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Recommendations for Future Research

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There are many avenues of future research that can spawn from this study. These areas of future research have the potential to provide a more specific lens through which to view the process of weight loss. There are six areas of future research that I have identified.

The first area for future research would be to focus on the weight of the participants (e.g., slightly overweight to morbidly obese) and the experience of each of these people in the weight-loss process. These students would each probably have experiences that are different from one another.

The second suggested research area is to focus only on the individuals who have had significant weight loss during the college years. A researcher might conduct a case study to explore the experiences of someone who may have had significant body changes. This would illuminate the experiences of the individual and how that person's body changes and internal changes have affected his or her experiences on campus.

The third area is to investigate how different individuals have chosen to go about the weight-loss process. Some participants may have chosen to focus only on nutrition, whereas others may focus only on exercise. Some people may have used surgical procedures or other extreme methods to lose weight. Connecting how the participants chose to lose weight with their experiences could be illuminating.

The fourth suggestion for future research is to include focusing on various aspects of the identities of the individuals who are losing weight. Looking at how race, gender, socio-economic status, and sexual identities intersect with the weight-loss process is an area that could be explored. Inclusion of these factors could lead to greater knowledge about different experiences and struggles in the weight-loss process.

The fifth area to investigate is why individuals choose to use selected resources on campus and in the community. This would highlight ways that professionals could promote their services to individuals in the weight-loss process. It would be helpful to understand what barriers are keeping individuals from going to certain offices or services.

Finally, investigating the weight-loss experiences of individuals who choose to lose weight with the help of a personal trainer versus the experiences of people without personal trainers would provide valuable information. Understanding how a professional can help or hinder the weight-loss process would be valuable information as we advocate for free trainers for people who are overweight.

Final Thoughts

As the researcher, it was very easy for me to understand the experiences and struggles of the participants and to carry some of their stories around with me. As I shared before, I am a person who has been overweight for the majority of my life and I understand the experiences of the individuals in the study. I was a student who did not always fit comfortably in a desk and felt self-conscious as a result. I understood the participants when they talked about walking across campus and getting winded, and having other people watch them because they are simply overweight and in motion. I understood Jason, Carla, and Ashley when they talked about not wanting to use the on-campus gym because of their self-conscious nature. To this day, I can count on one hand how many times I entered a college gym to work out. Even though I have lost 90 pounds, I still lack the self-confidence to work out with the college students, except for the ones who go to the community gym. I understood when participants talked about their nutrition and trying to break habits and comfort foods, and when they turn to food for comfort instead of working out or talking to another person. I, too, have called KFC "Kentucky Fried Feelings" and have turned to some good ole' Southern soul food when I am homesick or upset about something. Similar to the participants, I understand what that does to me, however it happens. During this dissertation

writing process I found myself turning to food to deal with stress, emotions, and setbacks. This has caused a little bit of weight gain even though I am still working out. When evaluating my Stages of Change regarding nutrition, I would say that I have moved from the maintenance stage to contemplation stage again. While this saddens me greatly, it helped me understand what the participants were struggling with in their journey to become healthier and deal with their stressors.

I have bonded with the participants and I feel very connected to the majority of them. Several of the participants and I have talked many times since their interviews and we have continued to support each other through our successes and struggles in our weight-loss journey. For this reason, I feel that their stories have touched me even more and helped me triangulate the data to some extent by talking to them throughout the process. This research was not intended to create a support community, but some of the participants expressed that they do not know whom else to talk to when they need support. No one on campus has ever talked to them about their journey, and no one can really connect with their experiences as a person who is going through the process personally. I have started to ponder if I should look into going into Recreation Services and start to manage gyms and resources on campus. Based on the advocacy for the individuals who need help losing weight, helping create and administer services would align well with the recommendations offered in this study.

I have maintained a journal of my feelings and emotions throughout this study, which has been very helpful as a processing tool. I have to admit, I am not a writer by nature, and I much prefer processing experiences internally than processing with a friend. I used another researcher and friend as a person to whom I could talk through my thoughts and feelings. Between the writing and processing, I have been able to document my journey and struggles

with this research process. My journey has been a little rough when it came to this research study and dissertation. I came into the research very wide-eyed and naïve. I thought that I would have no problems getting participants and everyone in the weight-loss process that I interviewed would have been really successful. This did not happen. It took months to find willing participants to participate in the study. Added to this dilemma, at first I thought these participants were not appropriate individuals to use in my study. I wanted to hear from people who had lost a lot of weight and had made huge strides in weight loss. After processing these feeling and thoughts, I realized that these participants were exactly those whom I wanted and needed for my study. Yes, understanding the stories from participants who have lost a lot of weight is valuable and informative, but most of those people have found systems and processes that work for them. By interviewing participants in the process, I had the privilege of understanding how to work with students who are still struggling and how higher education professionals can intervene to help them. This was clearly a very rewarding experience.

I have to admit that I walked away from the research for over a month. This was the needed processing time for me to work through personal issues as well when it came to the feelings that the participants triggered in me. I have been very upfront that the interview with Chris triggered me and actually was a process that I had to work through to be able to evaluate and code his interview. I appreciate his contribution to this research as he opened my eyes to each person's journey as being different as well as in different stages. I am very thankful that his interview was the first that I conducted because I was able to go into the other interviews with a little more understanding, and I was able to get more enthralled in the stories and experiences being shared with me.

The participants in the study amazed me with their honesty about their successes and struggles. It was hard to hear some of the stories, and the fact that these negative events took place on a college campus where students come to be accepted and to grow into responsible adults was disheartening. I knew that events like this happen, which is why I was scared to go to a gym on campus, but to actually know that these behaviors are going on is unacceptable. Carla was in the process of working on ways to advocate and educate the campus community about body types and body image, and these areas are research interest of hers. Listening to her talk about her efforts to advocate for others on campus made me realize that I am doing nothing in terms of advocacy, so I am looking into a couple of ways to make changes. As I mentioned previously, I have considered exploring administration of to the student recreation and gyms in the future, or at least attempt to partner with those individuals to see if some of my ideas and recommendations could be implemented. With that, I depart with a few quotations from the participants to illustrate the need to become an advocate and make changes:

> *But it was just that I didn't know how to deal with all this, you know, the privilege around me, not being able to fit in desks in one of the classrooms, or one of the buildings that I had a class in. Every time I went to the bathroom, the stalls were always touching me on both sides, like, you know, it's for a thin person. I cannot fit in there and there wasn't a handicap stall in that particular bathroom, so it's just really felt frustrating, just the small things that people don't think about, don't have to think about, but they think that I can control it when I lose weight. So that's just, it's been really hard, especially here. – Carla*

> *I am always so worried what everybody else is thinking. Difficulties otherwise? You know, the fact that stuff costs money, you know. I can't do the physical training. I can't do, you know, nutritionist, although I really don't think I need a nutritionist, because I think I understand how to eat well. I just don't, you know, I can't afford to and there's a difference there, you know. If you can't afford to do it then you can't do it. – Ashley*

It's not like I don't lose any weight, but obviously it doesn't happen overnight. A lot of it depends on who I'm with or where I'm living. I move around a lot, being a leader and stuff. We'll see how it goes next semester. I'll be living with a bunch of people and maybe I'll start working out again. – Chris

I needed to get professional help and I didn't know necessarily what that looked like, and so I actually went to counseling and started, kind of, getting counseling in terms of my eating habits and being able to eat healthier. I looked at getting a dietitian and kind of work with him a little bit and distancing more things. And then the other thing I did is, I decided I would much rather invest in being healthy now than invest in money for medications and things like that, so just avoid later. And so I decided to, even though I don't have the money, God knows I don't have the money, but I decided that I need to have a trainer to be able to help me out, in a lot of respects to just, kind of, staying on target. Now I have to admit that sometimes I wonder why in the hell I have a trainer, because they can be a little brutal. – Jason

I have just had a lot more positive of an outlook. I just, I feel comfortable going to the gym, where before I was, "I don't want to go to the gym and work out in front of people." And so it's just been, it's been nice not to have the constant burning, of being like, "Oh you are such a bad person," because you can't lose weight. But it also, it's still a struggle, because I am fitting with the change. I sometimes look in the mirror and still see the person that I used to be, not the person that it is, but overall it's been an improvement. – Traci

APPENDIX A. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice Provost for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207

515 294-4566
FAX 515 294-4267

Date: 10/15/2012

To: Michael W. Davis   CC: Dr. Daniel Robinson
2010A Buchanan Hall   N247 Lagomarcino
Ames, IA 50613

From: Office for Responsible Research

TITLE: Understanding the journey: An exploration of college students' experiences with the weight loss process

IRB Num: 12-505

Study Review Date: 10/15/2012

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b) because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

   2) Research involving the use of education tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures with adults or observation of public behavior where
   • Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; or
   • Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could not reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The determination of exemption means that:

   • **You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.**

   • **You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application.** Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any modifications to the research procedures (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, changes in confidentiality measures, etc.), modifications that result in the inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations, and/or any change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants. Changes to key personnel must also be approved. The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption.

   Non exempt research is subject to many regulatory requirements that must be addressed prior to implementation of the study. Conducting non-exempt research without IRB review and approval may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct according to ISU policy.

   Detailed information about requirements for submission of modifications can be found on the Exempt Study Modification Form. A Personnel Change Form may be submitted when the only modification involves changes in study staff. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans Form will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review. **Only the IRB or designees may make the determination of exemptions**, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

Please be aware that **approval from other entities may also be needed**. For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. **An IRB determination of exemption in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted**.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edi/

APPENDIX B. RESEARCH STUDY ANNOUNCEMENT AND INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Research Study Announcement

Informed Consent Document

Title of Study: Understanding the Journey: An exploration of college students experiences with the weight loss process

Investigators: Michael W. Davis

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of college students in the weight loss process. This research should add to the limited literature in this area in hopes of engaging student affairs and academic professionals in the crucial conversations that should be taking place about supporting students while in a period of weight change. In addition, this study will also provide information that can be used in educating and advocating for additional resources for this population of students. The findings from this study may be used to educate and advocate for the necessary resources needed for this population of students, including that of health education, more welcoming environments for student trying to lose weight, and additional support systems.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you identify as a person who has considered yourself overweight in college. Additionally, you identified as a person who has been trying to lost weight for at least six months. You should not participate in this study if you are under the age of 18 years old.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, you are requested to sign the informed consent document and return it to the researcher. Within a few days, the researcher may ask you to participate in 2-3 interviews. Each interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Additional interviews will be requested to ensure that all questions were covered and your responses are correctly understood. Interviews will be audio recorded. Each interview should take place a couple weeks after the prior interview. After I have completed all interviews, you will be invited to review preliminary results of the study and to provide feedback if you wish.

RISKS

You may find it inconvenient to make time for the interview. Interviews will be held at a time and place as convenient as possible for you and last no longer than necessary. You may also feel uncomfortable talking about certain topics during the interview. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable, and you may end the interview at any time. You may withdraw from the study at any time, and if you withdraw, all recordings, field notes, and other materials related to you will be destroyed.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study, you may enjoy the experience of talking about yourself and your experiences, but there may not be any direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by generating understanding about how the weight loss process affects college students, which can be useful to others who experience similar encounters as well as academic and student affairs professionals at institutions of higher education.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study, except for a possible charge from your phone company for calling the researcher, if necessary. Any cost may be avoided by arranging with the researcher by email to call you, if needed. You will not be compensated financially for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information, although participants' names will not be included to protect your confidentiality.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken. Interview transcripts will be kept in password-protected computer file and they will not contain any identifying information. Audio recordings of the interviews will be erased after they are transcribed. Printed transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet within a locked office at Iowa State University. Information for the study will be retained until the completion of the study. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- Due to the nature of this study it is to the participants benefit to be aware of the various resources at your disposal as a student at Iowa State University. If at any point during this study you feel the need for counseling, you may contact the Student Counseling Services at 515-294-5056.

- For further information about the study contact Michael Davis by phone at 515-294-0833 or by email at mwd@iastate.edu or Daniel Robinson by phone at 515-294-8182.

- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

****

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You shall retain or be given a copy of this written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

_____   _____

(Participant's Signature)   (Date)

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Participant's Name: _____   **Date of Interview:_____**

Pre-Interview Checklist

- ☐ Introduction of Self and the Study

- ☐ Review of Informed Consent

- ☐ Asked for the signed copy of Informed Consent Document

- ☐ Remind the participant that the interview will be recorded. Ask for any questions and start the recorder at this time.

- ☐ Remind the participant that they have the right to not answer any question or withdrawal from the study at any time.

- ☐ Ask if there are any questions about the interview or the research that the participants have. Answer their questions.

Interview Questions

Interview questions consisted of four major questions. Not all of the questions needed be asked, as the participants covered the general questions during the interview. The bulleted questions may be used as probes if the information was not forthcoming after posing the broader questions. Note: It was impossible to anticipate every possible question that I needed to ask during an interview, but these serve as the types of questions I asked.

<u>**Understanding the Participants' Weight History/Story**</u>

Please tell me about your history with weight and weight-loss?

- - What was your history with weight in elementary school? Middle School? High School? Community College or Undergraduate college?

- - How did you view your weight compared to your

<u>**Understanding the Participants' Current Weight Loss Process**</u>

Please tell me about your current weight and weight-loss process?

- - When did you start to decide to start losing weight?

- - Why did you start to decide to start losing weight?

- - How/what methods have you chosen to lose weight?

- - What successes and challenges have you had along the way?

<u>Understanding how the Weight-Loss Process has Affected the Participant in College</u>

In what ways, if any, has your weight-loss process affected you as a college student and in college?

- Have you noticed any changes in behaviors since losing weight?

- Have you noticed any emotional changes or struggles since you have started losing weight that are directly tied to your weight-loss process?

- Have you noticed a change in your academics and study habits since you have started to lose weight?

<u>Understanding how the University has Affected the Weight-Loss Process</u>

Think of [University Name], how has the campus, facilities, and services offered affected your

weight loss process?

- Have there been any positive experiences or services on campus that has helped your lose weight?

- Have there been any negative experiences or services on campus that has hindered your lose weight?

- If you can make a recommendation or change anything about the campus to make it more helpful to your weight-loss, what changes would you make and why?

Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your weight-loss that I have not covered or that you think would be beneficial to know about your story?

Post-Interview Checklist

- ☐ Thank the participant for agreeing to be interviewed.

- ☐ Stop the recording.

- ☐ Remind the participant they can have a copy of the interview transcripts.

- ☐ Inform the participant that you will be in touch with any follow up questions and/or setting up a follow up interview/conversation in the future.

- ☐ Ask if there are any questions about the interview or the research that the participants have. Answer their Questions.

- ☐ Thank them again for their participation.

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