



College weight change: The perception of upperclassmen on their weight change from freshman year

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Purpose

- The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons for students' increases and decreases in weight during college.
- Significant increases and decreases in students weight during college is a problem because current weight change can affect a person's current and long-term health and well-being.
- Fontaine and Barofsky (2010) stated that weight gain negatively affected a person's Health-Related Quality of Life, "a multidimensional construct, encompassing emotional, physical, social, and subjective feelings of well-being which reflect an individual's subjective evaluation and reaction to health or illness (p.174)."

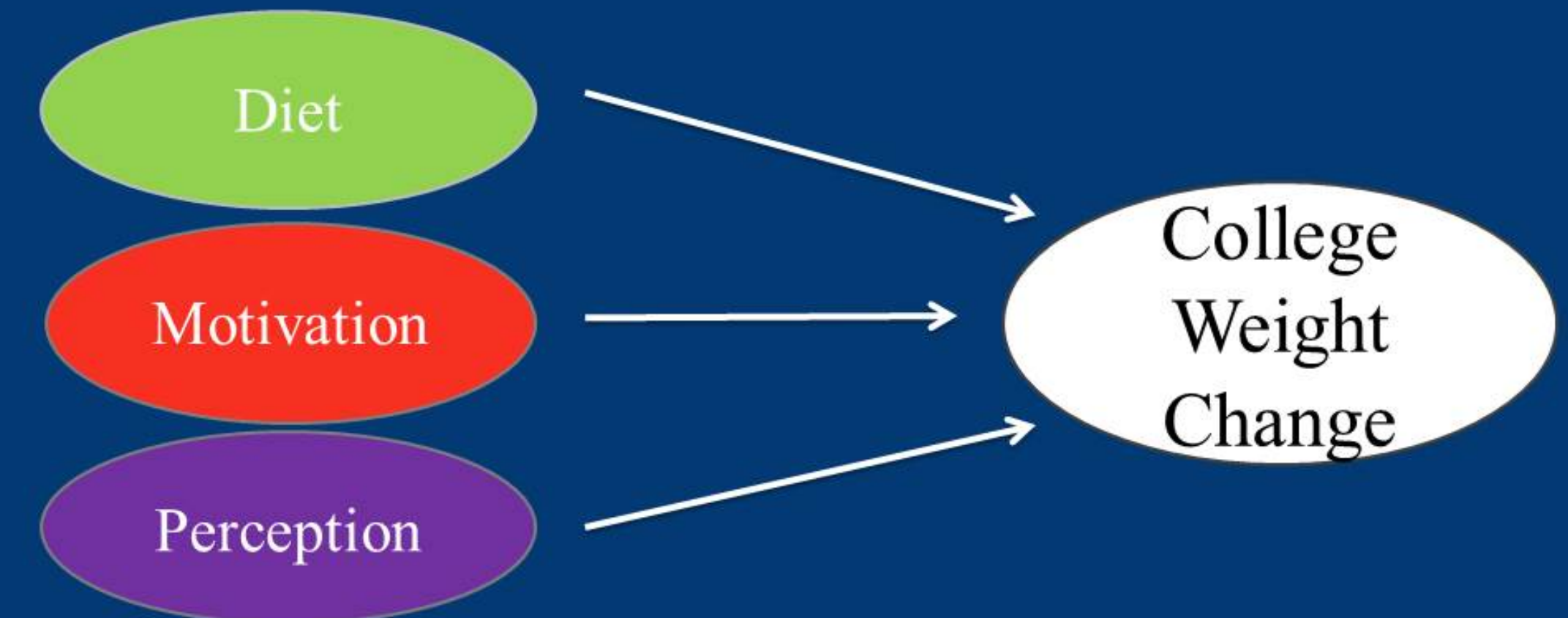
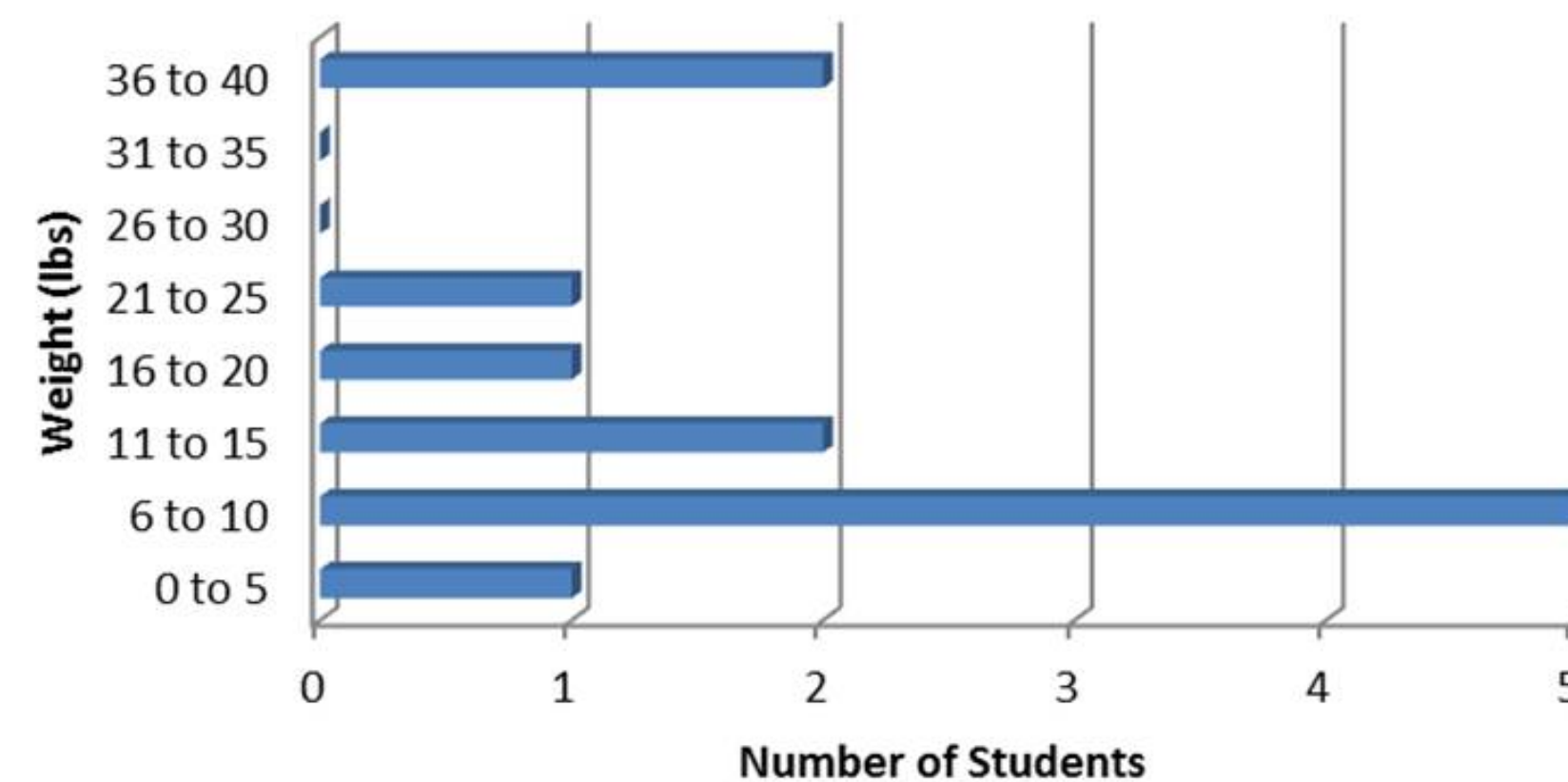
Methods

- Data collection was conducted at a small southeastern liberal arts college in central North Carolina
- The participants were selected through a convenience sample (n=12) of juniors and seniors who were male or female and athletes or non-athletes.
- Each participant completed an 11 question multiple-choice survey.
- Survey results indicated three extreme cases of weight change.
- Two extreme cases were selected to participate in a 15 minute individual interview to explore why these weight changes occurred. One extreme case was a 20 year-old female, junior, non-athlete and the other was a 22 year-old male, senior, athlete.
- Constant comparative methods were used to analyze transcribed interview responses.

Findings

- Survey findings indicated the average perceived weight change of students was 15.5 pounds from freshman year. Average weight change was calculated by converting all numbers to their absolute value before averaging the numbers.
- 1. Weight increases averaged 13 pounds.
- 2. Weight decreases averaged 19 pounds.
- Interviews revealed three main reasons for college perceived weight change:
 1. Diet: The participants either carefully managed their food intake or left it unmonitored.
 2. Motivation: This is from friends, technology, and/or body composition which participants wanted to change.
 3. Perception: The participants either felt they needed to change their weight or that their weight was unimportant.

Student Weight Change



Discussion

- Friends were found to motivate participants which was consistent with existing literature about peers and their influence on each other's weight gain (Smith-Jackson, 2012).
- Men were less conscious about their weight changes, a finding that corresponded to research by Harring (2010) which stated that men believed they were less overweight than they really were.
- Based on survey findings, students had a perceived weight change of 15.5 pounds which aligned with existing literature that found the average student gained 15 pounds in their freshman year (Smith-Jackson, 2015).
- Friends had a positive influence on the participants' motivation, however technology and body composition influenced the motivation of the participants both positively and negatively.
- The female participant interviewed in this study began her weight change because of a negative body weight perception which directly related to the literature of Harring (2010). Harring stated that women typically had negative perceptions of body weight and would quickly take action to change their body weight.

Conclusions

- It was concluded that the average upperclassmen college student experienced a significant perceived weight change from freshman year.
- The participants' perceived weight change was caused by a variety of factors which included diet, motivation, and/or perception.

References

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