

Collection Project
The Folklore of the "Freshman Fifteen"
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Introduction:

The "freshmen fifteen"- What exactly is it? An uncontrollable epidemic? An inevitable disease? Or it may even be called a an inexcusable lack of self-control? It is actually a saying referring to the fifteen pounds that many college new comers gain during their first few months on campus. These freshmen often come together to battle this, so called inevitable occurrence and a folk group can develop.

Most freshmen reside in dormitories or residence halls where they live in very compact places and tend to spend a great deal of time with members of their dorm (ie. hallmates and/or roommates). Close friendships are often formed and the struggle against the "freshman fifteen" can often be a bonding experience.

The "freshmen fifteen" usually attacks the female species. There are many different things that a women will do to keep herself from gaining weight and she might believe anything that someone might tell her on how to loose weight faster and easier. This group of freshmen girls can be called a folk group and their eating habits are called foodways. Within this folk group they have their own folk beliefs and the same types of attitude. This is considered a genre of folklore because it is the coming together of people from common backgrounds to practice a tradition. This process of dieting is a tradition because it has been

going on for many years. Every year, a new herd of freshmen come into the universities around the country and this attitude is, in a way, is passed on to all of these new students and these foodways will be practiced time and time again.

For this collection project, the topic I have chosen to do is the foodways, folk beliefs, and attitudes of female college freshmen on diets. The reason why I have chosen this folklore to study is that being a female freshman myself, I have observed the foodways and attitudes of the women within my residence hall and found it to be sort of culture or folklore.

In order to research my topic and to find out about the eating habits of women college freshmen, I have interviewed five different women who are dieting. I asked questions to one set of roommates together, two friends together, and another woman by herself from a university other than Indiana University. I also observed the behavior and attitudes towards eating and dieting within my hall of my residence hall.

I believe that informants which I've chose are good examples of the majority of female freshmen. All five of my informants are attractive as well as athletic young women from middle class families. These women are were not overweight to begin with but want to maintain the figure which they had when they came to school. In order to make my informants feel comfortable, I tried to keep the atmosphere of the interview rather relaxed. The tape recorder put a sort of uneasiness in the interview although.

I asked my informants if they were on diets and if had gained any weight since the beginning of school in August. I also asked them what sort of diet techniques they used- what sort of diet techniques they found helpful and what kind were harmful to their diets. These women all seemed to feel a little embarrassed to admit that they had gained weight and also I found it difficult to ask. No one really enjoys admitting that they have gained weight or how it happened, but I think that I received very truthful answers.

Interview #1

Informant: Kristin Ann Maier

Katie Barnes: Ok Kristi, are you presently attending college?

Kristi Maier: Yes.

KB: Where?

KM: Ohio State University.

KB: What year are you?

KM: Freshman

KB: So how long have you been in school so far this year?

KM: Approximately two months.

KB: Two months?

KM: Three months.

KB: Um, three months, ok, um, do you like live in a dorm?

KM: Yup. I live in a co-ed dorm.

KB: So you have, like a cafeteria that you eat your meals at?

KM: Yup.

KB: How is the food at your cafeteria?

KM: Not very good.

KB: Not very good. Ok, um.

KM: Starchy.

KB: Ok, um, would you consider yourself conscience about your weight.

KM: Yeah, I would.

KB: Are you an athletic person?

KM: Um...not lately, but yes. I've been trying to run to keep mt weight down but it's not been working.

KB: Oh really?

KM: Yes.

KB: Um, have you ever heard of the saying "freshman fifteen"?

KM: Uh huh.

KB: Really? What do you think about that?

KM: It's true. Ha Ha Ha. I'm gaining it.

KB: Have you gained any weight since you've been at school?

KM: Yes, I've gained, about, between about five to ten pounds. I think.

KB: Ok, have you tried any sort of diets?

KM: No, well...yeah, not to eat.

KB: Have you tried any sort of structured diets?

KM: No, we haven't got that far. All we do is, like, when we're hungry, we get water and try to drink that to see if it'll fill us up, but it hasn't really worked.

KB: Ok, so...um you, like, do things with your roommates and people down your hall or that kind of stuff, do you...

KM: One of my roommates is into it with me. We try to run every night but, and my other two roommates aren't really worrying about it. They don't really need to, so, it's sort of hard living with them cuz they can eat what ever they want, whenever they want.

KB: Oh, I see, um, let's see... did you find it harder to diet being at school, like being able to eat in the cafeteria whenever you want?

KM: Um...

KB: There is always, like, food available.

KM: Yeah, I do, and you stay up longer and later there so, like, in the middle of the night everyone orders out a lot.

KB: Oh yeah?

KM: And what really gets me and...the cafeteria food seems really fatty, with all the starchy food.

KB: Uh huh.

KM: It's not very good.

KB: Kay, do you feel this is kind of, when you like, when you like try to diet with, like, someone, it's like a bonding experience?

KM: Yeah! Ha Ha Ha...yeah. The one roommate and I always hang out together now because we are always watching each other and what we eat. But yeah, I understand what you're saying.

KB: Well good. (laughter)

KM: Well, I always feel like I have to eat the meals anyway because I don't feel right skipping them because my parents paid for all of them and...

KB: Oh.

KM: So I always feel like I should go eat and yeah...

KB: Do you ever feel...Why do you think girls that come, you know freshmen in college, why do you think they gain weight?...When they go to school?

KM: Well, because...(pause)...I don't know, because I guess we're away from home and you get to eat, like, stuff in cafeterias whenever you wand and there are a lot of opportunities to eat out more and it seems like you're always hungry there. At least I do in the dorms.

KB: Oh really? Just because you're studying all the time?

KM: And you're working hard all the time and you're stressing out all the time, at least I am, and I don't know. Usually you're in a rush sometimes and you eat fast and that doesn't really fill you up. That's why.

KB: Ok, well.

Interview #2

Informants: Kara Hendrickson & Tonya Feters

Katie Barnes: Ok, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself, Kara.

Kara Hendrickson: Well, I go to Indiana University and I'm staying in Foster Harper dorm and...

KB: Ok, um...

KH: I...

KB: And tell me a little bit about your eating habits. I mean, do you eat in the cafeteria?

KH: Yeah. There's three meals in the cafeteria, three times a day.

KB: Uh huh.

KH: Usually we have some food in the room too, but try not to keep that much food in the room.

KB: Oh really?...Oh um..(laughter). So how often do you eat? Do you go to breakfast in the morning?

KH: I usually don't go to breakfast and...just lunch and dinner. I try not to eat anything in the morning.

KB: Oh?

KH: I'm usually not hungry and rather try to eat less..Ha Ha.

KB: Oh, do you um, does your roommate, what...Have you been dieting at all?

KH: Trying to but it hasn't been working.

KB: You just try to.

KH: I've been trying to, I've been trying not to keep food in the room and just eat...

KB: So Kara, have you gained any weight wince you've been at school yet?

KH: Um, I'm sure I have. I haven't weighed myself. I'm kind of scared.

KB: Oh, ha ha ha.

KH: Actually, I know I have but I don't know how much.

KB: Oh, ok..um..well..so what do you, what, I mean what exactly do you do to keep form eating?

KH: Um, like I said before, I don't eat breakfast but at lunch I try to and dinner.

KB: But do you ever like splurge and order out because I found myself ordering out, you know, a lot.

KH: Yes, I try to but I try also I usually don't have a lot of money so that kind of helps sometimes to not keep a lot of cash, cuz then you can't order out a lot, but then when you have a roommate who convinces you. (laughter) No, I don't know.

KB: So your roommate makes you order ou a lot?

KH: Well the reason, well, I haven't really been successful in trying to figure out how to eat less. I'm trying to, I'm trying...

KB: Have you been trying to keep in shape at all?

KH: Well, I tried to at the beginning of the year to run but that fell through and then I tried to go to field hockey practice a couple hours, Tuesdays and Thursdays, but people stopped going to that and then we started a "Firm Workout" and we did that for about three days and we were too busy to keep up with that so...

KB: What's a "Firm Workout"?

KH: Uh, It takes about an hour and works out about your whole body and it's supposed to be really good and in about ten days you should see the difference. If you do it everyday.

KB: Oh.

KH: But...

KB: Is it what, a cassette tape?

KH: Yeah, it's a cassette tape.

KB: And you do it with people on your hall?

KH: Yeah, and that helps when you have other people supporting you to make you run or to workout, but when they decide no to then it is really easy not to yourself.

KB: Oh, um, that's good. Well do find that people make you make you eat more too?

KH: It can have a big influence because when a lot of...when you don't want to eat more and other people, like, didn't have that much at dinner and they're ordering our, it's really easy for you to just go right along with them.

KB: Uh huh?

KH: Or if they get food in the room and they offer it to you, just to eat it because it's there.

KB: Oh.

KH: So it is better, people can be a bad influence and they can be a good influence too.

KB: Kay, what, what kind of things make you eat more? Besides you know...

KH: The fact that we're in a cafeteria and you can go up for as many helpings as you want and that my parents are paying for it so I feel obligated to go to the cafeteria to eat and the stress of school sometimes you eat more and when it's kind of a social event when you're eating just to sit at the table and when everyone else is eating, it's just easy to eat when you're talking. And another thing is when you're up late studying at night and sometimes you feel like you need to order out and usually you get a lot more food.

KB: And you eat more...

KH: You eat more and more and more.

KB: Ok, at this point in the interview I'd like to introduce Tonya Fetters. Tonya is Kara's roommate. Tonya...

Tonya Fetters: Katie...

KB: So, what kind of food do you keep in your room? Healthy food? Bad food?

TF: A little of both. We always bring crackers back from the cafeteria and so we eat those with cheese and everything else. We usually have um...

KH: We have apples.

TF: Chicken noodle soup, we really don't have that much actually.

KH: Popcorn.

TF: Pop tarts

KH: We have lots of popcorn.

KB: So do you diet too, like Kara?

TF: I try to but it doesn't work.

KB: Tonya, I know you don't want me to ask this question but have you gained any weight since you've been here?

TF: Oh my gosh, can't you tell? I've almost gained the "freshman fifteen".

KB: Really?

TF: Uh huh?

KB: You've heard that rumor around, you know, before you came to school, "freshman fifteen"?

TF: Everyone kept teasing me about it.

KB: Really?

TF: And then when I went home they didn't even say anything. They were probably scared of embarrassing me.

KB: What about you Kara? Did anyone say anything like "freshmen fifteen"?

KH: Well, people talk about it but no one really says anything when I went home but I was conscience of it. I was...

KB: Oh yeah. Were you scared that people would talk behind your back, like she's gained weight?


KH: Yeah, cuz I used to do that. (laughter)

KB: Me too, so have I.

KH: So it's kind of, it's hard to go back when you know, you've gained some weight but you're not sure if how different you look.

KB: Oh yeah, ok what about drinking? Do you guys, like, alcohol, is that a big role, you know, does that make you gain weight, do you think?

TF: I think if you drink a lot of beer it, your stomach really gets. So I try to cut back on the beer but sometimes



it is kind of hard. The temptations are there.

KH: That's one thing that you don't, I don't usually associate calories with it cuz at the time I'm doing it but after, I might think that I did drink a lot because I don't think that I did drink a lot because I don't think of it as food but it does give you a stomach.

KB: So do you ever consider not drinking because it's fattening.

KH: No (laughter)

KB: Ok, so, have you guys learned anything about dieting since you've been at school? Any, like, you know, good, I mean good diet habits, have you, like and diet myths that you hear often like around the hall, like about, like...

TF: I don't think anyone else on this hall is dieting.

KH: I know, I haven't learned a thing since I've come to school.

TF: They don't need to.

KB: Well, like for instance, in my other interview she said that she drank a lot of water, she said it would fill her up so she wouldn't eat that much.

TF: Does it?

KH: Well I heard that last year, I didn't necessarily hear that this year but...

KB: You heard that?

KH: Yeah, that if you drink like eight glasses of water a day it is supposed to help your dieting, but that's never have worked for me. (laughter) Know what I'm talking.

TF: I know. Eight glasses of water a day is a lot of water.

KH: That is a lot of water. It's hard to...but it probably would fill you up.

TF: Especially when there's food that you want to eat.

KB: Ok, well thank you both for letting me interview you and I think that'll wrap it up.

Interview #3

Informants: Lisa Hauser & Marla Bauermeister

KB: Lisa? Are you on a diet right now?

Lisa Hauser: Yes.

KB: Yes?

LH: Yes.

KB: Marla, are you?

Marla Bauermeister: Yeah.

KB: Have you lost any weight?

LH: Not after Thanksgiving, no.

MB: No, I haven't.

KB: Um, ok, we've been at school for three months, right? Have you gained any weight?

LH: Probably yeah, I've gained like six pounds.

KB: Really?

LH: Put on about six pounds.

KB: Have you Marla?

MB: Yeah, I've gained seven.

KB: Well, um, do you guys do like structured diets or what kinds of diets do you do?

LH: I usually, I'm really good during the week but on the weekends, by that time I just can't handle it, so I eat all this food and I'm like oh, I'll go back on it Monday, you know and then I can loose it back and I just...I go back and forth.

KB: Do you eat in the cafeteria?

LH: Yeah.

KB: How many meals a day?

LH: For breakfast I just drink orange juice in the morning. I don't even go down to breakfast.

KB: Oh yeah?

LH: And for lunch I usually get bread and protein in, and two glasses of water, and then at dinner I would like just to eat a salad and water, but that usually doesn't end up that way.

KB: How 'bout you, Marla?

MB: I usually eat, um a bowl of cereal for breakfast and then have two glasses of water, and then for dinner I usually eat salad and two glasses of water with some fruit, then for dinner. Did I say dinner earlier? Ok. And then for dinner I usually have a salad and maybe some protein, some meat, and then, um, fruit and a couple glasses of water.

KB: So, it sounds like you guys are stict dieters.

MB: No. (laughter)

LH: Not by Thursday and Friday night though. We just...I usually have o eat something.

KB: Do you order out a lot or not?

LH: Jiffy Treat. Like one night Marla, I couldn't handle it, we ordered pizza at three in the morning.

KB: Really?

MB: That was on a weekend. We ate the whole thing.

LH: We ate the whole thing, a large pizza.

KB: Really? Well, do you splurge often or not?

LH: Yeah, like last night, this is a good example.

MB: She did, I didn't.

LH: Cuz last night, I knew that I was gonna start back like on eating good this week and stuff and so last night I went into Marla's room and she gave me these magazines. So I'm looking at these magazines and I just ate like eight pieces of chocolate. I'm like, well like that's it, I'm not gonna be able to eat 'um anymore so I might as well get them all in now.

MB: Yeah, but then you have to loose it.

LH: I don't care. Ha Ha. I wanted it. (laughter)
So, you know like I was like ok, last night, no more, I won't be able to eat any of this candy anymore but I just like totally went out last night and ate a whole bunch.

MB: So what kind of, like just little things do you guys do to keep you from not eating?

MB: Think about the summer and how you look in a swimsuit, or you know when you go home when people say you've gained the "freshman fifteen" and you don't want to look like that.

KB: What kind of things do you do though, um, besides, what do you do? Drink a lot of water?

LH: Yeah like, um, let me think. Today I didn't really that good because I don't feel well, but um, like if I eat something bad I;m like, ok, I'll just drink a whole bunch of water at night so it will like flush it out of my system. Like that's really gonna work. But, you know I just think that, you know, it's like, ok all that water will just flush it out of my system so it won't go in there anymore. I don't know.

MB: Mainly it's water we drink, you know, a lot of water. I think that helps too.

LH: Uh huh. Or like we'll say I'll, or I'll eat something and I'm like, oh, I'll do extra sit-ups. Or something, cuz I usually do sit-ups in the morning and at night.

MB: Well I do, I exercise usually at night.

KB: Do you?

MB: I do and I know she does too.

KB: Well, that's good

LH: I didn't last night though. (laughter) My stomach ached from all that chocolate

KB: Um...

LH: We had a flo- should I tell her about the floor thing?

MB: Yeah.

LH: We had a floor competition so we can be really good before Thanksgiving and we wrote down what we ate. And that helped me a lot, except for on that Thursday I couldn't do it anymore cuz it was just so...

KB: Ah, you guys, both you guys did really well.

MB: I didn't loose any weight though.

LH: See she didn't loose weight. I lost weight.

MB: And I did good and I did not cheat. See, I have like be on a diet a week before I start loosing weight.

KB: Oh yeah?

MB: So it didn't help me any.

KB: You saw mine. I had a huge, my column was just packed...I can't tell you. I should be interviewing myself because I am the worst dieter. Ha Ha Ha . I'm serious.
(pause) Um, so have you guys been on any kind of structured diets?

MB: I have been. I've been on Ultra-Slim Fast Diet and I liked that a lot. I mean, you don't think, I had to be on it like a week though before I lost weight, but it helps. It's easier, I don't know. I think it's easier.

LH: I was on it when I went, when I was home I went that and I drank, I drank the shakes for like two days and I couldn't handle the shakes anymore. I did like morning and lunch and then dinner.

MB: Try chocolate.

LH: I did try chocolate. And I had a weight watcher dinner for, at night, for supper and I wasn't hungry, you know, because my mind, I was intended to loose weight so much. But then I got those little, um, they're like little candy bars, but they're not, they're not the long ones, they're the little squares, like, they're like that big. They are so small, and then you drink a glass of skim milk with it, so I did that. I did that for the longest time an I didn't loose any weight at all. Nothing.

MB: Another thing that helps is not eating after dinner, cuz if you after dinner it just sits in stomach and...

LH: That's why we usually eat dinner really early.

MB: Yeah, we try.

KB: You should eat later so um, it's like less time you have to not eat.

MB: I know, but we're usually hungry because we don't eat a big lunch.

KB: Oh yeah.

MB: But then it sits in your stomach longer too if you eat it later.

KB: Yeah, I guess.

MB: Just drink water, if you get hungry...or have popcorn. If you're in a mode like we are go get yogurt. (laughter)

LH: Yeah, popcorn is good to eat.

MB: With out butter and salt.

LH: It's high in fiber.

MB: What?

LH: The high in fiber kind is new. Have you seen it?

MB: Yeah.

KB: What about when you guys stay up and study late. Does that make you hungry?

MB: Yeah.

LH: If I stay up and study late I always have, I go through gum like you would not believe.

MB: Or water.

LH: Yeah. I go through so much gum cuz I have to keep my taste buds activated or something. But I always have to chew gum, but I just found out, like this weekend, that a piece of gum has like ten calories. But there's no, there's no sugar.

MB: Not sugar free.

LH: Yeah, That's what they said cuz they said sugarfree just, has just as much calories as others but, I mean it's probably a different type of calories, you know what I mean? So at least I'm not getting sugar.

KB: Yeah.

MB: At least it's not bad for your teeth either.

LH: Uh uh. So I go through a lot of gum when I study, a lot. A lot of gum and water. And I noticed since, like I've been drinking, like how I drink, I don't know, it's two glasses at lunch and two glasses at dinner, but it equals out to be like four, I mean eight eight ounce glasses, or whatever. That's how many you need.

KB: Yeah, that's what I heard.

LH: And like when I went home for Thanksgiving I didn't drink that much water, and like at night I was so thirsty I felt dehydrated. So it's like my system needs it now. It's

weird.

MB: I know I get really thirsty to at nights I always had to drink a lot. It wasn't water. Ha Ha.

LH: It was like I had to catch up or something. (laughter)
I had to catch up.

MB: Another thing is booze doesn't help.

KB: Oh yeah, that's a lot of calories

LH: I heard that alcohol not as, it doesn't have that many calories though.

(We go on to talk about how alcohol is so fattening and then we end)

Analysis:

For the analysis of my study I will divide my data into three categories. One category will be the actual foodways of the folk group, and another is the folk beliefs and attitudes about dieting of this particular group. The other approach that I would like to include is what I have found in my research which will either reinforce the beliefs of these women or prove their beliefs wrong.

I will first discuss my findings concerning the basic foodways. I have found that these informants start off their day with either a small breakfast of juice or cereal or no breakfast at all. Lunch and dinner are to be fairly conservative meals. Water is very important in dieting. Eight eight ounce glasses should be consumed a day. Food that is kept in one's room may cause them to eat more so there is a minimal amount of food kept in rooms. Ordering food from the local delivery restaurants seems to be a ritual with these college students, but can be nothing but harmful to a diet. On some occasions, one may try a diet which includes a food supplement such as Ultr-Slimfast. This type of diet requires the dieter to drink a shake made from a powder that is bought at a store. On the whole, noticing from my observations and from my interviews, this folk group is always watching what they eat.

If they do happen to splurge, there is always some reason or consequence behind it. After stating what my informants have told me about their foodways, I will now

attempt to show the logic that is used to explain their behavior. First of all, a reason why one may go to the cafeteria, even though they do not particularly like the food, they go and find something to eat because they will feel guilty if they do not. They think that since their meal is already paid for, it is in their best interest to take advantage of it. This is not necessarily a bad reason to go down to the cafeteria, but it forces someone who is not hungry to eat. Here is a list of reasons or thoughts why the members of this folk group splurge, or go off their diet.

-It's too difficult diet on the weekend.

-I'm going back on my diet tomorrow so I better eat as much as I can right now.

-I'm studying late, I need more energy.

-I've been studying so hard lately, I deserve it.

-I'll just do more sit-ups tonight.

-I have to go eat, my parents have already paid for it.

-She talked me into ordering food.

All of these things listed above are just excuses to eat more food and to lessen the guilt that sets in afterward.

These women also have incentives which help them to stay on their diet. They:

-think about fitting into a swimsuit in the summer

-think about what might be said about them when they go home for the holidays

- diet with friends who give them moral support
- have competitions with friends to see who can eat the least
- try diets with food supplements

In my research, I have found that five out of six freshmen women were dieting (1). Which is a very high number considering the fact that a survey was done on nine hundred during the fall and spring of their freshman year. It was found that most were dieting, even though almost all of them were almost normal weight. " About 40 percent were casual dieters and another 30 percent said they were intense dieters" (2).

The ideas that have been expressed by members of this folk group to loose weight are not always healthy. To be healthy, we need to have a balanced diet from all four food groups. "The Select Committee on Human Needs has recommended that we try to have our general diet meet the following goal:" (3)

- Fats.....30%
- Proteins.....12%
- Carbohydrates:
 - Starches.....48%
 - Sugars.....10%

I think that this folklore is a perfect example of the stress put on women to be thin. These freshmen have enough to worry about as it is and since there is such a great emphasis put on being slim it is just another thing to add to all of the stress. It seems to me that some people just look for the extra couple inches around the waist of a freshman who has just returned from her first year at college. It would be unfair to criticize anyone who gained weight at college, especially freshmen.

Conclusion:

In this collection project, I have tried to point out that this group of people is worthy to be called a folk group and the study of it a folklore. They have their own beliefs and customs when it comes to food. This folk group seems to be unique, much different from other folk groups. First of all, the entire basis of the group is on food. And second of all many of their folk beliefs are myths.

I think that this topic deserves much more in-depth study. It does not seem as though it is a very serious topic but there are many people who take the "freshman fifteen" very seriously. Gaining weight can be a very dramatic experience and could seriously affect ones self-esteem and feeling of self-worth and can even affect one's entire future.

Endnotes

- (1) Retzky, Debra, The Ann Arbor News, November 21,1990,
(American University)

- (2) Drewnowski, Dr. Adam, The Ann Arbor News, November
21,1990; (University of Michigan,nutrition specialist)

- (3) Pamphlet- Life Skills Education Inc.; "Fad Diets (Fat,
Fakes, and Facts)"