

The Relationship Between Undergraduates with Hybrid Identities Eating Behaviors and Well-Being After Moving to a New Environment

Yasmine Wehbi



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

Abstract

This study examines the changed dietary behaviors and factors related to ethnic/cultural/religious (ECR) dietary assimilation in students with hybrid identities after moving to a new location to attend university in the United States. Around 59 student ECR organizations at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill were invited and sent an email link to allow student members to take part in the research. The study had about 20 students participating in the Qualtrics survey and 6 participated in a semi-structured interview over zoom. A qualitative research and inductive approach were used for data collection and analysis. A survey question and interview question/guide were developed to examine the dietary habits of students with hybrid identities. The results show that the students encountered many dietary challenges and factors due to the lack of consumption of ECR foods. The key dietary challenges include: campus access to ECR, transportation, religion, and more. Furthermore, the effects of dietary changes were associated with an impact on students' mental and physical health. Largely being the loss of ECR identity.

Background

A study by Mensah et al (2022), describes the phrase, "students with hybrid identities," as the student's identity is shaped by their own culture due to their ethnic heritage, and by their nationality and place of birth. College students who were raised in the United States for most of their life and consume a primarily ethnic/cultural/religious (ECR) diet that is different from the American diet may also be additionally impacted by new eating behaviors due to a changing environment that is different than the average college student. Since the topic is not as explored as other areas in students' dietary behaviors, there is not much to understand what potential factors may contribute to the changed eating behaviors of students. Past and current studies have shown what occurs to international students' post-migration to Western countries and adapting to their food culture. In the broad sense, international and students with hybrid identities share similarities in ECR dietary habits. The big question is are students with hybrid identities going to be like the general American or international student population when they move to a new environment and if that influences their eating behaviors and well-being.

Reference

Mensah, F. Z., Lane, K. E., & Richardson, L. D. "Determinants of Eating Behavior in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) University Students When Living at and Away from Home: With a Focus on the Influence of Food Enculturation and Food Acculturation." *Eat Behav.* vol. 171, 105932. 1 Apr. 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2022.105932>

Methods

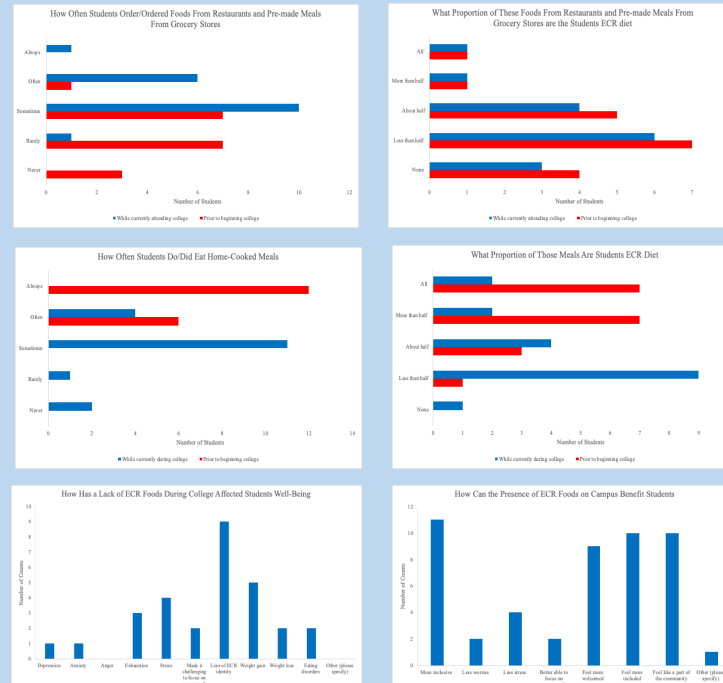
Qualtrics Survey

- Email sent to ECR student organizations with a link
- Eligibility criteria: non-international UNC undergraduate students over the age of 18 years and grew up consuming an ECR diet
- Around 20 students completed the survey

Semi-Structured Interviews

- 10 students were planned to be recruited but only 6 were able to partake
- Each interview lasted about 30 minutes
- Questions like the ones in the survey, but students were able to go more in detail about their experience

Results



Conclusion

Students with hybrid identities face many dietary challenges as a result of moving to a new environment that is scarce of or have difficulties accessing ECR foods.

The findings highlight the demand for university nutrition policies and services to acknowledge the nutritional needs of students with hybrid identities with other student populations as well. This would further improve the university's message of accepting diversity and promoting inclusivity.

Future Implications

Knowledge of food preferences and limitations impacting the dietary behaviors of students with hybrid identities with ECR background is crucial to provide effective care and inclusivity to an increasing population of students with diverse backgrounds

The implementation of new practices would be practically advantageous for students of ECR backgrounds as it will preach the university's message of celebrating diversity and acknowledging an issue that was present in students' minds.

Students Quotes

- "Respecting and creating cultural and ethnic food in the dining hall would be a huge first step. Maybe having students choose what to have on the menu in upcoming weeks to vote. Bringing more of that cultural awareness to the kitchen staff and menu would be beneficial." – Participant 1
- "I like to cook and bake a lot of Filipino foods. So, I like to share and make it known to other people. Filipino food is something that's a part of me." – Participant 2
- "I remember going to Chase dining hall and they would say orange chicken, but it would be frozen chicken nuggets with orange sauce on. It certainly wouldn't even be the kind you could find in a frozen back section." – Participant 3
- "I'm lucky enough that Asian cuisine and Chinese cuisine is a little more accessible compared to other cultural or religious foods. I would say options are limited, not always as satisfying or as good as you might want it to be." – Participant 4
- "Now that I can make and do my own food, I have control and don't go to the dining halls anymore because I trust myself more to be making my own food." – Participant 5
- "We get funding from the undergrad summit and one of the things that we aren't allowed to use the funding for, is food. I think that's kind of a major barrier for my club, and I would assume for a lot of other clubs because how we bond with each other is over meals and funding is not the easiest to get." – Participant 6

