Research Essay: Fast Food

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**Abstract**

This research paper written for students by Don Marshall D. Cabrera, an NMC student researcher focuses on how fast foods take blame for obesity in America and what should be done about this problem. An interview with a personal trainer certified by the National Academy of Sports Medicine gave information on how eating fast food is a choice. Whether a person’s daily schedule is tighter or pressed for time or times of relative ease, it is always a choice. Support also comes from surveys by the author. Some of those interviewed in the survey say that stress is a big factor and that each person spends an average of about thirty-five dollars a month on fast food. Stress maybe a good reason to eat fast food, but spending that much money a month is absurd.

**Introduction**

The topic chosen is fast food. The reason for choosing to research and write on this topic is because growing up, the researcher noticed the rise in numbers of customers who frequent fast food places. This is most likely due to the fact that fast food is becoming an easy, cheap, and fast way to eat, hence the word fast. The importance of this topic is its relevance to society today. Work, things that need to be done around one’s house, sports, activities, or even spending time with families limit time required to prepare a full course meal.

 Although fast food may not be the healthiest alternative to natural or fresh foods, it takes too much blame for the rise in obesity in America today. As a society, everyone busy resorts to fast food because it is quick instead of taking time to prepare a fresh meal. It has always been individual responsibility to take care of oneself by eating healthily and performing regular exercise. This paper will discuss how the rise in people eating out is due to lack of care and how some different factors contribute to the rise in obesity today.

**Background**

When people eat out, they want to order and get their food as quickly as possible. It satisfies the customer when the provider can serve the customer quickly. In restaurants, the aim is to completely sell the amount prepared before the day is over. On the other hand, fast food places have prepared, disassembled menu items frozen and or chilled waiting to be prepared. When the time comes to prepare what a customer has ordered, it is defrosted, and cooked. Restaurants have fresh food prepared and reheated. In contrast, fast food places have mechanically prepared food that is not the freshest, best cut of meat or vegetable. The two establishments both prepare food and try to cut costs by being more efficient with time and product. “Instead of being designed to facilitate the preparation of a variety of food relatively quickly, the kitchen's purpose was to make a very large amount of a very few items.” (Wilson) On the other hand, location is a lot more important than preparation.

 “Chances are, you've heard the term "location, location, location" more than a few times.” (Spaeder) This is a common phrase used to emphasize the fact that by using surroundings, one can attract more customers to the business. Being in areas where lots of people travel is important. So maybe setting up shop next to a major competitor might not be a bad choice, this allows one to use their demographic research to their advantage. Fast food places tend to be close to areas where there are lots of people all day long. Restaurants usually locate where customers can park comfortably, get out, and dine in. Fast food places are just the opposite because people get in and get out quickly. Aside from locations, advertisements yield similarities and differences in results, too.

Advertisements come in all shapes and sizes. Fast food places like to attract people of all ages. According to Schlosser and Wilson, some are directed towards children by using a collection of popular toys inducing them to come back for more until they have every piece. Restaurants on the other hand, mostly advertise alcohol with food or their flagship dish. Aside from this, both parties advertise their food. (pgs. 127-133) Restaurants usually combine things together to try and make people think they are getting more than what has been paid for, while advertising the actual food. Fast food places, on the other hand, just take their menu, find the best seller, and create a master piece that looks nothing like the actual thing. (Dario 2010)

**Literature Review**

 In “Chew on This,” the beginning consists of the history of McDonalds and its background of the hamburger and the French fry. Aside from those facts, it also informs how organizations target the youth to get entire families purchasing and to have life-long customers as well. Other facts relate to what additives are placed in foods, how soda affects dental hygiene, and the way fast food can affect a body when eaten at regular times.

 In “Don’t Eat This Book,” a lot of quotes are very useful because these statistics show how much Americans consume fast food annually. First, Spurlock (2005) states that the Centers for Disease Control reported that one out of three kids born in America in the year 2000 will develop type 2 diabetes. (pg. 14) It is a sad statistic considering that new advances in technology do not seem to be making breakthroughs in areas of health. Second, Spurlock (2005) states that between 1971 and 2000, the daily calorie intake among men and women has risen between two to three hundred calories each. Considering that ten minutes of running burns about 60 calories is a heck of a lot. (pg. 16) Between 1970 and 2004, the annual amount of money spent on fast food has risen by twenty times as much. From $6.2 billion to $124 billion, many Americans are eating out far too much. These are only a few studies provided in the book, but each give startling facts about the fast food industry.

**Research Questions**

Primary Question:

* Are we as society taking it too far by blaming fast food restaurants and franchises for obesity in America?

Secondary Questions:

* When is it individual responsibility to take care of these responsibilities and stop blaming?
* When is it appropriate to blame?

**Methodology**

The first stage is reading and researching literature on the topic. When thinking about how to read up on literature and how to select it strikes a problem. It is hard to find many books and articles that talk about how society blames fast food for obesity in America. With research though, it can happen. Popular sites such as Google Scholar can search for specific documents about obesity. Upon reading up on these articles and journals, the plan is to get books that just relate to how fast food is unhealthy to further understand the topic. The next stage is interviewing a few personal trainers well known to the researcher. The questions needed to be asked are about their take on fast food and how they feel it affects people in the CNMI. The researcher also plans to ask how they feel about the blame being put on fast food franchises for all the obesity in America.

 The final stage is surveying fifty people with certain questions. Though these people may not be professionals in the field of health, people do have opinions as citizens in the community and their thoughts count. So maybe getting the thoughts of random people in the community will further add insight to how people feel about fast food and how it might affect their daily lives. In the researcher’s opinion, eating at random times has to do with stress and the fact that people are busy. It is not easy coming up with time and being able to prepare a full lunch when your off-time is only an hour. So sometimes it is hard to make the right choices when the easy ones make life all the better. Being able to understand what makes choosing food we eat might shed some light on the problem that supposedly is fast food being the source of obesity.

**Findings**

The first finding according to the people who took surveys, was that about fifty-five percent of those surveyed said that at one time or another, stress had been involved in life. Of the ones who were affected by stress, about sixty-one percent admit that stress causes a change to diet. So many of the respondents claim that stress has affected their choice of food whether it was at school, work, or at being at one’s job during the day. With a hectic day ahead, it is startling that those that are stressed do not take time to relax and possibly cook a well prepared meal. The idea of convenience is probably what swayed a lot of those surveyed into eating fast food. Although the number of respondents claiming that fast food is a convenience, people still, during their free time, choose fast food rather than take the time available to cook a fresh, home cooked meal, showing it has become habitual or addictive

 Aside from the factors of stress listed, the second finding was that money spent on fast food per month might stress people out. Of those surveyed, about fifty percent said fifty dollars or more was spent on fast food meals a month. Most of those surveyed, at multiple times a week, admit to spending more time outside the comforts of home. So could this be another stress factor? Maybe but it could be insignificant as the only relevance would be time wasted driving to and from places that have been chosen for those who drive and walking for those who walk.

 The last finding was that people did not choose the healthier fast food place more often. As a matter of fact, the most popular choice was McDonalds. The reasons listed behind the choice of McDonalds are French fries, hamburgers, and the overall convenience of the establishment. The food and placement of the restaurant have a lot to do with the business the place receives. The French fries can either be ordered alone or in a meal with a hamburger or drink and hamburgers can also be ordered with a meal or alone. This allows customers to choose as they like.

**Important Finding/ Analysis/ Discussion**

Upon reading surveys, books, and interviewing both families and a certified professional trainer, several facts that can be supported by this information can be made clear. First is that it is an individual’s responsibility to take care of personal health. With the ease of access to fast food restaurants, it is starting to feel like a burden to cook. It is just another thing needed to be done in the day. Instead of it being a need when times are tough, it is now a choice and it becomes a choice picked often too many times. Second is that a lot of times people, use excuses to make up for the fact that eating out is easier and more convenient than eating a home cooked meal. Being busy and time related issues may be factors for eating comfort food and fast food. Although these are reasonable reasons, the excuses are being worn out by over use. Last is that one major factor leading to spending on fast food can be related to stress. Stress can affect everyone, and will affect everyone. It causes people to go into times of hardships due to fatigue and the need to do better, which is most of the time the case for students. Fast food though, is not the answer. The answer is using time to cook a prepared meal and stop continuing to slack off or overwork the body. This project is important because is relates to the issue that is fast food in America. It provides information on the topic of whether fast food in America is being blamed properly or not.

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Appendices

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**Appendix A**

**Pilot Survey**

1. Thank you for filling out this survey. Please respond to the demographic questions below honestly.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Nationality: |  |
| Gender: |  |
| Age: |  |
| Village: |  |
| Height: |  |
| Weight: |  |

2. Are you frequently stressed?

3. Is it a factor when choosing what to eat?

4. Do you eat fast food often?

5. If yes, how often?

6. What fast food franchise do you eat at the most?

7. Why do you choose to eat there opposed to all the other franchises?

8. If you could, would you rather cook food?

9. If no, why?

10. How much do you roughly spend on fast food per month?

**Appendix B**

**Formal Survey**

1. Thank you for filling out this survey. Please respond to the demographic questions below honestly.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Nationality: |  |
| Gender: |  |
| Age: |  |
| Village: |  |
| Height: |  |
| Weight: |  |

2. In your opinion, what is fast food?

3. Are you frequently stressed?

4. Is it a factor when choosing what to eat?

5. Do you eat fast food often?

6. If yes, how often?

7. What fast food franchise do you eat at the most?

8. Why do you choose to eat there opposed to all the other franchises?

9. If you could, would you rather cook food?

10. If no, why? What would you say is the reasoning behind your choices of food?

**Appendix C**

Interview Notes (Personal Trainer)

How do you feel fast food franchises affect the CNMI and increase the risk of obesity?

-“I believe that about 80% of the population is affected by fast food and have a high risk of obesity. It is proven that it is all about the choices we make when eating fast food and it all comes down to the numbers (calories, types of fat, salt, grease, etc.)”

How often would you suggest eating fast food is okay and why is that?

**-**“I would not recommend eating fast food on a daily basis as there are chemicals used in preparation of the food which in turn becoming addictive which include senses such as taste and smell. If for example you love Taco Bell, why not go to a similar restaurant that uses fresh ingredients or choose an item off the menu that is prepared healthier.”

Is fast food being blamed wrongly for obesity in the CNMI?

-“Yes as it is all about the choices an individual makes not the fast food itself.”

Interview Notes (Families)

1st Family-Used to eat out at fast food restaurants a lot

 -Style changed because of high cholesterol and weight problems

2nd Family-Dad is a spontaneous buyer of fast food

 -Mom usually has fast food on the weekends

 -Sister usually has fast food when drinking alcoholic beverages

**Appendix C (cont.)**

3rd Family-Eats out fairly regularly due to money shortages

 -Thinks it is okay because it is the healthier looking stuff on the menu

 -Feels the need to slow intake of fast food