

## Men's Stress Dressing and Eating Habits

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*Introduction:* A combination of psychological, emotional, intrapersonal, and/or physical changes makes it common for adults to experience stress (O'Connor, Jones, Conner, McMillian, & Ferguson, 2008). Various studies have provided evidence supporting the notion that stress is explicitly associated with changes in dressing habits and food choices (Habhab, Sheldon, & Loeb, 2009; Hepworth, Mogg, Brignell, & Bradley, 2010; The American Institute of Stress, 2008). Stress can result in direct behavioral changes such as eating patterns and other self-care activities (Kandiah & Saiki, 2010). These behavioral changes may be different between genders. Men and women react to and manage stress differently in both physical and mental capacities (American Psychological Association, 2018), due to differences in coping mechanisms. Men are more likely to use rational and detachment stress coping strategies, and score higher on emotional inhibition tests, while women tend to use emotional and avoidance stress coping strategies (Matud, 2004). Relative to women, men generally report experiencing lower levels of stress (Rice & Van Arsdale, 2010). When compared to men, women often report higher levels of chronic stress as well as minor daily stressors (Matud, 2004). Men are also less likely to report physical and emotional symptoms of stress (American Psychological Association, 2018), making them less likely to change daily habits and behaviors. Few studies have observed any effects of stress on male behaviors regarding dressing and dietary habits. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to assess how perceived stress affects clothing and dietary choices of males

*Methods:* A validated and reliable Men's Stress, Dressing, and Eating Survey (MSDES) was developed and adapted from the Stress, Dressing, and Eating Survey (SDES) created by the researchers, which was utilized for this study (Saiki & Kandiah, 2010). The survey was divided into four primary sections: Part A – generalized information on dressing, eating, and stress; Part B – Patterns of dressing and eating during perceived stressful (PS) situations, Part C – Patterns of dressing and eating during perceived non-stressful (PNS) situations; Part D – Demographic characteristics. Part A contained five questions regarding dressing and eating habits, typical stress levels and response to PS; the questions were either “yes/no” or were on a 5-point Likert scale. Part B consisted of thirteen multiple choice questions regarding typical dress items worn and foods eaten during PNS. Part C consisted of twelve multiple choice questions regarding typical dress items worn and foods consumed when under PS. Dress options were grouped into categories- accessories, informal dress, formal dress, hair, scent (fragrance), and appearance enhancement (e.g. tanning, manicure, etc.). Food options were grouped into categories - mixed dishes, salty/crunchy foods, sweet foods, creamy foods, beverages, and habits (e.g. skipping

meals, eating large portions, etc.). Part D contained twelve questions regarding reported demographics that included age, employment status, race, self-reported anthropometrics (e.g. height and weight), marital status, and living situation. After approval of the study's protocol by the Institution's Review Board, the MSDES was made available online to male students. IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25 for Macintosh was used in all data analysis; the analyses conducted included descriptive/frequencies, paired t-tests, and Cronbach's alpha to measure internal consistency. Significance was established at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

*Results:* One-hundred and eighty university students, ranging in age from 18 to 50 years completed the MSDES. The majority of participants were Caucasian ( $n = 132$ ; 73%), single ( $n = 169$ ; 94%), 18-22 years ( $n = 171$ ; 95%), and full time college students ( $n = 146$ ; 67%). Based on reported height and weight BMI was 25.54 (slightly overweight). A larger number of participants placed considerable ( $n=94$ ; 52%) or great ( $n=71$ ; 39%) effort to maintain their appearance; the same was true for planning and maintaining how they dressed with the majority reporting considerable ( $n = 96$ ; 53%) or great ( $n = 37$ ; 20%) effort. In response to PS, more than three-fourth ( $n= 163$ ; 91%) indicated that they were more likely to dress casually and 50% ( $n = 90$ ) dressed fashionably. A greater number of students ( $n=116$ ; 64%) reported that they enhance their appearance when under PS. Paired t-tests comparing variables with NPS and PS situations illustrated there were statistically significant increases in the selection of dressing formally ( $t = 2.27$ ,  $p = 0.025$ ), using accessories ( $t = 2.59$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ), maintaining hair ( $t = 3.25$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), and using fragrance ( $t = 3.99$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ) during PS.

Regarding dietary habits, 23% ( $n = 42$ ) placed little to no effort and only 37% ( $n = 66$ ) placed some effort into managing calorie intake, food choices, and reading foods labels. However, more than half indicated they typically make healthy eating choices ( $n=125$ ; 69%). When under PS, 55% ( $n = 99$ ) reported making healthy eating choices, but spent less time preparing food for themselves ( $n=124$ ; 69%). Paired t-tests revealed statistically significant increase in choosing mixed dishes ( $t = 2.58$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ) and decreases in diet modification ( $t = -3.21$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ) during PS.

*Discussion:* The findings of this study demonstrated, during PS, changes occurred in dressing and dietary habits. When comparing the number of dressing and eating categories during PS men exhibited greater changes in dressing categories ( $n=4$ ). PS had the most significant influence by increasing men's use of accessories, maintaining hair, using fragrance, and dressing formally. These results implicate that selection of accessories, hair care practices, scent products, and formal clothing may reveal stress prevalence in this population. These findings maybe of value for the apparel and textiles industry to concentrate on the design and merchandising of accessories and formal clothing to assist young male consumers when managing PS. Dietary results suggest PS may have the greatest influence on the selection of mixed dishes and decreased concern with controlling and modifying diet. Mixed dishes are associated with "comfort food," making it logical to observe an increase in the consumption of mixed dishes in times of PS

(Kandiah, Yake, Jones, & Meyer, 2006). A decreased concern with modifying the diet in times of PS is concerning since this can have an adverse effect on health and wardrobe choices in times of weight fluctuations. During PS a reduction in diet modification can also be related to reported decline in men preparing food for themselves, which could result in an increase in dining out with a higher likelihood of then making poor dietary choices. Future research will be needed to identify more diverse groups of males across a broader geographic location, age, ethnicity, and varied professions to better represent the overall U.S. population. The outcomes from additional research will expand results that will have broader application to dressing and eating habits of males during PNS and PS.

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