The Relation of Seasonal Patterns to Mood Changes and Gender Differences in College-aged Students

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Researchers found that mood and behavior patterns clearly depend on specific seasons of the year in college students (Rohan & Signor, 2000). College-aged participants felt worst, gained more weight, sleeping patterns decreased, slept less and socialized more during winter months. In the summer time, college-aged participants well-being increased, patterns increased and socialized less during winter months. Individuals felt more lethargic, lonely and moody during winter months in individuals diagnosed with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) in the DSM-V (APA, 2013). Women have a significant higher prevalence rate of SAD than men and overall mood fluctuation throughout the seasons of the year (Chotia et al., 2003).

I hypothesize that college-aged women experience more seasonal fluctuations in mood, socialization, sleep, eating patterns and weight gain than men do.

**RESULTS**

Two independent samples t-tests demonstrated no significant differences between the two groups.

Positive scores indicate better mood fluctuations and negative scores indicate worse mood fluctuations.

**DISCUSSION**

There is a body of work dedicated to the study of how weather impacts our overall moods and how it is associated to gender differences. However, most recent studies have not closely examined college-aged students in the U.S. as their population. The results of the current study do not support a gender difference in seasonality.

This outcome was the result of limitation in this specific experiment and not a confirmation that the hypotheses are false:

- Lack of participation of college students from other more “seasonal states” with more adverse seasonal patterns.
- Californians may not categorize December as part of the traditional fall season, unlike other states.
- Statistically, women are more prone to have diagnoses of SAD and depression (Young et al., 2008).
- Sunlight and darkness impact the levels of neurotransmitters and hormones in our brain (ex: melatonin and serotonin levels) (Roecklein & Rohan, 2005).
- Individuals may have over- reported or underreported their symptoms.

**SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSES**

Supplementary Analyses were ran with the intent to draw more conclusions about the data collected:

- 50% Sleep the most in the month January
- 62% Feel their best in June
- 60% Feel their best in July
- 54% Eat the most in December
- 54% Socialize the most in July
- 47% Gain the most weight in December
- 45% Eat the most in November

**FUTURE RESEARCH**

A 12-month longitudinal study that analyzes participants’ reported feelings during each month of the year (Mollin, Mellerup, Scheike, Dum, 1996).

Future research on gender differences in relation to seasonality who attend college with more severe seasons other than just CA.

Future research might help understand why onset mood disorders are developed in college-age students (Henriques, 2014).