Textile & Clothing Undergraduates' Recent Life Experiences: Are Students Stressed-Out?

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Abstract
The purpose of this pilot study was to identify experiences that cause stress in the lives of textile and clothing undergraduate students. An assessment of this type is important, as previous research has shown that high levels of stress are linked to negative feelings like tension, anxiety, sadness, fatigue and/or depression, which ultimately can impact the overall self-esteem and welfare of students.

Keywords
challenges, pressures, stress

Disciplines
Fashion Business | Psychiatric and Mental Health | Student Counseling and Personnel Services

Comments
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Keywords: challenges, pressures, stress

The purpose of this pilot study was to identify experiences that cause stress in the lives of textile and clothing (TC) undergraduate students. An assessment of this type is important, as previous research has shown that high levels of stress are linked to negative feelings like tension, anxiety, sadness, fatigue and/or depression, which ultimately, can impact the overall self-esteem and welfare of students (Hirsch, 2001; Woods, Sciarini, & Johanson, 2001). An awareness of students’ overall stress levels can help TC faculty members plan appropriate strategies to assist students in reducing stress, if needed. This pilot study is warranted as there has been no past research examining the stress levels of TC students.

The present study used the survey method for data collection. A questionnaire was designed using the constructs outlined in the Inventory of College Students’ Recent Life Experiences developed by Kohn, Lafreniere, and Gurevich (1990). The questionnaire included a list of 49 items intended to measure experiences that cause tension or stress in students’ lives. A 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 4 (Very much) was used to rate each item. These items group into seven factors titled by Kohn et al. (1990) as: time pressures, developmental challenges, academic alienation, romantic problems, friendship problems, assorted annoyances, and general social mistreatment.

Data were collected from 48 undergraduate TC students during the spring semester of 2004 at a 4-year institution located in the Midwest. The majority of students were either Juniors (44%) or Seniors (50%) between the ages of 18 and 22 (87%), and all were female. Ratings of the individual items indicated that important decisions about future career ($M=3.13$) and too many things to do ($M=3.04$) had the highest mean ratings among the 49 items, suggesting these two items were distinct issues causing stress in TC students’ lives.

Item ratings were combined to create scores for each of Kohn et al’s (1990) seven factors. Reliability estimates for the factors ranged from .61 to .86. Scores for the seven factors were
below 2.5 on the four-point scale, suggesting TC students in this study had a limited amount of stress. The factors, time pressures, developmental challenges, and academic alienation had the highest mean scores. However, students reported that these items only slightly evoked tension and/or stress in their lives. The time pressure factor had the highest mean score (M=2.44) and included items such as *not enough leisure time, not enough time to meet obligations, and a lot of responsibilities*. The developmental challenge factor included items such as *struggling to meet own academic standards, lower grades than hoped for, and important decisions about education and future career*, and had a mean score of 2.18. Academic alienation included items reflecting students’ dissatisfaction with school and finding course(s) uninteresting and had a mean score of 2.13. The remaining factors had scores less than 2.0, suggesting that romantic problems, friendship problems, assorted annoyances, and general social mistreatment induce little to no stress in the lives of TC students sampled in this study.

The results of this pilot study are useful, as they identify items that may be sources of stress for undergraduate students. Additional research is needed to explore how TC students differ in their stress levels given their year in college. The sample should also be expanded to include a broader geographic area. Identifying issues that cause stress for students may assist TC faculty members to help students better manage their time and make appropriate career decisions.

References