



Eat, Drink, and Be Happy: Comfort Food and Beer Preferences

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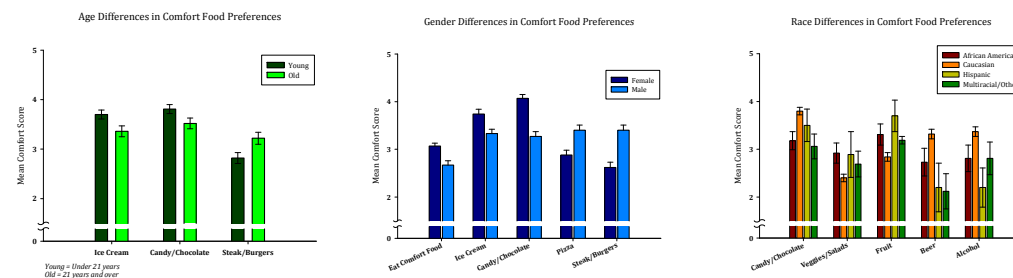


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Introduction

- Most people agree that comfort can be found through food and drink
- In previous studies, comfort foods have been identified and been found to differ for men and women and for young and old adults; women and younger adults have reported preferring snacks, both sweet and salty, and higher fat food as their comfort; men and older adults prefer meal items such as casseroles, meatloaf, or hamburgers
- The present study attempted to replicate and extend earlier research to investigate the role of race in comfort food preferences, specific definitions of comfort food, the existence of and individual differences in the concept of comfort beer, and origins of comfort beer and food
- Results from two different studies, one examining comfort beer, and the other comfort food were combined to address several hypotheses
- We expected the gender and age differences found previously and predicted that:
 - Similar gender and age differences would be seen in comfort beer;
 - Race differences would emerge for both comfort food and beer indicating cultural or family background in origin of preferences;
 - Categories of what makes a comfort food comforting could be identified

Comfort Food Results



Participants

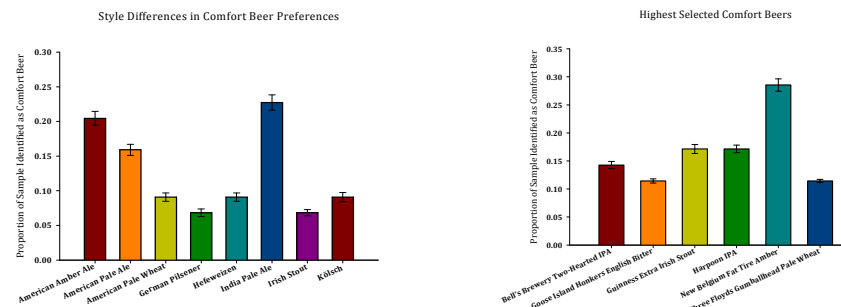
Comfort Food Sample

N = 289
 Women : 52%
 Men - 48%
 Age - 16-48 yrs.
 Race: African American - 13%
 Caucasian—77%
 Hispanics - 4%
 Multiracial/Other - 6%

Comfort Beer Sample

N = 171
 Women - 30%
 Men - 70%
 Age - 21-55 yrs.
 No Race Information

Comfort Beer Results



Method

Comfort Food Study

An extensive survey was administered that included:

- Definition of comfort food
- Ratings of the degree to which (5-point scale) each of 13 food and drink categories were considered comfort foods/drinks
- Frequency of consuming various comfort foods
- Ratings of the degree to which each of 13 food and drink categories produced guilt in their consumption

Comfort Beer Study

Participants were asked to complete a short survey that included:

- The degree to which beer can be considered a comfort drink
- Self report identification of which beers are considered "comfort beers"
- Identification of which beer categories are considered "comfort beers"
- Reasons for beer choices being comforting

Discussion

- A number of clear preferences emerged consistent with previous findings such as ice cream, cookies and candy reported by more than 50% of the sample as preferred comfort foods and many gender and age differences in food preference.
- Regarding gender differences in comfort beer, while men and women equally reported beer as a comfort item, the origin of their preferences differed; men traced their comfort beer to either their early drinking experiences in college or recent years of beer drinking while women said it was from their early bonding experiences with their fathers; their comfort beer was the beer their fathers drank.
- Interesting race differences emerged for food and beer preferences. African Americans were more likely to embrace healthier items such as vegetables as comfort foods and less likely to consider beer as a comfort than were Caucasians
- Definitions of comfort food focused on stress release and emotional eating but the additional comforting role of food in eliciting memories was interesting
- Based on preferences reported, we suggest that comfort beers may be a function of comfort food. Men preferred a beer style that happens to pair brilliantly with hamburgers and steak, their preferred comfort food; women had a tendency towards preferring beer styles that paired well with sweets and chocolates (i.e., Irish Stouts).
- The data indicate that while there are some comfort foods and beer that cut across gender, age, and race lines, individual differences play an important role in what makes us feel better when it comes to eating and drinking.