

The Relationship between Mental Stress, Coping Style, and the Heavy-Taste Culture of College Students

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Abstract-Objective: This research explores the relationship between mental stress, coping style, and the heavy-taste culture of college students, and we hope these results can advise the creation of mental health services and campus culture assistance. **Methods:** 801 college students completed the adolescent self-rating life event checklist, a simple coping style scale, and an undergraduate heavy-taste culture scale. **Results:** 1) Heavy-taste culture was popular among the college students, and there were statistically significant differences between gender, only-child or not, major of study, and grade. 2) The score on the heavy-taste culture scale had a statistically positive correlation with the total score and each dimensions' score on the ASLEC (0.01 level). 3) The score on the heavy-taste culture scale had a statistically positive correlation with the score on positive and negative coping styles (0.01 level). 4) Negative coping styles and negative life events could predict the heavy-taste cultures' prevalence in college students ($R^2 = 0.12$, 0.001 level). **Conclusion:** Using negative coping style and suffering the mental stress from negative life events could lead the college students to appreciate the heavy-taste culture. Colleges and universities should guide students to enjoy the heavy-taste culture in more constructive ways.

Keywords- College Student; Mental Stress; Coping Style; Heavy-taste Culture; Relationship

I. INTRODUCTION

Sensation seeking refers to the personality trait that searches for experiences and feelings that are “varied, novel, complex, and intense” and desires to “take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experiences.” It includes thrill and adventure seeking, experience seeking, disinhibition, and boredom susceptibility [1]. Research shows that there are correlations between sensation seeking and some behaviors of an individual, such as risky behavior, smoking, alcohol abuse, addiction, psychological therapy, mental health, and interpersonal communication, etc. [2-6].

The heavy-taste culture is one of the prevalent cultures in China. It is a culture that is very different from the traditional cultures in thought and behavior, and it can have a huge physiological and psychological impact through intense stimulation of the visual, auditory, and gustatory senses [7]. The heavy-taste culture spreads rapidly via networking and social media, on behalf of its unique life attitude and aesthetic taste. External expression of heavy-taste culture includes many aspects, such as heavy taste in food styles and flavours, popular film and television works, character modeling, popular books and magazines, and slang language and behaviors (such as interests in maid cafes, scary films and ghost stories, fancy dress, etc.). The characteristics of heavy-taste culture (novelty, thrill, and anti-tradition) fit the traits of a sensation-seeking personality. So we consider an interest in heavy-taste culture as an external expression of individuals' sensation seeking.

Previous studies showed college students were highly sensitive to pop culture and were the primary social group to pursue it [8]. Research shows that pop culture has a great impact on the moral values of college students [9] and can change their life styles and moral values, entice them to pursue “cool” appearances and luxuries, push them into cultural difficulties [10], or even affect their lifelong development. As technology has rapidly developed, the heavy-taste culture has become more popular among college students through the Internet and has permeated their lives. It can inevitably cause significant impacts on the lives of college students.

Previous studies on Chinese college students showed that sensation seeking was closely related to coping styles [11] and could actually relieve mental stress [12]. Individuals with an interest in activities that could bring intense feelings of sensation seeking coped with life events better than those who did not like sensation seeking [13]. When facing more negative life events, adolescents with high sensation-seeking personality traits pursued more sensation seeking [14]. So we hypothesize that the mental stress and coping styles of college students are related to the heavy-taste culture; when college students encounter more mental stress, they are more inclined to contact the heavy-taste culture. We hope to find the relationship between mental stress, coping style, and the heavy-taste culture, so the results can provide advice for the implementation of mental health services and campus culture construction.

II. STUDY OBJECTS AND METHODS

A. Participants

A convenient sampling method was adopted. 900 undergraduate Chinese students from 2 colleges in Chongqing city and 1 college in Anhui province were chosen. 900 questionnaires were sent out, and 801 valid questionnaires were taken back; the effective rate was 89%. Participants were classified according to gender, origin, family, major, and grade. The participants included 398 males and 403 females; 529 were from rural areas and 272 from urban areas; 334 were from only-child families and 467 from non-only-child families; 425 were majoring in science and 376 majoring in liberal arts; and there were 310 freshmen, 322 sophomores, and 169 junior students.

B. Measurement Methods

1) Adolescent Self-rating Life Event Checklist (ASLEC)

The checklist was used to evaluate the mental stress responses of adolescents caused by negative life events within one year [15], which included 27 subjects and 6 factors, such as interpersonal relationships, study stress, being punished, loss of relatives and property, health adaptations, and other specific factors. The scale was used to test the mental stress of individuals from these six aspects. During the evaluation of each life event, the occurrence of each life event was first confirmed and then the mental impact of each event was scored. All the items were to be answered on a 5-point scale ranging from “no impact, slight impact, moderate impact, and severe impact to notably severe impact.” The total score of the checklist referred to the total quantity of stress, and a higher total score indicated that one had more mental stress. A higher score on each factor showed a higher mental stress for the corresponding life event. Cronbach’s α of the list was 0.92.

2) Simple Coping Style Scale (SCSS)

The scale, which was used to evaluate the individual’s coping style [16], referred to common coping styles in life and included 20 subjects and 2 factors (positive coping style and negative coping style). There were 4 scores of each item, answer scores of “0, 1, 2, 3” represented “not used, occasionally used, sometimes used, often used” respectively. A higher score on the positive/negative coping style indicated that the individual was more inclined to adopt positive/negative coping styles to solve problems in daily life. Cronbach’s α of the scale was 0.80.

3) Undergraduate Heavy-Taste Culture Scale

The scale, which was used to investigate the prevalence of the heavy-taste culture among college students [17], includes 15 subjects and 4 factors (prevalence incentive, behavior characteristics, drive characteristics, and novelty-seeking characteristics). The prevalence incentive factor refers to the reason for the prevalence of the heavy-taste culture. It includes four items: I like the heavy-taste culture because it can improve our tolerance to new things; I like the heavy-taste culture because it can make us diverse; I like the heavy-taste culture because of its rise in the internet; I like the heavy-taste culture because it reflects the diversity of societal values. The behavior characteristics factor refers to the specific behavior characteristics of individuals under the influence of the heavy-taste culture. It includes four items: I like to play violent games online; I like to read erotic literature; I like to watch violent and horror films; I like dirty talk. The drive characteristics factor represents the satisfaction of internal psychological needs met by the heavy-taste culture. It includes four items: The heavy-taste culture can meet one’s psychological needs (such as emptiness, sexual fantasy), bring stimulation, satisfy curiosity, or it is a fashionable behavior. The novelty-seeking characteristic factor refers to the influence of the heavy-taste culture on the tendency to accept novelty. It includes three items: The heavy-taste culture opens our vision, makes us accept new things easier, and I like foods with unusual taste and shape. All the items were to be answered on a 5-point scale ranging from “complete disagreement” to “complete agreement.” A higher total score indicated that the individual was more inclined to accept the heavy-taste culture. Cronbach’s α of the scale was 0.81.

C. Data Processing

The data was inputted and processed with SPSS11.5 software.

III. RESULTS

A. The Current Situation of Heavy-Taste Culture among College Students

The total score of the heavy-taste culture among college students was 44.29 ± 8.53 . The scores for the drive characteristics, novelty-seeking characteristics, prevalence incentive factor, and behavior characteristics factor were 3.31 ± 0.78 , 2.86 ± 0.79 , 3.38 ± 0.71 , and 2.24 ± 0.88 , respectively.

An independent sample t-test was conducted on the heavy-taste culture among college students of different genders, origins, families, and majors; an ANOVA of different grades was also conducted (Table 1). The results showed that there were very significant differences between the total score and the score on behavior characteristics factors in college students of different genders; the score of males were higher than those of females. The total score and the scores on novelty seeking and behavior

characteristics factors of the only-child participants were higher than those of non-only-child participants. There were significant differences between the total score and the score on the behavior characteristics factor in students with different majors; the scores of the science students were significantly higher than those of liberal arts students. Notably significant differences were found between the total score and the scores on the factors of novelty seeking, prevalence incentive, and the behavior characteristics of different grades. Least significant difference (LSD) showed that the scores of junior students were significantly higher than freshmen and sophomore students'. However, there was no significant difference between the students from different origins.

TABLE 1 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HEAVY-TASTE CULTURE AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH DIFFERENT DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

	Property	Drive characteristics	Novelty-seeking characteristics	Prevalence incentive	Behavior characteristics	Total score
Gender	Male	13.07 \pm 3.30	8.74 \pm 2.47	13.37 \pm 3.06	10.46 \pm 3.30	45.64 \pm 8.87
	Female	13.39 \pm 2.96	8.44 \pm 2.31	13.63 \pm 2.64	7.49 \pm 3.07	42.96 \pm 7.96
	t	-1.45	1.76	-1.29	13.19***	4.51***
Origin	Rural area	13.13 \pm 3.06	8.48 \pm 2.33	13.38 \pm 2.67	8.91 \pm 3.54	43.91 \pm 8.08
	Urban area	13.42 \pm 3.27	8.80 \pm 2.50	13.74 \pm 3.19	9.07 \pm 3.46	45.03 \pm 9.31
	t	-1.24	-1.77	-1.70	-0.59	-1.77
Only child or not	True	13.36 \pm 3.21	9.01 \pm 2.39	13.67 \pm 3.04	9.49 \pm 3.55	45.53 \pm 9.03
	False	13.14 \pm 3.08	8.29 \pm 2.35	13.38 \pm 2.72	8.59 \pm 3.45	43.40 \pm 8.04
	T	0.99	4.27***	1.43	3.58***	3.52***
Major	Science	13.19 \pm 3.24	8.72 \pm 2.49	13.44 \pm 3.42	9.61 \pm 3.41	44.95 \pm 8.99
	Liberal arts	13.28 \pm 3.01	8.44 \pm 2.27	13.58 \pm 2.64	8.23 \pm 3.49	43.54 \pm 7.90
	t	-0.42	1.62	-0.71	5.64***	2.34*
Grade	Freshmen	13.03 \pm 3.11	8.08 \pm 2.31	13.26 \pm 2.49	8.26 \pm 3.41	42.74 \pm 7.81
	Sophomore	13.24 \pm 3.14	8.58 \pm 2.30	13.30 \pm 2.82	8.95 \pm 3.33	44.07 \pm 7.74
	Junior students	13.59 \pm 3.15	9.36 \pm 2.55	14.33 \pm 3.39	10.28 \pm 3.68	47.55 \pm 10.21
	F	1.71	13.58***	9.20***	18.83***	18.38***

(NOTE: * REFERS TO P < 0.05; ** REFERS TO P < 0.01; *** REFERS TO P < 0.001)

B. The Relationship between Mental Stress, Coping Style, and Heavy-Taste Culture among College Students

The results of Pearson product-moment correlation analysis (Table 2) indicated the following: the total score and the scores on the novelty-seeking characteristics of the heavy-taste culture had a positive correlation with the total score and each factor's score on mental stress; there was a positive correlation between the scores on drive characteristics and the scores on interpersonal relationships, study stress, and health adaptation; there was a positive correlation between the scores on the prevalence incentive and interpersonal relationships; there was also a positive correlation between the scores on behavior characteristics and interpersonal relationships, being punished, loss, health adaptation, and others; the total score and the scores on the drive characteristics, novelty-seeking characteristics, and prevalence incentive of the heavy-taste culture were positively correlated with the scores on positive coping and negative coping styles. A significant correlation was found between the score on behavior characteristics and negative coping styles, while no significant correlation was found with positive coping styles.

TABLE 2 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MENTAL STRESS, COPING STYLE, AND PREVALENCE OF HEAVY-TASTE CULTURE AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

	Interpersonal relationship	Study stress	Being punished	Loss	Health adaptation	Others	Total score of the stress	Positive coping style	Negative Coping style
Drive characteristics	0.10**	0.08*	-0.06	0.04	0.07*	0.01	0.03	0.13**	0.08*
Novelty seeking characteristics	0.13**	0.09*	0.13**	0.11**	0.16**	0.20**	0.17**	0.09*	0.31**
Prevalence incentive	0.07*	-0.01	-0.05	0.02	0.02	0.04	0.01	0.17**	0.10**
Behavior characteristics	0.14**	0.05	0.27**	0.13**	0.21**	0.34**	0.25**	-0.04	0.37**

Total	0.16**	0.07*	0.11**	0.11**	0.16**	0.21**	0.17**	0.11**	0.30**
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(NOTE: * REFERS TO $P < 0.05$; ** REFERS TO $P < 0.01$; *** REFERS TO $P < 0.001$)

C. Regression Analysis of Mental Stress, Coping Style, and the Prevalence of the Heavy-Taste Culture among College Students

Because there are significant correlations (Table 2) between the total score of the heavy-taste culture and the six factors of mental stress, the positive coping style and negative coping style, so we do regression analysis to study the causation between them. Multiple stepwise regression analysis (Table 3) was conducted using the eight factors as independent variables and the total score of the heavy-taste culture as the dependent variable. It was found that four factors (negative coping style, other specific factors, being punished, and loss) were entered in the regression equation and jointly predicted 12% variation of the heavy-taste culture.

TABLE 3 REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF MENTAL STRESS AND PREVALENCE OF THE HEAVY-TASTE CULTURE AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

Variables	R	R ²	ΔR^2	F	B	β
Negative coping style	0.30	0.09	0.08	78.12	0.59	0.30
Others	0.33	0.10	0.10	46.98	0.32	0.13
Being punished	0.34	0.11	0.11	34.67	0.07	-0.16
Loss	0.35	0.12	0.11	27.06	0.09	0.08

IV. DISCUSSION

The study results showed that the heavy-taste culture was popular among college students, which was consistent with existing research results [7]. The male students were found to have more heavy-taste behavior characteristics than female students, the reasons for which were that male students showed higher levels of sensation seeking and degrees of excitement and adventure than female students [18]. This was thought to be connected to the fact that, compared to female students, male students more preferred to use heavy-taste words (such as speaking crudely), displayed more aggressive behavior, and had more interests in pornographic materials. The existing research indicated that the only-child participants showed higher disinhibition in sensation seeking than the non-only-child participants, and that they were more self-concerned [11], which supported the results of this study. The only-child participants preferred the novelty of the heavy-taste culture more than the non-only-child participants, because the culture fit with their personality of pursuing dissimilarities. The science students were more likely to accept the heavy-taste culture than liberal arts students; this may be because of the following reasons: (1) the science students had more study stress than liberal arts students, so they vented their pressure through heavy-taste behaviors [19]; (2) the science students were more open to new cultures and behaviours than liberal arts students; (3) in China, there are more male students in science than liberal arts. The junior students were more likely to accept the heavy-taste culture and had more heavy-taste behaviors than freshmen and sophomore students; this result might be due to the following reasons: (1) the junior students adapted better to college life and had more information than others, so they were likely to receive the new culture; (2) compared to freshmen and sophomore students, the junior students had to consider what they should do after graduation, such as looking for a job or continuing to study, and this brought pressure [20], and the heavy-taste culture helped reducing pressure.

This study found that the mental stress and coping styles of college students were closely related to the heavy-taste culture. If college students had more mental stress and used more coping styles, they would more readily accept the heavy-taste culture. However, we should pay attention to the result that the heavy-taste behavior characteristics were significantly related to negative coping styles but not to positive coping styles. This might show that when college students used negative coping styles in life, they usually had heavy-taste behaviors, such as playing violent video games, watching violent films and television works, and speaking crudely.

This study found that negative coping styles and mental stress from negative life events (such as being punished, losing important objects in life etc.) could predict the prevalence of the heavy-taste culture. When college students faced mental stress from negative life events and used negative coping styles, they were more likely to accept the heavy-taste culture. The heavy-taste culture could relieve college students' mental stress and incline them to use negative coping styles.

Why does the heavy-taste culture help college students relieve stress? Why is the heavy-taste culture prevalent in college students? We thought it might be because the heavy-taste culture has the following characteristics: (1) Convenient access. As reported in the China Internet Network Development State Statistic Report (published in July 2013) by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), students are the major group of internet users, accounting for about 26.8% of the total users [21]. As the main prevalent channel of the heavy-taste culture is networking, and the web-surfing function of the cell phone is becoming increasingly powerful, college students can contact the heavy-taste culture quickly. (2) The coexistence of novelty and secularity. Because it pursues novelty and secularity, the heavy-taste culture not only satisfies college students'

mental demands of pursuing differences, but also keeps them in the popular tide of the student group. (3) Novel and stimulus. In heavy-taste literature, film, and television works, there are violent, scary, bloody, and pornographic plots, which provide college students stimuli and satisfy their novelty seeking. (4) Relieving mental stress. Heavy-taste behaviors (e.g. speaking crudely and playing violent game online) can bring the pleasure of venting pressure to college students who prefer the heavy-taste culture.

Why are college students who use a negative coping style more inclined to participate in the heavy-taste culture? The negative coping style includes avoidance, smoking, drinking, fantasy, etc. College students escape problems in life through playing games online, watching erotic literature and film, doing unusual behavior, etc. Students who use a negative coping style to resolve problems enjoy the heavy-taste culture because it can turn their attention from problems in life, allow them to vent pressure, and temporarily help them maintain their mental health.

These results do not indicate that the heavy-taste culture makes college students indulge in negative coping styles. The specific effects of coping styles depend on different situations and individuals. Positive coping styles always bring good results, such as confidence and optimism, but the negative coping style does not always bring bad results. Sometimes, negative coping styles, such as self-comforting, waiting, and accepting bad reality passively, can help individuals relieve stress and dismiss unhealthy emotions temporarily. However, by constantly solving problems with a negative coping style, college students may be inclined to escape reality and responsibility, without motivation for achievement. So, we must prevent the negative influence of the heavy-taste culture.

In conclusion, we consider the heavy-taste culture as a double-edged sword for the mental health of college students. On one hand, it can relieve college students' mental stress, help them to solve life events, and comfort them when they are under stress. On the other hand, it may make college students who are independent minded and want to pursue novel stimulus to accustom to using negative coping styles to solve problems. This may negatively influence college students' behavior, aesthetic preoccupations, and living habits. In colleges and universities, we should construct a campus culture and mental health services that can lead college students to accept this new culture rationally and reduce the negative influence of the heavy-taste culture.

V. LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study had two limitations: (1) The participants came from only two provinces, Chongqing city and Anhui Province, so the results cannot represent all college students in China. (2) We considered the heavy-taste culture as the external expression of one's sensation seeking on the basis of previous studies and social conditions. The connection between the heavy-taste culture and sensation seeking lacked empirical evidence.

In order to avoid the limitations above, in following studies we will expand the sample of participants and make the results more representative. Then we will use questionnaires to investigate the relationship between the heavy-taste culture and sensation seeking, to give more evidence to this study.

With the rapid development of the Internet, several popular cultures have emerged, such as the heavy-taste culture and micro-blog culture, etc. [22]. These new popular cultures have influenced the values of college students [23]. In future research, we should study the physiological and psychological effects of being under the influence of different popular cultures and study the relationship between popular culture and the physiological traits of college students. These results may assist the mental health maintenance of college students.

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