Self-mockery or Self-abasement: A Quantitative Study on the Status Quo of Self-stigma Among Chinese College Students

Shuran Huang

School of Psychology, Nanjing University, Nanjing City, Jiangsu Province, 210046, China

181820089@smail.nju.edu.cn

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Abstract: The research topic of this paper is whether "self-deprecating" stigma is beneficial to the mental health of Chinese college students. In the context of the Pan-stigmatization, college students are greatly affected, and they begin to use self-deprecating words to disparage their achievements in an attempt to gain psychological relief. This paper mainly adopts a questionnaire survey to study the influence of "self-deprecating" stigma and the reasons for this phenomenon. The research finds that after "self-deprecating" stigma, Chinese college students' anxiety will be reduced, and their future achievement level will be improved. At the same time, college students with a better family background are less likely to carry out self-stigmatization, and college students with better academic performance are more likely to use "self-deprecating" stigmatization. The research results based on college students in this paper are in line with the trend that the negative perception of self-deprecation is gradually fading, and "self-deprecating" stigma means the separation of self-stigma and identity.

1. Introduction

1.1 Social status

With the rapid development of modern society, people's anxiety has been increased invisibly. What is not in line with the rapid economic growth and the continuous improvement of industrialization level is people's increasingly strong sense of anxiety and powerlessness. Many people are caught in the tide of the times and cannot feel their own meaning, unable to stand firm in the intense competition of the present. This is especially usual in today's China, where there is a growing sense of existential threat. Under such conditions, people often have two choices: one is giving up the dream and returning to a state of "salted fish" (don't want to do anything and just want to lie down); the other choice, which is now very popular, is that people will use cynicism as a kind of self-deprecating or humorous way to diminish their power and status, thus producing a self-protective psychology, trying to reduce anxiety and maintain self-respect. However, they will work hard to improve their social status in a place where others can't see. This "retreat for advance" approach is especially common among college students in China today. College students try to relieve their emotional anxiety and employment pressure by stigmatizing themselves as "poor second-generation," "low-achieving students," "hopeless," and so on. However, they also make great efforts to get rid of the label of self-stigma [1].

Such a phenomenon runs counter to Goffman's research [2], and the separation of self-stigma and its identity is realized. However, this does not mean that the concepts of stigma and self-stigma have changed. The meaning of self-stigma has changed in light of China's specific social background and cultural context.

1.2 Pan-stigmatization

Pan-stigmatization means that with the transformation in Chinese society today, the phenomenon of stigmatization has been increased. Individuals and groups will or give themselves, or giving each other negative, mocking, insulting labels and characteristics, and thus led to the growing phenomenon of stigma, a generalization of stigma objects, diversity content of stigma, increasingly intertwined stigma relationship and other new trends. At the same time, while the public is more sensitive and intense to this kind of stigmatization, there is a tendency that the psychological perception of the

stigmatization is relatively weakened, which further affects the mutual trust and group identity among the members of the society [3]. This phenomenon is called Pan-stigmatization.

Pan-stigmatization includes cross-sectional stigma, implicit stigma, stigma normalization, and other characteristics [1]. In the process of Pan-stigmatization, public stigma and self-stigma gradually separated. Some people are still affected by public stigmatization, resulting in self-stigma of "low self-evaluation" and "self-inefficiency". However, there is also a tendency for some people who are stigmatized to gradually weaken their negative perception of stigmatization [4]. In order to avoid the negative consequences of public stigma in social life, the victims conceal the stigma by positive impression decoration [5]. That is to control and manage self-presentation in daily life by consciously concealing identity, restricting contact, maintaining social distance, and changing behaviors, so as to make their behavior meet social expectations and role requirements which can eliminate public stigma.

1.3 Chinese college students' "self-deprecating" stigma

The current research points out that the common self-stigma of college students grows up in the era of the continuous development of Pan-stigmatization. Self-stigma of Chinese college students can go deep into all aspects of college students' life, including study, family background, employment, friendship, and other aspects. More than 50% of college students highly identify with the social characteristics of the stigma vocabulary users, and believe that the bottom of the society can achieve a certain degree of self-protection and identity through self-deprecating, so as to vent their dissatisfaction and achieve a kind of group "carnival" [3]. Aside from a few rich second-generation college students and students who are excellent at their study, most of the students are facing the problem to struggle to the upper class alike the bottom of the people: less experience than the workplace; less outstanding family background than the rich second generation; no outstanding scientific accomplishment compared with students who are excellent at study. Under the severe social environment, college students are prone to self-denial. However, self-esteem and childhood education force them not to admit defeat and bow to fate, so "self-deprecating" stigma becomes their best outlet. According to Li chaoming, "self-deprecating" stigma is a tool for young people to defy traditional culture and show their individuality. He also pointed out that this kind of deconstruction culture has both the decadence of self-abandonment and the backbone of contempt for the mainstream. Wang Yuxiang also believed that "youth would rather accept reality in a way that seems to dwarf themselves. They do not sink into reality but achieve reconciliation with the society and themselves in a new way" [3]. Huang Zongzhi put forward the famous concept of "expression" and "practice" in his book *Law, Society and Culture in the Qing Dynasty: Expression and Practice in Civil Law* [6]. In his opinion, "expression" is a description of the fact, which may be consistent with the truth or contrary to it. In reality, expression and practice often go against each other. What behind such self-mockery of Chinese college students is that they want society to give them some breathing space and a chance to climb into the upper class, instead of mocking and looking down upon them.

Therefore, this article proposed the concept of "self-deprecating" stigma, namely the use of humor and self-deprecating language by Chinese college students to belittle selves. However, they don't produce identity to self-stigma vocabulary, and just see it as a kind of "protection", thus to privately through academic, appearance, competitiveness and so on to improve their comprehensive quality, and to take off the label of self-stigma [7].

1.4 Research hypotheses and objectives

This paper mainly intends to explore the psychological impact of "self-deprecating" stigma on Chinese college students and the influencing factors of self-deprecating self-stigma. The research objectives of this paper are as follows: (1) Prove that "self-deprecating" stigma can maintain self-esteem, reduce anxiety, and improves future achievement; (2) Prove the influence of family background, academic level, and financial status on the degree of "self-deprecating" stigma; (3) Prove the correlation between college students' "self-deprecating" stigma and actual actions.

Through the above research objectives, this paper can explore the psychological consequences of college students' "self-deprecating" stigma phenomenon, so as to determine whether this phenomenon can really benefit the growth of Chinese college students, and whether this phenomenon is really

positive self-defense. In addition, by classifying the family background, academic level, and economic status of college students, college students "self-deprecating" stigma behind the social and psychological reasons is explored. In this way, previous researches are repeated, and the reasons behind the phenomenon are extended from the macro society to the combination of society and family, so as to explore the individual reasons and social reasons behind the occurrence of this phenomenon in many aspects. Finally, given that future achievement levels are determined by individual efforts and are related to uncertainties such as opportunities, this paper also intends to explore the correlation between college students' "self-deprecating" stigma and their real actions. The correlation between "self-deprecating" stigma and real action can also prove that "self-deprecating" stigma does not represent the identification of stigma.

2. Method

This paper mainly adopted a questionnaire to achieve the above research objectives. The target subjects are mainly 18 to 30 years old students from Nanjing University. Considering that this age group basically includes undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students in the Chinese educational system, this age group is representative to a certain extent. In addition, as a comprehensive university, Nanjing University covers students of all personalities, backgrounds, and grades, and "self-deprecating" stigma is prevalent on the campus, so it has credibility.

The questionnaire is mainly composed of 4 parts. First, the subjects filled in the blanks about their basic population variables and made detailed descriptions of family background, academic level, and economic status. Secondly, participants described their experience of "self-deprecating" stigma, which mainly included the frequency of using self-deprecating nouns and the times of using specific self-deprecating nouns. Participants who had never used the word "self-deprecating" were asked to fill out their opinion of "self-deprecating" stigma. Then, the subjects filled in a series of questions on the scale of self-esteem, anxiety, and future achievement of college students, which were scored by 4 points. Finally, the subjects were required to fill in the real action questionnaire after the "self-deprecating" stigma, which mainly included three aspects: study, making friends, and life, that is, whether they had taken concrete actions to make substantive changes in these three aspects and how much they tried to make changes. The four-point scale was used for self-rating. Participants were asked to write down the actions they took so that a follow-up study could compile a summary of their motivation for self-change following the "self-deprecating" stigma.

This experiment first conducted an exploratory factor analysis on the revised scale to determine the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. Secondly, correlation analysis was adopted to study the correlation between college students' "self-deprecating" stigma and self-esteem, anxiety, future achievements and real actions, as well as the factors affecting "self-deprecating" stigma.

3. Results

A total of 138 questionnaires were collected in this experiment, including 71 male students, 67 female students, 102 undergraduate students, 24 master students, and 12 doctoral students, with an average age of 21.6. The subjects were all students from Nanjing University and were paid 2 RMB for completing a questionnaire. Self-deprecating stigma experienced by the participants were mainly "low-achieving students", "poor ghosts" (pauper), "low brothers" (describing themselves as weak), "diaosi" (loser) and "garbage" in terms of frequency of use. Among all the students who had experienced "self-deprecating" stigma, 29.81% thought that "self-deprecating" stigma was only a joke and they still thought they were excellent, 63.46% thought that they were hiding their pressure in this way, and only 6.73% thought that they were really demeaning themselves when they practiced "self-deprecating" stigma. The students with "self-deprecating" stigmatization believed that through "self-deprecating" stigmatization, they had some improvements in study, self-discipline, learning from role models, body control, and other aspects. However, a survey of college students who had never practiced "self-deprecating" stigma found that they had a very different view of "self-deprecating" stigma than those who had. They were either neutral or saw it as impolite, disagreeable, or too faking.

3.1 Reliability and validity of self-esteem, anxiety and future Achievement level scale of Chinese college students

Table.1. Reliability and validity of the scale

	Cronbach α coefficient	KMO value
Self-esteem scale	0.715	0.785
Anxiety scale	0.937	0.934
Future Achievement Level Scale	0.699	0.699

Table 1 shows that the reliability and validity of the self-esteem scale of college students are 0.715 and 0.785, both of which are relatively good. The reliability and validity of college students' anxiety scale were 0.937 and 0.934, both of which are very good. The reliability and validity of the scale of future achievement of college students are 0.699 and 0.795, which are relatively good.

3.2 Correlation of "Self-deprecating" stigma with self-esteem, anxiety, and future achievement levels in Chinese college students

Table.2. Correlation of "Self-deprecating" stigma with self-esteem, anxiety, and achievement

		Self-esteem score	Anxiety score	Future achievement score
number of using a self-stigmatizing word since entering college	correlation coefficient	0.064	-0.279**	0.398**
	p	0.492	0.002	0
How often do you use self-stigmatizing words	correlation coefficient	0.141	-0.198*	0.296**
	p	0.132	0.034	0.001

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$

Table 2 shows no significant correlation between "self-deprecating" stigma and the overall change of self-esteem in Chinese college students. And the more frequently college students use "self-deprecating" stigma, the more their anxiety is reduced. The frequency use of the words "self-deprecating" stigma is positively correlated with the change of future achievement level. In other words, "self-deprecating" stigma of college students can effectively improve their achievement level in study, life, and making friends.

3.3 The influence of family background, academic level, and economic status on the degree of "self-deprecating" stigma

Table.3. Correlations of family background, academic level, economic status and self-stigma

		family background	academic level	economic status
number of using a self-stigmatizing word since entering college	correlation coefficient	-0.396*	0.353**	-0.009
	p	0.026	0.001	0.928
How often do you use self-stigmatizing words	correlation coefficient	-0.168**	-0.181	0.042
	p	0.002	0.052	0.655

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$

Table 3 shows that family background is negatively correlated with "self-deprecating" stigma. In other words, college students with better family background use self-deprecation less frequently. Academic level is positively correlated with the number of using "self-deprecating" stigmatization, but not significantly correlated with the frequency of self-deprecating words. In other words, college students with better academic performance are more likely to use "self-deprecating" stigma words. There is no significant correlation between economic status and the frequency of "self-deprecating" stigmatization.

3.4 Correlation between college students' "self-deprecating" stigmatization and actual behavior

Table.4. Correlation between college students' "self-deprecating" stigma and real actions

		change	Number of friends	Progress in study	Attitude to competition	Life quality
number of using a self-stigmatizing word since entering college	correlation coefficient	0.635*	0.017	0.195*	0.088	0.269**
	p	0.031	0.854	0.036	0.345	0.007
How often do you use self-stigmatizing words	correlation coefficient	0.273*	0.02	0.266*	0.103	0.464*
	p	0.035	0.835	0.041	0.273	0.048

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$

Table 4 shows that college students' "self-deprecating" stigmatization is positively correlated with their changes. In other words, the more frequently college students use "self-deprecating" stigmatization words, the more likely they are to change their lives. There is no significant correlation between "self-deprecating" stigma and the number of friends. College students' "self-deprecating" stigma is positively correlated with their academic progress. In other words, the more frequently college students use self-deprecating words, the greater their academic progress will be. College students' "self-deprecating" stigma is positively correlated with their quality of life. In other words, the more frequently students use "self-deprecating" stigma words, the more likely they are to have a high-quality life. In the investigation of the action changes made after the specific stigma of college students, the changes made by college students are found and shown in Figure 1. College students work harder, study harder, and live a more regular life.
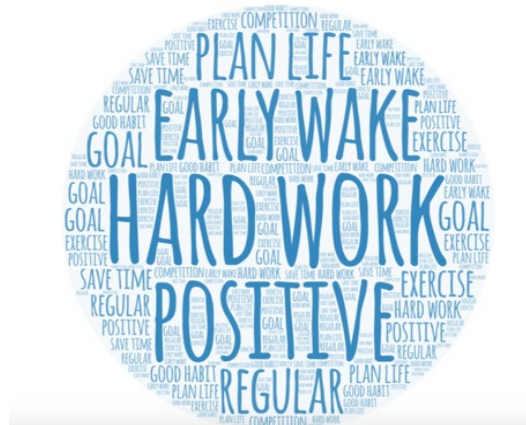

Figure 1. Changing actions of college students after "self-deprecating" stigma

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