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## The Characteristics of Self-Acceptance among College Students and the Main Demographic Factors

BY

Hou Yongmei<sup>1\*</sup> Rao Yumin<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology, School of Humanities and Management, Guangdong Medical University, Dongguan, China



### Abstract

**Objective:** To explore the characteristics of self-acceptance of college students, and analyze the impact of major demographic factors. **Method:** A convenient sampling is used to select 987 undergraduates from 2 colleges in Guangdong Province. They are investigated with Self-Acceptance Questionnaire (SAQ) and a self-compiled general personal information questionnaire. **Result:** (1) The total score of SAQ is (40.96±5.91). (2) The results of multiple stepwise linear regression analysis show that the total score of SAQ is positively correlated with 3 factors such as gender, grade and major category, while the following 6 factors like school category, class ranking of academic performance, family economic status, father's occupation, mother's occupation, and love experience, are negatively correlated with the total score of SAQ. **Conclusion:** The self-acceptance of college students is at a moderate level, and the related demographic factors can be summarized into three aspects: personal factors, family factors, and school factors.

**Keywords:** College students; Self-acceptance; Demographic factors

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Corresponding author

Hou Yongmei

## 1. Introduction

Self-acceptance originated from the concept of "acceptance of self" which refers to individuals having their own attitudes and values, having the courage to take responsibility, and being able to accept their own feelings, motivations, shortcomings, and talents instead of distorting and denying them. They refuse to actively seek negative criticism from others, refuse to be self-righteous, and are neither sensitive nor shy [1]. Subsequently, American personality psychologist Gordon Willard Allport defined the concept of self-acceptance. He believed that self-acceptance is an important component of self-awareness, which means that a person is willing to understand, face, and unconditionally accept all of their own characteristics [2]. Cong Zhong further pointed out that self-acceptance is the highest level psychological characteristic of self-esteem, believing that self-esteem is an emotional evaluation of an individual's importance and value, an attitude towards the difference between the ideal self and the actual self, and ultimately manifested as the degree of acceptance of the actual self, that is, self-acceptance [3]. In short, self-acceptance is an individual's recognition and acceptance of all their own characteristics, including body shape, appearance, personality, abilities, and other positive or negative traits, that is, their ability to objectively and

correctly evaluate themselves based on a full understanding of themselves.

Self-acceptance is a positive psychological quality that puts individuals in an advantageous position without being complacent, and in the face of negative evaluations, they are not easily denied or excluded from themselves. Previous studies have found that self-acceptance is a protective factor for social avoidance and distress [3], LGBTQ+(i.e. lesbian, gay, bisexual, and other non-heterosexual) behavior [4, 5], self-objectification [6], negative body image [7], dietary disorders [7], aggressive behavior [8], and positively predicts the development of online and offline identity [9], overall mental health [4], and subjective well-being [10].

Due to the significant importance of self-acceptance for individual physical and mental health, it has increasingly attracted the attention of the academic community. Exploring the current situation and influencing factors of self-acceptance has become our top priority. However, previous research on the influencing factors of self-acceptance has focused on social [8] and psychological [11] factors, while insufficient attention has been paid to demographic factors, which have a wide and profound impact on psychological quality.



Based on the above analysis, this study intends to use a large sample, multicenter questionnaire survey to understand the status of college students' self-acceptance and explore its main influencing factors.

## 2. Objects and Methods

### 2.1 Objects

A convenient sampling is used to select 1150 undergraduates from a medical university and a college of science and engineering in Guangdong Province, and a combination of paper and online questionnaires is used for the survey. A total of 987 valid questionnaires are collected, with an effective rate of 85.83%. Among them, there are 452 males and 535 females; 245 freshmen, 238 sophomores, 258 juniors, and 246 seniors; 262 in humanities, 270 in science, 263 in medicine, and 192 in sports and arts; 84 students have excellent academic performance, 274 students have good grades, 558 students have average grades, 55 students have poor grades, and 15 students have very poor grades; 531 from rural areas, 280 from urban areas, and 176 from cities; 805 only children and 182 non only children; 16 from rich families, 132 from well-off families, 719 from average families, 100 from financially disadvantaged families, and 20 from impoverished families; 308 are currently in love, 283 have been in love before, and 396 have never been in love; 90 fathers are employees in government agencies and public institutions, 145 employees in enterprises; 376 individual entrepreneurs, 219 farmers, 25 unemployed, and 132 self-employed individuals; 60 mothers are employees in government agencies and public institutions, 163 employees in enterprises; 291 individual entrepreneurs, 208 farmers, 113 unemployed, and 152 freelancers.

### 2.2 Tools

#### 2.2.1 Self-Acceptance Scale, SAQ

Compiled by Cong Zhong et al. (1999) [12], there are 16 items divided into two dimensions: self-acceptance (SA) and self-evaluation (SE). The Likert 4-point scoring method is used to score from 1 to 4 points corresponding to "very similar" to "very different". The higher the total score, the higher the level of self-acceptance. In this study, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient of the total scale is 0.854, and the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients of two dimensions are 0.763 and 0.802, respectively.

#### 2.2.2 A self-compiled personal general information questionnaire

It includes 13 items, namely gender, grade, origin, only child or not, school category, major category, class ranking of academic performance, family economic status, father's occupation, father's education level, mother's occupation, mother's education level, and love experience.

### 2.3 Data processing

SPSS 20.0 is used to analyze the valid data. The average score and standard deviation of each scale are calculated by descriptive statistics; independent sample t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) are used to analyze the inter- group differences.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 The general status of self-acceptance among college students

The total average score and average scores of 2 dimensions of SAQ in this group are above the lower limit of 2.0 for moderate scores and below the lower limit of 2.8 for high scores, indicating a moderate level.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics of SAQ scores (n=987)**

	Min	Max	Mean of dimension	SD of dimension	Mean of item	SD of item
SE	10	29	20.16	3.54	2.52	0.46
SA	11	31	20.78	3.49	2.60	0.45
SAQ	24	62	40.96	5.91	2.56	0.37

### 2.2 Influencing factors of self-acceptance among college students

#### 2.2.1 Variable assignment

First, the possible situations (alternative answers) of the demographic classification variables that may affect the total score of SAQ are assigned, and the results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Variable Assignment**

Item	Options and Assignments
1. Gender	0=female, 1=male
2. Grade	0=freshman, 1=sophomore, 2=junior, 3=senior
3. Origin	0=rural, 1=town, 2=city
4. Are you an only child?	0=yes, 1=no
5. School Category	0=first class, 1=second class, 2=third class
6. Professional categories	0=humanity, 1=medicine, 2=science, 3=art and

	sports
7. Class ranking for grades	0=excellent, 1=good, 2=average, 3=poor, 4=very poor
8. Family economic status	0=affluent, 1=well-off, 2=moderate, 3=financially disadvantaged, 4=impoverished
9. Father's occupation	0=employees of government agencies and institutions, 1=employees of enterprises, 2=individuals Industrial and commercial workers, 3=farmers, 4=unemployed, 5=freelancers
10. Father's education	0=below elementary school, 1=junior high school, 2=high school or vocational school, 3=college, 4=undergraduate, 5=graduate or above
11. Mother's occupation	0=employees of government agencies and institutions, 1=employees of enterprises, 2=individuals Industrial and commercial workers, 3=farmers, 4=unemployed, 5=freelancers
10. Mother's education	0=below elementary school, 1=junior high school, 2=high school or vocational school, 3=college, 4=undergraduate, 5=graduate or above
13. Love experience	0=currently in love, 1=once in love, 2=never in love

**2.2.2 Multiple linear regression analysis of factors related to self-acceptance among college students**

Taking the total score of SAQ as the dependent variable and the 13 demographic variables mentioned above as independent variables, the multiple linear stepwise regression analysis is carried out within a 95% confidence interval, and the results are shown in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3, three factors including gender, grade, and major category positively predict the total score of SAQ ( $\beta= 0.176$  to  $0.340$ , all  $P<0.10$ ); while other six factors, including school category, class ranking of grades, family economic status, father's occupation, mother's occupation, and love experience, negatively predict the SAQ total score ( $\beta=- 0.154$  to  $-0.492$ , all  $P<0.10$ ).

**Table 2. Multiple linear stepwise regression analysis of factors related to SAQ total score**

Factor	B	SE	$\beta$	t	P	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sub>adj</sub> <sup>2</sup>
Constant	2.271	0.184		12.360	<0.001	0.417	0.421
Gender	0.247	0.069		0.256	4.934	<0.001	
Grade	0.185	0.034		0.176	6.552	<0.001	
Major category	0.381	0.092		0.340	9.124	<0.001	
School category	-0.294	0.073		-0.319	-5.022	<0.001	
Class ranking of grades	-0.487	0.085		-0.492	-2.235	0.025	
Family economic status	-4.495	0.098		-0.399	-8.158	<0.001	
Father's occupation	-0.277	0.060		-0.218	-2.168	0.030	
Mother's occupation	-0.164	0.037		-0.154	-5.155	<0.001	
Love experience	-0.462	0.095		-0.435	-3.738	<0.001	

**4. Discussion**

The SAQ total score of this group is (40.96±5.91), with moderate self-acceptance, consistent with the research results of Zhang Xiaozhou et al [11] and Zhang Zixuan [13], indicating that college students generally have a moderate level of self-acceptance.

The self-acceptance of male students in this group is significantly higher than that of female students, consistent with the results of previous literature [13], indicating that gender culture has a profound impact on the psychological quality of college students.

Due to the influence of the concept of male superiority and female inferiority, women have been more discriminated against by society since childhood. They need to face more and greater difficulties in daily life [14], education [15], further education [16], employment [17], career development [18], and other aspects. Even in all aspects of appearance, such as facial shape, height, figure, skin color, proportion and shape of facial features, meticulous and strict requirements are put forward [19]. Many of these requirements, such as "golden ratio melon seed face" and "tall and thin body with low BMI," are unattainable for the vast



majority of women. Therefore, facing high screening standards and ubiquitous gender discrimination, girls are prone to self-doubt and self-denial [20], leading to low self-acceptance.

This study finds that grade positively predicts the self-acceptance of college students, meaning that self-acceptance increases with grade, which is inconsistent with the research results of Zhang Xiaozhou et al. [11] and Li Xiafei [21]. It may be due to different sampling methods. The results of this study suggest that social practice and self-awareness abilities can promote the development of self-acceptance among college students. Freshmen are in a critical transition stage from high school to university, and need to complete sociocultural adaptation as well as academic adaptation [22]. Sociocultural adaptation refers to the interaction between students, classmates, teachers, and other relevant personnel; Academic adaptation is manifested in the student's academic performance and academic growth. The former is the external manifestation of gains, while the latter is the internalized gains, which is the student's recognition of the academic norms of the school [22]. The adaptation of new students will have a profound impact on their subsequent academic development and mental health [23]. Some freshmen are unable to successfully adapt to the above two aspects in a short period of time, resulting in a decrease in self-efficacy [24], damaged self-esteem [24], and low levels of self-acceptance. After freshman year, students have significantly improved their level of adaptation to university learning and lifestyle, enhanced their self-efficacy and self-esteem, and improved their level of self-acceptance. At the same time, due to the improvement of self-awareness ability, active participation in social practice activities such as clubs and part-time jobs, students can objectively understand their strengths and weaknesses, promote strengths and avoid weaknesses, and learn from the strengths of others to make up for their weaknesses. This gradually improves their various qualities, makes them more satisfied with their performance, and improves their self-acceptance.

The school category, major type, and class ranking of grades independently predict the level of self-acceptance of college students, due to the internalization effect of "meta-stereotypes" [25]. The evaluation of others is a reference for self-acceptance. For a long time, people have been accustomed to evaluating the learning ability and intelligence of college students based on class rankings of school categories, major types, and academic performance. Due to the role of "meta-stereotypes" [25], these evaluation results will lead to consistent evaluations of all aspects of college students. Generally speaking, people subconsciously believe that students from first tier schools are smarter, more capable, and have better moral character than students from second tier schools or third tier schools; Students majoring in sports and arts are the cutest, followed by science students, medical students, and humanities students are the least adorable; The better the grades, the smarter, the more capable, and the better the character. These evaluations are gradually internalized by college students as self-evaluation, leading to a certain degree of self-acceptance.

The negative prediction of father's occupation and mother's occupation on college students' self-acceptance suggests that the

social status of parents has an impact on the formation of children's psychological qualities. The reason lies in the internalization effect of "meta-stereotypes" [25] and "halo effect" [1]. The social status of employees in government agencies, enterprises, individual businesses, farmers, unemployed individuals, and freelancers decreases in sequence. People tend to assume that the intelligence, abilities, and moral standards of these six types of personnel also decrease in sequence. Due to the "halo effect" (or "loving the house and the crow") [1], people unconsciously believe that the intelligence, ability, and moral level of the children of these six types of individuals also decrease in sequence. This kind of evaluation will gradually internalize into the self-evaluation of children, causing them to develop corresponding levels of self-acceptance.

The negative prediction of family economic status for college students' self-acceptance may have two reasons. One is the mediating role of self-esteem. A good family economic situation can enhance an individual's sense of self-esteem [26], comprehensively improve their self-evaluation, and thus enhance their self-acceptance. The second is also the internalization effect of "meta-stereotypes" [25], where people believe that the better the family's economic situation, the higher their social status, and the better their intelligence, abilities, and moral standards. This kind of evaluation will gradually be internalized into individual self-evaluation, causing them to develop corresponding levels of self-acceptance.

The negative prediction of love experience indicates a decrease in the level of self-acceptance among college students, who are currently in love, have been in love, and have never been in love. Love is a deep form of interpersonal communication, and it is also the closest and most comprehensive interpersonal comparison. Both parties in love will compare each other and their situations with other couples, making their strengths and weaknesses more clear. They will also remind each other through various means such as language explanation and facial expressions. As the other party is an important person, their evaluations and suggestions are naturally easily accepted by college students and serve as a basis for correcting themselves. In this way, interpersonal comparison in love can cultivate the rational thinking ability of college students, enabling them to objectively view their own and others' strengths and weaknesses, recognize that "People are not saints, who can make mistakes", and thus more rationally and openly accept their own strengths and weaknesses. At the same time, the supervision and assistance of lovers enable college students to constantly improve themselves, gradually enhance their personal qualities, and their level of self-acceptance is also higher. Although heartbroken individuals lack interpersonal comparison and reminders and supervision from their loved ones, the rational thinking ability they acquire during love can still enable them to have a certain level of self-acceptance. On the contrary, those who have never been in love not only lack interpersonal comparison and reminders and supervision from their partners, but also lack social experience and rational thinking ability, which is a psychological age characteristic of college students [27]. However, they do not

have sufficient rational thinking ability, fail to objectively view their own and others' strengths and weaknesses, and accept themselves rationally and calmly. They often exaggerate their own shortcomings and ignore the shortcomings of others, resulting in a lower level of self-acceptance.

## 5. Conclusion

This study conducted a preliminary exploration of the current status and main demographic factors of college students' self-acceptance, and the following conclusions were drawn: college students' self-acceptance is at a moderate level, and there is still a lot of room for improvement. The fundamental reason lies in whether their self-awareness is correct. There are many demographic factors that affect the self-acceptance of college students, which can be summarized into three aspects: personal factors such as gender, grade, origin and experience, family factors such as family economic status, parental occupation), and school factors such as school category, major category, class ranking of grades.

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