



Emotional State and Emotional Regulation Habits in Chinese University Students with Strong or Weak Psychological Suzhi

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Abstract

Objective: To explore the differences in emotional state characteristics and emotional regulation habits among college students with different psychological suzhi. **Methods:** Firstly, 1125 Chinese college students were tested by the Concise college student psychological suzhi scale (mental health version), and the top 5% and the last 5% of the subjects were selected out. They were divided into Strong psychological suzhi group and Weak psychological suzhi group. Complete emotion report form and emotional regulation habits questionnaire. **Results:** 1) The Strong psychological suzhi group showed more positive emotions, and the Weak psychological suzhi group showed more negative emotions. 2) On the whole, the group with Strong psychological suzhi is more inclined to adopt the emotion regulation habit of cognitive reappraisal, while the group with Weak psychological suzhi is more inclined to adopt the emotional regulation habit of cognitive attention. 3) In terms of negative emotion regulation, the group with Weak psychological suzhi tends to the emotional regulation habit of natural regulation (*i.e.*, unregulated) and cognition attention; while the group with Strong psychological suzhi tends to adopt cognitive reappraisal. 4) In terms of positive emotion regulation, the score of natural regulation in the group with Strong psychological suzhi is significantly higher than that in the group with Weak psychological suzhi. **Conclusion:** There are significant differences in the emotional states of college students with strong and Weak psychological suzhi. The differences may be due to the differences in their emotional regulation habits. Cultivating the emotional regulation habits of people with Weak psychological suzhi is of great significance in maintaining emotional health.

Subject Areas

Education, Psychology

*The first two authors contributed equally to this work and are co-first authors.

Keywords

College Students, Psychological Suzhi, Emotional Regulation Strategies, Emotion Regulation Habits, Emotional State

1. Introduction

Emotional health is an important part of the mental health of college students. Psychological suzhi is a key factor which affects mental health [1]. Therefore, this study examines the emotional states of college students with different psychological suzhi, and clarifies the differences in emotional regulation habits among college students with different psychological suzhi. To explore the influence of psychological suzhi on the emotional state and emotional regulation habits of contemporary college students, so as to provide an empirical basis for psychological health education based on psychological suzhi.

1.1. Psychological Suzhi

Psychological suzhi is a local academic concept proposed in China's suzhi education [2], also known as psychological quality or mental quality. *Handbook of Positive Psychology in Schools* (2nd) regards it as a positive psychological exploration with Chinese characteristics [3]. For more than two decades, many experts and scholars have conducted a lot of exploratory research on psychological suzhi [4]. Among them, Zhang Dajun's psychological suzhi research team's research on psychological suzhi structure and assessment tools has a long and systematic research and has been recognized by the international academic community [5].

Zhang Dajun's psychological suzhi research team believes that psychological suzhi is based on physiological conditions, internalizing what is obtained externally into stable, basic, derivative, and closely related to human adaptation-development-creation behavior. It consists of three dimensions: cognitive factor, personality factor and adaptive factor [6]. Among them, cognitive quality refers to the characteristics of individuals in the cognitive process, and personality quality refers to the personality characteristics of individuals in their daily learning and living. They are also the content elements of psychological suzhi. Adaptability (also known as adaptive ability) is an individual's habitual behavior tendency formed through interaction with specific contextual fields based on the two content elements of cognitive quality and personality quality, which are functional elements of psychological suzhi [7]. Zhang Dajun's psychological suzhi research team conducted a questionnaire survey and factor analysis on 2548 college students from 13 universities during 2002 [8]. The analysis revealed that the structure of university students' psychological suzhi is a multi-dimensional, multi-level structure model, which consists of three basic dimensions, 10 factors and 26 components [9]. Ten years later, the "college student

psychological suzhi scale” was further revised. The revised version consisted of 118 items, and college students from five regions of China were selected for investigation. It is reaffirmed that mental quality is composed of three basic dimensions: cognitive quality, personality quality, and adaptability [10]. Next, on the basis of existing research, in 2017, we explored typical, key core psychological suzhi factors that are closely related to mental health, and compiled a Concise college student psychological suzhi scale(mental health version) (CSPS-B-MH) [11]. The scale includes three dimensions of cognitive quality, personal quality and adaptive ability, and specific 12 factors, each of which consists of 3 items. Among them, the cognitive quality dimension includes three factors: metacognition, openness, and purpose; the personality quality dimension includes three factors: self-confidence, self-control, and optimism; the adaptive capacity dimension includes social adaptability, professional adaptability, learning adaptability, physiological adaptability, emotional adaptability, and interpersonal adaptability.

1.2. The Relationship between College Students’ Psychological Suzhi and Emotional State

As a relatively stable psychological quality system, psychological suzhi belongs to the individual’s psychological constitution, and there is a relationship between “base” and “standard” with mental health [7] [12]. The theory of the relationship model between psychological suzhi and mental health believes that psychological suzhi is the key factor affecting mental health, and training psychological suzhi is the key to breaking the vicious circle of adolescent psychological behavior problems [1] [12] [13].

Emotional health is an important part of college students’ mental health, which can be divided into positive emotion and negative emotion. Negative emotions and positive emotions have evolutionary adaptation significance to individuals. Negative emotions help people better respond to threats, while positive emotions have adaptive functions that can enhance people’s self-adaptation behavior, such as diet, sexual behavior, social activities, etc. [14] Some researchers have found that there are significant differences in positive/negative emotions and emotional elasticity among strong and Weak psychological suzhi middle school students. Individuals with Strong psychological suzhi have better positive emotional ability and emotional recovery ability, and have more positive emotions [15]. Therefore, based on this study, hypothesis 1: College students with Strong psychological suzhi have better emotional states than those with Weak psychological suzhi, that is, they have more positive emotions and less negative emotions.

1.3. The Relationship between College Students’ Psychological Suzhi and Emotion Regulation Habits

Emotional regulation strategies refer to planned and intentional efforts and practices performed by individuals in order to achieve the purpose of emotional

regulation. According to Gross, cognitive reappraisal and expression suppression are the two most commonly used and most valuable strategies for reducing emotional responses [16]. Among them, cognitive reappraisal refers to changing the understanding of emotional events and changing the individual's understanding of the meaning of emotional events; expressive suppression refers to inhibiting the emotional expression behavior that is about to occur or is happening [17]. Dong and Zhang (2015) found that there was a significant positive correlation between the total score of psychological suzhi and scores of various dimensions of middle school students and the cognitive reappraisal strategy for emotional regulation [18]. Middle school students with Strong psychological suzhi are more inclined to cognitive reappraisal strategies, which indicates that well-adapted individuals will define the meaning of life events and make explanations that are beneficial to their development in a more positive cognitive manner [19]. The researchers also found that both cognitive reappraisal strategies and acceptance strategies can effectively reduce college student interview anxiety; the effect of expressive suppression strategies on interview anxiety is relatively insignificant, and it enhances the anxiety experience after the interview to some extent [19].

Huang (2008) found that unhealthy people have more negative emotions and strong depression and anxiety. In regulating habits, the main characteristic is a strong evaluation of negative emotions; and positive emotions attention and revealing can significantly predict physical and mental health [20]. Therefore, this study believes that the emotional differences of people with strong and Weak psychological suzhi may be due to the differences in their emotional regulation habits. Hypothesis 2: College students with Strong psychological suzhi have healthier emotion regulation habits than those with Weak psychological suzhi, that is, they are more likely to use cognitive reappraisal habits.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The participants were 1152 students recruited from Jiangxi Normal University, including 316 males and 836 females, with an average age of 19.74; 691 freshmen, 242 sophomores, 187 juniors and 32 seniors; 447 students in liberal arts, 408 in science, 257 in engineering and 40 in arts; 473 came from cities and towns and 673 from rural areas. The subjects were sorted according to their psychological suzhi scores, and the top 5% and the last 5% were selected, mainly to highlight the difference between the two psychological suzhi group, for a total of 115 people. A text message was sent to these subjects, inviting them to conduct further experiments in the laboratory. Then, they were invited to complete the emotion report form and emotion regulation habit questionnaire. Finally, a total of 76 effective subjects were obtained. Among them, the Strong psychological suzhi group was 36 ($M = 137.86$, $SD = 6.41$); the Weak psychological suzhi group was 40 ($M = 102.95$, $SD = 6.27$); 15 males, 61 females; 48 freshmen, 18

sophomores, 9 seniors and 1 juniors ($M = 19.42$, $SD = 1.11$).

2.2. Measurement Instruments

2.2.1. Concise College Student Psychological Suzhi Scale (Mental Health Version)

This scale is the latest revised version of Wang *et al.* (2017), which is used to measure the psychological suzhi related to mental health of college students [11]. The questionnaire includes three dimensions: cognition, personality and adaptability, with a total of 36 items, using the Likert five-point score standard, from “very inconsistent” to “very consistent”. Items 10, 13, 15, 18, 20, 22, 25, 27 and 31 are reverse scores. The higher the total score, the better the psychological suzhi [11].

2.2.2. Emotional Regulation Habits Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed by Wang (2006), a total of 50 items, using the Likert five-point rating scale [21]. “1” means “never happened” and “5” means “always happen”. It measures five daily emotion regulation strategies, including natural regulation (non-regulation) (10 items, for example, “when I am happy, I do not consciously adjust or hide this feeling, let it happen naturally” and “when I was shy, I will not adjust or disguise this emotion and let it happen naturally”), cognitive reappraisal (10 items, for example, “under certain circumstances, in order to avoid being too happy, I will change my point of view, and re-recognize these things from a more objective and neutral point of view” and “if something makes me angry, I will try to change my mind and re-recognize it from an objective and neutral point of view. So as not to be too angry”), cognitive attention (10 items, example “when I encounter a boring thing or person, I will immerse myself in it, can’t help thinking about it, pay attention to the details” and “when I feel happy, I will immerse myself in it. Keep thinking about the people or things that make me happy”), expression suppression (10 items, example “when I feel shy, I try to hide myself. Do not want others to know that I am shy” and “when I am happy, if I consider the requirements of the occasion at that time, I will restrain and hide my expression and try not to let others know that I am happy”), expression revealing (10 items, for example, “if I feel guilty, I will communicate with others, tell others my guilt, vent this feeling heartily” and “when I am happy, I will be jubilant and cheerful. Always express this happy feeling in words and deeds”). Each emotion regulation habit can be further divided into positive and negative emotion regulation habits, such as the natural regulation of positive emotion and negative emotion [21].

2.2.3. Positive and Negative Affect Scale

The Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) was used to measure the subjective emotional experience of the subjects [22]. After the screening of the pre-experiment, 13 emotional words were selected to be closer to the emotions needed in the experiment. They are: interested, upset, disgusted, restless, encouraged, sad, happy, scared (afraid), calm, nervous, shy, angry and disgusted.

The subjects chose the score after each emotional word, ranging from “0” (not feeling the emotion at all) to “5” (feeling the maximum amount of the emotion).

2.3. Procedure

A total of 1200 questionnaires were distributed in this trial, and 1152 data were effectively recovered, with a recovery rate of 96.00%. The subjects were sorted by their psychological suzhi scores, and the top 5% and the last 5% of the subjects were screened out, for a total of 115 people. A text message was sent to these subjects, inviting them to conduct further experiments in the laboratory, and a total of 76 subjects received the information and came to do the experiments. Among them, 36 were in the Strong psychological suzhi group and 40 were in the Weak psychological suzhi group. After completing the emotional regulation habits questionnaire, the subjects sat down in front of the computer and relaxed for 3 minutes according to the instructions on the screen. After that, the subjects filled out an emotion report form.

2.4. Data Analysis

Statistical analysis using SPSS 21.

3. Results

3.1. Emotional Status of College Students with Different Psychological Suzhi

An independent sample T test is shown in **Table 1**. In the data analysis of the

Table 1. Influence of different psychological suzhi on emotional state.

Dependent variable	Strong psychological suzhi group		Weak psychological suzhi group		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Cohen's d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Interest	3.61	0.838	3.00	1.086	1.843	0.008**	0.629
Upset	2.06	0.826	2.68	0.971	-2.297	0.004**	-0.688
Pride	2.92	0.692	2.10	0.744	3.364	0.000***	1.141
Restless	1.86	0.867	2.73	0.933	-3.144	0.000***	-0.966
Much encouraged	3.25	0.732	2.45	0.932	3.416	0.000***	0.955
Sad	1.72	0.815	2.23	0.891	-1.970	0.013*	-0.597
Happy	3.64	0.543	3.00	0.847	3.059	0.000***	0.899
Fear	1.61	0.766	2.00	0.816	-0.655	0.036*	-0.493
Calm	3.42	0.692	3.15	0.864	2.202	0.145	0.345
Tension	2.06	0.860	2.75	0.927	-3.420	0.001***	-0.772
Shy	1.81	0.786	2.40	1.081	-2.081	0.008**	-0.624
Anger	1.69	0.749	1.95	1.061	-2.989	0.234	-0.283
Disgust	1.72	0.659	2.23	1.121	-2.407	0.210	-0.555
Positive emotion	16.83	1.935	13.70	2.972	5.381	0.000***	1.248
Negative emotion	14.53	4.539	18.95	5.349	-3.864	0.000***	-0.891

effect of different psychological suzhi on emotional state, we can find that there are three types of emotional states (calm, anger, and disgust) that are not significant; regardless of positive emotions State or negative emotional state, has a very significant relationship with the level of psychological suzhi. On the whole, the level of psychological suzhi affects emotional state to a large extent. Among them, the Strong psychological suzhi group showed more interest ($t = 1.843, p < 0.01$), pride ($t = 3.364, p < 0.001$), encouraged ($t = 3.416, p < 0.001$), and happy ($t = 3.059, p < 0.001$) and other positive emotions. Compared with the Strong psychological suzhi group, the Weak psychological suzhi group showed significantly more upset ($t = -2.297, p < 0.01$) and restless ($t = -3.144, p < 0.001$), sadness ($t = -1.97, p < 0.05$), fear ($t = -0.655, p < 0.05$), tension ($t = -3.420, p < 0.01$), shyness ($t = -2.081, p < 0.01$) Wait for negative emotions.

3.2. Emotion Regulation Strategies of College Students with Different Psychological Suzhi

On the whole, the score of cognitive reappraisal in the group with Strong psychological suzhi was significantly higher than that in the group with Weak psychological suzhi ($t = 3.389, p < 0.001$), and the score of cognitive attention in the group with Weak psychological suzhi was significantly higher than that in the group with Strong psychological suzhi ($t = 5.366, p < 0.05$).

Regarding the regulation of negative emotions, the scores of cognitive reappraisal in the group with Strong psychological suzhi are significantly higher than those in the group with Weak psychological suzhi ($t = 3.969, p < 0.001$), the scores of cognitive attention in the group with Weak psychological suzhi are significantly higher than those in the group with Strong psychological suzhi ($t = -6.405, p < 0.001$), and the scores of natural regulation in the group with Weak psychological suzhi are significantly higher than those in the group with Strong psychological suzhi ($t = -2.892, p < 0.01$).

Regarding the regulation of positive emotions, the natural regulation score of the group with Strong psychological suzhi is significantly higher than the group with Weak psychological suzhi ($t = 2.239, p < 0.05$).

That is to say, in terms of overall emotional regulation, high groups are more likely to reappraisal, while weak group are more likely to attention. For negative emotions, the weak group tends to be natural regulation (*i.e.*, unregulated) and attention. The high group is more accustomed to reappraisal than the weak group. For positive emotions, there are significant differences between the two groups only in natural regulation, and high groups are more inclined to natural regulation their positive emotions (Table 2).

4. Discussion

There are significant differences in the emotional status and emotional regulation habits among the strong and Weak psychological suzhi groups. Consistent with the research hypothesis, in the natural environment without experimental treatment, the strong-psychological suzhi group has more positive emotions

Table 2. Differences in emotion regulation strategies of college students with different psychological suzhi.

Dependent variable	Strong psychological suzhi group		Weak psychological suzhi group		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Cohen's d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Expressive revealing	28.83	5.218	29.95	5.425	-0.912	0.365	-0.210
Expressive suppression	27.89	5.120	29.70	5.095	-1.544	0.127	-0.354
Cogitative reappraisal	31.50	4.385	28.05	4.472	3.389	0.001***	0.779
Cognitive attention	27.22	4.330	33.08	5.141	-5.336	0.000***	-1.233
Natural regulation	27.11	4.509	29.20	4.962	-1.913	0.060	-0.441
Expressive revealing of positive emotions	7.47	1.699	7.15	1.331	0.925	0.358	0.210
Expressive suppression of positive emotions	5.03	1.276	5.23	1.271	-0.674	0.502	-0.157
Cognitive reappraisal of positive emotions	5.72	1.614	5.55	1.319	0.511	0.611	0.115
Cognitive attention of positive emotions	7.92	1.251	7.45	1.239	1.632	0.107	0.378
Natural regulation of positive emotions	7.86	1.437	7.15	1.331	2.239	0.028*	0.513
Expressive revealing of negative emotions	21.36	4.230	22.80	4.530	-1.426	0.158	-0.329
Expressive suppression of negative emotions	22.86	4.422	24.48	4.613	-1.553	0.125	-0.359
Cognitive reappraisal of negative emotions	25.78	3.634	22.50	3.559	3.969	0.000***	0.912
Cognitive attention of negative emotions	19.31	3.963	25.63	4.572	-6.405	0.000***	-1.477
Natural regulation of negative emotions	19.25	3.967	22.05	4.426	-2.892	0.005**	-0.666

than the weak-psychological suzhi group; in terms of overall emotional regulation, the strong-psychological suzhi group tends to positive emotional regulation habits, that is, reappraisal, while the weak-psychological suzhi group tends to pay more attention to emotions. Based on the above results, this study will discuss the emotional differences between strong and weak psychological quality groups from two aspects: emotional state and emotional regulation habits.

4.1. Emotional State of Strong and Weak Psychological Suzhi Groups

The positive emotion of the Strong psychological suzhi group was significantly higher than that of the weak group, showing more interest, more pride, and feeling that they were encouraged and happier. The Weak psychological suzhi group was significantly higher in negative emotions than the strong group,

showing more upset, more restless, more sad, more fearful, more nervous, and more shy. This result validates hypothesis 1. College students with Strong psychological suzhi have more positive emotions than those with Weak psychological suzhi, and college students with Weak psychological suzhi have more negative emotions than those with Strong psychological suzhi. This study is consistent with the findings of Zhang *et al.* (2015) [15]. People with Strong psychological suzhi experience more positive emotions and less negative emotions, and provide evidence for the previous study of college students. It can be seen that college students with Strong psychological suzhi show more confident and optimistic qualities, and are more adaptable than college students with Weak psychological suzhi.

4.2. Emotional Regulation Habits of Strong and Weak Psychological Suzhi Groups

In terms of overall emotional regulation, strong groups tend to use positive strategies, that is, reappraisal, while weak groups tend to focus on emotions. Here we verify the research of Dong and Zhang (2015) [18]. At the same time, this result also verifies Hypothesis 2. College students with Strong psychological suzhi have healthier emotional regulation habits than college students with Weak psychological suzhi.

For negative emotions, the weak group tend to be naturally regulated (ie, unregulated), and value emotions. The strong group is more accustomed to reappraisal than the weak group. For positive emotions, there are significant differences between the two groups only in natural regulation, and strong group are more inclined to naturally regulate their positive emotions. It can be seen that when dealing with negative emotions, the strong-psychological suzhi group is better at using positive strategies to regulate emotions, while the weak-psychological suzhi group attaches importance to emotions or adopts natural and unregulated methods that only make emotions more intense. Individuals with Strong psychological suzhi have better adaptability. They will use positive strategies to deal with events in life, adjust their emotions in time, and make explanations in their favor.

In the previous research on psychological suzhi, there is no analysis and research on the regulation habits of positive and negative emotions. After the proof and discovery of this study, future studies can further explore whether emotional regulation habits with different psychological suzhi are the cause of different emotional states. At the same time, in the direction of mental health education, we can focus on training and then training the students 'emotional regulation habits, so as to enhance students' psychological suzhi.

5. Value of Research and Expectations

Some studies have found that psychological suzhi affects mental health indicators such as emotional health. [14] [15] This study found that the influence of psychological suzhi on mental health indicators such as emotional health may be

mainly through the influence of their emotional regulation strategies and then affect mental health, deepening and enriching our understanding of the mechanism of psychological suzhi on mental health. Due to the relative stability of psychological suzhi and its long training time, future research can be based on the results of this study to interfere with individual emotional regulation to improve mental health.

In terms of limitations, the study is only a cross-sectional study and can't reveal the causal relationship, and there is no clear experiment to show that emotion regulation strategies affect the emotional state of college students. Experimental verification can be designed later. In the follow-up experiments, we can explore the emotional state of college students with different psychological suzhi in different situations, and explore the mechanism of psychological suzhi affecting the emotional state of college students, so as to train college students to have a good emotional state. Secondly, the subjects adopt the voluntary principle, which does not meet the randomization standard, and the number of subjects in strong and weak groups is different.

6. Conclusion

There are significant differences in the emotional states of college students with strong and Weak psychological suzhi. The differences may be due to the differences in their emotional regulation habits. Cultivating the emotional regulation habits of people with Weak psychological suzhi is of great significance in maintaining emotional health.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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