Title: Guilt, Self-Esteem, Coping Strategies and Stress in College Students

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Study and research chronic diseases
Participate in gathering data for Project Cope, which is focused on college students’ stressors
Stress is what wears down the body, as a student myself I decided to use data I could access to better understand what variables could associate with changes in stress.

- Anna, a student at UNT
- Academic, social and family pressures
- Stressed
- Lower self-esteem, feels guilt
- Engages in maladaptive behavior

Stress is what wears down the body, as a student myself I decided to use data I could access to better understand what variables could associate with changes in stress.
Introduction

Our cross-sectional, correlational study focused on guilt, self-esteem and three maladaptive subscales in a single model predicting perceived stress in college students. Using Lazarus and Folkman’s Stress-Coping model (1984) as a framework, I hypothesize that higher levels of hostile guilt and Brief Cope’s three subscales of disengagement, substance, distraction and lower self-esteem will account for a significant portion of the variance in perceived stress in students.

**Outcome Variable:** College student stress.

**Predictor Variables:** Self-esteem, guilt and maladaptive coping skills; disengagement, substance use and self-distraction.

- **Disengagement:** to release oneself from obligations.
- **Substance use:** to abuse drugs.
- **Self-Distraction:** to avoid focus on one’s self and one’s own problems.
- **Stress:** wearing down of the body
1. Increase in hostile guilt is associated with increase in stress in students.

2. Decrease in self-esteem is associated with increase in stress in students.

3. Increase in maladaptive coping skills such as disengagement, substance abuse, and self-distraction is associated with increase in stress in students.

Hypotheses
Method of Data Collection

Cross-sectional, correlational study. A sample of 317 college students from the University of North Texas was given computer based surveys on a program called Questionnaire Development System. They were given classroom credit for participating.
**Measures**

**Perceived Stress Scale** (Cohen et al., 1983; \( \alpha = .85 \))
“In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly.”
0=never, 4=very often, 14 questions scale asking feelings and thoughts last month.

**Mosher Guilt Inventory** (Mosher, 1998; \( \alpha = .90 \))
“I’m angry at myself.”
0= not at all, 6=extremely true, 114 questions about sentence completion stems.

**Brief Cope** (Carver, 1997, \( \alpha = .90 \))
“I’ve been making fun of the situation.”
1=I haven’t been doing this at all, 4=I’ve been doing this a lot, 28 questions about how one cope’s with stress.

**Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale** (Rosenberg, 1989; \( \alpha = .78 \))
“I wish I could have more respect for myself.”
1=strongly agree, 4=strongly disagree, 6 scales about what describes you.
# Descriptive Data

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<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Range</td>
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<td>Minimum</td>
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<td>Maximum</td>
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<table>
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### Bivariate Statistics

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<td>1. Hostile Guilt</td>
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<td>3. Stress</td>
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<td>4. Disengagement</td>
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<td>-.213**</td>
<td>.373</td>
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<td>5. Substance</td>
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<td>-.182**</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.454**</td>
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<td>6. Distraction</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>.140*</td>
<td>.251**</td>
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</table>

* - p < .05  
** - p < .01  
*** - p < .001
Hierarchical regression analysis explained 33% of variance in perceived stress. (Adj. $R^2=0.33$, $F(7,316) = 18.452$), $p<.001$
Conclusion

1. Increase in guilt is associated with increase in stress. Negatively Correlated and Supported.

2. Decrease in self-esteem is associated with increase in stress. Negatively Correlated and Supported.

3. Increase in maladaptive coping skills such as self-distraction is associated with increase in stress. Positively Correlated and Supported.

Clinical Implications

The research suggests that there are factors that account for a significant portion of the variance in perceived stress in students. Programs focusing on stress prevention amongst students should focus on increasing self-esteem, and avoid self-distraction by motivating them to solve their problems in an encouraging environment. Guilt may decrease stress because it prevents one from deviation.

Further research should be done in order to identify other factors that may contribute to an increase in stress and further research as to why guilt decreases stress.
Limitations

• **Self-Report Bias:** Students provided data, social desirability.

• **Generalizability:** Sample focused on college students all from one university.

• **Cross-sectional, correlational design:** can only make associations, not causality.
References


Acknowledgements

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