

Understanding Adolescent Transgressions: Internal Voices and External Factors

---- an Example of the Problem of e-Cigarettes among Youth in Shanghai

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Abstract: In recent years, e-cigarette smoking among adolescent groups has become a more focal issue in society. This paper uses socialization theory and social learning theory as the theoretical basis to construct an analytical framework combining internal and external factors. Taking the issue of e-cigarettes among adolescents in Shanghai as an example, the study finds that family and school education have established a cognitive concept for adolescent groups against e-cigarette smoking, but the dissemination of media and advertising information at the social level has a subtle negative impact on them, coupled with the belief among peer groups that e-cigarette smoking is a trend-chasing and individualized manifestation that can easily cause individuals to follow and learn from each other.

1. Introduction

In recent years, negative reports about smoking in the youth population have gradually increased, with new types of cigarettes represented by e-cigarettes being highly sought after by the youth population. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that more than 27.1% of high school students and about 7.2% of middle school students across the United States used tobacco products in 2018, with e-cigarettes (20.8%) becoming a common tobacco product for high school students for the fifth consecutive year, and the percentage of e-cigarette use rose from 20% in 2017 to 28% in 2018[1]. The problem of e-cigarettes actually epitomizes the transgressive behavior of youth and has a growing trend, which has become a serious social problem of common concern worldwide.

The academic field has produced fruitful findings in the study of adolescent transgressive behavior. Many studies have attempted to explore the reasons for the high incidence of adolescent transgressions, and these studies generally consider as that peer group influence is a key factor in causing transgressions. Specifically, the influence of peer groups on adolescents has two aspects. On the one hand, there are positive effects, as peer groups can help adolescents develop social awareness and learn skilled social skills; on the other hand, there are negative effects, as adolescents are not fully mature in terms of values and moral standards and are prone to deviance at transitional stages of life, and members of peer groups imitate and learn from each other, such as transgressions among peers due to vanity and desire for comparison [2]. In addition, when the opinions or norms of the peer group conflict with the thoughts or behaviors of group members, invisible pressures arise among group members to conform to the group's opinions or norms in order to maintain their relationship with the group, thus creating blind following behaviors that cause social transgressions[3]. Frustration-aggression theory suggested that adolescent groups are prone to transgressive behaviors such as aggression when they experience frustration. Aggression becomes a primitive and pervasive response when individual motivations and behaviors are frustrated. Berkowitz argued that the presence of frustration does not necessarily cause the individual to engage in actual aggression, but only puts the individual in a state of aggression arousal. Whether or not aggression eventually occurs depends on whether or not the environment in which the individual is placed provides him with certain aggression cues[4]. Bandura's social learning theory suggested that the demonstration of adult transgressions will lead adolescents to observe as well as

imitate similar transgressions[5], e.g. violence and criminality are readily available on the internet and adolescents who have not formed their own mature values can easily imitate the characters in the works, which may lead to the occurrence of adolescent transgressions and even to delinquency.

Theoretical research is now more comprehensive and, in a comprehensive manner, focuses on the interpretation of deviant behavior from both internal and external perspectives of adolescent groups, with the external perspective focusing on environmental analysis and the internal perspective on individual analysis. Researchers tend to adopt only a single mainstream theoretical study, and integrated cross-sectional research with multiple theoretical perspectives is still relatively lacking. This paper attempts to use Bandura's social learning theory and socialization theory to construct a comprehensive theoretical explanatory framework, and to use the case of e-cigarettes in Shanghai's youth groups as a case study to reveal the causes of transgressive behavior in youth groups.

2. Theoretical Foundations

From the literature review section, it is clear that the factors that lead to transgressive behavior in adolescent groups are diverse, and it is difficult for a single perspective to effectively explain the causes. In order to explain the problem of e-cigarette smoking among adolescents more comprehensively, this paper uses the following socialization theory and social learning theory as the theoretical basis to construct an analytical framework that combines internal and external factors.

2.1 Socialization Theory

Socialization theory considers the process by which an individual starts as a natural person and grows and develops into a social person. In the social perspective, socialization is the process by which society indoctrinates the individual; in the individual context, socialization is the process by which the individual interacts with other members of society and develops into a member of society that conforms to the rules of society. Society is the environment around the individual and the external factors that enable the individual to change in the process of development.

The process of socialization takes place throughout the life cycle and is defined by the developmental stages of childhood and adolescence as "early socialization", which focuses on the development of social roles in the adolescent group. It is through the vehicles of socialization that the adolescent group acquires the appropriate social roles. Family, school, social environment, and reference groups are considered the four major vehicles of early socialization. The parent-child relationship in the family and the parent's teaching play an important role in children's acquisition of language, emotions, roles, experiences, knowledge, skills and behavioral norms. As adolescents enter the school years, school becomes the most important place for their socialization. Schooling promotes mastery, motivates achievement, and provides students with opportunities for extensive social interaction. The social environment influences the transgressive behavior of adolescent groups in two main ways: on the one hand, the government's lack of regulation of the market structure of social institutions provides space and creates conditions for the emergence of transgressive behavior in adolescent groups; on the other hand, the mass media exerts a subtle influence on adolescent groups in the form of socio-cultural communication, prompting them to imitate and commit transgressive behavior. Reference groups, especially peer groups, are often used by adolescents as a standard of reference for their attitudes, behavior and values, and bad reference groups can set negative examples for adolescents and induce deviant behavior.

In socialization theory, the process of playing social roles is role expectancy, role apprehension, and role practice. Anticipatory socialization is an important stage of social role learning, and if there are contradictions within and outside the role during the role playing process, it can lead to role dissonance and possible abnormal behavior. Adolescence is an important stage of anticipatory socialization in adolescent groups and a social learning process that prepares them for playing future roles, and socialization theory has a long-term indoctrination nature, i.e., the use of adult values to guide adolescents. The assimilation of the adult world leads to the constant influence of the family and greater acceptance of the school and peer group, neglecting the education of the

adolescent subject, leading to a reaction of role ambiguity and role conflict in adolescents during that period.

2.2 Social Learning Theory

In 1952, American psychologist Albert Bandura proposed the social learning theory. This theory looks at the role of observational learning and self-regulation in triggering human behavior and places emphasis on the interaction between human behavior and the environment. Bandura believed it was an exploration of the influence of three factors - the individual's cognition, behavior and environmental factors and their interaction on human behavior.

Bandura emphasized that social learning is actually a learning process formed by four stages: attention, memory, action reproduction, and action retention. The first stage is the attention stage, in which the individual learns the effects of the observation by observing the characteristics of the demonstrator's action itself, and the relationship between the individual and the demonstrator. The second stage is the memory stage, where the demonstrator is no longer present, but the action observed by the individual recurs in cognition, and the individual needs to represent the demonstrated behavior in symbolic form. The third stage is the action-in-present stage, where the individual will translate the symbols and representations into concrete behaviors, actually imitating the previously observed acquired behavior in life. In the fourth stage, after reproducing the behavior, the individual will decide whether or not to reinforce based on self-aware judgments, which include external reinforcement, self-reinforcement, and alternative reinforcement.

Both social learning theory and socialization theory point to the study of adolescent transgression from the perspective of human sociality, emphasizing the process of observational learning, which holds that changes in human behavior are determined neither by individual intrinsic factors alone nor by extrinsic environmental factors alone, but by a combination of the results of their interaction. People create environmental conditions and generate experiences through their behavior, and the created environmental conditions and the experiences that are intrinsic to the individual in turn influence their subsequent behavior. Looking at the e-cigarette behavior of the adolescent population, the transgressive behavior of smoking is also the result of the interaction of multiple factors. Therefore, this paper attempts to use Bandura's social learning theory and socialization theory to construct a comprehensive theoretical explanatory framework that combines external and internal factors to examine the transgressive behavior of the adolescent group in depth.

3. Case Analysis

Research Hypothesis In summary, as two important perspectives in the study of transgressive behavior in adolescent groups, there is an integrative relationship between internal voices and external factors, which has been empirically tested by Western psychologists over a long period of time and has yielded inconsistent findings. In terms of integrative research, Western criminologists have conducted more in-depth empirical studies on separate internal or external factors, in contrast to the paucity of integrative tests based on the Chinese context. In this context, this paper will use first-hand research materials to conduct an integrated study of internal and external factors using e-cigarettes as an example. Specifically, the theoretical hypotheses to be tested in this paper include: first, internal voice and external factors can effectively explain adolescent deviance; second, internal voice and external factors have a significant interaction effect in explaining adolescent deviance.

This paper uses a combination of both questionnaire and participant observation research methods. Specifically, in the four administrative districts of Shanghai, China, we first selected a total of five general secondary schools and bilingual international schools within each district using the simple random method; after that, in the school sample, three classes were again selected using the simple random method; finally, in the class sample, all enrolled students would be enrolled in the final sample as a whole group. The above steps resulted in a valid sample of 523 secondary school students, with about the same proportion of students of different genders; their ages ranged from 15 to 18 years, with an average of 16.8 years.

3.1 External Environmental Factors

The choice of external environmental factors is based on the socialization theory of the vectors in the socialization process of adolescents, which mainly include the family, school, society, and peer groups. Of these, school and family act as disincentives to adolescent transgressions, while society and peer groups function more as negative effects.

The family and school are the most frequent places of activity and the most direct source of values for the adolescent population. For example, parents often teach their children that “smoking is bad for health” and school rules punish students for smoking. The labeling of smoking as “bad” and “bad students” creates a “labeling effect” that prevents smoking from occurring.

The friend group is the group with which adolescents have the closest contact, and in the real world, common hobbies or topics are important criteria for adolescents to make friends. The survey sample showed that 72.29% of adolescents got information about e-cigarettes through friends or classmates channels, and 40% of adolescents smoked because of friends or classmates' recommendation. E-cigarettes are a common topic of conversation among the adolescent population on a regular basis, and smoking is not a single act, not a pattern associated with adolescent life, but an identification with close friendships. E-cigarettes are a way to open up social channels, by smoking e-cigarettes groups of friends can discuss various aspects of smoking such as feelings, tastes, and smoking techniques.

There are two main aspects of social influence on e-cigarette smoking behavior among youth groups: the first is the laxly regulated market environment that gives youth groups access to e-cigarettes. In the field visits, 85% of e-cigarette store merchants did not check participants' identification information; of the 46 merchants that asked participants about their age, 86.9% also gave them sales after they showed other adult IDs. This data suggests that age does not play any barrier in the purchase process, indicating that market rules are being enforced and that regulators are not punishing such violations adequately. The second is the mass media's promotion of e-cigarettes, which has led to imitative behavior among the youth population. The survey sample showed that 42.17% of adolescents obtained e-cigarette information through ground advertising and 36.14% through online short video channels. This indicates that external advertising has a subtle influence on the youth group in the form of cultural communication, prompting the youth group to imitate and commit transgressive behaviors.

3.2 Internal Factors

The internal factors that influence the problem of e-cigarettes among adolescents are mainly based on the factors of individual perception in the social learning theory proposed by Bandura. There are three main mechanisms, observational learning, association, and reinforcement. For studying the internal factors, reinforcement again includes memory processes, action reproduction, and action repetition.

Personal self-perceptions are an important intrinsic factor influencing the problem of e-cigarettes among adolescents. The survey sample showed that 25% of the youth smoked e-cigarettes because they were trendy, and 20% smoked because they felt cool and could highlight their personality. According to the case study, Y was first exposed to e-cigarettes when a classmate showed him a fancy e-cigarette trick called “blowing smoke ring” at a party and received applause from others. This made Y think that smoking e-cigarettes was a cool thing to do, and he kept it in his mind. Every time he was at a party, he thought of the applause he could get from the e-cigarette. When 10 days later, Y saw his friend smoking e-cigarettes at school for the second time, he decided to try it himself. And found the store over the weekend to make his first purchase. In and out of school, Y showed his friends and classmates his new plaything, the e-cigarette. According to Y, the process gave him a sense of vanity and the pleasure of playing it cool. Because of the constant repetition of the memory action, smoking e-cigarettes also became a habit for Y.

Y's case shows how teenagers are often unable to make rational judgments in their minds when faced with new things. The e-cigarette technique of “spitting out a smoke ring” attracted Y's attention, and the vanity brought about cognitive structure linkage, and “spitting out a smoke ring”

became a self-satisfaction and vanity symbol imprinted in memory. Multiple repetitions of the action reinforced the behavior of e-cigarette smoking. Peer groups are an important factor influencing the cognitive structure and behavioral choices of adolescents. When peer groups transmit deviant messages, adolescents are prone to empathize and accept them, thus shaping their deviant values and perceptions and leading to deviant behaviors.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations of the Study

Taking e-cigarettes as an example, this paper finds that family and school education has established a perception against e-cigarette smoking for the youth group, but the dissemination of media and advertising messages at the social level has a subtle negative impact on them, coupled with the perception among peer groups that e-cigarette smoking is a trend-chasing and personalized manifestation that can easily cause individuals to follow and learn from each other. In addition, the lack of government regulation of stores makes it easy for teenagers to buy e-cigarettes. As an extension of socialization, e-cigarette behavior is a form of transgression that adolescents perform in order to advance their own expectations of society and that adolescents' own determinations of transgression deviate from those of the outside world. Therefore, the transgressive behavior of adolescents smoking e-cigarettes is the result of an interactive cycle of external and internal factors.

Based on the results of the study's findings, this study makes the following recommendations. First, the adolescent group should pay attention to adjusting their own concept of choosing friends and minimize contact with the transgressive adolescent group, and peer groups should encourage and caution each other to reduce the occurrence of such phenomena. Second, market supervision to increase law enforcement, the sale of youth groups to sell the corresponding punishment, such as fines, suspension and rectification; mass media, the government and Internet platforms to increase the quality of electronic cigarette advertising, self-media video audit, to ensure that the mass media information positive. Third, individual adolescents should improve their awareness of self-protection, establish correct values, and be able to effectively respond to negative information from the outside environment.

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