

# “Active Losers” in the Midst of Pan-self Era

## Aspects of Motivation Awakening of Contemporary College Students

Lingling Qu

School of Economics and Management  
Leshan Normal University  
Leshan, China 614000

Min Kuang

School of Economics and Management  
Leshan Normal University  
Leshan, China 614000

**Abstract**—With the arrival of the information society and the network era, different people are often labeled with different “labels” because of their special nature and characteristics. “Active loser” is one of them. Active losers refers to those who love setting and updating goals but always defers action, give up or change the goal with various excuses and reasons, whose execution ability never matches their high expectations. Such kinds of people are especially common among contemporary college students. Starting from this label with the characteristics of times, this paper traces the background where the problems arise and develop, dissects the “active loser” phenomenon from the subjective and objective perspective and take the subjective demands and motivation awakening as the key factors, in addition to the analysis of the expectation and the execution ability so as to analyze and think about this phenomenon and this kind of people from the perspective of “self-healing” and “self-ignition”.

**Keywords**—*pan-self; label; active loser; expectation state; execution ability; subjective demands*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Modernization has always been a complicated process full of contradictions. Although the increasingly abundant material life has meet people’s basic needs for production and living, the following sense of weakness make the spiritual nihilism such as anxiety, depression and self-loss take up most of people’s life, which makes people highlights “self” while greeting helpless “labels”, one after another.

### II. THE BACKGROUND OF PROBLEMS ARISING

With the arrival of the information society and the network era, different people are often labeled with different “labels” because of their special nature and characteristics.

#### A. Overwhelming “Pan-self Era”

As the wheel of the times goes by, the accelerated changes of world make us go through the “E era”, “big data era”, “Internet + era” etc. Meanwhile, in the rapid progress of science and technology, here comes an era emphasizing individuality and self. Modern society no longer needs neat and uniform duplicates exactly the same; the saying “beautiful vessels are common, while a interesting soul is one in a thousand” is becoming more and more popular as a motto or life credo of people. From the elderly to the young children, everyone is willing to consider “individuality” as a significant

mark distinguishing themselves from others, so the “Pan-self era” that emphasizing individuality and personal characteristics is born by surprise and overwhelmingly.

#### B. Endless Emergency of “Group Labels”

Accompanying the “pan-self era” comes the “group label”. With the change of the times and the society, more and more people with common characteristics are observed, given attention, sorted out and classified. Compared with the traditional labels such as “post-80s” and “post-90s”, which were simply classified according to the year of birth more than ten years ago, nowadays the group labels pay more attention to the combination of people’s internal demands and external behaviors to lay emphasis on qualitative summary and quantitative improvement. For example, from the beginning of the spring of 2018, the label “The Invisibly Poor” has appeared on the internet, which refers to those who appear to have a fantastic and high-quality life but actually are very poor. As soon as the label appeared, countless netizens began to compare themselves with those the label describes, and many found their current situation coincides with that described. As a result, more and more people begin to introspect their own behaviors; in the meantime, the wave brought by “The Invisibly Poor” has not faded away, another term “active loser” follows. Compared with the derogatory labels such as “Stinking Number Nine” and “Bumpkin”, the group labels in the new era such as “The Invisibly Poor” and the “active loser” have no clear dividing line between commendatory and derogatory meanings, and but more reflect people’s road of self-cognition and self-pursuit.

### III. FOCUS: “ACTIVE LOSER”

The term “active losers” refers to those who love setting and updating goals (also known as “setting a flag”) but always defers action, give up or change the goal with various excuses and reasons, whose execution ability never matches their high expectations. Such a hot contradictory word reveals a person’s self-conflict between thought and action to some degree. However, most “active losers” are the generation after 90s and “stopped” buy the flags they raise for themselves, and mostly of them are contemporary college students. In a random interview with students in the author’s university, quite a few students said that they had been in such a state of “intermittently self-satisfied and continuously waiting around to die”. For another example, “cheering for myself when

happy and slapping myself in the face when not happy”<sup>1</sup> is a typical self-mockery phase.

A. Labeling — Prototyping

Labeling theory originates from criminology and sociology. The labeling theory holds that it is a normal phenomenon that, during one’s life, his behaviors will inevitably violate social norms, and the labeling theory calls such behaviors as “original deviant behaviors”<sup>2</sup>. Fundamentally, everyone is a complex of contradictions. In the times full of dilemmas everywhere, the popularization of this kind of hot contradictory words is a true reflection of people’s inner world, and more likely a perfect interpretation of one’s real prototype. Contemporary college students, as representatives that were born and grew up in the new era, are facing too much outside temptations and materials. For example, only the phone’s versatility and the game’s diversification put college students in a dilemma between study and game, and force them constantly hover and make a choice between realization of goals and inner struggle. When their actions fail to follow their ambitions and goals, they will consciously and unconsciously equate themselves with “active losers”. Seemingly, this is labeling but actually a reflection of prototyping.

B. Stigmatization — True Call of the Heart

In Goffman’s theory of social stigma, a “stigma” is a social attribute, and stigmatization is the process where people having such social attribute are recognized by others as losing social reputation and social value, and thus suffer social rejection<sup>3</sup> (Goffman, 1963). Different from the stigmatization as it used to be, the “active loser” is not stigmatized passively, but people positively sit the right seat according to their characteristics, and the social rejection they suffer mostly from the labeled group themselves. Some people say, “young people of this era, when encountering setbacks, are not fighting bloody battles against reality; but decadently do puppy-dog eyes towards the world in such a self-mocking way”. Indeed, it is not hard to find that this way of expression, which seems to be depressed, is actually a true call of everyone’s heart.

IV. FIND AND THINK: MOTIVATION AWAKENING—  
OBSCURE EXPRESSION BASED ON IMAGINATION

“Active loser” is so much a depressed expression, but actually a label that can reflect partial positive energy from its connotation. At least, in the whole process, their thoughts are positive and progressive, but they delay to or simply do not put such thoughts into action, which makes them become the “active loser” in dilemma and angst. This is essentially different from the “avoidant depression”<sup>4</sup>. From a subjective

and objective point of view, “active loser” is a dynamic representation process of motivation awakening.

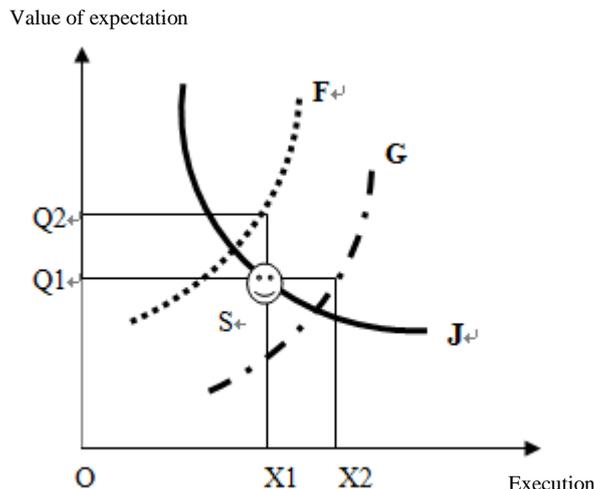


Fig. 1. “Active loser” is a dynamic representation process of motivation awakening.

A. Subjective Demands — Expectation State

As shown in "Fig. 1", the abscissa axis represents the execution ability and the vertical axis standards for the expectation. The higher up, the greater the expectation is, and the more right, the more execution ability you have. The expectation state express the one’s subjective demands numerically or the goal. The so called “setting a flag” is actually to set certain goals and plans for themselves to guide their behaviors in the future. The largest characteristic of the group “active loser” is that they often have certain illusions about their expectations and set goals beyond their abilities which thus are hard to be realized; or mentally they just want to prove that they still have the ability to work hard, regardless of whether their execution ability can keep up with their thought, or their execution ability contradicts their thought. Just as shown by the curve J in "Fig. 1", with the increase of expectation, the increasingly low execution ability fails to match up with it. As a result, with time, there is a great possibility for them to become “active losers”.

B. Objective Response-role Motivation

Gestalt psychology or gestaltism uses role concept to the all psychological processes of human is discovered and created through the integration model<sup>5</sup>. Under the stress of both study and employment, contemporary college students will inevitably be dominated by ideas from different point of views from the very beginning of admission. Therefore, they will be in an expectation state about their academic plan, for example,

or entertainment, and then will feel deeply dejected and guilty after the brief escape.

<sup>5</sup> Zhu Li et.al. Principles of Sociology [M], Social Sciences Academic Press, First Edition, September 2003: 91.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Quoted from Sohu Quanmeipai (ID: quanmeipai).

<sup>2</sup> He Shining. A Casebook of Social Work in China [M]. True & Wisdom Press\Shanghai People’s Publishing House, March 2008: 191.

<sup>3</sup> He Shining. A Casebook of Social Work in China [M]. True & Wisdom Press\Shanghai People’s Publishing House, March 2008: 192.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Quoted from Sohu Quanmeipai (ID: quanmeipai): “Avoidant depression” refers to the phenomenon where people, when facing a large number of uncompleted tasks, often flinch and choose to do other things

not failing the exam, obtaining all kinds of rating certificates and professional certificates, winning titles of honor, etc. In addition to the plan set by the school and class, there also the mutual influence from the peer group, so they have the habit of setting flags frequently. However, as we mentioned before, the increasingly abundant material and cultural life has brought people diversified accesses to information; the popularization of computers and smart phones together with the increasingly diverse mobile games add more entertainment factors in the daily life of students and also set more “stumbling blocks” on their road of improvement. Although they have a lot of goals waiting to be realized, the call of “King of Glory”, the postcard of “Travel Frog” and even the emoji package of “B612 Snow Cam” in addition to the “Tik Tok” and “Kuaishou App” makes every goal seem difficult to achieve. However, from the perspective of role motivation, these college students who raise flags have already been essentially different from those who used to sit around and idle away their days, and what they lacks mostly is the guidance for execution after their motivation awakens.

### C. Motivation Awakening — “Self-healing” or “Self-ignition”

With the advent of the label “active loser”, many college students have been flocking to this hot word full of contradictions and conflicts. In fact, that contemporary college students can realize they are “active losers” is also the most visible manifestation of their awakening role motivation. The only problem lies in the matching degree of their expectation and their execution ability. As shown in Figure 1, there is a positive correlation between the expectation and the execution ability and a negative correlation between the execution ability and the possibility of becoming an active loser. In other words, under the assumption that the expectation is achievable, the stronger the execution ability, the smaller the possibility of being an active loser is; on the contrary, the weaker the execution ability, the larger the possibility of being an active loser is.

Ultimately, this is about self-identification in the “Pan-self era”. The self-identification involves three aspects of problems: construction of self-identification, acquisition of sense of belongings and pursuit of sense of meaning. The three aspects of self-identification anxiety are exactly corresponding to the above three aspects, that is, deconstruction of self-identification, lack of sense of belongings and loss of sense of meaning<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, “active loser” precisely takes all the three aspects into consideration, that is, as the goal cannot be achieved, the greatest anxiety is the loss of sense of meaning, and this is exactly the key to solve the problem. In fact, “being active” itself is never wrong, and even though there is a mentality of flaunt in it, it is also the “positive energy” shown, so it is not a big problem. The point is that if a person ends up getting the outcome that doesn’t match the flag he sets before, then his “being active” naturally loses its meaning; to avoid becoming an “active loser”, the most important for a person is

<sup>6</sup> Wu Yujun. Modern Society and Self-identity Anxiety [J]. Tianjin Social Sciences, 2005(06): 39

to have execution ability<sup>7</sup>. For college students who need to complete their final thesis, if they do not set out to write an outline, put pen to paper and organize the literature review, the main body of article will never be completed at one stroke. For another example, for those who want to lose weight, if they fail to insist doing exercises for over 45 minutes every day, they will never realize their expectation. Therefore, contemporary college students who classify themselves as “active losers” can make themselves real active people by adjusting their subjective demands and objective responses appropriately. Simply, refer to “Fig. 1”, one method is to use the corresponding actions to realize the expectation, that is, to make the ratio of the expectation to the execution power of 1:1. This is similar to the curve F in the Figure, and easy to be realized for the “active losers” in the initial stage with active thought but passive action, and this process is called “self healing”. The other method is, for people who gradually get rid of the “active loser” and start to change into “active person”, to use double or more actions and efforts to realize an expectation, that is, to make the ratio of the expectation to the execution power of 1:2 or 1: more, etc. As long as you work hard, the final result you achieve will not be so bad. This is similar to the cure G in the “Fig. 1”, and this process is called “self-ignition”.

“Self-healing” or “self-ignition”, its fundamental motivation lies in the construction of identification of the implicit expression about the original role and the awakening psychological motivation. Only in this way, contemporary college students can be more in line with the leading concepts including inheritance of mainstream values, pursuit of diversified values, emphasis on emotional exchanges, and reform and breakthrough of traditional desire, etc.<sup>8</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

The appearance of the phenomenon “active loser” and the pigeonholing of contemporary college students is actually caused by the deviation between the construction of new-type self-concept and the elimination of identification anxiety, and the mismatching between the expectation state and the execution ability. In modern society, when facing the severe reality of self-identification anxiety, we should seek a solution on the basis of a new self-concept; to do this, we should abandon the concept of transcendental self, construct a shared interpersonal relationship and develop sense of existential meaning<sup>9</sup>. In the meantime, we have to acknowledge that, the advent and of popularization of “active loser”, together with the proposal of corresponding countermeasures have practical significance for and provide solutions for this group, even for the construction of subculture with positive label. Only if we turn stress into motivation, unify goals and actions and combine mental introspection and “self-healing” and “self-ignition” in action, can we turn “active losers” to “active

<sup>7</sup> Lin Junpeng. Active Loser: Young People Who Set Flag Has To Hold It Steady [N]. China Youth Daily. May 9, 2018, Issue 002.

<sup>8</sup> Xu Xueye. Attaching a Label on 1980ers and 1990ers New Generation and Their Generation Differences[J]. Journal of Social Work, 2012(01): 92

<sup>9</sup> Wu Yujun. Modern Society and Self-identity Anxiety [J]. Tianjin Social Sciences, 2005(06): 42.

people”; so that they will no longer live in the crack between thoughts and actions and waken their motivation to exert the “pink power” (China Youth Net, October 22, 2014), discard the prejudices, remove the stereotypes, make efforts and use practical actions to release the positive energy of youth<sup>10</sup>.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] He Shining. A Casebook of Social Work in China [M]. True & Wisdom Press\Shanghai People’s Publishing House, March 2008: 191.
- [2] Zhu Li et.al. Principles of Sociology [M], Social Sciences Academic Press, First Edition, September 2003: 91.
- [3] Wu Yujun. Modern Society and Self-identity Anxiety [J]. Tianjin Social Sciences, 2005(06): 39.
- [4] Lin Junpeng. Active Loser: Young People Who Set Flag Has To Hold It Steady [N]. China Youth Daily. May 9, 2018, Page 002.
- [5] Xu Xueye. Attaching a Label on 1980ers and 1990ers New Generation and Their Generation Differences[J]. Journal of Social Work, 2012(01): 92.

---

<sup>10</sup> Source: 90s: We choose “Pink Power” to prove ourselves. China youth net, October 22, 2014.