



# Stress, Coping, and Suicidal Ideation in College Students

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## Introduction

According to the Center for Disease Control (2009) suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students. Attempted and completed suicide is facilitated by thoughts and ideation of suicide prior to the act which is associated with various risk factors:

- Negative life stress and self-esteem are significant predictors of suicide ideation, as are depression and hopelessness (Smith & Wilburn, 2005).
- Pre-existing anxiety disorders is an independent risk factor for suicidal ideation and attempts. Depression and hopelessness are two variables that play an enormous role in suicide ideation (Sareen et al., 2005).
- College students experience high levels of stress and have been found to experience elevated levels of depression and anxiety.
- Inadequate or deficient use of coping styles is related to an increase in suicide attempts or suicide ideation (Wang et al., 2007). The way college students cope with stress may influence levels of suicide ideation.

## Objectives

• The current study attempted to provide information about the interaction between stress and coping styles in hope to understand how coping styles may influence risk for suicide ideation among college students.

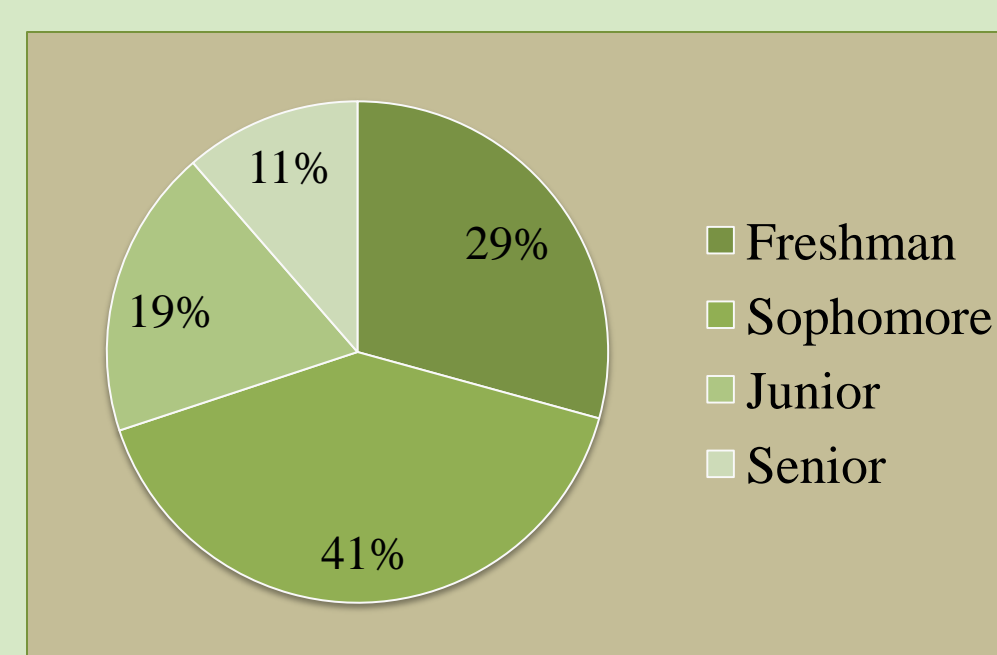
## Hypotheses

- Negative coping styles and other aforementioned variables would be positively correlated with suicide ideation.
- People in the high suicide ideation group will use less effective coping styles than would people in the low suicide ideation group.
- Coping styles will interact with stress levels to impact suicide ideation.

## Methods

### Participants

- 123 college students (79.7% female, 90.2% Caucasian/white, 4.1% Native American, and remaining were other ethnicities)
- Average age of participant: 19
- Reported year in school:



### Procedure

- Participants were recruited through psychology classes during the three weeks surrounding midterms and finals to ensure a naturalistic level of stress.
- Participants completed self-report scales that measured suicide ideation, hopelessness, depression, anxiety, coping styles, and stress.

## Results

• Participants were divided into high or low suicidal ideation groups based on their scores on the Adult Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire.

- 84 participants in low (72.4%)
- 32 participants in high (27.6%)

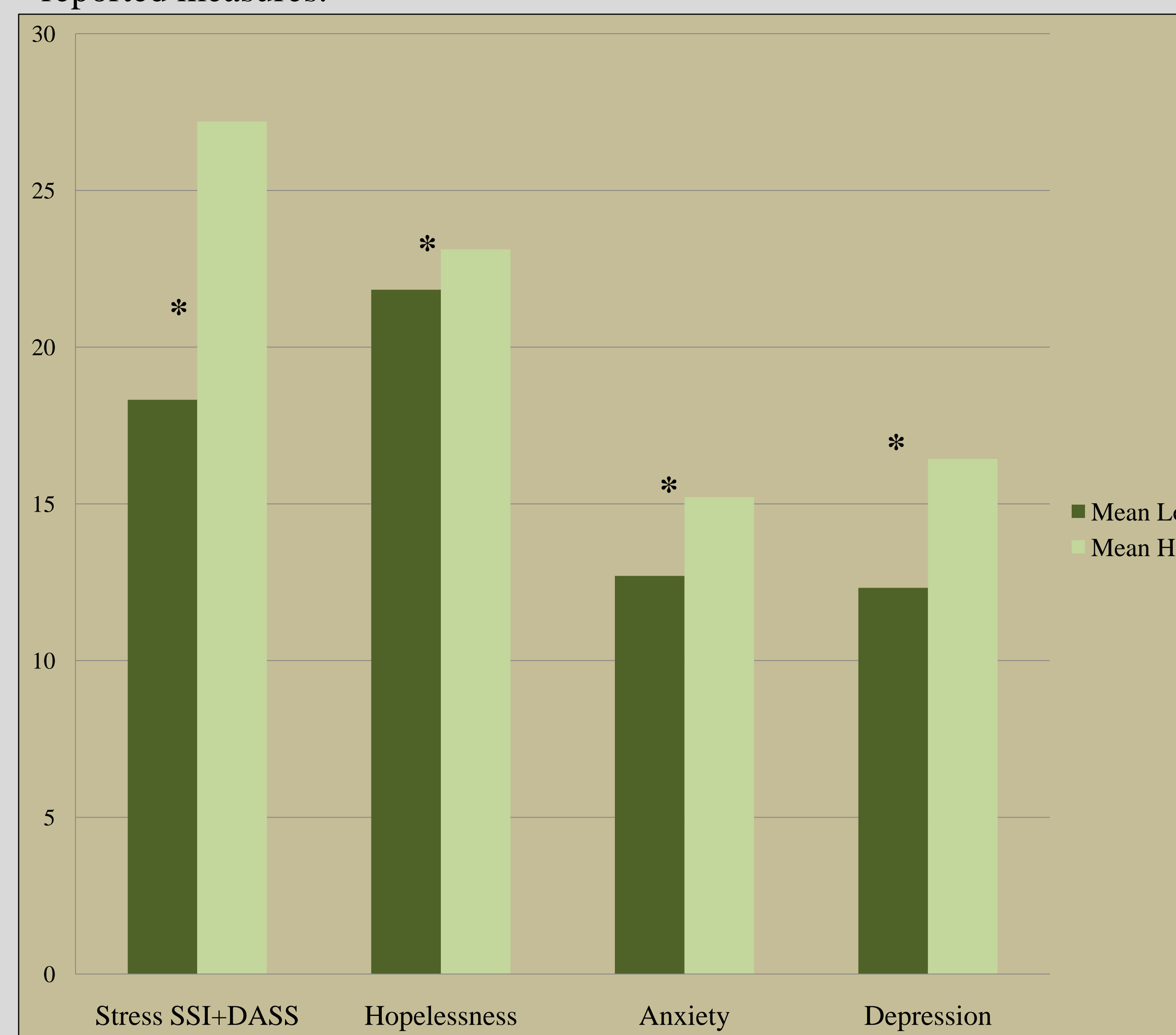
• A MANOVA was conducted, with gender held constant, to assess significant group differences between the high and low suicide groups.

**There were significant group differences, Wilk's  $\lambda = .582$ ,  $F(20, 95) = 6.61$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .418$  (See Figure 1 and 2).**

• A hierarchical linear regression was conducted in order to examine how much variation in suicide ideation can be explained by the dependent variables and the interactions of stress and coping styles.

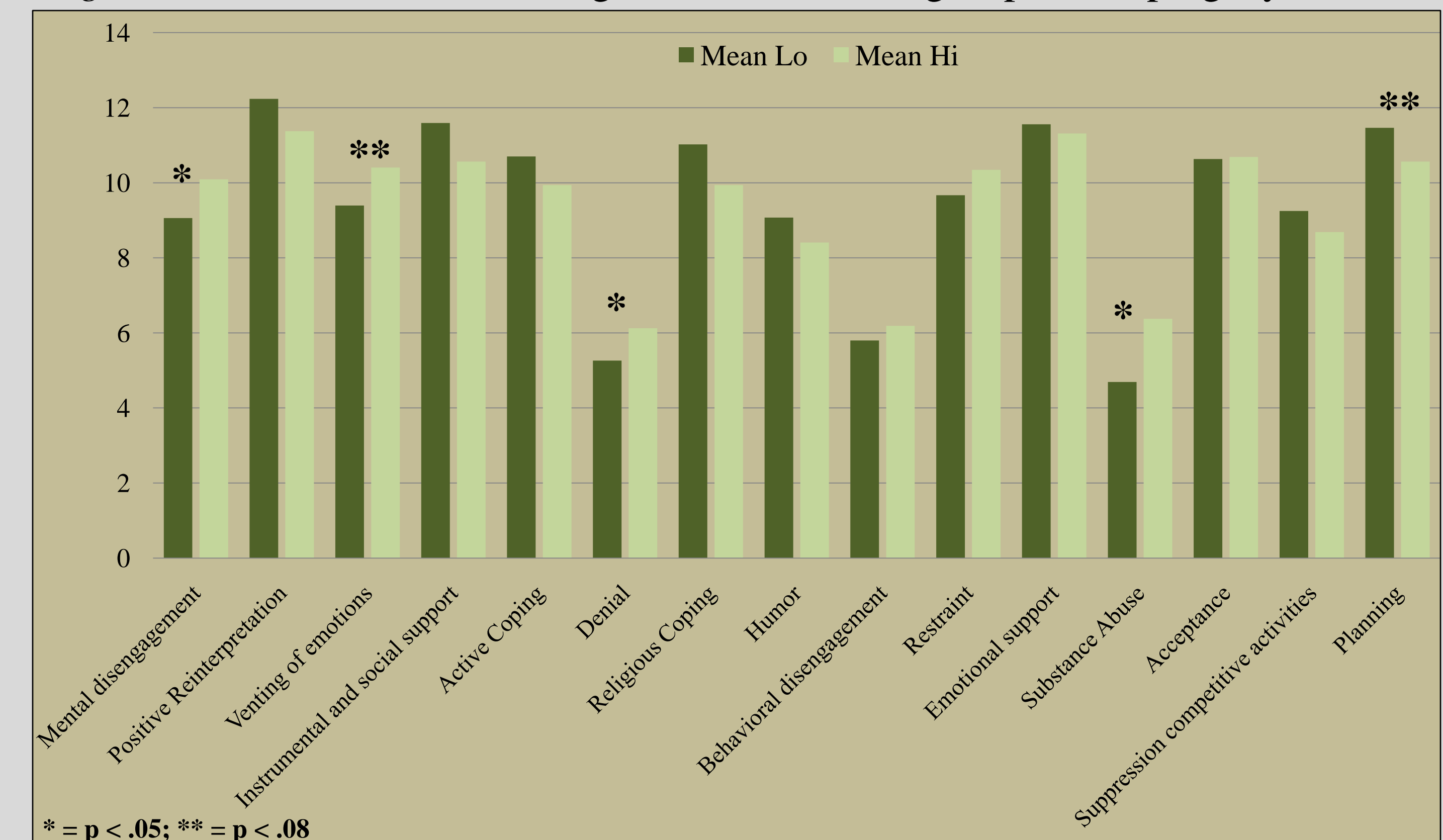
**The total model was significant,  $F(15, 122) = 6.03$ ,  $p < .001$ , accounting for 45.8% of the variance in suicide ideation (See Table 1).**

Figure 1. Difference between high and low suicide groups on self-reported measures.



\* =  $p < .05$ ; \*\* =  $p < .08$

Figure 2. Difference between high and low suicide groups on coping styles.



\* =  $p < .05$ ; \*\* =  $p < .08$

Table 1. Predictors of Suicide Ideation

Model	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	Beta		
Beck Hopelessness Scale	0.010	0.084	0.933
DASS Anxiety Total	-0.112	-0.835	0.406
DASS Depression	0.224	1.595	0.114
<b>Total Stress SSI+DASS</b>	<b>0.317</b>	<b>2.880</b>	<b>0.005</b>
Gender	-0.110	-1.267	0.209
COPE Mental disengagement	-0.074	-0.670	0.505
COPE Positive Reinterpretation	0.139	1.010	0.315
COPE Focus on and venting of emotions	0.066	0.621	0.536
COPE Use of instrumental and social support	-0.163	-1.122	0.265
<b>COPE Active Coping</b>	<b>-0.295</b>	<b>-2.019</b>	<b>0.046</b>
COPE Denial	0.026	0.274	0.785
<i>COPE Religious Coping</i>	<i>-0.172</i>	<i>-1.763</i>	<i>0.081</i>
COPE Humor	0.086	0.919	0.361
COPE Behavioral disengagement	0.078	0.696	0.488
COPE Restraint	0.040	0.313	0.755
COPE Use of emotional support	0.163	1.122	0.265
COPE Acceptance	-0.011	-0.102	0.919
COPE Suppression competitive activities	-0.007	-0.062	0.951
COPE Planning	0.254	1.628	0.107
<b>StressxDepression</b>	<b>-0.262</b>	<b>-2.302</b>	<b>0.024</b>
StressxDenial	0.042	0.410	0.683
<b>StressxMental Disengagement</b>	<b>0.290</b>	<b>2.027</b>	<b>0.046</b>
<b>StressxPlanning</b>	<b>-0.650</b>	<b>-3.851</b>	<b>0.000</b>
StressxReligion	-0.061	-0.567	0.572
<b>Positive ReinterpretationxStress</b>	<b>-0.239</b>	<b>-2.006</b>	<b>0.048</b>
<b>Social SupportxStress</b>	<b>0.469</b>	<b>2.179</b>	<b>0.032</b>
<b>ActivexStress</b>	<b>0.595</b>	<b>4.092</b>	<b>0.000</b>
RestraintxStress	-0.095	-0.802	0.424
AcceptancexStress	-0.015	-0.112	0.911
Emotional suppressionxStress	0.133	1.239	0.219

Significant predictors in Bold.

## Discussion

- Overall the results supported the hypothesis that students with increased suicide ideation have increased anxiety, hopelessness, depression, stress, and less adaptive coping styles.
- The current findings suggest there are many variables related to suicidal ideation in college students, and that the way students cope with stress may be particularly salient. For example, the current findings shows stress and coping styles interact to influence suicide ideation such that students with adaptive coping styles report less suicide ideation, even with increased stress.
- Results may offer some direction for college campuses interested in suicide prevention. Initiating programming that teaches and promotes students' stress management skills and the use of proactive or adaptive coping styles for managing high stress may help reduce suicide ideation.