



The Sense of Meaninglessness among College Students: Malfunction or Growth in Disguise? - A Research-Based Analysis and its Implication for Educational Practice

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a widely held belief in the Chinese society that college students are suffering from 'the disease of hollow-heartedness', which is characterized by a sense of hollowness caused by the lack of meaning in life. It is generally believed that it is related to the fact that Chinese college students, who have been under the highly exam-oriented educational system for a long time, usually have difficulty figuring out what is important and what is not. It is thus proposed that educators should focus on teaching values and life purposes. The above perspective mainly represents the understanding of mainstream educators and scholars, and fails to take into account the real psychological mechanism of college students. Based on interviews with six college students concerning the issue of life meaning exploration, this article argues that while a sense of meaninglessness does exist, it is functional and productive rather than lacking or harmful for college students, and should therefore be considered in a more positive light. The hollowness experienced by the young indicates an ongoing meaning-searching process, instead of a meaning-lacking outcome. Accordingly, in terms of educational practice, while it is important to pay more attention to the spiritual domains and be less obsessed with standard tests, educators should be alerted to the danger of excessive intervention. And to go a step further, if treated properly, the 'hollow-heartedness' and the inner conflicts brought by it can serve as great resources towards better development.

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