The Pressure Game—How to Survive a Hyper-competitive Environment

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Students nowadays are under huge pressures. High school students are under pressure to get into a good college, and college students are under pressure to perform well in school. The solution for today's "overloaded and underprepared" kids needs efforts from both students and schools. Students need to spend more time on introspection and slow down the pace of meaningless hard work. And schools should build a more comprehensive counseling system that could help students to get advice from all aspects.

Keywords: high school students, college school students, pressure, overloaded, underprepared, introspection

Introduction

Nearly all over the world, students are generally under huge pressures. High school students are under pressure to get into a good college, and college students are under pressure to perform well in school. In *Today's Exhausted Superkids*, Frank Bruni described the "sadness for American high school students, the most driven of whom are forever in search of a competitive edge" (Bruni, 2013, p. 1). Similar things also happen in college. Students stay up the whole night studying before finals to get good grades. In order to stay up late, some college students buy Adderall as their "secret weapon" to complete the demanding schoolwork. And some of them even risk their college lives to cheat on exams.

But why do students do these things? The answer is quite obvious: They cannot find the way to deal with pressures in this hyper-competitive environment. Under so much pressure, students are driven to study hard, and all they care about are the results of their hard work. Due to the blind hard working, students have no time to think of the real purposes of their learning process. They are lost on the path of acquiring education without realizing it. The solution to this problem requires both students' and schools' efforts: Students need to know how to slow down their pace of studying. Schools need to know how to make students less stressed during their school lives.

Efforts Required by Students

In *In the Name of College*, Michelle Rose Gilman described the pathetic life of Kelsey, an 11th grade student who desired to get into a good college. She "often falls asleep sometime around 1 a.m., with the lights on and her notebooks scattered around her on the bed" (Gilman, 2015, p. 1). What Kelsey experienced is definitely not something an 11th grade girl should experience. An 11th grade girl should be "playing in nature and discovering

things about us, and others, through playing” (Gilman, 2015, p. 2). But why was Kelsey doing that? The answer is just as the title of Gilman’s essay implied, *In the Name of College*.

Take the SAT classes in Chinese high schools for example, SAT class students are generally so concerned about their SAT scores that they spend most of their day on doing practice exams. Everyday they are doing the same work: first memorizing SAT vocabularies, then doing readings, grammar, and composing SAT essays. They try so hard to ace every class they enroll in, even if they are not truly interested in them. Everyday their lives are filled with heavy work, which really leaves them no time to think of things that really mattered. When they finally finish all their SAT exams, they find many of them having trouble with choosing their majors in college. In *No Time to Think*, Kate Murphy addressed “how far people will go to avoid introspection” (Murphy, 2014, p. 1). Students nowadays are eagerly keeping themselves busy on studying or entertaining, but refuse to think of the questions that really matters, like what they are going to do in the future.

The answer to this problem is to slow down the pace of living and use more time for introspection. A Chinese guy who was the second year college student in the United States shared his story by attending the “Mindful Awareness Meditation”. He went to this event looking for the inner peace he could get through meditation.

He said the effect was incredible. For the first time he truly released all his mental burdens. With the peaceful voice of instructor, he felt the existence of his body, and the freedom of his thoughts. He could peacefully think about things that bothered him during those days and gained the confidence to solve all his problems. From then on, he went to meditation whenever he felt stressed. In addition, he went to the gym more after this event, because he really enjoyed the way he could feel his body. This Mindful Awareness Meditation really slowed down his pace of living and improved the quality of his life.

For students under pressure, the advice which can be given to them is to spend more time on introspection and slow down the pace of meaningless hard work. They do not have to meditate like the guy did, but they have to spend time on introspection.

Efforts Required by Schools

In order to change the definition of schools in this hyper-competitive environment, schools also need to do their jobs. Teachers from high schools, especially elite ones in affluent areas, would regard scores as the only and most important way to evaluate students. In *How to Survive the College Admission Madness*, Frank Bruni described the New Trier High School in an affluent Chicago suburb. “Most of its graduating seniors go on to higher education from where they stand among their peers” (Bruni, 2015, p. 1). It is considered shameful for a student from this school with a relatively high class-rank to end up at an ordinary university. Driven by this thought, students of elite schools have to fight for their chances getting into top universities to earn respect from their classmates. It seems that schools are leading them to prioritize the wrong thing. Schools are supposed to give them education, teaching them both knowledge and how to be a person. However, the way schools encourage students is more result-driven.

When students start their college years, especially at universities in the West, They would unexceptionally find out the difference. The environment in college for freshmen is relatively less competitive than in high school. Students are eager to join in clubs, and pursue their interests in college. School does not encourage them to take as

many classes as possible to boost our GPAs. Although students have to finish their school works, they are no longer forced to do too many extra practices. However, some of students who come from highly competitive high schools do not feel comfortable for this change. Some of them even lose the motivation to study because no one is asking them to finish schoolwork on time. These students' lost is fairly reasonable, because they never had time to introspect before. All they had to do was following school's instructions like a machine to do anything that could help them get into college. But when they actually get into college, they cannot find the motivation to keep working as they did in high school. It was not exaggerated to say that highly competitive high school environment destroyed student's ability to adapt college life.

In order to make high school students get used to the way college is and acquire their self-motivation, high schools need to make some changes. Schools should no longer encourage students to take courses they are not interested in. Instead, school should let students have thoughts on their potential future careers, and provide help to students who already have their career plans. LI Chen, a Chinese guy, who was a talented musician willing to get into Berklee College of Music, was forced to take AP chemistry in high school. Not once did he make petitions to school to drop his chemistry class because he was not interested in it at all. However, the school told him he must finish the course because chemistry was the required science course in his school. So LI had to spend lots of time on chemistry instead of his portfolio he needed to submit to Berklee College of Music. In the end, he could not balance chemistry and music, so he decided to give up chemistry and spent all his effort on his portfolio. Fortunately, he was admitted by Berklee College of Music. LI was lucky but the school definitely should be blamed on. School should guide students to find their careers, not to limit them from pursuing their dreams.

High schools always have college counselors to help students get into college. Counselors should not only give students advice for how to get into college, but also guide students to find their future career. Furthermore, schools should also establish mental health centers to give students advice on person being and help them understand how to control the pace of life. The education should not be limited in knowledge; it should include all fields of guidance.

Conclusion

Just as Frank Bruni described in *Today's Exhausted Superkids*, students nowadays are "overloaded and underprepared" (Bruni, 2013, p. 1). They are "overloaded" for huge pressures on them from high expectations of getting into a good college, or from heavy school works. They are "underprepared" for lacking of comprehensive guidance of person being.

The solution for today's "overloaded and underprepared" kids needs efforts from both students and schools. Students need to spend more time on introspection and slow down the pace of meaningless hard work. And schools should build a more comprehensive counseling system that could help students to get advice from all aspects.

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