

"I'm bored!"

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We examined small-college students' complaints that their professors, classes, and so forth bore them. Comparing small-college students' degree of existential meaning in life with previously obtained large-university students' Purpose in Life Test scores yielded no difference except for students who felt that the small college campus does not have enough activities and that it is a uniquely dull place. Students with both negative views of a small campus had personality test scores that indicated they found life in general to be rather meaningless. It seems that small-college students' feelings of boredom are probably no different from those of students at large campuses. What may be true is that if a student arrives at a campus without inherent motivation, he/she will see the prevailing environment in a purposeless manner.

Students and faculty at small colleges frequently feel that life at these institutions is extremely dull. Students attend these smaller colleges for a variety of reasons. They may hope to obtain high grades and then transfer to a more preferable college. They may attend because they have a (misled) notion that the college has something to offer them that no other place has. Some students select small local colleges because word of mouth from their peers has it that it is easy to stay in and graduate from the local college since nothing of importance happens there and good grades abound for a minimum of effort. A student may attend because some years ago a relative attended the college, or because the student has little confidence in his/her academic abilities (sometimes justly), or because intellectual and other types of stimulation are somewhere above the threshold of perception. It is unlikely that students attend the small colleges because of low tuition costs or because of the high quality of education. Once students arrive at small colleges, however, they begin to complain that they are bored, that professors bore them, and that there is nothing to do.

Most psychology literature is written not about students attending small colleges (with enrollments of 1,000 or less), but about students attending larger institutions (with enrollments of more than 1,000 students). In learning about the way people act, it is relevant to take into account the environment sampled and the type of people sampled. Coffield and Buckalew (1985), for example, examined boredom at a black university of 3,500 students where there are more social and cultural activities in which students may participate than at smaller colleges and, in general, where students' boredom is less likely to occur. Coffield (1981) looked at white student apathy at a large university. No one, however, has examined apathy at the small college, a place where student apathy may well show

itself much more clearly than at larger institutions. The question we ask, then, is whether there is more overall apathy at small colleges than at large institutions. Furthermore, does apathy at small colleges vary with sex and year in college in a manner different from that at large colleges? Other factors that may affect apathy of the small-college student are the effects of hometown population size, the amount of television watched, grade point average, amount of time spent studying per week, and the amount of alcohol consumed. In an attempt to obtain information on whether American small-college students' existentialist views of life differ from those of American large-university students, we compared American small-college students' apathy test scores with test scores previously obtained (Coffield, 1981) from students attending larger universities, and we examined factors that may clarify how small-college students feel about the existentialist meaning of life.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 20 white males and 36 white females between the ages of 18 and 47, attending a small Kansas college with a total enrollment of less than 1,000. The 56 subjects were randomly selected from 150 students enrolled in three first- and second-year psychology courses. Our subjects were similar to the large-university sample with which we compared them (Coffield, 1981); Coffield's students were of approximately the same age (18-44), were of the same race, and were enrolled in psychology courses.

Materials

The Purpose in Life Test (PIL; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964), which consists of 20 questions to be rated on scales from 1 to 7 was used. The test generally gauges the degree to which a person has a purpose in life or finds meaning in his/her existence. The instrument appears to have construct validity in that results from it concur with Frankl's (1960) theory of logotherapy, based on existential philosophy, which claims that many people today suffer from a feeling of emptiness in life. Moreover, there is evidence that the PIL has concurrent validity. In addition to taking the PIL, the students rated, on a scale from 1 (*maximally disagree*) to 10 (*maximally agree*), 19 statements about their feelings on attending a small college. Table 1 presents the 19 statements along with Questions A to E.

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Table 1
Nineteen Statements and Questions A-E

Questions									
A. How many credit hours are you currently taking?									
B. What is your grade point average (GPA)?									
C. How many hours do you study per week?									
D. How many hours do you watch TV per week?									
E. How large (population) was the community where you spent most of your life? Please specify approximate number:									
Statements									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Disagree									
1. Outside the classroom, I think there is nothing much to keep me occupied on campus.									
2. I think there is not enough work given in classes to keep me from getting bored.									
3. I wish there were more for me to get involved with outside of classes.									
4. Sometimes my teachers bore me because they are not involved in their own work.									
5. I came here purely to get the best education possible.									
6. I came here because of the lack of outside activities and influences that might distract me.									
7. There is just "something" about being in a small school that makes me bored.									
8. There is just "something" about being in a small school that makes me very satisfied.									
9. I like it here.									
10. Make it bigger.									
11. Change the teachers.									
12. Increase activities.									
13. Keep it just as it is; it's great.									
14. Increase the classroom work requirements.									
15. Decrease the classroom work requirements.									
16. Increase the size of the library.									
17. Have more access time to the facilities (i.e., computer room, library).									
18. Offer more classes such as languages and physical education.									
19. Offer a wider variety of courses within each department.									
Agree									

Procedure

All 56 students responded to the test packet. The test packets were administered in three group sessions.

RESULTS

Each respondent had a total score on the PIL test, which was the sum of the ratings on each of the 20 test items.

The scores of our students were compared with those of white students at large universities (Coffield, 1981) with one-sample *t* tests. The overall PIL means for our sample and for Coffield's were 105.67 and 108.97, respectively [$t(55) = .62, p > .05$]. The means for Coffield's females, sophomores, juniors, and seniors were 110.12, 111.99, 111.40, and 109.42, respectively. In comparing our females', sophomores', juniors', and seniors' scores with those of Coffield's students, no *t* value was significant ($p > .05$). Thus, the small-college students' PIL scores were no different from those of the large-college students.

When we divided our sample into high PIL scorers (with scores over 120) and low scorers (with scores less than 100) and examined each of the 19 rating scales as dependent variables and used the high and low PIL groups as the independent variable, we found 19 nonsignificant ANOVAs. However, when we divided each rating scale into high (≥ 7) and low (≤ 3) scorers and used the PIL scores as the dependent variable with each of the 19 rating scales as independent variables, we found two statistically significant ANOVAs. Statements 1 ("Outside the classroom, I think there is nothing much to keep me occupied on campus") and 7 ("There is just something about being in a small college that makes me bored") each showed a significant effect on PIL scores. On Statement 1 the students who scored low (never occupied) obtained a PIL mean of 108.38, and the students who scored high (always occupied) scored 117.5 on the PIL [$F(1,26) = 4.54, p < .05$]. On Statement 7 students who scored low (not bored in a small college) had a PIL mean of 114.5 and the students who scored high (bored in a small college) had a PIL of 102 [$F(1,31) = 5.82, p < .05$].

DISCUSSION

From these data it seems that small-college students' PIL test scores are not different from those of students attending large universities (comparisons with Coffield's, 1981, results were not significant). Small-college students probably perceive their meaning in life in a manner similar to that of large-college students. Furthermore, students who scored high and those who scored low on the PIL do not differ in the amount of TV watched, hours studied, grades obtained, or the size of the community in which they grew up. The only things that affect students' existentialist views of life (as indicated by PIL scores) are (1) whether or not the students are occupied on campus outside of class (students who view the campus as having little activity tend to have apathetic outlooks on life in general, whereas those who view the campus as having much activity tend to have positive feelings about their purposes in life) (2) whether students feel that a small college is a boring place to be (students who are bored in a small college and are bored in life have low PIL scores, and students who are not bored in a small college and are not bored in perceptions of life in general have high PIL scores).

These data seem to indicate that small-college students may not be feeling or perceiving their environments in a negative, boring manner except when they already have the disposition to view all of life as an existential vacuum of sorts. If Coffield (1981) had divided his students into high- and low-apathy groups, he might have found that on large campuses bored people tend to see certain salient aspects of the environment as boring.

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