

Summary

Expressive Individualism in Opposition to the Ego Culture. Creative Pedagogy

The book *Expressive Individualism in Opposition to the Ego Culture. Creative Pedagogy* combines theoretical reflections and empirical research on expressive individualism as a potential source of protection and resilience against the crisis of critical thinking in the era of digital dominance and the culture of narcissism. This publication aligns with the interdisciplinary trend in research (e.g. Shoshana Zuboff, Sherry Turkle, Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, Jean Twenge, Manfred Spitzer) devoted to exploring the modern-day human as both the participant and creator of increasingly technologized forms of social relations.

The theoretical part develops two analytical categories, i.e. “navel-gazing” and “Ego boosters”, which form the conceptual foundation for the subsequent qualitative research. “Navel-gazing”, also referred to as Ego culture, serves as a metaphor for an egocentric culture focused on superficial, repetitive behaviours driven by narratives of objectification, body cult, and technological self-improvement. These processes contribute to the devaluation of empathy and the sense of community. “Ego boosters” refers to patterns of short-term self-affirmation, which in the long term, lead to dependence on the gratification of individual desires, social indifference, and existential emptiness. This section also engages with broader issues such as cultural narcissism, cancel culture, and the phenomenon of positive deviants, i.e. expressive individualists, outsiders and insiders who do not succumb to the pressure to be happy and have the courage to be disliked in a world governed by self-promotion and self-celebration on social media.

Research questions and objectives:

1. What is the social perception of expressive individualists and how do they resist the cultural phenomena that promote social indifference, lack of empathy, and existential emptiness?
2. How to cultivate future competences in creative pedagogy that support human self-agency, education, and culture?

The qualitative research aimed to reveal the cultural mechanisms that suppress and enslave expressive individualism, and to identify forms of resistance of creative individuals who do not succumb to technological appropriation of autonomy and therefore preserve their own agency. Two research methods were used: thirty in-depth interviews, arts-based research (ABR), i.e. an analysis of subversive pieces of poetry written by the respondents. The statements of artists representing various fields, including music, photography, graphic design, painting, interior design, and literature (prose, drama, and poetry) challenge stereotypical associations of individualism with egoism and reflect effective practices of creative pedagogy. These narratives express opposition to all forms of collective subjugation to algorithms and to artificial intelligence's increasing interference in the realms of creativity and identity.

The analysis of respondents' statements and original poems resulted in the identification of several metaphorical categories derived directly from their narratives, such as individualists breaking away from the wolf pack, the authentic in a world of camouflage, constructors of otherness, individuals marked by heightened sensitivity, and suffering from a lack of empathy and social misunderstanding.

The book opens up new perspectives for critical pedagogy, the sociology of culture, and social psychology. The author emphasizes the role of pedagogy as a field of academic research concerned with the processes of upbringing and education, which should increasingly take into account the cultural context in order to foster creativity and competences that help protect against conformism and uncritical acceptance of content imposed by the digital sphere.

By giving voice to expressive individualists, the study reveals this group's potential to safeguard autonomy while simultaneously nurturing respect, empathy and creativity as core competences that sustain humanistic values. These, in turn, are indispensable for building community, democracy, and constructive thinking.