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Well-being in interpersonal relationships. Sociocultural context

Dobrostan w relacjach międzyludzkich. Kontekst socjokulturowy

Abstract

Aim. To attempt a critical analysis around the questions: What socio-cultural processes lead to the destruction of bonds and relationships? Do activities linked to the dominant logic of instrumental reasoning: self-improvement, self-investment, self-realisation, the primacy of profit and loss, alter the socio-emotional competences of subjects and prevent a life of well-being?

Methods and materials. The whole reflection is embedded in a critical discourse analysis, whose main task is to unmask the myth of well-being, understood exclusively as subjects taking care of themselves, neglecting the common good. Selected research and analysis on cultural narcissism was used.

Conclusion. Satisfactory and sustainable social relations are a priority and a condition for the survival of the community. Nowadays, they are significantly weakened and require pedagogical intervention in the field of rational coding of the contents of the culture of instrumentalism, excess, and narcissism. The observed disappearance of social-emotional competences related to empathy correlates to a large extent with cultural determinants, including the logic of instrumental reason instead of moral and subjective reason. Digital distance cools emotionality, which in turn has a direct impact on loneliness, confusion, and lack of well-being in relationships.

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Abstrakt

Cel. Próba krytycznej analizy wokół pytań: Jakie socjokulturowe procesy prowadzą do destrukcji więzi i relacji? Czy działania związane z dominującą logiką rozumowania instrumentalnego, czyli samodoskonalenie, samorozwój, samozadowolenie, prymat zysków i strat, zmieniają kompetencje społeczno-emocjonalne podmiotów i uniemożliwiają życie we wspólnocie i dobrostanie?

Metody i materiały. Całość rozważań osadzono w krytycznej analizie dyskursu, której głównym zadaniem było obalenie mitu o dobrostanie rozumianym wyłącznie jako (dobro)byt i dbanie tylko o siebie, a zaniedbywanie dobra wspólnego. Wykorzystano wybrane badania i analizy dotyczące kulturowego narcyzmu.

Wnioski. Satysfakcjonujące i trwałe relacje społeczne są priorytetem i warunkiem trwania wspólnoty. Dziś poprzez proces indywidualizacji i narastanie narcyzmu kulturowego te więzi są znacznie osłabione, wymagają wyobraźni współczującej (o której pisała Martha Nussbaum) (Nussbaum, 2016) oraz interwencji pedagogicznej w rozwijaniu orientacji allocentrycznej, sprzeciwiającej się instrumentalizmowi, obojętności i cynizmowi. Obserwowany zanik kompetencji społeczno-emocjonalnych związanych z empatią w znacznej mierze koreluje z determinantami kulturowymi, w tym z przewagą logiki rozumu instrumentalnego nad moralnym i podmiotowym. Cyfrowy dystans, nastawienie na sukces, dominacja zachowań egocentrycznych wychładzają emocjonalność i ogólną wrażliwość społeczną, co z kolei bezpośrednio wpływa na osamotnienie, zagubienie i brak dobrostanu w relacjach.

Słowa kluczowe: relacje międzyludzkie, dobrostan, cyfrowy dystans, instrumentalizm, kultura narcyzmu, kompetencje społeczno-emocjonalne.

Introduction

Based on phenomenological analyses of the social sciences, it seems that the sensitive issue of well-being revolves primarily around satisfying bonds and relationships, satisfying the need for meaning in life and social validation. However, the lack of well-being in relationships is not always described as a social problem. It is often treated as an individual issue, worthy of psychological research and psychotherapeutic help. It is interesting to note that well-being is influenced by the feeling of belonging in union with others. We observe this at gatherings of all kinds: concerts, music festivals or dance workshops, where people seek the sacred, that is, a break from the profane, which is everyday life. Entering into union with others, into a kind of trance, takes place in well-being, in parties, for example at carnivals, in the experience of festivals, when the rigid boundaries of convention are transgressed. Today, in a society of fast-paced, hybrid and often instrumental relationships, carnival time has been elimina-

ted, festive days are getting shorter, and social gatherings often prove that we are dealing with the destruction of communications, because the participants, although present in body, stare at their phone screens, do not communicate directly with each other, do not notice the people around them.

The main leitmotif taken up in the paper will concern well-being strongly embedded in cultural narcissism and the proliferation of phenomena related to the dominance of the logic of instrumental reason (Kwaśnica, 2014, in: Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2020). In a market-based, pragmatic, useful, quantifiable reality, socio-material benefits become the most important, and the main motives of individuals' engagement revolve around profits and losses. Under such conditions, it is very easy to depreciate the community. The observable disappearance of social competencies related to building satisfying, selfless, and lasting relationships is due to the adoption of market-dictated content and a culture of narcissism. In my view, these trends will increase. I am referring to all social events and situations that devalue the notion of community, encouraging selfish, antisocial, associative behaviour, where the moral good and the needs of the subject are exchanged for socio-financial benefits (Ściupider-Młodkowska, 2023). The socio-cultural conditions and circumstances associated with the culture of excess, the culture of algorithms (Szpunar, 2019) and the dominance of instrumental reason over practical-moral reason, especially in the sphere of the technicisation and eroticisation of life, resulting in a misconception of well-being as a measurable material and social status. Furthermore, well-being, rather than welfare, influences other observed phenomena, including the myth of multitasking, instantaneous and multi-contextual relationships with unknown people online, which cools down emotionally close, i.e., kind, loving and grateful personal, professional, and social encounters.

In this text, I present some selected findings and conditions contributing, in my opinion, to the spread of the "virus" of egocentric behaviour and the resulting alienation, emptiness and loneliness observed especially in family and partnership life. Many of the strongly instrumental, narcissistic and thus enslaving attitudes that emerge do not allow for the well-being of the individual and distance themselves from the coefficient of the common good (a term introduced by the sociologist Florian Znaniecki) (Thomas, Znaniecki, 1976) and from the building of permanent bonds. The aforementioned category of the common good, understood by this author as the natural aspiration of people to create communities based on deep ties, prompts the question: "Is there a single perfect form of organisation which would unite the broadest individualism with the strongest social cohesion, which would exclude any abnormality, making use of all human inclinations, which would unanimously link the highest efficiency with the greatest happiness?" (Thomas, Znaniecki, 1976, p. 96). This is a question that relates to harmony and the well-being of relationships in the broadest sense, especially when it comes to solidarity, altruism and the mobilisation of group

forces in life-difficult situations, which we have all been experiencing for several years (the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing war in Ukraine).

In this research paper, I will not discuss charitable aspects and those relating to all forms of group, social, professional and subsidiarity relief, as this would require a separate academic inquiry. What is important to me is the socio-cultural context, contributing to the adoption of inauthentic relationships and bonds, enslaved by cultural codes, affecting individual well-being or the lack thereof. More broadly, it is a question of the image of destruction in the age of the self, where the narrative of the civilisational and cultural primacy of instrumental actions prevails (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2020), thus reducing them to notions of benefit, earning, self-improvement, self-investment, and self-creation. Today, we live in a culture obsessed with the good life, i.e., the paranoia of perfection – always feeling good, multi-tasking, and the constant pressure to strive for change. The plans and projects of the future, which are supposed to guarantee us self-fulfilment and a sense of happiness, further cement the commodification of relationships, in which dignity and respect have been supplanted by concrete profit and the question of "what the relationship gives me personally, what it helps me with." Self-esteem and the experience of satisfaction by the two people involved in the relationship begin to be of secondary importance.

In this context, I pose two questions:
1. Why do modern people stop thinking with a community perspective and do not care about well-being in relationships, but form a group of loners guided by the logic of instrumental treatment of others, thus depriving themselves of the possibility to experience authentic relationships and bonds?
2. What sociocultural processes take place in the observed relationships and bonds and how do they change and determine socio-emotional and future-oriented competencies?

To respond to the above concerns, I will first briefly analyse well-being misunderstood – as egoism or laziness. On the other hand, self-care, as Michel Foucault has already written about, should consist primarily of knowing oneself, but in a close relationship with others (Foucault, 2016). We cannot build happy relationships if we do not love ourselves. Nor can we feel well-being when the voice of a harsh censor in the form of social media comes to power, comparing us with others and undermining our self-esteem, and when the logic of instrumental reasoning prevails.

In what follows, in a phenomenological and sociological analysis, I will present the theme of the disappearance of empathy and sensitivity as a result of inauthentic, self-interested relationships and bonds, both virtual and real, causing emotional chilling.

I ground the selected theses and conclusions on cultural thinking about well-being in relationships in multidisciplinary theories and relate them to current social research, but they are not definitive research claims. I treat the theme undertaken as a continuation of my research inquiries into general civilisational and cultural changes. These changes directly create our place in a world full of paradoxes and tensions between the internalised will to live in a community and the individualisation of life. They lead to a conflict between the subject and the surrounding socio-cultural environment.

Well-being and its redefinition. Laziness/egoism versus the myth of perfectionism and multitasking

A controversial thesis I put forward when looking at contemporary attitudes to well--being in different spaces of life concerns the misunderstanding of the concept and equating it not only with well-being, i.e., financial and social status but also with laziness and/or selfishness. The lack of social acceptance of caring and concern for oneself can disrupt self-esteem. It can cause one to consider one's life solely in terms of sacrifice for others at the expense of one's own needs and rights. The prevention campaign run by the *Centrum Praw Kobiet* [Women's Rights Centre] presents a dramatic five-minute film entitled *Stop kobietobójstwu* [Stop feminicide]. The protagonist is a woman – a long-standing victim of cruel physical and psychological violence – trying to break free and seeking help from her family environment. However, society reassures her that this is what the role of a mother and wife is all about, to endure the hardships of everyday life in humility, silence and "altruism." We witness nightmarish scenes in which all support institutions (including the police station, the clergy, the neighbourhood, the mother, and the immediate family) fail. A woman experiencing contempt and violence hears advice from a "concerned" mother that she alone with one salary cannot support her children and herself. The woman is thus enslaved, she endures her partner's violence with her remaining strength, and her insecurity and loneliness in pain lead her to die from a bestial beating. The theme of toxic relationships was not the aim of the campaign, but more as a backdrop to the question of why relationship wellbeing is being redefined so quickly in Polish culture.

Carol Ryff (Ryff, Singer, & Dienberg Love, 2004), an American psychologist, defines well-being as positive relationships with other people. It occurs when a person assesses his or her own life as fulfilling and satisfying. Wellbeing, therefore, has many components, including the ability to assertively say no, to select a circle of well-wishers and friends, and to enjoy maintaining contact. In addition to this, it is important to be self-accepting, i.e., to be gentle, understanding and compassionate to oneself, which also means banishing the inner censor that mercilessly points out one's lack of

perfection in fulfilling the daily tasks of one's roles. When we live in well-being, we have full autonomy in decision-making and thus feel secure, and in control of our surroundings, helping ourselves and others to set life goals and develop positively. Well--being emerges as a result of the fulfilment of these goals, as well as the path to them, but this is always done in the company of kind and cooperative people, and never in isolation. We will experience well-being when we not only have dreams but when we can fulfil them. This gives satisfaction and thus, as positive psychology assures us, lowers overall life stress levels. A synonym for well-being may be the subjective perception of happiness, but not well-being in the sense of having material goods. The so-called "onion theory of happiness" according to Janusz Czapiński argues that happiness is mainly rooted in a person's psychological predispositions and not in the objective conditions of life (Czapiński, 2004). What is most important is the will to live and emotional contentment, which builds all other areas – metaphorical onion layers related to family, work, friends, and finances. In the context of the topic at hand, I am particularly interested in the plane of good relationships and bonds, which are constantly exposed to negative socio-cultural actions. The increasing problem of loneliness in our society, the diminishing will to live, and the increasing emergence of illnesses associated with a lack of meaning in existence, in my view, correlate strongly with the domination of all spheres of life by a culture of instrumental, narcissistic action, devoid of gratitude and co-responsibility for the common good.

Neuroscience, trying to understand the phenomenon of well-being, has taken four neurotransmitters, which are chemical compounds, as its key. Dopamine and oxytocin are also known as the hormones of happiness and closeness. Dopamine is responsible for motivation in the perpetuation of positive reward emotions, while oxytocin makes optimism and the desire to help others increase. Conversely, androgens and estrogens, the sex hormones, have a significant effect on the predisposition to fall into happy or depressed moods, not conducive to well-being. However, neuroscientists argue that the brain processes that correlate and transform our experiences towards feeling love or happiness, for example, are very flexible and non-finite. This should prompt people to be constantly concerned about their well-being, especially in the realm of relationships. Research by George E. Vaillant, a Harvard psychiatrist, shows that interpersonal skills for creating happy relationships with others, such as kindness, gratitude, and empathy, are responsible for feelings of fulfilment; moreover, they are related neither to IQ level nor to social or economic status (in: Czarnecka, 2023).

Among other things, well-being is felt as a result of the warmth and care of other people, which in turn are responsible for regulating emotions. It has long been known that hugging and supporting those close to us is like a muscle that we need to exercise to make it work at the moment of danger, i.e., the arrival of difficulties in life, when the need for solace and affiliation arises. An exercised "support muscle" will calm

the nervous system, reduce stress levels and allow us to return to a sense of security. Satisfactory bonds with others are therefore a guarantee of physical and mental health. This is particularly evident in hospitals, where parents – mothers and fathers – watch over their sick children day and night to give them a huge dose of support, warmth, and love. Under such conditions, healing is much faster and, what is more, traumatic moments associated with painful medical procedures are more quickly forgotten and do not leave a negative mark on the psyche of the youngest.

Practising and experiencing caring and self-compassion, on the one hand, is heavily prevalent in therapists' offices and, on the other, is met with social disapproval. A culture accustomed to attitudes full of sacrifice and putting the well-being of others first: the younger, the weaker, and those in need, especially in marital relationships and parental roles, equates well-being, and self-care with selfishness.

It is therefore worth asking the question of self-care anew. What does it mean for a human being experiencing the cultural myth of multitasking? The lectures of the great thinker M. Foucault on the hermeneutics of the subject and self-concern argue that this concern "[...] should consist in knowing oneself," but concerning another. In most of his lectures, the French philosopher argues for a rational concern for the self, for "concern for the self implies [...] a kind of attention directed to what one thinks, what comes to mind. The affinity of the words *epimeleia* and *melete*, which mean both exercise and meditation" (Foucault, 2016, p. 31).

In a 2022 study on the psychological well-being of Czech students, the authors demonstrate that self-compassion and self-criticism have a real impact on feelings of well-being. The study was organised by the team of Yasuhiro Kotera and Sarah Maybury (Kotera et al., 2022) and involved 130 undergraduate psychology students at the University of Brno. It was based on the assumptions of Daniel Gilbert's biopsychological concept, i.e., it was intended to prove to what extent the students understood and possessed self-compassion, which is responsible for motivation, emotions and social mentality, including skilful attention to rest, exercise and a healthy diet, and to what extent they showed its absence, i.e., self-criticism.

Unfortunately, the dominance of anxiety and stress and the need for constant struggle and competition have a very negative impact not only on academic performance but also on general psychological well-being. Students who are incapable of self-compassion, kindness, and empathy towards themselves and others are in the vast majority. Thus, we see a spreading attitude of irony, criticism, and self-criticism in comments on social networks. These behaviours can, in turn, lead to feelings of self-inadequacy, significant reductions in self-worth and self-confidence, hatred or feelings of self-loathing and even self-destructive behaviour.

One of the tasks affecting well-being is to develop self-compassion and to nullify self-criticism. Lack of empathy towards self and others also expresses indifference

about well-being in relationships, which are often treated as casual and transitory. In contrast, forbearance, kindness and, compassion towards the reinforce a sense of autonomy and agency of oneself. The Czech students participating in this study were at risk of mental health problems. In addition, they were at risk of alcohol addiction as a result of increasing academic and peer pressure (exposure to being criticised on social networks). In turn, the labour market towards young academics does not serve long-term ambitious projects but rather encourages them to be flexible and lavish, i.e. unstable. Persisting in constant suspense and uncertainty in both work and education fosters a sense of incompetence and lack of agency in relationships altogether.

Association. No empathy, no sensitivity, no well-being

Rapid advances in technology and its wonderful networking opportunities have not gone hand in hand with the development of the psyche and emotionality, and people continue to experience loneliness. This will be confirmed by the results of the studies reported in this text, which I develop more extensively in the findings and conclusion. Here I pose the thesis that simulacra of being together, or "as if relationships" or the same-but-different relationships, do not serve society, do not develop social intelligence, inhibit kindness, moderation, wisdom, sensitivity to beauty, optimism, and hope. Research provided by Noreena Hertz in 2022 (Hertz, 2022, p. 15) reveals that:

> In the US, just over one in five millennials admit to having no friends at all. In the UK, three in five 18- to 34-year-olds and almost half of 10- to 15-year-olds say they often or sometimes feel lonely.

The problem of loneliness also affects the countries of the European Union. Data from Eurostat reports that one in fourteen Europeans, including an average of one in ten Poles, admit to a problem of loneliness. In Japan, the fight against loneliness is a key task of the special ministry for lonely people. A neuropsychological study entitled the Loneliness Project has been underway for two years at an institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Their preliminary findings are crucial to understanding that competencies related to relationship skills disappear precisely as a result of loneliness. Lonely people, as argued by Łukasz Okruszek (Koper, 2021), become more suspicious of others and more likely to attribute hostile intentions to them, so they are not attractive interlocutors.

We live in a society where emotionality has become chilled as a result of many socio-cultural changes. This means that the quality of social relationships is in doubt. Martin Seligman (2011), a forerunner of positive psychology, lists several measurable elements that comprise well-being. These include satisfying, deep and meaningful

interpersonal relationships. The lack of a sense of connection and intimacy with others stems from functioning at the superficial level of social networks, where gifs and symbols replace eye contact and body language and do not allow us to experience authentic understanding of others. Situations of emotional chilling (Musiał, 2016) are observed in public spaces when spectators and social role-players are unable to distinguish truth from falsehood, public life from private life, lightness from heaviness, serious situations from the grotesque and many other confused antinomies, suggesting a lack of socio-emotional competence. An example of such attitudes is a lack of confidence in human behaviour. When, for example, someone falls in front of us, we do not empathetically provide immediate assistance, but suspect a state of intoxication. This social anxiety is also related to the scourge of photography. The wide availability of cameras has given rise to a suspicion of misuse of our image to compromise our appearance or deprive us of dignity and intimacy. intimacy. Educators see the need for the immediate introduction of programmes to counter hate speech, vulgar content, and comments underneath the images presented online.

Prevention of cyberstalking, cyberbullying, and pathostreaming should go much further in the direction of developing the currently lost social competencies of empathy and empathy, which are needed to form real relationships. The disappearance of empathy is a consequence of the absence of situations that force us to understand other people. If we do not spend time with them, we are not able to identify their needs, well-being, or daily concerns. The ability to empathise cannot be learnt alone, in the comfort of the home, in front of a smartphone monitor or through expert virtual webinars, training or coaching with a coach. The ability to empathise is linked to sensitivity, reflectiveness, and emotional maturity. The associative role of the media is fraught with paradoxes, as it is a space for superficial relationships, where the multiplicity of online contacts is increasingly unsatisfying and does not foster a sense of closeness or create bonds based on mutual care and trust.

In addition, online (re)constructions of sociocultural reality strongly involve one emotionally in a virtual community (there are an increasing number of examples of such communities, where members regularly meet, exchange views, play games or share their lives, e.g., *CZATeria*). At the same time, through general accessibility, apparent attractiveness and the impression that virtual meetings with anonymous people are something intriguing, real contacts are disappearing and social-emotional competencies are being significantly eroded.

The modern myth of multitasking has made us believe that all matters can be dealt with more quickly through virtual contacts, so we are shunning calling each other and replacing contact with recorded monologues, often unfinished, which only give the illusion of being in each other's world. Magdalena Szpunar (2020) explicitly calls all processes of adoration and exhibitionism online a culture of digital narcissism.

In discussing the thread of narcissistic behaviour in the age of the "Self," I refer to a multi-stage study (Ściupider-Mlodkowska, 2018, 2022), which, among other things, concludes that well-being is the preservation of life balance and that the overexposure of digital contacts does not allow this balance to be achieved.

Contemporary relationships are largely based on virtual expressions. This has given rise to a new category of relationships: nones, or none, based neither on deep friendships nor on trust, intimacy, or authenticity. For the well-being of relationships, this is a serious threat, because this ignorance of the other person, and only superficial reference to him or her on messengers like Messenger or WhatsApp, makes it impossible for us to catch pure or impure intentions in correspondence. This is because we assume that, since we hold someone in affection and are bound by similar memories and experiences, we have a similar mental map for seeing and describing the world. Disappointment comes very quickly when we discover inequalities when we meet in real life, where the animus added by gifs or symbols disappears. Michael Nast aptly put it: "Our acquaintanceships and friendships from the very first meeting consist of a tragic and unfair inequality. The same is true of emotional relationships" (Nast, 2017, p. 222).

In the *Etyka nikomachejska* [Nicomachean ethics] of Aristotle, cited especially recently in the context of a neoliberal culture that has consistently preached the need for therapeutic life, we read that the good life is understood as eudaimonia, an ethical category related to action rather than to random fate or pleasure (in: Horolets, 2023). It seems to be extremely difficult for contemporary people to distinguish between the components that make up the good life, as the consumerist mechanisms of caring for personal success, prestige, and financial and social status are strong. This imposed scenario of action is a simulacrum of a life of well-being.

I identify such a thesis with the fact that fraternisation, which means fraternising with people, has long since been cooled I am close to believing that good, satisfying life, as Charles Taylor states in *Etyka autentyczności* [The ethics of authenticity] (Taylor, 2002), is harmony in ordinary everyday life, in which loving, trusting relationships and contacts prevail, and social bonds contribute to satisfaction with what one does, rather than how much one achieves, earns or accumulates.

A different issue is self-care, which has nothing to do with egoism but obliges us to think about ourselves, to be attentive and to direct ourselves towards the inside and not towards external mechanisms that seek to take possession of the human being. We can include material possessions, narcissistic self-worth and the illusion of a strong ego presented by expert and coaching visions that tell us that we can achieve anything regardless of limitations. Misconceived well-being includes all the "luxury" ways of proving superiority over others: having a luxury car, designer furniture and clothes, striving for social prestige, or promotions. It is also about being at the centre of media

events, ubiquitous on social networks and the internet, and which have little to do with genuine self-care and are substitutes for experiences of recognition. Private space has become public, and the youth word of 2017 has become "attentiveness." This has created a world of illusion, of pretence, a world of people clamouring for applause, who focus so strongly on recognition from others that they fall into a world of comparisons, and likes, rather than caring about themselves.

In a world that is indifferent to attention and attentiveness, one strives for perfection in appearance, style, and manner. There is no more space for well-being; instead, there is constant proof of multitasking, in which there is no room for any shortcomings, ignorance, or being outside the boundaries of the terms: trendy, must have, be strong, etc. In a culture of pressure and multitasking, not keeping up with the latest technological developments is explicitly considered a weakness and reinforces isolation and exclusion. Many people with constant access to the internet, who are in daily contact with a very extended group of people, feel a sense of overwhelming loneliness. The paradox is that everyone on social networks fears rejection, but they experience it precisely as a result of imagined, inauthentic relationships that consume time, energy and vitality, thus isolating them from real-life connections. Surveillance systems, in turn, with the help of artificial intelligence, cleverly catch our shortcomings, and so spam us, steal our identities, manipulate us, force us to consume, to achieve perfection, to satisfy our every need with some consumer good or presence in the world of gossipy communities. Instagram, Facebook and many other heavily exhibitionist and superficial social networks reflect the problem of feeling lonely and excluded despite having many contacts. Contemporary slogans such as "Let's connect" or "Let's create unity" are an illusion of building bonds that everyone desires but is unable to find and stay in.

Conclusion

Well-being in relationships is strongly correlated with openness to the other and respect for their rights. The democratisation and secularisation of desires that become momentary whims significantly cool down interpersonal relationships. Mechanisms that weaken empathy can also include the spreading "virus" of destructive comments, full of contempt, irony, ridicule, and disparagement of others, often strangers, who reveal their thoughts on social networks. In turn, a strong fear of rejection and proximity makes us feel increasingly alone.

The mechanisms that impede well-being described in the text highlight the modern neurosis of self-improvement and investment in oneself, as well as the hunger for emotional encounters. Community groups without the opportunity to experience life

in real, close relationships will never achieve well-being. If there are many strong individuals in a group putting themselves first, but not experiencing deep relationships or having weak, superficial community, and family bonds, the destruction of society can occur.

In terms of the phenomena discussed, there are many challenges for pedagogical practice, which with its tools should emphasise and develop social-emotional competencies in young people. The generation born after 2000 is often referred to as Generation I. These are the people who were the first in history to grow up with access to smartphones and the internet. They are also referred to as the tilted head generation or the glass generation, a reference to staring at the screens of small phone screens. Smartphones displace other forms of relationships and communication, and this, in turn, increases levels of isolation, and alienation in real-life relationships, and subsequently becomes a cause of anxiety, depression and loneliness, all of which stem from a lack of social participation. A school is a place of relationships, but today's digital pressures displacing traditional contacts contribute to children and young people no longer thinking with a community perspective. They experience loneliness and cannot experience deep connections and relationships. Technicised forms of contact very often have the effect of dividing the group rather than strengthening it through shared activities. By writing messages to each other in chat rooms, children divide the group, because they do not understand the rules of friendly correspondence, full of understanding and personal culture. *Alienato* in Latin means alienation, mental isolation and shying away from people. While working at the school, I initiated a research project entitled Emotions on covid-alienation are important (Ściupider-Mlodkowska, 2022). The predominant emotions in the respondents, who were children, were increasing dissatisfaction, a drop in mood, general despondency, passivity, apathy, and loneliness, which resulted from various disorders. One of these is nomophobia (no mobile phone phobia), which is the fear of not having a phone and being away from an online connection during school activities when returning from remote education. Another disorder is FOMO (fear of missing out), which is the fear of missing what others are doing. Interestingly, this permanent state of loneliness is not only experienced by children and adolescents, who, due to various barriers – financial, time, or health – are unable to achieve what they care about at the moment, and the use of a smartphone is the only substitute for contact. Relationship facade, lack of self-esteem, dependence on the approval of others and egocentric behaviour are increasingly observed characteristics of adults, compulsively asserting themselves in their greatness and success, appropriating others for this purpose and treating all relationships instrumentally. Academics who have researched on a global scale describing the immediate dangers of the culture of narcissism and its delight in digital possibilities, especially in the Western world,

include. Shoshana Zuboff (Zuboff, 2020), author of an interesting book on surveillance capitalism, Sherry Turkle (Turkle, 2017), who explains choices, manipulation, the way we react and emotionally interact with machines, Thomas Hylland Eriksen (Eriksen, 2003), author of a book on lack of time and misinformation in a world of news overload, Manfred Spitzer (Spitzer, 2021), who wrote about digital dementia and the disastrous consequences of the misuse (especially by children) of social networks, Jean Twenge (Twenge, Campbell, 2010) and many others too numerous to mention here. In Poland, one noteworthy book is Natalia Hatalska's popular science book (Hatalska, 2021), which explains simply why technology is a real threat to the general condition of humanity. In addition, the repeatedly referenced contexts and analyses by M. Szpunar (Szpunar, 2019, 2020), Jacek Pyżalski with his research team (Pyżalski, 2012), a paper by Anna Błasiak (Błasiak, 2023), and many others are worth noting.

The second major conclusion of my long-term analyses is the cooling down of activity and engagement with the other, the lack of opportunity for empathy, and the feeling that it is necessary to act either perfectly or nothing at all. The children and young people in my research very often experience feelings of shame because they don't have something or haven't done something, and this in turn deprives them of the chance to be in the group, to be proactive and to try and experiment. The poetics of self-creation in social media today tell people of all ages that they need to assert themself heavily, they need to succeed to be noticed in an anonymous crowd. The problem is a lack of understanding of relationships in their sense; instead, what follows is treating oneself and others as capital worth investing in, hence the exhibitionist display of the online image of oneself at any time and in any situation of everyday life.

Another conclusion, which I have proved before, concerns the democratisation of envy and the laicisation of behaviour under cover of freedom of expression online. This leads to the spread of cynicism and hate speech, to heckling, bullying, mobbing and the phenomenon of group narcissism, i.e., the glorification of some groups and the belittling of others. This is also confirmed by the theses and psychological practices of Thomas Erikson (Erikson, 2021).

Both children and adolescents are in a constant struggle to be noticed and recognised and have a strong need to value themselves. The concept of social validation was introduced by Erich Fromm, who wrote that it makes people feel that they exist, without it this feeling would be impossible (Fromm, 1997). A faulty concept of social validation in digital pressure is the obsessive control of the correspondence between one's perceptions and those of others, the disclosure of scenes from one's private life in forums, the inversion of the intimate into the public sphere, the dependence of one's sense of self-worth on likes and dislikes from observers. This makes us abandon

our character – its beauty, strength, and individuality – in favour of popularity, and approval from others, which inevitably leads to fragile self-esteem, alienation, and inauthenticity. In the long term, it can lead to depressive disorders, feelings of loneliness, uprooting and humiliation.

Furthermore, my interviewees and respondents revealed a strong attachment to satisfying the need for appreciation with material goods that fill an existential void, e.g., after failed relationships. These are the phenomena of hyperconsumption and compulsive shopping (a concept introduced by George Ritzer) (Ritzer, 2001).

Among children and adolescents, we are faced with disrupted interpersonal communication – abbreviated words and statements, vagueness, and an overabundance of information stimuli that overwhelm and significantly reduce the response to a directed request or command. This results not only in poor Polish but also in a lack of attention span as a result of overstimulation and the use of various messengers such as WhatsApp, Messenger, Instagram and many others. This fact also corresponds to the pervasiveness of a false world of perfection, in which the sphere of health, or rather the obsession with beauty and self-improvement, feeds the individual's ego with false information and images, peer and social pressure, hiding under the question: Why is my life not as beautiful, as rich in sensations and as idyllic as that of celebrities or my colleagues?

Because of all the theses presented in the paper, it has to be said that today a compassionate imagination (M. Nussbaum's term, 2016) is particularly needed to better understand socio-cultural change. There is also a need for professional action to strengthen and rebuild weakened interpersonal bonds. The consequences of a lack of well-being in relationships are extensive: from the manipulation of information, the torrent of information, fake news, the lack of reflective and constructive thinking, to behavioural and psychological disorders related to addictions and, above all, an increasing sense of loneliness. The problem of the economic recession should not, in my opinion, obscure the collapse in interpersonal relationships, as I have demonstrated in this text. Once again, I would like to emphasise that all socialising environments, including the family home, school, and spaces for building lasting and satisfying relationships do not have to compete with the attractiveness of social media, which reduces the time for building real relationships, leading to ideocentrism and egocentrism, including indifference to others, domination of achievements and reliance solely on oneself.

Perhaps, therefore, the role of socio-centric culture and its allocentric features – the need to care for others, socialisation, social sensitivity, simple kindness, and empathy – should be more appreciated. Getting children and young people's attention to reduce the amount of time they spend in front of smartphone screens, including

the effective elimination of risks, is a priority for educational environments. Caring for well-being and mood enhancement and the ability to be an attentive human being among regular web users is to develop the competencies of the future, which will result in well-being and community.

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