



Hello, I'm Special: How Individuality Became the New Conformity

By Hal Niedzviecki

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"Hal Niedzviecki is one of the wisest, funniest and most acute cultural critics writing today."—Naomi Klein, author of *No Logo*

Hal Niedzviecki has a blunt message for the army of tattoo and piercing enthusiasts, bloggers, skateboard warriors, and anyone else walking around with the smug certainty that they are one of a kind: Individuality is the new conformity.

Niedzviecki's meditations touch on everything from designer religions to webcasts, from reality TV to the endless "everybody is a star" platitudes of global pop culture. The result is a smart, witty, and impassioned argument that shatters the you-can-do-anything pop myth and exposes the paradox of individualism.

Hal Niedzviecki is the founder of *Broken Pencil* magazine and the author of *We Want Some Too: Underground Desire and the Reinvention of Mass Culture*.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

When nonconformity has become not only cool but also consumable, and everyone is told they are special, what happens to our definitions of rebellion and individualism? Are our real rebels against "conformist nonconformity" now the "neo-traditionalists" who exchange their individualism for membership in a community that offers meaning in backward-looking ideologies? These questions are pertinent but hardly original, and Niedzviecki's approach doesn't refresh the cultural debate. Niedzviecki (*We Want Some Too*) details lively examples from pop, consumer and counterculture—e.g., backyard wrestlers who assert their uniqueness while participating in mass culture; the "philosophy" brand of health and beauty products that sells its lotions with "moral maxims." But he molds these cases to fit his often predictable arguments: celebrity culture has been confused with individualism; the "semi-collapse" of traditional culture has led some to rebel by embracing orthodoxy; marketers have exploited ideals of individuality; and political activism is often just a way for protestors to "affirm their specialness." Falling short of a richer, more contradictory and more provocative analysis of these cultural items, Niedzviecki only grazes the surface of many of the issues Christopher Lasch (*The Culture of Narcissism*) and Thomas Frank (*The Conquest of Cool*) have already explored with depth and complexity. (May)

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Review

" . . . Niedzviecki is just like you -- a savvy cultural critic . . . part disillusioned memoir, part rant, part astute criticism . . . " -- *Michael Leaverton, SF Weekly, May 2006*

" . . . because of mass media's infiltration into all aspects of our lives, everyone thinks they're Special." -- *Bookslut.com*

"A blend of cultural analysis, reporting and memoir, Hello, I'm Special is full of sharp and funny observations..." -- *Salon.com*

"Equal parts Jerry Seinfeld and Thomas Frank... .Niedzviecki... gives us everything that makes his brand of literary genius so... 'special'." -- *Tikkun Magazine*

"Hal Niedzviecki... is one of the wisest, funniest and most acute cultural critics writing today." -- *Naomi Klein, author of No Logo*

"Niedzviecki holds a scalpel to this social monster with analytic precision that evokes Malcolm Gladwell . . . " -- *Adrienne LaFrance, WBUR Boston, April 2006*

"Niedzviecki's examinations yield fertile insights, without sounding overly pretentious." -- *Gerry Donaghy, Powell's Bookstore, May 2006*

"Using case studies... the book links society's emphasis on celebrity to everything from anorexia to exorcisms." -- *7x7 Magazine*

"Who will bear the burden of being dazzled by the wondrous presence of our countless wondrous individuals?" -- *Paul Reidinger, San Francisco Bay Guardian, May 2006*

"Witty and wise, part journalist, part theorist, Niedzviecki takes up two long-running American themes – conformity and individuality..." -- *San Francisco Chronicle*

About the Author

Hal Niedzviecki's writings on culture have appeared in newspapers and magazines across North America. He is the founder of Broken Pencil, a magazine covering zine culture and the indie arts. In addition to three novels and a story collection, Niedzviecki is the author of *Hello, I'm Special* and *We Want Some Too: Underground Desire and the Reinvention of Mass Culture*.

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From reader reviews:

Fannie Garcia:

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Zachary Foushee:

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