

## ADOLESCENTS' OPINION ABOUT FRIENDSHIP AND CONSCIENCE

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*The starting point of the author is a confrontation between two concepts: one by N. Luhmann (1990) who states the modern society can not be integrated any more by moral and the other by B. Pokol (2005), who disagrees. The article accepts Luhmann's concept that the modern society contain a lot of various differentiated functional sub-systems in which the individual is viewed only from one aspect at a time. But it agrees with Pokol in the conclusion that there is the possibility for ethics and moral in the modern society if we distinguish two parts of the society: the functional sub-systems and the everyday life. The author emphasizes that the school is a special territory of ethics and moral, because it works as sub-system and as a place of everyday life at the same time. He gives an overview of the earlier researches and experiments of pupils' moral judgment in which he characterizes his own workgroup's surveys. He analyses the comments of the adolescents and defines 5 types of friendship based on the comments.*

**Keywords:** adolescents, friendship, moral, school

Luhmann (1990) examines the role of morality in the frameworks of the functionally differentiated society and comes to the conclusion that considering the present situation "the differentiated functional sub-systems are outside of the moral code, they are on a higher, amoral level. Thus, they do not include morality, there is no moral integration between them." According to him, the society - by which he means world society - can not be integrated any more by moral.

Pokol (2005), opposing Luhmann's views, emphasizes that there is the possibility for ethics and moral in the modern society.<sup>1</sup> He takes Luhmann's view as a start point: when speaking about moral, the whole personality of the individual is meant as opposed to most of the institutions of the modern society that view the individual only from one aspect at a time. What he criticizes in Luhmann's concept of ethics and society is that he neglects everyday life in the functionally differentiated society. The solution is to divide the system of society into two parts: "the everyday life containing millions of diffuse communications and the professional functional sub-systems originating from it".

This distinction makes it possible to use the definition of ethics and moral to refer to the whole personality of the individual. In the every day communication the person participates characteristically with his/her whole personality especially in the familiar, emotional community (family, friendship, neighbors etc.) In professional activity the individual as a

tendency - as in official or client position reduced to one role - participates retaining conscientiously the other part of his/her whole personality. Since the two parts of society are in continuous interaction the parameters of the professional sub-system appear in everyday life same as the representatives of every day life turn up in the professional sub-system. (Pokol, 2005)

Based on the above it is important to amplify the role of every day life - in which the individual participates with his/her whole personality, in which the ethic and moral are valid - in continuous interaction with the two parts of society. In my point of view the world of schools can be interesting which is an especial functional sub-system, in which the parameters of every day life play a very important role. The research of schools as relevant community places appreciates same as the survey the moral judgment of pupils. So researchers can give feedback about the situation of ethic and moral by youth's thinking. We have to pay more attention to the school concerning moral education because on this territory new ways opened by radio channels which concentrated on music and interactive entertainment and by TV of course. These channels occupy a dominant position in moral education, they crowd out (displace) the traditional forms of community communication, in which the individual participates with his/her whole personality.

According to Kohlberg's definition, moral competence enables us think and act on moral principles and ideals even if there is motivation or pressure in the opposite direction. This moral principle itself is the ability to judge social settings and conflicts in a just and fair way. Kohlberg viewed justice as a *balancing factor* between different demands and needs.

According to Habermas (1983) the need for moral action is based on a reasonable judgment of conflict situations. Conflict resolution can neither be based on violence nor on unprincipled compromises. The basis of moral action is discursivity and comprehension. Rather than fairness, Habermas emphasized the role of solidarity the basis of which is empathy, the capability of taking the other party's perspective. Another author, Gilligan (1995) stated that a mature form of morality includes both fundamental value: solidarity (the emotional part) as well as fairness (the intellectual part).

There is also *the practical problem* of the possibilities of initiating changes and facilitating a desirable way of development. It is an especially relevant question in the world of schools, which, in our aspect is very important. That kind of questions related directly to educational practice were addressed by *Lawrence Kohlberg* and his successors.

When *Kohlberg* introduced his model of the just community, which was based on school forms, it was also a response to critics regarding the predominance of cognition in his earlier work. He wanted to initiate a discernible and measurable degree of development by having students discuss hypothetical dilemmas using the Socratic method. (Kohlberg, 1985)

In the '80s and '90s more studies and experiments concerning the development of moral competence focused *on the moral aspects of helping behavior* (Bierhof, 1980, Krebs, 1982, Wundheiler, 1988, Staub, 1996, Lind, 1997). This reflected the general recognition that helping in itself has no moral content and that a valid moral judgment can not be established without knowing the actor's intentions and motives, and the possible consequences. These studies confirmed an old axiom of ethics which says that helpfulness increases with moral competence and that it can be developed in a purposeful way.

"Morality begins where the well-being of the individual depends on the behavior of the other", *Fritz Oser*, a German protagonist of the just

community model states (Oser - Althof, 1992. 11.). Oser emphasizes the central role mutuality, interdependence and discursiveness plays in this model. In his study published in 1996 *Georg Lind*, another German disciple of Kohlberg inquired into the moral aspects of violence as the lowest level of conflict resolution, affirming Kohlberg's and Habermas' proposition that morality and violence are mutually exclusive.

In his study with 708 last-grade Bad-Württemberg high school students Lind (1996) collected data by applying the instrument MUT (Moralisches-Urteil-Test) developed by himself, and Christie and Geis' (1973) New Left Scale. The study confirmed the hypothesis that there is a negative correlation between a tendency to violence and the development of moral reasoning. This relationship applied only within some restrictions, though. When moral commitment reached beyond a certain depth it could bring along pretensions to and justifications for violence in the spirit of the saying "the end justifies the means". The results showed that adolescents who wanted to democratize all domains of life and to whom radical policies had an appeal were much more inclined to adopt violent means than those not holding such attitudes. Szabó and Örkény (1998) found a similar pattern among Hungarian teenagers in a study.

The most authentic Hungarian representative of the Kohlbergian model, *Ibolya Vári-Szilágyi* started her educational and research program in the academic year of 1992/93. A part of this initiative was the application of the just community model in some Hungarian schools. The experiment also showed that a necessary precondition for a just community is an intensive and democratic relationship between teachers and students. Despite of the short duration of the study some noteworthy tendencies also were discovered. Participating teachers said the project was first of all suitable for developing tolerance and moral judgement. Another positive outcome was that it could create situations in which students were able to gather personal experiences of collectivism, and could also experience the advantages of compliance with certain ethical norms of action, co-existence and citizenship (*Vári-Szilágyi, 1996*).

The research of Ligeti (2001) didn't show any responses that are in the post-conventional stage among young people in Middle East Europe. The studies carried out as control studies of Kohlberg's surveys had the same results. In Ligeti's work though, there is strong connection between background data and moral judgments.

Our research-group organized two representative surveys about the moral judgments of Hungarian adolescents. The first of them was carried out in 1998 and the second in 2004. The first research sample was 3316 and the second 1505 pupils aged 12-16 years. The survey was representative of the pupils' sex, school year and the type of the settlement hosting their school. Our research group used our own questionnaire to research the moral judgments of pupils. One part of it contained moral dilemmas where the adolescents had to choose an answer based on what they would decide to do in the described situation. They also had the possibility to comment on the situations. In the other part of the questionnaire the pupils could sign in a scale how they agree or not with several moral judgments. We conducted a longitudinal study, too - we studied how moral dilemma discourses change moral judgment in 7 classes of 7 schools for a year. (Szekszárdi, Horváth H., Buda, Simonfalvi, 2000; Szekszárdi, Horváth H., Simonfalvi, 2005a; Szekszárdi, Horváth H., Simonfalvi, 2005b)

## Analyses of comments

This article is based on above two representative surveys about the moral judgments of adolescents. In the first survey the adolescents made more than 7500 comments. I performed a secondary analysis on the data in order to show what kind of moral values the opinions of the adolescents represent. Since in almost 40% of the dilemma situations the friend's behavior (the best friend, in some cases) was morally objectionable, it was obvious that we had a lot of comments concerning friendship. I found exactly 875 comments.

### Types of friendship

I organized these comments by their contents into different types. These are the following: Watchword, Protective-evaluative, Stage, Trembling and Certainty. The 5 types cover the 90% of the pupils' opinion. Let's see what is typical of each type!

The first one is the Watchword type friendship. For this type of pupils the friendship means: "Through foul and fair". They don't notice the moral problem in the practice of their friends. They accept their friends without criticism. They stand by their friend regardless of what he/she has done. Here are some typical examples: *"I do not betray my friend." /1884/*, *"I am not the type to rat on a friend." /2027/*, *"I would never ever betray my friend." /2210/*

The next type has a double name: Protective-evaluative. For pupils who belong to this group the friendship is of primary importance but they also consider moral issues. This type protects outward and evaluates inward. They expect their friends to keep the norms. Let's see a few examples. *"I do not betray him/her because he/she is my friend but I warn him/her not to do it again" /3022/*, *"I would not rat on my friend but would give him/her a scolding about it" /3086/*.

The term 'friend' has been depreciated (lost value) in the third type referred to as Stages. They make strong distance between the best friends and the other friends. At first they specify the stage of the friendship and only after that make the decision in the moral dilemma. It presupposes an implicit ranking. A few characteristic examples for this type: *"It depends on what kind of friend is he/she, I would certainly not betray my best friend." /2706/*, *"If he/she is a best friend, I do not rat on them." /2618/*, *"It depends on since when he/she is my friend and how good the friendship is." /2359/*

The type 'trembling' disapproves of norm breaking behavior but turns a blind eye. They give up own values rather than risking to lose friendship because the friendship may have been difficult to make. This type is characterized by submission. Let's see some examples: *"I won't tell who it was because then he/she may not be my friend any more." /2891/*, *"If I betray him/her I may ruin a good friendship." /3226/*

The last type is absolutely sure of him/herself and friends accordingly we name them 'certainty'. They are confident that such dilemmas do not exist for them because

- Do not have such a friend;
- Do not choose such a friend;
- Good friends do not do that.

For examples: *"I do not make friends with people who do such things." /1737/, "I do not choose friends with sticky fingers." /2679/, "...by the way, none of my friends would do that." /1449/*

On the basis of the results it can be stated that friendship is a basic value for the adolescents and of course a very important value for all the 5 types. The watchword type would never betray a friend. The protective-evaluative may do it in a critical situation, the stage type does NOT betray the BEST friend. The trembling type will betray his/her friend if he/she can be sure that the friend will not be told about it. The certainty type takes it obvious to betray because the pupil who does such things is not his/her friend.

### The five types and the 'conscience'

All the five types used the term 'conscience'. Altogether 55 comments contained this term, including special phrases with this meaning. About half of them uses its meaning as 'remorse', 'sense of guilt'. (I would like to call your attention to the fact that in the Hungarian language, unlike in English, these words have the same root).

Majority of adolescents considered the term 'conscience' to be in strong connection with the term 'remorse'. The pupils allude 'remorse' concerning serious and not so serious moral questions. The term has the same frequency of occurrence if it's the question 'cheating by a test' or 'stealing'. It seems that common judgment doesn't play as relevant role as the pupils' attitude. The majority (58% of the muster) agrees that people have to capitalize the possibilities. However a lot of pupils have remorse if they take advantage of the situation. *"Maybe I do that, but then I would have a sense of guilt and I would not be able to bow to it." /1536/* This sense does not only remain in pupils as sense of guilt but it rules forward, it provides preventive role in the pupils' thinking: they don't take amoral act so as not to feel remorse. *"My conscience wouldn't impel me to copy the test." /2865/*

It's a frequent occurrence in the situation of survey as a basic that the respondent has to say what he/she knows about the moral objectionable action what was made by his/her best friend and he/she was asked about it by the teacher. A part of pupils doesn't want to get into a scrape his/her friend that's why he/she doesn't betray what he/she knows but he/she could have remorse because he/she told a lie to their teacher. *"I wouldn't tell the teacher but I would have sense of guilt." /3000/* Another part of pupils thinks that the conscience wakes up in the perpetrator after so action and it doesn't let him/her lie. *"The conscience of my friend wakes up and he/she will confess his/her action." /1451/* These pupils don't betray their friend because they would like to open the way for their friend to decide on the basis of his conscience, the friend could say what happened so the stakeholders can clear the situation. *"I don't betray my friend I trust in his/her conscience." /1263/ "The delinquent has to confess his action if his/her conscience commands so." /1362/* In this approach the *conscience* appears in the meaning of 'adjudicator'. If this inward judge couldn't function for one's own sake the words of the friend could bring to move. *"I trust in his/her conscience, but he/she doesn't take the responsibility what he/she did, I make him/her feel that his/her behavior is unfair." /2084/*

## Conclusion

Such image manifests from the comments that friendship is an important value for pupils in spite of the fact that many of them use 'friendship' as 'chum, crony'. On the basis of 875 comments I managed to differentiate five types. In every type the key-question was the friend's betraying. The described types are appropriate to interpret more than 80% of the comments.

The teenagers speak about the friendship like a slogan, but most of them balance, analyze the action of his/her friend in the very simple cases as well. The more difficult they feel the moral dilemma the more they balance, analyze. The friendship is the most important value for pupils, most of them doesn't betray his/her friend, they protect his/her friend versus others but they expect - among each other - the right action, to keep the norms from his/her friend.

The conscience - on the basis of comments - is a value which has a strong connection with the friendship and the honor (we didn't examine the last one in the frame of this article). The teenagers used the conscience in the meaning 'remorse' in approx. half of the remarks. It seems that in pupils' thinking the term of conscience is closer to the sense of guilt, to the definition of Freud (1943) than to Fromm's (1947) interpretation, who wrote about conscience as a science of man himself, of success and miscarriage in the art of life.

## Note

1. He defines ethics as "the recognized beliefs, norms and values of the members of the society in the dimensions of the good and bad or right and wrong." He suggests using the term "moral" together with ethics "for the ethical behavior of the individual and his/her relationship with ethics." (Pokol, 2005)
2. The numbers in brackets after citation regard to the code of pupils.

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