

ÁGNES BÁLINT

Towards the Positive Psychology of Adolescence

Abstract Adolescence is a moratorium period modern society gives young people to prepare for the tasks of adulthood. Society, however, seems to be more and more impatient towards adolescents. During the last century, reference books and studies tended to depict young people as delinquent, selfish, abusive, irresponsible and deviant. My present study aims at deconstructing the “black legend” of adolescence, joining the efforts that try to elaborate the positive psychology of this age period. I rely on fiction written by adolescents. I point out that these stories reflect on adolescents’ identity crisis and serve as a tool for identity construction. The protagonists of these stories, depicted as Mary Sues, fulfill the function of identity projects. I conclude that adolescents are creative by nature, and speculate on mending the “dislocated world” while fighting on the “right side,” and visualize themselves as morally right and competent adults. All these characteristics have some very practical educational implications. Teachers should much more consciously exploit the creative power and speculative inclinations that adolescents possess. Teachers should also appreciate adolescents’ ambitions to live a meaningful life and help them find reasonable goals.

Key words: adolescence, black legend of adolescence, identity project, creativity, fiction

Adolescence

Moratorium for preparation

Adolescence is a moratorium period given by the modern society to young people to prepare for the tasks of adulthood. Society is patient in the sense that it allows adolescents to try themselves in different social roles without expecting responsible commitments from them for a certain period of time.

Historically adolescence is a fairly new period: it emerged in the 19th century due to modern civilization and it is present mainly in the modern Western societies. Today adolescence starts at around the age of 12 and finishes somewhere in the middle 20s. According to Moshman (2005), in Western societies “prolonged adolescence is the norm,” and he suggests that it “often lasts well past age 30” (Moshman, 2005, pp. xx-xxi).

Adolescents have some special life tasks to complete before they enter the threshold of adulthood. The first one is to separate from the parents and gain autonomy. Autonomy promotes to take the control over their lives into their own hands. Autonomy must be accompanied with responsibility:¹ the young person must

¹ This is the way I join and refer to the main topic of this Special Issue, Autonomy and Responsibility.

recognize his real talents and strengths and acknowledge his weaknesses. The sense of autonomy provides the adolescents the illusion of infinite freedom, which he insists on so much that it can be an obstacle of further commitments.

After the process of separation from the parents, adolescents find a new reference group, the peers. Young people dismiss the nest-warmth of the family to find emotional security in a community that shares the same dilemmas about identity and society. They form a distinct social group that has its own norms and needs, consuming habits and has cultural aspects as well.

As the young person moves beyond the boundaries of childhood (the parental control loosens and new mental skills arise), a new world opens before him. He faces a promising future, and experiences “infinite” freedom. Subjectively, it is an enjoyable and satisfying experience to be an adolescent. From this viewpoint, adolescence starts when the need for autonomy emerges and ends when the young person is ready to cross the threshold of adulthood by replacing the illusion of freedom with the real but reasonable freedom adults possess.

The second important life task is to achieve identity. Adolescence is the period when identity crisis (meant in the Eriksonian sense) appears. In modern societies, identity is not provided automatically to children by birth – it is a personal construction one has to work on. “Indeed, says Erikson (1980), in the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of ego identity” (p. 95). Identity crisis is a process over the course of which the individual faces the unlimited choices of vocations, life-goals, values and social roles the modern society offers. That is why Erikson (1974) identifies the achievement of identity a psychosocial task. The young person tries some options offered by the society to see which one fits him, meanwhile he actively speculates on the possibilities. Then he develops his attitudes to make his own choices and commitments. The more complex the tasks to be completed in the society are, the longer it lasts to make commitments. That is why the moratorium period tends to be gradually expanded – even over a decade.

The third life task is to find sexual identity. This is the first age period for the young person when the issue of sexual identity becomes the matter of life and death. Sexual identity is a core component to personal identity. The process of its ascertainment is full of dilemmas and doubts. In our modern society, sexual identity is to some extent a choice – and as such, it has to be decided. The issue is more complex if the sexual orientation is not clear.

The fourth life task is to gain control over the changed body. Puberty is attended by significant growth, and by some morphologic changes of the body (shape, composition and functioning). At the beginning of puberty children are usually frightened when realizing the new ways their body operates, but they soon

reconcile with their new powers and abilities that occur at the same time. They need some time to feel this new body their own. They need to construct a new body image as well as a new body scheme and gain control over this transformed body.

The fifth task is to undertake the grown-up social roles and fit in the society. This needs commitments, which are hard to make. Young people tend to enjoy being “on the go”, being free from responsibilities and duties. They are not eager to commit themselves to anything too quickly. Making responsible commitments is the last step of the adolescent to cross the threshold of adulthood.

Concerning psychological development as a whole, adolescence differs more from childhood than from adulthood. Moshman (2005) suggests that adolescence “be viewed not as the last stage of childhood, or even as an intermediate period between childhood and adulthood, but rather as the first phase of adulthood. This phase may be more distinct in modern Western societies than it has been traditionally, but it is nonetheless a mistake to overdifferentiate adolescents from adults” (p. xxi). The only differentiating character could be the preparatory nature of this age period – opportunities with limited responsibility and without the obligation to commitments.

The “black legend” of adolescence

The “patient” society, however, shows its more and more impatient face towards this social group which seems to aim enjoying life rather than becoming a responsible and adapting adult as quickly as possible. Society seems to have lost control over this group in the sense it controls children or adults. To maintain at least the illusion of control, society stigmatizes this age group labeling them deviants, delinquents, abusive, irresponsible and the like. Over the course of the 20th century psychologist, sociologists, and other practitioners were delegated to execute this stigmatization by constructing theories of adolescence that focus on the “risks” and “dangers” of this age period and making up therapies and policies to prevent both the adolescents and the society from these threats.² Lerner (2005) points out that „for about the first 85 years of the scientific study of adolescent development, the field was framed almost exclusively by a deficit perspective about this period” (p. 4). This discourse is what I call the “black legend” of adolescence. Lerner and others (2006) reflect on the vocabulary about young people, shaped by the deficit model, saying that it is inappropriate to discuss positive youth development, unless we mean the absence of negative or undesirable behaviors.

² Benson (2003), on the other hand, referring to the Americans’ discussions about youth, suggests that this deficit-focused discussion reflects on the American culture, “a culture dominated by deficit and risk thinking, by pathology and its symptoms” (p. 25).

„It is very discouraging for a young person to try to make a positive life – say Lerner et al. (2006) – when he or she is confronted by the suspicion of substance use and abuse, unsafe sexual practices, and a lack of commitment to supporting the laws and mores of society. What sort of message is sent to youth when they are spoken of as inevitably destined for trouble unless parents or practitioners take preventive steps? How do such messages affect the self-esteem of young people, and what is the impact of such messages on their spirit and motivation?” (pp. 2–3).

In order to transcend this “black legend”, theorist, practitioners and policy makers must change their focus and start to build up a new vocabulary to identify and describe these ignored characteristic features of adolescence. The 21st century offers two ways of different origins for that.

One is the Positive Youth Development (PYD) theory represented by Lerner and his collaborators, the most of whom are affiliated with Tufts University, Massachusetts. Lerner et al. (2005) claim that PYD is constructed „to replace long-held beliefs of the inevitable so-called storm and stress of adolescence and the predictable engagement by youth in risky or destructive behaviors” (p. 10). As Larson (2006) sums up, the adherents of Positive Youth Development believe that “Youth are producers of their own growth; development involves more than preventing problems; adults are most effective when they support the positive potentials within young people” (p. 677).

The other way at hand for transcending the “black legend” is the effort of positive psychology to convert psychology’s perspective from weaknesses to strengths. Seligman, Parks and Steen (2004) claim, that “We are committed to a psychology that concerns itself with repairing weakness as well as nurturing strengths, a psychology that concerns itself with remedying deficits as well as promoting excellence, and a psychology that concerns itself with reducing that which diminishes life as well as building that which makes life worth living” (p. 1381). Seligman (2002) points out, that “much of the task of prevention in this new century will be to create a science of human strength whose mission will be to understand and learn how to foster these virtues in young people” (p. 5).

Researchers of adolescence inspired by positive psychology stress the protective factors (see Piko, 2013, for example), rather than the risk ones. They point out that adolescents’ can also take “normal” trajectories in development. Analogically to the thesis that health does not equal the absence of illness, we can state that being free from delinquent behaviors and substance abuse does not necessarily result in a competent and happy adolescent. The issue is how we can promote adolescents’ creativity and their search for meaningful life.

I think, however, that positive psychology of adolescence can and should reach much further, than simply summing up protective factors. In my present study,

I suggest a more comprehensive approach, as my contribution to the positive psychology of adolescence.

Cognitive “revolution” in adolescence

Adolescence is a period when there are a plenty of changes in all fields of life. Adolescents face biological, social and cognitive maturation. These changes interact with one another. Now I only focus on the changes in reasoning and thinking.

Over the course of adolescence, argues Piaget and Inhelder (1958), the last qualitative turn of the mental maturation proces³ occurs. Thinking processes get under the direction of a highly elaborated logical system called INRC system. It means that the adolescent becomes able to make operations on operations in a sophisticated manner. Form this time on the adolescent does not tolerate contradictions. Hypotheses appear in reasoning and testing options set off. The adolescent aspires after the sophisticated comprehension of the cause and effect relations and can easily draw relevant conclusions (Moshman, 2005; Piaget & Inhelder, 1958).

The adolescent is able to think abstractly and understands high level abstractions. He is occupied with the interpretation of abstract concepts like *reality, justice, love, life and death*, that had been so incomprehensible and elusive to him before. Handling these concepts means an enjoyable busyness to him as well as a sense of competence. The adolescent is both a poet and a philosopher at the same time, who suddenly discovers the great issues of life, and realizes his smallness to solve them.

Through abstractions the adolescent becomes able to construct theories. As Piaget and Inhelder (1958) say, “the adolescent is the individual who begins to build “systems” or “theories” (p. 339). Building theories means pondering upon options and elaborating a system of premises that do not contradict one another, and lead to some conclusions. “The adolescent theory construction shows both, goes on Piaget (1958), that he has become capable of reflective thinking and that his thought makes it possible for him to escape the concrete present toward the realm of the abstract and possible” (p. 342).

Constructing theories need the same mental abilities as the construction of alternative, fictional worlds. Which also offers such an “escape.” This is what he

³Theorists of mental development keep on debating whether the Piagetian conception is relevant or not, and if it is, than in what degree. They agree, however, that “adolescents commonly make progress toward higher levels of rationality.” (Moshman, 2005, p. 46) They also conclude, that “Cognitive development beyond childhood is less certain than we might have liked, but its potential is richer and greater than we thought.” (Moshman, 2005, p. 46)

does during daydreams and when writing fiction stories. Adolescents are rather concerned with “what if” questions, than the simple “whats”. Alternative realities (either created by themselves or others) provide the frames inside of which they can enjoy the freedom of speculation. The limits and constraints of reality vanish, and the realm of possibilities seems infinite. This is the proper “space” to withdraw to in the course of daydreaming to work on the construction of identity.

Identity projects

Adolescents working on the construction of their identities are “professional” daydreamers. Daydreaming helps adolescents to imagine a series of possible identities for themselves and dwell on the contemplation of one or another desired image. In their imaginations, adolescents carry out the most different carriers and accomplish several lifestyles. They depict their future self as a successful, happy and popular person whom people accept and appreciate.

Meanwhile they fulfill wishes solving all the problems that they cannot cope with in reality. All these can be done without the pressure of commitment, purely as theoretical possibilities, as well as enjoyable pastime.

Thus, adolescents in the course of daydreaming make plans in connection with their future identities, or, with Harre’s term, they create identity projects. According to Harré (1983), identity projects are plans or imaginary carriers that we dream about when our current identity is threatened by inner or outer dangers. Though the Harreian term, identity project, originally refers to adults’ future plans, I still apply it for adolescents. I think adolescent identity crisis can be considered a threat (both inner and outer) that makes the adolescents construct identity projects (of a brand new identity). In fantasy, the adolescent can carry out or try his wished identity, or the wished aspects of his self.

Adolescent novelists do the same thing as daydreamers, in psychological sense. Novels are fictions, created by fantasy. Novels imply a fictional world, a conception what a world is constituted of and how it works. The heroes adolescent novelists create represent their wished self aspects and can also be considered their identity projects (Bálint, 2010a). I will go on with the details below, when analyzing adolescents’ novels.

Inflative and extension processes

In the course of adolescence the ego and the self go through crucial transformations. Different psychological theories grab and point out different aspects of this change. Psychoanalysis tells about the increased narcissism which means increased self-love and vulnerability at the same time. The adolescent demands acknowledgement and adoration, or else he reacts with withdrawal or hostility. In addition, the adolescent

withdraws his libido from his environment and feels that he is capable of loving only himself. Withdrawn libido results in an inflative state of the ego.

Into an extended ego like this, either the whole world can be involved. The adolescent realizes that he has to do with the whole world: he is interested in a great many fields and motivated to gain competencies and proficiency at the most divergent realms of life. He discovers unlimited potentials and means in himself.

Potentials integrated in the ego enable the amplification and the extension of the self, which results in the emergence of the so called grandiose self. Experiencing his grandiose self, the adolescent realizes himself to be extraordinary, capable of anything, and even invulnerable.

Piaget and Inhelder (1958) point out the revival of egocentrism at adolescence. Enjoying their new cognitive competences, adolescents construct theories focusing on the vocation and messianic reformer role assumed to themselves. Piaget and Inhelder (1958) suggest, that “the adolescent not only tries to adapt his ego to the social environment but, just as emphatically, tries to adjust the environment to his ego” (p. 343). “The result is, continues Piaget, a relative failure to distinguish between his own point of view as an individual called upon to organize a life program and the point of view of the group which he hopes to reform” (p. 343).

Regression, unconscious and creativity

Contrary to the inflative and extension processes, regression also appears within the structure of the ego during adolescence. Erikson (1974) argues that the state of crisis and regression usually go together. Regression means that the ego gives up the stage of adoption that it had gained before, and slides back to earlier stages. If the regression goes down deep, the adolescent can submerge into the unconscious spheres of his ego. Erikson (1974) presumes that the adolescent deliberately indulges in regression. According to Zsuzsanna Kulcsár (1992), regression can reach very deep. Through the process the adolescent gains insight into his unconscious spheres. This makes him capable and also inspires him to create. Over the course of the submersion into the unconscious, the ego can experience the “ancient chaos.” The contents found there serve as raw materials for all creative products. Emergence from the unconscious results in rebirth and self-creation. Kulcsár adds: “The emergence of the ego and the artwork out of the ancient chaos, that is, out of the deep regression, belongs to the category of transcendental experiences (“peak experience”, “mystic experience”, “Adam’s experience”). Passing through it is

rather a rule than an exception”⁴ (p. 227). Thus, regression and creativity often go together.

Another important connection to be discussed lies between the unconscious and creativity. Unconscious processes promote the individual to skip the limits of time and space and pass through experiences that could otherwise be accessed only in the course of dreaming. The contents taken out of the unconscious this way are only raw materials for fantasy that must be thoroughly modified. The process of modification is the process of creation itself.

Researches on adolescents’ novels

Sample

Publishers rarely publish books written by adolescents, at least in our country.⁵ On the web, however, one can easily come across dozens of homepages that are specialized in publishing adolescents’ writings. Adolescents tend to be busy with writing blogs, poems, short stories, fanfiction stories and even novels. They upload their artworks onto these internet sites, which function as virtual workshops. They enjoy the virtual company of their peers and look forward to enthusiastic readers. The authors usually use pseudonyms, which provide them with all the advantages of anonymity and the illusion of a different identity.

I chose some of these novels for research purposes – different number at a time. The least number of novels in an investigation was nine and the most were fifty. The authors were all adolescents – defined as a range – between the age of 12 and 20.⁶ Female⁷ authors seem to be overrepresented in my sample (there are twice as many females than males) which is due to the higher rate of girl authors on the homepages.⁸ It is common that all authors are involved in some different genres, other than novels, and some of them have more than one novel. My choice of novels also depended on the protagonists’ sex. I took a novel into my sample only if the author’s and his/her protagonist’s sex coincided. I did it so because I regard the protagonists the author’s identity project, and it would lead to unnecessary complications if protagonists of the opposite sex were also considered.

⁴ My translation.

⁵ In Russia, on the contrary, it is a common practice.

⁶ I took an author’s novel in the sample only in case he/she introduced himself/herself in some ways, and gave information about his/her age.

⁷ I took an author’s novel in the sample only in case the author’s sex was unambiguously identifiable.

⁸ There are two possible explanations for this. One is that girls are more likely to write fiction stories than boys are. The other is that girls are more likely to *publish* their artworks than boys are.

I have to admit that I did not intend to examine the aesthetic values of these novels and I share the opinion of those who are dubious about it. I considered these novels as texts that reflect identity crisis and I wanted to study them only from psychological aspects. Nevertheless, some authors showed inevitable literary talent.

Reasons for writing novels

The first issue here is what makes adolescents write novels? To answer this question we have to find out what the difference is between novels and other genres in psychological sense. These questions are all extensive – here I would like to give very simple answers instead of a complex analysis of genres.

Novel is a narrative genre which implies story telling. It is a fairly plausible literary genre for daydreamers to place a whole, multifarious world into it – opposite to short stories where usually a single conflict is discussed. The world depicted in a novel is necessarily fictional, an alternative world, where “what-if” questions can be posed. “What if” questions stand for hypotheses to be tested. Role-trials (represented by the hero’s adventures), simulating the undertaking of adult social roles, can also be carried out through a long story. Alternative carriers can be tried, and wishes can be fulfilled in an imaginary way, while enjoying the state of being away from the constraints of reality. The grandiose self (represented by the protagonist) fit into a novel as well. A novel is suitable for externalizing the inner chaos and gaining a control over it.

Common features of the novels

Adolescents’ novels in general share some common features with fairy tales, myths, and utopias (Bálint, 2010a). Some of them are adventure stories while others are rather love stories or fall in the category of science fiction. Most novels are film-like: while reading the stories one feels as if they were movies. This generation can use up the film’s tools to express their thoughts, due to their upbringing through cartoons and movies.

The vast majority of the stories are unfinished. Adolescents tend to be engaged in writing more novels parallel to one another and they frequently leave these stories incomplete. They enjoy speculating on several different options and are always dissatisfied with the universe they had previously created. Creativity can be detected in the abundance of ideas they possess time to time. The stories are of different length (5–300 pages).

All stories share the „separation from the parents” motif. In many cases the protagonists are orphans, or half-orphans, or loose their parents in the course of the story. Some parents are kidnapped, others are killed, and some of them just vanish somehow. Most protagonists go for a journey, or escape from home (Bálint, 2011). These circumstances form the basic situation in which the protagonists are on their

own when facing challenges. This kind of starting point indicates the pursuit for emotional separation from the parents in order to gain enough autonomy to prepare for adulthood.

The stories are full of speculative elements (supernatural powers, aliens, etc.) (Bálint, 2009, 2011). Some stories are placed into an alternative universe; some take place in foreign countries. Divergence from reality in fantasies provides a new perspective for adolescents working on the construction of their identities. From a distance like this, they can observe their hypothetical selves as outsiders. In addition, the new, fictional worlds give them a chance to vary the conditions in order to test these identity projects (Bálint, 2009).

Two more common features are to be discussed in details below that reveal some significant aspects of adolescents' identity crisis. One is that the depiction of the protagonists meets the criteria of the Mary Sue phenomenon. The other one is that the stories follow the narrative structure of the hero-myths, or, with Campbell's (2004) term, the monomyth.

The Mary Sue phenomenon

Mary Sue is neither a celebrity, nor a significant person, and what is more, she is not a real person either. Originally, it was the heroine's name in a Star Trek fanfiction parody but later it turned into a metaphor for all literary heroes (either males or females) who enjoy their authors' excessive sympathy. Mary Sue is created when the author places himself/herself into the story as the protagonist or some of the heroes. The Mary Sue-type hero represents the author's idealized, narcissistic, grandiose self. Mary Sue's character is depicted so unrealistically perfect and over idealized, that it evokes rather rejection and derision than identification or affection from the audience. Mary Sue's figure is so much „overwritten” that it generally implies a writer with poor skills.

In my research on the Mary Sue phenomenon in adolescents' novels (Bálint, 2011), I found that all protagonists in these stories meet the criteria of Mary Sue. Female protagonists are all particularly beautiful, attractive and popular among friends, especially among boys. They usually follow the latest fashion. Male protagonists are strong, masculine and handsome, idolized by girls. Not surprisingly, a great emphasis is put on the outward appearance, due to age peculiarities. The authors depict the protagonists' outstanding dressing style and admirable habit in a detailed manner.⁹

⁹ There is only one detectable difference between male and female Mary Sues. Only girls take a bath or a shower over the course of the story – boys never bother with cleaning themselves. The function of taking a bath, though, is not only cleansing, but also to go through a metamorphosis. (Bálint, 2010a)

The protagonists usually possess exotically sounding¹⁰ names, such as Kaira, Ryan, Amy, Kelly, Tyr, and so on. They are all young – their age either corresponds with their author's age or is a bit older than the author's.

All protagonists in adolescents' novels have excellent personal characteristics: they are intelligent, honest and brave, and possess all idealistic characteristic features that a human being can have. They usually have a vocation, face a grandiose mission to complete. These heroes and heroines always stand on the "right side": fight against evil and try to mend the dislocated world. They are successful in completing their mission – in case the story gets to an end. Even if the story remains unfinished, hints unambiguously reveal the happy ending.

Mary Sues usually possess supernatural abilities as well. These refer to the adolescent's changed body and the effort to gain control over it. The supernatural ability usually frightens the hero when he/she recognizes it for the first time. Then a training period starts when the hero tries his/her power and makes mistakes while using it. Later he/she becomes trained enough to use his/her power adequately.

If we would like to find a psychological explanation for Mary Sue's character, we have to refer back to the changes in the adolescent authors' ego and self. The increased narcissism explains the author's partiality towards his/her protagonist. The inevitable perfectness, the various special competences, the extraordinary features and supernatural abilities can be considered the manifestation of the grandiose self. The reviving egocentrism explains the messianic vocation.

In the background of all these we can recognize the ego in regression as well – the ego which is unable to struggle with the reality turns to previous, magical, wish-fulfilling fantasies and it uses up the available unconscious raw material for the construction of a new ego.

Mary Sue serves as the author's identity project, who is placed into a fictional world to fulfill the author's wishes. She grows up instead the author, satisfies his/her thirst for success and popularity, compensates his/her incompleteness. She has a mission through which the author can complete some virtual ambitions without any responsibility or consequences and meanwhile he/she forms an inner model about how one can achieve identity. Mary Sue is stands until she fulfills the model-forming role and promotes the author constructing his/her identity to find his/her real mission is real life.

I argue the Mary Sue that appears in adolescents' novels cannot be considered a lack of writer's skills. I think Mary Sue necessarily accompanies these stories. She is not only necessary but also unavoidable – for it is the true reflection of the changes in the adolescents' self. From this aspect, Mary Sue is the sign of the

¹⁰ They sound exotic to Hungarians.

healthy ego-development in adolescence. We have no reason to criticize it from an aesthetical point of view (Bálint, 2011).

The monomyth structure in the novels

Joseph Campbell American mythologist distinguished four function of myths (1991): mystical/metaphysical, cosmological, social and psychological. Following Jung he suggested that myth provide us with symbols that carry the human psyche forward and contribute to the maintenance of psychological health. He attributed the neurosis of modern age to the absence of myths. He agreed with one of his master, Heinrich Zimmer, who indicated that myths serve as personal mentors, guides or even “road maps” for those who look for themselves in the labyrinth of the modern world (Moyers □ Campbell, 1988).

Campbell exposed his principles on myths in his book entitled *The hero with a thousand faces*. He argues that myths follow a common narrative structure that he named as monomyth. Monomyth is the hero’s symbolic journey inside the deep layers of the psyche. The short summary of the monomyth by Campbell (2004) is as follows: „A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into the region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (p. 28).

According to Campbell (2004) this basic story can be revealed in all authentic myths as well as in all well written, psychologically authentic narratives. What stands for psychological authenticity? It is the monomythic structure, argues Campbell. The momentums of submergence into the unconscious and the return are archetypal and universal, and at the same time, they are psychologically relevant. All these particularly resemble for what we call crisis or coping with crisis in psychology. Following Campbell’s logic, we can say that monomyth models crisis, or, more precisely, the coping with crisis.

According to Jung all people possess a capacity to create myths: that is what he calls the mythopoetic¹¹ capacity. We are capable to create psychologically authentic stories instinctively, without learning about the monomyth structure, just having successfully coped with a crisis. Creating psychologically authentic stories has to do with the essence of art, though it is not the privilege of the artists.

In my study on the monomyth structure in adolescents’ novels (Bálint, 2010b) I pointed out that stories written by adolescents follow the narrative structure of the monomyth. Adolescents, though they are „amateur” writers, are capable to create psychologically authentic narratives. These narratives are either authentic

¹¹ Myth-creating capacity. If it is taken from Greek, it is spelled as „mythopoeic.”

confessions about identity crisis or report on the stages of the journey they had successfully passed. I concluded that through the analysis of the structure of the novels we could elicit authentic and empirical data about the adolescent identity crisis.

Implications for education

All these have some very practical educational implications.

Seligman, Ernst, Randal, Gillham et al. (2009) argue that the results of positive psychology should be applied to educational contexts as well. According to them (2009) we can coin the term “positive education” for education that aims at “both traditional skills and happiness” (p. 293). Happiness is a broad concept that includes experiencing positive emotions and flow as well as living a meaningful life. Happiness can also be considered an emotional component of subjective well-being. This term covers pleasant emotions, low levels of negative moods and high life satisfaction. Researchers of positive psychology (e.g. Fredrickson, 1998, Rowe et al., 2007; cited by Seligman et al., 2009 pp. 294–295) confirmed that there is an unambiguous connection between well-being and learning. Seligman et al. assert “More well-being is synergistic with better learning. Increases in well-being are likely to produce increases in learning, the traditional goal of education” (p. 294). They indicate that “well-being should be taught in school on three grounds: as an antidote to depression, as a vehicle for increasing life satisfaction, and as an aid to better learning and more creative thinking” (p. 295). They offer some training for students in order to become capable to promote their own well-being. I think this also implies some changes in teachers’ attitude. Teachers should appreciate adolescents’ ambitions (expressed in their novels) to live a meaningful life and help them find reasonable goals through which these young people can effectively contribute to the perfection of the “dislocated world”.

As for “better learning”, we can add, teachers must be aware that adolescents are inspired principally by “what if” questions, rather than the simple “whats”. Options attract them more than pure facts. Subject matters for adolescents should take this preference into consideration (see Bárdossy, 2011). Encouraging self-expression in their preferred way (see Dezső 2012) is also a fundamental issue of effective teaching. Promoting cooperative structures in the classroom also facilitates effective and self-reflective learning (see Arató 2013; Arató & Varga, 2008). Furthermore, teachers must realize that adolescents bother with virtual reality perhaps as much as they do with everyday one. This is, however not a sign of delinquency but an age-specific way of working on the construction of their identity.

Teachers should much more consciously exploit the creative power and speculative inclinations that adolescents obviously possess (see Mrázik, 2010).

Lerner et al. note, that “schools emphasize critical rather than creative thinking” (p. 295) though both would be equally important. We have discussed, that creativity which derives from a journey in the depth of the unconscious, is attached to identity construction. Besides, as positive psychology assumes, it can effectively contribute to subjective well-being. That is what positive education should consider most.

Summary

In my paper I tried to highlight on the actuality of reconsidering our general conceptions about adolescents. I coined the term “*black legend of adolescence*” to refer to the prevailing theories that represent a prejudiced approach towards a social group, which has already lost the innocence of childhood but has been reluctant to enter adulthood. I pointed out that there are two new discourses on adolescence (Positive Youth Development and Positive Psychology), that intend to deconstruct the “black legend”, and have a great contribution to construct a new image about this age period.

I pointed out that, since crisis and creativity are often synergic, adolescents are creative by nature. They speculate on mending the “dislocated world” while fighting on the “right side.” They tend to visualize themselves as morally right and competent adults. That is how they prepare for the challenges of adulthood.

This paper was intended to be a contribution to the positive psychology of adolescence.

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