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Responsibility as a personal, local and global phenomenon

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Abstract

Responsibility is one of the crucial competences for social and personal development. It is widely discussed in current educational discourses (e.g. social participation vs. social alienation). Philosophers, educators and psychologists (Bauman, Kennedy, Kerr, Branden) name responsibility as an important factor in becoming a social being, a significant factor in the process of understanding oneself as a member of society and for developing active participation. That responsibility functions on different levels (local, social and global) in communities, though, provokes questions about the understanding of responsibility, as well as its range. Using the AGA (Association Group Analysis) research method, data from 252 students aged 10-14-17 from a big city and a smaller town were examined. Results showed that for young people responsibility is very much related to the affective dimension, a relationship that decreases with age, while subjective references to responsibility become more important. The range of responsibility is wider than the personal sphere. It is related to close relationships (family, friends), but also, to a lesser extent, to the macro-perspective. Nevertheless, personal perspective becomes more related to responsibility with age.

Keywords: *responsibility, citizenship, personal perspective, social perspective, global perspective*

Introduction

Responsibility is a phenomenon central to contemporary ethics. It is noted by representatives of all social disciplines – philosophers, sociologists and psychologists. While civilizational changes in the 20th century - multitude of ideas, dispersion of meaning, obscurity of criteria and relativity of situations - create an aura of uncertainty in the postmodern age, that make people face choices and deal with their consequences, they also create circumstances for hitherto unseen freedom. This freedom gives a particular meaning to responsibility in the subjective sense, as the social change at the turn of the century is connected to leaving the era of obedience and entering the era of responsibility (Crozier 1996). Bauman (1996) stresses, that responsibility is one of the central phenomena connected to the building of individual subjectivity in the postmodern world. The turn in thinking about responsibility is also observed in psychology. Traditional psychological research concentrated on conditions for its assumption (Heider 1958, Reykowski 1986). Nowadays, the meaning of responsibility is as an attitude, as well as a competence necessary to building a good and happy life, with the latter more and more often stressed (Branden 1999).

Responsibility is a phenomenon very much present in educational discussions on social participation versus alienation, discipline versus responsibility, socialization versus

upbringing. Responsibility also accompanies considerations of current phenomena connected to growing up and development. Two examples can be named: phenomena connected to emerging adulthood and civic responsibility of the adolescents.

The phenomenon of ‘emerging adulthood’ (Arnett 2000) is a new development period, and it systematically becomes wider (in the past it used to be 2-3 years long, between 20-22 years old, nowadays it is seen as lasting more than ten years, sometimes until the age of 35-40). Its essence is being in two worlds – the adult world and the world of childhood. Adulthood is expressed in relation to financial and occupational independence. Being anchored in childhood is reflected in the unwillingness to develop stable relationships (e.g. marriage), having children, and also staying with one’s own parents and remaining in the ‘child-position’ in the family. Arnett (2000) sees the essence of ‘emerging adulthood’ in issues connected to being responsible for oneself, one’s life and for other people.

Another contemporary issue related to responsibility is the perception of oneself as a member of a social system and being ready to take responsibility for being a part of it. In his conception of citizenship, Kennedy (2006) names personal citizenship – connected to being responsible for one’s place in the social system. It is expressed in being responsible for everyday actions, e.g. learning to get an occupation, which will help gain independence and not be reliant on social support, which can then be given to those needing it more.

Facing such everyday issues makes one wonder: *How do we raise children to be responsible?* Before answering, other questions should be posed: *What is responsibility in the eyes of children and adolescents? What categories or associations is it connected to?* Answering those questions might help us to understand the phenomenon as viewed by children and adolescents, and through that, inspire its growth.

In this paper, we will attempt to answer this question. It will be analyzed on two levels: The range of responsibility, where we will answer the question: *To what extent is children’s and adolescents’ responsibility limited to the personal sphere and to what extent does it engulf wider areas (local or global)? Is this extent associated with age?* The semantic content of responsibility, where we will answer the question: *What meanings are associated with responsibility and if/how does its understanding change with age?*

Three groups of school-age children and adolescents participated in the study. The groups differed in terms of development period and the educational institution that they attended: 10 year olds represented the period of late childhood and attended primary schools, 14 and 17 year olds represented early and middle adolescence and attended secondary (polish second level education, gymnasium) and high schools, respectively.

The levels of analyses of responsibility

In this section we will present theoretical background for the discussed phenomenon of responsibility, in reference to the mentioned research questions.

The semantic content of responsibility

The notion of responsibility is understood very differently, depending on the context in which it is set. This was discussed by Ingarden (1987), who pointed to its polysemy. Ingarden concentrated on 'bearing responsibility', which refers back to punishment and legal sanctions. He also stressed the active and subjective nature of responsibility, which calls for an internal disposition for it – 'the taking of responsibility'. The notion of responsibility has deep and diverse meanings. Different levels and contexts for its understanding have been presented below, together with a proposition for their classification.

A fundamental prerequisite of responsibility, noticed by all theoreticians discussing this concept is awareness. It is expressed in the understanding of one's actions for oneself and others (Jonas 1996, Ingarden 1987, Fromm 1993). Predicting what might happen as a result of one's actions helps make a decision whether to go on, despite the possible damage while being ready to compensate for it. It also allows for the giving up of an action due to its negative consequences or to adjust it in such a way so as to avoid particular outcomes. It is thus connected to the readiness for a conscious control of one's own behaviour (Jonas 1996, Derbis 1987, Borowska 1998). In this sense, responsibility also has a cognitive dimension and it is related to caution and sense of agency (Ingarden 1987, Kofta 2001). Its prerequisite is maturity of reasoning, the ability to assume someone else's perspective (cognitive empathy), but also thinking in terms of 'cause and effect', which allows to understand the consequences of events.

Traditionally, responsibility was connected to obeying norms in legal and social terms (Picht 1981). Philosophers saw the core of responsibility in respecting rules and values (Ingarden 1987). Kwieciński (1998) stressed moral maturity as a factor influencing the development of the competence of responsibility. This maturity is understood as the ability to consistently employ internalized moral rules – the readiness to enter agreements with others and abide by them. Responsibility in this sense is also, however indirectly, an issue interesting for psychologists, who stress that the moral development is not only expressed in adoption of norms, but also in active organization of knowledge on the norms in terms of contact with other people (Kohlberg 1984). In this sense, responsibility also has a moral dimension. Emotional, social and cognitive development allow to understand the situation, assume the perspective of others and see the universal benefits of rules and norms of conducts and to act accordingly.

Philosophers stress, that appropriate behaviour is specific to humans and, apart from being regulated by the environment, it is also regulated by the subject. Karol Wojtyła (1985, 1992) claimed, that a person is answers mostly to his/her own conscience. He differentiated between responsibility in general and subjective responsibility. He stressed the importance of individual freedom and autonomy for responsibility. Psychologists stress, that an important prerequisite of responsibility is independence and maturity. It allows to set boundaries to influence and being responsible for what one can control (Branden 1999). This makes it possible to respect boundaries between oneself and another individual and it gives a realistic sense of responsibility (Derbis 1987). The writings on responsibility more and more often stress the responsibility for one's own

life – making most of the chances and possibilities, investing in competences and learning. This in turn stresses the attitude of entrepreneurship and courage in facing challenges (Branden 1999). Similarly, Kwiecinski (1998) claims, that the willingness to succeed is an important factor building the attitude of responsibility (e.g. of teachers). In this approach, responsibility has a subjective dimension.

When discussing responsibility of teachers, educators stress one more important aspect of responsibility – kindness and being eager to help. They claim, that a particular sensitivity towards others is an important element of a responsible attitude (Kwiecinski 1998, Borowska 1998), which is expressed in the relationships with the world and other people. In this sense, responsibility has an affective dimension.

The range of the notion of responsibility

Authors rarely describe responsibility in terms of its range. One can, however, infer it indirectly. Responsibility is most often considered as belonging to a person (Ingarden 1987), stressing self-awareness, awareness of one's actions, making choices, freedom and being able to shape one's future life (Wojtyła 1985, 1992, Branden, 1999). Another important context is being responsible for another person, both in terms of the consequences of one's action for another person as well as respecting their autonomy (Bauman 1996, Levinas 1991). Responsibility is also set in a wider social context. Theoreticians dealing with the issue of social capital and citizenship stress the importance of responsibility for one's social environment (closer – one's home area, village, quarter, and more distant – region, country) in the building of democracy and social participation (Nelson & Kerr 2006, Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz et al. 2010).

Michalik (1998) refers directly to the range of responsibility, by differentiating between individual responsibility (with a micro-range), groups and social roles (with a medium range) and responsibility for the world (macro-range). He also poses the question whether young people are ready to think about global responsibility and responsibility for the future. According to research conducted by Teresa Borowska in the 1990s (Borowska 1998), students perceive responsibility through its social dimension.

Developmental factors for responsibility

Since we discuss responsibility in the context of age-related changes, we should take note of its age-related characteristics. The below descriptions introduce only the basics of developmental issues connected to responsibility and the list is thus incomplete. Nevertheless, it points to the main factors, that may influence the change in the perception of this phenomenon occurring with age. In reference to the mentioned dimensions and ranges of responsibility, we will discuss the prerequisites of responsibility in terms of reasoning, building relationships with others and gaining autonomy between the ages of 10 and 17.

Late childhood is marked by an intense development of the cognitive sphere. One of the important achievements of this period is the development of cause-effect reasoning and

the ability to de-centrate (Brzezińska et al. 2008). Children develop the ability to plan their own behaviour for shorter and longer periods of time. These are critical abilities for the learning of responsibility, as they allow the children to understand their actions according to their consequences and individual agency. Understanding various points of view and developing cause-effect thinking allows, however limited it may be at this point, to make choices and decisions about one's actions and agreeing to their consequences. The sense of agency is developed at the same time, encouraging attempts to control one's own actions. The ability for hypothetical thinking is developed during adolescence, thus making it possible to plan the future with more awareness. The ability to consider the situation from various points of view, to analyze arguments for and against and to make conscious decisions develops fully during this period (Vasta et al. 1995). This allows to better understand social systems, expectations stemming from them and to assume responsibility for one's actions as e.g. a pupil, student or citizen in a more conscious manner.

Social life is particularly turbulent during late childhood. Children participate in various social relationships, which are controlled by adults to a lesser extent (Appelt 2005). They cooperate with one another in groups, pairs, with adults, but they also work independently. This gives them the possibility to learn different kinds of responsibility: for the task, motivation for its completion, for one's own development, learning, common work and it also gives an opportunity to experience the sense of responsibility for the group, renouncement of responsibility, its division and diffusion, and giving it up. The awareness of common good develops together with a sense of joint work, which is essential to building social responsibility and the willingness to participate for the good of the community. During the period of adolescence, teenagers build relationships with their peers in small groups, but also strong friendships and intimate relationships. This enhances social and interpersonal competences and the need for autonomy causes young people to redefine relationships with adults on more equal terms.

Autonomy understood as gaining independence from parents, but also as building relationships with role models other than the parents starts to develop during the period of late childhood (Bee 2004). It is a critical element of learning responsibility, since it gives a sense of influence, of freedom and its limits. During adolescence the autonomy strengthens and freedom is increased. Responsibility in that period is connected to a greater possibility to make decisions about oneself, to make choices not only about everyday activities but also about one's future (e.g. choice of university, occupation, partner).

AGA as a method for studying responsibility

Our research questions make it necessary, that the notion of 'responsibility' be analyzed in terms of its semantic contents, but they also encourage comparisons of age groups. This calls for a research method that would allow to make quantitative and qualitative analyses at the same time. The most promising method meeting both of these conditions is AGA (Associative Group Analysis). It allows to understand potential dispositions connected to responsibility by analysing free associations, without semantic or theoretical interference. AGA was developed by and an American sociologist Lorand

Szalay in the 1960s (Szalay & Bernt 1967, Szalay & Bryson 1974, Szalay & Deese 1978). He assumed, that free associations generated around a particular phenomenon are a reflection of people's beliefs about it and that they are directly related to the readiness for particular actions in a given area. The starting point for his method was Charles Osgood's work on semantic differential. Osgood (Osgood et al. 1957), Deese (1962, 1965) and Noble (1952) and colleagues assumed, that the language reflects individual dispositions connected to intra-subjective phenomena. Reaching those dispositions would allow to understand hidden, subjective meaning, which would make it possible to better understand behaviour (Osgood et al. 1957). James Deese (1965), who significantly contributed to this method stressed, that it is not only the associations, but also their sequence, and in consequence their availability, that is crucial. The associations generated first are most stable and they constitute the semantic core of the studied phenomena, which is the aim of AGA. Analyses are done on two levels: qualitative (the semantic content) and quantitative (quantification of meanings). The qualitative level is based on analyses done by competent judges, who cluster the associations according to their meaning into categories. Those categories may then be clustered into wider groups. This allows to differentiate between various meanings, which constitute the analysed notion. The quantitative analysis allows to compare the saturation of meaning between different groups of respondents (e.g. people of different ages). In order to do that, the associations are weighted – the first associations get 6 points, the second get 5 points and so on. The weights for each of the associations were determined by Szalay in his research on accuracy and reliability of the method (Szalay & Brent 1967, Szalay & Bryson 1974, Szalay & Lysne 1970, Szalay et al. 1972, Szalay et al. 1970). After calculating the weight for each category (expressed by the sum of points), a mean weight for each category is calculated, making it possible to compare the category's importance in comparison to other categories. Szalay recommends that the number of people in all groups should be identical. This makes it possible to compare the mere sum of weights. If the groups differ in terms of headcount, a mean weight can be computed for each person. This solution is used in the present study.

AGA was first used in cross-cultural studies. With time, it became more widely used for comparisons of groups within the same culture. In Poland, it was used to study changes in the perception of e.g. the phenomenon of entrepreneurship during the period when free trade was developing (Mroczkowski et al. 2002). It was also used to make comparisons among teenagers – their understanding of cooperation and competition (Ross et al. 2006).

Research procedure and participants

The AGA procedure consists in generating associations by research participants. The stimulus is an ordinary word, a term designating the studied phenomenon. In our case this was 'responsibility'. The instruction was formulated as follows:

You have a sheet of paper in front of you. Within one minute, write everything that comes to mind when you hear [the name or term designating the phenomenon is to be given here, in our case this was RESPONSIBILITY].

252 participants took part in our study. They came from two classes from three schools – primary school, secondary school and high school, and two cities – the capital and a 15 thousand inhabitant town in the northeast of Poland. The numbers of students in the groups are not the same (Table 1). The numbers are similar between cities – 52% in the capital and 48% in the smaller town. The number of boys (37%) is smaller than the number of girls. The biggest age group was that of 14 year olds (41%) and the smallest was that of 17 year olds (25%).

Table 1. The number of participants in different groups – associative method

Age	CAPITAL GIRLS	CAPITAL BOYS	SMALL TOWN GIRLS	SMALL TOWN BOYS	Sum
11 year olds	26	17	22	19	84
14 year olds	36	18	31	20	105
17 year olds	26	7	19	11	63
Sum	88	42	72	50	252
Sum for city		130	122		252

The study was conducted according to a standard procedure. After coding the data, weights were ascribed to each association, depending on their order. Competent judges clustered similar (in terms of meaning) associations into categories. The comparisons were made according to all included variables, but the biggest differences were detected for comparisons of age groups.

Results

In the section below, we present the research results. They have been presented in order, starting from the most general to the most detailed. First, we discuss the categories connected to responsibility named by competent judges. Then we present the categories that are connected to two levels of analyses: the range and the semantic content of the notion of responsibility, grouped according to theoretical assumptions. Computing weights for each category made it possible to make comparisons within the notion of responsibility, as well as between groups, mostly in terms of the proportions of categories that change with age.

Categories and responsibility

Competent judges selected 26 association categories based on the similarity of meaning. The categories have been presented below. Capital letters indicate the name of the category, i.e. a generalized label expressing the nature of the associations in a simplified way. Examples of associations have been given for each category:

CLOSE PEOPLE – children, girlfriend, marriage, mom, love, friendship, siblings, the beloved one.

DISTANT RELATIONS – companionship, acquaintances, co-worker, shop assistant, neighbour, colleague.

A GOOD JOB – precision, order, diligence, thoroughness, orderliness.

MATURITY – being an adult, maturity comes with age, age.

OTHER – stomach, combat 18, track suit, carrot, opinion, hand, pill, dancing, razor.

DIRECTING BEHAVIOUR – taking care of one's actions, one's own decisions, having control over something, being able to make one's own decision, composure, planning one's life.

CONSEQUENCES OF ACTIONS – consequences of one's actions, considering consequences, making up for mistakes, facing consequences of one's actions.

LEARNING AND WORKING – learning, taking up a job, home duties, work, school.

INDEPENDENCE – one's own flat, independence, earning a living, one's own money.

DUTY – duty, necessity, carrying out one's duties, performing duties.

RESPONSIBILITY – someone responsible, responsibility

CARE – caring, taking care of something, taking care of someone, being caring, looking out for someone/something, helping others, sacrifice, caring for someone.

COUNTRY/NATION – flag, nation, patriotism, emblem.

OBEDIENCE – being well-mannered, being obedient, discipline, obedience, obeying one's parents.

SOCIAL POSITION – the president, leadership, exercising power.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP – activity, ambition, aims, being able to manage in tough situations, action, courage, engagement, resourcefulness, determination.

OFFENCES – taking blame for something that one has done, punishment for something done, reprimands, being blamed.

CONSIDERATION – being careful, caution, consideration, reason, reasonable mind, reflection, thought.

SOCIAL JUSTICE – justice, social justice, being just, justice for others.

AWARENESS – foreseeing consequences, being aware of one's actions, being aware of the importance of decisions, knowing what one is doing, being aware of what one does.

DIFFICULTY – a difficult life, something difficult, a terrible thing, effort.

HONESTY – being fair towards acquaintances, clear conscience, telling the truth, respect, sincerity, honesty, truth.

IMPORTANT – something important, important, exceptional.

FOR ONESELF – for my life, for oneself, being responsible for oneself.

RULES – legal responsibility, law, respecting rules.

OBLIGATION – keeping one's word, promise.

The gathered material was a starting point for creating broader categories or dimensions in accordance with the theoretical assumptions and the research questions. In our studies the classifications were different for each research question. Most of the categories, however, were taken into account for all analyses. Some of them, such as A good job, Difficulty, Important, Duty, Obedience were not analysed because of the problems in ascribing them to one dimension. They can, however, be included in future analyses. Some categories were impossible to include, e.g. 'Other', which comprised of associations not fitting to any of the groups.

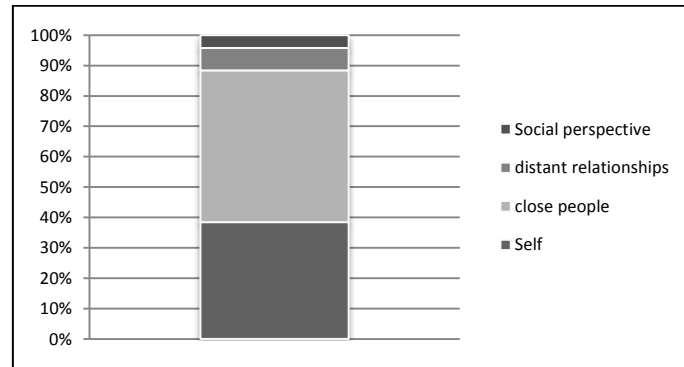
Range of responsibility

As indicated in chapter 2.2., the writings on the subject do not determine a one classification of the range of responsibility, but its connections to the Self, Other people and communities are often stressed (e.g. Michalik 1998). This differentiation became the basis of the classification of categories according to the implied range of responsibility. The analyses done by competent judges revealed a different understanding of the area of 'other people'. Some associations pertained to the other person as a close partner, some included more distant relationships. This division was taken into account, and so finally four ranges of responsibility were selected:

1. RANGE OF THE SELF – connected to such categories of responsibility, which directly pertain to the actions of a person or they stem from their action and are directly connected to the self and do not refer to others. The following categories were included here: For oneself, Duties, Offenses, Learning and working, Consequences of actions, Directing behaviour, Independence.
2. RANGE OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIP – includes categories directly relating to close people (girlfriend, mom, etc.) or all those associations pointing towards a close relationships with the other person (caring, helping). It included categories: Close people, Care.
3. RANGE OF DISTANT RELATIONSHIP – included on category pertaining to those people that one is in touch with, but does not form close relationships with, i.e. Distant Relations.
4. RANGE OF SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE – included categories of social and macro-social range pertaining to areas outside the closest environment (nation) but also to social functions that imply responsibility for a social group (e.g. exercising power, president): Country/Nation, Social position.

Graph 1 demonstrates the proportion for each categories. The associations pointing to close relationships constituted the categories that saturate the notion of responsibility to the greatest extent. The social perspective saturates it to the least extent.

Graph 1. Proportions for different ranges of responsibility

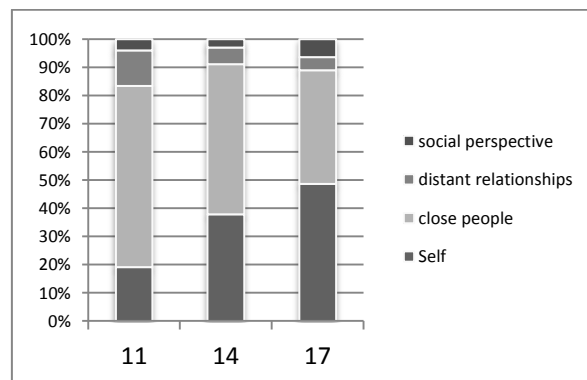


Range of responsibility and age

Comparing range of responsibility between age groups indicates that during late childhood (10 years old) responsibility pertains mostly to close people and relationships with them. The importance of this area decreases with age and in late adolescence (17 years old) it is close to the range of 'Self' (Graph 2). The meaning of the latter category increases with age. The meaning of the social range also increases with age.

To sum up, it is worth noting that the range of responsibility among older adolescents is more balanced, there is no dominating area.

Graph 2. The proportion for different range of responsibility and age

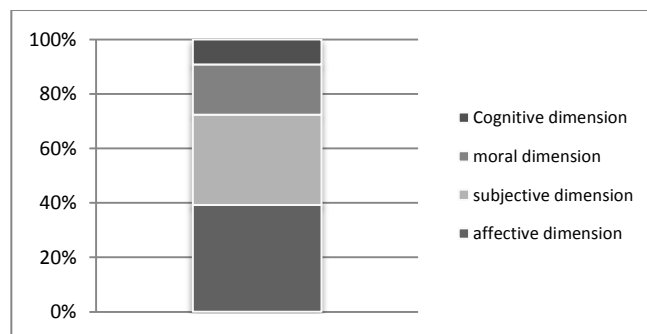


Semantic content of responsibility

The ways of defining responsibility in philosophy, education and psychology were discussed above. Referring back to those definitions, four dimensions of association categories were detected. For each of the dimension, the semantic content of responsibility was analysed:

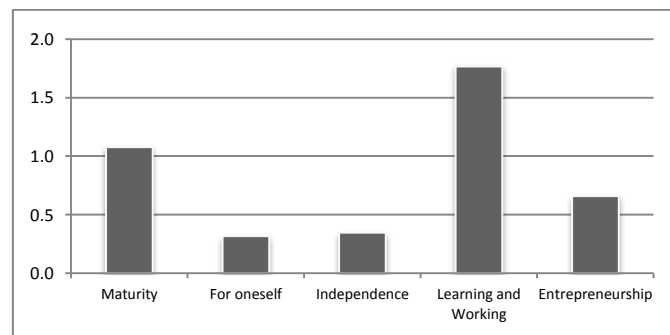
- **COGNITIVE DIMENSION OF RESPONSIBILITY** – connected most of all with understanding responsibility as being aware of the consequences of one's actions (Ingarden 1987, Jonas 1996, Fromm 1993), a sense of agency (Ingarden 1987, Kofta 2001) and readiness to direct one's behaviour (Jonas 1996, Derbis 1987, Borowska 1998). The following categories were included here: Consideration, Directing Behaviour, Awareness.
- **MORAL DIMENSION OF RESPONSIBILITY** – it is connected to respecting values (Ingarden 1997, Michalik 1998), acting according to conscience and the ability to enter agreements with others (Kwieciński 1998, Michalik 1998) and the maturity of moral reasoning (Kohlberg 1984, Piaget 1967). It included the following categories: Honesty, Rules, Obligation, Social Justice, Offences, Consequences of actions.
- **SUBJECTIVE DIMENSION OF RESPONSIBILITY** – understood as independence and maturity (Branden 1998, Erikson 2004), sense of responsibility (Ingarden 1987, Derbis 1987), awareness of the Self, connected to the identity and substantiality of the subject (Ingarden 1997, Erikson 2004) and readiness to take responsibility for one's life – chances, possibilities, learning, challenges, success (Branden 1998, Kwieciński 1998). It included categories: Maturity, For oneself, Independence, Learning and working, Entrepreneurship.
- **AFFECTIVE DIMENSION OF RESPONSIBILITY** – in education studies connected to kindness, openness, readiness to help others and support them (Kwieciński 1998, Borowska 1998). The following categories were included: Close people, Care.

Graph 3. Proportions of different dimensions of responsibility

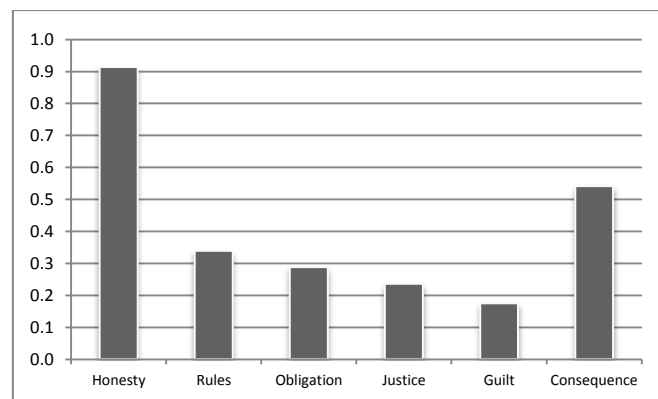


As indicated on Graph 3, responsibility is mostly saturated with the affective dimension. It pertains to emotions connected to building relationships with the closest people. The subjective dimension is also significant. Graph 4 demonstrates the average weights per person for each of the categories. Responsibility in the subjective dimension is connected mostly to the area of learning and working, as well as with convictions about one's maturity. Entrepreneurship, related to ambitious action, achieving goals and facing challenges is of secondary importance. On a moral level, responsibility is mostly related to honesty and facing consequences of one's actions and to the least extent it is connected with guilt (Graph 5). Feeling guilty is only weakly connected to the forming of conscience (Kohlberg 1984) and it is only slightly related to responsibility. The last dimension, saturating responsibility to the least extent constitutes its cognitive component.

Graph 4. Mean individual weights for the categories ascribed to different dimensions



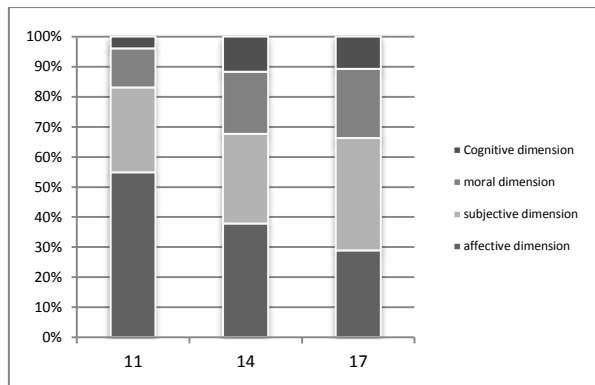
Graph 5. Mean individual weights for categories in the moral dimension



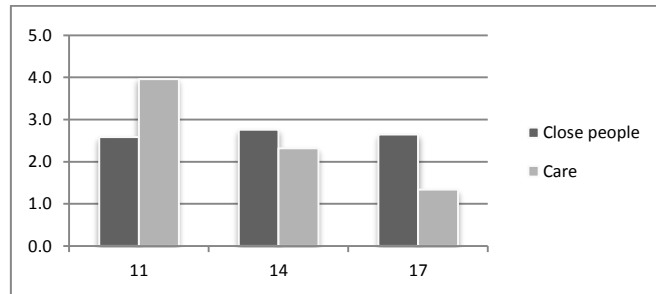
Semantic content of responsibility and age

The analysis of proportions of dimensions in different age groups yielded interesting results. As indicated on Graph 6 the biggest change was observed in the affective dimension, whose relationship with responsibility decreases with age. This stems mostly from the decreasing importance of the Care category (Graph 7).

Graph 6. Proportion of weights for different dimensions of responsibility and age



Graph 7. Mean individual weights for categories in the affective dimension and age



Interesting changes were observed for the subjective dimension, whose importance increased with age. This stems from the increase of importance of the Maturity category and the emerging category of “for oneself”, which first appeared among 14 year olds (almost absent among 11 year olds). Older teenagers perceived responsibility as something that comes with time, is connected to wisdom and being an adult. The increasing importance of the moral dimension stems from the rising category of honesty and facing consequences of one’s actions. The increasing weights of the cognitive dimension can be traced back to the increase in all of its categories. To sum up, children’s responsibility was saturated mostly with the affective dimension, and adolescents’ responsibility was more balanced and saturated with most categories, but mostly with the subjective dimension.

Summary and conclusions

Educating and bringing up children makes it difficult not to face questions about responsibility. This issue has been of particular importance in the last decades, called by sociologists post modernity (Bauman, 1995) and including fundamental changes in all areas of life. Psychologists refer to this period as the revolution of subjects (Obuchowski, 2000) and stress the importance of internal control, awareness of one's values, well-considered choices and being responsible for one's life. Educators mention the crisis of role models, the fall of great ideologies and the loss of monopoly in shaping world-view of adolescents previously held by the family, the church and the school (Śliwowski, 2005). They also stress children's and teenagers' subjective responsibility. The crisis of great narratives and the relativity of ideology (Melosik, 1995) creates a sense of being lost and aversion towards responsibility expressed in the rejection of adulthood as a desirable state (Arnett, 2000). Newest research pictures young people as a generation that shows little civic responsibility, i.e. readiness to participate and engage in social life (Koseła, 2005, Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz et al. 2010). Before asking how to raise children to be responsible, one should understand how children and adolescents perceive this notion. This was the question posed in the present article, where we discussed the results of studies on the range and semantic content of responsibility, conducted with the use of AGA method.

The results indicate, that young people perceive responsibility in extra-personal terms. It is, however, specific in nature. It pertains mostly to close people and relationships with them. The importance of this area decreases with age, making way for the subjective dimension, directly connected to the self. These changes have a developmental basis. Cause and effect thinking is developed during childhood and adolescence. This allows young people to better understand and estimate the limits of their control. Those limits become more realistic with age and the sense of responsibility for oneself is increased. The rise of the subjective range may also stem from the gradual rise in autonomy, especially intense during the period of adolescence. The social range of responsibility is marginal, but it increases with age, which may be connected to the teenagers' broadening social horizons and seeing oneself not only as a member of peer group but of the society in general.

Responsibility is saturated mostly with the affective dimension, but its meaning decreases with age. It is not connected to the decrease of importance of close relationships but with the change of those relationships – as children grow older responsibility is no longer viewed as sacrifice or helping. This might stem from the changing definition of relationships, especially with adults – from control and caring to partnership. The subjective dimension of responsibility, in turn, increase with age. It is characterized by an emerging understanding of responsibility as something that comes with maturity. It is difficult to say, whether this suggests passivity in acquiring responsibility (e.g. no matter what I do, I will become more responsible with time), nevertheless, it points to a strong relationship between responsibility and time, and not with individual attributes (action or effort). There is a great disproportion between the significance of the cognitive dimension and the definitions of responsibility proposed by

theoreticians. For children and adolescents, consideration and awareness of action are connected to responsibility only slightly, while philosophers list it as its most basic prerequisite.

To sum up, teenagers' responsibility becomes more tightly connected to the "self" with age. It is related to maturity and it comes with age. The importance of the affective component, connected to helping and sacrifice decreases with age, but at the same time the understanding of responsibility as the necessity to meet the consequences of one's action increases. Such outlook on responsibility might enhance readiness to take up responsibility in the form of contracts (Jonas, 1996) and avoiding natural responsibility.

The presented study on the meaning of responsibility constitutes a proposition for the search of meaning of this phenomenon. The empirical evidence encourages to take up new perspectives in analysing responsibility. Children's and teenagers' responsibility is connected to educational ideologies, e.g. in the authoritarian style understood as obedience and submission while in the anti-authoritarian style it is understood as independence and self-reliance. This issue however, calls for a separate article.

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