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Morality as the Adoption of Societal Norms

Abstract

Moral development is the process through which children develop proper attitudes and behaviors towards other people in society, based on social and cultural norms, rules and laws. Moral development is a complex issue that since the beginning of human civilization has been a topic of discussion among some of the world's most distinguished psychologists, theologians and culture theorists.

Keywords: Moral, Morality, Behavior, Cognitive.

Introduction

Moral development is the process through which children develop proper attitudes and behaviors toward other people in society based on social and cultural norms, rules and laws. Moral development is a concern for every teachers and parent's moral behavior means behavior in conformity with the moral code of the social group. Moral comes from the Latin word MORES, meaning Manners, customs and folkways. Moral behavior is controlled by moral concepts. The rules of behavior to which the members of a culture have become accustomed and which determine the expected behavior patterns of all group members. Behavior which may be called true morality not only conforms to social standards but also is carried out voluntarily. It comes with the transition from external to internal authority and consists of conduct regulate from within.

Moral development involves children learning how to tell the difference between right and wrong. To use this knowledge to arrive at appropriate decisions when faced with complicated choices and to have the strength and independence to act in accordance with that right decision despite the fact that it may not be a convenient thing to do. Moral development has both an intellectual and an impulsive aspect.

Early psychological interest in moral development was centered on discipline – the best type to use to ensure that children would learn to be law abiding citizens and the effect of such discipline of their personal and social adjustments. With the serious increase in juvenile delinquency, interest in studying the causes, cures and prevention of juvenile delinquency become a psychological as well as a sociological concern. In the past two decades psychological studies of moral development have been spurred on by theories based on research findings of the predictable patterns of moral development during the childhood years.

The work of the Givecks at Harvard University to determine what is responsible for Juvenile Delinquency has contributed two important finding which have stimulated psychological interest in other aspects of moral development. The first of the Gluecks findings was that juvenile delinquency is not a new phenomenon in the adolescent year but rather a continuation of a pattern of unsocial behaviors that had it origin in childhood. The second finding of the Gluecks was that there is a close relationship between juvenile delinquency and the environment, especially the home environment. This finding has spurred psychological interest in investigating the reasons for the discrepancy between moral knowledge and moral behavior even during the childhood years.

At birth no child has a conscience or a scale of values. Consequently, every newborn infant may be regarded as unmoral or no moral. Learning to behave in a socially approved manner is a long, slow process which extends into adolescence. It is one of the important developmental tasks of childhood. Before children enter school, they are expected to be able to distinguish right from wrong in simple situations and to lay the foundations for the development of a conscience. Before

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childhood is over children are expected to develop a scale of values and a conscience to guide them when they must make a moral decision.

In learning to be moral these are four essential elements learning what the social group expects as its members as spelled out in law, customs and rules developing a conscience, learning to experience guilt and shame when the individuals behavior fails to conform to the expectations of the group and having opportunities for social interactions to learn what members of the group expect. According to Santrock- 'Moral development concerns with rules and conventions about – just interactions between people.'

These rules can be studied in three domains-
1. An affective or emotional component that consists of the feelings that surround right or wrong actions and that motivate moral thoughts and actions.
2. Cognitive components that centre are on the way we conceptualize right and wrong and make decisions about how to behave.
3. A behavioral component that reflects how we actually behave when we experience the temptation to lie. cheat or violate other moral rules

As it turns out each of the three major theories of moral development has focused on a different components of morality. Psychoanalytic theorists emphasize the affective components or powerful moral affects. They believe that children are motivated to act in accordance with their ethical principles in order to experience positive effects such as pride and to avoid such negative moral emotions as guilt and shame. Cognitive developmental theories have concentrated on the cognitive aspects of morality or moral reasoning and have found the ways children think about right and wrong may change rather dramatically as they mature. The research of social learning and social information processing theorists has helped us to understand how social information processing theorists has helped us to understand how children learn to resist temptation and to practice moral behavior inhibiting actions such as lying stealing and cheating that violate moral norms.

Psychoanalytic Theory

According to Sigmund Freud morality emerges conflicts arise because they fear punishment and loss of parental love. Young children desire to possess the parent of the other sex, but they give up this wish because they fear punishment and loss of parental love. They describe the super ego as one of the three main structures of personality. I frauds' theory, a child's super ego – the moral branch of personality develops as the child resolves the Oedipus conflict and identifies with the same sex parent in the early childhood years.

Freud's focus on punishment and love withdrawal as initiating the super ego a type of discipline called induction- which spurs the child to Notice others feeling- supports conscience formation. Induction involves pointing out the effects of the child's misbehavior on others nothing especially their distress and making clear that the child caused it. Children exposed to induction showed more prosaically behavior in that they spontaneously gave hugs, toys and verbal sympathy to others in distress (Zahn-Waxler,Radke-Yarrow and King,1979) when children experience induction consistently, they may form a script for the negative emotional consequences of harming others. The guilt is also play the important role of moral development. There is little support for Freudian conceptions of guilt or conscience development. Guilt is an important motivator of moral action. Inducing empathy- based guilt by explaining to children that their behavior is causing pain or distress to a victim and has disappointed the parent is a means of influencing them without using coercion. Empathy based guilt reactions are consistently associated with stopping harmful actions, repairing damage caused by misdeeds and engaging in future prosaically behavior (Baumeister 1998). Freud can be credited for pointing out that moral emotions such as pride -, shame, and guilt are potentially important determinants of ethical conduct and that the internalization of moral principles is a crucial step along the way to moral maturity.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory emphasizes a large difference between an individual's ability to be morally competent and morally performing. Moral competence or acquisition of moral knowledge depends primarily on cognitive sensory processes. Competencies include what children are capable of doing what they know, their skills their awareness of moral rules and regulations and their cognitive ability to construct behaviors moral competence is the growth of cognitive sensory processes simply put being aware of what is considered right and wrong. Moral performance is influenced by the possible rewards and incentives to act a certain way.

Cognitive Development Theory

According to theorists both cognitive growth and social experiences help children to develop progressively richer understandings of the meaning of rules, laws and interpersonal obligations. According to Piaget moral development occurs in two clear cut stages. First stage of moral realism or morality by constraint and the second stage of autonomous

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morality or morality by cooperation of reciprocity. Piaget identified two broad stages of moral understanding-

Heteronymous Morality (5-10yr)

As the term heteronymous morality suggests, children of this stage view rules as handed down by authorities(god, parents and teachers) according to Piaget two factors limit children's moral understanding –

1. The power of adults to insist that children comply which promotes unquestioning respect for rules and those who enforce them.
2. Cognitive immaturity especially their limited capacity to imagine other perspectives. Because young children think that all people view rules the same way their moral understanding is characterized by realism that is they regard rules as external features of reality rather than as cooperative principles that can be modified at will.

Autonomous Morality (10yr and older)

Piaget second stage of moral development in which children view rules as flexible, socially agreed- on principles that can be revised to suit the will of the majority. Older children and adolescents move beyond this payback morality to a view of reciprocity as maturity of expectation, this advanced understanding is called ideal reciprocity.

Piaget theory accurately describes the general of change in moral judgment. Moral understanding is supported by cognitive maturity, gradual release from adult control and peer interaction.

Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory

The major perspective in moral development was proposed by Kohlberg. Kohlberg arrived at his theory after interviewing children, adolescents and adults about their views on a series of moral dilemmas. Kohlberg constructed a theory of moral development that has 3 main levels with 2 stages at each of the level.

In Level 1

Preconventional morality the child behavior is subject to external controls. In this level child is obedience and punishment oriented and the morality of an act is judged in terms of its physical consequences. In the second stage of this level children conform to social expectations to gain rewards.

In Level 2

Conventional morality the child increasing views moral issues from the perspective of others. In the first stage of this level 'Good Boy Morality the child conforms to rules to win the approval of others and to maintain good relations with them. They begin to judge behavior by intention; she meant to do well in stage 2 law and order mentality. Children are concerned with authority and maintaining the social order. Correct behavior is doing ones duty.

In Level 3

Post conventional level- if true morality is to develop it appears during these years. The child does not appeal to other people for moral decisions, these decisions are made by an enlightened conscience, in first stage the child makes moral decisions

legalistically or contractually, that is the best values are those supported by law because they have been accepted by the whole society. If there is conflict between human need and the law, individuals should work to change the law. In second stage an informed conscience defines what is right. People act not from fear, approval or law, but from their own internalized standards of right or wrong.

Review of Literature

Hugh Harshorne and mark may (1928-1930) observed the moral responses of 11000 children who were given the opportunity to lie, cheat and steal in a variety of circumstances- at home at school at social events and in athletics. A completely honest or dishonest child was difficult to find. Children were more likely to cheat when their friends put pressure on them to do so and when the chance of being caught was slim. Burton (1984) analysis of the consistency of moral behavior suggest that although moral behavior in influenced by situational determinants, some children are more likely that other to cheat lie and steal. Bandura(1991) A key ingredient of moral development from the social cognitive perspective is an individual's ability to resist temptation and to develop self control. Park(1972) cognitive rationales have been more effective in getting children to resist temptation over a period to time than have strategies that do not use reasoning, such as when parents place children in their rooms without explaining the consequences for others of the children's deviant behavior. Elliot Toriet(1983) observed that children actually encounter two kind of rules focus on the welfare and basic rights of individuals and include prescriptions against hitting, stealing, lying, cheating or otherwise harming others or violating their rights. Research by Lawrence Walker and John Jaylor(1991) suggests that by carefully tailoring their own reasoning to the child's ability to understand and by presenting new moral perspectives in a supportive way, parents may often promote their children's moral development. Thoma and Rest (1999) Recent research suggests that when children are in a state of development transition, kohlbergs moral concept are less influential in moral decision making that is children are unsure how to interpret actual events. Hoffman (1988) believes that parents should use induction to encourage children's moral development. In research on parenting techniques, induction is more positively related to moral development than is love withdrawal or power assertion, although the findings vary according to children's development level and socio economic status. Brody and Shaffer (1982) induction works better with elementary school age children than with preschool children and better with middle than with preschool children and better with middle than with lower SES children. Brody and Shaffer (1982) suggested that parents who rely on harsh forms of discipline tend to have children who often misbehave and rarely express feelings of guilt, remorse, shame or self criticism.

Parenting and Moral Development

Piaget and Kohlbarg held that parents do not provide any unique or essential inputs to children's moral development. They believe that parents are

responsible for providing general role taking opportunities and cognitive conflict. But they reserve the primary role in moral development for peers. Both parents and peers contributed to children's moral maturity. In Freud psychoanalytic theory the aspects of child rearing that encourage moral development are practices that instill the fears of punishment and of losing parental love. Love withdrawal power ascertains and inductions are more important parental discipline techniques. Love withdrawal comes closest to the psychoanalytic theory emphasis on fear of punishment and of losing parental love. Low withdrawal is a discipline technique in which a parent withholds attention or love from the child. Power assertion is a discipline technique in which a parent attempts to gain control over the child or the child's resources. And induction is the discipline techniques in which a parent uses reason and explanation of the consequences for others of the child's actions.

Parental discipline does contribute to children's moral development but there are other aspects of parenting that also play an important role, such as providing opportunities for perspective taking and modeling moral behavior and thinking. Moral children tend to have parents who –

1. Are warm and supportive rather than punitive.
2. Use inductive discipline.
3. Provide opportunities for the children to learn about others perspectives and feelings.
4. Involve children in family decision making and in the process of thinking about moral decisions.
5. Model moral behaviors ant thinking themselves and provides opportunities for their children to model such moral behavior and thinking.

School might also be involved in contribute to moral development. The moral development atmosphere should be created by school and classroom rules, the moral orientation of teachers and school administrators, text materials. Teachers serve as models of ethical or unethical behavior. Classroom rules and peer relations at school transmit attitudes about cheating, lying, stealing and consideration for others.

The contemporary approaches like character education, values clarification and cognitive moral education are also important for moral development. Character education is a direct approach to moral education that involves teaching students basic moral literacy to prevent them from engaging in immoral behavior and doing harm to themselves or others. Value education means helping people clarify what their lives are for and what is worth working for. And cognitive moral education is an approach based on the belief that students should learn to value things like democracy and justice as their moral reasoning develops.

Service learning also benefits for students in different ways such as-

Their grade improves. They become more motivated and they set more goals. There self esteem improves. They become less alienated and they increasingly reflect on society's political organization and moral order.

Conclusion

Both psychoanalytic and social cognitive theories regard moral development as a matter of internalization: the adoption of societal standards for right action as ones. According to Freud morality emerges with the resolution of the Oedipus and Electra conflicts during the preschoolers. Fear of punishment and loss of parental love lead children to form a super ego through identification with the same sex parents and to redirect hostile impulses toward the self in the form of guilt. Recent psychoanalytic ideas place greater emphasis on a positive parent child relationship and their earlier beginnings of morality, social learning theory views moral behavior As acquired in the same way as other responses through modeling and reinforcement. Piaget cognitive development perspective assumes that morality develops through constructions. According to Kohlberg, moral development is a gradual process that extends beyond childhood into adolescence and adulthood. According to John Dewey the moral atmosphere should be created by school and class rooms rules the moral orientation of teachers and school administrators and text materials. Teachers serve as models of ethical or unethical behavior. The three main contemporary approaches to moral education should be character education, value education and cognitive moral education. Service learning is form of education that promotes social responsibility and service to the community in service learning students might engage in tutoring, help the elderly, work in a hospital assist at a day care centre or clean up a vacant lot to make a play area.

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