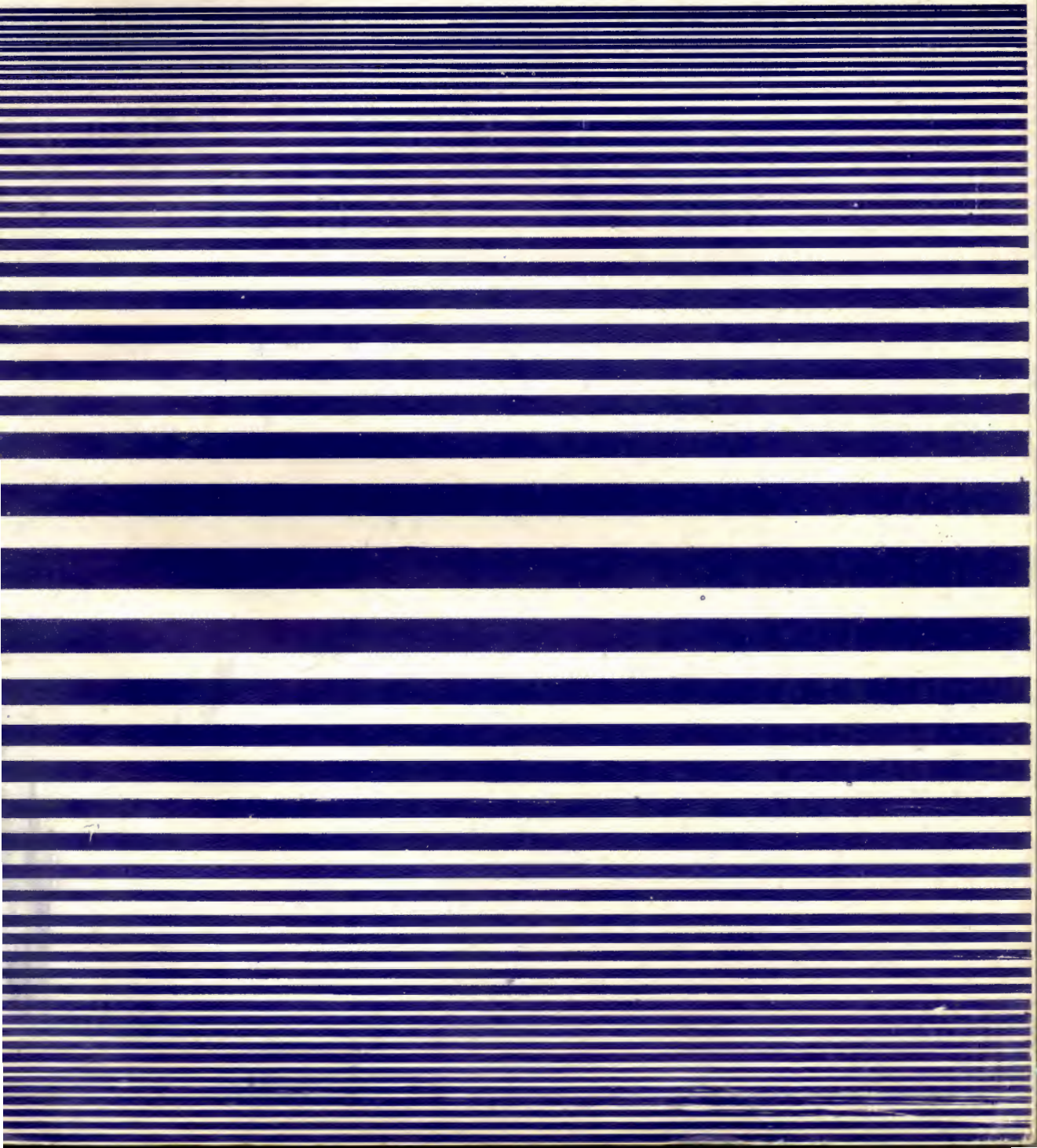


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STRATEGIES FOR HANDLING MORAL BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTHS

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Abstract

Curbing moral excesses of the adolescent should be of concern to the classroom teachers and parents. Effective handling of morality demands our knowledge of how moral behaviour develops and the several factors that can affect its development. The role of discipline and disciplinary methods in moral development must also be understood. Through counselling and case study discussions appropriate morality can be fostered in our adolescents.

Introduction

The moral behaviour problem of adolescents and youths has been an issue of concern in this society and others. It is also generally believed that some anti-social problems in the society, such as stealing, fraud, examination malpractices, dishonesty to mention a few can be reduced when adolescents and youths develop appropriate morality. Curbing any moral excesses of the young ones is regarded as laying a good foundation for a moral nation in the future.

The Moral Domain

Morality, generally, concerns the ideals and values that underlie an individual's actions, while the term "moral" is sometimes used to denote issues involving a person's principles and convictions. The word morality has been derived from the Latin word "moralis" meaning customs, manners or patterns of behaviour conforming to the standards of the group. Thus, judging by how closely an individual conforms to the group's standards, the individual can be labelled as moral or immoral. The unwritten rules of behaviour among polite people is often referred to as etiquette, while rules of conduct and behaviour may be regarded as ethics. Moral standard, if broadly conceived goes beyond the control of antisocial impulses, the concerns about the welfare and feelings of others are also involved. Such standards, sometimes, include exercising sound judgement in matters involving conflicts of interests between oneself and others. The sense of "right or wrong", of one's action refers to the individual's conscience, while someone who fails to persist is his or her convictions and who at some time has lost the sense of what is right or wrong can be said to be in a moral crisis.

Whereas the major foundations for the moral codes are usually laid in the different homes, the school, agencies and other significant adults play some roles in the acquisition of such codes. The child learns what is regarded to be right or wrong from his parents, teachers, clubs and others in authority. We all seem to be involved in the acquisition of appropriate moral behaviour of youths in the society. One can perhaps handle better the morality of the adolescents when one:

1. Understands the development of moral behaviour,
2. Understands some of the obstacles to developing appropriate morality,
3. Understands the role of discipline and disciplinary methods in moral development and
4. Other factors which affect moral development.

Theories of Moral Development

Hoffman (1970) noted that there are three major theories bearing on the moral development of children:

- (1) The "original sin" doctrine which assumes that each child has inborn anti social impulses that adults must teach him to curb;
- (2) The "innate purity" doctrine which assumes, that the children are inately good and that the adult society exerts corrupting influences from which children should be protected; particularly during the early years and
- (3) The tabula rasa or "clean slate" doctrine which assumes that children are born neither

good or bad, but become what their environment causes them to become.

There is the evidence that morality is developed not inborn, like all developments, it can be controlled and directed to ensure that the individual acquires that ability to conform to the expectations of his group. To make a successful transition to adult maturity, the adolescent:

- (1) has to change his attitudes and values which make up his moral concepts so that they will meet the more mature demands of an adult society.
- (2) must assume control over his behaviour. Those who believe that a person is born moral or immoral, usually hold that conscience (a sense of rightness or wrongness of one's own acts) is a part of hereditary endowment. Conscience is referred to, as the "voice of God" telling the person what to do or what not to do. Hurlock (1973) remarked that just as there is evidence that people are not born moral or immoral but become so through experience, there are evidences that the individuals conscience is a product of experience.

Guilt and shame act as deterrents to behaviour that falls below social expectation. If an individual felt no guilt, there will not be the desire to conform to social expectations. Shame relies on external sanctions alone while guilt relies on both internal and external sanctions, Bartemeire (1969), Black and London (1966). The behaviour controlled by shame is "outer-directed" while behaviour controlled by guilt is "Inner-directed". Both are products of experience, Campbell (1964), Peretti (1969).

Obstacles To Developing Appropriate Morality

In making transition to mature moral status, the adolescent, sometimes encounters some obstacles in the following ways:

- (1) The adolescents and youths brought up in an authoritarian home where decisions are made for them or those from permissive homes where there are little motivation to conform to group expectations, seem to be less prepared to make moral decisions, compared to those brought up in democratic homes.
- (2) The adolescents are also confronted with a number of moral alternatives, they are expected to obey more rules, regulations and laws than the child.
- (3) When the adolescents are faced with contradictory codes to be learnt, the transition to adulthood may not be quick or smooth. Conflicting values make it difficult for the adolescents to decide which to accept.
- (4) The adolescents also experience pressures from the peer group. There could be the attempt to win social approval among peers with preference to ignore adult standards in favour of those of his peers.

Girls, because of stricter early training, tend to have less difficulty, in making transition to an adult morality than boys. One could thus expect less problems from an all girls institution compared to an all boys institution.

The personality pattern of the adolescent has also been recognised as being significant in determining the ease or difficulty to the transition to mature moral status. Peck and Havinghurst (1962) classified moral character according to five types, varying in the difficulty involved in reaching mature moral status. The five types are:

The amoral type :Lacks internalized principles and has little regard for the consequences of his behaviour. This is the most infantile, impulsive and irresponsible kind of personality.

The expedient type :is primarily self centred, he considers other people's welfare only to gain his own ends; he behaves according to the moral standards of the group only, as long as it suits his purpose, primarily to get what he wants and to avoid social disapproval.

The conforming type; One whose main moral principle is to do what others do and what they say he should do. This type follows rules and laws specific for each occasion instead of having generalized moral principles.

The rational conscientious type :has his own internal standards of right and wrong by which he judges his acts, but is rigid in applying his moral principles. To him, an act is "good" or "bad" because he defines it as such, not because of the good or ill effects it may have on others.

The **rational altruistic type** represents the highest level of moral maturity. Such an individual has a stable set of moral principles by which he guides his behaviour. He also tries to appraise the results of a given act and tries to assess it in terms of whether or not it serves others as well as himself. He is "rational" in his assessment of his conduct, in the light of his principles and "altruistic" in showing concern for the welfare of others as well as of himself.

THE ROLE OF DISCIPLINE AND DISCIPLINARY METHODS IN MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Discipline plays an important role in moral development. When parents, for example, condone or encourage cheating, the adolescent's attitude toward it becomes lenient. The main purpose of discipline is to teach the individual to conform to social expectations to a reasonable degree. It helps the individual to develop self-control and self direction. Discipline in the adolescent must include the following:—

- (1) education in moral concepts;
- (2) rewards for socially approved behaviour;
- (3) punishment for intentional wrong doing and
- (4) consistency in social expectations.

Education in moral concepts :One may not assume that by the time an individual has reached adolescence, what is right or wrong has been learnt. Further moral training may be needed. The adolescent may need to be consistently reminded of what is expected of him. (Examples: that smoking is not permitted in the school premises, that the use of alcohol or drugs in the school is prohibited etc).

Reward for Socially Approved Behaviour.

Rewarding, a socially approved behaviour, apart from being educational can be ego-bolstering, thus stimulating the adolescent to continue to act in that way. However, rewards must be developmentally appropriate. What reinforces an adult is different from what reinforces a child. Rewards can be tangible or intangible.

Punishment for Intentional Wrong Doing

Punishment may be administered,

- 1 to deter the repetition of socially undesirable acts and
2. to show the adolescent what the social group considers wrong.

Punishment may be administered only when the "offending" adolescent knows what was expected of him but intentionally violated the expectation.

Characteristics of Good Punishment.

The most important characteristics of good punishment, according to Brumrind (1968), Gnagey (1970) and Solomon (1964) include the following:

- (1) The severity of the punishment should reflect the severity of the wrong doing, (e.g. coming to class late and cheating should not attract the same punishment). The punishment should be related in form to the behaviour.
- (2) The punishment must be consistent.
- (3) The punishment must seem fair and just to the adolescent. If adults punish according to adult values, the severity of the punishment may seem out of proportion to the wrong doing as the adolescent judges it. The severity of the punishment should not reflect more of the adults anger than the seriousness of the behaviour.
- (4) The punishment should be constructive and conducive to inner control. Adolescents are very critical of certain forms of punishment, such as corporal punishment, being embarrassed before the group, or when it is in form of a disguised hostility.
- (5) The punishment should avoid undue arousal of fear.
- (6) The punishment should not involve the assignment of extra work that is unrelated to the act for which the punishment is imposed.

Consistency in Social Expectation

Consistency in social expectation gives the adolescent a feeling of security and eliminates confusion. Inconsistent discipline has been observed to slow down the learning process. The adolescent may consider as unfair, the punishment of an act which previously has gone unpunished.

DISCIPLINARY METHODS

The methods used in controlling behaviour of adolescents may be discussed under these three systems; the authoritarian, the democratic and the permissive. Sometimes, disciplinary methods vary according to where the family lives, size and socio-economic status and many other factors do effect disciplinary methods.

Authoritarian Discipline.

In authoritarian discipline there is the assertion that adolescents "receive their morality ready made from domineering parents. Little or no attempt is made by the parents to explain to the adolescent the reason for the rule he is expected to obey. There is also the assumption that the breaking of rules by adolescents is intentional and the adolescent is given no opportunity to explain his behaviour. The punishment is almost always corporal, often harsh and some times cruel. No rewards, not even words of praise are given for good behaviour.

Consequences Over scrictness, which leads to the feeling that the world is hostile causes the adolescent to reject authority ant try to assert his independence. Over strictness may lead to boys leaving home or dropping out of school or to early marriage in girls to escape parental domination.

Permissive Discipline.

The permissive parent or teacher sets no rules and the adolescent is permitted to do what he thinks is right. Punishment is rare because there are no rules to break. There is the underlying belief that the wrong doer will learn from the consequences of his act that is wrong. Rewards are not given for good behaviour. It is believed that social approval will be sufficient reward.

Consequences : Adolescents who have grown up in permissive homes tend to become spoiled. They tend to be uncooperative and inconsiderate with peers. There is also the failure to develop a sense of shame or guilt which could motivate the adolescent to conform to social expectantions.

Democratic Discipline. In this system of discipline, there is the underlying belief that the adolescent has a right to know why a rule is imposed on him. The adolescent is also given the opportunity to explain why he has broken a rule before a punishment is administered. The punishment administered is related to the act and its severity matches the seriousness of the misbehaviour. Rewards are also given, in form of praise, for good behaviour.

Consequences; Adolescent relationships with teachers and parents are far better when discipline is democratic rather than authoritarian or permissive. Under democratic discipline, the adolescent developes a more co-operative attitude, which is reflected in better relationships with members of the peer group as well as with those in authority.

OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING MORAL BEHAVIOUR

The knowledge of what is right or wrong, sometimes, may not necessarily guarantee a behaviour consistent with such knowledge, Crow and Crow (1965). Knowing that it is wrong to cheat may not prevent an adolescent from cheating to improve his own grade or to help a friends. Some adolescents, also engage in behaviour they know is wrong more frequently than others. Discrepancies between moral knowledge and moral behaviour in adolescents are due most commonly to the following:

- 1, Peer group pressures; some adolescents are strongly motivated to do what the group thinks is right, even when it conflicts with their own values.
- 2) Confusion about moral values; Many adolescents become confused when the moral values learned at home differ from those of the peer group, or others in the society.
- 3) Immature control of strong urges; Some adolescents indulge in self-satisfying but socially disapproved behaviour, such as cheating.
- 4) Decisions based on expediency and emotional factors; when a goal is important, adolescents often sacrifice some of their abstract moral beliefs to achieve it.
- 5) Striving for independence: Adolescents who wanted to be treated as adults may break a rule or law as a form of rebellion against authority.

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The effects of discrepancies between moral knowledge and behaviour depend, to some extent on whether the adolescent misbehaviour is known to others, how others react to the discrepancies and how the adolescent himself feels about them. While guilt may prevent the adolescent from repeating an act, rationalization tends to weaken its restraining value.

OTHER METHODS IN HANDLING MORAL BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS

Counselling in moral behaviour problems.

Every aspect of our living presupposes moral and human values. Counselling is an expression of values and attitudes as the counsellor deals with the client from his own personal concept of the nature of man. In the encounter of the counselling relationship, the "hypocritical" behaviour of the client is transcended.

In delinquent behaviour, the emphasis should be on rehabilitation and prevention rather than punishment. In misdemeanors where punishment is to be given, the characteristics of good punishment, need to be considered. To effectively handle delinquent behaviours, one may need to identify and control the predisposing and motivating causes of delinquency. The potential delinquent can also be identified and socialized into the group.

Moral development is better facilitated in an atmosphere of openness and personal integrity. Giving individuals concrete experience in decision-making and practice in skills of moral reasoning may lead to insight in handling one's moral behaviour

CASE – STUDY METHODS

One effective learning activity for moral education, is the case study discussion. Adolescents and youths may be provided with hypothetical situations in which an individual faces a decision; they are asked to consider the problem from their own perspective and draw some conclusions about how they would act, if they were faced with a similar decision. The approach utilized can be through 1) open discussion, 2) rational strategy, 3) conflict strategy or 4) games and simulations.

Open – Discussion Approach : During the discussion, adolescents and youths may be made to face considerations which will reveal their inadequacies in moral judgement. With assistance from the counsellor and through insight, the participants may develop a more mature patterns of moral judgement.

Rational Strategy : The thought patterns of adolescents and youths may also be developed in terms of specific skills of decision making, the ability to envisage alternative kinds of action, and the ability to determine the consequences of each option selected.

Conflict Strategy : In the course of a moral discussion, a disagreement may be created among the participants. This will challenge them to defend their moral opinions. Each side is forced to listen to the other, leading to accommodation of ideas. Care has to be exercised in this strategy, the counsellor making sure that the adolescents acquire the better moral judgement.

Games and Simulations : Games permit adolescents and youths to deal with the decision people think they should make but also with the people's actual choices and reactions. The basic purpose of educational games, is to provide a direct experience of decision making. Some people seem to profit immediately by their experience. One common game is role-playing. Becoming aware of one's own feelings is an important aspect of moral education of which role play is better than mere discussion.

Examples : Case one

Mr A. who was very broke decided to travel from Ibadan to Lagos, to borrow money from a friend Mr. B. On the Ibadan Lagos expressway, he had a flat tyre and while fixing the extra tyre, his eyes caught a bundle of ₦500 (five hundred naira) by the road side. What should Mr. A. do and why?

In case one, any of the approaches mentioned earlier, may be utilized. If the Rational strategy is preferred the procedure would be:

- 1) identifying all the alternative open to Mr. A.
- 2) Considering the consequences of each alternative identified;

- 3) employing the Socratic inquiry by
 - (a) separating facts from values and
 - (b) finding the best reason for choice taken

It is assumed that good moral judgements share a "Golden Rule" and moral principles are universal.

Alternatives to Case One. If the decision of Mr. A. is handing over the money to the police OR leaving the money where it was, what will be your reactions to each alternative?

Case Two : Student A is an above - average undergraduate and had been raised from a strong religious background. He was in his final year when a member of his study group brought questions meant for the second day's examination for group discussion. Everybody had read the questions before they were told that they were exam questions. What should Student A do and why?

Case Three : A group of elementary school children usually visit a nearby store near the school during break to purchase food items. After some time, these children began to take items from the store without paying for them. One day the store owner caught them and the children admitted they have been stealing his things for some time. What should the store-owner do and why?

To effectively help adolescents and youths in handling their moral problems, knowledge by parents, teachers and other significant adults of how moral behaviour develops and the factors that affect its development will be helpful. Social learning undoubtedly plays some role in moral development especially in the early stages of development. Firm and sympathetic but not harsh approach of discipline may be necessary if our youths are to "internalize" the necessary controls. Simply educating the youths on the right things to do may not always guarantee that the right thing will be done by them. The adolescents and Youth may also need to inculcate in themselves the habit of rational judgement.

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