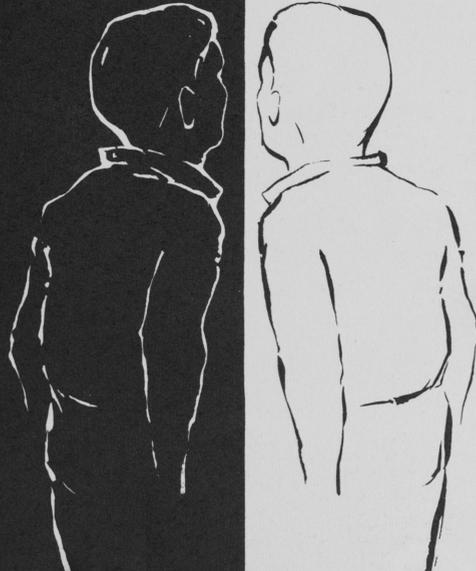


ADULTS look at children's values



ADULTS LOOK AT CHILDREN'S VALUES

BY

BERNICE MILBURN MOORE

THE HOGG FOUNDATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS, 1956-1961
Fourth Printing 1966

Reprinted from CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, February, 1956

**PRINTED BY
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS PRINTING DIVISION**

INTRODUCTION

“Values” is a term often thought of as a sophisticated concept belonging to courses in philosophy.

Dr. Moore has shown that values are a basic part of any person’s development from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. The concept is indispensable to an understanding of the make believe play life of children, the hero worship and life planning of adolescents, and the reconciliation of ideals and reality in adults.

Many articles and books have been written on child development. Few have dealt with the dynamic way values arise in the experience of the individual. Dr. Moore’s article first appeared in *Childhood Education* and is here reprinted with permission for wider circulation in the Southwest.

Dr. Moore is a full time consultant for the Home and Family Life Division of the Texas Education Agency and for the Hogg Foundation. She is co-author of a high-school text, *You and Your Family*, which has been used in many states and has been translated into two foreign languages. Her articles in professional and other national journals are numerous.

Robert L. Sutherland

ADULTS LOOK AT CHILDREN'S VALUES

This thought-provoking article will help the adult look at his own values and see his role in helping children develop their values. Bernice Milburn Moore is consultant, Home and Family Life Education, Texas Education Agency and the Hogg Foundation for Mental Hygiene, University of Texas, Austin.

“PLAY LIKE” is a favorite game of children. Like much of play, the significance is far greater than appears on the surface. Emotional conflict is often detected by close observation; so also does it reveal values a child is beginning to accept.

Values are initially taken over from members of the family, and they reflect in turn the culture from which they come. While values do change from generation to generation, there is a residue handed down from family group to family group. Moreover, the school and the church, as well as other social institutions, add their weight to the value pattern which will be taken over in part by children. Children, therefore, tend to “play like” those whom they want to be like and those actions which they sense as acceptable to important older people.

An indication of developing maturity is the ability to set and work toward long-range goals. Young children find it very difficult to wait patiently to become like older persons whom they admire. They attempt immediate attainment by imitating what they would immediately like to be. “Superman” has the power to escape from

the limiting confines of earthly demand. Realistic parents make many down-to-earth demands. The youngster, in his imagination, becomes “Superman” and thereby escapes into the never-never land of effortlessly becoming what he wants to be.

“I want to be like” is a step in development toward maturity. When youth reach this stage, they are indicating their acceptance of the fact that to realize a goal, it is essential to work toward it. If imaginative play is carried over into day-dreaming instead of planning for goal attainment as children develop toward maturity, then there is evidence of maladjustment. Parents and teachers have a real contribution to make in the transition from play to planning by helping young persons establish realistic and attainable goals, by encouraging them, and by making clear that the ability to work efficiently and effectively is a worthwhile value in itself.

Values as Priorities

Values, as Kimball Young describes them, are a combination of ideas and attitudes which give priority or preference to certain goals. These goals or values take the place of high importance to the personality. Moreover, when values are established, then action and behavior are set into a priority system which is determined by whether or not they lead toward the desired goal.

The values one lives by, then, become needs in the person’s life and motivation to work or strive toward meeting these needs. So values tend to control behavior as well as to motivate it. Behavior — or actions — which would appear to put off or to make impossible the realization of what one considers desirable is avoided.

Values are, therefore, both positive and negative. Each personality holds certain goals as dear and others to be rigorously avoided. Which are held dear and which

avoided in large measure depend upon the value pattern of the family. Consistency in positive and negative values indicates their incorporation into personality and sets the stage for predictable behavior.

Values and the Culture Pattern

Values do vary from family to family. However, these variations are within the wider framework of what is generally accepted by groups within the culture and by the culture as a whole. The culture of the United States is distinctive in the values which are considered basic to its way of life. "The American way of life" is derived by a unique combination of the religious teachings of love, kindness, and cooperation with the frontier values of individualistic achievement, competition, and the aggressive pursuit of personal success. How to balance this dichotomy of values so that it does not become the source of conflict in

children and youth is one of the complex problems of education in the family and in the schools.

That these value patterns, as different as they are, have been reconciled successfully is indicated by emphasis upon individual differences and at the same time upon effective group functioning. Technological and ideological achievements of this "free enterprise-democratic culture" are evidences of the blending of the contribution of different personalities toward the well being of all. The cultivation of distinctive personalities, each one different and each one having the right to be different, offers opportunity for imaginative creativity. From this creativity has come group productivity which has made this nation the richest in material goods; but even more important, the richest in its ideal of free men working together for common good.

This says each child should come to value

and respect his fellowmen. Each child should be motivated by a feeling of good will and by basic consideration of others. Each child should have opportunity to cultivate his ability to live with, work with, and get along with others. At the same time, his motivation must include the development of his own abilities in order that he may make a real contribution to his world. It must contribute to recognition of his responsibility for his own behavior and his behavior toward others. It must help him to mobilize and use his energy toward the achievement of a feeling of personal worth but always in relation to the worth of others.

Cross Cultural Likenesses

Cultural anthropologists have discovered that though values and their expression do differ from culture to culture, cross cultural likenesses do exist: "... no culture has made of human suffering an end of or for itself;

nowhere is indiscriminate lying or cheating within the group approved ... 'in all human societies there is a basic view that it is good as a general rule to attempt to preserve human life.' " (3, Chap. 2, pp. 952-953)

"Honor thy father and thy mother" also appears to be near universal at least through pre-adolescence. One may hazard the guess that "honor thy father and thy mother" is broadly adhered to because it is living with honorable and creditable parents that children come to accept this same goodness as a part of their own value pattern. Values have been defined by Whiting and Child "*as a custom (or customary way of behaving) whose response attributes goodness or badness to some event.*" (4, pp. 28-29) When the event is considered good, it becomes a goal to be sought. If it is bad, then it is avoided.

Values become group standards and determine social practice. They take on the

label good or bad, right or wrong, positive or negative. Learning to make value judgments is an important lesson every person must learn, and the beginning of this learning takes place in childhood.

Imitation as Practice

Imitation is practice in behavior. From imitating adults whom they admire, children gradually come to identify with them and with their values. Values, at first imitated, gradually become integrated into the personality. They then become guides for behavior and motivation toward desired ends.

A series of studies reported in the *Source Book of Social Psychology* indicates a close relationship between value orientation and the impression one has of self and of others. R. Stagner, in a research study on the psychological aspects of industrial conflict, divided a group of students into pro-labor and

anti-labor groups. They were asked to check on a list of traits those which characterized factory workers and executives. They then marked traits which they thought they, themselves, had. Finally they checked those characteristics which they considered pleasant or unpleasant. The pro-labor students saw in workers many of the same traits they had and described them as pleasant. The anti-labor group gave these same traits to executives and to themselves. This would seem to indicate that values which are important to a person, he tends to see in others whom he likes or admires. One remembers that children first imitate values they would like to have and finally emulate them in their own behavior.

Children in many instances tend to see in their teachers those qualities which they like in their parents and which are in process of becoming a part of their own personalities.

Values and Predictable Behavior

Children need direct control from mature adults in their formative years. Discipline at this stage of development cannot be too subtle or evasive. The emotional security in children depends upon having definite boundaries within which they must live. Crossing these boundaries comes to be understood as going from the good and acceptable to the bad and unacceptable. Values become established when parents are consistent and predictable in what they will approve as good and what they immediately react to as bad.* When there is fluctuation in reaction to the same behavior, then there is no opportunity for the child to come to recognize what is of negative or positive value.

Predictable behavior depends upon values consistently held and lived by. Children are obliged to accept values set by adults.

They do not have the experience out of which to determine whether or not their behavior is suitable to a given situation. It is only when adults define for the child whether how he has acted is good or bad, that the child comes to understand what is expected in a given situation.

Many values are obligatory. Through long experience and practice society has determined values which seem consistently to be necessary for the well being of its members. However, where obligatory values are preponderant, then society is autocratic. On the other hand, every society has certain values which its members must hold, but at the same time, has a wide range of permissive goals which each person may choose for himself. The range of permissive goals in a dictatorial society is very limited.

* "Good" and "bad" as here used implies acceptable or unacceptable and does not necessarily have moral significance.

Permissive goals in a democratic society are in the ascendancy.

Children live by obligatory values set by their parents. As they develop and have wider experiences they are allowed to set more and more of their own values. Maturity itself in a democratic society might be measured by a preponderance of permissive goals with a basic value structure taken over from parents and from the culture as transmitted by them.

When the authority of parents fades into the rigid authority of the state in values to be lived by, a dictatorship exists. When the authority of parents gradually gives way as children become able to discriminate and make choices in values, then the democratic process is at work. Emotional and social maturity imply the ability to use judgment in choice of values and goals of long or short range.

Many values are transitory. They change from generation to generation, from stage of development to stage of development. These do not have either the importance or tenacity of those values which have come to be understood as destructive or constructive to the ongoing of a culture or society. Sometimes conflicts between adults and youth come about because the adults tend to place a quality that the actual transitory value does not possess. What is conventional becomes confused with what is valuable. An expression of this confusion is most often indicated by the statement, "youth are not like they used to be." Yet when demands are made upon the younger generation to sustain the basic value pattern in which they have been raised, they willingly will die for it in order that others may be privileged to live under these same values.

Permissiveness in nonessential values

which are of short duration eases the acceptance of basic values which are of long duration. Discrimination and consistency in values which are held as obligatory by parents and teachers will go far to entrench these in the lives of children and youth. When these become cluttered and unclear by confusion with nonessentials, then their impact upon children and youth is dimmed.

Values themselves are integrating factors in personality. As the person internalizes the values with which he is identified, they become his conscience. If he disregards his basic values, then his guilt feeling will be relieved only when his behavior once again becomes reconciled with his priorities. Freud saw externalized values internalized as the super-ego, and the super-ego as the controlling mechanism of the social self. Self regard, so essential to the mental health of any personality, comes about when be-

havior reflects socially acceptable and basic values.

Sometimes real values become concealed by the opposite in behavior. A child holds as a value recognition and acceptance by his peers. If the child does not gain these desired ends, very often the values remain stable but the means to the end become boisterous and unattractive behavior. When this occurs, it is the responsibility of the adult to help this young personality to get his behavior back on the track toward the values which he holds dear. Self understanding makes for predictability in behavior.

What a Child Values

What children value, then, is what they are taught to value by either direct or indirect means. Parents and teachers show

their values in their behavior. If the behavior is admirable, then children tend to imitate to immediately achieve that which they admire. As they practice the expression of values by imitation, they come to identify the admired values as their own. When these admired values become "controls from within," as Fritz Redl describes them, then they take their place as motivation toward emotionally mature and socially acceptable ways of living.

Values are taught not only by example

Bibliography

1. Krech, David and Crutchfield, Richard S. *Theory and Problems of Social Psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1948. pp. 52-53; 68-69; 414.
2. Lane, Howard and Beauchamp, Mary. *Human Relations in Teaching*. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1955. pp. 237-238.
3. Lindsey, Gardner. Editor. *Handbook of Social Psychology*. Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-

but by discussion in order that they may be understood. Why certain standards are held and why others are avoided must be recognized if choice in values is to be wise. Present-day society offers a complex and complicated system of values and conventions, and the necessity of choice is inevitable.

Values to live by need to be clear and with apparent worth if they are to become the controlling conscience of personalities trained for and dedicated to a democratic way of living.

Wesley Pub. Co., 1954. pp. 648; 788-789; 952-953.

4. Whiting, John W. M. and Child, Irvin L. *Child Training and Personality*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1953. pp. 28-32 and Chap. 11.
5. Young, Kimball. *Personality and Problems of Adjustment*. New York: F. S. Crofts and Co., 1941. pp. 181-184; 658-659; 808-809.
6. ————. *Sociology*. New York: American Book Co., 1949. p. 110.

