

Tools from moral psychology for measuring personal moral culture

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Abstract Moral culture can mean many things, but two major elements are a concern with moral goods and moral prohibitions. Moral psychologists have developed instruments for assessing both of these and such measures can be directly imported by sociologists. Work by Schwartz and his colleagues on values offers a well-established way of measuring moral goods, while researchers using Haidt's Moral Foundations Theory have developed validated measures of moral prohibitions. Both values and moral foundations are distributed across the social landscape in systematic, sociologically interesting ways. Although typically measured using questionnaires, we show that values and moral foundations also can be used to analyze interview, archival, or "big data." Combining psychological and sociological tools and frameworks promises to clarify relations among existing sociological treatments of moral culture and to connect such treatments to a thriving conversation in moral psychology.

Keywords Culture · Measurement · Moral psychology · Morality · Values

Given the breadth of the domain denoted by the term "culture," it may be futile to develop tools for measuring "it," since "it" could refer to anything from language, to religious beliefs, to art styles, to conventional practices surrounding birth and death. But when we narrow down the meaning of culture, we may find the difficulties somewhat more tractable. The objective of this paper is to propose some useful tools for the measurement of individual and group differences in the subset of culture we call *moral culture*. In particular, we focus on strategies borrowed from the flourishing field of moral psychology. Admittedly, this approach sidelines a number of useful ways of thinking about moral culture, including interesting work on metaphors and related cognitive structures, and a vibrant tradition that explores the perceptual and emotional foundations of morality and moral judgment (e.g., McAdams et al. 2008; Cisneros 2008; Inbar et al. 2012; Schnall et al. 2008). The advantage, however, is that it has the potential to link sociological work on morality to a vast and thriving tradition in

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psychology, one that has theories, findings, and measurement tools that can be immediately adapted and applied to questions of sociological interest.

This article proceeds as follows: we begin by defining key terms—“moral” and “culture”—that delimit the theoretical scope of our methodological proposal. We next describe two existing approaches to theory and measurement that can help sociologists assess differences in moral culture at the individual level, providing illustrations of their utility for quantitative and qualitative research. We conclude with a general discussion of the promise as well as the limitations of the strategies we propose.

Background: defining “moral” and “culture”

The objective of this article is to propose concrete techniques for measuring individual and group differences in moral culture. For the reader to judge whether this proposal is plausible, it is necessary to define the words “moral” and “culture” as used here. In the social science literature, “moral” has two very different meanings: (1) corresponding to a priori, universal standards of harm, rights, and justice (see, e.g., Stets and Carter 2012); or (2) having to do with questions of good and bad or right and wrong that might vary between individuals or collectivities (see Hitlin and Vaisey 2013). In the first sense of the term, approximate synonyms would be “altruistic” or “prosocial” and the best antonym would be “immoral.” In the second sense of the term, an approximate (though unwieldy) synonym would be “ethically salient” and the best antonym would be “non-moral,” that is, having nothing to do with morality. In what follows, our concern is with the second sense of “moral,” and more specifically, with the differences between persons and social groups concerning what *counts* as a moral consideration.¹

Even with this definition of moral in place, however, there is still one further distinction worth pointing out. We need to distinguish between moral *goods* on the one hand and moral *prohibitions* on the other. One philosopher summarized these two different approaches to the question of morality as follows: “One asks what are the concerns that make up an ideal life. What is the way to live? ... [The other] is asking for the right boundaries on conduct. This is the sense in which if we fail to live up to expectations, we have done something *wrong*” (Blackburn 1999, pp. 278–279, emphasis in original).

Steven Hitlin (2008) calls these two categories “bright lights” and “bright lines.” The first—the domain of moral *goods*—refers to things that we feel called to pursue as part of “a full life” (Taylor 1989, p. 15). The second—the domain of moral *prohibitions*—refers to violations that we must avoid. Although these categories can overlap in practice, they are different enough to keep analytically separate. Key terms related to the first type are good, bad, worthy, unworthy, valuable, and essential; key terms for the second are (un)acceptable, (in)appropriate, right and wrong.

With a working definition of “moral,” we now turn to defining “culture,” as used here. Our definition is a practical one, grounded in the old distinction that every person is (a) like *no* other person, (b) like *all* other people, and (c) like *some* other people (Kluckhohn and Murray 1948, p. 53; see Hitlin 2008, p. 21). Culture has to do with

¹ This position does not imply any kind of philosophical moral relativism. It does, however, involve a *methodological* relativism of the kind advocated by Abend (2008).

(c)—characteristics, behaviors, and practices that are shared by some, but not all, people. We thus distinguish among moral individualism (moral goods and prohibitions that are idiosyncratically personal), moral universalism (moral goods and prohibitions that are universal), and moral culture (moral goods and prohibitions that are socially patterned).² Most research in neuroscience, for example, is concerned with moral universalism because it seeks to understand how and to what extent the human brain is “hard wired” to regard some things as more morally problematic than others (e.g., that it is more or less universally regarded as worse to kill a person by pushing them than by pulling a lever if you need to stop a runaway trolley from killing five other people; see Greene et al. 2008). The concern here is measuring differences in understandings of moral goods and prohibitions that are associated with social locations like class, nationality, religion, or generation. This is what we mean by *moral culture*.

There are several good examples of studies of moral culture in sociology. One of the most famous is *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al. 1996), which outlined four types of moral cultural themes in the United States—expressive individualist, utilitarian individualist, civic republican, and biblical—and considered their differing implications for personal and civic life. Michele Lamont’s *Money, Morals, and Manners* (1992) presented three different types of evaluation—cultural, “moral” (i.e., conventionally ethical), and socioeconomic—that professional men in the United States and France used to judge the worthiness of themselves and others. Projects like these are extremely valuable and insightful, but they rely on “virtuoso” sociological performances (see DiMaggio 1997, p. 263) and are rarely followed up with more systematic investigations. The tools we offer can help organize insights like these in ways that deepen our understanding of morality and facilitate the conceptual systematicity needed to turn masterful studies into ongoing research programs.

Below, we present two frameworks borrowed from psychology that may be useful to sociologists who seek to describe and explain social differences in conceptions of moral goods and prohibitions. Since the days of Durkheim, many sociologists have been wary of psychology as a “reductionist” discipline that focuses on atomized individuals rather than social groups. Although that characterization may be true in some cases, it is not true of either of the frameworks presented below; both were explicitly created in order to understand social diversity. Moreover, psychologists focus much, much more on measurement than do sociologists, who often (of necessity) take whatever measurement tools they can find lying around in secondary data (see, e.g., Vaisey 2009). When psychologists have figured out how to measure something that sociologists care about, chances are they have done it well. We should have no reservations about adapting their tools for our purposes.

Measuring moral goods

Moral goods are the “bright lights” that people pursue in their search for the good life. Because goods are desirable by definition, it is not a question of whether a particular good is valuable, but about which goods take priority over others. A successful career

² This is (intentionally) analogous to the distinctions Zerubavel (1997) makes among cognitive individualism, cognitive universalism, and social cognition.

and a satisfying family life, for example, are both good things, but the structure of social life is such that these become “competing devotions” (Blair-Loy 2003). Weber spoke of these goods in terms of “values” and recognized that different values were often in irreconcilable conflict (see Swedberg 2005, pp. 290–291). To the contemporary cultural sociologist, perhaps “moral goods” sound like something compelling to study while “values” sound hopelessly old-fashioned, static and moribund. It is true that values were exiled from the pantheon of cultural sociology over the past few decades, but as we have written elsewhere (Vaisey 2010; Miles 2013), this exile was largely unwarranted. We cannot recapitulate the whole argument here; we simply point out that the most widely adopted classical definition of value—“a conception of the desirable”—carries with it the notion of “the good” (Kluckhohn 1951, p. 395). In his *Genesis of Values* (2000), Hans Joas makes the same connection. “Values” and “goods” are not different things, but rather different labels for the same thing in different research traditions.

The varieties of values

The psychologist Shalom Schwartz (with many collaborators) has spent more than two decades developing a typology of basic moral goods, or values, and has applied it and refined it around the world (see Schwartz 2011 for a discussion). Schwartz hypothesized that values would have a roughly circular structure, with opposed values arrayed across from each other on a circular continuum. Just as Weber recognized, Schwartz posited that some values are in opposition to each other and that it is impossible to “please all the gods” simultaneously (see Abend 2008, p. 93).

Now 25 years and literally hundreds of studies later, the basic findings associated with the Schwartz model of values can be summarized by Fig. 1. The model recognizes 10 basic values: universalism, benevolence, conformity, tradition, security, power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, openness to change, and self-transcendence.

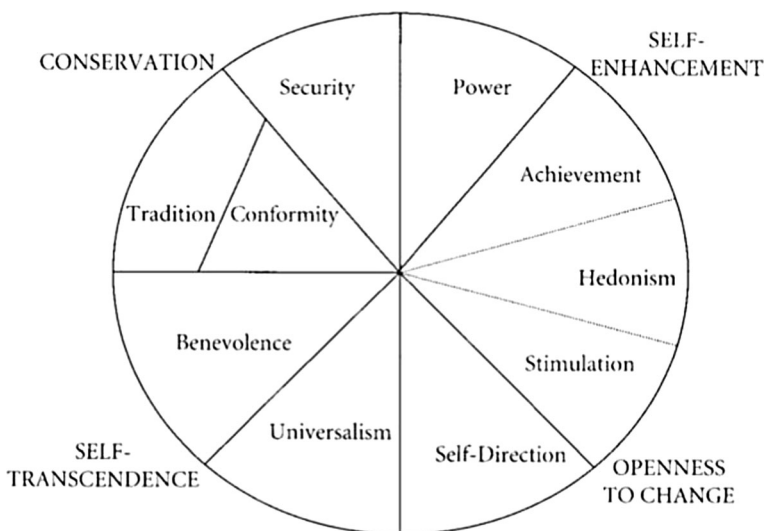


Fig. 1 The Schwartz model of values. *Note:* Taken from: Schwartz, Shalom H. 2011. “Values: Cultural and Individual.” Pp. 463–493 in *Fundamental Questions in Cross-Cultural Psychology*, edited by Fons J.R. van de Vijver, Athanasios Chasiotis, and Seger M. Breugelmans. New York: Cambridge University Press

achievement, hedonism, stimulation, and self-direction. These are obviously just abstract words; Table 1 shows the types of moral goods that are the referent of each. For simplicity, these are often grouped into four values with two major dimensions: self-transcendence vs. self-enhancement, and openness to change vs. conservation. Technically, the theory holds that the numbers 4 or 10 (or more recently, 19 [see Schwartz et al. 2012]) are just a heuristic convenience; there are potentially infinite numbers of values around the circumplex and our ability to detect them is limited only by the level of detail in our measures.

It is difficult to convey the empirical and conceptual development of an entire research program in a paragraph, but this typology of values has been subjected to a level of empirical scrutiny unheard of, perhaps even unimaginable, in sociology, where measurement receives less emphasis. The basic circular structure has been empirically verified in scores of countries, including recently with 71 nationally representative samples from 32 countries as part of the European Social Survey (Bilsky et al. 2011). It has been used both to compare individuals within countries and to compare patterns across countries. It has become the gold standard for measuring competing moral goods at a level of abstraction that is generalizable across cases (cf., Beckers et al. 2012).

Despite its strengths, some might wonder how the Schwartz model fits with existing sociological work on morality and values. Most obviously, it maps well onto Inglehart's values framework, which distinguishes between traditional vs. secular-rational values and survival vs. self-expression values (e.g., Inglehart and Baker 2000; see Schwartz 2011). More generally, this model can be used to examine core sociological concerns such as "individualism" (Durkheim 1983/1964; Bellah et al. 1996; Lichterman 1996; Fischer 2010). Some sociologists may also be heartened to find that W.I. Thomas (1923, pp. 1–40) outlined a typology of "four wishes" that are remarkably similar to the Schwartz scheme. Thomas saw the "desire for new experience" as opposed to "the desire for security" and "the desire for response" (i.e., love, caring relationships) as

Table 1 Definitions of the 10 values

Value	Related concepts
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection of all people and nature
Benevolence	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact
Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset others and violate social expectations or norms
Tradition	Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs or ideas that traditional culture or religion provides
Security	Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of the self
Power	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence
Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life
Self-direction	Independent thought and action; choosing, creating, exploring

Adapted from Table 1 of Schwartz et al. 2012

opposed to the “desire for recognition” (i.e., achievement, status). These mirror the major Schwartz oppositions almost exactly. As we explore in more detail below, there are also affinities between values and the moral typologies offered in Lamont’s *Money, Morals, and Manners* and Bellah and colleagues’ *Habits of the Heart*.

Although the cognitive and emotional processes of valuation necessarily happen “inside” a person (Joas 2000), there is nothing particularly “psychological” about the content of the model. Values are not just something that people hold privately; people also use them to construct public frames and to coordinate interaction and mobilization with others who share their values. For example, as Andrew Walder (2009, p. 406) notes, “social movement organizations offer interpretive frames that connect with the self-conceptions, values, or moral and cultural sensibilities of political adherents.” Values—and public struggles over values—are an essential part of social life.

An empirical illustration

For sociologists who see promise in the Schwartz model of values, there are ready tools for measurement. The 21-item Portrait Values Questionnaire provides each respondent with statements about a hypothetical gender-matched person (e.g., “It’s very important for her to show her abilities. She wants people to admire what she does”) and asks her to judge how much that person is “like me.” These items are then combined into the 10 values, with two or three questions per value. Because values are in tension, the respondent’s mean score over all questions is subtracted from each value score; this means that, within a respondent, an increase in one value necessarily results in a decrease in some other value(s). Although Schwartz does not make the connection explicitly, this trade-off model is consistent with Weber’s “polytheistic” view of values.

To give a first sense of the utility of this model, we present descriptive results from the Measuring Morality Survey, a nationally representative sample of 1,423 adults collected in 2012 that includes the PVQ-21.³ Figure 2 is a multidimensional scaling plot that shows that the predicted circular structure occurs almost perfectly in this sample.

These values, though measured at the individual level, are not only “personal” or idiosyncratic; they are socially patterned. Figure 3 shows the means of several social categories (age, education, and income) on the main dimensions of the value scales. Reducing the plot to two dimensions obscures some of the more complex features of the relationship between social categories and the 10 values, but there is a great deal of social patterning—the social field and the “moral field” are not independent. Age (or generation) seems to matter most, with younger respondents more open to change (stimulation, self-direction) and caring more about personal gain (achievement, power) than older individuals, who tend to value self-transcendence (benevolence, universalism) and conservation (tradition, security) to a greater extent. Income and education (or economic and cultural capital) have some opposing tendencies; though both higher education and higher income are linked to a greater openness towards change, they differ in their focus on self-enhancing goods (income) over other-focused goods (education).

The goal of this section is not to test hypotheses but to provide the barest demonstration of this model’s potential for research on the social varieties of moral goods.

³ See <http://kenan.ethics.duke.edu/attitudes/resources/measuring-morality/> for more details.

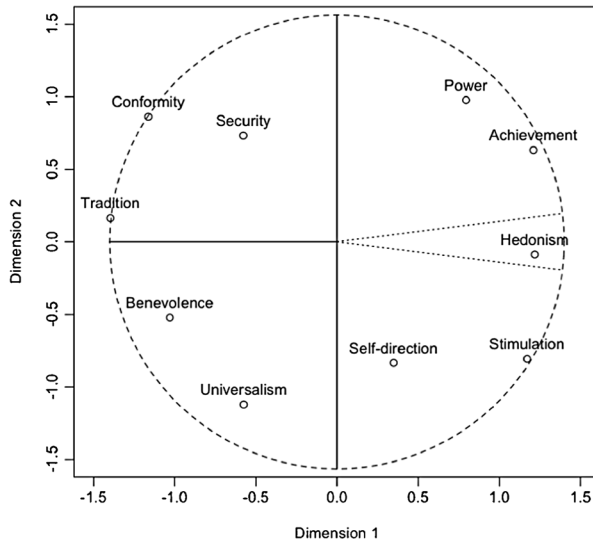


Fig. 2 Observed value relations in measuring morality data

People in different social locations have—on average—different value priorities (see also Longest et al. 2013). We now turn to an examination of some tools for thinking about and measuring the social varieties of moral prohibitions.

Measuring moral prohibitions

As we defined them above, moral prohibitions are the “bright lines” people are reluctant to cross in their actions and interactions. While moral goods or values are

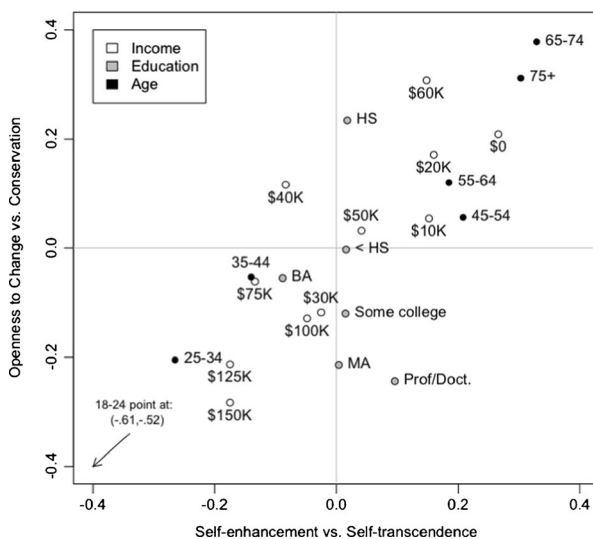


Fig. 3 Social category means on major value axes

things that people pursue (both individually and collectively), moral prohibitions are things to avoid. Some work in this area predefines the moral using a priori philosophical standards (see, e.g., Stets and Carter 2012). There is nothing wrong with that approach, but from the point of view of cultural sociology, it is preferable to determine empirically how the categorization of moral prohibitions varies across social groups.

The varieties of moral prohibitions

Unlike work on values, there is not a single dominant scheme for analyzing the varieties of moral prohibitions in psychological research. In the past several years, however, Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) has emerged as a widely used framework with a promising and increasing degree of cross-cultural support (see Haidt and Graham 2007).

MFT was developed in part as a corrective to classic psychological work that regarded morality as having solely to do with issues of harm and fairness rather than varying culturally (see, e.g., Kohlberg 1981; Turiel 2002). MFT builds on the work of cultural anthropologist Richard Shweder, whose fieldwork in India convinced him that, in some cultures, morality involves obligations to community and the divine or natural order in addition to obligations to individual human rights and dignity. Jonathan Haidt and his collaborators have worked to expand these ideas into an empirically measurable typology of moral prohibitions that recognizes five different moral foundations:

1. *Harm/care*: basic concerns for the suffering of others, including virtues of caring and compassion.
2. *Fairness/reciprocity*: concerns about unfair treatment, inequality, and more abstract notions of justice.
3. *In-group/loyalty*: concerns related to obligations of group membership, such as loyalty, self-sacrifice and vigilance against betrayal.
4. *Authority/respect*: concerns related to social order and the obligations of hierarchical relationships, such as obedience, respect, and proper role fulfillment.
5. *Purity/sanctity*: concerns about physical and spiritual contagion, including virtues of chastity, wholesomeness, and control of desires.⁴

Again, it would be impossible to summarize an entire research program adequately in the space provided here. One of the main findings of this research—other than establishing the validity of the measures themselves—has been to investigate differences in the moral prohibitions that are salient to liberals and conservatives (see Graham et al. 2011). This research has found that liberals tend to endorse the importance of only the first two foundations whereas conservatives tend to endorse all five; that is, conservatives recognize a wider range of valid moral prohibitions (e.g., Graham et al. 2009).

⁴ Quoted verbatim from Haidt and Graham (2009, pp. 111–112). Haidt's (2012) most recent research suggests there might be a sixth foundation, liberty/oppression, but this has not been well integrated into the measurement yet.

An empirical illustration

For sociologists who want to measure the social or demographic correlates of these foundations using survey techniques, there are several potential instruments depending on the amount of space a researcher has available.⁵ One instrument of reasonable length for social research is the 20-item Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ20). This questionnaire uses four items to measure each foundation: two questions are about how relevant different issues are for making judgments about “right and wrong” (e.g., “whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority”) and two rate agreement with specific moral judgments (e.g., “respect for authority is something all children need to learn”). The four items are summed to create a mean score for each foundation.⁶

The illustration in this section relies on MFQ20 data collected as part of the Generosity and Giving Survey of the University of Notre Dame. This was a nationally representative survey of 1,001 adults conducted in 2008. Figure 4 shows that the main pattern discussed in the literature—the different moral foundations of liberals and conservatives—is indeed replicated in a nationally representative sample. Liberals rely much more on harm and fairness, while conservatives draw from all five foundations.

But what about the social correlates? Figure 5 presents the same type of simple descriptive analysis performed above in Fig. 3. For simplicity of visual presentation, we reduce the axes on Fig. 5 to the social category means on the “individualizing” (harm, fairness) and “binding” (loyalty, authority, purity) dimensions of moral prohibitions. This two-dimensional presentation is consistent with the data but is a substantially worse fit than the full five-dimensional model (see Graham et al. 2011). It will, however, be adequate for the brief illustration here.

The two dimensions are measured on the same scale, making it possible to see, as expected, that there is greater social variability in the salience of prohibitions against violations of authority, loyalty, and purity (i.e., binding scores) than there is on the harm/fairness dimension. As predicted by MFT, most people do endorse harm and fairness concerns at a high level. As with values, by far the greatest differences here are due to age (or generation), with respondents from the oldest cohorts endorsing the most foundations across both dimensions and respondents from the youngest cohorts endorsing the fewest. There are also educational differences in binding endorsements, with the more highly educated lower on the salience of authority, loyalty, and purity prohibitions. This also reflects basic patterns we observe with political data, suggesting that the variable salience of different types of moral prohibitions might be an important mediator in the relationship between social and political position. The goal here is not to test such hypotheses, but merely to point out that they might be usefully considered with these measurement tools.

⁵ All questionnaires are available at <http://www.moralfoundations.org/questionnaires>.

⁶ Unlike with the PVQ-21, it is not necessary here to subtract off the mean score on all items to create the scale. Where tradeoffs are a necessary part of the theory when it comes to values, it is at least theoretically possible for a person to endorse a smaller or larger range of moral prohibitions. At least according to the MFT, moral prohibitions are not a zero-sum affair. This is a question that may require more investigation.

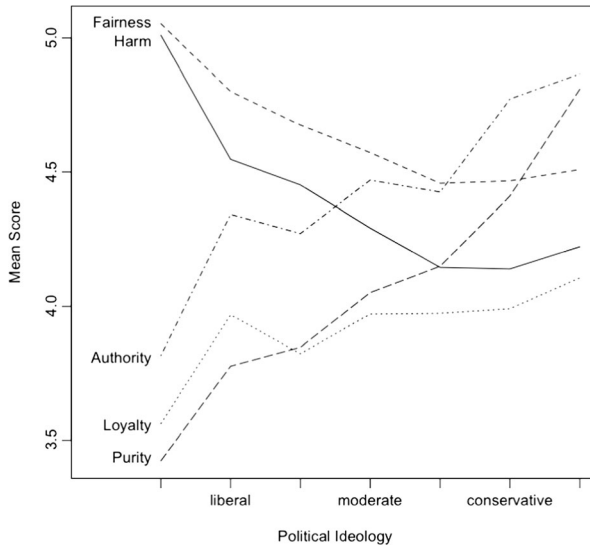


Fig. 4 Mean scores on moral foundations by political ideology

Applications to interview, textual, and “big” data

To this point, we have presented two theoretical and measurement frameworks for measuring moral goods and moral prohibitions. We have also provided very simple empirical illustrations to show that different priorities among moral goods and the differential salience of moral prohibitions are socially patterned. The goal of this section is to show that, although most studies using the Schwartz values theory and Moral

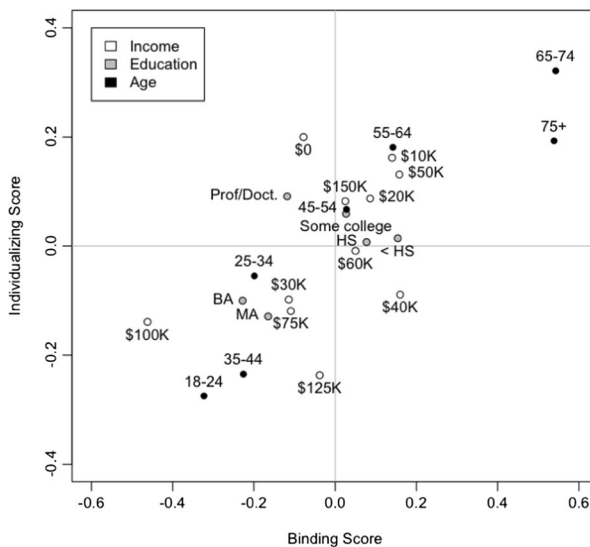


Fig. 5 Social category means on moral foundations dimensions

Foundations theory have been questionnaire based, there is no necessary correspondence between these conceptual frameworks and the use of survey methods. These frameworks can easily be used with qualitative data including interview transcripts, other textual documents, and “big data” collected from the Internet. We then argue that such applications are more than just an interesting possibility; rather, applying values and moral foundations to qualitative data will significantly advance the sociological study of morality.

Discovering values and moral foundations in interview material

Translating work on values and moral foundations from the quantitative to the qualitative realm is relatively straightforward, because (typically) both types of analysis rely on the same approach: uncovering patterns in data that can be used for comparisons. Text-based analysis (whether of documents or interview transcripts) typically involves applying themes or codes to data, but this requires researchers to have a sense of what each theme entails. These codes can either be pre-defined by existing debates, as when an analyst wishes to determine if a “culture war” exists (Thomson 2010), or inductively generated from the data. Both the 10 value dimensions and the 5 moral foundations have been clearly defined in the literature, suggesting that they can be used to pre-define codes, or as points of comparison for themes that are generated through a more inductive approach.

To give an example, suppose we wanted to understand American young people’s aspirations and understandings of “the good life.” Because such aspirations are closely tied to views of what is “desirable,” we might predefine categories corresponding to Schwartz’s value typology. We would code as “benevolence” statements suggesting “preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact,” and mark as “security” statements indicating a desire for “safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self” (Schwartz et al. 2012, p. 2).

With these themes in mind, consider the following excerpt from an open-ended interview the first author conducted as part of wave 3 of the National Study of Youth and Religion. The interview excerpt is from Alex, a 22-year-old college student from upstate New York. In this part of the interview, the interviewer is trying to get a sense of what Alex regards as important in life.

Vaisey: What, ultimately, do you want to get out of life? What would having a “good life” look like to you? [...]

Alex: I want to, I just want to have great memories. I want to have friends that we can’t count how many I have, you know, that really care about me and stuff and that I care about and I want to have a family that I love and that’s it. Those are the most important things for me.

Let us leave aside for now whether Alex’s words reflect his true beliefs or his echoing of a moral-cultural “account” prevalent in his social environment (see Vaisey 2009) and focus on the cultural themes themselves. Drawing on the value scheme we outlined, we might say that Alex’s emphasis on having many caring friends and family

reflects the theme of personal security, and his stated desire to care for loved ones reflects the theme of benevolence. Making these connections is relatively straightforward and does not require us to torture the data to make it fit. This suggests that the values Schwartz has investigated are not just quantitative abstractions, but may in fact be meaningful categories that could prove useful for detecting patterns in qualitative data.

Categories from MFT could be applied to better understand the moral boundaries people create. MFT sensitizes us to the fact that people are likely to draw on notions of harm, fairness, authority, loyalty, and purity to different degrees when considering what is right or wrong. With these categories in mind, we can detect meaningful patterns even in speech that appears disjointed or inconsistent. Consider the following interchange:

Vaisey: How do you normally decide or know what is good or bad, right and wrong in life?

Alex: [...] You don't, you treat people fairly and you do, yeah, you treat people how you'd like to feel or how you'd like to be treated...

[...]

Vaisey: What do you think it is that *makes* something right or wrong?

Alex: It always depends on the situation but I mean, if it's going to harm someone, cause problems for people, if it's selfish, if it's, I mean obviously in terms of like the environment, if you're, like I always just say, if you're leaving the world better than you found it then it's a good thing. If you're making things worse, then it's a bad thing.

At first glance, Alex's responses seem a jumble of different perspectives, including situational morality ("[i]t always depends on the situation"), absolute moral rules ("you treat people fairly"), and consequentialist reasoning ("if you're leaving the world better than you found it then it's a good thing"). With MFT-based codes to hand, however, we can see that behind this hodgepodge of *reasoning* may lurk some consistent moral *content*. Alex's moral worldview clearly includes fairness, as evident by his declaration that "you treat people fairly and ... you treat people how ... you'd like to be treated," and in the way he cites selfishness as morally wrong. Similarly, Alex explicitly draws moral boundaries related to harm, claiming that behaviors are also wrong if they are "going to harm someone" or "cause problems for people." Using MFT categories helps us to grasp the "bright lines" that Alex uses to sketch his moral landscape.

Values and moral foundations in archival material and "big data"

Values and MFT categories can also be used with automatic text analysis programs to examine large bodies of written material. For example, Graham et al. (2009, study 4) used a mixed word count and qualitative coding procedure to compare of moral word usage between Unitarian and Southern Baptist sermons. Using the popular text analysis

program Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; see Pennebaker et al. 2003), they first counted words relevant to each moral foundation, then determined which words differentiated most between the two groups. These words (and the two-to three sentences of text surrounding them) were then copied into a spreadsheet, randomized, and independently rated for their correspondence to each moral foundation. Results indicated that the Unitarian sermons relied more on harm and fairness language whereas Baptist sermons relied more on language related to authority and purity. The key point (for our purposes) is that MFT concepts may be able to uncover meaningful cultural differences in textual data.

Graham and colleagues' study also offers scholars practical tools for conducting their own analyses. Prior to using LIWC, the authors developed a dictionary of words and word stems for each of the five moral foundations. For the care/harm foundation, for instance, they used words like safe, war, care, and shield, while words such as obey, respect, order, and permit were used to represent the authority foundation. This dictionary would provide a useful starting point for sociological research on group differences in moral discourse. The entire dictionary is available at www.moralfoundations.org, and could be directly used by scholars working in LIWC, adapted for use in other text analysis programs, or even used as a starting point for manual coding. To our knowledge, no comparable dictionary exists using the Schwartz values framework, but in principle this would not be difficult to create. The survey instruments themselves provide a great deal of language that could be used to identify each of the ten values (see the [Appendix](#), also Schwartz 1992; Schwartz et al. 2012).

A related approach that is growing in popularity is the analysis of “big data” (see, e.g., Bail, this volume). The explosion of online material over the past two decades has greatly expanded the availability of information, putting a gold mine of data at the fingertips of those with the tools to collect and interpret it. Online “texts” are constantly created and can include tweets, blogs, posts, or any other form of socially-relevant material. The moral typologies we have outlined can then be used to analyze these corpora as well as more conventional types of textual data.

There are already examples of research combining big data with the MFT. For example, Sagi and Dehghani (2013) explored the extent to which moral categories were applied to public perceptions of the World Trade Center (WTC) before and after the terrorist attacks in 1993 and 2001. Applying a new text-analysis technique to 1.8 million articles from the *New York Times*, they found that after the attacks journalists used significantly more moral rhetoric when describing the WTC, but that this declined over time. In particular, the period following each attack saw heightened use of language related to MFT's harm/care and ingroup/loyalty dimensions. Their results suggest that external threats can moralize public discourse, imbue national symbols with moral meaning, and galvanize nationalistic loyalties.

Methods for collecting and analyzing large amounts of textual data is an area of ongoing, rapidly evolving research, and our impression is that user-friendly tools for scholars often lag behind theoretical advances. Still, even currently available tools could be used to generate substantial insights into moral culture. Most software seems to use word frequencies as the basis for judging similarities between documents (e.g., which blog posts have lots of morality-related language?; Lee et al. 2010), suggesting that users wishing to use topic-level groups of words *within* documents as the unit of

analysis will have fewer out-of-the-box tools (see Sagi and Dehghani 2013 for one such method).

As with the quantitative illustrations above, the goal here is not to make any substantive point about a particular research question nor to advocate any particular approach to analyzing archival material or big data. The point is to show that moral psychological theories can easily be—and have already been—extended well beyond the use of questionnaires.

Why apply values and moral foundations to textual data?

Of course, knowing that we *can* use values or moral foundations to interpret texts does nothing to tell us if it is worthwhile for sociologists to do so. After all, interpretive research has been getting along without these constructs for many years. We believe that there are at least two reasons to apply these conceptual frameworks to qualitative data. First, applying these categories can yield additional theoretical insights. To give just one example, the circular structure of values implies compatibilities and conflicts among values, suggesting that once we know which values individuals strongly endorse, we also can predict which values they are likely to find less appealing (i.e., those on the opposite side of the circle, see Fig. 1). Alex—the interviewee from above—prizes the largely compatible values of security and benevolence, but the structure of values implies that he is therefore unlikely to place great emphasis on self-direction or stimulation. Knowing this can prompt interviewers to probe for compatible or opposing values, perhaps uncovering contradictions or complications in the process. People who exhibit unusual patterns may in fact be the most interesting for exploratory qualitative work and theory development.

Second, using established categories facilitates comparability across studies. Qualitative data that are coded using values or moral foundations will have immediate links to both a sizeable body of existing research and to one another. These connections can be established without having first to translate researchers' largely idiosyncratic coding categories into a common metric. We believe that this second point is a strong argument in favor of adopting values and moral foundations as part of cultural sociologists' conceptual toolkit. One of the primary limitations of existing “virtuoso” moral typologies is our difficulty in systematically testing, linking, and comparing them. To be clear, we do not advocate exclusive application of these moral categories to every qualitative study—a strength of qualitative methods is their ability to ferret out new themes and puzzles. We do, however, encourage researchers who are interested in morality to consider existing typologies as possible interpretive categories and to consider how they relate to whatever new themes and patterns they uncover in their work.

To illustrate these two points further, we briefly consider the insights value categories provide when applied to the two classic texts in the sociology of morality that we mentioned earlier: Bellah et al.'s *Habits of the Heart* (HH) and Lamont's *Money, Morals, and Manners* (MMM). Both of these studies offer typologies of morality and have prompted considerable research, but at least two important questions remain. First, how do the HH and MMM categorization schemes relate to one another? Second, how do we tie them to the larger body of research on morality?

One approach to answering both questions is to “translate” these typologies into a common metric. We argue that values provide one useful way to accomplish this. Figure 6 presents a plausible mapping of the HH and MMM schemes onto Schwartz’s value typology. The four value dimensions are listed in all capital letters, the HH categories are listed in *italics*, and the MMM categories are in **bold**. These connections are admittedly preliminary (and we will take no space here to defend them). They are, however, plausible, and we hope our brief analysis is adequate to encourage interpretive researchers to look more deeply into these value constructs.

Figure 6 helps us begin to address our two questions. First, mapping the HH and MMM typologies onto the values circle makes it clear that, despite their differences in terminology, the two schemes can be related through their affinities with the same values. For instance, both utilitarian individualism from HH and MMM’s socioeconomic boundaries are concerned with desires for status and success—power and achievement in the nomenclature of values theory. Similarly, both the biblical and republican traditions from HH and the moral boundaries from MMM are concerned with ethical and pro-social conduct, concerns that are conceptually very close to Schwartz’s benevolence and universalism categories. These examples underscore the point that underneath the different nomenclature, both of these typologies are pointing toward related phenomena, a point that is easier to see once they have each been related to a common framework.

This exercise in translation also helps address our second question. Once we know how the HH and MMM moral categories are related to values, we have an immediate link to any study that uses Schwartz’s value scheme. This connection can yield a number of insights. For example, the fact that the value dimensions have been found in scores of countries suggests that the HH and MMM typologies might be useful beyond the borders of the United States (and beyond the borders of France, in the case of

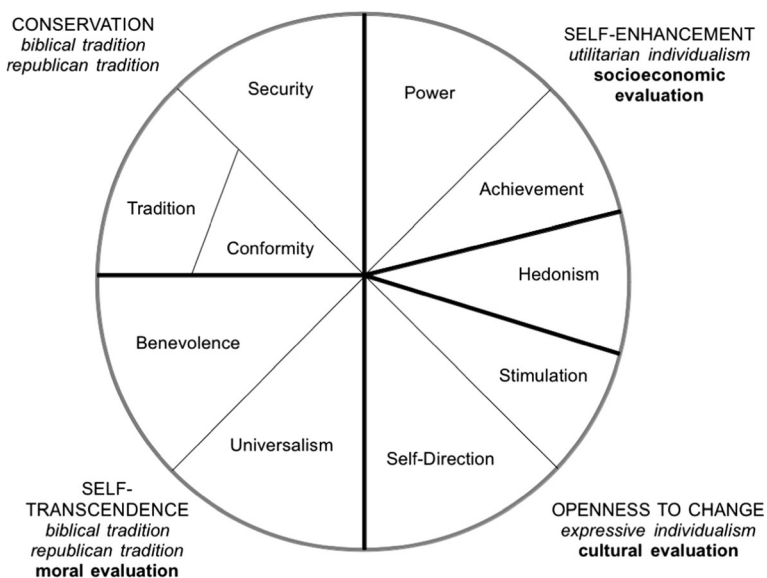


Fig. 6 Mapping two moral typologies onto Schwartz’s value theory. *Note:* Categories taken from *Habits of the Heart* are in *italics*; categories taken from *Money, Morals, and Manners* are in **bold**

Table 2 Correlations between symbolic boundaries in *Money, Morals, and Manners*

regular type = French respondents; italics = American respondents

	Socioeconomic	Cultural	Moral
Socioeconomic	–	<i>–0.19</i>	<i>–0.26</i>
Cultural	<i>–0.17</i>	–	<i>–0.07</i>
Moral	<i>–0.40</i>	<i>–0.17</i>	–

MMM). Drawing these connections would also help psychologists learn from qualitative studies how people in specific social locations use and interpret values in everyday conversation.

Connecting sociological typologies to values can also yield specific predictions. Recall that value commitments entail both affinities and tensions, such as those between self-enhancing and self-transcending values. This suggests that we should also expect to find these divisions in the corresponding HH and MMM categories. For example, Fig. 6 indicates that moral and socioeconomic evaluation should conflict, whereas cultural boundaries should be somewhat more compatible with each. Because Lamont provides numeric coding of all her interviews in the back of her book, we can test this hypothesis directly. If the value mapping is reasonable, we should find weak negative correlations between adjacent values and stronger negative correlations between the opposing categories of socioeconomic and moral boundaries. Table 2 shows that this is exactly what we find.

Using the same logic, we would expect that expressive and utilitarian individualism can more easily co-exist (because they occupy adjoining spaces along the values circle), but that they will have an uneasy relationship with the biblical and republican traditions. This unease stems from the fact that both traditions imply some values that are compatible with individualism, and some that are not. We cannot test these numerically, but these observations largely correspond with what Bellah and colleagues found—biblical and republican traditions often worked hand in hand to check unrestrained individualism (the oppositional component), but never eliminated it (the complementary component).

As a final example, consider the insight we gain when we realize that MMM's moral, socioeconomic, and cultural evaluation types only map on to self-transcendence, self-enhancement, and openness to change sections of the values circle. In light of the extensive empirical support for value theory, we might expect the *entire* values circle to be present. However, this omission makes sense when we recall that Lamont's interviews were with middle-class professionals and that security and conformity are less common values among those with higher income and education (see Longest et al. 2013). It also comes as no surprise, then, to find that tradition, security, and conformity surface as major themes in Lamont's subsequent book on working-class morality (Lamont 2000).⁷

Although we believe that making these sorts of connections is extremely useful, our goal is emphatically *not* to claim that the immensely rich and detailed research of Bellah, Lamont, or any other scholars should be flattened or reduced to fit an external typology. No typology—even the authors' own typologies!—can paint a complete picture of the moral worlds that real social beings inhabit. But we are convinced that that applying values and moral foundations to interpretive cultural research is likely to

⁷ There is no room to elaborate here, but the MFT themes of care, ingroup, and purity also play an essential role in Lamont's *The Dignity of Working Men*.

advance the study of morality by providing comparability across studies and links to a large body of research in moral psychology.

Concluding remarks

We have outlined two theoretical frameworks and measurement strategies we hope will help sociologists measure patterned differences in moral goods and prohibitions. These frameworks are well supported by existing research, are compatible with existing sociological research and theory, and the phenomena they measure are not reductionist in any sense but genuinely social. Ready-to-use tools exist for quantitative measures of these constructs, but we also argued that these constructs can easily be adapted to analyze interviews, texts, and socially-relevant “big data,” and that doing so will provide theoretical insights by increasing comparability across studies. What we have *not* argued is that all variations in the cultural meanings of morality can be perfectly measured by these two frameworks, their associated instruments, or any adaptations thereof. There are undoubtedly many questions in the sociology of culture and morality that would be better addressed using other approaches. But when possible on existing and well-validated measurement strategies has both direct and indirect benefits. Directly, we can borrow from work on psychological measurement to get better indicators of key dimensions of variation in the cultural realm. Indirectly, we can also help create opportunities for interdisciplinary communication and collaboration.

Morality is an increasingly important area in both sociology and psychology, and sociologists have much to gain by adding a few psychological tools to our sociological toolkits. Psychologists, for their part, are looking to sociology for insights because, more and more, they realize that morality involves social processes and has social implications.⁸ Making theoretical and empirical connections between our fields—and challenging each other where necessary—can only improve the quality of research in both disciplines.

Appendix

Portrait Values Questionnaire (21 items)⁹

Now we will briefly describe some people. Please listen to [or read] each description and tell me how much each person is or is not like you. (1 Very much like me; 2 Like me; 3 Somewhat like me; 4 A little like me; 5 Not like me; 6 Not like me at all.)

Conformity

She/he believes that people should do what they're told. She/he thinks people should follow rules at all times, even when no-one is watching.

⁸ For example, in his most recent work, Haidt draws extensively from Durkheim and Christian Smith's *Moral Believing Animals* (2003). See Haidt et al. 2009; Haidt 2012.

⁹ The version used in the Measuring Morality survey referenced above used first person versions of these statements (i.e., “it is important to me...”). In general, the third-person, gender-matched presentation is preferred.

It is important to her/him always to behave properly. She/he wants to avoid doing anything people would say is wrong.

Tradition

It is important to her/him to be humble and modest. She/he tries not to draw attention to herself/himself.

Tradition is important to her/him. She/he tries to follow the customs handed down by her/his religion or her/his family.

Benevolence

It is important to her/him to be loyal to her/his friends. She/he wants to devote herself/himself to people close to her/him.

It's very important to her/him to help the people around her/him. She/he wants to care for their well-being.

Universalism

She/he thinks it is important that every person in the world should be treated equally. She/he believes everyone should have equal opportunities in life.

It is important to her/him to listen to people who are different from her/him. Even when she/he disagrees with them, she/he still wants to understand them.

She/he strongly believes that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to her/him.

Self-direction

Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to her/him. She/he likes to do things in her/his own original way.

It is important to her/him to make her/his own decisions about what she/he does. She/he likes to be free and not depend on others.

Stimulation

She/he likes surprises and is always looking for new things to do. She/he thinks it is important to do lots of different things in life.

She/he looks for adventures and likes to take risks. She/he wants to have an exciting life.

Hedonism

Having a good time is important to her/him. She/he likes to “spoil” herself/himself.

She/he seeks every chance she/he can to have fun. It is important to her/him to do things that give her/him pleasure.

Achievement

It's important to her/him to show her/his abilities. She/he wants people to admire what she/he does.

Being very successful is important to her/him. She/he hopes people will recognise her/his achievements.

Power

It is important to her/him to be rich. She/he wants to have a lot of money and expensive things.

It is important to her/him to get respect from others. She/he wants people to do what she/he says.

Security

It is important to her/him to live in secure surroundings. She/he avoids anything that might endanger her/his safety.

It is important to her/him that the government ensures her/his safety against all threats. She/he wants the state to be strong so it can defend its citizens.

Moral Foundations Questionnaire (20-item version)

Part 1. When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to your thinking? Please rate each statement using this scale:

[0] = not at all relevant (This consideration has nothing to do with my judgments of right and wrong)

[1] = not very relevant

[2] = slightly relevant

[3] = somewhat relevant

[4] = very relevant

[5] = extremely relevant (This is one of the most important factors when we judge right and wrong)

- _____ Whether or not someone suffered emotionally
- _____ Whether or not some people were treated differently than others
- _____ Whether or not someone's action showed love for his or her country
- _____ Whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority
- _____ Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency
- _____ Whether or not someone was good at math
- _____ Whether or not someone cared for someone weak or vulnerable
- _____ Whether or not someone acted unfairly
- _____ Whether or not someone did something to betray his or her group
- _____ Whether or not someone conformed to the traditions of society
- _____ Whether or not someone did something disgusting

Part 2. Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement:

[0]	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree

- _____ Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue.
- _____ When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly.
- _____ I am proud of my country's history.
- _____ Respect for authority is something all children need to learn.
- _____ People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed.
- _____ It is better to do good than to do bad.
- _____ One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal.
- _____ Justice is the most important requirement for a society.
- _____ People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong.
- _____ Men and women each have different roles to play in society.
- _____ I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural.

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