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Cultural Conceptions of Morality: Examining Laypeople's Associations of the Moral
Person

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Abstract

Moral psychology is controversial regarding the question whether it is universal or culturally relative. One option is to refrain from imposing theoretical constraints in the assessment of morality, and instead to ask laypeople from different cultures how *they* conceptualize morality. Our paper is the first to adopt this approach by examining laypeople's associations of the moral person in individualistic- and collectivistic-oriented cultures. Using correspondence analysis we found that the concept of the moral person yields associations with justice and welfare concerns that are widely shared. Yet, as expected, there were also clear cultural differences with individualistic-oriented samples associating more frequently rights-based attributes and collectivistic-oriented samples duty-based attributes. When matching the free-listed trait categories with Schwartz' (1992) ten value types, the moral values hierarchy was very similar across cultures. Imposing constraints through expert-designed category systems may mask cultural differences and narrow the scope of inquiry to universal aspects of morality.

Keywords: culture, morality, prototypes, correspondence analysis, values

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Morality is probably one of the most controversial topics when it comes to the question whether it is universal or culturally relative (cf. Frimer & Walker, 2008). Moral psychology has a long history of advocating the universalism position (Kohlberg, 1984; Turiel, 1983), yet more recent theorizing suggests that it is likely that there is both a universal and culturally-specific morality (e.g., Haidt, 2008). Despite the recent theoretical advancements in this area, there is still a great deal of ambiguity as to which elements of the human moral system are exactly universal and which ones are culturally specific. Divergent findings that lend support to either the moral universalism or relativism position may be due to different definitions of morality and divergent methodological approaches in studying the moral domain. In this paper, we aim to bring some clarity to the matter by carefully reviewing the literature and presenting a synthesis from which we derive our hypothesis on moral universals and specifics. We then empirically compare how individuals from four different cultures conceive morality and whether similarities and differences are in line with our theoretical proposition.

More specifically, we are interested in how laypeople conceive morality if they are not given any external cues. Most studies use expert-designed taxonomies and self-report measures to assess individuals' moral conceptions (Chiu, Dweck, Tong, & Fu, 1997; Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Nucci, Turiel, & Encarnacion-Gawrych, 1983). Yet, this may narrow the focus of study to what the experts define as moral. By using a laypeople's perspective we circumvent this problem and leave it entirely to the respondents on what qualifies as moral and what does not. We also use the opportunity to compare our results to data from the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS; Schwartz, 1992) which is an expert-designed value taxonomy and which contains some value types that have been theorized to belong to the moral domain

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(Helkama, 2004). We aim to identify the methodological implications of adopting one or the other approach.

Moral Universalism

The moral universalism perspective posits that there is a universal morality that can be attained through rational reflection (Kohlberg, 1984; Turiel, 1983). Justice, rights and welfare are seen as the pinnacle of moral maturity and used for definitions of what belongs to the moral domain and what does not. The moral domain has usually been assessed through moral reasoning. For instance, in Turiel's (2002) studies participants were asked questions about rule violations, e.g., whether the act would be OK in another country or whether the transgressor should be punished. The empirical findings corroborated that violations of justice, rights and welfare concerns are widely judged as wrong and as moral matters.

A very different line of research, i.e. values research based on Schwartz' (1992) values theory, has also come to the conclusion that there is a set of universal moral values; however not limited to justice, rights and welfare concerns. Schwartz (1992) developed an expert-designed category system that identifies ten value types: power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, conformity, tradition, and security. He also constructed a measure, the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS; Schwartz, 1992), in which participants are asked to rate a set of value items according to their personal importance. To date, the SVS has been used in more than 70 countries validating the existence of the 10 main value types (Davidov, Schmidt, & Schwartz, 2008; Schwartz, 2006a; Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995; Spini, 2003). Based on this value theory, Helkama (2004) proposed that the most important moral values that may be widely shared across cultures should be universalism, benevolence

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and conformity/ tradition. These value types serve important functions of morality in every culture: Universalism serves moral problem-solving (resolving value conflicts and issues of justice), benevolence serves the promotion of prosocial actions (being kind and considerate towards others) and conformity/ tradition serves the control of antisocial action (resistance to temptation). The moral importance of these three value types has been empirically corroborated in studies in which participants were explicitly asked about their moral values (Schwartz, 2007; Vauclair et al., 2012).

In sum, the moral universalism perspective suggests that justice, rights, and welfare are part of a universal set of moral values. Researchers adopting a values theory approach (e.g., Helkama, 2004; Schwartz, 2007) further suggest that conformity values are also widely shared moral values which are considered to be part of the social conventional domain in the moral reasoning approach (e.g., Turiel, 1983, 2002). We think that conformity may indeed be widely shared as an *abstract* value. Conformity has emerged very early in evolution (Moghaddam, Slocum, Finkel, Tzili, & Harré, 2000) serving an important social function by making sure that individuals conform to certain desirable standards which help organizing collective life (Moghaddam, Slocum, Finkel, Tzili, & Harré, 2000). Hence, if the abstract value of conformity is assessed (and not a concrete rule) it is very likely that this is recognized as an important moral value across different cultures.

Culture and Morality

Findings from cross-cultural studies raised the question whether pluralistic conceptions of morality may exist (e.g. Nisan, 1987, Shweder, et al., 1987). Following a series of interviews on moral discourse in India, Brazil and the United States, Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park (1997) developed the ‘big three’ theory of morality: the

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ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity. The ethic of Autonomy contains moral values and virtues related to justice, rights and prevention from harm. Moral agents are defined as independent people who are free to make their own choices, only restricted by concerns whether their behaviour would inflict harm on others or restrict their rights. The ethic of Community defines the moral agents in terms of their interdependence or membership to social groups and the obligations that go along with this membership. Moral values and virtues are those that benefit the functioning of the community, such as duty, honour, chastity, respect, modesty, and self-control. The ethic of Divinity defines the moral agents as spiritual entities who aim to follow divine laws in the attempt to achieve moral purity. Moral values and virtues are often derived from religious authorities and texts, and are those that protect and dignify the divinity inherent in people. These three ethics vary in their emphasis and distribution across cultures. The ethic of Autonomy has been found in both Western and non-Western moral discourse, whereas the ethic of Community and Divinity is also important in collectivistic-oriented cultures such as Asian cultures (e.g., Haidt, et al., 1993; cf. Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990; Shweder, et al., 1997).

More recently, Graham, Haidt and Nosek (2009) identified two major 'moral foundations' that appear consistently in lists of values (e.g., the SVS, Schwartz, 1992) and taxonomies from anthropology, psychology, and evolutionary theories about human and primate sociality. They labeled these foundations the individualizing and the binding foundation. The individualizing foundation emphasizes justice, rights and welfare concerns of individuals and the authors state that it corresponds to Kohlberg's ethic of justice, Shweder et al's (1997) ethic of autonomy and Schwartz' values of universalism and benevolence. The binding foundation emphasizes group concerns,

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such as duty, and self-control, and corresponds to Shweder et al.'s (1997) ethic of Community/ Divinity and Schwartz' values of conformity and tradition.

In sum, the moral relativism perspective acknowledges that justice, rights and welfare are widely shared moral concerns, but that some cultures also care about group and religious concerns. We think that one important issue with this conceptualization of morality is that it conflates two different moral concerns, i.e. the concern about justice/welfare and the concern about rights. While the former is likely to be widely shared, because the universal rules of social cooperation dictate to be fair, not to cheat, deceive or intentionally harm someone (Richerson & Boyd, 2005), the latter is likely to show more variation across cultures.

The concept of rights can be conceived as the counterpart of the concept of duties (Chiu, et al., 1997; Dworkin, 1978). Rights- and duty-based moral orientations define conceptions of an individual's choices and conduct in a society. Duty-based cultures are more restrictive and individuals believe in a fixed socio-moral reality, i.e. a rigid moral order prescribing what is right or wrong. The dominant moral orientation is toward supporting the status quo and therefore it is a system-oriented morality. Rights-based cultures are more flexible and believe in a malleable socio-moral reality, i.e. the authority of the existing moral order is no longer absolute and primary concern is to uphold fundamental human rights. The dominant moral orientation is towards promoting social change and it is therefore a person-centered morality. Chiu, et al. (1997) corroborated that there is cultural variation in these moral orientations consistent with what one would expect: US-Americans gave priority to a rights-based morality, whereas Hong Kong Chinese gave priority to a more duty-based morality. More recent empirical findings from a large scale comparative study also showed that people from more collectivistic cultures are less accepting of personal rights and choices (e.g.,

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homosexuality, divorce, abortion) than individuals from more individualistic cultures (Vauclair & Fischer, 2011). Yet, contemporary theories on morality usually blend universal justice and welfare concerns with rights concerns which might in fact be regarded as more or less important depending on the culture.

Laypeople's Conception of Morality

One limitation of past research, which may have led to the blending of rights and justice/welfare concerns, is that researchers have mostly employed expert-designed measures or taxonomies (e.g., Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Graham, et al., 2009; Nucci, et al., 1983) to study individual's moral orientation and possible cultural variations. The problem is that the researchers impose their definition of morality onto their participants and this may narrow the focus of study to what the experts regard as relevant. An alternative is to leave it entirely to the respondents on what qualifies as moral and to examine to what extent rights and duties emerge as moral concerns in different cultures and whether there are also shared justice/ welfare concerns. One way of doing so is to use prototype analysis (Rosch, 1975) in which a group of laypeople are asked to free-list the attributes they associate with a concept's meaning.

When prototypes are studied, researchers typically rely on two samples of informants: the 'nominators' who generate features of the prototype through free-listings, and the 'raters' who rate the importance of each feature in terms of how well it defines the prototype in question (Horowitz & Turan, 2008). However, more recently prototypes have also been inferred from the first step alone, i.e. from the free-listed features produced by nominators (see e.g., Gregg, Hart, Sedikides, & Kumashiro, 2008; Smith, et al., 2007). The underlying assumption hereby is that the group-generated frequencies of attributes are already an index of everyday accessibility in the particular sample in which it has been produced. Moreover since it is a group-generated prototype, it describes the

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normative associative meaning of a term and reflects a form of “collective wisdom” (Horowitz & Turan, 2008, p. 1059) and is therefore especially intriguing for a cross-cultural study.

There are a few studies that examined laypeople’s associations with moral concepts. Yet, there are a number of shortcomings that motivated us to conduct the present study. First, the possibility that people from different cultures could have different conceptions of morality has not been examined (see Lapsley & Lasky, 2001; Walker & Pitts, 1998). Second, examining what laypeople associate with *morality* has not been the focus of past studies (Smith, Türk Smith, & Christopher, 2007). Third, it has been argued that attributes of the moral prototype can be understood as implicit moral values (Smith, et al., 2007), yet there is no study that compared implicit moral value hierarchies with explicit measures of moral value hierarchies.

Summary of Research Goals and Hypotheses

Our aim was to study the moral prototype across cultures. We first examined cultural similarities and differences in the moral prototype and whether they fit recent theorizing on moral universalism and relativism. We expected attributes related to justice and welfare to be widely shared, however, attributes related to duties to be more often mentioned in the collectivistic-oriented samples and attributes related to rights to be more prominent in the individualistic-oriented samples.

We also compared moral values obtained through the prototype analyses implicitly with explicit moral value ratings with the SVS. We expected that after forcing free-listed traits into expert-designed categories, implicit and explicit moral value assessments should produce similar moral value hierarchies, with universalism, benevolence and conformity being at the top, since they serve universal functions of morality in the abstract (see Helkama, 2004).

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Method

Participants

A total of 458 university students from the social sciences participated in this study. Participants were recruited from two individualistic- (New Zealand, Germany) and two collectivistic-oriented cultures (The Philippines, Brazil) according to past research (see Hofstede, 2001; Schwartz, 2006b). Respondents were only included in the analysis if they identified with the country of residence as assessed in the survey. Hence, responses were analyzed from 98 Brazilians, 119 Germans, 108 Filipinos and 90 students from New Zealand (see Table 1 for more details about the samples).

There were significant age differences across the four samples, $F(3, 425) = 72.93$, $p < .001$, and also differences in the proportion of females, $\chi^2(3) = 16.39$, $p < .001$. Respondents' average age was highest in Brazil and Germany ($M_{Brazil} = 23.62$, $SD = 4.77$; $M_{Germany} = 23.61$, $SD = 4.94$) and lowest in the Philippines ($M = 17.32$, $SD = 1.15$). These age groups correspond roughly to differences in student profiles as a result of different university entry requirements in each country. The New Zealand sample showed the highest percentage of females (71%) and the Brazilian sample the lowest (49%). The samples reflect the typical gender composition in the social sciences with females being often in the majority.

Table 1

Procedure

Participants were first asked to provide basic demographic information. They were then asked to write down what kind of characteristics they associate with a moral person. The Filipino sample received the instruction in English, since English is one of the official languages in the Philippines. Participants from Germany responded in

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German and those from Brazil in Portuguese to the free-listing task. We analyzed the first six attributes that respondents wrote down.

Analytical Strategy

Content analysis. We translated free-listed attributes from German and Portuguese into English using a community approach (Harkness, 2003) with two bilingual translators for each language. The number of elicited traits was 590 for the Filipino moral target sample, 496 for the New Zealand sample, 608 for the German and 512 for the Brazilian sample.

The frequency analysis was done in two stages: In the first (intra-cultural) stage, frequencies of word stems (e.g., honest and honesty were both coded as honest) were analyzed separately in each culture with the software program MAXQDA 2007 (Kuckartz, 2007). Idiosyncratic attributes not directly related to the question were dropped (e.g., ‘children’s books’). The second (pan-cultural) stage consisted of pooling all free-listed features regardless of the respective cultural group in which they have been listed to identify common categories that may underlie the data. The categorization of all free-listed attributes was done by two independent raters who reduced the attributes to 49 distinct moral trait categories. Inter-rater reliability for assigning attributes to categories that have been established independently by both raters was acceptable, yet moderate ($\kappa = .48$, see Landis & Koch, 1977). Discrepancies were discussed with a colleague, who was naïve to the hypothesis, until agreement and consistency in the categorization and labelling of the categories was achieved. The frequencies of the final attributes in the respective trait categories were added up. Only categories that were mentioned by at least five percent of the respondents in any one of the samples were retained and further analyzed cross-culturally.

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Correspondence analysis. We applied a correspondence analysis (in SPSS 14) to the final trait categories. Correspondence analysis is a multidimensional scaling technique that creates a perceptual map. Variables and objects (here trait categories and samples) are simultaneously plotted in the map based on the association between them (for technical details on this technique, see e.g., Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). In our case, this method allows us to visualize (1) how similar or different cultural samples are in their free-listed associations, and (2) what kind of trait categories are associated with which samples.

Results and Discussion

Comparing Laypeople's Associations of the Moral Person Across Cultures

We analyzed responses from the New Zealand, Filipino, Brazilian and German sample on the moral target concept in order to identify possible cultural similarities and differences in the moral prototype. We focused on moral attributes that emerged as central in each cultural sample. Central attributes are those that are highly accessible and therefore occur with a relatively high frequency compared to peripheral attributes (cf. Gregg, et al., 2008; Smith, et al., 2007). A scree test was used as an aid to differentiate between central (frequent) and peripheral (non-frequent) trait categories in which the relative frequencies were arranged in descending order along the ordinate and the features along the abscissa. The cut-off point between central and peripheral trait categories is where there is a substantial change in the gradient of the slope. We then applied a correspondence analysis on the central trait categories.

The scree test yielded eleven central trait categories in the Brazilian and German sample, twelve in the New Zealand and nine in the Filipino sample. Central and peripheral trait categories for all four cultural groups and the associated frequencies can be seen in Table 2. The results show that *honest* was a shared central moral trait category (occurring

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in all four cultural samples), followed by *friendly*, *good* and *just* (central in three samples). These attributes are consistent with the moral universalism perspective that morality is a matter of welfare and justice (see e.g., Kohlberg, 1984; Turiel, 1983). Culturally idiosyncratic trait categories were *open*, *critical*, *reliable* and *obedient* in the German sample and *correct*, *serious*, *educated*, *responsible*, *loyal* and *sociable* in the Brazilian sample. *Well-mannered* was an idiosyncratic central moral category in the Filipino sample and *caring*, *strong*, and *trustworthy* were central and specific to the New Zealand sample.

Table 2

Correlating the frequencies of the central moral trait categories of the different samples with each other showed that none of the samples were significantly similar to each other, except for the New Zealand and Filipino sample which reached marginal significance ($r_s = .41$, $p = .05$). The correspondence analysis on all central moral trait categories across the four cultural samples produced a significant chi-square ($\chi^2(75) = 745.23$, $p < .001$), therefore there was a significant relationship between the samples and trait categories. The total inertia indicated that the three dimensions explained 50.7% of the variance in the original correspondence table. The first dimension explained 45% of the inertia, the second 30.9% and the third dimension 24%. Even though the third dimension added a considerable amount of explained variance, the first two dimensions already explained about three-quarters of the total inertia. Hence, to facilitate the interpretation of the perceptual map, only two dimensions were retained. The resulting two-dimensional biplot is depicted in Figure 1.

The triangular shape of the biplot is due to the distinctive responses of the German, Filipino and Brazilian sample, while traits shared across the four cultural

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samples are located at the centroid of the map. Culturally idiosyncratic traits from these three samples occurred with very high frequencies in the respective samples and very low frequencies in all the other samples; this tendency was somewhat less accentuated in the case of the New Zealand sample. The biplot shows indeed that New Zealand has the most overlap with all other samples, the Filipino and Brazilian sample overlap more with each other than they do with the German sample, and the German sample has the least overlap with the other samples.

Taking the trait categories in the triangle of the biplot as an anchor for interpretation, we found surprisingly that Brazilian trait categories are more about the ‘moral self’ (e.g., *being serious, educated*), whereas Filipino, German and New Zealand trait categories are more about relations to others (e.g., *being kind, helpful, and trustworthy*). Walker and Pitts (1998) also reported a self-other distinction in their moral prototype study with Canadian participants, however, their distinction differs somewhat from ours. They found self-focused attributes that are more directly related to morality (e.g. being righteous, having high standards, p. 414). However, the self-focused associations of the Brazilian sample are only distantly related to the concept of a ‘moral person’ and could in fact be applied to a number of other persons, too. This may point to a broader definition of morality in the Brazilian culture. Yet, given that this finding is somewhat surprising and not fitting well with any moral theories, we are cautious in interpreting it any further.

As expected, German trait categories that are highly central are those that reflect a rights-based morality, characterized by moral trait categories that indicate an individualized and flexible orientation towards moral standards (e.g., *being open-minded*, a trait category that was mostly defined by the free-listed attributes ‘tolerant’; and *being critical* which was mainly free-listed as ‘critical thinking’). Both the Brazilian

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and Filipino trait categories have in common that they deal more with a ‘duty-based’ morality (e.g., *being religious, well-mannered, and responsible*). Their perception of a moral person reflects a more obligational and communal kind of morality targeted at maintaining already existing moral standards¹.

Figure 1

Comparison of Free-listed Moral Trait Categories with Explicit Value Ratings

We finally compared moral values that are implicitly assessed with the prototype technique to explicit value ratings. In order to do so, we matched the moral trait categories to values from the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS; Schwartz, 1992). Only values that Schwartz’ (1992) found to be equivalent across cultures were included in the matching procedure. To enhance the number of matches, moral trait categories that occurred with a frequency of less than five percent in all samples were also included. When matching these attributes, we were guided not only by the trait category and value label, but also by all free-listed attributes that make up a moral trait category and the defining phrases of the values from the SVS (e.g., the moral trait category *well-mannered* consists of the free-listed attributes ‘courteous, tactful, polite, well-raised’ and therefore corresponds to the Schwartz value *politeness*, defined as ‘courtesy, good manners’). There were moral trait categories that corresponded directly to a value from the SVS (e.g., *helpful*) and moral trait categories that were semantically equivalent (e.g., the trait category *conservative/ conventional* corresponding to the SVS value *respect for tradition* defined as ‘preservation of time-honoured customs’). A total of 36 moral trait categories corresponded to values in the SVS and were further categorized into value types according to Schwartz’ value theory (1992).²

Table 3 provides an overview of pan-cultural and culture-specific frequencies of the moral trait categories falling under Schwartz’ value types. Note that hedonism

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values did not occur at all. Some of the value types were accessed significantly more frequently than others (pan-cultural sample: $\chi^2(8) = 266.09, p < .001$; Germany: $\chi^2(7) = 53.54, p < .001$; New Zealand: $\chi^2(7) = 70.00, p < .001$; Brazil: $\chi^2(5) = 66.75, p < .001$; The Philippines: $\chi^2(7) = 56.13, p < .001$)³. Moral trait categories that were accessed most frequently, after adjusting by both number of participants and number of values in the respective value type, belonged to benevolence values followed by conformity and universalism values. One exception is the Filipino sample for which moral trait categories belonging to tradition and conformity value types were accessed most frequently.

Table 3

As can be seen from Table 3, the rank ordering of the moral trait categories is fairly similar across cultural samples. The average Spearman correlation between cultural samples was relatively high with a value of .88 (for frequencies adjusted by the number of participants in the respective sample, $\Sigma f/n$) and .80 (for frequencies adjusted by both number of participants and number of values in the respective value type, $\Sigma f/nk$). Therefore, matching moral trait categories with Schwartz' (1992) value types rendered the cultural samples more similar to each other.

In order to correlate the frequencies of free-listings with Schwartz' (1992) explicit average ratings of the ten value types, we used data from Schwartz and Bardi's (2001) pan-cultural value hierarchy (across 54 nations) based on students' importance ratings of the SVS. In addition, we used culture-specific data from an unpublished values study (see Vauclair, et al., 2013): students from Brazil (N = 141), Germany (N = 68), New Zealand (N = 73), and the Philippines (N = 73) responded to a shortened version of the SVS and rated whether the values were (1) personally important to them (comparable to the original SVS instruction), (2) a moral value to them, and (3)

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perceived as a societal expectation. We found that the moral trait categories were not reliably related to personal value hierarchies or perceived societal expectations. However, they correlated significantly with the personal moral value hierarchies (see Table 4). This correlation pattern was prevalent in both the pan-cultural sample as well as in the four culture-specific samples. Hence, people's associations of what it means to be a moral person seem to reflect their personal moral values (and not the perceived societal expectations) which are fairly similar across cultures when matched with Schwartz' (1992) value types. Benevolence, universalism and conformity were here the value types that ranked highest which is consistent with Helkama's (2004) functional theory of morality. Societal expectations on the other hand may reflect the actual normative pressure about how to behave and what to value, which is considerably different and more culturally dependent than the high ideals and abstract values of a personal morality.

- Table 4 -

General Discussion

Our study showed that there are cultural differences and similarities in the conceptualization of the *moral* person. Consistent with our synthesis of moral theories presented in the introduction, we found that there were widely shared attributes which are related to issues of justice and welfare. This is in line with the moral universalism perspective (Kohlberg, 1984; Turiel, 1983) and corroborates the widespread 'human obsession' with fairness, reciprocity and justice (Graham, et al., 2009) as well as the importance of social cooperation as emphasized by evolutionary theorists (Richerson & Boyd, 2005). As expected, we found that duty-based concerns, i.e. concerns about obligations, obedience and respect for (social or religious) authority, were mentioned more often in collectivistic-oriented samples. Yet, rights-based concerns, i.e. concerns

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about self-determined moral thinking that is not affected by any other (social or religious) authority, were more salient in the individualistic-oriented German sample. It is noteworthy, that the biplot of the correspondence analysis also shows trait categories that diverge from our interpretation. For instance, the trait *obedient*, which can be conceived as a trait representing conformity, was mentioned frequently in the individualistic-oriented German sample. As so often in psychological research, the findings show a trend and no clear cut results in absolute terms. It is the pattern of relative accessibility of trait categories that illustrates which moral orientation is more salient in which culture.

These findings extend our knowledge on moral psychology in an important way. They suggest that cultural differences in morality cannot just be reduced to the number of moral codes people use as previously claimed in contemporary moral theories (see e.g., Haidt, et al., 1993). All of our samples used predominantly two moral codes when associating attributes with the moral person⁴, i.e. the moral code of justice and welfare and more frequently either the moral code of duties or rights depending on the culture they come from. Hence, the difference is not in the number of moral codes, but in the emphasis laid on a rights- or duties-based morality. We think this is an important finding as it points to an underlying bipolar dimension of morality. This bipolar dimension may help in unpacking culture to examine cultural variation in moral attitudes and beliefs (see e.g., Vauclair & Fischer, 2011). For instance, Schwartz' cultural value dimension Autonomy-Embeddedness seems closely related to the rights and duties polarization. In autonomy cultures, people express their own preferences and ideas and pursue positive experiences for themselves. In embeddedness cultures, people emphasize the status quo and restrain themselves in order not to disrupt in-group solidarity or the traditional order

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(Schwartz, 2006b). This parallels very much the person-centred and system-oriented morality inherent in the rights and duties moral codes.

The rights and duties dimension also helps in interpreting past research on moral issues in which there is no harm involved or the perception of harm depends on the interpretation of the issue. For instance, Vauclair and Fischer (2011) found that people in autonomy-oriented cultures were more lenient in their judgment of, for example, homosexuality, abortion, and divorce, than people in embeddedness-oriented cultures. People in autonomy cultures adopt a person-centred moral orientation in their moral judgment, and therefore, believe that each individual should have a maximum liberty in her choices and a maximum likelihood to fulfill her potential (see also Chiu, et al., 1997). This finding could not be explained with Shweder et al.'s (1997) three ethics or Graham et al.'s (2009) two moral foundations since the rights component of morality and the universal justice and welfare concerns are blended into one single moral code.

Finally, this study also showed that when moral trait categories are matched with Schwartz' (1992) ten value types, the implicit moral value hierarchy, which is based on frequencies of trait categories, correlated significantly with explicit measures of personal moral values, but not with personal importance ratings or societal expectation ratings of values. Hence, there is a significant association between implicit and explicit measures of moral values meaning that different methods of assessing intrinsic moral values converge (cf. Campbell & Fiske, 1959). Moreover, the three most important moral values in the intrinsic moral value hierarchy are benevolence, universalism, and conformity supporting Helkama's (2004) reasoning that these values serve universal social functions of morality in regard to promotion of prosocial actions, moral problem-solving, and control of antisocial action. Forcing the free-listed moral attributes into the Schwartz'

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(1992) value types diminished the cultural differences and rendered the samples more similar to each other. We think that there are two reasons for this finding, one is theoretical and the other methodological in nature.

First, universalism and benevolence refer to the previously claimed universal justice and welfare concerns, and therefore it is not surprising that they rank highly in the moral value hierarchy across samples. Somewhat more contradictory is the rank order for conformity given that we found an important cultural variation in the free-listings regarding the salience of duties. Conformity is in fact, to some extent, fundamental for every social group in ascertaining smooth social relations and has developed very early in human evolution (Moghaddam, et al., 2000). We think that people from different cultures might commonly agree that conformity is important in upholding the moral order. However, there may be subtle differences in the meaning of conformity when it is assessed with different methods. Conformity, as assessed with the values of the SVS, may be interpreted as conforming to certain abstract standards or moral ground rules necessary for the smooth functioning of every social group. On the other hand, conformity as it emerges with the free-listing procedure can be interpreted as conforming with social or religious authorities that define the moral standards. These two conceptualizations of conformity are fundamentally different in regard to the motivational underpinnings of human morality, juxtaposing an intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to conform.

Second, closed-ended self-report questionnaires, such as the SVS, contain an important methodological limitation (see also Smith, et al., 1997). They are expert-designed category systems, and in the case of the SVS, ask respondents to rate very general and abstract goals. Regardless of culture, the general goals of morality are to

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promote and protect positive relations of self to others. This can be fulfilled with the values of universalism, benevolence and conformity and this is why respondents recognize these values as moral values across different cultures. However, if there are no constraints at all imposed upon respondents, people from different cultures can access their cultural conception of morality. For instance, being *critical* emerged as a trait category that defines a rights-based morality, yet it is not a value that appears in the SVS. Hence, the group-generated prototype provides an insight into which attributes are most salient in a specific culture without constraining individuals' responses to pre-defined categories and yields therefore a more culturally refined conceptualization of morality than expert-designed category systems can provide.

Limitations

The series of analyses in this study have produced an insight into what it means to be a 'moral' person in different cultures. When drawing conclusions from the findings, there are also limitations to consider. One of them is the different proportion of females in the samples. The New Zealand sample showed the highest proportion of females which leads to the question whether the responses may not exhibit a gender effect as opposed to a cultural effect. Gender differences in morality have been discussed in moral psychology since Gilligan (1982), who argued that women adopt the principle of care in their moral reasoning. However, a careful analysis of the literature by Walker (1991) revealed that studies of moral reasoning have generally failed to find gender differences. Moreover, Walker and Pitts (1998) found that men and women were very similar in their moral prototypes and concluded that they share a common conception of the 'moral person'. Even though, it is not possible to fully exclude gender as an explanation for the emerging New Zealand moral trait categories, it seems very unlikely that it has induced a substantial bias.

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We acknowledge that religion may also be an alternative explanation for the differences we found between the cultural samples. Although all samples were drawn from predominantly Christian cultures to control for this potential confound, it does not exclude the possibility that the samples differ in their levels of religiosity which may have influenced the moral trait associations. It might be that the Filipino and Brazilian sample associate more duty-based trait categories than the German sample, because they are *more* religious. It is noteworthy that it is difficult to delineate religious from cultural moral codes. Both are based on obligations, duties, obedience and respect for authorities, which may have a social or religious source (Haidt, et al., 1993). This is also evident in Haidt's (2008) moral foundation theory in which he merged religious moral concerns (purity/sancity) with community moral concerns (ingroup/loyalty and authority/respect) into the binding foundation of morality. Hence, religious and duty-based cultural concerns are difficult to distinguish theoretically as well as empirically as evident in our and past studies (see also Shweder, et al., 1997).

Conclusion

There are two main conclusions that we draw from our study. First, if cultural differences are the research focus in morality, imposing constraints through expert-designed category systems may in fact mask any differences. Moreover, it narrows the scope of inquiry onto the researcher's definition of morality which may reflect the universal functions of morality or obscure hidden cultural conceptions of morality. Adopting a descriptive approach and examining a layperson's perspective provides an important insight into everyday morality as conceived in different cultures with the potential to inform theory development, such as the inclusion of a separate moral code defined by the importance of personal rights (e.g., expressed in gay rights, women's rights) that varies cross-culturally in its emphasis.

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Last not least, an important theoretical contribution of this study is that we provide evidence for the notion that there is an opposite pole to the concept of duties (i.e. the concept of rights) that is not equivalent to the universal justice and welfare concerns as suggested in contemporary theories and research on human morality (e.g., Graham, et al., 2006; Shweder, et al., 1997). This provides also a new perspective on the moral disagreements in the American 'culture war' (see Graham, et al., 2007). Political liberals and conservatives may agree on basic aspects of social cooperation (e.g., not intentionally harming someone with no reason, not to deceive one another), yet there are large disagreements whether the moral order is seen as fixed (pre-defined by a social or religious authority) or malleable (subjected to challenge and social change, see also Chiu, et al., 1997). This has important implications for the moral discourse between different (sub)cultures and therefore, intergroup and intercultural relations.

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Footnotes

¹ The triangular shape of the correspondence analysis may have been caused by outliers (prevalence of culture-specific moral trait categories) which may lead to an overestimation of cultural dissimilarities in the perceptual map. Two additional analyses were conducted to examine whether the result is dependent on the attributes included in the analysis. The first analysis was based on central moral trait categories, but excluded all culturally idiosyncratic moral trait categories. The second analysis was conducted using all 49 (central and peripheral) moral trait categories. In both analyses, the same triangular shape emerged and the cultural groups were arranged in the same fashion as in Figure 2. Hence, the relative association of the four cultural samples was replicated with different sets of moral trait categories. Moreover, the analyses on all 49 trait categories corroborated the interpretation of the trait clusters as referring to duties, rights, and the moral self (e.g., the trait categories *humble*, *tolerant*, and *dignified* were more strongly associated with the Filipino, German, and Brazilian sample respectively). More details on these analyses and findings can be obtained from the first author.

² We would like to point out that there were a number of trait categories that did not fit with Schwartz' values, such as being *friendly*, *generous*, and *kind* which constitute a set of moral values that is not assessed in the SVS.

³ Chi-square statistics were computed on frequencies corrected for number of values in a value type.

⁴ Note that we do not interpret the *moral self* trait cluster in the Brazilian sample as a separate *moral* code at this stage. Future research is needed to ascertain that the attributes referring to the 'self' constitute indeed a separate moral code.