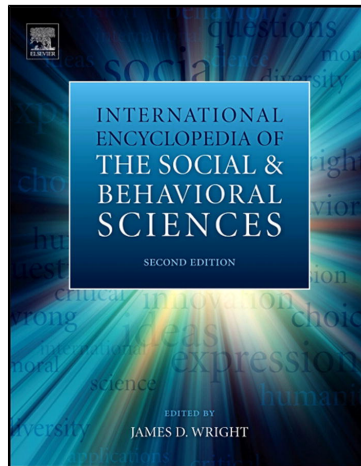


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## Values, Psychology of

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### Abstract

Values are internalized cognitive structures that guide choices by evoking a sense of basic principles of right and wrong, a sense of priorities, and a willingness to make meaning and see patterns. Like other cognitive constructs, values can be studied at the individual level or at the group level. That is societies, cultures, and other social groups have value-based norms, priorities, and guidelines, which describe what people ought to do if they are to do the 'right,' 'moral,' 'valued' thing. The study of values currently focuses more explicitly on the circumstances in which values predict action.

### Values: Psychological Perspectives

Values are internalized cognitive structures that guide choices by evoking a sense of basic principles of right and wrong (e.g., moral values), a sense of priorities (e.g., personal achievement vs group good), and create a willingness to make meaning and see patterns (e.g., trust vs distrust). Like other cognitive constructs, values can be studied at the individual level. However, while it is unusual to discuss attitudes as a group-level phenomenon, values are amenable to analysis at the societal or group level. That is societies, cultures, and other social groups have value-based norms, priorities, and guidelines, which describe what people ought to do if they are to do the 'right,' 'moral,' 'valued' thing. A society, political party, or region can be described as having conservative or liberal values, traditional or progressive values, religious or secular values, and so on.

Values are supposed to influence behavior and people are suspicious of others if they suspect that they hold different values in part because of the presumed link between values and behavior. Knowing a person's value system provides a sense that one also knows what he or she will do in a particular situation or across situations. In spite of the strong belief that values predict behavior, the effect of values on behavior is subject to situational constraints and affordances. That is, if mobilized or made salient, individual values are linked with behavior and choices but not necessarily otherwise.

However, if values do not come to mind, they are unlikely to influence judgment and behavior. Cultures may be said to provide concrete and social embodiments of values. Thus, if cultural values are mobilized or made salient, they also predict behavior and choices of groups and to some extent, of individuals within these groups. Whether cultural cues (e.g., the national flag) serve to cue relevant values may depend on whether their appearance in context seems unremarkable or an obvious attempt to cue a particular value response. Some kinds of values, those that form the basis of moral judgments, appear to have a more visceral effect on judgment, influencing how people feel about a topic, situation, or choice separately from their cognitive evaluation of the topic, situation, or choice. Thus values can cue affective (feeling) as well as cognitive (thinking) responses. The effect of values on judgments and behavior can be seen whether the value is explicitly part of the decision-making or not. That is, a value can be

associated with a choice without the association being made explicit.

### Overview

This article addresses the following questions. First, what are values, how do psychologists study values, and how are values distinguishable from related concepts – motives, goals, and attitudes? Second, are values best considered at the individual level as located within individuals, or at the context level, as if located in social structures, or are both levels of analyses needed to understand values? Third, what do values imply for behavior? With regard to the first question, values are often studied by asking people to rate how important certain statements are to them or to people in their group. These methods rely on explicit judgments which may be subject to the same variety of constraints as all self-report measures (including, for example, whether people can make explicit judgments about what they value, and social desirability – the desire to say things that the questioner will approve of). Reliance on self-report makes values difficult to study and persistent questions arise as to whether they are 'real,' that is, whether they actually can be shown to have causal influence on behavior.

In spite of this difficulty, values have intuitive appeal as an explanatory construct. Much of everyday life is cast in terms of values, value judgments, or value preferences. Think of ethics, law, religion, politics, education, art, lifestyle, child rearing, and more. Choices in these domains are often explained in terms of values and the value trade-offs one is willing or unwilling to make. Abstract value judgments are embodied in seeming gut reactions that something is right, moral, or natural versus wrong, immoral, or unnatural. Another way to 'see' values in action is to contrast cultures or subcultures in what seems right, natural, or moral.

Empirically, an emerging literature uses priming techniques to show that values matter when brought to mind, not otherwise and that what a value means depends on the context in which it is considered. Values related to loyalty (e.g., patriotism) and to acceptance of authority (e.g., traditionalism), for example, are associated with more trust in government. This effect occurs only in contexts in which government functions brought to mind are relevant to these (e.g., trusting the government to make the right choices for defense spending)

not otherwise (e.g., trusting the government to make the right choices for health care). A similar argument has been made for the role of values in acceptance of social policies, policies that appear to come from one's own political party are preferred in part because in-group loyalty is valued.

Another way in which values are studied is by comparison. Comparisons in choices, behavior, social structures have all been used to infer differences in values. One of the great contributions of cultural and cross-cultural research is the way that it brings Western cultural values into sharp relief by making these values stand out in comparison to alternative frames of core values. These and other differences are also found in comparisons of political parties, social classes, religions, and even professions. Consider American cultural values, Americans are said to value life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But what does 'value' mean? Implicitly or explicitly we evaluate or assign value to everything – regarding things as good or bad, a truth or falsity, a virtue or a vice. How do we know? One important means is through values. Values can be thought of as priorities, internal compasses, or springboards for action – moral imperatives. In this way, values or mores are implicit or explicit guides for action; they are general scripts framing what is sought after and what is to be avoided. Values can be thought of as scaffolded on universal human needs for security, autonomy, and connection, which would imply that since all cultures face similar problems they are likely to overlap in values (though not necessarily in their ranking of the importance of each value). To sustain a group, for example, people have to believe that their place within the group is fairly assigned, that authority is justly applied and not used in a harmful way.

Each of these is a value judgment, while the need for these core values may emerge from an evolutionary basis, the relative importance of each value may emerge from socialization within the family. Thus, saying that Americans value life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness does not necessarily imply that people from other societies value these things less. Rather it implies that Americans are likely to consider security, autonomy, and connection as needing to fit together in ways that maximize autonomy while not undermining security and connection. Moreover, Americans may differ in the relative weight that they put on these core values depending on their social class, political affiliation, and profession, because each of these provides a particular meaning to what connection, security, and autonomy mean. Connection can focus on loyalty to in-group and security can mean purity and sanctity to differing degrees among different groups. This has been studied both by cultural and cross-cultural psychologists interested in cultures of honor and by psychologists interested in morality both generally and as part of the study of other domains, including religion, politics, and organizational processes.

## Definitions

Modern theories of values are grounded in the work of Kohn (class and values), Rokeach (general value systems), Merton (social structure and values), and Kluckhohn (group-level values). For example, Rokeach defines values as shared proscriptive or prescriptive beliefs about ideal modes of

behavior and end states (outcomes) – what is worth striving for. Social groups couple these ideals about modes of behavior and outcomes with regulations of allowable ways to attain these outcomes. Thus values can focus on both the outcomes and the procedures or process (behaviors) used to attain the outcomes. Moral foundations theory (Haidt and Joseph) builds on this work focusing on moral principles – values one should live by, and bridges from psychological and sociological accounts to anthropological and evolutionary accounts of morality to understand core values, which they term virtues. Actualizing one's talents, enjoying oneself, leading a purposeful life, caring for the next generation are all examples of operationalization of values into behaviors and outcomes.

Values can be conceptualized on the individual and group level. At the individual level, values are internalized social representations or moral beliefs that people appeal to as the ultimate rationale for their actions. Though individuals in a society are likely to differ in the relative importance assigned to a particular value, values are an internalization of sociocultural goals that provide a means of self-regulation of impulses that would otherwise bring individuals in conflict with the needs of the groups and structures within which they live. Thus, discussion of values is intimately tied with social life. At the group level, values are scripts or cultural ideals held in common by members of a group; the group's 'social mind.' Differences in these cultural ideals, especially those with a moral component, determine and distinguish different social systems. In this sense Weber's Protestant 'ethic' and 'spirit' of capitalism describe value systems.

Values, to which individuals feel they owe an allegiance as members of a particular group or society, are seen as the glue that makes social life possible within groups. Yet, they also set the stage for frictions and lack of consensual harmony in intergroup interactions. Values are thus at the heart of the human enterprise; embedded in social systems, they are what makes social order both possible and resistant to change. Values are not simply individual traits, they are social agreements about what is right, good, to be cherished.

What is common to all value phenomena? At the individual level, values contain cognitive and affective elements and have a selective or directional quality; they are internalized. Preference, judgment, and action are commonly explained in terms of values. Values may be grounded in evolutionary press to prefer people, contexts, and situations which do not spread disease or harm, resulting in values of purity, fairness, caring, loyalty to in-group, and acceptance of authority that are differentially emphasized across time, place, and situation. Individuals take on values as part of socialization into a family, group, and society. Once taken on, values are assumed relatively fixed over time (*see Values Across Cultures, Development of*). Indeed, values that are individually endorsed and highly accessible to the individual do predict that individual's behavior. Conversely, even personally endorsed values would not influence action when they are not made salient to the individual at the time of action. Moreover, in any given situation more than one personally endorsed value may apply, and the behavioral choice appropriate for one value may conflict with the behavioral choice appropriate to another value.

Values are codes or general principles guiding action; they are not the actions themselves nor are specific checklists of what to do and when to do it. Thus, two societies can both value achievement but differ tremendously in their norms as to what to achieve, how to achieve, and when pursuing achievement is appropriate. Values underlie the sanctions for some behavioral choices and the rewards for others. A value system presents what is expected and what is hoped for, what is required and what is forbidden. It is not a report of actual behavior but a system of criteria by which behavior is judged and sanctions applied. Values scaffold likes and dislikes, what feels pleasant and unpleasant, and what is deemed a success or failure. Values and value systems are often evoked as rationales for action; for example, values of freedom and equality were evoked to elicit American support for the Civil Rights movements. Values differ from goals in that values provide a general rationale for more specific goals and motivate attainment of goals through particular methods.

### History and Current Developments

Initially viewed with suspicion by Western social scientists as too subjective for scientific study, the concept of values found increasing use beginning with *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1921). Impetus for the study of cultural values comes from the work of Alfred Kroeber, Clyde Kluckhohn, Talcott Parsons, Charles Morris, Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, Raymond Firth, A.I. Hallowell, and more currently from Michael Bond, Jonathan Haidt, Geerd Hofstede, Ronald Inglehart, Milton Rokeach, and Shalom Schwartz.

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) proposed that cultural value systems are variations of a set of basic value orientations that flow from answers to five basic questions about being. These are first, what is human nature – evil, neutral, mixed, or good? Second, how do we relate to nature or supernatural – subjugation, harmony, or mastery? Third, what is the nature of time – past, present, or future? Fourth, what is the nature of human activity – being, being-in-becoming, or doing? And fifth, what is the nature of our relationship to others – are we joined vertically, horizontally or are we simply separate individuals? Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck also organized a system for comparing values in terms of their level of generalization and function in discourse and conduct, proposing that values fit into a pyramid of ascending generalization. For each society, a few central or focal values were proposed to constitute a mutually interdependent set of what makes for the ‘good life.’ These include the unquestioned, self-justifying premises of the society’s value system and definitions of basic and general value terms; for example, happiness, virtue, beauty, and morality. The basic questions raised by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck continue to be studied, for example, by asking if societies differ in the propensity to accept or value vertical relations in which power differential is clear.

Since American researchers dominated values research, much early work focused on documenting American values. As early as 1944, need for achievement was described as an important or even a defining American value which was in decline (Spates, 1983). The idea that American values are in

decline continues to be a hot topic of political debate. Some relevant research focuses on change over time in narcissism, the extent that individuals (over) value themselves, and their own needs and desires compared to others.

Early values studies documented the influence of education, age, type of employment, and socioeconomic status on value preferences of Americans, adding to Weber’s thesis of the influence of religion (Protestantism vs Catholicism) on achievement and work values in Europe. Kohn (1977) was responsible for a number of important values surveys documenting that in various European countries and the United States, parents of higher socioeconomic status value self-direction in their children more than parents of lower educational and occupational levels. These findings have been verified cross-nationally in 122 societies. The influence of education on values continues to be hotly debated, the concern being that education carries with it reduced acceptance of traditional values (e.g., submission to authority, obedience). However, within the United States, for example, there is no evidence that political party affiliation or religiosity is causally influenced by obtaining a college degree.

Extending the documentation of American values, Rokeach (1973) validated empirically 36 values related to preferred end states and preferred ways of behaving. Using Rokeach’s scale, value differences tied to class, age, race, subculture, and level of differences were documented in many countries. Building on Rokeach, Schwartz (1992) delineates values as ways of articulating universal requirements of human existence – to survive physically, have social interchange, and provide group continuity. For Schwartz, values represent operationalizations of these needs as goals that fit together in meaningful clusters (achievement, self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, security, and power). Some clusters are compatible (e.g., stimulation and hedonism) and others compete (e.g., self-direction and conformity).

Using mostly data from teachers and college students in 20 primarily Western countries, Schwartz shows that, with the exception of China, specific values mostly do ‘cluster’ and ‘compete’ as expected. Thus, ‘honest,’ ‘forgiving,’ and ‘helpful’ cluster together as ‘benevolence,’ and ‘self-direction,’ and ‘stimulation’ cluster far from ‘conformity,’ ‘tradition,’ and ‘security.’ These data suggest important universality to how values are organized cross-culturally and that societies differ in which clusters of values predominate public life.

More recent analyses, using as its base, all literature published between 1980 and 2000 comparing Americans either with one another or with people from other countries on the extent that they endorse values of individualism and collectivism suggest that Americans are neither the most individualistic nor the least collectivistic of people (Oyserman et al., 2002). There was no difference between America and other English-speaking countries and only relatively small differences between Europe (Western and Central) and America, with Americans being higher in individualism. The majority of available studies (40%) focused on comparisons between East Asians and Americans, making them the most common comparison in the cross-national individualism literature. Combined effect sizes for comparisons with East Asia were moderate in size, as were combined effect sizes for Africa and

the Middle East. Whereas these findings corroborate conventional expectations of cultural theorists, surprisingly the combined effect size for countries in the “other Asia” region including India and Pakistan was small. Moreover, no difference in individualism was found between the United States and South America, with Americans in the United States being less individualistic than Latin Americans in South America in more than half of the country samples tested by Oyserman and her colleagues. With regard to collectivism, Americans were found to value collectivism less than were others from all regions of the world, with the exception of English-speaking countries. Surprisingly, Americans were *lower* in collectivism than Europeans were, befitting the idea of a uniquely American way of being (high individualism and low collectivism) but challenging the notion of a single ‘Western’ cultural set of values. In addition, effect sizes for Asian regions were similar to those for European regions, with large differences in valuing collectivism only when US and African samples were compared. Almost half of all studies focused on comparisons between East-Asian regions and America but effects were heterogeneous implying that simple between group comparisons would not necessarily yield value differences.

Priming people to consider their cultural values changes the extent that they feel obligated to act to help others rather than do their own thing (for a review, Oyserman and Lee, 2008). Values frameworks have been broadened to include Confucian values such as valuing relationships, valuing the family as the model of relationships, valuing a basic benevolence in engaging with others, and valuing hard work, skill development, and thrift (education, industriousness) (Hofstede and Bond, 1988). Cultural researchers have also shown that changes in societies produce rapid changes in values as well as in which personality and social interaction styles are valued. Emotional expressivity and outgoingness are valued more as societies shift toward individualistic values.

## Controversies

Key tensions in the values literature focus on the conditions under which they may influence behavior, and the appropriate level of analyses for seeing values in action. Interest in values as a research focus has ebbed in the past as each paradigm for studying values has been criticized for lack of specificity of findings as due to values as distinct from other constructs, including social norms, attitudes, or situational constraints. Current cultural psychology focuses attention on social structures as the repository of values such as personal freedom, group harmony, personal happiness, and duty or filial piety.

How do we know that values exist? A number of options are available: (1) Individual testimony – people say what values they hold. Yet, self-reports of values are subject to pronounced context effects (*see* Attitudes and Behavior). (2) Behavioral choices – either in naturalistic or laboratory settings, value differences may be imputed from behavior. Yet, behavior is influenced by many variables other than values. At the individual level, values themselves are assumed to link to behaviors via their influence on norms and attitudes, but people may infer their values from their behavior, reversing the causal relationship. (3) Cultural and

social structures – expenditure of resources, time, energy, and structuring of the natural environment; cultural products can be seen as concrete residues of value-based choices (*see* Cross-Cultural Psychology; Cultural Psychology). (4) Social interchange – observation of behavior in situations of conflict, and more generally observation of what is rewarded or punished, praised or vilified provides data for identifying what is socially valued. Here, too, the question of appropriate evidence arises. To what extent is it appropriate to assume that differences in social structures and societies are evidence of value differences? Political and economic influences and simple inertia may set the stage for behaviors, without a causal influence of necessarily values.

## Future Directions

Cross-cultural perspectives are currently becoming increasingly central to values discussion. For example Inglehart (1990) documented values and value change in a large multinational study, and thus a large number of two-nation comparison studies has emerged. Another important topic of research is the connection between values of individuals, values of subcultural groups, and values of larger cultural systems and methods for identifying and studying each of these. Perhaps in addition to identifying value vocabularies at each level, it is time to begin to ask whether values appropriately are studied as fixed traits of individuals or as embodied in groups and to what extent values research is synonymous with cultural and cross-cultural research.

Given that any particular behavior importantly is influenced by context effects that make certain information salient at the moment of action, it is not surprising that the effects of individual value endorsements on behavior have a ‘sometimes you see it, sometimes you don’t’ quality about them. But focusing on individual endorsement of values may miss much of the power of value systems to influence everyday life. That is, individuals may not need to personally endorse or have salient particular values in order for their influence to be felt. The most profound influence of values may be through the ways that they influence rules, norms, procedures within a society, and in this way structure the everyday life choices for individuals within a society.

Thus, whereas previous researchers have documented values using survey techniques in which individuals rated the extent to which various values were important to them, future assessment of values may need to consider more indirect approaches such as what services a society provides its members, what behaviors are rewarded or sanctioned and so on.

*See also:* Attitudes and Behavior; Collectivism and Individualism: Cultural and Psychological Concerns; Critical Psychology; Cross-Cultural Psychology; Levels of Analysis in Social Psychology; Social Cognition; Social Psychology; Values Across Cultures, Development of; Values, Anthropology of; Values, Sociology of; Vocational Interests, Values, and Preferences, Psychology of.

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