



6-1-2017

Upper Classes and Immorality: Ecological Validation of 50 Years of Power Research

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Recommended Citation

Cachia, P. (2017). Upper Classes and Immorality: Ecological Validation of 50 Years of Power Research. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 4(4). <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1151>

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Abstract

Does power corrupt? Scholars have examined this causality with mixed results. This study uses the World Value Survey (WVS) database to examine the power–corruption link across cultures and time. The WVS inquires respondents’ justification for moral domains of purity/sanctity, authority/respect, and fairness/reciprocity. Power is operationalized as belonging to the upper–class. The study provides evidence that the upper–class respondents are significantly more justifying of breaking moral rules across world regions. But results also indicate that morality of upper classes is diverging with time from the rest of the population, narrowing in some countries, and widening in others. A discussion on the implications of these findings and the need to monitor the morality of those in power is provided.

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Introduction

“Power corrupts.” Socrates’ apothegm appears even more valid today¹. Scandals pertaining to morality repeatedly occur among government heads, business leaders, sports champions, spiritual leaders of various religious denominations, elite scholars, and celebrities. Is it merely those scandals are more often reported in recent years, or are our elites increasingly likely to succumb to temptation and corruption? How bad is the situation? This study uses social class as a proxy for power, and especially focuses on the link between upper-class appurtenance and morality. The article is organized in three sections: first, I provide definitions of morality, power in general, and power obtained from ones’ group appurtenance. Especially of interest here is *social class*, whose appurtenance is associated to a change in morality. In the second section, I summarize the literature that associates morality domains (Moral Foundation Theory; Graham et al., 2011; Haidt, 1995; Haidt & Joseph, 2004) to individual power first, and then to social class. I then use the World Value Survey (WVS), a database of self-reported values from 99 countries, to closely examine if upper-class respondents from each country differ from their fellow countrymen and women in the assessment of cheating, respecting rules, and sexual behaviors. In conclusion, I assess the validity of the “power corrupts” adage across time.

Theories on Morality and Power

What is Morality?

Defining morality is never easy, as attested by the endless list of philosophers who have tried. According to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, and later Karl Marx, men are good by nature but can potentially become depraved by society, thus requiring a social contract. These thoughts led to the principles of universal human rights to enjoy freedom and self-determination. The utilitarianism school of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill focused on the inner moral inclination toward empathic feelings; the alleviation of suffering should be the source of all morality. Such thoughts have led to anti-slavery movements, women’s emancipation, and the “right to pursue happiness” enshrined in the US constitution. Developmental psychologists also located the origin of moral thoughts either in a social contract or in the individuals’ inner ability to reciprocate and treat others equally (for reviews see Gibbs, Basinger, Grime, & Snarey, 2007; and Wendorf, 2001). Piaget and Kohlberg recognized that, together with the cognitive development stages of children, emerges the ability to understand (culture specific) moral issues and to behave accordingly (Kohlberg, 1973, 1984; Piaget, 1932/1948). However, Kohlberg together with Turiel further argue that the most advanced form of morality goes beyond blind acceptance of social conventions: the experience of Nazi Germany demonstrates that it is in the capacity to *reject* social rules,

¹ In the Republic (Book VIII), Plato explains how political leaders become corrupted by power, thus leading to tyranny.

authority, and loyalty to one's in-group where lays a true morality, one based on life, justice, and liberty, at the apex or "principled" level of cognitive development (Kohlberg, 1973; Turiel, 1966, 1983).

The "empiricist view" that morality is learnt from childhood has been challenged by a "nativist view" (e.g., Haidt & Joseph, 2004) that argues morality precedes education, and is ingrained in the human mind as an outcome of evolution (Darwin, 1859). Evolutionary psychologists have proposed morality evolved among humans to regulate group functioning (Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). For example, humans have developed inner abilities to detect cheaters (Cosmides & Tooby, 2005), laying the moral ground for *equity* (i.e., others should be treated with fairness and justice; Haidt & Joseph, 2004), and they have evolved the ability to care for group members, laying the moral ground for *empathy* (i.e., one should be kind and compassionate with others; Haidt & Joseph, 2004). From this nativist standpoint, moral judgments come to mind without rational thinking; they elicit emotional reactions (Greene, Nystrom, Engell, Darley, & Cohen, 2004; Haidt, 2003; Huebner, Dwyer, & Hauser, 2009; Turner & Stets, 2007) and they are intuitive (Federico, Weber, Ergun, & Hunt, 2013; Haidt & Joseph, 2004). Therefore, defining morality solely along the dimensions of life, justice, and liberty, as proposed by Kohlberg and Turiel might be particular to WEIRD (western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010), liberal, and Judeo-Christian societies.

Starting from moral intuitions and enlarging their sample to include various cultures, Haidt and Joseph observed that morality involves a wide range of social regulations beyond just equity and empathy (2004). This new line of research, also called the Moral Foundation Theory (MFT; Graham et al., 2011; Haidt, 1995; Haidt & Joseph, 2004) suggests five universally observable domains of moral judgment: harm/care (with empathy at its core), fairness/reciprocity (which covers equity), in-group/loyalty (which prioritizes same-group members and self-sacrifice for the group), authority/respect (concerned with order and social hierarchy), and purity/sanctity (related with physical or spiritual contagion and disgust, sexual chastity and desire). These domains have been grouped into individualizing foundations, i.e., harm and fairness, and socially binding foundations, i.e., respect for authority, loyalty to group, and purity (Weber & Federico, 2013).

Therefore, a multi-dimensional definition of morality is required to ensure cross-cultural validity of a morality study. Because the strength and types of social bonds differ across cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Schug, Yuki, & Maddux, 2010), the characteristics of morality, as of the social contract, also vary across cultures (Rai & Fiske, 2011). For example, Confucianism, the founding moral philosophy in many Asian societies, treats the respect for hierarchy and authority as its highest virtue, at the apex of morality (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Nisbett, 2003). Studies in India (e.g., Mahalingam, 2007), among liberals and conservatives in the USA (e.g., Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009), or lower classes in Brazil and the USA (e.g., Haidt, Koller, & Diaz, 1993), indicate various levels of moral concerns about purity, degradation, hierarchical deference and loyalty to a national or ethnic group. Although research on the ethology of mammalian species suggests empathy, respect for authority, and equity might have been inherited from our pre-human ancestors (de Waal, 1982, 2006), the relative importance given to each moral domain varies with social

environment. For these reasons, this cross-cultural study will use the moral foundation theory as a cross-cultural framework to analyze morality.

Power at the Individual Level and its Paradox

Philosophers Thomas Hobbes and Friedrich Nietzsche, and more recent psychologists (e.g., McClelland, 1961, 1970, 1975; Winter, 1973, 1991) recognized that individuals have a motivation for power. Social hierarchy provides the evolved advantages of enhancing cooperation and coordination in the group among primates (de Waal, 1982), and human children as well (e.g., Barkow et al., 1975).

But psychologists have also warned that power should be channeled into responsible behaviors, or it might just be used to increase personal gain (Winter, 1991). Maner and Mead (2010) describe power-holding as a paradoxical social contract: instead of using one's asymmetric resources to benefit the group in totality, the powerful could potentially use their position for self-benefit (or that of one's family) at the expense of the larger group. As the social contract in a society is embedded in moral rules and regulations, whether or not those in power respect the social contract translates into whether or not they share morality with the group. For those in power, moral deviance shall thus be considered as breaking their end of the social contract. But power is not always granted according to characteristics such as physical strength, ability to form coalitions, and personality traits. More commonly, power derives from social structures (Sidanius, Pratto, van Laar, & Levin, 2004).

The Link Between Individual and Social Power

Although power has been defined as the ability *to do* (Berdahl & Martonara, 2006), or *to choose* (Ng, 1980), prevalent definitions are centered on interpersonal relationships: the ability *to make others do* (Sturm & Antonakis, 2015), *to influence* others (Copeland, 1994; French & Raven, 1959), or *to manipulate* others (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Kipnis, 1972). But power is not only the ability to influence others; it also stems from one's group appurtenance.

According to social identity theory, individuals define their identity from the group they belong to (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and derive self-esteem from the relative ranking of their group (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherall, 1987). One key characteristic of social groups is their power entitlement: genders, classes, castes, clans, economic and educational standings, as well as kinship structures involve social ranking (Bourdieu, 1991), which individuals are readily able to recognize (Anderson, Srivastava, Beer, Spataro, & Chatman, 2006). Such willingness to maintain hierarchy among social groups appears to be an evolved human capacity (Barkow et al., 1975), theorized as *social dominance* (Sidanius et al., 2004; Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006). In a word, group appurtenance is an indicator of social power.

Finally, individual power leads to group power. Not only are groups of individuals with power, by simple aggregation, more powerful than other groups, but also individual- and group-identities are both linked to individuals' appreciation of social hierarchy. For example, individuals with high social dominance orientation (i.e., endorsement of social hierarchy)

tend to choose careers in organizations with hierarchical structures (e.g., army and police) rather than horizontal structures (e.g., civil liberty organizations; Haley & Sidanius, 2005; Sidanius, van Laar, Levin, & Sinclair, 2003). And the sense of power is consistent across social interactions (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2011; Kenny & Zaccaro, 1983; Zaccaro, Foti, & Kenny, 1991). In sum, power at individual- and group-level is interconnected.

Social Class as Power

Social class has a profound effect on social life (Durkheim, 1802/1984; Fiske & Markus, 2011; Marx & Engels, 1848/1973). According to the class struggle theory (Marx & Engels, 1848/1973), social groups are formed according to their ability to obtain and maintain asymmetric access to economic and political resources, a definition that directly echoes that of power at the individual level. In the US, perceived power and social class are significantly correlated (Anderson et al., 2006).

Evidence also shows that social classes affect health, cognitive functioning, and behavior. Social classes emerge through shared experience—at school, at work, or in marriage, with individuals from the same social background—and it determines one's access to resources (Oakes & Rossi, 2003) and freedom of choice (Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens, Markus, & Townsend, 2007). Moreover, social class appurtenance strongly correlates to health (Adler et al., 1994; Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000) and social anxiety (Wilkinson, 1999). When exposed to nasal drops of *rhinovirus* and *influenza virus*, healthy subjects who perceive that they belong to a lower social class (subjective measure), but not those with lower salary (objective measure of social class) presented significantly more symptoms of cold and clinical illness (Cohen, Alper, Doyle, Adler, & Treanor, 2008). Furthermore, parental socioeconomic status (SES) appears to affect children's health, itself leading to children having lower SES at adult age (Currie, 2009).

Social class appurtenance also affects cognition and behavior. Members of the higher social classes tend to *essentialize* social categories and behaviors as inherent and stable, based on ingrained and genetic characteristics of individuals (Keller, 2005), while members of the lower classes tend to *contextualize* social categories and behaviors as flexible and constructed by social experience (Kraus, 2010; Mahalingam, 2003, 2007). Thus, higher-class members tend to favor personal abilities and neglect social interconnectedness. Studies on agency indicate that working (lower) class respondents favor social conformity and connection to others when performing the task of choosing a pen, while middle class respondents would rather opt for differentiation (Stephens et al., 2007). In another study on agency, Hurricane Katrina survivors were asked what guided their choice of staying or evacuating. Those who evacuated (who were mostly of a higher SES) were guided by a sense of independence and control, whereas those who refused to evacuate (who were mostly of a lower SES) were guided by interdependence, strength, and faith (Stephens, Hamedani, Markus, Bergsieker, & Eloul, 2009).

Morality, Individual Power, and Social Class

The next section reviews the literature on the link of morality with individual power and with social class. These two areas of study (i.e., *individual power-morality*, and *social class-morality*) have typically been two distinct fields of social psychology. But because individual- and social class-levels of analysis are different, though highly interconnected, the two fields deserve to be compared. The review is conducted separately for the five moral foundation domains.

Harm/Care Domain

Harm/care and individual power. The infamous Stanford prison experiment and the Milgram experiment at Yale University exemplify the extent to which bluntly immoral harming of others by empowered individuals becomes possible (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973; Milgram, 1963). Altogether, 13.6% of US workers have reported being abused by supervisors, including sexual harassment, physical violence, public ridiculing, etc. (Tepper, 2007). A large amount of studies have shown that, in experimental settings or in organizations, individuals given power, or primed with power, tend to have less empathy for others (for a summary see Sturm & Antonakis, 2015). Those given power tend to dehumanize or objectify others (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008; Gwinn, Judd, & Park, 2013). Dehumanization itself is correlated to a greater willingness to torture in prison settings (Haney et al., 1973; Milgram, 1963; Viki, Osgood, & Phillips, 2013). Individuals given power over others tend to manipulate them (Kipnis, 1972), to express less compassion, ignoring distress and suffering of others (Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten 2012; van Kleef, Oveis, van der Löwe, LuoKogan, & Goetz, 2008), and tend to punish more severely in retributive justice settings (van Prooijen, Coffeng, & Vermeer, 2014) compared to individuals with less power.

Conversely, a handful of studies provide the opposite evidence that individual power might improve moral judgment in the harm/care domain. For instance, power might increase interpersonal sensitivity (Hall, Andrzejewski, & Yopchick, 2009; Schmid Mast, Jonas, & Hall, 2009), and those empowered might become altruistic, if they are other-oriented (Blader & Chen, 2012; Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001), or if they are directed toward interpersonal tasks (Copeland, 1994; Overbeck & Park, 2001, 2006). Finally, those in power are more willing to help in situations of distress, as the less powerful are typically waiting for someone to lead (Whitson, Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, & Liljenquist, 2007).

Harm/care and social class. At the social class level, the assessment of the harm/care moral foundation is more balanced. First, children's moral development stages increase with SES across cultures (Gibbs et al., 2007; Snarey, 1985). Higher SES children have more "principled" levels of moral judgment: they are more passionate and empathic (Kohlberg, 1973; Turiel, 1966, 1983). High SES individuals in the USA also volunteer more than lower classes (Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005).

However, various studies indicate higher social class might be associated to more harming and less caring. Higher SES individuals are less likely to “moralize” their behavior than lower SES individuals (Ellemers, Pagliaro, Baretto, & Leach, 2008). Upper-class members’ economic autonomy and personal agency make them depend on others less than lower classes do (Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens et al., 2007). In chaotic situations, for example, high SES individuals bank on their personal wealth, while lower class members lean on their community (Piff, Stancato, Côté, Mendoza-Denton, & Keltner, 2012). More directly, high SES individuals in the USA display lower levels of compassion than low SES respondents (Stellar, Manzo, Kraus, & Keltner, 2012) and manifest less empathic accuracy (Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010). In a cooperation exercise, upper-class respondents give 40% less to anonymous partners, they are less trusting of others, less helpful to distressed experimenters (Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010), they direct less attention to other participants, have less eye contact, and laugh less (Kraus & Keltner, 2009) than lower class respondents. They are also on average less polite with strangers than the lower classes (Argyle, 1994). Moreover, upper-class members in the USA give on average 2.2% of their income to charitable organization, whereas poorer class members give 4.6%, although a larger percent of upper classes (70% vs. 30% for lower classes) do give (James & Sharpe, 2007). Finally, the individual measures of social dominance orientation (SDO), which is higher among upper social classes (Sidanius, Levin, Liu, & Pratto, 2000), was negatively correlated to the harm/care moral foundation (Federico, et al., 2013).

Fairness/Reciprocity Domain

Fairness/reciprocity and individual power. At the individual level, those in power tend to satisfy their own needs at the expense of others (Keltner et al., 2003) and several studies provide evidence of this non-equalitarian propensity (e.g., DeCelles, DeRue, Margolis, & Ceranic, 2012; Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2015; Pitesa & Thau, 2013). Having power was also correlated to cheating more if the power situation was stable (Kim, Shin, & Lee, 2015).

Fairness/reciprocity and social class. By definition, social hierarchy implies unequal situations and therefore, less fairness and reciprocity between members of various social classes. Ideologies that promote social hierarchy (e.g., social dominance) tend to support inequality in society at large, and thereby tend to promote and legitimate prejudices and discrimination (Sidanius et al., 2000). The inclination of upper-class members to validate and justify inequality in an *essentialist* manner further legitimates social inequality (Keller, 2005; Kraus, 2010; Mahalingam, 2003, 2007). More directly, high SES is correlated to lower fairness/reciprocity: upper-class members are more selfish (Dubois, et al., 2015). In experiments, high SES individuals took more sweets intended for children, were more likely to cheat in online games, and to lie in negotiation (Piff et al., 2012). Although this study has been criticized (Francis, 2012), high SES also correlated to being more self-serving, and low SES correlated to redistribution, especially if high SES individuals also have strong upper-body strength (Petersen, Sznycer, Sell, Cosmides, & Tooby, 2013).

In-group/loyalty Domain

In-group/loyalty and individual power. Individuals given power feel more distant from others (Kipnis, 1972; Lammers, et al., 2012; Magee & Smith, 2013), implying the weakness of any possible link between power and in-group loyalty. For example, individuals with high power confirm less the opinion of others when making a decision (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008). However, a direct measure of the relationship between in-group loyalty and individual power has yet to be conducted.

In-group/loyalty and social class. Social class, as demonstrated above, has a bearing on individuals' perception of in-group appurtenance: studies have shown that upper social class members are more independent, have a higher sense of control, and are less prosocial *in general* than lower class members (e.g., Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2009). No prior study, however, tested if these conclusions apply to *in-groups*. Overall, the connection between in-group loyalty and social class is not clear. Social dominance theory sheds a little more light: Group appurtenance in general is the source of in-group bias (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987). For those with high SDO, e.g., upper-class members (Sidanius et al., 2000), in-group bias is further enhanced (Pratto et al., 2006). Not only do legitimating myths of social ranking increase bias among those in high social strata, but also the combination of high SDO and high group-identification increases discrimination against out-group subordinates (Pratto et al., 2006). Although a study shows that high SDO does not directly correlate to in-group loyalty (Federico et al., 2013), evidence indicates that SDO enhances in-groups' hierarchical ranking (Haley & Sidanius, 2005).

Authority/Respect Domain

Authority/respect and individual power. The authority/respect domain is associated with duties, obedience, respect, and maintenance of traditions (Graham et al., 2011). Powerful individuals are expected to promote rules and regulations, not only to simplify decision-making processes (for cognitive ease; Fiske, 1993), but also because rules reinforce the status quo (Sidanius, Pratto, Sinclair, & van Laar, 1996; Sidanius et al., 2004). In parallel, the literature gathered ample evidence that those in power tend to become disinhibited and therefore less respectful of social conveniences, rules, and regulations (Galinsky, Jordan, & Sivanathan, 2008), whereas powerless individuals are more sensitive to threat and punishment (Fiske, 1993). The approach/inhibition reasoning (Keltner et al., 2003) proposes that powerful individuals are ready to take more risks (such as breaking rules), than powerless individuals (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Galinsky et al., 2008).

Authority/respect and social class. Both the Marxist concept of class struggle (Marx & Engels, 1848/1973; Marx, 1844/1964) and social dominance theory (Pratto et al., 2006; Sidanius et al., 2004) propose that social hierarchy is maintained by those with higher rank. Because dominant ideologies support the power system in place (Foucault & Gordon, 1980), upper-class members would promote a moral foundation based on duties, traditions, and obedience to secure compliance of the less powerful. However, evidence that social power may enhance adherence to social rules is mixed. On the contrary, elevated social rank may

reduce threat sensitivity and increase sense of control (Kraus et al., 2012), thereby reducing threat-driven obedience to rules and regulations: high SES individuals tend to make more driving infractions and exhibit more unethical behavior (Piff et al., 2012), especially when that behavior benefits them (vs. others), and when their power was enhanced (Dubois et al., 2015). This result, however, was not replicated with a large Dutch sample (Trautmann, van de Kuilen, & Zeckhauser, 2013). The researchers explain the cultural variation by the difference in the type of unethical behavior tested: the wealthier may cheat significantly more on taxes, but they may not steal cars (nor cheat on social welfare, or in a trust game) more than poorer individuals might. Results on social dominance are also mixed. High SDO individuals endorse hierarchy and tend to choose careers in hierarchical organizations, where respect of authority is required, such as the police or military (Haley & Sidanius, 2005). Person-occupation congruence (potentially expressed as respect for authority on the job) increases efficacy at work (Sidanius et al., 1996). But the direct correlation between SDO and the authority/respect moral foundation was not observed (Federico et al., 2013).

Purity/Sanctity Domain

Purity/sanctity and individual power. The purity/sanctity domain is associated with moral judgment founded on physical or spiritual contagion, disgust, chastity, and desire (Haidt & Joseph, 2004). Individuals in power do not particularly curb their desire, as having power is associated to more sexual harassment behaviors (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995). But studies that inquire directly into the link between purity- and sanctity-related moral judgments and individual power have yet to be conducted.

Purity/sanctity and social class. On the link between social class and purity/sanctity, one rare study indicates that higher classes tend to “moralize” purity less than lower classes (Horberg, Oveis, Keltner, & Cohen, 2009). However the direct measure of purity/sanctity moral foundation was not correlated to social dominance (Federico et al., 2013). More studies have observed a link between political orientation (conservative vs. liberal) and the moral domain of purity/sanctity, but social class was not included in these studies.

Hypotheses

Although abundant and highly informative, research on the link between morality and power/social class needs to be complimented. Its main weakness is that it was conducted in WEIRD societies (Henrich et al., 2010) for the most part, and therefore lacks cross-cultural validity (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011). Morality rules express the terms of the social contract that is specific to that of each culture (Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987). For example, cultural variations in hierarchical and vertical dimensions (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995) might promote individualizing vs. socially binding moral foundations. The acceptance of social hierarchy might also influence morality (e.g., Oyserman, 2006).

The main objective of this inquiry is to confirm if perceived appurtenance to upper social classes affects moral judgments in all cultures similarly. As the great majority of prior studies have observed a lower rating in empathy/compassion and equity/fairness among the

upper classes, I hypothesize that these results can be extrapolated across cultures, and to all moral domains because power increases the sense of personal control and reduces socially binding behaviors (the “unrestricted” low morality hypothesis).

The process of modernization leads to changes in values (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). According to these authors, industrialization leads to the replacement of traditional forms of authority (e.g., religion) with secular forms (e.g., government) in a first step, before all forms of authority are eventually replaced by emancipated individualization in the postmodern step (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Applying this rationale, the upper classes in highly industrialized societies might adhere more to individualizing moral foundations such as equity and empathy, than to socially binding moral foundations such as authority, purity, and in-group loyalty (the “selective” low morality hypothesis).

Table 1.

Regions, Sub-regions and Countries sampled in the WVS (WVS, 2015; Geoscheme, 2006)

Africa	America	Asia	Europe	Oceania
Eastern Africa: Ethiopia, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia.	Central America: El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico.	Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan.	Eastern Europe: Bulgaria, Belarus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine.	Oceania: Australia, New Zealand.
North Africa: Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia.	Latin America: Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago.	East Asia: China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea.	Northern Europe: Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, Great Britain	
South Africa: South Africa.	North America: Canada, USA.	South East Asia: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Viet Nam, Thailand.	Southern Europe: Albania, Andorra, Bosnia, Croatia, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Macedonia, Serbia & Montenegro.	
Western Africa: Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Burkina Faso.	South America: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela.	Southern Asia Bangladesh, India, Iran, Pakistan.	Western Europe: France, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland.	
		Western Asia: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bahrain, Cyprus, Georgia, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Yemen.		

Measuring Class Power and Morality

The World Value Survey

The association between social class and morality is examined using data from the several rounds of the WVS. The strength of the WVS is in its global coverage. The WVS includes *representative* samples of 99 countries (Inglehart, Basanez, & Moreno, 1998), altogether representing 90% of the world population (WVS, 2015). Although the WVS dataset does not include the wide variety of sub-cultures or lifestyles existing in each country, this large sample of 340,000 individuals provides an unrivaled sample of *national cultures* with diverse economic-development levels, political systems, religious beliefs, social practices, as well as diversity in ethnic and genetic factors. In this study, the concept of culture is therefore understood as countries or *national cultures*. The countries are further grouped into five regions and 18 geographical sub-regions (see Table 1) using the United Nations Geoscheme classification (Geoscheme, 2006).

Furthermore, the WVS was obtained in six waves, from 1981-1984 to 2010-2014. Each wave contains a different sample of countries: The first wave in 1981-1984 includes eight countries ($n = 10,307$) and the last one in 2010-2014 includes 60 countries ($n = 86,272$). When a country appears in several waves, each wave is analyzed as one dataset, because culture evolves with time. The dataset for each country and wave is called “case” thereafter.

The WVS Measure of Social Class

The World Value Survey (WVS, 2015) database provides a (self-reported) measure of social class. Respondents are asked to rate the social class to which they belong on a Likert scale, ranging from *lower-class*, then *working-class*, *middle-class* (lower- and upper-middle-class in few studies), to finally *upper-class*. Self-reported identification with the upper-class (UC) ranges from 0.1% (Latvia and Burkina Faso) to 6.9% (Israel) of the respondents per country (2.2% of the full sample or $n = 6,702$ respondents).

To characterize the upper-class respondents of the full sample, their gender, age, education, and income levels were compared with the rest of the sample (Table 2), using a Welch *t*-test (for unequal variance; Welch, 1947). Overall, respondents who identified as upper-class fit a broad definition of *elites* whose power rests largely on economic resources and high education. This study focuses on the *subjective* perception of upper-class appurtenance. Research has shown that subjective feelings of power are enough to modify attitudes (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002). And not only do objective measures of upper-class appurtenance not always correlate to subjective measures (Kraus et al., 2009; Kraus et al., 2011), but subjective measures have a bigger impact on life than objective ones (Adler et al., 2000; Cohen et al., 2008).

Table 2.
Demographics of Upper-Class Respondents and Populace

Variables	Populace ^a	Upper-class	Welch's <i>t</i> (<i>df</i>)	<i>p</i>	95% CI		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Gender ^b	0.48 (0.50)	0.53 (0.50)	-7.01 (304436)	<.001	-.06	-.03	-0.10
Age	40.8 (16.0)	37.8 (15.2)	15.61 (304121)	<.001	2.59	3.33	0.19
Education ^c	4.70 (2.23)	5.86 (2.15)	-39.55 (275363)	<.001	-1.22	-1.10	-0.53
Income ^d	4.57 (2.28)	6.62 (2.67)	-59.49 (282304)	<.001	-2.12	-1.98	-0.83

Note. CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit. ^a 0 = *female* and 1 = *male*. ^a Populace refers to the respondents who do not identify as upper classes. ^b Scale from 1 (*primary education not completed*) to 8 (*university degree obtained*). ^c Scale from 1 (*lowest income group in the country*) to 10 (*highest income group in the country*).

Morality Measures

I first provide a descriptive analysis of WVS morality items for upper classes and populace (i.e., respondents who do not identify as upper-class) on the full sample and by region. In a second step, the WVS dataset is used to construct a morality model aligned with the MFT using exploratory and then confirmatory factor analysis.

Descriptive analysis

Respondents of the WVS are asked if they would justify a range of behaviors on a 1 - 10 Likert scale from 1 (*always justifiable*) to 10 (*never justifiable*). A sample item is "Avoiding a fare on public transportation." Table 3 provides means values of the morality items and the Welch *t*-test comparison for the full sample and by region. On the full sample, upper-class respondents agree significantly more than the other classes in justifying 12/23 various behaviors such as accepting bribes ($d = .19$), sex under legal age of consent ($d = .16$), fighting with the police ($d = .15$), and cheating on taxes ($d = .15$). However, upper classes justify only one item significantly less than other classes (homosexuality, $d = -.06$). There is no significant difference between upper-class and populace on other items.

Regional variations are observed: in Europe, America, Asia, and Africa, upper classes justify significantly more than other classes from 8/23 (Asia) to 12/23 items (Africa) per region ($.37 \geq ds \geq .08$), and significantly less than other classes from 0/23 items (Africa and Europe) and 3/23 items (Asia) per region ($-.09 \geq ds \geq -.16$). In Oceania, there are no significant differences between the upper class and the populace, except for claiming undue government benefits (upper-class justify less than populace, $d = -.43$). In sum, upper classes tend to justify "immoral" behaviors more than other classes, and regional differences such as in Asia might be related to a definition of self that is socially interdependent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Table 3

Mean, Standard Deviations and Welch *t*-test Comparison for Populace and Upper-class Groups, by Region, for the 23 Morality Items of the WVS (*n* = 304637)

Items	Homosexuality		Prostitution		Sex under legal age		Divorce	
	Populace	Upper class	Populace	Upper class	Populace	Upper class	Populace	Upper class
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
World	3.12*** (2.99)	2.95 (2.91)	2.59 (2.48)	2.69*** (2.62)	2.25 (2.34)	2.65*** (2.59)	4.61 (3.10)	4.56 (3.12)
Africa	2.05 (2.12)	2.46*** (2.53)	2.08 (2.11)	2.57*** (2.66)	3.19 (2.97)	4.02* (3.16)	3.72 (2.88)	3.95** (3.30)
America	3.71*** (3.13)	3.21 (2.94)	2.87 (2.60)	2.63*** (2.43)	2.53 (2.58)	3.14*** (2.85)	5.15 (3.26)	5.14 (3.31)
Asia	2.30 (2.31)	2.52*** (2.60)	2.01 (1.98)	2.39*** (2.47)	1.66 (1.98)	1.79 (1.70)	3.67 (2.77)	4.10*** (2.79)
Europe	4.06 (3.44)	4.56*** (3.58)	3.11 (2.67)	3.69*** (2.93)	2.25 (2.36)	3.18*** (2.95)	5.87 (2.93)	6.04 (3.09)
Oceania	5.50 (3.38)	4.71 (3.51)	4.47 (2.84)	4.52 (3.31)	^a	^a	6.51 (2.60)	6.02 (2.98)
Items	Euthanasia		Abortion		Fighting with the police		Suicide	
	Populace	Upper class	Populace	Upper class	Populace	Upper class	Populace	Upper class
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
World	3.68 (3.19)	3.64 (3.17)	3.35 (2.84)	3.53*** (2.92)	2.83 (2.47)	3.21*** (2.59)	2.20 (2.21)	2.46*** (2.51)
Africa	2.48 (2.50)	3.35*** (3.02)	2.31 (2.25)	2.90*** (2.76)	2.83 (2.38)	3.80*** (2.81)	1.90 (1.98)	2.36*** (2.47)
America	3.65 (3.20)	3.59 (3.16)	2.83 (2.68)	3.18*** (2.82)	2.73 (2.58)	3.26*** (2.71)	2.05 (2.11)	2.17 (2.34)
Asia	3.24 (2.98)	3.35 (3.03)	2.86 (2.47)	3.44*** (2.78)	3.06 (2.43)	3.12 (2.42)	2.01 (1.99)	2.40*** (2.42)
Europe	4.97 (3.34)	5.00 (3.41)	4.88 (3.03)	5.05 (3.19)	2.56 (2.28)	2.93 (2.64)	2.71 (2.55)	3.18*** (2.91)
Oceania	6.30 (3.07)	6.03 (3.39)	5.31 (2.95)	5.36 (2.95)	^a	^a	3.12 (2.58)	3.76 (3.03)
Items	Killing in self-defense		Claiming undue benefits		Avoiding fare on public transport		Cheating on taxes	
	Populace	Upper class	Populace	Upper class	Populace	Upper class	Populace	Upper class
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
World	5.42 (3.52)	5.54 (3.45)	2.57 (2.45)	2.77*** (2.68)	2.56 (2.41)	2.78*** (2.70)	2.23 (2.18)	2.61*** (2.60)
Africa	4.82 (3.60)	5.28 (3.51)	2.41 (2.36)	2.70** (2.64)	2.42 (2.35)	2.77 (2.67)	2.20 (2.19)	2.65*** (2.59)
America	5.66 (3.55)	6.36*** (3.31)	2.72 (2.68)	3.04*** (2.95)	2.92 (2.74)	2.90 (2.75)	2.10 (2.14)	2.42** (2.48)
Asia	5.32** (3.50)	4.94 (3.41)	2.69 (2.47)	2.77 (2.65)	2.27 (2.17)	2.70*** (2.68)	2.06 (2.03)	2.60*** (2.65)
Europe	5.35 (3.42)	5.43 (3.51)	2.50 (2.29)	2.51 (2.44)	2.82 (2.48)	2.97 (2.70)	2.61 (2.38)	2.88** (2.62)
Oceania	^a	^a	1.88*** (1.78)	1.23 (0.68)	2.14 (1.87)	1.84 (1.95)	2.07 (1.92)	1.98 (2.04)
Items	Accepting a bribe		Joyriding		Taking soft drugs		Throwing away litter	
	Populace	Upper class	Populace	Upper class	Populace	Upper class	Populace	Upper class
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
World	1.80 (1.79)	2.19*** (2.69)	1.61 (1.62)	1.69 (1.73)	1.49 (1.57)	1.62** (1.71)	1.68 (1.70)	1.76 (1.69)
Africa	2.03 (2.03)	2.49** (2.49)	2.29 (2.19)	2.61 (2.55)	1.98 (1.96)	2.05 (2.01)	1.93 (1.70)	2.22 (1.88)
America	1.70 (1.71)	1.85 (1.97)	1.67 (1.78)	1.81 (1.99)	1.63 (1.84)	1.81* (1.98)	1.87 (2.01)	1.88 (1.84)
Asia	1.77 (1.75)	2.28*** (2.36)	1.49 (1.40)	1.47 (1.28)	1.24 (1.02)	1.29 (1.08)	1.57 (1.48)	1.64 (1.57)
Europe	1.82 (1.76)	1.98* (2.01)	1.33 (1.04)	1.42 (1.5)	1.54 (1.65)	2.09** (2.33)	1.39 (1.24)	1.49 (1.39)
Oceania	1.41 (1.25)	1.29 (0.79)	^a	^a	^a	^a	^a	^a

Cachia: Upper Classes and Immorality

Items	Driving under influence		Buying stolen goods		Political assassination		Failing to report a parking accident	
	Populace	Upper class	Populace	Upper class	Populace	Upper class	Populace	Upper class
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
World	1.57 (1.54)	1.73*** (1.68)	1.82 (1.77)	1.87 (1.89)	1.86 (1.96)	1.88 (1.92)	2.40 (2.36)	2.48 (2.36)
Africa	1.80 (1.73)	2.01 (2.14)	1.82 (1.76)	1.84 (1.91)	2.35 (2.30)	2.74 (2.66)	2.44 (2.15)	3.14** (2.72)
America	1.65 (1.74)	1.82* (1.79)	1.78 (1.78)	1.85 (1.90)	1.80 (1.98)	1.78 (1.89)	2.91 (2.77)	3.03 (2.72)
Asia	1.48 (1.37)	1.60 (1.50)	1.77 (1.69)	1.85 (1.85)	1.93 (1.97)	1.84 (1.80)	2.04 (1.92)	1.97 (1.84)
Europe	1.47 (1.31)	1.76* (1.62)	1.89 (1.83)	1.93 (1.93)	1.66 (1.69)	1.70 (1.72)	1.78 (1.83)	2.16 (2.09)
Oceania	_a	_a	1.60 (1.48)	2.56 (2.73)	_a	_a	_a	_a

Items	Lying		Adultery		Keeping money found	
	Populace	Upper class	Populace	Upper class	Populace	Upper class
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
World	2.85 (2.55)	2.90 (2.47)	2.43 (2.43)	2.58* (2.43)	3.70 (3.20)	3.55 (3.03)
Africa	3.55 (3.02)	3.99 (2.93)	2.92 (2.82)	2.83 (2.49)	3.98 (3.20)	3.79 (2.90)
America	2.95 (2.69)	3.14 (2.67)	2.88 (2.76)	3.11 (2.77)	4.99 (3.52)	5.04 (3.33)
Asia	2.79*** (2.44)	2.45 (2.07)	1.89 (1.87)	1.96 (1.82)	2.39* (2.19)	2.21 (1.96)
Europe	2.46 (2.16)	3.21*** (2.56)	2.42 (2.29)	3.17** (2.79)	3.46 (3.05)	4.11* (3.26)
Oceania	_a	_a	_a	_a	_a	_a

Note: Scale from 1 (*never justifiable*) to 10 (*always justifiable*).

^a No data for Oceania. *** < .001, ** < .01, * < .05, for significantly higher mean values.

Africa: Ethiopia, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, South Africa, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Burkina Faso.

America: El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Trinidad & Tobago, Canada, USA, Argentine, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela.

Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Viet Nam, Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Iran, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bahrain, Cyprus, Georgia, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Yemen.

Europe: Bulgaria, Belarus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, Great Britain, Albania, Andorra, Bosnia, Croatia, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Macedonia, Serbia & Montenegro, France, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland.

Oceania: Australia, New Zealand.

Table 4
Factor Loadings and Communalities, Based on Principal Component Analysis with Oblimin Rotation for the 23 Morality Items of the WVS (n = 10969)

Moral Foundation MFT Domains Factors	Socially binding				Individualizing	Communalities
	Purity / Sanctity		Authority / Respect		Fairness / Reciprocity	
	Purity ($\alpha = .73$)	Death ($\alpha = .66$)	Authority 1 ($\alpha = .64$)	Authority 2 ($\alpha = .85$)	Cheat others ($\alpha = .63$)	
Homosexuality	-.83					.73
Prostitution	-.70					.65
Sex under legal age	-.47					.46
Divorce	-.42	.52				.59
Euthanasia		.68				.52
Abortion		.60				.57
Fighting with the police		.50				.49
Suicide		.45	.41			.52
Killing in self-defense		.48		.52		.52
Claiming undue government benefits			.89			.67
Cheating fare on public transport			.74			.60
Cheating on taxes			.55			.51
Accepting a bribe				.65		.53
Joyriding				.70		.57
Taking soft drugs				.60		.55
Throwing away litter				.74		.53
Driving under influence				.76		.60
Buying stolen goods				.62		.58
Political assassination				.65		.50
Failing to report a parking accident						.41
Lying					.65	.56
Adultery	-.41				.44	.49
Keeping money found					.76	.62

Note: |Factor loadings| < .4 are removed. Boldface indicates items kept for consistency measures

Exploratory factor analysis

To determine if the 23 observed morality items combine into morality latent constructs, I proceed in two steps: first, I explore if the 23 variables split into factors corresponding to the MFT domains at face validity; then, I use confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test if the identified factors demonstrate convergent and discriminant validity, and if they are invariant by group, so they can be compared.

Principal components analysis with oblimin rotation was applied on the 23 morality items for the full sample, leading to five factors² (Table 4). The first factor invokes the “purity” aspect of the moral foundation, as it deals with sexual behaviors. The second factor includes items about death and is therefore related to sanctity ($\alpha = .66$). The next two factors evoke cheating the administration ($\alpha = .64$), and breaking social rules without especially hurting or being unfair to others ($\alpha = .85$): they relate to the authority/respect domain and are labelled “authority 1” and “authority 2.” Political assassination, which loads on authority 2, is removed as it lacks face validity with this domain. The last factor suggests a relationship to fairness/reciprocity, as it evokes cheating other individuals ($\alpha = .63$). Finally, the item *failing to report a parking accident* is not used because loadings are $< .4$.

Confirmatory factor analysis

The confirmatory factor analysis proceeds in three steps: first, CFA is applied on the full sample (after data screening and listwise removal of missing-at-random values) and optimized according to modification indices; then, the adjusted model is applied to populace and upper-class groups separately to confirm fit; finally, model invariance across the two groups is tested, to allow the comparison of their mean values (He & van de Vijver, 2012).

The initial model’s goodness of fit is low (see Table 5). The model is therefore optimized using modification indices, adding error terms covariance, and removing items with loadings $< .4$ (Jackson, Gillaspay, & Purc-Stephenson, 2009). The “purity” and “death” constructs are combined into a single latent variable labelled purity/sanctity, because their correlation is $> .85$ (Kline, 2005). Although they both relate to the authority/respect domain, the “authority 1” and “authority 2” constructs are discriminated ($r = .73$), implying cheating on social benefits and public services is assessed differently from breaking the law. The adjusted model (Figure 1) using 17 morality items demonstrates acceptable fit with the data ($\chi^2[104] = 2101.15$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2[104] = 20.20$; $CFI = .966$; $NFI = .964$; $RMSEA = .042$), acceptable convergence (standardized loadings $\geq .43$; Kline, 2005), and discriminant validity between constructs (correlation between constructs $\leq .73$; Kline, 2005). To allow between-group comparison, invariance is verified using the decrease in CFI from configural to metric, and to scalar models (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002)³. Both metric and scalar invariance are obtained on the whole sample (see Table 5).

² Listwise non-missing sample is large enough to run the analysis: $n = 10969$, and culturally representative as only Oceania respondents are missing. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of adequacy is .93 (above the recommended value of .6), and Barlett’s test of sphericity is significant, $\chi^2(253) = 82074.55$, $p < .001$, thus factor analysis was considered feasible with the 23 items. Principle component analysis provided five factors, but seven items load on two factors. To achieve a simpler structure, Oblimin rotation with Kaiser Normalization is applied and produces an identifiable solution with five factors. Finally, the communalities (all $> .3$) indicate items share variance with each other (Table 3).

³ In order to compare means between groups (i.e. populace and upper class), constructs should demonstrate full score (or scalar) equivalence (He & van de Vijver, 2012). The analysis proceeds in three steps: first a configural model (using the two groups) is created for baseline. For testing metric invariance, only factor loadings are fixed across groups, and the decrease in fit from the configural to this “metric” model is tested. The non-significance of fit difference indicates measurement weights for populace and for upper class do not differ. For testing scalar invariance,

Table 5
Summary of Model 2 Fit and Invariance for Groups Populace and Upper Class

Model	<i>n</i>	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>NFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>CFI</i>	ΔCFI^a
Initial model- full sample	10969	9296.74	179	.874	.068	.877	
Optimized model - full sample	10969	2101.15	104	.964	.042	.966	
Single group model – populace ^b	8539	1733.54	104	.963	.043	.965	
Single group model - upper class ^b	1084	423.76	104	.936	.053	.951	
Configural invariance	9623	2157.45	208	.960	.031	.964	
Metric invariance	9623	2195.13	221	.959	.030	.963	-.001 *
Scalar invariance	9623	2336.30	238	.957	.030	.961	-.003 *

^a $\Delta CFI = CFI_{metric} - CFI_{configural}$ for metric invariance. $\Delta CFI = CFI_{scalar} - CFI_{configural}$ for scalar invariance.

^b Social class information is missing for $n = 1346$ respondents. * $\Delta CFI < .01$ (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002).

The same invariance test is conducted on each country-wave case, with the optimized model (four constructs) in cases where all observable variables are available (eight cases). For cases where the 17 morality items are not available, a simplified model (including the eight items for the *purity/sanctity* and the *authority 1* constructs) is used for invariance test. A total of 159 cases with non-missing variables are tested, among which a) for 80 cases the upper class sample size is too small to run the invariance test, b) for three cases the invariance tests cannot be rejected, and c) for 75 cases (49 countries, $n = 106053$) both metric and scalar invariance are obtained. Only these cases are used in the next sections (for the list of 75 cases, see note in Table 6).

Results

The primary goal is to analyze the *extent* of the morality gap between upper classes and others. Because measures' means and variances of morality are expected to vary within country (Gibbs et al., 2007; Haidt, 1995; Haidt et al., 1993; Miller & Bersoff, 1992; Shweder

both factor loadings and intercept are fixed equal across groups in a “scalar” model. The absence of significant difference in fit between the configural and the scalar models demonstrates the latent constructs would produce same observable measures for populace and for upper class, and only if this condition is fulfilled, can straightforward group mean comparison be realized (He & van de Vijver, 2012). Typically, χ^2 difference between models is tested to confirm significance in fit difference. This method cannot be used here, as χ^2 for each model and subsequently $\Delta\chi^2$ between models are always significant due to large sample sizes. For large sample sizes, Cheung and Rensvold (2002) propose instead to analyze the decrease in *CFI* between models: $\Delta CFI < .01$ indicates the null hypotheses for the tested invariance should not be rejected.

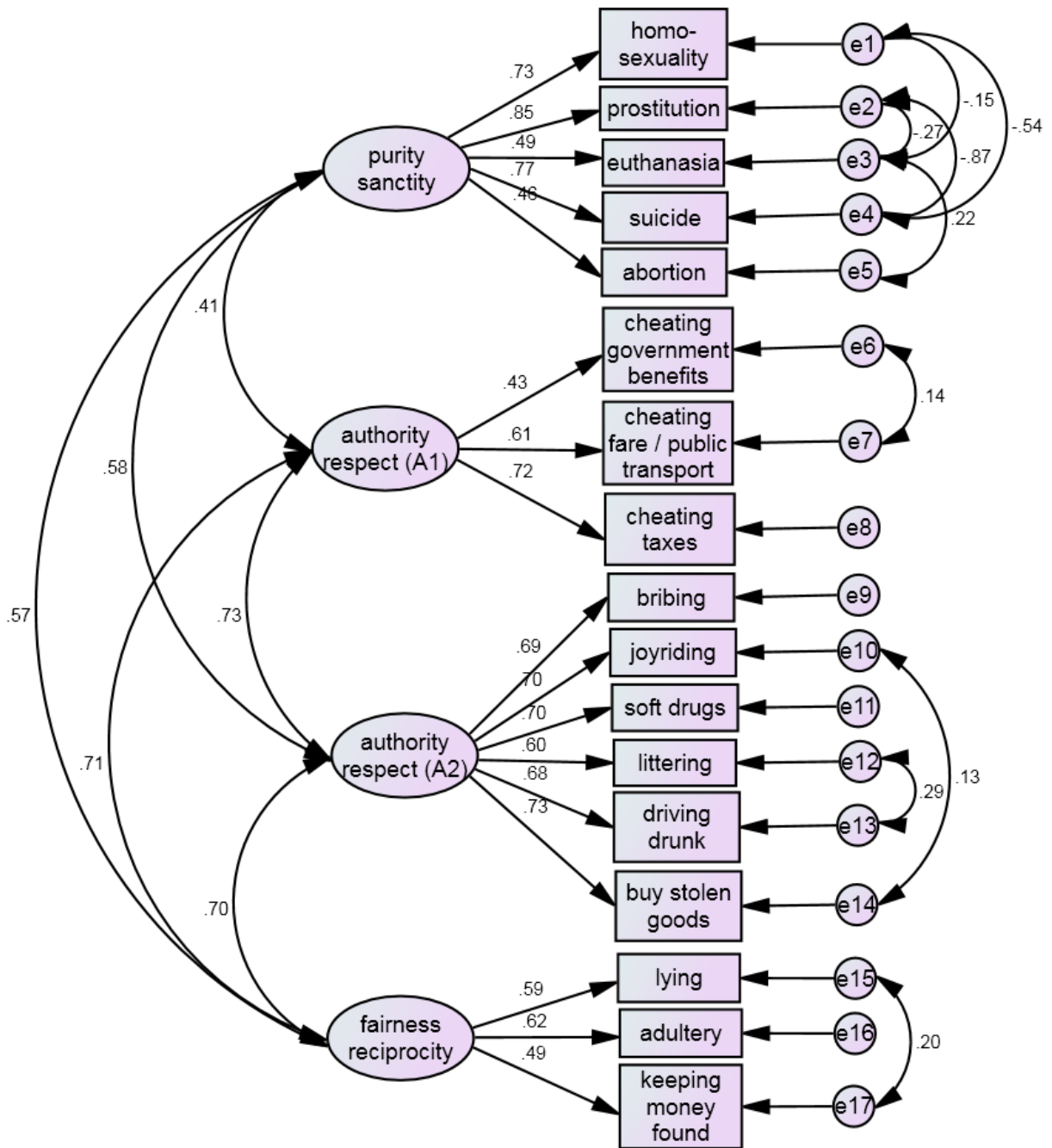


Figure 1. Optimized morality model with standardized loadings

et al., 1987; Snarey, 1985), respondents' measure of morality is standardized as a z-score by country and wave (Fischer, 2004). Then for each country-wave case, the mean value for upper-class respondents' z-scores is compared to the mean value for the remaining (or populace) respondents' z-scores, using a Welch *t*-test as the two groups have different sample sizes (Welch, 1947).

Morality Gap Between Upper Class and Populace

Purity/sanctity (75 cases)

The z-score comparison between upper-class and populace respondents is done on the *purity/sanctity* for each case. Among the 75 cases, upper classes provide significantly higher justification on 15 cases. Although significance is not reached, upper-class respondents justify the "immoral" behaviors more than populace in most cases (61/75). Reversely, upper-class respondents show significantly less justification than non-upper-class respondents on only two cases.

Authority/respect (75 cases)

The z-score comparison between upper-class and populace respondents is done on *authority 1* constructs for each case. Among the 75 cases, upper classes provide significantly higher justification on 8 cases. Although significance is not reached, upper-class respondents justify the "immoral" behaviors more than non-upper-classes in most cases (47/75). Reversely, upper-class respondents show significantly less justification than non-upper-class respondents on seven cases.

Fairness/reciprocity (eight countries, wave 1989-1993)

The z-score comparison between upper-class and populace respondents is done on the *cheating others* construct for the available eight cases. Upper classes justification of moral constructs is higher for 5/8 cases, and significantly so for Argentina and Spain ($d_s = .25$). In none of the countries are upper classes significantly less justifying.

In conclusion, compared with the populace of their own country, respondents who identify as upper-class generally show more lenience for all moral constructs, not only in the socially binding domains of *authority/respect* and *purity/sanctity*, but also in *fairness/reciprocity*. The results confirm prior literature arguing that power might encourage individuals to take more risks (e.g., Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Galinsky et al., 2008), because they have a heightened sense of control (Kraus et al., 2012) that inhibits threat-driven obedience to rules (Piff et al., 2012). But especially the results provide novel evidence that upper classes see the morality of *purity/sanctity* with more lenience than other classes. As proposed by morality scholars, upper classes might "moralize" sexuality and death-related behaviors less than other classes (e.g., Horberg et al., 2009).

Geographical Variations in Morality Gap.

To shed light on regional differences and confirm the morality gap outside of WEIRD countries, the 75 cases are grouped into sub-regions (link to Table 6).

On *purity/sanctity*, the mean value for the upper classes is higher (or more lenient) than that of other classes in 15/18 sub-regions and significantly so in 8/18 sub-regions: South and Western Africa, North and South America, Southeast and Southern Asia, and Northern and Southern Europe ($.32 \geq ds \geq .11$). On *authority/respect*, the mean value for the upper classes is higher than that of other classes in 13/18 sub-regions, and significantly so in 5/18 sub-regions: Western Africa, North America, Central Asia, Southeast and Southern Asia, and Southern Europe ($.55 \geq ds \geq .09$). Finally, on *fairness/reciprocity*, the mean value for the upper classes is higher vs. other classes in 4/6 sub-regions, and significantly so in one sub-region: Southern Europe ($d = .25$). Only in one sub-region was the upper classes' justification significantly lower other classes (in Western Asia, for *authority/respect*, $d = -.13$). The review of results by sub-regions confirms a tendency for upper class to be more lenient than populace in many regions of the world beyond WEIRD countries.

Do the results support the *unrestricted* low morality hypothesis, or rather the *selective* low morality hypothesis, which states that upper classes in highly developed countries might display lower morality in socially binding domains (e.g., *purity/sanctity* and *authority/respect*), but not in individualizing (e.g., *fairness/reciprocity*) domains? Among countries where *fairness/reciprocity* was measured, Spain and Japan were classified as "high income," India and Nigeria as "lower middle income," and other countries as "upper middle income" (World Development Indicators for year 1990, The World Bank). In high income countries, Japanese upper classes were stricter (vs. populace) on both domains ($d \leq -.02$), and Spanish upper classes were significantly more lenient (vs. populace) on both domains ($d \geq .24$). In lower income countries, Indian upper classes were more lenient in *authority/respect* ($d = .04$), but less lenient (vs. populace) on *fairness/reciprocity* ($d = -.09$), whereas Nigerian upper classes were more lenient (vs. populace) on both domains ($d \geq .02$). Such results do not confirm the "selective" morality loss of upper classes in developed countries, but rather lend support to an unrestricted low morality hypothesis, independent from the level of economic development. Nevertheless, the relative loss of morality of upper classes is not universal, and societal variables might arguably moderate this general tendency.

Changes in Morality Over Time

Is the gap between upper classes and the others widening or narrowing over time? To answer this question, multi-wave constructs (*purity/sanctity* and *authority/respect*) and multi-wave country samples (43 cases, 17 countries with at least two waves) are used. *Fairness/reciprocity* is not included in the analysis, as only one wave is available. First, the analysis is pursued with the 43 cases' means for upper-class respondents' z-score: regression is run on this sample of 43 values to determine if upper classes' morality becomes

Table 6

Mean Values of the Moral Constructs (Standardized by Country and Wave), with 95% Confidence Intervals, for Cases with Scalar Invariance ($n = 106053$) for Populace and Upper Class.

Moral domains by sub-region	Populace	Upper Class	Welch's	p	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M (SD)	M (SD)	t -test (df)		LL	UL	
Purity/Sanctity	-0.00 (0.73)	0.11 (0.81)	-8.43 (106051)	<.001	-0.15	-0.09	.14
Eastern Africa ^{a1}	0.00 (0.70)	-0.01 (0.49)	0.14 (1525)	<i>ns</i>	-0.19	0.21	.02
North Africa ^{a2}	-0.00 (0.85)	0.25 (1.10)	-1.35 (1807)	<i>ns</i>	-0.64	0.13	.26
South Africa ^{a3}	-0.01 (0.80)	0.15 (0.80)	-3.09 (10819)	.002	-0.25	-0.05	.19
Western Africa ^{a4}	-0.01 (0.77)	0.17 (0.90)	-3.73 (5607)	<.001	-0.28	-0.09	.22
Central America ^{a5}	0.00 (0.73)	0.09 (0.77)	-1.59 (6115)	<i>ns</i>	-0.19	0.02	.11
Latin America ^{a6}	0.00 (0.74)	-0.07 (0.61)	1.16 (2705)	<i>ns</i>	-0.05	0.19	-.11
North America ^{a7}	-0.00 (0.74)	0.25 (0.86)	-2.38 (5278)	.020	-0.46	-0.04	.31
South America ^{a8}	-0.01 (0.68)	0.15 (0.75)	-4.57 (14306)	<.001	-0.22	-0.09	.21
Central Asia ^{a9}	-0.01 (0.70)	0.11 (0.82)	-0.93 (988)	<i>ns</i>	-0.37	0.14	.15
East Asia ^{a10}	-0.00 (0.68)	0.06 (0.71)	-1.19 (2699)	<i>ns</i>	-0.16	0.04	.09
South East Asia ^{a11}	-0.00 (0.78)	0.20 (0.91)	-2.70 (6148)	.008	-0.35	-0.06	.24
Southern Asia ^{a12}	-0.01 (0.76)	0.08 (0.90)	-2.87 (12127)	.004	-0.15	-0.03	.11
Western Asia ^{a13}	0.00 (0.67)	-0.01 (0.62)	0.36 (10359)	<i>ns</i>	-0.05	0.07	.02
Eastern Europe ^{a14}	-0.00 (0.71)	0.11 (0.82)	-1.55 (6708)	<i>ns</i>	-0.26	0.03	.15
Northern Europe ^{a15}	0.00 (0.67)	0.22 (0.72)	-2.10 (3639)	.041	-0.43	-0.01	.31
Southern Europe ^{a16}	-0.01 (0.72)	0.27 (0.94)	-3.70 (6953)	<.001	-0.42	-0.13	.32
Western Europe ^{a17}	-0.00 (0.74)	0.10 (0.70)	-1.53 (5159)	<i>ns</i>	-0.24	0.03	.14
Oceania ^{a18}	-0.00 (0.74)	0.15 (0.86)	-0.84 (3085)	<i>ns</i>	-0.53	0.22	.19
Authority/Respect^a	-0.00 (0.79)	0.04 (0.85)	-3.11 (106051)	.002	-0.07	-0.02	.05
Eastern Africa ^{a1}	0.00 (0.87)	-0.01 (0.92)	0.06 (1525)	<i>ns</i>	-0.36	0.38	-.01
North Africa ^{a2}	0.00 (0.81)	0.08 (0.92)	-0.51 (1807)	<i>ns</i>	-0.40	0.24	.09
South Africa ^{a3}	-0.01 (0.86)	0.05 (0.87)	-1.01 (10819)	<i>ns</i>	-0.15	0.05	.06
Western Africa ^{a4}	-0.01 (0.80)	0.13 (0.87)	-3.00 (5607)	.003	-0.23	-0.05	.17
Central America ^{a5}	-0.00 (0.74)	0.02 (0.74)	-0.50 (6115)	<i>ns</i>	-0.13	0.08	.03
Latin America ^{a6}	0.00 (0.74)	0.00 (0.69)	-0.01 (2705)	<i>ns</i>	-0.14	0.14	.00
North America ^{a7}	-0.00 (0.79)	0.24 (1.05)	-1.91 (5278)	.061	-0.50	0.01	.26
South America ^{a8}	0.00 (0.73)	-0.04 (0.71)	1.29 (14306)	<i>ns</i>	-0.02	0.10	-.05
Central Asia ^{a9}	-0.02 (0.79)	0.45 (0.90)	-3.40 (988)	.001	-0.75	-0.19	.55
East Asia ^{a10}	0.00 (0.73)	-0.03 (0.70)	0.56 (2699)	<i>ns</i>	-0.07	0.13	-.04
South East Asia ^{a11}	-0.00 (0.81)	0.19 (0.86)	-2.64 (6148)	.009	-0.33	-0.05	.23
Southern Asia ^{a12}	-0.01 (0.78)	0.07 (0.91)	-2.32 (12117)	.021	-0.13	-0.01	.09
Western Asia ^{a13}	0.00 (0.79)	-0.10 (0.87)	2.43 (10359)	.016	0.02	0.19	-.13
Eastern Europe ^{a14}	-0.00 (0.79)	0.01 (0.81)	-0.21 (6708)	<i>ns</i>	-0.16	0.13	.02
Northern Europe ^{a15}	0.01 (0.75)	0.04 (0.82)	-0.28 (3639)	<i>ns</i>	-0.27	0.20	.04
Southern Europe ^{a16}	-0.01 (0.79)	0.16 (0.95)	-2.28 (6953)	.024	-0.32	-0.03	.19
Western Europe ^{a17}	-0.01 (0.77)	0.04 (0.89)	-0.56 (5159)	<i>ns</i>	-0.22	0.12	.07
Oceania ^{a18}	0.01 (0.82)	-0.14 (0.77)	0.90 (3085)	<i>ns</i>	-0.19	0.48	-.18
Fairness/Reciprocity	-0.00 (0.75)	0.01 (0.74)	-0.66 (9621)	<i>ns</i>	-0.06	0.03	.02
Western Africa ^{b1}	-0.00 (0.74)	0.01 (0.71)	-0.17 (860)	<i>ns</i>	-0.18	0.15	.02
Central America ^{b2}	-0.09 (0.77)	0.08 (0.82)	-1.10 (1183)	<i>ns</i>	-0.24	0.07	.11
South America ^{b3}	-0.00 (0.73)	0.03 (0.75)	-0.68 (3669)	<i>ns</i>	-0.12	0.06	.04
East Asia ^{b4}	0.00 (0.86)	-0.01 (0.77)	0.24 (798)	<i>ns</i>	-0.12	0.15	-.02
Southern Asia ^{b5}	0.01 (0.72)	-0.05 (0.64)	1.57 (2156)	<i>ns</i>	-0.02	0.14	-.09
Southern Europe ^{b6}	-0.01 (0.77)	0.20 (0.86)	-2.10 (945)	.039	-0.40	-0.01	.25

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; *ns* = no significant difference ($p > .1$). Boldface for significant difference between upper-class and populace. Boldface red for upper-class significantly less justifying than populace.

^a Measured with the construct authority 1.

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a1 Eastern Africa: Rwanda (Wave 6). a2 North Africa: Libya (W6). a3 South Africa: South Africa (W3/W4/W5/W6). a4 Western Africa: Mali (W5), Nigeria (W2/W3/W4). a5 Central America: Mexico (W2/W3/W4/W6). a6 Latin America: Dominican Republic (W3), Puerto Rico (W3), Trinidad & Tobago (W5). a7 North America: Canada (W5), USA (W3/W4/W5). a8 South America: Argentina (W1/W2), Brazil (W2/W5), Chile (W2/W5), Columbia (W3/W6), Venezuela (W4). a9 Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan (W4). a10 East Asia: China (W1), Hong Kong (W6), Japan (W2). a11 South East Asia: Malaysia (W5), Philippines (W3/W4/W6), Singapore (W4). a12 Southern Asia: India (W2/W4/W5/W6), Iran (W4/W5), Pakistan (W6). a13 Western Asia: Azerbaijan (W3/W6), Armenia (W3), Cyprus (W5), Georgia (W3), Turkey (W5). a14 Eastern Europe: Moldova (W4/W5), Poland (W3), Romania (W3/W5), Russia (W3), Ukraine (W5). a15 Northern Europe: Finland (W5), Norway (W3), Sweden (W5). a16 Southern Europe: Bosnia (W3/W4), Croatia (W3), Montenegro (W4), Slovenia (W5), Spain (W2), Serbia & Montenegro (W1). a17 Western Europe: Germany (W5), Netherland (W6), Switzerland (W3/W5). a18 Oceania: Australia (W3/W5). b1 Western Africa: Nigeria (W2). b2 Central America: Mexico (W2). b3 South America: Argentina (W2), Brazil (W2), Chile (W2), b4 East Asia: Japan (W2). b5 Southern Asia: India (W2). b6 Southern Europe: Spain (W2).

more lenient (i.e., the mean value increases) with increasing wave values. For the 17 countries, I also compare the earliest case's means with the latest case's means, to estimate change. Second, the analysis is done at the respondent level, for the 17 countries individually, to shed light on geographical variations.

Linear regression is applied on the 43 cases' means for upper classes on both constructs, with wave number (1 = 1981-1989 to 6 = 2010-2014) as a predictor. Wave does not predict cases' means for *purity/sanctity* ($p = .195$) but does predict an increase in cases' mean for *authority/respect* ($\beta = .27$, $t(41) = 1.77$, $p = .084$), and explains a significant proportion of variance ($R^2 = .07$, $F(1,41) = 3.13$, $p = .084$). See Figures 2 and 3 for illustration. In addition, a *t*-test comparison was run between cases' means for upper classes on the earliest and the latest wave by country. Although there is an increase in upper classes' country mean between the oldest waves (for *purity/sanctity* $M = 0.09$, $SD = 0.15$; for *authority/respect* $M = 0.04$, $SD = 0.19$) and the newest waves (respectively $M = 0.19$, $SD = 0.22$; $M = 0.12$, $SD = 0.27$), the difference does not reach significance ($ps \geq .120$) probably because of the small sample size, which invites for a country-by-country review.

The regression analysis was run on the z-scores of upper-class respondents, for each of the 17 countries with multi-wave data (see additional Figures in the supplementary file). Wave significantly predicted an increase of upper classes' justifying more *purity/sanctity* in Chile ($\beta = .35$, $t(150) = 4.58$, $p < .001$) and in India ($\beta = .13$, $t(768) = 3.66$, $p < .001$), but a decrease in Brazil ($\beta = -.15$, $t(136) = 1.78$, $p = .078$). Wave was not a significant predictor of *purity/sanctity* for other countries ($ps > .129$). Wave also significantly predicted an increase of upper classes' justifying more *authority/respect* in Brazil ($\beta = .18$, $t(136) = 2.08$, $p = .040$), in India ($\beta = .21$, $t(768) = 5.98$, $p < .001$), in Romania ($\beta = .35$, $t(274) = 2.11$, $p = .043$) and in the USA ($\beta = .32$, $t(52) = 2.40$, $p = .020$), but not in other countries ($ps > .127$). In conclusion, the analysis of time-trends seems to indicate a progressive widening of the morality gap between upper classes and other classes in few tested countries, on both domains of *purity/sanctity* and *authority/respect*. The narrowing of morality gap was only observed in Brazil for *purity/sanctity*.

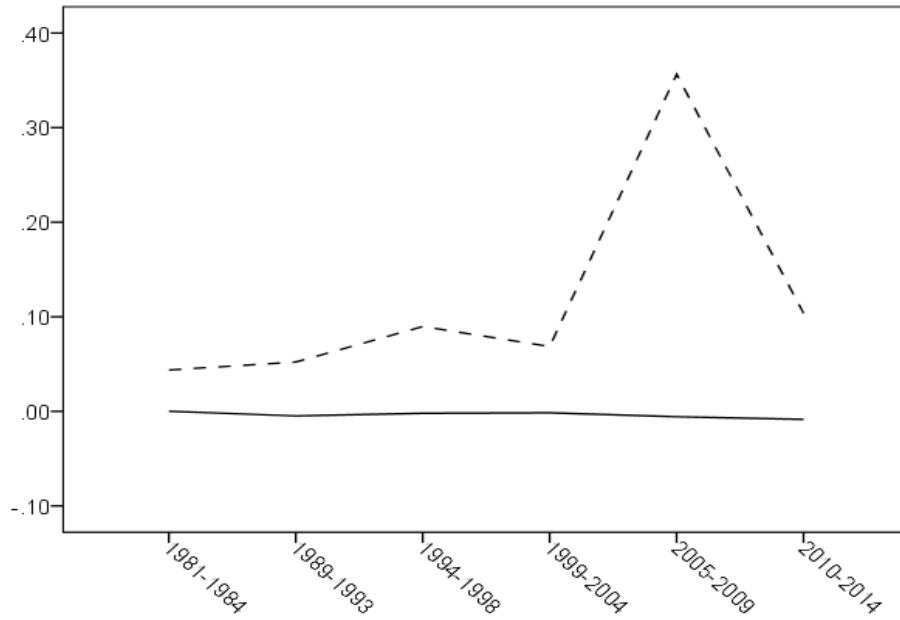


Figure 2. Trend of z-scores for upper-class and populace on *purity/sanctity*. (CI = Confidence Interval. Populace in plain lines, upper class in dotted lines).

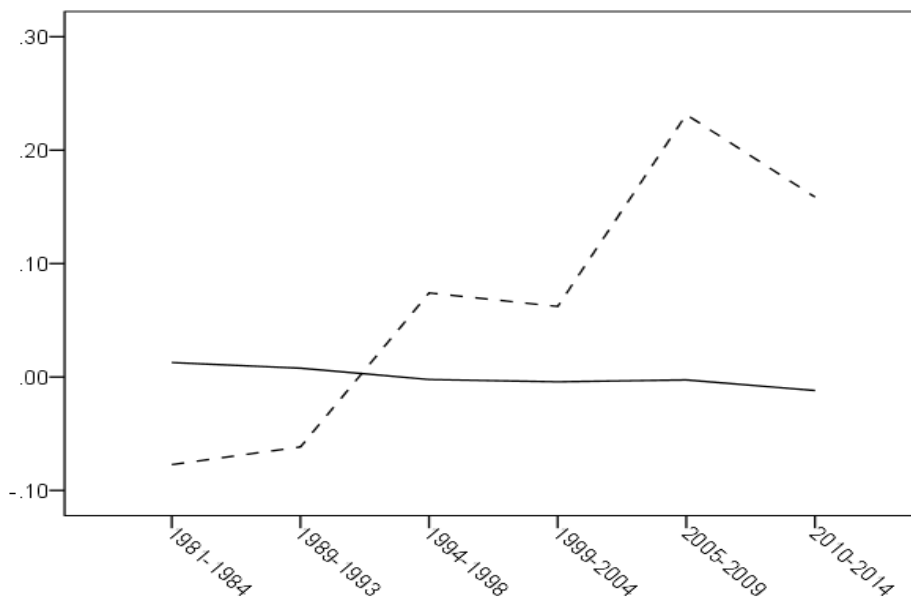


Figure 3. Trend of z-scores for upper-class and the populace on *authority/respect*. (CI = Confidence Interval. Populace in plain lines, upper class in dotted lines).

Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, the research exclusively uses a set of questions from the WVS that were not directly designed to assess the moral foundation questionnaire itself. As such, this study only provides a good assessment on purity/sanctity, authority/respect, and fairness/reciprocity domains, but ignores harm/care and in-group loyalty. A wider range of measures that fully represent the moral foundation theory should be analyzed in the future. Another inherent limitation is the self-reporting aspect of WVS responses. Finally, the causality of the morality-power link remains unclear: although experimental studies have demonstrated the effect of power on individuals' moral judgment, research is lacking as to whether those who disregard morality have an advantage in accessing power, or not.

Conclusions

The objective of this study was not to compare morality across cultures, but to expand research on the power-morality link outside of WEIRD countries (Henrich et al., 2010). The WVS database reveals that upper-class respondents (vs. other classes) are less strict on various aspects of morality (e.g., driving drunk, receiving bribes, fighting with the police, suicide, or prostitution). The variables provided in the WVS reveal latent moral constructs aligned with the MFT (*purity/sanctity*, *authority/respect*, and *fairness/reciprocity*), and the gap between upper and other classes is replicated on these constructs.

The morality gap is, however, not monolithic. Although the study demonstrates a link between upper-class and lower morality, not all upper-class respondents differ from others. For example, the upper-class respondents are significantly more likely than other classes to justify a bribe. But the large majority of upper-class respondents still share the same opinion as others: 67% of the upper-class vs. 74% for other classes considers bribing *never justifiable*.

Second, geographical and time differences indicate that the class-related moral gap is not a universal characteristic of every society: first, the moral gap between upper classes and populace is not significant in all regions of the world and for each moral domain. Second, class-related morality difference might be widening with time in some societies, but not all. In conclusion, although upper classes are not always expressing moral divergence from others, the gap is prevalent and widening in many of the world's regions.

How, then, can those in positions of power be kept in check? Among WVS respondents, those who perceive they belong to upper-class react less intensely to the suggestions of illegal (e.g., taking drugs, drunk driving) and anti-social (adultery, cheating on public transportation) behaviors, probably because the perception of status and power promotes disinhibition as well as self-interest (Keltner et al., 2003; Fiske, 1993). However, upper-class respondents from several sub-regions (i.e., Western Asia, East Asia, Latin and South America, and Oceania) displayed less lenience than other classes in few domains.

Reducing or even reversing the morality gap is therefore feasible and should be pursued as an avenue for further research.

Implications for Future Research

Like many other social occurrences, the social class divergence in morality requires monitoring and corrective social action. Individuals who perceive they belong to the upper-class probably “moralize” less (Ellemer et al., 2008; Horberg et al., 2009) or perceive that their social group obeys a different set of rules (Sidanius et al., 2000). Therefore, enforcing social controls to ensure power holders are accountable to the whole society appears necessary to ensure that they share the moral judgment of others (e.g., Pitesa & Thau, 2013). A domain-by-domain assessment of morality is however required because upper-class might be at the forefront of social progress when, for example, they challenge unequal gender roles or discrimination based on sexual orientation. But when power holders’ attitudes defy general social rules, then distrust in elites, institutions, and in democracy itself surges (Sandholtz & Taagepera, 2005). Societies where those in power are allowed too much moral lenience may find themselves placed precariously on a slippery slope, as population may growingly wonder why they should fulfill their side of the social contract.

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Recommended Videos

On the loss of empathy (or banality of evil) and the struggle with in-group loyalty, I recommend *Anna Arendt* (film): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDO5u2YSbm>

On the morality of power and the manipulation of youths, I recommend *The Wave* (Film): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9vdfb2f-B0>

On the morality of animals, I recommend the capuchin monkey fairness experiment: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KSryJXDpZo>

Questions for Discussion

1. Do animals have a sense of good and bad? In what species? Do you think animals' sense of good and bad is innate or is learnt? What about humans: discuss if human's sense of good and bad is innate or learnt.
2. Can you think of morality items that are shared across countries, and items that differ by country? What aspects of culture (e.g., individualism/collectivism) might have an influence on morality?
3. Discuss how people of lower and higher social classes may have different sets of moral judgment? Beyond education, how could social interaction (e.g., think of cooperation vs. competition) change your moral judgment?

4. Do animals have a sense of social hierarchy? In what species? What could be the evolved benefit of such hierarchy? For humans what are the benefits of hierarchy? Of cooperation?
5. Psychologists (and this article) mention a “paradox of power.” What does it mean?
6. Do you know famous people who behaved in immoral ways, in sports, politics, business, clergy, and psychology? Why do you consider these behaviors to be immoral, and why famous or powerful individuals might not feel the same way about morality?
7. Based on your experience, how would having power over other people make you change your behavior, and ultimately, your moral judgment?
8. Do you see reasons why people who have power in our society (e.g., business and political leaders) should be allowed to behave with moral leniencies? If you cannot see any reason, what solutions could you propose (in business and in political practices) to limit the immoral behavior of leaders?

About the Author

Philippe Cachia is a chemist by training. After a long career in environmental technologies, he decided at 45 years old to become a teacher and researcher in social psychology. He is now a PhD candidate in the IDAS program of the Chengchi University in Taipei and focuses his studies on the psychology of emotions, politics, and morality, with a cross-cultural perspective.