Social Axioms Project

Upcoming Events

Principle Investigators

Kwok Leung, Department of Management, City University of Hong Kong

Michael H. Bond, Department of Psychology, Chinese University of Hong Kong

Current Collaborators

Maria Cristina Ferreira (Brazil)
Jianxin Zhang and Lina Chen (China)
Klaus Boehnke, Günter Bierbrauer, and Edgar Klinger (Germany)
Jenny Kurman and Ram David Thein (Israel)
Susumu Yamaguchi (Japan)
David Lackland Sam (Ghana)
Rosnah Ismail (Malaysia)
Jose Liht Sigall and Dominguez Espinosa Alejandra del Carmen (Mexico)
Nadezhda Lebedeva, Andrianna Viskochil, and Oksana Ponomareva (Russia)
Luke Conway (United States).

Background

Rationale of studying social axioms

Value dimensions have been the dominant construct used to guide cross-cultural research (e.g. Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 1994; Smith, Dugan, & Trompenaars, 1986). This monolithic focus has led to important progress, but it is also clear that we need to search for additional constructs to conceptualize cultural dimensions and to explain cultural differences. These new constructs will serve at least two purposes: They may yield information about cultural variations that cannot be detected by the value perspective and/or they may provide needed triangulation for well-known results based on values. An obvious choice for a complementary framework is beliefs, which are known to relate to a variety of social behaviors.

What are social axioms?

Our current position is that social axioms are general, context-free beliefs that people hold as a result of their socialization experiences. These beliefs are central to people's cognitive functioning. Following the work done in the attitude area, we adopt a functionalist approach and assume that they are related to human survival and functioning (Katz, 1960; Kruglanski, 1980). Like attitudes, social axioms serve four major functions; they facilitate the attainment of important goals (instrumental), help people protect their self-worth (ego-defensive), serve as a manifestation of one's values (value-expressive), and help people understand the world (knowledge).

Social axioms are assumed to be pan-cultural because of their functionality and because of the universal problems that humans have to tackle for survival (for reference, see Schwartz, 1992).

Definition of social axioms

Based on the previous definitions of beliefs (e.g. Katz, 1960; Bem, 1970; Bar-Tal, 1990), a working definition of social axioms is proposed as follows:

"Social axioms are generalized beliefs about people, social groups, social institutions, the physical environment, or the spiritual world as well as about events and phenomena in the social world. These generalized beliefs are encoded in the form of an assertion about the relationship between two entities or concepts".

A typical axiom has the structure "A is related to B". A and B can be any entities and the relationship can be causal or correlational. For instance, "Good things will happen to good people" represents a typical structure of an axiom. Values are different because they are of the form "A is Good/desirable/important". A is a value or a goal. In fact, many researchers regard a value as an evaluative belief. When an evaluative belief becomes more specific, it becomes an axiom. For instance, "Wars are bad" and "health is good" are evaluative statements, and we would classify them as values rather than axioms. On the other hand, "Wars will lead to the destruction of civilization" and "Health leads to success in work" are regarded as axioms because each statement spells out the relationship of two concrete entities.

The Five Individual Level Dimensions of Social Axioms

Based on an initial study involving Hong Kong, Venezuela, Japan, Germany, and the US, and a subsequent round-the-world-study with both college students and adults across over 40 cultural groups, five individual-level axiom dimensions have been identified.

1. Social cynicism

It represents a negative view of human nature, especially as it is easily corrupted by power; a biased view against some groups of people; a mistrust of social institutions; and a disregard of ethical means for achieving an end. An example item is "Kind-hearted people usually suffer losses."

2. Social complexity

It suggests that there are no rigid rules, but rather multiple ways of achieving a given outcome, and that apparent inconsistency in human behavior is common. An example item is "People may have opposite behaviors on different occasions."

3. Reward for application

It represents a general belief that effort, knowledge, careful planning and the investment of other resources (Foa, 1971) will lead to positive results and help avoid negative outcomes. An example item is "Hard working people will achieve more in the end."

4. Religiosity

It asserts the existence of supernatural forces and the beneficial functions of religious belief. An example item is "There is a supreme being controlling the universe."

5. Fate control

It represents a belief that life events are pre-determined and that there are some ways for people to influence these outcomes. It is interesting to note that lay people accept the logical contradiction between pre-determination and their ability to alter pre-determined events. In fact, practices for avoiding bad luck are commonplace in many cultures, and the contradiction involved in the simultaneous belief in pre-determination and possibilities for altering one's fate may be widespread in every day life. An example item is "Fate determines one's successes and failures."

Current Projects

The validity and usefulness of the five-dimensional structure of social axioms have been established by identifying meaningful correlations between citizen profiles across these dimensions for each cultural group with societal characteristics. In addition, several within-culture and cross-cultural studies also provide support for the meanings of these axioms. However, because the items constituting these scales were derived empirically, three of the five dimensions show only marginal reliability, namely, reward for application, social complexity, and fate control. The number of items for these three scales is small (6 to 9), and some items may be sub-optimal in tapping the target construct. The first objective of the present research is to develop more and better items to measure these five axiom dimensions in a diverse range of cultural groups. The second objective is that because the establishment of the nomological

network of these five dimensions of belief about the world is only in an initial stage, the present research will attempt to evaluate the convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity of the axiom dimensions.

Citizen Scores of Social Axioms

Citizen (Individual Level) Axiom Scores of 40 Countries (Leung & Bond, 2004, Table 3)

Citizen	Social Cynicism	Social Complexity	Reward for Application	Religiosity	Fate Control
American (Caucasian)	2.65	4.10	3.66	3.18	2.46
Belgian	2.97	4.03	3.36	2.58	2.58
Brazilian	2.81	3.98	3.54	3.39	2.49
British	2.75	4.11	3.46	2.81	2.35
Canadian	2.63	4.20	3.74	3.10	2.43
Chinese	3.03	4.08	3.74	2.92	2.90
Czech	2.77	4.10	3.29	3.10	2.62
Dutchman	2.62	4.18	3.18	2.73	2.56
Estonian	3.16	4.11	3.81	2.70	2.81
Filipino	2.84	4.09	4.03	3.52	2.60
Finn	2.76	4.08	3.59	3.07	2.54
French	3.05	4.08	3.56	2.60	2.62
Georgian	3.37	3.88	3.69	3.65	3.00
German	3.32	4.33	3.76	2.93	2.77
Greek	3.32	4.02	3.73	3.13	2.37
Hong Kong Chinese	3.13	4.08	3.70	3.44	2.69
Hungarian	2.96	4.13	3.40	2.99	2.67
Indian	3.04	3.92	4.19	3.37	2.97
Indonesian	2.72	3.96	4.14	4.22	2.91
Iranian	2.89	3.79	4.12	4.15	2.85
Israeli	2.76	4.16	3.60	2.60	2.53
Italian	2.74	4.01	3.28	2.72	2.29
Japanese	3.16	4.04	3.50	2.65	2.59
Korean	3.16	3.98	3.85	3.10	2.98
Latvian	3.05	4.02	3.58	3.10	2.77
Lebanese	3.05	4.11	3.77	3.10	2.47
Malaysian	2.88	3.93	4.29	4.30	2.96
New Zealander	2.77	4.14	3.59	2.83	2.34
Nigerian	2.98	3.89	4.04	3.67	3.08
Norwegian	2.66	4.37	3.53	2.55	2.01
Pakistani	3.29	3.77	4.15	4.40	3.15
Peruvian	3.29	3.67	3.88	3.21	2.48
Portuguese	2.87	3.90	3.61	3.09	2.43
Romanian	3.23	3.72	3.74	3.29	2.55
Russian	3.09	3.86	3.82	3.12	2.97
Singaporean	2.93	4.14	3.78	3.24	2.52

Spaniard	2.89	4.14	3.48	2.40	2.27
Taiwanese	3.30	4.22	3.87	3.22	3.01
Thai	3.22	3.80	3.98	3.43	3.14
Turk	2.94	4.14	3.97	3.48	2.68

Correlates of Social Axioms (Individual Level) with Socio-Economic-Political Indicators, Controlling for Wealth (Leung & Bond, 2004, Table 6)

Variable	Source	N	Social Cynicism	Social Complexity	Reward for Application	Religiosity	Fate Control
GDP per capita 2000 (PPP US$)	Human Development Report 2002, UN; The World Fact Book 2002	40	-.39	.62*	-.62*	-.62*	-.60*
Average daytime temperature	National Geographic Atlas of the World 1990, as cited in Van de Vliert, Schwartz, Huismans, Hofstede, and Daan (1999)	37			.45*	.41	
Life expectancy at birth	Human Development Report 2001, UN	39			-.39	-.37	-.42*
Population growth rate 2000-05	Statistical Division, UN	36			.55*	.49*	
Number of persons per room 2001	Statistical Division, UN	23			.56*	.50	
Urbanism 2000	Statistical Division, UN	39					-.40
Percent of GDP on education	Human Development Report 2001, UN	39				-.33	
Percent of GDP on health	Human Development Report 2001, UN	32		.41	-.56*	-.67*	-.36
Environmental sustainability index 2002	World Economic Forum	36					-.37
Human development index 1999	Human Development Report 2001, UN	39			-.47*	-.48*	-.43*
Human rights	Humana (1992)	35			-.56*	-.43	-.44*
Political rights and civil liberties 1992/93-2001/02	Freedom House	39			-.48*	-.49*	
Women status	Population Crisis Committee (1988)	35			-.50*	-.53*	-.42
Voter turnout at latest elections	Human Development Report 2000, UN	32		.38			-.45

Working hours per week	International Labour Organization	28	.51*	.49*	
Heart disease death rate	World Health Statistics Annual 1995-98	22			.52
Suicide rate	World Health Statistics Annual 1992-95	27			.54*
Alcohol consumption 1996	Human Development Report 2001, UN	36	-.49*	-.38	

Note: All scales are scored in a way so that a higher score indicates a higher level of the concept represented by the label. The correlations involving per capita GDP are simple correlations, and the rest are partial correlations with per capital GDP controlled for. All correlations are significant at the .05 level, and those with an asterisk are significant at the .01 level.

Correlates of Social Axioms (Individual Level) with Psychological Indicators at the Societal Level, Controlling for Wealth (Leung & Bond, 2004, Table 7)

Variable	Source	N	Social Cynicism	Social Complexity	Reward for Application	Religiosity	Fate Control
Life satisfaction	World Value Survey 1990-93, as cited in Diener & Suh (1999)	21	-.69*				
Job satisfaction	International Survey Research (1995), as cited in Van de Vliert & Janssen (2002)	21					-.55
Satisfaction toward company	International Survey Research (1995), as cited in Van de Vliert & Janssen (2002)	21	-.51				-.60*
Positive affect	World Value Survey 1990-93, as cited in Diener & Suh (1999)	24				.64*	
Negative affect	World Value Survey 1990-93, as cited in Diener & Suh (1999)	24				.45	
Hedonic balance - Positive affect minus negative affect	World Value Survey 1990-93, as cited in Diener & Suh (1999)	24	-.50			.47	
Pace of life	Levine & Norenzayan (1999)	19	.73*			-.53	.50
Extraversion	McCrae (2002)	25					-.52
Agreeableness	McCrae (2002)	25			.49	.59*	
Conscientiousness	McCrae (2002)	25	-.51				
Work ethic - Enjoyment of working hard	Lynn (1991)	22					-.54

Achievement via conformity	Lynn (1991)	22	-.62*				
Sources of guidance - Vertical (superiors)	Smith et al. (2002)	32			.49*		
Sources of guidance - Beliefs that are widespread in my nation	Smith et al. (2002)	32			.42		
Sources of guidance - Specialists	Smith et al (2002)	32			-.45		
View on leadership - Charismatic/value based	Den Hartog, House, Hanges & Ruiz-Quintanilla (1999)	28	-.65*				-.46
View on leadership - Humane	Den Hartog et al. (1999)	28			.47	.52*	
View on leadership - Team-oriented	Den Hartog et al. (1999)	28	-.46				-.72*
Mate preference - Emphasizing mutual attraction; deemphasizing financial prospect, social status & ambition	Shackelford & Schmitt (2002)	23			-.74*		-.54*
Mate preference - Emphasizing education and intelligence; deemphasizing desire for home and children	Shackelford & Schmitt (2002)	23			-.53		-.64*
Mate preference - Emphasizing sociability and pleasing disposition; deemphasizing religious background	Shackelford & Schmitt (2002)	23			-.53		
Tolerance of divorce	World Value Survey 1990-93, as cited in Diener et al (2000)	25			-.43		
Percentage of thinking scientific advances will help mankind	Inglehart, Basañez & Moreno (1998)	23			.44	.53	
Importance of religion in life - % of very important	Inglehart et al. (1998)	24				.69*	
Frequency of pray to God outside of religious services - % "often" or "sometimes"	Inglehart et al. (1998)	20				.62*	
Percentage of adult population that attends church at least once a week	World Value Survey 1990-93/1995-97, as cited in Swanbrow (1997)	26	-.44			.43	
Percentage of showing interest in politics	Inglehart et al. (1998)	23		.55*			.43

In-group disagreement	Smith et al. (1998)	18	.50				
Other-referenced performance motive - compared with others' performance	Lynn (1991), as cited in Van de Vliert & Janssen (2002)	22		-.60*	.68*	.67*	.49

Note: All scales are scored in a way so that a higher score indicates a higher level of the concept represented by the label. All the correlations are partial correlations with per capital GDP controlled for. All correlations are significant at the .05 level, and those with an asterisk are significant at the .01 level.

The Two Country-Level Dimensions of Social Axioms

1. Dynamic externality

It combines items from four of the factors previously identified across cultures at the individual-level: reward for application, religiosity, fate control, and social complexity. There are elements of religiosity and fate in this factor, which give rise to the label "externality", but the concomitant emphasis on effort and control gives a dynamic quality to this construct.

2. Societal cynicism

It consists of items from the individual-level factor of social cynicism. Thus this construct can be described as the same as social cynicism, but only at the country-level in a conceptual sense.

Cultural Scores (Country-Level) of Social Axioms

Cultural Means of Social Axioms Dimensions at the Country Level (Bond et al., 2004, Table 4)

Dynamic Externality				Societal Cynicism			
Country	Index	Raw Mean	SD	Country	Index	Raw Mean	SD
Pakistan	81.7	4.08	0.28	Pakistan	64.3	3.22	0.47
Malaysia	80.9	4.04	0.28	Georgia	64.3	3.21	0.46
Indonesia	79.6	3.98	0.31	Estonia	64.1	3.21	0.44
Iran	79.6	3.98	0.46	Thailand	64.1	3.20	0.42
Nigeria (Yoruba)	74.8	3.74	0.27	Taiwan	63.7	3.18	0.47
India	72.5	3.63	0.35	Greece	63.5	3.18	0.42
Philippines	72.3	3.61	0.38	Korea	62.4	3.12	0.43
Thailand	71.6	3.58	0.26	Peru	62.2	3.11	0.48
Turkey	70.2	3.51	0.50	Japan	61.4	3.07	0.46
Georgia	69.6	3.48	0.35	Germany	61.0	3.05	0.55
S Africa (Caucasian)	68.4	3.42	0.30	Germany (East)	66.3	3.31	0.48
Peru	68.4	3.42	0.35	Germany (West)	59.3	2.96	0.43
Hong Kong	68.1	3.41	0.33	Romania	60.9	3.05	0.50
Taiwan	67.8	3.39	0.33	India	60.2	3.01	0.56
Venezuela	67.4	3.37	0.35	Hong Kong	60.2	3.01	0.43
Russia	66.8	3.34	0.30	Russia	59.7	2.98	0.38
Singapore	66.8	3.34	0.41	Latvia	59.5	2.97	0.44

Korea	66.1	3.31	0.37	Lebanon	59.1	2.95	0.47
Canada	65.9	3.30	0.43	Belgium	58.9	2.95	0.46
Romania	65.7	3.29	0.38	Belgium (Dutch)	59.1	2.95	0.44
Brazil	65.6	3.28	0.49	Belgium (French)	58.8	2.94	0.46
US (Caucasian)	65.6	3.28	0.41	China	58.8	2.94	0.46
Lebanon	65.0	3.25	0.47	France	58.2	2.91	0.51
Latvia	64.9	3.25	0.40	Hungary	58.1	2.90	0.47
Greece	64.1	3.20	0.42	Nigeria (Yoruba)	58.0	2.90	0.49
Portugal	63.7	3.19	0.39	Iran	56.7	2.83	0.57
Finland	63.7	3.18	0.38	Venezuela	56.6	2.83	0.50
China	63.5	3.17	0.33	Singapore	56.2	2.81	0.42
Estonia	63.3	3.17	0.35	Malaysia	55.4	2.77	0.43
New Zealand	62.0	3.10	0.34	Spain	55.3	2.76	0.46
United Kingdom	61.9	3.10	0.37	Czech	54.6	2.73	0.45
Germany	61.3	3.06	0.34	Turkey	54.6	2.73	0.49
Germany (East)	63.9	3.20	0.47	S Africa (Caucasian)	54.5	2.72	0.48
Germany (West)	60.4	3.02	0.33	Portugal	54.3	2.71	0.43
Czech	60.9	3.05	0.35	Philippines	53.6	2.68	0.54
Japan	60.2	3.01	0.32	New Zealand	53.3	2.67	0.46
Israel	59.7	2.98	0.40	Finland	53.1	2.65	0.45
Hungary	59.6	2.98	0.41	United Kingdom	52.7	2.64	0.42
France	59.3	2.96	0.52	Brazil	52.6	2.63	0.46
Norway	58.5	2.93	0.45	Israel	52.4	2.62	0.54
Netherlands	57.7	2.89	0.37	Netherlands	51.7	2.59	0.47
Italy	57.3	2.86	0.46	Italy	51.3	2.56	0.53
Spain	56.9	2.85	0.40	Canada	51.0	2.55	0.54
Belgium	56.8	2.84	0.46	Indonesia	51.0	2.55	0.46
Belgium (Dutch)	57.9	2.90	0.35	US (Caucasian)	50.7	2.53	0.47
Belgium (French)	55.6	2.78	0.46	Norway	48.2	2.41	0.43

Correlates of Social Axioms (Country Level) with Socio-Economic-Political Indicators, Controlling for Wealth (Bond et al., 2004 Table 3)

Variable	Source	N	Dynamic Externality	Societal Cynicism
GDP per capita 2000 (PPP US$)	Human Development Report 2002, UN; The World Fact Book 2002	41	-.65*	-.40
Average daytime temperature	National Geographic Atlas of the World 1990, as cited in Van de Vliert, Schwartz, Huismans, Hofstede, and Daan (1999)	38	.47*	
Sex ratio 2001 (Male to Female)	Statistical Division, UN	38	.56*	
Age dependency ratio 2001 - Dependents to working-age population	WDI Online, World Bank Group	40	.41*	

Variable	Source	N	Dynamic Externality	Societal Cynicism
Averaged number of persons per room	Statistical Division, UN	23	.65*	.47
Population growth rate 2000-2005	Statistical Division, UN	37	.59*	
Life expectancy at birth	Human Development Report 2001, UN	40	-.44*	
Illiterate adult 2000 - aged 15 or above	Statistical Division, UN	24	.44	
Growth competitiveness index 2002	World Economic Forum	37		.36
Human development index 1999	Human Development Report 2001, UN	40	-.55*	
Human rights	Humana (1992)	36	-.54*	
Relative Status of Women	Population Crisis Committee (1988)	36	-.60*	
Political rights and civil liberties 1992/93-2001/02	Freedom House	40	-.52*	
Unemployment rate	Statistical Division, UN	37	-.70*	
Employees work hours per week	International Labor Organization	28	.60*	
Percent of GDP on education	Human Development Report 2001, UN	40	-.32	
Percent of GDP on health	Human Development Report 2001, UN	33	-.68*	
Alcohol consumption 1996 Litres per adult	Human Development Report 2001, UN	37	-.50*	.38
Reducing human vulnerability (Environmental Sustainability Index subscale 3) - By means of human sustenance (food and water) and environmental health	World Economic Forum	33	-.42	
Social and institutional capacity (Environmental Sustainability Index subscale 4) - Capacity to understand and respond to environmental dynamics for favorable long-run environmental conditions	World Economic Forum	33	-.42	
Voter turnout at latest elections	Human Development Report 2000, UN	32	-.38	-.36
Television receivers - number per 1000 inhabitants	WDI Online, World Bank Group	37	-.37	
Percentage of population who have accessed the Internet during the past month	Taylor Nelson Sofres (2001)	29		.43

Variable	Source	N	Dynamic Externality	Societal Cynicism
Job satisfaction	International Survey Research (1995), as cited in Van de Vliert and Janssen (2002)	22		-.53
Company satisfaction	International Survey Research (1995), as cited in Van de Vliert and Janssen (2002)	22		-.60*
Life satisfaction	World Value Survey 1990-93, as cited in Diener and Suh (1999)	25		-.65*
Quality of life Index	Diener (1995)	30	-.61*	
Hedonic balance - Positive affect minus negative affect	World Value Survey 1990-93, as cited in Diener and Suh (1999)	24	.42	-.49
Positive affect	World Value Survey 1990-93, as cited in Diener and Suh (1999)	24	.53*	
Pace of life	Levine and Norenzayan (1999)	19		.79*
Helping index	Levine, Norenzayan and Philbrick (2001)	15	-.72*	
Neuroticism	McCrae (2002)	25	-.44	
Agreeableness	McCrae (2002)	25	.63*	
Conscientiousness	McCrae (2002)	25		-.47
Mean score for length of emotions	Scherer, Wallbot, and Summerfield (1986); Wong and Bond (2002)	15	.68*	
Sources of guidance - Vertical	Smith, Peterson, and Schwartz (2002)	32	.44	
Sources of guidance – Beliefs widespread in my nation	Smith et al. (2002)	32	.38	
Mate preference - Emphasizing mutual attraction; deemphasizing financial prospect, social status & ambition	Shackelford and Schmidt (2002)	25	-.52*	
View on leadership - Charismatic/value based	Den Hartog, House, Hanges, and Ruiz-Quintanilla (1999)	29		-.70*
View on leadership - Team-oriented	Den Hartog et al. (1999)	29		-.53*
View on leadership - Self-protective	Den Hartog et al. (1999)	29		.39
View on leadership - Humane	Den Hartog et al. (1999)	29	.55*	

Variable	Source	N	Dynamic Externality	Societal Cynicism
View on leadership - Autonomous	Den Hartog et al. (1999)	29		.49*
In-group disagreement	Smith, Dugan, Peterson, and Leung (1998)	19		.48
Other-referenced performance motive - compared with others' performance	Lynn (1991), as cited in Van de Vliert and Janssen (2002)	23	.75*	
Percentage of mentioning "Work is like a business transaction. The more I get paid, the more I do; the less I get paid, the less I do."	Inglehart, Basañez, and Moreno (1998)	23		.51
Percentage of mentioning trust in own nationality	Inglehart et al. (1998)	24	.44	
Percentage of thinking scientific advances will help mankind	Inglehart et al. (1998)	23	.56*	
Percentage of adult population that attends church at least once a week	World Value Survey 1990-93, as cited in Swanbrow (1997)	27	.46	-.49
Frequency of praying to God outside of religious services - % "often" or "sometimes"	Inglehart et al. (1998)	20	.52	
Importance of Religion in Your Life - % of Very Important	Inglehart et al. (1998)	24	.62*	
Importance of God in Your Life - % of Very Important	Inglehart et al. (1998)	21	.52	
Gough's Achievement via Conformity Scale	Lynn (1991)	23		-.47
Spence-Helmreich Competitiveness Scale	Lynn (1991)	23	.64*	

Note: All scales are scored in a way so that a higher score indicates a higher level of the concept represented by the label. The correlations involving per capita GDP are simple correlations, and the rest are partial correlations with per capital GDP controlled for. All correlations are significant at the .05 level and those with an asterisk are significant at the .01 level.

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