



# Nastiness, Morality and Religiosity in 33 nations

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the main dimensions of social attitudes across 33 countries. Altogether, 20 social attitude scales were administered, mostly to university students ( $N = 6938$ ). A series of factor analyses showed that three factors exist at the pancultural level: Morality, Nastiness and Religiosity. Furthermore, Morality and Nastiness did not correlate with each other, but Religiosity correlated with both Morality and Nastiness. This suggests that one can be religious and both moral or nasty. Only one factor – Conservatism – emerged at the ecological level (i.e., between-countries analysis). The largest cross-cultural differences were found on the dimension of Religiosity, followed by Nastiness and then by Morality. The clear distinction emerged between South East Asia, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa on one hand, scoring high on all three factors, and Western Europe, Eastern Europe and Anglo regions on the other, scoring low on all three factors.

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Since the beginning of the 21st Century there has been an increased focus on the positive side of life and steps that can be taken to improve people's well-being and life satisfaction (see [Seligman, 2002](#)). At the same time, 9/11 served as a wake-up call about our neglect of the darker side of human nature. This paper reports on the outcomes of a large-scale cross-cultural survey relating to both positive and negative aspects of people's thinking and behavior.

Psychological study of the negative side of human nature is, arguably, older than the study of the positive side and it dates from the end of World War II. Explanation of the behavior that led to Nazi atrocities during the War, and the rise of dictatorships in its aftermath, traditionally has been captured by measures of Authoritarianism, Dogmatism, Machiavellianism and related constructs (cf. [Stankov, 1977](#)). The label 'social attitudes' or, more appropriately, 'anti-social attitudes' was used to distinguish these measures from those of, say, personality. The study of the positive side of human nature is more recent. Of particular relevance is the literature on the role of values (see [Rokeach, 1973](#); [Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990](#)), moral foundations (see [Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009](#)), and studies of family values ([Georgas, Berry, Van de Vijver, Kagitcibasi, & Poortinga, 2006](#)) and individualism/collectivism ([Triandis & Gelfand, 1998](#)) that have been of interest to cross-cultural researchers.

Our survey employed a variety of measures from the domains of social and anti-social attitudes, including broadly defined values and beliefs relating to family life and people's moral foundations, Religiosity, and measures of militant extremist mindset. This approach opens the

possibility of addressing a number of significant questions relevant for cross-cultural comparisons. For example, what are the commonalities among the diverse measures, and can their number be reduced to a smaller subset of latent dimensions that capture a substantial part of individual differences? Is there evidence that negative social attitudes on the one hand, and positive values and moral foundations on the other, define a single bipolar dimension, similar to the Extraversion/Introversion dimension within the domain of personality? The issue is whether one can hold both strong moral views and at the same time condone the use of violence. What is the role of Religiosity vis-à-vis anti-social attitudes and values/moral foundations?

All twenty scales employed in the survey were administered to participants from 33 countries. Our cross-cultural approach gave rise to two further questions, namely is it meaningful to examine how pronounced cross-cultural differences are, and which traits reveal small and which reveal substantial cross-cultural differences? Furthermore, we can examine the relative standings of different cultural units – countries or world regions – on these dimensions and be in a position to discuss possible causes of cross-cultural differences. This approach may be helpful for the development of a taxonomy of psychological processes that underlie social behavior. A similar approach has been fruitful in other domains of psychology that study individual differences. For example, the areas of cognitive abilities and personality have both profited from attempts to organize a large number of traits and measures into a smaller and more manageable set of dimensions.

The main part of this paper reports the findings based on structural analyses that were carried out on the full sample of participants, i.e., without regard to the cultural group to which participants belong. [Stankov and Lee \(2009\)](#) refer to this as the "pancultural" level of analysis. Factor scores were then used to examine mean differences between

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the cultural groups. In the second part, we report the outcomes of further analyses of the same data set. We examine the outcomes of the analyses based on the “ecological” approach similar to that used by Stankov and Lee (2009) in which the units of analysis are countries, not individuals, and the questions about the structure among the 20 measures that exist at the level of countries are addressed.

In the following sections we briefly discuss the nature of the diverse constructs that we assess and provide background information about these constructs.

## 1. Social attitudes

Saucier's (2000) summary of the earlier literature shows that there is no consensual definition of the social attitude construct(s). Researchers have defined social attitudes by pointing out that they have different manifestations (opinions, values, beliefs), involve evaluations (e.g., like or dislike) of “objects” broadly understood, and imply different conceptions of what is desirable. Saucier claims that social attitudes often refer to individual differences in ideology within a society.

### 1.1. The bad: Anti-social attitudes

Although many investigators found it difficult to show that additional social attitudes stand apart from Authoritarianism, Dogmatism and Machiavellianism, Saucier (2000) identified a separate Betaism factor, which he labeled “Unmitigated Self-interest”. Studies by other investigators also suggest the presence of additional, possibly independent, factors. For example, Stankov and Knežević's (2005) study of amoral social attitudes identified two additional factors – “Toughness” in the sense of machoism and “Maliciousness” that captures proneness to aggression. These two were referred to as measures of Amoralism. Another area of study that has generated measures of anti-social attitudes derives from contemporary attempts to understand psychological processes that may lead to terrorism. It has been argued that three components comprise the militant extremist mindset (MEM): Nastiness (or Pro-violence), Grudge (i.e., blaming a particular social group for the misfortune of one's own social unit or seeing the world as being vile and unpleasant to live in) and Excuse (i.e., conviction that one has higher moral principles that may justify the use of violence) (see Saucier, Akers, Miller, Stankov, & Knežević, 2009; Stankov, Saucier and Knežević, 2010, 2011; Stankov, Higgins, Saucier and Knežević, 2010).

### 1.2. The good: Pro-social attitudes

The rise in popularity of positive psychology and the emphasis on helping behavior that improves well-being has led to increased interest in what may be called pro-social attitudes. The scales employed by Saucier (2000) in his isms research to assess Gammaism (i.e., Communal Rationalism) and Epsilonism (i.e., Egalitarianism) are not anti-social but pro-social in nature. These pro-social measures may also be related to values and moral beliefs.

### 1.3. Beyond anti- and pro-social attitudes

Realistically, some social attitudes are hard to classify in terms of their orientation, being neither anti- nor pro-social. Conceptually, Conservatism (Stankov & Lee, 2009) belongs to this category. Two additional social attitude scales included in the present study are the Materialism scale based on the work of Shen-Miller and Saucier (2009) and the Ethnonationalism scale derived from the work of Connor (1994). While Materialism cannot be labeled as either pro- or anti-social, the Ethnonationalism scale should probably be viewed as having an anti-social inclination since its predominant characteristic is the non-favorable view of the outsiders, perhaps akin to Authoritarianism. It should be mentioned that Saucier (2000) points to a close relationship between social attitudes and measures of personality (see

also Stankov, 2011; Stankov & Lee, 2008, 2009; Stankov, Lee, & van de Vijver, 2014; Stankov, Higgins, Saucier and Knežević, 2010). Personality traits are not considered in this paper.

## 2. Values and moral foundations

### 2.1. Values

Much of the recent work in cross-cultural psychology has focused on the study of values, defined as the guiding principles in our lives. This work is based on Schwartz's Values Survey (SVS, Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990). Using the original SVS, Stankov and Knežević (2005) identified two correlated factors among the SVS measures. They labeled one factor “Self-indulgence/Transcendence”. The second factor was labeled “Conservatism/Individualism”. In further studies by Stankov (2007, 2011), the correlation between the two Values factors has been shown to be greater than .50, and they tend to define a single factor at the higher order. A different set of values is captured in the work of Georgas et al. (2006). These Family Values concern perceptions of the role of mother and father and the respect that children are expected to show to parents and grandparents (see Method section and supplementary material for example statements).

### 2.2. Morality

We employ several recently developed scales in order to explore the role of people's views of what is moral or otherwise. One of these scales is based on the work of Haidt and collaborators (see Graham et al., 2009). They define “moral systems as interlocking sets of values, practices, institutions, and evolved psychological mechanisms that function to suppress selfishness” (p. 1031), and they point out that “research in moral psychology... has been limited to issues of justice, rights, and welfare” (p.1030). In order to assess Morality, Graham et al. (2009) have developed measures of five sets of moral foundations: Harm/care, Fairness/reciprocity, Ingroup/loyalty, Authority/respect, and Purity/sanctity.

Another way to measure Morality is by constructing statements that are intended to be the reverse of statements that measure Amoral Social Attitudes, such as those used in Stankov and Knežević's (2005) study. Thus, in the present study, we constructed a set of statements that are opposite in meaning to the Amoralism measures of Toughness and Maliciousness.

Measures of Individualism/collectivism (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) or Tightness/looseness (Gelfand et al., 2007) that are the focus of much recent work in cross-cultural psychology can be seen as additional assessments of Morality. This view is based on the assumption that one pole of each of these two dimensions captures values and beliefs that benefit group cohesion, and these measures reflect Morality in the sense of displaying selfless behavior. Thus, it can be assumed that strong endorsement of collectivist and societal tightness statements would indicate strong standing on moral issues, while high endorsement of individualistic and ‘loose’ society statements would indicate low standing on Morality.

### 2.3. Religiosity

Of particular relevance to us, however, are measures of Religiosity that are tapped by different social attitudes scales (e.g., the Alphaism and Deltaism factors in Saucier's work, Spirituality in Schwartz' SVS), and scales that measure aspects of family values and moral foundations (see Graham et al., 2009). In previous work, Stankov (2007) assessed Religiosity using Saucier's Alphaism (i.e., Traditional Religiosity) scale, and demonstrated that it defines a Conservatism factor that was separate from both personality and other social attitudes' dimensions. In our survey we included yet another measure of Religiosity – the Duke

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