

## **Parallels between competence- versus morality-related traits and individualistic versus collectivistic values**

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### *Abstract*

*The distinction between individualistic (IV) and collectivistic (CV) instrumental values was compared to the distinction between competence-related and moral personality traits. Study 1 (N=89 students) showed that IV referred mostly to competence and were self-profitable, whereas CV referred mostly to morality and were other-profitable in their nature. Therefore, IV were predicted to reach a relatively higher position in the value hierarchy formulated for the self, whereas CV were predicted to rank higher in the value hierarchy formulated for other people. Both hypotheses were confirmed in study 2 (N=118 high school students) in which subjects ordered 18 instrumental values of the Rokeach Value Survey according to their importance either for themselves, or for other people.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Values and trait inferences constitute currently two separate subfields of social psychology with meagre, if any, inter-reference between the two areas of research. Nevertheless, somewhat ironically, two major lines of studies in these two areas had actually based construction of their methods on the same list of 18 000 person-descriptors compiled by Allport and Odbert (1936). About one-quarter of this list consisted of trait-names which were condensed to 18 items by Rokeach (1973) to constitute the instrumental values of his value survey. Anderson (1968) condensed

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the list to 555 trait-names (including all Rokeach's instrumental values) then heavily used in dozens of impression formation studies which eventually gave rise to modern research on trait inferences, person memory, and related issues.

The parallels between the two fields of research—values and trait inferences—go beyond the superficial similarity of key words used and involve some intriguing correspondences in empirical findings in both areas, despite the lack of interference and some important differences in theoretical languages and methods of research. This is, for example, visible in the case of a distinction between competence-related and moral traits on the one hand, and a distinction between individualistic and collectivistic values on the other.

### COMPETENCE VERSUS MORALITY IN BEHAVIOUR CONSTRUAL

Several social cognition studies suggest that competence and morality constitute the two most important meanings of social behaviour and personality traits in the lay person's perception. For example, Rosenberg and his coworkers (Rosenberg & Sedlak, 1972) showed that co-occurrences of different traits in person impressions were underlain by two dimensions dubbed *intellectually good–bad* and *socially good–bad*. The names *competence* versus *morality* may be equally or even more appropriate, because numerous traits marking the intellectually good–bad dimension have more to do with competence in general than with intellect (e.g. *persistent, industrious, wavering*), whereas many traits defining the socially good–bad dimension clearly pertain to morality (e.g. *sincere, helpful, dishonest*). Moral and competence-related traits frequently appear in voters' open-ended commentaries on political candidates (Page, 1978). Kinder and Sears (1985) claimed the two constitute basic and separate clusters of traits in the perception of political leaders and this has been recently shown for the perception of the Polish president rated by a national sample representative of Polish adults (Wojciszke, Pieńkowski & Klusek, 1995).

In another study, Wojciszke (1994) asked his subjects for recollections of episodes in which they had come to strongly evaluative conclusions on other people or themselves. Content analyses of over 1000 episodes showed that in three-quarters of them the evaluative impression was based either on moral or competence-related considerations. The same series of studies showed that in the case of behavioural acts construable both in moral and competence-related terms, perceivers tended to select only one of the two possible meanings and shaped their evaluative impressions accordingly.

All these social cognition studies point to the conclusion that competence-related and moral meaning of traits and behavioural acts tend to be ubiquitous and are used by social perceivers in a mutually exclusive way.

### INDIVIDUALISTIC VERSUS COLLECTIVISTIC VALUES

A popular classification of values is the distinction between individualistic (IV) and collectivistic (CV) values. This differentiation emerges on the individual level (Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995; Triandis, 1989), and especially on the level of whole

societies (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede & Bond, 1984), though the two levels are clearly linked to each other (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1994). Using the smallest space analysis on big samples coming from eight rather divergent cultures, Schwartz and Bilsky (1987, 1990) showed that IV and CV occupy opposing regions of two-dimensional projections of the multidimensional space that represented correlations among 36 values of *Rokeach Value Survey*. This tendency emerged for each sample studied and was independent of whether the value ranking procedure was used (where ranking some values high automatically results in other values being ranked low) or the values were separately rated for their importance. In short, IV and CV seem to be quite universally opposite, independently of the specific culture and method used.

Schwartz and Bilsky attribute this mutual exclusiveness of IV and CV to the fact that values are goals, and goals may serve interests of the self and/or the collective, and the two interests may differ or diverge. In numerous contexts, such individualistic values as *intelligence* or *ambition* may forward interests of a collective an individual participates in, and in various situations such collectivistic values as *reliability* or *helpfulness* promote the individual's well-being. Nevertheless, ambition serves the individual's interests more frequently or more immediately than helpfulness, and the opposite is true for interests of the group. In effect, an opposition between IV and CV emerges as reflected in numerous studies (and some values serve interests of both the self and the group which results in an additional, *mixed interest* category of values, not discussed in the present work).

## HYPOTHESES

*Hypothesis 1* resulting from the present discussion is that whereas IV are related rather to competence than morality, the opposite is true for CV. This hypothesis was tested in the Study 1 where IV and CV instrumental values of the *Rokeach Value Survey* were rated for their competence- and morality-relatedness.

*Hypothesis 2* is that for the self, IV will be desired to a higher degree than CV. *Hypothesis 3* predicts that the opposite will be true for others—in the hierarchy of values ordered according to their desirability in other persons the subject interacts with, CV will be desired to a higher degree than IV.

There is a twofold rationale for hypotheses 2 and 3. The first is the already mentioned fact that interpretation of behavioural acts construable both in competence and moral terms tends to focus either on the competence or moral content of the acts. Moreover, Wojciszke (1994) showed that whereas actors construe such acts in the categories of competence rather than morality, the opposite is true for interpretations made by observers, who prefer moral construals of the same acts. Provided there is the hypothesized overlap between the IV and competence-related traits on the one hand, and between the CV and moral categories on the other, it is expected that people will show a stronger preference for IV rather than CV when revealing their *self* value hierarchies, but a stronger preference for CV than IV when revealing values preferred in others.

The second rationale has to do with the idea that one's own IV/competence traits are adaptively more important for him- or herself, whereas CV/moral traits are more

important when met in other people. This idea was originally introduced by Peeters (1983) who showed that some traits (like *intelligence* or *efficiency*) are self-profitable in the sense that individuals who show such traits usually benefit from them, whereas lack of these traits is harmful for them (whatever they intend to do, it is better for them to do it efficiently rather than not). Other traits (like *honesty* or *cruelty*), however, are other-profitable in nature. Following Peeters (1983, 1992) it may be argued, that from the point of view of the social perceiver's interests, morality of other people is usually more relevant than their competence. Typically, others' immoral behaviour is harmful, whereas their moral behaviour is beneficial. Social perceivers are involved as targets of those harms or benefits, either actually (when they are recipients of an action) or potentially (by an anticipation of what would happen to them if they interacted with the actor). This reasoning leads to an additional hypothesis that IV are self-profitable to a higher degree than CV, but the latter are other-profitable to a higher extent than IV. This hypothesis was tested in Study 1.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 were tested in Study 2. The subjects were asked to order 18 instrumental values of the Rokeach Value Survey according to their importance either for the subjects themselves, or for other people whom the subjects interacted with. An additional *Hypothesis 4* was also tested that in the process of behaviour construal, perceivers would use competence-related categories to higher extent, but moral categories to a lower extent, after the activation of the self rather than the other hierarchy of values.

This hypothesis was based on the assumption that in subjects who had been asked to show their *self hierarchy* of values (i.e. to order values according to their importance and desirability in themselves), the competence-related categories (IV) were activated to a higher degree than moral (CV) ones. The latter, however, should be activated to a higher degree in those subjects who had been asked to show their *other hierarchy* of values (i.e. to order values according to their importance and desirability in other people they interact with). To test this hypothesis, subjects of Study 2 who had showed their self or other hierarchy of values were asked for interpretations of behavioural acts construable both in moral and competence-related terms.

## STUDY 1

### Method

#### *Subjects*

Eighty-nine university students (44 of them male) of age ranging from 20 to 23 years participated in groups of 10 to 20. Twenty subjects rated the instrumental values of the *Rokeach Value Survey* for their global favourability as personality traits, 18 rated the values for their competence-relatedness, and the remaining groups (17 subjects each) rated the values for their morality-relatedness, self-profitability, and other-profitability.

### Procedure

The list of 18 instrumental values of the *Rokeach Value Survey* was translated to Polish, preceded and followed by five buffer traits, and subjected to ratings for five parameters using a procedure generally following that of Rothbart and Park (1986).

*Global favourability* was rated on a scale ranging from  $-5$  (*very negative trait*), to 0 (*neutral*), to  $+5$  (*very positive trait*). Subjects simply showed how much they considered each trait to be positive or negative in general. Examples of clearly negative and positive traits (not from the main list) were given, and the way of using the rating scale was explained in detail. Similar detailed instructions also accompanied the ratings of the remaining trait parameters.

*Morality-relatedness* was rated on a scale ranging from 0 (*not related to morality at all*) to 10 (*very strongly related to morality*). Morality-related traits were defined as those which pertained to breaking or maintenance of moral rules and/or to doing good or bad things for another person.

*Competence-relatedness* was rated on a similar 0/10 scale. Competence-related traits were defined as those which enable people efficiently to attain their goals or obstruct the goal attainment, whatever the goals may be.

*Self-profitability* was rated on a scale ranging from  $-5$  (*very harmful to a person who has the trait*), to 0 (*neutral*), to  $+5$  (*very profitable for the person*). Subjects answered the question how much a trait was profitable (rewarding) for the person who has the trait (ratings from 0 to  $+5$ ) or how much it was unprofitable (disadvantageous) for the person who has the trait (ratings from 0 to  $-5$ ).

*Other-profitability* was rated on a similar  $-5/+5$  scale. Subjects answered the question how much a trait was profitable (rewarding) for others who interact with a person who has the trait (ratings from 0 to  $+5$ ) or how much it was unprofitable (disadvantageous) for them (ratings from 0 to  $-5$ ).

Based on data of Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) and Schwartz (1992) eight individualistic and eight collectivistic instrumental values were identified. These values are listed in Tables 1 and 2.

## Results and Discussion

### *Competence- and Morality-Relatedness*

The average competence- and morality-relatedness ratings of the eight IV and eight CV were subjected to a 2 (value type: IV versus CV)  $\times$  2 (trait content: competence-versus morality-relatedness) MANOVA with repeated measurements on the second factor. This analysis revealed the expected value type  $\times$  trait content interaction,  $F(1,14)=27.13$ ,  $p<0.001$ . As can be seen in the two last rows of Table 1, IV appeared more strongly related to competence than morality, whereas the opposite tended to be true for CV. This latter effect, however, was relatively weaker and only marginally significant,  $t(7)=1.65$ ,  $p<0.10$ , one-tailed. The inspection of other rows in Table 1 shows that the expected differences were more reliable for IV than CV. All IV were significantly more saturated with competence than morality, whereas the expected reversal was significant only for five out of eight CV.

Table 1. Competence- and morality-relatedness of individualistic (I) and collectivistic (C) values and ratings of their self- and other-profitability

Value	Content ratings			Profitability ratings		
	Competence	Morality	<i>t</i>	Self	Others	<i>t</i>
Ambitious (I)	8.44	4.82	4.19***	3.59	2.29	2.39*
Capable (I)	7.61	2.23	7.23***	4.65	3.00	4.30***
Cheerful (I)	3.78	1.59	2.70**	4.24	3.71	1.58
Courageous (I)	7.17	4.24	3.41**	3.53	3.47	<1
Forgiving (C)	2.72	7.47	-4.15***	3.18	3.59	<1
Helpful (C)	3.61	6.88	-3.18**	3.29	4.06	-1.48
Honest (C)	5.11	9.59	-4.79***	3.71	4.35	-1.13
Imaginative (I)	7.78	3.94	3.98***	4.41	3.00	2.91**
Independent (I)	7.89	4.71	3.29**	3.82	2.59	2.19*
Intellectual (I)	9.39	4.59	4.76***	4.88	4.00	3.67***
Logical (I)	7.94	3.24	5.02***	2.94	2.82	<1
Loving (C)	3.28	5.71	-2.26*	3.35	4.12	-1.61
Obedient (C)	6.67	4.94	1.61	3.82	3.29	1.21
Polite (C)	4.44	6.76	-1.97*	4.00	4.35	<1
Responsible (C)	8.56	6.18	2.72**	3.94	4.12	<1
Self-controlled (C)	4.27	3.94	<1	-0.53	0	<1
Individualistic values	7.50	3.67	10.11***	4.01	3.11	4.21***
Collectivistic values	4.83	6.43	-1.65	3.10	3.49	-2.60*

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Finally, univariate  $F$ s comparing IV and CV 'in columns' appeared significant both for the competence-relatedness,  $F(1,14) = 8.85$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , and the morality-relatedness ratings,  $F(1,14) = 13.99$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . The IV were saturated to a higher extent with competence than morality, but the opposite was true for the CV. None of these effects was changed when trait global favourability rating was entered into the analyses as a covariate.

### Self- and Other- Profitability

The averaged self- and other-profitability ratings of IV and CV were subjected to a similar 2 (value type)  $\times$  2 (trait content) MANOVA, which revealed the expected value type  $\times$  trait content interaction,  $F(1,14) = 24.39$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . As can be seen in the two last rows of Table 1, the IV appeared rather self- than other-profitable, but the opposite was true for CV. On the level of particular values, the expected differences once more appeared more reliable for IV than CV. Most of the individualistic values appeared significantly more self- than other-profitable, whereas the expected opposite difference was significant for none of the specific CV.

Univariate  $F$ s comparing IV and CV 'in columns' were significant neither for the self- nor the other-profitability ratings. However, this lack of significant effects was due to interference of the trait global favourability, which was highly related to both the self- and the other-profitability ratings,  $r$ s amounting to 0.80 and 0.88,

respectively. When global favourability was entered into a MANOVA as a covariate, the univariate  $F$ s appeared significant both for the self-profitability ratings,  $F(1,13)=7.72$ ,  $p<0.05$  (adjusted means: 3.97 versus 3.14), and other-profitability ratings,  $F(1,13)=4.24$ ,  $p<0.05$  (adjusted means: 3.07 versus 3.53). The IV appeared, then, more self-profitable than CV, and the opposite was true for other-profitability ratings.

Altogether, the present data seems to be quite consistent with *hypothesis 1* predicting that whereas IV are related rather to competence than morality, the opposite is true for CV. As predicted, the self- versus other-profitability of the IV and CV follow the same pattern of differences.

## STUDY 2

In this study, hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 were tested. Subjects were asked to rank 18 instrumental values of the *Rokeach Value Survey* according to their importance/desirability in themselves or in other people. After having activated the 'self' or the 'other' hierarchy of values, the subjects received descriptions of fictitious persons' behaviour construable both in moral and competence-related terms in order to test the hypothesis that competence-related categories are used to a higher extent, but moral categories to a lower extent, after the activation of the *self* rather than the *other* hierarchy of values.

### Method

#### *Subjects*

Forty-two male and 76 female high school students (all of 18 years of age) participated in the study in four groups.

#### *Procedure*

The subjects were asked to rank the 18 instrumental values either under the *self* or under the *others* instruction. Each value was printed on a separate sheet of paper and subjects were asked to order them from the most to the least important. The *self instruction* was the standard instruction of the *Rokeach Value Survey* where subjects were asked to rank the values according to their importance and desirability for themselves. Under the *other instruction*, subjects were asked to rank the values according to their importance and desirability in other people whom they met in their daily interactions.

Having completed the value survey, subjects were presented with four descriptions of actions interpretable in terms of both competence and morality. The descriptions (60–80 words each) were borrowed from Wojciszke (1994, Study 1) whose procedure was followed in the present experiment. The following actions were described: (1) trying to cheer up her younger brother, the actor was so clumsy that she actually

depressed him; (2) the actor unsuccessfully tried to persuade his teenage daughter to return surplus money; (3) under a smart pretext, a manager (the actor) left a conference to avoid answering an inconvenient question; (4) the actor pushed himself in front of the queuing people and bought the last two bottles of milk. Episodes 1 and 2 described actions where a moral intention was not efficiently realized (the actions were morally positive, but negative in competence terms). Episodes 3 and 4 described actions where an immoral intention was efficiently realized (the actions were morally negative, but positive in competence terms).

After reading each episode, subjects were asked to formulate a global impression of the actor (on a scale ranging from  $-5$ , to  $0$ , to  $+5$ ), and to write down a rationale of their evaluations. The rationale was afterwards rated by a pair of judges (blind to conditions) for its morality-relatedness on a scale ranging from  $6$  (*the rationale strongly involves oral considerations*) to  $0$  (*does not involve morality at all*). A similar format was used for competence ratings made by an additional pair of judges. Because both pairs of raters showed a substantial agreement in judgments, their ratings were averaged providing measures of moral and competence-related interpretation of the behaviour described in the episodes. The ratings averaged within a subject over the four stories yielded the final indices of the degree to which the subject employed moral and competence categories in his or her construal of behavioural information.

## Results and Discussion

### *The Self Versus Other Value Hierarchy*

The obtained ranks were subjected to comparisons by Mann–Whitney  $U$  tests both on the level of individual values and mean ranks of IV and CV.

As can be seen in Table 2, IV showed a significantly higher mean rank in the self than the others condition (8.3 versus 10.2). This also held for the majority of specific values although the differences did not always reach statistical significance. On the other hand, CV showed a significantly lower mean rank in the self than the others condition (10.2 versus 8.8). This also held for the majority of specific values.

In addition to these ‘within row’ analyses, an appropriate ‘within column’ analysis was performed comparing the rank of IV and CV within the same condition (i.e. under the same instruction). This analysis revealed that IV showed a higher mean rank than CV in the self condition (8.3 versus 10.2),  $z = 3.62$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . The expected inversion of this difference in the others condition (10.2 versus 8.8) appeared also highly reliable,  $z = 2.88$ ,  $p < 0.01$ .

When the first seven values from each condition are listed and compared, very divergent value hierarchies emerge. Under the *self* instruction, the first seven values are: *independent*, *loving*, *intellectual*, *courageous*, *cheerful*, *responsible*, and *ambitious* (five IV and two CV). Under the *others* instruction the values are: *honest*, *loving*, *responsible*, *cheerful*, *helpful*, *polite*, and *intellectual* (two IV and five CV). Altogether, these results are quite consistent with hypotheses 2 and 3 that IV are important and desired in the self rather than others, whereas the opposite is true for CV.

Table 2. Mean ranks of individualistic (I) and collectivistic (C) values in the self and other conditions of Study 2

Value	Condition		z
	Self	Others	
Ambitious (I)	8.5	9.7	1.40
Capable (I)	9.9	12.6	2.90***
Cheerful (I)	8.0	8.4	< 1
Courageous (I)	7.6	10.1	2.73***
Forgiving (C)	11.1	10.0	1.28
Helpful (C)	10.6	8.6	2.49**
Honest (C)	8.9	4.2	5.45***
Imaginative (I)	9.1	10.0	< 1
Independent (I)	6.3	10.1	3.79***
Intellectual (I)	6.5	9.4	3.26***
Logical (I)	10.2	11.2	< 1
Loving (C)	6.4	5.3	1.64*
Obedient (C)	15.5	15.7	< 1
Polite (C)	10.6	9.3	1.60
Responsible (C)	8.0	5.5	2.94***
Self-controlled (C)	10.5	11.7	1.39
Individualistic values	8.3	10.2	4.73***
Collectivistic values	10.2	8.8	3.85***

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

### Differences in Behaviour Construal

The indices of behaviour construal were subjected to a 2 (condition: self versus other)  $\times$  2 (sex)  $\times$  2 (construal content: competence versus morality) MANOVA with repeated measurements on the third factor (on 113 subjects, as five subjects yielded incomplete data on behaviour construal measures). This analysis revealed three significant effects.

The first was a strong main effect of the construal content,  $F(1,108) = 51.59$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , with a much higher behaviour construal in moral than competence-related terms, as can be seen in Figure 1. This effect is consistent with the theorizing and data of Wojciszke (1994) who showed a preference for moral over competence categories in the construal of others' behaviour. This preference, however, was significantly smaller in the present *self* than *other* condition, as evidenced by the predicted instruction  $\times$  construal content interaction,  $F(1,108) = 6.47$ ,  $p < 0.02$ . In effect, as illustrated in Figure 1, the behaviour construal in moral terms was higher in the other (3.74) than the self (3.08) condition,  $t(110) = 3.21$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , but its construal in terms of competence was lower in the other (1.57) than the self (1.98) condition,  $t(110) = 1.69$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .

Finally, a sex  $\times$  construal content interaction appeared significant as well,  $F(1,108) = 7.23$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Whereas the competence construal was higher for males (2.19) than females (1.55),  $F(1,110) = 6.61$ ,  $p < 0.02$ , just the opposite was true in the case of the moral construal (3.04 versus 3.62),  $F(1,110) = 7.04$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Competence categories appeared relatively more important for males than females, but the moral

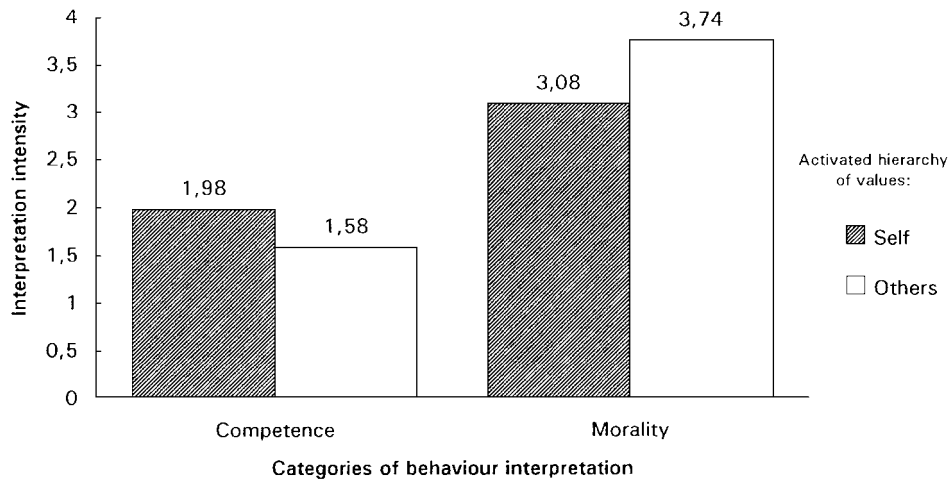


Figure 1. Competence and moral interpretation of behaviour by subjects in whom the self or the other hierarchy of values had been activated

ones were more important for females, which is probably related to the differentiation of gender roles. In the traditional sex–role stereotypes, caring for others' needs and well-being is considered the domain of women rather than men, whereas task-orientation and striving for occupational achievement is considered the domain of men rather than women. Although in modern societies the sex–role stereotypes decrease in their scope and intensity, they are still being built into people's self-identities. In the course of socialization, males learn more about the importance of competence traits, whereas females—about the importance of moral ones (cf. Eagly, 1987), which results in sex differences in construal of behaviour where both categories are applicable.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present data suggest a substantial overlap between two theoretical distinctions: the distinction between individualistic and collectivistic values on the one hand, and the distinction between competence-related and moral traits on the other. It is well-established that the preferences for individualistic or collectivistic values tend to hamper each other (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987, 1990), just as the construals of the same behaviour in competence-related and moral terms tend to be mutually exclusive (Wojciszke, 1994). The present studies show that whereas individualistic values are preferred for oneself, collectivistic values are preferred in others rather than in oneself. This parallels closely construal findings of Wojciszke (1994) who showed that people tend to apply competence-related categories when interpreting their own behaviour but moral ones when reading a similar behaviour in others. However, the preference of CV in others is probably further modified by the specification of who the others are—for example, this preference could be stronger for others who are

outgroups whereas the ingroup others may be treated in a way more similar to the self. Heterogeneity of the 'other' category may also explain why the present Study 1 found the theoretically expected relations weaker for collectivistic than individualistic values.

The relations between the three theoretical distinctions (individualistic–collectivistic values; moral versus competence-related traits; and self versus other-profitability) showed in the present work had been anticipated in previous literature. Most notably, Peeters (1983) showed the relation between self versus other-profitability on the one hand, and social-value orientations (McClintock, 1988; Maki, Thorngate, & McClintock, 1979) on the other. The social-value orientations paradigm describes interpersonal evaluations and relations on two dimensions of self-concern (which opposes positive and negative orientations towards the self) and other-concern (which opposes positive and negative orientations towards others). These two dimensions seem clearly parallel to categorization of values into individualistic and collectivistic (as far as IV are defined as values forwarding interests of the self and CV as serving interests of others).

This paper started from the notion that values and traits constitute two separate fields of research which remain separated despite similarities in their origins and findings. This may be due to divergent research focuses of the two domains. Value researchers typically focus on the differentiation of value preferences and their concomitants; they also pay somewhat decreasing attention to the way in which values govern behaviour. On the other hand, social cognition researchers, who study traits, pay attention mainly to the way in which trait inferences are made from behavioural information, how such inferences are affected by contextual and categorical information, and how traits influence processes of encoding, understanding, and retrieval of behavioural information.

Actually, the research interests of the two fields may be seen as complementing each other. Current value research by and large ignores an important issue raised by early value theorists: how values influence the understanding and evaluation of one's own and others' behaviour. Fortunately, the social cognition research agenda on traits may be seen as just that—an attempt to answer the question how traits/values influence the understanding (and evaluation) of behaviour. Instead of remaining separated, then, the two fields may benefit from each other in understanding what values and traits are and how they function.

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