

## SEARCHING FOR THE ORIGINS OF CONSUMER ETHICS: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN INTUITIVE VALUES AND CONSUMER ETHICAL JUDGMENTS

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*In a cross-sectional survey study, links between two prominent measures of values structures and consumers' attitudes – Haidt's Values Model and Muncy and Vitell's Consumer Ethics Scale – are examined to test the general presumption of the role of intuitive processes in shaping attitudes. Three of the five "values pools" depicted in Haidt's model are positively linked to attitudes about recycling, doing good, actively and passively benefitting from unethical activities, activities of questionable ethicalness, and activities deemed "no harm no foul."*

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### INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, business ethics researchers have labored to produce a body of theoretical and empirical research to illuminate the process of ethical decision making in business. Unquestionably, the predominant stream in this endeavor is the rational decision making approach, characterized by the most widely-accepted models of decision making, including the Hunt & Vitell (1986; 1993) model, the Treviño (1986) model, the Ferrell & Gresham (1985) model, and the literally dozens of investigations drawing upon these. Increasingly, however, observers and researchers inside and outside of academia have begun to question the primacy of rationality in ethical decision-making and elsewhere (Freestone & McGoldrick, 2007; Haidt, 2001). Perhaps in response to this, researchers have begun to investigate more intuitive approaches to understanding ethical decision making, drawing particularly on the roles of values, emotions, and intuitive responses, and using such diverse techniques as values inventories and more recently, brain imaging and fMRI technologies (see, for example, Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley & Coehen, 2001; Helmuth, 2001).

An important implication of these trends is that there appear to be distinct processes at work in ethical decision making, and more significantly,

that these processes work in tandem to influence ethical decision making. The purpose of the present study is to examine whether and how intuitive processes underpin the ostensibly cognitive, rational processes that go into decision making, using validated, generally available measures of each. Following the general position that intuitive processes such as values and emotions precede rational cognitive thought (D'Amasio, 1994; Haidt, 2001; 2006; Kahneman & Frederick, 2002; Sunstein, 2005) this study aims to identify specific linkages between these two poles. At the same time, it is expressly not an aim of this study to promote one understanding of the ethical decision-making process at the expense of the other. Indeed, it is argued most persuasively by D'Amasio (1994) and others (e.g. Bartsch & Wright, 2005; Sunstein, 2005) that the two processes – the intuitive and the rational – are interdependent for effective problem solving, whether the context is ethical decision making in business or in life, generally. Most of the focus of the literature discussion in this study is on the intuitive side of ethical decision-making, with only limited attention to the better-understood rational side of the process.

### VALUES AND INTUITIVE PROCESSES IN ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

Although values and emotions have been the subject of much recent research in ethics, the topic is not a new one. Hume, for example, argued that morality can never be grasped by reason alone; that we have certain benevolent sentiments that can't be reduced to self-interest

(Hume, 1751). Dewey (1932) identified a “direct sense of value” – as opposed to a consciousness of general rules or ultimate goals – which operates as a running commentary to stamp objects at once as good or evil (p.274). More recently, Wilson (1993) has identified the presence of a “moral sense;” an intuitive or directly-felt belief about how one ought to act, listing among these moral senses sympathy, fairness, self-control, and duty. In the marketing literature, Vitell, Bing, Davison, Ammeter, Garner, & Novicevic (2009) introduced the construct of “moral identity,” and conclude that the rational view of moral motivation based on reasoning alone is insufficient to explain moral actions.

Values are clearly central to our discussion of ethical decision making. They are defined in a variety of ways: as “enduring beliefs about desirable end-states and behaviors that transcend specific situations” (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987; Urbany, Reynolds, & Phillips, 2008); so deep-seated as to be invisible but for the way they manifest themselves in opinions, attitudes, preferences, etc. (Posner, 2009). These preferential standards can be used to resolve conflicts existing along a continuum of relative importance (Rokeach, 1973) and ultimately coalesce into values systems, which researchers define as normative beliefs about proper standards of conduct and preferred or desired results (Nystrom, 1990; Rokeach, 1973).

Previous research has investigated the linkages between values and consumer behavior constructs, including consumers’ motives, personal values, ethical ideologies, and ethical beliefs (e.g., Freestone & McGoldrick, 2008; Homer & Kahle, 1988; Steenhaut & van Kenhove, 2006). Other studies have examined the connection between personal values and moral reasoning of undergraduate business students (Lan, Gowing, McMahon, & King, 2007); between personal values and fair trade (Doran, 2009), sustainable business practices (Ng & Burke, 2010), organizational decision making (Fritzsche & Oz, 2007), and shopping attitudes and behaviors (Shim & Eastlick, 1998), to name but a few of the dozens of studies done in this area. Clearly, the list of specific values relevant to ethical decision making is long, and summarizing the values

literature is not a goal of this study. While some have suggested that values are both “poorly conceptualized and poorly measured” (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004), Hunt & Vitell (1993) emphasize the “unquestionable impact of an individual’s value system in the (ethical) decision process and urge researchers to explore “many different values” and their various impacts on ethical decision making.

## INTUITION

Perhaps a better way to conceive of values is to construe them as a particular form of intuitive response; an expression of and motivation for the fulfillment of basic human needs to sustain the individual’s biological and social functioning (Lan, et al., 2007). In philosophy, “Intuitionism” holds that there are moral truths, and when people grasp these, the process is more one of perception than reflection. In a similar vein, (Haidt, 2001; Haidt & Joseph, 2004) attribute the sudden appearance in consciousness of a moral judgment, without prior searching, weighing of evidence, or inferring a conclusion as intuitive response. MacIntyre (1981) identifies something similar in the ethical theory of “emotivism;” that the emotivist’s moral judgments are purely non-rational, expressions of attitude or feeling, devoid of factual judgments (p. 12). In a comprehensive review of ethical decision making research, Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe (2008) report substantial evidence supporting the intuitionist view of ethical decision making. One example given is that of Haidt, who argues against the supremacy of reason in ethical decision making (2001). Haidt maintains that moral judgments are often made quickly and on the basis of intuition; reasoning itself is basically a *post hoc* justification for intuitive responses (Haidt, 2001; Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008).

Probably the best explanation of the tandem processes of rationality and intuition comes from Kahneman & Frederick (2002), who posit that two families of affective and cognitive operations – Systems I and II – can be distinguished. System I is “...intuitive, rapid, effortless, and automatic” while System II is “reflective, slower, self-aware, calculative, and deductive.” System I supplies “quick answers” to judgment problems; System II is a monitor

that confirms and/or overrides System I judgments (Sunstein, 2005). Occasionally, System I supplies a heuristic, for example, the incest taboo, that may or may not be subject to override by System II. In those cases where System II doesn't override System I, the individual cannot, or does not, seek or offer rational explanations for moral judgments, resulting in a sort of "moral dumbfounding" (Haidt & Joseph, 2004).

Although Sunstein's position is that heuristics and intuitive responses usually result in errors of logic and fact, others have questioned this assertion. Bartsch & Wright (2005) suggest that intuitive responsiveness may actually be the product of expertise, of knowledge gained through experience, brought rapidly, effortlessly, and automatically to the decision context. Such a well-functioning intuitive system produces "moral sensitivity" that relies on experience as opposed to heuristics to produce moral maturity. Experience also plays a role in Faber's (1999) account of intuitionism; it is the routinized aspects of daily life, offering not an objective or impartial tool for judgment and decision making, but instead a "composite of cultural lessons that carry with them political judgments representing specific values and ideologies" (Faber, 1999, p. 193). This routinization – the result of trust and security derived from the repetitive nature of day-to-day life and the familiarity it provides – allows individuals to quickly and easily face the decisions of daily life, with important assumptions and choices made without critical reflection (Faber, 1999).

#### MEASURES OF VALUES AND ETHICAL JUDGMENTS

In his research on values and intuitive responses to ethical dilemmas, moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt has proposed and developed a model of five psychological systems – sometimes referred to by Haidt as "values pools" that provide a basis for much of moral reasoning (Haidt, Kotler, & Dias, 1993; Haidt 2001; 2006; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt & Joseph, 2004). Following Schweder (1990), who identified a schema of three fundamental moralities: an "ethic of autonomy" emphasizing rights, justice, and freedom, an "ethic of community" emphasizing institutions,

families, tribes, etc., and an "ethic of divinity" to protect the soul and spirit from degradation, Haidt's model proposes that social and cultural influences engender specific intuitive responses when individuals are faced with moral and ethical issues. These responses are evaluative feelings – feelings of like/dislike, good/bad – that appear without any conscious awareness of having searched for evidence, evaluated the facts, or reflected on the consequences (Haidt, 2001). Haidt & Graham (2007) have labeled these five values pools as harm, reciprocity (in other studies, aka "fairness"), ingroup, hierarchy, and purity.

To summarize briefly, Haidt draws on various sources in philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and elsewhere to establish the conceptual underpinnings of his model. The "harm" construct (sometimes referred to in Haidt's work as "harm/care") is deeply rooted in the thought of Hume, making the similar argument that people everywhere have an innate sensitivity to cruelty and harm (in the same way a taste bud responds to bitterness) and at the same time express approval toward those who relieve or prevent harm (Haidt & Graham, 2007). "Reciprocity" is founded on the idea that all cultures exhibit "developed virtues related to fairness and justice," and these play out in the valuation of individual rights and equality. "Ingroup" expresses the importance of social cohesion within small communities; the idea that humans have evolved in kin-based groups, being wary and distrustful of other groups, always valuing those who sacrifice for the in-group, while condemning those who betray the group or are otherwise disloyal (Haidt & Graham, 2007). "Hierarchy" also embodies the idea of group cohesion, with an emphasis on authority structures which provide protection and security for members. Respect and admiration for superiors, as well as the virtues of subordination (e.g., duty and obedience) characterize the "hierarchy" values pool which highly prizes magnanimity, fatherliness, and wisdom (Haidt & Graham, 2007). Finally, "purity" (sometimes referred to in Haidt's work as "the psychology of sacredness") is founded in the idea that the self is a spiritual entity striving to avoid pollution and to attain purity and sanctity (Haidt, et al., 1993). Within the domain of purity, disgust is said to function as a guardian of the body and

soul, sanctioning some bodily activities (e.g., carnal passions) and regulating religious activity. Chastity and piety are seen as elevated and virtuous (Haidt & Graham, 2007). These five values pools are summarized in Table 1.

In most of Haidt’s studies cited above, the objective was generally to examine the idea that people in many different cultures and settings are skilled at finding reasons to support their gut feelings (Haidt, 2006).

In light of the preceding discussion, it seems reasonable to expect that many of the ethics measures developed by researchers to tap into ethical cognitions, beliefs, and attitudes should “map” nicely onto these intuitive moral foundations. If the intuitive and the rational, the System I and the System II do operate in tandem, this operation should be evident if we test the Haidt model alongside an accepted and validated measure of ethical decision making – the objective of this study. Clearly there are many to choose from, but in this study, the researchers have selected the Muncy & Vitell Consumer Ethics Scale (1992; 2005). The Consumer Ethics Scale is a logical choice for this study, because it has been used in dozens of studies (see, for example, Erffmeyer, Keillor, LeClair, 1999; Rawwas, 1996; Muncy & Eastman, 1998; Polonsky, Brito, Pinto, & Higgs-Kleyn, 2001; Vitell, 2003), and especially because it measures responses in the context of everyday life, without reference to specialized domains of business, legal, or technological decision making in situations having ethical content.

Following a modification, (Vitell & Muncy, 2005) the Consumer Ethics Scale consists of 31

ethical behaviors, active choices and omissions, for which the respondent indicates their belief that the behavior is(not) wrong. These items are subdivided into seven subscales, each of which examines an area of ethical concern. These are labeled by Vitell & Muncy as downloading/buying counterfeit goods (Downloading), recycling/environmental awareness (Recycling), doing the right thing/doing good (Do Good), actively benefitting from illegal activities (Actively), passively benefitting (Passively), actively benefitting from questionable, but legal practices (Questionable), and no harm/no foul activities (No Harm) (Vitell & Muncy, 2005).

An interesting feature of the Consumer Ethics Scale is the valence of the items. In two of the subscales – recycling and doing the right thing – the statements are worded positively (e.g., “purchasing something made of recycled materials even though it is more expensive”). In the other subscales, the statements are worded negatively, or in the unethical direction (e.g., “drinking a can of soda in a store without paying for it”). Essentially, the former items invite approval; the latter items, disapproval. To facilitate this discussion, these will henceforth be referred to as the “ethical” and “unethical” items of the Consumer Ethics Scale, respectively. It is expected that – to the extent that respondents rely on and endorse one or more intuitive values pools – they will issue approval of the ethical items and condemnation of the unethical items. The reasons for this is that, as construed above, values are positive inasmuch as they have evolved and developed for the preservation of justice, the avoidance of harm, the promotion of caring behaviors, the maintenance of social cohesion and order, as

**TABLE 1:  
Haidt’s Values Dimensions**

Values Dimension:	Emphases:
Harm	pain, suffering, protection, empathy, compassion
Reciprocity / Fairness	justice, individual rights, equality, equity
Ingroup	group cohesion, loyalty, fidelity
Hierarchy	deference, obedience, order, discipline, conformity
Purity	transgression, decency, disgust, cleanliness

well as the sanctity of the soul and spirit. Therefore we should expect that when an individual condemns an unethical act or when an individual approves an ethical behavior, he or she is being “nudged” by intuitive values.

Accordingly, it is hypothesized:

**Hypothesis One: The Harm Values Pool will be significantly related to one or more of the Consumer Ethics subscales.**

- H<sub>1a</sub>:** The Harm values pool will be negatively related to the Downloading subscale of the Consumer Ethics Scale.
- H<sub>1b</sub>:** The Harm values pool will be positively related to the Recycling subscale of the Consumer Ethics Scale.
- H<sub>1c</sub>:** The Harm values pool will be positively related to the Do Good subscale of the Consumer Ethics Scale.

As construed by Haidt, harm focuses intuitively on the avoidance of pain and suffering, with an emphasis on protection. “Harms” present in the Consumer Ethics scale would include harm to / protection of / empathy for the environment and/or providers of intellectual property. In addition, the Harm values pool’s characteristics of empathy and compassion suggest it is relevant to Do-good items in the Consumer Ethics Scale, especially those that concern the welfare of employees.

**Hypothesis Two: The Fairness Values Pool will be significantly related to one or more of the Consumer Ethics subscales.**

- H<sub>2a</sub>:** The Fairness values pool will be positively related to the Do Good subscale of the Consumer Ethics Scale.
- H<sub>2b</sub>:** The Fairness values pool will be negatively related to the Active (actively benefitting from unethical activities) subscale of the Consumer Ethics Scale.
- H<sub>2c</sub>:** The Fairness values pool will be negatively related to the Passive (passively benefitting from unethical activities) subscale of the Consumer Ethics Scale.

Haidt’s values typology presents the Fairness values pool as a set of intuitive concerns about justice, rights, and equity. Accordingly it should be expected to be especially significant in consideration of Actively and Passively benefitting from unethical activities as presented in the Consumer Ethics Scale, as well as the Do Good items which focus specifically on the fairness of direct exchanges between consumers and businesses.

**Hypothesis Three: The Ingroup values pool will not be significantly related to any of the Consumer Ethics subscales.**

As noted above, Haidt contends that, for some persons, not all of what he refers to as “values pools” are invoked in moral reasoning. It is therefore plausible, in examining the Consumer Ethics Scale, that some of the pools are more relevant than others to some respondents. Here it is expected that values relating to group cohesion and loyalty will not affect items from the Consumer Ethical Scale, which mostly portray isolated individual behaviors.

**Hypothesis Four: The Hierarchy values pool will be significantly related to one or more of the Consumer Ethics subscales.**

- H<sub>4a</sub>:** The Hierarchy values pool will be negatively related to the Downloading subscale of the Consumer Ethics Scale.
- H<sub>4b</sub>:** The Hierarchy values pool will be negatively related to the Active (actively benefitting from unethical activities) subscale of the Consumer Ethics Scale.

As construed by Haidt, the Hierarchy values pool focuses intuitively on order and conformity, with an emphasis on social hierarchies. It is expected that any of the negatively-valenced subscales of the Consumer Ethics Scale will represent a “challenge” to values concerning order and conformity, however Downloading and Active (actively benefitting from an unethical act) seem conceptually closest to a variety of illegal activities and hence more likely to draw on the Hierarchy values pool.

**Hypothesis Five: The Purity values pool will be significantly related to one or more of the Consumer Ethics subscales.**

**H<sub>5a</sub>:** The Purity values pool will be negatively related to the Active (actively benefitting from unethical activities) subscale of the Consumer Ethics Scale.

**H<sub>5b</sub>:** The Purity values pool will be negatively related to the Passive (passively benefitting from unethical activities) subscale of the Consumer Ethics Scale.

Most of the items in the purity values pool represent the intuitive disapproval of unnatural, disgusting acts, and other forms of transgressions. Therefore it is expected that the Purity values pool will not be associated with positively-valenced subscales (i.e., Recycling and Do Good items). Rather, it is expected that the Purity values will be significantly related to condemnation of negatively-valenced items, specifically Actively and Passively benefitting from unethical activities. Finally, although not hypothesized, it is expected here that the Consumer Ethics subscales Questionable and No Harm – being relatively less ethically intense – will be unrelated to the values pools.

### METHODOLOGY

Data for the study were collected across nine sections of seven different courses, both online and face to face, in the College of Business of a regional state-supported university in the United States, and from a sampling frame including approximately 1,500 members of national professional organizations of business professors. The sample itself was comprised of both junior- and senior-level undergraduate and graduate business students, as well as non-student professionals. Responses to the survey were completely anonymous; no identifying information was requested, and prior to taking the survey, respondents were given all information necessary to secure their informed consent. All students in the sample were subsequently debriefed as to the purpose of the survey. Although there was no opportunity to provide debriefing for the non-student respondents in the online survey, the email solicitation was carefully worded so as to secure their informed consent as well. The final

count included 261 completed surveys. As a precaution, two different versions of the survey were distributed to minimize the effects of order bias. In addition, consistency checks were performed on the surveys to spot unreliable response sets, producing a final total of 243 usable surveys.

Data for the Haidt and the Muncy & Vitell scales were then analyzed for reliability using Cronbach's alpha; items reducing the reliability of any subscales were subsequently removed. Next, the data set was subjected to confirmatory factor analysis, and following validation of the underlying theoretical structure of the measures, a path analysis was conducted to examine the hypothesized relationships. All the items from the Haidt measures, the Muncy & Vitell Consumer Ethics Scale, and the path analysis can be seen in the appendix.

### RESULTS

After performing reliability checks, and removing five (of thirty) items from the scales reducing the reliability for the measures used in the study, all but one of the measures demonstrate satisfactory reliability, as shown in Tables 2 and 3. For the values pools in the Haidt measure, Cronbach's coefficient alpha range from .58 to .73. Clearly the reliability for the fairness, ingroup and authority values pools are not optimal, but, as noted by Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham (2006), "the generally agreed upon lower limit for Cronbach's alpha is .70, although it may decrease to .60 in exploratory research." Four of the five values pool measures in this study satisfy Hair et al.'s criterion. The relatively lower alphas for these constructs should not be surprising when we consider Wilson's (1993, p. xiii) comment that "...the standard supplied by one's moral sense is often, indeed usually, rather general and imprecise." Alpha values for the Consumer Ethics Scale were generally good; coefficient alphas range from .66 to .85. The mean scores on the items in the Haidt measure vary; however all except two means were above the midpoint of the scale (2.5 on a 5-point scale), indicating reliance on/endorsement of the item (see Table 2). Mean values on almost all of the variables in the Consumer Ethics scale appear to be in the expected direction. For the positively-valenced

items in the Recycling and Do Good dimensions, means above the midpoint of the scale (above 3 on a 6-point scale) indicate respondents' approval of or support for these behaviors (see Table 3). The negatively-valenced items Download, Active, Passive, and Questionable, mostly show mean scores below the midpoint of the scale, to indicate respondents' condemnation of the activities. Respondents appear to feel that two of four of the No Harm activities are relatively benign, as evidenced by their lower scores.

To validate the factorial structure of the Moral Values measure and the Consumer Ethics Scale, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. Of the Haidt moral values items, 22 of 25 show significant loadings, with T-values ranging from 2.00 to 13.86, all significant at  $p < .05$ , as indicated in Table 2. Three items had insignificant loadings. Although the  $X^2$  value was on the high side, this is presumably due to sample size. Overall, the model performed well on the criteria specified by Schumacker & Lomax (2010), who specify that good model fit

**TABLE 2:**  
**Moral Values Dimensions, Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

Value Dimension	Item	Average	T Value**	Coefficient	subscale	
					alpha	mean
Harm	Emotionally	3.65	8.29	.65	.72	3.65
Harm	Weak	3.26	10.05	.86		
Harm	Cruel	3.93	12.84	.91		
Harm	Compassion*	3.67	6.96	.52		
Fairness	Treated	3.67	10.34	.73	.66	3.84
Fairness	Unfairly	3.88	9.23	.64		
Fairness	Rights	4.10	9.17	.69		
Fairness	Fairly*	3.76	6.04	.54		
Fairness	Justice*	3.79	4.34	.27		
Ingroup	Love Country	2.55	8.45	.79	.58	3.00
Ingroup	Betray	3.61	12.78	.90		
Ingroup	Loyalty	3.06	13.86	1.04		
Ingroup	History*	3.66	1.95 (n/s)	.15		
Ingroup	Family*	2.99	2.00	.19		
Ingroup	Team*	2.16	.30 (n/s)	.03		
Hierarchy	Respect	3.17	10.49	.80	.62	3.25
Hierarchy	Tradition	2.31	7.46	.60		
Hierarchy	Chaos	3.27	11.19	.85		
Hierarchy	Kidrespect*	4.24	5.16	.30		
Purity	God	3.09	6.98	.84	.73	2.98
Purity	Harmless*	2.86	4.83	.46		
Purity	Unnatural*	2.61	3.45	.35		
Purity	Disgusting	2.65	9.88	.09		
Purity	Decency	3.68	11.36	.84		
Purity	Chastity*	2.99	.71 (n/s)	.11		
$X^2 = 356.41$ (df = 230); $p = .00$			Normed Fit Index (NFI) = .92			
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .048; Root Mean Square Residual = .11			Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = .89, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = .85			
Scaling: 0 = not at all relevant, 1= not very relevant, 2=slightly relevant, 3=somewhat relevant, 4=very relevant, 5=extremely relevant						
*Scaling: 0 = strongly disagree, 1= moderately disagree, 2= slightly disagree, 3=slightly agree, 4=moderately agree, 5=strongly agree						

\*\*all paths significant at  $p < .05$ , except as noted (n/s)

is indicated by  $X^2$  probability values  $> .05$ , a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)  $\leq .05$ , T values for the paths  $\geq 1.96$ , Goodness of Fit and Adjusted Goodness of Fit indices (GFI and AGFI) as close as possible to .95 and a Normed Fit Index (NFI) as close as possible to .95. As shown in Table 2,

the confirmatory factor analysis of the Haidt scale performs well on most of these criteria:  $X^2=356.41$ ,  $p = .00$ , RMSEA = .048, GFI and AGFI = .92 and .89, respectively, NFI = .92, and all but three T values in the acceptable range.

**TABLE 3:**  
**Consumer Ethics Dimensions, Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

Dimension (Consumer Ethics Scale)	Item	average	T Value**	Coefficient	subscale	
					alpha	mean
Download	Download	2.66	12.10	.98	.66	2.60
Download	Counterfeit	2.53	9.00	.72		
Recycling	Recycle*	3.87	13.75	.82	.77	4.11
Recycling	Protect*	3.84	11.65	.78		
Recycling	Materials*	4.63	10.11	.43		
Do Good	Cashier*	4.56	14.53	.73	.73	4.52
Do Good	Miscalculate*	4.48	13.06	.75		
Do Good	Tip*	4.53	6.35	.34		
Active	Own Fault	1.86	10.15	.71	.79	1.51
Active	Mislead	1.54	13.09	.75		
Active	Access	1.53	14.21	.69		
Active	Soda	1.35	10.40	.53		
Active	Stolen	1.28	7.59	.34		
Passive	Cable TV	2.11	14.32	.93	.85	2.08
Passive	Lying	1.93	15.36	.92		
Passive	Not Saying	1.95	14.34	.90		
Passive	Change	1.83	14.09	.82		
Passive	Free CDs	2.79	8.49	.69		
Passive	Shoplift	1.88	7.23	.44		
Questionable	Coupon	2.59	12.42	.91	.82	2.24
Questionable	Gift	2.31	12.32	.85		
Questionable	Merchandise	2.07	12.3	.85		
Questionable	Automobile	2.33	11.31	.88		
Questionable	Tax Return	1.88	8.38	.55		
No Harm	Software	2.39	14.70	.97	.71	3.37
No Harm	Burning	2.88	16.36	1.15		
No Harm	Not Liking	4.03	3.91	.30		
No Harm	Taping	4.16	7.60	.53		
$X^2 = 415.79$ (df = 315); $p = .00$			Normed Fit Index (NFI) = .95			
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .036, Root Mean Square Residual = .058			Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = .89, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = .86			
Scaling: 1 = strongly believe that it is wrong      2      3      4      5 = strongly believe that it is not wrong						

\*items "ethically valenced," e.g., "correcting a bill that has been miscalculated in your favor;"  
all other items "unethically valenced," e.g., "drinking a can of soda in a store without paying for it."  
\*\*all paths significant at  $p < .05$

The Consumer Ethics Scale performed similarly in the confirmatory factor analysis, as seen in Table 3, with  $X^2 = 415.79$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $RMSEA = .036$ ,  $GFI$  and  $AGFI = .89$  and  $.86$  respectively,  $NFI = .95$ , and all  $T$  values  $\geq 1.96$ .

To test the hypotheses in this study, path analysis was used. To conduct the path analysis, means scores for each of the subscales (labeled "dimensions" in the tables) were computed. Items within each subscale may be seen in Tables 2 and 3. Data in Table 4 show a good fit between the path model and the data:  $X^2 = 43.47$ ,  $p = .012$ ,  $RMSEA = .056$ ,  $GFI$  and  $AGFI = .97$  and  $.91$ , respectively,  $NFI = .97$ ,  $RMR = .053$ , and several significant paths from the values pools to the consumer ethics items are identified.

Since the Haidt items are scored such that higher means indicate greater reliance on/endorsement of a values pools, higher mean scores on the Consumer Ethics Scale indicate more approval of Recycling and Do Good, and lower mean scores indicate more condemnation of Active, Passive, Questionable, and No harm, significant and positive  $T$  values for any path from Haidt's measures to a Consumer Ethics item would indicate support for hypothesized relationships. Specifically, Hypothesis one, that the Harm values pool will be significantly related to three of the subscales from the Consumer Ethics Scale received partial support. H1b, which predicts a significant positive relationship between Harm and the Recycling subscale is supported ( $T = 5.08$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Respondents' greater reliance on/endorsement of the Harm values is significantly related to their approval of recycling. H1a and H1c, predicting Harm's negative relationship to Downloading and positive relationship to Do Good were not supported.

Hypothesis Two, which predicts significant paths between the Fairness values pool and Do Good, Active, and Passive Consumer Ethics subscales was not supported, as all three paths failed to reach significance. Interestingly, Hypothesis Three, which predicts the Ingroup values pool will be unrelated to any of the Consumer Ethics subscales was not supported. Data in Table 4 show that respondents' greater reliance on/endorsement of the Ingroup values

is significantly and positively related to their approval of downloading music from the internet without buying it, and buying counterfeit goods ( $T = 3.46$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Hypothesis Four, which predicts significant paths between the Hierarchy values pool and Downloading and Active Consumer Ethics subscales was not supported, as both paths failed to reach significance. Finally, in support of Hypothesis Five, respondents' greater reliance on/endorsement of the Purity values pool is significantly related to their disapproval of Actively and Passively benefitting from unethical activities ( $T = -2.69$  and  $-4.83$  respectively,  $p < .05$ ). More significantly, respondents' reliance on/endorsement of the Purity values pool is significantly related to fully six of the seven Consumer Ethics subscales: the Purity values pool is negatively related to Downloading ( $T = -3.50$ ), negatively related to Recycling ( $T = -3.38$ ), negatively related to Questionable items ( $T = -4.47$ ), and negatively related to the No Harm subscale ( $T = -4.31$ ).

## DISCUSSION

It is worth noting at the outset of this discussion that the data overall is consistent with some basic expectations, particularly in the case of the Consumer Ethics measures. Data in Table 2 show clearly that, with the highest average score, the Fairness values pool seems to have the most endorsement of/reliance on in the sample (average =  $3.84/5.00$ ), followed by Harm, Hierarchy, Ingroup, and Purity, respectively. And of the Consumer Ethics subscales, Table 3 data shows most approval for Do Good items (average =  $4.52/6$ ), followed by Recycling, No Harm (average =  $3.37/6$ , at approximately the midpoint of the scale), Downloading, Questionable, Passive, and Active (the latter 4 having means of  $2.60$ ,  $2.24$ ,  $2.08$ , and  $1.51$ , respectively, and all below the midpoint of the scale, representing the view that these behaviors are wrong).

In addition, several of the hypothesized paths were in the expected direction, although in at least two instances, the results are somewhat equivocal. Clearly, additional research using the Haidt values measures is needed to confirm or qualify the findings here. At the core of the

**TABLE 4:**  
**Path Analysis of Values and the Consumer Ethics Scale**

Value Dimension	Consumer Ethics Items	T Value*	Coefficient
Harm	Downloading	.30 (n/s)	.02
Harm	Recycling	5.08	.33
Harm	Do Good	1.58 (n/s)	.12
Fairness	Do Good	-.72 (n/s)	-.05
Fairness	Active	-1.60 (n/s)	-.10
Fairness	Passive	-1.34 (n/s)	-.06
Ingroup	Downloading	3.46	.23
Hierarchy	Downloading	-.92 (n/s)	-.07
Hierarchy	Active	.24 (n/s)	.02
Purity	Downloading	-3.50	-.25
Purity	Recycling	-3.38	-.22
Purity	Do Good	1.75 (n/s)	.12
Purity	Active	-2.69	-.19
Purity	Passive	-4.83	-.29
Purity	Questionable	-4.47	-.28
Purity	No Harm	-4.31	-.27
X <sup>2</sup> = 43.47 (df = 25); p = .012		Normed Fit Index (NFI) = .97	
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .056, Root Mean Square Residual = .053		Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = .97, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = .91	

\*all paths significant at p < .05, except as noted

Harm/care values pool is a deep sensitivity to cruelty, suffering, and compassion – especially as it applies to other persons. It appears these same instincts play out in the form of approval when the object of concern is the environment and environmentally-friendly practices (in this case, recycling).

Although respondents appear to rely on/endorse the Fairness values pool, this reliance did not yield significant paths to any of the Consumer Ethics subscales. Given the sample’s reliance noted above on Harm and Fairness, and the weak influence of those intuitions on the Consumer Ethics scale, it seems reasonable to attribute this to the fact that the items in the Harm measure – suffering, cruelty, and weakness – are more “grave” than the ethical issues implicit in the Consumer Ethics scale. And in the case of Fairness, the emphasis there on rights and justice, and the role of governments and society make this values pool at once more abstract and distant from concerns

in the Consumer Ethics scale, which mostly focuses on individual choices and private acts. In the cases of Ingroup and Hierarchy, these intuitions seem to invoke social relationships, which again, are somewhat different from the Consumer Ethics issues. The only path here that was significant – the Ingroup values’ endorsement of Downloading – seems to run counter to expectations. Perhaps the explanation is one of “us versus them:” that – in this sample – intuitions about loyalty to family and team are related to approval of activities that are actually detrimental to people who are, after all, “others.” These others would include producers of intellectual property: those in the music, film, and software businesses, especially. Clearly, this is only surmise and more research is needed.

The Purity values pool produced the strongest relationships and the most interesting results in this study. Of the “unethical” items in the Consumer Ethics scale (Downloading, Active,

Passive, and Questionable), reliance on/endorsement of Purity intuitions was significantly and negatively related to all. As we would expect, Purity is strongly associated with disapproval of unethical activities. More interesting is the relationship of this pool to the “ethical” items, Recycling and Do Good, where the opposite relationship doesn’t appear quite as we would expect. Although the loading of Purity on Do Good was positive and in the expected direction, the path failed to reach significance. On the other hand, Purity intuitions are negatively related to Recycling: in this sample, this value is associated with disapproval of recycling.

At this point it is premature to speculate, but still worth wondering whether the sense of purity is fundamentally punitive: quicker to condemn injustices than to give praise where it is due. Perhaps the intuitive sense of disgust and transgression acts as a sort of “trip wire” that fosters more severe ethical judgments of unethical behaviors, and occasionally ostensibly ethical behaviors such as recycling. If this circumstance is not limited to consumer ethics and can be found in other contexts (e.g., workplace ethical issues, conflicts of interest, privacy), this finding might provide an interesting prologue to Jones’s model of ethical intensity (1991), in which he depicts an ethically intense situation in terms of magnitude and probability of consequences, social consensus, concentration of effect, temporal immediacy, and social, cultural, psychological, and physical proximity. Jones’s criteria are all perceptions, System II output, much like this sample’s judgments about consumer ethics are cognitively-mediated, and these may also be influenced by underlying values as presented in this study. Based on the findings in this study, it is fair to ask whether one’s propensity to recognize and classify ethical issues as Jones depicts depends on the operation of intuitive values, such as harm, fairness, purity.

Clearly, these findings and this alignment of approval and condemnation remain open to further examination. Why does the purity values pool seem to endorse “doing good” but not the “recycling” subscale of the Consumer Ethics Scale? One possibility comes from Kirklin (2007), who speculates that in various situations, values come into conflict or are

given different priorities by different people, depending on the circumstances. Doran (2009) makes the similar argument that behavior consistent with one value may conflict with another value.

It is also plausible to expect that other qualitative distinctions exist among harm, fairness, ingroup, hierarchy, and purity, and that these might be identified with further research. Schweder’s (1990) typology would suggest that harm and fairness should be classified as an ethic of autonomy, while purity concerns lie within the domain of an ethic of divinity. Why and how autonomy and divinity interact with this sample of students, educators, and practitioners – if this is the underlying factor – remains to be explored.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study presents evidence of relationships between underlying intuitive values and consumer ethical judgments, and leaves many questions unanswered, awaiting further research. Several limitations should be acknowledged here so that the future pursuit of these questions may proceed successfully. First among these is the sample. While care was taken to select a variety of respondents, including students, academics, and practitioners, and a large sample was ultimately collected, it is not possible at this point to establish the representativeness of the sample. As regards the method of the study, it would obviously be preferable to have observational measures of intuitive processes. Using a pencil and paper methodology may possibly compromise the “intuitive” quality of the responses to the Haidt items, even though Haidt (2001, 2004, 2007) uses the method himself in published studies. The logistical problems associated with collecting this type of data by observational means or by fMRI are probably the reasons that paper and pencil measures are the approach used in similar research (e.g., Bagozzi, Sekerka, & Hill, 2009; Homer & Kahle 1988; Rokeach 1973). Possibly a result of this difficulty are the resulting low alpha values for the values measures reported in Table 2. As noted by Wilson (1993) above, phenomena of this type are “general and imprecise.” In their study of values, Homer &

Kahle (1988) report similar results with alpha values for their five values subscales of .69, .68, .53, .64, and .71.

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Hunt & Vitell (1993) emphasize the “unquestionable impact of an individual’s value system in the (ethical) decision process and urge researchers to explore “many different values” and their various impacts on ethical decision making. Even though the five values pools in this study had only a partial impact on the Consumer Ethics scale, it seems reasonable to expect that other studies of important ethical settings in marketing may benefit from a deeper understanding of values structures, including those noted above. For example, do hierarchy and ingroup values affect the ethical judgments and behaviors of sales managers and sales people? If it is important to understand consumers’ and business persons’ attitudes in these areas, then it clearly is also important to recognize the role of values as “...the criteria for judgment, preferences, and choice” (Williams, 1979).

It also seems likely that the other values will – if at first only intuitively – affect consumers’ responses to organizations, their conduct, and policies. The harm values, for example, may be invoked if consumers perceive an abuse of power and authority (i.e., banks “too large to fail”) causing economic harm to markets and consumers, or when ingredient scares, product recalls, and product liability stories appear in the media. And presumably, the values in the harm pool will guide the consumer to be more receptive to organizations that successfully establish their credentials in the area of sustainability and green marketing.

Although connections were not well established in this study for the justice values pool, it nevertheless seems highly relevant to numerous corporate ethical issues such as abuse of market power or confidential information, human resources issues and discrimination, conflicts of interest, truth in advertising, customer service, retail sales activities, and the overall trustworthiness of marketing communications (the theme of a recent television ad campaign for Ally Bank depicting, in one ad, a suave bank executive misleading a small girl).

For the proactive organization, the most significant implication of this study is that there exists a motivated audience with an identifiable set of intuitive concerns. These are opportunities to signal their values to consumers and to deepen the engagement of targeted audiences and consumer groups with the organization’s brand. Since we know that people are more likely to attend to and elaborate information that agrees with their attitudes, it may also be that they do the same with information congruent with underlying values, although this remains to be investigated. Organizations like Chevron and Georgia Pacific probably see themselves as doing Public Relations when they promote their sustainability initiatives. But at the same time, they may in fact be linking their corporate values to consumers’ unspoken values. Other groups – for example, drug abuse resistance groups, not-for-profits opposed to all manner of damaging and destructive behaviors, and political and/or religious groups – will benefit when they clearly telegraph their values mindful of the consumer’s responsiveness to the kinds of transgressions in the disgust values pool. Making values-based outcomes the objective of promotional activities, and addressing challenges in measuring these, would seem to be a meaningful next step for researchers and practitioners.

We hope that researchers and commentators will continue to expand our understanding of the dual nature of ethical decision making – rooted as it is in intuitive values and in conscious deliberation – and particularly the critical importance of their joint operation in our decision making. It is now commonly understood that the operation of intuitive processes without the stamp of conscious deliberation can produce unfavorable outcomes. Brandt (1979) suggests that intuition is little more than socially-inculcated bias, echoing Dewey’s (1932) position that a solely intuitive approach to problems (what he called “an ethic of approbation and condemnation”) has a tendency to enforce a customary morality. And long before it occurred to anyone to say “if it feels good, do it,” Dewey cautioned that over-reliance on intuition leads people to neglect the purpose of their actions, and to justify what they feel inclined to do on the ground that their feelings when doing it were innocent and

amiable (1932, p. 174.) Tobler, Kalis, & Kalenscher (2008) and Sunstein (2005) suggest that although intuitive processes may be sufficient most of the time, they can fail or result in inconsistent behavior in difficult circumstances. Finally, it is easy to imagine that reliance on/endorsement of the “authority” values pool could lead to unwarranted compliance with authority figures, or that the “ingroup” or “purity” values pools could be associated with cronyism, nepotism, racism, less tolerance for diversity, and other forms of discrimination.

On the other hand, advances in our understanding of values and intuitive processes may lead to important insights in the business ethics context, including a better understanding of decision makers’ beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Posner, 2009). Central to this discussion is the role of values in learning and moral maturation (Vitell, et al. 2009). There is no reason to assume that values and intuitive ways of responding to ethical dilemmas are somehow fixed, in childhood or later on. The extent to which values may be learned, their plasticity in response to cultural influences in the workplace, and their contribution to decision making represents opportunities for practitioners, educators, and researchers.

If it is true that people in organizations sometimes engage in unethical behaviors when they are uncertain of their own values (Vitell, et al., 2009), then it would seem necessary for everyone in the organization to examine their otherwise “invisible” intuitive reactions, to examine their inclinations, preferences, and assumptions to make explicit what is otherwise unexamined. This is probably what ethicist Dan Ariely had in mind when he wrote in his blog: “...we’ll all be better off if we challenge our intuitions.” So it’s clear that values can be a help or a hindrance to better decision making; what’s needed are good measures and methods to relate them to the everyday world. Kirklin (2007) has written that the challenge for ethicists is to engage the listener or reader – or the customer, worker, or manager – in moral reasoning in a way that recognizes and responds to their intuitive feelings about what is acceptable or desirable. We agree; it is becoming increasingly clear that values and

intuition don’t just contribute to moral reasoning, they drive the process.

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## APPENDIX

### Haidt's Moral Values Scale items (with variable names)

- \*Response format: not at all, not very, slightly, somewhat, very, extremely relevant
- \*\*Response format: strongly, moderately or slightly disagree; slightly, moderately, or strongly agree

### Harm Items:

- \*Whether or not someone suffered emotionally (emotionally)
- \*Whether or not someone cared for someone weak or vulnerable (weak)
- \*Whether or not someone was cruel (cruel)
- \*\*Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue. (compassion)
- \*\*One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal. (animal)
- \*\*It can never be right to kill a human being. (kill)

### Fairness Items:

- \*Whether or not some people were treated differently than others (treated)
- \*Whether or not someone acted unfairly (unfairly)
- \*Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights (rights)
- \*\*When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring everyone is treated fairly. (fairly)
- \*\*Justice is the most important requirement for a society. (justice)
- \*\*I think it's morally wrong that rich children inherit a lot of money while poor children inherit nothing. (rich)

### Ingroup Items:

- \*Whether or not someone's action showed love for his or her country (lovecountry)
- \*Whether or not someone did something to betray his or her group (betray)
- \*Whether or not someone showed a lack of loyalty (loyalty)
- \*\*I am proud of my country's history. (history)
- \*\*People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong. (family)
- \*\*It is more important to be a team player than to express oneself. (team)

### Hierarchy Items:

- \*Whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority (respect)
- \*Whether or not someone conformed to the traditions of society (traditions)
- \*Whether or not an action caused chaos or disorder (chaos)

\*\*Respect for authority is something all children need to learn. (kidrespect)  
\*\*Men and women each have different roles to play in society. (sexroles)  
\*\*If I were a soldier and disagreed with my commanding officer's orders, I would obey anyway because that is my duty. (soldier)

**Purity Items:**

\*Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency (decency)  
\*Whether or not someone did something disgusting (disgusting)  
\*Whether or not someone acted in a way that God would approve of (god)  
\*\*People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed. (harmlessdg)  
\*\*I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural. (unnatural)  
\*\*Chastity is an important and valuable virtue. (chastity)

**Muncy and Vitell's Consumer Ethics Survey items (strongly believe that it is/is not wrong)**

**Downloading Items:**

Downloading music from the internet instead of buying it (downloading)  
Buying counterfeit goods instead of original manufacturers' brands (counterfeit)

**Recycling Items:**

Buying products labeled as "environmentally friendly" even if they don't work as well as competing products (friendly)  
Purchasing something made of recycled materials even though it is more expensive (recycled)  
Buying only from companies that have a strong record of protecting the environment (protect)  
Recycling materials such as cans, bottles, newspapers, etc. (materials)

**Do Good Items:**

Returning to the store and paying for an item that the cashier mistakenly did not charge you for (cashier)  
Correcting a bill that has been miscalculated in your favor (miscalculate)

Giving a larger than expected tip to a waiter or waitress (tip)  
Not purchasing products from companies that you believe don't treat their employees fairly (employees)

**Active (actively benefit from unethical activity) Items:**

Returning damaged goods when the damage was your fault (ownfault)  
Giving misleading price information to a clerk for an unpriced item (misleading)  
Using a long distance access code that does not belong to you (access)  
Drinking a can of soda in a store without paying for it (soda)  
Reporting a lost item as "stolen" to an insurance company in order to collect the insurance money (stolen)

**Passive (passively benefit from unethical activities) Items:**

Moving into a residence, finding that the cable TV is still hooked up, and using it without paying for it (CATV)  
Lying about a child's age to get a lower price (lying)  
Not saying anything when the waiter or waitress miscalculates a bill in your favor (notsaying)  
Getting too much change and not saying anything (change)  
Joining a CD club just to get some free CD's with no intention of buying any (freeCDs)  
Observing someone shoplifting and ignoring it (shoplift)

**Questionable (ethically questionable) Items:**

Using an expired coupon for merchandise (coupon)  
Returning merchandise to a store by claiming that it was a gift when it was not (gift)  
Using a coupon for merchandise you did not buy (merchandise)  
Not telling the truth when negotiating the price of a new automobile (automobile)  
Stretching the truth on an income tax return (taxreturn)

**No Harm (no harm no foul) Items:**

Installing software on your computer without buying it (software)

“Burning” a CD rather than buying it (burning)

Returning merchandise after buying it and not liking it (notliking)

Taping a movie off the television (taping)

Spending over an hour trying on clothing and not buying anything (clothing)