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MEASUREMENT OF CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

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Abstract

Durkheim's theory – that virtually anything can be viewed as sacred (or not) and that the sacred is cultural-specific and part of an expressively ordered *Gestalt* – is tested comparing conceptions of religious and non-religious identities in six cultures. In our cultural comparison we employ a Culture Gender Ratio (CGR) that standardizes cultural differences with gender differences in the respective cultures. The CGR serves as an estimate of cultural intersubjectivity. Following Durkheim, we find that intersubjective agreement does not differ for religious and nonreligious identities within each of our six cultures. On the other hand, the CGR does detect differences in meaning for such identities across cultures, demonstrating its utility as a benchmark in comparing culture-bound concepts.

Keywords: Sacred, profane, cross-cultural comparison, affect control theory, culture gender ratio

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INTRODUCTION

In viewing religion cross-culturally, one would expect variation in how religious concepts are understood. Confucianism, for instance, is dramatically different from Islam, which in turn has fundamental disagreements with Judeo-Christian beliefs. The magnitude and quality of these differences, however, have been hard to capture reliably, other than through anthropological and philosophical methods. Indeed, comparing religious concepts across different sociohistorical contexts has been a common concern in recent literature in the sociology of religion (Beyer, 2006; Borowik, 2011; Bruce, 2001; Davie, 2006; Ellison & Sherkat, 2008). While this study did not engage in a comparative analysis of religions, we did consider how one might consistently compare aspects of religion within different meaning systems. In this article we address this issue through systematically investigating the meanings of multiple religious identities across cultures.

To do this, we drew upon existing datasets collected by Affect Control Theory (ACT) researchers in six countries, all of which contain the same terms for religious personages as rated by members of the culture in which the data were collected. As all datasets were collected using the same ACT methodology, we were able to compare sentiments about these religious identities across the six datasets. In doing so, we sought to clarify cultural differences in the "expressive order" (Goffman, 1967, p. 9), the process whereby individuals monitor their social environment to maintain a flow of events consistent with their needs and beliefs. Expressive order in turn shapes religion and beliefs about the sacred. Using a standardized measure, we illuminated similarities and differences in the affective meanings of religious identities within each society's expressive order, making more empirically comparable how people of different cultures define things as sacred or profane in their society. As encouraged by Smith (2008), we drew on the theories of social psychology and the sociology of emotions and concepts from the study of religion in hopes of generating a fruitful new tool for the cross-cultural analysis of beliefs.

Culture and Meaning

Following the symbolic interactionist tradition (Mead, 1967/1934; Shibutani, 1986), we defined culture in its most micro sense as a body of shared meanings. From this perspective sharing differentiates individuality (uniqueness of each person) from normativeness (commonalities of the group) (Heise, 2007). Since meaning emerges from social interaction, repeated interaction builds a body of shared meanings. The degree of sharing is enhanced if people share languages, national identities, or religions (Osgood et al., 1975; Osgood & Tzeng, 1990).

Within a cultural body of shared meanings, there are variations by subgroup based on social structural differences that produce patterned interactions. These differences can take on the form of subcultures that emerge from ethnic, religious or racial divisions, or

they can result from social status discrepancies based on demographics like gender, age or class. While different cultures can have very different compilations of religions or races, they all share differences in sexes that lead them to construe gender concepts. While gender patterned meanings are, of course, inextricably bound with the larger culture which encompasses them, and the degree of difference between genders varies substantially from culture to culture, they are universally present. It is this assumption of universal presence that made us choose gender differences as stable benchmarks for intercultural differences (Schneider, 2002). This universality made gender differences within a culture likely the most stable form of intracultural variation by which to benchmark intercultural variation.

From this perspective, we used gender subgroup differences to benchmark and illuminate the magnitudes of cultural differences found in national and Western-Eastern comparisons. The West was represented by the US and the English speaking portion of Canada as North America as well as Ireland and Germany as European representatives. National boundaries and histories define distinctive cultures, Germany adding some language diversity. The East was geopolitically represented by China and Japan. Both nations are distinctively different in their historical development, religion and language. Their congregation as Eastern cultures was more justifiable by their difference to the West than their homogeneity. Their historical isolation to the West, their profound differences in philosophy, language, alphabet and grammar, their non-Judeo-Christian tradition and their historical political forms of organization in a different hemisphere define their profound differentiation form the West.

Such assumptions, of course, largely beg the question of monolithic treatments of national culture (Valsiner, 2000). There is, however, little in the way of objective or absolute differentiation between cultures. Indeed, such differentiation is rather fluid and sometimes imposed depending on the research agendas and theoretical frames of those asking the question. Thus, rather than attempting to rectify this problem, we accepted relatively uncritically the notion that cultural homogeneity is greater within national borders than across them. We then sought to focus on the level of interactionally-constructed shared meanings. The goal of this article was to approach the problem starting from micro-interactional research and attempting to establish a constant within each of the national cultures we analyzed. By developing such a constant, actually benchmarking a culture with internal group differences in its own shared meanings, we sought to provide a means of increasing comparability of even so abstract sets of concepts as religious identities. We hoped this measure could serve as a basis on which to frame further studies of the nature of culture and cultural comparisons, and perhaps contribute to future studies on the nature of culture. To begin this endeavor, we focused on the basic definitions of the "sacred" and the "profane," using Durkheim's classic distinctions.

The Sacred and the Profane

Durkheim (1965/1915) provides the classic social science definitions of the sacred versus the profane, and religious phenomena. His basic distinctions between the "sacred" and the "profane" enable the comparison of religious practices and understandings across cultures and across belief systems. According to Durkheim, the *sacred* are things set apart and forbidden to the common person. The sacred are also beliefs and practices that unite all who adhere to them into a single, collective moral community (p. 62). A group can define anything as sacred (p. 52). The profane is juxtaposed against sacredness as anything that should not – and cannot – touch the sacred, without punishment, harm, or recrimination. To fully escape the profane, one must forsake all profane life while assuming a sacred identity (p. 55).

Sacred identities are supported and maintained through enacting collective beliefs and rites. Religious beliefs express the nature of sacred things, the relationships between the sacred and profane, and their impact on life and death. Rites**,** according to Durkheim, prescribe the rules of conduct when in the presence of sacred things (1965/1915) – how, when and to whom to pray; to make sacrifices; to perform rites of propitiation; etc. A place of worship translates common beliefs into common rites, embodying the sacred world and its relations with the profane world. Some type of house of worship typically unites a moral community of believers within a single faith. An individual's lone sense of truth and faith would quickly weaken without buttressing from communal rituals and congregational assemblies of likeminded believers. Thus the institutions of religion – churches, congregations, doctrines – are essential to the maintenance of beliefs in the sacred and to the enduring sacredness of religious identities. The variation seen across cultures in the institutions of religion should therefore be reflected in the religious identities held sacred by each faith.

Institutional Sentiments

According to Goffman (1967, p. 9), it is essential to the self-identity of the individual that a "particular expressive order is sustained – an order that regulates the flow of events, large or small, so that anything that appears to be expressed by them will be consistent with his face". In other words, to maintain the face to which he or she is committed, the individual must monitor what is occurring in the immediate environment to prevent anything that might undermine or weaken the identity they have chosen. Individuals strive to make circumstances and interactions express an order congruent with their self-presentation.

Religious beliefs are important components of self-definition and self-presentation in most societies. Actors are therefore arguably motivated to protect the expressive order supporting their defining religious concepts – and their associated sentiments – from external challenge (Heise, 2007). Individuals engage in substantial

interactional work to maintain such beliefs for themselves and others, engaging in face-work to support the self-presentations of all (Goffman, 1967). Examples of such work can be seen daily in any newspaper, as religious groups worldwide reject disagreements or threats to their belief system (sometimes violently), celebrate unifying events and rites (such as holidays), and redefine events to make sense of them within the context of their world views. Indeed, in the Durkheimian view, the expressive order binding the sacred and the profane can be seen as the embodiment of core collective sentiments and ideas that unify, uphold, affirm and reaffirm what it means to be a member of a particular society, culture or sub-culture. As such, the expressive order supporting religious identities should be stable, identifiable and measurable.

Affect Control Theory and Expressive Order

Affect Control Theory (ACT): Affect control theory codifies the symbolic interactionist work of George Herbert Mead (MacKinnon, 1994) and the microinteractional ideas of expressive order of Erving Goffman (Heise, 2007). ACT has been successfully used to empirically study the expressive order of religious and sacred identities within cultures (Heise, 2007; MacKinnon, 1994; MacKinnon & Luke, 2002; Smith-Lovin & Douglass, 1992). ACT measures expressive order by providing a tool to assess events that individuals view as not supporting that order. Specifically, the theory argues that as a result of being socialized into a particular society or group, individuals carry with them a set of cultural sentiments, or affective meanings (Heise, 2007) about all aspects of the world around them. Measurements of these affective meanings are central to the fully quantifiable Theory. Such affective meanings are built on three dimensions of feeling: Evaluation – whether something is good or bad; Potency – whether that thing is strong or weak; and Activity – whether it is active or inactive. Evaluation, potency and activity ratings provide the EPA profiles of affective meaning that originated in one of the largest quantitative cross cultural investigation of the social sciences conducted by Charles Osgood (Osgood et al., 1975) in the 1950s. The centrality these three dimensions have for the processing of meaning is most convincingly presented with the original voice of Osgood:

"First, convincingly the most important question today, as in the day of the Neanderthal, about the sign of a thing are: first, is it good or bad for me? (is it a cute Neanderthal female or a sabertooth tiger?); second, is it strong or is it weak with respect to me? (is it a sabertooth tiger or a mouse?); third, is it an active or a passive thing? (is it a sabertooth tiger or merely a pool of quicksand that I can carefully skirt?). Survival of the species has depended on answers to such questions. (Osgood & Tzeng, 1990, p. 247)."

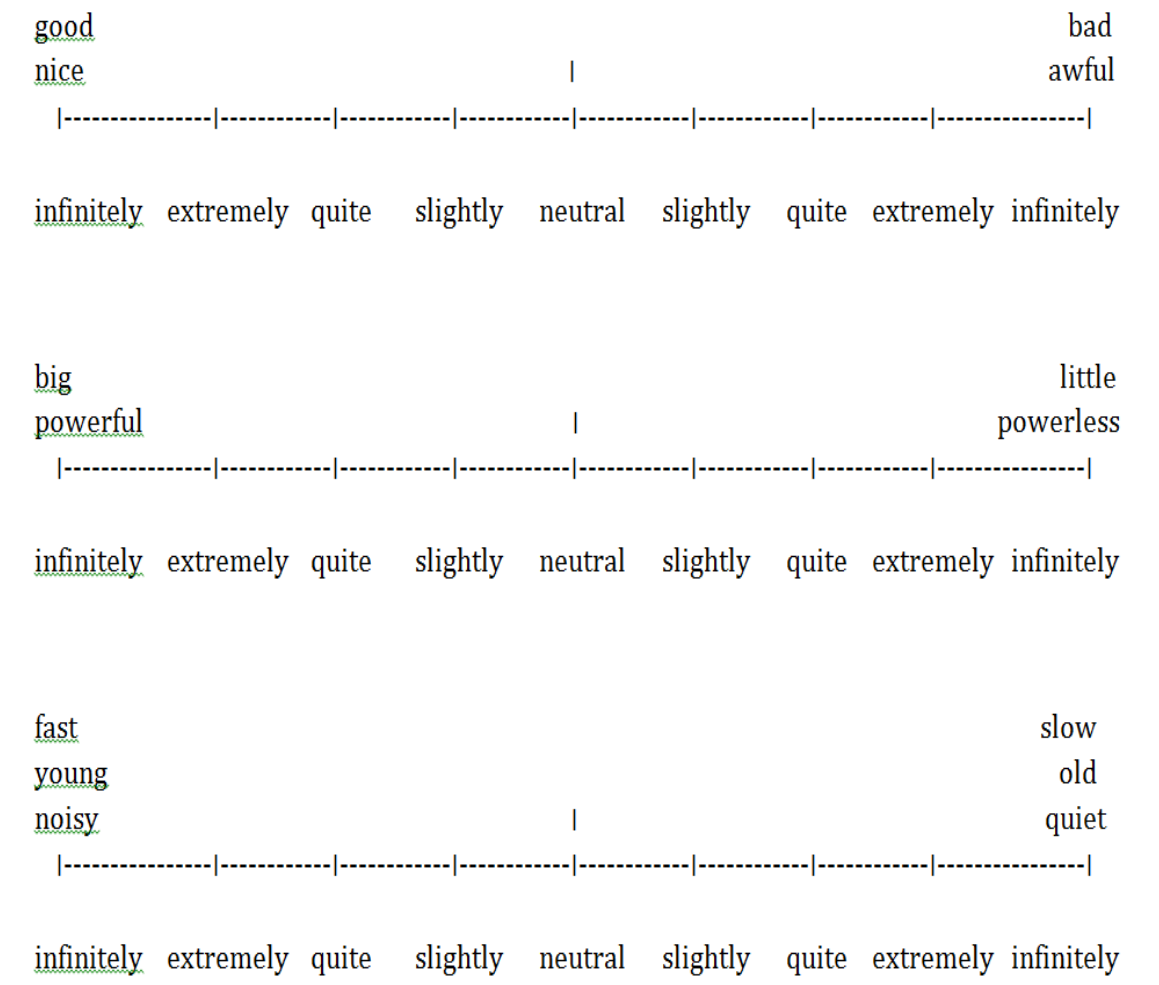

***Figure 1*.** English Language Evaluation, Potency and Activity semantic differential scales (ranging from -4.33 to + 4.33) used in the empirical collection of EPA profiles.

Affect Control Theorists have built dictionaries of meanings gathered from thousands of subjects in several cultures around the world, and use these dictionaries to make predictions about expressive order. To create these dictionaries of affective meanings, research participants responded to a series of Likert scales in their native language asking them to rate single identities, actions, emotions on the three dimensions described above: evaluation, potency, activity. Osgood et al. (1975) have shown these dimensions to exist across cultures; ACT uses them to provide a multidimensional picture of affective meanings of individual concepts. When concatenated into events (as sentences), these affective meanings can be used to accurately model and predict

emotional and behavioral reactions of participants (Heise, 2007). Examples of ratings of American cultural identities are sports star (somewhat good, powerful, very active), priest (very good, slightly powerful, somewhat inactive), gangster (very bad, powerful, active), and mother (very good, slightly powerful, neutrally active). Examples of actions are comforting (very good, slightly powerful, somewhat inactive), punching (very bad, powerful, active), kissing (good, neutrally powerful, neutrally active), scolding (slightly bad, slightly powerful, and slightly active). Examples of emotions are anger (bad, powerful, active), fear (bad, weak, inactive), enthusiasm (good, powerful, active) and love (good, neutrally powerfully, inactive).

Within religion, ACT can model interactions between religious identities based on the EPA profiles of the interactants and their actions. For example, using a computer-generated model based on EPA profiles, we can show how an American ACT prediction of the interaction between a minister and a sinner results in a recognizable expressive order of events. For a minister (quite good, fairly powerful and slightly active) acting toward a sinner (quite bad, quite weak, slightly inactive), ACT suggests the minister is more likely to be in charge of the interaction, and may do things such as trying to indoctrinate the sinner. The sinner's reaction is predicted to be something akin to exasperation, to which the minister will respond by feeling contemptuous and try to quiet the sinner. An interaction that proceeds along the lines of these expectations confirms the cultural sentiments of the situation, maintains the desired expressive order in the flow of events, and validates the identities of all participants in the eyes of observers.

A shortcoming of this example is that it is drawn entirely from the American lexicon. Before we could proceed to make predictions cross-culturally, however, we first had to determine if our tools could accurately assess differences across the expressive orders of distinct societies. Could we measure, for instance, the differences between the fundamental divisions of the sacred and the profane in disparate religions? Past research provides support for this assumption.

Measuring Religious Identities: ACT has been used previously to study the relationship between expressive order and religious role-identities, particularly with respect to how identities are maintained or changed in the face of cultural challenges or change (Heise, 2007; MacKinnon & Luke, 2002; Smith-Lovin & Douglass, 1992; MacKinnon, 1994). In work by MacKinnon and Luke (2002), for example, the authors used Affect Control Theory (ACT) to evaluate change in attitudes toward several sets of role-identities in Canada across two time periods. For the key religious identity *clergyman*, MacKinnon and Luke found declines in both potency and evaluation from 1981 to 1995. This finding, among others, reflected a larger cultural trend toward lower respect for authority in general (Giddens, 1990; Schneider & Schröder, 2012). Over time, changes in the religious expressive order produced changes in religious identities.

Another ACT study (Smith-Lovin & Douglass, 1992) illustrates how a subcultural group was able to maintain its members religious self-sentiments in the face of larger cultural challenges. This study collected affective meaning data for persons with salient Christian role-identities among members of a gay-community outreach program and a mainstream congregation of heterosexuals. They found that homosexual communities create their own sub-cultural religious sentiments. These created sentiments allow them to maintain positive face within the larger culture of mainstream American religion, which has historically rejected homosexuality.

Other work using similar assumptions about identities and expressive order has demonstrated how religious identities are conceptualized within North America, laying the groundwork for cross-cultural comparisons. MacKinnon and Heise (2007) provide perhaps the most complete analyses of North American religious identities. Their primary resource, the on-line WordNet, is the most important publicly available resource in psycholinguistic and computational linguists. Although WordNet is an English language resource, it includes English transliterations for such non-English religious role-identities as for Islam (Sunni, Iman); Hinduism (Hare-Krishna, swami); and Buddhism (Zen-Buddhist, Buddha). MacKinnon and Heise (2007) factor analyze the WordNet lexicon (Fellbaum, 1998), which organizes English nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs into synonym sets. Their North American factor analysis[1] produces two archetypes of religious role-identities for a total of 265 religious identities: (1) leaders of an ecclesia and (2) descriptors of a monotheistic deity. Ecclesiastic role-identities (Protestants, Roman Catholics, clergy, priest, rabbi, etc.) correspond to those who affirm and receive religious beliefs in the form of religious doctrine, and those who perform religious rites.

MacKinnon and Heise (2007) filtered out leadership and authoritative connotations from identities (to distinguish sacred from profane identities such as executive, businessman, strike-breaker, supervisors and subordinates). The taking of a North American ecclesiastic role-identity obligates expression of the nature of sacred things, delineation of the sacred versus profane, prescriptions of morality, and performing of religious rites as an expression of a moral community of believers. However, the second principle religious factor – monotheistic divinity – appears unique to North American conceptions of the supernatural. Recall that religion may exist completely independently of God or gods in the Durkheimian view. This implies that completely monotheistic beliefs are the exception rather than the rule. Furre and Heise (2008) build on this work to show how English language definitions of religious identities privilege Christian beliefs and encourage eccentric views of the religious identities of other faiths. To assess real differences in religious identities, therefore, requires data collected within the culture and language. Such research shows both a) the existence of dissimilar expressive orders in religion across cultures and subcultures, and b) the utility of religious identities for measuring expressive order through the associated sentiments. On the basis of these findings, we argued that our approach holds potential for empirical measurement

of cross-cultural differences in religious expressive orders. Durkheim's conceptualization of the sacred and the profane provides a theoretically sound and well-research target for this endeavor. While the above-mentioned studies have been limited to Americans and Canadians and the English language, they nonetheless provide the basis for extending to religious comparisons across more widely divergent cultures.

Measuring Religious Sentiments Cross-Culturally

One of the challenges of quantitative cross-cultural comparison is the question of substantive interpreting of magnitudes of numerical differences. Traditional empirical assessments of statistical significance are necessary but not sufficient indicators of the substance of cross-cultural differences. Thus two questions remain unanswered: what level of statistical differences observed in cross-cultural data indicates cross-cultural differences, and how substantial are these differences? To address these problems, intra-cultural differences within cultures can be used as benchmarks for cross-cultural differences. One intra-cultural difference all cultures in national comparison share is variation by gender. People within each culture have an idea how sexes might differ in their own culture. Not that their assessments of gender differences are empirically valid, but gender differences in one's own culture are an accessible comparison for most people. The average person has a clearer grasp on their intracultural gender differences than they do of intercultural differences. Using gender differences as a benchmark, however, people can actually judge how different they are from cultures that they do not even know.

While *Verstehen* (Weber, 1922/1985) of gender differences is an individual's assessment and thus subjective, gender differences also have empirical manifestation. *Verstehen*, the interpretive or participatory examination of social phenomena, offered an alternative to the positivist investigation. While detailing interpretative and positivist forms of investigation and demonstrating their relative strength and weaknesses is not the agenda of our contribution, we demonstrated that marrying the two forms of investigation had the potential to overcome the respective shortcomings of both quintessential methodological perspectives. We did not seek to extend the philosophical and ideological discussions of Jürgen Habermas (1990), Sir Karl Popper (1974), and others, but to apply the benefits of triangulating interpretative and positivist perspectives in our pragmatic methodological development. What was important for our triangulation of methodologies was that gender differences are both a cultural interpretation and a measurable empirical phenomenon. Matching the interpretation of gender differences with the interpretation of intercultural differences with their numerical representation, we provided a gauge for the interpretation of cultural differences.

Our triangulation of interpretative and empirical methodology was schematically illustrated as an equation of four variables: inter-cultural differences, intra-cultural (gender) differences, empirical measurement, and qualitative interpretation. Since three

(gender differences, empirical measurement, and qualitative interpretation) of four variables were known the equation could be solved for the one variable unknown, cross-cultural difference.

If *Verstehen* is the qualitative interpretation of gender differences as well as inter-cultural differences, and empirical variables are the numerical representation of gender differences as well as inter-cultural differences, then cross-cultural differences could be understood if we hadan understanding of gender differences in our culture and empirical measurements of cross-cultural and gender differences.

Consequently, if gender differences were interpretable and gender differences and inter-cultural differences were measured empirically, a numerical ratio of gender differences and inter-cultural differences could help the interpretation of inter-cultural differences. Creating the Culture Gender Ratio (CGR), Schneider (2002) combined rigid empirical measurements with the qualitative principles of *Verstehen* that we needed for our interpretation of cross-cultural differences. Using empirical measures of affective meanings central in ACT, the CGR standardizes inter-cultural differences on intra-cultural gender differences for any two cultures. The CGR varies from 0 (an extreme point implying that there are no cross-cultural differences besides gender differences) to unity (implying culture differences equal gender differences in both cultures) to infinity – suggesting how much greater cultural differences are compared to gender differences. A CGR value of three, for example, indicates that cross-cultural differences are three times larger in magnitude than gender differences standardized for both cultures. Small CGR ratios identify cross-cultural homogeneity while large ratios indicate cross-cultural heterogeneity. The formulas for computing the CGR values of the evaluation dimension are presented in Figure 2. CGR values for potency and activity ratings are computed respectively.

Culture Gender Ratio

$$CGR_e = \frac{CD_{e_{mf}}}{GD_{e_{Culture_1 Culture_2}}}$$

Cultural Difference

$$CD_{e_{mf}} = \sqrt{\frac{(Culture_{1_{em}} - Culture_{2_{em}})^2 + (Culture_{1_{ef}} - Culture_{2_{ef}})^2}{2}}$$

Gender Difference

$$GD_{e_{Culture_1 Culture_2}} = \sqrt{\frac{(Culture_{1\,em} - Culture_{1\,ef})^2 + (Culture_{2\,em} - Culture_{2\,ef})^2}{2}}$$

***Figure 2*.** Culture Gender Ratio (CGR) of males (m) and females (f) for the evaluation (e) dimension

Using this measure, we were able to extend previous research on religion and expressive order. In this article, we began this process by investigating cultural differences in the religious sentiments and self-meanings associated with sacred identities across cultures. To do this, we addressed the two research questions proposed earlier in this article: 1) are the sacred and the profane complementary concepts within each culture? 2) Do these concepts vary across cultures? Durkheim argues for the universal manifestation of the concepts of the sacred and the profane (1965[1915]), and this general principle assumes that the basis for religion exists worldwide. This universality does not, however, rule out variation in religious concepts across distinguishable faiths. Empirical demonstration of both the universality of sacredness and measurable cultural differences in religious identities could provide a new means of comparing religious, cultural and ideological belief systems. These analyses comprised the first step in that endeavor.

Hypotheses

In our first hypothesis we compared the sacred and the profane. First, we asked if cross-cultural religious concepts were indeed comparable. Durkheim's contention is that the sacred and profane are essentially two sides of the same cultural coin, such that whatever is not sacred is, by definition, profane. We expected that (a) these two categories would encompass all components of a culture, and (b) there would be internal consistency for each category within each culture. Expressive orders of the sacred and profane would mirror each other, not work in different ways within a culture. Following these expectations, our first hypothesis was:

Hypothesis 1: *Cross-cultural differences between religious identities should not be different from cross-cultural differences between non-religious identities.*

In other words, we expected that religious identities would be coherent and complementary parts of the belief system in every culture. Analysis should not have

reflected wider discrepancies in expected sentiments between sacred identities than it did between profane identities when all were part of the same culture.

In our second hypothesis we compared Eastern and Western religious identities. Americans, Canadians, Germans and Irish can all be said to have majority religious beliefs stemming from the Judeo-Christian tradition, whereas Japan and China are more represented by Buddhism and Confucianism. In addition, available research indicates potential differences in degree of secularization East and West. Studies that use quantitative symbolic interactionism in the investigation of this topic indicate that North Americans are the exception rather than the rule when it comes to religious beliefs and rites (Heise, 2007; MacKinnon & Heise, 2010), holding strong monotheistic views. Miller's (1998) work provides independent corroboration, arguing that the effect of religion in Japan is attenuated compared to the United States in particular, and people in Japan are more likely to receive confirmation of their social identities from secular sources. Focusing on those religions with the likely greatest discrepancies -- Eastern religions versus Western -- may provide a fruitful beginning for assessing cross-cultural differences in religious meanings. Our second hypothesis sought to test if there was a West-East split in affective meanings for religious identities.

Hypothesis 2: Religious identities are ordered by degree of intersubjectivity from East to West.

Specifically, we expected people in Western cultures to agree among themselves more regarding the meanings of sacred identities than they did with people in Eastern cultures.

It might not appear surprising that we expected finding differences in the affective meaning of religious identities that indicated basic West-East differences in the conception of sacred and the profane. Indeed, by testing our second hypothesis we not only tried to extend the scope of our study, but we pursued a methodological investigation. We wanted to demonstrate the sensitivity and validity of the new instrument, the CGR that we used to indicate intersubjectivity in cultures. Testing our first hypothesis, we used the non-significance of differences to reject the alternative hypothesis. Working with an instrument that was not yet exposed to significance testing we would be open to the critique that our instrument was simply unable to differentiate different levels of intersubjectivity. If, however, we found differences to be statistically significant in testing our second hypothesis, we would give evidence to the fact that Culture Gender Ratios are sensitive enough to indicate cultural differences; and conversely, that the failure of finding significant differences between our measures of intersubjectivity indeed would indicate the inability to differentiate the sacred from the profane in the affective differentiation of identities.

METHOD

Affective Meaning Data

Affect control theory embodies a large repository of affective meaning data sets based on psychometric improvements to what used to be known as the Semantic Differential. These affective meaning data sets consist of ratings of evaluation, potency, and activity (EPA) for six publicly available cultural lexicons (see http://www.indiana.edu/~socpsy/ACT/data.html). These lexicons build upon constant improvements in reliability and validity of a three-dimensional SD measurement theory introduced by Osgood and his associates after factor analyses of over 20 cultural data sets (Osgood, May et al., 1975). For example, the Japanese data set produces reliability coefficients above .9 for each of the three dimensions across samples of college students versus adult employees.

The entries in these lexicons embody cultural sentiments because EPA ratings within cultures show remarkable stability over at least two generations (MacKinnon & Luke, 2003). This is important because the Affect Control principle states that actors (including supernatural ones) are essentially conservative – there is a strong propensity to confirm cultural sentiments. This conservative endeavor means that actors constantly search for behaviors, partners, settings, emotions and attributions that maintain face, to put it in Goffmanian terms.

For understanding cultures, it was necessary that our subjects be good informants about their respective cultures. For the cross-cultural comparability of the data it was central that subjects can be assumed to be of similar sociodemographic background. All data were collected from undergraduate students. While this limited the cultural heterogeneity captured within each society, it increased our certainty that we are comparing 'apples to apples.' Improving the comparability between cultures, US undergraduates were matched in age, class and education level. This was, for example, necessary in the German data collection where students remained longer in the high school equivalent institution and were more mature entering the university as undergraduates.

Undergraduate students, or their equivalent, served as cultural informants reporting the common culture that is reproduced amongst the general population (Heise, 2010). While in a traditional opinion survey participants describe a population of individuals who are representative for the special case under scrutiny, we sought the quality of the informants of a culture. Traditional survey research seeks a sample that reflects the variation inherent to the target population. In contrast, our investigation profited from the normativeness of the informants, not their diversity. Applied to our case, we were not seeking a sample of Japanese Buddhists whose responses were to be compared to that of non-Buddhists. Instead we needed a sample of people knowledgeable about the Japanese culture to provide us with a mainstream Japanese perspective. Using

cultural informants led to an important consideration for sample size. Romney, Weller, & Batchelder's (1986) mathematical and statistical analysis of cultural informants revealed that 5 to 15 respondents would provide an accurate picture of the norms shared in a given culture (Heise, 2010). All the samples we used go well beyond this threshold.

We used publicly available affective meaning lexicons for all six cultures in which these data have been collected. Two North American cultures (USA and Canada), two European cultures (Ireland and Germany), and two Asian cultures (Japan and China) are part of the Magellan Project accessible online (Heise, 2013):

1.) USA, 2003: "Ratings of 500 Identities, 500 Behaviors, 300 Modifiers, and 200 Settings were collected at Indiana University, via the Internet using the Surveyor applet. The 1027 respondents lived in the U.S.A. at age 16, and were about equally male and female" (Francis & Heise, 2006).

2.) Canada, 2003: "Data on 993 Identities, 601 Behaviors, and 500 Modifiers, and 200 Settings were gathered with the Attitude program from Guelph, Ontario, undergraduates in 2001-2. Data on settings were gathered with the Surveyor program at Guelph in 2003. Funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada." (MacKinnon, 2006).

3.) Germany, 1989: "Ratings of 442 Identities, 295 Behaviors, and 67 Modifiers, selected for back-translatability with the 1978 U.S.A. dictionary were obtained with the Attitude program from 520 Mannheim students." (Schneider, 2006).

4.) Northern Ireland, 1977: "Ratings of 528 Identities and 498 Behaviors were obtained with paper questionnaires from 319 Belfast teenagers in Catholic high schools in 1977. Ratings of modifiers and settings were not obtained in the Belfast study. Up to 18 females and 14 males rated each concept." (Willigan & Heise, 2006).

5.) Mainland China, 1991: "Ratings of 449 Identities, 300 Behaviors, 98 Emotions, 150 Traits, and 149 Settings were obtained with Attitude from about 380 undergraduate students at Fudan University in Shanghai, Peoples Republic of China, during the Spring Semester, 1999." (Smith & Yi Cai, 2006).

6.) Japan, 1989-2002: "Ratings of 403 Identities and 307 Behaviors, and a few Settings were obtained with the Attitude program from 323 Tohoku University students in 1989. In 1995 and 1996, 120 women students at Kyoritsu Women's, Japan Women's, and Teikyo Universities and 120 men students at Teikyo and Rikkyo Universities rated an additional 300 settings, 300 modifiers (mainly traits), 200 business identities, and 75 behaviors. Yoichi Murase (Rikkyo University) and Nozomu Matsubara (Tokyo University) provided access to students who rated 102 emotions, 70 behaviors and 55 identities in 2002 using Surveyor.

Total numbers of entries in Interact lexicon were: 713 Identities, 455 Behaviors, 426 Modifiers, and 300 Settings. Number of male or female raters generally was about 30 for each concept." (Smith et al., 2006).

Selection Criteria for Religious Identities

To minimize a selection bias in our choice of religious identities, we chose to use results of a recently completed factor analysis of 9199 identity labels in the English language based primarily on the WordNet lexicon (MacKinnon & Heise, 2010). Their approach viewed social identities as organized into conceptual meaning-systems. We followed MacKinnon and Heise's symbolic interactionist approach of assuming that human exchanges of cultural sentiments create social institutions. Their factor analyses of Canadian and American lexicons of social identities organized specialized semantic-linguistic social institutions into institutional meaning-systems. Social institutions embody cultural theories of social identities bundled together by links between appropriate identities, actions, emotions, attributions, and settings. Social institutions organize sets of affective meanings, and they link social identities to prescribed interactional partners, actions, emotions, attributions and settings.

Given this assumption, we searched the six cultural databases for religious identities. This search produced a table of comparative EPA profiles of 122 religious identities. The residual category of 1834 non-religious identities defines the profane. While at least two of our six cultural databases included ratings for forty-six of these identities, not all 122 religious identities were rated in each of the six cultures. Following Mackinnon & Heise (2010) we filtered out those identities that did not have exclusive religious/moral meanings. In gathering affective meaning lexicons, when male and female versions of an identity were available in a language, one was randomly chosen for rating, such that neither the masculine nor feminine was standard. Among religious identities in the countries compared, however, the masculine form dominated. While the incidental gender distribution of cross-cultural terms was interesting in and of itself, an exploration of it was beyond the scope of this analysis. We excluded 16 identities with multiple, non-religious institutional denotations: counselor, dignitary, disciplinarian, friend, follower, Korean, leader, mentor, mourner, novice, protégé, skeptic, superior, supervisor, supporter, and trainee. This selection procedure produced a set of 30 religious identities: Agnostic, angel, astrologer, atheist, Buddhist, Catholic (Roman), Christian, church deacon, clergy, clergyman, devil, evangelist**,** fortune teller, ghost, God (Judeo-Christian), Jew, minister, missionary, mystic, pagan, pastor, preacher, priest, priest (Buddhist), Protestant, puritan, rabbi, saint, sinner, villainess.

These 30 identities formed the basis of our analyses in this study.

Benchmarking Cross-cultural with Intra-cultural Differences.

In our first analysis, which tested the hypothesis that c*ross-cultural differences between sacred identities should not be different from cross-cultural differences between profane identities,* we investigated the homogeneity/heterogeneity of the cultural representation of the sacred and the profane. First we did that by comparing mean CGR on all three EPA dimensions separately in all six cultures. If there were no significant differences in the homogeneity/heterogeneity of ratings between religious and non-religious identities we would have failed to reject our hypothesis. In a second test of the first hypothesis we included the data on all three EPA dimensions in our analysis. Tripling the number of cases increased the statistical likelihood of indicating significance in the comparison of the CGR values. Since our hypothesis stated that there should be no differences, this second test was more conservative.

Testing our hypothesis that r*eligious identities are ordered by degree of intersubjectivity from East to West,* we were looking for significant differences in mean CGR ratings of intra-Western or West-East comparisons. Again we compared the GGR readings on all three EPA dimensions separately and then in a combination of all three dimensions of meaning.

Unlike in testing our first hypothesis, we would have failed to reject our second hypothesis if there were significant differences in CGR values. Therefore, the analysis that separated the three EPA dimensions of meaning was more conservative in testing the second hypothesis. It should be stressed that in testing both hypothesis we only compared the CGR values that standardized culture differences with gender differences. With this measurement index we were not comparing the absolute ratings, but assessed the homogeneity/heterogeneity that we found between cultures.

RESULTS

The Sacred and the Profane

We empirically tested our first hypothesis, stating that there would be no differences between the sacred and the profane by comparing the CGR values of 30 religious identities with 1834 non-religious identities. We compared ratings of our two North American cultures (USA and Canada), two European cultures (Ireland and Germany), and two Asian cultures (Japan and China) on all three EPA dimensions of affective meaning. This resulted in 15 cross-cultural comparisons on the evaluation, potency and activity dimension. Since not all identities were rated in all cultures there were 115 valid comparisons (of 30*6=180 possible) on each affective dimension, resulting in a total of 345 comparisons of CGR values for the sacred and 9840 for the profane.

We tested the both of our hypotheses with a t-test comparing the mean CGR values of all cultural comparisons[1]. In our first test of our first hypothesis we compared the CGR values for each affective dimension separately. On the evaluation dimension of nonreligious identities all cultures disagreed on the average 2.59 times more inter-culturally than with the other gender in their respective culture. In case of religious identities the average inter-cultural disagreement was at 2.50 slightly smaller. A t-test revealed that there was no significant difference in the intensity of inter-cultural agreement/disagreement between the affective nature of religious and nonreligious identities. On the potency dimension intercultural disagreement was 2.49 times as pronounced as the gender disagreement in the respective cultures for nonreligious identities. The potency of religious identities was experienced 2.15 times more different across cultures than across gender. Intercultural disagreement was hereby not significantly different for religious identities as it was for nonreligious identities. On the activity dimension we observed the same tendencies but at a higher level of cross cultural disagreement, 2.14 for nonreligious and 2.85 for religious identities.

***Table 1*. T-test for Equality of Means of Culture Gender Ratio (CGR) Ratings on the evaluation (e), potency (p), and activity (a) Dimensions between religious (Rel) and nonreligious (Nonrel) Identities.**

Rating	Identities	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
CGRe	Nonrel	3280	2.59	3.49	.280	.779
	Rel	115	2.50	1.92		
CGRp	Nonrel	3280	2.49	4.06	.898	.369
	Rel	115	2.15	2.43		
CGRa	Nonrel	3280	3.14	4.85	.642	.521
	Rel	115	2.85	3.06		
CGRepa	Nonrel	9840	2.74	4.18	1.07	.29
	Rel	345	2.45	2.52		

In our second test of the first hypothesis we pooled the three EPA dimensions in our comparison. Testing for significant differences in the last column of Table 1 we tripled the number of cases in the analysis, thereby becoming more conservative in our t-test. Revealing no significant differences between religious and profane identities this fourth test reaffirmed our rejection of the alternative hypothesis that religious identities were different from nonreligious identities.

West-East Comparison of Religious Identities

In our second hypothesis we investigated if people in Western countries agreed more on the meaning of religious concepts with people of other Western countries than they did with people from Eastern countries. If this is true, subjects of Western countries would have shown more intersubjectivity with other Western subjects than they did with Eastern subjects. For this comparison we merged the two European cultures and the two North American cultures into one category and treated the two Eastern cultures as the complementary category in our comparison.[2] Again there were two tests. One compared EPA dimensions separately while the other combined all EPA dimensions in the comparison. Unlike in our first hypothesis that predicted no differences, the second hypothesis predicted differences among cultures. While testing the first hypothesis, compounding the EPA dimensions in the t-test was more conservative, in the test of the second hypothesis, the separation of the EPA dimensions was more conservative. As in the first analysis, we started with the less conservative comparison, which in this case was the comparison of the compounded EPA dimension in the last row of table 2.

In both tests of the second hypothesis, small CGR measures indicated high levels of intersubjectivity in cross-cultural comparison, controlled for respective gender differences. According to our second hypothesis, CGR values in inter-Western comparisons should have been lower than in West-East comparisons. Indeed, in the West cross-cultural differences were 2.18 times as pronounced as Western gender differences. In contrast, the West-East comparison showed 3.00 times more cultural differences than gender differences. The difference between both means was significant and we consequently rejected our null hypothesis, thereby supporting our research hypothesis that there was more intersubjectivity within the West than in West-East comparisons.

In this first test we concatenated the three dimensions of meaning and were able to base our t-test on 186 inter-Western comparisons and 138 West-East comparisons for which data existed. In our second, more conservative test of our second hypothesis, we focused on the EPA dimensions separately. Here we compared mean CGR values of the 62 inter-Western comparisons to the mean value of the 46 West-East comparisons.

***Table 2*. T-test for Equality of the Mean Culture Gender Ratio (CGR) Ratings on the evaluation (e), potency (p), and activity (a) Dimensions for the intra-Western (WW) and the West-East (WE) comparisons of religious Identities.**

Rating	Regions	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t	Sig. (1-tailed)
CGRe	WW	62	2.24	1.33	-1.684	0.047
	WE	46	2.88	2.19		
CGRp	WW	62	1.68	1.33	-2.353	0.010
	WE	46	2.80	3.41		
CGRa	WW	62	2.62	3.20	-1.108	0.135
	WE	46	3.30	3.06		
CGRepa	WW	186	2.18	2.26	-2.816	0.002
	WE	138	2.99	2.92		

On the evaluation dimension the CGR of 2.24 for intra-western comparison was significantly smaller than the CGR of 2.88 for the West-East comparison. On the potency dimension, intra-western differences of 1.68 were also significantly smaller than the West-East differences which were 2.80 times as pronounced as gender differences.

Just like on the evaluation and potency dimensions, the activity dimensions showed higher disagreement in the West-East comparison (CGR=3.30) than in the intra-Western (CGR=2.62) comparison. However, comparing intra-Western differences with West-East differences did not reveal statistical significance on the activity dimension. This failure to demonstrate statistical significance was mainly due to the higher variance that Westerners show on the activity dimension as compared to the evaluation and potency dimensions.

While overall we found support for our second hypothesis that religious identities are ordered by degree of intersubjectivity from East to West, when dimensions were investigated separately (and statistically speaking more conservatively) this support was only clear on the evaluation and potency dimension.

DISCUSSION

The study of religion and culture is a burgeoning field. Contrary to the secularization arguments of earlier in the century, religion as a social phenomenon is not

fading away, but growing. This fact has produced calls for cross-fertilization of the disciplines of social science, to find new ways to address the issues that face contemporary scholars of religion (Ellison & Sherkat, 2008; Smith, 2008). Our current analysis was a first attempt in that direction, bringing theoretical and empirical tools of social psychology to bear on the rich concepts of culture and religion. In so doing, we built on the symbolic interactionist tradition to investigate culture as a body of shared meanings transmitted through socially patterned and constrained interaction. We then introduced Durkheim's original argument based on the universality of the fundamental divide between the sacred and the profane. We conceptualized this dichotomy through Goffman's theory of the expressive order of events, by which people make sense of the world and their beliefs about it. Finally, we operationalized this expressive order of the sacred and profane across cultures using Affect Control Theory, in which the sentiments about religious identities can be empirically measured. The six cultures for which data exist became the source of our analyses comparing religious (sacred) and non-religious (profane) identities.

Can an abstract multidimensional cultural comparison be comprised in a single number? In our investigation we took this challenge. We used one number, the Culture Gender Ratio (CGR), which married the qualitative imagination we have from comparing ourselves to the other gender in our own culture with established quantitative measures of affective meanings. Our Culture Gender Ratio (CGR) provided gender-differences of the respective culture as an intercultural benchmark to gauge cross-cultural differences. While all cultures – Eastern or Western – showed dramatic diversity in their affective representation of identities in general, these cross-cultural differences were not different for religious and nonreligious identities. Statistical differences only arose when we compared the East and the West in their attitudes towards religious identities. Thus, in congruence with Durkheim's arguments, we found that while there were strong cross-cultural differences concerning religious identities, these differences were not more pronounced than for profane concepts. Sacred identities, then, followed a similar pattern to identities that had no religious significance. Not surprisingly, however, when we differentiated the West into US, Canadian, German, and Irish cultures and the East in Japanese and Chinese cultures we found a major divide between East and West in fundamental religious conceptions.

These findings were in line with our two hypotheses. Surprisingly we found stronger empirical support for our assumption that there is an absence of differentiation between the sacred and the profane than for the assertion of West-East differences in the affective representation of religious identities. While we found empirical evidence for a higher general intersubjectivity concerning religious identities within Western countries than in the West-East comparison, this support weakened on the more conservative separate test on all three dimensions of affective meaning. Here we were only able to

support our idea of higher inter-Western intersubjectivity on the evaluation and potency dimension, not the activity dimension.

In previous cross-cultural comparisons of affective meanings, ratings of evaluation, potency, and activity were compared. Patterns of EPA profiles had to be identified for the operationalization of the concept of investigation for the comparison to be meaningful. Here it was the nature of religious concepts that were cross-culturally compared. Religious identities, for example, followed the same pattern as secular authorities. Their potency in respect to us would lead to devaluation if their power was not legitimate. Their power is understood and does not need to be communicated in expressive actions. This conceptualization of authority allows the operationalization of authorities in terms of their affective representation as good, potent, and not active (Schneider, 2004). However, such a comparison becomes dramatically complex in cross-cultural comparisons since differences on three dimensions have to be discussed for each culture and each cultural comparison. The second limitation of such numerical comparisons is the question of what constitutes substantive cross-cultural differences. The third related problem is the question of which of the three dimensions is most central in dividing cultures. Using a simple index like the CGR allowed for a standardization that eliminates all three problems in numerical comparison and, most importantly, eliminates the need for the operationalization of the concepts in EPA profiles that are cross-culturally compared.

The CGR cross-culturally measures homogeneity/heterogeneity standardized in relation to a benchmark that is meaningful for all people in all cultures: the difference between the sexes. For the layperson as well for the practitioner, in cross-cultural research comparison of one's own culture to an alien culture is generally harder than comparisons to the other sex. However, this argument only concerns the accessibility of benchmark used in the CGR. The main benefit of using the CGR lies in the creation of a meaningful benchmark where a comparison of numbers with traditional statistics does not allow the equation of statistical significance with culturally meaningful differentiation. The statement that the meaning that people of another culture assign to a class of concepts is x times more different than the differences encountered by the sexes in the respective cultures is general, accessible, and easily quantifiable.

What does this tell us about cross-cultural comparisons of the religious expressive order? First, we found new confirmation of Durkheim's conception of the sacred and the profane. Since cross-cultural variations among religious identities were no different than cross-cultural variations among non-religious identities, sentiments associated with religious identities within a culture complemented those associated with non-religious identities. The other central empirical finding was that using sex differences in the respective cultures as a benchmark showed that there was homogeneity in the affective representation of religious sentiments within Western cultures, while in West-East comparison these sentiments were relatively heterogeneous. In other words, sentiments

associated with religious identities were more similar to each other within Western cultures than they were to religious identities in Eastern cultures. While this finding largely confirmed expectations, it was useful to be able to quantify this difference and identify on which EPA dimensions the differences fall. Measuring the established sentiments of the religious identities of the cultures in question allowed us to empirically compare the expressive order of the sacred and profane across divergent cultures.

Conclusion

In this article we could have focused on testing the possibility of empirically differentiating the religious/sacred and the profane. By testing the absence of significant differences with a new innovative instrument we would, however, invite the critique that our instrument might be to blunt for indicating differentiations. By introducing our second hypothesis we not only extended the scope of our study, but demonstrated that Culture-Gender-Ratios were indeed sensitive enough to pick up differences in intersubjectivity that were significant in traditional t-tests of the equality of means. The utility of our instrument was demonstrated by reaching high levels of significance indicating cultural differences even when using fewer cases than in our test of our first hypothesis where we were looking for the absence of differences.

In the Culture-Gender Ratio we applied a new tool in the investigation of cross-cultural differences, quantifying cultural differences in relation to the respective gender differences in each culture. Culture-Gender Ratios help to objectify investigations of religious discourse (along with other discourses) that have been described by their own adherents as hopelessly fragmented and relativist with inconsistent and paradoxical conceptual distinctions (Derrida, 1981). Indeed, research in the social scientific study of religion remains concerned with the problems of definition (Beyer, 2006; Borowik, 2011; Bruce, 2011), orientation (Chriss, 1993; Creelan, 1987; Turner, 2005) and comparison (Davie, 2006; Read & Eagle, 2011). In this supposedly fragmented field we indicated robust patterns of findings on the sacred and profane and the intersubjectivity of religious beliefs in regional cultures. This study joins empirical evidence from over a third of a century support the affect-control assumption that human actions, perceptions and beliefs are socially-constructed cultural categories that unite cultures; and that social institutions – such as religion – maintain, sustain, organize and create intersubjective meaning, interpersonal bonding and social organization (MacKinnon & Heise, 2010).

Our tool would lack purpose without the theoretical context that links our indication of cross-cultural differences in affective meaning to consequent actions their institutional structures. Skvoretz and Fararo (1989, p. 134) define an institution as "a design for social action." Affect Control Theory differentiates between different institutional grammars, of which religion is an important one. We have shown clear evidence of great differences in the institutional grammars of religion in six different cultures.

As a study of religion, this analysis was less than ideal. The dictionaries used were not collected expressly for the purpose of comparing religious identities and West-East intersubjectivity. Therefore the identities available were neither exhaustive nor precisely tailored to the question. However, the multi-cultural data sources and the strength of the well-tested EPA dimensions lend credibility to our findings and underscore their potential to illuminate new directions for future research.

Despite these limitations, we have empirically confirmed Durkheim's original assertion of the fundamental cultural importance of the sacred and the profane. Indeed, we have gone beyond his original assertion to specify variations in the internal affective coherence of these two crucial categories. Developing culture-gender ratios we have generated a new approach for the comparison of religious and ideological differences in the expressive order across cultures, sub-cultures and other sociological groups.

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Footnotes:

1. Using a t-test of a difference between the means rests on two assumptions: each population has a normal distribution and each population has the same variance. The assumption of the equal variances, however, is especially critical if the number of cases in both categories is unequal, as in our case. The assumption of normal distribution is less problematic, especially in our case with relatively large sample sizes. One of the core problems in comparing the mean of two samples of different size is that differences in population variances have a stronger impact than in samples of equal or similar size (Hays, 1994, p.328). In this case, called the "Behrens-Fischer problem," (Hays, 1994, p.28) variances can be separated in the analysis using the Welch and/or the Brown-Frosy procedures (SPSS, 2007, p. 298). However, using the separate variance t-value creates a larger observed significance level if variances are equal. For that reason we investigate the homogeneity of variance before conducting the t-test. Using Levene's test for equality of variances (SPSS 2007, p. 293), the hypotheses that both variances are equal are rejected in all comparisons and we are confident using the pooled variance procedure in our t-tests.

2. Our West-East comparison is, of course, partly driven by the availability of the data. As in the comparison of religious and nonreligious identities, both categories of interest have different numbers of cases. Statistically, however, comparing a class of 62 with a class that received 46 observations is by far not as problematic as in our comparison of 3280 ratings of nonreligious and 115 cases of religious identities. Still, we are using the same statistical procedures that ensure stability in the case of disproportionate number of cases in different categories.

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