Moral Values

Respondents were asked to examine a list of 15 values and indicate the five values that are *most important to them* in their daily lives. At a later point in the survey, respondents were asked to indicate which one of the five was most important and to define that value.

Each of the 272 respondents could choose five values. If there had been no consistent choices—if the importance of the values was randomly distributed among the respondents—we would expect that each value would be chosen a total of about 91 times. Clearly the values were not randomly chosen (see Figure 1). The least frequent choice, Respect for Elders, was chosen only 19 times; the most frequent choice, Truth, was chosen 169 times. Six values were chosen 100 or more times: Truth, Compassion, Responsibility, Freedom, Reverence for Life, and Fairness. Five values were chosen 50 or fewer times: Humility, Social Harmony, Honor, Devotion, and Respect for Elders.

Survey Instructions: Please look at the list of 15 values carefully and check the five values that are most important to you in your daily life. . . [and choose] the one value you consider to be most important.

Table 1
Most Frequently Chosen and Most Important Values

Value	Chosen # (%)	Most Important # (%)
Truth	169 (62)	33 (16)
Compassion	153 (56)	44 (21)
Responsibility	147 (54)	33 (16)
Freedom	113 (42)	19 (9)
Reverence for Life	108 (40)	25 (12)
Fairness	100 (37)	12 (6)
Self-Respect	96 (35)	16 (8)
Preservation of Nature	92 (34)	5 (2)
Tolerance	86 (32)	8 (4)
Generosity	73 (27)	4 (2)
Humility	50 (18)	4 (2)
Social Harmony	43 (16)	2 (1)
Honor	31 (11)	4 (2)
Devotion	27 (10)	4 (2)
Respect for Elders	19 (7)	0 (0)

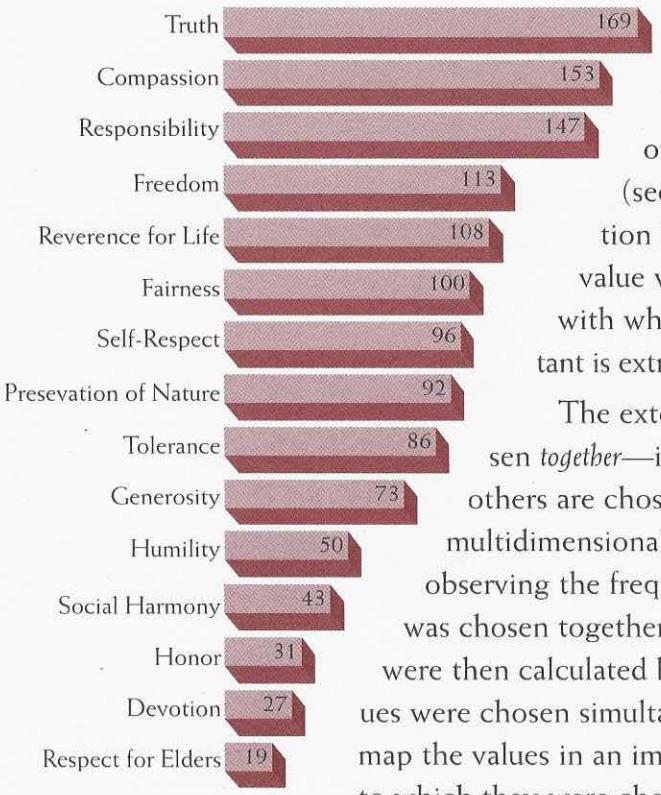


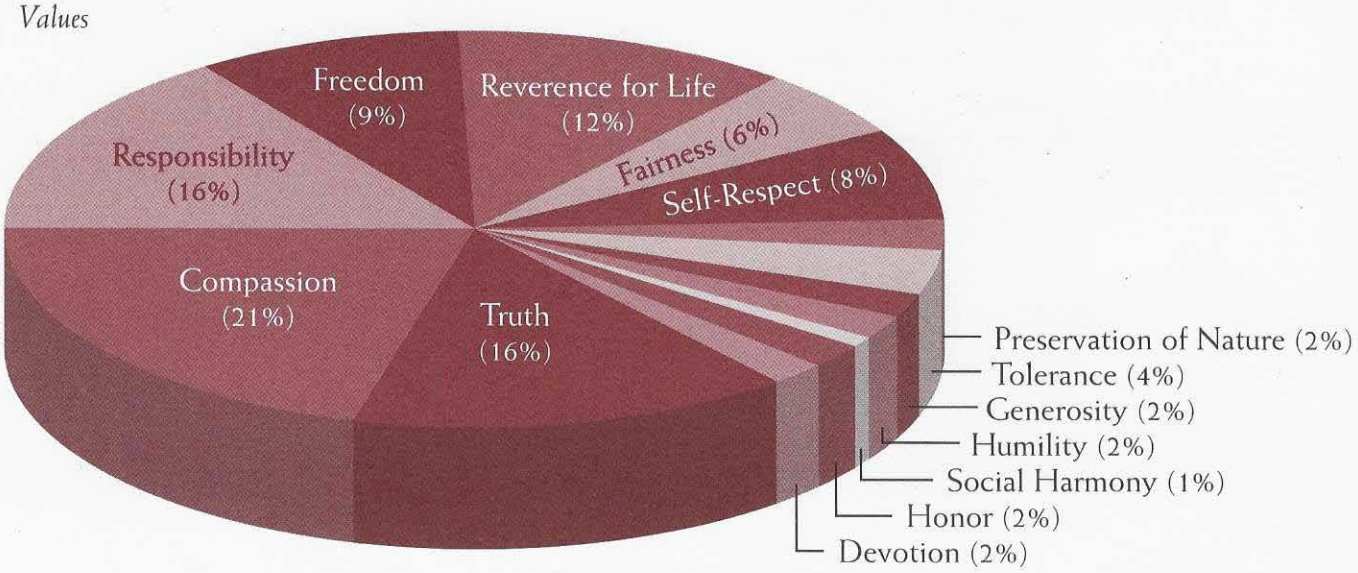
Figure 1
Number of Times Each Value Was Chosen

Compassion was most often considered the primary value, followed by Truth and Responsibility (tied at second), Reverence for Life, and Freedom (see Table 1 and Figure 2). The correlation between the frequency with which a value was chosen at all and the frequency with which it was considered the most important is extremely high.

The extent to which certain values were chosen *together*—in a consistent cluster, more often than others are chosen together—was measured through multidimensional scaling (MDS). MDS starts by observing the frequency with which each pair of values was chosen together or not chosen together. "Distances" were then calculated based on the frequency with which values were chosen simultaneously, and it becomes possible to map the values in an imaginary space according to the extent to which they were chosen by the same respondents.

To avoid creation of a cluster that represents infrequently chosen values, the three least-often-chosen values (Respect for Elders, Devotion, and Honor) were not included in this analysis. The MDS analysis of the values chosen by the respondents shows that the values of Compassion, Truth, and Responsibility (the most frequently chosen) tend to cluster together in the center of the space created by the analysis (see Figure 3). These three seem to form a core of oft-chosen values. They are also the three most frequently chosen as most important.

Figure 2
Most Important Values



The fourth and fifth most-important values, Freedom and Reverence for Life, are relatively far apart in the MDS map. It appears that some respondents perceived a distinction between these two values such that they would not choose them simultaneously, even if the values were each chosen often.

Values that occupy the margins of the MDS map, as Fairness does, are more likely than others to be indicators of distinct attitudes, or to be a point of distinction among respondents. This is particularly likely when a value on the margin was frequently chosen. Generosity and Reverence for Life seem polar opposites to Fairness in the MDS map.

There appear to be at least three values (Truth, Compassion, and Responsibility) that about half of the respondents consider important in their daily lives. There are three others (Freedom, Reverence for Life, and Fairness) that appear to be important to different subgroups of respondents. Other values round out the choices people made.

What is it that distinguishes people such that they choose different values? Can the diversity we've already noted in nationality, sex, education, and occupation account for the value choices of respondents? If there is a set of variables in human life and culture that predicts one's values, then it

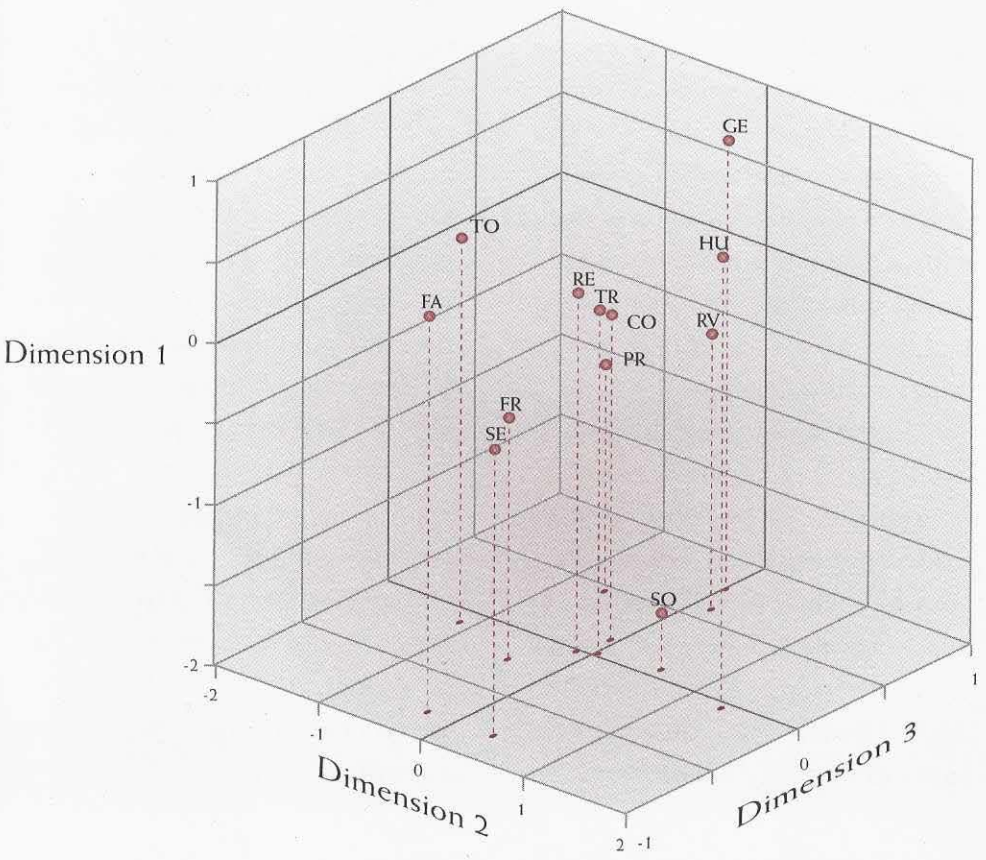


Figure 3
Values Clusters
(as viewed from above)

TR = Truth
CO = Compassion
RE = Responsibility
FR = Freedom
RV = Reverence for Life
FA = Fairness
SE = Self-Respect
PR = Preservation of Nature
TO = Tolerance
GE = Generosity
HU = Humility
SO = Social Harmony

becomes difficult to argue that there is a core set of values we inherit just by being human. Values become one more way to divide us. If, on the other hand, knowing a person's nationality, sex, religion, age, or social status does not help one to predict that person's values, then perhaps our values transcend these demographic characteristics and can serve as a basis for unity rather than division.

A series of analyses was performed to test hypotheses about the ability of demographic variables to predict the choice of values from the list of 15. The result: Despite occasional differences in value choices by occupation, religiosity, and gender,

The Values Women Cherish

Mahnaz Afkhami (Iran) *was minister of state for women's affairs in Iran until her exile after the Islamic Revolution. She is now the executive director of The Sisterhood Is Global Institute in Maryland.*

The essential moral values are universal. They come from humanity—not one's connection to some other affiliation, be it national, or religious, or ethnic, or geographical.

The most important value to me is the integrity of the human person—body and mind. I would [also] consider respect for each other's choices. I would consider giving other people the same possibilities one wishes [for oneself] for freedom, for self-expression. And of course, a sense of something other than one's own individual well-being—a sense of giving and not only taking.

In the West especially, but not exclusively, there has been an exaggeration in asserting the rights of the individual. Sometimes I'm shocked when I talk to someone and they immediately say, "What's the bottom line? What's in it for me?" There's very little sense of something that does not have an immediate profit, something you cannot count.

I've been working with women for a long time, from different religious, ethnic, social backgrounds. There are values that women cherish probably more intensely than men. I think of their interest in community ties, in responsibility, in giving of themselves—all over the world, women are not eating so their children can eat, so men can eat. But I think that the lack of assertiveness, the lack of valuing power, not valuing a role in decision making as much [as men]—it's not necessarily positive, because without having that, you're not going to be able to make things change.

I think now, as we're approaching the 21st century, [we're coming to] some sort of a consensus that it's not me against them, it's not Western values, Eastern values, some other kind of values. It's human values that we have to address.

there does not appear to be a separate set of core values for people who are separated by other variables.

To be sure, some distinctions emerge:

- Men were more likely than women to choose Fairness and Humility.
- Younger people were slightly more likely than older people to choose Respect for Elders, while older people were slightly more likely to choose Reverence for Life.
- People who spoke English at home were more likely than others to choose Reverence for Life, but speaking English was not related to any other value choice.
- People born or living in the United States were more likely to choose Compassion and Reverence for Life than others. Being born in the United States was related to choosing Self-Respect. People born outside of the United States were significantly more likely to choose Tolerance than natives of the United States.
- Jews, Moslems, and those with no religion were more likely than people of all other faiths to choose Fairness.
- Occupation was related to certain value choices in almost stereotypical ways. Compassion, which was one of the most frequently chosen values, was less likely to be chosen by those in the business category (which included businesspeople, the self-employed, bankers, and those in finance) than by those in other categories. Fairness, on the other hand, was more frequently chosen by people in the business category than by others (the nonprofit sector was particularly less likely to pick this value). Generosity was slightly more likely to be chosen by professionals than by others. Truth was chosen disproportionately by those in the education sector.

  Fortunately, we were able to test the impact of occupation on values in another way, through the respondents' choices of the most important value. There was no significant difference between occupational sectors on this choice. Whatever the impact of occupation on values, it does not appear to be overly divisive.
- Religiosity was a strong predictor of several values. People who describe themselves as more religious were more likely to choose Compassion than the less (or not at all) religious. To a lesser degree, the religious were more likely

to choose Truth. But the less and not-at-all religious were more likely than the religious to choose Tolerance and (to a lesser degree) Fairness. This is an interesting distinction. The religious seem to emphasize empathy while the less religious seem to emphasize rationality and equality.

It is worth noting that the values related to religiosity (whether related positively or negatively) were some of the most frequently chosen of all. Truth, Fairness, and Compassion were all chosen 100 or more times, and Tolerance 86 times. No other variable has seemed so closely related to the most popular values.

IN SUMMARY, there do not appear to be separate core values for people otherwise delineated by demographic variables. To the extent that one value consistently appears to serve as a point of distinction across groups, it is Fairness. Chosen 100 times overall, Fairness was preferred by men, Jews and Moslems, businesspeople, and the not-very-religious and nonreligious. On the multidimensional scale, one notes that Fairness occupies a somewhat marginal position vis-à-vis the other values. In fact, of the six values chosen 100 or more times, it is the most "aloof."

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To the extent that the results point to a set of core values, they are Compassion, Responsibility, and Truth. These were the most frequently chosen values, and they occupy the very center of the three-dimensional space drawn by the MDS analysis. Of these, Responsibility is the only one that has no significant relationship to any demographic variable.

In this area, it is the *lack* of steady significant findings that is most striking. Among these respondents, one's religion hardly separates one's values from others' values. In fact, being religious, regardless of faith, is more significant. One's occupation, apart from some fairly predictable distinctions, does not determine one's values. Nor do gender, nationality, education, and age predict one's values. Most of the attributes that people feel most strongly about, then, *don't* seem related to their values.