

The Mileage from Social Axioms: Learning from the Past and Looking Forward

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Abstract Social axioms are proposed as fundamental psychological constructs tapping a person's beliefs about the social world and how it works, positioned centrally in the nomological network of broad psychological constructs and capable of predicting crucial psychological outcomes. This ambitious proposal has been put to empirical test across psychological domains around the world. In this chapter, we review all published empirical investigations on social axioms, demarcating them from other broad psychological constructs (e.g., personality and values) as well as examining if and how they could serve the four specific functions originally proposed, viz., "facilitate the attainment of important goals (*instrumental*), help people protect their self-worth (*ego-defensive*), serve as a manifestation of people's values (*value-expressive*), and help people understand the world (*knowledge*)" (Leung et al., 2002, p. 288). We envisage social axioms as fundamental and useful psychological constructs that will continue to gain importance in social sciences research in the decades to come, and we propose a number of fruitful future research directions to promote this line of research.

The Mileage from Social Axioms: Learning from the Past and Looking Forward

Since the model of social axioms was proposed (Leung & Bond, 2004; Leung et al., 2002), there has been a growing interest in their functions. The present chapter serves as a summary of what has been found so far about their functions, along with some proposed research directions for the future. This chapter consists of three parts: The first demarcates social axioms from other important and closely related psychological constructs, such as values and personality. The second part presents a literature review of the nomological networks and psychological implications of each social axiom. Given that previous research demonstrated that the five-factor

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model of social axioms is universal across multiple cultures (Cheung, Leung, & Au, 2006; Leung & Bond, 2004), we will use this five-factor model of social axioms for illustration. Future directions for the axioms research program are discussed in the final section.

Separating Social Axioms from Personality and Values

In proposing a new psychological construct, it is essential to explain how it is distinct from other established constructs, both at the theoretical and empirical levels. Distinguishing social axioms from other important psychological determinants of behaviors has been a major focus of the social axioms research program. Two of these constructs are personality and values.

The Distinction Between Personality and Social Axioms

A large body of social cognitive research has demonstrated that personality or individual dispositions influence information encoding (Robinson, Meier, & Vargas, 2005; Wilkowski, Robinson, & Meier, 2006), enhance selective attention (Derryberry & Reed, 1994; Noguchi, Gohm, & Dalsky, 2006), and increase information accessibility (Robinson, Ode, Moeller, & Goetz, 2007; Schimmack, Diener, & Oishi, 2002). Undoubtedly, these temperamental dispositions manifest themselves in distinguishable behaviors as well as attitudinal structures, the transformational process of which is known as characteristic adaptation (Costa & McCrae, 1994; McAdams & Pals, 2006). For instance, optimism is positively related to extraversion but negatively related to neuroticism (Williams, 1992). Extending upon this idea, one may argue that a person's worldview is largely determined by his or her personality. If this argument is valid, it will challenge the rationale for social axioms, as they are not distinct constructs that can add value to our psychological investigations.

Chen and her colleagues (Chen, Bond, & Cheung, 2006; Chen, Fok, Bond, & Matsumoto, 2006) have addressed this question and demonstrated that social axioms were only weakly predicted by both Western and Chinese indigenous personality measurements, namely the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992), the Chinese Personality Assessment Inventory (Cheung, 2001), and the Sino-American Person Perception Scale (Yik & Bond, 1993): less than 20% of the variance of each axiom dimension could be explained by any of these personality instruments. The results provide convergent evidence to suggest that the conventional personality dimensions are not important determinants of social axioms as might have been presumed. For detailed correlations between the five social axioms and different measures of personality, see Table 1.

Table 1 Correlations between social axioms and personality

	n	SCyn	RA	SCom	FC	Rel
Chen, Fok et al. (2006)	117					
Five-factor model of personality						
Neuroticism		0.21		0.24		
Extraversion		−0.25	0.26			
Agreeableness		−0.42	0.23			
Openness to experience				0.24		
Sino-American Person Perception Scale						
Extraversion		−0.27				
Emotional stability				−0.19		
Helpfulness		−0.30			−0.28	
Horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism						
Vertical individualism		0.38		0.27	0.20	
Vertical collectivism			0.20			
Chen, Bond et al. (2006)	359					
CPAI-2						
Novelty			0.18	0.14		
Diversity		−0.19	0.21	0.18		−0.11
Divergent thinking			0.11	0.17		
Leadership			0.17			
Logical vs. affective orientation			0.23			
Aesthetics		−0.16				
Extraversion vs. introversion			0.12			
Enterprise		−0.19	0.19			
Responsibility		0.17	0.20	0.15	−0.14	
Emotionality		0.20		0.21	0.15	
Inferiority vs. self-acceptance		0.23	−0.21		0.17	
Practical mindedness		−0.23	0.16	−0.15	−0.19	−0.11
Optimism vs. pessimism		−0.16	0.27			
Meticulousness		−0.13				
Face		0.26		0.19	0.18	0.13
Internal vs. external locus of control		−0.29	0.34	−0.16	−0.28	
Family orientation		−0.13	0.18	−0.15		
Defensiveness		0.31		0.13	0.17	
Graciousness vs. meanness		−0.38	0.21		−0.18	
Interpersonal tolerance		−0.23				
Veraciousness vs. slickness		−0.31	0.20	−0.15	−0.17	
Traditionalism vs. modernity				−0.12		
<i>Renqing</i>			0.23	0.12		
Social sensitivity		−0.17	0.23			
Discipline				−0.12		
Harmony		−0.23	0.18		−0.15	
Thrift vs. extravagance						−0.13

Note: All correlations are significant at 0.05 level.

Despite the small to moderate correlations between the five social axioms and personality, preliminary evidence seems to suggest that social axioms are not solely determined by personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Winter, 1996); contextual factors also matter. For instance, in a relatively highly stable context (e.g., in the university), the average test–retest reliability of social axioms within six months was as high as 0.74 (Leung, Hui, & Bond, 2007), which is comparable with those of personality measures within a similar time interval (for a meta-analysis, see Bazana and Stelmack, 2004). However, in a more dynamic context, like that of the working world, the stability of social cynicism within six months drops to 0.46 (Leung, 2006). The discrepancy in terms of stability of social axioms may reflect the dynamic nature of working conditions, which might vary substantially across and within individuals. One's beliefs about the world are responsive to changes in one's work environment. Illustrated by these two sets of longitudinal data, social axioms are speculated to be malleable constructs which, unlike personality, are subject to change as the social environment changes over time.

Putting these findings together, we argue that social axioms are neither personality by their essence nor simple manifestations of personality, given that they are not highly correlated with typical personality constructs, and that they are social context-sensitive in nature and are rendered malleable by changes in the situations people confront.

The Distinction Between Values and Social Axioms

In the original theoretical proposal, one function of social axioms is to express values, such that social axioms are manifestations of the endorser's values (Leung & Bond, 2004). Accordingly, social axioms play a role in facilitating value-congruent behaviors. For example, reward for application has been shown to be a correlate of the self-transcendent value dimension as well as related to the preference of other-concerning tactics in conflict management/resolution strategies (Bond, Leung, Au, Tong, & Chemonges-Nielson, 2004). Under the original framework, we might think that social axioms are shaped by values. However, axioms may also assume an active role to shape values, resulting in a reciprocal, dynamic relationship between the two (see Leung & Zhou, in press, for a thorough discussion). The logic of this conceptualization is based upon the notion that the desirability or instrumentality of an object or a goal may depend upon the network of beliefs surrounding it (Wyer, 1974).

Despite the conceptual connection between values and social axioms, their correlations are only of moderate sizes as presented in Table 2, with data drawn from Bond et al. (2004) and Leung et al. (2007). Values are largely independent of social axioms, despite the existence of some significant correlations between the two.

The distinction of values and social axioms resembles the conceptual differences of these constructs discussed in expectancy–value theory. In this classic framework (e.g., Feather, 1992; Vroom, 1964), beliefs and values are considered as two

Table 2 The correlations between social axioms and values

	n	SCyn	RA	SCom	FC	Rel
Leung, Au et al. (2007)	912					
Self-direction		−0.09		0.11	−0.07	−0.15
Conformity		0.08	0.07			0.10
Power		0.08	0.07	−0.08		−0.10
Hedonism			−0.05			−0.14
Tradition			−0.13	−0.19	0.07	0.33
Achievement			0.15			−0.11
Benevolence				0.09		0.14
Stimulation						−0.10
Bond et al. (2004)	180					
Openness to change				0.18		
Conservation			0.30		0.18	0.34
Self-enhancement		0.35				−0.21
Self-transcendence			0.32	0.23		0.23

Note: All correlations are significant at 0.05 level.

important constructs that jointly shape attitudes and behaviors. Values define the outcomes desired by an individual, while beliefs define the likelihood with which a target object associates with a particular outcome. The empirical evidence accrued supports the conclusion that beliefs and values are largely independent of each other, an outcome that parallels what has been found in the social axioms research. In particular, two studies (Bond et al., 2004; Leung, Au et al., 2007) showed that social axioms are weakly correlated with basic values measured with Schwartz's value survey (1992). Moreover, after controlling for values, social axioms can still independently predict psychological outcomes, such as political attitudes (Keung & Bond, 2002), style of conflict resolution, vocational interests, and coping strategies (Bond et al., 2004).

This discovery has important implications for cross-cultural research. Values are the primary explanatory variables utilized to account for cultural differences in previous research (e.g., Hofstede, 2001; Schwartz, 1992). Only until recently researchers have attempted to use different perspectives for unpacking cultural differences (e.g., Chiu, Dweck, Tong, & Fu, 1997; Goodwin & Findlay, 1997; Leung, Bond, & Schwartz, 1995). The empirical differentiation between social axioms and values adds to this new endeavor and specially gives promise for the utility of general beliefs in cross-cultural investigation.

Psychological Correlates of the Five Axiom Dimensions

Despite the recency of empirical research on social axioms, their psychological functions have been broadly investigated. Up until the writing of this chapter, there were already 15 publications documenting such investigations. In this section,

we will focus on reviewing the within-cultural correlations between social axioms and psychological correlates. For a general discussion of the nation-level correlations between social axioms and other constructs, consult Leung and Bond (2004).

Establishing the Four Functions of Social Axioms

According to Leung et al. (2002), social axioms serve at least four functions: (a) *value-expressiveness*: presenting one's values, (b) *knowledge*: helping people understand the world, (c) *instrumentality*: facilitating attainment of important goals, and (d) *ego-defensiveness*: protecting self-worth. As we have discussed the connection between social axioms and values, we will only review the latter three functions based upon all the published work on social axioms.

Social axioms serve as general knowledge about the world, such that they function as governing principles for beliefs in different specific domains. In line with this argument, social axioms predict attitudinal variables in many areas of psychological investigation, such as political attitudes (Keung & Bond, 2002) paranormal beliefs (Singelis, Hubbard, Her, & An, 2003), vocational interests (Bond et al., 2004), and attitudes towards help-seeking (Kuo, Kwantes, Towson, & Nanson, 2006). Importantly, social axioms do have survival utility. One recent study done by Kurman and Ronen-Eilon (2004) suggested that immigrants adapt better if they have accurate knowledge about social axioms characterizing their host cultures. Thus, social axioms serve as a set of important psychological tools helping individuals to comprehend, relate to, and even maneuver in the social world.

In addition, social axioms serve as guiding principles steering progress towards the attainment of important goals in life. As discussed earlier, a belief reflects how a means is related to a specific end and the subjective judgment of the likelihood with which a particular means leads to a particular end in a given situation (Vroom, 1964). Accordingly, different social axioms might pair up a given end with different prescribed means. For example, reward for application defines the contingency between effort invested and reward received, whereas social cynicism defines the contingency between one's social power and probable reward. More specifically, in a conflict situation, reward for application predicts preference for collaborative and compromising strategies to reach a better decision, while social cynicism predicts a competitive orientation, which involves an exercise of power or defense against its probable use by a collaborator (Bond et al., 2004; Chen & Zhang, 2004). Similarly, reward for application predicts preference for using persuasive influence tactics, while social cynicism predicts assertive and relationship-based tactics, which are again exercises in power and status advantage (Fu et al., 2004). Thus, social axioms govern choices, their generation and selection, leading to situationally based goal attainment as selected by the "belief-holder."

Finally, social axioms have important implications for our self-worth and subjective well-being. Self-worth and well-being are the universal goals pursued by human kind throughout history (e.g., Freud, 1920/1952; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, &

Solomon, 1986), although individuals differ in their definitions and choice of strategies to achieve these goals. As social axioms define instrumentality of various means to reach a given goal, they should predict how individuals cope with the challenges of life and achieve self-worth and well-being. For example, reward for application predicts the use of a problem-solving coping style, while fate control predicts passive forms of coping, namely wishful thinking and distancing (Bond et al., 2004). Although self-worth and well-being are universal goals, it is important to note that individual differences exist in assessing the effectiveness of different strategies. For example, individuals high in social cynicism exhibited more negative attitudes towards seeking help through professional services (Kuo et al., 2006). This result may serve as one of the factors accounting for the robust finding that social cynicism is consistently linked to a more gloomy psychological condition, such as low life dissatisfaction (Chen, Cheung, Bond, & Leung, 2006; Lai, Bond, & Hui, 2007), psychological distress (Kuo et al., 2006), and death ideation (Hui, Bond, & Ng, 2007).

In sum, the empirical evidence accumulated so far points to one important characteristic of social axioms, the specific functionality as proposed earlier by Leung et al. (2002). In the following, we present the literature review conducted and summarize the findings by each of the axiom dimensions.

Literature Review: Psychological Correlates of Social Axioms

We conducted a literature review of the 15 published empirical articles on social axioms aiming at (1) to investigate the nomological networks of each of the five social axioms, (2) to extract overarching themes of the psychological functions informed by these empirical findings, and (3) to identify potential research gaps and to shed light on future research directions for the social axioms research program.

In this section, we will discuss the psychological correlates of the five social axioms one by one. The complete list of significant correlations between different psychological constructs and each of the social axioms found in the existing literature is presented in Table 3.

Social Cynicism Social cynicism is a belief syndrome that portrays a negative view of human kind, especially focusing on the corrosiveness of power, the lack of trust towards authority and social institutions, and the low likelihood of others using ethical means for attaining goals. With this negative view of the social world, individuals might be predisposed towards greater self-absorption and lower concern over humanity (Leung & Bond, 2004). As they proposed, social cynicism heightens one's sensitivity to potential threats or deception in social context. Despite the potential protective functions served by this heightened sense, it does not come without some cost. Empirical findings yielded do seem to paint a gloomy picture for people high in social cynicism across life domains, such as personal happiness and psychological well-being, thinking and judgment abilities, coping, interpersonal communication, and relationship building.

Table 3 Psychological correlates of social axioms

	n	SCyn	RA	SCom	FC	Rel
Beliefs and attitudes						
Keung and Bond (2002)	204					
Political Attitudes						
Egalitarianism			0.22	0.16		
Freedom from regulation		0.20	-0.22		0.23	-0.53
Bond et al. (2004)	180					
Vocational interest						
Social		-0.15	0.23			0.22
Conventional						-0.15
Singelis, Hubbard et al. (2003)	272					
External locus of control		0.34			0.18	
Social desirability		-0.21	0.24		-0.15	
Interpersonal trust		-0.43				
Cognitive flexibility		-0.25	0.16			
Paranormal beliefs						
Spiritual beliefs					0.35	
Supernatural beliefs		0.19			0.35	
Beliefs in precognition					0.36	
Traditional beliefs			0.16		-0.26	0.64
Bilas-Henne (2006) ^a						
Love styles						
Eros					0.24	
Pragma		0.29			0.16	0.21
Mania		0.19			0.31	0.29
Behaviors and choices						
Chen and Zhang (2004) ^b	120					
Conflict resolution style						
Competition		0.20	0.23			
Accommodation		0.21				
Compromise			0.37			
Collaboration			0.33	0.22		
Avoidance		0.24				
Bond et al. (2004)	180					
Conflict resolution style						
Competition		0.22				
Accommodation			0.33			0.31
Compromise			0.15	0.18		
Collaboration			0.17	0.22		
Fu et al. (2004)	291					
Influence tactics						
Relationship based		0.23	0.06		0.19	0.15
Persuasive		-0.10	0.25		-0.09	0.06
Assertive		0.20			0.17	0.07

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

	n	SCyn	RA	SCom	FC	Rel
Coping and well-being						
Bond et al. (2004)	180					
Way of coping						
Wishful thinking		0.23			0.22	
Problem-solving			0.15	0.22		
Distancing					0.15	
Chen et al. (2005)	359					
Ambivalence over emotional expression						
Emotional rumination		0.27	-0.10	0.17	0.18	
Emotional suppression			0.11	0.26		
Safdar et al. (2006)						
Coping and adjustment	149					
Coping			0.44	0.19		0.25
Satisfaction		0.18	0.35	0.43		0.21
Harmony		0.31	0.74	0.58	0.25	0.55
Self-esteem			0.34	0.19	0.20	0.29
Mastery			0.42	0.36		0.27
Kuo et al. (2006)	400					
Perceived stress		0.18			0.12	
Help seeking attitudes		-0.22				
Neto (2006)	117					
Ageism total		0.49		-0.20		
Mastery			0.18	0.25		
Self-esteem		-0.25		0.18		
Loneliness		0.27				
Social desirability						
Chen, Cheung et al. (2006)	359					
Life satisfaction		-0.15	0.14	-0.14		
Lai et al. (2007)	78					
Mean life satisfaction across three time-points		-0.39		-0.23		
Hui et al. (2007)	133					
General death anxiety		0.35			0.44	-0.22
Death ideation		-0.25	-0.20		-0.35	

Note: All correlations are significant at 0.05 level.

^aIn this study, the author did not report the correlations with reward for application and social complexity as the reliability indices of these subscales were too low.

^bIn this study, the religiosity and fate control were combined into one single score.

Social cynicism is essentially related to the disliking of the self and other social beings, as shown in its negative relations with lower self-esteem (Neto, 2006), lower interpersonal trust (Singelis et al., 2003), and heightened social anxiety (Lo, 2006). If there is a relation between the disliking of the self and others, the underlying mechanism is sure to be an intriguing one, whether it is the negative view of the self being projected to others in the social world, or the negative view of the social world being internalized into the self, or both springing from the sense

of helplessness in the face of a corrupting world. The nature of the relationship deserves more scientific inquiries. Still, it is worth noting that both self-view and social cynicism tend to have unique contributions to psychological outcomes, such as suicidal ideation (Chen, Wu, & Bond, 2007) and life satisfaction (Chen, Cheung et al., 2006).

With a mistrust of other people, it is not surprising to find that social cynicism is negatively related to help-seeking attitude (Singelis et al., 2003). Instead of garnering external professional help to cope with challenges in daily life, social cynics might resort to maladaptive coping, such as wishful thinking (Bond et al., 2004) and emotional rumination (Chen, Cheung, Bond, & Leung, 2005). The lack of trust in others (Singelis et al., 2003) and the choice of competition, avoidance, and accommodation rather than collaboration and compromise during interpersonal conflicts (Bond et al., 2004; Chen & Zhang, 2004) are two sides of the same coin, which further diminish the social capital of social cynics. The deliberate choice to stay away from careers which involve more frequent social interactions (Bond et al., 2004) might further reduce opportunities to expose oneself to positive social experiences that may contradict the social cynics' mindset and thus "correct" their negative bias against the social world. It seems hard for social cynics to avoid the self-fulfilling prophecy it sets in motion and which leads to a negative self-view (Lai et al., 2007).

Given that social cynics tend to dislike themselves and other individuals, and that they do not seek help from others, their well-being may be compromised. Indeed, multiple well-being indicators converge to suggest that social cynics walk in a path of inner darkness. Not only does social cynicism relate to greater loneliness (Neto, 2006) and perceived stress (Kuo et al., 2006), it also predicts lower level of life satisfaction concurrently (Chen et al., 2006) and prospectively (Lai et al., 2007). Mortality-related issues seem to trigger greater threat or at least negativity among social cynics as well, reflected by their greater endorsement of ageism (Neto, 2006) and exhibition of death anxiety (Hui et al., 2007). On top of all these findings, their stronger beliefs in external locus of control and supernatural power (Singelis et al., 2003) might further instill a sense of helplessness and psychological vulnerability among social cynics, both reflecting fragility and putting their mental health more at risk than otherwise.

This discussion of the many dark sides of social cynicism leaves us wondering what are the possible adaptive functions associated with a negative view of the social world and whether there are ways out for social cynics to live a happy and healthy life? Perhaps, this answer may depend upon the context. Suppose a social cynic lives in a nation-at-war. The belief-facilitated sensitivity to social deception and avoidance of close bonding may safeguard the individual from being exploited or even killed. In this case, social cynicism may have a survival value. On the other hand, social cynicism may not be that useful in a lawful, liberal, and fair society, where one's personal welfare has already been well protected by the social system. In this case, the costs (e.g., refraining individuals from establishing authentic and meaningful relationships) would outweigh the benefits (e.g., safety) creating a maladaptive response. Perhaps for this reason, Bond et al. (2004) report that societal cynicism, a nation-level representation of social cynicism, is correlated with a

host of inimical societal conditions, like lower wealth, human rights observance, and homicide.

Reward for Application Reward for application is a belief about human agency. Unlike self-efficacy belief (Bandura, 1997), reward for application does not limit the target object to the self, but refers to what is true for all persons. Empirical evidence suggests that there are distinctive contributions of self-efficacy and reward for application to subjective well-being. Specifically, while self-efficacy beliefs tend to relate to well-being at any time (e.g., Pinquart, Sibereisen, & Juang, 2004; Vecchio, Gerbino, Pastorelli, Del-Bove, & Caprara, 2007), reward for application seems to relate to well-being only in difficult or challenging situations. For example, in two studies (Chen, Bond et al., 2006; Lai et al., 2007), reward for application was only weakly related to life satisfaction, especially in comparison to the contribution of social cynicism. However, for studies on coping and adjustment, reward for application predicts active coping (Bond et al., 2004) and better coping and adjustment in intercultural communications (Safdar, Lewis, & Daneshpour, 2006). These results suggest that reward for application is not just a synonym of self-efficacy, but is also useful in predicting successful adjustments and transitions in life.

An interesting finding is that reward for application is related to prosocial and prorelationship values and behaviors. Specifically, reward for application is moderately related to conservative and self-transcendent values (Bond et al., 2004), egalitarian political attitudes (Keung & Bond, 2002), vocational interests in professions serving others, such as the social type (Bond et al., 2004), preference for compromising, accommodating, and collaborative behaviors in conflict resolution (Bond et al., 2004; Chen & Zhang, 2004), and preference for “softer” forms of influence strategies involving the use of established relationships and noncoercive persuasion (Fu et al., 2004). The specific findings all point to one underlying theme of reward for application—the belief in the equity principal. That is, people high in reward for application tend to also respect and acknowledge other’s interests and fairly divide resources between them.

Feather’s expectancy–value model (1982) provides another plausible conceptualization of the pattern found. Prosocial behaviors, like other behaviors, can be predicted by the multiplicative function of valuation of the goal and the goal attainability belief. While valuation of social connection has been considered as one basic human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000), the goal attainability belief may depend upon one’s belief network. The belief in reward for application may increase one’s belief about his or her agentic control over interpersonal rewards, because the agent trusts that others in his or her social network will be responsive and fair. As a result, the endorers are more active in engaging in prosocial and prorelationship behaviors because of the foreseeable rewards, i.e., the satisfaction of their interpersonal needs and the fulfillment of their expectation that justice would be upheld by all parties.

Social Complexity Social complexity is defined as a belief that there is no single rule governing social occasions, so that individuals need to adjust their behaviors to varying circumstances. In general, social complexity serves as an active facilitator

of problem solving (Bond et al., 2004), and it may orient problem solving in a prosocial manner as indicated by its links to self-transcendent values (Bond et al., 2004), egalitarian political attitudes (Keung & Bond, 2002), and a collaborative conflict resolution style (Bond et al., 2004). It is important to note that social complexity is not related to social desirability (Singelis et al., 2003), suggesting that belief in social complexity does not lead to social compliance as one might speculate. Instead, social complexity reflects a more differentiated view of problematic situations, possibly leading towards more thorough assessment of a situation to yield moderate and balanced solutions.

Given that social complexity fosters problem solving, does social complexity promote well-being? The findings are mixed and inconclusive. In one study, Safdar et al. (2006) showed that social complexity facilitates coping and adjustment in intercultural contact. On the other hand, social complexity is found to be negatively correlated with life satisfaction in both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies (Chen, Bond et al., 2006; Lai et al., 2007). One plausible explanation to reconcile these apparently contradicting findings might be the moderating effect of the salience of the demand for accommodation in a situation. When the situation, like immigration (as studied in Safdar et al., 2006), calls for accommodation, social complexity may facilitate adjustment. In a situation where need for accommodation is not salient, adopting a belief that the social world is multifaceted and multi-determined, one would inevitably feel overwhelmed and burdened by the need to consider so much social information to get by in life. Thus, subjective well-being might suffer.

Fate Control Fate control is the belief that there are impersonal, external forces that determine life events (e.g., fate, destiny, luck, etc.) *and also* the possibility for individuals to exert influence over or shape their outcomes by engaging in various culture-specific practices (Leung & Bond, 2004). Due to its conceptual complexity, its psychological correlates might not seem to be compatible with each other at first glance.

First of all, the small but positive correlation between fate control and external locus of control found in the study conducted by Singelis et al. (2003) points to a small overlap of the two measures regarding the role of external forces in bringing about life events, but at the same time provides empirical support for the distinction between the two constructs. Belief in fate control is different from a personal belief that the holder of that belief is controlled more by external than internal forces. Rotter's I-E scale forces a respondent to choose between an internal or an external explanation for his or her behavior; the axioms describe the world, not the self, and belief in reward for application has repeatedly been shown to be orthogonal, i.e., independent, of belief in fate control

Moreover, the concept of fate control might be easily confused with belief of religiosity as both refer to powerful external forces at work. Religiosity, however, involves more than a belief in "a Supreme Being"; there are many more associated beliefs that refer to the positive, prosocial consequences of adherence to a religion of any kind. For example, in an American study (Singelis et al., 2003), we see that fate control is only related to nontraditional religious beliefs, such as beliefs in

spirits, supernatural forces, and precognition, whereas religiosity is only related to traditional beliefs in a monotheistic God. Though the argument may be confounded by the sample characteristics (i.e., Americans are mostly protestant), it may also illustrate the distinction between fate control from other social axioms at the conceptual level.

In contrast to religiosity, fate control does not correlate positively with the various well-being indicators studied, but presents mixed findings. For example, fate control is related with perceived stress (Kuo et al., 2006), emotional rumination (Chen et al., 2005), and general death anxiety (Hui et al., 2007), creating a negative profile for subjective well-being. In addition, fate control is not related to active coping, but to wishing thinking and distancing in the face of challenging life events (Bond et al., 2004).

This finding leads us to speculate whether a belief in fate control has been used as an excuse not to confront head-on the larger difficulties in life. However, fate control also consists of a belief that fate is malleable. Here comes an interesting conceptual question of the interactive effect of different social axioms: Are people who are high on fate control as well as reward for application the ones who would choose to confront their fate in an active manner, as they are more likely to believe in the power of their own effort to change their fate? Or, if fate control exerts such a strong impact on individuals that no matter they are high in reward for application or not, people high in fate control would still attribute human problems as determined by external agents and beyond the reach of human agency?

On the other hand, fate control was found to be related to interpersonal harmony and self-esteem, two indicators of well-being (Safdar et al., 2006). These different findings present us with a challenge to understand how the seemingly opposing forces exerted by the two themes of fate control work with or against each other to bring about mixed findings across studies. It may be that fate control is particularly responsive to cultural influence in both the importance and direction of its impact on outcomes. Cross-cultural studies will be needed to address this speculation.

More importantly, this puzzle leads us to another important research question: If fate control really captures the idea of individuals exercising control to influence the predetermined trajectories of fate, what are the personal strengths and situational affordances that would allow the shift from being a victim of fate to a coauthor of fate? Is it the kind of problem shaped by fate that distinguishes those high and low in fate control, perhaps?

Religiosity Religiosity refers to the belief in the existence of a higher power or Supreme Being and also the beneficial functions of religious beliefs and religious institutions for human social life (Leung & Bond, 2004). If we consider social cynicism as the “dark force,” associated with a wide array of negative psychological outcomes, religiosity definitely strikes us as the “good force,” along with reward for application, which promotes diverse positive psychological outcomes.

First of all, the relations between religiosity and various paranormal beliefs provide evidence to support their convergent and discriminant validities. Religiosity is related only to traditional religious beliefs (e.g., beliefs in God, in Allah, Atman, etc.), but not with those concerns over superstition, reincarnation, and precognition

(e.g., belief in fortune-telling ability, as found in Singelis et al., 2003). It is also interesting to note that religiosity links negatively to one type of political attitude, namely freedom from regulation (Keung & Bond, 2002). All religious practices and membership in religious institutions involve some degree of self-restraint and rule-adherence; so it is understandable that those higher in religiosity would endorse a more regulated polity. Moreover, religiosity seems to be associated with a lower level of anxieties, whether it is the anxiety over death (Hui et al., 2007) or social anxiety as implied by the inclination towards choosing a social-oriented vocation (Bond et al., 2004).

In terms of coping and adjustment, studies with immigrants on their adaptation repeatedly show religiosity to be a protective factor associating with positive psychological outcomes. In a study conducted in Canada, Iranian immigrants who endorsed religiosity fared better across various well-being indicators, such as active coping, sense of mastery, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and interpersonal harmony (Safdar et al., 2006).

The findings mentioned above should not come as surprises, since the positive relation between personal religiosity and mental health has been repeatedly shown in previous meta-analyses (e.g., Bergin, 1983, 1991; Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Payne, Bergin, Bielema, & Jenkins, 1991). However, the use of the religiosity scale from the SAS taps not only religious affiliation and practices (behavioral aspects) but also the belief (the cognitive component) that religions are socially beneficial, a conceptually different construct as compared to those studied in most previous research on being religious. One may argue that the belief in religiosity is the hallmark of religious internalization (Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993), capturing the true essence of what a religion means to an individual.

In the future, research investigating independent contributions of the cognitive and behavioral components of religiosity would help to advance our knowledge on the specific pathways linking religiosity and well-being.

Future Directions

This literature review has identified three important gaps in the current research on social axioms and points towards four important agendas for future research. Firstly, it is necessary to consider the causal relation, if any, between social axioms and their different psychological correlates. In our review, most research conducted involves correlational studies. Only three studies (Lai et al., 2007; Leung, 2006; Leung, Hui, & Bond, 2007) have so far employed a longitudinal design. Thus, the causal relationships between social axioms and various psychological processes remain inconclusive, albeit suggestive. We encourage colleagues to use longitudinal designs to better test the causal directionality of social axioms and other psychological constructs. In addition, as previously mentioned, the levels of some social axioms endorsed are not fixed but somewhat

malleable, subject to situational cues and influences. Accordingly, this suggests the possibility of experimental manipulation of the endorsements of social axioms, similar to other belief constructs, such as lay beliefs about intelligence and personality (Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995). If such experimental paradigms prove to be feasible, it opens up important and fruitful opportunities to test the causal relationships among social axioms and other psychological constructs of interest.

Our second suggestion concerns the person–situation interaction as discussed by Mischel and Shoda (1995, 1998). Specifically, we suggest that social axioms may moderate the impact of situational cues on various psychological outcomes. Social axioms are regarded as epistemic beliefs; they may color inferences and interpretations drawn from situational cues. Previous research has also shown that beliefs can shape social inferences. For example, individuals who believe that a relationship's outcome is destined tend to heavily emphasize the goodness of initial interaction experiences more than nonbelievers, such that their assessment of the partner's initial personality and initial relationship satisfaction is a stronger predictor of their relationship commitment (Knee, 1998; Knee, Nanayakkara, Vietor, Neighbors, & Patrick, 2001). Similarly, it is presumed that different levels of social axioms may impose different subjective meanings upon the same situation, and hence create different realities leading to diverse psychological outcomes. For example, fate control induces individuals to make more external attributions for negative events (Leung et al., 2007) and hence may encourage an individual to engage in wishful thinking to overcome these negative experiences (Bond et al., 2004). Future studies may examine the interaction effects between social axioms and situations on psychological outcomes.

Thirdly, instead of considering each of the five social axioms separately for their impact on psychological outcomes, we can also investigate an individual's profile of social axioms. For example, an individual who believes in fate control *and* reward for application might be more likely in his or her attempt to shape the impact of fate than one who does not endorse the belief of reward for application. So, it is possible that not only does the level of each individual social axiom matter, but also their interactions with each other within the individual.

Finally, as discussed by Leung et al. (2002), the major contribution of social axioms research is to expand the toolbox for explaining cross-cultural differences. In past decades, cross-cultural differences have primarily been explained by values; still, values cannot explain a great deal of variance in many social phenomena. Social axioms are promising candidates for explaining variance in cross-cultural differences that are not readily accounted for by values.

Currently, most of the social axioms research thus far has involved one single cultural group. This feature of the available database makes integrating results across these various cultures an "iffy" enterprise, because culture may influence the way axioms operate to influence psychological outcomes (see, e.g., Fu et al., 2004). Future studies are needed to test the functioning of social axioms in cross-cultural comparisons to assess their roles in differing cultural contexts.

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