Conscience: The Do’s and Don’ts of Moral Regulation

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Recent years have witnessed a proliferation of books invoking the word “conscience,” including The Conscience of a Liberal (Krugman, 2007), Conservatives without Conscience (Dean, 2006), Liberty of Conscience (Nussbaum, 2008), The Conscience of a Libertarian (Root, 2009), Conscience and Corporate Culture (Goodpaster, 2006), The Secular Conscience (Dacey, 2008), and a re-issue of Conscience of a Conservative (Goldwater, 2009). Apparently attractive in marketing books, the word “conscience” appeals to our interest in understanding human behavior, and in particular moral conduct. As morality has increasingly been implicated as a basis for rifts in politics and business, “conscience” has become a catch-all term implying moral legitimacy.

Yet conscience remains an underdeveloped construct in psychology. It has a long history in human discourse, but a brief resumé in psychological investigations. Derived from the Latin word conscientia, conscience was originally identical to consciousness in English, German, and the Romance languages, suggesting the self-awareness common to both terms. Before it was the “lumen natural” of Kant’s practical reason, conscience was the voice of God (Arendt, 2003); as Milton writes in Paradise Lost, “And I will place within them as a guide/My umpire Conscience” (III: 194-5). Metaphors for conscience abound. For Victor Hugo, it was the “gazing eye,” whereas for Herman Melville conscience was akin to the “heaving tides of the sea”
Feldman, 2006). Freud (1961) focused on its punitive nature as the “garrison in a conquered city” (p. 84). In contrast, Becker (1973) recognized our yearning to be good and noted that this “inner sensitivity” is conscience, which should be treated with the “highest reverence” (p. 150).

Early perspectives supported the view that there is no misinformed conscience. As the voice of God, conscience was unerring; and Kant believed that our natural rationality leads us to know right from wrong--that the “law of morality” is a “categorical imperative” (Kant, 1964/1785). The shift to “moral sentiments” in the work of David Hume, Adam Smith, and Charles Darwin not only placed feelings and emotions at the center of morality (“morality…is more properly felt than judg’d of” [Hume, 1978/1739, p. 470]), but also stressed the social bases of conscience. Thus Smith attributed our awareness of right and wrong to “sympathetic understanding” and Darwin to our “instinctive sympathy” (see Hyde, 2001).

In social psychology, too, conscience has long been understood as socially derived, for it is the internalized representation of normative standards (e.g., Baldwin, 1906; Newcomb, 1950). The liberalist tradition (e.g., Kohlberg, 1981, 1984; Turiel, 1983), with its focus on rationality, conceives of morality as based in our understanding of justice, rights, fairness and people’s welfare. More recently, moral psychology has embraced more intuitive processes and has expanded the domain of moral standards and action to include sexual behavior, cleanliness, work ethic, and other instances of personal conduct (e.g., Haidt, 2001, 2007; Hauser, 2006; Krebs, 2008; Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997).

Psychologically, conscience is a regulator of conduct in these moral domains. It functions as guide, witness, and judge. Although we regulate our actions in many ways, conscience is the only name given to a particular sort of self-regulation, suggesting its centrality--and the centrality of morality--in human experience. This chapter explores the nature of moral regulation,
popularly understood as conscience. Based on past work on self-regulation more generally, two types of morality are distinguished. The features of each moral regulatory system are presented, and the utility of distinguishing between them is then explored through applications to two markedly different domains: moral emotions and politics. More specifically, this dual regulatory approach to morality is used to inform differences between shame and guilt, which are implicated in the self-regulation of morality, and between political liberalism and conservatism, which involve the social regulation of morality.

**Self-Regulation: Approach versus Avoidance**

Based on studies of animal conditioning, human learning, neuroscience, and psychopathology, contemporary psychologists acknowledge the importance of distinguishing between two systems of self-regulation: a behavioral inhibition system based in avoidance motivation and a behavioral activation system based in approach motivation (for reviews, see Carver & Scheier, 2008, and Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2003). Overall there are two primary characteristics—end-states and action tendencies—that differentiate approach and avoidance motivational systems. The approach system has a *positive* end-state and an *activation* action tendency, whereas the avoidance system has a *negative* end-state and an *inhibition* action tendency. As Carver and Scheier (1998, 2008) note, the approach system involves movement towards a goal or desired referent, whereas the avoidance system involves withdrawal from an “anti-goal” or undesired referent. They build on Gray’s (1982, 1990) distinction between the Behavioral Activation System (BAS) and the Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS). The BAS is an appetitive motivational system sensitive to reward, whereas the BIS is an aversive motivational system sensitive to punishment.
Approach and avoidance motivational systems have long been regarded as key organizing bases of behavior, and there is now strong support for distinct patterns of brain activation, represented by asymmetrical frontal cortical functions. Recent neuroscience research has found that the BIS and BAS are associated with different neural substrates (e.g., Davidson, 1998; Davidson, Ekman, Saron, Senulis, & Friesen, 1990; Sutton & Davidson, 1997), and numerous studies support the conclusion that greater relative left frontal activity is involved in approach motivation, whereas greater relative right frontal activity is involved in avoidance motivation (see Coan & Allen, 2004; Davidson, 1992; Harmon-Jones, 2003; Peterson, Shackman, & Harmon-Jones, 2008).

The distinction between an approach-based behavioral activation system and an avoidance-based behavioral inhibition system is a fundamental feature of self-regulatory processes broadly considered. It seems likely, then, that it will also characterize self-regulatory processes in the moral domain more specifically.

**Two Modes of Moral Regulation**

Based on fundamental differences in self-regulation, Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, and Hepp (2009) recently proposed two systems of moral regulation: a *proscriptive* system sensitive to negative outcomes (i.e., “anti-goals,” threats, punishments, and other undesirable end-states) and based in behavioral inhibition, and a *prescriptive* system sensitive to positive outcomes (i.e., “goals,” rewards, incentives, and other desirable end-states) and based in behavioral activation. Proscriptive regulation focuses on what we *should not* do, whereas prescriptive regulation focuses on what we *should do*. Proscriptive morality involves avoidance motives and inhibiting a motivation to do something “bad”; prescriptive morality involves approach motives and activating a motivation to do something good.
Proscriptive and prescriptive morality therefore involve different motivational tasks, for the former requires overcoming or curbing “tempting” negative desires, whereas the latter requires catalyzing or establishing a positive desire by overcoming inertia. Proscriptive immorality involves a failure to inhibit a negative moral outcome, whereas prescriptive immorality involves a failure to activate a positive moral outcome. It follows that the two systems of moral regulation are generally concerned with different behavioral domains.

Proscriptive morality is focused on “dangers” to the self and others and involves the restraint of harm, including physical harm and behaviors believed to violate valued group norms. This is also the realm of many of the popularized “deadly sins,” which involve excesses or indulgences that presumably call for self-control. Prescriptive morality focuses on providing positive outcomes and includes behaviors that help others by relieving their suffering or advancing their well-being; examples are acts of benevolence, charity, and generosity. Also included are “activation-based” traits and behaviors associated with the “Protestant ethic”—industriousness, self-reliance, and hard work (see Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Balducci, 2008).

Largely the legacy of thinkers as diverse as Kant (1964/1785) and Freud (1960/1923), morality has typically been viewed monolithically, as a conflict between duty and desire; immorality is regarded as having its source in desire, which must be restrained and overcome. This is the domain of proscriptive morality, which involves the inhibition of harmful behaviors. Yet not harming another is not equivalent to helping another, just as not lying is not the same as telling the truth (as recognized in U.S. courts of law, which permit silence rather than self-incrimination via the truth). Although there is considerable work on prosocial behavior in social and developmental psychology (see, e.g., Batson, 1994, 2010; Batson, Ahmad, & Powell, 2008; Eisenberg, 2010; Eisenberg & Fabes 1998, Eisenberg & Miller, 1987), it exists as a separate
literature and has not been integrated into research and theory on morality. Interestingly, the importance of recognizing a distinction between moral rules that “prohibit harming others” and those that “enjoin one to help others” was recently acknowledged in moral philosophy by Gert (2001), who claims that to date this difference “has not been sufficiently appreciated” (p. 1169).

Despite the dearth of research examining this distinction, there is an important exception in a study by Kochanska, Coy, and Murray (2001), who provide support for two forms of moral self-regulation in their longitudinal research on the early development of morality in children. They distinguished between “do’s,” behaviors involving activating and sustaining an activity (e.g., toy cleanups), and “don’ts,” involving prohibitions and suppressing behaviors (e.g., not playing with a forbidden attractive toy). Kochanska et al. (2001) found that “do’s” were more challenging than “don’ts” for children at all ages studied (14, 22, 33, and 45 months), and fearfulness was associated with “don’ts” but not “do’s.” They conclude that their data provide “impressive evidence of substantial differences” between do’s and don’ts in early self-regulation.

In our own research we have found evidence of the distinct approach versus avoidance bases of prescriptive and proscriptive morality. These differences emerged in studies involving approach-avoidance priming, linguistic representations associated with approach and avoidance, and associations with individual-difference measures of approach-avoidance sensitivity (see the seven studies reported in Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009). Thus a threat-based avoidance prime resulted in increased moral proscriptions, but not increased moral prescriptions. Further, following work by Semin and Fiedler (1988), which demonstrated that concrete versus abstract language reflects avoidance versus approach orientations respectively, we found that proscriptive morality was represented in more concrete verb-terms, whereas prescriptive morality was represented in more abstract-adjective terms. Such linguistic associations may help us better
understand differences underlying the moral philosophies of Kant (1964/1785), who focuses on duties, which are primarily proscriptive, and Aristotle (1989/350BC), who emphasizes virtues, which appear to be primarily prescriptive. Moving beyond language, we found that BIS scores (reflecting a chronic sensitivity to avoidance motivation; see Carver & White, 1994) were positively associated with proscriptive morality, whereas BAS scores (reflecting a chronic sensitivity to approach motivation) were positively associated with prescriptive morality.

**Moral Asymmetry**

Work on the negativity bias in psychology suggests a moral asymmetry—that is, that proscriptive regulation is likely to be harsher and more demanding than prescriptive regulation. Past work on the negativity bias demonstrates that the motivation to avoid a negative entity is stronger than the motivation to approach a positive entity, and the failure to avoid incurs greater psychological distress than the failure to approach (for reviews, see Baumeister, Brataslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Vaish, Grossmann, & Woodward, 2008). Further, Knobe (2003; Leslie, Knobe, and Cohen, 2006) has found that negative side effects have a greater impact and are seen as more intentional than positive side effects in moral dilemmas.

Consistent with this work, Janoff-Bulman et al. (2009) found that the greater potency of negative consequences is reflected in a stronger motivation to avoid “errors” in the proscriptive than prescriptive system. More specifically, proscriptive morality was regarded as more mandatory, whereas prescriptive morality was perceived as more discretionary, and this was the case even when the behaviors involved were “imperfect” duties (see Kant, 1964/1785) that would not be regarded as clearly obligatory. Further, greater blame was attributed for proscriptive immorality than prescriptive immorality, but greater moral credit was attributed for prescriptive morality than proscriptive morality. The concrete-abstract linguistic differences
noted above also support the moral asymmetry of the two regulatory modes. The stricter, more mandatory nature of proscriptive morality depends on greater specificity; we need to know precisely what behaviors to avoid in order to escape the harsher consequences of proscriptive errors. The more discretionary nature of prescriptive regulation allows for more abstract representations of positive outcomes.

Overall, proscriptive morality is condemnatory and strict, whereas prescriptive morality is commendatory and less strict. Given the moral asymmetry of the two moral regulatory systems, it is perhaps not surprising that at the societal level, proscriptive morality is primarily regulated via legal systems. The mandatory, concrete, restraint-based nature of proscriptive morality readily lends itself to a system of laws that is focused on what we should not do, and it can apply to everyone in a society; thus people are punished for “breaking the law.” For any individual, conscience is likely to operate on the basis of both forms of regulation, for we are generally sensitive to “shoulds’ and “shoulds nots.” Nevertheless, one or the other system may be dominant at a given time or for a given person, with implications for domains as diverse as moral emotions and political orientation, as will be discussed below.

Moral Emotions: Shame versus Guilt

When we consider moral regulation, we naturally think about shame and guilt, for these are the emotional consequences of failing to follow the dictates of our conscience. Whether actually felt or anticipated, both function as moral motivators and involve self-evaluation and negative valence. Yet shame and guilt are nevertheless distinct constructs and experiences. In attempts to differentiate between the two, psychologists have focused largely on descriptive differences, and to date the dominant basis for distinguishing between shame and guilt has been a focus on the self versus behavior. As originally proposed by Lewis (1971), shame follows a
transgression attributed to the wrong-doer’s global self, whereas guilt follows from a transgression attributed to a specific behavior. These ideas have been further developed and advanced by Tangney (1991; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007), who also regards this self versus behavior difference as the primary basis for distinguishing between the two moral emotions; when we feel guilt we are focused on what we did (i.e., the “bad” act), whereas when we feel shame we are focused on who we are (i.e., the “bad” self).

Interestingly, past research has also found that shame and guilt are associated with distinct motivations to hide and amend. Guilt motivates attempts to repair damaging consequences, including apologies, confessions, and prosocial actions; in contrast, shame motivates hiding, withdrawal, and escape (for reviews see Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). Despite recognition of these distinct avoidance versus approach action tendencies, to date differences between shame and guilt have not been informed by self-regulation theory. The most common explanation for these divergent action orientations has been the posited self versus behavior appraisals associated with shame versus guilt. Thus Tangney and Dearing (2002) write that these self-behavior differences have “far-reaching implications…for subsequent motivation” (p. 24), for when specific behavior is the problem, its malleability and controllability enable us to make changes and remedy the consequences of the bad action. However, with more global attributions to the self, no action can repair the inadequacies of the “bad” self, and we are therefore motivated to hide or withdraw (also see Niedenthal, Tangney, & Gavanski, 1994; Tangney, 1991, 1993).

We have proposed an alternative framework for understanding differences between shame and guilt, one that links these emotions more directly to self-regulation in the moral domain (see Sheikh & Janoff-Bulman, 2010). Specifically, we maintain that guilt is experienced
when we interpret our transgressions via the prescriptive system--by attending to positive end-
states and moral “shoulds” (the right, good, or moral). Shame, in contrast, is experienced when we interpret our transgressions via the proscriptive system--by attending to negative end-states and moral “should nots” (the wrong, bad, or immoral). Our transgressive act or omission is recognized in both instances, yet we feel guilt when we focus on the recognition that we didn’t act morally by doing the right thing; that is, we did not act like an honest person or caring partner. And we feel shame when we focus on the recognition that we acted immorally by doing the wrong thing; that is, we acted like a liar or a cheat. Guilt highlights positive, rewarding moral referents (shoulds) and impels us forward towards the possibility of repair, redemption and future moral outcomes; we want to act to right the wrong. Shame highlights negative, punishing moral referents (should nots) and leaves us confronting our immorality; we want to escape and withdraw. Consistent with the end-states and action tendencies associated with prescriptive and proscriptive morality respectively, guilt involves a focus on positive outcomes and an action tendency based in activation, whereas shame involves a focus on negative end-states and an action tendency based in inhibition.

In three empirical studies (Sheikh & Janoff-Bulman, 2010), we found support for the proscriptive-shame link and the prescriptive-guilt link. In Study 1, individual differences in approach versus avoidance orientation differentially predicted guilt versus shame-proneness respectively, over and above the predictive value of self-esteem. More specifically, we found that BAS scores (Carver & White, 1994), which assess an approach-based regulatory orientation, were associated with proneness to guilt but not shame. In contrast, BIS scores, which assess an avoidance-based regulatory orientation, were associated with proneness to shame but not guilt. Study 2 found that situationally priming proscriptive versus prescriptive morality increased state
shame but not guilt, whereas priming prescriptive versus proscriptive morality increased state guilt but not shame.

In a third study (Sheikh & Janoff-Bulman, 2010) we found that the types of transgressions most apt to engage proscriptive regulation engendered more shame than guilt, while transgressions most apt to engage prescriptive regulation engendered more guilt than shame. Hypothetically any transgression can be interpreted via the proscriptive or prescriptive system, or both, in response to the same act; this no doubt accounts in part for the positive correlations often found between shame and guilt in past research. Nevertheless, as discussed above, there are some behaviors that are more likely to be associated with one system or the other (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2008). Thus helping and caring behaviors involving the well-being of others and behaviors associated with the Protestant ethic (i.e., reflecting industriousness and self-reliance) are most likely to engage the prescriptive system; transgressions here should result in guilt rather than shame. Proscriptive regulation involves overcoming temptations and restraining from “bad” behavior, and thus more shame than guilt should result from self-perceived “indulgences’ and “excesses” often associated with eating, drinking, gambling, and the body more generally (e.g., Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Sanftner, Barlow, Marschall, & Tangney, 1995). These transgression-based differences in guilt and shame were supported in our third study, both in participants’ responses to experimenter-created scenarios and in their own self-reported narratives as well.

Together the three studies provide support for self-regulatory differences in shame and guilt. An individual’s dispositional orientation in terms of approach-avoidance motivation appears to affect proneness to shame versus guilt, but situational variables (as demonstrated via experimental priming) and the nature of the transgression itself also have an impact on the
specific self-evaluative moral emotion experienced. This self-regulatory framework for shame and guilt does not negate previous perspectives, but rather provides a theoretical framework for understanding them. The more severe, condemnatory proscriptive system of morality naturally leads to harsher, more negative self-evaluations likely to generalize to the global self. It also follows that shame is the more painful of the two emotions (e.g., Lewis, 1971; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Tangney et al., 1992; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Guilt’s emphasis on rewarding outcomes and positive referents is likely to limit the negative evaluation following a transgression and activate alternative, reparative behaviors; a more specific focus on behavior rather than the self would be the likely attribution, for it is a focus on specific behavior that best provides an opportunity to advance subsequent morality.

Interestingly, much past work on self-regulation has assumed that approach motivation is necessarily associated with positive-valence emotions and avoidance motivation with negative-valence emotions. As Carver and Harmon-Jones (2009) note, motivation and valence have been confounded in past research, particularly research on cortical asymmetry. Yet their own work on anger has clearly demonstrated the independence of the two. More specifically, based largely on studies of neural substrates, they have found that anger is associated with approach-based motivation (with an activation action tendency) despite its negative valence, and it involves left rather than right frontal activation. Our own work on moral regulation suggests that from a regulatory perspective, guilt is very similar to anger, in that it too is based in approach and activation and yet is an emotion with negative valence.

**A Few Words about Parenting**

A self-regulatory perspective on shame and guilt receives additional support from work on parenting. Parents are undoubtedly prime influences in the development of conscience and are
instrumental in producing early orientations towards morality and immorality. It follows that parents who focus primarily on prohibitions, relying on threats and punishment (emphasizing Baumrind’s [1966, 1967] restrictive parenting dimension), are likely to produce proscriptively oriented children who are also high on shame. Parents who focus on positive behaviors, relying on emotional incentives and rewards (emphasizing Baumrind’s [1966, 1967] nurturant dimension), are likely to produce prescriptively oriented children who are more apt to experience guilt than shame. From our perspective, with high restrictiveness the parent focuses the child on immorality and “bad” conduct, and thus the goal is obedience and inhibition. Nurturing interactions, in contrast, focus on morality and communicate that the child is inclined to be moral and engage in moral conduct.

In recent research we found support for these links between parenting, moral regulation, and moral emotions; the associations among restrictive parenting, proscriptive moral orientation, and shame were particularly strong. Further, past research has found that recurrent positive, rewarding interactions with parents who rely on warmth and affection rather than punishment are associated with the development of guilt in children (e.g., Hoffman, 1982; Zahn-Waxler & Kochanska, 1990). In contrast, the children of punitive parents who use putdowns and emotional abuse are prone to high levels of shame (Lutwak & Ferrari, 1997; Hoglund & Nicholas, 1995; for a summary, see Tangney & Dearing, 2002), and parents’ own shame-proneness predicts their use of psychological restrictiveness (Freeman, Clara, Frank, Walling, & Mak, 2007). Although parenting is surely not wholly determinative of regulatory orientation, it is nevertheless of fundamental importance in the development of conscience and the moral emotions.

**Politics: Liberalism and Conservatism**
The distinction between prescriptive and proscriptive morality provides a theoretical framework for understanding differences between guilt and shame. As the more condemnatory system, proscriptive morality results in the harsher of the two experiences, shame. Prescriptive morality, focused on positive, more commendatory outcomes, results in guilt and the motivation to repair ruptures in the moral fabric. As moral emotions, shame and guilt are bound to these systems and become engines of moral regulation themselves. Yet in making a claim for the utility of a dual regulatory system of morality, it would seem advantageous to move farther afield and use the prescriptive-proscriptive distinction to unpack differences in an entirely different domain. We therefore turned to politics, and in particular to the distinction between political liberalism and conservatism.

In focusing on politics, we move from self-regulation to social regulation, from a consideration of morality in terms of one’s own “shoulds” and “should nots” to a consideration of morality in terms of broader societal “shoulds” and “should nots.” It is therefore not surprising that books representing the Left and Right invoke conscience, as evident in the list of titles presented at the beginning of this chapter. In recent work we have argued that liberalism and conservatism reflect distinct self-regulatory systems, with liberalism based in approach regulation and conservatism in avoidance regulation (Janoff-Bulman, 2009; Janoff-Bulman et al., 2008; Rock & Janoff-Bulman, 2010; also see Lakoff, 2002). Yet politics fundamentally involves regulation at the societal level, and in particular moral regulation, and thus it seems likely that liberalism and conservatism reflect regulatory differences in the moral domain in particular.

It follows that conservatism, based in avoidance regulation, primarily reflects a proscriptive moral orientation focused on “should nots,” whereas liberalism, based in approach regulation, primarily reflects a prescriptive moral orientation focused on “shoulds.” Most
generally, liberals are motivated to *provide* for the welfare of societal members, whereas conservatives are motivated to *protect* group members. Despite each side’s certainty regarding the other side’s immorality, both of these are moral motivations intended to benefit the group and contribute to its survival. Nevertheless, these distinct orientations reflect fundamental differences in moral regulatory orientation, differences that have major implications for social goals and policy preferences. And although both forms of regulation are typically used in the self-regulation of morality (although one system may certainly be dominant), as we move to the realm of social regulation, and to political liberalism and conservatism in particular, the moral orientations seem to become increasingly non-overlapping.

Reflecting their distinct regulatory orientations, liberals focus on positive outcomes, specifically societal gains, and conservatives focus on negative outcomes, particularly societal losses (Janoff-Bulman, 2009). Conservatives are particularly sensitive to threats and losses (for a review, see Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003), whereas liberals are more willing to embrace novelty and change (e.g., Altmeyer, 1998; Braithwaite, 1997; Duckitt, 2001; Jost, Napier, Thorisdottir, et al., 2007). In our own research, we found that on a neutral cognitive categorization task, conservatives, but not liberals, showed greater cognitive rigidity following an avoidance prime (Rock & Janoff-Bulman, 2010), and in provocative recent research conservatives showed higher physiological reactivity to threat (i.e., sudden noises and threatening visual images) than liberals (Oxley, Smith, Alford, et al., 2008). Moreover, a 20-year longitudinal study of personality found that conservatives at the age of 23 were likely to have been fearful and over-controlled preschoolers two decades earlier; and liberals at 23 were more often described as energetic and resilient as preschoolers (Block & Block, 2006). These
findings all support the posited differences in approach/activation and avoidance/inhibition we believe underlie liberalism and conservatism.

The conservative focus on threats and losses produces a protective orientation reflected in an emphasis on stability and security. The liberal focus on positive outcomes produces a forward-looking orientation that strives to provide for group members via social initiatives and interventions. These differences are reflected in the primary moral agendas advocated by the two political orientations: liberals strive for social justice; conservatives strive for social order. Liberals are particularly attuned to fairness and social equity, whereas conservatives particularly value norm adherence and stability (e.g., Bobbio, 1996; Janoff-Bulman et al., 2008; Janoff-Bulman, 2009; Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008; Kerlinger, 1984).

In past research we have consistently found that contemporary social issues factor into two distinct clusters (e.g., Janoff-Bulman et al., 2008; also, Lewis-Beck, Jacoby, Norpoth, & Weisberg, 2008). One set of issues, which we have labeled Equity issues, includes items such as affirmative action and government welfare for the poor. The other, which we have labeled Lifestyle issues, includes items such as abortion and gay marriage. Positions on both factors are strongly associated with political orientation. However, the Lifestyle issues are strongly correlated with beliefs about social order, but not social justice, whereas the Equity issues are strongly associated with beliefs about social justice, but not social order (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2008). That is, your position on abortion and gay marriage depends on how much you strive for social order; social justice beliefs do not predict these Lifestyle attitudes. In contrast, social justice beliefs predict your attitudes towards Equity issues, which are not associated with your social order beliefs.
More interestingly, we found that the two domains are differentially associated with proscriptive and prescriptive morality, as measured by an instrument that has nothing to do with political orientation (i.e., the Moralisms Scale; Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009). Proscriptive morality scores were significantly associated with positions regarding Lifestyle but not Equity issues, and proscriptive scores were positively associated with more conservative positions. Prescriptive morality scores were significantly associated with Equity but not Lifestyle issues, and prescriptive scores were positively associated with more liberal positions.

The prescriptive link to social justice goals and proscriptive link to social order goals are evident in the domains of social regulation advocated by liberals and conservatives. Liberals seek to regulate social and economic goods in hopes of approaching a more equal distribution of resources in society, whereas conservatives seek to regulate the domain of lifestyles and personal behaviors in hopes of minimizing “deviance” from “acceptable” social norms. At first glance we might also believe that liberals want to regulate lifestyles—just differently from conservatives—and conservatives want to regulate social/economic goods—just differently from liberals. However these are domains of autonomy (based on individual freedom and choice), not regulation, for the respective groups; thus liberals don’t want to regulate abortion and gay marriage, and conservatives do not want to regulate the distribution of social/economic goods. (Some people are not pure liberals or conservatives, but have a foot in both camps; thus libertarians prefer no regulation in either domain, whereas communitarians prefer regulation in both domains [Janoff-Bulman et al., 2008]).

It is in the mode of preferred regulation--the “how”--associated with their respective domains of regulation that proscriptive and prescriptive orientations become particularly evident. Regarding moral social regulation, the activation and inhibition action tendencies associated with
prescriptive and proscriptive morality translate into positive obligations and prohibitions. For liberals, social regulation involves a primary focus on positive obligations; they strive to intervene and establish programs (e.g., affirmative action, welfare programs, publically funded day care) aimed at advancing social welfare and producing greater social justice. For conservatives, social regulation involves a primary focus on prohibitions; conservatives seek to prohibit stem cell research, abortion, and gay marriage. Proscriptive regulation focuses on the “should nots” that restrain people from behaviors that violate group norms; prescriptive regulation focuses on the “shoulds” that activate positive obligations towards others and foster group interdependence.

When protection, social order, and adherence to group norms are paramount, as they are for conservatives, there is a concomitant focus on ingroup-outgroup boundaries and group loyalty. Who is in the group and who is not? Who can be trusted? In this context, lifestyle behaviors become signals of commitment and allegiance to the community—social identity markers indicating warranted inclusion in the group. For conservatives the basis for group membership is common social identity, which is restrictive; for liberals it is a sense of shared responsibilities and is relatively inclusive (Rock & Janoff-Bulman, 2010). These differences are evident in responses to illegal immigrants, for example. Restrictive and attuned to transgressions with their proscriptive orientation, conservatives respond with harsh, punishing responses. Liberals, with their prescriptive moral orientation and consequent emphasis on positive obligations, are more forgiving and accepting of illegal immigrants.

Overall, prescriptive versus proscriptive moral orientations appear to underlie the social regulatory orientations of liberals and conservatives. Liberals aim to advance the good via providing for group members, whereas conservatives aim to prevent the bad via protecting group
members. By focusing on positive morality and “shoulds,” liberals rely on positive obligations as their primary mode of social regulation. In contrast, by focusing on immorality and “should nots,” conservatives rely on prohibitions as their primary mode of social regulation.

**Current Work and Future Directions**

The distinction between proscriptive and prescriptive morality provides one means of exploring conscience and moral regulation. This dual perspective offers new ways of understanding old divisions such as shame versus guilt and political liberalism versus conservatism. We are currently investigating additional phenomena that we believe may also benefit from a dual regulatory analysis. At the societal level, we are interested in regulatory differences associated with major religions, particularly given their different emphases on sin and transgressions versus virtue and good deeds. Following Monin, Pizarro, and Beer’s (2007) call for more work on the “moral self-image,” we have also begun to explore the relationship between moral self-image and the two regulatory orientations. Differences in monitoring for positive versus negative outcomes suggests that prescriptive regulation will render “good” versus “bad” thoughts and behaviors differentially accessible and available. Prescriptive regulation is therefore likely to result in higher moral self-regard then proscriptive regulation, a pattern of results we found in a recent study. We are also investigating the over-regulation of proscriptive morality (and the under-regulation of prescriptive morality) to better understand increases in behavioral transgressions associated with very restrictive, punitive parents. High levels of shame in their children suggest that traditional attribution-based explanations (i.e., strong external justification precludes internalization of norms) are inadequate. Hence we are testing an ego depletion model based on monitoring and suppression effects associated with increased availability and potency of negative temptations.
We have also begun to explore power and moral corruption in terms of the over-regulation of prescriptive morality and under-regulation of proscriptive morality (given that power involves approach motivation; e.g., Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). High power may have the dual effect of licensing “moral credits” (Monin & Miller, 2001) while minimizing the importance of proscriptive morality, thereby increasing the likelihood of proscriptive transgressions. At the risk of resembling the boy with the hammer who believes everything looks like a nail and requires pounding, we hope to use the proscriptive-prescriptive distinction in the moral domain to expand our understanding of diverse psychological and social phenomena.

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