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Culture Wars: American Moral Divisions Across the Adult Lifespan

Lene Arnett Jensen[1,2]

Sociologists have argued that the public moral debate in contemporary America is characterized by a "culture war," pitting "orthodox" and "progressivist" groups against one another (Hunter, 1991). This study addressed whether the culture war is evident in the moral thinking of ordinary Americans, and whether age-related patterns exist. Sixty fundamentalist Baptists (orthodox) and 60 mainline Baptists (progressivist) evaluated and reasoned about moral issues such as divorce and abortion. Each group was divided evenly into three age groups consisting of young, midlife, and older adults. Moral reasoning was analyzed in terms of Shweder's (1990) ethics of autonomy, community, and divinity. Within all three age groups, progressivists used the ethic of autonomy more than orthodox participants. Orthodox participants used the ethic of divinity more than progressivists. Orthodox and progressivist groups did not differ much in their use of the ethic of community. Very few age group differences were found within the orthodox and progressivist groups. It is concluded that morality is conceived of in markedly different ways by orthodox and progressivist groups, and that these conceptions are consistent across age groups.

KEY WORDS: Adult development; culture; culture wars; moral evaluation; moral reasoning.

OVERVIEW

The starting point of the present study was the sociological observation that public moral discourse in contemporary America evinces a "culture war." On the basis of an analysis of public debates pertaining to issues such as abortion, the family, and educational policies, the sociologist James Davison Hunter (1991, 1994) argued that these issues show a pronounced polarization between groups that tend toward "orthodoxy" and groups that tend toward "progressivism." The culture war between these two sides is cultural in the sense that they have markedly different moral conceptions. For example, those who are orthodox hold that moral precepts are revealed to humans by a transcendent authority, whereas those who are progressivist emphasize human agency in understanding and formulating moral precepts. It is a war in the sense that the two sides often engage in acrimonious exchanges.

The present study examined the extent to which the culture war that characterizes the public debate finds expression in ordinary Americans' moral evaluations and reasoning. The responses of mainline Baptists (representing the progressivist side) and fundamentalist Baptists (representing the orthodox side) to issues such as divorce and abortion were compared and contrasted. Participants representing the adult lifespan were included in order to examine age-related patterns.

While sociological observations formed the foreground of the present study, it was set against the backdrop of a recent line of moral psychology research that emphasizes contextual factors. In this research, individuals' definitions of morality and their moral reasoning and development have been studied in the context of their culture and religion (e.g., Armon, 1994; Dien, 1982; Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993;

[1]University of California—Berkeley, Berkeley, California 94720.
[2]Correspondence should be directed to the Department of Sociology, 410 Barrows Hall, University of California—Berkeley, Berkeley, California 94720.

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Huebner & Garrod, 1991; Jensen, 1995, in press a; Miller, 1991; Miller & Bersoff, 1992; Richards, 1991; Richards & Davison, 1992; Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1990; Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997). This contextual approach to moral psychology may not be irreconcilable with a cognitive approach (e.g., Kohlberg, 1981, 1984; Turiel, 1983). However, compared to the cognitive approach, the contextual one tends to emphasize the specific more than the abstract, the culturally distinct more than the universal, and the relation between moral reasoning and comprehensive worldviews more than their separation (for elaboration, see Jensen, in press b; Shweder et al., 1990).

The Culture War

I will begin by summarizing Hunter's (1991, 1994) concept of the culture war in more detail (see also Bellah, 1987; Jensen, 1996; Neuhaus, 1990; Wuthnow, 1988, 1989). Hunter examined the opposing political alliances that have been forged on a wide variety of current issues in American society, including those pertaining to abortion, sexuality, family policy, and the content of education and media. He also examined the moral and political discourse of public figures. On the basis of his analyses, Hunter argued that the old lines between religious denominations have collapsed when it comes to moral and political issues. It is no longer the case that moral debates tend to divide different religious denominations, such as Catholics, Jews, and Protestants. Instead, according to Hunter, a new division has occurred within religious denominations and in American culture more generally. It is a division that is vividly seen in the political arena, but the political clashes reflect a deeper division over the sources of moral authority and the extent of individual autonomy. Hunter suggested that American people and groups are divided in terms of what he called "the impulse toward orthodoxy" versus "the impulse toward progressivism" (Hunter, 1991, p. 43).

Briefly described, those who are orthodox share a commitment to transcendent authority—an authority that is independent of, prior to, and more powerful than human experience. In the orthodox view, this transcendent authority originated a moral code and revealed it to human beings. Different religious traditions have different conceptions of the sources through which transcendence communicates its authority (for example, Jews look to the Torah and the community that upholds it, Protestants look to the Old and New Testaments). However, all orthodox regard moral precepts as given to humans by a transcendent being, and they regard these precepts as sufficient for all times and circumstances. Accordingly, moral precepts ought not to be altered to accommodate societal changes, or new human understandings, or individual differences. Rather, individuals and societies ought to adapt themselves in accordance with the moral precepts ordained by the transcendent authority.

In contrast to the orthodox, progressivists stress the importance of human agency in understanding and formulating moral precepts. They reject the view that a transcendent authority directly reveals itself and its will to humans. Instead moral (and spiritual) truths are expressed by humans. Progressivists vary in the basis on which they arrive at moral precepts. Some progressivists draw upon scientific evidence about the human condition. As pointed out by Hunter (1991), this approach is derived from the intellectual tradition of Enlightenment naturalism. Other progressivists draw upon their personal experiences. This approach is derived from the intellectual tradition of Enlightenment subjectivism. However, progressivists unite in a focus upon human understanding and formulation of moral precepts. Progressivists also unite in regarding moral precepts as changeable, because human and individual understandings evolve and societal circumstances change.

As should be clear, Hunter's categories of orthodoxy and progressivism are broad and a caveat is necessary. While American culture might show a marked division between impulses toward orthodoxy and progressivism, this should not be taken to mean that all political groups—let alone all individual Americans—can be classified neatly into two camps. The categories describe two general types, and it is recognized that some groups and individuals possess characteristics of each.

Ordinary Americans and the Culture War

In his writings, Hunter (1991, 1994) primarily focused on the views of publicly active figures and groups who are orthodox and progressivist. He did not analyze the moral reasoning of ordinary Americans who might be expected to show impulses toward orthodoxy and progressivism. In previous research, I

have found that ordinary Americans also give voice to orthodox and progressivist moral outlooks (Jensen, in press a). Next, I will describe this research in more detail.

Interviews were conducted with 40 midlife adults: 20 fundamentalist Baptists (representing the orthodox side) and 20 mainline Baptists (representing the progressivist side).[3] (Members of only one religious tradition were included, in order to capture the extent to which the division between orthodox and progressivist views is occurring within denominations, as Hunter [1991, 1994] described it.) It was found that the two groups were markedly divided in their moral evaluations and reasoning in response to issues such as divorce, abortion, and suicide. With respect to moral evaluation, the orthodox group was more likely to evaluate the practices as wrong.

With respect to moral reasoning, the participants' responses were analyzed in terms of Shweder's (1990) ethics of autonomy, community, and divinity. These three ethics entail different conceptions of the moral agent. The ethic of autonomy defines the moral agent as an autonomous individual who is free to make choices, with few limits. What restricts a person's behavior is mainly a prohibition on inflicting harm to oneself and others, and a prohibition on encroaching upon the rights of other people. Moral reasoning within this ethic invokes concepts such as individual rights, individual interests, individual psychological well-being, and equality between individuals. The ethic of community defines the moral agent in terms of her or his membership in social groups (such as family and nation), and the obligations that ensue from this membership. Moral reasoning within this ethic invokes concepts such as a person's duties to others, the interests of groups (e.g., family and society), and social sanctions. The ethic of divinity defines the moral agent as a spiritual entity who seeks to follow sacred guidelines and to come closer to moral and spiritual purity. Moral reasoning within this ethic invokes concepts such as divine authority, scriptural guidelines, and spiritual virtues. In the previous research (Jensen, in press a), it was found that progressivists reasoned more in terms of the ethic of autonomy than did orthodox participants. Orthodox participants reasoned more in terms of the ethic of divinity than did progressivists. However, progressivist and orthodox groups did not differ in their use of the ethic of community.

The findings of the previous research suggested that the public moral division detailed by Hunter also finds expression in ordinary Americans' moral thought. Thus the orthodox and progressivist groups differed markedly in their moral evaluations of right and wrong, and in their moral reasoning.

Present Aims

The present study was an extension of the previous research. It included midlife adults (ages 35 to 56) as did the previous research, but additionally it included samples of young (ages 19 to 27) and older (ages 65 to 84) adults. The aims of the present study were twofold. One was to investigate whether the division found in the previous research between orthodox and progressivist midlife adults also occurs in other age groups representing the adult lifespan. It was hypothesized that the division along the culture war lines would be found within all three groups of young, midlife, and older adults. Adults of all ages identify with and participate in the activities of groups that fall on opposite sides of the culture war divide. This is the case for such groups as political organizations, special-interest groups, and religious institutions. Also, most of these groups are concerned with attracting adults of all ages. They seek to draw upon the experience and resources of midlife and older adults while ensuring that young adults will be prepared to take over future responsibilities. Thus one would expect the cultural division to occur across the adult lifespan.

The second aim was to examine if there might be adult age-related changes in the use of Shweder's three ethics that occur within the orthodox and progressivist groups. Given the cross-sectional nature of the present research, developmental and cohort factors cannot be separated. However, almost no research has been carried out comparing adults of different ages on their use of Shweder's ethics, and the present study aimed to provide a preliminary examination.

Research addressing whether developmental changes occur in adults' cognitive and moral reasoning has grown in recent years in psychology and related disciplines. Researchers and theorists have addressed whether adult cognitive development oc-

[3] In the study, the proportions of women and men did not differ significantly. All participants were Caucasian, and almost all belonged to the middle to upper middle classes.

curs in such areas as postformal and dialectical thought (Benack & Basseches, 1989; Kramer & Woodruff, 1986; Labouvie-Vief, 1980, 1990, 1992; Sinnott, 1989), reflective judgment (Kitchener & King, 1990; Kitchener, Lynch, Fischer, & Wood, 1993), and wisdom (Baltes, Staudinger, Maercker, & Smith, 1995; Smith & Baltes, 1990; Smith, Dixon, & Baltes, 1989). Researchers have also addressed whether adult moral development occurs in terms of Kohlberg's stages (Bielby & Papalia, 1975; Chap, 1986; Pratt, Golding, & Hunter, 1983, 1984; Pratt, Golding, Hunter, & Norris, 1988; Pratt, Golding, & Kerig, 1987).

The present research followed these lines of cognitive and moral research in addressing adult development. Here, the specific focus was upon age-related changes that might occur within the orthodox and progressivist groups in their use of Shweder's three ethics. In previous research, Haidt et al. (1993) have found that young American adults make frequent use of the ethic of autonomy and infrequent use of the ethics of community and divinity. Arnett, Ramos, and Jensen (1997) similarly have shown that young American adults frequently use the ethic of autonomy and infrequently use the ethic of divinity. In their study, the young adults used the ethic of community less than the ethic of autonomy in response to one moral issue but as much as the ethic of autonomy in response to another issue. In a study of young, midlife, and older American adults, Jensen (1995) found that young adults made frequent use of the ethic of autonomy, particularly as compared to the ethic of divinity. In contrast, midlife and older adults used the three ethics in roughly equal proportions. Together the three studies suggest that young adults reason markedly in terms of the ethic of autonomy. Later in life the ethic of autonomy may be less salient.

Based on the above studies and more general theoretical formulations suggesting that with age individuals become less focused on their own individual identities and goals and more aware of interdependency issues (e.g., Erikson, 1963; Levinson, 1978), it was hypothesized that use of the ethic of autonomy would decrease with age among both orthodox and progressivist adults. It was further hypothesized that use of the ethic of community would increase with age. Finally, no age differences were expected in the use of the ethic of divinity. Irrespective of age, people are likely to self-select into the groups of fundamentalist Baptists and mainline Baptists based upon similar views of the divine and transcendental. Furthermore, these views are likely to become reinforced through participation in common religious activities.

As an addendum, I want to note that it was not my goal to advocate the theological or moral positions of the groups described in the present study. I see research on America's culture war as a way to better understand the underlying moral conceptions and discourse. In turn, this may point to specific areas of future conflict as well as possible ways toward rapprochement.

METHOD

Participants

There were 120 participants in the study: 60 fundamentalist Baptists (orthodox) and 60 mainline Baptists (progressivist). The participants in each group were divided evenly into three age groups (n = 20): young (ages 19 to 27 years, M = 23.2, SD = 0.58), midlife (ages 35 to 56 years, M = 46.5, SD = 1.49), and older adults (ages 65 to 84 years, M = 72.7, SD = 1.30).

The fundamentalist Baptists attended four independent Baptist churches that self-identified as "fundamentalist."[4] The mainline Baptists attended a church that had a dual affiliation with the American Baptists Churches/USA and the Southern Baptist Convention. The latter affiliation is regarded as an historic affiliation.[5] All the churches were located in a medium-sized Midwestern city.

Only members of one religious tradition were included in the study, in order to capture the extent to which the culture war is occurring within denominations, as Hunter (1991) described it. Also, by comparing people from the same religious tradition some

[4]The term *fundamentalist* derives from a series of booklets edited by A. C. Dixon between 1910 and 1915. They were entitled *The Fundamentals*, and defended a literal reading of the Bible, the Second Coming, and conservative doctrine. The booklets were symptomatic of a more general reaction against the liberalism and ecumenism endorsed by mainline Protestant denominations. The fundamentalist reaction began in the later part of the 19th century.

[5]Generally, the American Baptists Churches/USA are considered to be liberal to moderate in their moral and political orientations. The Southern Baptist Convention is considerably more conservative. However, since the late 1970s, Southern Baptists have engaged in contentious battles among themselves, with many Southern Baptists calling for orthodoxy but some moving toward progressivism (Ammerman, 1990; Hunter, 1994).

Table I. Demographic Information[a,b]

	Young adults			Midlife adults			Older adults		
	Prog.	Orth.	*p*	Prog.	Orth.	*p*	Prog.	Orth.	*p*
Age (years)	22.9	23.6		49.0	44.1		74.7	70.8	
Gender (%)									
Women	60	50	n.s.	50	65	n.s.	50	65	n.s.
Men	40	50		50	35		50	35	
Marital Status (%)									
Single	70	40		0	10		0	5	
Married	30	60		75	90		85	60	
Divorced	0	0	n.s.	15	0	n.s.	0	5	n.s.
Remarried	0	0		10	0		0	15	
Widowed	0	0		0	0		15	15	
Children (number)	0.1	0.3	n.s.	1.9	2.5	n.s.	2.5	3.2	n.s.
Education (%)									
< High school	0	0		0	0		0	15	
Some H.S.	0	0		0	0		0	25	
H.S. diploma	5	10	n.s.	0	10	[c]	30	30	[d]
Some college	45	45		10	20		10	15	
Col. degree	20	35		5	15		30	10	
Post-col. ed.	30	10		85	50		30	5	
Income (%)									
< $11,000	25	10		0	0		0	0	
$11–20,000	10	30		5	0		5	55	
$21–35,000	30	25	n.s.	0	25	n.s.	35	40	[d]
$36–50,000	10	20		30	25		15	0	
> $50,000	20	10		60	50		45	0	

[a]Chi-square analyses were used for gender and marital status. Analyses of variance were used for number of children, educational status, and income. Prog. = progressivists; Orth. = orthodox; H.S. = high school; Col. = college; Ed. = education.
[b]Percentages may not add up to 100 if a participant did not provide the information requested.
[c]$p < .05$.
[d]$p < .001$.

aspects of theology and denominational organization were held constant, as opposed to comparing members of different religious traditions. However, the exclusive focus on Baptists means that groups who are more progressivist (and secular) than mainline Baptists could have been identified. Also, the exclusive focus on one Protestant tradition may limit the generalizability of the findings to some degree.

To provide a sense of the generalizability of the study, it might be noted that mainline Protestants constitute about 33% of the American population (Roof & McKinney, 1987). Fundamentalist and evangelical Protestants, who share very similar moral views, constitute about 20% of the American population (Reichley, 1990). There are, of course, important differences in the theological and moral conceptions between different Protestant groups, as well as between Protestants and other religious traditions. However, Hunter's (1991) evidence indicates that the commonalities within progressivist and orthodox outlooks carry across different religious denominations. Here, the mainline and fundamentalist Baptists will be referred to as progressivist and orthodox, respectively, in line with the assertion that they represent a broader division in American culture.

The participants were recruited in two ways. In larger churches (the mainline church and one fundamentalist church), ministers typically provided the author with a list of active members who were then contacted by the author. Eighty-one percent of those contacted agreed to participate (79% from the mainline church and 86% from the fundamentalist church). Forty-nine percent of all participants were recruited in this way. The remainder of the participants volunteered to take part in the research project after the author had described it at a service.

Within each age group, orthodox and progressivist participants were compared on the following demographic variables: gender distribution, marital

status, number of children, and levels of education and income (see Table I for results and statistical analyses used). Among young adults, there were no significant differences between the orthodox and progressivist participants on these variables. Among midlife adults, the orthodox and progressivist groups differed significantly on level of education. Sixty-five percent of midlife orthodox participants had obtained a college degree or some post-college education whereas the comparable figure was 90% for the midlife progressivists. Among older adults, orthodox and progressivist participants differed significantly on levels of education and income. Fifteen percent of older orthodox participants had obtained a college degree or some post-college education whereas the comparable figure was 60% for the older progressivists. None of the older orthodox participants reported a yearly family income of $36,000 or more whereas 60% of the older progressivists did.

Age group comparisons on the demographic variables were also carried out within the orthodox and progressivist groups. The three age groups did not differ significantly in their proportions of women and men within either the orthodox or progressivist groups. However, as might be expected, the age groups differed significantly on marital status, number of children, and levels of education and income within both the orthodox and progressivist groups.[6] As will be explained later, demographic differences between groups were controlled for in statistical analyses where appropriate.

Responses on questionnaires concerning political outlook and theological beliefs and practices provided additional information about the participants. The orthodox and progressivist groups differed markedly in their political outlooks. For example, 85% of the orthodox participants described themselves as conservative or very conservative. The comparable figure for the progressivists was 10%. (There were no age group differences within either group.) As might be expected, the majority of orthodox and progressivist participants expressed adherence to central Baptist beliefs. For example, 97% of the orthodox and 60% of the progressivist participants described themselves as born-again. One hundred percent of the orthodox and 68% of the progressivist participants believed in the Second Coming of Christ. The participants also engaged in a variety of religious practices. For example, 100% of the orthodox and 80% of the progressivist participants reported that they attended religious service once or more a week. Likewise, 100% of the orthodox and 80% of the progressivist participants indicated that they prayed every day or a few times a week. (The differences between the orthodox and progressivist groups on these religious measures were statistically significant. There were no age group differences within the orthodox group. Within the progressivist group, the young adults attended religious services and prayed less frequently than the midlife and older adults.) Further information about political views and activities, and theological beliefs and practices, is available from the author upon request.

Materials and Procedure

The participants filled out a questionnaire pertaining to five practices: suicide in general, suicide in the case of terminal illness, divorce, abortion, and sati.[7] The construction of the questionnaire was based upon in-depth interviews with 40 fundamentalist and mainline Baptists about the same practices (Jensen, in press a). (Analyses have shown that results from the questionnaire are similar to results from the interview. These analyses were based on samples completing both the interview and questionnaire, as well as samples completing only one of the two measures. The data are available from the author upon request.)

The five practices included in the questionnaire were chosen so as to pertain to matters of life and death, the family, and the roles of women and men. Hunter (1991) has pointed out that these are primary areas of contention between orthodox and progressivist groups. The practice of sati was included in order to see whether participants would reason differently in response to a foreign and unfamiliar practice.

For each practice, the participants first *evaluated* whether they generally regarded it as morally

[6]Among progressivist participants, the significant statistical results for the age group comparisons were the following: marital status $\chi^2(2, 60) = 49.42, p < .001$; number of children $F(2, 59) = 34.40, p < .001$; education $F(2, 60) = 8.21, p < .001$; income $F(2, 58) = 10.29, p < .001$. Among orthodox participants, the significant statistical results for the age group comparisons were the following: marital status $\chi^2(2, 60) = 23.53, p < .01$; number of children $F(2, 59) = 32.70, p < .001$; education $F(2, 5) = 18.72, p < .001$; income $F(2, 58) = 22.01, p < .001$. (See Table I for further demographic information.)

[7]Sati is the Hindu practice where a widow immolates herself on her husband's funeral pyre.

Table II. Sample from Questionnaire: Justifications for the Evaluation That Divorce Is Morally Wrong[a]

DIVORCE—GENERALLY WRONG

Following is a list of statements that people sometimes make in order to explain why divorce is morally wrong. Please read all of these statements carefully, then circle the statements that you think are true and *the most important.* You must circle at least *one* statement, but you may not circle more than *four* statements.

a) Divorce is morally wrong because it is very emotionally damaging to the husband and wife, for example, they may lose their ability to trust others.

b) Divorce is morally wrong because it hampers your relationship with God, you can no longer expect all of his blessings.

c) Divorce is morally wrong because it is harmful to children and to families, and this leads to societal problems related to crime, welfare, and so forth.

d) Divorce is morally wrong because it is very emotionally damaging to the children, for example, they often feel abandoned.

e) Divorce is morally wrong because it causes economic hardship on one or both of the divorcees.

f) Divorce is morally wrong because the Bible states that "what God has joined together, let no man put asunder."

g) Other: _____

_____

_____

[a]Justifications a and e were coded as ethic of autonomy, c and d as ethic of community, and b and f as ethic of divinity.

wrong or not wrong (e.g., "Do you think that generally it is morally wrong to divorce?"). Then, they indicated whether there were *exceptions* to their evaluation. Lists of exceptions were provided along with the option of providing one's own (e.g., participants who regarded divorce as morally wrong were provided with the options of: "Adultery," "Physical abuse of a spouse," "Mental abuse of a spouse," and "Other: _____").

Subsequently, participants selected from a list what they regarded as the most important moral *justifications* supporting their evaluation. A list of possible justifications accompanied *each* moral evaluation (i.e., *generally wrong* and *generally not wrong*) for each of the five practices. In constructing the lists, the most common moral justifications provided by participants in the previous interview study were used (Jensen, in press a). Generally, these justifications were phrased in words used by the interviewees. Each list included six different justifications along with the option of *independently* providing one's own (see Table II for a sample of the questionnaire justifications). Participants were asked to select at least one but no more than four justifications. (Where relevant, statistical analyses controlled for differences between groups in number of justifications provided).[8]

The questionnaires were mailed to the participants' homes. Each participant was offered $10.00 for completing a questionnaire.

Scoring

Each moral justification listed on the questionnaire had been precoded into one of Shweder's (1990) three ethics of autonomy, community, and divinity (described in the Introduction). For every list of justifications, two of the six justifications represented each of the three ethics (for an example, see bottom of Table II). Each justification provided independently by participants was also coded within

[8]Six justifications were included on each list in order to provide participants with a variety of justifications, yet not make the lists too extensive and unwieldy. (By choosing a number of justifications divisible by three, each of the three ethics could be equally represented.) Participants were asked to select at least one justification in order that their moral reasoning could be assessed. A limit was set on the number of justifications that participants could select in order that they would have to discriminate among the options. Four justifications were set as the limit in order that participants could reason within all three ethics and still choose one ethic as their preferred one. The participants were given the option of stating justifications of their own in order not to restrict entirely their response options.

Table III. Comparison of Progressivist and Orthodox Groups on Moral Evaluation[a]

	Young adults			Midlife adults			Older adults		
	Prog.	Orth.	*p*	Prog.	Orth.	*p*	Prog.	Orth.	*p*
Suicide, General									
Not wrong	15	0	n.s.	25	0	[b]	10	0	n.s.
Wrong	85	100		75	100		90	100	
Suicide, Terminal									
Not wrong	45	5	[c]	65	0	[d]	55	0	[d]
Wrong	55	95		35	100		45	100	
Divorce									
Not wrong	55	20	[b]	60	0	[d]	70	10	[d]
Wrong	45	80		40	100		30	90	
Abortion									
Not wrong	35	5	[b]	65	0	[d]	35	0	[c]
Wrong	65	95		35	100		65	100	
Sati									
Not wrong	15	0	n.s.	45	0	[d]	15	0	n.s.
Wrong	85	100		55	100		85	100	

[a]Values shown are percentages. Prog. = progressivists; Orth. = orthodox.
[b]$p < .05$.
[c]$p < .01$.
[d]$p < .001$.

one of the three ethics. (There were 28 of these justifications, which constituted 2% of the total number of coded justifications.)

The justifications were coded on the basis of a manual constructed by the author in cooperation with Shweder (Jensen, 1991; the manual is available from the author upon request). All precoded justifications on the questionnaire had been coded by the author as well as by an independent coder. There was 100% agreement on these codes. All justifications provided independently by participants were also double-coded. There was 100% agreement on these codes as well.

RESULTS

Analysis Guidelines

Chi-square analyses were used for all analyses pertaining to moral evaluation. Analyses of variance were used for all analyses pertaining to moral reasoning. Covariates were entered into the latter analyses where demographic sample differences were likely to be due to sampling error (Stevens, 1992). Thus there is little or no reason to expect orthodox and progressivist populations to differ in levels of education or income. While fundamentalist Baptists have less education and income than mainline Baptists at the national level, this is due to a higher proportion of fundamentalists being from the South. Within local regions the two groups do not differ on levels of education and income (Ammerman, 1987; Hunter, 1983). In the present study, differences between the orthodox and progressivist samples on education and income were thus regarded as being due to sampling error, and education and income were used as covariates in comparisons of the groups.

Covariates were not entered into age group comparisons. The reason is that the demographic differences between the samples of young, midlife, and older adults would also be expected in the age populations they represent (Stevens, 1992). For example, one would expect young and older adults to have less education and income than midlife adults. Many of the young adults were still in the process of completing their education. The older adults were educated at a time when the level of educational attainment for the population as a whole was lower than when the midlife adults received their education.

The number of moral justifications provided in response to a particular issue was entered as a covariate in all analyses where groups differed significantly. The tables specify analyses where this was the case.

For age group comparisons on moral reasoning, a priori contrasts were used between young and

Table IV. Proportion of Orthodox and Progressivist Participants Indicating Moral Exceptions[a]

	Young adults		Midlife adults		Older adults	
	Prog. (*n*)	Orth. (*n*)	Prog. (*n*)	Orth. (*n*)	Prog. (*n*)	Orth. (*n*)
Suicide–wrong						
Lost control of one's mind	18(17)	5(20)	41(15)	10(20)	78(18)	35(20)
Suicide—not wrong						
"Other"[b]	33(3)	n.a.	100(5)	n.a.	100(2)	n.a.
Divorce—wrong						
Adultery	89(9)	81(16)	75(8)	63(20)	67(6)	68(18)
Physical abuse of spouse	89	56	88	37	83	56
Mental abuse of spouse	89	25	88	20	67	44
Divorce—not wrong						
"Other"[b]	27(11)	25(4)	33(12)	n.a.	71(14)	50(2)
Abortion—wrong						
Danger to mother's life	85(13)	53(19)	100(7)	55(20)	100(13)	65(20)
Incest	62	21	86	10	92	30
Rape	54	21	86	10	92	25
Deformed fetus	54	11	86	10	100	25
Teen pregnancy	0	0	0	0	23	5
Abortion—not wrong						
Used as method of birth control	86(7)	100(1)	69(13)	n.a.	86(7)	n.a.
Fetus is viable	43	100	85	n.a.	14	n.a.
Selection of sex of fetus	29	100	85	n.a.	57	n.a.

[a]The numbers in the parentheses indicate the number of participants who held a practice to be either wrong or not wrong. The first numbers in a column indicate the percentage of those participants who agreed with the specified exceptions. Prog. = progressivists; Orth. = orthodox.

[b]"Other" indicates exceptions independently indicated by participants. An example of an exception to suicide not being wrong was when it is intended to spite someone else. An example of an exception to divorce not being wrong was when it is initiated on the spur of the moment and without careful thought.

midlife adults and between midlife and older adults for the ethics of autonomy and community. These a priori contrasts were based on the age-related hypotheses described earlier. For the ethic of divinity, *post hoc* contrasts using a Bonferoni adjustment were used for analyses where the three age groups differed significantly overall. *Post hoc* contrasts were used because no age group differences had been hypothesized. The *post hoc* contrasts were structured in the same way as the a priori contrasts.

Moral Evaluation

Within all three age groups, orthodox participants were more likely to evaluate the moral practices as wrong, compared to the progressivists (see Table III). This was particularly the case for suicide in the case of terminal illness, divorce, and abortion. By and large, the orthodox participants were unanimous in regarding the practices as morally wrong. The majority of progressivist participants regarded suicide in general and sati as wrong, while they were about evenly divided in regarding suicide in the case of terminal illness, divorce, and abortion as morally wrong or not wrong.

Within the orthodox and progressivist groups, virtually no age group differences were found.[9] The only difference occurred within the progressivist group for the practice of sati. Significantly more young and older adults regarded sati as morally wrong compared to midlife adults ($\chi^2(2, 60) = 6.40$, $p < .05$).

Participants indicated whether they saw exceptions to their evaluations of a practice being morally wrong or not wrong. The results are shown in Table IV. Given the small sample sizes for each evaluation, the results can only be regarded as suggestive and statistical analyses were not carried out. Adultery was

[9]The percentages can be found in Table III. However, the nonsignificant statistical results are not reported.

Table V. Use of Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity: Comparison of Progressivist and Orthodox Participants Within Age Groups[a,b]

	Young adults			Midlife adults			Older adults		
	Prog.	Orth.	*p*	Prog.	Orth.	*p*	Prog.	Orth.	*p*
Ethic of autonomy									
Sui. Gen.	0.53	0.00	[d]	0.40	0.00	[d]	0.37	0.05	[c]
Sui. Term.	1.05	0.40	[d]	1.15	0.05	[e]	1.15	0.21	[e]
Divorce	0.60	0.15	[c]	0.84	0.05	[e]	0.90	0.32	[d]
Abortion	0.84	0.84	n.s.	0.79	0.74	[d]	0.90	0.74	n.s.
Sati	0.47	0.00	[e]	0.79	0.06	n.s.	0.50	0.11	[e]
Ethic of community									
Sui. Gen.	1.16	0.75	n.s.	1.30	0.32	[e]	1.26	0.89	n.s.
Sui. Term.	0.60	0.65	n.s.	0.40	0.53	n.s.	0.50	0.95	n.s.
Divorce	1.00	0.70	n.s.	0.95	0.37	n.s.	1.05	1.00	n.s.
Abortion	0.74	0.32	n.s.	0.42	0.32	[e]	0.65	0.53	n.s.
Sati	1.00	0.65	n.s.	1.00	0.28	[c]	1.10	0.84	n.s.
Ethic of divinity									
Sui. Gen.	0.79	1.75	[e]	0.50	1.74	[e]	1.00	1.89	[e]
Sui. Term.	0.85	1.65	[d]	0.35	1.79	[e]	0.65	1.53	[c]
Divorce	0.55	1.10	[d]	0.58	1.16	[e]	0.55	1.21	[e]
Abortion	0.84	1.74	[d]	0.37	1.95	[e]	0.65	1.58	[e]
Sati	0.95	1.05	n.s.	0.42	1.11	[e]	0.75	1.16	[c]

[a]The numbers indicate the average number of justifications provided within each of the three ethics. Prog. = progressivist; Orth. = orthodox; Sui. Gen. = suicide in general; Sui. Term. = suicide in the case of terminal illness.

[b]Number of justifications provided by young participants was entered as a covariate for the issue of sati. Number of justifications provided by midlife participants was entered as a covariate for the issues of divorce, abortion, and sati.

[c]$p < .05$.

[d]$p < .01$.

[e]$p < .001$.

commonly regarded as an exception to divorce being morally wrong. Also, a pregnancy that endangers a woman's life was commonly seen as an exception to abortion being wrong. Among participants who did not regard abortion as morally wrong, most held that an exception is when the procedure is used as a method of birth control.

Moral Reasoning

Within all three age groups, progressivists reasoned more in terms of the ethic of autonomy for almost all of the moral issues than did orthodox participants (see Table V). Orthodox participants reasoned more in terms of the ethic of divinity for almost all of the issues than did progressivists. Within the young and older age groups, orthodox and progressivist adults did not differ in their use of the ethic of community for any of the issues. Within the group of midlife adults, progressivists were somewhat more likely to use the ethic of community compared to orthodox participants.

Very few age group differences were found within the orthodox and progressivist groups (see Table VI). There were almost no age differences in the use of the ethics of autonomy and divinity. Among progressivist adults, there were no age differences in the use of the ethic of community. Among orthodox participants, young and midlife adults did not differ in their use of the ethic of community. However, older orthodox adults used this ethic more than midlife orthodox adults for most moral issues.

It was noticed that orthodox adults appeared to use the ethic of autonomy more in response to the issue of abortion than in response to other issues. In order to investigate whether this was a significant finding, Cochran Q tests with a Bonferoni adjustment were carried out. These confirmed that significantly more orthodox adults used the ethic of autonomy in response to the issue of abortion com-

Table VI. Age Group Comparison of Use of Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity[a]

	Age Groups			*p*-Values		
	Young	Midlife	Older	Overall	Young-Midlife	Midlife-Older
			Progressivist			
Ethic of autonomy						
Suicide, Gen.	0.53	0.40	0.37	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Suicide, Term.	1.05	1.15	1.15	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Divorce	0.60	0.84	0.90	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Abortion	0.84	0.79	0.90	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Sati	0.47	0.79	0.50	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Ethic of community						
Suicide, Gen.	1.16	1.30	1.26	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Suicide, Term.	0.60	0.40	0.50	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Divorce	1.00	0.95	1.05	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Abortion	0.74	0.42	0.65	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Sati	1.00	1.00	1.10	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Ethic of divinity						
Suicide, Gen.	0.79	0.50	1.00	n.s.	n.a.	n.a.
Suicide, Term.	0.85	0.35	0.65	n.s.	n.a.	n.a.
Divorce	0.55	0.58	0.55	n.s.	n.a.	n.a.
Abortion	0.84	0.37	0.65	n.s.	n.a.	n.a.
Sati	0.95	0.42	0.75	[b]	[b]	n.s.
			Orthodox			
Ethic of autonomy						
Suicide, Gen.	0.00	0.00	0.05	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Suicide, Term.	0.40	0.05	0.20	n.s.	[b]	n.s.
Divorce	0.15	0.05	0.30	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Abortion	0.84	0.70	0.75	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Sati	0.00	0.05	0.10	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Ethic of community						
Suicide, Gen.	0.75	0.30	0.95	[b]	n.s.	[c]
Suicide, Term.	0.65	0.50	0.95	n.s.	n.s.	[b]
Divorce	0.70	0.35	1.05	[b]	n.s.	[c]
Abortion	0.32	0.30	0.50	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Sati	0.65	0.26	0.85	[b]	n.s.	[c]
Ethic of divinity						
Suicide, Gen.	1.75	1.75	1.90	n.s.	n.a.	n.a.
Suicide, Term.	1.65	1.75	1.55	n.s.	n.a.	n.a.
Divorce	1.10	1.15	1.20	n.s.	n.a.	n.a.
Abortion	1.73	1.95	1.60	n.s.	n.a.	n.a.
Sati	1.05	1.10	1.15	n.s.	n.a.	n.a.

[a]The numbers indicate the average number of justifications provided within each of the three ethics. Gen. = in general; Term. = in the case of terminal illness.
[b]$p < .05$.
[c]$p < .01$.

pared to other issues (see Table VII). This was the case within each of the age groups. The proportions of orthodox adults who used the ethic of community in response to the five moral issues were not significantly different. Likewise, similar proportions of orthodox adults used the ethic of divinity in response to the moral issues.

DISCUSSION

Divergent Moral Evaluations and Reasoning Across the Adult Lifespan

The present results support a distinction between orthodox and progressivist moral evaluations

Table VII. Use of Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity Across Moral Issues Among Orthodox Participants[a]

Age group	Moral issue					p
	Suic.-gen.	Suic.-term.	Divorce	Sati	Abortion	
Ethic of autonomy						
Young	0	26	11	0	63	[b]
Midlife	0	5	5	5	63	[b]
Older	5	20	25	10	70	[b]
Ethic of community						
Young	53	58	47	42	32	n.s.
Midlife	26	47	26	26	32	n.s.
Older	65	70	75	70	50	n.s.
Ethic of divinity						
Young	100	100	100	95	95	n.s.
Midlife	100	100	95	100	100	n.s.
Older	95	100	95	95	90	n.s.

[a]The numbers indicate percentages. Suic.-gen. = suicide in general; Suic.-term. = suicide in the case of terminal illness.
[b]$p < .001$.

and reasoning. Evidently, the distinction found in public debates, as pointed out by Hunter (1991, 1994), also finds expression in ordinary Americans' moral thought. Furthermore, the results show that the distinction between orthodox and progressivist moral evaluations and reasoning occurs across the adult lifespan. Previous research employing a different methodology (interviews instead of questionnaires) has found a similar distinction among midlife adults in the United States (Jensen, in press a).

The orthodox adults were more likely to regard such practices as divorce, suicide, and abortion as morally wrong compared to progressivists. In terms of moral reasoning, the orthodox and progressivist participants seemed engaged in a tug of war over how much to emphasize individualistic and divinity considerations. Progressivists used the ethic of autonomy more than orthodox adults, whereas orthodox adults used the ethic of divinity more than progressivists.

Examples of the justifications that the participants selected provide a more detailed illustration of the difference. In response to the issue of divorce, many orthodox agreed with the ethic of divinity justification that "divorce is morally wrong because the Bible states that 'what God has joined together, let no man put asunder.'" In contrast, many progressivists selected an ethic of autonomy justification. For example, they agreed that "divorce is not morally wrong because to stay together in an unhappy marriage is destructive to the husband and wife, their emotional well-being and sense of self-worth."

The tug of war is also illustrated by the responses selected for the issue of suicide in the case of terminal illness. Orthodox adults repeatedly selected the ethic of divinity justification that stated: "[it] is morally wrong . . . because even when we are ill God still has a purpose for us." In contrast, progressivist adults were more likely to reason in terms of the ethic of autonomy irrespective of whether they considered suicide in the case of terminal illness to be morally wrong or not wrong. For example, some progressivists agreed with the justification that "it is morally wrong to commit suicide in the case of terminal illness because contrary to expectations you might suddenly get better, and if you commit suicide you will miss out on the rest of your life." A substantial proportion of progressivists also agreed that "suicide in the case of terminal illness is not morally wrong because a person has the right to make that decision."

Thus, the orthodox adults held that God provides human beings with moral precepts. These precepts are given to us in order that we may to the best of our abilities fulfill God's purposes for us. In the orthodox view, the moral precepts should serve to structure communal life and the lives of individuals. God has indicated that such practices as divorce, abortion, and ending one's life when terminally ill are morally wrong. If individuals and communities allow these practices, they are defying God's will. Rather, individuals and communities ought to adhere to the divinely ordained moral precepts.

The progressivist adults focused considerably less on God's word, will, or agency in human affairs and the lives of individuals. Instead, they focused more upon the choices that we must make in life. In explaining the basis upon which choices are made, progressivists often referred to how individuals have the right to make choices. They also often referred to the outcomes of choices. For example, they considered whether the choices are useful and whether they lead to happiness for the self (and for others). The progressivists, then, emphasized that each individual to a large extent is free to make choices. Thus the progressivist adults were less willing to demand adherence to moral precepts than the orthodox adults because they gave more consideration to individual inclinations. For example, they were less willing to set limits on the extent to which individuals might divorce, or have an abortion, or commit suicide when terminally ill.

In short, there is a considerable division between the orthodox and progressivist cultures in moral thought. A focal point of this division is different conceptions of the extent of individual and human autonomy.

The Ethic of Autonomy and the Orthodox

As just discussed, the orthodox seldom used the ethic of autonomy. Yet the issue of abortion presented an exception. A larger proportion of orthodox adults used the ethic of autonomy in response to abortion than any of the other issues, and this proportion constituted a substantial majority. In addition, abortion was the only issue in response to which young and older orthodox adults did not differ from young and older progressivist adults in their use of the ethic of autonomy.

The increased use of the ethic of autonomy among the orthodox adults is accounted for by the fact that they selected the justification that "abortion is morally wrong because the baby has a right to life." Orthodox participants never invoked rights-based justifications except in response to the issue of abortion. As explained above, the concept of individual rights is incongruent with the orthodox moral outlook. Therefore it seems surprising that orthodox participants would justify their moral evaluations on this issue in terms of rights. One possible reason is that in the public realm there has been a movement toward adopting a rights-based language among those who regard abortion as morally wrong (Hunter, 1994). Perhaps in an attempt to appeal to a broader cross-section of Americans, the pro-life movement has begun to speak the popular language of individualism (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985, 1991). They refer to the rights of the child and the importance of the child also having a choice. It seems quite likely that the adoption of the incongruous rights-based language on the sole topic of abortion among the orthodox participants in the present study was a reflection of the public strategy of the pro-life movement.

Homogeneity Across the Adult Lifespan

Homogeneous moralities characterized the different age groups. Within the orthodox and progressivist groups, young, midlife, and older adults were alike in their moral evaluations and reasoning with only a few exceptions. This finding is open to multiple interpretations.

One possibility is that age-related change does not occur past young adulthood within the orthodox and progressivist cultures. Some researchers have argued that individuals very early express the dominant moral evaluations and reasoning of their community (Shweder et al., 1990). Perhaps such early moral conceptions are often maintained throughout the lifecourse. Indeed, the general pattern has been for researchers in adult moral development to detect few or no differences between age groups (Chap, 1986; Pratt et al., 1983, 1984, 1987, 1988). Also, researchers on wisdom argue that it is a form of pragmatic expertise, and they have shown that wisdom is equally distributed across adult age groups (Baltes et al., 1995; Smith & Baltes, 1990; Smith et al., 1989). Perhaps adults develop expertise or proficiency in reasoning about the world in terms of particular constellations of ethics, and such moral expertise or proficiency can be found throughout the adult lifespan.

Another possibility is that age-related change does occur in adulthood, but cannot be seen in the present study. Thus the age group comparisons involved modestly sized samples which may not be sufficiently large to observe statistical differences. Also, age group differences may be found in a more broadly selected sample. In the present study, adults may well have self-selected into the groups of fundamentalist and mainline Baptists on the basis of

common moral (and spiritual) thought. In a previous study (Jensen, 1995), where the sample was drawn from a broader population, differences were observed in young, midlife, and older adults' use of Shweder's ethics. Finally, in future research, it may be useful to compare age groups not only in terms of the three ethics but also in terms of the subcodes within each of these ethics.

Conclusion: The Present and the Future of the Culture War

The present research with orthodox and progressivist Americans indicates not age differences in moral evaluations and reasoning, but rather a cultural divide. The orthodox and progressivist participants were markedly divided in their moral evaluations and reasoning, and this division occurred across the adult lifespan.

It is possible that the issues selected for the present study highlighted the differences between the orthodox and progressivist groups. In future research, it would be useful to include other kinds of issues. For example, research on issues pertaining to the environment, race relations, and aspects of economic policy may find more common ground (Jensen, 1997; Steinfels, 1996).

In terms of basic research, the present study joins with a line of research that emphasizes the study of morality in its cultural context, and with a line of research that focuses upon adult development. In terms of research applications, the present study aimed to be a step toward a better understanding of the underlying moral conceptions and discourse in America's culture war. This approach may point to specific areas of future conflict as well as possible paths to rapprochement.

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