

TALK

UNEARTHING THE FOUNDATIONS: TESTING THE UNIVERSALITY OF MORAL FOUNDATIONS THEORY IN THREE NON-INDUSTRIALISED POPULATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) stands out as a leading contemporary framework for understanding morality, proposing five categories found across human cultures: Care, Fairness, Loyalty, Authority, and Purity. Despite claims of universality, most of the evidence supporting MFT comes from rich and democratic societies. This study steps into previously unexplored territory by examining MFT in non-industrialised populations: the Hadza hunter-gatherers, Datoga pastoralists, and Iraqw farmers. Confirming the presence of these five moral foundations in such populations could bolster claims of cultural universality. To address the challenge of studying illiterate individuals, we devised a novel method—Moral Foundations Boards—employing pictorial representations of moral violations. Our research encompassed both non-industrialized populations and, for comparison, US citizens. While our findings did not align precisely with MFT's proposed structure of morality, they allowed us to notice important cross-cultural variation. For example, individuals from non-industrialised populations exhibited a greater sensitivity towards violations of the Purity foundation. Our results do not fully support the structure of the Moral Foundations Theory, but the study provides clues for further research on the cross-cultural determinants of morality.