

# American Youth's Moral Values: Facts and Reasons Based on the Data Analysis of World Values Survey

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**Abstract:** This article examined American youth's moral values using Wave VI of World Values Survey data. The facts and impact factors of American youth moral values were analysed. SPSS22.0 was applied for data analysis. The following four aspects were explored to discover the facts and reasons of American youth's moral values. First, factor analysis was administered to compare and analyse American youth moral values by examining their attitudes towards immoral behaviors. American youth's moral values were eventually divided into two categories basing on their attitudes towards "deceptive or violent behaviors" and "sexual or extreme behaviors". Second, American youth's acceptance level of deceptive and violent behaviours was analysed separately, and found that young people had a higher acceptance level of "sexual or extreme behavior". Thirdly, potential influencing factors including "education level", "income level" and "the attitude towards traditional customs" were testified to be significant factors influencing the moral values of American youth. Fourthly, this paper tried to explore the reasons explaining the current status of American youth's moral values. Social environment background and multicultural background were mainly considered as the cause of the facts of the moral values among US youngsters. Some notable developing trends were discussed at the end of this paper.

## 1. Introduction: Notion and Types of American Youth Moral Values

Moral values are the internal standards for social members to judge whether various phenomena in society can have moral values according to their own moral needs. They are the sum of moral concepts and moral attitudes formed by members of society according to various moral norms. Individuals understand the moral phenomena in society through cognition of moral values, then compare and choose according to their own moral needs, and finally form moral values that meet their own needs [1]. At the same time, the formation and development of moral values is also the process of two-way interaction between individuals and their environment. In this process, individuals gradually form a complex system of moral values. As a conceptual principle and norm, moral values are the sum of psychological consciousness and behavioral activities. From the perspective of psychology, moral values are important factors influencing moral cognition, moral emotion and moral will, controlling moral behavior, and have a dominant role in individual moral value selection and value judgment. Therefore, moral values are an important part of the individual's moral life in the overall value system. It is an important ideological basis for people to judge moral values and moral values according to certain moral standards. It is an individual's moral value evaluation standard system. Because this article used the World Values Survey data to analyse the American youth moral values, the moral values in this paper specifically referred to the attitudes and

values of American youth in deceptive, violent, extreme and other moral behaviors.

This section selected the questions about moral values in Wave VI of World Values Survey. Factor analysis was applied and the 13 questions on moral values were divided into two categories: the attitudes towards “deceptive behavior or violence” and “sexual or extreme behavior” (the specific analysis results are shown in Table 1). The characteristics of the American youth’s moral values were analysed to discover the reality.

**Table 1:** Factor analysis of American youth’s moral values

<b>Types of immoral behaviors</b>	<b>Question</b>
<b>Deceptive and Violent Behavior</b>	Claiming government benefits to which you are not entitled
	Avoiding a fare on public transport
	Stealing property
	Cheating on taxes if you have a chance
	Someone accepting a bribe in the course of their duties
	For a man to beat his wife
	Parents beating children
	Violence against other people
<b>Sexual or Extreme Behavior</b>	Homosexuality
	Abortion
	Divorce
	Sex before marriage
	Suicide

## 2. Methods: the Characteristics of American Youth Moral Values

SPSS22.0 was applied in all data analysis. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using the principle components analysis (PCA) with maximum variables rotation to reduce the dimensions of the 13 items to reflect people’s attitudes towards certain immoral behaviors. Since the sample size was nearly 2000, we used a cut-off value of .35 for factor loadings [2]. Based on these factors, scale scores were calculated from raw responses for each participant. At the same time, in order to accurately analyse the significant influencing factors of American youth moral values, this paper took the American youth's income level, academic background, and attitude towards traditional culture as independent variables [3] and took the overall level of moral values as the dependent variable.

**Table 2:** Descriptive statistics on attitudes of deceptive & violent, sexual & extreme behaviors

<b>Type</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Standard error</b>	<b>Confidence interval</b>	
				<b>Lower limit</b>	<b>Upper limit</b>
Deceptive and Violent	4.3326	.82407	.04325	4.2476	4.4177
Extreme	2.9894	.98871	.06872	2.8539	3.1249
Sum	4.2992	.84596	.03507	4.2303	4.3681

The specific question for American youth moral values was "Please tell me how much you can accept the following practices? The numbers in this scale range from 1 to 10, indicating that they are completely unacceptable to fully acceptable levels." To facilitate data analysis, the scale was revised to a five-level scale. From completely unacceptable to fully acceptable, the numbers 1 to 5 were indicated, 1 meant "fully acceptable", 2 meant "acceptable", 3 meant "not necessarily", 4 meant "unacceptable", 5 meant

"completely unacceptable". Therefore, if the respondent's score was higher, it indicated that the respondent's acceptance of a certain behavior was lower. If the respondent's score was lower, it indicated that the respondent's acceptance of a certain behavior was higher. This section was based on the above types and analysed the average scores and value orientations of the attitudes of the American youth on "deceptive and violent behaviors" and "sexual or extreme behavior", and explored the characteristics of American youth moral values. Therefore, the overall situation of the American youth moral values was grasped.

### **2.1 Values reflected by attitudes towards "Deceptive and Violent Behavior"**

According to the factor analysis results, deceptive and violent behaviors include eight specific behaviors. Table 1 presents the descriptive analysis of the American youth moral values, including "Claiming government benefits to which you are not entitled", "Avoiding a fare on public transport", "Stealing property", "Cheating on taxes if you have a chance", "Someone accepting a bribe in the course of their duties", "For a man to beat his wife", "Parents beating children" and "Violence against other people". It can be seen from the data in Table 1 that American youth's acceptance of deceptive behavior is very low, and the mean level is between 4 and 5, indicating that the degree of acceptance is "completely unacceptable" and "unacceptable". Overall, American youth are less accepting of deceptive and violent behaviors, and most young people are unable to accept such deception and violence. However, it is worth noting that the standard deviation of acceptance of deceptive and violent behaviors among American youth is relatively high, indicating that there is a large gap between the samples. There are obvious differences among American youth's attitudes toward such behaviors.

### **2.2 Values reflected by attitudes of "Sexual or Extreme Behavior"**

According to the results of the factor analysis, Table 1 also shows the basic conditions of the average degree of acceptance and standard deviation of sexual behaviors or extreme behaviors among young Americans and shows the attitudes of American youth towards five sexual behaviors or extreme behaviors. It can be seen from the data in Table 1 that American youth have a higher degree of acceptance of sexual or extreme behavior, and the mean level is between 2 and 3, indicating that their acceptance is "not necessarily" and "accepted". Overall, American youth have a higher level of acceptance of sexual or extreme behavior, and nearly half of American youth are acceptable for sexual or extreme behavior. At the same time, the standard deviation of American youth's acceptance of sexual or extreme behavior is also high, indicating that American youth have great differences in the value orientation and attitude of this behavior.

## **3. Correlation Analysis of the Significant Factors Affecting American Youth Moral Values**

In order to explore the influential factors of the significant relationship between American youth moral values, this paper examined the potential influencing factors of American youth moral values based on understanding the current characteristics of American youth moral values. Through combing relevant literature and empirical research, it is found that the current moral values of youth groups face many problems and challenges, which are essentially the result of a combination of various influencing factors. In general, its influencing factors mainly focus on political background, economic development level, history and culture, social environment, family and other aspects [4]. This paper examined the potential influencing factors of moral values from the macroscopic and micro perspectives. Combined with the sixth round of World Values Questionnaire, it was finally determined that the "educational level", "income level" and "attitude of traditional customs" of American youth were the potential influencing factors of their moral values. Therefore, this section focused on the correlation between the above three potential influencing factors and the American youth moral values and tested the potential influencing factors by calculating the bivariate correlation coefficient. The relevant analysis test results are shown in the Table 3. It can be seen from the data in the table:

First, there is a significant positive correlation between the overall moral values of young Americans and the youth's attitude toward traditional customs and income levels. The test of the relationship between the overall moral values of the youth and the attitude towards “traditional customs” passed the independence test with a significant level of 0.05, and the correlation test with the “income level” passed the independence test with a significant level of 0.01. Judging from its correspondence, if the American youth group pays more attention to tradition and conforms to the traditions passed down by family or religion, the higher the overall moral value level; if the income level of American youth is higher, the higher the overall moral value level.

Second, there is a significant positive correlation between the value orientation of deceptive and violent classes in the United States and its “educational level” and “income level”, and the correlation test passes the independence test with a significant level of 0.01. It shows that if the level of education or income of American youth is higher, the more deceptive and violent behaviors are not accepted.

Third, there is a significant positive correlation between the value orientation of American youth in extreme or sexual behaviors and their “educational level” and “attitude towards traditional customs”. All the related tests passed the independence test with a significant level of 0.01. It shows that the more the American youth group follows traditional customs or the higher the level of education, the lower the acceptance of extreme or sexual behavior.

**Table 3:** Correlation Analysis of Significant Factors Affecting American Youths’ Moral Values

Test items		Moral values	Deceptive and Violent	Extreme	Education	Tradition	Income
<b>Moral values</b>	Pearson	1	.838**	.682**	.069	.094*	-.265**
	Significant		.000	.000	.144	.048	.000
	N	448	448	448	446	440	448
<b>Deceptive and Violent</b>	Pearson	.838**	1	.172**	.192**	-.014	-.284**
	Significant	.000		.000	.000	.758	.000
	N	448	460	448	460	457	452
<b>Extreme</b>	Pearson	.682**	.172**	1	-.141**	.185**	-.074
	Significant	.000	.000		.003	.000	.119
	N	448	448	456	456	454	448
<b>Education</b>	Pearson	.069	.192**	-.141**	1	.032	.057
	Significant	.144	.000	.003		.486	.219
	N	448	460	456	488	471	462
<b>Tradition</b>	Pearson	.094*	-.014	.185**	.032	1	.125**
	Significant	.048	.758	.000	.486		.007
	N	446	457	454	471	471	459
<b>Income</b>	Pearson	-.265**	-.284**	-.074	.057	.125**	1
	Significant	.000	.000	.119	.219	.007	
	N	440	452	448	462	459	462

#### 4. Discussion: Reasons for the Current Situation of American Youth Moral Values

From the current characteristics of American youth moral values, the following two conclusions can be drawn: on the one hand, the moral values of young people in the United States are in good condition, and most youth groups are unacceptable for most unmoral behaviors. On the other hand, American youth have a slightly higher level of acceptance of extreme or sexual behaviors, and there are certain differences

between the youth groups on such issues. Combined with the relevant analysis results of the significant influencing factors of the moral values of the young people in the United States above, we can analyse the reasons for the current characteristics of American youth moral values mainly including the following two points:

First, the social environment background is an important factor in the formation of youth group moral values. Many scholars have proved through empirical research that the social environment is the main way to influence the formation of moral values, especially the economic factors [5]. On the one hand, in the state of vigorous economic development, people pursue the maximization of interests and benefits, and good economic conditions and social backgrounds encourage young people to form correct values. On the other hand, when there is a contradiction between economic interests and value orientation, the contradiction between the pursuit of interests and moral constraints leads to the swaying of the moral values of the youth. Therefore, there is a significant positive correlation between income levels and youth moral values. In addition, negative events in society will also have an impact on the moral values of young people to a certain extent. Therefore, there is a significant positive correlation between the value orientation of deceptive behavior and the overall social background of youth.

Second, the impact of multicultural background on young moral values is another important factor. Although American multiculturalism brings moral values, orientations and norms of diversity, it also brings about certain conflicts and differences. In particular, the real dilemma of moral relativism and moral nihilism in American multiculturalism has led the majority of youth groups to fall into the dilemma of moral dilemma and moral relativism, which has had a negative impact on the formation and development of their moral values [6,7]. The cognition of mainstream moral values is vague or questionable, leading to a higher acceptance of extreme or sexual behavior by American youth. At the same time, due to the correct guidance of moral education and civic education in American universities, the moral values of some young students can be developed under the guidance of the correct direction, especially for the value orientation of extreme or sexual behavior. In summary, there is a positive correlation between the level of moral values of American youth and its attitude towards traditional customs. Among them, there is a significant positive correlation between the value orientation of American youth on extreme or sexual behavior and its “educational level”.

## 5. Conclusions

In summary, the overall level of moral values of the American youth group is generally good, but there are also some notable development trends. Future work may include the investigation of the three factors of “income level”, “education level” and “attitude of traditional customs” of American youth which are also significant factors influencing the moral values of American youth.

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