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Correlates of Moral Orientations in Contemporary Societies: Case of People Married or in a Stable Relationship in Poland

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Abstract

Usually, people use different sets of rules that organize their moral behavior. Social scientists introduced several concepts of moral orientations supporting a better understanding of the underpinnings of moral behavior, which are the dignity-related, prosocial, reciprocal, and egoistic moral orientations. The study presents the sociological quantitative analysis of prevalence of the moral orientations in Polish society based on a survey carried out in Poland at the end of 2023 on a statistically representative sample of 1082 adults married or in an informal partnership. Various sociocultural predictors such as self-identification with religious faith, self-esteem, materialism, and classic demographic features (age, gender) were tested as predictors of the moral orientations. Comparing our findings to the latest available results, thought-provoking regularities are discovered—individual features like self-esteem and religiosity are stronger predictors in the case of the dignity-related and prosocial moral orientations. The full array of tested factors is visible particularly in the case of reciprocal moral orientation, followed by the egoistic one. The article attempts to suggest a further discussion on the possible future scenarios of morality in modern societies.

Keywords: moral orientation; self-identification with religious faith; self-esteem; materialism

1. Introduction

In the paper, we present empirical evidence for the existence of four basic moral orientations and consider factors that support or weaken susceptibility to practicing them. The concept of social value orientations forms the basis on which we distinguish the types of morality defined as the dignity-related, prosocial, reciprocal, and egoistic orientations. While the moral orientations based on the axis of prosociality and proindividuality are well described in the literature, dignity-related and reciprocal morality are analyzed to a lesser extent. Both require attention because, at least in Poland, they characterize a significant part of society. Our interests focus on the exploration of factors differentiating people's susceptibility to the types of morality. Preliminary analyses have led us to the conclusion that self-identification with religious faith, self-esteem, materialism, and demographic variables such as age and gender can play an especially important role in explaining the moral orientations.

(1) The importance of an individual's religious faith for their moral orientations is quite obvious. At least in the case of dominating religions, this is due to their structure containing ethical dimensions with guidelines for ways of conduct which are morally good from the point of view of a given religion (Geertz 1973). As stated by Shariff

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(2015) religion affects moral decision making as well as moral behavior. This is particularly visible when comparing the prosocial behavior of believers and non-believers. Yi and Tsang (2020) found links between religiosity and moral foundations, especially between intrinsic religious orientation/religious attendance and moral foundations of loyalty, authority, and purity. As evidenced by Skalski-Bednarz et al. (2023), moral foundations can play a mediating role in the relationship between religious attitudes and environmentalism. The meta-analysis of Saroglou et al. (2004) demonstrated that religious people prefer the values connected with tradition, conformity, security, and benevolence more often than non-religious persons. An inverse relationship was pointed out for values such as openness to change, autonomy, hedonism, and self-enhancement. Schwadel and Hardy (2022) pointed out numerous statistical associations between different aspects of religiosity and particular values included in the concept of Schwartz's circle model.

(2) Self-esteem describes the individual resources conditioning the ability to internally resist social pressures aimed at changing one's moral orientation. Sociometer theory indicates that self-esteem is socially related; other people's acceptance and the issue of inclusion in social groups cause a lot of concern. People's perceived relational value evokes psychological responses, including self-esteem states (Reitz 2022). In pluralistic societies, moral orientations, which are specific interpretations of ethical systems, compete with each other, sometimes creating different worldview patchworks. The social processes of pluralism and secularization may create individuals' belief that all moral orientations are equally important. This free choice, however, is confronted with expectations from different social groups and institutions that would like to convince individuals of their arguments on the "free market of beliefs". This may cause some disorientation of individuals in terms of moral judgments and behaviors while healthy self-esteem can be a psychological factor supporting resistance to social influence from groups and institutions competing with each other on the "free market of beliefs".

(3) Materialism describes individuals' susceptibility to life orientation assuming that purchase, possession and consumption are the key criteria of happiness. According to materialists, this relationship is directly proportional—the more possessions, the more happiness and satisfaction in life. Hence, materialists set themselves the goal of multiplying material goods, which causes the development of a materialistic orientation along with the subsequent satisfaction of materialistic desires. This approach has serious social implications, because materialists judge themselves and others through the prism of quantity and quality of the goods possessed (Richins and Dawson 1992). This means that materialists need to constantly communicate to the social environment about their social position built on material goods, which they thus try to exchange for immaterial goods (social prestige). Modern communication platforms such as social media seem to be the perfect tool for this. However, as research results show, this materialistic strategy does not work. Materialism correlates negatively with satisfaction with life (Ozimek et al. 2024). Furthermore, materialism stands in contradiction with some ethical systems, e.g., those promoted by most Christian denominations, which condemn excessive attachment to material values in place of spiritual ones (Frunzaru and Frunzaru 2017). It means that material possessions are not inherently bad, but as an instrumental value they cannot dominate over autotelic values (Dokoupilová et al. 2024), e.g., in Christianity defined in the Ten Commandments.

(4) As research results indicate, age and gender are important variables differentiating the level of self-esteem in the population (Bleidorn et al. 2016), as well as the extent

of self-identification with religious faith and materialism (Pew Research Center 2018; Norris and Inglehart 2009).

Using the Scopus database, we checked over 1100 publications in the field of social sciences containing the term "morality" in the title. None of these publications examines the relations between moral orientations and our proposed set of predictors. We hope that our paper will fill the gap in this area at least partially.

2. Conceptual Framework

Sociological analyses of morality have a long tradition. Durkheim (1982) treated morality as a social fact independent of an individual's will, although reflected in individual behaviors. This assumption has an important consequence: an individual tends to rate their or someone else's social action as good or bad when the action is perceived socially as good or bad (Durkheim 2003). The social interpretation of the action as morally good or bad vests the action with a virtue of obligation which is independent of the actual implementation of the action in real life. So, the collective ideas about which social actions are good and which are bad fulfill the regulative functions in a society (solidarity) persuading individuals into acting in a specific way (Durkheim 1960).

The sociological approach of understanding morality is empirical rather than philosophical in this sense that sociology is not keen on investigating what is really good, what is really bad, or what people should acknowledge as worthy or unworthy. Sociology is focused only on the investigation of what people find as good or bad, worthy or unworthy and which motives induce the realization of social actions based on moral assessments (Hitlin and Vaisey 2013). Therefore, the subject of sociological research on morality is focused on people's moral orientations understood as a set of values, norms and assessments regulating human behavior from the socially prevalent point of view on what is good and what is bad (Ossowska 1971). Depending on historical, social, and cultural conditions, people's moral orientations are organized into types characteristic of a greater or lesser part of society.

Currently, moral foundation theory (Haidt 2013) and the theory of basic human values (Schwartz 2017) are the most influential concepts that capture people's axiological orientations. MFT is based on the concept of the moral judgment that integrates moral intuitions and moral reasoning (Graham et al. 2018). The latter is an intentional, conscious decision-making process regarding a moral attitude, including its behavioral dimension. Moral intuitions are spontaneous in nature and co-driven by emotions and unconscious motives (Haidt 2001). Moral intuitions play a primary role in the formation of moral judgments, the latter are supported and rationalized by moral reasoning (Graham et al. 2011). Clusters of moral intuitions constitute the moral foundations which are an innate mental structure of moral judgments shaped by intra- and extra-group competition (Haidt and Kesebir 2010). Haidt (2013) differentiates five basic types of moral foundations: care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity. The foundation of care underlies the virtues of kindness, gentleness, and nurturance. Fairness is related to virtues of justice and right, while loyalty describes the virtues of patriotism and self-sacrifice for a group. Authority emphasizes the virtues of leadership and followership and purity is associated with the virtues of self-discipline, self-improvement, naturalness, and spirituality. In later works, Atari et al. (2023) distinguish two dimensions of fairness, equality and proportionality. The first describes the pursuit of equal treatment and outcome for individuals. The second refers to the strategy of outcomes for individuals dependent on their merit and previous contribution.

The TBV defines values as beliefs about desirable goals that stimulate behaviors and are standards of people's assessments of other individuals, institutions and their actions. Thus, values perform important functions, ensuring the satisfaction of human needs, at

both basic and higher levels, regulating social interactions and contributing to maintaining group cohesion (Schwartz 2017). The structure of values takes a circular form whose quadrants represent four general value orientations: openness to change, conservation, self-enhancement, and self-transcendence. Openness to change and conservation are opposite value orientations which reflect the conflict between values emphasizing independent thought, creativity, openness to challenges, novelties, changes and values that uphold tradition, unchanging rules, and order. The self-enhancement and self-transcendence orientations describe the conflict between values underlining the need to protect the interests of other people and values focusing on one's own interests. Values in this sense are rather unconscious motives, becoming elements of consciousness in a conflict situation between competing values located in opposing positions in their circular structure (Schwartz et al. 2012). This is a significant difference from the MFT concept of moral judgments, which in the dimension of moral intuitions are acts of consciousness. In this sense, morality, as an at least partially conscious practice of individual and social life, can be treated as an empirical indicator of unconscious value orientation.

In this context, the concept of social value orientations seems to be particularly useful for explaining moral orientations related to the self-enhancement vs. self-transcendence values. The concept of social value orientations explains individuals' disposition to evaluate and to conduct interactions. This disposition varies depending on the extent to which they are willing to compromise between their own and other people's good. These individual preferences are located on the axis of social values between two extremes: prosociality and individuality (Pletzer et al. 2018). The principle of other people's good is a core of the prosocial value orientation. Prosocials are able to take action for the good of other people, even if it requires giving up their own benefits. When the well-being of others in need becomes a central value of prosocials, they are ready to take purely altruistic actions. The general rule of prosociality consists in maximization of the outcomes for themselves and others and/or minimization of the differences between the outcomes (Van Lange et al. 1997). Prosocials treat social responsibility as a norm at the rank of cultural obviousness (Boos-Nünning 1972), which makes them help other persons who are in need (Berkowitz 1972). This individual susceptibility to aiding activities increases along with the internalization process of an overall social norm of providing help and the transformation of the social norm into a personal norm. From the sociological point of view, a personal norm is a specific operationalization of a social norm which indicates specific steps to take to realize the social norm. An internalization and then fulfilling the personal norm of aid directed to needy people can be a source of satisfaction for an individual or even a way to improve self-esteem (Zuffianò et al. 2014). Numerous studies characterize prosocials as persons donating more willingly, manifesting civic attitudes and devoting time to volunteering and proenvironmental activities to a greater extent than other people (Pletzer et al. 2018).

Individualists represent the opposite orientation. They prefer maximization of their own outcomes with little or no respect for others' outcomes, which is evident in a specific life strategy characterized by putting one's own good above other people's good, indifference towards the interests of other people, and insensitivity to social issues. Some social psychologists point to the existence of a common orientation named proselfs combining individualists with so-called competitors who are focused on maximization of the relative difference between their own outcome and the outcome of others (Van Lange et al. 1997; Pletzer et al. 2018). Individuals as well as competitors consciously avoid any contribution to other people's good, even if they have such a possibility. This general disposition to assess and to act in interdependent situations can be conceptualized as an egoistic orientation, being opposite to prosociality.

The set of types of morality is certainly broader than the prosocial and egoistic orientations which can be a basis for mixed types and specific varieties of morality. Peter Blau's (1964) social exchange theory offers an insight into this process. According to the concept, social acts are performed by people to reciprocate somebody's previous act. The driving force for an individual's action in this case is the desire to repay a kind of debt that has been incurred with the person whose acting generated economic, social or psychical profits for the individual. People in debt are socially obligated to repay the obtained profits proportionally. The reciprocal act does not have to be immediate, but its validity does not weaken over time. The interaction aiming at exchange of profits might be direct, such as alternate neighborly help, or indirect, e.g., if a generous donation is not exchanged for poor people's gratitude but for respect of wealthy people among whom charity is part of their status. In this way, a reciprocal motif drives interpersonal interactions.

Certainly, some moral orientations may refer not to the predominance of social or individual good but rather seek justification in an ethical system rooted, e.g., in a specific religion, philosophical concept or political beliefs (Smith 2023; Kant 1998; Fukuyama 2006). Then, the driving force of moral assessments will be the compliance of this behavior with the principles proclaimed by a given ethical system, regardless of whether the assessed behavior is prosocial or proindividual. We call this type of morality a dignity orientation. The correlation between dignity and prosocial, reciprocal or egoistic orientations is possible but this is not a sine qua non condition if the justification for moral judgments is not the social or individual good but fidelity to certain ethical principles unrelated to prosociality or proindividuality. Persons oriented to the dignity-related morality value the courage of one's convictions, honor, being true to oneself, and resistance to the influence of the social environment. Denial of one's own views or giving up one's own principles due to immediate benefits is basically rejected by representatives of this morality.

3. Research Aim

The purpose of our study is to find out to what extent susceptibility to representing particular moral orientations can be explained by sociocultural variables such as self-identification with religious faith and materialism as well as individual features such as self-esteem, age, and gender. In this context, the following hypotheses will be tested:

H1. *The stronger self-identification with religious faith, the higher self-esteem, the weaker materialism and the higher age, the greater susceptibility to the dignity-related moral orientation. This effect is even stronger among women than men.*

H2. *The stronger self-identification with religious faith, the higher self-esteem, the weaker materialism and the lower age, the greater susceptibility to the prosocial moral orientation. This effect is even stronger among women than men.*

H3. *The stronger self-identification with religious faith, the weaker self-esteem, the stronger materialism and the higher age, the greater susceptibility to the reciprocal moral orientation. This effect is even stronger among men than women.*

H4. *The weaker self-identification with religious faith, the weaker self-esteem, the stronger materialism and the lower age, the greater susceptibility to the egoistic moral orientation. This effect is stronger among men than women.*

Polish society is relatively homogeneous in terms of denomination. According to the 2021 General Census, over 71% of Poles indicated the Roman Catholic denomination, while 1.3% declared other religions. Additionally, 6.9% of Poles represent people who

do not belong to any religion. The remaining part of Polish residents refused to answer the question (GUS 2023). This leads us to the assumption that those who declare a high degree of self-identification with religious faith are oriented towards the values promoted by the Roman Catholic Church. Hence, we expect a positive correlation between self-identification with religious faith and the dignity-related and prosocial orientations, which is additionally supported by results of other studies indicating, e.g., a positive correlation between religiousness and prosociality (Tsang et al. 2021). Consequently, we assume that the direction of the relationship will be reverse in the case of the egoistic moral orientation. Because the reciprocal orientation is characterized by a traditional approach to shaping social relations, which rather refers to a religious tradition (Patru 2022), we expect a positive correlation between self-identification with religious faith and the reciprocal moral orientation. If the dignity-related and prosocial moral orientations really reflect some Christian ideals, then those who identify themselves with religious faith cannot be guided in life by materialism which is rejected as a life orientation by most Christian denominations (Klinkenborg and Rossmoeller 2022). The opposite is true in the case of the egoistic orientation. Here, the place of religious faith may be taken by materialism as an expression of life orientation towards worldliness. We expect a positive correlation with materialism also in the case of reciprocal orientation, but for a different reason. This is related to the attachment of reciprocals to tradition that on the one hand is permeated with folk religiosity (deep attachment to religious faith, but rather as a custom, not as an authentic, deeply internalized faith) and on the other hand characterized by great respect for materialistic values which guarantee security and social prestige (Patru 2022). Therefore, we expected that, despite their attachment to religion, reciprocals would be materialistically inclined.

In the conditions of consumer society, buying and consuming can be used as a relatively easy way to improve self-esteem (Consiglio and Osselaer 2022). At the same time, consumer attitudes differentiate value orientations which are components of moral orientations (Buerke et al. 2017; Nazirova and Borbala 2024). In our opinion, reciprocals and egoists are more likely to use consumption and shopping as self-esteem-enhancing tools than prosocials and representatives of the dignity-related orientation, who are less individualistically and consumeristically oriented. Hence, we believe that reciprocals and egoists are characterized more often by lower self-esteem than representatives of the remaining orientations.

Older people show a stronger self-security orientation than younger people (Leijen et al. 2022), which means a greater need for autonomy and independence in interpersonal relationships. This is consistent with the dignity-related orientation which characterizes people who value being true to oneself and resistance to the influence of the social environment. Hence, we assumed that the dignity-related orientation will be more prevalent among older than younger people. At the same time, older people display more prosocial attitudes than representatives of younger age groups; however, it depends on the type of prosociality and socioeconomic status. A meta-analysis of Li et al. (2024) evidenced that a positive correlation between age and prosociality takes place if a prosocial behavior consists in somebody's support in satisfaction of their material needs ("sharing"). In the case of other types of prosociality, this positive correlation may disappear. Hence, we assume that the prosocial orientation is more prevalent in younger than older persons, which results from our operational definition of prosociality covering other types of prosociality than "sharing". At the same time, we also assume a negative correlation between age and the egoistic orientation.

Some studies indicate that younger people attach higher importance to hedonism and stimulation than older people (Leijen et al. 2022), which is associated with considering

such values as an exciting and varied life, courage, pleasure and enjoying life as important. This hedonistic strategy can be most effectively implemented in combination with the egoistic moral orientation. Because the reciprocal orientation in our understanding is more characteristic of more traditionally oriented people, we expect a positive correlation between susceptibility to the reciprocal moral orientation and age.

Our assumptions about the role of gender in the explanation of preferred moral orientations are based on the results of the previous research. Women, as generally more prosocial and compassionate (McDonald and Kanske 2023), should show a greater tendency to the dignity-related and prosocial moral orientations, while men should be more likely to represent the reciprocal and egoistic orientation.

4. Material and Methods

4.1. Sample

The survey was carried out in Poland at the end of 2023 on a statistically representative sample of 1082 adults married or in an informal partnership. Once the survey had been approved by the Ethical Committee of the Institute of Sociology (decision 6/DKE/NS/2023), computer-assisted web interviews at the respondent's home were conducted among the internet panelists. The survey was based on the sampling frame of the research company Ariadna, which was responsible for the recruitment process of participants and the fieldwork. The participants' consent was provided by them in the questionnaire.

The 2023 adult population of Poland was estimated at 30.8 million people, 64% married or in an informal partnership (19.7 million). Taking into account the size of the target group, a sample of about 1100 respondents meets the condition of statistical error at a maximal level of 3%. The limitation of the target group to people married or in an informal partnership resulted from the research topic which is not discussed in this article (types of marital ethos).

All members of the Ariadna research panel who met the recruitment criteria (50,000 persons) received an invitation to the survey. The completed questionnaires were collected until the assumed quotas in terms of gender, age, size of locality, and region of residence were fulfilled. The quotas were based on the official statistics of the Main Statistical Office of Poland (See Table 1).

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample.

	N=	%
Gender		
Male	523	48.4
Female	559	51.6
Age		
18–29	73	6.7
30–39	228	21.1
40–49	272	25.1
50–59	231	21.3
60–69	197	18.2
70+	81	7.5
Average age	49.5	

Table 1. *Cont.*

	N=	%
Family status		
Formal marriage (church wedding)	705	65.2
Formal marriage (civil)	158	14.6
Informal partnership	219	20.3
Children		
The respondent does not have children	174	16.1
One child	322	29.8
Two children	442	40.9
Three children or more	143	13.2
Professional status		
Full-time employment	601	55.6
Part-time employment	60	5.5
Entrepreneur	68	6.3
Pension	260	24.1
Housewife	60	5.5
Other	32	2.9
Class of the locality		
Village	401	37.1
Town up to 20,000 inhabitants	141	13.1
Town 20,000–99,000 inhabitants	222	20.5
Town 100,000–500,000 inhabitants	191	17.7
Town above 500,000 inhabitants	127	11.7

4.2. Measurement Instruments

The adopted research model requires the construction of four special scales measuring moral orientations. In the case of the remaining variables, we used predefined measurement instruments based on M. Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale adopted by Łaguna et al. (2007) and Richins and Dawson's (1992) materialism scale, adopted by Górnik-Durose (2002). The measurement of respondents' self-identification with religious faith based on a single-item Likert scale was included in the survey questionnaire (M10) (See Supplementary Materials).

The construction process of the moral orientation scales consisted of two steps. In the first stage, based on the factor analysis, a set of variables was selected that meet the condition of unidimensional measurement of the studied phenomenon. In the second stage, the selected set of variables is tested for the reliability of measurement based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Hence, in the first step, 25 empirical indicators were adopted, measuring respondents' self-assessment of various aspects of moral judgments and behaviors on five-point Likert's scales:

1. Frequency of aid activities (7 indicators).
2. Moral judgments and rules of conduct consistent with the dignity-related, reciprocal, and egoistic moral orientations (6 indicators per orientation).

Next, the above items were included in the factor analysis based on the method of the principal components analysis using the orthogonal rotation Varimax with Kaiser's normalization. The determinant of the correlation matrix close to 0, the KMO coefficient of sampling adequacy above 0.5 (0.898) and the significance of Bartlett's test of sphericity below 0.05 indicate the validity of the factor analysis to create the target measurement scales. After the rotation of the four factors meeting Kaiser's criterion with an eigenvalue above 1, the following matrix was obtained (See Table 2).

Table 2. Factor Analysis: Rotated Component Matrix.

Indicator	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Frequency of aid activities				
Q1_1. Systematic help for a sick person outside the immediate family			0.615	
Q1_2. Selfless neighborly help			0.791	
Q1_3. Helping disabled/elderly people on the street or in buildings, e.g., when crossing the street, getting on a bus, elevator, opening a door, etc.			0.755	
Q1_4. Help provided to friends/acquaintances, e.g., with moving, renovation, repairs, etc.			0.760	
Q1_5. Selfless help to a stranger, e.g., showing directions, giving a ride by car, providing first aid			0.731	
Q1_6. A financial donation to a foundation/organization for those in need				0.736
Q1_7. Food donations for those in need made privately or as part of campaigns such as Szlachetna Paczka, Help Children Survive Winter, etc.			0.466	0.676
Moral judgments and rules of conduct consistent with the dignity-related moral orientations				
Q2_1. I appreciate people the least who pretend to be different than they really are—just to please someone		0.659		
Q2_2. I try to help my friends, regardless of whether I can get something out of it		0.599		
Q2_3. I agree with the principle "there is more joy in giving than in receiving"		0.496		
Q2_4. I don't conform to the group if I don't think it's right		0.694		
Q2_5. I have my own rules of conduct and I do not change them under the influence of my friends and surroundings		0.669		
Q2_6. It is worth trying to complete various tasks, even if no one appreciates it		0.544		
Moral judgments and rules of conduct consistent with the reciprocal moral orientations				
Q2_7. I am committed to helping others if I can get something out of it	0.745			
Q2_8. I believe that you should not help someone who cannot reciprocate	0.702			
Q2_9. It is not worth devoting time to, e.g., a hobby if it does not bring financial benefits	0.747			
Q2_10. I only help those who once helped me	0.775			
Q2_11. I am irritated by those who only benefit from the help of others and do not contribute anything themselves		0.549		
Q2_12. I appreciate people who remember the help they once received and come to my aid at the right time		0.621		

Table 2. *Cont.*

Indicator	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Moral judgments and rules of conduct consistent with the egoistic moral orientations				
Q2_13. We should be able to change our views depending on the situation, as long as it is beneficial to us	0.656			
Q2_14. You should only take care of yourself, because you can't really count on others	0.729			
Q2_15. The essence of life is to pursue your goals, even at the expense of others	0.757			
Q2_16. You should put your own affairs above the good of the group	0.610			
Q2_17. You should avoid people who are an obstacle to achieving your goals		0.493		
Q2_18. Everyone should have the right to do what they want regardless of other people's opinions		0.551		

In the further analysis, the first, second and third factors deserve special attention. Loadings of at least 0.4 suggest that the selected variables can be used to construct scales with sufficient homogeneity. We adopted the principle that all measurement scales should be of the same length. Because the scales of the reciprocal and egoistic moral orientations can only consist of four items, we decided similarly about the construction of the four-item scales describing the prosocial and dignity-related moral orientations. To construct both scales, we selected four items each with the highest factor loading. The above sets of variables meet the condition of measurement reliability defined by Cronbach's alpha coefficient. On this basis, four measurement scales were created that meet the conditions of measurement reliability and normality of the distribution of results (See Table 3).

Table 3. Scales of the moral orientations: Descriptive statistics.

	Prosocial Moral Orientation (PMO)	Dignity-Related moral Orientation (DMO)	Reciprocal Moral Orientation (RMO)	Egoistic Moral Orientation (EMO)
Minimum	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Maximum	20.00	20.00	20.00	20.00
Mean value	13.02	15.74	9.17	10.52
Median	13.00	16.00	9.00	10.00
Standard Deviation	3.14	2.52	3.29	3.10
Skewness	−0.191	−0.446	0.613	0.203
Kurtosis	0.383	0.683	0.372	0.066
Cronbach's Alpha	0.817	0.719	0.815	0.743

The remaining scales, namely Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (SES) and Richins and Dawson's Materialism Scale (MS), meet the requirements of measurement reliability and normal distribution. The variables describing self-identification with religious faith (SIRF) and respondents' age are also characterized by a normal distribution of results (See Table 4). The meaning of religious faith does not describe the entirety of such a complex phenomenon as religiosity, but it nevertheless represents an important dimension of religiosity described in the literature as a global attitude towards religious faith (Glock 1962; Jarmoch 2022).

Table 4. SES, MS, SIRF, and age: Descriptive statistics.

	SES	MS	SIRF	AGE
Minimum	11.00	21.00	1.00	18
Maximum	40.00	132.00	5.00	86
Mean value	29.15	74.62	3.17	48.95
Median	29.00	77.27	4.00	48.00
Standard Deviation	4.62	15.24	1.20	13.61
Skewness	0.213	−0.246	−0.511	0.166
Kurtosis	0.191	0.469	−0.845	−0.833
Cronbach's Alpha	0.843	0.864	-	-

5. Results

5.1. Prevalence of Moral Orientations

Analogically to Faber and O'Guinn's (1992) interpretation of results on the CBS scale, respondents were divided into five groups for each moral orientation: strong supporters achieving results on the scales at least equal to two standard deviations above the mean; supporters whose results were between one and two standard deviations above the mean value; light supporters who fall on the scales in between the mean and one standard deviation above the mean; opponents achieving a result between the mean and one standard deviation below the mean; and strong opponents with the lowest results below one standard deviation below the mean.

The size of the particular segments is presented below (See Table 5).

Table 5. Segments of the moral orientations, in %.

	DMO	PMO	RMO	EMO
Strong opponents	19.6	19.0	13.4	15.7
Opponents	21.5	37.7	43.9	35.0
Light supporters	44.0	32.5	29.7	34.1
Supporters	14.0	7.2	8.3	12.7
Strong supporters	0.0	3.6	4.7	2.5

The obtained data show a relatively strong susceptibility of respondents to the dignity-related moral orientation. Although strong supporters of the orientation have not been found in the sample, the percentage of DMO supporters is the largest and the aggregated ratio of the strong DMO opponents and opponents is the lowest (41.1%). Egoistic morality seems to be the second most prevalent moral orientation. On the one hand, the size of the added segments of the EMO supporters and strong supporters is comparable with the size of the analogical DMO segments (15.2%). On the other hand, the aggregated ratio of the strong EMO opponents and opponents is considerably higher than in the case of the analogical DMO segments (50.7%). Reciprocal morality seems to be in third position in the rank of the moral orientations, while prosocial morality finds the weakest support. Although the aggregated percentages of the opponents and strong opponents of both moral orientations are practically the same (56.9% vs. 57.3%), the aggregated ratio of the supporters and strong supporters of the RMO is slightly higher than the analogical segment referring to the PMO (13.0% vs. 10.8%). However, it is necessary to note that the above

moral orientations are not exclusive, which means that a supporter of, e.g., the prosocial orientation may also prefer another orientation to some extent.

5.2. Predictors of Moral Orientations

At first glance, the particular moral orientations correlate with the independent variables which are contained in the research hypotheses (See Table 6).

Table 6. Correlations matrix of the moral orientation scales and the independent variables, r-Pearson's and V-Cramer's coefficients (Gender), for all coefficients $p < 0.001$.

	DMO	PMO	RMO	EMO
SIRF	-	0.127	0.102	-
SES	0.241	0.120	−0.317	−0.250
MS	−0.187	-	0.446	0.441
Age	0.112	-	−0.281	−0.289
Gender	-	-	-	-

The tendencies seem to be clear: positive self-esteem goes with the DMO and PMO; the negative one co-occurs with the RMO and EMO. One's non-materialistic attitude co-exists rather with the DMO. On the contrary, increasing materialism goes clearly along with the growing susceptibility to the RMO and EMO. Those who identify themselves with religious faith are more probable supporters of the PMO or RMO. Increasing age goes along with the growing acceptance of the DMO and with the declining support of the RMO and EMO. The two-dimensional analysis does not show any relationships between gender and moral orientations. However, the above correlations may only occur in the two-variable models, therefore it is necessary to use multivariate analyses to verify the previously presented multidimensional hypotheses. The linear stepwise regression analysis was used for this purpose.

For each moral orientation type the predictors were processed in five steps starting with the variable which explains moral orientations to the greatest extent. Self-esteem measured on Rosenberg's scale was entered first (SES), then materialism measured on the Richins and Dawson scale (MS), followed by the scale of self-identification with religious faith (SIRF), age and gender.

We observe growing results on the SES scale and decreasing scores of the MS along with increasing results on the scale of the DMO when the general population is taken into consideration. At the same time, the variables describing the extent of SIRF, age, and gender do not explain susceptibility to the moral orientation at a satisfying significance level (See Table 7). Although the regression model is statistically significant, it explains a very low level of variance (7.7% in step 5).

In the case of the prosocial moral orientations, the obtained results partially lead to other conclusions. Similarly to the DMO, we observe growing results in the SES along with increasing results on the scale of the PMO when the general population is considered (See Table 8). However, different from the case of the DMO, susceptibility to the PMO becomes stronger along with growing SIRF, while the MS does not predict a moral orientation. Similarly to the DMO, age and gender do not play any role in the explanation of susceptibility to the PMO. These findings have their limitation: although the regression model is statistically significant, it explains a very low level of variance (3.1% in step 5).

Table 7. Summary of the stepwise regression analysis of predictors of the dignity-related moral orientation (DMO).

	B	Std. Error	β	T	*p*
Total population					
Step 1					
Constant	11.919	0.475		25.098	<0.001
SES	0.131	0.016	0.241	8.149	<0.001
Step 2					
Constant	14.069	0.707		19.899	<0.001
SES	0.110	0.017	0.203	6.589	<0.001
MS	−0.021	0.005	−0.126	−4.080	<0.001
Step 3					
Constant	14.407	0.732		19.693	<0.001
SES	0.110	0.017	0.202	6.583	<0.001
MS	−0.021	0.005	−0.125	−4.052	<0.001
SIRF	−0.109	0.061	−0.052	−1.772	0.077
Step 4					
Constant	14.026	0.793		17.685	<0.001
SES	0.108	0.017	0.197	6.365	<0.001
MS	−0.019	0.005	−0.115	−3.619	<0.001
SIRF	−0.111	0.061	−0.053	−1.806	0.071
Age	0.007	0.006	0.038	1.241	0.215
Step 5					
Constant	14.220	0.814		17.464	<0.001
SES	0.108	0.017	0.198	6.385	<0.001
MS	−0.019	0.005	−0.114	−3.580	<0.001
SIRF	−0.114	0.061	−0.054	−1.852	0.064
Age	0.008	0.006	0.041	1.314	0.189
Gender	−0.156	0.148	−0.031	−1.053	0.293

Step 1: $\Delta R^2 = 0.058$, Std. Error = 2.443; Step 2: $\Delta R^2 = 0.072$, Std. Error = 2.426; Step 3: $\Delta R^2 = 0.075$, Std. Error = 2.423; Step 4: $\Delta R^2 = 0.076$, Std. Error = 2.422; Step 5: $\Delta R^2 = 0.077$, Std. Error = 2.422 (for all steps $p < 0.001$).

The reciprocal moral orientation is predicted in a statistically significant way in the total population by all analyzed variables (See Table 9). The direction of the prediction is almost completely different from the previously analyzed orientations. Firstly, a weakened SES goes along with a stronger susceptibility to the RMO. Secondly, the growing tendency to this moral orientation co-appears with increasing MS. Thirdly, unlike the case of the DMO and PMO, the RMO is predicted by age and gender. The tendency to the orientation becomes stronger along with the declining age and is more characteristic of men than women. The only similarity to the previous orientations was found in the prediction of the RMO by the SIRF: the stronger the latter, the greater susceptibility to the RMO is.

The MS is the strongest predictor of susceptibility to the RMO. An increase on the 112-degree MS scale by 1 point goes along with a growth by 0.075 points on the 17-degree scale of the RMO (±0.006). SES also predicts susceptibility to the RMO to a considerable extent. A growth on the 30-degree SES scale by 1 point co-occurs with a decline by 0.131 on

the RMO scale (±0.020). The prediction strength of the RMO by age is only slightly weaker. An increase in age by 1 year goes with a decline by 0.036 on the RMO scale (±0.007). The role of the SIRF and gender is secondary, however statistically significant. A growth on the 5-degree scale of the SIRF by 1 point goes along with an increase by 0.273 on the RMO scale (±0.071). And the result on the RMO scale increases by 0.642 points (±0.172) when men are considered instead of women. The final regression model explains the variance at a satisfying level (27.2% in step 5).

The egoistic moral orientation is predicted in the total population by three analyzed variables (See Table 10). These variables, which explain the egoistic orientation in a statistically significant way, predict the orientation similarly to the reciprocal one when it comes to the direction of the correlations. The weaker the SES and the stronger the MS, the stronger susceptibility to the EMO. At the same time, susceptibility to the EMO becomes weaker along with increasing age.

Table 8. Summary of the stepwise regression analysis of predictors of the prosocial moral orientation (PMO).

	B	**Std. Error**	**β**	**T**	***p***
Total population					
Step 1					
Constant	10.636	0.606		17.546	<0.001
SES	0.082	0.021	0.120	3.985	<0.001
Step 2					
Constant	10.325	0.909		11.356	<0.001
SES	0.085	0.022	0.125	3.936	<0.001
MS	0.003	0.007	0.015	0.459	0.646
Step 3					
Constant	9.286	0.934		9.938	<0.001
SES	0.085	0.021	0.126	3.995	<0.001
MS	0.003	0.006	0.012	0.386	0.699
SIRF	0.334	0.078	0.128	4.271	<0.001
Step 4					
Constant	8.957	1.013		8.839	<0.001
SES	0.083	0.022	0.122	3.850	<0.001
MS	0.004	0.007	0.019	0.582	0.561
SIRF	0.333	0.078	0.127	4.246	<0.001
Age	0.006	0.007	0.027	0.839	0.402
Step 5					
Constant	8.693	1.040		8.356	<0.001
SES	0.083	0.022	0.121	3.828	<0.001
MS	0.004	0.007	0.018	0.543	0.587
SIRF	0.337	0.078	0.129	4.293	<0.001
Age	0.006	0.007	0.024	0.757	0.449
Gender	0.211	0.189	0.034	1.119	0.264

Step 1: $\Delta R^2 = 0.014$, Std. Error = 3.118; Step 2: $\Delta R^2 = 0.015$, Std. Error = 3.119; Step 3: $\Delta R^2 = 0.031$, Std. Error = 3.095; Step 4: $\Delta R^2 = 0.032$, Std. Error = 3.095; Step 5: $\Delta R^2 = 0.033$, Std. Error = 3.095 (for all steps $p < 0.001$).

Table 9. Summary of the stepwise regression analysis of predictors of the reciprocal moral orientation (RMO).

	B	Std. Error	ß	T	*p*
Total population					
Step 1					
Constant	15.757	0.606		25.993	<0.001
SES	−0.226	0.021	−0.317	−11.001	<0.001
Step 2					
Constant	7.136	0.838		8.512	<0.001
SES	−0.143	0.020	−0.201	−7.194	<0.001
MS	0.083	0.006	0.385	13.799	<0.001
Step 3					
Constant	6.357	0.864		7.358	<0.001
SES	−0.143	0.020	−0.200	−7.207	<0.001
MS	0.083	0.006	0.384	13.806	<0.001
SIRF	0.251	0.072	0.092	3.464	<0.001
Step 4					
Constant	8.208	0.926		8.864	<0.001
SES	−0.129	0.020	−0.181	−6.552	<0.001
MS	0.075	0.006	0.347	12.252	<0.001
SIRF	0.261	0.072	0.095	3.645	<0.001
Age	−0.034	0.007	0.095	3.645	<0.001
Step 5					
Constant	7.406	0.945		7.837	<0.001
SES	−0.131	0.020	−0.184	−6.665	<0.001
MS	0.074	0.006	0.344	12.187	<0.001
SIRF	0.273	0.071	0.100	3.833	<0.001
Age	−0.036	0.007	−0.150	−5.456	<0.001
Gender	0.642	0.172	0.098	3.740	<0.001

Step 1: $\Delta R^2 = 0.101$, Std. Error = 3.118; Step 2: $\Delta R^2 = 0.236$, Std. Error = 2.876; Step 3: $\Delta R^2 = 0.244$, Std. Error = 2.862; Step 4: $\Delta R^2 = 0.262$, Std. Error = 2.828; Step 5: $\Delta R^2 = 0.272$, Std. Error = 2.811 (for all steps $p < 0.001$).

The MS is the strongest predictor. An increase on the 112-degree materialism scale by 1 point goes along with a growth by 0.073 points on the 17-degree scale of the EMO (±0.006). Age is the second strongest predictor of the EMO. An increase in age by 1 year means a decline by 0.037 points on the 17-degree scale of the EMO (±0.006). The SES predicts susceptibility to the moral orientation to a lesser extent. A growth on the 30-degree SES scale by 1 point co-occurs with a decrease by 0.073 on the EMO scale (±0.019). The SIRF and gender do not play any significant role in the prediction of susceptibility to the EMO in the total population. The final regression model explains the variance at a satisfying level (23.5% in step 5).

Table 10. Summary of the stepwise regression analysis of predictors of the egoistic moral orientation (EMO).

	B	Std. Error	ß	T	*p*
Total population					
Step 1					
Constant	15.421	0.584		26.417	<0.001
SES	−0.168	0.020	−0.250	−8.493	<0.001
Step 2					
Constant	6.931	0.804		8.620	<0.001
SES	−0.086	0.019	−0.128	−4.525	<0.001
MS	0.082	0.006	0.402	14.171	<0.001
Step 3					
Constant	6.973	0.833		8.370	<0.001
SES	−0.086	0.019	−0.129	−4.524	<0.001
MS	0.082	0.006	0.402	14.166	<0.001
SIRF	−0.014	0.070	−0.005	−0.197	0.844
Step 4					
Constant	8.931	0.891		10.028	<0.001
SES	−0.072	0.019	−0.107	−3.805	<0.001
MS	0.074	0.006	0.362	12.512	<0.001
SIRF	−0.003	0.069	−0.001	−0.044	0.965
Age	−0.036	0.006	−0.160	−5.684	<0.001
Step 5					
Constant	8.595	0.914		9.406	<0.001
SES	−0.073	0.019	−0.108	−3.840	<0.001
MS	0.073	0.006	0.360	12.457	<0.001
SIRF	0.002	0.069	0.001	0.029	0.997
Age	−0.037	0.006	−0.163	−5.791	<0.001
Gender	0.269	0.166	0.043	1.623	0.105

Step 1: $\Delta R^2 = 0.063$, Std. Error = 3.003; Step 2: $\Delta R^2 = 0.210$, Std. Error = 2.758; Step 3: $\Delta R^2 = 0.210$, Std. Error = 2.760; Step 4: $\Delta R^2 = 0.233$, Std. Error = 2.720; Step 5: $\Delta R^2 = 0.235$, Std. Error = 2.719 (for all steps $p < 0.001$).

6. Discussion

We set ourselves two main goals of the analyses. In the descriptive sense, we wanted to check to what extent the moral orientations we theorized actually exist, and, in the explanatory sense, whether the variables adopted in the predictive model differentiate social identification with particular orientations. It turned out that all four moral orientations are present in Polish society, the dignity-related and egoistic moral orientations slightly more often than the reciprocal orientation and definitely more often than the prosocial orientation. Only self-esteem turned out to be a statistically significant predictor of moral orientation in all four analyzed models. The remaining variables explain susceptibility to the moral orientations only in some predictive models. In this context our assumptions expressed in the hypotheses are partially confirmed. Indeed, the obtained data show us that self-esteem correlates positively with the dignity-related (H1) as well as the prosocial moral orientations (H2) and negatively with the egoistic orientation (H4). The healthier self-

esteem is, the greater the probability that the dignity-related or prosocial orientations are represented in the general population, while a stronger tendency to the egoistic orientation co-exists with a lower level of self-esteem. This diagnosis is in line with results of other studies. Zuffianò et al.'s (2014) longitudinal study shows that prosociality and self-esteem are positively correlated and the development of one factor during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood co-occurs with the development of the other. Since the egoistic orientation is the opposite of the prosocial one, the results of the Zuffianò et al. study indicate a possible negative correlation between self-esteem and the egoistic moral orientation. Using Rosenberg's scale, Shiqing and Hao (2022) clearly found this relationship in a sample of 540 adolescents aged 12–14 years old.

The positive correlation between self-esteem and susceptibility to dignity-related morality observed by us is also not surprising. The orientation is characterized by resistance to the influence of the social environment and faithfulness to one's own beliefs, while an individual's autonomy correlates positively with self-esteem. Bouali et al. (2023) found an association between negative self-esteem and a loss of autonomy in the case of 65+ year olds. Similar conclusions were drawn by Floricica et al. (2022), who verified the hypothesis of a positive correlation between autonomy and self-esteem among Romanian students.

In the case of materialism we find an opposite direction of the correlations, but only in reference to the dignity-related (H1) and egoistic orientations (H4). Self-determination theory defines autonomy as an individual's ability to conduct actions independently of external pressure. In this sense, autonomy is a constitutive component of the dignity-related moral orientation. Nagpaul and Pang (2017), who conducted a survey among students and working adults from Singapore, evidenced a negative correlation between autonomy and materialism. Similar conclusions are drawn by researchers who conducted a study in the UK and Chile. The materialistic orientation correlates negatively with well-being which includes autonomy (Unanue et al. 2014).

Unexpectedly, growing materialism does not predict declining susceptibility to the prosocial moral orientation (H2). It seems that, in the conditions of Polish society, a tendency towards prosociality may occur among materialists as well as non-materialists. This may be related to our operationalization of prosociality which we understand as the readiness to provide help in the immediate environment and in everyday situations that do not require taking specific actions that would limit the individual's own resources for the benefit of others. Apparently, materialism is not an obstacle to the implementation of prosociality understood in this way.

Although materialism does not predict the prosocial orientation, there is a positive correlation between materialism and the egoistic moral orientation. This is consistent with the results of other studies if we understand egoism as the opposite of prosociality. Lv et al. (2023) found a negative correlation between materialism and prosociality based on a sample of 543 adolescents from Beijing. The positive correlation between materialism and the egoistic moral orientation is not surprising, as an egoistic focus on one's own interest can be an effective strategy for achieving materialistic goals, i.e., seeking satisfaction in life through possessing goods.

As expected, susceptibility to the prosocial moral orientation increases along with self-identification with religious faith (H2). This effect disappears in the case of the dignity-related orientation (H1) and the egoistic orientation (H4). The prediction of susceptibility to the prosocial moral orientation by self-identification with religious faith which we observed in our regression models is fully consistent with the findings of other researchers. A meta-analysis of Kelly et al. (2024) embracing 237 samples and almost 812 thou. participants shows a clear positive correlation between religiosity and self-reported prosociality.

We expected a correlation in the opposite direction in the case of the egoistic moral orientation, while the obtained data do not meet the expectations. Probably as a result of the process of privatization of religion (Luckmann 2022), morality has been separated from religiosity, i.e., people who consider themselves religious choose certain contents of faith, including those related to the moral dimension of religion, which they consider to be right. Then, religiosity treated in this way can be combined with various types of morality, which previously excluded the possibility of defining oneself or others as religious.

The lack of a statistically significant correlation between self-identification with religious faith and susceptibility to the dignity-related moral orientation is actually also not surprising. It only confirms the ongoing secularization in Polish society. One of the features of secularization is the gradual separation of religiosity from practiced morality (Moniz 2023). This means that individuals do not define their own or other people's religiosity through the prism of moral actions but to a greater extent through the prism of religious practices or through the prism of their spirituality (non-church religiosity). In this sense, the dignity-related moral orientation may be completely non-religious, because the importance of values central to this orientation, such as fidelity to one's views, autonomy, resistance to social influences, and independence, may be motivated non-religiously.

Age and gender do not play any role in the explanation of susceptibility to the dignity-related (H1) as well as prosocial moral orientation (H2). This is not in line with our expectations of a positive correlation between age and susceptibility to the dignity-related moral orientation as well as a negative correlation between age and tendency to the prosocial moral orientation. Additionally, we assumed a greater susceptibility to both orientations in women than in men. The obtained data also did not confirm this assumption. Our findings regarding age are inconsistent with the trends found in other studies. A meta-analysis of Pollerhoff et al. (2024) conducted on 120 samples including nearly 104 thou. respondents clearly confirms that older adults are more prosocial than younger adults, while the peak of prosociality occurs in midlife. It is difficult for us to state clearly why our results are different, but we suppose that the specificity of our sample is the reason. Limiting the sample to people who are married or in a partnership results in an over-representation of respondents in midlife compared to the entire population—the average respondent is almost 50 years old, while the average age for the whole population in Poland amounts to 42. Less clear is the lack of a statistically significant correlation between age and susceptibility to the dignity-related moral orientation. Theoretically, the increase in an individual's life experience with age should result in an increase in an individual's autonomy. This expectation is confirmed by other studies. For example, Sheldon et al. (2006) comparing college students and their parents showed that representatives of the older generation are characterized by greater autonomy than their children. In this context, we suppose that the over-representativeness of the older age groups in our sample accounts for the inconsistency of our findings with the theoretical assumptions and results of other studies.

At first glance, it seems to be more difficult to explain the lack of statistically significant associations between gender and susceptibility to the dignity-related and prosocial moral orientations. This positive association is not at all obvious at least in the case of prosociality. Extensive research carried out by Olsson et al. (2021) in 10 countries proves that "there is no more helpful gender". Gender differences in susceptibility to prosocial behavior are contextual, for example, it depends on the gender of the recipients of the help. Perhaps this mechanism was also reproduced in our study. According to our operationalization, honesty towards oneself and other people is an important aspect of the dignity-related moral orientation. We assumed the differentiating role of gender in terms of disposition to honesty, which is supported by the research results. For example, Grosch and Rau (2017) concluded their research results by stating that women are significantly more honest

than men. We could therefore expect that women would show stronger susceptibility to the dignity-related moral orientation than men, while our findings do not reflect this assumption. It is possible that the limitation of the sample to people who are married or in a partnership plays a role here again. Perhaps people in relationships generally value honesty more than others, independently of gender. Perhaps the over-representation of older age groups in the sample also plays a role here because, as O'Connor et al. (2023) pointed out in reference to the results of their cross-cultural study, moral evaluations of dishonesty are decidedly harsher among older than younger adults.

Based on H4 we expected a negative correlation between age and susceptibility to the egoistic moral orientation. The obtained data meet our expectations. Indeed, increasing age co-occurs with weaker egoistic tendencies. These findings are consistent with the meta-analysis of Pollerhoff et al. (2024) which evidenced a positive correlation between age and prosociality. Since prosociality excludes egoism, the reverse direction of the correlation between age and the egoistic moral orientation compared with the prosocial orientation is not surprising.

We believe that reasons similar to those observed in the case of the prosocial moral orientation are responsible for the lack of correlation between gender and egoistic morality in our study, although we assumed that men would be more likely than women to represent this type of morality. It is likely that egoistic behaviors, like prosocial behaviors, are contextual and therefore it is not possible to determine general gender differences in terms of the prosocial and egoistic moral orientations.

Consistently with H3, we observed in the general population increasing materialism and self-identification with religious faith going along with stronger susceptibility to the reciprocal orientation, while increasing self-esteem has an opposite effect. In our opinion, the obtained results regarding self-esteem can be explained reliably based on Cialdini's (2001) concept of methods of influencing people. The first principle of exerting this influence is reciprocity which is also the basis of the reciprocal moral orientation. People oriented reciprocally consider applying the rule of reciprocating other people for favors, help, kindness, etc. as morally good and socially desirable. This orientation therefore regulates the social process of exchanging goods which is subject to the rules of socially controlled obligations. Self-esteem is individuals' self-assessment of their value (Leary and Baumeister 2000). An individual's decision-making processes, relationships, well-being or even health can be affected by self-esteem (Orth and Robins 2022). Healthy self-esteem helps individuals maintain balance in the reciprocal process of exchanging actions in which one party in the reciprocal process tries to influence the other according to the principle "You should make concessions to those who make concession to you" (Cialdini et al. 1975, p. 206). Individuals suffering from low self-esteem are in a worse negotiating position in relation to other individuals who take part in the reciprocal exchange. As a result, individuals with low self-esteem may offer too much to the reciprocity partners to their own detriment because they tend to overestimate the partners' contribution to the reciprocal process while depreciating their own contribution. In this context, an effect is possible that people suffering from weaker self-esteem use the reciprocal process to improve it by offering the reciprocal partners during the exchange process either too much (e.g., overprotective actions towards loved ones) or too little (e.g., emotional blackmail).

The identified positive correlation between materialism and the reciprocal moral orientation seems to be confirmed by the results of other studies which concern the social influence of other people understood as an individual's willingness to accept information from others or to conform to the expectations of others for utilitarian reasons (reward or punishment avoidance) or to improve self-image thanks to conformity actions (Bearden et al. 1989). Denegri et al. (2022) examining about 1.3 thou. 15–16 year olds from Chile

found a positive correlation between materialism (Adolescents' Materialism Scale) and susceptibility to peers' influence measured by the Bearden's Susceptibility to Peer Influence in Consumption Scale. The results confirm the previous findings of Roberts et al. (2008), who also evidenced a positive correlation between materialism and peer normative influence among US adolescents aged 11–19 years old. The cultural context of consumer society is not without significance here to explain the relationship between the two variables. In this type of society, the interaction of consumers is accompanied by an exchange of meanings contained in consumer goods. For example, the demonstration of status symbols through brands by interaction partners leads to mutual confirmation of the social position and consumer competences (Reisch 2002). And since consumer society is characterized by developed materialism (Bauman 2007), the correlation between materialism and the tendency to consumer demonstrative behavior and consumer symbolic reciprocity of prestige is quite obvious.

Our findings about the relationship between self-identification with religious faith and susceptibility to the reciprocal moral orientation are consistent with the assumptions expressed in H3. Growing self-identification with religious faith goes along with stronger susceptibility to the reciprocal orientation. This is generally consistent with the results of other analyses showing a positive impact of shared religious practices on internal community cohesion (Kimani 2024). Indirectly, this shows us the importance of reciprocity (mutual influencing) in such a community. The greater the cohesion of the community (religiousness may be one of the factors supporting it), the greater the pressure to reciprocate the influence of others proportionally and the stronger susceptibility to the reciprocal moral orientation. Additionally, it is worth referring here to the specificity of Polish society which is still characterized by religiosity referred to as folk religiosity (Modrzejewski and Potulski 2022). One of the indicators of folk religiosity is attachment to religious tradition but not motivated by deep religious faith. In our study, this segment embraces 1/5 of the sample. Thus, the process of exchanging recognition of the social environment (prestige) for the implementation of religious practices that positively correlate with authentic religious beliefs may be co-responsible for a broader correlation between self-identification with religious faith and susceptibility to the reciprocal moral orientation.

Surprisingly, the assumptions of H3 regarding the age effect on the reciprocal orientation are not confirmed. We expected that susceptibility to the orientation should grow along with increasing age. Meanwhile, we observe the opposite direction of the relationship. Apparently, the traditional social norm of reciprocity is appreciated by people oriented towards materialism. Because materialism is accepted more often by younger people than by older ones and it is the strongest predictor of the reciprocal orientation at the same time, it is no wonder that young materialists have a tendency to the moral orientation.

Also, according to H3, the variable of gender differentiates the tendency to this orientation in such a way that men tend to present the orientation more often than women. Cialdini's first principle of persuasion and Adams' (1963) equity theory suggest that people value equality and balance to some extent. In other words, people do not like to feel that they owe anything to interaction partners. Because men value the prestige resulting from conspicuous consumption more than women (Segal and Podoshen 2013), the reciprocal process, at least under the condition of consumer society, should be more important for men than for women. Consequently, the reciprocal moral orientation should find greater support among men than among women. Despite recognizing partial correlations, we cannot really verify Hypotheses 1 and 2 referring to the dignity-related and prosocial moral orientations due to a very low percentage of variances in our regression models (from 3.3% to 7.7%, depending on the model). Apparently, other variables explain susceptibility to the dignity-related and prosocial moral orientations as compared to those that we assumed

in our model. Our assumptions were focused on the role of the importance of religious faith in explaining the inclination to both orientations. Meanwhile, as a result of ongoing secularization processes, religious faith ceased to be the driving force behind both moral orientations, the support of which began to be motivated by other factors. Although the partial correlations found between the dignity-related and prosocial moral orientations and self-esteem, materialism, and self-identification with religious faith require additional empirical verification in other predictive models, they are consistent with results from other studies, which encourage further analysis. The obtained data provide much more insight into the prediction of the reciprocal and egoistic moral orientations. The analyzed regression models capture from 23.5% to 27.2% of the variance, which is a fully satisfactory result.

As we indicated in the theoretical part of the text, the comparison of moral foundation theory and the theory of basic human values leads to the conclusion that the study of moral orientations may be operationally useful in inferring socially preferred value orientations. Although proving this thesis is not the aim of the article, it may be a contribution to in-depth analyses on this topic. Our proposed empirical measurement of moral orientations based on an axis, whose ends are described by prosocial and individualistic value orientations, allows for the diagnosis of general axiological orientations that constitute the background of specific social attitudes. In the case of this part of Polish society that lives in formal or informal relationships, a slightly more frequent susceptibility to the dignity-related and egoistic moral orientations is observed than to the prosocial and reciprocal orientations, although the differences in the extent of support for particular orientations are not large. While the dignity-related, prosocial, and indirectly egoistic orientations (as a reserve of the prosocial orientation) may share some similarities with the moral foundations defined by moral foundation theory, the reciprocal orientation seems to be distinct. Further research is needed to determine to what extent it is unique to Polish society.

7. Conclusions

From a sociological standpoint the concept of moral orientations can be an interesting and useful area of study providing new interpretations regarding modernizing societies. Morality (as a social phenomenon) can be explicated by a broad range of dependent variables. This variety is part of the explanation of the nature of the phenomenon, not a flaw. The traditional and well-established factors (religion) are slowly losing their effective power in shaping moral conscience of individuals as the paradigm shifts towards more subjective, independent interpretations of morality in postmodern societies. It appears that individual and cultural factors play a more significant role in the process. As the research demonstrated, self-esteem and materialism embedded in consumeristic cultures appear to be the backbone of moral orientations. Self-esteem seems to be the innermost and the most sensitive nerve empowering or weakening moral attitudes. Since self-esteem is co-shaped by interactions and experiences with the outer world it is a reflective mechanism—social environments support or weaken healthy self-esteem of individuals needing environmental feedback on whether what they are doing is socially accepted or unaccepted. If this feedback is influenced by consumerist culture assuming that satisfaction in life can be found in buying and consuming, it leads to discouragement in seeking the dignity-related or prosocial moral orientation.

Polish society is clearly polarized in terms of the preferred orientations: contradictory orientations, dignity-related and egoistic morality, are the most widespread. About half of the population represents the dignity-related moral orientation, with the other half representing the egoistic orientation. Of course, this division is typological. Being a supporter of the dignity-related orientation does not mean a complete lack of egoistic behavior and vice versa. However, the general disposition to implement moral behaviors is

clearly determined by susceptibility to dignity or egoisms. On the one hand, the strongest susceptibility to the dignity-related orientation is shown by the part of the general population whose representatives are characterized by healthy self-esteem and weak materialism. Self-identification with religious faith and demographic variables such as age and gender do not play any role in the explanation of susceptibility to the moral orientation. On the other hand, that part of the population displaying the strongest susceptibility to the egoistic orientation belong to younger age groups and are characterized by weak self-esteem as well as by strong materialism. Again, self-identification with religious faith and gender do not explain susceptibility to the moral orientation.

The prosocial and reciprocal moral orientations supported to a similar extent are less prevalent in Polish society. The highest probability of representing the prosocial moral orientation should be expected among persons characterized by healthy self-esteem and a high level of identification with religious faith. This time materialism does not explain susceptibility to the moral orientation. Similarly, age and gender do not predict the tendency. Susceptibility to the reciprocal moral orientation is explained by the widest range of predictors. The strongest susceptibility to the orientation is shown by younger men who are characterized by weak self-esteem, strong materialism, and a high level of self-identification with religious faith at the same time.

Self-esteem and materialism appear to be the most important predictors of moral orientations. Further development of consumerism in Polish society may result in strengthened materialism which is an important context of lowered self-esteem. In the light of the collected data, this may lead to a further spread of the reciprocal and egoistic moral orientations.

Finally, some limits of the study should be mentioned. Firstly, the sample of the survey was limited to respondents who are married or in an informal partnership who embrace less than 2/3 of the total population. Because the group is characterized by over-representation of people from older age groups, it can be expected that the actual share of people susceptible to the reciprocal and egoistic moral orientations is higher than evidenced. In this context, extending this study to the entire population seems appropriate.

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