

Proposal Title: The Strength of Social Norms Across Cultures: Implications for Intercultural Conflict and Cooperation

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Humans are unique among all species in their ability to develop, maintain, and enforce social norms. It is likely, then, that humans have evolved cognitive and affective neuro-mechanisms to be able to detect norm violations very quickly which affords punishment of violators and enforcement of the social order. Despite this fundamental aspect of human nature, however, there has been surprisingly little research on how norm violation processes are supported at the neurobiological level. While there has been neurobiological research on how humans react to violations of task-related expectations in non-social domains, research on neurobiological processes related to social norm violations is only in its infancy and, moreover, there has been a dearth of research on cross-cultural variation in the neurobiology of social norms. Thus, at present, we know little about how vast cultural differences underlying reactions to norm violations are realized at the level of brain mechanisms. This lack of any cultural neuroscience research on social norms represents a large limitation on our current understanding of group identities, cultural norms, and belief systems. This MINERVA research will address this deficit by investigating such questions as:

- How can we develop new measures of detection of social norm violations at the neurobiological level?
- Which cultures, individuals, and situations show stronger neurobiological reactions to norm-violating events?
- How are neurobiological processes underlying social norms violations related to behavioral processes, including implicit and explicit attitudes, self-control, cooperation, creativity, among other behaviors?
- Do neurobiological indices of social norm violation mediate cultural differences in social behaviors?
- How can research on the neurobiological basis of social norms help to improve intercultural interactions?

Social norms, though omnipresent in our everyday lives, are highly implicit. Recent social neuroscience research has provided compelling evidence that neural indicators of attitudes can predict meaningful social behaviors above and beyond self-report measures. Thus, this research has the potential to facilitate the development of theoretical models and measures with improved predictive power. It also has the potential to make important scientific breakthroughs regarding the mutual constitution of culture, mind, and brain. We will focus on outreach to the DOD community to enhance its capabilities through providing: (a) Tools to assess the strength of social norms across cultures; (b) An understanding of the behavioral correlates of such measures; (c) policy recommendations for how to manage clashes of moralities and improve intercultural interactions; (d), mechanisms to promote the spread of positive beliefs of Western countries through diverse communities; (e) a cadre of interdisciplinary young scientists available to study drivers and dynamics of social norms in the future; and (f) crucial input into training for the military, diplomats, policy makers, managers, immigrants, and travelers alike.