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Core Values in Public Administration and Policy: Three Levels of Evaluation in the Public Sector

By

Emily Berg Brandt

A Dissertation

in

Public Administration and Public Policy

Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Texas at Arlington in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Texas at Arlington

August 2024

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Abstract

Core Values in Public Administration and Policy: Three Levels of Evaluation in the Public Sector

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The University of Texas at Arlington, August 2024

Supervising Professor: Alejandro Rodriguez, Ph.D.

This dissertation is composed of three separate but interrelated papers that examine the role of core values in public administration and public policy and how they show up at the societal, bureaucratic, and individual levels to inform the identification of the use of values, engaging proper awareness of how these values impact public sector actions, and how individuals can engage the right values frameworks in the face of conflict in various public and public service contexts. The first paper takes a societal look at core values via a systemic literature review on American morality policies; policies that inspire great debate not because of their intrinsic value, logically based reasoning, or data-informed decisions, but instead focus on the symbolic messages these policies convey to a polity about what core values are held in higher esteem by a society. The second paper analyzes where bureaucrats believe the locus of ultimate responsibility for change lies after they publicly contest a policy's enforcement, compliance, or regulation on the grounds of moral and ethical considerations. Finally, the third paper proposes a conceptual definitional framework of morally conscious decision-making; a concept that can be used by individual public administrators to make values-based decisions when facing a dilemma, to ensure moral engagement in public sector work. Together these three papers help illustrate the influence of core values on public policy and administrative issues.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Samantha Elizabeth, my greatest inspiration and my most enduring distraction. Thank you for instilling in me the importance of balance, levity, and light-heartedness. I am forever and always a writer at heart, but when it comes to describing my love, adoration, and awe for you, I am simply at a loss for words.

And to my husband, Scott, who built the very desk this was written on and who was beside me during every celebration, listening to every rant. Thank you for your support and advice, for making hotel escapes and library nights possible, for enabling an out-of-control caffeine habit, and for never judging me on empty promises for “all-nighters” that inevitably ended at 9 p.m.

Finally, I want to extend heartfelt gratitude to my entire committee. I feel remarkably fortunate to have had such talented researchers and educators in my corner giving me the tools, inspiration, support, and encouragement I need to succeed in this academic endeavor. Dr. Alejandro Rodriguez, thank you for being a remarkable chair and providing essential guidance, encouragement, and tools every step of the way. I will forever be appreciative for landing in your class that first semester and setting a remarkable foundation for this transformative experience. I have been challenged and inspired by your direction and have been thankful for every minute of your mentorship. Dr. Emily Nwakpuda, thank you for providing the encouragement I needed to pursue my strengths and the tools I needed to not let my weaknesses define me. I am so appreciative of the time you spent with me, and I am honored to have learned so much from you. Finally, Dr. Karabi Bezboruah, thank you for being a beacon of solid leadership for this entire program and for being a supportive force every time I needed it most. Thank you.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The foundation of Public Administration and Public Policy is built upon core values. A service-oriented, responsive, and trustworthy public sector depends on the integrity, transparency, and accountability of public institutions and the individuals who work within them. In the absence of those values, the effects of corruption, misconduct, unethical practices, fraud, waste, self-interested decision-making, and criminal activity have very real human costs that reverberate throughout society (Armstrong, 2005). Core values, or “influential, enduring beliefs that shape and develop world views” serve as stable criteria within individuals, guiding institutions, and uniting society, are used at every level to shape decision-making, form expectations and evaluations of behavior, make moral judgments, and influence world views while helping to shape our government, society and culture (Armstrong, 2005; Brandt, Rodriguez, Nwakpuda, & Bezboruah, 2023, p. 192; Haidt, 2001; Neo, Grimmelikhuijsen & Tummers, 2022).

Examples of such values prevalent in the public sector are numerous. Schreurs (2005) identified 63 values, Jørgensen & Bozeman (2007) named 72, and Rutgers (2008) added another 33, with some of the most cited public sector values including accountability, altruism, benevolence, compliance, duty, effectiveness, equitability, fairness, flexibility, honesty, innovation, leadership, loyalty, objectiveness, professionalism, resourcefulness, responsiveness, transparency, and trustworthiness (Armstrong, 2005; Rutgers & van der Meer, 2010). The list of values public sector individuals and institutions are expected to uphold is seemingly endless, and yet nebulous and

abstract, especially when residing alongside societal values and personal values, which may or may not conflict with those of public service.

1.2 Background

This long and growing list of diverse public sector values began with just four. Drawing upon classical philosophy and theology, the values – or virtues – of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance were named by Plato, expounded upon by Aristotle, and were built upon by a long line of philosophers eager to have these values serve as guiding principles and a framework for conducting affairs of state (Rhonheimer, 2011). In more modern times, societies “depend upon the existence of core social values and shared social norms” to “unify individuals and groups to provide their support” to their fellow man (Perrucci & Perrucci, 2014, p. 245). Montgomery Van Wart, prolific contributor to the study of public administration values, compiled significant and useful contributions from fields of ethics, philosophy, theology, management studies, decision-making, and organizational behavior and theory to identify five main sources of values: public interest, legal, organizational, professional, and personal (Van Wart, 1998).

Van Wart (1998, p. 135) described public interest values as “what is good for society at large and balances the competing interests of different groups.” The concept of society and the public interest is largely a social construct, but one with great meaning beyond geographic boundaries and one whose roots form shared values, customs, norms, and relationships (Hossain & Ali, 2014). Jonathan Haidt (2001) built his social institutionist model, the groundwork of Moral Foundations Theory, on the concept that the private moral reasoning done by individuals is a culmination of social and cultural influences of agreed-upon adopted by the actor. Though, this concept of the

public interest or the public good will always face some conflict. The diversity of values within a heterogeneous society is similarly reflected in the innumerable interpretations of what the public good is and what needs to be done in the name of the public interest (Van Wart, 2008).

Despite this conflict and seeming incongruence on what the public good or public interest is, service to the public, improving society, and the concept of duty and pride to one's community is a major pull for those motivated to join public service, ensuring a bureaucracy consisting of values-aware individuals and ideally results in policies and policy implementation consistent with those personal, public service, and societal values. As the federal workforce continues to grow and diversify, albeit slowly, individuals, the bureaucracy, and society will continue to be faced with challenges to perceptions of the public good and shifting values. A Partnership for Public Service Report on the Federal Workforce (2022) stated that the federal workforce is older than the American workforce at large with those under 30 representing only 6% of the federal workforce. The same report cites 18.2% of federal employees as retirement eligible indicating future demographic shifts are imminent (Partnership for Public Service, 2022). By 2021, the federal government was already seeing signs of changes in the federal workforce with small growth in the number of women (42.7% in 2019 to 44.44% in 2021) though decreased employment of non-Caucasians (37.8% in 2019 to 36.84% in 2021) (Luterman & Sosin, 2023). However, in the decade before, the representation of persons with disabilities in the federal workforce doubled and historically disadvantaged groups were hired and promoted at higher rates (Locke, 2023). These emerging changes will continue to challenge the established perception of "the public good" and the values held by the changing bureaucratic workforce will be drastically impacted by individuals, their concepts of societal values, and how they carry out their perceptions of the public interest.

In the research, this concept of societal values and the public interest can and has branched off in many different areas. Scholars including Christopher Z. Mooney, Kenneth Meier, and Donald Haider-Markel, in their various publications, drew from a line of thinking to create the societal concept of morality policy; policies drawn from interpretive elements of right and wrong that validate values of society rather than pursue what is best for society as a whole. Others like Perrucci and Perrucci (2014, p. 245) take a conceptual approach to identify specifically American values such as achievement, value, and responsibility “that can unify individuals and groups to provide their support ...to remedy long-standing economic and social problems in American society” to guide policy discussions. Yet another societal values perspective can be found in the intersection of political parties and strategic messaging toward different subgroups of society designed to tap into such shared values and inspiring connections.

Two more groups of Van Wart’s (1998) sources of values are organizational and professional values. For mediating organizations, any institution that rests between individuals and large groups such as bureaucracies, core values can be found in values statements reinforced by the organizational culture, training, and leadership environment (Brandt, Rodriguez, Nwakpuda, & Bezboruah, 2023). Employees are expected to model the values of the organization and act by the professional values prioritized by the employer, yet despite more than 90% of organizations having something akin to a values statement, Gallup data shows that only 27 percent of employees strongly believe in their company’s values, with most not knowing what those stated values are (Dvorak & Nelson, 2016; Lina, 2018). Ripoll and Schott (2023) found that interpretations of situations combined with the tension between different values within an individual actor cause dilemmas that force decision-makers to choose one value over another, often their individual

values over that of their employer and often in the name of congruence with what they believe is best for society. The public sector incorporates the concept of historical institutionalism and has persistent values patterns found in administrative traditions that form conceptions of ideal behavior, yet the individual bureaucrat or leader still prioritizes their own interpretations within their scope of influence (Neo, Grimmelikhuijsen, & Tummers, 2022).

In fact, this is what we, as a society, expect of those in public service. Rosemary O’Leary’s (2006, p. 1) book on Government Guerrillas opens with a story of Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat living in Kaunas, Lithuania during World War II who “in direct disobedience to orders from his superiors” ensured passage out of the country to more than 10,000 Jews at risk of persecution and death. Sugihara’s story may seem an extreme example, but those who speak and act against their employer, but in-line with personal values, is behavior we as a society praise, especially during times of turmoil and crisis directly contributing to our trust in institutions to do the right thing. Alexander Vindman is a more recent example of a federal employee speaking truth to power, breaking confidentiality, and reporting a breach of protocol in a 2019 phone call between President Trump and the Ukrainian President, Vlodomir Zelensky. When asked why he went public about this breach, part of Vindman’s response included, “because it was my duty” and that “we’ve lost the political leadership that is driven by value-based decision-making, integrity, ethics, and so forth” (Swisher, 2020).

As seen in these extreme bureaucratic acts based on values, Van Wart’s personal values are perhaps the most consequential of all. The way individuals interact with their environment, make decisions, demonstrate leadership, and generally draw from their history, culture, and ideology, while “[acting] as members of the public-interest-system” make them simultaneously “steward, citizen,

and contributor” of administrative values, and impossibly conflicted decision-makers balancing high personal standards, individual responsibility, and civic integrity with the understanding that each individual acting in their own self-interest would result in anarchy (Haidt, 2001; Van Wart, 1998, p. 34).

1.3 Problem

What we know about core values in public policy and public administration takes us far beyond the philosophical musings of Plato and Aristotle and into post-positivist approaches achieving objective answers on very real dimensions and impacts on human life, behavior, and decisions. Despite this topic being a frequent feature in philosophy, policy studies, political science, psychology, and even more fields, there is still a lot more to explore about core values, the societal influence they have on public policies, human behavior and language they influence, and how individuals draw from them to make public-sector decisions. For example, in the attempt to reach an agreed-upon societal consensus on social problems, what are the major determinates that cause certain values-based issues to break through more than others? In organizations, when bureaucrats take responsibility to publicly oppose directives, what happens next and how do they utilize values in their calls to action for others? For individuals, while acting as stewards of the public trust and with the lens of civic integrity, how can one make values-based decisions rationally, transparently, and dependably? In pursuit of these answers, this dissertation asks, how do the core values of society, bureaucrats, and individuals shape various public and public service contexts?

Following recommended practices for postpositivist and postmodern perspectives to incorporate structure in pursuit of rational discourse in abstract concepts, this research has been broken into

three levels of evaluation; Society, Bureaucracy, and Individual (Rutgers, 2008; Tiryakian, 1968). Within society, the core values of key actors have been central to monumental movements and cultural touchpoints in American history. For example, the founding fathers espoused freedom, equality, individual responsibility, and fair representation in the founding documents of the country. In more modern times, we see debates about civil liberties reduced to similar emotional appeals utilizing the same core values but with contextual changes designed to appeal to specific audiences. Complete consensus within a society, especially a heterogeneous one like the United States of America, is next to impossible, but even when political or policy actions are utilized as a symbolic response to the debate, the discussion, language used, and possible adoption of such a policy based on those values sends a message to the world about what the society does and doesn't stand for, what the government approves or disapproves of, and what message they want sent to other societies who may or may not be in alignment with those values (Gusfield, 1963; Sutton, 1959; Weber, 1947; Young, 1992).

Within the bureaucracy, groups of increasingly diverse individuals are tasked with implementing policies that espouse these symbolic values while simultaneously being held to the values of their employer and acting by the ethical, democratic, and professional values they prioritize as individuals (Toth & Simanyi, 2006; Trommel, 2020; Schultz & Zelezny, 1999). However, when values clash by individual action, global events, policy directives, or other means, bureaucrats may prioritize their personal values in the name of the public good and act out. Responses to this (in)action and the eventual resolution must simultaneously address the root issue in a way that upholds societal values and public service values.

Within an individual, actors must make decisions on how to resolve those dilemmas, values tradeoffs, or conflicts in ways that make the decisions still morally sound and in line with their bureaucratic responsibilities. The immediate inclinations towards self-interest that we have as humans are often accompanied by quick moral judgments, so being able to critically assess the situation at hand to make an informed decision based on values is a critical component to cumulative effects on social institutions and effective bureaucracies with social capital and earned trust (Haidt, 2001; Rorty, 2012).

This dissertation is comprised of three papers that will examine these three levels of evaluation as they relate to the main research purpose of understanding how the core values of society, bureaucrats, and individuals shape various public and public service contexts. Figure 1.1 breaks down each paper, their level of evaluation, and associated theoretical approaches, methodologies or frameworks, and research designs.

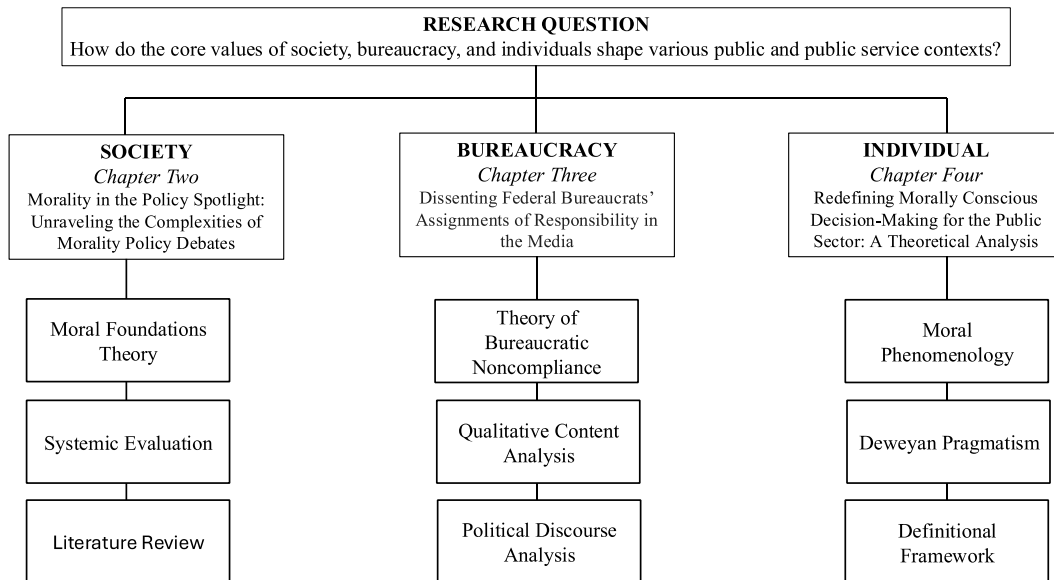


Figure 1.1: Breakdown of Each Paper's Main Components

The first paper investigates how core values show up in a subset of policies within the American political system that relies on perceived public values to frame policy needs while simultaneously exploiting those same values to ensure policy adoption. The second paper provides insight into where bureaucrats who voice external, public opposition to a policy view the ultimate responsibility for change to lie. The third and final paper proposes a conceptual framework for using core values in decision-making in appropriate and rational ways. These three papers together demonstrate various levels of evaluation on the use and engagement of core values in public and public service contexts.

While I am the primary author for each paper included in this dissertation, doing the entirety of the research and writing, the doctoral committee listed as co-authors on each article played valuable roles in each article's completion. These co-authors provided guidance on formulating initial research questions and identifying appropriate methodologies and approaches. They further assisted in editing, making substantial suggestions for improvements, and identifying additional paths of inquiry to strengthen and elevate the research. Furthermore, their tremendously positive impact on my morale, motivation, and completion of each paper cannot be understated.

1.4 Paper One Summary

The first paper in this dissertation provides a comprehensive, systematic review of theoretical and empirical studies on morality policy, focusing on the key themes, trends, debates, and gaps in research. Specifically, "Morality in the Policy Spotlight: Unraveling the Complexities of Morality Policy Debates" takes a macro look at how core values show up in public policies and the formation of public opinion on certain controversial issues. Morality policies – such as abortion,

capital punishment, physician-assisted suicide, pornography, prostitution, vaccine mandates, alcohol prohibition, and drug decriminalization, among others – consist of the most controversial and widely discussed issues facing public policymakers in the United States (Doan & McFarlane, 2012; Mooney, 2001). Because these policies strategically and purposefully weaponize principles, labels, values, and labels of “right,” this paper is included to understand how core values show up within public policy at a societal level (Haider-Markel & Meier, 1996; Meier, 1994; Mooney, 1999; 2001; Mooney & Lee, 1995).

When studying issues of morality, values, and principles, there are hundreds if not thousands of viewpoints on how they could be applied, assessed, or measured. The study of morality policies is no different. Morality policies are defined as “a debate over first principles, in which at least one advocacy coalition portrays the issue as one of morality or sin and uses moral arguments in its policy advocacy. Such arguments are presented as self-evident and morally compelling, leading to ultimate clashes of values that cannot be resolved” (Mooney, 2001, p. 3). Morality policy studies suffer from a lack of scholarly cohesion and find their notable findings scattered across various academic fields including philosophy, sociology, medicine, public policy, political science, religious studies, education, and more. This paper’s purpose was to provide such cohesion with a systematic assessment of scholarship across all such fields with a policy lens to gain a full picture of major themes, areas of consistency and disagreement, and the methodological and theoretical perspectives that help explain the modern discourse around such policies, as well as to better understand the weaponization of and reliance on core values, especially in competitive and heated political environments.

Through this systematic literature review, which used qualitative synthesis methods to identify key themes, patterns, and gaps in the literature of work published on this topic between 1975-2022, four main findings were announced. The first finding was identifying the agreed-upon definition and correct categorization of morality policy. Both issues have plagued morality policy scholarship for years with no real decisive outcome, but through a meta-analysis of the literature, this definition and the categorization of morality policy as redistributive policy are clearly the consensus. The second finding was that actors and interest groups are a major point of consideration when evaluating these policies because morality policies do not exist without the purposeful crafting of moralized language to inspire and incite certain reactions (Mucciaroni, 2011). Both sides have “right” seemingly on their side and draw from their own actual or desired values to utilize symbolism, influence, crafted language, and other resources to achieve their desired policy outcomes. The third finding is that even if the proposed policy is adopted, the policy lifecycle rarely sees a period of stability since the “losing” group learns from their loss and uses it to reframe, find a new venue, or re-strategize. This ensures debates and saliency of morality policy, the issues they represent, and the values they draw from follow a cyclical pattern rather than linear progressions (Bowen, 2012; Doan and McFarlane, 2012; Smith, 1999). This further results in the actual adopted policies being ineffective, unstable, and rarely reflective of the reality of society’s needs. This leads right into the fourth outcome of this paper, which is that morality policies are overwhelmingly poorly designed, ineffective failures that fall short of their stated policy objectives. However, in reframing their purpose to send messages about societal values, to convey to a polity that values the government sanctions, or to justify the allocation of rewards and penalties within a policy, they are highly effective (Ingram, Schneider, & deLeon, 2007).

1.5 Paper Two Summary

The second paper in this dissertation investigates the intersection of currently employed federal bureaucrats with complex and individualized understandings of personal, public service, and societal values and the ways they verbalize dissension or opposition to their employer's directives in the media. By utilizing a Political Discourse Analysis approach, selected because of its recognition that individuals reason their way to decisions before communicating those decisions to others and clear acknowledgement of the role of instrumental belief structures within actors that impact their actions, "Dissenting Federal Bureaucrats' Assignments of Responsibility in the Media," analyzed 59 public memos, e-mails, interviews, comments, letters, released statements, reports, speeches, op-eds, released formal complaints, and even a podcast representing 78 different bureaucrats or groups of bureaucrats' language of opposition that showed up in 10 different media publications over thirteen years of reporting (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). Knowing federal bureaucrat opposition or dissension regarding a policy or directive can take many forms ranging from government guerillas who act covertly, engaging in rule-bending, noncompliance, or strategic delays, to public whistleblowers who pursue court cases, testify in front of committees, and give repeated insight into the policies they had access to, this analysis focused on a small subset of dissenters; those who remain employed within the federal government but openly make statements to the media in an attempt to raise the profile of a problem (O'Leary, 2006; Yaver, 2015). This subset goes to the media because they recognize that while they have taken initial responsibility for raising their concerns, they do not have the full power, influence, or responsibility to implement the intended change without thrusting the issue into the active stage of policymaking by utilizing a public platform for the bureaucrats to express their call to action. This paper asked, when bureaucrats publicly contest a policy's enforcement, compliance, or

regulation, how do they conceptualize and articulate the locus of ultimate responsibility for the actual change?

As a result of this analysis, three major findings were identified. The first, and the most closely tied to the research question was that currently employed bureaucrats who externally raise the profile of a governmental dilemma still see the locus of responsibility for change to rest within existing channels. Specifically, they are likely to assign responsibility to the Head of their Agency, the President of the United States, Fellow Federal Employees, Congress, and themselves. All but four individual mentions and implications of responsibility, brought the locus of control back to internal channels. While having the identified parties is helpful in answering the research question, the discourse analysis drew out several interesting patterns that informed the remaining two findings. Personal, Public Service, and Societal Values were instrumental in defending the reasoning for speaking to the media and for crafting compelling calls to action towards their identified responsible parties. Specific values consistently shifted amongst responsible parties, scope of the issue, and their reasoning for coming forward, but values were present at every level and were utilized in strategic and patterned ways. Finally, one such value stood out from others listed. Specifically, the concept or stated obligation of Duty, was a large enough driver to overcome consistently negative emotions about the experience and the risk related to pursuing external channels for expressing dissent.

Now these values and the assigned responsible parties are not, in reality, wholly responsible for actors' behavior when speaking to the media about their employer, but this analysis contributes to the understanding of motivations for those who do reach out to the press, for understanding who

they are trying to reach, what internal dilemmas they are undergoing as tension occurs between values, and what their ultimate goals are based on the purposeful utilization of certain values over others.

1.6 Paper Three Summary

The third and final paper in this dissertation, titled “Redefining Morally Conscious Decision-Making for the Public Sector: A Theoretical Analysis,” proposes a conceptual definition of morally conscious decision-making that is drawn from moral phenomenology, Deweyan pragmatism, and previous scholarship on decision-making in the public service when faced with equally challenging, beneficial, or detrimental alternatives. Taking an entirely theoretical approach, this paper focuses on the individual decision-maker in a public service position and their process of utilizing critical thinking and situational awareness to better activate a response to growing demands for increased accountability and just leadership in public administration and public policy. The proposed definition is, “cognizant processing of an actor’s core values setting aside self-interest when presented with a dilemma” (Brandt, Rodriguez, Nwakpuda, & Bezboruah, 2023, p. 184). With the intention of going beyond codes of conduct, organizational values statements, and bureaucratic dysfunctions to provide a tool for individual responsibility, this definition was developed “to create better decision-makers with the skills to balance arguments and adopt meaningful solutions in a rational yet moral way” (Brandt, Rodriguez, Nwakpuda, & Bezboruah, 2023, p. 186).

The heart of this paper is in the breakdown of the structure of the proposed definition of morally conscious decision-making. It is a conceptual and exploratory definition but one that is intended

to provide a framework for sound decision-making within an actor, particularly when faced with a conflict and unclear possible resolutions. The first part of the definition is cognizant processing. The actor making the decision must be aware there is a decision to be made or a dilemma at hand and must consciously choose to take steps to address the situation. That cognizant processing is then done against an actor's core values, essentially "enduring beliefs that shape and develop world views" that are highly influential impacts on individual behavior, judgements, and actions (Brandt, Rodriguez, Nwakpuda, & Bezboruah, 2023, p. 192; Kernaghan, 2003). To do this effectively, they must resist the first temptation of something that may appear immediately beneficial and instead take the time to critically weigh the options, setting aside their own self-interest. This step is the difference between making a morally sound decision and making a narcissistic or self-righteous choice and is essential to the element of trust necessary in public sector positions. Finally, there must be a dilemma as the impetus to this decision-making process. The element of moral decision-making (rather than ethical decision-making) is that the possible outcomes to the dilemma are equally challenging, beneficial, or detrimental. This decision-making process occurs within an actor to make defensible decisions in the context of complex dilemmas in public service and is designed to provide a structure to the process of how core values show up within public administration at an individual level.

Chapter Two

Morality in the Policy Spotlight: Unraveling the Complexities of Morality Policy Debates

Co-Authors: Alejandro Rodriguez, Ph.D., Emily Nwakpuda, Ph.D., and Karabi Bezboruah, Ph.D.

Abstract

Morality policy, characterized by principle-first conflicts and debates over identity, societal values, and government sanctioning of behavior, is a complex and contradictory public policy domain. This article provides the first comprehensive, systematic review of morality policy studies, synthesizing the state of knowledge and compiling research trends spanning fifty years to identify key actors, issues, and themes, using existing research findings to settle key debates around moral controversies in public policy. The findings have implications for public administration, public policy, and political science and offer insights for future research and policy development.

Key Words: morality policy, values, interest groups, policy outcomes

2.1 Introduction

Morality policies are a unique subgroup of public policies consisting of the most controversial and widely discussed issues facing public policymakers in the United States. Issues of life and death, sex and sexuality, public health and bioethics, and some civil rights matters have intentionally been moralized to establish highly contentious, technically simple debates and policies in response to perceived or actual social issues (Doan & McFarlane, 2012). In theory, morality policies are constructed around the idea of democratic responsiveness. However, in practice, these policies define, regulate, suppress, and sanction behavior through the coercive power of the state alongside raising poignant questions about societal values, governmental paternalism, and the role of dominant cultures' influences on public policy (Patton & Fording, 2020; Smith, 1999).

The concept of morality policies and the control on behavior they supposedly influence has existed long before their concepts, definitions, and understanding of their impact showed up in policy literature, notably including the temperance movement of the early 1900s and the creation-versus-evolution education debates of the 1920s-30s. These complex and nuanced policy topics are designed to legally sanction right versus wrong while validating particular sets of values with debates often reduced to emotional appeals, presented as “self-evident” and morally compelling (Mooney, 1999). The civil rights struggles and Vietnam War in the 1960s and 70s placed substantive issues on the political agenda that drew from moral and political theory, including questions of civil disobedience, the doctrine of the just war, equal opportunity, and criteria for legitimate political authority (Fishkin, 1979). The 1980s brought about additional traction in incorporating moral judgements and evaluative approaches through the “Just Say No” anti-drug campaigns and various Cold War policies, whose goals were more focused on codifying American values and projecting a certain image rather than actual, tangible outcomes or impacts. By the time

the term “morality policy” became known in literature in the mid-1990s, these “extremely popular but rarely effective” policies that redistribute values, pressure behavior change, and inspire hyper-responsive policy reactions to combat “a host of social ills” were here to stay (Doan & McFarlane, 2012, p. 619; Meier, 1994).

Literature with various perspectives on and documentation of morality policy began in the 1960s but became more mainstream around the turn of the millennium. Between 1994 and 2004, 20 percent of all literature on this topic was published, advancing scholarly understanding of what morality policy is, why and how it differs from traditional policy paths, and how specific topics influence the policy lifecycle, key actors, interest group involvement, and more. This decade specifically saw literature overlapping in many ways. Studies published during this time built off each other and advanced ideas in a way that made it clear for throughlines to be drawn through concepts, ideas, definitions, and other commonalities. However, near the end of this period, the cohesion in studies began to fracture, with research building less off the established foundations of morality policy and instead focusing on individual case studies, practices, theories, and how they related to specific fields. As the various fields of study evolved and spanned public administration, public policy, political science, health, education, philosophy, criminal justice, theology, law, and many other fields, contradictory and dispersed findings followed, exposing the concept of morality policy to new scrutiny, with some scholars even questioning the existence of morality policy as a unique subclass of policy entirely (See Mucciaroni, 2011; and, Haider-Markel & Meier, 1996).

This lack of cohesion in morality policy scholarship has progressed research in various independent topic areas. However, because of the diverse fields from which this research now

emerges, it is increasingly challenging for new scholars to zoom out to gain a whole, cohesive, and succinct picture of morality policy scholarship, its major themes, and areas of consistency and disagreement that help explain modern discourse in public policymaking, especially in competitive, heated, and values-laden political environments. Creating a cohesion of the literature and a high-level pulse-taking on primary considerations is long overdue for the study of morality policy. With that aim, we systematically assessed morality policy scholarship to identify and highlight just those features.

This article is structured as follows: First, the Methods section outlines the systematic literature review process employed in this article. The Results section identifies the main breakdown of the 107 empirical and theoretical studies evaluated on morality policy from 1975-2022. Then, the Discussion section dives into the findings, arguments, and key features of four main topics identified in the analysis; (1) defining and classifying morality policy; (2) actors and interest groups; (3) policy change and stability; and (4) policy outcomes and impacts. Finally, the Implications and Conclusion section synthesizes the main insights from the literature. It reflects on the effects of these themes on policy and practice before presenting recommendations for further research and practice and the study's limitations.

2.2 Methods

The review aims to illuminate existing literature's key debates, findings, and themes of morality policy studies. This field has been highly diverse and interdisciplinary, yet contradictory with various approaches, theories, and variables under review. To best understand this important subset of policies, a comprehensive, systemic search strategy was developed to identify, select, and analyze relevant studies for inclusion, detailed below and shown in Figure 2.1, below.

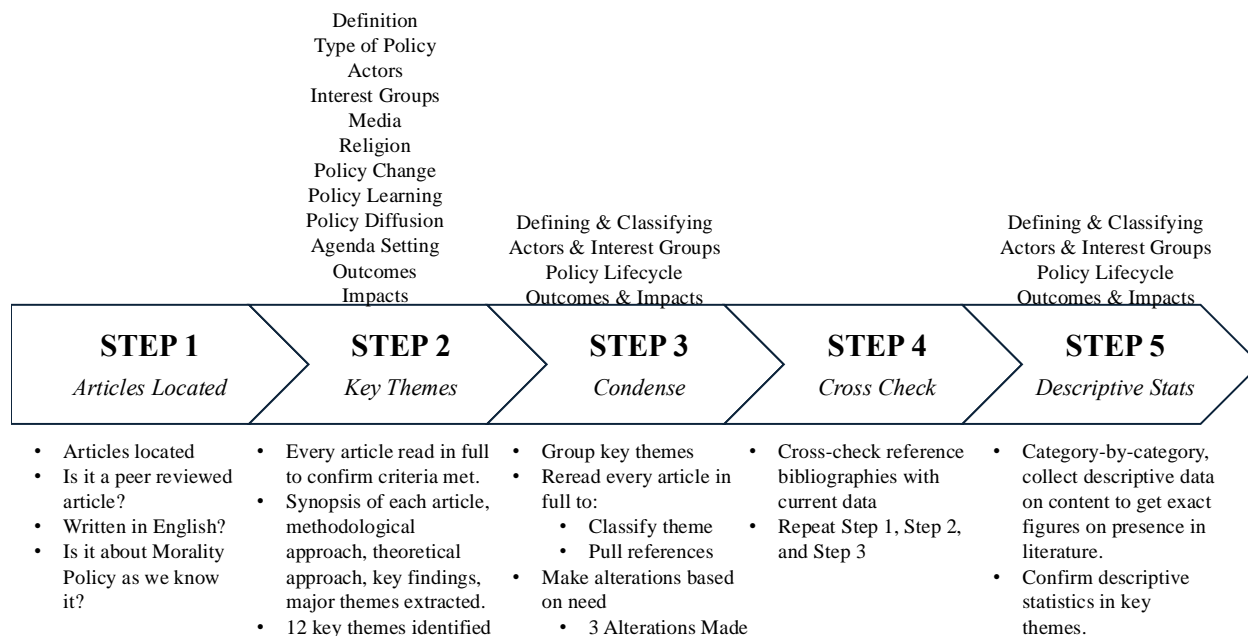


Figure 2.1 Search Strategy

First, relevant articles in the following electronic databases were identified using the keywords and Boolean operators, “morality policy,” “social regulatory policy¹,” “values + policy,” “morals + policy,” and “moral panic + policy.”: Social Sciences Citation Index, Academic Search Complete, Wiley Online Library, Taylor & Francis Online, Oxford University Press Journals, Web of Science, and JSTOR. No date limits were set, though only peer-reviewed articles published in English, focusing on the American context were included. As a result, over 400 pieces of literature from 1898 to 2023 were collected.

Exclusion criteria were utilized to continue refining the search, ensuring only relevant studies were included in the analysis. Studies were included if they focused on morality policy or if they utilized the key dimensions of morality policy (e.g., high levels of value conflict, moral dimensions in democratic decision-making, reduction of complex arguments into emotionally charged appeals,

¹ Morality policy has gone under many names over the evolution of the literature, but “social regulatory policy” was the most common before 1995.

and values-based policy adoption). The study under evaluation had to use morality policy or its key concepts as a substantial part or have key findings that furthered the understanding of morality policy issues. Studies were excluded if they did not focus on morality policy, only marginally addressed morality policy issues, investigated a known morality policy issue without substantially connecting the findings to broader morality policy scholarship, or touched upon morality policy issues in a way that was outside the scope of this review. Studies that did not meet all criteria were excluded from the review. Finally, because this review was focused on the American context, works by scholars outside of the United States were not included in the evaluation (notably Christopher Knill, Emma Budde, Eva-Maria Euchner in Germany, and Isabelle Engeli in the United Kingdom).

A meta-content analysis was completed using qualitative synthesis methods to identify key themes, patterns, and gaps in the literature. Based on the above standards, data was pulled from 107 peer-reviewed articles spanning 1975-2022. Relevant data was extracted and organized in a standardized format, including the study's research design (if applicable), theoretical framework, policy area under study, available commentary and findings, and key conclusions. This process facilitated the synthesis of findings and themes from the literature into thirteen main substantive categories. The inclusion of a transparent search strategy, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, quality assessment, and thorough data analysis ensured that the review captured relevant studies, synthesized key findings with accuracy, and identified areas for further research in the study of morality policy to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the current state of knowledge on morality policy.

2.3 Results

For the 107 relevant articles analyzed, four key themes emerged². First, defining and classifying morality policy issues were present in 63.6% of articles. Despite frequent declarations that there is no definition of morality policies, 66.13% of literature referenced Christopher Z. Mooney's 2001 definition, detailed below. Furthermore, 52% of articles in this section classified morality policies as a subset of redistributive policies rather than a distinct policy type, regulatory policy, or some combination of policy types (Lowi T. J., 1972).

Secondly, topics of actors and interest groups were present in 89.7% of articles. Notable and identifiable actors present in morality policy studies included groups of individuals, elected officials, entrepreneurs and other policy actors, and elites and authorities. Because highly technical, non-salient policy does not excite, motivate, or mobilize the average citizen, interest groups often work with actors, with the most visible in the literature, including religious institutions and the media. With 60.75% of literature focusing on a single policy area, overarching themes of how these actors and interest groups interact with, shape, and influence morality policy are compared to other policy types, with higher-than-average involvement present across topic areas.

Third, policy change and stability were the focus of 42.1% of the articles reviewed. Of this selection, 89% focused on elements of policy change, including diffusion (44%), policy change within a single subsystem (37.78%), and policy learning across subsystems (24.44%). Notably, policy stability (17.78%) and policy outcomes and impacts (22.4%) were underrepresented.

² Articles could be included in more than one category depending on their content and scope.

Further discussion and theories as to why this disproportionality exists are explored in the following section.

The systematic review additionally identified eighteen theories and frameworks used to contextualize, explain, or guide methodologies to investigate morality policies. The four most prominent were Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, Advocacy Coalition Framework, Social Construction of Target Populations, and Moral Foundations Theory.

2.4 Discussion

2.4.1 Defining and Classifying Morality Policy (63.6%)

“Morality policy” as a term to describe technically simple policies often framed in the binary that rely upon deeply held personal and fundamental values for an opinion, rather than one formed by argument, logic, or facts, was first used by Fairbanks (1981) and made popular by Meier (1994; Studlar, 2001; Mooney, 2000; Roh & Berry, 2008). Both proposed a general theory “[involving] interesting policy areas, because one segment of society attempts by governmental fiat to impose their values on the rest of society” (Meier, 1994, p. 4). This imposition of values by the government on the rest of society was not a new concept. Downs (1957), Gusfield (1963), and Olson (1965) each identified policies with significant conflict over first principles, in which the typical policy process did not clearly explain the observed political activity. Page and Clelland (1978) and Gormley (1986) identified “struggles of lifestyles” between status groups as an emerging issue playing out through public policy. Both Tatalovich and Daynes’ (1988) and Mooney and Lee (1995) identified deviations in abortion politics from traditional policy processes. Though no such definition of these policies existed over the decades, multiple were proposed (See Haider-Markel, 1998, 1999; Haider-Markel & Meier, 1996; Mucciaroni, 2011; Mucciaroni et al., 2019; Doan &

Kirkpatrick, 2013; Mooney & Lee, 1995; Mooney, 2000; Tatalovich & Daynes, 1988; Smith, 1999, 2002; Cocoa, 2002; Gormley, 1986; Bowen, 2012; Blankenau & Leeper, 2003; and Meier, 1999).

The analysis of the literature showed a clear outlier in the definitions used. 66.13%³ of definitions cited were of Christopher Z. Mooney's definition of morality policies;

“a debate over first principles, in which at least one advocacy coalition portrays the issue as one of morality or sin and uses moral arguments in its policy advocacy. Such arguments are presented as self-evident and morally compelling, leading to ultimate clashes of values that cannot be resolved”
(Mooney, 2001, p.3).

This definition has faced little opposition, conflict, or change to date. Alternative definitions proposed have not taken up more than 11 percent of citations though notably share many characteristics of Mooney's definition and are not substantively different in content.

Nearly as soon as morality policy began to be studied as an identifiable subset of policies, the question of “What kind of policies are these?” emerged. Because morality policies often stress symbolic issues that are extrapolated to represent real policy issues, there is scholarly relevance to answering this question so patterns can be identified and generalizations made (Page & Clelland, 1978). This simple question and the resulting taxonomy, classification, and typology debates that emerged was the prominent point of contention for early morality policy scholars who set out to investigate, “Is this its policy subset entirely? A subset of redistributive policies? Or is it something

³ This figure includes articles authored or co-authored by Mooney himself. If his numerous works are excluded from the calculation, the figure becomes 57.4%, a lesser but still statistically significant value.

else entirely?" (Studlar, 2008; Tatalovich & Daynes, 1988). Findings from the literature indicate four possible outcomes to these questions.

Redistributive Policy (52% of articles). Redistributive policies target a broad group of people, feature a high level of bargaining between large groups of people, have great potential for conflict, are very visible, and are concerned with changes in social and economic power (Lowi, 1972; Studlar, 2008; Smith & Larimer, 2009). These elements have made it a productive categorization of policy for morality policy scholars to identify with, "since morality policy validates certain basic values and rejects others, it redistributes moral values just as surely as a progressive income tax scheme redistributes economic values" (Mooney, 1999, p. 768). While morality policy as a subset of redistributive policy is found in more than half of the total literature on categorization, it is worth noting that 100% of literature in this category published since 2012 considers redistributive policies to encompass morality policy.

Distinct Policy (23% of articles). In "Does Morality Policy Exist?: Testing a Basic Assumption," Mooney & Schuldt (2008, p. 200) found that "morality policy exists; there is a class of policies that have most of the bundle of characteristics claimed by morality policy scholars to distinguish them from other policies." Years before, Roh and Haider-Markel (2003, p. 17) said something similar about morality policy and the politics they generate: "We may need an additional policy type that is distinguished from traditional policy categories." Numerous other sources discuss distinct differences from standard redistributive policies (including, but not limited to, welfare, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and even income tax). However, the analysis confirms that this is a minority opinion.

Regulatory Policy (3% of articles). William Gormley’s foundational work, “Regulatory Issue Networks in a Federal System,” makes the most compelling and direct argument for morality policy as regulatory policy. Gormley uses characteristics of morality policy (including high saliency, low complexity, interest group behavior, and issue network mobilization of values-laden policies) to claim morality policy is a type of regulatory policy, arguing, “regulatory politics is more than just the aggregation of interests. It is a drama in which ideas, interests, values, roles, rights, and standard operating procedures all matter” (Gormley, 1986, p. 619). While Gormley can make a convincing argument to this end, other scholars do not seem so convinced.

All, Some, Neither, or No Opinion (22% of articles). Other articles are not so definitive in their pursuit of the question, “What kind of policy is this?” 6% of articles take no position entirely, choosing to include various perspectives on the debate from a historical or theoretical perspective, though fail to take a stand themselves. Still others (16%) create categories of their own, arguing that certain policies can be simultaneously distinct morality policies and redistributive policies (Roh & Berry, 2008) or that morality policies span multiple policy types and, therefore, can be categorized into “redistributive morality policy” or “sin morality policy” depending on the content, topic, or values drawn from (Mooney & Lee, 2000). Mucciaroni (2011, p. 187) is the most prominent voice, saying that because of this wide variance, morality policies do not exist. “We should distinguish morality policy from other policies by how political actors frame issues rather than by its substantive content.”

2.4.2 Actors and Interest Groups (89.7%)

Actors and interest groups are an undeniably outsized influence on morality policy literature. After all, public policies do not diffuse, change, enter or leave the agenda, stabilize, become adopted, or

any number of possible outcomes independently of actors (including individual voters, politicians, policymakers, policy entrepreneurs, and elites) or interest groups (including organized coalitions, advocacy groups, religious institutions, and the media). Morality policies are designed to regulate the behavior of individuals and redistribute values between groups, thereby directly involving and impacting actors at every level of society. However, they do so in notably distinct ways from other policy areas.

For example, key actors in many morality policy processes are likely those without a direct stake in the outcome of adoption and change. Meier and McFarlane (1993, p. 87) found that abortion regulation, restrictions, and funding reallocations have outsized effects on low-income women; however, the key actors in the abortion policy change movement were “the more affluent members of the political community.” This finding is backed up by Mooney and Lee (1995; 2000), who share that those facing execution are not leading the debate over capital punishment, but instead, the issue is led by interest groups eager to send messages to policymakers and politicians about the values of forgiveness, justice, rehabilitation, or retribution that they want to be affirmed by the state. Likewise, policy actors often “adopt” a seemingly unrelated issue purely to expand their political agenda because of its perceived interest to existing or desired constituents (Haider-Markel, 1998). In other policy areas (including but not limited to gambling legislation, alcohol-related topics, and LGBTQIA+ policies), there is a more substantial overlap between main actors, interest groups, and the policies’ targeted populations (Doan & McFarlane, 2012; Mooney, 2000).

Because of the variation in key actors and interest groups’ motivations, roles, terms of debate, and impact across various morality policies, scholars have historically found it beneficial to spotlight single-topic areas. 39.25% of peer-reviewed articles took a theoretical approach or focused on

morality policies as a monolith, whereas 60.75% focused on specific policies or topic areas and then generalized their findings to morality policies as a whole. Topic areas that appeared in the research more than once are reflected in Chart 1.

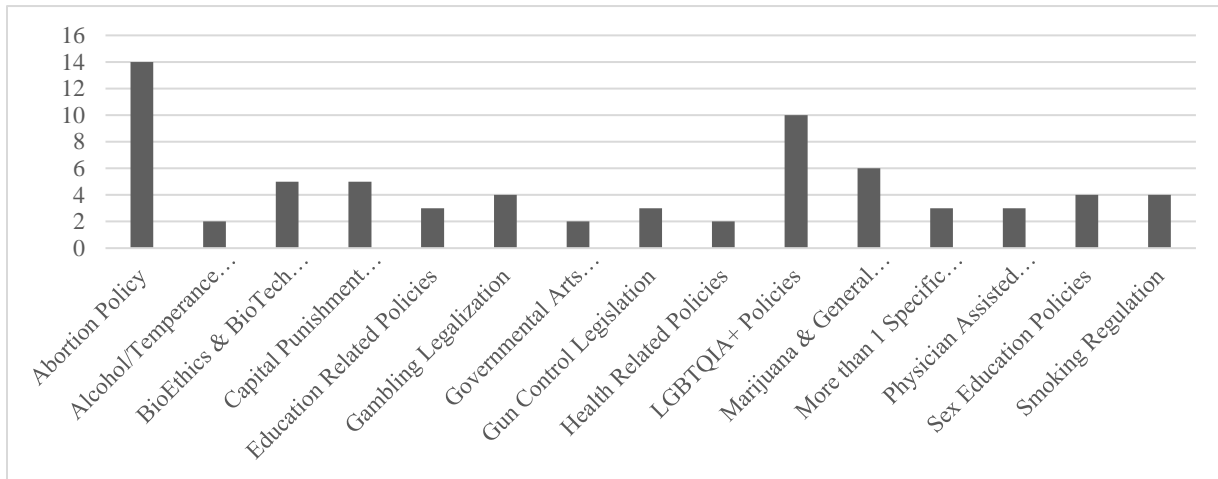


Chart 2.1: Distribution of articles directed towards specific policies.

Evaluated as a whole, valuable generalizations and commonalities about actors and interest groups as they relate to morality policy across topic areas can be identified. The literature evaluation identified 36 different identifiers used for actors that we have further grouped into four main categories: Groups of Individuals, Elected Officials, Entrepreneurs and Other Policy Actors, and Elites and Authorities. Interest Groups are divided into three main categories: General Interest Groups, Religious Institutions, and the Media.

Groups of Individuals (35.7%). Groups of Individuals⁴ are the foundational and most influential actors at every step in the morality policy lifecycle. Morality policy adoption has been repeatedly and consistently shown to be driven by public opinion and the “moral values of state citizens,” with all other actors and interest groups strategizing and utilizing resources to convert this group to their side (Kreitzer et al., 2019; Mooney, 1999; Wald et al., 1997; Berry & Berry, 1990; Fairbanks, 1977; Mooney & Lee, 1995, 2000; Nice, 1992). As such, much of the morality policy lifecycle prioritizes securing public opinion, motivating individuals and groups of individuals to participate in the policy process by identifying real or perceived threats to their fundamental values, challenging established social norms, attempting to change behavior, trying to stigmatize and sanction actions or beliefs that conflict with their values; identifying an issue that harms a specific group they deem favorable; or reacting to governmental actions that regulate private behavior they consider to be overreaching, unfair, unnecessarily regulative, have selective enforcement, or that is disproportionately targeted (Blankenau & Leeper, 2003; Ferraiolo, 2013; Lewis & Brooks, 2005; Smith, 1999; Mooney, 2000; Mucciaroni et al., 2019).

The strategic push towards motivating and involving the general public works. Individual citizens “do not chain themselves to cars or commit murder over a change in telephone regulation, but they have done these things and more in the debate” over morality policies (Mooney & Schuldt, 2008, p. 4; Taylor et al., 2012). Citizens are highly motivated to make their values known to policymakers and face little technical questions that could prevent their involvement; in turn, morality policies

⁴ This category encompasses references to “activists,” “adults,” “citizens,” “community leaders,” “constituencies,” “consumers,” “figureheads,” “individuals,” multiple written variations of “public” (including “general public,” “mass public,” etc.), “society,” “subculture(s),” “voters,” and “youth.”

report higher levels of citizen participation than non-morality policies and are a driver for votes especially in competitive political environments (Mooney, 2000; Nice, 1988).

Elected Officials (26.4%). It is because of this high participation rate, general lack of policy complexity, and a citizenry eager to mobilize over morality policies that Elected Officials⁵ find them so attractive as parts of their political platforms (Gormley, 1986). Candidates, politicians, and other elected officials have potent incentives to respond to public preferences for self-preservation as voters “have a desire to find a candidate who shares their stand on the ethically interpreted issue” (Domke, et al., 2000, p. 645). This hyper-responsiveness and desire to reflect the general constituency’s opinion, normally a positive sign of democratic responsiveness, are bastardized and instead lead this hyperresponsiveness can lead to the necessary moralization of policies, political responses disproportionate to the actual need, responses that do not reflect the citizenry’s true beliefs or values, circumvent standard information-filtering mechanisms normally so important in policymaking, and the resulting policies are rarely correlated with the elected official or general public’s actual preferences, ideology, or religious affiliation (Cambreco & Barnello, 2008; Meier, 1999; Meier & McFarlane, 1992; Mooney, 1999; Mooney & Lee, 1995). Meier (1999, p 681) describes this process as “rational politicians [perceiving] that demand for restrictive policies will be greater than it actually is and thus [competing] to produce more extreme policies.” If the politicians correctly perceived the true public preferences, “they would keep moderate policies designed to appeal to the median voter,” though because they are hyper-responsive to the inflated impression of demand, they always perceive there is greater support than there is (Meier, 1999, p. 683; Oldmixon, 2002). This inconsistency has been found to result in

⁵ This category encompasses references to “candidates,” “lawmakers,” “legislators,” “office holders,” and “politicians.”

more extreme positions, feature less accountability to the public than in more routine policymaking, have an impact on judicial decision-making, and disproportionately enhance political entrepreneurs', interest groups', party activists,' and elites' influence on the policymaking process (Mooney, 1999; Mooney & Lee, 2000).

Entrepreneurs and Other Policy Actors (35.6%). Omori (2013) credits Entrepreneurs and Other Policy Actors⁶ for the existence of morality policies. Since morality policies are strategically framed in a way to attract moral reasoning, appeal to an ideological base, and create divisions over an issue, entrepreneurs, the support they mobilize, and the institutions that benefit from their attention and resources benefits sees their status in society elevated and their values affirmed (Omori, 2013; Lewis, 2006; Mooney, 2001; Pierce & Miller, 1999). Essential to the policy process, policy, political, and moral entrepreneurs have broad freedom to recast issues as morality policy, testing provocative symbolism and emotional reactions with the general public to punctuate the political agenda with their causes, raise their profile, and pressure individuals, institutions, or entire subcultures to enact change (Mucciaroni, 2011; Mooney & Schuldt, 2008; Lewis, 2006). Though just as there is a disconnection between real and perceived demand for these regulative policies, it has been found that the symbolism attached to the policies is more important to supporters than the substantive content of the issue itself (Mucciaroni, 2011).

If entrepreneurs can control the symbolism and scope of debate and leverage a framing event(s), entrepreneurs and other policy actors have significant power over these issues in ways that impact

⁶ This category encompasses references to “policy entrepreneurs,” “political entrepreneurs,” “moral entrepreneurs,” “bureaucrats,” “government actors,” “political actors,” “policy advocates,” policy analysts,” “policymakers,” and “political players.”

both the policy under debate itself and the population being regulated. Klocke and Muschert (2010, p. 296) found that moral entrepreneurs were directly responsible for labeling individuals or subcultures as deviants, further ostracizing them through political and media mechanisms “to exercise their moral authority.” However, “deviants” in this context are not those who indulge in perverted or disturbing behavior; instead, it is a term widely used to describe groups that do not subscribe to the values of the primary identity and behavior ascribed to specific races, genders, sexualities, and religions (Button, et al., 1997; Lowi, 1998; Mooney, 1999; 2001; Tatalovich & Daynes, 1988).

Elites and Authorities (11.4%). Elites and Authorities⁷ are a final category of actors that engage with the electoral, economic, and political process related to morality policy debates. Elites consider the platforms an “easy way to build a political reputation or stereotype one’s opponents and glean ... capital from the coalitions mobilized around the issue” (Doan & McFarlane, 2012; Haider-Markel & Meier, 1996, p. 334). Their values are a conditioning force on mass attitudes and public opinion; they produce a stronger determinant than other factors, such as religious cues (Cambreco & Barnello, 2008). As such, cues the general public receives from elites are strongly related to citizen values and provide an excellent incentive for elites to heavily utilize additional channels, including interest groups, religious institutions, and the media, to spread their support for causes, candidates, and issues to accomplish their goals (Miles, 2016; Roh & Haider-Markel, 2003; Mooney, 2000; Mooney & Lee, 2000; Pollert & Mooney, 2022).

⁷ This category encompasses references to “authorities,” “elites,” “elites in society,” “political elites,” and “officials.”

Interest Groups. Because of this high level of citizen participation, interest groups focus their time and resources selectively activating actors, taking proactive parts in the narrative framing process, strategically limiting broader involvement in the policy to control the venues and agendas, targeting and delivering resources to supportive actors; providing financial or human resources to key decision-makers; finding common ground to align their cause with already established beliefs of specific populations; and intentionally creating or utilizing framing events to their benefit; all in place of providing technical expertise on the issue (Haider-Markel, 1999; Haider-Markel & Meier, 1996; Mooney, 1999; Mucciaroni, 2011; Studlar, 2008). Because of this hands-on, highly involved influence over morality politics at every level, interest group behavior is a significant determinant of morality politics at all levels.

With interest groups typically active on both sides of a morality policy debate, the presence of equally strong, opposing groups has been found to cancel out the impact on policy change or diffusion. However, competing groups succeed in keeping issue salience front-of-mind for individual citizens, elected officials, policy actors, and elites (Roh & Berry, 2008). Notably, of the entire sample of literature that mentions interest groups, 30.56% is directly focused on interest groups as they relate to abortion, often referred to as the “quintessential morality policy” (Kreitzer, 2015; Meier & McFarlane, 1992; Patton, 2007, p. 472; Pollert & Mooney, 2022). If the scope is expanded to all matters of sex and sexuality, that number jumps to 47.22%.

Religious Institutions. No such group of advocates has been more influential in the debates around abortion, sex, and sexual expression than religious institutions. Nearly 1/3 of all literature reviewed in the analysis included religious institutions, influences, ideology, groups, or religious leaders as significant players in morality policy. Religious affiliations are the second highest predictor of

policy opinion formation, spiritual leaders are more frequently cited as being influential than policy experts, and the most consistent factor for determining attitudes on morality policies is religious values (Mooney & Schuldt, 2008; Roh & Berry, 2008; Mooney & Lee, 2000; Patton, 2007; Cambreco & Barnello, 2008).

Beyond the persistent, well-funded, highly organized, and consistent presence these institutions have in communities where voters live and work, the deeply engrained beliefs, principles, and calls to action that stem from religious organizations profoundly shape both core values of the general public and morality policy opinion (Cambreco & Barnello, 2008; Cocca, 2002). Some religious institutions, like the Catholic Church, overtly oppose some morality policies, citing moral objections stemming from their ideology (notably abortion and LGBTQIA+ civil rights policies). Once described as the “greatest opposition to right-to-die policy innovations in state legislatures and courts,” the Catholic faith “demands that Catholics not be guilty bystanders in the face of “immorality” and to “protect the vulnerable;” powerful statements that leverage the actual and perceived power and authority of the church as moral leaders to influence their constituencies on these specific policies (Cunningham, 2014, p. 23; Glick & Hutchinson, 1999). Christian conservatives, a powerful, organized political force since the 1980s, are one group especially motivated and equipped for morality politics debates, demonstrating consistent “evangelical adherence” in matters of contentious or unclear policies (Cocca, 2002; Lewis & Brooks, 2005; Gibson, 2004, p. 1142). “Even though constitutional principles separate church and state in America, religion remains one of the most important factors influencing political attitudes and behavior, including voting, displaying campaign materials, attending rallies, assisting a political party, attempting to influence others’ votes, and contributing funds to a campaign” (Kraus, 2007; p. 67). Even groups with less political adherence and mobilization, or that are apolitical together,

will still routinely and consistently rely on their doctrines and religious literature when making decisions about political or policy matters, elevating the dichotomous language and perceptions around “sin” and “sinners” (Bowen, 2012; Gibson, 2004; Nice, 1988).

Media. Finally, the media, “an institution embedded both in the larger political structure as well as general public opinion,” is a heavily sourced influence on morality policy in the literature (Omori, 2013, p. 519). While the categorization of the media as an interest group can be debated, their influence on morality policy narratives, information distribution, audience mobilization, potential for radicalization, and symbolism attached to groups, objects, individuals, events, and social problems cannot (Albrecht & Amey, 1999; Ferraiolo, 2013; Omori, 2013). 36.44% of all literature reviewed mentions the media as a collective mouthpiece for key actors, entrepreneurs, other interest groups, or elites in morality policy debates, and plays a crucial role in influencing aggregate opinion and shaping collective preferences through the information shared, amount of information made available, tone of rhetoric, and nature of the narrative (Miles, 2016; Mulligan et al., 2013). Journalists gravitate towards salient issues and find audiences receptive to coverage of evocative statements, controversial figures, and “classic struggles between good and evil” often found in morality policy, perpetuating the salience, widening the scope of debate, and “pushing these issues quickly onto the political agenda and into the active phase of policymaking” (Gormley, 1986, p. 604; Mooney, 2000, p. 176).

When discussing the overlap between the media and morality policy, a significant consideration is how the media frames particular issues (Anglund, 1998; Kingdon, 1984). Narrative frames and the strategic crafting of emotive symbols “serve to organize an individual’s thinking, weaving various threads of content and context into a coherent storyline that suggests what the controversy is about

and the essence of the issue. These frames, in turn, affect public opinion” (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2004, p. 244; Olive et al., 2012). Frequently cited frames include harm reduction, reconceptualization, focusing events, radicalization, blending issues, procedural arguments, moral judgments, and even moralization or demoralization of issues; most commonly, some combination of one or more frames (Kreitzer, 2015; Haider-Markel, 1998; Hollander & Patapan, 2017; Ferraiolo, 2013, p. 125; Studlar, 2008; Mucciaroni, 2011). While elected officials have been demonstrated to be the primary source of framing narratives, the media has an incentive to disseminate and discuss the message, event, or issue to a broader audience using frames to benefit unambiguous causes (Johnson, 2012; Olive et al., 2012; Omori, 2013).

2.4.3 Policy Change and Stability (42.06%)

In the beginning days of morality policy studies, it was the “remarkable similarities” in how the political system handled “noneconomic,” “militant single issue,” and “controversial” policies that first signaled distinctions and a possible new policy subtype within the political system (Tatalovich & Daynes, 1988, p. 210). One such distinction was in policy diffusion. Mooney and Lee (1995; 1999), Cocca (2002, p. 57), and Traut and Emmert (2003) each came across the same conclusion with their findings on the diffusion of these policies: there is “no pattern to diffusion, unlike some ... would predict.” Attempts to find diffusion patterns in clusters or regions also produced little evidence, with only Mooney and Lee (1999, p.776) showing any kind of distinction, albeit nebulous, describing the morality policy diffusion process as “very different both from each other and from the usual diffusion pattern of nonmorality policy.” In more recent years, it has been suggested that even if morality policy has a distinct pattern of diffusion, it is not measurable given the multidimensional process and multiple variables that influence diffusion at any given time (Taylor et al., 2012; Butz et al., 2015, p. 349).

Unlike diffusion issues, morality policy change and learning have consistently strong correlations with each other and specific outside factors, including a more significant correlation to public opinion (Cocca, 2002; Cambreco & Barnello, 2008; Mooney & Lee, 2000). This is in large part because morality policies are relatively simple; there is less need for policy learning since “at stake are basic questions about right and wrong, not subtle questions about policy impact;” everyone considers themselves an expert on morality and therefore is less concerned with the standard social learning or policy learning process (Mooney & Lee, 1999, p. 83). Incrementalism, a well-documented feature of policy change, is not amenable to morality policies. However, there is evidence in specific state-level policies that while there is no significant social learning process driving adoption, there are some incremental modifications post-adoption to address external spillover effects for instrumental, non-symbolic policies directly (Butz et al., 2015; Pollert & Mooney, 2022).

Policy stability is the least represented element of the policy lifecycle in the literature, likely because the “noncompromising nature of morality policy is that policy debates are rarely settled. The losers retain their values and continue to seek their validation, whether in the same or other forums...[and] losers may be inspired to political action by their policy defeats” (Mooney, 1999, p. 678). Court decisions do little to settle these debates, though they are increasingly being used as the arbiter of final opinion especially when the policy is based on “some criterion other than citizen preference, such as on a constitutional right,” (Patton, 2007; Mooney, 2000). Only when policy and public preferences, or when the policy has changed so extensively by reinvention, reformation, or limiting comprehensiveness, does the issue come off the agenda. However, even in situations of general societal agreement and lack of action within courts, stability is still far from certain (Patton & Fording, 2020; Mooney, 2000).

2.4.4 Policy Outcomes and Impacts (22.4%)

Despite being a significant consideration in general public policy literature, policy outcomes and impacts are vastly underrepresented in morality policy literature. To identify why it is so underrepresented, the authors believe that the most common outcomes and impacts can also illuminate why this theme is so under-researched. The first consideration is that once policies are adopted or shift in their saliency, their outcomes and impacts move outside the scope of morality policy literature, instead becoming part of other less controversial evaluations and analyses (i.e., Marijuana policies fall under drug laws with no room for moralization, emotion, or symbolism). When evaluating Mooney's (2001) definition of morality policy, one can see that no component is about the policy itself but rather about the symbolic nature of the policy, the way it is framed by actors, what arguments are inspired by the policy, and how the public perceives the policy. The policy itself seems to hold little consequence. For this reason, Mucciaroni (2011, p. 187) questions the existence of morality policy altogether, saying, "We should distinguish morality policy from other policies by how political actors frame issues rather than by its substantive content."

The second consideration in the literature is the incongruence between the policy's goal and the actual outcome. Morality policies are primarily seen as some variation of "expensive failures," an unchanging and conclusive outcome over the years or policy topic (Meier, 1999, p. 686). In 1988, Nice found that legislating private matters, including sex and sexuality, "produced costs which outweighed their benefits" (p. 180). Meier (1994, p. 4) found that morality policies as a whole were "extremely popular but rarely effective," and Mooney (1999, p. 678) determined that that the "nature of morality policy and politics [leads] to significant noncompliance by those affected." Meier and McFarlane (1993) further found that abortion restrictions did not reduce the demand for abortion-related services but rather only reduced access. Even those that initially began as effective

in achieving objective goals saw their impact reduce in magnitude after initial implementation or had unintended and unrelated impacts (Levine, Lacy & Hearn, 2013). A clear example of this is Meier & Johnson's 1990 study on restrictive alcohol sales. These policies were enacted to reduce drunk driving but instead found that "restrictions on alcohol sales have a direct impact on alcohol consumption and an indirect impact on heavy drinking. Efforts to limit drunk driving" and drunk driving fatalities "...have no impact" at all (p. 425). These findings of failure and ineffectiveness echo across literature on marijuana (Johns, 2015), abortion (Fairbanks, 1981), stem cell research (Levine, Lacy & Hearn, 2013), hate crime policy (Haider-Markel, 1998), LGBTQIA+ protections (Cravens, 2015), sex education (Kramer, 2019), and more. Capital punishment perhaps has the most optimistic track record of intended outcomes with consistently inconsistent results (Nice, 1992). For policies and their politics to be "extremely popular but rarely effective," continue to be "led by values and morals, instead of logic," and "largely driven by partisanship and ideology rather than by fiscal maximization or state needs" there must be another measure of success not reflected in measurable outcomes (Bowen, 2012; Doan & McFarlane, 2012, p. 612; Meier, 1994; Mooney, 1999).

Kevin Smith (1999, p. 723) approaches this very issue in his study of the regulation of pornography, finding that the politics associated with morality policies "are indeed less about the struggle to balance individuals' freedom and social harm than about an effort by one group to impose its moral taboos on everyone else." Meier (1999, p. 690) similarly writes that "morality politics [seeks] a total vindication of values." Morality policy's outcomes and impacts are found in the messaging, the framing, and the othering of so-called "deviants" rather than in the tangible, measurable policy outcomes. The message sent by adopting the policy is the intended outcome, and these largely symbolic, mostly unenforceable policies are passed with little intention of or a

clear path to substantive impact (Pollert & Mooney, 2022). These policies force the government to put its stamp of approval or disapproval on a specified set of values, sending a message to those in a polity about what American values are. At that goal, they are quite successful (Gusfield, 1963; Mooney, 1999; Young, 1992). Only adopted policies that eliminate procedural difficulties are associated with any level of measurable outcomes or behavior change, but even then, the demand for the underlying behavior or need is unaltered, ensuring that the cycle of debate, political maneuvering, and policy change never ends (Arsneault, 2001; Meier & Johnson, 1990).

2.5 Implications and Conclusion

Given the findings from this systematic literature review, we can synthesize four main points about our scholarly understanding of morality policies in America. First, morality policies are defined as “a debate over first principles, in which at least one advocacy coalition portrays the issue as one of morality or sin and uses moral arguments in its policy advocacy. Such arguments are presented as self-evident and morally compelling, leading to ultimate clashes of values that cannot be resolved;” a definition which purposefully focuses on the symbolism, framing, and arguments of actors, interest groups, and other institutions as it relates to the policy rather than on the policy itself (Mooney, 2001, p. 3). Furthermore, morality policies are overwhelmingly considered a subtype of redistributive policy.

Second, the debate around morality policies is a fight for public opinion with “right” on each side of the debate, with each party utilizing symbolism, influence, strategically crafted language, and all other resources at their disposal to sway public opinion to their side. Politicians and other elected officials, in an attempt to show the public that they have “right” on their side and are ethically aligned with their constituents, respond dramatically and disproportionately, creating a

gap in the perceived vs actual public preferences, resulting in more extreme policies that often target a specific group of ostracized “deviants.” Policy and moral entrepreneurs build off that public opinion with strategic symbolism in pursuit of the public interest, and elites utilize various channels to see their wishes carried out by garnering public support (Arsneault, 2001; Mooney, 2000; Pierce & Miller, 1999). Religious institutions, the media, and other interest groups are particularly involved in morality policy debates, taking more public and extreme stances to woo groups of voters to their sides. This kind of behavior is not present to the same extreme in highly technical, non-salient policies because it does not excite, motivate, or mobilize the average citizen who cannot be concerned with necessary technical information but who would be highly motivated by emotion-laden statements, strategically crafted to engage and enrage (Mooney, 1999; Mooney & Lee, 2000).

Third, in part because of the lack of policy learning or focus on tangible policy benefits beyond projecting values and messages, once policies are adopted, their cycle through the policy process is mostly random, ineffective, and rarely reflective of the reality of society’s needs (Doan & McFarlane, 2012; Mooney, 2000; Mucciaroni, 2011). Despite all this, even if the proposed policies are adopted, they are rarely stable, with group losses only serving as inspiration to reframe, find a new venue, or re-strategize, ensuring the debates and saliency of the moralized issues continue in perpetuity.

Fourth, given all of this, morality policies are perceived as poorly designed, ineffective, and expensive failures that consistently fall short of their stated policy objectives. They are only effective in the underlying, often unstated goals to take a stand, send a message, and intentionally project specific societal values and the behavior the government sanctions.

Given this information coupled with the outsized influence on American policymaking, what are the implications for policy and practice given this synthesis of findings from the literature? Morality policies, the politics they create, and the division of public opinion they inspire are likely to stay ever present in American policymaking, media, and political discourse so long as moral considerations overshadow the instrumental effects of a given policy and voters continue to turn up to cast more votes for morality policy than nonmorality policy with no single definition, categorization, actor, interest group, policy, or outcome affecting the trajectory or impact of morality policies in America.

To further understand the study of morality policies in America and answer what is next, there are several other paths for practitioners and researchers to pursue advance understanding of this topic. For practitioners, increasing which aspects of morality policies are visible to the general public, knowing how to identify symbolic policies from instrumental policies, and focusing on more nuanced policy discourse can encourage more rational decision-making. Additionally, focusing on actions with tangible and measurable outcomes could contribute to elevating these emotionally laden issues beyond binary debates (Pollert & Mooney, 2022). For scholars, focusing future studies on morality policies' paths post-adoption, investigating specific demographics impacted by morality policy discourse, and how morality policy elements are at play in international policy would be valuable areas to pursue. It is our hope that, through this systematic review, our analysis of the current state of morality policy scholarship can set a cohesive and clear starting place for a more well-rounded view of these policies.

Chapter Three

Dissenting Federal Bureaucrats' Assignments of Responsibility in the Media

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Abstract

To understand when federal bureaucrats publicly contest a policy's enforcement, compliance, or regulation and how they conceptualize and articulate the locus of ultimate responsibility for change, the authors analyzed 59 media articles from 10 independent, nonpartisan sources over 13 years representing 79 individuals and groups. Through a political discourse analysis approach, we determined that even when currently employed bureaucrats externally raise the profile of a governmental dilemma, they still see the locus of responsibility for actual change to rest within existing internal channels. Furthermore, they utilize personal, public service, and societal values as instrumental aspects of crafting these calls to action in unique and patterned ways in the assignment of perceived responsibility. From the three propositions offered as a result of this analysis, the authors provide launch pads for further pursuits in theory building and practice in the study of bureaucratic noncompliance and conscientious objection in bureaucratic behavior.

Key Words: Bureaucrat, media narratives, contentious objection, non-compliance, responsibility

3.1 Evidence for Practice

- Currently employed bureaucrats who externally raise the profile of a governmental dilemma still see the locus of responsibility for change to rest within existing internal channels including leaders, figureheads, and influential groups within the agency or field rather than an external force or oversight group.
- Personal, Public Service, and Societal Values are instrumental in both defending the reasoning for speaking with the media to influence change and in the crafting of calls to action toward the responsible parties.
- The value of *Duty*, in both specific and abstract terms, is a large enough driver to overcome consistently negative emotions and the risk related to pursuing external channels for expressing dissent.

3.2 Introduction

To the public, “bureaucracy” is often synonymous with red tape: rules, regulations, rigorous processes, compliance, and policies that shape public administration to ensure and mandate equitable and efficient service delivery that pursues the public good. However, “as long as there have been rules, rules have been broken, bent, ignored, misinterpreted, and sometimes obeyed” (Bozeman, 2022, pg. 1). Two examples of bureaucrats taking to the media to achieve a goal contradictory to their work directives happened on the same day, January 22, 2024. That day more than two dozen federal employees organized a walkout in opposition to the U.S. Government’s resolute support of Israel in the context of ongoing violence in Gaza. Despite President Biden’s loud and vocal support of Israel, these agency employees vocally cited their “patriotic duty and moral imperative” to act, saying, “This is something that we could not in good conscience stand by without doing something” about (Katz, 2024). That very same day, sixty Department of

Corrections officers and staffers assigned to working with and supervising death row inmates signed their names to an organized public letter begging the Missouri Governor for clemency for a model inmate (Moore, 2024). Despite death penalty laws being on the books in Missouri since 1810 and 53% of Missourians indicating support for capital punishment, these employees, in voicing their opposition, wrote to the Governor and simultaneously shared with the media, “We are part of the law enforcement community who believe in law and order. We believe in the use of capital punishment. [sic] But we are in agreement that the death penalty is not the appropriate punishment” for the inmate in question (Death Penalty Information Center, 2024; Gomez, 2024).

These employees have likely broken no rules in public opposition to their bureaucratic employer. However, there is still a significant element of noncompliance in the activities both groups have undertaken in their refusal to carry out or open opposition to their responsibilities for implementing legislation entrusted to them as bureaucrats. It has been well documented that when issues arise in the course of governmental work, bureaucrats have a responsibility to raise an alarm rather than being morally disengaged and blindly following policies that may contribute to a sum worse than the whole (Adams & Balfur, 2004; Bandura, et. al., 1996; Brandt, et. al., 2023). Though, without a responsive bureaucracy sworn to carry out policies enacted by elected lawmakers, anarchy would ensue if individual bureaucrats were emboldened to follow every individual preference or whim (Piar, 2006). To further refine our understanding of where the balance lies between these two extremes, we argue that if an individual or group of individuals who identify an issue take responsibility for raising the alarm of only the most important situations and then embolden others to democratically respond within the scope of their work, moral engagement, personal and professional accountability, and change may responsibly occur. But how does that individual embolden others to democratically respond? Who do they assign responsibility, and why?

3.2.1 Bureaucratic Opposition Behavior

One model that can explain why bureaucrats may exhibit this opposition to certain directives entrusted to them, includes Bozeman's (2022) Heuristic Model of Rules Compliance Behavior. Bozeman speculates that rule compliance, in full or in part, is dictated by five main factors. These include the source or origin of the rule, the proximity of the rule's decision-maker to the employee's work locus, cost measures to comply, penalties for not complying, and the sheer amount of rules an employee is expected to adhere to that directly affect behavior (Bozeman, 2022). This model implies that with an increasing number of regulations and the growing geographic reach of an increasingly scattered federal workforce, dilemmas of compliance are bound to continue arising across the bureaucracy. What this heuristic does not include is the concept of conscientious objection to the directive requiring a deviation from the actors' values though in its presentation, Bozeman identifies a need to increase knowledge of responses to rules, both to understanding ways to increase compliance and to understand when rules need to be enforced, relaxed, or removed (Bozeman, 2022). Bureaucratic Noncompliance Theory fills in some of these gaps, acknowledging the role of moral conflicts and group dynamics in organizations tasked with obeying and carrying out certain policies, but makes no differentiation between those who, for example, silently ignore a directive to focus on equity and instead prioritize equality in their service delivery, from those who declare systematic unfairness in service delivery via a public forum speaking against their employer's directives (Fernandez-Gutierrez & Van de Walle, 2018; Yaver, 2015).

So, when bureaucrats make the decision to take a stand against directives from their employers, there are multiple different paths to choose from. Some do choose to silently ignore directives, becoming government guerillas or internal actors who "push policy towards their preferences

rather than being wholly faithful to their legislative principles” when dissatisfied with the actions of their public organizations and engage in actions including rule-bending, deliberate delays, or noncompliance (O’Leary, 2006; Hollibaugh, Miles, & Newswander, 2020; Yaver, 2015, pg. 3). Others proactively pursue formal but anonymous paths, including hotlines, filing whistleblower complaints, reaching out to the Inspector General, other oversight agencies, or watchdog groups, or working with their employee union. Still, others go quite public within their established pathways, reaching out and testifying in front of subcommittees, writing public letters to administrators, filing civil suits in court, or utilizing other internal channels of dissent (Schuster, et. al., 2022). A very small number decide to continue working as a current employee but contact or leak information to the media about their reason for dissent in an attempt to impact both internal changes and shift the external perception of their cause (Kang, 2023).

3.2.2 The Media as a Tool

No strangers to the use of the media as a public management tool, bureaucrats standing against their employers recognize that they do not have the full power, influence, or responsibility needed to implement change from the inside, but that by utilizing the media, especially when presented with a moralized frame, individuals can thrust a particular issue into the active stage of policymaking, transcending bureaucratic red tape, structures, and regulations to make a situation or issue more salient (Brandt, et. al., Under Review; Liu & Horsley, 2007). In addition to directly affecting the saliency of an issue, the media has a tremendous influence on the information shared, the reach of information, and the tone of the information presented (Saffer, Sommerfeldt & Taylor, 2013). In turn, these publications influence public opinion, the associated symbolism, the potential for audience mobilization, and perpetual information distribution (Brainard & Edlins, 2015). Through the crafting of narratives around certain issues and the selection of strategic quotes,

stories, and figures, the media is widely seen as a collective mouthpiece for actors, moral entrepreneurs, and those across the bureaucratic spectrum who want to enact change (Lee & Kwak, 2012). The trail of evidence and social artifacts created through media intervention in an issue is attractive for those wanting to immediately get a significant draw to their case or to those who have already pursued internal channels without seeing their desired level of change or attention (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2006). After these bureaucrats in question have undergone a decision-making process that led them to take public responsibility in the media for not complying with or following a particular directive, they have taken a valuable step towards moral alignment with their core values (Brandt, et. al., 2023). However, the core issue at the heart of the issue remains unaddressed and unresolved. Once a public statement has been made, what happens next? When bureaucrats publicly contest a policy's enforcement, compliance, or regulation, how do bureaucrats conceptualize and articulate the locus of ultimate responsibility for change?

3.2.3 Uncovering Responsibility

By utilizing discourse analysis of media coverage on federal bureaucrats who have taken public action to oppose their employer's directives, we pursue the main research question, when bureaucrats publicly contest a policy's enforcement, compliance, or regulation, how do bureaucrats conceptualize and articulate the locus of ultimate responsibility for change? In addition to answering this question, we intend to contribute to the state of knowledge of bureaucratic noncompliance, especially as it relates to balancing value conflicts in public administration in public forums giving voice and meaning to dissent in practice. With growing demands for increased accountability and just leadership within the federal bureaucracy, but with mixed receptions for those who do speak up, there is great value in understanding how these problems are framed in the media, how bureaucrats speak to the media about their dilemmas, how they see

media coverage pushing the locus of responsibility towards their intended party, and what patterns can be discerned in the assignment of that responsibility.

This article is structured as follows. First, the Methods section outlines why discourse analysis was selected as the primary research method, the coding framework for the analysis using Davidson (2011) as an example, and the four-stage methodology employed across the data. The Results section then identifies central breakdowns of the analysis, focusing on assigned responsibility for the issue raised and the values drawn from their opposition. The Discussion section further investigates the findings, arguments, and key features in context and offers three main propositions to provide guidance for future researchers exploring this topic. Finally, the Implications and Conclusion section synthesizes the main insights from the literature, reflecting on themes for policy and practice, before presenting specific recommendations for further research.

3.3 Methods

This study utilizes data drawn from 59 public memos, e-mails distributed, interviews, public comments, public letters, released statements, reports issued, speeches, op-eds, publicly released formal complaints, and even a podcast. This diverse collection reflects a data pool that included ten media sources, thirteen years' worth of reporting, and 78 different bureaucrats or groups of bureaucrats' language of opposition. Political Discourse Analysis was chosen as a method for the analysis for three primary reasons. First, at its foundation, Political Discourse Analysis recognizes that politics, policymaking, and bureaucratic behavior are not something carried out only by groups or collectives to be evaluated as a monolith but by "lone individuals reasoning their way to decisions" and in recognizing the common interest in communicating with each other about those decisions (Finlayson 2013, pg. 311). Secondly, Political Discourse Analysis was selected because

of its practical approach in allowing researchers to better understand actors' actual concerns and desires while contextualizing where the speaker interprets responsibility to lie and what patterns of organizational behavior bring them to this point (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012; Fernandez-Gutierrez & Van de Walle, 2018). Finally, the thought framework Political Discourse Analysis builds upon acknowledges an instrumental belief structure within an actor that impacts individuals' external-facing actions (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). We conducted the discourse analysis using a sequential, inductive coding process with four distinct stages, Selection of Text, Analyzing Linguistic Features, Social and Argumentation Context, and Implications of Discourse, presented in Table 3.1. The qualitative software MAXQDA supported our coding efforts.

3.3.1 Stage One

We selected established, non-partisan, and geographically diverse publications' texts to analyze including Government Executive, Federal News Network, Federal Times, NBC, ABC, the Associated Press, Washington Post, New York Times, Chicago Tribune, and Los Angeles Times, to create a database of media coverage. We specifically selected a variety of sources as part of a purposeful effort to include a mix of publications containing federal employee-specific news alongside nationally and regionally published media for the general public's consumption. While we did not have exact demographics for the bureaucrats making up this data set, due to inconsistent self-reporting, those speaking to the media trended older with the most common job title being "Director" followed by "Deputy Director" and "Chief," and 50% of those reporting how long they have held federal employment listing 15 years or more. This is in line with the current federal workforce statistics that show an aging workforce (Locke, 2023). Though, of those whose gender could be discerned from the reporting (utilizing self-reporting, stated names, photos, or pronouns) 77% were men. This is an overrepresentation of men as compared to the federal workforce,

however, 36% of individuals in the total dataset were completely anonymous with no demographic markers.

The search parameters were limited to the years 2010-2023 and must have included a direct interview with a currently employed federal worker. Weber's general definition of a "bureaucrat" as a government official who is not elected but responsible for upholding rules and regulations within an administration was utilized (Gerth & Mills, 1946). Content from political appointees, politicians, committee volunteers, or courts were not considered. Per the media report, the bureaucrat had to be exhibiting opposition to their employer's directives, policy, or rules and had to have a reasonable perception of responsibility for their opposition. Utilizing the inclusion and exclusion criteria, table 1: Example of Coding shows that we selected "A Bittersweet Win for a Whistleblower" by J. Davidson as a text sourced from The Washington Post because it was published in 2011, included an interview with a currently employed federal bureaucrat, and the interview included direct quotes opposing their employer. Data collection to inform this database of media coverage was completed in March 2024.

It is important to note that a decision was made to focus on the final media product released to the public over original transcripts. This decision was made because these are the sources that directly influence public opinion on an issue and have the potential to shape future bureaucrat behavior. It is the medium in which the responsible party will be framed, and the selection of relevant content in the story provides insight into the public-facing framing of the issue under discussion (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2004; Olive, et. al, 2012). Essentially, the primary unit of analysis is the framed and contextualized perception of responsibility. An additional decision was made not to put parameters on specific policy types under evaluation partly due to the limited amount of data

available for currently employed federal employees undertaking this course of action (rather than former, fired, or retired employees of which data is plentiful) but also because these issues and the bureaucrats at the center of the opposition have already been pre-selected and pre-screened by the media bodies under evaluation. Their decision to cover the topic and selection of the associated quotes are already expected to disproportionately reflect social policies with the potential for high saliency (Brandt, et. al., Under Review).

Table 3.1: Example of Coding

Stage	Findings	Analytical Category	Analysis
<i>Stage 1</i> Selection of Text	Davidson, J. (2011, July 26). <i>A Bittersweet Win for a Whistleblower</i> . Retrieved from The Washington Post: https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/a-bittersweet-win-for-a-whistleblower/2011/07/26/gIQA8pJUbIstory.html		<ul style="list-style-type: none">√ Published between 2010-2023√ Includes direct interview with bureaucrat.√ Bureaucrat is still employed with federal government.√ Bureaucrat opposes employer directives.
<i>Stage 2</i> Analyzing Linguistic Features	<p>“<u>I hope that the plight I suffered prompts the administration and Congress to move dedicated civil servants from second-class citizenry and to finally give federal employees the legal rights that they need to protect the legal trust.</u>”</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">(1) Background and Assumptions: What is the context for the problem? What is the reasoning for speaking to the press?(2) Actors, Assumptions, Roles, and Values: Who is the actor assigning responsibility to after speaking out? Are they speaking of their personal experience or making generalizations? What is their end goal?(3) Rhetorical devices/Platforms Used: What values are being drawn from?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual Personnel Issue• Actor attempted internal reporting but were retaliated against resulting in going to the media.• Responsibility assigned to “the administration” and to “Congress” for next steps.• They speak from personal experience and extrapolate their own experience to that of all federal employees.• Individual Values of equality and fairness present in rhetoric.• Public Sector values are called upon through dedication, protection, and service.
<i>Stage 3</i> Social and Argumentation Context		<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Medium of Communication: Released Statement2. Intended Audience: General Public, Congress3. Potential Stakeholders: Future Whistleblowers and Fellow Federal Employees4. Broader Socio-Political Context: Certain whistleblower protections have not gained final approval in Congress5. Rhetorical Devices: “Second Class Citizens”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Goal is to ensure federal employees are better protected.• Hope for elevated priority for 1) protections and 2) long-overdue prioritization of civil servants.• Feeling Deprioritized• Describes experience as a plight to be suffered.• Federal employees need this to their jobs protecting the legal trust.
<i>Stage 4</i> Implications of Discourse			Responsible Party: “Congress” and “The Administration”

3.3.2 Stage Two

Once our texts were selected, we analyzed the linguistic features to identify how bureaucrats articulated their objections, assigned responsibility, and the values they drew from in the process, utilizing Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) framework for structural reasoning in political discourse analysis to inform the methodology; a framework specifically chosen because its components explicitly recognize forced choices between personal, professional, organizational, legal, and public interest values and the role of various perceptions of "the public good." We specifically recorded data, including the following:

- (1) The claim for action, actor's goal, actor's values, circumstances, and means-goal.
- (2) The use of pronouns, names, or titles to identify both shifts in perceived responsibility and if the actor is speaking about their experience, another's experience, or extrapolating information, intentionally or unintentionally, about a wider group.
- (3) Linguistic markers of obligation or necessity (i.e., must, should, may, need) that signal both responsibility and moral imperatives for action by either themselves or another party.
- (4) And values explicitly or inexplicitly stated through statements similar to, "I believe my first duty is to..." Or "We are firm believers in openness and transparency, but..."

Through the analysis of these linguistic features, we were able to additionally identify the context for the situation at hand, the evidence provided, historical precedent or public debate the quote was commenting on, the timing of the opposition, and root causes. Some of these linguistic features are further elaborated upon in table 1 building off the sample quote. Based on the quotes across the data, we created a coding scheme for these categories and coded the material using MAXQDA software.

3.3.3 Stage Three

With the content coded, we further examined the social and argumentation context in which the bureaucrat's objections were made. We focused on inputting and analyzing the medium of communication, intended audience and potential stakeholders, and the broader socio-political context surrounding the policy and the bureaucrats' objections. The MAXQDA software also enabled us to note rhetorical devices utilized. Continuing with the example, Table 1 shows that the Medium of Communication was 'Released Statement,' and the Broader Socio-Political Context was determined to be 'Certain whistleblower protections have not gained final approval in Congress,' among other contextual factors. The coding and the context level provided at this stage enabled us to identify categories and draw interpretive conclusions from the empirical text. This stage ended with 2,152 codes, text excerpts, and notes.

3.3.4 Stage Four

Finally, we critically assessed the implications of the bureaucrats' discourse to analyze where these actors conceptualize and articulate the locus of ultimate responsibility, drawing out patterns of perceived responsibility related to the three following analytical categories: (1) Context, Background, Circumstances (2) Actors, Assumptions, Goals, and Values, and (3) Rhetorical Devices, Platform Utilized, and Public Discourse. Continuing with our example, table 1 shows the perceived locus of ultimate responsibility to be 'Congress' and 'The Administration.'

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Assigned Responsibility

The main research question guiding this analysis was, when publicly contesting a policy's enforcement, compliance, or regulation, how do bureaucrats conceptualize and articulate the locus of ultimate responsibility for change? As anticipated, there were many pathways bureaucrats took when assigning responsibility to other actors for achieving their end goal. In total, 17 different responsible parties were identified in the direct quotes from 59 articles and included The Head of Agency, the President of the United States, Fellow Federal Employees, Congress, Themselves, the American Public, the Courts System, Direct Supervisors, the Government, Office of Special Council, House of Representatives, Government Leadership, and their Employee Union. Table 2: Key Findings of Political Discourse Analysis gives a descriptive breakdown of the bureaucrats being interviewed and those they assign responsibility to.

Table 3.2 Key Findings of Political Discourse Analysis

Code	Key Findings
Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 63 Individual Actors and 15 Coordinated Groups of Actors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 38 Individuals were named, 25 Individuals were anonymous • 22 Federal Agencies were named as employers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The top 5 of which were Department of Defense, Department of State, Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Homeland Security, and Department of the Interior. • 56% of actors had 15 years or more in federal employment, of those who reported their tenure. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Of those who reported their job title, the most common was “Director” followed by “Deputy Director” and “Manager.”
Assigned Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most frequent responsible parties in order include (1) Head of Agency, (2) President of the United States, (3) Fellow Federal Employees, (4) Congress, and (5) Themselves. • Others with less representation include but are not limited to Courts or other Legal Pathways, their direct supervisor, and their employee union.

3.4.2 Values

In addition to directly answering our research question of who bureaucrats indicate have the ultimate responsibility for change, we also intended to contribute to the state of knowledge on bureaucratic noncompliance as it relates to balancing value conflict. For example, one quote in the data exhibiting conflict is, “[The] White House [has] profoundly rattled my confidence in its

commitment to inclusivity and its respect for diversity.” Through this quote, we see that the actor places personal importance upon the values of diversity and inclusivity but no longer sees those values reflected in a public service institution, causing distress. This tension between the stated personal values and public service values acts as a contributing force to express their dissension (Kernaghan, 2003; Nieuwenburg, 2014). Drawing out repeated instances of such values creating conflict identified the main categories of Personal Values, Public Service Values, and Societal Values, as was expected. The specific values drawn from are reflected in Table 3 and are discussed further in the following section.

Table 3.3 Summary of Values Exhibited Through the Data

Categories of Text	Categories of Variables		
	<i>Personal Values (30)</i>	<i>Public Service Values (38)</i>	<i>Societal Values (18)</i>
Background and Assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service • Duty • Accuracy • Dedication • Integrity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accuracy • Integrity • Transparency • Consistency • Justice • Accountability • Proper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To Society ○ To Country ○ To Uphold American Values ○ To Add Value • Freedom
Actors, Roles, and Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moral Leadership • Principled Leadership • Honor • Fidelity • Loyalty • Respect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duty to Right • Honor • Ethical Obligations • Respect • Honesty • Adherence to Rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolerance • Friendship • Openness • Fairness
Motives and Rhetorical Devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning • Impact • Trust • Integrity • Moral Imperative to Do Something 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust • Duty to Protect • Sense of Duty • Harm Reduction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love of Country • Tradition • Peace • Unity

3.5 Discussion

3.5.1 Assignment of Responsibility

Among the most implied or directly mentioned responsible parties included the Head of Agency and the President of the United States. Both political figureheads and no strangers to responsibility for issues within the federal workforce, these parties have tremendous influence over policy and the tone-setting of issues and are highly capable of shaping employees' and citizens' perceptions of responsibility, in part due to their "grandiose claims" as a means of improving their reputation, status, or electoral chances (Kane, 2016, pg. 335). In turn, these figureheads take on a reasonable and frequent perception of responsibility in the minds of the public and federal employees, even if the responsible party is not involved in the actual decision-making process. The Head of Agency were given responsibility most frequently when the agency was on the receiving end of negative public relations as a result of systemic failures or perceived inadequate responses to events and was called upon to secure the reputation of their agency externally, as well as to make internal, concrete judgments clarifying policies when the implementation processes were inconsistent or when improper use of bureaucrat discretion was of concern. While the Head of Agency was often seen as the final arbitrator of the issue at hand, the President of the United States was framed more as a messenger, enforcer, and tone setter for the discourse of issues and was more strongly tied to calls of societal values than any other responsible party combined. Two clear examples of this include, "[President] sent them a clear message: They are not welcome here," and "[President] has the power—and I argue the responsibility—to direct [agency] and [agency] to acquiesce in seeking a judicial review of these important, untested, questions..." The President, despite being perceived as a pass-through responsible party, was also notably but unsurprisingly deemed the responsible party for others' decision-making because of how their administration, in appearance or reality, allowed or facilitated such decision-making.

Fellow Bureaucrats were also among the top parties assigned responsibility by their fellow federal employees. Interestingly, these speakers who assigned responsibility to their fellow bureaucrats routinely employed two distinct features in their quotes. The first was that these speakers who assigned responsibility evoked some kind of values-based call to action where they, directly or indirectly, reminded their colleagues of the values they had sworn to uphold. Notable examples include, “we’ve got to follow the law,” “we will do what we can” and “...doing otherwise would violate the public trust of an apolitical civil service system.” Secondly, issues assigning responsibility to fellow federal employees most frequently employed a rhetorical device we coded as “Us vs. Them” with three distinct patterns. The first “us vs them” set comprises *Good Federal Employees vs. Undesirable Federal Employees*. Relevant context featured anything from efficient and productive workers versus those who lived up to “existing stereotypes” of bureaucratic behavior, federal workers who were morally opposing policies vs those who were compliant, and even federal employees who were government guerillas versus those who weren’t. Ultimately the focus was on differentiating themselves as the “good” kind of federal employee, “unlike the others.” Second, calls to *Federal Employees vs. Politicians* were the most likely to use “we” and “our” pronouns when discussing bureaucratic behavior, distinctly separating their work from the policy calls, rhetoric, or reputation of politicians, political appointees, or political parties. This subset was interesting as both the use of sarcasm and open criticism was heavily present when making this distinction between them and the politicians or political appointees. While it is not possible to discern tone from the written word with accuracy, the use of sarcasm was discerned by the context following or preceding the quote (“Frye said sarcastically”) or through quotes placed around words to indicate tone (“his misguided ‘policies’”). Open criticism was far simpler to discern, though it required open-ended coding with no set parameters. Examples included “morally

repugnant, counter-productive and ill-considered” and “half-baked, ill-informed and occasionally reckless decisions.” The final “us vs. them” linguistic feature worth exploring was *Federal Employees vs the American Public*. In the analyzed texts, the American people were both characterized as the opposition, with their values, priorities, behavior, failures, and lack of respect for bureaucrats’ work being a source of fear, anger, and shame, but also as a group to win over. “I do think it's important for the American people to see that not everybody connected with the government is a brute, is a lawbreaker, and that actually some of us do have a measure of conscience,” said one actor. “Feds have been under threat — from foe and sometimes even friends — for decades, and yet, here we are,” said another.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, blame was a common sentiment towards Congress and their responsibilities specifically related to overall government efficiency and productivity by actors. “It’s Congress’ job to sort that out,” wrote one federal employee in an opinion piece on gridlock and government shutdowns. These quotes certainly contributed to a common narrative trope of an ineffective and inefficient legislative system. Despite these perpetuated perceptions, Congress has a unique role to play in employee complaints within the federal government, making context for mentions of Congress particularly important. Many actors had reported contact with a member or representative of Congress at some point in their path to dissension or opposition since very few actors’ processes involved going directly to the media and media alone (though a small number did). Such Congressional interaction included but was not limited to sending letters to or testifying in front of subcommittees, making whistleblower complaints or retaliation complaints, having employee unions request audits through congressional channels, sending internal reports to them for increased visibility, enlisting a congressional representative in their quest for change, and many

others in an attempt to escalate the issue at hand beyond their respective agency. Despite being touted as a source of blame, Congress was clearly perceived to have a unique role to play in the process of “making whole” federal employee concerns and is seen as a viable pathway both within discussions with the media and within more anonymous channels as a pathway for resolution, enforcement, and responsibility for change.

Finally, rounding out the most frequently mentioned perceived responsible parties, a small subset of those speaking to the media, having gone through the decision-making process to raise alarm about a dilemma against their employers, assign the ultimate locus of responsibility to themselves. Interestingly, of those that do assign responsibility to themselves, 100% come from the same employer: The Department of Defense. Of those who spoke to the media outside of proper channels, dissenters either identified their responsibility to remove themselves from certain actions and reduce risking further personal moral hazard- but falling short of critiquing those actions themselves- or realized that it is not possible to enact timely, substantive change based on their dissent alone within internal channels. As an agency with a rigid hierarchy, a culture of strong leadership and unquestionable trust, and one arguably less inclined to tolerate dissent, The Department of Defense is remarkably the most cited employer in this study. While *Issues of Leadership* were the top reason actors gave for going to the press, *Concerns for National Security* and *Concerns for Public Safety* rounded out the top three giving insight into the congruence between personal, professional, and societal values that may create a sense of urgency requiring one to go outside of normal reporting channels and reach out to the media specifically in this line of work.

This discourse analysis shows that bureaucrats who have taken public action to oppose their employer's directives most frequently assign responsibility for achieving their end goal to the Head of their Agency, the President of the United States, their Fellow Bureaucrats, Congress, and themselves. These institutional bodies and individuals are notable in their identification by the actor because even though they have pursued an external path to get their complaint addressed by going to the media, they still clearly see the path toward resolution as an internal one. This finding is in line with Witkowski's (2020) survey findings of federal employees' priorities and important influencers in driving change in the workplace.

Given this finding, we offer the first of three propositions designed to link our findings to the broader questions of responsibility identification, bureaucratic noncompliance, and balancing value conflicts in public administration.

Proposition 1: Currently employed bureaucrats who externally raise the profile of a governmental dilemma still see the locus of responsibility for change to rest within existing internal channels.

3.5.2 Values

For those actors that did pursue the path of media outreach, taking on the first locus of responsibility before verbally identifying responsibility to other actors, they shared a significant commonality in their use of language and in their calls to action. These bureaucrats heavily used personal, public service, and societal values at three clear stages, in line with Van Wart's (1998) terminology for value pillars. *Personal Values* are generally considered to be the most

consequential because they directly impact how individuals interact with their environment, make decisions, demonstrate leadership, and generally draw from their individual history, culture, and ideology (Van Wart, 1998). *Public Service Values* (also called Public Interest Values) are a value set for many working in public service, either already existing within them or fostered through the course of employment, that guide public sector employees towards their pursuit of the public good (Nabatchi, 2012). Van Wart describes individuals' adherence to and prioritization of these values as acts of a "custodian of society's values" and as a "protector of the rights of individuals" all in the name of being stewards of the common good in the public sector (Van Wart, 1998, pg. 20-21). *Societal Values* take values engrained in individuals through their primary and shared identities, collective experiences, and shared histories to create a set of values that ultimately define a society. Christopher Z. Mooney (2001, pg. 4) elaborates upon the intersection of personal and societal values as "values [that] define not only who each individual and his or her place in society but also society itself. If these values change, then society changes" with the legislative codification of societal values through morality policies often framed as "saving the world" or "protecting" the country and Public Service Values acting as a facilitator between the two, relied upon in the course of employment by bureaucrats (Mooney, 2001, pg. 4; Brandt, et. al., Under Review; Van Wart, 1998). Please refer to Table 3 for the exact list of values evoked directly or indirectly within the actor's quotes in the data in both their identification of the dilemmas as they experienced tension between sets of values and as they described their decision-making process to raise the profile of the dilemma⁸ and in their pursuit of the media as the channel to do so. When evaluating the use of Personal, Public Service, and Societal Values against the assigned responsible parties, several additional patterns emerge.

⁸ The most commonly discussed dilemmas included perceived professional misconduct, policy or mission deviation, or safety hazard.

The concept of *Duty* is heavily present across all three levels of values. At the personal level, the value of *Duty* is discussed as an abstract concept or compelling force most frequently present when assigning responsibility to oneself or to one's fellow bureaucrats. Calls to *Duty* are also clearly present in the assignment of responsibility to the President, Head of Agency, and even when responsibility is assigned to the Legal System. Other like-but-not-synonymous values of *Fulfilling Vows*, *Loyalty*, *Dedication*, and *Fidelity* also overlap with these perceived responsible parties. *Duty* in the context of public service values is the least frequently referenced, but every mention of it provides a measure of specificity not seen when actors utilize personal values in their speech; specifically, in assigning responsibility to both Congress and the President, the *Duty to Protect* is used as an argument that should compel action for next steps by those parties. That trend towards specificity continues with *Duty to Country* and *Duty to Contribute to Society* making up 40.7% of all referenced societal values. Fellow Bureaucrats are again the most targeted group with calls to *Duty* even before considering the adjacent stated values of *Love of Country* and *American Exceptionalism*. This concept of *Duty* and the increasing levels of refinement as the value increases in scope is notable in context because the actor's statements utilize *Duty* in assigning responsibility as well as citing abstract concepts of *Duty* as their own claim for action.

The concepts of *Leadership* also exhibit a notable trend. Leadership, in this context, is not mentioned as a societal or public service value and is only framed as a personal value; most frequently referenced when assigning responsibility to Fellow Bureaucrats, the President, the American Public, and Political Party(ies). When assigning responsibility specifically to Fellow Bureaucrats, *Moral Leadership* is employed twice as often as with any other party. The concepts of *Good Leadership* (specifically the desired traits of adherence to principles, democratic

guidance, and thoughtful decision-making in leadership) are also present in the Fellow Bureaucrats group, though interestingly, the same values of *Good Leadership* are equally applied alongside the American Public and Political Party(ies). These groups appear less obligated to be assigned the value of *Moral Leadership*, though it is worth noting that the only concept of leadership assigned to the President is that of *Moral Leadership*, rather than *Good Leadership*.

The final trend worth identifying is that of *Trust* as a public service value. *Trust* is mentioned as a personal value as well, especially in the context of interpersonal relationships or the relationship one has with their agency, but *Trust* as a public service value is referenced three times more often than as a personal value. There are notably zero references, directly or indirectly, to *Trust* as a societal value in this data. When evaluating the use of *Trust* in the public service value context, we find that it is evenly distributed across the assignment of responsibility to Self, Fellow Bureaucrats, and the Head of Agency. When these values are sorted by frequency of appearance in the set, the related values of *Honesty* and *Transparency* immediately follow *Trust*, confirming how these actors perceive the concept of *Trust* as a public service value.

Through public memos, e-mails distributed, interviews, public comments, public letters, released statements, reports issued, speeches, op-eds, publicly released formal complaints, and even a podcast, these bureaucrats routinely rely on the use of shared values between individuals, amongst common professionals, and in appeals to society at large to both make their case and to inspire their call to action. To inform balancing value conflicts in public administration and to formalize this trend, we offer the second of three propositions.

Proposition 2: Personal, Public Service, and Societal Values are instrumental in defending the reasoning for speaking with the media and for crafting calls to action toward their identified responsible parties reported on in the media.

3.5.3 Feelings

Finally, while the unique internal conditions bureaucrats face about their decisions were not included as an initial variable of analysis for this study, the words they used (broken out by phase in Table 4) to describe their experience through direct quotes identifying the dilemma, during the reporting process, and in dealing with the aftermath, a noticeable, perceptible, and identifiable trend was seen.

Table 3.4 Summary of Expressed Feelings

Before	During	After
Alarmed –	Crazy –	Afraid –
Astonished –	Defiant –	Cautious –
Cowardly –	Disheartened –	Hopeless –
Concerned –	Exacerbated –	Hopeful +
Denial –	Fearful –	No Longer
Disbelief –	Heroic +	Complicit +
Hopelessness –	Impatient –	Scared –
Naivete –	Justified +	Suicidal –
Protective +	Reluctant –	
Shame –		

While the focus on the process of reporting was not present in much of the coverage analyzed, we can take away from the feelings the actors explicitly identify that the process was

overwhelmingly negative for those who found themselves in these dilemmas. As Table 4 shows, only five positive emotions were mentioned at all: Protective, Heroic, Justified, Hopeful, and No Longer Complicit, compared to 21 negative emotions including suicidal, crazy, fearful, and shame. The heavy (yet not exclusive) presence of *Duty* alongside the same language by the same actors gives us insight into bureaucrats’ priorities when faced with these dilemmas, both within themselves and when assigning responsibility. Despite consistently negative emotions before, during, and after taking action, their call to fulfill their duties as currently employed federal

bureaucrats outweighs the risks they take by pursuing external channels for expressing their dissent and assigning responsibility.

Proposition 3: The value of *Duty*, in both specific and abstract terms, is a large enough driver to overcome consistently negative emotions and the risk related to pursuing external channels for expressing dissent.

3.6 Implications and Conclusion

On May 17, 2020, after a CBS News Interview given by a bureaucrat in this dataset, then-President Donald Trump tweeted, "...How can a creep like this show up to work tomorrow and report to @SecAzar, his boss, after trashing him on T.V.?" These dilemmas and the conversations highlighted by the media continue to inspire conversations that are ever-present in our political and media landscape today. While many choose to leave their governmental employer before critiquing, those who stay and work within the system, (but with some outside help) face many obstacles. With growing demands for increased accountability and just leadership but with mixed receptions for those who do speak up, there is great value in understanding how these problems are framed in the media, how bureaucrats speak to the media about their dilemmas, how the bureaucrats articulate pushing the locus of control towards their intended party, and in identifying patterns in that assignment of perceived responsibility.

As a result of the political discourse analysis, we know that those who externally raise the profile of a governmental dilemma keep accountability for change within existing internal channels including leaders, figureheads, and influential groups within the agency or field rather than an

external force or oversight group. Specifically, the most common channels are the Head of Agency, President of the United States, Fellow Bureaucrats, Congress, and themselves. During communication about that assignment of responsibility, these actors frequently rely on personal, public service, and societal values to defend their reasoning for speaking with the media and in their crafting of calls to action toward their identified responsible parties. Finally, these values' influence on the decision-maker assists in overcoming the consistently negative emotions about the experience, outweighing the risk within an individual actor pursuing external channels for expressing dissent.

The limitations of this article must be mentioned alongside possibilities for future pursuits to continue this path of inquiry. First, by choosing to focus only on currently employed federal workers, we constrained our data set to a relatively rare phenomenon as compared with retired, fired, or ex-federal employees where information was far more plentiful. While both named and anonymous workers were included in the sample, it is not possible to know if additional statements exist outside of this dataset where the speaker's employment is not identified. That said, a comparative study between currently employed and former employees would be incredibly beneficial in providing a well-rounded picture of how or if the language shifts, responsibility assignments are modified, or values utilized change based on their employment and financial dependency on their employment. Additionally, when looking at the actors who gave quotes analyzed as part of this political discourse analysis, it is impossible to ignore that nearly 80% of actors willing to be named publicly had male pronouns or traditionally male names, so understanding possible underlying factors for such a gender gap could be another interesting path of inquiry. Finally, this study's focus is entirely on external statements made and then strategically

chosen as part of a specific narrative. It is possible that the bureaucrats speaking to the media had alternative motives for their dissent and strategically crafted their concerns to sound more noble or purposefully connected to core values, in which case more study would be needed about perceptions of these values in calls to action and justification of actions alongside internal decision-making processes and belief systems of bureaucrats. Together these additional paths for inquiry would be vital in developing a well-rounded picture of this issue, though it is our hope that the propositions listed here provide valuable launch pads for further pursuits in theory building, testing, and practice.

Chapter Four

Redefining Morally Conscious Decision-Making for the Public Sector:

A Theoretical Analysis

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Abstract

This paper proposes a conceptual definition of morally conscious decision-making as “cognizant processing of an actor’s core values setting aside self-interest when presented with a dilemma.” Using moral phenomenology, Deweyan pragmatism, and piecing together previous works on decision-making, we develop a definitional framework that makes a case for specified and refined scopes of our understanding of morality and ethics in public administration. We then decompartmentalize this framework to demonstrate the validity, benefits, purpose, and consequences of decision-making that is morally conscious. We propose critical thinking and situational awareness as required skills for the application of the proposed framework. Ultimately, morally conscious decision-making is a way for public administration to better activate a response to growing demands for increased accountability and just leadership.

Keywords: morality, leadership, decision-making, ethics

4.1 Introduction

Public administrators inherently strive to make the right decisions on a regular basis. The democratic processes of institutions create tensions between individuals' moral autonomy and their engagement in habitual unconscious decision-making practices. The citizenry is to assume that public actors and organizations will notice the need for informed and conscious decision-making demanding far more due diligence of a public official than the traditional citizen, especially regarding major, impactful, and critical choices requiring a fair assessment (Reed et al., 2020). The multi-level complexity of this assumption poses unique challenges for public leadership as their diverse personal experiences, contexts, and interpersonal processes influence leadership roles, discretionary decisions, overwhelming statistics of professional burnout, and the reality that some public officials use their position and trust to pursue their own interests or to undermine the interests of others (Allison & Cecilione, 2008; Brady, 1983; Hassan, 2019; Witkowski, 2020). This is especially important post-2020, a year of upheaval and calls for increased accountability, critical assessment, and public vigilance from street-level bureaucrats to our highest leaders.

The purpose of this article is to provide a conceptual and exploratory definition for a morally conscious decision-making framework in public sector leadership. We argue that critical thinking and situational awareness are required to use the framework. Its potential impact on organizational culture would also set the tone for leadership, community, and the trust earned when matters of the public are executed with integrity. We contribute a cultivated understanding of morally conscious decision-making apart from self-interested motives or reflexive reliance on past behavior.

The moral dimension of public administration has a long history with roots in ancient philosophy and 18th century European societal values, up to the Minnowbrook conference and ASPA's Ethical Code of Conduct (Cooper, 1987; Svara, 2014). Even in the absence of formality, administrative ethics and moral psychology have been relied upon to inform the complexities of decisions, service delivery, and individual responsibility (Brady, 1983; Cooper, 2004; Stewart, 1985). As the field moved into new strains of scholarship derived from philosophical and social perspectives, influential thinkers including Chandler (1983) and Waldo (1980) built on social and philosophical perspectives to explore the moral emphasis on the administrator's role being inseparable from the nature of the work, and to identify more than a dozen sources of obligation relevant to the conduct of administrators (Reed et al., 2020). Especially in the last four decades, the moral dimension of public administration has grown to highlight the central place of values in the normative determinations made, and the role of the moral responsibility of actions. As morals and ethics became part of public service education, it became evident that "public servants rely on the assistance of qualified specialists in all areas of public administration except one, namely deciding what is right" (Brady, 1983, p. 220; Lilla, 1981; Rawls, 1971; Stewart, 1985).

Right and wrong certainly exist in the public space, though they are difficult to discern (Willbern, 1984). Codes of conduct are not enough to satisfy the need for rational decision-making, the lack of an overall doctrine and "lack of professional identity [that] leaves the field of public administration vulnerable to dominance by organizational and political imperatives" (Cooper, 2004, p. 395; Hatcher, 2019; Rohr, 1986; Svara, 2014).

Where a professional is able to deliver a service or make a decision directly, the individual responsibility for the action pales in comparison to the issues of the morality of the interaction and decision (Stewart, 1985). Since morality issues have demonstrated sustainability and centrality to the field, what is needed goes beyond updated codes of conduct or training, but instead lies in approaches to solutions, understanding of the assumptions, reasons, motives, and circumstances, a way of thinking that allows a balance of all arguments, proper steps to avoid “bureaucratic dysfunctions” and “simplistic foils” to be able to create better decision makers with the skills to balance arguments and adopt meaningful solutions in a rational yet moral way (Brady, 1983; McDonald, 2021; Svara, 2014).

It is with this purpose that, we begin developing a morally conscious decision-making framework, starting with a discussion of the social constructions of morality and ethics. We then discuss the need for a morally conscious decision-making framework before elaborating on the benefits and liabilities of incorporating this framework into public sector decision-making. We conclude with recommendations for future research and theoretical implications as we encourage both scholars and practitioners to recognize morally conscious decision-making as a valid decision-making process, especially in the public sector.

4.2 Morality and Ethics

There are distinct differences worthy of discussion and specificity to better contextualize the role of morals and ethics in leaders’ decision-making, especially for public organizations. By definition, morals represent core values, intuitive knowledge, and a deep and unchanging worldview and outlook within an individual (Harman, 1977; Hauser et al., 2007; Levi, 2002). What

makes a moral dilemma, or a decision based on morals, is the use of one's core values to find an answer or framework to follow in pursuit of an answer. By using decision-making processes that rely on morality, the leader in question is likely to explore prompting questions and considerations, reminders, and scenarios, and use a morally conscious decision-making process as the beginning of an extended inquiry into their dilemma (Gunia et al., 2012; Harman, 1977).

Alternatively, ethics are situational and contextual ultimatums that determine the right and wrong course of action informed by lived experiences, character, and culture, concerning abstract evidential relations apart from considerations of belief. The outcome of an ethical dilemma is binary and absolute, often relying on a single net positive outcome by a single actor working within their capacity (Elcock, 2012). Administrators are far more likely to encounter routine, daily decisions in which consequences are readily apparent, benefits are clear and small, habitual, and reflective decisions culminate into the eventual outcome when working within organizations (de Graaf, 2005; Simon, 1945). As a result, the principles and studies behind ethics suggest the decision-making process for administrative leaders does not easily translate to effective choices when decisions are to address a dilemma, particularly a complex problem. Making decisions rooted in morality instead is more likely to prompt a need for further consideration and encourage the use of questions, considerations, and context in their decision. For these reasons, morally conscious decision-making can be more applicable and consequential in administrative practice. Examples are provided in Table 4.1 that provide situational examples and the processing required for both ethical and moral decision-making.

Table 4.1. Illustrative Differences between Moral and Ethical Dilemmas in Public Administration

Concept	Implementation	Example situation	Dilemma	Process to an Outcome	Supporting PA Literature
Morals	The use of one’s core values to find an answer or framework to follow in pursuit of an answer.	The actor working in a benefits center is tasked with processing applications for benefits. Fellow employees’ greatest sense of frustration is that the individuals receiving services are “undeserving” and have a system of how to distinguish between “real” and “fake” applications and are told in training they have a duty to report potential abuse. If an application comes across an actor’s desk with two different registration numbers, there is reason to believe the person in question is lying on the application. The actor considers it a duty to notify authorities of the suspected irregularity, even though it goes beyond the professional mandate of their role and might adversely affect the outcome of the person’s application.	Balancing the conflicting expectations of superiors, target groups, and personal values when managing vulnerable individuals in a precarious situation.	The cyclical inquiry involves weighing competing values to ask questions, considerations, reminders, and scenarios to identify a path of action that results in minimal harm. The decision-making process will not only reflect moral positions and values of the actor and organization but also generate new dilemmas. This reflects the need for a cyclical inquiry with ongoing, active processing of the situation.	Borrelli and Lindberg (2018); Fassin (2015); Feldman (2016); Goodsell (2011); Gunia et al. (2012); Harman (1971, 1977); Hauser et al. (2007); Kvalnes (2019); Levi (2002); Thompson (1980); Zacka (2016)
Ethics	Determining a right and wrong course of action based on the situation and context, informed by lived experiences, character, and culture.	The resident at the domestic violence shelter was caught breaking multiple rules during their short stay on campus. They were not severe infractions, but the “strikes” quickly added up. Organizational custom and policy dictates the resident should be asked to leave, resulting in the client either becoming homeless or returning to their abuser- both undesirable outcomes that go against the mission of the organization.	The next step of the resident’s care. Should the resident be required to leave or be allowed to stay?	The outcome is binary and absolute, with the decision resulting in the resident either staying or going. Ethical decisions often rely on a single outcome by a single actor working within their capacity.	Anderson and Walker (1954); Bennett (1974); de Graaf (2005); Elcock (2012); Golembiewski (1965); Horgan and Timmons (2005); Kriegel (2008); Leys (1944, 1952); Rohr (1986); Scarre (1998); Skidmore (1995); Willbern (1984)

Subject to the “I know it when I see it” fallacy, morals, and ethics are often described vaguely and interchangeably. In the past decade of research specifically, two trends exacerbate this ambiguity. First is the argument that morality and ethics are subject to shared cultural elements. For example, in Western cultures like the United States, leadership is trust-based (Asencio & Mujkic, 2016). This aspect of Western cultures can empower and grant autonomy to subordinates to earn trust through bold, confident, and risk-taking actions. Both the cultural and organizational culture elements of leadership contribute to the way we view actions as moral and/or ethical, though this changes significantly around the world (House et al., 1997; Ly, 2020). While moral values’ application to specific situations vary because of formal practices and procedures not in line with cultural standards created to promote good behavior, the most obvious distinction is that between consideration of the ethical behavior of the official and consideration of the moral content of the public policy or action the official promulgates or carries out (Downe et al., 2016; Wines & Napier, 1992). Most criticism of public ethics focuses on the former, the concerns of adherents of the “new public administration” were on the later (Willbern, 1984).

Second, morals and ethics are frequently and falsely viewed from the lens of immorality or unethical actions, as if to simplify morality and ethics to negative but tangible examples of their inverses (See Shaw’s (2012) “Morality of Blackmail”; van Wart’s (1996) “The Sources of Ethical Decision-Making for Individuals in the Public Sector”; or Baron’s (1986) “On Admirable Immorality”; or for examples over time). Negative terms and phrases like amorality, moral indifference, moral weakness, and moral negligence dominate our perceptions of morality; an arguably positive concept. This is likely linked to the ambiguity and complex nature of the topic

concerning the bounded rationality of human nature that challenges our ability to settle on a single use or definition for such an unavoidably complex topic.

Rather than taking a negative view or affixing specific behaviors to the definitions or morals and ethics, we treat the two concepts as unequivocal partners in good leadership but not as interchangeable synonyms. Both can be a foundation for decision-making in any sector, but ethics more often deals with extremes, questions of magnitude, dilemmas that will impact the actor or someone else to a great extent (Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2002; Wilkinson et al., 2019). The study of public administration is rife with examples of decision-making based on ethics, such as whistleblowers, death penalty debates, and privacy issues (See de Graaf, 2005; Jos et al., 1989, or Stewart, 1985). However, while public administrators face ethical dilemmas, they also tackle decisions that touch upon theoretical and empirical questions that require moral considerations before settling on a choice (Kvalnes, 2019; Willbern, 1984). Our understanding of organizational behaviors, especially in leadership, are typically based on moral phenomenology, or the moral philosophy of experience, whereas ethics pursues a separate line of philosophical inquiry (Bennett, 1974; Horgan & Timmons, 2005; Kriegel, 2008; Scarre, 1998). In the next section, we introduce and explore moral phenomenology as the foundation for morally conscious decision-making and draw upon neoclassical pragmatism as a way to deepen our connection with moral philosophy.

“Students of government and public administration, from Plato to Wilson and from Weber to the proponents of the ‘new public administration’, have nearly always known that what public officials and employees do has a central and inescapable normative component, involving values, morality, and ethics, although they may have differed as to the degree to which this component could be separated, either analytically or in practice, from aspects of administration involving facts, science, or technique. Discussions about moral considerations involving public officials, however, frequently deal with significantly different types of forces and phenomenal.

York Willbern, “Types and Levels of Public Morality” p. 102.

4.3 Moral Phenomenology and Neoclassical Pragmatism

Both moral phenomenology and neoclassical pragmatism have had essential roles in debates about and questions of moral principles. Rooted in a Kantian tradition and building upon the works of Husser, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and others, moral phenomenology understands both the intersectionality of the human experience and first-person perspective that informs morality (Smith, 2003). “In metaethical inquiry, talk or moral phenomenology is used very broadly to include such deeply embedded phenomena as. . . critical practices regarding moral thought and discourse” (Horgan & Timmons, 2005, p. 58). Moral phenomenology is also profoundly intertwined with moral thought and discourse and the pursuit of understanding the role of individual experience and contextual circumstances in the role of moral decisions. While there is a tendency to assume solutions to dilemmas can be identified as good or bad, right or wrong, “reflexive morality demands observation of particular situations rather than fixed adherence to a priori principles” (Brady & Hart, 2006; Dewey, 2008, p. 329).

Understanding that the role of desires, experiences, and personal obligations cannot be fully separated from decision-making, American philosopher Mandelbaum (1955) modeled using moral phenomenology as a starting point to make moral verdicts or judgments on actions (Horgan & Timmons, 2005). Contemporary philosophers and administrative researchers have built upon this work, especially as it relates to the justification of actions by claiming morally conscious decision-making in the capacity of employers. Zoller (2019) found that when individuals were focused solely on their responsibilities and relationships without the context of how their actions contributed to organizational outcomes, the dilemma at hand failed to strike individuals as direct elements of their actions and moral situation. Relatedly, this failure to address the potential

outcomes of their actions could be because of inherited stereotypes of employers resulting in prime causal factors leading to immoral decision-making at work (Scarre, 1998). By accepting the idea that only organizations, parties, or employers, are morally responsible for the outcomes of their work, actors who behave morally in their off-duty hours in accordance with normal moral standards are capable of violating categorical imperatives while in the name of their employer (Caldwell et al., 2008; Scarre, 1998).

Further exploring moral philosophy, neoclassical pragmatists like John Dewey, Charles Peirce, William James, and more, offered ways of rethinking moral value, strategizing situations of means/ends, and exploring the relationship between beliefs (Hollinger, 1980; Stroud, 2011). Through practical moral cultivation, or attending to the present situation, we can further draw upon neoclassical pragmatism as a way to deepen our connection with moral philosophy, using it to guide the cognitive and organizational crises faced in the absence of a complete understanding of a situation (Ansell & Boin, 2019).

As individuals judge others by moral standards and hold leaders to an even higher standard than the average citizen, actors must develop the character traits, moral maturity, and framework to sustain this guidance by moral principles both as individuals and within the context of their work as public sector leaders (Rorty, 2012). With this understanding of moral experience and capacity as employees in public organizations, we present a decision-making framework that relies on individual morals and ethics shaped by core values, intentionality brought to a situation and lived experiences. After all, Jonathan Bennett claimed, “no one thinks that his own morality is bad- if he did he would give it up, but we should keep our sympathies as sharp and sensitive and aware

as possible in order to test our principles and maintain ultimate control over their content” (Bennett, 1974, pp. 132–133).

4.4 The Structure, Function, and Definition of Morally Conscious Decision-Making

To increase our understanding of morally conscious decision-making and advance its future use in the field, we propose conceptually defining it as “cognizant processing of the actor’s core values setting aside self-interest when presented with a dilemma.” This conceptual and exploratory definition provides a framework for making better decisions when the actor, especially a public sector administrator or leader, is faced with awareness of a conflict and is unsure how to move forward with a potential resolution. This definition prioritizes a working framework over a more specific, technical, or rigid definition to leave room for flexibility, improvisation, and context-dependent thinking. Next, we dissect each key component of the aforementioned definition.

4.4.1 Cognizant Processing

Cognizant processing is the assessing, thinking, and identifying of a situation and its potential outcomes (Gunia et al., 2012). The actor must be aware they are faced with a dilemma and consciously choose to address the situation. Similar to the concept of utilitarian ethics, the actor filters the choices through a series of potential outcomes and consequences (Gunia et al., 2012). For example, in legal morality, one must understand what they are doing and make the conscious decision to proceed after understanding the possible consequences (Rorty, 2012). Whether legalistic or not, this contemplation is the “essential element of the decision-making process” (Gunia et al., 2012, p.14). Cognizant processing can be in the form of internal dialog or external conversation with a peer, subordinate, or supervisor, allowing for explanation, commentary, and

input on the decision or dilemma or be a purely internal focused assessment of the situation at hand.

The goal is to highlight values that counterbalance an initial inclination toward the reflexive, natural gravitating self-interest of individuals. Additionally, this step of processing decision-making prevents the actor from ignoring a situation's intensity, deters moral disengagement, and reduces habitual decision-making made in routine activities while introducing a rational thought process into what could be a reflexive decision (Reed et al.,2020). The decision-maker is forced to rely on the situation as it is presently and not rely on immediate responses to past situations (Bandura et al., 1996; Gunia et al., 2012).

4.4.2 Core Values

Over time, values have been persistently confused with attitudes due to the unclear definition of the values construct (Rodriguez & Brown, 2014). The problem is partially the result of the ambiguous definition of the values construct and the existing confusion between values, attitudes, and norms. According to Rokeach (1972), attitudes are differentiated orientations or judgments about a social entity or object that leads one to react in a preferential manner. Norms are closely related to values (conceptually and empirically), but norms are narrowly constructed, concrete, situation-specific social standards (Williams, 1967).

Core values are influential, enduring beliefs that shape and develop world views and serve as the foundation for morally conscious decision-making (Kernaghan, 2003). For an organization, agency, institution, or other public service organization, core values are found in values statements

and reinforced by training materials and culture. In an agency or organization, the stated core values measure employee assimilation and organizational culture while giving them a valuable tool to weigh moral decisions against. Williams defines values as “those conceptions of desirable states of affairs that are utilized in selective conduct as criteria for preference or choice or as justifications for proposed or actual behavior” (Williams, 1967, p. 23).

Employees often model the values of the organization, and they are expected to act by the ethical, democratic, and professional values the employer prioritizes, though individual core values are influenced by an indefinite number of factors with ongoing tradeoffs between competing or contradictory values (Toth & Simanyi, 2006; Trommel, 2020). For example, a public administrator might positively view participatory management because of beliefs in democratic values (liberty, justice, due process, and the like). In contrast, another administrator might support participatory management, believing that the organization’s survival depends on getting employees and outside stakeholders to agree to proposed alternatives – the “cooptation” process described by Selznick (1949). This study assumes that values, more than attitudes, are the underlying convictions guiding individuals’ social choices, making values more stable than attitudes (Georgel & Jones, 1997; Hofstede, 1983; Kamakura & Novak, 1992). Furthermore, the study infers that core values form the building blocks of morality and influence individual behavior.

4.4.3 Setting Aside Self Interest

An actor who can resist the first temptation of something that may appear immediately beneficial to herself and actively take time to critically weigh options with greater potential for communal benefit is deciding against the initial inclination toward self-interest. By keeping awareness of self-

interest at the forefront of any morally conscious decision, the actor is more likely to find flaws, hidden motivations, or conflicts of interest that may not have readily been apparent, and the actor is encouraged to reconsider, reevaluate, or realign if self-interest is determined to be a deciding factor (Gawthrop, 1990). Even in a flawed actor, setting aside self-interest is the difference between making a morally sound decision, and making a sanctimonious, self-righteous, or narcissistic choice, enabling public sector leaders to be good stewards of trust and authenticates the eventual outcome of the dilemma (Rorty, 2012).

4.4.4 Dilemma

“Moral dilemmas are situations in which the decision-maker must consider two or more moral values but can only honor one of them” (Kvalnes, 2019, p. 11). This choice between alternatives concludes the definition of morally conscious decision-making since it is the impetus to begin this inquiry process. We see dilemmas in public administration present as equitable service provision, policy application in context, and interpersonal relationships among dozens of other potential dilemmas or dozens of situations in which tension between morality and duties are on equal footing. Rather than approaching dilemmas only as right vs. wrong, dilemmas present equally challenging, beneficial, or detrimental alternatives to find the degree to which something is right or wrong (Kvalnes, 2019; Willbern, 1984).

Dilemmas emerge in any profession, but to be good stewards of trust while still ensuring active morality in the decisions public administrators make, they must move beyond reactionary or absolute decision-making. The framework in Figure 4.2 prioritizes the critical thinking and

situational awareness as one addresses the dilemma through a number of steps, going back as necessary and ensuring the resulting outcome is logical, defensible, and morally conscious.

4.5 Praxis

4.5.1 Modeling Behavior

Rohr (1978), Lilla (1981), Menzel (1997), Adams and Balfur (2004), Svava (2007), and many more have spent years discussing the value of teaching public administration values to students and practitioners, but even in these most foundational discussions, the importance of emulation alongside or above analysis is emphasized. Managers who exhibit moral behavior through multiple sources are found to develop more confidence in resolutions and find their managerial outcomes translated into organizational outcomes (Heckler & Ronquillo, 2020; Rauh, 2020). Furthermore, by demonstrating sound decision-making practices, public sector leaders and administrators are able to model acceptable behavior to those who passively observe their actions and processes. Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004) discuss the value of generativity, or the passing along of nurturance and guidance to those who succeed managers, supervisors, leaders, or mentors, creating a ripple effect of action that lives beyond the single leader and contribute to reflexivity of action. Reflexivity of action, called a defining characteristic of modernity, is a key part of reflection of values, motives, and intentions (Giddens, 1990, 1994). With the sphere of influence administrators have, exhibiting moral decision-making practices directly impacts the confidence, faith, and trust placed in the leaders and their decisions and ties the success and confidence they have with the reflexivity of their decision-making (Trommel, 2020). Since these factors are a motivating influence in employee involvement, confidence, output, longevity, and performance beyond minimum standards, dedicated attention to morally conscious decision-making will ripple

throughout the organization or agency resulting in stronger moral maturity levels and actively assist avoiding moral disengagement (Moore, 2008).

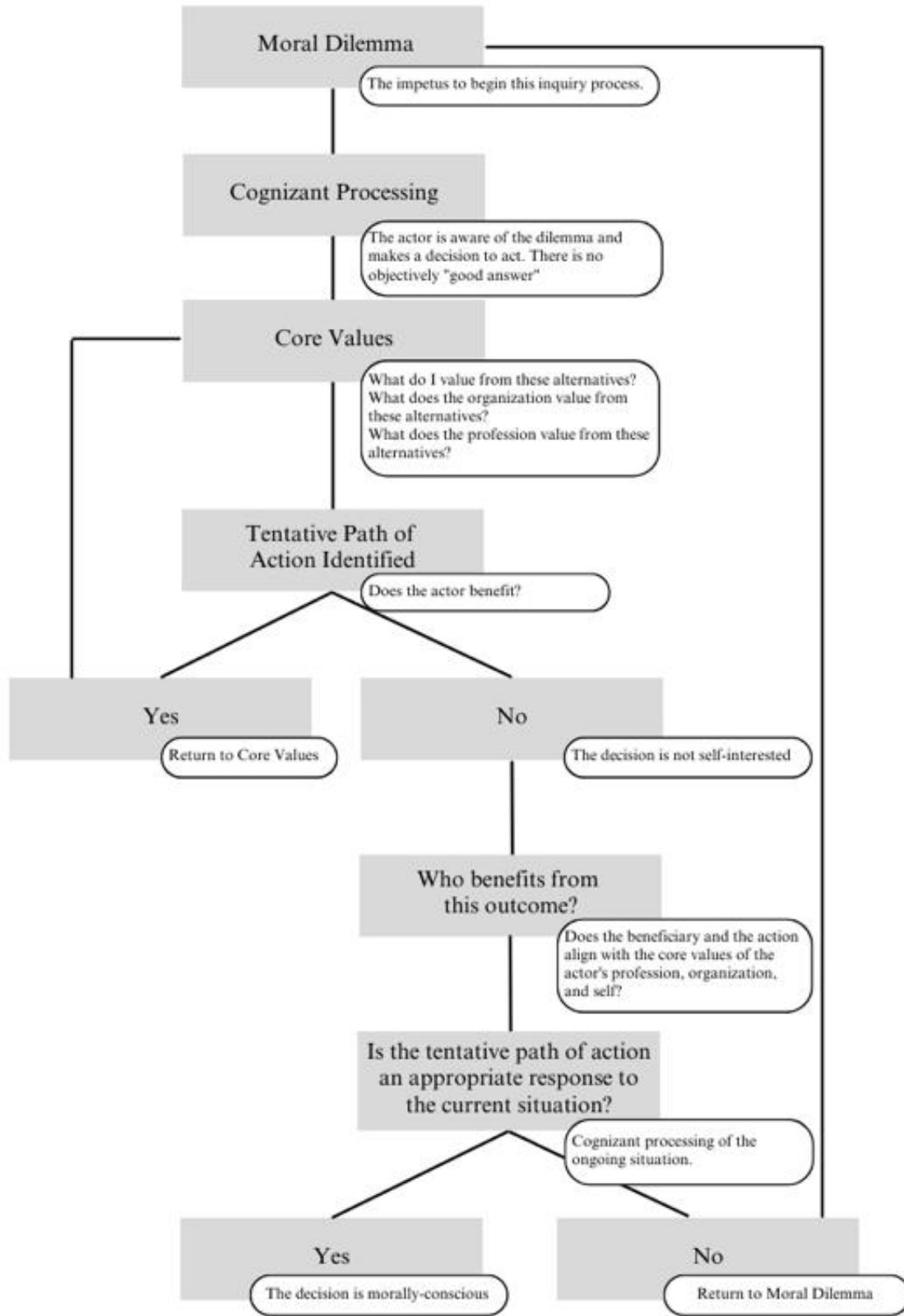


Figure 4.2: A proposed flow chart of the morally-conscious decision-making process.

4.5.2 Contributions to Organizational Culture

The first step in avoiding moral disengagement is to promote moral engagement. Organizations' cultures are built upon shared values and directly impact how well teams or leaders manage change, achieve goals, coordinate teamwork, and employee satisfaction in their work (Sashkin, 1995). Effective, trustworthy leadership ingrained into the culture sets this tone and guides those in their sphere of influence to elevate their values and interests to contribute to the culture (Asencio & Mujkic, 2016). In addition to trustworthy leadership having been shown to be positively associated with organizational outcomes, the absence of moral leadership becomes obvious when undesirable behavior occurs (Cho & Ringquist, 2011; Svara, 2014).

Organizational culture, leadership and training establishes reinforcements, consequences, and shared language that directly impacts employee behavior, lessening the threat of flawed actors failing to consider moral decisions (Mahalinga Shiva & Suar, 2012; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). When immoral, or morally neutral "behavior is present, it decreases the degree to which employees feel they can communicate, decreases the perceived openness of the environment; and reveals frustration" with decisions (Rauh, 2020, p. 11). While we assume that individuals who pursue a path of public service are moral, care about others, and would inherently strive to not make self-interested decisions or use their authority for personal gain, misuse of claims to moral actions are made increasingly difficult in an organizational culture where traditional public service values of equity, morality, and integrity are modeled and encouraged through each step in the employment process and where conversation about moral decision-making is the norm (Hassan, 2019; Hood, 1991; Wright et al., 2016).

4.5.3 Avoiding Moral Pitfalls

The final asset to the application of morally conscious decision-making in public sector leadership is likely the most obvious. If individuals engage in a conscious interpretation of their values, actions, and motivations, they are likely to make better and more well-informed decisions. Suppose individuals are morally disengaged, cognitively separating their actions from a moral component, and fulfilling the work they need to do without critically questioning or evaluating their contributions to a larger goal. In that case, they may contribute to organizational immorality (Bandura et al., 1996). The collective sum of individual actions combines to produce organizational actions and outcomes where small actions may be worse than their parts. Adams and Balfur (2004) argued that evil seems moral when it becomes part of organizational norms; although when administrators are more reflexive and more analytic, those actions can be recognized for what they are, resulting in greater moral learning (Brady, 1983).

While these three practical benefits are identified, since this is an exploratory and conceptual definition, more practical implications may emerge as research into this topic continues.

4.6 The Limits

While this morally conscious decision-making process has potential to positively impact public sector administration, it has clear limitations and liabilities. Overreliance on morals to make singular decisions can lead to inflexibility, inelasticity, an insensitivity to context (Zamzow, 2015; Zoller, 2019). Misuse, false claims, and incorrect interpretations of morality are a significant liability, though Amelie Rorty rightfully addresses this limit by explaining that, “we can parade a pretense of morality as if it were the real thing, but we cannot use the real thing against itself. The

apparent abuse of morality. . .is so estranged from morality as no longer to qualify for the title” (Rorty, 2012, p. 2). A thin line divides morality and the pretense of morality, but this only further necessitates a decision-making framework that can assist the administrator avoid liabilities in this kind of decision-making process.

Two other limitations are worth addressing. First, each decision will be made by an actor, a flawed human confined by bounded rationality and the inability to ever be completely neutral, unbiased, or free of flaws (Warren, 1982). Lived experiences as members of diverse cultures, classes, races, and genders impact the way information is heard, processed, or interpreted with identities, loyalties, priorities, and other influences force them to operate within several contexts that can and do influence the decision-making process (de Graaf, 2005; Warren, 1982). This limitation itself does not rest with morally-conscious decision-making, but with the flawed actor engaging in the decision-making process.

Second, there is a real challenge in measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of morally conscious decision-making. Morality and morally conscious decision-making are fundamentally abstract and ambiguous, even when viewed through the lenses of phenomenology and pragmatism. “The evolving naturalistic picture of the world that is presented to us by science does not clearly leave a place for normativity,” proving that any generalizations about morally conscious decision-making will always have exceptions making it imperfect to measure or standardize (Horgan & Timmons, 2005, p.56). Just as John Dewey describes this process of analysis as a continuum of investigatory, reconstructive efforts, morally conscious decision-making is an inherently cyclical decision-making framework (Dewey, 1938, 2007; Stroud, 2011). “The project of morality is

ongoing, without certain beginning or end” wrote Margolis (2004), so providing concrete outcomes as a result of this decision-making framework presents a challenge for applied evaluation.

While using or advocating for this framework may seem a utopian delusion to some, it is built upon on the idea that public sector organizations can rise to the renewed public vigilance if proper steps are taken to avoid some of the more “pathological bureaucratic dysfunctions to which public organizations are somewhat prone” or dysfunctional leadership that Rodriguez and Brown (2016) call “leadership psychosis” (Lovrich, 1985, p. 311). Previous researchers including Ventriss (2012) and Spicer (2012) have proposed the use of rationalism as part of an engaging decision-making process and that public officials must engage in rational debates to avoid potentially evil outcomes. In their criticism of current policy decision-making, Reed et al. (2020, p. 317) state that public administration and democratic theory “demand far more due diligence of a public official than of an individual.” Pragmatism researchers Hollinger (1980) and Stroud (2011) point out moral cultivation, moral maturity, and moral inquiry are often overlooked or undervalued as developmental aspects of moral activity in western culture, with action being favored over contemplation. Historically, the framers of the United States of America shaped the new government to be in the philosophical search for “the good”, and the system continues to be shaped and reshaped as we reassess “the good” through the evolving lens of the moral ideal and a refined sense of moral consideration (Gawthrop, 1990). Through these changes, “the future. . .depends upon the widening spread and deepening hold of the scientific habit of mind,” something made possible by processes of inquiry set forth by this framework (Dewey, 1910, p. 127).

4.7 Conclusion

In contemporary times, when we have seen repeated national calls for accountability of leaders in the public sector at every level, the importance of morality in action and applying individuals' moral cognizance to their work is not going away. Due to ongoing critical assessments of policies and practices administrators need to both question their complicity in decisions that culminate in entire organizational actions and outcomes, as well as objections based on cognizant processing of core values setting aside self-interest when presented with a dilemma needs to be seen as a valid objection to actions, and the first step of evaluating and making decisions.

The purpose of this paper was to begin to address the role and validity of moral consciousness in decision-making in public sector leadership. We provide a definitional framework of morally conscious decision-making to inform the complex dilemmas in public service and other sectors. This working definition has practical value and is grounded in a critical analysis of morals and ethics. Modern public administrators and leaders are obligated to update their perspective of decision-making to augment the long-term success of organizations and outcomes of service recipients.

When committing to the morally conscious decision-making process, public administrators and leaders can influence the organizational culture of their workplace, inspire peers and subordinates to engage in morally sound behavior, and contribute to the continued trust of the field and public sector as a whole. These actions, commitments, and processing demonstrate good stewardship of the public's trust and the flexibility possibilities in training, employee resources and policies will assist in toeing the line between moral autonomy and the democratic processes institutions have

established, and further promote the commitment to public serving values that have always been part of the theory and practice of public administration (Svara, 2001).

Morally conscious decision-making is a valid process in the public sector. We predict that the critical thinking and situational awareness required to use the framework proposed will result in stronger engagement and a more unified approach for addressing management priorities, successes, and difficulties. Ultimately, this morally conscious decision-making framework spurs buy-in from employees and leaders by offering an additional benchmark for which they vet the moral soundness of decisions and outcomes to set the tone for trusting and understanding our leaders, institutions, and systems.

Chapter Five

General Discussion and Conclusion

This three-paper dissertation sought to contribute to the understanding of core values in public administration and public policy by asking, how do the core values of society, bureaucrats, and individuals shape various public and public service contexts? With research spanning three levels of evaluation, the purpose of this dissertation was to refine and coalesce the scholarship of morality policies, give voice and meaning to dissent in practice by federal bureaucrats, and establish a conceptual framework for justifiable, reasonable, and transparent internal decision-making processes; all together providing insight into how core values shape society, bureaucracies, and individuals in various public and public service contexts.

The first paper in Chapter Two addressed several key issues of morality policy literature, providing the first synthesis of the field in over two decades. As a result of this research, the current state of morality policy knowledge is cohesive and less contradictory than previously recorded. There is a clear definition; a redistributive classification; comprehensive understanding of the enhanced role of actors and interest groups in the policy process and decreased role of policy learning and traditional lifecycle steps; along with a suggestion to reframe how we view the goals of morality policies to better reflect their intended purpose in society. This research provides us with a foundation to better identify morality policies, identify the framed language strategically used to trace motives for support, and enable practitioners and researchers alike to shift approaches to measure policy outcomes to reduce waste. While we still lack knowledge on post-adoption

evaluations, morality policy as international policy, and the likely disproportionate effects on different populations, this paper serves as a starting point with clearly identified gaps.

While Chapter Two took a societal view of how core values show up in policies, much of the human element of implementation, interaction, or impact of these policies focused on how these values emerged over the decades. Chapter Three addressed this by looking closely at the actors charged with implementing policies as part of the bureaucracy, how they viewed those conflicts, how they spoke about those conflicts, and where they saw responsibility to lie after taking the initial first step to align their actions with their core values.

Chapter Three's findings clarify that bureaucrats pursue internal channels for change even when expressing external dissent; most commonly assigning responsibility for change to the Head of Agency, President of the United States, their Fellow Federal Bureaucrats, Congress, and themselves. When assigning responsibility, the bureaucrats rely on personal, public service, and societal values to defend their reasoning and craft their calls to actions, uniquely relying on patterned values including trust, leadership, and duty to reach their end goal. While this work provides much clarity on how bureaucrats articulate the locus of ultimate responsibility, several questions remain unanswered yet provide valuable research opportunities for others. For example, are bureaucrats accurately speaking to their values-based decision-making and genuinely believing in their calls to action, or are they merely using the language they believe wants to be heard? How does current employees language about these dilemmas differ from former, fired, or retired, federal employees? And of course, we cannot ignore the gender gap both within the data set and the

distinct difference with federal workforce statistics. It is my hope that additional studies be carried out to investigate this disparity.

Whereas Chapter Two identified actors as key players in the policy process, all attention was focused on their external actions and impact on the policy process and general lifecycle. Chapter Three went one level deeper, analyzing linguistic markers of individual bureaucrats to draw out commonalities in reasoning, the values they evoked when speaking to the media about values-based dilemmas, and where their perception of responsibility lay. However, when dilemmas arise between these values, bureaucrats simply cannot follow every individual preference or whim for how they believe things should be addressed according to their own moral code. Chapter Four addresses this paradox by providing a structural framework for decision-making for these individuals to utilize when trying to use morally conscious decision-making in a way that is defensible, rational, engaged, and transparent.

By utilizing the conceptual definition of morally conscious decision making in Chapter Four, we can now use a standard of morally conscious decision-making as a flexible framework to evaluate and make decisions when presented with a dilemma. Encouraging and cultivating moral education and values-based decisions utilizing this framework can inspire morally sound behavior and influence an organizational culture, inspire peers, and contribute to the continued trust of the field and public sector as a whole through morally engaged and rational individuals. Though much work is still needed to reduce risk in decision-making like this, secure buy-in of those questioning, discerning distinctions or differences in usage within a hierarchical bureaucracy, or what actually can be considered a “dilemma” in this context.

In conclusion, this dissertation used three levels of evaluation to demonstrate that the core values of individuals reverberate throughout the public sector showing up in unique ways at each level of evaluation. The findings and content were designed to be of interest and provide benefit to scholars and practitioners alike but may have particular significance for current bureaucrats as they contextualize and understand the impact of their work within themselves, their employer and within their place in the larger society.

Chapter Six

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Brandt, E., Rodriguez, A., Nwakpuda, E., & Bezboruah, K., Redefining Morally Conscious Decision-Making for the Public Sector: A Theoretical Analysis, *Administration & Society* (55:1) pp. 184-205. Copyright © 2023 SAGE Publications. DOI: 10.1177/00953997221105103

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- Redefining Morally Conscious Decision-Making for the Public Sector: A Theoretical Analysis

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