



Background

This assignment encourages students to step outside their comfort zone and learn about moral worlds different from their own. By completing the assignment, students will not only deepen their understanding of the world around them but also experience the value of viewpoint diversity and learn how to engage constructively across lines of difference.

The assignment was originally created by Jonathan Haidt for his Psych 583 course at the University of Virginia. We encourage educators to adapt the assignment to fit any number of classrooms and courses. It can also be an educational experience alongside the teaching of All Minus One, which can be accessed for free [here](#).

Assignment Introduction

The purpose of this assignment is to step out of your moral matrix and into another. Immerse yourself in a moral world that conflicts with your own. Seek people expressing heartfelt moral convictions and pretend you are an anthropologist trying to understand them accurately and fairly. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz said that the goal of fieldwork is not to become a native but to converse with the natives, and in the process, to "figure out what the devil they think they are up to."

Start thinking about what moral world you will study – with the emphasis being on finding a world different from yours – and create a plan to familiarize yourself with that world. Some options include attending an event and conducting structured interviews. You may do your research on campus, off campus, on a visit home, or elsewhere.

Finding a way to have face-to-face contact with real human beings is strongly recommended – this will make it easier to empathize and understand. If you are arranging conversations or attending events, some examples of groups or people you could study include, but are certainly not limited to, the college Republicans, college Democrats, or religious groups you feel morally opposed or highly critical towards. Most importantly, regardless of what group or world you choose and how you choose to research them, remember that passively observing is not enough; talk with people, and when you do, approach with humility, be charitable, and remember that your goal is only to understand the person or group.

If you cannot find a way to complete the assignment in person, it is permissible to immerse yourself in your target group's TV, radio shows, social media, and texts. If you do not have in-person contact, you are expected to be more ambitious – for example, choose a group that is more radically challenging or delve deeper into that moral world than you initially planned.

Remember to be bold and take social risks, but at the same time, be careful that you do not hurt or offend the people you are trying to learn from and understand.

Instructions

Students will write and clearly label two sections:

1) Observations. The first section should be purely descriptive, with no evaluation and only minimal interpretation (if it is necessary to present the observations). What did you see, read, or hear? If you attended an event, describe it as though you were an anthropologist. If you conducted interviews, include the questions you asked, along with the responses in short summary form. If you immersed yourself in documents or television shows, describe those materials and some of their content. The more details, the better.

2) The Moral Matrix. The second section should attempt to extract or describe the underlying moral worldview or commitments of the people/group you studied. Present them as sympathetically as possible, in a form they might recognize as a fair statement of what they are up to and of why they say and believe the things they do. But then go deeper; try to figure out why or how they came to have this particular moral matrix when others nearby have an entirely different one.

There is no fixed length for this assignment; educators are encouraged to assign a length in line with class expectations and abilities.