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INTRODUCTION

Why is morality important?

- The endorsement of moral attitudes seems to be an important indicator of prosocial behaviour and social adjustment more broadly (Guerra, Nucci & Huesmann, 1994), which highlights the importance of understanding what predicts moral attitudes.

Emotion recognition and morality

- One characteristic that might promote morality is emotion recognition: the ability to understand and predict others' emotions (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004).
- Understanding others' emotions is associated with prosocial attitudes and behaviours (Gleason, Jensen-Campbell & Ickes, 2009), as well as greater moral tendencies, such as sensitivity to injustice for others (Decety & Yoder, 2016).
- However, morality is a complex, multi-faceted construct, theorized to have five different foundations (Haidt & Graham, 2007).
- To better understand the links between emotion recognition and morality, we therefore examined the links between emotion recognition and each moral foundation/attitude.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

Is emotion recognition associated with different moral attitudes?

METHODS

78 participants (62 females, $M_{age} = 21.5$, $SD = 2.27$) performed an emotion recognition task and reported on their endorsement of moral attitudes.

1. Emotion recognition

- The "Reading the Mind in the Eyes" test (RMET; Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, Hill, Raste & Plumb, 2001) was used to assess participants' emotion recognition ($M_{score} = 27.67$, $SD = 3.48$).



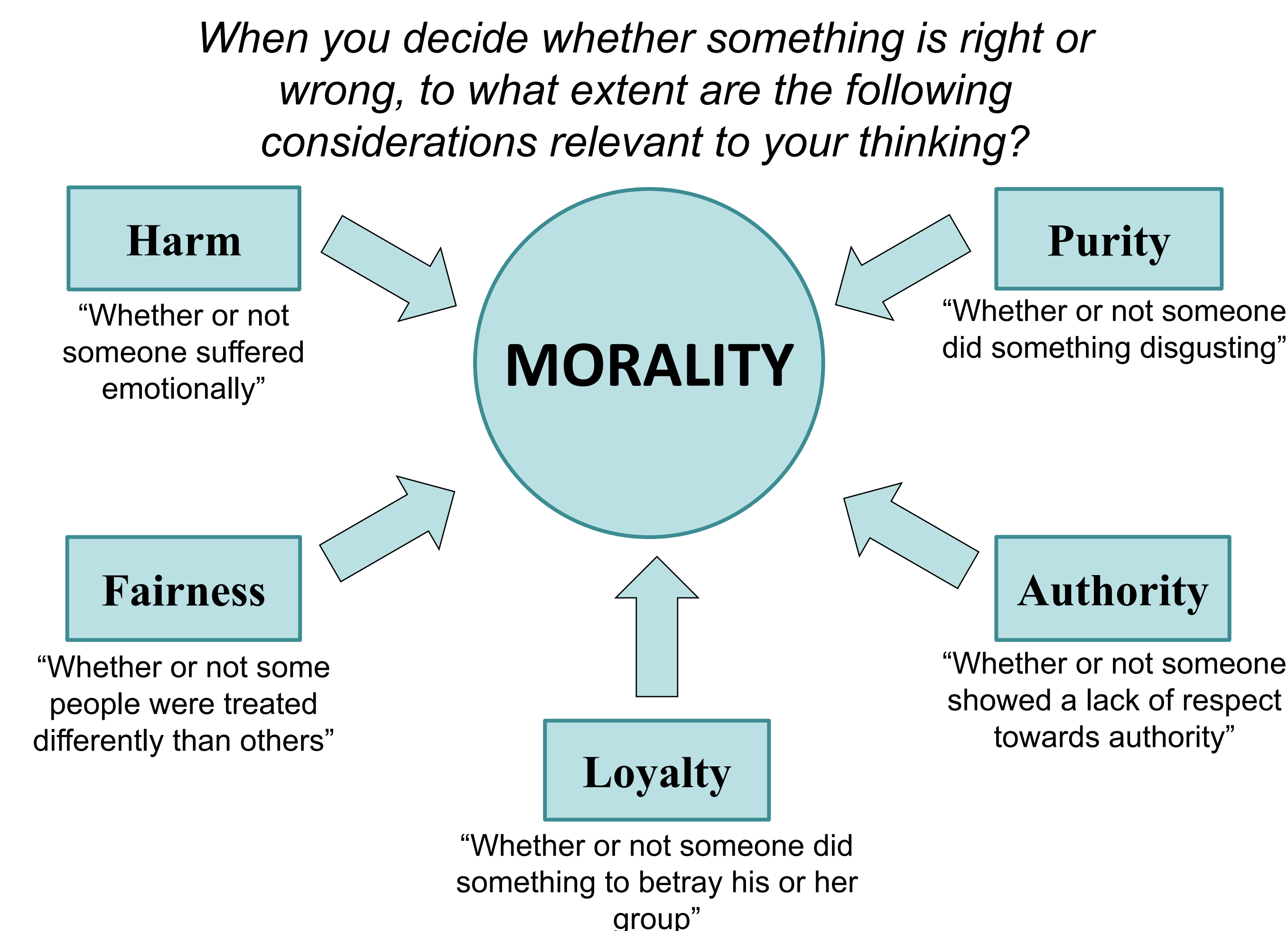
Jealous **Panicked (correct)** Arrogant Hateful

Example of an item in the "Reading the Mind in the Eyes" test (Baron-Cohen et al., 2001)

METHODS (cont.)

2. Morality

- Morality was measured using the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ; Graham, Nosek, Haidt, Iyer, Koleva & Ditto, 2011).
- MFQ scores were averaged from self and close-other ratings ($M_{score} = 20.30$, $SD = 2.08$).



Five core moral attitudes measured in the MFQ and example items

RESULTS

Core moral intuition	Pearson's r w/ RMET score	Sig. (2-tailed)
Morality (average)	-.186	.104
Harm	-.190	.095
Fairness	-.052	.648
Loyalty	-.048	.677
Authority	-.231*	.042
Purity	-.143	.213

* Significant at $p < 0.05$

RESULTS (cont.)

- Emotion recognition was marginally associated with lower global morality, the average of the five attitudes ($r = -.186$, $p = .104$).
- Emotion recognition was significantly negatively associated with the core moral attitude of authority ($r = -.231$, $p = .042$).
- Emotion recognition was marginally negatively associated with harm ($r = -.190$, $p = .095$).
- Emotion recognition had negative, though non-significant relationships with the remaining moral attitudes: fairness, loyalty, and purity.

DISCUSSION

- The results suggest higher emotion recognition is associated with a lower endorsement of the five moral attitudes, which is somewhat surprising given the positive relationship between understanding emotions and prosocial behaviour.
- However, the only significant negative relationship was between emotion recognition and the moral attitude of "authority/respect"
 - This is consistent with previous research linking lower psychological flexibility with greater valuation of authority (Williams, Ciarrochi, & Heaven, 2012)

Future research should:

- Focus on the authority part of morality, as it may have a relationship with emotion recognition distinct from the other moral attitudes.
- Go beyond moral attitudes, measured in the MFQ, to directly assess moral behaviour and its links to emotion recognition.
- Investigate the reasons behind the negative relationship between emotion recognition and moral behavior, and whether there are bi-directional links.
 - It is possible that one's moral attitudes also influence emotion recognition.

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