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Exploring the Relationship between Morality and Offending Through the Use of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire

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Abstract

This study applies the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ) to examine the relationship between morality and self-reported offending, captured using a questionnaire (N= 184). One hundred and forty-one respondents (77%) reported previously committing an offence. Identified measures of morality revealed no statistically significant differences between self-reported offenders and non-offenders, challenging commonly held presumptions that offending is associated with lower levels of morality. Moreover, this pattern was consistent across a range of offence types and offence severities. Using the MFQ, morality was broken down by individual MFQ foundations (sub-domains). A consistent although non-significant pattern emerged: scores for the in-group/loyalty, authority/respect and purity/sanctity foundations were lower than the harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations for all respondents. This highlights the importance of future research into morality and offending moving beyond the use of single metric measures of morality, and deconstructing this further into sub-domain measures, such as those offered by the MFQ.

Keywords: Morality, Self-Reported Offending, Moral Foundations Questionnaire

Introduction

A range of theories have been proposed to explain offending including: biological theories linking criminality to physical and genetic characteristics of an individual (Akers, 2013; Barnes & Boutwell, 2012); evolutionary explanations (Durrant & Ward, 2015; Kanazawa & Still, 2000); opportunity theories (Clarke, 2012; Hough & Mayhew, 2012); and sociological and environmental accounts that relate offending to an individual's lack of available resources (Anasatsia et al, 2014). Less attention has been afforded to understanding the role of moral values in offenders' propensity to engage in crime. Explanations here have concentrated on three areas, namely an individual's: level of moral development (Beerthuizen & Brugman, 2012; Brugman et al, 2008); ability to carry out moral reasoning (Ashkar & Kenny, 2007; Buttell, 2002; Dodd et al, 1990; Gregg et al, 1994; Palmer, 2003), and capacity to disconnect from moral values (Caprara et al, 2002; Marsh et al, 2002).

This paper presents a novel use of an existing measure of morality to quantitatively examine the relationship between crime and morality, utilised within a broader mixed-methods Masters by Research (Author, 2018). For this paper, morality is measured using the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ) (Ditto et al, 2011), and criminal behaviour is measured through self-reported offending (Gomes et al, 2018). Furthermore, the MFQ deconstructs morality into five separate foundations of morality (sub-domains), which facilitates a novel examination of the relationship between offending and morality across five subcomponent measures.

The overall aim of this study is to develop new insights into the relationship between morality and offending. A secondary purpose is to examine the appropriateness of using the MFQ to explore the association between morality and offending. More specifically, the research addresses the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between morality and self-reported offending?
2. To what extent does the type, and/or severity of the offence impact on the relationship between offending and morality?
3. How does self-reported offending vary across different foundations of the MFQ?
4. How appropriate is the MFQ for examining the relationship between morality and offending?

Defining Morality

Early Nichomachean Ethics highlighted the importance of individuals creating honest, successful societies; people wished to be regarded as trusted, noble, and honest (Haidt, 2008). As moral philosophies advanced, moral behaviour was gauged through deontology and consequentialism. The former relates to adherence to rules, and whether a single action is morally right or wrong; the latter on the consequences of one's individual actions (Carlson, 1995; Spielthenner, 2005). These early definitions of morality have been criticised as simplistic and vague, blurring the concepts of morals, ethics, deontology, and consequentialism (Spielthenner, 2005; Smith, 1974).

Philosophers have further defined morality through either a universalist position or relativist stance. Moral universalism proposes some actions will always be considered as immoral and wrong, irrespective of possible consequences, individual differences, and experiences (Vauclair & Fischer, 2011). For example, the act of killing another person would be considered dishonest and immoral by most, if not all. Relativism promotes that acts considered as moral and good will vary from person to person due to individual differences and experiences (Vauclair & Fischer, 2011). From the perspectives of relativism and universalism it is therefore necessary to consider individual morals within the context of society.

A society can be defined as a large collective of people within a shared environment (Thomas, 2002). Within societies and communities, shared informal rules and ideals of behaviour are passed down through generations (Dhyani et al, 2014). These values denote behaviours considered acceptable and moral to each society. When individuals fail to abide by these informal rules their actions are deemed unacceptable, and therefore judged as immoral. However, not all individuals will accept societal morals and rules (Tilley, 2000). This may result in smaller diverse groups and cultures within a society, creating and following their own moral standards (Cook, 1999).

One explanation of varying moral standards in communities is that of cultural relativism (Cook, 1999). As societies evolve, new divisions and sub-groups form, increasing the spectrum of moral values. This may result in confusion and conflict over what is moral/immoral behaviour, leading to social unrest, hate crime, and aggression (Craig, 2002). However, it is also possible that societies with increasingly diverse groups may

converge towards a greater social harmony, as people respect, learn from, and connect with one another (Turiel, 2002).

In general, the dominant hegemonic values in a society become enshrined in legislation. An underlying principle of the Criminal Justice System is that legislation should reflect current moral values. Indeed, Shavell (2002) argues that before becoming statute, the law should be formulated in line with social views. Legislation can be defined as a formal set of social rules and guidelines for behaviour, one that all members of society should follow. If individual actions contravene these official rules (laws) they are judged more harshly and subjected to formal repercussions. In contrast, those who breach informal rules suffer less legal repercussion. When crimes are considered immoral, research shows that sentencing outcomes tend to be more severe (Ulmer, 2008; Alter et al, 2007).

Linking back to moral relativism however, not all societal rules are universally accepted. Therefore, an individual may behave in a manner that they consider moral, but their actions breach the laws that govern their society. This is partially explained by Situational Action Theory (Wikstrom, 2011; 2019; Wikstrom & Treiber, 2016). Despite behaviour being contrary to the morals enshrined in law, individuals may consider their actions reasonable and moral (Wikstrom, 2011). One example is the work of animal rights activists. Society may deem their actions to be disruptive and at times unlawful; whilst activists feel their actions are morally justified (Gallupe & Baron, 2014).

An important concept to recognise is that of moral integrity. Morality is not simply what individuals recognise as good or bad behaviour. It relates to whether their behaviour falls in line with their own morals and values. Therefore, to understand morality it is necessary to consider; external behaviour - the extent to which an individual behaves in accordance with their morals; and, individual commitment - the values and beliefs they possess (Black & Reynolds, 2016, pp 121).

In summary, morality is an intricate phenomenon, often perceived in an abstract manner (Zigon, 2008). Multiple authors define morality as an individual's intrinsic beliefs of right and wrong (Caracuel et al, 2015; Goodwin & Darley, 2012; Gray et al, 2012; Smith, 1974; Thomas, 2019), linking morality to popular theories that consider moral development as an innate process (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987). However, as Henning et al

(1999) articulate, morals are further shaped by the interaction of these values with the thoughts and emotions that govern a person's voluntary actions. Thus, individual behaviours are consciously performed in reference to moral values. Hence morals, based on individual beliefs and attitudes, can be suggested as subjective, unique to individuals. What is regarded as 'good' to one person, may not be to another. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, the authors adopt a relativist perspective of morality, shaped by both individual personality, and cultural and social contexts.

Measuring Morality

The above discussions demonstrate that morality is comprised of multiple elements rather than a singular set of guiding principles, and, therefore, any measure of morality should seek to deconstruct this concept. The Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt & Joseph, 2007) attempts to do this by proposing five separate foundations that constructs an individual's morality:

1) The harm/care foundation relates to individuals valuing, protecting and caring for others, for example, caring for those who are vulnerable, young, or ill;

2) The fairness/reciprocity foundation relates to how people may emotionally react in times of social co-operation, such as during marital harmony, and in times of conflict, such as marital infidelity;

3) The in-group/loyalty foundation relates to how individuals who have similar characteristics, interests, and beliefs tend to naturally group together, generating a common sense of loyalty between those integrated within the group, such as that seen between members of a sports team or other community group;

4) The authority/respect foundation portrays the interplay of dominant and submissive social roles within social interactions, for example, dominance displayed by bosses towards employees, or between members of society and police officers;

5) The purity/sanctity foundation demonstrates how individuals strive to live healthy happy lives, avoiding situations which may cause them harm, reflected by individuals who maintain standards of personal cleanliness and fitness for example.

These five foundations provide the opportunity to explore morality within different domains and, from a psychological perspective, consider different levels of morality (higher or lower) for each of these foundations. Thus, the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (Ditto et al, 2011), developed from this theory is an established instrument that facilitates measures of morality across a range of values within these domains. Subsequently, this instrument approaches the topic of morality from a psychological stance, rather than a philosophical one.

Morality and Offending

Previous studies have examined elements of the five moral foundations, although not explicitly using the MFQ, and not across all five foundations. For example, in relation to the authority/respect foundation: feeling disrespected has been shown as a trigger for violent behaviour (Butler & Maruna, 2008; Bennett & Brookman, 2011); and, offenders have been identified as less cooperative than non-offenders (Scheeff et al, 2018; Mokros et al, 2008). Furthermore, the concept of loyalty within gangs and peers has been linked to delinquent behaviour (Decker & Curry, 2002; Brezina & Azimi, 2018).

Ashkar and Kenny (2007) explored the moral development of incarcerated sexual and non-sexual offenders using the Moral Judgement Interview Standard Issue Scoring Manual (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987). This found that no offenders had high levels of morality and were in an early stage of moral development. Dodd et al (1990) conducted a meta-analysis of 15 studies, 13 scoring morality through moral dilemmas, and two developed their own measures. They concluded juvenile delinquents engage in a lower level of moral reasoning than non-juvenile delinquents (Dodd et al, 1990). Later studies continue to suggest an association between moral reasoning and offending (Chen & Howitt, 2007; Lahat et al, 2015; Romeral et al, 2018; Spenser et al, 2015). However, a limitation of this interpretation is that offending may be better explained through moral relativism; some individuals may consider some of their actions as moral, yet society may deem their actions immoral and or illegal.

Moral Disengagement Theory suggests offenders can detach themselves from their moral values, in effect they 'suspend' morality, or at least do so more effectively than those who do not offend (Marsh et al, 2002). Furthermore, similar to neutralisation techniques, individuals may attribute blame to their current circumstances and surrounding environment. Therefore, an individual justifies their actions as necessary in their current situation, rather than exercising their own choices and agency (Bandura et al, 1996). In essence, individuals disengage from morality and identify 'themselves as faultless victims driven to injurious conduct by forcible provocation' (Bandura, 2002, pp 110). Moral disengagement techniques have been identified in those who commit sex offences (D'Urso et al, 2019; Petruccelli et al, 2017) and drug trafficking (D'Urso et al, 2018), in street gang (Niebieszczanski et al, 2015) and prison gang members (Wood et al, 2009), along with offenders who are frequently aggressive and violent (Caprara et al, 2002).

It is suggested that those with a strong sense of morality are less likely to perpetrate online bullying (Song & Lee, 2019). The Sociomoral Reflection Measure-Short Form examines the moral value of life. These are related to an appreciation of life, value for life, having opportunities, and disapproval of self-pity (Gibbs, et al, 1992). This found sociomoral reflection to be higher for male offenders who mainly committed property offences (Palmer & Hollin, 1998). In contrast, the value of life was significantly lower for violent offenders than those who committed theft or drug offences (Chen & Howitt, 2007).

It is difficult to ascertain whether: offenders have higher or lower levels of morality compared to hegemonic societal standards; if they use moral disengagement techniques; or, if their moral values are just different from those promoted within wider society. Moreover, offence type and severity impact sentencing outcomes (Bastian, 2013; Ulmer, 2008; Alter, 2007), but few studies into morality and offending have directly considered offence severity. Additionally, while the instruments outlined above may be useful for gauging an individual's moral judgement, they lack a quantitative approach and the ability to examine morality in relation to differing sub-domains. Thus, the study reported here addresses these current gaps using an established morality score to examine offending across a set of deconstructed moral values and across different offence severity.

Methodology

A questionnaire was used to capture participants' demographic characteristics, MFQ measures of morality, and self-reported offending. The survey was distributed using two formats to increase overall sample size, geographical reach, and achieve a diverse sample. Using opportunity sampling, a paper version was distributed amongst the public within local facilities, including a university campus and pharmacy in Greater Manchester. Additionally, an electronic version was shared on social media platforms and through email to students and staff at two higher education institutions within the North West of England. This method of recruitment relied heavily on a self-selecting sample but was boosted by snowball sampling as participants were encouraged to share the survey link on their own social networks.

The Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ)

The MFQ was used to capture data on participants' individual levels of morality. This is an established instrument being previously implemented to explore moral concerns (Ditto et al, 2011), political attitudes (Jasmine & Eric, 2017), digital behaviours (Kalimeri et al, 2018) and to investigate the association between morality and psychopathy in adult male offenders (Aharoni et al, 2011). It has been described as holding 'considerable promise as a framework for conducting criminological research on the relationship between morality and offending' (Silver & Silver, 2020, pp 2), but has had limited application in the context of offending behaviour.

The MFQ uses 32 items on a six-point Likert scale (0-5) to provide a score of an individual's morality. The MFQ comprises of two parts, one measuring moral relevance while the other measures moral judgement, with different questions within both sections but that are still associated with the five moral foundations. Upon completion of both parts, a score of the individual's morality is established whereby the higher the score, the more value the individual places on that moral foundation. Validity and reliability of the questionnaire has previously been established for all five domains, with figures relating to internal and external validity, test-retest reliability, and factor analysis being reported in Ditto et al (2011). The MFQ also contains two 'catch questions' to identify those who may not complete the questionnaire properly or fall victim to social desirability, thus allowing for elimination of their scores. Overall, one of the advantages of using this

questionnaire is that it enables different subscales or components of morality to be examined alongside previous self-declared offending.

Offending and Criminal Behaviour

In addition to completing the MFQ, participants were asked to self-report whether they have previously committed any of a preselected range of 25 offences. These were extracted from the Crown Prosecution Service (2016) and the Department for Transport (2016). This selection aimed to include a mixture of offence types and offence severities, from minor to more serious crimes, to encompass a broad variety of possible offending behaviours. Sex offences were excluded from this study due to ethical considerations and the complex relationship of these offences with morality (Ashkar & Kenny, 2007). A discussion of the limitations of using self-reported offending is provided in the discussion section.

Offences were categorised in two separate ways. Firstly, offences were categorised into broader similar crime types based on the behaviour, action and circumstances that are involved in committing the offence. Six categories were created: driving offences, drugs/alcohol, minor offences, financial/non-personal crime, violent/personal crime, and cyber-crime (Fig. 1). Each of the 25 offences were also separately classified by 'severity', according to the length and type of sentence permissible for the offence within the sentencing guidelines (Sentencing Council, 2017; Crown Prosecution Service, 2017; Department for Transport, 2016; Ministry of Justice, 2017), resulting in categories of: low (where an individual is likely to receive a fine), medium (where an individual may face up to 7 years imprisonment), and high (where an individual may be faced with the maximum possible sentence available; life imprisonment) (Fig. 2). Non-Parametric Mann Whitney U and Kruskal Wallis tests were used to compare differences of the mean for ordinal variables, with more than two groups using unpaired samples (Field, 2013).

Results and Discussion of Findings

A total of 184 participants completed the survey: 119 (65%) were female, 61 (33%) male and 4 (2%) did not disclose their sex. The age of the sample ranged from 18 to 65 years plus; the modal age group was 18-24

years (31%, N= 57); and the smallest 65 years or over (2%, N= 4). The ethnicity of participants was predominantly White (85%, N=157). The majority identified as non-religious (42%, N= 77), followed by Christian (36%, N= 67), Atheist (9%, N= 17), and Muslim (9%, N= 16). A total of 32% (N= 59) of the sample were students, 29% (N= 54) in full-time employment, and 26% (N= 48) part-time employed.

To assess the reliability of the MFQ scores in this study, the values were compared with the original MFQ scores obtained by Ditto et al (2011). In four of the five foundations (see Table 1) MFQ scores in this study were higher than the original study, with the greatest difference in the purity/sanctity foundation. Non-parametric Mann-Whitney U tests revealed significant differences for the purity/sanctity (U= 473832, Z= -11.931, p< .001); harm/care (U= 856238.50, Z= -2.736, p= .006); in-group/loyalty (U= 848557.50, Z= -2.920, p= .004); and authority/respect (U= 605049.50, Z= -8.774, p< .001) foundations.

Self-Reporting of Past Criminal Behaviours

A total of 141 (77%) participants self-reported previous offending. MFQ scores revealed those who did not declare past offending tended to score higher than those who did (Table 2). This relationship was true for all sub-categories of the MFQ, except for the authority/respect foundation whereby those who self-reported offending scored slightly higher (M= 2.69, SD= .947) than those who did not (M= 2.67, SD= 1.004), however these differences were non-significant.

Participants reported a total of 590 offences (offenders could declare committing multiple offence types) ranging from more frequently reported low level offences (where an individual is likely to receive a fine) such as speeding and parking fines, to more high offences (where an individual may be faced with life imprisonment) such as perverting the course of justice and arson. Overall, the majority related to driving offences. No participants declared committing burglary. Moral foundation scores were calculated for offences with N greater than 20 (see Table 3). Robbery offences had the highest MFQ foundation scores for harm/care, in-group/loyalty, authority/respect and purity/sanctity, while arson scored highest for the fairness/reciprocity foundation. Production of illicit substances had the lowest MFQ scores for fairness/reciprocity, in-group/loyalty and purity/sanctity foundations. Computer hacking scored lowest for the harm/care foundation, and arson scored lowest for authority/respect. A key finding was that for all offences, MFQ scores for in-

group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity foundations were lower than harm/care and fairness/reciprocity. This may suggest that those who engage in offending may have a lower sense of loyalty to others (in-group/loyalty), lower regard for those in authoritative positions (authority/respect) and may not be religious or take care in avoiding situations that may cause them harm (purity/sanctity).

Due to small responses for some offence types, offences were categorised into six broader crime categories and compared with morality. The analysis of these results (Table 4) revealed a similar pattern to those previously observed. MFQ scores for the in-group/loyalty (M= 2.18, SD= .846), authority/respect (M= 2.62, SD= .901) and purity/sanctity foundations (M= 2.14, SD= 1.083), were lower than the harm/care (M= 3.57, SD= .711) and fairness/reciprocity (M= 3.61, SD= .678) foundations. Further analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in moral foundation scores between offence type classification groups.

Analysis of morality scores based on offence severity revealed offences in the high classification scored the lowest morality scores, and those in the low category displayed the highest scores (see Table 5). Consistent with previous findings, MFQ scores for the in-group/loyalty (M= 2.19, SD= .845), authority/respect (M= 2.63, SD= .906) and purity/sanctity (M= 2.15, SD= 1.084) foundations were lower than the harm/care (M= 3.57, SD= .714) and fairness/reciprocity (M= 3.61, SD= .681) foundations. Non-parametric Kruskal Wallis tests revealed no significant difference between moral foundations scores and the severity of crime classifications.

Overall, no statistically significant relationship was found between morality as measured by the MFQ and self-reported offending. This suggests there was no major difference between participants who declared previous criminal behaviour and those that did not. This is contrary to previous findings (Ashkar & Kenny, 2007; Beerthuizen & Brugman, 2012; Brown et al, 2010; Brugman et al, 2008; Buttell, 2002; Dodd et al, 1990; Gregg et al, 1994; Palmer, 2003; Brown et al, 2010; Maitra et al, 2018) and challenges commonly held presumptions that offending is associated with lower levels of morality.

Utility of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ)

One of the purposes of this paper was to explore the suitability of the MFQ for examining criminal behaviour. This research offers partial support for doing so, highlighting the reliability of the MFQ to gain a measure of an individual's morality. The MFQ is an established tool for measuring morality, and an added benefit is that it provides scores across different foundations, thus morality is not captured as a single low/high score. Whilst overall scores are afforded, a more subtle breakdown of the five foundations allows for a more nuanced examination between morality and offending, which this study indicates to have potential benefit in future research.

Scores for the in-group/loyalty, authority/respect and purity/sanctity foundations were consistently lower than harm/care and fairness/reciprocity. Ditto et al (2011) suggests that in western cultures a higher emphasis is placed upon the harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, and authority/respect foundations. In this study these elements of the MFQ were similar for harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations, although the authority/respect foundation received the lowest scores. A possible explanation here may be sample size, given Ditto et al (2011) collected over 10,000 responses. Indeed, with a larger and more diverse sample, greater variance within results may have been observed.

Another possible explanation is that the studies were conducted at different time periods. The current research took place seven years after Ditto et al (2011), therefore possible changes in societal attitudes towards authority may have occurred. However, it is questionable the extent to which social attitudes will have shifted in this time. An alternative explanation is that 32% of this current sample are students and Yariv (2009) suggest that students often hold a low regard for authority. Therefore, a more plausible suggestion is that the presence of students in the sample may have resulted in lower overall scores for authority/respect foundation. Further exploration of the individual moral foundations and their scoring within the instrument, may provide additional insight into the relationship they share with one another, as well as their ability to capture the complexities of the relationship between morality and crime. Additionally, given the paucity of studies using MFQ to better understand offending, it is recommended that qualitative insights would support a better understanding of some of the initial patterns identified in this study. Indeed, some of the qualitative elements explored within the Masters by Research (Author, 2018) will form the basis of future publications.

One of the challenges of using quantitative measures of morality is they only account for an individual's perspectives of morality at the time of the survey. As demonstrated in the literature, culture and society are likely to influence an individual's morality and/or behavioural adherence to moral values. Consequently, factors other than an individual's internal values may impact their criminal behaviour. Morality is, therefore, perhaps less of a factor than might be anticipated in the commissioning of a crime. Nevertheless, future researchers investigating morality, should seek to socio-culturally contextualize their project and establish how their understanding of morality informs their research approach (Schein, 2020).

Future studies should also seek to investigate and measure morality with an appreciation that it is a flexible component of human behaviour and varies depending on the context and situation an individual finds themselves within. While this present study gauges an understanding of participants' previous criminal behaviour, detail related to the circumstances in which they performed these acts is missing. An individual's behaviour may depend upon which moral values they consider more valuable and important at the time of the criminal act, thus linking to principles proposed within Situational Action Theory (Wikstrom, 2011; 2019; Wikstrom & Treiber, 2016). For instance, a police officer questioning an associate of a suspected offender. Typically, the associate may morally believe in being honest but considers being loyal to their friends as morally more important at this time. Therefore, in this context, the associate's moral principles related to upholding loyalty to their friend are stronger than being honest and telling the truth to the police, and so their behaviour reflects that.

This suggests individuals may not only have subjective moral values shaped, perhaps, by hegemonic social values, but may also have a subjective hierarchy of morals. This hierarchy of morals may then alter or shift dependent upon the situation and circumstances that an individual finds themselves within, and or the criminal opportunities presented. A key future research avenue is therefore to identify possible situational factors relating to morality that may influence a participants' decision to commit criminal behaviour.

Limitations and Future Direction

The findings of this study should be considered carefully against potential limitations, including the sample size (N=184) and location of the study. A future recommendation would be to replicate the study with a larger sample size and extend its geographical coverage. A large majority of the behaviours disclosed in this study related to driving offences such as speeding (N= 79), driving whilst using a mobile phone (N= 61), driving whilst not wearing a seatbelt (N= 35), and receiving a parking fine (N= 67). Thus, one could argue that this over representation may have biased some of the results.

A potential bias introduced through using self-reporting offending is social desirability (Bachrach et al, 2009). However, the incorporation of two 'catch questions' in the MFQ questionnaire should mitigate against this. Furthermore, when administering the MFQ, concerted efforts were made to allow participants to complete the survey in private. This may have had some influence as 77% of the whole sample disclosed a previous offence. On the other hand, it could be proposed that morality may influence self-reporting behaviours as someone who views themselves as moral and honest, may be more inclined to be truthful. Future research could examine the relationship between morality and self-reporting behaviours, or ideally conduct this with a randomly selected groups of convicted offenders and non-offenders.

A further possible limitation is participants are asked to think retrospectively about their previous offending. It may be difficult to recall events that may have happened years ago, especially for minor offences. (Elliot, 2005). A pre-selected list of offences was used to mitigate this and cue memories. Nonetheless, a limitation of this type of study design is that MFQ measures morality at the time of the survey, whereas offences may have occurred several years previously, and moral values may have changed in that time.

Conclusion

This study identified that the morality of those who self-reported committing offences and those who did not report previous offending were not significantly different. Additionally, no significant differences were observed when comparing morality scores and self-reporting of offences in relation to offence type, offence category or offence severity. Nevertheless, further scrutiny across each of the five moral foundations revealed

insightful findings. Consistently, the in-group/loyalty, authority/respect and purity/sanctity foundations displayed lower scores than the harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations for all participants, regardless of previous offending. Although these differences were non-significant, these scores suggest that when considering values that construct their morality, participants placed less emphasis on some foundations (harm/care and fairness/reciprocity), but more importance on others (in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity). Explanation for this pattern is difficult to determine, therefore future studies could seek to examine the relationship between moral foundations with the inclusion of qualitative methods.

Additionally, this research utilises the MFQ to examine morality within a less familiar context, thus extending the application of this instrument. This study highlights how the MFQ can be a useful tool for measuring morality and providing a fuller overview of an individual's morality as related to offending through deconstructing morality. It also highlights the need to conduct more detailed analysis of the appropriateness of the questions in dissimilar contexts to which it was created, this would expand the reliability of the measure. Accordingly, confirmation of the sub-domains of the questionnaire and use of the moral foundations could be achieved. However, future research seeking to explore morality should acknowledge the flexible nature of the concept and added complexity that the context and situation in which the behaviour was carried out, may influence moral decision making.

Furthermore, this study highlights the complexity and multi-faceted interaction of morality and crime. In particular, the results suggest it is an oversimplification to suggest offenders have lower morals. This raises the question as to why the public assumes this to be the case (Palmer, 2003; Gregg et al, 1994). This is pertinent when considering the attribution of stigma and negative perceptions that can give rise to labelling (Lanier & Restivo, 2015). Such experiences create barriers for (ex) offenders to successfully reintegrate and impacts their future prospects (Cherney & Fitzgerald, 2016; Moore, et al, 2016. Sinko et al, 2016). Future research should aim to explore how perceptions and the profile of an offender is represented within society, especially in relation to how the public perceives an offender's morality. Examining this topic could provide insight into how negative perceptions of offenders are created and maintained, thus allowing for examination of how these views may be altered and overcome.

Overall, this study contributes to the existing literature that attempts to comprehend the intricate relationship between morality and criminal behaviour. The study also extends the application of the MFQ to a less familiar criminal context and provides some support for the utility of implementing an instrument that deconstructs the complex subject of morality. Nevertheless, a lack of clarity surrounding the relationship between morality and offending still exists with the need for further research to delve deeper into the connection that both elements share with one another, with measures that recognise morality to be fluid, and contextual factors which might influence the role of morality in offender-decision making.

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Table 1

Comparison of the mean and standard deviation of each of the five moral foundations from the current study to previous research conducted by Ditto et al. (2011)

	Date from current study		Data from study conducted by Ditto et al. (2011)	
Moral Foundation	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Harm/Care	3.69	.770	3.52	.834
Fairness/Reciprocity	3.65	.745	3.68	.748
In-group/Loyalty	2.27	.958	2.08	.008
Authority/Respect	2.69	.958	2.03	.902
Purity/Sanctity	2.34	1.08	1.33	.986

Table 2

Comparison of Moral Foundation Scores between Those Who Self-Reported Committing a Crime and Those That Did Not

		Moral Foundations									
		Harm/ Care		Fairness/ Reciprocity		In-group/ Loyalty		Authority/ Respect		Purity/ Sanctity	
	n	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Crime committed	141	3.64	.777	3.60	.750	2.26	.893	2.69	.947	2.27	1.076
Crime not committed	43	3.88	.720	3.81	.717	2.33	1.011	2.67	1.004	2.57	1.100

Table 3

Moral Foundation Scores for Offences (N >20)

Offence	Frequency	Moral Foundation Scores									
		Harm/Care		Fairness/Reciprocity		In-group/Loyalty		Authority/Respect		Purity/Sanctity	
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Speeding	79	3.54	0.794	3.58	0.797	2.20	0.872	2.72	0.901	2.25	1.095
Parking fine	67	3.67	0.729	3.69	0.706	2.33	0.920	2.79	0.967	2.31	1.153
Cycling on pavement	65	3.60	0.698	3.65	0.658	2.17	0.779	2.56	0.908	1.98	1.105
Driving whilst using a mobile phone	61	3.62	0.708	3.69	0.613	2.25	0.832	2.68	0.967	2.25	1.074
Shoplifting	43	3.60	0.668	3.62	0.639	2.09	0.862	2.53	0.836	1.89	1.047
Drunk and disorderly	43	3.60	0.688	3.65	0.652	2.24	0.862	2.63	0.919	2.32	1.130
Possession illicit substances	38	3.49	0.820	3.57	0.760	2.10	0.910	2.52	0.916	1.87	1.14
Driving whilst not wearing a seat-belt	35	3.52	0.726	3.52	0.740	2.08	0.882	2.56	0.986	2.18	0.934
Software piracy	34	3.49	0.729	3.58	0.683	2.08	0.729	2.33	0.825	1.85	1.000
Handling stolen goods	21	3.36	0.600	3.34	0.571	2.02	0.910	2.49	0.671	1.96	0.997

Table 4

Comparison of Moral Foundation Scores Between Offence Types

		Moral Foundations									
		Harm/Care		Fairness/Reciprocity		In-group/Loyalty		Authority/Respect		Purity/Sanctity	
	n	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Driving offences	242	3.59	.743	3.63	.720	2.23	.875	2.71	.945	2.25	1.079
Drugs/Alcohol	58	3.50	.766	3.56	.708	2.08	.861	2.52	.878	1.91	1.123
Minor offences	111	3.62	.697	3.66	.645	2.20	.803	2.60	.926	2.16	1.128
Financial/Non-Personal crimes	134	3.55	.673	3.55	.669	2.13	.891	2.59	.822	2.01	1.035
Violent/Personal crimes	49	3.61	.649	3.65	.554	2.20	.768	2.66	.918	2.33	1.092
Cyber-crimes	39	3.47	.687	3.55	.646	2.10	.700	2.38	.801	1.85	.964

Table 5

Comparison of Moral Foundation Scores Based on Severity of Criminal Behaviour

		Moral Foundations									
		Harm/Care		Fairness/Reciprocity		In-group/Loyalty		Authority/Respect		Purity/Sanctity	
	n	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Low offences	324	3.60	.727	3.64	.696	2.21	.851	2.67	.934	2.19	1.092
Medium offences	172	3.58	.713	3.61	.670	2.17	.860	2.61	.900	2.16	1.122
High offences	94	3.47	.670	3.51	.851	2.12	.800	2.53	.815	2.02	.981

Fig. 1

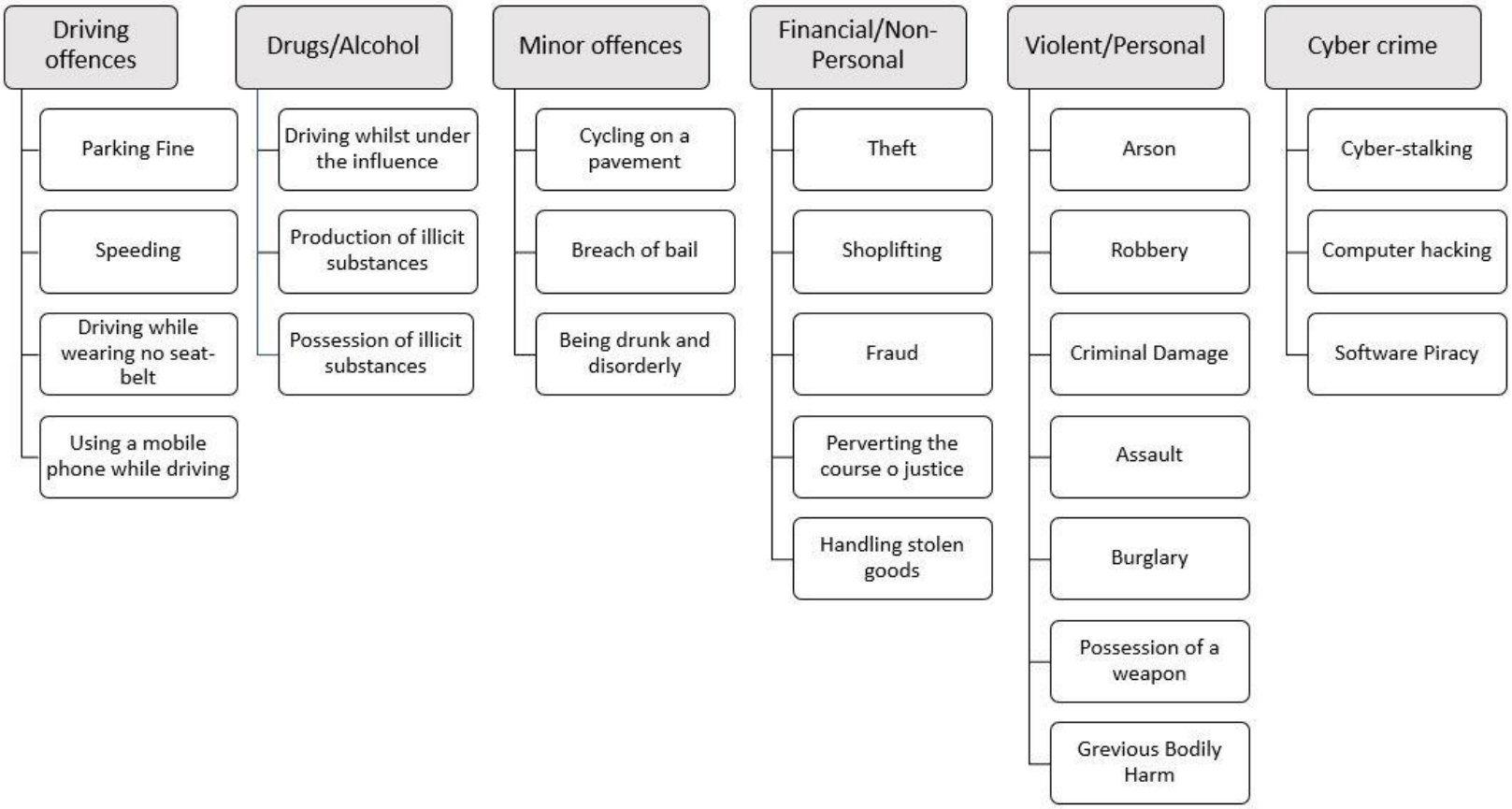

Diagram depicting how offences were categorised based on offence type

Fig. 2

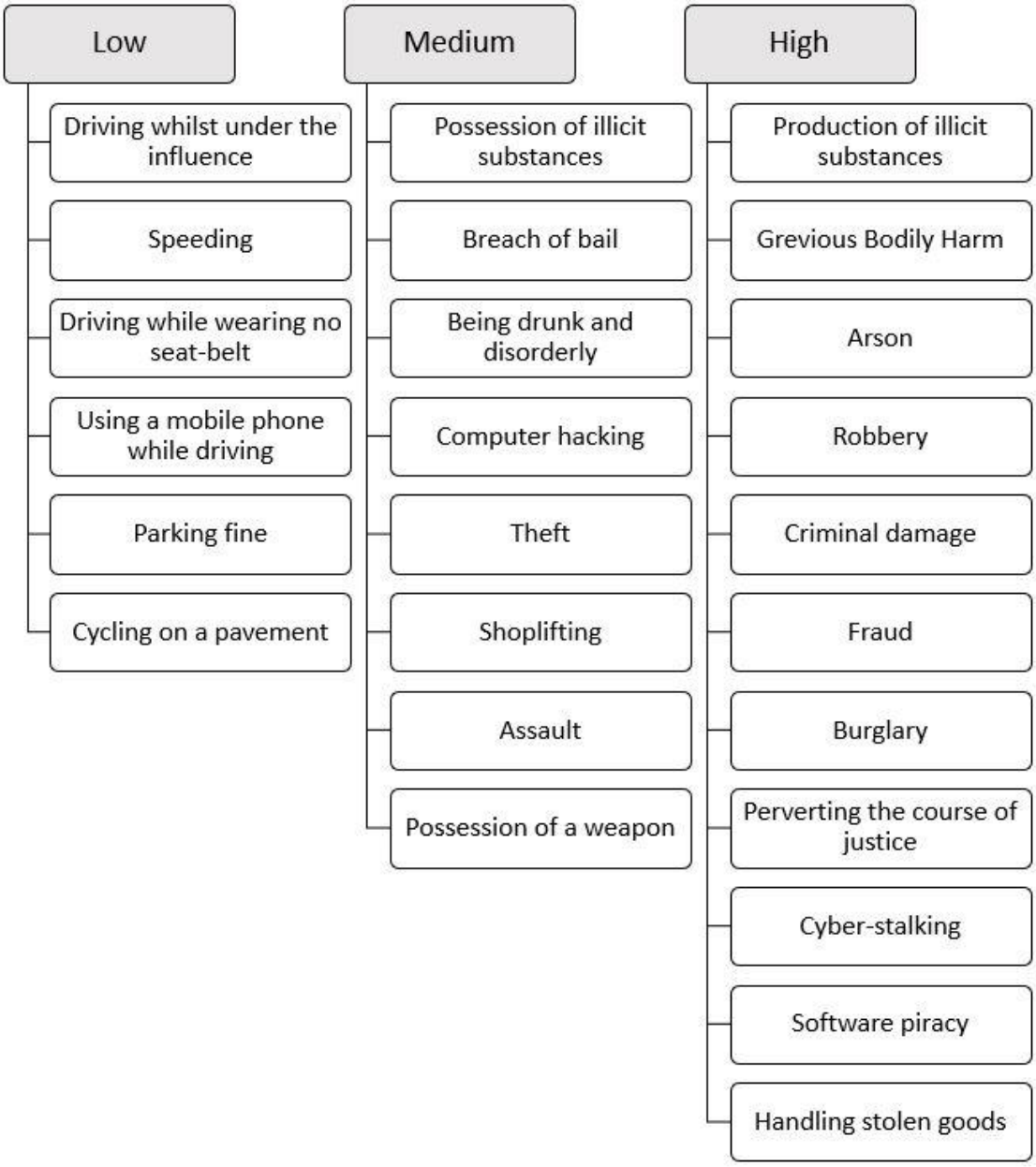

Diagram depicting how offences were categorised based on offence severity