



The Influence of Moral Concerns on Memory for Individuals and Their Actions

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Introduction

Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt & Graham, 2007) provides a framework for understanding the psychological foundations of morality. At least five innate and universal psychological systems are proposed to underlie morality in all societies and individuals. These include:

Harm (H): concerns for the suffering of others, which includes caring and compassion.

Fairness (F): concerns about unfair treatment, cheating, justice, and rights.

Loyalty (L): involves obligations of group membership, such as loyalty, self-sacrifice, and vigilance against betrayal.

Authority (A): relates to social order and obligations of hierarchical relationships, such as obedience, respect, and the fulfillment of role-based duties.

Purity (P): concerns about physical and spiritual contagion, involving cleanliness, chastity and control of desires.

Previous work has shown that we are highly sensitive to information suggesting costly social interactions; categorizing others on the basis of moral behaviors may be one adaptive mechanism for minimizing such costs (van Leeuwen, Park, & Penton-Voak, 2012). The ability to individuate on the basis of moral behavior may be another adaptive mechanism for avoiding costly social interactions. Although previous work points to the importance of morality in social perception, the impact of moral behavior on facial recognition has not been thoroughly explored.

In two separate studies, we explored how behaviors that violate or uphold universal moral concerns influence: a) the ability to recognize individuals who engage in them and b) the formation of approach and avoidance tendencies when later cued with facial features alone. In addition, we explore how behaviors representing five major psychological moral foundations influence associative memory for face-behavior pairings and approach/avoidance judgments differently according to whether the moral foundations are ones typically emphasized by liberals or by conservatives (Study 1) and whether the foundations more strongly reflect immediate survival versus social concerns (Study 2).

Method

Participants

Study 1

N = 76 (13 males, 63 females)
Age (M = 18.58 years, SD = 1.39)

Study 2

N = 41 (11 males, 30 females)
Age (M = 19.56 years, SD = 2.27)

Materials

Faces

- 60 Neutral White Male Faces (30 Old, 30 Foils)

Facts about Behavior

- 30 Facts:
 - 10 Upholding, 10 Neutral, 10 Violating
- 5 Moral Domains: H, F, L, A, P

Procedure

Learning Phase

Participants were presented with a fact about an individual's behavior, followed by an image of the individual's face.

Face Recognition Phase

Participants were shown faces from the learning phase, randomly intermixed with an equal number of novel faces, and indicated whether the presented face was old new. Participants then indicated whether they would approach or avoid that individual.

Paired Recognition Phase

Participants indicated whether the presented face-fact pair was correct or incorrect.

Discussion

In two separate studies, we observed higher associative memory for individuals linked with behaviors that violated principles of H and F relative to individuals linked with behaviors that upheld these moral concerns. In contrast, higher associative memory was observed for individuals linked with behaviors that upheld moral concerns of L, A, and P relative to individuals linked with behaviors that violated these concerns.

In Study 2, we examined how instances of moral transgression and obedience impacted facial recognition and approach and avoidance judgments when participants were later cued with facial features alone. In addition, we re-categorized the moral foundations to reflect Survival versus Social Exchange concerns to explore the impact of these categorizations on memory and approach/avoidance tendencies.

Summary of Findings for Liberal vs. Conservative Categorization
Approach tendency was stronger toward upholders for behaviors in the LAP domain relative to that for behaviors in the HF domain. The tendency to avoid violators was equally strong in the HF and LAP domains.

Summary of Findings for Survival vs. Social Exchange Categorization

Facial recognition accuracy was higher for upholders of Survival Concerns (H and P) relative to violators. In contrast, facial recognition accuracy was higher for violators of Social Exchange Concerns (A, F, and L) relative to upholders.

Approach tendencies toward upholders were stronger in magnitude than were avoidance tendencies away from violators for Social Exchange Concerns and Survival Concerns.

Navigating the social world requires adaptive behaviors which include implicit and explicit assessments of others' morality level under minimal conditions. The current findings highlight the importance of moral concerns and clarify their role in the formation of approach/avoidance tendencies and memory for individuals and their actions.

Results

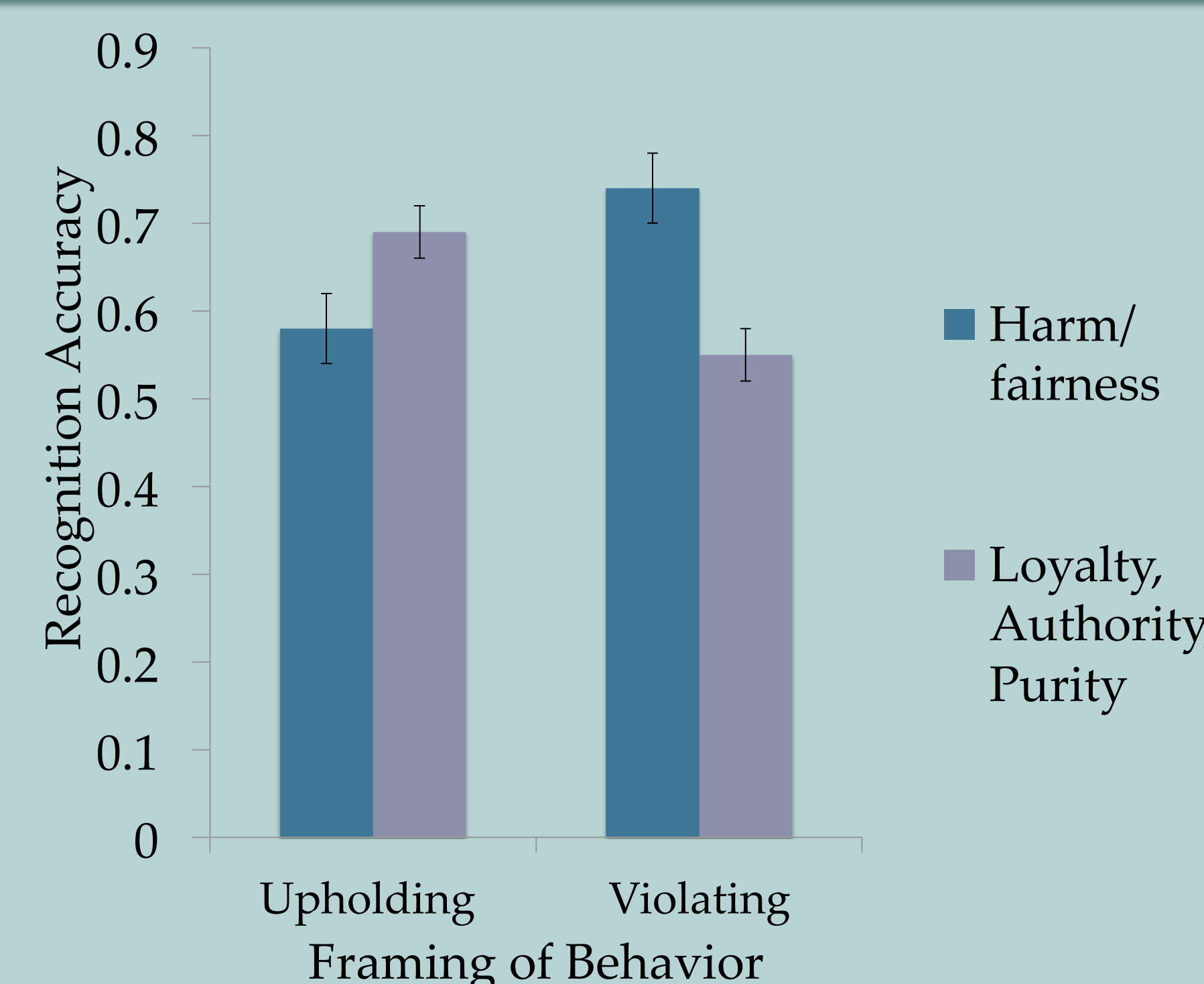


Figure 1. Study 1: Face-Behavior Associative Recognition Accuracy for Violators and Upholders of HF and LAP Moral Concerns

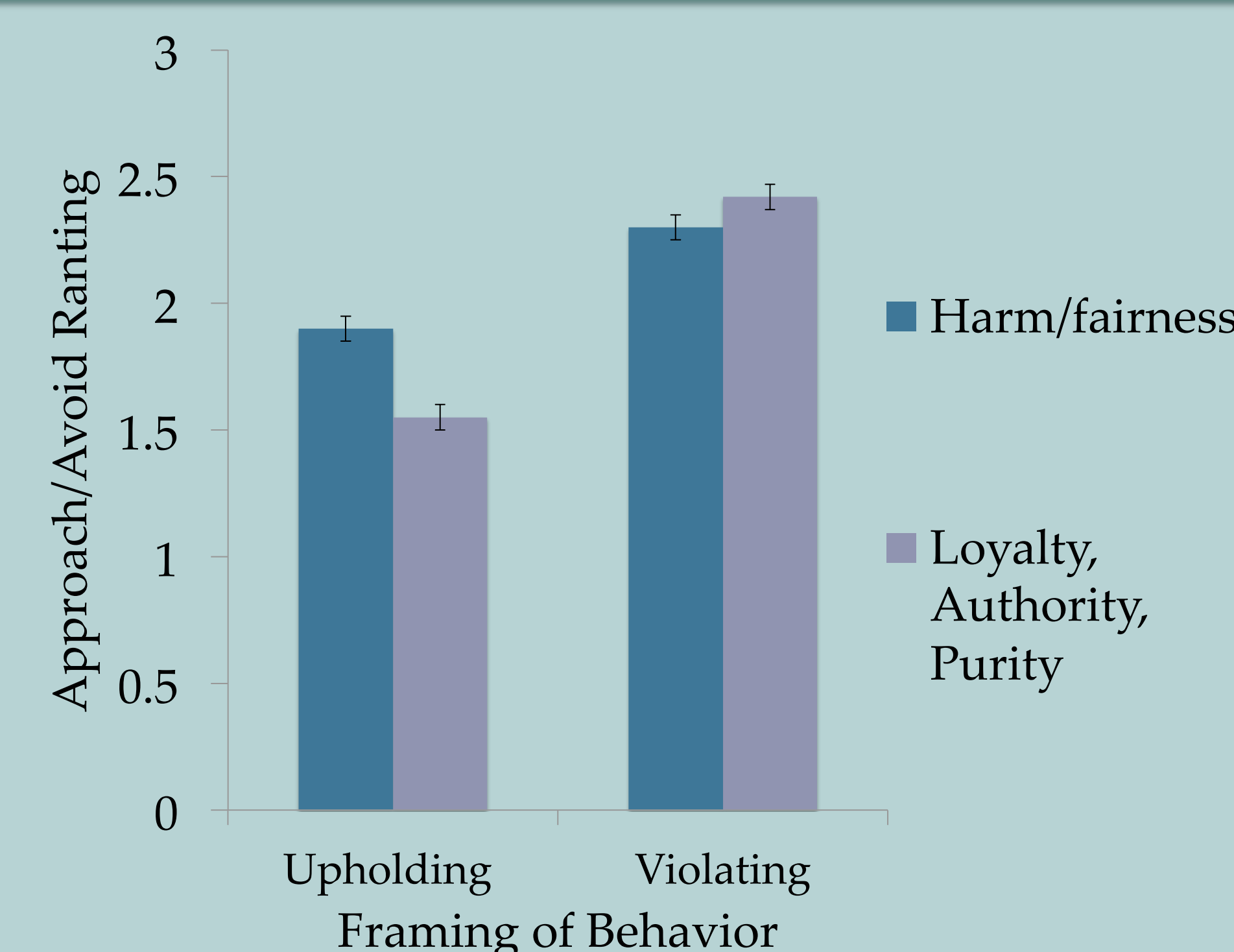


Figure 2. Approach/Avoidance Rating for Violators and Upholders of HF and LAP Moral Concerns

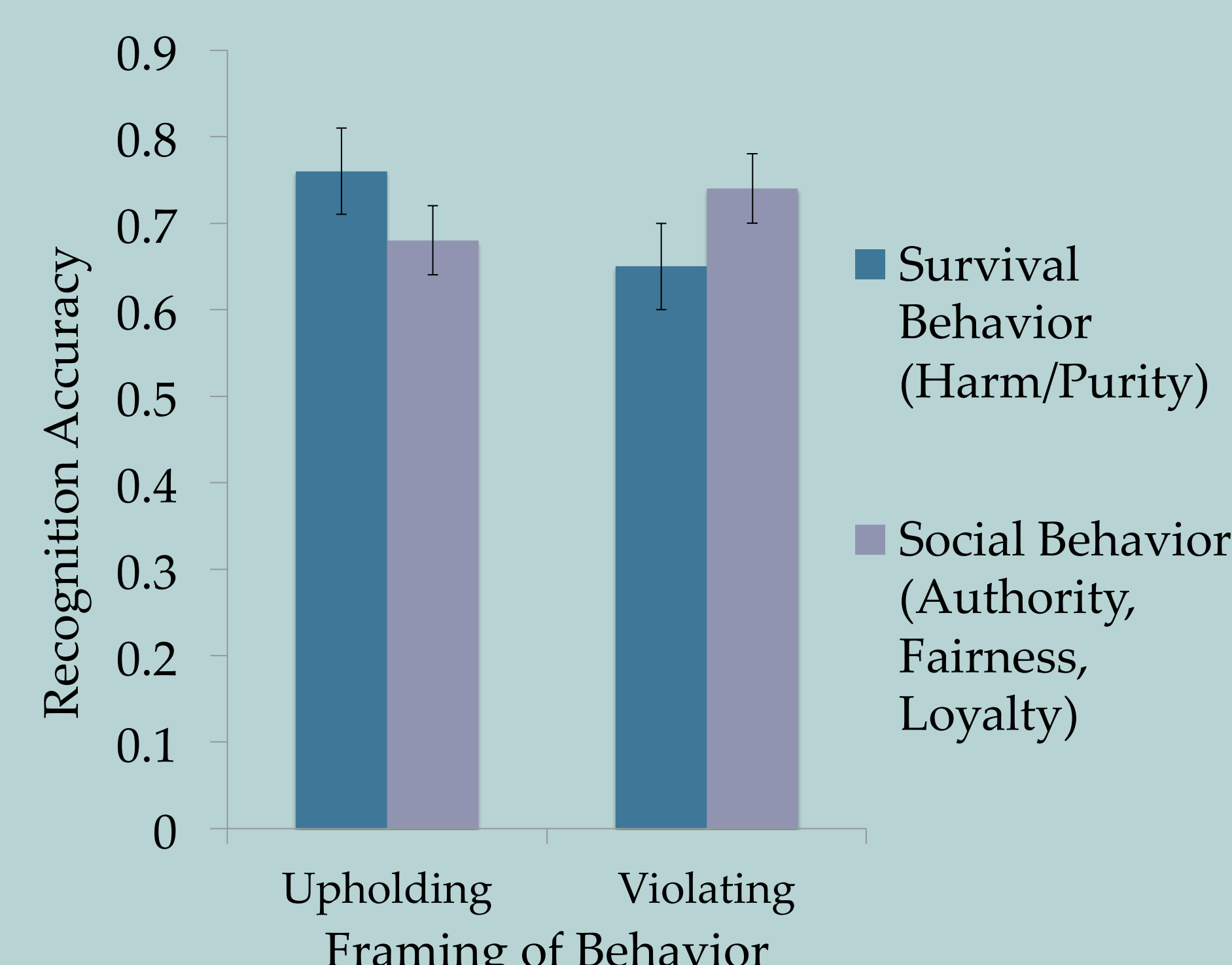


Figure 3. Face-Behavior Associative Recognition Accuracy for Violators and Upholders of Survival Behaviors and Social Behaviors

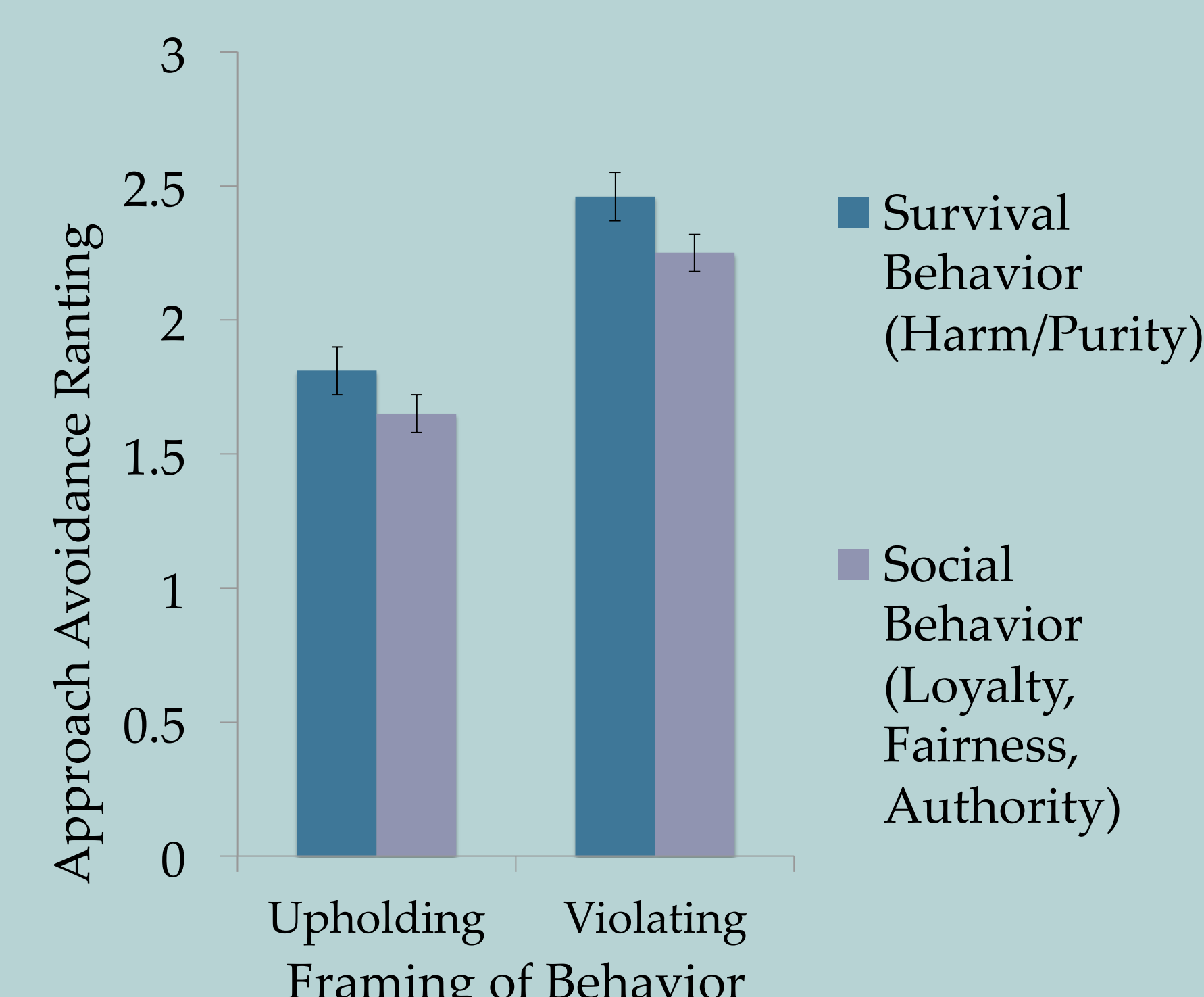


Figure 4. Approach/Avoidance Rating for Violators and Upholders of Survival Behaviors and Social Behaviors

References

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- van Leeuwen, F., Park, J. H., & Penton-Voak, I. S. (2012). Another fundamental social category? Spontaneous categorization of people who uphold or violate moral norms. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48, 1385-1388. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2012.06.004

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