

## What Do We Mean by Attitudes Towards Violence?

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## Attitudes Towards Violence

- ▶ Attitudes are typically defined as summary evaluations (e.g., positive vs. negative) of psychological objects, such as people, things, or behaviours (e.g., Ajzen, 2001; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Fazio, 2007).
- ▶ Attitudes towards violence are evaluations of violence.
- ▶ Conceptualization and assessment of “attitudes supportive of violence” often seem to go beyond evaluation of violence to include a much broader range of cognitions.

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## Rationalizations

- ▶ Rationalizations (excuses) are cognitions intended to minimize responsibility for a transgression while not denying the wrongfulness of the act (Scott & Lyman, 1968).
- ▶ Rationalization of criminal behaviour is not an uncommon phenomenon and can be predictive of antisocial behaviour (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996).

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## Justifications

- ▶ Justifications are cognitions intended to minimize the wrongfulness of a transgression while not denying responsibility for it (Scott & Lyman, 1968).
- ▶ Justification is viewed as a more forceful defense of behaviour, because it changes the wrongfulness or antisocial nature of the behaviour into appropriate behaviour (Bandura et al., 1996).

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## Present Study

- ▶ The purpose of the present study to begin to clarify the attitude construct in research on violence and to explore the extent to which items of the Measure of Criminal Attitudes and Associates Revised (MCAA-R) Violence scale (Mills & Kroner, 2007) reflect attitudes towards violence.
- ▶ The study examined the correlations of each item of the MCAA-R Violence Scale with more specific evaluative ratings of violence (outcome expectancies for violence).

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## Participants

- ▶ Undergraduate male students at Carleton University ( $N=129$ )
- ▶ Median age= 19- 21 years of age

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## Measures: VOE

### *Violence Outcome Expectancies (VOE) Scale.*

- ▶ We have developed the VOE scale to assess expectancies of violence.
- ▶ Participants are asked to provide three outcomes of violence, rate how likely each outcome is to happen, and rate the valence of each outcome.
- ▶ Attitudes towards a given behaviour are thought to be based on the combined valence of the expected outcomes of that behaviour (e.g., Fishbein & Ajzen's (1975) expectancy-value model of attitudes); thus, outcome expectancies are a reasonable indicator of attitudes.

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## Measures: MCAA-R

### *Measure of Criminal Attitudes and Associates Revised (MCAA-R)*

- ▶ The instrument is composed of two parts: Part A is a quantifiable measure of criminal associates, and Part B measures the domains of Violence, Entitlement, Antisocial Intent, and Attitudes Towards Associates.
- ▶ The scale of Violence is composed of both rationalization and justification items, and includes 10 items that are measured on a 4 point scale.

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## Measures: MCAA-R

### ▶ Violence Scale Items

- ▶ 1. It's none of my business if I saw someone being robbed.
- ▶ 5. It's understandable to hit someone who insults you.
- ▶ 9. Sometimes a person may have to carry a weapon to protect themselves.
- ▶ 13. Sometimes you have to fight to keep your self-respect.
- ▶ 17. It is reasonable to expect a fight from someone you cheated.
- ▶ 21. Ignoring a store being robbed is not wrong.
- ▶ 25. There is nothing wrong with beating up a child molester.
- ▶ 29. It's not wrong to fight to save face.
- ▶ 33. Someone who makes you very angry deserves to be hit.
- ▶ 37. It's all right to fight someone if they stole from you.

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## Analysis

- ▶ MCAA-R Violence scale and all MCAA-R Violence scale items were correlated with VOE Scale total score and VOE Evaluation total score.

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## Results

- ▶ MCAA-R Violence scale was significantly correlated with VOE Scale total score ( $r = .23$ ,  $p = .008$ ) and with sum of evaluation ratings on VOE Scale ( $r = .32$ ,  $p \geq .0001$ ).
- ▶ 40 % (4) of the items were significantly correlated with VOE Scale total score.
- ▶ 50% (5) of the items were significantly correlated with sum of evaluative ratings on VOE Scale.

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## Results

	Violence Scale of MCAA-R	Item 21	Item 9	Item 5	Item 29	Item 37	Item 1	Item 17	Item 13	Item 25	Item 33
VOE total score	.23*	.01	.03	.08	.12	.13	.16	.18*	.20*	.20*	.22*

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### Results

	Violence Scale of MCAA-R	Item 21	Item 9	Item 5	Item 37	Item 1	Item 29	Item 33	Item 25	Item 17	Item 13
VOE-EVAL	.32*	.06	.08	.09	.14	.15	.20*	.22*	.23*	.29*	.34*

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### Discussion

- ▶ Significant correlations were found between MCAA-R Violence scale and VOE Scale total score and sum of evaluation ratings on VOE Scale.
- ▶ The present study shows that half of the items from the MCAA-R Violence scale, even though designed to measure attitudes towards violence, show only small sized correlations and do not show a significant correlation with a VOE measure of attitudes towards violence.
- ▶ What do these items reflect if they are not correlated with a VOE measure of attitudes towards violence?

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### Limitations

- ▶ Student sample
- ▶ Violence Outcome Expectancies (VOE) Scale is only one measure of attitudes

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### Discussion

- ▶ Better understanding of the types of cognitions that lead to the initiation and maintenance of violent behaviour
- ▶ Clarity about the differences between groups
- ▶ Better identification and treatment of offenders

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