

Do Criminal Attitudes Reflect Evaluation of Crime? ¹

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Attitudes ³

- An attitude is a relative evaluation of behaviour and refers to the extent to which a person has a favourable or unfavourable appraisal of that behaviour (Azjen, 2001).
- Therefore attitudes towards crime can be described as evaluations of crime
- It has been suggested that attitudes play a role in behavioural outcomes (Azjen, 1991, 2001)

Attitudes ⁴

- Behaviour models reflect this assumed relationship (Azjen, 1985; Theory of Planned Behaviour, Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2007)
- In a meta-analysis a large correlation was found between attitudes and behaviour (Glasman & Albarracin, 2006)
- However, measures of attitudes often measure other constructs (such as excuses and justifications)

Current Study ⁵

- Purpose
- Correlations were performed between the Measures of Criminal Attitudes and Associates (MCAA) with evaluative ratings of crime (semantic differential scale)

Participants ⁶

- Undergraduate Students in Psychology at Carleton University ($N = 212$)
- 144 female participants 64 male participants (4 did not provide their gender)
- Median age = 18-19 years of age
 - Range 17-54

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Measures of Criminal Attitudes and Associates (MCAA; Mills & Kroner, 2001)

- 46 items
- 4 subscales
- **Attitudes Towards Violence**
 - It is understandable to hit someone who insults you
- **Anti-social Intent**
 - I could easily tell a convincing lie
- **Attitudes Towards Entitlement**
 - Taking what is owed to you is not really stealing
- **Attitudes Towards Associates**
 - I have friends who have been to jail

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Crime Semantic Differentials

Doing Crime Is...

| | | |
|---------------|---------|-----------|
| Negative | Neutral | Positive |
| Immoral | Neutral | Moral |
| Bad | Neutral | Good |
| Not enjoyable | Neutral | Enjoyable |
| Wrong | Neutral | Right |
| Not fun | Neutral | Fun |

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Analysis

- Crime semantic differential scores were correlated with MCAA total scores and MCAA scales
- Correlations were performed between each item of the MCAA and the semantic differential total scores (CSD)

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MCAA subscales & CSD Correlations

| | CSD Total |
|-------------|--------------|
| MCAA Total | .55** |
| Violence | .30** |
| Entitlement | .22** |
| Intent | .57** |
| Associates | .50** |

** Significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

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Correlations > .25

| MCAA Items | CSD |
|--|--------------|
| 36. I have committed a crime with friends | .48** |
| 19. I would be open to cheating certain people | .47** |
| 43. I will not break the law again | .44** |
| 39. For a good reason, I would commit a crime | .43** |
| 16. I would not steal, and I would hold it against anyone who does | .38** |
| 11. I could see myself lying to the police | .38** |

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Correlations > .25

| MCAA Items | CSD |
|--|--------------|
| 46. I would be happy to fool the police | .35** |
| 20. I always feel welcomed around criminal friends | .33** |
| 15. In certain situations I would try to outrun the police | .32** |
| 4. I have a lot in common with people who break the law | .32** |
| 3. I am not likely to commit a crime in the future | .31** |
| 2. Stealing to survive is understandable | .30** |

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Correlations > .25

| MCAA Items | CSD |
|--|-------|
| 40. I have friends who are well known to the police | .29** |
| 27. Rules will not stop me from doing what I want | .27** |
| 32. None of my friends has ever wanted to commit a crime | .27** |
| 8. None of my friends have committed crimes | .26** |
| 12. I know several people who have committed crimes | .26** |
| 9. Sometimes you have to fight to keep your self respect | .26** |
| 28. I have friends who have been to jail | .25** |

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Correlations < .25

| MCAA Items | CSD |
|--|-------|
| 33. It is not wrong to fight to save face | .23** |
| 31. I would not enjoy getting away with something wrong | .23** |
| 35. I would run a scam if I could get away with it | .23** |
| 21. It's all right to fight someone if they stole from you | .22** |
| 30. Taking what is owed you is not really stealing | .22** |
| 23. I could easily tell a convincing lie | .22** |
| 44. It is reasonable to fight someone who cheated you | .20** |

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Correlations < .25

| MCAA Items | CSD |
|--|-------|
| 5. There is nothing wrong with beating up a child molester | .19** |
| 6. A person is right to take what is owed them even if they have to steal it | .16* |
| 41. There is nothing wrong with beating up someone who asks for it | .16* |
| 37. Someone who makes you really angry shouldn't complain if they get hit | .15* |
| 17. People who get beat up usually had it coming | .15* |
| 13. Someone who makes you really angry deserves to be hit | .14* |

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Correlations < .25

| MCAA Items | CSD |
|--|-----|
| 14. Only I should decided what I deserve | .13 |
| 1. It's understandable to hit someone who insults you | .08 |
| 7. I would keep any amount of money I found | .07 |
| 10. I should be allowed to decide what is right and wrong | .07 |
| 45. A lack of money should not stop you from getting what you want | .07 |
| 22. It's wrong for a lack of money to stop you from getting things | .04 |

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Correlations < .25

| MCAA Items | CSD |
|--|------|
| 24. Most of my friends don't have criminal records | -.03 |
| 18. I should be treated like anyone else no matter what I've done | -.03 |
| 38. A person should decide what they deserve out of life | -.01 |
| 42. No matter what I've done, It's only right to treat me like everyone else | -.01 |

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Discussion

- 44% of MCAA items showed correlations to total CSD scores over .25
- 56% of items showed correlations to total CSD scores under .25
- 76% of items were significantly correlated with total CSD scores
- 24% of items were not correlated with the CSD total scores

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Discussion

- Evaluation of crime measure was strongly correlated with the MCAA total score
- Moderate to large correlations were found between the semantic differential total scores and all the of the four scales of the MCAA
- The smallest correlations were with the attitudes towards entitlement and violence scales

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Discussion

- The MCAA overall does appear to measure criminal attitudes
- The 25 items showed correlations under .25
- Items not correlated with the CSD may be measuring other criminal cognitions

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Limitations

- MCAA item 25 was missing
- Student sample
- Measurement of evaluation of crime

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Future Research Directions

- Future research should attempt to determine what other constructs are being measured with the MCAA
- Future research should attempt to clarify the distinction between more general cognitions related to criminal behaviour

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Thank You

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