

## A More Thorough Test of the Effect of Attitudes Toward Violence: Replication and Extension

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## Attitudes Toward Violence

- Various frameworks and models suggest that attitudes toward violence causally influence violent behaviour
  - Risk-Need-Responsivity model (Andrews & Bonta, 2010)
  - Multiple risk assessment tools
- Existing evidence primarily consists of correlational/observational studies
- Absence of strong causal tests

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## Recent Experimental Study

- Nunes et al. (2022) randomly assigned participants to an anti-violence attitude condition or a control condition
- Participants completed a vignette measure of violent behaviour
- Those exposed to the anti-violence attitude condition chose fewer violent responses,  $d = -0.23$ , 95% CI [-0.46, 0.01]

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## Two Notable Shortcomings

- Did not test the full casual model: only manipulated attitudes to be more negative
- Did not examine the possible influence of demand characteristics

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## Current Study

- Replicate Nunes et al. (2022)
- Add a pro-violence attitude condition to test the full causal model
- Examine the potential influence of demand characteristics

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## Methods

Qualtrics online experimental study

Eligibility criteria:

- Men
- Older than 18 (primarily between 18 and 40)
- Residing in Canada or the United States
- Fluent in English

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## Sample

Obtained a sample of **526 men**

Most between the ages of 18 and 30 (65.8%,  $n = 346$ )

Nearly half were single (48.1%,  $n = 253$ )

Primarily sexually attracted to women (87.6%,  $n = 461$ )

Canada (49.8%,  $n = 262$ ), United States (50.2%,  $n = 264$ )

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## Manipulation

Participants randomly assigned to:

1. Anti-violence attitude condition\* ( $n = 175$ )
2. Control condition\* ( $n = 176$ )
3. Pro-violence attitude condition ( $n = 175$ )

\*Same as Nunes et al. (2022) with evaluative conditioning procedure removed



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## Pro-Violence Condition

Framed as a self-defence scenario:

*"A threatening man approaches you and an important woman in your life (for example, wife/girlfriend/mother/sister/friend, etc.). He says really rude, insulting, and threatening things about her. You tell him to stop, and you and the woman try to walk away, but he punches you and grabs her."*

"Now consider some of the **good things** that could happen if you defended yourself and the woman by fighting back:"

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## Message Example

- **You fight off the attacker**
- **You keep you and the woman from getting serious injuries**, like
  - Broken bones; for example, you don't get a **broken nose or jaw**
  - Brain damage; for example, you don't get a **concussion**
- **You and the woman don't get killed**



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## Materials

### Violent Behavior Vignette Questionnaire (VBVQ)

- Ten vignettes with response options that are violent or non-violent
- Total scores can range from 0 to 1

### Evaluation of Violence Questionnaire (EVQ)

- Self-report measure of attitudes toward violence
- Seventeen items resulting in a score between 1.00 and 4.00

### Attention Checks

- Two instructional attention checks embedded in EVQ
- Attention check procedure asking participants to select the correct passages they had viewed at beginning of the study

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## Experimental Demand Question

"Do you think the message you read at the beginning changed how you reacted to the conflict situations?"

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## Experimental Demand Question

“Do you think the message you read at the beginning changed how you reacted to the conflict situations?”

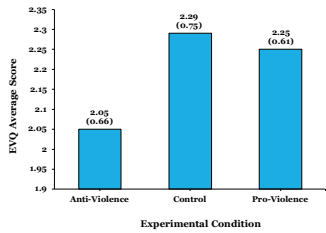
- The message changed how I answered and it changed how I really think about violence.
- The message changed how I answered, but it didn't change how I really think about violence.
- The message didn't change how I answered.”

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## Results: Did the Manipulations Work?

- Significant one-way ANOVA:  $F(2, 523) = 5.97, p = .003$
- Anti-violence attitude condition had the intended effect
  - $d = -0.33, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.54, -0.12]$
- Pro-violence attitude condition did not have the intended effect
  - $d = -0.06, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.27, 0.15]$

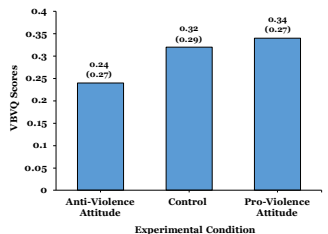


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## Results: Did Attitudes Influence Violent Responding?

- Strong positive correlation between EVQ and VBQ:
  - $r = .56, p < .001$
- Anti-violence attitude condition resulted in reduced violent responding:
  - $d = -0.29, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.50, -0.08]$
- Pro-violence attitude condition did not significantly influence responding:
  - $d = 0.06, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.15, 0.27]$



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## Results: Experimental Demand

Responses to the Experimental Demand Question Among Participants Assigned to the Anti-Violence Attitude and Pro-Violence Attitude Conditions (n = 350)

Response	Condition	
	Anti-Violence Attitude % (n)	Pro-Violence Attitude % (n)
(a) The message changed how I answered and it changed how I really think about violence	30.3 (53)	11.4 (20)
(b) The message changed how I answered, but it didn't change how I really think about violence	14.9 (26)	20.6 (36)
(c) The message didn't change how I answered	54.9 (96)	68.0 (119)

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## Results: Sensitivity Analyses

- Same pattern of results** after removing participants who selected the experimental demand option (i.e., “b”) at the end of the study:
  - Anti-violence vs. control:  $d = -0.33, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.55, -0.11]$
  - Pro-violence vs. control:  $d = 0.02, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.20, 0.25]$
- Negative binomial regression:
  - Anti-violence vs. control:  $B = -0.29, SE = 0.12, p = .01, \text{Exp}(B) = 0.75$
  - Pro-violence vs. control:  $B = .05, SE = 0.11, p = .67, \text{Exp}(B) = 1.05$

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## Summary

- Results of Nunes et al. (2022) successfully replicated:
  - Participants assigned to the anti-violence attitude condition selected fewer violent responses
  - Evidence that demand characteristics did not account for the observed effects
- The pro-violence condition was not effective
  - Messages may have been weak and/or incompatible with participants' attitudes
  - May have only strengthened attitudes toward self-defence

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## Limitations and Future Research

### Limitations

- Generalizability of results unknown
  - Manipulation and measures targeted evaluative attitudes toward violence
  - Other measures of violence?
- Sample size was smaller than desired

### Future Research

- Test full causal model of attitudes toward violence
  - Develop an effective pro-violence condition
  - More effective manipulation

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## References

- Andrews, D.A., & Bonta, J. (2010). *The psychology of criminal conduct* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Cincinnati, OH: Anderson
- Nunes, K. L., Pedneault, C. L., & Hermann, C. A. (2022). Do attitudes toward violence affect violent behavior? *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*. Advance online publication. doi: [10.1080/10926771.2021.2019158](https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2021.2019158)

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