Attitudes Toward the Use of Violence as a Moderator for Provocation-Aggression Relationship

Jonathan Oskvarek, Joel Sprunger, & Christopher Eckhardt
Purdue University

Introduction

- Years of research and common sense indicate that attitudes predict a number of behaviors (Glasman & Albarracin, 2006).
- The same may be true for intimate partner violence (IPV).
- Eckhardt et al. (2012) established that behavioral predictions of attitudes toward the use of violence (ATV) in maritally violent criminals versus non-violent men.
- The current investigation explores prediction in the opposite direction, with ATV predicting the extent of behavioral aggression demonstrated in the laboratory.
- Studies evaluating explicit measures of attitudes toward violence found a small and moderate correlation with behavioral aggression (Muñoz-Revas et al., 2011).
- Explicit measures, such as questionnaires, rely on participants' honest and unbiased responses.
- Explicit measures of attitudes often poorly reflect participants' actual attitudes on socially sensitive topics such as aggression and IPV (Scott & Straus, 2007).
- The Implicat Association Test (IAT) avoids biased responding to socially sensitive topics on questionnaires. Instead of directly asking participants to report attitudes, it uses a word-sorting task to deduce attitudes on a target concept.
- The Implicat Association Test for violence (V-IAT; Eckhardt, et al., 2012) measures implicit attitudes by evaluating the mean reaction time for sorting words related to violence into “good” and “bad” categories.
- The V-IAT’s predictive ability was compared to explicit measures in the current study to show the weaker predictive ability of explicit measures.
- An audio scenario involving jealousy toward an intimate partner provoked participants, a necessary condition for violence (Finkel & Eckhardt, in press).
- Studies have used measures of aggression that fail to closely simulate the actual act. This study improves on previous methods with a voodoo doll measure of behavioral aggression.

Method

- Male and female undergraduates in heterosexual relationships.
- Implicit measure of attitudes: V-IAT.
- Explicit measures of attitudes:
  - Acceptance of Violence Questionnaire (Riggs & O'Leary, 1996).
  - Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence Scale (Burt, 1980).
  - Attitudes about Aggression in Dating Situations (Slep et al., 2001).
  - Justification of Verbal/Coercive Tactics Scale (Slep et al., 2001).
- Random assignment to the control or provocation conditions of the Articulated Thoughts in Simulated Situations (Eckhardt et al., 1998).
- Measure of behavioral aggression: number and location of pins placed in gendered voodoo doll representing intimate partner during audio scenario.
- V-IAT Procedure:
  - Participants sort words into categories as fast as they can.
  - First, they sort words “good” or “bad”.
  - Next, they sort words as “peaceful” or “violent”.
  - These categories are combined into “peaceful-good” and “violent-bad” (consistent block).
  - The final block of trials switches the combination to “violence-good” and “peaceful-bad” (inconsistent block).
  - Mean reaction time latency for the two combined-category blocks are compared with the D statistic (Consistent block – Inconsistent block)/(Standard deviation of both).
- Participants who have a small difference between the combined blocks have less implicit difficulty with the concept and thus implicit attitudes favoring violence.

Results

- Provocation will likely be linked to a greater number of pins being placed in the dolls.
- Participants with positive ATV will place more pins in the doll than those with negative ATV.
- The V-IAT will likely predict the increase in pin placement better than the explicit measures.

Discussion

- Having strong attitudes favoring the use of violence will likely lead to more behavioral aggression after provocation.
- The ATV-behavioral aggression will likely be the strongest between the implicit attitudes measure and the voodoo doll measure of aggression.
- These results would suggest ATV moderate the relationship between provocation and aggression.
- The V-IAT predicted violence better than explicit measures.
- The results have implications for batterer intervention programs, which are based primarily on explicit attitudes.