

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RIGHT-WING AUTHORITARIANISM AND ATTITUDES TOWARD VIOLENCE: FURTHER VALIDATION OF THE ATTITUDES TOWARD VIOLENCE SCALE

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In this study the relationship is examined between attitudes toward violence and right-wing authoritarianism. One hundred and fifty participants completed the Attitudes Toward Violence Scale (ATVS; Anderson, Benjamin, Wood, & Bonacci, 2006) and the Right Wing Authoritarianism Scale (RWA; Altemeyer, 1996). Three of the ATVS subscales (war, penal code violence, and corporal punishment) correlated significantly with the RWA. The findings suggest that the ATVS is linked to authoritarianism and that its subscales tap into attitudes regarding authoritarian aggression.

*Keywords:* authoritarianism, attitudes toward violence, aggression

The aim of the present study was to further validate the recently revised Attitudes Toward Violence Scale (ATVS; Anderson, Benjamin, Wood, & Bonacci, 2006) by examining its relationship to individual differences in right-wing authoritarianism (RWA; Altemeyer, 1996). The 39-item ATVS is a revised version of the scale originally developed by Velicer, Huckel, and Hansen (1989), and has been demonstrated to measure four dimensions: attitudes toward war, penal code violence, corporal punishment, and intimate violence (Anderson et al.). The present version of the ATVS has satisfactory psychometric properties and confirmatory factor analyses have shown that the factor structure of the ATVS remains invariant across genders (Anderson et al.). Furthermore, the

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ATVS factors show a positive relationship with trait aggressiveness as measured by Buss and Perry's (1992) Aggression Questionnaire.

In the present study, the four ATVS factors are correlated with Altemeyer's (1981) RWA scale. According to Altemeyer (1981, 1988, 1996), RWA includes three dimensions: submissiveness to authority figures, conventionalism, and a propensity to engage in aggression sanctioned by authority figures. It is the last of these dimensions, authoritarian aggression, which makes the RWA scale relevant to the current research, as many of the items in the ATVS have to do with authority-sanctioned violence. Therefore, it was predicted that the RWA scale would correlate significantly with attitudes toward war, penal code violence, and corporal punishment. The relationship between RWA and intimate violence is unclear. Although Walker, Rowe, and Quinsey (1993) found a significant relationship between RWA and several indices of attitudes towards sexual aggression, there have been no subsequent efforts at replication. Furthermore, it is unclear whether violence and sexual coercion against domestic partners is actually sanctioned by authorities. Altemeyer's own research on US politicians would seem to suggest that both low and high RWA legislators disapprove of such behavior (Altemeyer, 1996). Therefore, no *a priori* prediction was made regarding the strength or direction between RWA and attitudes toward intimate violence.

## METHOD

One hundred and fifty students (84 women, 64 men, and two unspecified) at Oklahoma Panhandle State University volunteered to participate in the present study. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 57 ( $M = 21.35$ ). After reading and signing a statement of informed consent, participants completed a battery of questionnaires, including the 39-item ATVS (Anderson et al., in press) and the 34-item RWA Scale (Altemeyer, 1996). As mentioned earlier, ATVS items tap attitudes toward war (e.g., "Killing of civilians should be accepted as an unavoidable part of war."), penal code violence (e.g., "Any prisoner deserves to be mistreated by other prisoners in jail."), corporal punishment (e.g., "Children should be spanked for temper tantrums."), and intimate violence (e.g., "The dominant partner should keep control by using violence."). Higher scores on each of the ATVS subscales indicate more favorable attitudes toward violence. Items in the RWA measure conventionalism, submission to authority, and authoritarian aggression (e.g., "Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn.;" "Laws have to be strictly enforced if we are going to preserve our way of life"). Higher scores on the RWA indicate greater acceptance of authoritarianism. After completing the questionnaires, participants were thanked and debriefed.

## RESULTS

Three of the four ATVS subscales were significantly correlated with RWA: war ( $r = .43, p < .001$ ), penal code violence ( $r = .26, p = .002$ ), and corporal punishment ( $r = .33, p < .001$ ). There was no relationship between attitudes toward intimate violence and RWA ( $r = -.03, p = .74$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The above findings suggest that the ATVS is a valid measure of attitudes toward various forms of authoritarian aggression. War, corporal punishment, and harsh punishment for lawbreakers are all forms of aggression sanctioned by right-wing authority figures in government, religious institutions, and the mass media. Violence against women, on the other hand, is not socially acceptable in contemporary American society and one is hard-pressed to find authority figures, even among the right-wing, who would endorse physical or sexual assault of women. In this regard the lack of a relationship between the Intimate Violence subscale and RWA is consistent with Altemeyer's (1996) own research (though see Walker, Rowe, & Quinsey, 1993 for contrary findings).

In summary, there appears to be a strong positive link between authoritarianism and attitudes toward war, penal code violence, and corporal punishment. These three dimensions tapped by the ATVS may be used as valid indices of attitudes toward authoritarian aggression.

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