“You have to hit some people, it’s all they understand!”:
Are Violent Sentiments More Criminogenic than Attributing Hostile Intent in the escalation of grievances?

by
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This thesis is presented for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
of Murdoch University
2006.
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Sally Fiona Kelty
**Abstract**

Is it what adult violent offenders think or how they think that discriminates them most from non-offenders? This study investigates whether violent and criminal sentiments, attributional biases and violence based grievance resolution strategies represent dynamic criminogenic risk factors. The results indicate that it is what offenders think that discriminates them more than how they think.

The participants were 546 adults comprising 105 violent offenders, 238 university students and 203 men and women from a stratified random community sample. Using interview data from high-risk violent offenders, two scales were specifically developed to measure the variables of interest. The differences between offenders and non-offenders in violent attitudes was measured by expanding the scope of the Criminal Sentiments Scale. The differences in attributional biases and problem solving was assessed by a second scale developed for this study.

The results showed that offenders were clearly different from non-offenders with the offenders endorsing significantly higher criminal and violent sentiments with an effect size of $\eta^2 = .46$. The offenders also reported a significantly higher level of violence-based resolution strategies to end grievances than non-offenders. However, the surprising finding was that the adult male high-risk offenders did not demonstrate more pronounced hostile attributional biases than either adult men and women students or men and women from the community. The results imply that believing violence is acceptable and being prepared to use violence is more criminogenic than how you interpret the social behaviour of others. These findings have important implications for our understanding of why grievances escalate and the development of more effective intervention programs.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, a huge debt of gratitude to my three supervisors.

To Guy, who was with me the whole journey. You are the best supervisor anyone could ever wish for.

To Angela, who was with me the first two and a half years. Thank you for your immense help with the methods and statistical guidance.

To Anne, who before becoming my supervisor guided me through the process of community sampling, and who in the last six became the proof reader. Thank you to you all for your enthusiasm and support when it felt like I would never see the light at the end of the tunnel and when I was too tired to even think straight. Most of all for letting me stand on my own two feet and being very patient sounding boards for my ideas, whilst at the same time making sure I was on track and kept the research grounded. I learnt an enormous amount by being under your guidance.

The author gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of the West Australian Department of Justice for allowing this research to be conducted. Special thanks go to Dr Kati Kraszlan and Wendy Dunstan from Head Office and Offender Programs and the Superintendents and staff at Hakea and Casuarina prisons. Thank-you for your invaluable support and assistance and allowing this research to be conducted.

The opinions expressed in this thesis reflect those of the author and this research does not necessarily reflect the policies or views of the Western Australian Department of Justice.

A sincere debt of gratitude goes to Dr. Stephen Wormith from the Correctional Services in Canada, for allowing me to use and amended the CSS, for providing feedback on the new JFV subscale and new items for the existing ICO subscale, but also sending me bundles of government papers and reports from Canada.

A special thank-you to Eugene (my second qualitative coder), who took the time to learn how to score the MAPS and to think about how to make the MAPS scoring guide more user-friendly. This was a huge undertaking and I am very indebted. Thank-you also for the on-going encouragement and utter passion for Phds, you always lifted my spirits and made me see that I really could achieve this.

I have to acknowledge the on-going assistance provided by two very special little ladies who share my house (Mistress Lilly Wong and Miss Enchway). It is only fair to stress that without their assistance this thesis would never have been completed. To Miss Wong, for insisting that 1000 cuddles is the acceptable number (keeping stress under control). To Miss Enchy for insisting that the best place to sleep is of course on the keyboard (this was her method of performing essential editing as the paragraphs she deleted were obviously irrelevant).

A very special thank-you to the 546 people who gave up their time and participated in this research. Without their help this project would have been impossible.

Last, but not in no least, to Brian. Thank-you for keep me sane, for nagging me when I wanted to slack off, and for proof-reading every page (at least twice). What can I say except thank-you and I send you all my love. To you, I dedicate this thesis.
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