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***The Notion of Violence in Social Theory and Lay Perception:
Development of Theoretical and Methodological Approach***

Thesis Summary for the purpose of obtaining academic degree PhD in Sociology

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Relevance

In contemporary social theory, the concept of violence is experiencing a peak in popularity among researchers. It would be fair to note that this is far from the first such surge of interest in understanding the phenomenon of violence; similar surges have been observed in the past. What distinguishes the current research focus on violence from all previous attempts to examine the phenomenon is the emergence of systematic sociological studies of various aspects of violence and its determinants in diverse situations of social interaction, including micro-level ones. Researchers are focusing their attention on intimate partner violence and its determinants (Capaldi 2012), violence on television (Anderson & Bushman 2002) and in computer games (Przybylski et al. 2009), violence in sports (Jamieson & Orr 2009), and protest political movements that direct violence against those who have a legal monopoly on it (Myers 2000, Straus 2012).

In turn, the abundance of such publications reveals a number of problems that have not gone unnoticed by theorists¹, including multiple and often mutually exclusive interpretations of violence in the social sciences and the absence of conventionally established ways of conceptualizing it, as well as the heterogeneity of operationalizations of the concept of violence, reflected, among other things, in the diverse taxonomies used by the social sciences. Such a reference to the current state of social theory will be followed by a logical objection that empirical sociological studies of violence may be in demand even in cases where they are alien to the doubts shared by theorists. This is partly true, but the concept of “violence” is used not only in the discourse of the social sciences, but also in public and political rhetoric, as well as by ordinary people in everyday life. Constantly acquiring new meanings, changing connotations and its own referents, the concept becomes less and less defined, which, in turn, actually encourages researchers to resort to the last option – turning to everyday and lay understandings² of violence in the hope that they will prove to be more intuitively clear and less controversial (Imbusch 2003). In turn, a more consistent approach to working with key sociological concepts, aimed at clarifying them, may prove useful not only for research within the scientific community, but also for public policy and practical recommendations (Abend 2023). Thus, the problems identified as characteristic of the concept of “violence” in social theory demonstrate the need for a consistent systematization of ways of conceptualizing violence in the social sciences, which would be sensitive both to theoretical transformations of the concept and to lay perceptions of it.

¹ Obviously, theorists had raised conceptual problems with the notion of “violence” earlier – almost immediately after the research community began to take an interest in it. See, for example, the works of J. Dewey (1939) and N. Garver (1968), whose ideas were later summarized by J. Betz (1977).

² The “clarity” of these concepts is highly deceptive: the lay understanding of violence is perhaps even more vague than the scientific one, not only because of the absence of a formal conceptualization procedure, but also due to cultural conditioning, the situational nature of the concept's use, and so on.

Researchers have repeatedly argued that violence is a phenomenon that is inaccessible to research, since it turns into “paralyzing fear and indescribable horror” (Žižek 2010: 7) for each of its witnesses, and therefore its study is only possible from a certain distance, ‘sideways reflections’. Violence appears as a kind of “blind spot”: its prerequisites and causes, consequences and means of legitimization are studied, while its immediate conceptualization and lay perceptions remain “in the shadows.” A consistent systematization of existing conceptualizations of violence will make it possible to partially overcome the aforementioned limitation in violence studies and, in the future, to compare the ideas about violence formulated in the body of social research with everyday ideas.

In turn, scientists conducting empirical research on violence actually assume that their proposed operationalization of the concept, often presented in various ways (see, for example, Schafer 1996), whether it be a slap or verbal abuse, corresponds to lay perceptions of violence (Larsson & Gill 2013: 282), i.e., that respondents also consider slaps and verbal abuse to be forms of violence (Stanko 2003). Researchers note that the scientific community is moving further away from a consensus on what actually constitutes the concept of violence and how attitudes towards it should be measured (Blumenthal et al. 1972, Tolan 2007). In a situation where there are varying ways of conceptualising the concept of “violence”, attempts at operationalization in empirical research are often based not on an explicit theoretical interpretation, but on the virtually unverifiable assumption that researchers' ideas about indicators of violence will by default coincide with “everyday” classifications of manifestations of violence. Studies of lay perceptions of violence and their determinants have appeared in sociological science relatively recently and focus on the study of lay perceptions of violence in narrowly defined areas of social interaction: for example, intimate partner violence and domestic violence (Morgan & Björkert 2006), violence in educational institutions and in the adolescent environment (Gardner et al. 2003, Larsson & Gill 2013). The few studies that exist in this field, which aim to identify the determinants of lay perceptions of violence (Barlow 2013, Dutton & Nicholls 2005, Sander 1997, Sikström et al. 2021, Sikström & Dahl 2023, Triplett et al. 2016, Wilson & Smirles 2022) study them separately from other normative and evaluative judgments, such as those concerning causality, attribution of blame, and responsibility. Moreover, these studies do not aim to theoretically systematize the determinants of lay assessments of violence. It is worth cautiously noting that studies of everyday perceptions of violence in more general everyday contexts, not tied to a narrow problem area – such as intimate partner violence or adolescent violence – are still lacking. Moreover, methodological approaches to studying the determinants of everyday perceptions of violence for less specific situations of interpersonal interaction have not been developed.

Statement of the Research Problem and Research Question

The research problem underlying the proposed work is as follows: on the one hand, there is a lack of theoretical systematization of the existing diversity of approaches to conceptualizing the phenomenon of violence in the social sciences, a systematic classification of its characteristics, and, accordingly, various approaches to their operationalization and measurement; on the other hand, there continues to be a growing number of both theoretical and empirical sociological studies articulating the need for such systematization, conceptual analysis of the notion of “violence,” and the restoration of its theoretical significance in contemporary sociological theory.

The research problem unfolds, as demonstrated above, in the field of research on lay perceptions of violence: on the one hand, a growing number of studies *a priori* assume that violence conceptualized in a specific way is identical, at least, to everyday perceptions of violence and, in general, to what is potentially labeled as such in the lay judgments of respondents³; on the other hand, there is no systematic approach to assessing the determinants of lay perceptions of violence.

Thus, the research question of the work is detailed for the theoretical and empirical sections of the dissertation research. The theoretical part is designed to answer the question of how the conceptualization of violence has transformed in social theory and what are the key determinants of lay perceptions of violence, while the testing of the methodological approach proposed in the dissertation examines what factors and how exactly determine lay assessments of violence and what their key differences from theoretical interpretations of the phenomenon are.

The theoretical object of the study is the conceptualization of violence in social theory, considered in the context of its relationship with lay perceptions of violence and their determinants. The subject of the study is the factors that determine lay assessments of violence. The empirical object of the study is Russians aged 18 to 70. The task of testing the theoretical and methodological approach is to ensure the internal validity of the experiments. The research sample thus allows assessing the presumed presence and direction of effects, but does not allow statistical extending the obtained effect sizes to the entire population.

The work systematically uses the terms lay perceptions and lay assessments of violence. Lay (everyday) perceptions of violence are mentioned mainly at the level of theoretical analysis as part of the theoretical object of research. Lay (everyday) assessments are normative-evaluative judgments based on lay perceptions and expressed in quantitative form. The study is conducted using quantitative methodology based on a factorial experiment with text vignettes. Data is collected using

³ Such *a priori* identification of the results of research operationalization and lay perceptions of violence is possible (and probably necessary), including due to the lack of comprehensive comparative studies of the two aforementioned ways of understanding violence.

an online survey. The testing of the methodology for studying lay perceptions of violence is presented in three studies: *Study 1*, *Study 2*, and *Study 3*.

Literature Review

It is generally accepted that the concept of “violence” owes much of its genealogy to political philosophy. Indeed, indirect references to violence can be found in the works of early Greek philosophers, such as Heraclitus. In philosophy, violence was studied by G. W. Leibniz (1989), I. Kant (1965, 2019), G. W. F. Hegel (1990, 2000), A. Schopenhauer (2001), F. Nietzsche (1990), M. Scheler (1916), and others. In political philosophy, violence is considered by T. Hobbes (1991) and appears to be inextricably linked to the emerging social order (Filippov 2009), in the works of C. Schmitt (1992, 2007), H. Arendt (2008, 2014), G. Agamben (2011, 2012), J. Baudrillard (2000, 2016), and J. Rancière (2013). The relatively late consolidation of the concept in the discourse of social sciences is associated in such cases with the emergence in modern times of interdisciplinary scientific works devoted to the phenomenon of violence, which, on the one hand, blur the disciplinary boundaries between political philosophy and sociology and, on the other hand, opening up opportunities for the mutual exchange of elements of the theoretical and conceptual apparatus in the above-mentioned fields (Dilts et al. 2012, Wolff 1969). Moreover, the growing attention to violence is also linked to the general historical context, expressed, in particular, in the spread of left-wing socio-political movements (see, for example, Inshakov 2022).

The dissertation proposes to consider violence as one of the main categories used by classical social theory. There are a number of reasons to believe that violence was an important, albeit not always noticeable, conceptual element of classical sociological theories, for example: Émile Durkheim points out that social facts possess an external coercive force that shapes the behavior of individuals, often acting at a level inaccessible to individual consciousness – this coercion is moral and normative in nature, rather than physical, and is not violence; moreover, it is often not felt by individuals (Durkheim 2003: 35–36), although some researchers offer theoretical speculations about violence in Durkheim (Stedman Jones 2006, Mukherjee 2006), M. Weber identifies the monopoly on violence as a defining feature of the state (Weber 1990: 651), and struggle (German: *der Kampf*) appears as a basic sociological concept (Weber 2016: 96), For G. Simmel, violence – and conflict as its institutionalized manifestation – constitutes a form of socialization, that is, a social condition (Simmel 1904: 490, Simmel 1917, Simmel 2010).

The concept of violence in the social sciences is inextricably linked to the concepts of conflict, struggle, and coercion. Karl Marx, who largely ensured the transition of the concept of “violence” from philosophical discourse to the apparatus of social sciences, showed that violence, on the one hand, is an element that ensures the exploitation of the working class, and on the other hand, is an

instrument of retaliatory struggle (Marx 1952: 757, Marx & Engels 1985). Classical Marxism, which considers the dialectical nature of social relations inevitably leading to conflict, is further traced in neo-Marxist and Freudo-Marxist currents (Adorno 2001, Adorno 2003, Marcuse 2002, Fromm 2019), which show that violence characterizes the relationship between humans and the system in capitalist societies. Separate attention should be paid to W. Benjamin's development of a critical understanding of violence, which is inextricably linked to the category of law (Benjamin 2011). R. Darendorf (Darendorf 1958) and L. Coser (2000) should also be noted, as they proposed ways of considering social conflict that subsequently formed the basis of some functionalist conceptualizations of violence. The emergence of symbolic violence and power as a focus of research is largely due to the influence of P. Bourdieu (Bourdieu 2003) and N. Elias (Elias 2000). The social sciences, in turn, owe much to Michel Foucault (1999, 2004) for the emergence of the analysis of transformations of violence in a historical perspective. Contemporary attempts to classify the ways in which violence manifests itself should also be noted – the most well-known typologies of violence were proposed by J. Galtung (1969, 1990) and S. Žižek (2010).

The working definition of violence proposed in this paper is thus based on the idea of violence as an act involving deliberate action directed against an individual or group of individuals with the aim of causing harm⁴. Moreover, social theory often considers violence to be a normatively relevant phenomenon: it is regarded as reprehensible and, in most cases, constitutes disapproved behavior. At the same time, discussions continue about the boundaries of the concept in the social sciences: minimalist and comprehensive interpretations of the concept are proposed (Bufacchi 2005), and restricted, wide, and legitimate ways of conceptualizing the notion are distinguished (Coady 1985).

The working definition is largely based on the so-called “restricted” definition given by T. Coady (Coady 1985: 2–3), but is refined and supplemented in the course of further analysis: violence, according to this definition, is understood as “interpersonal acts of force that involve physical injury.” Coady himself notes that this definition is “normal and common,” not so much because it is based on dictionary definitions of violence, but because “proponents of ‘wide’ definitions propose an extension of this nominal – normal and narrower – interpretation of violence” (Coady 1985: 2). Clarifying the “restricted” definition of violence, T. Coady points to an important feature of violence: “actions aimed at causing harm are usually intentional” (Coady 1985: 8). Later, the theorist admits cases of non-physical harm as manifestations of violence: “...the decision as to whether we allow the non-metaphorical use of the term ‘violence’ in psychological cases will depend on whether we can realistically consider some of these cases as involving the use of force” (Coady

⁴ This working definition of violence is semantically close to the content of the concept of aggression, but it is not identical to it. Violence is viewed as primarily acts of physical force, while aggression allows for the inclusion of both physical and verbal aggression.

1985: 14). Situations in which causing harm – that is, physical, material, psychological, and other damage – is desirable or inevitable are not considered manifestations of violence (see, for example, Hamby 2017: 171–173, Jacquette 2013). This makes it possible to analytically compare the scientific approach to understanding violence proposed by the social sciences with lay perceptions of it: everyday assessments of violence are also based on such characteristics of an act as the intentionality of causing harm and its normative evaluation.

Contemporary empirical studies of the determinants of lay conceptions of violence focus on topics that are in one way or another related to violence: blame attribution (Alicke 2000, Cushman 2014, Shaver 2012), responsibility (Fincham & Jaspars 1980, Fincham & Emery 1988), and moral evaluation (Monroe & Malle 2019, Malle et al. 2014, Gray et al. 2012). With the exception of a number of studies devoted directly to violence (Barlow 2013, Larsson & Gill 2013), the field of research focuses primarily on the concept of harm. In any case, with rare exceptions (Holmes 1973, Runkle 1976, Wyckoff 2013), violence is theorized largely in technical and instrumental terms, as if it arose out of nothing – that is, in isolation from the moral conflict that accompanies it. Donald Black identifies this problem and attempts to partially overcome it. In his work *Moral Time*, devoted to the mechanisms of everyday reactions to moral conflicts, he argues that all violence arises as a result of too rapid or too radical changes in social time (Black 2011). This work is important in the context of the dissertation, as Black is one of the few authors to offer a theoretical conceptualization of normative lay judgments about conflict and violence, which is rarely done by researchers in the context of attribution theory.

Violence thus appears not only as a category of philosophical, legal, or political theoretical analysis, but also as a sociologically significant phenomenon, the theoretical conceptualizations of which are closely linked to the concepts of conflict, social regulation, and moral evaluation. Its theoretical understanding in the social sciences requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account both physical and non-physical forms of its manifestation. Despite the existing diversity of theoretical views on the subject of violence, most approaches agree that violence is inseparable from the social context in which it occurs and from the moral interpretation that accompanies it. The comprehensive theoretical and methodological approach to the study of violence proposed in this study therefore necessarily takes into account both the scientific conceptualizations of the concept proposed by social theory and people's everyday perceptions of the phenomenon.

Methodology

The dissertation research is devoted to the concept of violence in social theory and lay perceptions; its key task is to propose and test a methodological approach for assessing the factors that determine lay perceptions of violence. The work involves, on the one hand, identifying key elements of the conceptualization of violence in social theory and, on the other hand, searching for determinants that condition lay perceptions of violence. This, in turn, makes it possible to propose the outlines of the grounds on which it is possible to compare two views on the category of violence – scientific and lay.

The study was conducted using a quantitative methodology based on a factorial experiment with text vignettes (Rossi & Anderson 1982, Wallander 2009). Unlike classical surveys, this research design allows us to trace the causal links between experimental factors and experimental responses. The use of the proposed methodology greatly simplifies the tracking of the effects of interaction between factors and the influence that their various combinations have on subjective assessments of situations.

The experimental part of the dissertation presents three studies, the overall objective of which is to test the methodology proposed on the basis of the theoretical review and to refine the connections identified at the theoretical stage. *Study 1* includes three experimental factors (see below) and three dependent variables: lay assessment of the violence of an act, as well as moral and legal assessment. *Study 2* includes three experimental factors (see below) and one dependent variable: lay assessment of the violence of the act. *Study 3* forms a variable part of 48 vignettes in which 5 factors vary (see below) – the situations described in the vignettes are given 5 lay assessments: lay assessment of violence, moral and legal assessment, assessment of the severity of consequences, and blame attribution.

Several factors are considered that potentially determine the lay assessment of violence.

Moral Time. This factor is directly related to D. Black's model of moral time (2011). By relational time, he means direct social closeness, such as the closeness of spouses, colleagues, or friends; by vertical time, he means social stratification, such as differences in income among the population; and by cultural time, he means value and normative differences, such as those between representatives of different ethnic and national backgrounds. Black shows that changes in moral time occurring in the relational, vertical, or cultural dimensions are perceived and collectively evaluated regardless of their belonging to one dimension or another. This factor is presented in the design of *Study 1* and *Study 2*.

Institutional Context. This factor sets the institutional context for the social interaction taking place, describing the situational conditions in which it occurs. This factor is related to previous studies that convincingly show that attribution of blame can vary significantly depending on the institutional context (Uttich & Lombrozo 2010, Deviatko & Gavrilov 2020). This factor is represented in the design of *Study 3*.

Initial Social Distance. This factor describes the degree of social distance between agents, understood as an element of “horizontal time” according to D. Black's theory (2011). According to his ideas, transgression in social relations, in which actors are separated by a large social distance, is perceived more acutely. This is due to the intensity of the changes occurring in the distance between the subject and the recipient: when it increases or decreases sharply. This factor is represented in the design of *Study 1*, *Study 2*, and *Study 3*.

Intensity of the Preceding Conflict. This factor explains the presence of a conflict history, i.e., an explicit motive for the “culpable” action related to the preceding interaction between the actors. The factor is closely related to studies showing that the intensity of verbal exchanges affects the everyday assessment of harm – the more pronounced the contradictions between the subjects, the higher it is (Bleske-Rechek et al. 2023). The factor is presented in the design of *Study 3*.

Degree of Intentionality of Action. This factor describes the presence of intent to carry out a potentially violent action on the part of one of the agents. The factor follows a long research tradition linking the intentionality of an action and its subjective normative assessment (see, for example, Gray et al. 2012, Ames & Fiske 2013). This factor is represented in the design of *Study 3*.

Harm to Third Parties. This factor describes whether the agent's action causes harm to third parties who are not directly represented in the interaction situation. This factor is based on D. Black's (2011) hypothesis, which shows that an action is generally perceived as a more serious transgression if it affects not only the subject and object of the action, but also third parties. This factor is presented in the design of *Study 1*.

Type of Harm. This factor describes the type of harm caused during the interaction described. This factor is based on research that systematically shows that everyday evaluations of actions are determined by the type of harm caused to the recipient (Deviatko & Gavrilov 2020, Williams et al. 2012, Sikström et al. 2021). The factor is represented in the design of *Study 2* and *Study 3*.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of the study is to propose and test a methodological approach that allows for the assessment of factors determining lay perceptions of violence, based on a reconstruction of the conceptualization of violence in social theory and a systematization of the determinants of lay perceptions of violence.

The aim is also detailed in a number of research objectives directly related to the implementation of the theoretical (objectives 1, 2) and empirical (objectives 3, 4, 5) parts of the study.

Objective 1. Trace the transformations in the logic of the theoretical interpretation of violence in social theory, highlighting the key elements of classical and “new” conceptualizations of violence; present a theoretical systematization of scientific approaches to understanding violence that is sensitive to changes in the ways it is conceptualized in the social sciences.

Objective 2. Theoretically systematize and identify the key determinants of lay perceptions of violence based on existing studies devoted to models of everyday perceptions of the degree of violence of actions, the severity of consequences, blame attribution, and moral and legal assessment.

Objective 3. Identify the normative-evaluative component in lay judgments expressed in assessments of violence and establish how it is related to other lay normative-evaluative judgments about the situation: its moral and legal assessment, assessment of the severity of consequences, and attribution of blame.

Objective 4. Based on D. Black's concept of “moral time” and other models of everyday moral judgments, develop a methodological approach to the study of lay normative-evaluative judgments about violence based on experimental modeling of interpersonal social interactions, and test it by assessing the influence that experimental factors have on lay assessments of violence, establishing both the presence or absence of a connection between each factor and lay assessments of violence, and the direction and magnitude of the effect in cases where there is a connection between the factor and normative-evaluative judgments about violence.

Objective 5. To determine the impact of experimental factors on other lay assessments: assessment of the severity of the consequences of an act, blame attribution, moral and legal assessment.

Hypotheses

1. It is assumed that, at the interpersonal level, lay assessments of the violence of an act, the presumed severity of its consequences, the degree of blame attributed to it, and moral and legal assessments of the act will be strongly and positively correlated (see, for example, Trémolière & Djeriouat 2016). On the one hand, ideas about violence, the presumed severity of consequences, the degree of blame, and the moral and legal aspects of an act are quite closely related in everyday thinking; at the same time, these are conceptually different ideas, which are expected to be expressed in similar but not identical assessments.

2. Lay assessments of violence are influenced by information about the characteristics of the social situation in which the violence manifests itself, as presented by the person assessing it: the degree of intentionality of the action and the type of harm. If the subject acts intentionally, with the intention of causing harm to the recipient, the action is assessed as more violent. If the subject acts accidentally and unintentionally, without intending to cause harm to the recipient, the action is assessed as less violent (see, for example, Knobe 2003, Ames & Fiske 2013, Malle et al. 2014). If no harm is done to the recipient, the action will not be assessed as violent, but if the recipient suffers physical (bodily) harm or material damage, the action is assessed as more violent (Deviatko & Gavrilov 2020).

3. Experimental factors are expected to influence other lay normative assessments as well: assessment of the severity of consequences, attribution of blame, moral and legal assessment. Among other things, the initial social distance determines lay moral and legal assessment (Black 2011): in situations where the initial distance between the agent and the recipient is greater, the action will receive stricter moral and legal assessments. Based on the provisions of attribution theory, it is expected that the type of harm and the degree of intentionality of the action will determine lay normative assessments of the action.

Contribution to the Discussion of the Problem in Existing Literature

The proposed study allows, as shown above, to achieve a number of scientifically significant results.

1. First, a new theoretical systematization of scientific approaches to understanding violence is presented, which is sensitive to changes in the ways it is conceptualized in the social sciences. Second, an original research approach to conceptualizing violence as a complex phenomenon is proposed, the understanding of which cannot be reduced to its taxonomies alone – key elements of its conceptualization are identified, which can be refined and supplemented in the future. Third, for the first time, a theoretical review of the few theoretical and empirical studies devoted to the determinants of lay perceptions of violence is proposed, on the basis of which key situational factors influencing lay assessments of violence in interpersonal interaction are identified.

2. From the point of the empirical part of the study, it is of scientific and practical importance to demonstrate the possibility of using factorial experimental surveys to identify the determinants of lay perceptions of violence. For the first time, a methodological approach has been developed and tested aimed at studying lay assessments of the violence of actions of social actors leading to intentional or unintended negative consequences for others, taking into account the proposed conceptualizations of the phenomenon of violence in the social sciences. The use demonstrated which experimental factors, carrying information about the social situation of interpersonal interaction, determine the lay assessment of violence – it is shown that such factors are the degree of intentionality of the action and the type of harm. Moreover, it has been further clarified how experimental factors determine other common assessments of a normatively ambiguous situation: assessment of the severity of consequences, blame attribution, moral and legal assessment, and how these assessments are related to each other.

3. The tested approach made it possible for the first time to propose grounds for comparing perceptions of violence in theoretical discourse and lay perceptions. The chosen research logic revealed one of the key differences between the two views on violence, related to the position of physical harm in the definition of violence. It has been shown that while modern social theory considers non-physical forms of violence on a par with physical ones, in lay perceptions the degree of violence of the two forms remains differentiated.

4. Finally, the proposed dissertation develops the direction of fundamental theoretical research into the phenomenon of interpersonal violence, which has only just begun to emerge in the contemporary Russian-language sociological tradition (see, for example, Huseynov 1994, Dmitriev & Zalysin 2000, Kapustin 2003). While the theoretical discussion focuses mainly on violence as such – interstate, intergroup, and interpersonal violence are often considered together, without

differentiation, this dissertation proposes a theoretical and methodological approach to conceptualizing interpersonal violence, which in the future could be extended to other types of violence. For the first time, a comparison of scientific and everyday ideas about interpersonal violence is proposed, which has the potential to enrich the existing theoretical discussion on the conceptualization of the concept.

Defense Statements

Based on the results of the dissertation research, the following provisions are submitted for defense:

1. Theoretical conceptualizations of violence can be reasonably classified on the basis of “classical” – “new”, depending on their positions in relation to the act of violence, the subject and object of violence, and the model used to explain it. The “classical” conceptualizations of violence focus on the observed and directed physical act. In turn, the “new” conceptualizations of violence, which have been actively developing since the middle of the 20th century, suggest that violence should include systemic forms of oppression that are not directly observable. The theoretical approaches to conceptualizing violence proposed by social theory in the 20th and 21st centuries radically expand the concept of violence to include acts not associated with physical harm.

2. The determinants of lay perceptions of violence can be described within the framework of the approach proposed by attribution theory and theories describing everyday reactions to conflicts of a moral nature, although in comparison with other normative assessments, for example, blame attribution or attribution of responsibility, they rarely become its direct subject. Situational factors inherent in the assessed situation of interpersonal interaction make a greater contribution to lay perceptions of violence in comparison with the individual characteristics of the evaluator. Such factors include: the degree of intentionality of the action and the intention of the agent, the physical nature of the action and the associated physical harm, the legitimacy and permissibility of the action, the moral reprehensibility of the action.

3. The conceptualization of violence, which is entrenched in the discourse of social sciences, is based on the idea of it as a deliberate action directed at an individual or group of individuals in order to cause harm. This allows us to analytically compare the scientific approach to understanding violence with everyday ideas about it, in which the key feature is also the intentionality of harm.

4. The methodology of the factor experiment makes it possible to assess the influence of factors presented in the form of information cues about the situation of interpersonal interaction on the lay assessment of the violence of actors' actions. With the help of experimental studies (*Study 1*, *Study 2*, *Study 3*), the following conclusions were obtained about the assessments of social interaction

in which violence manifests itself: firstly, the ordinary assessment of violence is positively associated with other normative value judgments, and secondly, intentional actions resulting in physical harm are assessed as more violent than others.

5. The lay concepts of violence, which form part of normative representations, differ from the “new” approaches to conceptualizing the notion in social theory, focusing, among other things, on non-physical, symbolic and structural forms of violence and often leading to an expanded theoretical interpretation of the latter. Lay assessments of violence are more sensitive to physical harm and intentional harm, which brings them closer to “classical” theoretical approaches.

Main Content of the Study and its Results

The introduction of the dissertation research substantiates its relevance, poses a research problem and formulates a research question, characterizes the degree of development of the problem, summarizes the main theoretical and methodological foundations of the research, formulates its aim and related objectives, object and subject, presents the working hypotheses of the dissertation research and the defense statements.

The first chapter presents a conceptual analysis of the theoretical foundations of violence research in the social sciences. The first section presents the problematization of theoretical conceptualizations of violence in the light of the discursive division of “social order” and “social conflict” in social theory (Alexander 1982: 90-92). In the second paragraph, the outlines of a meta-theoretical approach to conceptualizing violence in social and political theory are proposed. The author identifies the analytical categories of “classical” and “new” violence, described taking into account the different elements of its conceptualizations: the act of violence, the subject and object of violence, and the model used to explain it. This analytical operation allows tracing the main transformations committed in the ways of theoretical description and explanation of violence in the XX – XXI centuries. A theoretical conceptualization of the transformations of the concept of “violence” in social theory is presented, as a result of which the main differences between “classical” and “new” violence are formulated (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Line of comparison	“Classical” violence	“New” violence
Specificity of action	Extremely public and fundamentally observable act of directed and material application of will	Unobserved and unobserved sporadic and/or systemic manifestations of determination, including non-material
Subject of violence	Specific and tangible actor: human being, holistic community or state	Indefinable and subjectless structure or subject, constructed by violence and not existing before it
Object of violence	Aware of what is happening and able to label actions as violent	May be deprived of reflexivity of violence due to systemic repression, not always willing to stop the violence being perpetrated
Models of explanation	Violence as a tool for creating and maintaining social order, canalizing aggressive human urges, and a formative force for community	Violence as a destroyer of politics, deepening dissociation, and violence in the guise of good intentions

The second chapter of the dissertation provides a justification for the choice of experimental factors that determine everyday perceptions of violence – cues about the characteristics of the social situation of the manifestation of violence at the microlevel. A theoretical review of previous studies of lay perceptions of violence aims to identify key factors influencing what people will evaluate as violence in interpersonal interaction. The rationale is based, among other things, on new concepts linking everyday ideas about violence with conflicts of a moral nature, with mechanisms for attributing blame and assessing the severity of their consequences. In the first paragraph, based on a systematic review, several key situational factors are identified that determine the common perception of violence, including: the degree of intentionality of an action and intention, physical action and associated physical harm, the legitimacy and permissibility of violence, and its moral reprehensibility. The second paragraph presents factors such as moral time, initial social distance, harm to third parties, and the type of harm. In the third paragraph, the institutional context, the initial social distance, the degree of intensity of the previous conflict, the degree of intentionality of the action and the type of harm are considered among such factors.

The third chapter, based on the previous tradition of researching everyday ideas, including normative and evaluative judgments about conflict situations at the micro level, proposes a methodology for empirical research, describes the procedure, and describes the main results. The interpretation of the main research results and their discussion are proposed. The first paragraph outlines the results of *Study 1*, the second *Study 2*, and the third *Study 3*.

The sample of *Study 1* consists of 136 people: 66.2% of them are women, the average age is 21.76 years. The sample of *Study 2* includes 270 people: 72.6% of them are women, the average age is 23.68 years. The sample of *Study 3* is 654 people: 50.9% of them are women, the average age is 26.91 years.

It is shown that lay assessments of violence are strongly and positively correlated with other ordinary normative assessments. These results indicate a strong positive relationship between lay assessments, but also that normative value judgments should not be reduced to one general indicator. *Study 3* showed that the common assessment of violence is determined by the degree of intentionality of the action ($F = 651.6, p < .001, n_p^2 = .504$). This factor turns out to be, along with the type of harm ($F = 12.2, p < .001, n_p^2 = .037$), among those that have the greatest effect on the lay assessment of violence. At the same time, the pairwise interaction of the factors *Degree of Intentionality of the Action* and *Type of Harm* also turns out to be significant ($F = 3.6, p < .05, n_p^2 = .011$), it is shown in Fig. 1.

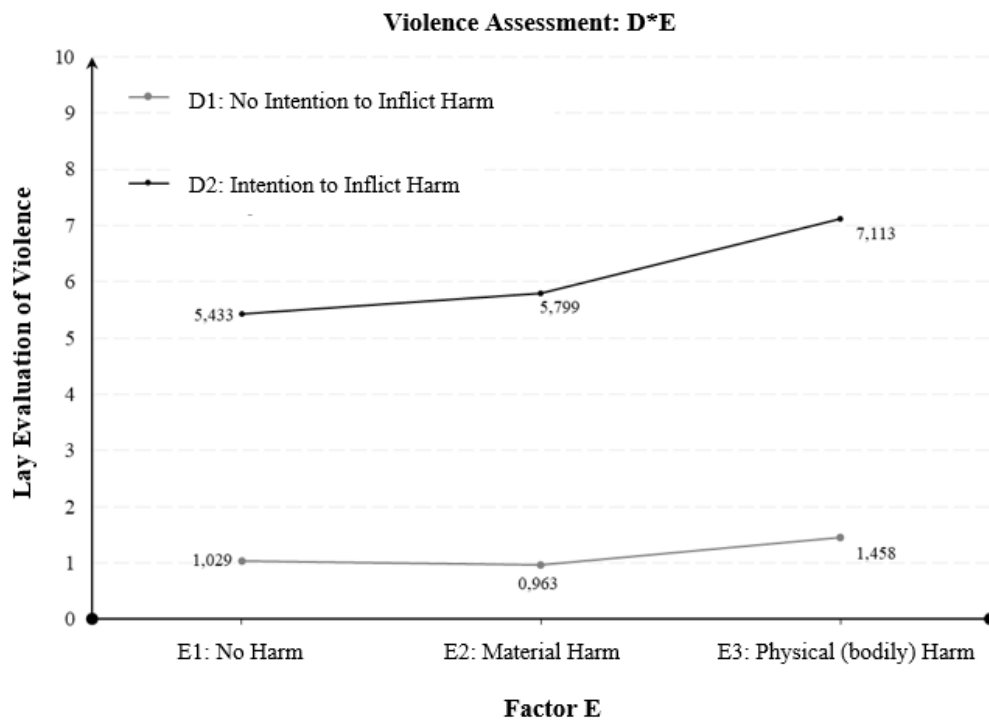


Figure 1. Assessment of Violence Interaction of Effects D Degree of Intentionality of Action * E Type of Harm.

An act is assessed as more violent if there is an intention to harm, compared with its absence. The act is assessed as more violent in the case of physical harm, in comparison with material harm or lack of harm. It is important to note that estimates of violence do not statistically differ between situations in which material harm has been inflicted and no harm has been inflicted, respectively. *Study 2* also shows that higher levels of violence are associated with actions that potentially cause physical rather than moral harm.

Empirical *Study 1* shows that the common assessment of violence is determined by the factor *Initial Social Distance* ($F = 33.081, p < .001, n_p^2 = .197$). At the same time, the assessment of the violence of an act increases significantly in cases where there is a greater initial social distance between the agent and the recipient. *Study 1* ($F = 46.566, p < .001, n_p^2 = .256$) and *Study 3* ($F = 10.8, p < .001, n_p^2 = .017$) showed that the initial social distance determines the usual legal assessment. In *Study 1*, it was found that the agent who committed the act should, according to common estimates, bear more legal responsibility in the case of a larger initial distance than a small one. A similar direction of communication persists in *Study 3*: for a greater social distance and a smaller one, respectively.

In conclusion, the limitations and prospects of the presented dissertation research are outlined. Among the limitations are the relatively small effect sizes obtained, the limitations of the research design focusing on interpersonal violence, and the specifics of the chosen factor survey methodology. In addition, the text discusses the limitations of the validity of statistical conclusions related to the characteristics of the samples in the three empirical studies presented. At the same time, the prospects include the possibility of further clarifying theoretical conceptualizations of violence and expanding the set of studied ways of violence manifestation.

The conclusion also summarizes the brief results of the dissertation research, noting the basis for a possible difference between theoretical and everyday ideas about violence. While modern social, sociological, and political theory expand the concept by introducing new non-physical forms of violence into the understanding – psychological, symbolic, cultural, and structural violence; the key criteria for defining violence in lay judgment remain the intentionality of the action and physical harm.

List of Publications of the Author, in which the Main Results are Reflected

Rodionova M. M., Smirnov N. M. Ship of Theseus: transformations of the concept of violence in political and social theory // *Politya: Analysis. Chronicle. Forecast*. 2022. No. 3. PP. 6-27. doi: 10.30570/2078-5089-2022-106-3-6-27

Rodionova M. M. Social theory on Lacan's couch: categories of violence, social order and “other” sociology / *Philosophy. Journal of the Higher School of Economics* [accepted for printing]

Rodionova M. M. Babylonian Tower: a theoretical review of social determinants of everyday perceptions of interpersonal violence / *Sociology of Power* [accepted for printing]

Rodionova M. M. Trauma of the Academy: in attempts of idiorhythmic contextualization // *INTERaction. INTERview. Interpretation*. 2022. Vol. 14. No. 4. PP. 10-28. doi: 10.19181/inter.2022.14.4.1

Gulevich O. A, Rodionova M. M. Procedural justice and attitude to the political system: the role of perceived external threats // *Politya: Analysis. Chronicle. Forecast*. 2025. No. 1. Vol. 116. PP. 83-105. doi: 10.30570/2078-5089-2025-116-1-83-105

Gulevich O., Borovikova J., Rodionova M. The Relationship between Political Procedural Justice and Attitudes toward the Political System: A Meta-analysis // *Political Psychology*. 2024. Vol. 45. No. 3. P. 537–557. doi: 10.1111/pops.12936

Zernova I., Rodionova M. Lay Attribution of Agency and Responsibility to AI- and Remotely Piloted Drones in Military Context: Vignette Experiment in Russia // *Monitoring Obshchestvennogo Mneniya: Ekonomicheskije i Sotsial'nye Peremeny*. 2025. doi: 10.14515/monitoring.2025.3.2725

Approbation of the Research Results at Conferences and Public Speeches

The results of the study are presented in the following conferences:

[2024] XXII International Conference of Young Scientists “Vectors” (Moscow). Paper: Comprehension of violence in social and political theory of XX-XXI centuries: is there a place for paradox? (Section: “Post tenebras lux: symptomology of violence and autonasiliy”)

[2023] XXI International Conference of Young Scientists “Vectors” (Moscow). Paper: Trauma of the academy: in attempts of idiorhythmic contextualization

[2021] Interpersonal Violence Interventions - Social and Cultural Perspectives Conference (IPVI) (Jyväskylä). Report: Lay judgments about violence in various social situations: results of vignette scenario-based experiments

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