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Self-evaluation in a naturalistic context: The case of juvenile offenders

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The authors investigated how self-evaluation motives (self-enhancement, self-assessment, self-verification, self-improvement – and also self-diminishment and no information) shape self-knowledge preferences in male incarcerated juvenile offenders (IJOs). IJOs responded to questions on how much they would like to receive and actually received each of six types of feedback (positive, truthful, improving, consistent, negative and no feedback) from each of six sources (teachers, parents, siblings, best friend, girlfriend and behavioural specialists or psychologists). IJOs disliked negative feedback and the lack of feedback. They preferred truthful feedback to consistent feedback, and received truthful and positive feedback more frequently than improving feedback. Additionally, they received more negative or no feedback from parents than they would like. Finally, IJOs expressed a preference for receiving more improving feedback from their girlfriends than they did. The study highlights the interplay of self-evaluation motives in IJOs and opens up promising research and rehabilitation directions.

A fundamental epistemic concern is the pursuit of self-knowledge. This pursuit is guided by motives, to which we refer as self-evaluation motives. These motives influence not only the kind of information that individuals seek out, but also the way in which they judge, accept or reject and remember this information. Prior research has identified four self-evaluation motives: self-enhancement, self-assessment, self-verification and self-improvement (Sedikides & Gregg, 2003; Sedikides & Strube, 1995). The *self-enhancement motive* refers to striving for a more positive self-concept and protecting the self from negative feedback. This motive is thought to contribute to a relatively high level of self-esteem. The *self-assessment* motive refers to strivings for an accurate and objective image of the self. This motive is thought to reduce uncertainty about aspects of the self. The *self-verification motive* refers to preference for information that is consistent with existing self-conceptions. This motive is assumed to promote a sense of

control and predictability. Lastly, the *self-improvement motive* reflects a genuine desire to improve traits or abilities. The quest for self-improvement is assumed to confer a sense of progress and growth.

Substantial evidence exists to document the presence of each of these four motives as well as their functional importance for the self (Sedikides & Strube, 1997; Swann, Rentfrow, & Guinn, 2002; Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995; Trope, 1986). Although an abundance of research exists on the ways in which self-evaluation motives guide self-knowledge preferences, this research has two major weaknesses: it is, almost exclusively, confined to the laboratory and to adult populations. The over-arching objective of this investigation is to remedy these weaknesses. In recognition of the renewed emphasis on the study of self-evaluation across a wide range of situations (Bonanno, Field, Kovacevic, & Kaltman, 2002; Fleury, Sedikides, & Donovan, 2002; Tomich & Helgeson, 2004), we examine self-evaluation motives in a naturalistic setting (i.e. prison population). Furthermore, in recognizing that little is known about self-evaluation motives among younger populations, we direct our attention to an adolescent population. We believe that motivation does matter in such a population: whether individuals hold a learning or achievement goal has notable consequences for the positivity of their self-concept (Dweck, Higgins, & Grant-Pillow, 2003; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Ruble & Frey, 1991). Thus, research into self-evaluation motives can provide insights into not only self-knowledge preferences but also the consequences of such preferences for the self-system. In summary, we investigated how self-evaluation motives direct self-knowledge preferences, focusing on a particular male adolescent population: incarcerated juvenile offenders (IJO).

Self-evaluation motives in incarcerated juvenile offenders

Adolescence is a developmental period in which the search for self-knowledge is a primary concern. A rich history of research on identity status points to the relevance of exploration and commitment processes pivotal to identity formation during this period (Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; Erikson, 1982). Exploration, in particular, necessitates a search for self-knowledge in order for the individual to gain insight both into one's self and one's possible selves (i.e. the various personas and roles that the adolescent is considering for the future). By implication, the four self-evaluation motives should be particularly active during adolescence.

Self-evaluation in juvenile delinquents is an especially important issue. Psychologists have long studied the link between self-esteem and delinquency (Emler, 2001; Emler & Hopkins, 1990; Emler & Reicher, 1995). However, findings have been contradictory: some studies report relatively low self-esteem among delinquent youth (Mason, 2001; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 1978), other studies report that there is no relation between self-esteem and delinquency (Oyserman & Markus, 1990; Wells & Rankin, 1983) and still other studies report relatively high self-esteem among delinquent youth (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; Jankowski, 1991). In a further variation on this theme, aggression and hostility have been linked to unstable high self-esteem: individuals with high but frail self-esteem respond aggressively to perceived insult (Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1989; Kernis & Waschull, 1995). Hence, juvenile delinquents may have high, fragile self-esteem.

Recently, Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs (2003) concluded that self-esteem alone provides insufficient insight into delinquent or aggressive behaviour. Instead, it is important to consider additional variables. Our investigation approaches

self-evaluation among delinquent adolescents from a distinctly different angle. Rather than focusing on the positivity of self-evaluation, we explored IJOs' perceptions of self-related information. What type of feedback do IJOs receive and what type of feedback would they like to receive? Do IJOs report that they typically receive negative (i.e. criticism) or positive (i.e. praise) feedback from others? Do IJOs wish to hear only positive feedback?

More generally, we examined the presence and prevalence of the self-evaluation motives in IJOs. We asked two main questions. First, is each self-evaluation motive active? That is, are IJOs motivated to self-enhance, self-assess, self-verify and self-improve? Second, what is the *relative prevalence* of the four self-evaluation motives? That is, are some self-evaluation motives more powerful in guiding the self-knowledge preferences of IJOs than other motives? The lack of relevant research and lack of a non-incarcerated comparison group led us to take an exploratory approach. Nevertheless, we expected that the therapeutic demands of the Youth Development Center environment coupled with the developmental tasks of adolescence would serve to activate multiple self-evaluation motives in IJOs. To consider this possibility, we present a more detailed discussion of the adult literature on the self-evaluation motives and link this literature to IJOs. Also, we articulate additional purposes of our research.

Self-enhancement

Adults manifest several biases that serve to enhance the positivity of the self. For example, they spend more time processing positive than negative feedback (Baumeister & Cairns, 1992), remember favourable feedback better than unfavourable feedback (Sedikides & Green, 2000) and take credit for their successes while denying responsibility for their failures (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999). Sedikides (1993) reported evidence that self-enhancement concerns are more potent than self-verification or self-assessment concerns when participants are in an information-gathering mode.

Self-enhancement serves to maintain a relatively high level of self-esteem (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989; Sedikides & Strube, 1997). Given that the self-enhancement motive is so pervasive in adults and given the universal human need for high self-regard (Brown & Kobayashi, 2002; Kobayashi & Brown, 2003; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005; but see Heine, 2005; Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama 1999), we expected that this motive would strongly influence the self-knowledge preferences of IJOs.

Self-verification

Research on adults is also supportive of the self-verification motive. Adults solicit self-confirming rather than self-disconfirming feedback from interaction partners (Swann & Read, 1981a) and selectively recall information that is consistent with their self-concept (Swann & Read, 1981b), while attributing self-disconfirming behaviours to situational factors (Kulik, Sledge, & Mahler, 1986). In addition, young adolescents display a preference for feedback consistent with their self-perceptions (Cassidy, Ziv, Mehta, & Feeney, 2003), evidence for the presence of self-verification motives in younger populations.

As stated previously, the primary function of self-verification is to afford controllability and predictability to the social world. For adolescents in general, developmental transitions (e.g. physical changes, joining other schools and shifting allegiances among friendship networks) and looming uncertainties about the future may activate the self-verification motive. Incarcerated youth, in particular, face additional

threats to their sense of control. Their behaviour within the Youth Development Centre is strongly regulated by others. In our study, over half felt that they had little or no control over entering the Youth Development Centre. Hence, IJOs may be especially motivated to seek information that is consistent with their self-concept in order to reintroduce a feeling of control into their lives.

Self-assessment

The self-assessment motive is most typically observed in preferences for highly diagnostic achievement tasks (Strube & Roemmele, 1985; Trope, 1979, 1982). Highly diagnostic tasks (e.g. standardized tests) provide individuals with accurate feedback regarding their relative standing on personality characteristics (i.e. skills, abilities or attributes). Preference for such tasks indicates the desire for uncertainty reduction. Indeed, the self-assessment motive is activated in the face of uncertainty about one's personality characteristics.

Harter (1986, 2002) found that adolescents were more likely than children to report perceiving characteristics within the self as opposites. For example, an adolescent may report being shy in one situation, outgoing in another and that these two 'selves' are conflicting. Such perceptions were accompanied by feelings of confusion. Thus, the self-assessment motive may also be prevalent during adolescence, given that the motive follows from the desire to reduce feelings of confusion. For IJOs, self-assessment may be even more pressing. In reference to our study, the treatment objectives in the Youth Development Centre were to encourage IJOs to acknowledge their crime, take responsibility for their actions and understand the suffering that they caused to their victims. These goals presuppose an accurate perception of the self as an instigator of behaviour.

Self-improvement

The self-improvement motive is distinct from other motives in its orientation towards the future (Dweck, 1999; Pemberton & Sedikides, 2001; Sedikides, 1999). Individuals choose tasks (Taylor *et al.*, 1995) or social comparison targets (Collins, 1996) with an eye towards personal improvement. For example, cancer patients make upward comparisons when selecting interaction partners among other cancer patients, a choice that is assumed to reflect an attempt to acquire more effective coping strategies (Van der Zee, Oldersma, Buunk, & Bos, 1998).

The improvement motive is likely to be potent among incarcerated youth. The treatment objectives in the Youth Development Centre were formulated to discourage further offending and, hence, improve future behaviour. With incarceration serving as evidence of their failure to meet social goals, IJOs may have shifted their attentional orientation, reinvesting their hopes and aspirations in the future.

Other motives

The special circumstances of IJOs raised additional issues. The participants in the current study entered treatment with negative backgrounds. The majority had witnessed or been a victim of multiple violent events (Shahinfar, Kupersmidt, & Matza, 2001). Many participants came from families with a history of criminal behaviour. Hence, participants had probably experienced either verbal or physical abuse. A negative social environment may in fact be common among many IJOs. Consistent feedback, for these offenders, may mean self-diminishing feedback. To explore this possibility we assessed preferences for, and receipt of, negative feedback.

Alternatively, IJOs may have experienced a lack of social feedback. Lack of parental monitoring and supervision is a predictor of delinquent behaviour (Jacobson & Crockett, 2000; Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984), raising the possibility that low levels of parental supervision contributed to the delinquency of some of the participants. In the current study, about 70% of participants came from single-parent families, which may face greater difficulties in fully monitoring adolescents' behaviour. In short, prior to their incarceration, a relatively high proportion of these adolescents may have not received enough guidance and feedback from adult sources. Hence, they may think that the absence of self-relevant information (i.e. the absence of constraints and discipline) is normal. Consequently, IJOs may actually prefer no feedback. By considering preferences for negative feedback as well as no feedback, we extended the scope of the current study beyond the traditional four self-evaluation motives.

Source of feedback

Another novel contribution of this study rests in our explicit acknowledgement that the source of feedback matters. Pre-adolescent children report seeking different types of social support from various sources in their social network (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). Adolescents may attempt to compensate for low support from one source by seeking more support from another (van Aken & Asendorpf, 1997). Because peers and adults occupy different roles in adolescents' lives, we might expect both desired and received feedback to vary across sources. This point is particularly relevant in the case of IJOs, who may receive quite different feedback from teachers, parents, siblings, best friends, romantic partners and psychologists. For example, IJOs may receive self-verifying feedback from best friends, self-enhancing feedback from romantic partners and self-improving feedback from teachers or psychologists. We also examined the possibility that the type of feedback sought varies as a function of the feedback source. For example, IJOs may report that positive feedback from peers is more desirable than positive feedback from adult figures.

Preferred versus received feedback

Additionally, we distinguished between preferred and received feedback. Social self-discrepancy theory emphasizes that the discrepancy between actual and ideal social circumstances is of key importance in considering negative outcomes (Kupersmidt, Buchele, Voegler, & Sedikides, 1996; Kupersmidt, Sigda, Sedikides, & Voegler, 1999). In the current study, we explored discrepancies between actual feedback received on the one hand and preferred (ideal) feedback on the other. The discrepancy between the two is particularly germane in the case of IJOs. For example, they may prefer self-enhancing feedback but instead receive self-diminishing feedback. Thus, we examined whether such discrepancies differed as a function of source and type of feedback.

IJOs have clearly experienced negative outcomes. They are imprisoned for having committed crimes and the majority report negative life experiences. These contextual factors prompted us to expect significant discrepancies between actual and ideal circumstances in these adolescents' lives. Due to lack of informative literature, however, we took an exploratory approach regarding differences in discrepancy scores across sources.

Overview

We asked participants to indicate their preferences for various types of feedback from different people in their lives (e.g. best friends, romantic partners and teachers). We also

asked participants about the feedback that they actually received from these differing sources. The questions focused on role-specific feedback from each source. For example, 'My teachers tell me how to get better at my schoolwork' assessed improving feedback from teachers. Of key interest was the presence and relative prevalence of the four major self-evaluation motives (self-enhancement, self-verification, self-assessment and self-improvement) as well as of two additional motives (self-diminishment and no information) in self-relevant feedback that IJOs prefer and receive. We operationalized self-enhancement in terms of positive feedback, self-assessment in terms of truthful feedback, self-improvement in terms of improving feedback, self-verification in terms of consistent feedback, self-diminishment in terms of negative feedback and no information in terms of no feedback. We investigated the discrepancy between ideal and actual levels of feedback by subtracting participants' level of preferred feedback from the level of received feedback across the six motives.

Method

Participants

Participants were 110 male juvenile offenders between the ages of 13 and 17, incarcerated in a secure Youth Development Centre environment in the southern United States. The current study includes only those adolescents who completed two questionnaires assessing self-evaluation motives. This limitation lowered the sample size to 45. (Details on the full sample are available in Shahinfar *et al.*, 2001.) The considerable drop in sample size was primarily due to participants who completed only one or neither of the questionnaires ($N = 43$) because of scheduled releases from confinement that occurred over the course of the assessment procedure. The drop in sample size was also due to some participants skipping items within the questionnaires ($N = 22$).[1] Participants in the current study were on average 15.5 years of age ($SD = 1.1$). In terms of ethnicity, 71% of the participants were African-American and 29% were white.

Procedure

The Youth Development Center included measures of preferred and received feedback in a clinical assessment system of which the primary purpose was treatment planning. The Youth Development Centre staff and consultants supervised and trained adult assistants to conduct the clinical assessments. The assistants read aloud the questions and response choices to small groups of participants. Each participant marked his answer on his own questionnaire. The assistants administered questionnaires individually to participants who required greater assistance with reading. The assistants also allowed participants to complete the questionnaires individually if they had missed portions of the group administration due to time constraints or scheduling conflicts.

The assessment system was administered over several different sessions. Preferred feedback was assessed in a separate administration session than received feedback. Participants were told that the questionnaires would assist their psychologist in the formulation of their treatment plan. The North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP) provided us with access to the data, which were presented as anonymous archival records.

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[1] *We chose to include only those participants with data across all analyses in our sample. Using all available participants for each separate analysis (N= 70 for preferred feedback; N= 65 for received feedback) produces identical results in terms of the statistical significance of all main effects and interactions.*

Measures

Preferred feedback

We determined participants' feedback preferences by asking them to rate how much they would like to receive each of six possible types of feedback from each of six possible sources. The feedback types included: positive, truthful, improving, consistent, negative and no feedback. The sources of feedback included teachers, parents, siblings, best friend, girlfriend and behavioural specialists or psychologists.

The specific questions appear in Appendix A. The questions asked for role-specific feedback. Responses ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 3 (*a lot*). To illustrate, the full set of questions for parents are reproduced below with the type of feedback indicated in parentheses. Participants were provided with the question but not the underlying type of feedback.

I want my parent or the adults who have helped raised me to tell me . . .
  I am a great son. (*Self-enhancing*)
  The truth about how good a son I am. (*Self-assessing*)
  How to be a better son. (*Self-improving*)
  I am the kind of son I think I am. (*Self-verifying*)
  I am a bad son. (*Self-diminishing*)
  Nothing about the kind of son I am. (*No feedback*).

In a similar vein, questions regarding feedback from teachers focused on the participants' schoolwork (e.g. 'I would like for my teachers to tell me the truth about how good I am at my schoolwork').

Received feedback

We determined participants' received feedback through a parallel series of questions comparable to the ideal feedback questions (Appendix B). Participants indicated how frequently they received each of six types of feedback ('My parents or the adults who have helped raised me tell me I am a great son') from each of six sources. We tailored the questions to reflect role-specific feedback received. Responses ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 3 (*a lot*).

Feedback discrepancy

We created difference scores to assess the discrepancy between preferred and received feedback. Specifically, we subtracted participants' received score from their preferred score. Values greater than zero indicated that participants would prefer more of a particular type of feedback than they received. Values less than zero indicated that participants received more of a particular type of feedback than they would prefer.

Results

Preliminary analyses

We began by examining ethnic differences in feedback type. Ethnicity did not interact with feedback type or feedback source for preferred feedback, received feedback or feedback discrepancy. Also, the main ethnicity effect was not significant. Hence, we did not include ethnicity in subsequent analyses.

We also examined the relation between age and preferred feedback, received feedback and feedback discrepancy. Age was negatively related to consistent feedback received ($r = -.23$, $p < .05$), indicating that older participants reported receiving consistent feedback less frequently than did younger participants. Age was not related, however, to any other feedback type. We therefore excluded age from subsequent analyses.

Main analyses

Preferred feedback

We analysed intra-individual differences in preferred feedback in a 6 (type) × 6 (source) within-participants repeated-measures multivariate ANOVA (MANOVA). The main effect for source of information was marginal ($F(5, 40) = 2.07$, $p < .09$). We examined this trend with a *post hoc* comparison of the absolute amount of feedback preferred from each source using a Bonferroni adjustment with $\alpha = .05$. Participants showed a significantly higher preference for feedback in general from girlfriends ($M = 2.23$), siblings ($M = 2.23$) and parents ($M = 2.20$) than from teachers ($M = 2.16$) and best friends ($M = 2.03$). The main effect for type of feedback was significant ($F(5, 40) = 38.64$, $p < .001$), indicating that participants preferred certain types of feedback more frequently than others. *Post hoc* analyses revealed that participants showed a significantly greater preference for truthful ($M = 2.62$), positive ($M = 2.57$), self-improving ($M = 2.45$) and consistent ($M = 2.42$) feedback compared to no feedback ($M = 1.65$) and negative feedback ($M = 1.32$). Additionally, preference for truthful feedback was significantly higher than preference for consistent feedback. Finally, negative feedback was significantly less preferred than no feedback.

This main effect, however, was qualified by the interaction between type and source ($F(25, 20) = 3.04$, $p < .01$). In order to explore this interaction, we conducted several *post hoc* comparisons. Within each type of feedback, or within each source, we used a Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons with $\alpha = .05$. Although this is less conservative than other possible adjustments, we chose to balance possible Type I errors with the relatively small sample size. Another factor that influenced our decision was the exploratory nature of our research, given that practically no empirical forays into the role of self-evaluation motives in either adolescents or juvenile offenders exist.

We present the means in Table 1. In the top half of the table, we display means for preferred feedback and in the lower half we provide means for received feedback. Within each row, we use different subscripts to note significant differences between types of feedback within each source. The interaction between type and source of preferred feedback primarily arises from differences in preferences for negative versus no feedback. Notably, this difference was significant only for preferred amounts of feedback from teachers and siblings.

Within each feedback type (the columns in Table 1), participants generally did not report significant differences in preferred feedback across sources. That is, the frequency of each type of feedback rarely differed according to source. The only exception involved participants reporting that they would prefer to hear nothing (no feedback) from their teachers more frequently than from their parents.

Received feedback

We analysed intra-individual differences in received feedback in a 6 (type) × 6 (source) within-participants repeated-measures MANOVA. The main effect for source of

Table 1. Mean preferred and received feedback scores as a function of source and feedback type

Feedback source	Feedback type					
	Positive	Truthful	Improving	Consistent	Negative	None
Preferred feedback						
Teachers	$2.36_{a,b}$	$2.38_{a,b}$	2.58_a	$2.29_{a,b}$	1.44_c	1.93_b
Parents	2.67_a	2.76_a	2.56_a	2.53_a	1.27_b	1.42_b
Siblings	2.73_a	2.71_a	2.44_a	2.51_a	1.27_b	1.69_c
Best friend	2.36_a	2.51_a	2.18_a	2.18_a	1.27_b	1.67_b
Girlfriend	2.71_a	2.73_a	2.47_a	2.56_a	1.33_b	1.60_b
Psychologists	2.58_a	2.62_a	2.49_a	2.47_a	1.33_b	1.58_b
Received feedback						
Teachers	2.16_a	2.27_a	2.33_a	2.18_a	1.49_b	1.60_b
Parents	2.47_a	2.33_a	2.18_a	2.33_a	1.51_b	1.62_b
Siblings	2.44_a	2.44_a	$2.02_{a,b}$	2.27_a	1.38_c	1.58_b
Best friend	2.31_a	2.38_a	1.84_b	2.31_a	1.44_b	1.69_b
Girlfriend	2.56_a	2.56_a	1.76_b	2.31_a	1.22_c	$1.62_{b,c}$
Psychologists	2.27_a	2.31_a	2.42_a	2.22_a	1.53_b	1.60_b

Note. Across each row, means with different subscripts differed significantly at $p < .05$ in a Bonferroni difference comparison.

information was not significant ($F(5, 40) = .62, p < .69$). The main effect for type of feedback was significant ($F(5, 40) = 19.43, p < .001$). *Post hoc* analyses demonstrated that participants received truthful ($M = 2.38$), positive ($M = 2.37$), consistent ($M = 2.27$) and improving ($M = 2.27$) feedback significantly more often than they received either no feedback ($M = 1.62$) or negative feedback ($M = 1.43$). Participants reported receiving both truthful and positive feedback significantly more often than improving feedback. Participants received negative feedback less frequently than no feedback.

This main effect, however, was qualified by the type × source interaction ($F(25, 20) = 3.19, p < .01$). In order to explore this interaction, we conducted several *post hoc* comparisons. Again, we used a Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons. In the lower half of Table 1 we present the means for received feedback. Participants reported that they received positive, truthful, improving and consistent feedback more frequently than negative feedback or no feedback. We observed this pattern for received feedback from teachers, parents and psychologists. Participants received improving feedback as infrequently as they received negative or no feedback from their best friends and romantic partners. In addition, participants received improving feedback from teachers and psychologists more frequently than from best friends or girlfriends.

Feedback discrepancy

We analysed discrepancy scores in a 6 (type) × 6 (source) within-participants repeated-measures MANOVA. The main effect for type was significant ($F(5, 40) = 4.70, p < .01$) although the main effect for source was not ($F(5, 40) = .85, p < .53$). *Post hoc* examination of the discrepancy scores revealed that participants would like to receive more improving, truthful, positive and consistent feedback compared with negative feedback, which they would like to receive less often than they do.

The source × type interaction was also significant ($F(25, 20) = 2.07$, $p < .05$). Analytical comparisons helped to illuminate these results (Table 2). We use different subscripts to denote significant comparisons within each row. Participants reported that, whereas they received negative and no feedback more than they would like from their parents, they would like to receive more truthful and improving feedback than they currently did. Participants also reported a greater discrepancy in the amount of improving feedback from their romantic partners as compared with positive feedback, negative feedback or no feedback. This in part reflects the comparatively low levels of improving feedback that participants actually received from romantic partners.

Table 2. Mean feedback discrepancy scores (preferred minus received feedback) as a function of feedback source and feedback type

Feedback source	Feedback type					
	Positive	Truthful	Improving	Consistent	Negative	None
Teachers	.20	.11	.24	.11	− .04	**.33**
Parents	.20$_{a,b}$	**.42** $_a$	**.38** $_a$	.20$_{a,b}$	− **.24**$_b$	− .20$_b$
Siblings	**.29**	**.27**	**.42**	.24	− .11	.11
Best friend	.04	.13	**.33**	− .13	− .18	− .02
Girlfriend	.16$_b$	.18$_{a,b}$	**.71**$_a$	.24$_{a,b}$	.11$_b$	− .02$_b$
Psychologists	**.31**	**.31**	.07	.24	− .20	− .02

Note. Across each row, means with different subscripts differed significantly at $p < .05$ in a Bonferroni difference comparison. Absence of subscripts denotes no significant difference in means across the row. Means in bold-faced type are significantly different from zero.

Only one effect within feedback type (columns of Table 2) reached significance. The discrepancy between preferred and received improving feedback from romantic partners was significantly higher than the discrepancy between preferred and received improving feedback from psychologists.

Finally, we tested the magnitude of the discrepancy scores. Overall, about one third of the scores differed significantly from zero (means displayed in bold-face in Table 2). This pattern of results suggests a substantial lack of fit between what participants receive and what they would like to receive. Inspection of the means reveals that participants would especially like to receive more improving feedback from people within their intimate social sphere (i.e. family and peers).

Discussion

Self-evaluation, the search for self-knowledge, is motivated. The motives underlie the selection of self-relevant information (i.e. feedback preferred) and the interpretation of it (i.e. feedback received). The current investigation was guided by consideration of ways in which the motives play out in a naturalistic context. In particular, the investigation examined possible developmental demands on adolescents in general and environmental demands specific to IJOs. These demands could influence the presence and relative prevalence of self-evaluation motives.

Summary of findings and implications

We assessed six self-evaluation motives. Four of them (self-enhancement, self-verification, self-assessment and self-improvement) have been examined in the adult

literature. We added two motives (self-diminishment and no information) in order to consider possible unique influences in the lives of incarcerated youth. We also considered sources of feedback (e.g. best friend vs. psychologist) as well as discrepancies between preferred and received feedback.

We found interesting differences in the prevalence of positive, truthful, improving and consistent feedback. IJOs reported preferring truthful feedback more frequently than consistent feedback. They also reported receiving both truthful and positive feedback more frequently than improving feedback. The frequency of negative and no feedback were relatively low and we obtained few significant differences between the two. The relatively low preference for negative feedback is consistent with the self-enhancement motive and, possibly, with the self-verification motive. That is, it was not clear in our study whether IJOs had a positive or a negative self-concept to begin with. Preference for positive feedback could reflect self-verification for those with positive self-concepts or self-enhancement for those with negative self-concepts.

In our analysis of discrepancies between preferred and received feedback, we found significant differences within the types of feedback that IJOs received from parents. Whereas IJOs indicated they would like more truthful and improving feedback than they receive from their parents, they actually received more negative or no feedback than they would like. We also found significant differences among discrepancy scores across the types of feedback from girlfriends. Participants indicated that they would like to receive more improving feedback from girlfriends than they did, with this discrepancy being significantly higher than that for positive, negative or no feedback. This primarily reflected the trend that, while girlfriends infrequently provided improving feedback, participants on average would like to get as much improving feedback from girlfriends as they would like from others. In fact, participants wanted more improving feedback from many of the people in their intimate social network.

Past research on the self-evaluation motives has often focused on which motive 'wins out' (Brown, 1990; Taylor & Lobel, 1989; Trope, 1980). In general, the self-enhancement motive seems to exert a stronger influence than the other motives (Brown & Dutton, 1995; Sedikides, 1993; Tesser, 2000), although culture moderates the way in which self-enhancement motivation is manifested (Sedikides *et al.*, 2003; Sedikides *et al.*, 2005; but see Heine, 2005). We did not obtain evidence for the prevalence of the self-enhancement motive in this study. One reason may be that self-enhancement motivation exerts its strongest influence at on-line information gathering settings in which the self is apparently put 'under siege' (Sedikides, 1993; Sedikides & Green, 2004) rather than at reflective, wish-expressive, and ultimately less-threatening settings as was the case in the current investigation. Another reason may be due to our measure of self-evaluation motives. Swann, Griffin, Predmore, and Gaines (1987) argued that cognitive responses are more probably to reflect the self-verification motive, whereas affective responses reflect the self-enhancement motive. Thus, given that our measure relied more on cognitive responses (i.e. judgements), we may have been unable to detect the full influence of the self-enhancement effect. On the other hand, the somewhat equal distribution of the impact of the four self-evaluation motives in self-knowledge preferred and received could reflect the developmental and situational context of our participants' lives. Theoretically, adolescence should be a time of heightened exploration. Thus, self-enhancement may be less influential during this developmental transition (Sedikides & Strube, 1997).

Self-evaluation research has begun to investigate the conditions under which each motive becomes activated and influences the process of self-knowledge acquisition and

interpretation. For example, when individuals believe that an ability is a stable trait, the self-enhancement motive is likely to be activated; on the other hand, if individuals believe that an ability is malleable, the self-assessment motive is likely to be activated (Dauenheimer, Stahlberg, Spreeman, & Sedikides, 2002; Dunning, 1995; Green, Pinter, & Sedikides, 2005). Past research on feedback seeking in children or adolescents has focused primarily on self-assessment and self-enhancement (e.g. Cassidy *et al.*, 2003; Ruble & Flett, 1988). We proposed that preferences for various types of feedback are motivated by multiple self-evaluation motives, and, indeed, demonstrated that IJOs are able to recognize and desire many types of feedback. Furthermore, our research suggests that the source of feedback matters: preferences for various types of feedback differed across sources, as did actual receipt of various types of feedback.

Research on the prevalence of self-evaluation motives among IJOs has the potential to inform therapeutic interventions. Ward and Stewart (2003) argued that rehabilitative efforts should include a focus on elevating the quality of offenders' lives. A quality-of-life focus is facilitated by understanding IJOs' preferences for different types of feedback. Preferences for self-related feedback are tied fundamentally to basic human needs for competence (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and esteem (Sedikides & Gregg, 2003). Therefore, rehabilitative efforts that are sensitive to feedback preferences may be well placed to meet these basic needs. Nevertheless, Baumeister *et al.* (2003) cautioned that inflated self-esteem may not be adaptive, especially as unstable high self-esteem may be a contributing factor to aggressive behaviour (Kernis *et al.*, 1989). Self-improvement as a means to self-enhancement, however, may meet both the needs of the individual and the goals of rehabilitation. The challenge may lie in tapping into offending adolescents' desire for self-improvement.

In order for evaluative feedback to be maximally effective, it may need to be tailored to IJOs' preferences for 'what kind of feedback and from whom' in their therapeutic milieu. Moreover, identifying changes in feedback preferences over the course of treatment, such as greater willingness to accept improving feedback, can be useful in decisions to implement certain types of feedback over others. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of feedback may depend on more than IJOs' preferences for certain types of feedback. Future research would do well to investigate the correspondence between the type of feedback actually given and IJOs' interpretation of the feedback. Although IJOs indicated a willingness to receive improving feedback, is improving feedback interpreted as such, or is it instead interpreted as negative feedback? Future research should also explore further the link between the effectiveness of feedback and the source of feedback. For example, van Aken and Asendorpf (1997) found that support from parents and classmates influenced pre-adolescent children's self-worth, but support from siblings, grandparents, non-school peers and other adults did not.

Our investigation opens up another promising research direction: The interplay between research on self-evaluation motives and social cognition approaches. As a case in point, Crick and Dodge's (1994) social-information-processing model of pre-adolescent children's social adjustment suggests that aggressive children may selectively attend to and use social cues. The extent to which delinquent adolescents differ from non-delinquent adolescents in terms of reported preference for different types of feedback, and the extent to which the two groups differ in use of or interpretation of actual received feedback, may provide further insight into the link between social cognition and adjustment.

We speculated that developmental and environmental contexts might affect the prevalence of self-evaluation motives in IJOs. The current research, however, was

unable to detect whether adolescence *vis-á-vis* certain aspects of confinement affected the relative prevalence of the motives. To begin with, future research will need to address explicitly developmental differences in the prevalence of these motives. We do know that judgements of the self become less positive across childhood (Stipek & Mac Iver, 1989), reflecting a more realistic conception of the self (Schuster, Ruble, & Weinert, 1998). But how about the other motives? What is the nature of their interplay as a function of developmental transitions? Although we did not find age differences in the receipt of and preference for most types of feedback, the relatively limited age range of the participants precludes our ability to speculate on developmental trajectories.

Future research will also need to compare the interplay of self-evaluation motives in non-offending adolescents as opposed to delinquent adolescents. Aggressive behaviour is linked with narcissism and threatened self-esteem. Narcissists have a very high opinion of themselves and want others to share and confirm this view (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, Elliot, & Gregg, 2002; Sedikides & Gregg, 2001; Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2005). When someone challenges their positive self-view, narcissists retaliate with aggression (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). Considering preliminary evidence that incarcerated youth have relatively high levels of narcissism (Bushman & Baumeister, 2002), they may also display a different profile of self-evaluation motives than non-offending adolescents.

Non-offending youth may also differ in the amount of feedback they receive. Scholte, van Lieshout, and van Aken (2001) found that adolescents who reported either low support overall or relatively low parental support accompanied by high friend support also reported more delinquent behaviour. These differences in social support may translate into differences in received feedback. Although our participants reported relatively low levels of negative feedback and clearly received other types of feedback, it is unclear how the IJOs would compare with non-delinquent adolescents. Identifying the prevalence of different types of feedback in non-delinquents would help clarify this question.

Limitations

We would also like to consider several limitations of our exploratory investigation. One limitation in interpreting our results arises from the attrition rate across data collection and the resultant relatively small sample size. Certainly, the small number of participants limited the power of our investigation to detect significant differences in motive prevalence. Although we acknowledge that attrition may limit the generalizability of our findings, we also realize that it reflects, to some extent, the true transitory nature of this population.

Limitations in our measure of self-evaluation motives may also have hampered our ability to detect differences in motive prevalence. That is, the restricted response scale (3 points) may have produced ceiling effects. Future research using an expanded scale may be better able to detect differential activation of self-evaluation motives. Additionally, it is possible that participants tended to respond as they thought they ought to rather than as they really felt at the moment, given that staff at the development centre administered the questionnaires as part of the treatment programme. It is unclear, however, how demand characteristics would produce the somewhat nuanced differences we found in received feedback, preferred feedback and feedback discrepancies.

It can be argued that participants may not have adequately discriminated among the four motives. However, certain result patterns led us to believe that this explanation is

not viable. In particular, IJOs reported that they received improving information from their best friends and girlfriends relatively infrequently, as infrequently as they received negative or no feedback from these sources. Additionally, IJOs reported that they received improving feedback more frequently from teachers or psychologists than from best friends or girlfriends. This pattern provided evidence for the face validity of our measure. That is, participants' reports of received feedback are consistent with what one might expect them to receive. Teachers or psychologists would fulfil role expectations by providing more improving feedback than is provided by best friends or girlfriends.

Concluding remarks

The study of self-evaluation motives has had a long and cherished history in the adult literature. We argue that much can be gained by an informed transfer and adaptation of parts of this literature to the study of delinquent adolescents. Knowing the strategies that delinquent youth use to explore, bolster or modify their self-perceptions promises to shed new light on the way in which the youth think about themselves, the relation between themselves and society, and society at large. This basic understanding, in turn, may provide new insights into the causes of violent adolescent behaviour as well as inform effective interventions for violent behaviour. We believe that our study has made a preliminary start in this direction.

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Appendix A

Preferred feedback questionnaire

How much do you want to hear each of the following? [Please circle the number that is best for you: 1 (*not at all*), 2 (*a little*) or 3 (*a lot*).]

I want my parent or the adults who have helped raise me to tell me. . .
    I am a great son.
    The truth about how good a son I am.
    How to be a better son.
    I am the kind of son I think I am.
    I am a bad son.
    Nothing about the kind of son I am.

I want my teachers to tell me. . .
    I am great at my schoolwork.
    The truth about how good I am at my schoolwork,
    How to get better at my schoolwork.
    They agree with me about how good I am at my schoolwork.
    I am bad at my schoolwork.
    Nothing about how good I am at my schoolwork.

I want my best friend to tell me. . .
    I am a great best friend.
    The truth about how good a best friend I am.
    How to be a better best friend.
    He agrees with me about how good a best friend I am.
    I am a bad best friend.
    Nothing about the kind of best friend I am.

I want my brothers and sisters to tell me. . .
    I am a great brother.
    The truth about how good a brother I am.
    How to be a better brother.
    I am the kind of brother I think I am.
    I am a bad brother.
    Nothing about the kind of brother I am.

When I go out with someone, I want my date to tell me. . .
    I am a great boyfriend.

The truth about how good a boyfriend I am.
How to be a better boyfriend.
I am the kind of boyfriend I think I am.
I am a bad boyfriend.
Nothing about the kind of boyfriend I am.

I want my psychologist or behavioural specialist to tell me. . .
My behaviour is great.
The truth about my behaviour.
How I can be better behaved.
My behaviour is as good as I think it is.
My behaviour is bad.
Nothing about my behaviour.

Appendix B

Received feedback questionnaire
How much do you hear each of the following? [Please circle the number that is most true for you: 1 (*not at all*), 2 (*a little*) or 3 (*a lot*).]

My parent or the adults who have helped raise me tell me. . .
I am a great son.
The truth about how good a son I am.
How to be a better son.
I am the kind of son I think I am.
I am a bad son.
Nothing about the kind of son I am.

My teachers tell me. . .
I am great at my schoolwork.
The truth about how good I am at my schoolwork,
How to get better at my schoolwork.
They agree with me about how good I am at my schoolwork.
I am bad at my schoolwork.
Nothing about how good I am at my schoolwork.

My best friend tells me. . .
I am a great best friend.
The truth about how good a best friend I am.
How to be a better best friend.
He agrees with me about how good a best friend I am.
I am a bad best friend.
Nothing about the kind of best friend I am.

My brothers and sisters tell me. . .
I am a great brother.
The truth about how good a brother I am.
How to be a better brother.

I am the kind of brother I think I am.
I am a bad brother.
Nothing about the kind of brother I am.

My dates tell me. . .
I am a great boyfriend.
The truth about how good a boyfriend I am.
How to be a better boyfriend.
I am the kind of boyfriend I think I am.
I am a bad boyfriend.
Nothing about the kind of boyfriend I am.

My psychologist and my behavioural specialist tell me. . .
My behaviour is great.
The truth about my behaviour.
How I can be better behaved.
My behaviour is as good as I think it is.
My behaviour is bad.
Nothing about my behaviour.