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Perceived multiple emotional self-concepts in groups of juvenile delinquents and nondelinquents

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Abstract

Representative sample of 74 institutionalized juvenile male and female delinquents in Estonia were administered a 16 item self-report questionnaire to measure emotions in the actual, ideal and social selves based on Plutchik's multidimensional model of emotions. Mean ratings of three aspects of emotional self-concept were compared with those of matched comparison group of 148 nondelinquent youth. The hypothesis that delinquents would manifest more negative emotional characteristics of multidimensional selves than nondelinquent subgroup was supported with respect to higher scores on nine negative (aggressiveness, anger, contempt, disappointment, disgust, fear, remorse, sadness, submission) and low scores on two positive (joy, optimism) emotions.

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1. Introduction

The self-concept has been conceptualized traditionally as containing both cognitive and affective components - "totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object of evaluation" (Rosenberg, 1979, 7). In contrast with views that characterized the self-concept as a monolithic entity, most current perspectives conceive of it as a multifaceted structure containing a diverse array of self-representations (e.g. Waugh, 2000). Not all of the self-representations that comprise the self-concept are alike - some are positive, some negative; some refer to the individual's here and now experience, whereas others refer to past or future experiences; some

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concern with different standpoints of the self and some with different situation-related aspects. Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976) emphasized that the self-concept is organized, multidimensional and hierarchical consisting of different facets in which a general self-concept is located at the apex. Self-concept in this model is divided into four domains: the academic self-concept, social self-concept, physical self-concept, and emotional self-concept, whereby the last domain of self-concept composed of self for particular emotional states such as anxiety, love, happiness, depression, and anger. Variety of different self-concepts have recognized and one of the alternative conceptualizations construe self-concept as a multi-dimensional construct as consisting of actual, ideal, social and ideal social self-concept (Sirgy, 1982). Within this framework, actual self-concept refers to the present way in which individuals perceive themselves, whereas the ideal self-concept reflects the manner in which they would like to perceive themselves. Social self-concept represents the way individuals believe others perceive them. However, general self-concept measures include “real” self-concept and other representations, such as the ideal and social selves, are excluded.

In this paper, emotional self-concept – how each person sees themselves in the emotional dimension, is viewed as having more than one component. This includes the perception of three aspects of self-concept: the actual, ideal, and social selves.

More than five decades ago, self-concept started being viewed as an important factor in the etiology of delinquency, but despite a growing body of empirical evidence pointing to the role of self-concept as one of the dynamic personal risk factors in the offence process (Blackburn, 1993), there has been relatively little work focusing on relationships of multiple selves and delinquent behavior among adolescents. Of particular interest is the question of whether some domain-specific emotional self-evaluations contribute more heavily to the prediction of juvenile delinquency than do others.

From a developmental perspective, at one side, this question is valid – number of domains that can be differentiated increased with development across early childhood through adolescence (Marsh, 1989), whereby emotional aspects of self-concept merge during early adolescence (Harter, 2003). At the other side, delinquent behavior among young people, as they negotiate the transition from childhood to adulthood, is overwhelming multi-trajectory and multi-form part of antisocial behavior in most contemporary societies (Moffitt et al., 2001). Delinquency refers to those antisocial behaviors which are more serious, and the delinquent may be put under arrest when the behavior was noticed to the police. Antisocial behavior is viewed as subclass of externalized actions in which the rights of others or society are violated (Hinshaw & Zupan, 1997).

Efforts to assess the juvenile delinquents’ self-concept have relied mostly on measures of self-esteem, and general self-esteem alone has not emerged as a powerful predictor of delinquency (e.g. Mason, 2001; Wan, 2012). After controlling for some potential confounding variables Donnellan and colleagues (2005) found a robust relation between adolescents’ low general self-esteem and antisocial (included delinquent) behavior, although this relation is not universally found (e.g. Oyserman & Markus, 1990). Moreover, studies (Levy, 1997) have indicated that the more serious the delinquent behaviors among adolescents, the more negative their general self-concept. Also, institutionalization may influence negatively those juvenile delinquents’ general self-concept who were not previously incarcerated – their self-concept tended to decrease linearly with increasing time incarcerated (Culbertson, 1975).

Studies adopting a multidimensional model instead of a global self-esteem measure have rendered more sophisticated results in this area. A bidimensional view of measurement of the relationship of self-esteem to male students’ self-reported delinquency showed that the effect of negative component of self-esteem on delinquency was stronger than that of positive component (Owens, 1994); and negative component of self-esteem was associated with increased involvement in self-reported delinquency over time among male students (Mason, 2001).

Adopting a multidimensional model of self-concept, Leung and Lau (1989) found that students’ self-reported delinquency had positive correlations with their social self-concept and physical self-concept, but academic self-concept had a negative effect on delinquency. It was revealed by Cheng (2014) that moral self (i.e. self evaluative views in the moral domain) did exhibit a negative association with delinquency in a more extensive way than global self-esteem did, such that it was predictive of students’ self-reported delinquent behaviors in the area of gambling, property offense, gangsters, sexual misconduct, and drug offenses. Vermeiren et al. (2004) measured different domains of self-concept among youngsters and found that a low self-concept regarding family climate and school competence and a high self-concept regarding friendships were significantly related to self-reported juvenile

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