

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Travis K. Hamrick for the Master of Science
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Title: Comparison of Self-Esteem of Parolees with Violent
Histories and Nonviolent Histories

Abstract approved: Carper B Holmes

Recently, researchers have questioned a long-assumed link between violent behavior and low self-esteem by suggesting that violence relates to high self-esteem rather than low self-esteem. This study compared self-esteem, stability of self-esteem, and narcissism of 20 male offenders on parole for violent offenses to 20 male offenders on parole for nonviolent offenses. The results showed there was no difference between self-esteem, stability of self-esteem, or narcissism of violent parolees and nonviolent parolees. High self-esteem appears not to be related to tendencies to commit violent acts. Also, this study found narcissism did not correlate with self-esteem. This implies self-esteem and narcissism have two different meanings.

COMPARISON OF SELF-ESTEEM OF PAROLEES
WITH VIOLENT HISTORIES AND NONVIOLENT HISTORIES

A Thesis Presented to
the Division of Psychology and Special Education
EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

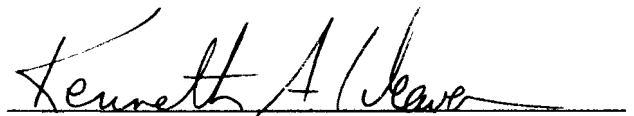
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of the Requirements of the Degree
Masters of Science

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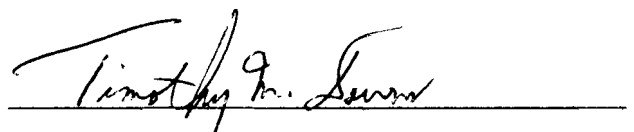
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August, 1999

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Kenneth A. Heave", written over a horizontal line.

Approved by the Division Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Timothy M. Lewis", written over a horizontal line.

Approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Researchers in psychology have attempted to explain violent behavior by finding links between personal characteristics and increased tendencies to commit violent acts (Toch & Adams, 1989). Harris (1997), for example, attempted to find a relationship between parolees' locus of control and their history of violence or nonviolence. Recently, a long-assumed link between violent behavior and low self-esteem has been questioned (Baumeister, 1996). The concern is whether high rather than low self-esteem relates to tendencies to commit violent acts.

Rosenberg (1965) examined relationships between self-esteem and school-related activities and found that 52% of the students with the least self-esteem participated in few or no extracurricular activities (e.g., involved in school clubs, elected to office in a school organization, and being an opinion leader) compared with 36% of the students with the highest level of self-esteem. In an effort to promote students' achievement, California formed a task force to reduce the number of activities lowering self-esteem and promote activities increasing self-esteem (California Task Force, 1990). Baumeister (1996) opposed the California Task Force activities by showing that raising self-esteem might present an inherent danger of increasing tendencies to

commit violent acts, suggesting raising self-esteem might be more harmful than beneficial.

Literature Review

Low Self-Esteem and Violence

In a review of research on self-esteem, Baumeister, Smart, and Boden (1996) pointed out that many of the findings about low self-esteem were contradictory. Research would describe violent actions as egotistical and then credit the violent actions to low-self esteem. Baumeister et al. further stated they were unable to find empirical evidence showing that low-self esteem causes violence. Even though Baumeister et al. were unable to find empirical evidence showing that low self-esteem causes violence, low self-esteem has been related to so many emotional and behavioral problems that such a causal link might exist (Leary, Schreindorfer, & Haupt, 1995).

Toch (1992) attempted to link violence to personality characteristics of criminals. He analyzed interviews of inmates and parolees in California who were considered some of the most violent offenders in the state. Different typologies of violence-proneness were created from the analyses. Toch then described several methods for deterring violence in which he states violence feeds on low self-esteem and self-doubt. His study concluded violent men are

childlike and lack the self-confidence needed for positive communication.

In a description of emotionally disturbed criminals, Toch and Adams (1989) attributed the violent act of arson to low self-esteem. They wrote about five different perpetrators who had committed incendiary violence or criminal arson. Prior to committing the crime, all five of the perpetrators were reported to have been in an argument or a dispute where they were feeling resource-less and overwhelmed. Toch and Adams concluded from these reports that offenders had a low level of self-esteem.

In an anthropological essay in Atlantic Monthly, social scientist Anderson (1994) described the behavior of inner-city gang members. He portrayed family life in the inner city as being one of two spectrums: decent families or street families. Neither family life is financially secure, and both support and obey the unwritten rules of their social network, which Anderson names "the code of the streets." The code of the streets states survival and respect must not be taken for granted, and you have to fight for your place in the world. Anderson concludes the violence of the inner-city youth is the result of feeling hopeless and alienated, which suggests these youths possess a low self-esteem.

In a study about violence on a national level, Staub (1989) related characteristics (e.g., difficult life conditions and authoritarianism of culture) of societies to the violence they inflicted on subgroups. He examined the historic events and circumstances that led to genocide in different cultures, such as the Holocaust in Germany. Throughout the examination, he cited the traditional view that low self-esteem relates to violence. However, in the conclusion, Staub attributed violence committed by a culture to a superior self-concept accompanied by self-doubt.

The sociometer model of self-esteem (Leary et al., 1995) clarifies how low self-esteem is related to emotional and behavioral problems but has little empirical support for relating low self-esteem to violence. The sociometer model views self-esteem as a measure of social acceptance or rejection. It states that people are not motivated to maintain their self-esteem, but rather to maintain connections with significant people in their lives. One's perceived inclusion or exclusion in the immediate situation influences what is termed "state self-esteem," the primary monitoring system. Perceived inclusion or exclusion over time develops what the authors call trait self-esteem. People develop low self-esteem because of constant rejection by others and come to believe they will not be accepted by socially acceptable means. They then try to improve their

social inclusion by other means, such as deviant behavior. This suggests the dysfunctional behavior is not caused directly by low self-esteem but by the perceived rejection of others when performing socially acceptable behaviors. Showing a cause and effect relationship between low self-esteem and violence is difficult because once a person becomes accepted by others through deviant behavior, state self-esteem raises. Therefore, it appears that socially deviant behavior is first created by the low trait self-esteem but maintained by high state self-esteem.

High Self-Esteem and Violence

In a review of the research examining the relationship between self-esteem and violence, Baumeister et al. (1996) stated there was an absence of evidence supporting the traditional view of low self-esteem causing violence. They further suggested elevated feelings of self-approval are more likely to lead to violence. Even though they admit reliable data measuring the self-esteem of violent people is not available, they describe a wide array of research on aggression and high self-esteem. For example, they showed that the higher level of self-esteem for men compared to women corresponds with the higher percentage of men compared to women committing violent acts. Baumeister et al. further suggested that violence does not result from high self-

esteem alone, rather it results from high self-esteem combined with an ego threat (e.g., criticism or insult).

Gough, Wink, and Rozyko (1965) conducted a study supporting a relationship between high self-esteem and violence. They examined the ability of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, California Personality Inventory, and a base expectancy table to predict successful outcomes of parole. They found that persons who are most likely to be successful on parole, which includes not committing a violent crime, are conscientious, restrained, and not flamboyant. Also, the persons who are least likely to be successful on parole, including committing a violent crime, are those who are more narcissistic and too sure of themselves.

Kernis, Grannemann, and Barclay (1989) examined the relationship between level of self-esteem, stability of self-esteem, and the tendencies to experience anger and hostility. Where stability of self-esteem is the extent of short term fluctuations in one's overall self-esteem, level of self-esteem is the baseline of these fluctuations. They compared student's scores on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Rosenberg Stability of Self-Esteem Scale, Novaco's Anger Inventory, Trait Anger Scale, Buss-Durkee Hostility Inventory, and Zelin Anger Self-Report Scale. Their results showed that when assessing the tendency to experience anger,

stability of self-esteem (stable or unstable) and level of self-esteem (high or low) significantly interacted. Unstable high self-esteem students have a greater tendency to experience anger than stable high self-esteem students. Also, the tendencies for unstable or stable low self-esteem students to experience anger fell in between the unstable and stable high self-esteem students but did not statistically significantly differ from either. They concluded by saying a person with high unstable self-esteem would be more vulnerable to a self-esteem threat, such as an insult, than a person with high stable self-esteem. Therefore, people with a high unstable self-esteem react with anger to protect themselves, suggesting a stronger tendency towards violence.

Kernis, Cornell, Sun, Berry, and Harlow (1993) studied level of self-esteem and stability of self-esteem by focusing on the relationship each had to the reaction participants gave to positive and negative feedback. They found the participants with unstable high self-esteem were more accepting of positive feedback and more resistant to negative feedback than the participants with stable high self-esteem or the participants with stable/unstable low self-esteem. Also, the participants with unstable high self-esteem were more likely to attribute their negative feedback to characteristics of the evaluator and to the

assessment technique used. Kernis et al. suggested that people with unstable high self-esteem externalize the cause of negative feedback by reacting with anger and hostility towards ego threats.

Baumeister, Heatherto, and Tice (1993) examined ego threats. They examined how people with high self-esteem would regulate their work goals when faced with an ego threat. High self-esteem participants were the most successful at setting appropriate goals and achieving those goals when no ego threats were presented. However, when given an ego threat such as negative feedback, participants with high self-esteem set extremely high goals they were unable to achieve. They reacted irrationally when their self-esteem was threatened.

Bushman and Baumeister (1998) examined the relationship between self-esteem and direct or displaced aggression. They focused on people with high self-esteem, which they related to narcissism. To conceptualize this relationship, they examined previous studies that correlated narcissism to self-esteem and described different views explaining this relationship (Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1971; Rhodewalt, Madrian, & Cheney, 1997). The view they adopted defined narcissism as having an emotional and motivational investment in an extremely favorable, grandiose self-image. The results of their study showed ego threats, such as

insulting evaluations, increased direct aggressive responses for all participants. However, the largest increase in direct aggressive responding occurred in participants who scored high in narcissism. Also, regardless of whether there was an ego threat or not, participants with high narcissism scores had higher aggressive responding overall. Surprisingly, the level of self-esteem showed no significant effect on aggression with or without an ego threat. Bushman and Baumeister attributed the non-significance of level of self-esteem to a conflict in terminology. That is, high self-esteem means thinking well of oneself, whereas narcissism is passionately wanting to think well of oneself.

Even though Bushman and Baumeister (1998) demonstrated level of self-esteem had no effect on aggression, a study by Raskin, Novacek, and Hogan (1991) suggests a need for further examination of a possible interaction. They studied the relationship between narcissism and self-esteem by examining the correlation between participants' scores on various global self-esteem scales and various narcissistic scales. The strength of correlation between self-esteem and narcissism fluctuated for each measure used. For example, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale had a weak ($r = .20$) but significant ($p < .01$) correlation with the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, whereas the California Self-Evaluation Scale had a strong ($r = .53$) and significant ($p <$

.001) correlation with the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. However, the results showed narcissism positively correlated with self-esteem, whether defensive or non-defensive.

Bushman and Baumeister (1998) used a version of the Janis and Field Scale and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and found the results were consistent for both measurements, reducing the possibility that the non-significance of self-esteem was caused by the measurements used. However, they did not examine the stability of self-esteem in their study. As reported earlier, stability of self-esteem has been shown to interact with the reaction people with high self-esteem have when faced with an ego threat. The lack of examining stability of self-esteem may explain the reason for self-esteem not having a significant effect on aggression.

Purpose of Study

The literature supports Baumeister et al.'s (1996) view that there is a lack of reliable data measuring the self-esteem of violent people. Also, the literature fails to provide clear evidence as to whether self-esteem, stability of self-esteem, or level of narcissism have an effect on tendencies toward violence. This study measured the self-esteem, stability of self-esteem, and narcissism of offenders on parole for committing violent or nonviolent

crimes. The purpose of this study was to determine whether high self-esteem is related to tendencies toward violent acts.

Research Questions

1. Does the self-esteem of violent offenders differ from nonviolent offenders?
2. Does the narcissism of violent offenders differ from nonviolent offenders?
3. Does the stability of self-esteem of violent offenders differ from nonviolent offenders?
4. Does narcissism significantly correlate with self-esteem?

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Participants

Forty men on parole in Kansas served as participants in this study. The participants consisted of 55% Caucasian, 42.50% African American, and 2.50% Hispanic, and ranged from 18 to 54 years old with an average age of 35.70 and standard deviation of 9.15. The sampling for participants was contingent upon which offender had an appointment with his parole officer during the period of time the data were collected and which offenders agreed to participate.

Participants were separated into two groups of 20 each based on their available legal history: violent (those who had been convicted of a crime against persons, e.g., aggravated assault or domestic violence) and nonviolent (those who had been convicted of a crime against property but not convicted of a crime against persons, e.g., theft, burglary) (Harris, 1997; Look, 1991). The information regarding legal history was obtained from the Kansas Department of Corrections.

Instruments

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) is a 10-item questionnaire with responses based on a 4 point scale (1 = strongly agree, 4 = strongly disagree). The items are separated into six groups. A group is scored as 1

if the single item in the group or the majority of the group (depending on the number of items in the group) are answered in the direction indicating low self-esteem (e.g., answers #1 and #2 would indicate low self-esteem for the question, "I feel I am a failure: 1. Strongly agree, 2. Agree, 3. Disagree, 4. Strongly disagree"). The 6 group scores are added together producing the range for possible scores of 0 to 6, with 0 reflecting high self-esteem and 6 reflecting low self-esteem. This is reported to have good face validity, criterion validity, and good test-retest reliability, $r = .80$ (Rosenberg, 1965).

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Stability Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) is a 5-item questionnaire designed to assess self-esteem stability. Responses for 2 of the items are based on a 4 point scale (1 = strongly agree, 4 = strongly disagree) and the remaining 3 items are agree/disagree questions. Each item is scored positive if the answer selected is indicative of self-esteem instability (e.g., #1 would indicate self-esteem instability for the question, "I have noticed that my ideas about myself seem to change very quickly: 1. Agree, 2. Disagree"). The range for possible scores is 0 to 5, with 0 reflecting highly stable self-esteem and 5 reflecting highly unstable self-esteem. This instrument has been widely used (Kernis et al., 1989; Kernis et al., 1993; Wells & Sweeney, 1986) and is reported to have

good face validity (Rosenberg, 1965). It has also demonstrated by Rosenberg to have good test-retest reliability, $\underline{r} = .94$.

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory is a measure of narcissism (Raskin & Hall, 1979; Raskin & Terry, 1988) that consists of 40 questions in which the participants are required to choose one of two statements (e.g., A. I have a natural talent for influencing people, or B. I am not good at influencing people). In this sample item, A response is scored as 1 (narcissistic) and the B response is scored as 0 (not narcissistic), making the range of possible scores 0 (no narcissism) to 40 (high narcissism). This instrument has been widely used (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Raskin & Shaw, 1988; Raskin & Terry, 1988) and is reported to have good construct validity (Raskin & Novacek, 1989). It has also demonstrated good alpha reliability, $\underline{r} = .83$ (Raskin & Terry, 1988).

Procedure

The researcher obtained permission from Emporia State University Institutional Review Board and the Kansas Department of Corrections to use human participants in this study. Potential participants were asked if they would like to participate when they met with their parole officer at the Topeka Parole Office for their regular meeting. If they agreed to participate, the researcher provided them with the

informed consent form (see Appendix) and gave the following instructions, "These questionnaires will be used to assess how you feel about yourself. I can help you if you have difficulty understanding a word or question, but I can not assist you with how to answer a question. Please let me know when you're finished." Participants then completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Stability Scale. Upon completion, the researcher provided the participants with the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. In cases where participants were not able to read, instructions and questions were read aloud to them. After the participants were finished, the researcher thanked them, and answered any questions they had.

The participants met individually with the researcher until both categories (Violent and Nonviolent) contained a minimum of 20 participants. Although an exact count was not kept, less than 10 parolees refused to participate. Information regarding criminal history used to distinguish category classification was obtained from the participant's parole officer once the session was completed. Because it was impossible to determine the category a participant would be in before administering him the instruments, the nonviolent category ended with two additional participants. Subsequently, the nonviolent category did not include the last two participants administered the instruments.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Scoring the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Stability Scale, and Narcissistic Personality Inventory independently produced three separate dependent variables. Using the Statistical Analysis Software (SAS) for Windows, three t -tests for independent samples were conducted on the dependent variables. The independent variable was the category of offense (violent or nonviolent). The mean score obtained on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale by the violent group ($\bar{M} = 1.10$, $SD = 1.25$) was not significantly different from the nonviolent group ($\bar{M} = 0.90$, $SD = 1.52$), $t(38) = .45$, $p > .05$. Also, the mean score obtained on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Stability Scale by the violent group ($\bar{M} = 0.85$, $SD = 0.99$) was not significantly different from the nonviolent group ($\bar{M} = 1.15$, $SD = 1.66$), $t(38) = -.69$, $p > .05$. Finally, the mean score obtained on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory by the violent group ($\bar{M} = 10.45$, $SD = 5.79$) was not significantly different from the nonviolent group ($\bar{M} = 12.15$, $SD = 5.89$), $t(40) = -.92$, $p > .05$.

The scores for the violent parolees and the nonviolent parolees were combined to calculate Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients among scores on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Stability Scale, and

the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. Table 1 presents the results of the correlation coefficients between the variables.

As seen in the data, the scores on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale correlated significantly with the scores on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Stability Scale ($r = .62$, $p < .01$). However, the scores on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory did not correlate significantly with the scores on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale or the scores on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Stability Scale.

Table 1

Correlation Coefficients Among Scores on Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Stability Scale, and Narcissistic Personality Inventory

	Self-Esteem	Narcissism
Self-Esteem Stability	.62*	-.14
Narcissism	.02	

* $\underline{p} < .01$

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Research Question 1

The results show the self-esteem of violent offenders did not differ from nonviolent offenders.

Research Question 2

The results show the narcissism of violent offenders did not differ from nonviolent offenders.

Baumeister et al. (1996) showed a relationship between high self-esteem and high rates of aggression and anger, suggesting high self-esteem could lead to violence. However, the results of this study indicated otherwise. Violent parolees did not score higher on self-esteem or narcissism than did non-violent parolees. This indicates, for parolees in Topeka, high self-esteem is not related to tendencies toward violent acts. Even though people with high self-esteem may respond irrationally to ego threats (Baumeister et al., 1993), it does not necessarily mean they will commit violent acts. Also, narcissistic people may respond aggressively to ego threats (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998), but never go to the point of committing a violent act or at least one they could be incarcerated for.

The results of this study confirm Bushman and Baumeister's (1998) results. They found level of self-

esteem has no significant effect on aggressive responding among college students; this study found no significant difference in level of self-esteem between violent parolees and non-violent parolees. These results suggest level of self-esteem does not have a direct relation to committing violent crimes. This contests the belief of a relationship between low self-esteem and violence, even though it does not support the hypothesis that high self-esteem is a cause of violence.

Research Question 3

The results show the stability of self-esteem of violent offenders did not differ from nonviolent offenders.

This writer questioned if level of self-esteem was not a significant variable in Bushman and Baumeister's (1998) study because they did not include stability of self-esteem. However, the present study found stability of self-esteem to not differ between parolees with violent histories and parolees with nonviolent histories. This casts doubt on the belief that Bushman and Baumeister's results would have been different if they had included stability of self-esteem as a variable in their study.

Research Question 4

The results show narcissism did not significantly correlate with self-esteem.

This study found no significant correlation between narcissism and self-esteem. This supports Bushman and Baumeister's (1998) findings, where they also found no significant correlation between narcissism and self-esteem. At first glance one may expect self-esteem and narcissism to be related, but this appears to not be true. Since there is no relationship between the two, narcissism and self-esteem most likely are measures of two different personality characteristics. As Bushman and Baumeister suggested, high self-esteem could be feeling good about oneself, whereas narcissism could be the desire to feel good about oneself.

Even though this study found violent and nonviolent parolees to have no significant difference in self-esteem, stability of self-esteem, or narcissism, confirming these results requires further research. Also, it is difficult to generalize the results of this study to other populations because there was a relatively small number of participants. Participants also volunteered from one location, and the instruments used were self-report.

A confounding variable in this study could be the accuracy of truly separating violent and nonviolent parolees based upon the available legal histories alone. Simply because someone has no legal charge of a violent crime does not mean the person has not been violent. Also, the parolees' available legal records did not state if the

crimes they were convicted of were plea bargains or the actual charges. A parolee would be considered nonviolent if he received a plea bargain to a nonviolent charge, even though his original charge was violent. Another confounding variable could be the setting. Being in the Topeka Parole Office might intimidate the parolees and lead them to present a favorable image of themselves. For example, the average Narcissistic Personality Inventory score for the violent group (10.45) and nonviolent group (12.15) were lower than the average for the normative population of the instrument (15.55). Future studies should include a standardized test to measure violence or aggression in addition to their available legal histories and a scale to measure conformity (e.g., a social desirability scale). Perhaps, then, a link between high self-esteem and violence acts could be established.

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APPENDIX

Participation Consent Form

Read this consent form. If you have any questions ask the experimenter and he will answer the question.

You are invited to participate in a study investigating the self-esteem of parolees. You will participate in completing three self-esteem inventories, which should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

The information gathered will be used to help with understanding the self-esteem of parolees. To ensure confidentiality, only code number will identify information obtained in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may terminate your participation at any time. There is no risk or discomfort involved in completing the study.

If you have any questions please ask the experimenter, Travis Hamrick, who can be reached at the Topeka Parole Office.

I, _____, have read the above information and have decided to participate.
(please print)

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time.

(signature of participant)

(date)

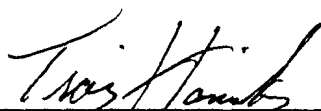
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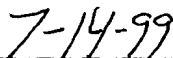
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Comparison of Self-esteem of Parolees
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Histories

Title of Thesis



Signature of Graduate Office Staff



Date Received