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Accommodative Processes in Incarcerated Young Males: The Role of Adjusting the Ideal Self to the Actual Self

Keywords: accommodation, self-esteem, profile similarity

Abstract:

Objective: This study aims to investigate whether adjustments of self-concept profiles serve as indicator for accommodative processes. It is argued that accommodative self-concept adjustments are related to higher levels of self-esteem during incarceration.

Methods: Accommodative adjustments were operationalized as the change in similarity of self-concept profiles that was accounted for by the adaptation of the ideal self to the previous actual self. In contrast, assimilative adjustments were defined as change in self-concept similarity accounted for by an adaptation of the actual to the previous ideal self. In a longitudinal study design with three measurement occasions, the data of N = 728 incarcerated males (age 14 to 24) were investigated by correlational and regression analyses.

Results: Diachronic accommodative adjustments of the self-concept were significantly correlated with the established dispositional indicator of accommodation. Compared to the assimilative group, accommodative individuals showed similar levels and a smaller increase in self-esteem towards the end of incarceration. However, an explorative analysis indicated a lower level of self-esteem in the beginning of incarceration for the assimilative group followed by a stronger increase in self-esteem, while the accommodative group maintains a more stable level of self-esteem throughout incarceration.

Conclusions: The findings suggest a buffering effect of accommodative adjustments in the earlier phases of incarceration. In a context of restricted developmental conditions, accommodative processes are linked to a (re-)stabilization of self-esteem. The findings are discussed with respect to practical implications of juvenile detention, further research directions and methodological considerations of the new indicator of accommodative processes.

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