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Applying Positive Psychology to Illuminate the Needs of Adolescent Males Transitioning Out of Juvenile Detention

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Abstract

Reducing the recidivism of young offenders is a critical research issue, not only to enhance the future outcomes for the young person but also to reduce the future risk to the community. Navigating the immediate transition from detention back into the community is positioned as a critical milestone. This small qualitative study describes how young offenders participating in a formal mentoring program in Australia experienced the transition from detention to the community and the intrinsic drivers of their behaviour throughout this transition. Perspectives of their mentors and caseworker were also solicited. Importantly, their stories were interpreted through the lens of positive psychology and self-determination theory to discuss the relevance of one's pursuit of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Increasing our understanding of these intrinsic motivators will assist young offenders to pursue a better life away from crime and benefit both themselves and the wider community.

Keywords

positive psychology, transition, juvenile offenders, rehabilitation, mentoring

Introduction

Juvenile offending is a critical issue of our time. Traditionally, research into juvenile recidivism has adopted a risk and deficit model and focused on how best to *deter*

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offenders from re-offending (Wainwright & Nee, 2014). More recently, however, a new research trend has emerged that adopts a strengths-based approach rooted in principles of positive psychology (Twyford, 2013; Wainwright & Nee, 2014; Ward, Yates, & Willis, 2012). The present study contributes to the field by adopting a strengths-based approach to describe the experience and motivation of young offenders as they move through the critical period of transition from detention to the community. Gathering the perspectives of the young offenders who were participants in a formal mentoring program, as well as their mentors and caseworker, increases our understanding of how best to encourage a better life for young offenders.

High Rates of Juvenile Recidivism

Adolescents and young adults tend to have the highest offending rates of any age group (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2012; Shulman, Steinberg, & Piquero, 2014), which can be attributed to a number of co-occurring psychological and social factors (Sweeten, Piquero, & Steinberg, 2013). Moffitt's (1993, 1997, 2006) developmental theory posits that juvenile offending can be characterised by both "life-course persistent offenders," where a chronic pattern of criminal activity has occurred from an early age and "adolescence-limited offenders," where participation in criminal behaviour is only temporary and occurs as a function of the context of adolescence.

For young people in juvenile detention, the transition back into the community represents a critical time in which they face challenges on multiple fronts (Unruh, Povenmire-Kirk, & Yamamoto, 2009). These include the "after-effects" of incarceration such as psychological displacement, discontinuation of psychological and medical care (Altschuler, 2008), and social stigma from having spent time in secure facilities (Unruh et al., 2009). There is also the challenge of progressing from adolescence to young adulthood (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Vickers, 2010). In Australia, more than half of young offenders released from detention will be reconvicted within the first 6 months living in the community (Payne, 2007). With such a high incidence of offending and recidivism among young people, more research is needed that focuses specifically on young people (LeBaron, 2002) and the critical transition back to the community (McGuire, 2010).

Deterring Offenders Away From Recidivism

Research into recidivism has been conducted mainly under the premise of the risk-prediction tradition. That is, these efforts have largely concentrated on how best to *deter* offenders from re-offending (Wainwright & Nee, 2014). This is best demonstrated by the large number of sophisticated *risk* assessment tools (Hiscox, Witt, & Haran, 2007; Richards, 2011) designed to measure the juvenile's negative personal and contextual factors that should be managed to reduce the likelihood of recidivism (Mulder, Brand, Bullens, & van Marle, 2011).

Difficulties with drug use (Snyder, 2004); mental health issues (Snyder, 2004; Sullivan, 2004); cognitive and emotional deficiencies (Griller-Clark & Unruh, 2010);

limited education and skills (Altschuler, Stangler, Berkley, & Burton, 2009; Griller-Clark & Unruh, 2010); problematic peer networks (Barry, 2010; Payne, 2007; Sullivan, 2004); limited family contact or instability (Altschuler et al., 2009; Green, Mitchell, & Bruun, 2013; Snyder, 2004); limited financial, social, and health resources (Altschuler et al., 2009; Payne, 2007); and unstable accommodation (Payne, 2007) have all been cast as barriers to successful re-entry into the community. Understanding risk factors that lead to recidivism continues to be an important endeavour for research and practice; however, there is an emerging shift toward positive psychology and incorporating the strengths of an individual to motivate them on the road to a better life, and one without crime (Ward et al., 2012).

Pursuing a Better Life: Positive Psychology

Positive psychology "aims to understand the positive side of human functioning, expanding research on positive behaviors, cognitions, emotions, and character traits" (Schueller & Parks, 2014, p. 145). Advances and interest in the principles of positive psychology have grown substantially over the past decade (Krentzman, 2013), with it being championed as a new scientific endeavour that embodies a meta-psychological value position (Linley, Joseph, Harrington, & Wood, 2006) and seeks to restore an apparent imbalance in the emphasis of negative human experiences and drivers. Positive psychology advocates valued subjective experiences and offers a distinct interpretative framework to consider established areas of research around the human experience and drivers (Linley et al., 2006).

Twyford (2013) asserted that for the most part, "juvenile justice researchers and practitioners have not yet followed other social science disciplines and shifted their paradigm to a perspective based in mental wellness and positive psychology" (p. xi). Nonetheless, in recent times, research with juvenile offenders has begun to utilise positive psychology frameworks such as the good lives model (e.g., Nee, Ellis, Morris, & Wilson, 2013; Wainwright & Nee, 2014; Wylie & Griffin, 2013), and self-determination theory (e.g., Millward & Senker, 2012; Sander, Sharkey, Olivarri, Tanigawa, & Mauseth, 2010), as a means of furthering our understanding of recidivism.

Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory provides an evidence-based framework for understanding key motivators that drive an individual's goal setting, behaviours, and interactions with others and the environment. Self-determination theory posits that one's intrinsic motivation is driven by three fundamental psychological needs—the need for relatedness with others, autonomy, and a sense of competency (Ryan & Deci, 2008). Individuals pursue relatedness through connecting with others and feeling that they are cared for by others; seek autonomy in the form of exerting personal choice and the opportunity for self-direction and control; and competency in a sense of being effective in their interactions and roles in their context or environment (Ryan & Deci, 2008). Ward and colleagues built on Ryan and Deci's (2008) theory and developed the good lives model for rehabilitation work with offenders (Ward & Maruna, 2007). Similar to self-determination theory, the good lives model recognises that humans share common fundamental life goals, and advocates that rehabilitation

work should build the capacity of the individual to lead a fulfilling life and attain 11 primary goals and in turn desist from crime (Purvis, 2010; Thakker & Ward, 2010).

Adopting this positive approach requires researchers and practitioners alike to consider not only just reducing recidivism but also fostering one's ability to lead a more fulfilling life. Hence, young offenders need to be encouraged to strive toward obtaining a good life rather than simply running away from a bad one. Two central goals that are complementary include enhancing well-being and reducing recidivism (Ward et al., 2012).

The Present Study

This study seeks to contribute to the emerging body of research by describing the experiences of young offenders as they re-enter the community and inform the practice of assisting them to attain a better life following their release. A qualitative, phenomenological design was adopted where the views of young offenders, their mentors, and a caseworker were gathered.

Specifically, the study endeavours to discuss the key drivers permeating the experiences of young offenders as they desist from offending and, through the analysis of the data, aligns these emerging themes with a parsimonious theory of positive psychology. Furthermore, it is critical to identify how these drivers change as the young offenders transition from detention to the community, and if stakeholders' perceptions of these drivers are conflicting.

Method

Participants

Participants were (a) young male offenders, (b) volunteer community members who supported the young men in a mentoring relationship, and (c) a caseworker who managed the mentoring program.

Fifteen young male offenders participated in the study with the length of their involvement ranging from 9 to 18 months. On entry to the study, the average age of the young men was 18 years (range = 16-19 years). The young men described their cultural identity as Australian (n = 7), New Zealand European (n = 3), Tongan (n = 1), New Zealand Māori (n = 1), Lao (n =1), and two did not specify. All of the young men were participating in a voluntary mentoring program which stipulated that on enrolment to the program, participants must be due for release into the community within approximately 6 months and returning to the geographical area covered by the program. Any young man with a recorded sex offence was not eligible to enter into the program.

Twelve mentors (3 females, 9 males) and one caseworker (female) also participated in the study. The volunteer mentors worked with the young men on an individual basis while they were detained and when the young men returned to the community (e.g., fortnightly visits to the centre and outings once the young men were released). The

caseworker supported both the mentors and mentees throughout their time on the program.

Materials and Procedure

The project received clearance from both the University Human Ethics Research Committee and the Department of Attorney General and Justice—Juvenile Justice. The researchers established a partnership with a not-for-profit community organisation who administer a mentoring program to young male offenders to support their transition back into the community. The young men were recruited to the mentoring program by the program caseworker, and their participation was voluntary.

At the commencement of the study, the young men were located in a detention facility in New South Wales, Australia. While recruiting participants, the researcher outlined the research aims and the time commitment required. The researcher also emphasised that participation was voluntary, that their identity would be kept confidential except when required by law, and that they were free to withdraw at any time. Also, it was stressed that their participation in the mentoring program would not be adversely affected by their unwillingness to participate in the study. All of the young men who entered the mentoring program during the period of the study agreed to participate in the research study.

The researcher met with the participants individually to conduct semi-structured open-ended interviews. Interviews were collected over three time periods: (a) while the young men were located in the detention facility ($n = 11$), (b) 3 to 6 months following their release into the community ($n = 11$), and (c) 9 to 18 months following their release into the community ($n = 7$). The number of interviews conducted with the young men, the location of these interviews, and when these occurred varied as a function of the availability of the young men. The length of the interviews ranged from 4 to 21 min, with an average of 10 min. The length of the interviews are short (Robson, 2002), however, researchers have documented the unique contextual factors that may reduce the length of interviews with young offenders (Holt & Pamment, 2011). Young offenders may not be forthright in interviews as a result of their negative experience with criminal justice interviews (Holt & Pamment, 2011) and difficulties with oral language (Fougere, Thomas, & Daffern, 2013; Snow & Powell, 2011). Such factors may result in an apparent shallowness in responses (Snow & Powell, 2012). An examination of the 4-min interview transcript revealed that, although the length was brief, the content of the interview portrayed the perspective of the interviewee and thus, warranted inclusion.

Four mentors (1 female, 3 male) participated in an individual, semi-structured open-ended phone interview toward the end of the study. Twelve mentors kept journals of the mentee's experience throughout the duration of their relationship. Finally, the caseworker participated in an individual semi-structured open-ended phone interview toward the end of the study. The length of the interviews ranged from 16 to 50 min, with an average of 30 min. Consistent with the framework of positive psychology, the study sought to capture the valued subjective experiences of the young men as

a primary goal and thus, conducted more regular interviews with this group of participants (Linley et al., 2006).

Data Analysis

With participant consent, all interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed for analysis. The interviews with the young men were placed into three clusters (while in detention, 3-6 months post release, and 9-18 months post release), and the generated themes were compared across these three time points. Several steps were undertaken in the analysis of the data, consistent with a phenomenological approach (pioneered by Edmund Husserl, cited in Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Each transcript was read line by line to identify single concepts. Identified concepts were then sorted into categories. These categories were then further organised into broader themes. This process was then repeated until data saturation occurred (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). In organising the data, the researchers endeavoured to identify a positive psychology framework that most closely matched the emerging themes. The three human needs stipulated in self-determination theory appeared to present the best fit and provide a parsimonious model for this exploratory study. Thus, the self-determination theory was applied to interpret the data. To promote qualitative reliability, inter-coder agreement (Creswell, 2009) was measured whereby the first and second authors independently carried out thematic coding of the interview data. For the initial cross-checking, there was 80% agreement in the themes identified. The final themes presented represent a reconciled position facilitated by discussion between the first and second author.

Results and Discussion

The young men appeared to share some common experiences throughout their transition from juvenile detention to the community that align closely with the pursuit of the three primary goals outlined in self-determination theory. Gathering the perspectives of their mentors and caseworker provides an opportunity to explore the extent to which there were shared or divergent perspectives among different stakeholders. This is particularly important as some studies rely on reports from professionals around the young offender (e.g., Mears & Travis, 2004), rather than the young offenders themselves. If their views are divergent, researchers must reconsider the way in which they source this vital information.

The young offenders' feelings about re-entering the community were mixed. Some indicated that they were apprehensive whereas others expressed their excitement at this prospect. All of the young men, however, clearly *desired a better life* and held a sense of fear of returning to their old life that led them to getting into trouble. This can be seen in comments such as "I've got plans . . . try and start a whole new life" and "learning a different lifestyle and how to live properly on the outside." The mentors also observed that the young men wanted a better life, and for many of them (e.g., "I could see that he wanted a different life and might want to work towards that"), this became a source of motivation for the mentors to assist the mentees. It is apparent that

the three intrinsic needs of relatedness, competency, and autonomy drove the plans and actions of the young men. Over the period of transition, however, the nature and weight of these needs varied.

The Need to Accomplish Relatedness With Others

The strongest theme that emerged from the *pre-release* interviews with the young offenders can be connected to the self-determination theory construct of *relatedness*. The young men expressed a strong desire to reconnect with their family as a priority, after they had "burnt a lot of bridges," as conveyed in the following quote: "I just think about my family pretty much and not my mates anymore. Before it just used to be all about my mates but now I've finally noticed my family is there and I've got that support." Another interviewee explained that he wanted to establish a more positive relationship with his partner—"build a happier, stronger relationship with my girl—because it wasn't the best when I was out." The heightened value of family relationships over peer relationships, as expressed by these youth offenders, can be best understood through Wainwright and Nee's (2014) assertion that only relationships built on trust and respect would satisfy the need for relatedness.

Interestingly, a small number of the young offenders reported that their opportunity to relate and belong once they returned to the community was provided by groups outside the family such as sporting teams or church groups that were almost like surrogate families, evident when one young man explained that he "feels like there's a family" within his football team and his desire to play sport again ". . . because I work good with a team and I miss that feeling a lot." In support of the above comments, participation in fitness activities or team sport has been cited as a possible deterrent to youth delinquent behaviour (Thames & Vaisman-Tzachor, 2009). Comments from the young men suggest that this may serve as an avenue for them to achieve relatedness.

The desire to relate and feel like they belonged featured prominently in the responses of the young offenders as they were readying themselves to return to the community. In the interviews following their release, however, the need to relate with others, namely, family, did not emerge as a strong theme. Key psychological theories may provide some plausible explanations for this trend. It could be that when the young men re-entered the community, they were able to reunite with loved ones and thus, this need was met, and they were able to focus on meeting their needs for autonomy and competence. Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs would support this assertion as the need to accomplish love and relatedness must be met for an individual to pursue achievement and confidence.

The only evidence of their drive to relate and belong following their re-entry into the community was related to two themes: poor psychosocial adjustment back into the community and broken close relationships. It is possible that the foundation of such difficulties was the desire to feel that they belong to the greater community. The experience of one young man, corroborated by both his mentor and caseworker, demonstrated this experience:

> I was kind of feeling weird being on the outside and being out . . . as the days went on I was kind of getting paranoid about people looking at me. It was like they thought that—I don't know I thought that—because what the judge said to me that I'm unwanted in the community and I don't belong in the community—so everyone was looking at me funny.

For most of the young men, they had sustained relationships with family at the times they were interviewed. This, however, broke down for one young man as his partner had left him 8 months following his release. The despair that he felt as a result signifies that the need for relatedness is overwhelming when the need remains unmet:

> You talk about all these hopes and dreams of when you get out . . . when you actually do get out your hopes go down, because you've got nothing . . . I came back and I didn't even know who I was anymore.

Themes generated from the interviews with the mentors and caseworker focused more so on the young offender's need for autonomy and competency, rather than relatedness. This is consistent with the key focus of the mentors' role in providing guidance to the young offender and assisting with acquiring assets such as work and training. They did acknowledge that the young offenders had a need for relatedness, but this was discussed in the context of the mentor's relationship with the young men and how they were able to provide an essential caring interpersonal relationship for them. "I like to think that having someone who was genuinely interested in them and their lives, even for a short period of time was beneficial to the boys in some way." "He hasn't been in trouble . . . because someone cared about him."

The Need to Accomplish Autonomy

Another recurring theme discussed by the young offenders *prior to release* clustered around the young offenders' relationship with what they perceived as the negative peer group influences, which contributed to their initial crimes. On the surface, a theme concentrating on relationships with others would appear to be relevant to the concept of relatedness in self-determination theory. The way in which the young offenders spoke about their goals in these relationships, however, was distinctively different. The young offenders perceived their return to the negative peer group as a threat to their sense of autonomy. A sense of autonomy was highly valued by the young offenders as they planned for their return to the community. They acknowledged that they would have to discontinue interacting with their prior peer group, "not mixing with my old friends again . . . just like, their influence and they're a bad group to hang around." Similarly, the young offenders identified the need to manage the relationships and their influence in a way that would allow them to remain in control of their actions and remain autonomous:

> Before it was hard for me to say no. You don't want to feel bad because they're going by themselves or something like that so I'd just go along with it. But now probably I can talk to them and tell them no . . . I'm more mature and I've learnt to make decisions.

The mentors agreed that although the young men desired autonomy to choose a better life, this could be undermined by the young men returning to their previous living arrangements and negative peer groups:

> The environment these kids go back to is pretty much guaranteeing they will keep getting in trouble . . . seemed to feel powerless to not do the things that had gotten them incarcerated in the first place . . . a certain group of people had led him down the garden path and these people and their families lived in his estate. He refused to commit to not going to the house where all his trouble had started.

It is well established that delinquent peer groups influence individual delinquent behaviour (Lachman, Roman, & Cahill, 2013). In this discussion, these relationships are cast as a threat to the desire for autonomy where the individual is striving for a better life.

The caseworker stated that not only did peer influence undermine autonomy, but also the misuse of substances: "There are two major reasons why these young people re-offend—drugs and peers." The young men themselves spoke about how alcohol and drugs threatened their autonomy to make good decisions, such as "just get all the drugs and that's when stuff goes wrong," or partake in crime directly: "I don't want to go nowhere near it (drugs) because that's what was the main thing, too, like doing shit to get money for it." This theme became more prominent following their re-entry into the community.

Finally, the young offenders demonstrated a clear desire for *autonomy* once released that moved beyond escaping the influence of the prior peer group, but through more tangible entitlements such as "being able to wear my own clothes and being able to walk down the street. Being able to do what I want," "just being free," and having "your own money and that sort of thing." In comparison, the mentors were concerned with the impact of this new sense of autonomy, following sometimes years of incarceration over a key development period for the young men, as captured by the following quote: "I get the feeling that he has got used to his time in Juvenile Justice, he has got used to the routine and the lifestyle and mateship there, and that worries me for when he does get out."

Prior to release, the young men spoke fondly of their anticipated autonomy on release. Once they had re-entered the community, however, their desire for autonomy did not diminish, but it was evident that some struggled with this sense of freedom. One young man talked about his struggle on re-entry into the community

> I just can't get to sleep . . . When I was in there it's just the same routine over and over, like you get used to it like if you're locked in your room early you're going to get tired if you're just laying there . . . it's just stressful because I can't sleep.

Another commented on a similar experience "it just felt a bit weird at first like being able to walk around by myself and just not waking up, like work isn't telling me to wake up and all that."

Despite this initial struggle on re-entering the community, the young men continued to seek a sense of autonomy. The mentors also wanted to encourage the young men to develop autonomy now that they were living in the community. Interestingly, in some cases, the way in which the young men operationalised the concept of autonomy varied significantly to that of the mentors. While living in the community following detention, some of the young men did pursue education and employment. Others, however, pursued autonomy by the way they lived their daily lives. Many talked about wanting to enjoy the freedom, such as "just having a good chance to relax" and "I've just been lazy, just lazing around and going to the gym and footy training and that." One young man explained "I just don't like to over think things and just set a goal . . . I just like sort of kick back, just cruise along." This was in contrast to the views of mentors who wished for the young men to pursue autonomy in more goal-oriented ways, and this, at times, was a source of conflict: "I've told them [my mum, bloody my counsellors, my parole officer] to back off a bit . . . I just needed to get my head right first." The mentors also commented on this difference in worldviews: "They're very lazy when they come out of there because they have been confined for so long. I don't know whether they believe they're having a rest because I'm always onto him about working and that." This is consistent with the literature that has recognised that young offenders may spend a large amount of time participating in "passive leisure" rather than productive activities (Farnworth, 2000), and such practices may not support their pursuit of autonomy or competence.

It is useful to consider why some of the young men pursued autonomy in ways consistent with the worldview held by the mentors, that is, through gaining training and employment, whereas others pursued leisure and relaxation as a form of autonomy. One young man's comments suggest that the length of their detention may be a significant determining factor influencing the young men's expectations of life or locus of control:

> They say if you've been in there for more than 2 years you're institutionalised . . . it's just constant every day drilling of get up at six, weekends get up at seven . . . it's just all organised and all routine and you don't have a word in any of it.

The caseworker explained that for many of the young men, a lack of confidence and competency played a major role in their difficulties in achieving autonomy. This perspective will be explored further below.

The Need to Accomplish Competency

The journal entries and the interviews with the mentors demonstrated their focus on assisting their mentees to achieve competence once they returned to the community, namely, in the form of acquiring employment or enrolling in formal training. This focus is presumed to be strongly related to their worldview of what success means, and their expectation about how best to assist their mentee as indicated by the following quotes: "I've told him the importance of education" and "I told him, once he gets out, he's just got to keep busy . . . go to TAFE and does a part-time job." Indeed, the

research suggests that engagement in education and employment reduces recidivism and boosts the positive community involvement among young people (Bullis, Yovanoff, & Havel, 2004; Zagar, Grove, & Busch, 2013). Discussions around work and employment were a key component of the mentors' work with the young persons, and given the empirical evidence to date, this seems highly appropriate.

In the *post release* interviews, the need to achieve competence became more of a focus for the young men than it had while they were in detention. A number of the young men had gained employment or enrolled in training. Such participation was a marker of competence for some of the young men. For the young men who were not engaged in education or training following their release, they did identify that they wanted to "find work and make money and that for my future." Some of the young men spoke about their desire to achieve such mastery as obtaining a car license or purchasing a motorbike, which may be interpreted as their way of gaining competence.

A noteworthy reoccurring theme that identifies the young men's desire and achievement of competence related to comments about making smarter choices and mastering either bad peer relationships or drug and alcohol. For example, one young man explained, "I probably just got older and less stupid" while another said, "I'm not stupid now like I was before." It may be that in early adolescence, they experimented with identities that led to criminal activity, but now at the end of this stage, they have achieved a sense of identity regarding who they are and where their lives are headed (Erikson, 1968). Both Maruna (2001) and Wainwright and Nee (2014) reported similar findings where young offenders who have successfully desisted from crime portray an elevated sense of control over their lives and appear to embrace an internal locus of control and sense of responsibility. Such developments can be framed within the emergence of competency.

Finally, a few of the young men spoke about their desire to conquer social skills and confidence, which can be interpreted as competency to function in the community. For example, one young man explained how he wanted "just to get more confidence with talking to people in the community . . . just my confidence in doing things." Another shared how, even after 8 months living in the community, he still does not like being around people due to a lack of confidence and social skills: "I still don't want any contact because I still don't like being around people." Although striving to achieve confidence was mentioned by some of the young men once they re-entered the community, it presented as a significant driver of behaviour according to both the mentors and the caseworker. The caseworker described that

> it's more lack of confidence. A lot of their fears are over communicating with people, and that's when it's not quite happening for them . . . The young person tends to struggle with this as they display low self-esteem, lack of confidence so the process of the young person on their return home is quite difficult.

Conclusion

Given the relative high rates of recidivism by juvenile offenders and the negative individual and societal costs of criminal activity, there is an increasing need to focus on transitional planning. Indeed, Hogan, Bullock, and Fritsch (2010) have argued that

"among the educational services provided to youth in correctional facilities, transition planning is one of the most critical to the youths' success" (p. 135). The current study captures the perspectives of young offenders, their mentors, and caseworker to elucidate the experience of young offenders over this critical period of transition. Importantly, their experience is viewed through the emerging lens of a strengths-based approach to determine what drivers may steer young offenders toward a better life. This is in stark contrast to the deficit-based, risk-prediction tradition of previous rehabilitative research.

The three intrinsic needs postulated in self-determination theory—autonomy, relatedness, and competence—are evident throughout the young offenders' transition from detention to the community. The nature and priority of those drivers, however, varies considerably. Prior to release, the need to relate was central in the mind-frames of the young offenders. Once they re-entered the community, the need for autonomy and competence was more prominent, although at times operationalised in a different way than that conceived by their mentors. If we understand the drivers of behaviour and what the young men strive to achieve at different points in their re-entry into the community, then these motivations can be used as anchor points to guide the young men to lead a better life without crime.

The generalisations that can be made from the current study are limited due to the small sample that includes only a narrow subset of the population who were participating in a formal mentoring program. In addition, the responses of the participants may have been influenced by social desirability, most notably impression management or self-deception. Paulhus and Vazire (2007) describe how self-report methodologies may not resemble a true depiction of the construct in question when respondents either seek to deceive others (impression management) or evidence an unconscious form of self-presentation (self-deception). The researchers attempted to minimise the impact of social desirability on the findings by ensuring the interviewer did not reinforce responses, and by collecting the perspectives of multiple stakeholders in an effort to triangulate the data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010). As a result of such limitations, the findings are presented as expositional rather than conclusive.

Nonetheless, policy makers and practitioners are advised to recognise the intrinsic needs of these young offenders and how they evolve throughout the transition period. As argued elsewhere (e.g., Thakker & Ward, 2010), the theoretical foundation of positive psychology and a strengths-based approach may be integrated with the traditional risk-prediction approach to provide a more comprehensive and successful method. Sheldon and Ryan (2011) attest that the success of interventions can be measured by how well they meet the needs of their participants. To inform such interventions, the current study has provided a forum for young offenders to articulate what matters in their life and what motivates them to pursue a better life. Harnessing and promoting these innate values and motivators may serve to build stronger futures for these young offenders, and benefit us all.

Author's Note

The views expressed do not necessarily represent any official views of Juvenile Justice: Attorney General and Justice

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