

# Quantifying the effects of a resocialization project for prisoners

***Mona Wolff***

*Goethe-University, Frankfurt*

***Sonja Rohrmann***

*Goethe-University, Frankfurt*

***Rolf van Dick***

*Goethe-University, Frankfurt*

*m.wolff@jur.uni-frankfurt.de*

## **Abstract**

Qualitative studies have shown positive effects of theater projects conducted as measures of resocialization in the penal system on participants (among others, Sandberg, 2009, Thompson, 1998). The present evaluation study presents a quantitative evaluation of a musical theater project with respect to changes in participants' core self-evaluation, their affect, and future prospects compared to a control group. In addition, we wanted to test whether prisoners who identified more strongly with the project would benefit more from participation. In total, 51 prisoners participated in two data collections at the start and end of the project. Significant differences were found between the project group and the control group in core self-evaluation ( $p = 0,024$ ) and negative affectivity after the project ( $p = 0,03$ ): Members of the project group reported higher self-efficacy and less negative moods at the end of the project. Moreover, participants of the project who identified strongly with it, also reported more positive mood ( $r = .68$ ), positive self-evaluation ( $r = .51$ ) and a positive view of future prospects ( $r = .47$ ) at the end of the project. Thus, the present study attests to the positive effects of resocialization projects of this kind. Future studies should examine the sustainability of these effects.

**Keywords:** inmates, resocialization, theater, identification, self-concept, PANAS

## 1. Introduction

Already from the 1930s, theater work has been used as a measure of resocialization in prisons. A recent review of theater projects in European prisons (EU-project "Teatro e Carcere in Europa", 2005/2006) documents that about 10% of prisons in Germany report ongoing and/or past theater activities, in Sweden about 20%, and in Austria even more than 50%. The use of such projects for the penal system is measured in terms of resocialization, which aims at re-integrating criminal offenders into society. Thus, the possibilities of influencing participants and the effects on participants are crucial in evaluating the use of such projects. Investigations on the effects of theater projects in prisons document, among other things, an improvement in participants' self-concept and a more positive self-perception (e.g., Sandberg, 2009, Thompson, 1998). Moreover, inmates report that in theater projects they experience appreciation and have the feeling of being viewed as a person rather than merely as a prisoner (e.g., Sandberg, 2009). However, all of the pertinent investigations are qualitative analyses. Therefore, the present evaluation study aimed at investigating quantitatively whether systematic changes can be detected in prisoners participating in such resocialization projects. Our particular focus was on changes in the self-concept, as the development of a stable self-concept is regarded as one goal of imprisonment (Kaiser & Schöch, 2003), while some investigations register deterioration in self-concept during imprisonment (cf. Greve et al., 1997). In addition, a positive self-concept seems to correlate negatively with delinquent behavior; thus, personality traits associated with a conviction of external control (less endurance, less ability to delay gratification, less self-responsibility) correlate with a higher probability of delinquency (Scheurer, 1993).

Another aim of the study was to examine whether strong identification with the project contributed to an improvement in self-esteem. Identification with teams or organization refers to emotional commitment and the acceptance of norms and values of the groups one belongs to (e.g., van Dick, 2004). Research of the past 20 years has consistently shown that persons with a higher identification tend to show more active involvement in a group (van Dick et al., 2006), are more content, experience more well-being (Riketta & van Dick, 2005; Schuh et al., 2013) and are less inclined to leave the group (van Dick et al., 2004). Accordingly, strongly identifying participants should profit more from the project in the context of the present study.

The first question to be tested was whether prisoners who participated in the project displayed more positive changes in their core self-evaluation, their affect and self-estimated future prospects than prisoners in the control group (Hypothesis 1). In addition, we tested whether inmates who identified more strongly with the project would benefit more from it with regard to positive self-evaluation, affect, and self-estimated future prospects (Hypothesis 2).

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Sample

In total, the sample consisted of 51 male prisoners of a prison in Frankfurt, Germany. The project group comprised 27, the control group 19 prisoners. Their ages ranged between 20 and 60 years, the majority (39.9%) being between 36 and 45 years old; another 35.7% between 21 and 30. Fifty percent of the participants had completed junior high school/lower secondary school (German *Hauptschule*). The following reasons for imprisonment were mentioned (multiple responses possible): fraud 21.88%, failure to pay fines 15.63% (German *Ersatzfreiheitsstrafe*), violations of the narcotics law 12.5%, and aggravated assault 6.25%. Further offences were mentioned in the category "other" by 59.38%: e.g., aggravated robbery, damage to property, misappropriation and driving without a driving license. The duration of

imprisonment was between two and 51 months with an average of 18.96 months ( $SD = 14,85$ ). Participation in the study was voluntary. For answering the questionnaires members of the control group received a bar of chocolate at both times of measurement.

## 2.2. Design of the study

Twenty-seven inmates volunteered for participation in the project. They were divided into three groups: a theater group, a music group, and a group which worked on converting a push barge (a special type of a large boat for industrial purposes) into a theater. For eight months (April 2011 to December 2011), the theater and music groups prepared the music theater play "Carmen" in two groups under professional supervision. Both groups rehearsed separately and met each other only in the final rehearsal. During the last three months, another group of inmates worked on converting the push barge into a theater ship, which then served as the performance venue. In all, the project comprised twelve public performances.

When the conversion of the push barge started, inmates from the project group and the control group answered a set of questionnaires for the first time; at the end of the project they completed the survey once more. The following instruments were used:

## 2.3. Instruments

**Identification with the project.** To measure identification with the project, we used six items from Mael and Ashfort (1992; e.g., "When I talk about the project I usually say 'we', not 'they'.") as well as two items from Kreiner and Ashfort (2004; e.g., "I have mixed feelings towards the project.", recoded). The items are well-established and have been validated also in German. The interviewees indicated on a 4-point scale how much each statement applied to them (1 = does not apply at all, 4 = applies completely).

**Positive and negative affect.** Affect was measured with the German version of the "Positive and negative affect schedule" (PANAS, Watson et al.; 1988) by Krohne et al. (1996). High degrees of positive affect are characterized by high activity, elation, and enthusiasm, negative affect by a fearful mood, irritability, and annoyance (e.g., "active", "irritable"). Ten adjectives each for positive and negative affect were to be rated on 4-point scales (1 = not at all, 4 = very). The present investigation was limited to capturing participants' current condition.

**Self-concept.** The scale *Core Self-Evaluations* (CSES, Judge, Erez, Bono & Thoresen, 2003) measures the basic attitude of an individual toward herself or himself. In the present study, we used the German version (Heilmann & Jonas, 2010) of CSES. CSES comprises 12 items and assesses the four traits self-esteem, self-efficacy, conviction of internal control, and emotional stability (e.g., "Sometimes I have the feeling that I don't have control over my work.", "I have doubts of my competence."). Participants were to indicate on a 4-point scale to what extent the respective statements applied to them (1 = does not apply at all, 4 = applies completely). Using CSES allows for assessing the following facets of self-evaluation (cf. Heilmann & Jonas, 2010; Judge & Bono, 2001): (1) the basic evaluation of one's own person (Rosenberg, 1965; Judge et al., 1997), (2) the expectation of being able to manage situations successfully, i.e., trust in one's own capabilities (Locke et al, 1996; Judge et al., 1998), (3) the conviction to be able to control events of one's own life (Rotter, 1966), and (4) a tendency towards self-assurance, equanimity, and stability (Goldberg, 1990) even in stressful situations.

**Self-estimated future prospects.** Future prospects were measured with the help of self-constructed questions which participants used to estimate the time after their release from prison (e.g., "I feel well-prepared for my release."; "I am *not* sure whether I will get along after my release."). These items as well were to be rated on a four-point scale (1 = does not apply at all, 4 = applies completely).

Internal consistencies of the individual instruments are shown in Table 1.

### 3. Results

To examine the comparability of project group and control group concerning a number of relevant variables, we conducted t-tests for independent samples. No significant differences between control and project group were found for age, school-leaving certificate, and the offence that was the reason for imprisonment (Age:  $t = -0,75$ ;  $df = 47$ ;  $p = 0,45$ ; School-leaving certificate:  $t = 1,37$ ;  $df = 48$ ;  $p = 0,18$ ; Offence<sub>Drugs</sub>:  $t = -0,86$ ;  $df = 40$ ;  $p = 0,40$ ; Offence<sub>Fines</sub>:  $t = -0,90$ ;  $df = 40$ ;  $p = 0,37$ ; Offence<sub>Assault</sub>:  $t = -1,82$ ;  $df = 40$ ;  $p = 0,08$ ; Offence<sub>Fraud</sub>:  $t = 1,41$ ;  $df = 40$ ;  $p = 0,17$ ).

Subsequently, we conducted a single-factor analysis of variance with repeated measurements to check whether participants of the project showed significant changes over the different times of measurement compared to the control group (Hypothesis 1). In the next step we analyzed to what extent participants of the project identified with the project and whether this was positively associated with the other variables (Hypothesis 2).

With respect to **positive affectivity**, there were no significant differences between project group and control group. However, positive affectivity was significantly higher in the project group than in the control group even at the first time of measurement ( $t = 3,66$ ;  $p \leq 0,001$ ).

Similarly, no significant difference was revealed for **negative affectivity**, but the two groups displayed opposite developments. Thus the data indicates that inmates from the project group showed less negative moods after the project (Figure 1). Correspondingly, a t-test for independent samples revealed a significant difference between the two groups at the second, but not the first time of measurement (start of project:  $t = -1,78$ ;  $df = 42$ ;  $p = 0,08$ ; end of project:  $t = -2,66$ ;  $df = 27$ ;  $p = 0,03^*$ ;  $N_{t1} = 44$ ;  $N_{t4} = 29$ ; \* significance  $p \leq 0,05$ ).

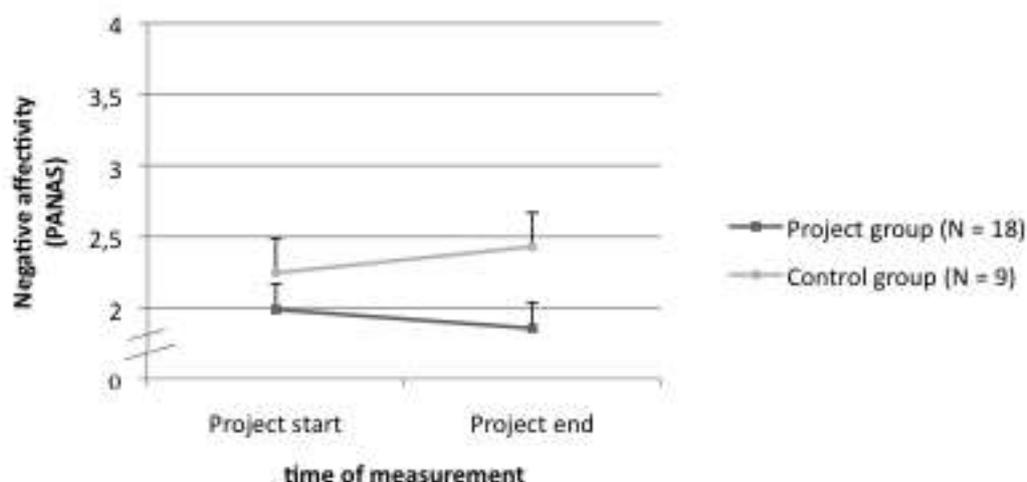


Figure 1: Means and standard deviations of inmates' negative affectivity at the start and at the end of the project (project group and control group) with respect to PANAS.

A significant difference between project and control group was found for **core self-evaluation** (self-esteem, self-efficacy, conviction of internal control, emotional stability) ( $p = 0,024$ ): Those inmates who participated in the project showed an increase in core self-evaluation, whereas a decrease was found in the control group. This is illustrated in Figure 2.

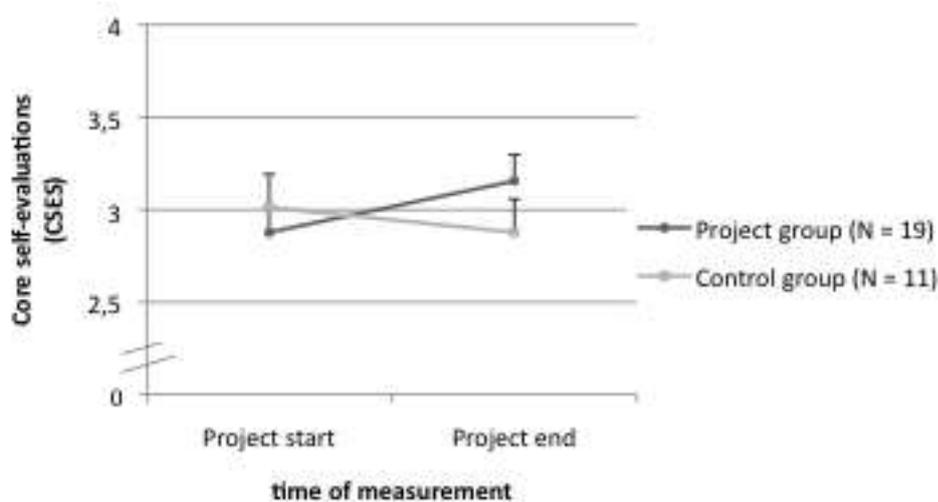


Figure 2: Means and standard deviations of inmates' core self-evaluations at the start and at the end of the project (project group and control group) with respect to the CSES.

Both members of the project group and the control group were asked questions about their upcoming release. We assessed to what extent they expected to get along after their imprisonment and to what extent they expected to be capable of coping with potential problems. In addition, they were asked whether they felt prepared for their release. The statistic analysis did not reveal any differences between project and control group.

The results reported above partly confirm the first hypothesis: Compared to the control group, favorable changes were found in the project group with respect to core self-evaluation and negative affectivity. However, no differences emerged with regard to positive affectivity and self-estimated future prospects.

To test Hypothesis 2, we analyzed correlations between the constructs within the group of project participants. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of variables are given in Table 1.

Participants of the project showed high identification with the project across the different times of measurement. Thus, they felt a strong bond with the project over its whole course ( $M = 3,39$ ;  $SD = 0,08$ ). In the individuals examined high identification at the end of the project was accompanied by an overall more positive mood ( $r = .68$ ), a more positive self-evaluation ( $r = .51$ ) and a positive estimation of the future ( $r = .47$ ) at the end of the project. In all, these findings confirm Hypothesis 2.

In addition, core self-evaluation displayed significant positive correlations with the other variables: Higher degrees of core self-evaluation were associated with higher degrees of positive affectivity ( $r = .56$  to  $.77$ ). Correspondingly, significant *negative* correlations obtained between core self-evaluation and negative affectivity ( $r = -.49$  to  $-.70$ ). Individuals with an overall positive core self-evaluation were thus characterized by higher activity, elation, and enthusiasm and less characterized by fearful moods, irritability, or annoyance. There were also moderate to high correlations between core self-evaluation and self-estimated future prospects after release from prison ( $r = .58$  to  $.77$ ). Consequently, inmates with a more positive core self-evaluation viewed their future after release from prison overall more positively.

**Table 1:**

Means, standard deviations, internal consistencies, and intercorrelations of variables in the project group

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Positive Affect_t1	3.36	.67	.92								
2 Positive Affect_t2	3.09	.76	.39	.91							
3 Negative Affect_t1	1.92	.75	-.60**	-.19	.88						
4 Negative Affect_t2	1.81	.80	-.72**	-.45	.66**	.92					
5 Core self-evaluations_t1	3.02	.63	.70**	.56*	-.50**	-.67**	.87				
6 Core self-evaluations_t2	3.12	.74	.77**	.77**	-.55*	-.70**	.88**	.92			
7 Identification_t2	3.23	.65	.19	.68**	.02	-.21	.48*	.52*	.78		
8 Future prospects_t1	3.44	.56	.54**	.48	-.26	-.60*	.58**	.63**	.64**	.82	
9 Future prospects_t2	3.33	.58	.63*	.58*	-.66**	-.72**	.74**	.77**	.47	.71**	.82

Note:  $14 < N > 27$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; Cronbach's Alphas in the diagonal.  
t1 = project start; t2 = project end

#### 4. Discussion

**Identification.** The present study shows that participants in the project identified strongly with the project at all times of measurement. Furthermore, identification was positively associated with participants' self-esteem. Haslam and colleagues (2009) investigated identification at different phases of a theater production in a professional theater company; they found stronger variations in identification over the course of the project and also between participants. Persons who work at the theater as professionals apparently experience phases of lower identification - for instance because they like a particular play less or cannot cooperate well with a director. In the present project, however, the inmates were obviously highly motivated from the start and therefore strongly identified with the project. The project leaders also seem to have succeeded in sustaining participants' identification over the whole course of the project. This cannot be taken for granted, especially as projects of this type can get into a crisis, above all at the start, but also at later stages - Haslam et al.'s study, for instance, describes particularly high stress levels during dress rehearsals. But in contrast to the study by Haslam et al. (2009) our project was conducted on a voluntary basis. The findings of the present study therefore suggest that a strong identification is important for the success of a project and that the leaders of a project should invest time and effort, particularly at the beginning, in developing a strong shared identity. This can be achieved, for example, by intensive attempts at getting to know each other, including exercises for team building, but also by clearly communicating the shared values and goals of the project.

**Affectivity.** With respect to positive and negative affectivity, only negative affectivity revealed a different development in the project group compared to the control group. Results indicate that the project group experienced less negative affectivity at the end of the project than the control group. For positive affectivity there was a significant difference between

members of the project and the control group already at the first time of measurement. A possible explanation could lie in the fact that the theater group and the music group had already started rehearsing three months *before* the first data collection. Thus, it can be assumed that corresponding changes had set in before the first measurement and that affect had already been influenced in a positive direction. But the differences between project group and control group might also be explained as effects of selection: Since participation in the project was voluntary, the project may have attracted especially those persons who were characterized by positive affect in the first place.

The fact that we could not find an overall increase in positive affectivity for participants in the project group may be explained by the high strain exerted by the project: The participants experienced individual demands, faced new challenges and had to assume responsibility for the joint result. It is also conceivable that in the course of the project processes of reflection were initiated which also impacted affect. Such processes may not always be of a positive nature, as fears or personal weaknesses can become obvious or make themselves felt. From a statistical angle, however, we could also be dealing with a simple ceiling effect, for positive expectations and the distraction from the monotonous prison routine connected with the project could have triggered a positive affect that could not increase further; rather, the effort connected with the project may have diminished the initial euphoria.

**Self-concept.** Relevant differences between participants of the project and the control group could be detected with respect to core self-evaluations: Over the course of the project, the core self-evaluations of the project group improved, whereas the control group deteriorated. After the end of the project the participating inmates reported more self-esteem, higher self-efficacy, higher conviction of internal control as well as higher emotional stability. Negative effects of imprisonment on the self-concept (e.g., Greve et al., 2003) did not occur in the project participants or could be compensated. The relevance of core self-evaluation has already been demonstrated in numerous studies (e.g., Judge et al, 1998). It seems to play an important role also in the context of reintegration: Persons with a positive core self-evaluation rate their own ability higher to achieve something, which makes them activate their own resources more effectively in order to succeed (e.g., Bandura, 1994). Moreover, they tend to view events as internally controlled, i.e., controlled by their own abilities and characteristics, rather than controlled by external situational factors. Ultimately they can be described as more self-assured, equanimous, and stable – even in stressful situations – and have a positive attitude towards themselves. These traits seem to be of central importance for (re-)integration, e.g., finding a job, a place to live, (re-)establishing social contacts, etc.

Moreover, correlations between core self-evaluation and the other variables show that prisoners with a positive core self-evaluation are also more convinced that they will be able to cope with problems in the future and that they will get along after their release. Therefore, it can be seen as highly relevant that the present project strengthened core self-evaluation.

## 5. Limitations

The sample size of the present evaluation study constitutes a limitation which must be viewed critically. A larger sample would have been desirable both for the project group and for the control group, even though sample sizes in field studies of this kind are often comparable with the present one.

## 6. Conclusion

The present resocialization project aimed at facilitating prisoners' transition from imprisonment to freedom and opening up perspectives for the future. We succeeded in quantifying positive effects of such measures of resocialization and in confirming that,

compared to a control group, the project group profited considerably from the measures taken: Prisoners' high identification with the project contributed positively to their self-esteem. This is relevant because imprisonment tends to have a negative impact on the self-concept (Greve et al., 1997), while a positive self-esteem is known to be a protective factor for resocialization and a strengthening of self-esteem is thus a goal during imprisonment (Kaiser & Schöch, 2003). The control group was also found to display more negative affectivity at the end of the project than the project group. A positive impact on negative affect is likewise an important goal in imprisonment. Yet the most relevant effects of the resocialization measures consisted in the positive impact on the self-concept. Compared to the control group, the project group felt higher self-efficacy and was more convinced of being able to cope with problems after their release from prison. This stance might be central to a positive development after imprisonment. Participants from the project group and the control group did not differ significantly with respect to changes in future prospects. However, core self-evaluations correlate positively with future prospects. Thus the project may affect future prospects only indirectly, via an initial increase in self-esteem and subsequently more positive prospects. The sample size of the present study does not suffice to conduct corresponding analyses of mediation but such analyses would be very useful in future investigations with more participants.

To test the sustainability of the results we had planned a follow-up study six weeks after the end of the project. Due to scant participation, however, this data could not be analyzed. The problem was that at this point in time the majority of participants had been either released or transferred, we could not contact them or did not receive responses. It is therefore desirable that future studies on the effects of resocialization measures investigate the sustainability of effects.

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