Forgive and Forget?:
Religiosity and Perceptions of Ex-Offenders

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This study examined the factors that shape the perceptions young Catholics have of ex-offenders.

- How does the degree of religiosity affect young Catholics’ perceptions of ex-offenders?
- How does knowledge of Catholic Social Thought affect young Catholics’ perceptions of ex-offenders?
The findings illustrate that regardless of religiosity or knowledge of Catholic Social Thought, young Catholic students at Saint Mary’s College tend to possess similar opinions and perceptions of ex-offenders in comparison to non-Catholic students at Saint Mary’s College.
Literature Review

- Rights of Ex-Offenders
  - Bradley et al. (2001), Legal Action Center (2004)
  - Kleinig and Murtagh (2005), Manza et al. (2004)

- Social Stigmas and Attitudes Toward Ex-Offenders
Literature Review

- Religion and Crime
  - Garland (1990), Applegate et al. (2000)

- Catholic Social Thought and Crime
Ann Swidler (1986)
Culture as a tool kit
- Elements of culture
- Religion
Tool kit leads to strategies of action
Methodology

- Procedure
  - Surveys
- Target Population
  - Saint Mary’s College students
- Sampling Technique
  - Population study
  - Non-representative sample of 218 students
  - Response rate of 14.4%
Methodology

- Measurements
  - Demographic information
  - Religiosity
  - Knowledge of Catholic Social Thought
  - Opinions of ex-offenders
  - Recoded responses
- Strengths and weaknesses
Findings

- 218 participants
- Average age of 19.78
- All majors
- Every class
- 171 participants identified as Catholic (79.5%)
## Findings

### Table 1: Opinions and Perceptions of Ex-Offenders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean (1-5)</th>
<th>Strongly Agree/Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree/Disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Should ex-offenders be allowed to vote?</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>162 (76.4%)</td>
<td>36 (17.0%)</td>
<td>14 (6.6%)</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should ex-offenders be allowed to work as public employees?</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>117 (55.1%)</td>
<td>59 (27.8%)</td>
<td>36 (17.0%)</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should ex-offenders be allowed to become police officers?</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>55 (26.0%)</td>
<td>53 (25.0%)</td>
<td>104 (49.0%)</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should felony convictions restrict ex-offenders from obtaining federal housing assistance?</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>50 (23.5%)</td>
<td>65 (30.5%)</td>
<td>98 (46.0%)</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Findings

#### Table 2: Catholics versus Non-Catholics on Opinions and Perceptions of Ex-Offenders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Catholics</th>
<th>Non-Catholics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree that ex-offenders should be allowed to work as public employees</td>
<td>55.9% (94)</td>
<td>52.3% (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree that ex-offenders should be allowed to become police officers</td>
<td>27.4% (46)</td>
<td>20.5% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree that ex-offenders should be allowed to vote</td>
<td>79.1% (133)</td>
<td>65.9% (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would hire an ex-offender</td>
<td>49.1% (82)</td>
<td>53.7% (22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Catholics</th>
<th>Non-Catholics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very Concerned</strong></td>
<td>55.5% (92)</td>
<td>41.9% (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agree that ex-offenders are a threat to society</strong></td>
<td>24.1% (40)</td>
<td>33.4% (14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Findings

### Table 4: Importance of Social Justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Catholics</th>
<th>Non-Catholics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean Importance of Social Justice</strong></td>
<td>8.65</td>
<td>8.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard Deviation of Importance of Social Justice</strong></td>
<td>1.526</td>
<td>1.529</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

- Ex-offenders should be allowed to vote and work as public employees
- Uncertain about other liberties like federal housing and employment
- Negative stigma of the label of “ex-offender” still exists despite religious affiliation
Discussion

- Willingness to hire an ex-offender
- Variations in the results suggest differences in the composition of each participant’s cultural tool kit
- Religious affiliation is one of the different sources
- Future research will need to examine other sources for variations
Similarities exist suggesting that the cultural tool kit of a Catholic individual and a non-Catholic individual also contain similar tools and resources

What is the common tool?

- General concept of religion
- Required religious studies courses
- Identity as Saint Mary’s College student
Questions?
References

- http://familiesuma.org/ex-offender_and_re-entry.html
- http://bloggers.com/topics/rosary