

Forgive and Forget?:

Religiosity and Perceptions of Ex-Offenders

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Research Questions

- 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?

Thesis

- 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
 - Freeman (2003), Travis et al. (2001), Wodahl (2006), Thompson (2004)
 - Bradley et al. (2001), Legal Action Center (2004)
 - Kleinig and Murtagh (2005), Manza et al. (2004)
- Social Stigmas and Attitudes Toward Ex-Offenders
 - Geiger (2006), Homant and Kennedy (1982), Travis et al. (2003), Owens (2009), Hirschfield and Piquero (2010)

Literature Review

- Religion and Crime
 - Garland (1990), Applegate et al. (2000)
- Catholic Social Thought and Crime
 - United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2000), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2003)

Theory

- 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

	Mean (1-5)	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Total
Should ex-offenders be allowed to vote?	2.10	162 (76.4%)	36 (17.0%)	14 (6.6%)	212 (100.0%)
Should ex-offenders be allowed to work as public employees?	2.53	117 (55.1%)	59 (27.8%)	36 (17.0%)	212 (100.0%)
Should ex-offenders be allowed to become police officers?	3.33	55 (26.0%)	53 (25.0%)	104 (49.0%)	212 (100.0%)
Should felony convictions restrict ex-offenders from obtaining federal housing assistance?	3.26	50 (23.5%)	65 (30.5%)	98 (46.0%)	213 (100.0%)

Findings

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

	Catholics	Non-Catholics
Agree that ex-offenders should be allowed to work as public employees	55.9% (94)	52.3% (23)
Agree that ex-offenders should be allowed to become police officers	27.4% (46)	20.5% (9)
Agree that ex-offenders should be allowed to vote	79.1% (133)	65.9% (29)
Would hire an ex-offender	49.1% (82)	53.7% (22)

Findings

Table 3: Catholics versus Non-Catholics on Concern if Ex-Offender Moved Next Door

	Catholics	Non-Catholics
Very Concerned	55.5% (92)	41.9% (18)
Agree that ex-offenders are a threat to society	24.1% (40)	33.4% (14)

Findings

Table 4: Importance of Social Justice

	Catholics	Non-Catholics
Mean Importance of Social Justice	8.65	8.28
Standard Deviation of Importance of Social Justice	1.526	1.529



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



Discussion

- 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?

Rights



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