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Sydney Mosser

Northern Michigan University, smosser@nmu.edu

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FACTORS INFLUENCING ATTITUDES TOWARDS EX-OFFENDERS

By

Sydney T Mosser

THESIS

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Factors Influencing Attitudes Towards Ex-Offenders

This thesis by Sydney T Mosser is recommended for approval by the student's Thesis Committee and Department Head in the Department of Psychological Sciences and by the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research.

Jon Barch

04/01/2022

Committee Chair: Dr. Jon Barch

Date

V. Jeevar

04/01/2022

First Reader: Dr. Vincent Jeevar

Date

Michael Harrington

04/01/2022

Second Reader: Dr. Michael Harrington

Date

Adam Prus

04/01/2022

Department Head: Dr. Adam Prus

Date

Lisa Schade Eckert

5/3/22

Dr. Lisa Schade Eckert

Date

Dean of Graduate Studies and Research

ABSTRACT

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Every day, incarcerated individuals are being released back into the general population having served their time. However, these released ex-offenders are 83% likely to reoffend if they are not able to reintegrate properly (Alper et al., 2018). The present research explored how various factors of ex-offenders and community observers could have an influence on attitudes towards ex-offenders upon reintegration. Specifically, we looked at the influence of three manipulated characteristics of a hypothetical ex-offender, race, gender, and age, which were presented to the participant in the form of a vignette. After reading one randomly assigned vignette, the participants were asked to rate their attitudes on three dependent measures (attitudes towards ex-offenders, explicit racial bias and explicit gender bias). There were significant results showing a more positive attitude towards the Black male who didn't take responsibility. All other results were not statistically significant. Despite the results, this research provided further evidence and future directions for understanding what factors influence positive attitudes towards ex-offenders to help them reintegrate successfully.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2018 there were 6,410,000 individuals in the U.S. justice system, accounting for incarcerated individuals and individuals in community supervision (Maruschak & Minton, 2020). Having such a high number of individuals removed from society is problematic enough, but if they fail to successfully reintegrate after serving their sentence, ex-offenders are more likely to re-offend. A 9-year longitudinal study followed the release and re-offense records of 77% of the total offenders released in the US in 2005 (Alper et al., 2018). The analysis found that 83% of the sample was rearrested in the 9-year period of the study, with 44% of them being rearrested within their first year of release. This pattern of recidivism not only contributes to a continuing cycle of crime and poverty but also causes damages to communities; damages that occur when individuals are repeatedly removed from and reintroduced to the community (Clear et al., 2001).

With so many people affected by this problem, it becomes increasingly important to understand the factors that contribute to success or failure in ex-offender reintegration. One of the leading explanations is the troubles ex-offenders have finding employment. A 2018 study found that ex-offenders have an unemployment rate greater than 27%, which is nearly 5 times higher than the unemployment rate for the general population of the US (Couloute & Kopf, 2018). This extreme rate of unemployment remained high when race and gender (other factors influencing rates of unemployment) were controlled for. According to recent data the reported rate of unemployment for the general population of the US in 2022 is 4% (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). While this 2022 report does not specifically address ex-offender unemployment levels, if the rates have remained constant since the 2018 report then they would currently have a rate nearly 7 times that of the general public. When ex-offenders are unable to find stable employment, they are more likely to return to crime, and employment is just one example of the

problems ex-offenders face when they're released. One way this problem and others can be addressed is to understand and account for the social factors that make it difficult for ex-offenders to find their place in general society. Some of these social factors are characteristics of the individuals in the communities where an ex-offender attempts to reintegrate and other factors are the characteristics of the ex-offender themselves. The present study is important because understanding these factors can inform policies and programs to help ex-offenders better reintegrate into normative society.

Literature Review

Observer Factors

Attitudes towards a particular individual are informed by two things, the characteristics of the observer and the characteristics of the person being observed. To understand ex-offender reintegration, we need to understand the attitudes of the community members they interact with when they return from incarceration. The characteristics of interest for the community member or observer in the present study are race, age, political affiliation, and gender.

Race

Previous research has shown that members of minority groups tend to have more favorable attitudes towards ex-offenders. A study by Hirschfield & Piquero (2010) looked at several participant-level factors that influenced attitudes towards offenders. They conducted a phone survey of 2,282 participants across four states and accounted for 11 demographic controls. For race, they asked two questions where participants indicated whether they were Black individuals (alternative response being non-Black) or Hispanic individuals (alternative response being non-Hispanic). Results indicated that both of these minority races were predictors of softer

attitudes towards offenders. In other words, both Black and Hispanic individuals held fewer negative attitudes towards offenders than those who self-reported not being Black or Hispanic

Age

The same study mentioned above also found that as age increases individuals become more favorable towards rehabilitation and more positive towards offenders (Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010). They attributed this finding to longer development or experience from having lived through historical periods that placed more importance on rehabilitation. However, this demographic does not seem to be typically included, or at least is rarely discussed as a variable in the analyses, in studies on this topic. A meta-analysis on 19 studies of public attitudes towards offenders (consisting of a total of 9,355 participants) found a negligible effect size for the age of the participant as a predictor of attitudes towards offenders (Rade et al., 2016). However, only 9 of the included 19 studies included age as a variable.

Political Affiliation

Compared to race and age, political affiliation seems to be included as a demographic in more studies, however, it has drawbacks of its own. Once again, this variable was covered in the Hirschfield & Piquero (2010) study, which found that conservative identification predicted negative attitudes towards offenders while liberal views softened attitudes. Similar results were found in a subsequent study looking at community attitudes towards offenders (Leverentz, 2011). They sent paper surveys to a random sample of registered voters in the community and received 235 complete responses. Based on analysis they found that politically moderate and conservative (compared to politically liberal) individuals were harsher towards offenders and had a lower belief in redeemability. This finding was further confirmed by the aforementioned meta-analysis which found that individuals who identified as politically conservative held more negative

attitudes compared to “non-conservative” individuals (Rade et al., 2016). The main problem with this variable is that previous research has relied on dichotomous options rather than continuums (Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010; Leverentz, 2011).

Gender

The final participant-level variable being considered in the present study is gender. Similar to age, there is some disagreement in the literature over the effect of gender, with some studies finding significant results and other studies finding null results.

The Hirschfield and Piquero (2010) study also included gender as a variable, however, it was one of the studies that found null results. The researchers did not give a possible explanation as to why gender yielded null results, they only stated that it was consistent with some other findings. Another study that included gender as a participant level variable was looking at group differences in attitudes towards offenders between inmates (N = 298), prison employees (N = 387), and college students (N = 183) (Kjelsberg et al., 2007). While this study found some interesting offender level results, covered later in this review, the participant level variables of age and gender had null results.

Additionally, the study by Leverentz (2011) found that women were more punitive and less likely to believe in redeemability (Leverentz, 2011). While this is the only significant main effect of gender found De Soto and colleagues (2021) found that gender had an effect that was dependent on the type of crime committed by a hypothetical offender. Specifically, they found that American men were more punitive towards the crimes of robbery and burglary, which contradicts the previous finding. Additional research confuses things further, with findings in a meta-analysis concluding that gender differences tend to revolve around sex offenses (Rade et al., 2016). Specifically, women tend to view them more harshly.

While there seem to be some inconsistent findings regarding the participant level variables, it is enough to consider them in the present research. Since these variables have been shown to have a potential effect they need to be accounted for. They will not be factored into the analysis, but demographics of the conditions will be checked to confirm that any variation caused by the participant level variables will be evenly distributed through random assignment to condition.

Ex-Offender Factors

The other factors of interest are characteristics of the ex-offender, which are observable and subsequently judged by the participant. Two of the ex-offender variables in the present study have been included in previous research and one is novel. The pre-existing variables are the race and gender of the ex-offender. The novel variable is whether or not the ex-offender has taken responsibility for the crime committed.

Race

Previous research has shown that Black individuals with a criminal record are treated far less favorably than White counterparts (Pager, 2003). The study that found these results was an audit study that looked at the effects of race and a criminal record on job callbacks. The study consisted of race-matched pairs of "applicants" that either reported or didn't report a criminal record on their applications. The pair of White applications were sent to 150 employers and the pair of Black applications were sent to 200. The extra tests for the Black applicants were accounting for an observed deficit of callbacks. Since the Black applicants received fewer callbacks, they needed to increase the sample size so that it would be large enough for analysis. Results showed significant main effects of race and criminal record. Black applicants without a criminal record received 14% callbacks compared to the White applicants without a criminal

record who received 34% callbacks. Additionally, the ratio of callbacks between the non-offending and offending Black applicants was nearly 3:1 respectively. The authors also noted that Black applicants without a criminal record received fewer callbacks than White applicants with a criminal record (14% and 17% respectively), but the interaction effect wasn't statistically significant.

Gender

Additionally, observers tend to have more favorable attitudes towards female offenders. One study found that employees in female prisons had more positive attitudes towards offenders, but the authors stated that this finding could have been due to other factors such as the size difference between the male and female prisons included in the analysis (Kjelsberg et al., 2007). It is also possible that individuals who choose to work in female prisons are different as a whole than people who choose to work in male prisons, but more research would be needed to draw any conclusions on this. Even though female offenders seem to be subject to more favorable attitudes, Couloute and Kopf (2018) found that women with criminal records have higher unemployment than their male counterparts. This finding is not necessarily contradictory to the previous finding, since this study also found that females without a criminal record have higher rates of unemployment. Additional experimental research would be needed to draw any conclusions about attitudes towards female offenders.

Responsibility

The new factor included in the present study is “responsibility taken.” This means that the ex-offender has apologized to the victim or their family, or admitted that what they did was wrong. In other words, the ex-offender seems to show some level of remorse over their crime. On the other hand, the “no responsibility” condition is an ex-offender who serves their sentence

without making a statement on their actions. This is an ex-offender level factor that has been informed by various factors of previous research but has not previously been presented in the way it will be here.

Desistance Signals

The first factor that informs our “responsibility taken” variable is referred to as “desistance signaling,” which is a fairly new term in criminology (Bushway & Apel, 2012) that stems from economic signaling theory (Spence, 1973). The economic theory proposes that prospective employees signal their value through observable characteristics (such as educational degrees), but this theory has been adopted into the context of criminology and is referred to as desistance signaling. A desistance signal has been defined as an external characteristic of an ex-offender that suggests to an observer they will successfully desist from crime (DeWitt, 2018; Reich, 2017). In the study by Reich (2017) the term referred to the completion of job training and its effect on an employer's willingness to hire. However, in the present study, the terminology is being applied to a more general context. Instead of limiting the focus to employment, the variable of responsibility will inform people's evaluative social judgments more broadly. Specifically, we expect that this will suggest to a general observer that the ex-offender will successfully desist from criminal activity and will in turn lead to more favorable attitudes.

Impression Formation and Explicit Bias

The “responsibility taken” variable is also informed by the concept of “individuating information” from research on impression formation. When observers make judgments about others they are interpreting a combination of broad and specific characteristics, or stereotypes and individuating information (Bodenhausen, 2005). Both of these factors are important to the present study. As mentioned above, the gender and race of an offender are known to have an

impact on people's attitudes towards them. These variables fall into the category of stereotyping or judging someone on an external characteristic that labels them as a member of a certain group. The third variable, the offender's responsibility taken, falls under individuating information which distinguishes someone as an individual with unique characteristics rather than judging them based on a general category. Individuating information can reduce the effect of stereotyping (Bodenhausen, 2005).

Belief in Redeemability

The final factor that informs our "responsibility taken" variable is "belief in redeemability" which is frequently seen in the existing literature. However, in previous research, this has been a participant-level variable. The most used scale for measuring belief in redeemability was developed by Maruna & King (2009) and consists of four Likert scale items that gauge a participant's belief in whether offenders can change their ways and move on from a life of crime. The higher the total score, the more the participant believes an offender can change. This same scale was used by Reich (2017) in a study that looked at employers' attitudes towards applicants with a criminal record who differed by race (white or aboriginal Australians). This study found that employers with a higher belief in redeemability were more likely to hire an applicant with a criminal record. The most important source of belief in redeemability for the present research is the study conducted by Leverentz (2011) which looked at attitudes towards ex-offenders in a community context. This study used the same four items from Maruna & King (2009) but they also added two more items of their own, the most notable of which is "society should look favorably on prisoners who sincerely apologize." While this item was not analyzed individually in the original study, it is what most closely resembles the "responsibility taken" variable of the present research.

Belief in redeemability has been shown to negatively correlate with strong attitudes towards punitiveness (Leverentz, 2011; Maruna & King, 2009) and positively correlate with an employer's willingness to hire someone with a criminal record (Reich, 2017). Additionally, Reich (2017) proposed that this relationship between belief in redeemability and willingness to hire is mediated by the presence of desistance signals.

Accordingly, the current research has taken the concept of a participant's belief in an ex-offenders redeemability and turned it into an expressible and observable characteristic of the ex-offender. The expectation is that this characteristic will be viewed by the participant, interpreted as the ex-offender wanting to desist from crime, which suggests the offender has greater redeemability and ultimately will result in more favorable attitude judgments about the ex-offender.

The Present Study

While much of the previous research on attitudes towards ex-offenders has consisted of correlational data gathered through questionnaires (De Soto et al., 2021; Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010; Kjelsberg et al., 2007; Leverentz, 2011; Maruna & King, 2009; Melvin et al., 1985) there is precedent for using an experimental vignette to control for said variables (De Soto et al., 2021; Jonnson & Viljoen, 2021; Reich, 2017). The present study will use this vignette design, which will allow us to draw causal conclusions through the use of manipulated variables and random assignment to condition.

Given the findings of previous research and the variables in the present study, we expect to see the following: 1) participants who are presented with the "responsibility taken" condition will have a more positive attitude towards the ex-offender compared to the condition where no responsibility was taken, 2) participants who are presented with the female ex-offender condition

will have a more positive attitude compared to the male ex-offender condition, 3) participants who are presented with the White ex-offender condition will have a more positive attitude compared to the Black ex-offender condition, 4) the effect of gender and race (stereotyping) will be dependent on the presence of responsibility (individuating information), and 5) race and gender effects on attitudes towards ex-offenders will not be completely attributable to the explicit race and gender bias, suggesting the influence of implicit bias. In other words, it is hypothesized that there will be a significant main effect for each of the three manipulated independent variables. It is also hypothesized that the race by responsibility interaction and the gender by responsibility interaction will both be significant. Finally, it is hypothesized that ex-offender race and gender will be significant predictors of participants' attitudes after controlling for explicit race and gender bias.

METHODS

Participants

Participants (N = 220) were recruited through Qualtrics survey distribution. Quota restrictions were placed on the sample to create a diverse sample of ages, races, and genders, which would be representative of the US population. The survey was distributed to participants via email. Monetary compensation (\$6) was provided upon completion of the survey. The survey was distributed between June 4th and June 22nd of 2021, with 64% of the responses recorded June 14th and 15th.

Measures

Manipulated variables were delivered and participant responses were collected through an electronic questionnaire. The questionnaire contained experimental vignettes, a dependent variable which measured attitudes about the ex-offender, and two covariate measures of racism and sexism. Finally, demographic questions of gender, race, and political affiliation were assessed to examine if random assignment to vignette groups led to relatively equal distribution across experimental conditions.

Vignettes

There were eight possible experimental vignettes (See Appendix A). Each vignette contained a basic description of an offender who varies by gender (male or female), race (White or Black), and responsibility taken (admitted responsibility or not) (see Table 1 for an example of the manipulations). All other details about the offender were consistent across vignettes. The age of the ex-offender was selected arbitrarily. Burglary was selected as the crime committed to avoid any possible effect of attitudes towards violent crime.

Table 1*Experimental Vignette Examples*

Vignette label	Vignette text
Vignette 1: Male, White, Responsibility	John is a 35-year-old White male. He was arrested and convicted for second-degree burglary, and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. After serving 8 years he was released on parole. The parole board had determined that John knew what he did was wrong and that he was genuinely sorry for his actions.
Vignette 8: Female, Black, No Responsibility	Jane is a 35-year-old Black female. She was arrested and convicted for second-degree burglary, and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. After serving 8 years she was released on parole. The parole board had determined that Jane's good behavior during her sentence warranted early release

Note. The other vignettes are as follows. V2: Male, Black, Responsibility; V3: Female, White, Responsibility; V4: Female, Black, Responsibility; V5: Male, White, No Responsibility; V6: Male, Black, No Responsibility; V7: Female, White, No Responsibility

Altered ATP

The first scale presented was the attitudes measure, which was based on the Attitudes Toward Prisoners scale (ATP, Melvin, et al., 1985). The original ATP is a 36 item, Likert scale format questionnaire designed to gauge general attitudes towards prisoners. For the present study, the scale was reduced to 12 items which were selected based on compatibility of context and factor loading values determined by Kjelsberg et al. (2007). The items used were also reworded to fit the context of the vignette. For example, an original item is "Prisoners never change" (Melvin et al., 1985) and for the present research it was changed to "This ex-offender will never change" (See Appendix A for the full altered scale).

Symbolic Racism Scale

The next measure presented was the first of two explicit bias measures, the Symbolic Racism scale (Henry & Sears, 2002). This scale consists of 8 Likert scale items that are worded to measure general cultural attitudes towards Black individuals in the United States rather than personal feelings. An example item is “How much of the racial tension that exists in the United States today do you think blacks are responsible for creating?” (Henry & Sears, 2002).

Modern Sexism Scale

The second explicit bias measure is the Modern Sexism Scale (Swim et al., 1995). This scale also consisted of 8 Likert scale items that gauge attitudes towards women. More specifically the items were worded to measure perceptions of continuing discrimination and empathy towards women’s groups. For example, one item states “It is easy to understand why women’s groups are still concerned about societal limitations of women’s opportunities.” (Swim et al., 1995). These explicit bias measures were included as exploratory analyses, working under the assumption that differences in attitudes towards the offender will not be wholly explained by explicit bias. If true, this will suggest the influence of implicit bias and will provide directions for future research.

Procedure

All participants were recruited through Qualtrics survey distribution. Once recruited they were provided with a link to access the questionnaire. The order of the elements on the questionnaire were as follows: informed consent, randomly assigned vignette, the altered ATP, the Symbolic Racism Scale, the Modern Sexism Scale, and demographics. All participants receive these elements in the same order. The survey took an average of 5.57 minutes to complete with a range of 0.77 – 77.42 minutes.

RESULTS

The first step in the analysis was to confirm that random assignment properly distributed the demographic variables between conditions. Given the known effect of these variables, this step was included to ensure that random assignment evenly distributed the variables across conditions. Assuming the distribution is even, any effects that would be caused by these variables should be negated. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Breakdown by Vignette Group (n-values)

Demographic	Vignette Race		Vignette Gender		Vignette Responsibility		Total
	White	Black	Male	Female	R	NR	
Gender							
Male	34	40	44	30	40	34	74
Female	76	68	60	84	77	67	144
Race							
White	73	72	71	74	82	63	145
Black	15	12	11	16	15	12	27
Hispanic	11	14	14	11	10	15	25
Asian	9	6	6	9	8	7	15
Other	2	5	2	5	3	4	7
Political Affiliation							
Conservative	43	50	42	51	53	40	93
Liberal	43	44	41	46	42	45	87
Other	23	15	21	17	22	16	38

Note. For vignette responsibility R = Responsibility and NR = No Responsibility. Each vignette contained one level of each independent variable. Totals reflect the breakdown of the entire sample. Total sample age (M = 47.2; SD = 18.89; Range 18-64)

The distribution was even enough to continue with the analysis.

The original plan for the primary analysis was to conduct a three-way ANOVA with the race, gender, and responsibility of the vignettes as the independent variables and the overall ATP scores as the dependent variable. However, exploratory factor analysis of the reduced ATP scale

yielded three factors (see factor loadings in Table 3). The first factor has been labeled "irredeemable" since it covers items that propose that the ex-offender cannot be reformed for various reasons. The second factor covers items discussing the possibility of rehabilitation. Finally, the third factor seems to cover general trustworthiness. However, it should be noted that the third factor only contains two items.

Given this factor structure a three-way MANOVA was conducted instead of the originally planned three-way ANOVA, using the three vignette variables as the independent variables and the three ATP factors as the dependent variables. The means and standard deviations for the MANOVA are reported in Table 4. The results of the MANOVA yielded one significant interaction which was the three-way interaction between race, gender, and responsibility when using ATP factor 3 as the dependent variable $F(1, 212) = 4.51, p = .035$. In this interaction, the most positive ratings were towards the Black male vignette but only when no responsibility was taken. All other main effects and interaction effects were insignificant ($p_s > .168$).

Table 3*Results From a Factor Analysis of the Reduced and Altered ATP Scale*

ATP Item	Factor Loading		
	1	2	3
Factor 1: Irredeemable			
2. Trying to rehabilitate this ex-offender is a waste of time and money*	.803	.014	-.054
4. This ex-offender is too lazy to earn an honest living*	.799	.028	.084
1. This ex-offender will never change*	.740	-.033	.000
9. This ex-offender is basically a bad person*	.703	-.041	.198
7. This ex-offender is just plain immoral*	.546	-.026	.386
8. This ex-offender should be under strict, harsh discipline*	.535	-.035	.368
Factor 2: Rehabilitation			
11. I would like associating with this ex-offender	.141	.764	-.232
5. I wouldn't mind living next door to this ex-offender	.196	.734	-.290
10. This ex-offender can be rehabilitated	-.365	.601	.341
12. If this person did well in prison, they should be let out on parole	-.299	.519	.157
Factor 3: Trustworthiness			
6. I would never want one of my children dating this ex-offender*	.036	-.044	.755
3. You never know if this ex-offender is telling the truth*	.307	.096	.488

Note. N = 220. The extraction method was maximum likelihood with an oblique (promax with Kaiser normalization) rotation. Factor loadings were determined by a .30 lower cutoff and the 75% cross-loading ratio rule of thumb. Reverse scored items are denoted by *. Items are adapted from "A Scale to Measure Attitudes Toward Prisoners" by K.B. Melvin, L.K. Gramling, and W.M. Gardner, 1985, *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 12(2), 251-252 (<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0093854885012002006>).

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations, and Group Size of MANOVA Analysis for Vignette Variables and ATP Factors

Group (Race, Gender, Responsibility)	Irredeemable			Rehabilitation		Trustworthiness	
	N	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Black, Male, R	28	2.24	0.98	3.38	0.76	3.09	0.96
Black, Male, NR	25	2.35	1.01	3.25	0.72	3.50	1.09
Black, Female, R	31	2.40	0.96	3.35	0.84	3.16	1.03
Black, Female, NR	26	2.44	0.80	3.38	0.84	3.27	0.65
White, Male, R	26	2.31	0.89	3.47	0.77	3.29	0.92
White, Male, NR	25	2.03	0.72	3.48	0.70	2.78	0.74
White, Female, R	33	2.27	0.78	3.30	0.79	3.03	0.94
White, Female, NR	26	2.25	0.55	3.29	0.57	3.25	0.68

Note. Responsibility: R = responsibility taken, NR = no responsibility taken

DISCUSSION

Even though none of the hypotheses were supported by the data this study still produced some interesting and encouraging results. Additionally, there are some possible explanations for why the results turned out unexpectedly. The first thing worth discussing is the significant three-way interaction between race, gender, and responsibility when the dependent variable was factor 3. As mentioned above, the interaction showed that the highest rating was towards Black males when no responsibility had been taken, which is contradictory to the findings of previous research, the expected outcome of the present research, and the general social atmosphere in the United States. It was expected that a Black male who had taken no responsibility for his crime would create the harshest ratings, not the most favorable ones. The most likely explanation for this finding is reverse discrimination, which is defined as the tendency for people to act more favorably towards a negatively stereotyped minority group once they have been made aware of their biases (Dutton & Lake, 1973).

Reverse discrimination has been featured in quite a bit of previous research, but the findings are a bit mixed. Dutton & Lake (1973) found that White participants were more likely to donate more change to a Black panhandler after they were experimentally led to believe they showed a racial bias. Another one of the supporting studies looked at hiring decisions towards ex-offenders and found that mock employers had higher positive regard towards hiring Black applicants (Holloway & Wiener, 2021). This finding was counterintuitive to their hypothesis and the findings of previous research they covered. They attributed the discrepancy to an online format and social desirability. Since the survey was online and the responses were anonymous it didn't trigger socially desirable responses. This also could have been true of the present study, since our survey was also distributed anonymously online. Another study that looked at attitudes

towards juvenile offenders on parole found that participants rated Black ex-offenders as more likely to adhere to parole regulations (Petty & Wiener, 2019). Just like with the Holloway and Wiener (2021) study, this finding was contradictory to their hypothesis and they attributed the finding to reverse discrimination/overcompensation.

However, not all sources that have looked at reverse discrimination have found an effect. A study comparing employer attitudes to their actual behavior found that employers who claimed to be open to hiring Black applicants and applicants with criminal records didn't follow through (Pager & Quillian, 2005). Their analysis showed that 34% of White non-offenders received callbacks compared to 17% White ex-offenders and 5% of Black ex-offenders. This study is not a clear example of reverse discrimination, but rather shows the effect when race is not made salient and reverse discrimination is not triggered. Since the survey and the audit were not linked the employers were not motivated to follow through with their reported attitudes. While there is no evidence for why reverse discrimination occurs in some settings and not others, Dutton & Lake (1973) suggested that time (short-term vs long-term) and severity (trivial vs committed) of the situation could be an explanation for why reverse discrimination only occurs in certain contexts. What is clear is that reverse discrimination only occurs when race is made salient.

Since race salience is such an important factor, it is important to acknowledge a considerable threat to external validity. The survey for this project was released in June of 2021, which falls directly in the timeframe of the Black Lives Matter movement. More specifically, the survey period occurred two months after the conclusion of the trial for the murder of George Floyd. News coverage for this trial continued until late June. Based on this and other events it is safe to say that race was salient in the minds of anyone who participated in the present research. It is very likely that when participants were faced with vignettes and questionnaires that openly mentioned attitudes about race they experienced anxiety from the thought of being perceived as

racist if they expressed their true opinions. As a result, they rated the Black male with no responsibility very highly. However, this explanation should be treated with caution. The three-way interaction was only significant with ATP factor 3 as the dependent variable and this factor only contains two items.

As for why no other effects were found there are several possible explanations. The first is similar to the reverse discrimination theory listed above. When asking about sensitive topics such as race, participants tend to respond in a way that they think makes them look better even if they are told the results will be anonymous (Krumpal, 2013). This is referred to as social desirability and a study on hiring decisions found that it causes considerable skew between what people say and what they do (Pager & Quillian, 2005).

Aside from the potential psychological factors, certain methodological factors could influence the results. For instance, since COVID-19 presented a threat to in-person data collection this study was designed with an online format. However, this decision lowered experimental control and exposed the project to unforeseen variables such as time taken, attention given, or environment. Even though the average response time for the survey was five and a half minutes, the range was 76 minutes. This indicated that some respondents walked away or became otherwise distracted during the survey and may have had unknown effects on the quality of their responses. This is a clear limitation that would need to be corrected for in future research. The other methodological concerns regard components of the survey, or more specifically, potential problems with the vignettes and the reduced ATP scale.

When reviewing the data, it appeared that the ratings towards all 8 vignette ex-offenders were fairly positive. This suggested that the vignettes were either not clear enough or did not contain a serious enough crime. The vignettes were intentionally written in a very simple format

to reduce confusion or accidental additional variables, but they likely ended up being too simple. More details may have added realism to the scenario or clarification about the ex-offender's situation. Additionally, burglary was chosen as the crime for all vignettes to represent a "moderate" threat but admittedly little to no research on crime type was done before the study since it wasn't being included as a variable.

The second problematic survey component is the altered and reduced ATP scale. To keep the full battery of measures at an acceptable length the ATP was reduced from its original 36 items to 12 items. This decision was justified by a factor analysis done in the original ATP development study and a more recent study that both showed that the 36 items loaded onto a single factor (Kjelsberg et al., 2007; Melvin et al., 1985). The chosen 12 items were also partially reworded. The change didn't alter the content of the items, only the context (now referring to the singular vignette offender as opposed to the original, more general context). Despite the confidence that the changes wouldn't affect results, factor analysis on the 12 ATP items included in the current study yielded three factors instead of one. It is unclear why the chosen 12 items loaded onto three factors when all 36 of the original items only loaded onto one. Additional research would be required to explain.

While the results of the current study are disappointing there are many further directions to pursue. One possible starting point is to design a study to address the potential problems of the present study, in which the vignettes could be rewritten to include more detail such as a further description of the crime event. A possible suggestion would be to change the crime to a more severe crime such as armed robbery. The robbery crime type would be a good choice based on previous research which found it to be more severe than burglary (De Soto et al., 2021). Another vignette variable that would be worth looking at is the morality of the crime. For example, is an individual who steals to provide for their family viewed more favorably than someone who steals

out of greed, and how would race and gender effect those views? Other vignette variables, such as crime type or time served could also be included to experimentally explore the effect that such changes would have. Regarding the reduced ATP scale's performance specifically, it might be useful to administer this version of the scale to a large sample, independent of vignette manipulations, to further examine scale performance and factor structure. This might help explain why it acted unexpectedly in this study. Finally, any future research on the topic would ideally be conducted in the lab to reduce the effect of any variables introduced by the online format.

Overall, the current study showed some promising trends and several paths for further exploration. The methodological issues will be easy to address with additional research. Additionally, the one significant result we did find might have positive implications. Even if the finding is largely the result of overcompensation or social desirability, it is reassuring to think that our culture has made progress towards racial and gender bias being socially unacceptable. Given the importance of successfully reintroducing ex-offenders into the general population, the problems encountered are worth fixing and this area of research is worth pursuing.

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APPENDIX A: MATERIALS

Modified ATP items:

Instructions: The following statements describe attitudes toward the offender in the vignette you just read. Please respond to each statement by selecting the response that best describes your personal attitude. Please answer honestly. There are no right or wrong answers and all responses are confidential.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

- I. This ex-offender will never change*
- II. Trying to rehabilitate this ex-offender is a waste of time and money*
- III. You never know if this ex-offender is telling the truth*
- IV. This ex-offender is too lazy to earn an honest living*
- V. I wouldn't mind living next door to this ex-offender
- VI. I would never want one of my children dating this ex-offender*
- VII. This ex-offender is just plain immoral*
- VIII. This ex-offender should be under strict, harsh discipline*
- IX. This ex-offender is basically a bad person*
- X. This ex-offender can be rehabilitated
- XI. I would like associating with this ex-offender
- XII. If this person did well in prison, they should be let out on parole

Note: * indicates reverse-scored items

Vignettes:

Instructions:

Please carefully read the following vignette. You will be asked questions about what you read later in the survey.

V1: Male-White-Responsibility

John is a 35-year-old White male. He was arrested and convicted for second-degree burglary, and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. After serving 8 years he was released on parole. The parole board had determined that John knew what he did was wrong and that he was genuinely sorry for his actions.

V2: Male-Black-Responsibility

John is a 35-year-old Black male. He was arrested and convicted for second-degree burglary, and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. After serving 8 years he was released on parole. The parole board had determined that John knew what he did was wrong and that he was genuinely sorry for his actions.

V3: Female-White-Responsibility

Jane is a 35-year-old White female. She was arrested and convicted for second-degree burglary, and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. After serving 8 years she was released on parole. The parole board had determined that Jane knew what she did was wrong and that she was genuinely sorry for her actions.

V4: Female-Black-Responsibility

Jane is a 35-year-old Black female. She was arrested and convicted for second-degree burglary, and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. After serving 8 years she was released on parole. The parole board had determined that Jane knew what she did was wrong and that she was genuinely sorry for her actions.

V5: Male-White-No Responsibility

John is a 35-year-old White male. He was arrested and convicted for second-degree burglary, and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. After serving 8 years he was released on parole. The parole board had determined that John's good behavior during his sentence warranted early release.

V6: Male-Black-No Responsibility

John is a 35-year-old Black male. He was arrested and convicted for second-degree burglary, and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. After serving 8 years he was released on parole. The parole board had determined that John's good behavior during his sentence warranted early release

V7: Female-White-No Responsibility

Jane is a 35-year-old White female. She was arrested and convicted for second-degree burglary, and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. After serving 8 years she was released on parole. The parole board had determined that Jane's good behavior during her sentence warranted early release

V8: Female-Black-No Responsibility

Jane is a 35-year-old Black female. She was arrested and convicted for second-degree burglary, and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. After serving 8 years she was released on parole. The parole board had determined that Jane's good behavior during her sentence warranted early release

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL



Graduate Studies and Research
Marquette, MI 49855-5301
906-227-2300
www.nmu.edu/graduatestudies/

Memorandum

TO: Jon Barch
Department of Psychological Sciences

Sydney Mosser
Department of Psychological Sciences

FROM: Lisa Schade Eckert
Dean, Graduate Studies and Research

DATE: February 1, 2021

SUBJECT: IRB Proposal HS21-1161
“Factors influencing attitudes towards ex-offenders”
IRB Approval Date: 2/1/2021
Proposed Project Dates: 8/24/2020 – 4/23/2022

Your proposal “Factors influencing attitudes towards ex-offenders” has been approved by the Northern Michigan University Institutional Review Board. Please include your proposal number (HS21-1161) on all research materials and on any correspondence regarding this project.

If you find that modifications of investigators, methods, or procedures are necessary, you must submit a Project Modification Form for Research Involving Human Subjects before collecting data. Any changes or revisions to your approved research plan must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Until further guidance, per CDC guidelines, the PI is responsible for obtaining signatures on the COVID-19 Researcher Agreement and Release and COVID-19 Research Participant Agreement and Release forms.

All forms can be found at the NMU Grants and Research website:
<http://www.nmu.edu/grantsandresearch/node/102>

APPENDIX C: COPYRIGHT PERMISSIONS



A Scale to Measure Attitudes toward Prisoners
Author: KENNETH B. MELVIN, LORRAINE K. GRAMLING, WILLIAM M. GARDNER
Publication: Criminal Justice and Behavior
Publisher: SAGE Publications
Date: 06/01/1985
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Hello,

My name is Sydney Mosser and I'm a masters student at Northern Michigan University. I'm in the second semester of my first year and I plan to graduate in the spring of 2022. Part of my masters thesis involves looking at attitudes regarding sex and I would like to include your Modern Sexism scale as a measure. Could I get your permission to use it?

If you have any additional questions about my study feel free to reach out to me or my thesis adviser Dr. Barch (jbarch@nmu.edu).

Thank you

--
Sydney Mosser B.S.
Graduate Teaching Assistant
Department of Psychological Science
Northern Michigan University
1005 Weston Hall
smosser@nmu.edu

 **Janet Swim** 2:13 PM (3 minutes ago) ☆
Yes you may. Good luck with your research. Janet

Copyright Request Inbox x ↕ 🖨 📧

 **Sydney Mosser** 1:49 PM (15 minutes ago) ☆
Hello, My name is Sydney Mosser and I'm a masters student at Northern Michigan University. I'm in the second semester of my first year and I ...

 **David Sears** <sears@sigs.ucla.edu> 2:02 PM (2 minutes ago) ☆ ↩ ⋮
to me ▾
Yes, of course. Full permission.
David Sears
⋮

 **Sydney Mosser** 2:02 PM (0 minutes ago) ☆ ↩ ⋮
to David ▾
Thank you so much. I appreciate your help and your quick reply.