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An Analysis of Student Opinions on Former Convicts as Professors

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Abstract: Recently numerous convicts, upon release from prison, have been pursuing advanced education as an avenue for successful re-entry. A small group of ex-convicts have been conducting research, and/or teaching Criminal Justice or Sociology courses at universities worldwide. Using survey questionnaires, students majoring in Criminology and Criminal Justice (CJ) at a midsized Midwestern university were asked how they would react to a course that is taught by a former convict. The findings from this research suggest that the vast majority of CJ students would welcome professors with a criminal history into the classroom. Consequently, policies implemented within various universities of not employing those convicted of felony offenses may be ill advised as students' value the diversity a convict criminologist would bring to the classroom.

Keywords: Convict Criminology; Criminal Justice Students; Criminal Desistance

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, America has experienced a type of “incarceration binge” (Irwin & Austin, 1997) which has arguably been the most thoroughly implemented social program of modern times. At the start of 2008 there were 2,319,258 persons incarcerated across the nation representing a full 1% of the adult population (Pew Center on the States [PEW], 2008). Currently there are 4.3 million people on probation, and another 824,365 on parole (PEW, 2009). Jointly, these numbers reveal that over 3% of the American adult population is under some form of correctional supervision. On the other hand, each year over 600,000 individuals are released from prison back into society nationwide (Petersilia, 2004). It is conceivable that some of these released prisoners will someday aspire to careers in academia (Ross & Richards, 2003). Additionally, it is also probable that many of these former-convict academics will pursue studies in criminology and criminal justice.

As the faculties of many Criminology and/or Criminal Justice programs are dominated by former practitioners of the Criminal Justice system and/or trained academics, some of whom may have never visited a prison or interacted with a convict, more often than not, they do not understand the subjects of their studies: convicts (Irwin, 2003). Many academics do not value the perspective of former convicts, nor do they view prisoners as people (Jones, Ross, Richards, & Murphy, 2009). Consequently, much academic research currently being conducted is motivated by political ideology, economics, and government funding with an emphasis and concern with increased social control of an already marginalized population: the prisoner (Richards & Ross, 2001; Austin, 2003; Terry, 2003; Jones et al., 2009). In short there is an obvious disconnect between much of the academic literature and the realities of prisoners and

the realities of the lives they lead (Richards & Ross, 2001).

Many universities, which claim to value diversity, regularly deny employment to persons convicted of a felony offense. In the past the majority of academics with a criminal record “stayed in the closet,” choosing not to disclose their past (Jones et al., 2009, p.153). Today, with the ever increasing use of background checks, it is increasingly more difficult to conceal a disreputable background. The increased use of background checks along with augmented correctional supervision can be seen within the plight of Paul Krueger, who was terminated from a tenured position at Penn State University when it was discovered that nearly 40 years prior he had been convicted of multiple felonies. At the time of his dismissal, the university stated that Paul Kruegers’ “ability to carry out his responsibilities effectively ... has been compromised in light of revelations about his history” (Leung, 2004).

At the same time instructors in virtually every introduction to criminal justice or corrections course assure students that a basic tenant of the criminal justice system is *rehabilitation*. The response by Penn State University sends a clear message that the administrators of this institution do not believe the concept of rehabilitation of former convicts; even after 12 years of incarceration and 25 years of productive citizenship. In short, felons need not apply at Penn State University. Many universities deny employment to anyone with a felony record including the most menial positions (custodial worker, landscaping etc.) let alone for a position as an assistant professor. Not only are universities denying employment to former felons, many inquire as to criminal past on student applications for admissions.

As the vast majority of CJ students, like their instructors, have never actually visited a prison, interacted with prisoners or been the victim of a crime; their perceived

knowledge of the subject is therefore socially constructed (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Potter and Kappeler (1998) observe that over 90% of the American population has not experienced any form of direct criminal victimization, nor ever will. Consequently, a great deal of what mainstream society, as well as CJ students, believes and holds true about prisoners is often disingenuous. The stereotypical prisoner is often based on a mixture of media representations of sensationalized crimes, politicians' rhetoric, as well as academic studies of career criminals (Irwin & Austin, 1997).

Over the last 30 years, in the face of numerous studies which have repeatedly shown that most prisoners are *not* career or even dangerous criminals, a disproportionate amount of academic attention has focused on "career criminals," "super predators," and the "truly dangerous" (Austin, 2003). It has been observed that, "one of the best ways of defining what we are is by pointing to what we are not" (Erckson, Baranekand, & Chan, 1987, cited in Greer & Jewkes, 2005, p. 29). This then creates a sense of otherness, or that "they" commit crime because they are not like "us" (Greer & Jewkes, 2005). In other words, on the topic of criminals, society constructs a clear distinction between those who are good and those who are bad. Criminals serve as the common enemy, without "them" (bad people) there can be no "us" (good people).

The separation between "us" and "them" is extremely problematic since virtually all of us are lawbreakers. Bohm (1986) suggests that, "for many people, it is comforting to conceive of themselves as law abiding citizens...[meanwhile] evidence suggests that over 90% of all Americans have committed some crime for which they could be incarcerated" (p. 200-201). Austin (2003) observed that what is truly frightening for many people is to recognize that, in general, prisoners are regular people.

There is no big difference between the person labeled criminal and the average citizen (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1967).

THE EMERGENCE OF CONVICT CRIMINOLOGY

Convict Criminology is a relatively new and contentious perspective within academia. John Irwin (2003) observed that "excon criminologists are going to have to play a major role in pushing our discipline to critically examine the issues surrounding incarceration" (p. xvii). In general, Convict Criminology is a compilation of essays and research conducted by convicts or former convicts who have acquired PhD's, or are enrolled in graduate studies, as well as other non-convict academics and practitioners who are contributing to a reform ideology within academia (Richards & Ross, 2001). Many of these former convicts attempt to utilize their past experiences to better inform the study of prisons and prisoners (Richards, Faggiani, Roffers, Hendricksen, & Krueger, 2008; Richards & Ross, 2001).

The Convict Criminology (CC) perspective was first realized at the 1997 meeting of the American Society of Criminology as a means for giving a voice to those former convict academics (Irwin, 2003; Terry, 2003; Richards, et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2009). The idea that former convicts could influence the study of criminology/sociology can be viewed within the "standpoint theory" of social relations. This perspective, originally advanced by feminist theorists, observes that marginalized populations have a unique opportunity to conduct social science research as a result of their marginalized status (Harding, 1991). Wood (2004) explains that "a standpoint is achieved – earned through critical reflection on power relations and through engaging in the struggle required to construct an oppositional stance" (p. 61).

Standpoint theory, which is a methodological premise based on critical theory as opposed to a theory of its own, is guided by the argument that social location (i.e. gender, race, social class etc.), experience, or perspective shapes peoples' lives and perceptions. According to Harding (1991), researchers from marginalized or unprivileged social positions (such as former convicts) are likely to generate research which is "less partial and less distorted" (Harding, 1991, p. 121) than research generated by traditional social scientists who often hold more privileged social positions. Similarly, Wood (2004) observes that "knowledge is situated in social circumstances [and] shaped by our social location" (p. 215). Therefore, the CC perspective notes that the former prisoner academic will perceive the prison and the criminal justice system differently than traditional academics.

When applying the CC perspective to the study of criminology/sociology we understand, as Eugene V. Debbs (1927/2000:95-96), who ran for President of the United States while incarcerated in Federal prison, observed that:

Only the inmate, the imprisoned convict, actually knows the prison and what it means to him and his kind. Even the officials in charge and on the grounds, and in close personal contact with the inmates, do not know the prison. Indeed they cannot know it, for they have never felt its blighting influence, nor been oppressed by its rigorous discipline; nor have they suffered the mental and physical hunger, the isolation, the deprivation and the cruel and relentless punishment it imposes (p. 95-96).

Consequently, when conducting research related to prisons/prisoners, researchers *must* consider the standpoint of the prisoner and whenever possible conduct qualitative, ethnographic or observational research relevant to this marginalized population. Moreover, Irwin (1987) argues that "any approach not based firmly on qualitative or

phenomenological ground is not only a distortion of the phenomenon but also is very likely a corruption" (p. 42, cited in Jones, et al., 2009, p. 157). Objectivity, a basic canon of social research which observes that research need be unbiased and ethically neutral, according to the Convict Criminologists perspective, is "an illusion that illustrates the social distance of the traditional armchair academic researcher from the sordid lives of criminals and convicts" (Richards & Ross, 2001, p. 185).

In other words, Convict Criminology seeks to provide academia, as well as the general public, with an understanding of criminal justice with a more realistic view point; one based on the standpoint of prisoners first hand qualitative research methods (Richards & Ross, 2001). The time these academics have served behind prison walls and fences contributes to their ideology, which in turn informs their research agenda.

THE CURRENT STUDY

As former prisoners turned academics may be controversial within CJ it becomes paramount to understand how, or if, students (particularly of criminology, criminal justice, justice administration etc.) will accept these academics that undoubtedly will bring a unique perspective not only to the research they conduct but also into the classroom. The current study, utilizing survey methods, seeks to discover how students studying criminology and criminal justice at a mid-sized Midwestern University would respond to a course taught by a former convict. This research is unique in that it represents the first attempt to qualitatively measure student attitudes ($n = 186$) pertaining to Convict Criminology or for having ex-convicts as professors in the classroom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To date, there has been no research conducted which has sought to qualitatively examine student attitudes pertaining to Convict Criminology or of having former-convicts as professors in the classroom. Prior research pertaining to CC in the classroom has been limited at best.

Richards, et al., (2008) conducting exploratory research related to student perceptions concerning the usefulness and/or value of a Convict Criminology course offered at the University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh. For this research surveys were distributed to students upon completion of the elective course. In general, the student sample ($n=16$) for this research came to the realization that CC was about transformation of the former prisoner. Many of these students observed that the CC course was not the typical criminology course. As one student observed:

I felt that Convict Criminology was a very valuable class for me. I felt that the books I read had a very different take on the correctional system. It was good to have another side of the story. I think that a person who wants to study the criminal justice system would be selling themselves short if the only information they were given was from the outside. I felt that this course gave me a complete understanding of the system than I did before this class (Richards, et. al. 2008, p. 131).

The findings contained within this essay must be viewed with caution. As the researchers note, the sample of student responses contained was obtained from a convenience sample and should not be viewed as a basis for making inferences to a larger university population or sub-population of criminology students. This is evident in the relatively small sample, 16, of students from a course which has been taught at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (by a former convict) since 2004. Additionally, this research did not discuss response from students who may

have not found value or usefulness within the course.

Other research has been conducted by Mackey and Courtright (2000) who sought to measure the differences, if any, between criminal justice (CJ) students and non-CJ students with regard to their attitudes towards criminal punishment. This research was implemented when researchers observed that when the works of John Irwin (a former prisoner and prominent Convict Criminologist) was introduced into several CJ classes, numerous students “displayed open hostility to [Irwin’s] ideas” (p. 424). Researchers had utilized Irwin’s (1985) book *The Jail* in an attempt to:

Illustrate the view that criminal justice interventions may not always provide a better correctional solution for the individual offender, and may also lead to the continuation and escalation of criminality by further isolating the offender from society, weakening his or her bonds to family, friends, and work (Mackey & Courtright, 2000, p. 424).

For this research, researchers define punitiveness as “an attitude toward sanctioning and punishment that includes retribution, incapacitation, and a lack of concern for offender rehabilitation” (p. 430). When compared to the control sample CJ majors, at all levels of student status, held more punitive attitudes. Researchers note that there may be a sort of liberalizing effect related to increased educational attainment as seniors from both the control group and CJ majors were found to be less punitive than were freshman, though due to a lack of longitudinal methodology, this liberalizing effect was not a conclusive finding.

Based upon the aforementioned resentment displayed by numerous students when exposed to the works of John Irwin, Courtright, Mackey, and Packard (2005) hypothesized that CJ students were unable to empathize with disadvantaged populations especially prisoners. This research measured “emotional empathy” of CJ

majors with a control group of non-CJ majors. The finding of this research does show statistical significance between the 2 groups with the CJ majors showing lower levels of empathy. As the research sample contained students from both private Catholic universities as well as public institutions, it was revealed that students enrolled in Catholic Universities displayed significantly higher levels of empathy than their public university peers. Similarly, the findings also found that gender has a major effect upon empathy. Overall, male CJ students displayed the lowest levels of empathy followed by males from other majors with females from both groups' possessing higher empathy levels than their male counterparts. An additional significant finding within this research is a negative relationship between students who sought careers in law enforcement and empathy. In other words, students who sought to pursue employment in law enforcement were most likely to possess low levels of empathy. In regards to students who plan to pursue employment as a correctional counselor, the findings reveal that these students had the highest empathy levels.

Similar research conducted by Mackey, Courtright, and Packard (2006) set out to test the rehabilitative model among students. This research put forth the hypothesis that there would be a difference in whether or not students would accept the principles of rehabilitation when the independent variable of gender was introduced. The findings did support their hypothesis as there was a significant statistical difference present between females and males within their sample with females showing more support for the rehabilitation model. Additionally, a second hypothesis, that CJ majors would be less supportive than non-CJ majors, was also tested and this hypothesis was supported though the difference was not statically significant. Hypothesis number three for this research sought to determine if any

difference existed between students of various class standing (i.e. freshman, sophomore, junior, senior). Again the findings show that lower classmen were less supportive of the rehabilitation model than were upper classmen, but this finding was not statistically significant.

Research conducted by Farnworth, Longmire, and West (1998) examined students' attitudes in relation to the death penalty, alternatives to incarceration (i.e. probation), as well as attitudes towards the war on drugs. They hypothesized that (1) senior classmen would hold less punitive views than their freshman counterparts thereby supporting a "liberalizing effect" from education; and (2) in-service students (those who currently are or have been employed in some capacity within the CJ system) would be more punitive in their views than traditional students with no in-service experience. A secondary goal of their research was to compare the attitudes of CJ majors with students of non-CJ majors theorizing that CJ majors would be more punitive in their views than non-CJ majors at all levels.

By comparing attitudes of freshman CJ majors with attitudes of senior CJ majors their findings reveal that for all variables (support for the death penalty, support for alternative sanctions and attitudes towards the war on drugs), non-CJ seniors were less likely than non-CJ freshmen to hold punitive views, thereby supporting the hypothesis of a liberalizing effect of the college experience; this effect was not evident for CJ majors. At the same time just the opposite was found for non-CJ majors with seniors having *more punitive* views than non-CJ freshmen. Another hypothesis that in-service CJ students would hold more punitive views than traditional students was not supported by this research.

Utilizing a pretest-posttest design, Lane (1997) hypothesized that students enrolled in a corrections course at a California

university, emphasizing intermediate punishments or alternatives to incarceration (i.e. house arrest, ISP and boot camp), would be increasingly likely to accept the less punitive punishments. Findings from this research show that after exposure to a college course emphasizing intermediate sanctions, students were more likely to support alternatives to incarceration for non-violent crimes than they were when they completed the pretest. These findings did not extend to violent crimes, as both before and after the corrections classes students still preferred incarceration for persons committing violent crimes. This does seem to point towards a liberalizing effect of education to some degree as students exposed to education and knowledge of the harm perpetuated by the prison system; these findings show them to be less punitive in regards to non-violent crimes.

However, the author did note that during the interval between pretest and posttest, media influence may have affected these results for support of incarceration for violent crimes. In-between the pretest and posttest periods of this research, the State of California was in the midst of a heated debate over Three Strikes legislation, with the media giving much attention to the murder of Polly Klaas which was a current event at that time.

Research conducted by Miller, Tewksbury, and Hensley (2004) concluded that most university students, CJ majors or not, commonly do not have a true understanding of crime in America nor do they truly comprehend many of the problems within the correctional system. Their research with students in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Florida reveal that students are seriously misinformed about crime and corrections issues. Within this study, six dependent variables were utilized, (number of homicides in America, total number of prisoners in the system, number of prisoners killed by other prisoners, number of

correctional officers murdered by prisoners, amount of consensual sex amongst prisoners, number of sexual assaults in prison). For all six of these variables, a majority of students appear to be misinformed as they regularly overestimated totals for all these categories. For example, when asked to estimate the total number of homicides in 2001 (the year prior to data collection), which was 13,752, 41% of the CJ students vastly overestimated this total, with some 16% of this sample believing that there were over 250,000 homicides that year (p. 318).

The findings also show that when compared to non-CJ majors, CJ majors did not have a more reliable or accurate understanding of the issues. Furthermore, it does not appear that education clarifies these issues for this sample as upper level CJ students' knowledge was no more accurate than the knowledge of freshman CJ students. The authors note that if educators do not address this misinformation within the classroom, they "create a vacuum in which the students are never challenged to rethink the realities of crime compared to the myths" (p. 314). The authors caution that if these myths are not addressed by educators, they could subsequently affect the decision making process once the student is working within the CJ system.

The literature review contained above makes clear CJ majors tend to be more punitive and less empathetic in relation to criminal conduct than students of other majors. Also, that educating students to the realities of imprisonment may produce profound changes within their notions on criminal justice. This literature review leads to the hypothesis that students of Criminology and CJ would not welcome former convicts as professors of CJ.

METHODS

In an attempt to measure if students of CJ would accept former convicts as

academics, a three page pencil and paper survey instrument was distributed to a stratified random sample of students majoring in criminology and criminal justice at a mid-sized, mid-western university. Lower-level freshman classes (100's & 200's) were not asked to participate in order to avoid participants who may be taking the course as an elective while majoring in a different field, thereby allowing this research to concentrate on CJ majors. By concentrating on only upper level courses (300's & above) the sample will better represent those students majoring in criminology and criminal justice. A total of 197 student surveys were distributed. During the coding process, it was discovered that four respondents were not Criminology & Criminal Justice majors. An additional seven respondents had not fully completed the survey instrument and were therefore deemed unusable. Hence, a total of 186 completed surveys were used for this study ($n=186$).

Dependent Variable

The outcome under investigation in the current study is the students' responses to an open-ended question about how they would react to a course that is taught by a former convict. The written responses were coded using a focused coding scheme based on three mutually exclusive dimensions: 1) not an issue, 2) hesitant, and 3) would drop the course. The vast majority of criminal justice students surveyed reported no problems with a convict professor (N = 126, 67.7 percent), many of whom indicated that a convict professor would actually enhance the educational process. Others were less enthusiastic about a convict professor, mainly reporting the fear that a convict professor might introduce too much bias into the classroom material (i.e. they may have an axe to grind) or would be reluctant due to the nature of the crime committed (N = 50, 26.9 percent). A minority of students

reported that they would immediately drop the course upon learning of a professors' status as a convict (N = 10, 5.4 percent).

Independent Measures

To address the patterns of responses to a convict professor, the following independent measures are included in the following analyses: age (1 = 18-21, 4 = 31 or older), gender (female = 1), race (minority = 1), self-reported socioeconomic status (1 = poor, 5 = wealthy), current or prior work in the criminal justice system (1 = yes), full time college enrollment (1 = yes), class standing in college (1 = junior, senior, or graduate student), and a traditional measure of political conservatism (1 = conservative) (Hamm, 1990).

The vast majority of the sample is between the ages of 18 – 26 (N = 168, 90 percent), females comprise 43 percent of the sample, and 24 percent of the sample are racial minorities. Class standing in college is relatively evenly split, with 102 of the subjects (54.8 percent) being of junior, senior, or graduate student status. Accordingly, 164 (88.2 percent) of the subjects maintain a full-time course load, and 54 (29 percent) of the subjects report subscribing to a conservative political viewpoint.

Analytic Strategy

We begin the following analyses by examining the differences in the values of the independent measures across the categories of student responses to a convict professor with one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) methods. The second step in the quantitative component of the project is a multivariate assessment of factors contributing to criminal justice student responses to a convict professor using multinomial logistic regression techniques (see Aldrich and Nelson, 1985). The second component of the current investigation is a qualitative evaluation of the open-ended

Table 1. Mean Comparisons between Key Variables in the Study (One Way Anova)

	Not an Issue	Hesitant/Bias	Would Drop	F
Age	1.480	1.400	1.600	0.292
Female	0.374	0.511	0.300	1.563
Minority	0.278	0.120	0.400	3.207
SES	2.710	2.880	2.900	0.453
CJ Employee	0.135	0.120	0.422	0.227
Full Time Student	0.887	0.900	0.900	0.034
Conservative	0.268	0.320	0.556	1.753
Class Standing/Year	0.556	0.560	0.400	0.466

responses provided by the research participants. We analyzed the qualitative data using a grounded theory coding strategy (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), in an effort to describe, explain, and understand the reactions of the research participants to a convict professor.

Mean Comparisons by Student Responses to Convict Professor

As mentioned above, the vast majority of criminal justice students surveyed for the current project report no problems with a convict professor, while others would be hesitant or drop the course. To better understand the characteristics of the students with each perspective, the mean levels of each independent variable are shown by each perspective in Table 1.

With age, the data show that the students who would drop a course with a convict professor are slightly older, on average, than those who do not have an issue or are hesitant, but the differences are not statistically significant. Females are overrepresented in the hesitant category, those currently or previously employed in the criminal justice system and political conservatives are overrepresented in the “would drop” category, but again the differences are not significant. In fact, the only significant variation evidenced within the sample of criminal justice students are

between racial minorities and whites. Minorities are significantly overrepresented in the “would drop” response category, suggesting that racial minorities are more likely to exhibit negative reactions to a convict professor.

Multivariate Assessment of Student Responses

Given the strong relationships between many of the independent measures in the current study (i.e., political conservatism and employment in the criminal justice system); a more complete understanding of the patterns of student responses to a convict professor is produced through a multivariate analysis of the available data. The results of the multinomial logistic regression comparing the odds of inclusion in each of the three response categories are shown in Table 2.

Consistent with the ANOVA calculations reported above, the results of the multinomial logistic regression indicate that minorities are significantly less likely to report than a convict professor is not an issue than indicate they would drop the course. Similarly, minorities show significantly lower odds of being included in the hesitant category when compared with the “would drop” group. Interestingly, however, minorities are significantly more

Table 2. Student Reactions to Convict Instructor by Background Characteristics

	Not an Issue v. Would Drop		Not an Issue v. Hesitant/Bias		Hesitant/Bias v. Would Drop	
	<u>B</u>	<u>Std. Error</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>Std. Error</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>Std. Error</u>
Age	-0.284	0.465	0.048	0.261	-0.333	0.499
Female	0.031	0.783	-0.747	0.370 *	0.779	0.823
Minority	-1.339	0.815 +	0.928	0.505 +	-2.267	0.910 *
SES	-0.348	0.431	-0.228	0.222	-0.121	0.457
CJ Employee	-0.795	1.067	0.328	0.587	-1.123	1.156
Full Time	-0.586	1.403	-0.003	0.589	-0.583	1.473
Conservative	0.690	0.849	-0.078	0.391	0.768	0.891
Class Year	-1.462	0.803 +	-0.209	0.397	-1.253	0.849
N=	174					
Model X ² =	17.455					
R ² _L =	0.089					

* p < .05, + p < .10

likely to indicate that a convict professor is not an issue compared with being hesitant about a convict professor. These results suggest that racial minorities are simply less likely to report being hesitant about a convict professor in the classroom than either of the more firm reactions (not an issue, would drop). The other notable finding from this analysis is that students with upper class standing are significantly less likely to report that a convict professor is not an issue than indicating that they would drop the course.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The findings contained within this research note that many student would appreciate and value the diversity and perspective that a formerly incarcerated individual would bring to their education. As noted by Ross and Richards (2003) many of the portrayals of prisoners and prisons, as they are currently discussed in university classrooms, as well as movies, are often a distortion of reality.

As the majority of this research sample supports the idea of former prisoners as university instructors, these findings are important for university hiring policies as the finding contained here indicate that students seem to reject the dominant stereotype of a prisoner as one committed to crime and unresponsive to rehabilitation. Many of these students note that it is the different perspective, or standpoint, which a former prisoner would bring to the classroom which would enhance their education.

As many universities claim to value diversity, while denying employment to former felons, incorporating felons on staff will bring an added dimension of diversity which would greatly benefit students. A small minority of students (less than 10%) were totally against the idea of having former convicts in the class. By introducing former convicts into the classroom students would be required to face their fear of others and thereby possibly reconsider any preconceived stereotype. The university

classroom is the ideal place to expose and dismiss many of the stereotypes and myths surrounding former convicts, and having convicts in the classroom would assist in this area.

This research fills holes in our knowledge and adds to the literature concerning CJ students and is the first attempt to analyze CJ students' perceptions of having former convicts as professors while articulating convict criminology in a broader framework. These findings are contrary to previous research by Courtright, Mackey, and Packard (2005), which found that CJ students are reluctant to consider empathy towards prisoners, or that CJ students are reluctant to support the idea of rehabilitation (Mackey, Courtright, & Packard, 2006). We are unsure as to why our findings are inherently different from the previous literature.

This research is not without its flaws, our sample did not include distant education students; future research should incorporate these students as many distant education students may be "in-service" or currently employed as CJ practitioners which may influence future research. Also, utilizing a longitudinal design in future research may also display different results. As this research attempted to exclude freshman students, future research should use a pretest/posttest experiment where students are asked about their perception as incoming freshmen and asked the same questions as seniors prior to graduation. Additionally future researchers may evaluate academic faculty perceptions and whether they would welcome former convicts as peers and fellow faculty members.

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