

University of Nevada, Reno

**How an Inmate's Conversion and Race Affect Parole Release Decisions of Mock
Parole Board Members**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Criminal Justice

by

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Abstract

Conversions and race were examined to determine if they affect parole board member's release decisions, emotions, and perceptions. The study was a 2 (race: African-American, Caucasian) X 4 (conversion: Islam, Christianity, Secular lifestyle change, no lifestyle change) factorial design. Participants read one of eight mock inmate case files and determined whether they would grant or deny parole by means of an online survey. While, previous literature and studies have suggested that racial bias is found whenever authorities have the power to make discretionary decisions (Morgan & Smith, 2008), this study found that race did not matter. In addition, it was found that religious conversions (Islam, Christianity) do not affect parole board release decisions, emotions, or perceptions. However, having a conversion did. The inmate who experienced a Secular lifestyle change was more likely to be granted parole. Also, having a conversion, religious or not, is better than not having a conversion at all (no lifestyle change) in terms of emotions and perceptions. These findings suggest that having a conversion influences parole board member's release decisions, emotions, and perceptions.

Keywords: conversion, race, parole board decision-making

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Chapter 1- Introduction

In many states, parole boards make decisions as to whether an inmate will be released from prison. While parole board members follow certain guidelines, little is known about the complex set of factors that may also influence the decision-making process (Conley & Zimmerman, 1982). Parole board members largely base their decisions on factors such as: severity of the crime, mental illness, behavior of the inmate while in prison and danger to the community if released (Caplan, 2007). While those are general guidelines, this study will investigate other factors that may influence release decisions. Specifically, this study will investigate how an inmate's conversion and race affect release decisions.

This study will determine if conversions affect parole board member's release decisions, emotions, and perceptions. Positive lifestyle conversions, religious or not have the potential to change an offender's behavior for the better, which can affect release decisions. On the other hand, inmates may use religion as a means of obtaining parole even if they did not truly convert (Dammer, 2002). This study will be based on an inmate who either converts to Christianity, Islam, has a Secular lifestyle change or no lifestyle change. It is expected that the inmate who experiences a Secular lifestyle change will be the most likely to be granted parole based upon findings from a previous study (Shamblin & Miller, 2008). It is also expected that having a conversion will be perceived more favorably than having no lifestyle change based upon a previous study (Miller & Bornstein, 2006), unless parole board members are skeptical about the inmate's conversion, then they may be less likely to release the inmate.

This study will also determine if race affects parole board member's release decisions, emotions, and perceptions. Prior research has indicated that race plays a factor in release decisions and that race may be used as a cue for dangerousness and risk when the decision is made with incomplete information (Huebner & Bynum, 2008). This study will be based on an inmate who is either Caucasian or African-American. Based on studies about racial bias, one would expect that the Caucasian inmate will be viewed more favorably than the African-American inmate and thus be more likely to be released.

The relationship between conversion/race and release decision is likely not a direct one. It may be mediated by factors such as emotions (e.g., fear of the inmate), perceptions of the inmate (e.g., likeability, credibility, trustworthiness), believability of the conversion, and beliefs as to whether the inmate will commit another crime in the future. Thus, these factors will be measured and tested as possible mediators.

Chapter 2- Literature Review

Parole Boards

Parole is the “conditional release of a convicted offender from a correctional institution, under the continued custody of the state, to serve the remainder of his or her sentence in the community under supervision” (Alarid, Cromwell, & del Carmen, 2008, p. 233). Parole today is not always determined by parole board members. Concerns over the amount of discretion that parole boards had gave rise to stricter guidelines which limited the authority of parole board members. Mandatory release and discretionary release are the two main types of release from prison. Mandatory release or supervised release is a process by which an offender is automatically released at the expiration of his or her imposed sentence minus credit for good behavior. Parole boards do not have

control over mandatory release decisions; they are determined by sentencing laws (Alarid et al., 2008). Discretionary release, on the other hand, is determined by parole boards. Parole boards can release offenders from prison before they have served their maximum period of incarceration. The type of release differs by state (Alarid et al., 2008).

In the United States, parole was first implemented at the Elmira Reformatory in New York in 1876 (Alarid et al., 2008). Zebulon R. Brockway was an American penologist who established the Elmira Reformatory and was instrumental in implementing the first indeterminate sentence law, which gave rise to parole boards (Alarid et al., 2008). Indeterminate sentencing is determined by a judge, who sets the minimum and maximum period of incarceration and the parole board determines the length of incarceration the offenders will serve before they are released (Alarid et al., 2008). Parole was originally intended as a form of rehabilitation (Morgan & Smith, 2005). Brockway helped shift the focus of punishing offenders to rehabilitating them (Schoenherr, 2009). Parole would serve as rehabilitation in the sense that the offenders would be better off being released than incarcerated when incarceration might only serve to harm them. Parole was intended to minimize the length of incarceration so that when the offenders were released, they would be less likely to recidivate (Morgan & Smith, 2005). The Medical Model, which was popular from 1930 to 1960, was a rehabilitative model that was concerned with why criminals committed crime. The Medical Model assumed that through treatment, a criminal could be cured and should therefore be released (Alarid et al., 2008). The indeterminate sentence and parole were frequently used between 1930 and 1960.

In the late 1970's, parole was almost eliminated as tough crime policies and punitive ideals flourished. Sentencing laws were modified and many states adopted determinate sentencing. This restricted parole boards from granting early release, thereby limiting their authority (Morgan & Smith, 2005). Opponents argued that parole boards did not have enough information in order to make proper release decisions (Alarid et al., 2008). Determinate sentencing took away discretion from parole boards and judges by confining offenders for a fixed amount of time. As a result of sentencing guidelines, parole boards have less discretion to make release decisions than they did in the past.

Parole Today

In some states, parole board members have a lot of discretion; in other states, inmates are released after serving some form of determinate sentence (Alarid et al., 2008). Nationwide, there are twenty-five states in which parole boards have full discretion to release offenders. Many of those states require that the offender serve their mandatory minimum sentence before they are eligible for release. In the remaining states, parole boards have limited discretion. For example, in states such as Georgia, Louisiana and Tennessee, parole boards are limited to making release decisions for nonviolent offenders. In Arizona, Arkansas, Florida and North Carolina, parole boards are limited to cases prior to 1994. Maine and Indiana are the only two states in which parole boards have absolutely no discretion to release (Alarid et al., 2008).

There are over two million people incarcerated in the United States. Eventually, many of these offenders will be released. It is the job of certain parole boards to make these release decisions. When considering a release decision, parole board members consider many different factors such as institutional behavior, severity of the crime,

criminal history, mental illness, time served, victim input and the offender's risk of re-offending (Caplan, 2007). However, since certain parole boards have the authority to release inmates, there have been concerns as to how decisions are made and the amount of discretion that parole board members have (Morgan & Smith, 2008). Prior research has indicated that race may play a factor in release decisions (Huebner & Bynum, 2008; Proctor, 1999) and that inmates often have religious conversions in order to obtain early parole release (Dammer, 2002). Therefore, race and conversions may affect release decisions of parole board members.

Religion and Parole

Religion is very influential and prevalent among prisons; including faith-based treatment programs, religious activities and religious conversions among inmates (Dammer, 2002). The use of religion as treatment is very common in correctional settings and has been around since the beginning of prisons (Dammer, 2002). Religious-based treatments are believed to be more effective than secular strategies in reducing recidivism among inmates (Clear, Hardyman, Stout, Lucken, & Dammer, 2000). Many criminals lack certain moral values (Baier & Wright, 2001); faith-based programs are meant, among other things, to instill a sense of right from wrong. In addition to religious treatments and programs, religious conversions are very common among inmates. This especially pertains to Christian and Islamic conversions since they are the two major religions in prison (Clear et al., 2000), and Islam is the fastest growing religion in prison (Gordon, 2002), especially among African-American inmates (Kusha, 2001). Despite the influence of religion in prison, religious conversions are largely understudied in criminal justice research (Ammar, Weaver, & Saxon, 2004).

There are many motivations for religious conversions. Most simply, inmates convert because they truly are religious. Inmates are also motivated to convert for reasons other than belief in the religion. Clear et al. (2000) found that inmates convert for reasons such as safety, access to outsiders, and social support. In addition, religion provides a way in which inmates can deal with being in prison and helps them overcome the guilt and pain of committing a crime. For Muslims and Christians, the guilt of wrongdoing can be dealt with by adhering to one's faith (Clear et al., 2000). Dammer (2002) found that inmates often participate in treatment and educational programs as well as religious conversions for "sincere" and "insincere" reasons. A sincere reason was that the inmate wanted to better himself. Insincere reasons for undergoing religious conversions included protection and for the purpose of obtaining early parole release.

While it is possible that religious conversions alone influence parole board members, other factors attributed to religion may be influential. For example, recent theories posit that religious conversions deter criminal behavior (Baier & Wright, 2001). One hypothesis is that religion instills moral and social values that prevent a criminal from recidivating. Reference group theory states that individuals associate with groups with whom they share similar beliefs and backgrounds and through this association, they begin to adapt to each other's behaviors (Baier & Wright, 2001). Religious conversions may not directly influence parole board members, but if they show that the inmate is making an effort to change his ways, parole board members may take that into account.

One study found that the inmate who experienced a Secular lifestyle change was the most likely to be released in comparison to the inmate who converted to Christianity, Islam, and the inmate who experienced no lifestyle change (Shamblin & Miller, 2008).

The study also looked at whether an inmate who had a conversion to Christianity or Islam was more likely to be released than an inmate who experienced no lifestyle change. Their findings were not-significant, and this may suggest that parole board members did not believe that the inmate had truly converted to Islam or Christianity. If parole board members believe that the inmate experienced a conversion for insincere reasons or that the conversion was fake, parole board members may be more reluctant to release the inmate.

Lindsey and Miller (2009) found that actual parole board members differed from mock parole board members in believability of an inmate's religious conversion. Actual parole board members were not influenced by religious conversions. However, among the mock parole board members, the inmate's conversion to Islam was believed to be more sincere than the inmate's conversion to Christianity, but only by a small amount. However, it was found that only a Secular lifestyle change was viewed to be the most believable conversion and that only a Secular conversion increased the likelihood of the inmate being released (Shamblin & Miller, 2008). While evidence of religious conversions affecting parole is limited, there are studies of race impacting parole board release decisions.

Race and Parole

Many criminologists have suggested that racial inequality is found whenever authorities make discretionary decisions (Morgan & Smith, 2008) and parole boards have been criticized for how they make their discretionary release decisions (Alarid et al., 2008). While there have been many studies about racial prejudice within the criminal

justice system, less is known about the role of prejudice within parole board decision-making (Huebner & Bynum, 2008). Studies concerning racial bias within parole board decision-making have found mixed results.

A study conducted by Proctor (1999) found that racial minority offenders are equally likely to be given a parole hearing, but are sixty-eight percent less likely to be released on parole. This may suggest that parole boards use race as an indicator for risk (Huebner & Bynum, 2008). Another study found that African-American men spend longer times waiting to be paroled than Caucasian offenders do and are less likely to receive parole (Huebner & Bynum, 2008). Morgan and Smith (2008) found that African-Americans are less likely to be paroled than Caucasians, but by such a non-significant amount that their results were inconclusive. Carroll and Mondrick (1976) on the other hand found that African-American inmates were paroled at the same rate as Caucasian inmates, but many of the African-American inmates had to meet an additional requirement of institutional treatment, which was not required of the Caucasian inmate. Also, the African-American inmates that were granted parole spent more time in prison than the Caucasian inmates who were granted parole. This suggests that African-American inmates are assessed differently than Caucasian inmates.

While most offenders are released at some point in time, differences in the amount of time in which certain offenders are released is a cause for concern (Huebner & Bynum, 2008). While there may be underlying factors other than race such as demographic characteristics, Huebner and Bynum (2008) found that there was no interaction between African-American race, crime type, and community factors. It was therefore suggested in their study that African-American offenders are perceived as more

dangerous and threatening. Parole board members may be more reluctant to release an inmate based upon race, especially if they perceive the inmate to be dangerous. While there are not many studies about racial bias within parole boards, there are many studies concerning race and juror decision-making.

Bias in Jury Decision-Making

Studies about bias within juries may be applicable to the current study because jurors may make similar decisions as mock parole board members, assuming that the decision-making process is similar and jurors and parole board members base their decisions on similar factors. While there are not many studies about religious conversions impacting parole board decision-making, there are studies about religion affecting jury decision-making and many studies about racial bias affecting juror decision-making.

Terry Nichols and Timothy McVeigh were both charged with bombing the Oklahoma City Federal building. While McVeigh received the death penalty, Nichols did not. One reason why Nichols may not have received the death penalty is due to his conversion to Christianity while in prison. Lawyers for the case believed that the jury was more lenient towards Nichols because of his conversion which evoked more sympathy (Associated Press, 2004). In addition, a study conducted by Miller and Bornstein (2006) found that jurors are influenced by religious conversions. The study found that jurors were less punitive toward the defendant who converted to Christianity when the defense made a religious appeal on his behalf, in comparison to the defense's use of a Biblical appeal, an appeal on the behalf of a "lifelong" Christian, and an appeal for a defendant who was not religious. This may suggest that the jury felt that the defendant who

converted to Christianity was trying to become a better person and therefore deserved a lighter sentence.

In addition to religious conversions affecting juror decision-making, racial bias can influence jurors. Numerous studies have found that Caucasian defendants are treated better and are less likely to be convicted than African-American defendants. Studies have found that African-American defendants receive longer sentences than Caucasian defendants (Dane & Wrightsman, 1982; Schuller, Kazoleas, & Kawakami, 2009; Sweeney & Haney, 1992). Other studies have investigated how jurors associate crime and guilt with race. One study found that defendants associated with certain types of crimes were judged by mock juries more harshly (Gordon, Bindrim, McNicholas, & Walden, 1988). Defendants were given longer sentences for committing racially stereotypical crimes such as African-American defendants committing burglary and Caucasian defendants being charged with embezzlement. Maxwell, Robinson, and Post (2003) found that African-Americans and Hispanics received harsher sentences for murder, robbery and assault than Caucasians. Most studies that look at race and the death penalty have also found racial disparities. For example, defendants who murder Caucasian victims are more likely to receive the death penalty than those who murder African-American victims (Cole, 1999). Cole (1999) suggests that jurors are more sympathetic toward Caucasian victims. This is important because the bias and prejudice that exist within juries may lead to the same bias found within parole boards. While parole board members follow certain guidelines, unconscious stereotypes and bias may play a role in whether the inmate is released.

Stereotypes and Prejudice, In-Group/Out-Group Bias

Stereotypes and prejudice are found throughout the justice system (Graham & Lowery, 2004) and can have many unintended consequences. For example, stereotypes can affect how offenders are judged, perceptions of whether they will reoffend, and how they should be punished (Graham & Lowery, 2004). Stereotypes and prejudice can affect who people associate with and their perceptions of other people (Dasgupta, 2004). In-group and out-group bias can also affect how people are judged. In-group and out-group bias is the tendency to favor certain groups over others (Dasgupta, 2004; Mackie & Smith, 1998; Wilder & Simon, 2001). Research on these topics can inform the current study by explaining where biases come from and how this can impact judgments.

Stereotypes and Prejudice

Stereotypes are generalizations or assumptions made about people whom certain characteristics are associated with that person or group of people (Fiske, 1998). There can be negative and positive stereotypes, and both types are often false. The problem with negative stereotypes is that they often generate perceptions of people that are misconceived and can result in negative judgments and discrimination (Graham & Lowery, 2004). For example, the mass media tends to associate crime with African-American males (Rome, 2004). Because stereotypes can especially impact minorities, it has the potential to lead to racial bias.

There are double standards that are present within our criminal justice system (Cole, 1999). African-Americans are treated more unjustly than Caucasians. There are racial disparities found within the death penalty, length of sentences, drug offenses and overall treatment of minorities within the justice system (Cole, 1999). Disparities in

sentencing and arrest rates became apparent during the 1980s and 1990s when incarceration rates grew rapidly and more African-Americans were being incarcerated in comparison to the rest of the population (Dix-Richardson & Close, 2002). The “War on Drugs” contributed substantially to the growth in incarceration and led to more drug offenders being incarcerated (Blumstein, 2004). Furthermore, the majority of drug offenders targeted by the “War on Drugs” were minorities. A report by Human Rights Watch (2000) found that African-American males are more likely to be incarcerated for drug offenses than Caucasian male drug offenders, even though the drug offense rate for both groups is equivalent. In addition, African-American juvenile males are more likely to be arrested and to receive tougher sentences than Caucasian juvenile males and this may be due to stereotypes of minority offenders (Graham & Lowery, 2004).

While prejudice in our society has improved, it is still a problem (Dix-Richardson & Close, 2002). For example, Muslims have experienced more discrimination and prejudice after the events of September 11, 2001 than they did prior to this event (Sheridan, 2006). Islamophobia is a term that is used to explain the irrational fear of Islam that has resulted in the discrimination and stereotyping of Muslims (Sheridan, 2006). Because the bombings of September 11th heightened awareness of terrorism, it is a possibility that Americans have become more punitive toward people who are Muslim. A poll was taken prior to September 11, 2001 concerning racial profiling. The majority of Americans said that they did not approve of racial profiling as a law enforcement tactic. However, after September 11, 2001, more Americans supported the use of racial profiling of Muslims at airports (Harris, 2002).

Because stereotypes and prejudice can be unconscious (Graham & Lowery, 2004), many decision-makers might not realize that they are doing it. According to Graham and Lowery, explanations as to why African-American juveniles are treated worse than other groups in the justice system, studies how minority offenders are perceived by legal decision-makers such as if they are likely to commit another crime in the future and how dangerous they are. Groups who are negatively stereotyped may be less likely to be granted parole because they may be seen as more of a risk and thus more likely to recidivate. Parole board members may also be reluctant to release an inmate who they view as part of their out-group, or someone whom they do not have much in common with.

In-group/Out-group bias

In-group bias is the tendency to favor one's in-group more than one's out-group (Mackie & Smith, 1998; Wilder & Simon, 2001). As a result, people will view other groups (i.e., out-groups) more negatively compared to one's in-group (Dasgupta, 2004). When people are viewed as part of an out-group, they are viewed as less trustworthy, less cooperative and are viewed overall more negatively (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). In the United States, Islam used to be a fairly scarce religion and there was only a small percentage of Muslims in the prison system (Ammar et al., 2004). This contributed to Muslims being viewed as an out-group in comparison to more common religions such as Christianity.

In-group bias is the tendency to give preferential treatment to those who are part of your group. People tend to associate with others whom they have things in common with and are more likely to have positive perceptions of members of their own group. For

example, Jewish jurors are less likely to convict a Jewish defendant than a Christian defendant and Christian jurors are less likely to convict Christian defendants (Kerr, Hymes, Anderson, & Weathers, 1995). Cairns, Kenworthy, Campbell and Hewstone (2006) found that in-group bias is more prevalent among groups that have higher-status as compared to groups that have lower-status. Another study found that groups with higher power show more favoritism than groups with less power (Bourhis, 1994; Sachdev & Bourhis 1991). For example, a study conducted by Mitchell, Haw, Pfeifer, and Meissner (2005) found that jurors were more likely to convict a defendant of another race than of their own race and that racial bias within juror decision-making was more directed towards the African-American defendants than the Caucasian defendants. This may suggest that in-group bias is more common among Caucasians than among African-Americans who are a minority and less powerful.

Out-group bias is typically directed towards minorities and more disadvantaged groups (Dasgupta, 2004). Because people have a tendency to view people in their in-group more favorably than those in their out-group (Dasgupta, 2004; Hewstone et al., 2002), this may have a bearing upon parole board release decisions. It is possible that parole board members may have more negative perceptions of inmates that are not part of their in-group.

Perceptions

Perceptions include how credible, honest, trustworthy and likeable we think people are. As stated previously, when people are viewed as part of our out-group, we tend to have more negative perceptions of them and view them as less trustworthy and cooperative (Hewstone et al., 2002). Parole board members are more likely to grant an

inmate parole if they have a positive perception of the inmate, whereas negative perceptions of the inmate is likely linked to denying parole.

In a study conducted by Shamblin and Miller (2008) participants perceived the inmate who had a Secular lifestyle change as more likeable, credible, and honest, compared to the inmate who converted to Islam, the inmate who converted to Christianity and the inmate who experienced no lifestyle change. Other studies that have looked at perceptions have found that religious people (e.g. people who pray and attend church frequently) are perceived to be nicer and more cooperative (Brennan & London, 2001; Ellison, 1992; Morgan, 1983). This may be due to the fact that religious people are seen as less likely to engage in anti-social behaviors, (Kerley, Matthews, & Blanchard, 2005) and more likely to adhere to the morals that their faith teaches (Ellison, 1992). While there are not many studies about perceptions affecting parole board release decisions, how an inmate is perceived, may influence whether or not they are released.

Emotions

There are not many studies about how parole board members are affected by emotions, but there have been studies about emotions affecting jurors. For example, lawyers will often try to influence juror's emotions (Salerno & Bottoms, 2009). While jurors are supposed to remain unbiased and neutral, it was found that highly disturbing cases such as murder trials can affect juror's emotions and thereby affect their verdicts (Salerno & Bottoms, 2009). Bright and Goodman-Delahunty (2006) and Douglas, Lyon, and Ogloff (1997) found that visual stimuli such as photographs that depict a murder or a horrific image, influence juror judgments and are more likely to result in a guilty verdict.

It was found that the image caused anger towards the defendant. The same emotions that affect jurors may also affect parole board members. Other emotions such as fear of the inmate may influence parole board members, because parole board members are not likely to release an inmate that they view as a danger and risk to society.

Sensibilities and moral panics are mechanisms that influence people's opinions, beliefs, and the way in which people respond to events (Tonry, 2004). Moral panics and sensibilities can cause people to overreact and think with emotion rather than with logic, and this has influenced changes in public policy and overall treatment of criminals within our society (Tonry, 2004). If perceptions and emotions do sway release decisions, then Muslim converts may be seen as a risk. Popular culture is very influential in affecting people's emotions (Altheide, 2006) and Muslims may be seen as more dangerous due to fear about the September 11th attacks, which were heightened by the media (Altheide, 2006). The media's use of the word 'terrorism' largely increased after 9/11 and succeeded in producing fear and insecurity (Altheide, 2006). Muslims were targeted after the 9/11 attacks, and reported that they have experienced more discrimination and racism than before 9/11 (Sheridan, 2006). In addition, prisons foster radical Islamists and are viewed as recruiting grounds for converting Muslims into extremists (Dooghan, 2006). While the majority of Islamic converts in prison are peaceful, there is fear among U.S. officials that radicals have the potential to influence Muslims into becoming extremists (King, 2005). Because most of the Muslim converts are African-American (Kusha, 2001), they may be seen as especially dangerous because race may also be used as an indicator for dangerousness and risk (Huebner & Bynum, 2008). While there are not

many studies about how fear of the inmate influences parole-board decision-making, there have been studies that look at an offender's dangerousness. For example, judges consider how dangerous the offender is and if they are likely to recidivate when they are making their decision (Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2000). If parole board members are fearful that the inmate will pose a danger to society if released, then it is not likely that the inmate will be granted parole.

Recidivism

Parole boards have an obligation to protect the community from potentially dangerous offenders (Alarid et al., 2008). Therefore, recidivism is an important consideration in the decision to release an inmate. Parole boards in general will deny parole to dangerous inmates if they feel that the offender will commit another crime in the future (Carroll & Coates, 1980). Institutional behavior is one of the most influential release decision factors (Caplan, 2007), as behavior in prison may be a good indicator of future behavior outside of prison. Carroll and Coates (1980) found that parole release decisions were strongly correlated with the inmate's behavior while in prison. Good conduct in prison increased the likelihood of the inmate being granted parole. Other studies have found that good behavior in prison may not influence parole board members, but bad behavior will. A study conducted by Carroll, Weiner, Coates, Galegher, and Alibrio (1982) found that a parole board in Pennsylvania only denied parole to inmates who misbehaved while in prison and were considered to be dangerous. West-Smith, Pogrebin, and Poole (2000) also found that parole board members were only concerned with bad institutional behavior, which was influential in denying parole.

While recidivism rates vary among states (Petersilia, 2004), a study conducted by Gendreau, Little, and Googin (1996) found that criminal history, age, sex, and race are the most significant factors for predicting recidivism. One study found that African-American males were more likely to recidivate than Caucasian males and that African-American females were more likely to recidivate than Caucasian females, but that overall, males are more likely to recidivate than females regardless of race (Wehrman, 2006). Felony adult offender statistics for the state of Washington also found that African-American inmates had the highest rate of recidivism compared to all other groups (Sentencing Guidelines Commission, 2005). While race in itself may not account for high recidivism rates, other factors such as employment and lack of social services may affect recidivism rates among minorities (Petersilia, 2004). Minorities are the most often affected by poverty and social disparities and because of this, minorities are more likely to become criminals and more likely to recidivate (Sampson, 2004). Therefore, parole board members may be more reluctant to release a minority based upon a greater likelihood of recidivating.

Other studies have found that religious involvement such as attending church and participating in faith-based programs reduces the likelihood of delinquency in adolescents and deters adult offenders from engaging in criminal behavior (Evans, Cullen, Dunaway, & Burton, 1995; Jang & Johnson, 2001). Johnson, Larson, and Pitts (1997) found that there is no significant difference between inmates who participate in prison fellowship programs compared to inmates who do not participate in prison fellowship programs in terms of recidivism. However, they found that inmates who highly participate in bible

studies are less likely to be arrested after their release, compared to inmates who have less involvement in religious activities and inmates who do not participate at all. Specifically, Muslims tend to have a low rate of recidivism (Mufti, 2001). This may be due to the fact that Muslims are more devoted to their religion than participants of other religions (Ammar et al., 2004) and studies have shown that strong affiliations to religion tend to reduce recidivism (Evans et al., 1995; Jang & Johnson, 2001). Therefore, inmates who experience religious conversions may be seen by parole board members as less likely to recidivate as compared to inmates who experience no lifestyle change.

Summary

Prior studies have found that race and conversions (depending upon the conversion) influence parole board members. Shamblin and Miller (2008) found that conversions influence parole board members and Huebner and Bynum (2008) and Proctor (1999) found that race influences parole board release decisions. This study will determine if conversions and race affect mock parole board release decisions, emotions, and perceptions.

Chapter 3- Overview of Study

This study will investigate if mock parole board members (PBMs) are more or less likely to release an inmate if he has a religious or a non-religious conversion. Additionally, this study will determine if an inmate's conversion to Christianity, Islam, Secular lifestyle change or having no lifestyle change will affect PBM's emotions (e.g., fear of the inmate), perceptions of the inmate (e.g., likeability, credibility, trustworthy, honesty), believability of the conversion, and beliefs as to whether the inmate will commit another crime. This study will also investigate if an inmate's race affects release

decisions. Additionally, this study will determine if an inmate's race either Caucasian or African-American, will affect PBM's emotions (e.g., fear of the inmate), perceptions of the inmate (e.g., likeability, credibility, trustworthy, honesty), believability of the conversion, and beliefs as to whether the inmate will commit another crime.

This study expands on a previous study conducted by Shamblin & Miller (2008), which investigated whether mock parole board member's decisions are influenced by conversions (Islam, Christian, Secular lifestyle change, and no lifestyle change). The study found that the inmate who experienced a Secular lifestyle change was the most likely to be released, as compared to the other conversions (e.g., Christian, Islam, no lifestyle change). Also, the most believable conversion was the Secular lifestyle change. The current study will replicate those findings and will also investigate whether race has an effect on release decisions and if there is an interaction between race and conversion. This study will also determine if race and conversions affect parole board member's emotions and perceptions. This study was designed to test the following hypotheses:

Parole decision certainty

1a. It was hypothesized that there would be a main effect for conversion in which the inmate who had a Secular lifestyle change would be the most likely to be paroled compared to all other groups. This is expected based upon a previous study which found that only a Secular lifestyle change increased chances of the inmate being released (Shamblin & Miller, 2008). It is also hypothesized that the inmate who experiences no lifestyle change will be the least likely to be granted parole. This is based upon a previous study which found that jurors were less likely to convict a defendant who experienced a

religious conversion to Christianity compared to the defendant who experienced no conversion (Miller & Bornstein, 2006).

1b. It was hypothesized that there would be a main effect for race in which the Caucasian inmate would be more likely to be granted parole than the African-American inmate. This is expected based upon previous studies that found that African-American inmates were less likely to be released on parole than Caucasian inmates (Huebner & Bynum, 2008; Proctor, 1999).

1c. It was hypothesized that there would be an interaction between conversion and race, in which the inmate who was Caucasian and experienced a Secular lifestyle change would be the most likely to be released compared to all other groups.

Fear

2a. It was hypothesized that there would be a main effect for conversion in which participants would be the most fearful of the inmate who converted to Islam based upon negative stereotypes of Muslims, especially after the World Trade Center attacks (Sheridan, 2006).

2b. It was hypothesized that there would be a main effect for race in which participants would be the most fearful of the African-American inmate compared to the Caucasian inmate. This is expected based upon a previous study which found that African-American inmates may be seen as more of a danger and a risk than Caucasian inmates (Huebner & Bynum, 2008).

2c. It was hypothesized that there would be an interaction between conversion and race in which participants would be the most fearful of the African-American inmate who converted to Islam.

Believability of the inmate's conversion

3a. It was hypothesized that there would be a main effect for conversion in which the Secular lifestyle change would be viewed as the most believable conversion compared to all other groups. There were only three conversion conditions in this analysis (Christian, Islam, Secular lifestyle change) because the “no lifestyle change” condition was not a conversion. This is expected based upon a previous study which found that the Secular lifestyle change was viewed as the most believable conversion (Shamblin & Miller, 2008). It is also expected that the conversion to Christianity will be viewed as the least believable based upon the same study which found that a conversion to Islam was slightly more believable than the conversion to Christianity (Shamblin & Miller, 2008).

3b. It was hypothesized that there would be a main effect for race in which the Caucasian inmate's conversion would be viewed as more believable than the African-American inmate's conversion. This is based upon racial bias (Cole, 1999; Dix-Richardson & Close, 2002).

3c. It was hypothesized that there would be an interaction between conversion and race in which the most believable conversion would be the Caucasian inmate who had a Secular lifestyle change compared to all other conditions.

Recidivism

4a. It was hypothesized that there would be a main effect for conversion in which the inmate who converted to Islam would be viewed as less likely to commit another crime based upon the fact that Muslims tend to have a low rate of recidivism (Mufti, 2001). It was also hypothesized that the inmate who experiences no lifestyle change would be viewed as the most likely to commit another crime compared to the religious groups. This

is expected based upon previous studies which have found that religious involvement reduces the likelihood of antisocial behavior (Evans et al., 1995; Jang & Johnson, 2001; Johnson et al., 1997).

4b. It was hypothesized that there would be a main effect for race in which the Caucasian inmate would be viewed as less likely to commit another crime than the African-American inmate based upon previous studies that found that race is a good indicator for recidivism (Sentencing Guidelines Commission, 2005; Wehrman, 2006).

4c. It was hypothesized that there would be an interaction between conversion and race in which the inmate who was African-American and experienced no lifestyle change would be viewed as the most likely to commit another crime compared to the Caucasian inmate who converted to Islam

Perceptions

5a. It was hypothesized that there would be a main effect for conversion in which participants would have the most positive perceptions of the inmate who had a Secular lifestyle change based upon a previous study which found that participants perceived the inmate who had a Secular lifestyle change as more likeable, credible and honest as compared to all other groups (Shamblin & Miller, 2008). It was also hypothesized that participants would have more positive perceptions of the inmate who experienced a conversion to Christianity than the inmate who experienced no lifestyle change. This is based upon previous studies that have found that religious people are perceived to be more cooperative and nice (Brennan & London, 2001; Ellison, 1992). However, it was hypothesized that participants would have negative perceptions of the inmate who converted to Islam based upon negative stereotypes of Muslims (Sheridan, 2006).

5b. It was hypothesized that there would be a main effect for race in which participants would have more positive perceptions of the Caucasian inmate than the African-American inmate. This is expected due to previous studies about racial bias (Cole, 1999; Dix-Richardson & Close, 2002).

5c. It was hypothesized that there would be an interaction between conversion and race in which participants would have the most positive perceptions of the Caucasian inmate who had a Secular lifestyle change.

Mediators

6a. It was hypothesized that beliefs about recidivism, fear of the inmate, perceptions of the inmate, and beliefs about credibility of the conversion mediate the effect that conversion (independent variable) and race (independent variable) have on parole decision certainty (dependent variable). While there are main effects expected for perceptions, recidivism, fear, and believability, these variables will also be tested as possible mediators. It is possible that race and conversion affect these perceptions, emotions and beliefs, and that these in turn affect parole decisions. Mediation analyses will determine if race and conversion impact parole decisions directly or if these relationships are mediated by these other factors.

Chapter 4-Methodology

Participants

The data for this study came from a pool of 250 social psychology and criminal justice students from a mid-sized western university. Participants were granted credit in their class for participating in the study. Participants acted as mock PBMs (parole board members). Participants read one of eight mock inmate case files and determined if they

would grant or deny parole. Participants also indicated their perceptions of the inmate (e.g., likeability, credibility, trustworthiness, honesty), how believable they thought the inmate's conversion was, the likelihood of the inmate committing another crime, how scared participants were of the inmate and answered various demographic questions. There were 25-37 participants in each condition ($M = 31.25$). Participants were 64% female, 36% male, 71% Caucasian, 10% Hispanic, 6% Asian/Pacific Islander, 6% African-American and 5% Other. Participants were 49% Republican, 33% Democrat, 12% Undecided/no affiliation and 5% Independent. They ranged in age from 17-61 years ($M = 21.26$, $Mdn = 20$) and had a variety of religious backgrounds, 31% Catholic, 26% believed in God, but did not have a particular faith, 23% Other, 7% Protestant, 6% Agnostic, and 5% Atheist.

Procedure

Participants completed an online study using surveymonkey.com. (Participants had the option of completing a paper survey, but all the students opted to complete the study via surveymonkey.com). Participants started the survey by reading about the purpose of the study and details of the study (see appendix for a copy of the survey). Participants were then asked to read an information sheet which described the participants' rights and information about confidentiality. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of eight conditions, which manipulated the inmate's conversion (Islam, Christianity, Secular lifestyle change, no lifestyle change) and race (Caucasian, African-American). After completing the questionnaire, participants were given information on receiving credit for participating in the survey. Participants were provided with a debriefing form which explained the purpose of the study and contact information should

they have any questions or concerns. Lastly, they were thanked for participating in the survey.

Materials

The survey is a 2 (race: African-American, Caucasian) X 4 (conversion: Islam, Christianity, Secular lifestyle change, no change) factorial design. Participants read an approximately 670 word mock case file. The case file summary was based on an actual case summary provided by an actual PBM and two actual PBMs verified that the case summary was realistic. The case summary was used in Shamblin and Miller (2008), however, the case summary was changed to include a race condition and the inmate's name was changed to Muhammad Yasir for the Islam condition.

The mock case file was based on a fictitious prisoner, "David Mitchum" or "Muhammad Yasir" (Islam condition)" who was convicted of 2nd degree murder. He was sentenced to 15 years in prison, with eligibility for parole after 10 years. The inmate served 10 years of his sentence. During his time in prison, David Mitchum either converted to Christianity, had a Secular lifestyle change, or made no lifestyle change. Muhammad Yasir converted to Islam. The survey described the conversion conditions as the inmate experienced a religious conversion either to Christianity or Islam, or made a decision to commit to a positive lifestyle change (e.g., reading self-help books) after serving 7 years of his sentence. For the no lifestyle change condition, the survey did not describe any conversion. Race was also manipulated in which David Mitchum and Muhammad Yasir was either African-American or Caucasian in each of the conditions. The eight mock inmate conditions are as follows: 1. David Mitchum is Caucasian and converts to Christianity. 2. David Mitchum is Caucasian and experiences a Secular

lifestyle change. 3. David Mitchum is Caucasian and makes no lifestyle change. 4. Muhammad Yasir is Caucasian and converts to Islam. 5. David Mitchum is African-American and converts to Christianity 6. David Mitchum is African-American and experiences a Secular lifestyle change. 7. David Mitchum is African-American and makes no lifestyle change. 8. Muhammad Yasir is African-American and converts to Islam. After being randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions, participants answered a series of questions about the inmate. After reading about the inmate, participants checked whether they would “grant” or “deny” parole to the inmate and were asked their certainty in that decision. Demographic questions were also asked including the participant’s age, gender, race/ethnicity, political party affiliation and religious background. Participants were also asked questions about their political, social, moral and religious beliefs.

The first question was whether the participant would grant parole to the inmate, in which the participant either checked “grant parole” or “deny parole”. They were also asked how certain they were in their decision based on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very uncertain and 5 being very certain. Parole decision certainty was measured by multiplying the parole decision (grant= +1, deny= -1) with the certainty of their decision (1= very uncertain to 5= very certain) resulting in a scale from (-5= very certain to deny to 5= very certain to grant).

Participants were then asked their overall perception of the inmate and how honest, trustworthy, likeable and credible they thought the inmate was based on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very negative, very dishonest, not trustworthy, very dislikeable, and very uncredible and 5 being very positive, very honest, very trustworthy,

very likeable and very credible. Participants indicated how scared they were of the inmate based on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very scared and 5 being not scared.

Participants were asked how likely it is that the inmate will commit another crime in the future based on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very unlikely and 5 being very likely. Lastly, participants indicated how believable they thought the inmate's claim was that he had experienced a conversion which has changed his behavior in a positive way, based on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very unbelievable to 5 being very believable. Participants were also asked demographic questions that included their age, gender, race/ethnicity, political party affiliation and religious background.

Chapter 5-Results

The independent variables included the conversion manipulation (Christian, Islam, Secular lifestyle change and no lifestyle change) and the race manipulation (African-American and Caucasian). The dependent variables included parole decision certainty, believability of the inmate's conversion, how fearful the participant was of the inmate, likelihood of the inmate committing another crime in the future, and perceptions of the inmate (e.g., likeability, credibility, trustworthiness, honesty, overall perception).

Parole decision certainty

A 2-way ANOVA was conducted with the inmate's race and conversion as independent variables and the participant's parole decision certainty as the dependent variable. Low scores equal certainty to deny parole and high scores equal certainty to grant parole. There was no significant main effect for race nor was there a significant interaction ($p > .05$; $\eta^2 < .021$). There was a significant main effect for conversion ($F(3, 241) 2.876, p = .037, \eta^2 = .035$). Tukey's post hoc tests revealed a marginally

significant difference between the no change condition ($M = -.7636$, $SD = 3.33$, 95% CI [-1.71, .17]) and the Secular ($M = .7808$, $SD = 3.57$, 95% CI [-.026, 1.596] $p = .069$) condition. There was also a marginally significant difference between the Secular condition and the Christian ($M = -.6441$, $SD = 3.60$, 95% CI [-1.547, .258] $p = .098$) condition. There were no other significant differences between other groups, including the Islam ($M = -.3387$, $SD = 3.59$, 95% CI [-1.434, .361]) condition. Consistent with Hypothesis 1a, participants were more likely to grant parole to the inmate who experienced a Secular conversion and the least likely to grant parole to the inmate who do not have a lifestyle change, however, only a Secular lifestyle change affected participant's release decisions. Hypotheses 1 b and 1 c are not confirmed.

Fear

One 2-way ANOVA was conducted with the inmate's race and conversion as independent variables and how fearful the participant was of the inmate as the dependent variable. Low scores equal higher perceptions of fear and high scores equal lower perceptions of fear. There was no significant main effect for race or an interaction ($p > .05$; $\eta^2 < .019$). There was a main effect for conversion ($F(3, 241) = 2.891$, $p = .036$, $\eta^2 = .035$). Tukey's post hoc tests revealed a significant difference between the no change condition ($M = 3.05$, $SD = .970$, 95% CI [-1.71, .17]) and both the Secular ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.01$, 95% CI [-.026, 1.596] $p = .025$) and Islam ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.00$, 95% CI [-1.434, .361] $p = .037$) conditions. There were no other significant differences between other groups, including the Christian ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.22$, 95% CI [-1.547, .258]) condition. Contrary to Hypothesis 2a, participants were the most fearful of the inmate who did not experience a lifestyle change and the least fearful of the inmate who

experienced a Secular lifestyle change, however only the inmate who experienced no lifestyle change affected how fearful participants were of the inmate. Hypotheses 2 b and 2 c are not confirmed.

Believability of the inmate's conversion

This analysis only contained three conversion conditions (Islam, Christian, Secular lifestyle change). The “no lifestyle change” condition was not included in this analysis because that inmate did not experience a conversion. A 2-way ANOVA was conducted with the inmate's race and conversion as independent variables and how believable the participant thought that the inmate's claim that he has experienced a conversion which has changed his behavior in a positive way as the dependent variable. Low scores equal less believability of the conversion and high scores equal more believability of the conversion. There was no significant main effect for race or an interaction ($p > .05$; $\eta^2 < .006$). There was a main effect for conversion ($F(2, 188) = 4.160, p = .017, \eta^2 = .042$). Tukey's post hoc tests revealed a significant difference between the Secular ($M = 3.14, SD = .918, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.026, 1.596]$) and the Christian ($M = 2.69, SD = 1.087, 95\% \text{ CI} [-1.547, .258], p = .027$) conditions. There was also a significant difference between the Islam condition ($M = 3.11, SD = .889, 95\% \text{ CI} [-1.434, .361]$) and the Christian ($p = .049$) condition. No other differences were significant. Consistent with Hypothesis 3a, the Secular lifestyle change was the most believable conversion and the conversion to Christianity was the least believable conversion. Hypotheses 3b and 3c are not confirmed.

Recidivism

A 2-way ANOVA was conducted with the inmate's race and conversion as independent variables and the participant's perception of the likelihood that the inmate will commit another crime as the dependent variable. Low scores are equal to perceptions that it is very unlikely that the inmate will commit another crime and high score are equal to perceptions that it is very likely that the inmate will commit another crime. There was no significant main effect for race or an interaction ($p > .05$; $\eta p^2 < .001$). There was a main effect for conversion ($F(3, 242) 5.053, p = .002, \eta p^2 = .059$). Tukey's post hoc tests revealed a significant difference between the no change condition ($M = 3.86, SD = .819, 95\% \text{ CI} [-1.71, .17]$) and the Secular, ($M = 3.29, SD = .905, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.026, 1.596]$) $p = .004$) Islam, ($M = 3.27, SD = .978, 95\% \text{ CI} [-1.434, .361]$) $p = .004$) and Christian ($M = 3.39, SD = .983, 95\% \text{ CI} [-1.547, .258]$) $p = .036$) conditions. Consistent with Hypothesis 4a, participants perceived the inmate who experienced no lifestyle change to be the most likely to commit another crime in the future and the inmate who experienced a conversion to Islam to be the least likely to commit another crime in the future. However, only the no lifestyle change condition affected beliefs about recidivism. Hypotheses 4b and 4c are not confirmed.

Perception Variables

A 4 (conversion) x 2 (race) MANOVA was conducted on the set of perception variables (e.g., honesty, credibility, trustworthy, likeability, overall perception). Low scores equal very negative, very dishonest, not trustworthy, very dislikeable, and very uncredible perceptions and high scores equal very positive, very honest, very trustworthy, very likeable and very credible perceptions. There was no main effect for race, Pillai's trace = .012, $F(5, 227) .539, p = .746, \eta p^2 = .012$. The interaction between conversion

and race was also not significant, Pillai's trace = .073, $F(15, 687) 1.135$, $p = .321$, $\eta^2 = .024$. There was a significant main effect for conversion, Pillai's trace = .158, $F(15, 687) 2.546$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .053$.

Univariate comparisons demonstrated that conversion significantly affected the overall perception of the inmate, $F(3, 231) 6.867$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .082$, and perceptions of the inmate as honest, $F(3, 231) 5.050$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .062$, as trustworthy $F(3, 231) 5.825$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .070$, as likeable $F(3, 231) 3.395$, $p = .019$, $\eta^2 = .042$, and as credible $F(3, 231) 3.775$, $p = .011$, $\eta^2 = .047$.

Overall perception

Tukey's post hoc tests revealed a significant difference between the no lifestyle change condition ($M = 2.39$, $SD = .640$, 95% CI [-1.71, .17]) and the Secular ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .650$, 95% CI [-.026, 1.596] $p = .001$) and Islam ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .810$, 95% CI [-1.434, .361] $p = .002$) conditions, and a marginally significant difference in the Christian ($M = 2.75$, $SD = .872$, 95% CI [-1.547, .258] $p = .062$) condition. No other group differences were significant. Consistent with Hypothesis 5a, the inmate who experienced a Secular conversion was perceived the most favorably, however this difference was not significantly different from the other conversion groups. Importantly, the no lifestyle change condition differed significantly from the Secular and Islam conversion conditions and marginally differed from the Christian conversion condition, indicating that any change is better than no change—but that the actual type of conversion matters little. Hypotheses 5b and 5c are not confirmed.

Honest

Tukey's post hoc tests revealed a significant difference between the no lifestyle change condition ($M = 2.47$, $SD = .710$, 95% CI [-1.71, .17]) and the Secular ($M = 2.97$, $SD = .769$, 95% CI [-.026, 1.596] $p = .005$) and Islam ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .816$, 95% CI [-1.434, .361] $p = .004$) conditions. There were no other significant differences between other groups, including the Christian ($M = 2.72$, $SD = .901$, 95% CI [-1.547, .258]) condition. Contrary to Hypothesis 5a, the inmate who experiences a conversion to Islam is perceived to be the most honest; however this difference was not significantly different from the other conversion groups. Importantly, the no lifestyle change condition differed significantly from the Secular and Islam conversion conditions, indicating that it is better to have a conversion than no lifestyle change.

Trustworthy

Tukey's post hoc tests revealed a significant difference between the no lifestyle change condition ($M = 2.10$, $SD = .743$, 95% CI [-1.71, .17]) and the Secular ($M = 2.67$, $SD = .712$, 95% CI [-.026, 1.596] $p = .001$), Islam ($M = 2.54$, $SD = .765$, 95% CI [-1.434, .361] $p = .016$) and Christian ($M = 2.58$, $SD = .885$, 95% CI [-1.547, .258] $p = .008$) conditions. Consistent with Hypothesis 5a, the inmate who experiences a Secular conversion is perceived to be the most trustworthy. However, the only condition that actually differed from the other conversions was the no lifestyle change condition.

Likeable

Tukey's post hoc tests revealed a significant difference between the no lifestyle change condition ($M = 2.61$, $SD = .759$, 95% CI [-1.71, .17]) and the Secular ($M = 3.06$, $SD = .803$, 95% CI [-.026, 1.596] $p = .024$), Islam ($M = 3.07$, $SD = .873$, 95% CI [-1.434, .361] $p = .027$) and Christian ($M = 3.05$, $SD = .915$, 95% CI [-1.547, .258] $p = .038$)

conditions. There were no other significant differences between other groups. Contrary to Hypothesis 5a, the inmate who experiences a conversion to Islam is perceived to be the most likeable. However, only the no lifestyle change condition differed significantly from all the conversion groups, indicating that having a conversion is better than not.

Credible

Tukey's post hoc tests revealed a significant difference between the no lifestyle change condition ($M = 2.20$, $SD = .790$, 95% CI [-1.71, .17]) and the Secular ($M = 2.68$, $SD = .709$, 95% CI [-.026, 1.596] $p = .006$) condition, and a marginally significant difference in the Islam ($M = 2.57$, $SD = .763$, 95% CI [-1.434, .361] $p = .066$) condition. There were no other significant differences between other groups, including the Christian ($M = 2.40$, $SD = .863$, 95% CI [-1.547, .258]) condition. Consistent with Hypothesis 5a, the inmate who experiences a Secular conversion is perceived to be the most credible; however the only condition that actually differed from the other conversions was the no lifestyle change condition. The no lifestyle change condition differed significantly from the Secular conversion condition and marginally differed from the Islam condition, indicating that the type of conversion matters little, but that it is better to have a change than no change.

Mediating variables for Conversion manipulation

It is possible that the relationship between conversion and decision certainty is not a direct one. Specifically, it was hypothesized that beliefs about recidivism, fear of the inmate, perceptions of the inmate, and beliefs about credibility of the conversion mediate this relationship between conversion and decision certainty. Mediation has four required elements: 1) The IV—conversion manipulation condition—must be related to the

mediator, 2) the mediator must be related to the DV—parole release decision, 3) the IV must be related to the DV and 4) when controlling for the mediator, the IV is no longer significantly related to the DV. All four steps must be satisfied for mediation to occur. A Sobel test indicates whether the overall mediation is significant. These steps are taken for each possible mediator (see Baron & Kenny, 1986).

In order to test each hypothesis about mediation, a series of regressions and a Sobel test was conducted following the approach suggested by MacKinnon and Dwyer (1993). Because it was not possible to use a multi-categorical predictor, three sets of regression analyses were used for each mediation test, in which the above four steps were repeated to compare the three conversion conditions to the control (no lifestyle change) condition. In other words, the first set of analyses focused on the Secular-control comparison, the second set of analyses focused on the Christian-control comparison and the third focused on the Islam-control comparison. Because the variance of estimates varies in logistic regression, this mediation approach requires that all regression coefficients be standardized (see MacKinnon & Dwyer, 1993).

Recidivism.

Three sets of analyses were performed to determine whether recidivism mediates the relationship between conversion condition (IV) and parole release decision (DV).

Secular.

The first set of analyses was performed comparing the Secular condition to the control condition (no lifestyle change). In step 1, Secular condition participants (the IV)

were less likely to believe that the inmate will recidivate (the mediator) compared to the control condition, $\beta = -.311, p < .001$. In step 2, recidivism (mediator) was negatively related to the parole decision (the DV), $\beta = -.602, p < .001$. In step 3, Secular condition participants (the IV) were more likely to release the inmate on parole (the DV) compared to the control condition, $\beta = .217, p = .014$. In step 4, when the IV (conversion manipulation condition) and mediator (recidivism) were simultaneously used as predictors, the coefficient for conversion condition was no longer significant, $\beta = .039, p = .60$. The coefficient for recidivism was still significant, $\beta = -.591, p < .001$. A Sobel test confirmed that there was a significant indirect effect from conversion condition to perceived recidivism to parole decision, Sobel $Z = 3.347, p < .001$. Thus, the effects of conversion on parole release decision are fully mediated by beliefs about recidivism for the Secular lifestyle change condition.

Islam.

The second set of analyses was performed comparing the Islam condition to the control condition (no lifestyle change). In step 1, Islam condition participants (the IV) were less likely to believe that the inmate will recidivate (the mediator) compared to the control condition participants, $\beta = -.308, p = .001$. In step 2, recidivism (mediator) was negatively related to the parole decision (the DV), $\beta = -.550, p < .001$. However, in step 3, Islam condition participants (the IV) were *no more likely* to release the inmate on parole (the DV) compared to the control condition, $\beta = .062, p = .510$. Because step 3 was not significant, the effects of conversion on parole release decision are not mediated by beliefs about recidivism for the Islam condition.

Christian.

The third set of analyses was performed comparing the Christian condition to the control condition (no lifestyle change). In step 1, Christian condition participants (the IV) were less likely to believe the inmate will recidivate (the mediator) compared to the control condition participants, $\beta = -.252, p = .007$. In step 2, recidivism (mediator) was negatively related to the parole decision (the DV), $\beta = -.619, p < .001$. However, in step 3, Christian condition participants (the IV) were *no more likely* to release the inmate on parole (the DV) compared to the control condition, $\beta = .017, p = .855$. Because step 3 was not significant, the effects of conversion on parole release decision are not mediated by beliefs about recidivism for the Christian condition.

These three analyses indicate that recidivism was a complete mediator of the relationship between conversion condition and parole release decision, but only for the Secular lifestyle change condition.

Fear.

Three sets of analyses were performed to determine if fear of the inmate mediates the relationship between conversion condition (IV) and parole release decision (DV).

Secular.

The first set of analyses was performed comparing the Secular condition to the control condition (no lifestyle change). In step 1, Secular condition participants (the IV) were less fearful of the inmate (the mediator) compared to the control condition, $\beta = .259, p = .003$. However, in step 2, fear of the inmate (mediator) was not related to the parole

decision (the DV), $\beta = .075$, $p = .402$. Because step 2 was not significant, the effects of conversion on parole release decision are not mediated by fear of the inmate for the Secular lifestyle change condition.

Islam.

The second set of analyses was performed comparing the Islam condition to the control condition (no lifestyle change). In step 1, Islam condition participants (the IV) were less fearful of the inmate (the mediator) compared to the control condition, $\beta = .259$, $p = .005$. However, in step 2, fear of the inmate (mediator) was not related to the parole decision (the DV), $\beta = .135$, $p = .149$. Because step 2 was not significant, the effects of conversion on parole release decision are not mediated by fear of the inmate for the Islam condition.

Christian.

The third set of analyses was performed comparing the Christian condition to the control condition. In step 1, Christian condition participants (the IV) were *no more fearful* of the inmate (the mediator) compared to the control condition, $\beta = .126$, $p = .195$. Because step 1 was not significant, the effects of conversion on parole release decision are not mediated by fear of the inmate for the Christian condition.

These three analyses indicate that fear of the inmate, is not a mediator of the relationship between conversion condition and parole release decision.

Perceptions.

Three sets of analyses were performed to determine whether perceptions of the inmate mediate the relationship between conversion condition (IV) and parole release decision (DV).

Secular.

The first set of analyses was performed comparing the Secular condition to the control condition (no lifestyle change). In step 1, Secular condition participants (the IV) perceived the inmate more favorably (the mediator) compared to the control condition, $\beta = .410, p < .001$. In step 2, perceptions (mediator) was positively related to the parole decision (the DV), $\beta = .574, p < .001$. In step 3, Secular condition participants (the IV) were more likely to release the inmate on parole (the DV) compared to the control condition, $\beta = .217, p = .014$. In step 4, when the IV (conversion manipulation condition) and mediator (perceptions) were simultaneously used as predictors, the coefficient for conversion condition was no longer significant, $\beta = -.021, p = .792$. The coefficient for perceptions was still significant, $\beta = .583, p < .001$. A Sobel test confirmed that there was a significant indirect effect from conversion condition to perceptions to parole decision, Sobel $Z = 4.157, p < .001$. Thus, the effects of conversion on parole release decision are mediated by beliefs about perceptions for the Secular lifestyle change condition.

Islam.

The second set of analyses was performed comparing the Islam condition to the control condition (no lifestyle change). In step 1, Islam condition participants (the IV) perceived the inmate more favorably (the mediator) compared to the control condition, β

= .351, $p < .001$. In step 2, perceptions (mediator) was positively related to the parole decision (the DV), $\beta = .539$, $p < .001$. However, in step 3, Islam condition participants (the IV) were *no more likely* to release the inmate on parole (the DV) compared to the control condition, $\beta = .062$, $p = .510$. Because step 3 was not significant, the effects of conversion on parole release decision are not mediated by perceptions for the Islam condition.

Christian.

The third set of analyses was performed comparing the Christian condition to the control condition (no lifestyle change). In step 1, Christian condition participants (the IV) perceived the inmate more favorably (the mediator) compared to the control condition, $\beta = .248$, $p = .007$. In step 2, perceptions (mediator) was positively related to the parole decision (the DV), $\beta = .579$, $p < .001$. However, in step 3, Christian condition participants (the IV) were *no more likely* to release the inmate on parole (the DV) compared to the control condition, $\beta = .017$, $p = .855$. Because step 3 was not significant, the effects of conversion on parole release decision are not mediated by perceptions for the Christian condition.

These three analyses indicate that perceptions were a complete mediator of the relationship between conversion condition and parole release decision, but only for the Secular lifestyle change condition.

Believability of conversion.

Two sets of analyses were performed to determine if the believability of the conversion mediates the relationship between conversion condition (IV) and parole release decision (DV).

Islam.

The first set of analyses was performed comparing the Islam condition to the Secular condition. In step 1, Islam condition participants (the IV) were no more likely to believe the conversion (the mediator) compared to the Secular condition, $\beta = -.013$, $p = .878$. Because step 1 was not significant, the effects of conversion on parole release decision are not mediated by believability of the conversion for the Islam condition.

Christian.

The second set of analyses was performed comparing the Christian condition to the Secular condition. In step 1, Christian condition participants (the IV) were less likely to believe the conversion (the mediator) compared to the Secular condition participants, $\beta = -.217$, $p = .012$. In step 2, believability of the conversion (mediator) was positively related to the parole decision (the DV), $\beta = .672$, $p < .001$. In step 3, Christian condition participants (the IV) were *less likely* to release the inmate on parole (the DV) compared to the Secular condition, $\beta = -.195$, $p = .025$. In step 4, when the IV (conversion manipulation condition) and mediator (believability) were simultaneously used as predictors, the coefficient for conversion condition was no longer significant, $\beta = -.052$, $p = .437$. The coefficient for believability was still significant, $\beta = .661$, $p < .001$. A Sobel test confirmed that there was a significant indirect effect from conversion condition to

believability to parole decision, Sobel $Z = 3.347$, $p < .001$. Thus, the effects of conversion on parole release decision are mediated by believability of the conversion for the Christian condition.

These two analyses indicate that believability of the conversion is a mediator of the relationship between conversion condition and parole release decision, but only for the Christian condition.

Mediating variables for race manipulation

It was hypothesized that beliefs about recidivism, fear of the inmate, perceptions of the inmate, and beliefs about credibility of the conversion mediate the relationship between race and parole release decision. Even though these mediators were predicted race was not related to parole release decision, therefore, step 3 was not significant for any model. Thus, none of the mediation hypotheses for race were confirmed.

Chapter 6-Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if race and/or conversions affect parole board member's release decisions, emotions, and perceptions. To accomplish this, eight conditions were developed that combined different variations of the inmate's race (African-American, Caucasian) and conversion (Christian, Islam, Secular lifestyle change, no lifestyle change). Only conversions were found to be significant influences on the dependent variables. Specifically, only the Secular lifestyle change affected release decisions and believability of the conversion, and the no lifestyle change condition affected beliefs about whether the inmate was likely to commit another crime and how

fearful the participant was of the inmate. In addition, recidivism and perceptions are mediators of the relationship between conversion condition and parole release decision, but only for the Secular lifestyle change and the no lifestyle change conditions, and that believability of the conversion is a mediator of the relationship between conversion condition and parole release decision, but only for the Christian and the Secular lifestyle change conditions. The findings indicated that race and the interaction between conversions and race do not have a significant effect on parole board member's release decisions, emotions, or perceptions.

Based upon previous studies about race and parole board decision-making (Huebner & Bynum, 2008; Proctor, 1999) and racial bias within legal decision-making (Cole, 1999; Dane & Wrightsman, 1982; Maxwell et al., 2003; Schuller et al., 2009; Sweeney & Haney, 1992), it was expected that the African-American inmate would be less likely to be released than the Caucasian inmate. It was also expected that the African-American inmate would be perceived less favorably, would be seen as more likely to commit another crime in the future, their conversion would be seen as less believable, and that participants would be the most fearful of the African-American inmate. However, no main effects were found for race nor was there a significant interaction between conversion and race.

The study may have failed to find race differences because race may not have been salient enough. Race was only mentioned one time in the survey when describing the inmate's characteristics. Unfortunately, there were no race manipulation check questions, so it is unknown as to whether the participant remembered the inmate's race.

While race may not have played a role, other factors may have contributed to this finding, as discussed above. Thus, further research is needed to determine whether these null findings are a result of a methodological flaw or an actual lack of racial bias.

The study found that religious conversions (Christianity, Islam) do not affect parole board release decisions. However, the Secular lifestyle change conversion did affect release decisions. As predicted, participants were more likely to grant parole to the inmate who experienced a Secular lifestyle change and the least likely to grant parole to the inmate who experienced no lifestyle change, however only a Secular lifestyle change affected release decisions. This finding was consistent with a previous study that found that the inmate who experienced a Secular lifestyle change was the most likely to be released (Shamblin & Miller, 2008).

Also, as expected, the Secular lifestyle change was the most believable conversion and the Christian conversion was the least believable conversion. This finding is consistent with a previous study that found that a Secular lifestyle change was the most believable conversion compared to the Christian conversion and the Islam conversion (Shamblin & Miller, 2008). Participants may have been skeptical of the inmate's claim to have converted to Christianity or Islam because prior research has found that inmates will convert for insincere reasons (Clear et al., 2000; Dammer, 2002).

The study found that the no lifestyle change condition affected emotions (i.e., fear of the inmate), but that conversions (Christianity, Islam, Secular lifestyle change) did not. Participants were the most fearful of the inmate who experienced no lifestyle change. This is contrary to the hypothesis that participants would be the most fearful of the

inmate who converted to Islam. The inmate who experienced no lifestyle change was probably the most feared because he did not try to better himself and may have still been seen as a bad person. Also, participants viewed the inmate who experienced no lifestyle change as the most likely to commit another crime in the future. The inmate who experienced no lifestyle change may have been perceived as most likely to commit another crime because he did not make any change and therefore may have been seen as likely to repeat prior behaviors.

None of the conversions (Christianity, Islam, Secular lifestyle change) affected perceptions of the inmate. The only condition that significantly differed from the other conversions was the no lifestyle change condition; indicating that any change is better than no change. This was unexpected, as it was hypothesized that the inmate who experienced a Secular lifestyle change would be perceived the most favorably. This was also contrary to a previous study which found that the inmate who experienced a Secular lifestyle change was perceived as more likeable, credible and honest compared to all other groups (Shamblin & Miller, 2008).

Lastly, it was found that recidivism and perceptions are mediators of the relationship between conversion condition and parole release decision, but only for the Secular lifestyle change and no lifestyle change conditions. Also, believability of the conversion is a mediator of the relationship between conversion condition and parole release decision, but only for the Christian and Secular lifestyle change conditions. Participants were more likely to release the inmate who had a Secular lifestyle change because they believed that the inmate was less likely to recidivate and perceived the inmate more favorably compared to all other groups. In addition, participants believed

that the conversion to Christianity was the least believable conversion and thus were reluctant to release the inmate. Participants may have been skeptical about the inmate's conversion to Christianity, because inmates sometimes claim to have converted when they truly did not (Dammer, 2002). The results of this study offer new implications for parole boards and for the field of psychology.

Chapter 7-Implications

The implications for parole boards are that religious conversions (Christianity, Islam) did not affect release decisions for this study. Very little research has studied if religious conversions affect parole board release decisions. Dammer (2002) found that one reason inmates will undergo religious conversions is to obtain early parole release, however, the results of this study found that religious conversions do not affect release decisions. While the results of this study suggest that concerns about religious bias in parole decisions may be unfounded, more research is necessary to determine if this is true.

The significant finding was that the Secular lifestyle change increased chances of the inmate being paroled. Previous research has been mixed as to whether good behavior in prison increases the likelihood of an inmate being granted parole, or if parole board members are just concerned with bad behavior. The results of this study suggest that good behavior, i.e., the inmate who experienced a Secular lifestyle change did influence parole board decision making. Because participants were most likely to release the inmate who experienced a Secular lifestyle change, prisons might want to invest in more secular based institutional programs rather than faith-based reform.

The implications for the field of psychology are that religious conversions (Christianity, Islam) did not affect emotions (i.e., fear of the inmate) or perceptions. While it was hypothesized that religious conversions would affect emotions and perceptions, specifically for the Islam condition, no apparent effects were found. Research conducted on emotions within legal decision making has largely come from a psychological standpoint (Bornstein & Wiener, 2006). There is debate as to whether emotion plays a role within decision making. The results of this study suggest that emotions do not affect parole decision making. However, the current study only investigated one emotion (fear of the inmate), therefore other emotions may influence parole board decision making.

Lastly, none of the conversions (Christianity, Islam, Secular lifestyle change) affected perceptions of the inmate. However, the inmate who made no lifestyle change was perceived more negatively by participants. This has implications because it shows that an inmate who makes a change (Secular lifestyle change, Christian conversion, and Islam conversion) is more likely to be perceived favorably than an inmate who makes no lifestyle change, and this may be based upon beliefs about the likelihood of recidivism, as was found in the mediation for the no lifestyle change condition. The study also found that the inmate who experienced no lifestyle change was believed to be the most likely to commit another crime and was the most feared. This has implications because previous studies have found that criminal history, age, sex, and race are the most significant factors for predicting recidivism (Gendreau, Little, & Googin, 1996), but the results of this study suggest that making no lifestyle change may be a good indicator of recidivism (or at least, it affects beliefs about the likelihood of an inmate recidivating).

The results of the mediation suggest that for each conversion, participants had different decision-making processes. For the Secular lifestyle change, it was found that recidivism, perceptions, and believability of the conversion mediated the relationship between conversion condition and parole release decision. This suggests that participants felt that the inmate who experienced a Secular lifestyle change was less likely to recidivate and participants had more favorable perceptions of this inmate which influenced their decision to grant the inmate parole. Participants may have felt that this inmate was trying the hardest to make a positive lifestyle change and thought that this inmate was the most sincere.

For the Christian conversion, believability of the conversion mediated the relationship between conversion condition and parole release decision. Participants thought that the Christian conversion was the least believable conversion compared to the Islam conversion and the Secular lifestyle change and because of this, were less likely to grant the inmate parole. It is possible that participants felt that this was the least believable conversion because a conversion to Christianity is more common and obvious. Whereas, inmates are more unlikely to fake a conversion to Islam because they may fear that parole board members will be biased against them, but if an inmate fakes a conversion to Christianity he might think that he will be shown leniency. However, if participants had thought that the inmate's conversion to Christianity was more sincere, they may have released this inmate. It is a possibility that religious conversions can affect release decisions if they are thought to be believable.

For the no lifestyle change, recidivism and perceptions mediated the relationship between conversion condition and parole release decision. Participants felt that this

inmate was the most likely to recidivate and had negative perceptions of him, which influenced their decision to deny the inmate parole. This suggests that participants had more favorable perceptions of the inmates who made a change and felt that they were less likely to commit another crime than the inmate who remained the same. In other words, when considering whether to grant parole, recidivism is an important factor.

Lastly, for the Islam conversion, none of the dependent variables (e.g., believability of the inmate's conversion, fear of the inmate, recidivism and perceptions of the inmate) mediated the relationship between conversion condition and parole release decision. Because none of the dependent variables mattered, it is possible that participants did not want to appear biased against this religion, similar to the concept of aversive racism.

Aversive racism is a discrete form of racism in which a person tries to appear unprejudiced, even though they actually are (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). A mock jury study was conducted that compared the judgments of Caucasian and African-American jurors. It was found that when race was salient (i.e., the crime was committed because of race) Caucasian jurors were not influenced by race. However, when race was not salient, Caucasian jurors tended to judge the African-American defendant guiltier than the Caucasian defendant. The African-American jurors on the other hand, demonstrated same-race leniency in both the salient and non-salient conditions (Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000).

Similar to the idea of race aversion, it is possible that participants did not want to appear biased toward the inmate in the Islam condition. In the current study, religion was salient and most of the participants were Caucasian. The decision making in the current

study was similar to that found in the Sommers & Ellsworth (2000) study. A second study also partially supports the notion that people seek to avoid being biased against Muslims. One mock jury study found that participants were the most lenient toward the Muslim defendant (Miller, Maskaly, Green, & Peoples, 2009). During the pre-deliberation, jurors were most likely to find the Muslim defendant guilty, but during the post-deliberation participants were less likely to find the Muslim defendant guilty. It was indicated that the change between pre-and post-deliberation may be due to the fact that the jurors were trying to appear less biased in front of other people; people are biased when making individual decisions pre-deliberation, but overcompensate and change their verdicts after deliberation with others. This post-deliberation leniency did not happen in the control condition, suggesting that there is something about a Muslim defendant that led to leniency when discussing the verdict with others (Miller, Maskaly, Green, & Peoples, 2009). The results of these two studies suggest that “religious bias aversion” might have accounted for the change in pre-and post-deliberation verdicts for the Muslim defendant condition. The results of the current study might also indicate that “religious bias aversion” played a role, for the fact that nothing mediated the relationship between conversion to Islam and parole release decision.

In summary, the results of the mediation suggest that participants had different decision making processes for each conversion. Each conversion prompted different questions such as if the inmate would recidivate (Secular lifestyle change and the no lifestyle change), how believable the conversion was (Secular lifestyle change, Christian conversion), and perceptions (Secular lifestyle change, no lifestyle change). These

findings are important because there is very little research about how conversions affect parole board member's release decisions, perceptions and emotions.

Chapter 8-Limitations/Future Directions

The main limitation of this study is that mock parole board members were used instead of actual parole board members. Mock parole board members may make release decisions differently than actual parole board members, as Lindsey and Miller (2009) found. While there are limited studies that investigate whether mock parole board members differ from actual parole board members, there are jury studies that have investigated how mock jurors and actual jurors differ.

Many jury research studies use mock jurors and simulated jury trials instead of actual jurors and trials. While few studies suggest that mock jurors differ from actual jurors (e.g., Reichert, Miller, Bornstein, & Shelton, 2009), most research has found few differences between mock and actual jurors (Bornstein, 1999; MacCoun, 2005). However, more research is needed because there are relatively few studies concerning this subject.

While using mock jurors may not be a problem within jury research, it may be an issue within parole research because parole board members are experienced professionals that are specially trained, in most jurisdictions. Therefore, future studies should use actual parole board members to see if there are differences between mock and actual parole board members. If so, then the results of this study may not be relevant to actual parole board decision-making.

Another limitation is the case study. Although the case study was based off of an actual parole board case file, it was shortened down to make it more appropriate for the

study. It is possible that the mock parole board members may not have had enough information in order to make a proper decision. In addition, the study was an online survey and not an actual parole hearing. Mock parole board members for this study were not able to meet the inmate face to face. Although, some parole hearings do not include the inmate and are just based off of the inmate's file (Alarid et al., 2008). Regardless, the case file used for this study was much shorter and included less information than an actual case file would. In jury studies, this may not matter. According to Bornstein and McCabe (2005) and Bornstein (1999), jury studies have not gotten any more realistic than they were in the past. Mock jurors and written testimonials are still commonly used. However, this may not matter since no major differences have been found among mock jurors and how the simulation is presented (e.g., video testimonial, written summary). Even though this may not be an issue within jury research, future parole board studies should use an actual parole case file in order to make the study more realistic.

Another limitation is that only one measure was used for emotions (i.e., fear of the inmate) and only a few measures were used for perceptions (i.e., how honest, credible, trustworthy and likeable the participant thought that the inmate was, and the participant's overall perception of the inmate). Future studies should investigate other emotions such as how angry the participant was of the inmate. Bright and Goodman-Delahunty (2006) and Douglas, Lyon, and Ogloff (1997) studied jurors and found that visual stimuli such as photographs caused anger toward the defendant and jurors were more likely to render a guilty verdict. If parole board members are angry at the inmate, they may be less likely to grant parole. Future studies should also include more perception variables such as cooperativeness. Previous studies have found that religious

people are perceived to be more cooperative (Brennan & London, 2001; Ellison, 1992; Morgan, 1983) and cooperativeness may influence parole decision-making.

Finally, future studies should make race more salient, by mentioning the inmate's race more than once. The current study only included race when describing the inmate's characteristics. Therefore, it was difficult to determine if participants actually found race to be non-significant or if they just simply forgot the inmate's race or did not notice it at all. Also, future studies could include more race conditions other than just Caucasian and African-American. A Hispanic race condition might be useful to see if bias differs among race. More religious conversion conditions could be added as well. A Jewish inmate could be included since Judaism is a fairly common religion, although conversions to Judaism are likely less common than conversions to Islam and Christianity. Despite these limitations, this study helped to further knowledge about how conversions and race affect parole board decision-making.

Chapter 9-Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine if conversions and race affect parole board member's release decisions, emotions, and perceptions. It was found that religious conversions (Islam and Christianity) had no effect on parole release decisions, emotions, or perceptions. Only the Secular lifestyle change increased chances of the inmate being released and this was mediated by believability of the conversion and perceptions.

Prior research has found that parole board members largely base their release decision on institutional behavior (Caplan, 2007). While research has found mixed results as to whether good institutional behavior affects release decisions, the results of this

study seemed to find evidence that good behavior (at least as operationalized by a conversion) does affect release decisions in some conditions. The inmate who had a secular lifestyle change was more likely to be released and this suggests that parole board members are influenced by positive behavior, more so than an inmate who experiences a religious conversion or makes no lifestyle change. However, if mock parole board members had thought that the conversion to Christianity had been believable; they may have been more likely to release that inmate, because believability mediated the relationship between the Christian conversion condition and parole release decision.

The major theories for this study were in-group and out-group bias and stereotypes and prejudice. It was hypothesized that the African-American inmate would be perceived less favorably than the Caucasian inmate due to these biases. It was also hypothesized that the inmate who experienced a conversion to Islam would be viewed more negatively and be the most feared. However, no apparent bias was found against the inmate who converted to Islam and despite prior studies that have found racial bias within parole board release decisions (Huebner & Bynum, 2008; Proctor, 1999), race was found to be non-significant. It is possible that race did not play a role, but it could have also been due to the design of the study. Therefore, more research is needed to investigate the role of race within parole board decision-making.

Overall, research that investigates how conversions and race affect parole board release decisions is very limited. While there are a few studies concerning race and decision-making, there are even fewer studies that investigate the role of conversions within parole board decision-making. Although this study used mock parole board

members instead of actual parole board members, it gave insight as to what influences people's decisions to grant parole.

Appendix

TITLE OF STUDY: Parole Board Decision-Making

INVESTIGATOR(S): Monica Miller, J.D., Ph.D. (mkmillier@unr.edu) (775) 784-6021

UNRresearch2@yahoo.com

PROTOCOL #: SA06/07-124

SPONSOR: UNR Office of Undergraduate Research

PURPOSE: You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to investigate how parole boards make decisions to release inmates. You are invited to participate in this research because you are in a psychology or criminal justice course at the University of Nevada, Reno.

PARTICIPANTS: You are being asked to participate because you are an adult (over 18) UNR student enrolled in a course that requires or offers credit for participation.

PROCEDURES: If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in the decision-making process of a parole board. You will be asked to read the file of an inmate who is requesting release on parole, and then to decide whether you, as a parole board member in this case, would grant or deny parole to this inmate. You will also be asked to describe your perceptions of the inmate and which factors influenced your decision. In addition, you will be asked to provide some demographic information, such as your age, gender, and religious affiliation, and some questions about social, political, and religious beliefs. All information obtained will be kept confidential. You will be given the option of completing the study through the mail or online. Participants choosing the mail option will be sent a paper copy of the survey and a stamped return envelope in which to send the completed survey back to the researchers. Participants choosing the online option will follow a link to the online survey to complete. The study will take about 30-35 minutes.

DISCOMFORTS, INCONVENIENCES, AND/OR RISKS: There are minimal risks for participating in this study. However, you will be asked to read about an inmate who has been convicted of murder. If you are sensitive to the subject of murder, you may become upset. Becoming upset is very unlikely, but if you are concerned about it you may withdraw from the study with no penalty. If you develop problems, you may discuss them with the experimenter or contact the University of Nevada, Reno Counseling Center (775-784-4648), which offers free counseling sessions to UNR students.

BENEFITS: This study will potentially be of great benefit to society and the social

scientific community. The results will provide researchers with valuable insight into how parole board decisions are made. If you would like to learn more about the study (including final results), you may ask the experimenter or contact UNRresearch5@yahoo.com

Please continue to the next page

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your identity will be protected to the extent allowed by law. You will not be personally identified in any reports or publications that may result from this study.

The Department of Health and Human Service (HHS), other federal agencies as necessary, the University of Nevada, Reno Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board and the Office of Undergraduate Research may inspect your study records.

The information you provide for this study will be kept confidential. All information and records will be stored for 5 years in a locked space in the principal investigator's laboratory. Further, the published report will not include any information that will make it possible to identify any participant. All survey responses will be kept confidential and will not be released to any other individual or entity for any other purpose. Only the investigator, research assistants, and the UNR Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board will have access to the data. Please maintain the confidentiality of other participants. This means that you should not tell anyone outside the research room what you did or who you saw while doing this research.

COSTS/COMPENSATION: There is no cost to you to participate. If you are participating in this study you will receive credit, to be applied to your grade in a manner specified by your instructor. Equivalent alternatives for credit will be offered in every class where credit is given for participation in this study. If you are in a class which offers extra credit for this study and wish to do an alternate extra credit opportunity, please ask your professor. The alternate activity involves reading and summarizing a research article. You will get to choose any professional journal article (approx. 5-10 pages) to read and summarize in a couple of paragraphs. You will receive equivalent extra credit for this alternate activity. All professors who have agreed to give extra credit in their class have approved this alternate extra credit activity.

RIGHT TO REFUSE OR WITHDRAW: You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. If the study design or use of the data is to be changed, you will be so informed and your consent re-obtained. You will be told of any significant new findings developed during the course of this study, which may relate to your willingness to continue participation.

QUESTIONS: You may ask questions of the experimenter and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate or during the research. You may

call the researchers at (775) 784-6021, or via email at UNRresearch5@yahoo.com. You may ask about your rights as a research subject or you may report (anonymously if you so choose) any comments, concern, or complaints to the University of Nevada, Reno Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board, telephone number (775) 327-2368, or by addressing a letter to the Chair of the Board, c/o UNR Office of Human Research Protection, 205 Ross Hall / 331, University of Nevada, Reno, Reno, Nevada, 89557.

1. Do you wish to participate in this study:

- Yes
- No

Imagine that you are a parole board member deciding whether to release this inmate on parole. Read the inmate information and then answer the questions following.

Name: David Mitchum ["Muhammad Yasir" in the Islam condition]

Age: 32

Race: African-American

Race: [Caucasian]

Crime convicted of: 2nd Degree Murder, 1997

Sentence imposed: 15 years, with eligibility for parole after 10 years

Time served: 10 years

Age at arrest: 22

Employment history: David held a total of 3 jobs from ages 18-22. His first job ended when he quit. At the second job, David was fired by his employer. His longest consistent employment at one position was 8 months, at his third job. David left this position by choice, shortly before his drug conviction.

Education: High school diploma

Prior convictions: David was convicted of a misdemeanor theft in 1989. He and three friends were arrested in possession of stolen cash and entertainment merchandise (DVD's, CD's) totaling approximately \$200. He was ordered to pay restitution for the stolen goods. David was convicted of drug possession, a category E felony, in 1991. He was sentenced to a confinement period of 6 months in jail, followed by a probation period of one year, and was also fined \$500.

Prior parole/probation revocations: This inmate's probation was not previously revoked.

Drug or alcohol abuse: David has a history of alcohol abuse, including underage drinking. He also used and was convicted of possessing illegal drugs. Since being incarcerated, he has not demonstrated any serious drug or alcohol addiction problems, and has not had to enter a drug rehabilitation program.

Institutional activities: David attends Christian [Islamic] religious services [self-help and counseling groups] on a regular basis. He also participates in occasional recreational activities, such as basketball games with other inmates.

Programs completed: David began a degree program for Western Nevada Community College (WNCC), but did not complete the program.

Disciplinary history: This inmate has been disciplined on three occasions for getting into fights with other inmates. These fights occurred in 1998, 2000, and 2006.

Psych evaluation: Inmate shows no psychological or psychiatric problems or abnormalities.

Caseworker reports: David began a degree program through WNCC in 2000. He worked towards this degree for about 3 months, but then seemed to lose and did not complete the program. He has not since expressed any desire to re-enter the degree program.

David reports that in 2004, after serving 7 years of his sentence, he experienced a religious conversion to Christianity [Islam] [made a decision to commit to a positive lifestyle change]. He began to request copies of the Bible [Koran] [self-help books] and other religious readings from the prison library, and began attending religious services regularly [anger management program and the peer mentoring group]. He says that being a Christian [Muslim] has helped him overcome his anger problems and has shown him how to be a good example for others.

David claims that since this experience, his outlook on life has changed, and that he now sees the error of his previous ways. He claims that his behavior has been and will continue to be drastically different than when he was younger, before he became a Christian [Muslim] [converted to new lifestyle]. He feels that this conversion [experience] has transformed him into a good person, and that he can now have a positive influence on society if he is released.

David has demonstrated some aggression since his imprisonment. During his first three years in prison, he was disciplined for fighting on two occasions. Since his religious conversion [lifestyle change], he claims to no longer feel that he must turn to violence in order to resolve disputes. However, David did get into a fight with another inmate after his conversion [experience], in 2006.

David [Muhammad] has encouraged three other inmates to attend the religious services [group meetings] with him, and has shared his readings [self-improvement readings] with them. Two of these inmates have also converted to Christianity [Islam] [lifestyle changes] and now attend the prison's religious programs [anger management and mentoring programs] regularly as well.

Instructions: Thinking about the inmate file you read, please answer the following questions honestly. There are no right or wrong answers for any of the questions.

2. Based on your own individual decision, would you choose to grant parole to this inmate? (Please check one)

- Grant parole
- Deny parole

3. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “very uncertain” and 5 being “very certain,” how certain are you in your decision regarding parole? Please choose ONE number (1-5).

- Very uncertain 2 3 4 Very certain

4. What factors influenced your decision to grant or deny parole to this inmate?

5. Indicate your overall perception of David Mitchum (the inmate):

- Very Negative 2 3 4 Very positive

6. How honest do you think David Mitchum is?

- Very dishonest 2 3 4 Very honest

7. How trustworthy do you think David Mitchum is?

- Not trustworthy 2 3 4 Very trustworthy

8. How likeable do you think David Mitchum is?

- Very dislikeable 2 3 4 Very likeable

9. How credible do you think David Mitchum is?

Very uncredible **2** **3** **4** **Very credible**

10. How scared are you of David Mitchum?

Very scared **2** **3** **4** **Not scared**

11. How likely is it that David Mitchum will commit another crime in the future?

Very unlikely **2** **3** **4** **Very likely**

12. How believable is David Mitchum's claim that he has experienced a Conversion which has changed his behavior in a positive way?

Very unbelievable **2** **3** **4** **Very believable**

Instructions: The following questions are demographic questions and are used to determine information about participants. All information will be kept confidential.

Please check the box that corresponds to your answer or write an answer where asked.

13. What is your age?

14. What is your gender?

Male

Female

I prefer not to answer

15. What is your race/ethnicity?

African-American

- Asian/Pacific Islander**
- Hispanic**
- Native American**
- White/Caucasian**
- Other (please specify)**

16. Do you have a political party affiliation? If so, please specify here:

17. What is your religious background?

Thank you for participating in this study!

In order to receive credit for your participation, please complete the following steps:

- 1) Send an email to UNRresearch2@yahoo.com, and give your name, what class you would like credit for, and the name of your professor.
- 2) Please enter your email address below.

You do NOT need to contact your professor to let them know that you participated. The researcher will use your email to confirm your participation, and will tell your professor that you participated in the survey.

36. Email address:

Debriefing for Study titled: Parole Board Decision-Making

This experiment investigates the factors which affect a parole board's decision to release an inmate on parole. There were several experimental conditions, and you participated in only one condition. Thus, different participants received different versions of the study, allowing the researchers to discover what factors influence participants' responses to the survey. Specifically, the researchers manipulated:

- 1.) The absence or presence of a lifestyle change being experienced by the inmate during his incarceration.
- 2.) Whether that lifestyle change was secular, with no mention of religion, or was a religious conversion, either to Christianity or Islam.
- 3.) The inmate's race whether it was African-American or Caucasian.

If you were upset by reading about the crime the inmate was convicted of or answering questions regarding this inmate, you may discuss your concerns with the experimenter or contact the University of Nevada, Reno Counseling Center (775-784-4648), which offers free counseling sessions to UNR students. You may also visit a counseling center of your choice.

Please do not discuss this experiment with other people who might be participants themselves. If you have further questions about it, you may ask the experimenter or contact at UNRresearch2@yahoo.com. Thank you for your participation.

June 2, 2009

Thank you for participating.

If you have any questions, please email the researcher at

UNRresearch2@yahoo.com. This page confirms that you participated in the study.

Thank you!

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