



Blaming the Innocent: The Effects of Biases on Latino Exonerees' Culpability

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INTRODUCTION

Background

- Biases against Latinos and individuals of low socio-economic status (SES) exist within the legal system
- Individuals who have been incarcerated have difficulties finding jobs, housing, or receiving adequate pay after release
- Exonerees face unjust post-incarceration stigmatization despite being proven innocent of their crime
- *Purpose:* To determine if prejudicial attitudes would be predictive of biased perceptions of exonerees based on race and SES

Hypotheses

- Individuals with high Mexican American bias (MABS) ratings will find the Latino exonerees more culpable
- Latino exonerees with low SES will be found more culpable than White exonerees or Latino exonerees with high SES

METHODS

Participants

- 246 adult U.S. citizens (See Table 1 for univariate statistics)

Materials

- Online self-report survey
 - Demographics; culpability measures (Cronbach $\alpha = .89$), 9 items (Table 2); MABS ($\alpha = .86$), 23 items (Martinez, 2015)
 - Manipulated news articles varying race (Latino vs White) and SES (high vs low) of the exoneree

Procedure

- Recruited from the online service MTurk (Mechanical Turk) and directed to Qualtrics to complete the study
- Completed demographics, read the manipulated articles, completed manipulation checks, culpability measures, and MABS scale

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1
Summary of Demographic Information

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>Std.</i>	<i>N</i>	Univariate Statistic
Age	31.40	9.02	246	
Sex			246	Male 173 (70.3%) Female 73 (29.7%)
Race			246	White 165 (67.1%) African American 29 (11.8%) Asian 44 (17.9%) Hispanic 6 (2.4%) Mixed 2 (.8%)
Incarcerated			246	Yes 60 (24.4%) No 186 (75.6%)
Legal System*			246	Yes 85 (34.6%) No 161 (65.4%)

* Participants who work in the legal system or who have immediate family members who work in the legal system



Angel Gonzalez (left) and "friend Chris" (right). Gonzalez served 20 years for sexual assault and kidnapping before being exonerated by DNA evidence in 2015. Gonzalez now tells his story with the help of the Innocence Project.
<https://www.innocenceproject.org/illinois-impasse-hinders-exonerees/>

Table 2
Effects of MABS on Culpability Measures for the Latino Exoneree

Culpability Measure	High MABS <i>M</i>	Low MABS <i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2
How guilty do you think the exoneree actually is?	4.74	2.03	70.70**	.38
In your opinion, how responsible was the exoneree for this crime?	4.81	1.85	86.17**	.43
How likely is it that the exoneree will commit a crime in the future?	4.93	2.26	76.73**	.40
How much do you believe the exoneree committed this crime?	4.71	1.81	93.45**	.40
How likely is it that you would find yourself in a similar situation as the exoneree? (R)	3.00	5.50	54.55**	.32
How much of the blame for the incident should the exoneree receive?	4.69	1.87	76.73**	.40
How likely is it that the exoneree committed a similar crime in the past?	4.78	1.79	94.37**	.45
How likely is it that the exoneree committed any crime in the past?	4.74	2.79	36.87**	.24
How likely is it that this exoneree has a criminal personality?	4.86	2.35	57.03**	.33

Note: (R) = Reverse Coded, ** $p < .001$.

RESULTS

Public's Knowledge and Opinions of Exonerees

- Only 35% of participants knew what an exoneree was before the manipulation
- 40% of participants believed that someone who has been incarcerated has something fundamentally wrong with them

Mexican American Bias and Latino Exonerees

- MANOVA for MABS and SES for Latino exonerees yielded no interaction, but there were significant main effects for SES and MABS
 - SES: $F(9, 108) = 2.60, p < .009, \eta^2 = .18$
 - Participants saw themselves as less likely to be in the low SES Latino ($M = 4.72$) exoneree's position, compared to the high SES Latino ($M = 3.85$) exoneree (Reverse Coded)
 - $F(1, 116) = 6.02, p < .016, \eta^2 = .05$
 - MABS: $F(9, 108) = 13.07, p < .001, \eta^2 = .52$
 - Every culpability measure was significant (see Table 2). Participants with high MABS found the exonerees more culpable
- MABS was a significant predictor of the belief that the exonerees' children would become criminals
 - $F(1, 118) = 113.09, p < .001, R^2 = .49 (\beta = .70)$

DISCUSSION

Race and SES: While there was no interaction, the main effects show that low SES exonerees are found more culpable

MABS: MABS was highly predictive of biases against Latino exonerees

Limitations: Participants were limited to individuals who use MTurk. Additionally, the majority of the participants were White (67%) and male (70%)

Future Research: Effect of incarceration time on culpability, perceived culpability of African American exonerees, and the attribution process