

My "criminal mindset"

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A friend at church asked me to help with her son's project for a college psychology class. He was studying the criminal mindset of women inmates and needed a control group to compare them with. So his mom handed out the survey to adult women at our church.

I answered the questions as honestly as I could. Yes, I believe there are systemic issues that keep people in poverty. Yes, I believe people of color are sometimes treated unfairly by our judicial system.

A few weeks later my friend mentioned that her son was surprised by the results from our control group: we scored extremely high on having a criminal mindset. Now, I don't know much about the methodology. The test is apparently a standard survey developed and approved by boards to judge "criminal thinking." But I was offended by the results.

I tried to answer the questions from a Christian perspective. I care about things like liberation of the oppressed, fairness for the poor and acceptance of the ethnic other. I try to be educated about places where injustice is present so that I can work for justice, encompassing righteousness, mercy and reconciliation.

But by following our church's biblical emphasis on breaking the chains of injustice, we church ladies were pegged as thinking like criminals.

It's unsettling until I remember that Jesus was arrested, tried and executed by a society that saw his message of economic reversal and love for the poor and the

oppressed as criminal too. Then I realize how countercultural Christianity really is.