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# EDUCATION AND CRIME

In modern societies, an individual's life trajectory—including an individual's involvement in criminal activity—has become increasingly determined by his or her educational experiences. Over the past few centuries, schools have in many ways come to challenge families as the primary site for childhood socialization. The expanding role of formal education in the lives of youth has many causes. Economic production has become more dependent on cognitive skills taught in schools. Work has become typically set off from home life, limiting parents' ability to monitor and train children informally. Increasing female labor participation rates in recent decades have accelerated this trend, with over two-thirds of mothers with children under age eighteen now currently employed. At the same time that work responsibilities have increasingly separated parents from their children, public education has been expanded to command greater portions of a youth's time. At the beginning of the nineteenth century only about ten percent of U.S. individuals age fourteen to seventeen attended high school; by the end of the century, only about ten percent of young adults failed to complete high school. As recently as in the 1940s, less than ten percent of individuals attained a bachelor's degree; by the end of the century, almost one-third of young adults were expected to attain such degrees. Not only have the number of years an individual is involved in a formal education system increased, but the amount of time per year has also dramatically expanded. The length of the school day has grown and the days in an academic school year have roughly doubled over the past century.

Research has clearly demonstrated how an individual's educational outcomes structure a wide range of adult life-course outcomes. Given the prominent role of education in an individual's life, educational experience has both significant direct and indirect effects on criminality. Over the past decade, educational experience has come to mediate the influence of social background on occupational destinations. By the end of the twentieth century, educational attainment had come to replace social origins as the primary determinant of occupational status, earnings, and even one's choice of marital partners. It is not surprising, therefore, that educational attainment plays a prominent role in explaining who is likely to commit criminal acts or subsequently to become incarcerated. Individuals who are incarcerated are less likely to have had previous success either in labor or marriage markets: about half of jail and prison inmates have never been married, close to half were unemployed prior to incarceration, and more than half had been living in poverty. More direct effects of educational experience are apparent when one examines the educational characteristics of those who are incarcerated. Only about 28 percent of incarcerated individuals in state and federal prisons have successfully graduated from high school (U.S. Department of Justice).

Schools play such a critical role in adult life-course outcomes because they affect individuals through several important social mechanisms. Schools are responsible for the socialization of youth. Schools work to train individuals for different roles in society and thus determine the selection of individuals for the allocation of scarce resources. Schools also structure an individual's interpersonal interactions and associations. The criminological significance of these distinct educational functions will first be explored and then connected to the relationship between crime and variation in educational performance and the structure of schooling. Lastly, conclusions and implications about the relationship between education and crime will be identified.

## Mechanisms producing education-crime associations

As youth increasingly spend time in educational (rather than family) settings, the role of

schools in the socialization of children and adolescents increases. Schools provide the context where much of the drama of the maturation process now unfolds. Children and particularly adolescents struggle—often in interaction with school authority—to define themselves as individuals with distinct identities. Identity formation involves challenges in many social psychological domains, including moral development. Educational psychologists have long argued that a critical stage in the process of moral development occurs during adolescence. Youths struggle to create their own definitions of right and wrong, as well as their own place in such a moral order (see Gilligan; Kohlberg).

Émile Durkheim, one of the founding influences on modern sociology, devoted a significant portion of his writings to how schools contribute to this socialization process. In *Moral Education: A Study in the Theory and Application of the Sociology of Education* (1903), Durkheim argued that schools confront individual students as the embodiment of society's moral authority. Youths learn in schools to respect society's moral authority if the rules they confront do not appear arbitrary, unenforceable, or unjust. Durkheim argued that discipline is needed in education "to teach the child to rein in his desires, to set limits on his appetites of all kinds, to limit and, through limitation, to define the goals of his activity" (p. 43). Essential to Durkheim's conception of the role of school discipline in the socialization of youth is his attention to the Hobbesian problem of order. The philosopher Thomas Hobbes argued that since individuals are governed by passions and desires, the threat of sanctions from a greater authority was necessary to constrain individual actions and promote social order. Durkheim countered that the strength of external sanctions was ultimately dependent on individuals internalizing these restrictions as normative rules. Durkheim argued that schools provide social settings whereby individuals are able to develop attachments to and integration with a larger societal moral order.

Durkheim's insights were most effectively introduced into contemporary criminological research by Travis Hirschi. Following Durkheim's insights, Hirschi was instrumental in developing criminological *control theory*, which has argued that individuals are subject to greater likelihood of criminal involvement when they have less attachment and integration with conventional authority. Since control theory owes its intellectual origins to earlier explorations of the role of schools in moral development, it is not surprising that—given the dramatic expansion of the role of schools in the lives of youth—much of the contemporary research from this perspective has emphasized the relationship between educational experience and criminality. Hirschi in later work with Michael Gottfredson argued that schools in fact were in many respects better situated than families to control and properly socialize youth. School personnel were argued to have a greater ability than family members to monitor, assess, and sanction youth misbehavior. School personnel were also claimed to have a greater incentive and need to control youthful behavior because of the large concentration of children and adolescents in close proximity to each other. Regardless of whether it has in any way replaced family-based socialization, involvement in schooling also serves an important role in the socialization of individuals. Schools provide youth with forms of attachment to conventional activities and thus increase an individual's ability to resist the temptations of criminal behavior.

While socialization of youth is one of the primary mechanisms whereby a causal relationship develops between educational experience and crime, the role of the education system in training, selection, and allocation is also critical. Sociologists Max Weber and Pitrim Sorokin, writing in the first third of the twentieth century, highlighted the fact that schools not only were responsible for training individuals for specific occupational tasks, but more importantly schools also served as closure mechanisms preventing individuals from gaining access to lucrative subsequent occupational positions. A second primary function of schools is thus "to sort and sieve" students for either success or failure. Schools directly determine through grades and promotions which students will have access to privileged advanced training leading to coveted occupational positions in a society and which will instead face the greatest risk of economic hardship.

Criminologists have argued that since schools are involved in selection and the allocation of scarce resources, they are sites where individuals confront obstacles to their aspirations for upward social mobility. Social scientists such as Richard Cloward, Lloyd Ohlin, and Arthur Stinchombe have developed *strain theories* of delinquency that link criminal behavior to blocked and frustrated status attainment. To the extent that schools produce resistance and misbehavior associated with institutional barriers to adult occupational success, a second mechanism underly-

ing an association between crime and education is identified.

In addition to socialization and selection, schools also function to structure patterns of individual interpersonal interactions and associations. Social scientists, such as George Simmel and George Herbert Mead, argued early in the twentieth century that interpersonal interactions and associations were critical dimensions of how individuals came to understand and act in society. Criminologists have applied these insights by focusing on two processes. First, researchers such as Edwin Sutherland argued that delinquency could result from patterns of *differential association*. Since schools can structure youth interaction through a variety of mechanisms, the likelihood of youth misbehavior could be increased or dampened through such a structuring process. Second, schools provide settings where individual interactions occur. Researchers have argued that personnel within formal institutions often engage in a *labeling process*. Students are argued to have negative labels applied to them, which carry social stigmas. Since this research tradition assumes that individual meanings are the product of the dynamics of social interactions, often students will accept the negative labels assigned to them by authority figures. Rather than labels being easily rejected by students as being erroneous, they instead are argued to often become self-fulfilling prophecies.

### Crime and educational performance

Given the multiple mechanisms whereby schools can influence adult life-course outcomes, it is not surprising that researchers repeatedly and consistently have demonstrated that educational performance and commitment are both negatively associated with adolescent delinquency, adult criminality, and incarceration. The more education an individual has the lower the risk of both criminal behavior and penal sanction. The higher the score on standardized cognitive tests, which partially reflect school learning, the lower the risk of criminality. High grade point averages and positive student attitudes toward school also have repeatedly been demonstrated to reduce the likelihood of adolescent delinquency and presumably adult criminality. Youth records of school sanction for student misbehavior, such as expulsion and suspension, are also clearly associated with adult criminality (Laub and Sampson; Gottfredson and Hirschi; Wilson and Herrnstein). These patterns are consistent with various criminological theoretical expectations discussed above. Students who are successful in terms of test score, grade point average, and years of education, are: defined as "bright" and "good" (labeling theory); have generally high degrees of attachment to conventional school activities (control theory); face easier success in pursuit of their ambitions (strain theory); and often are segregated off from students who are disruptive (differential association).

Several important research efforts have documented the relationship between school performance and crime. In 1950, Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck published an influential study of delinquency that documented the early onset of delinquent behaviors. Nearly half the delinquent youth had identifiable behavior problems before entering the fourth grade. Individuals who demonstrate early onset of serious identifiable misbehavior are likely to have entered school predisposed to failure as a result of the absence of early childhood family socialization. Even for these students, however, it is likely that schools can serve to either reinforce or dampen their preexisting tendencies for misbehavior. In 1969, Travis Hirschi published a seminal study of delinquency that focused much greater attention on educational behavior than did the earlier study by the Gluecks. Hirschi surveyed over five thousand junior and senior high school students in the San Francisco Bay area. He found systematic evidence that school performance and attachment (as measured by cognitive test scores, grades, and attitudes toward school) each had significant effects on the number of self-reported delinquent acts. Hirschi attributed this pattern of results to variation in the extent to which students formed positive attachments to school authority and activities. In the early 1990s, criminologists John Laub and Robert Sampson extended Hirschi's work, demonstrating that school attitudes and performance (as measured by grades) affect delinquency rates.

### Variation in the structure of schooling and crime

Years of educational attainment, cognitive test score, student grades, and attitudes toward school, however, are only a small part of how schools structure adolescent experience. Educational research demonstrates that other school factors—such as curriculum, resources, and school peer climates—also strongly influence a

student's life chances. While numerous studies have examined the overall effect of schooling on deviance and crime, much of the existing criminological research has largely ignored the actual character of schooling. Criminological research has only begun to provide a more pedagogically sensitive examination of an adolescent's involvement with educational institutions. Such an examination requires a more complete elaboration and specification of the high school context that serves to diminish or increase the probability of criminality. Educational research has begun to inform criminological investigation by focusing on the role of vocational education, educational resources, and peer climates in affecting the incidence of delinquency, crime, and incarceration.

## Vocational education

Vocational programs were instituted and expanded in high schools based on proponents' claims that occupational course work would reduce unemployment, crime, and deviant behavior in young adults. Criminological research has suggested mixed evidence on whether these programs have actually served to reduce individual propensity for criminal behavior. Because vocational education can function to segregate low-achieving students in particular courses either within a school or actually in a separate school within a larger district, many criminologists are skeptical that any positive effects of the programs can emerge. Setting vocational students off from academic students could lead to detrimental patterns of differential association or the labeling of vocational students as "less able" or as "youthful troublemakers."

It is important to note, however, that such negative effects are conditional on the actual structure of how vocational programs are organized. In many European countries such as Germany, for example, vocational programs and adolescent apprenticeships are an integral part of a socially validated educational system. In these settings, there is neither great stigma nor profound social segregation associated with these programs. In the United States, many schools in recent years have attempted to adopt an academy model for their vocational programs, where vocational education is integrated into both academic course work and the world of work: in these programs significant stigma or segregation is less likely. In 1971, Ahlstrom and Havighurst published what became a prominent skeptical evaluation of the role of vocational education

in reducing the prevalence of delinquency. Ahlstrom and Havighurst investigated a specialized vocational work-study program designed for four hundred inner-city, maladjusted youth. The program was shown to have little effect on crime rates during student teen years.

Vocational education, however, has been demonstrated to have positive effects on student reports of satisfaction with school and positive perceptions of their teachers. Positive adolescent work experience is also related to psychological feelings of mastery, internal control, and self-competence. Given the significance of these factors in predicting criminality, it is likely that under certain circumstances vocational education can significantly discourage criminality. Recent criminological research has demonstrated that vocational education course work significantly reduces the likelihood of adult incarceration, if the course work occurs in an educational setting that does not concentrate and segregate high proportions of economically disadvantaged youth (Arum and Beattie).

## Educational resources

Few criminological studies have attempted to estimate the effects of educational resources on individual delinquency and propensity for criminal behavior. One exception is Gary Gottfredson and Denise Gottfredson's *Victimization in Schools* (1985). The Gottfredsons argue that rates of student and teacher victimization in schools are a product of a range of school characteristics, including school resources, peer composition, and vocational curricular emphasis. Educational resources are likely important in that they can allow schools to reduce class size and thus increase a student's opportunities for learning from, and relating to, their teachers—that is, their likelihood of attachment to conventional activities. Educational resources can also be used to ensure greater monitoring of youth.

Educational resources likely affect a school's ability to influence positively an individual's life course, since schools with greater resources are better able to provide more positive enriched educational experiences for adolescents (such as costly vocational education programs). Recent noncriminological research has identified a clear pattern of the effects of educational resources on a range of socioeconomic outcomes including growth in test scores, increased years of educational attainment, and higher lifetime earnings. These socioeconomic outcomes have all been re-

lated to individual criminality and incarceration risk. It is therefore not surprising that high school student-teacher ratios have also been demonstrated to affect adult incarceration risk (Arum and Beattie).

## Peer climates

Peer climates can affect criminality in a number of ways, including differential association and altering social norms for acceptable behavior. Peer climates emerge in school as a product of both ecological and institutional factors. While peer climates are partly a reflection of peer composition, they are also structured by institutional factors. School practices in general and school disciplinary practices in particular define the parameters in which specific peer climates emerge and flourish. In the United States, significant variation in disciplinary practices exist: many public schools still practice corporal punishment, while in other schools often little is done to control student misbehavior and gang activity.

Peer composition has been demonstrated to be clearly associated with delinquency and subsequent incarceration in a large number of studies. Peer climates characterized by higher dropout rates and students of lower socioeconomic origins provide settings that make conventional school attachment more difficult. Research by James Coleman has emphasized, however, that schools have a role in structuring the manner in which peer climates exist. Work by Émile Durkheim also suggests the importance of school disciplinary practices in the socialization of youth. Punishment is necessary, according to Durkheim, because it unequivocally communicates that a normative rule has been broken.

Challenges to school disciplinary practices, regardless of whether they are from external environmental or internal organizational sources, would be particularly unsettling to the normative order of the school. Conservatives argue that due to administrative and legal challenges to school authority, students no longer view school rules as inviolate (Toby). At a practical level, school discipline works to generate student compliance and academically focused peer cultures. Peer climates have long been associated with student academic performance. In recent work, Coleman and his colleagues have argued that private schools outperform public schools in part because they are able to maintain stricter disciplinary climates with lower rates of student absenteeism, vandalism, drug use, and disobedience. Sociologists have also found that rates of misbehavior during the senior year are lower in schools that have higher rates of disciplining of sophomore students (Diprete et al.). Misbehaving students also have lower levels of educational achievement as measured by change in grades and test scores. Conservatives claim that without proper order and discipline, schools are unable to function properly and effective socialization is impossible.

Progressive educators, however, have countered that as traditional authoritarian disciplinary practices are eliminated from public schools, students will be less alienated from their educational environments, and more likely to remain in school and apply themselves to their studies. Support for this is suggested by the fact that the use of strict disciplinary practices, such as corporal punishment, leads to lower educational achievement and higher rates of delinquency. Researchers also argue that these school practices can lead to the formation of oppositional peer groups that resist formal education.

## Conclusions and implications

Criminologists who believe that propensity for adult criminality is established in early childhood attempt to dismiss empirical research that identifies significant school effects on delinquency and crime. These critics argue that selection bias accounts for education-crime associations. That is, some criminologists will argue that both educational and criminal trajectories are set at a very early preschool age. By the time that children enter school, the argument goes, families (or genetics) have already produced "bad kids." Individuals fail in school because they lack social control: failure in school thus reflects individual-level socialization problems that underlie criminal propensity; poor educational performance itself therefore does not produce criminal behavior. While some criminologists might still argue this position, it is fundamentally inconsistent with the larger social scientific research community's understanding of the role of education in life course development. At least since the late 1960s, social scientists have recognized that educational experience has come to mediate the relationship between social origins and adult life-course outcomes. While poorly socialized youth certainly are less likely to do well in terms of educational attainment, schools—if properly structured—can successfully counter these tendencies. Schools are institutions that can serve as "turning points" in individual lives. As the

criminologists John Laub and Robert Sampson have argued: "despite the connection between childhood events and experiences in adulthood, turning points can modify life trajectories—they can 'redirect paths.'"

Since schools play a critical role in determining the likelihood of delinquency, crime, and incarceration, policymakers historically have turned to educational reform to address social problems associated with adolescent delinquency and adult criminality. The last two decades of the twentieth century, however, were exceptional in U.S. history in terms of both educational and criminological policy. In unprecedented ways, policymakers have relied on incapacitation by the penal system to address the crime problem in society. Concurrently, educational policy has lost its focus on designing programs to integrate and socialize economically disadvantaged youths to become productive members of society. Instead, educational policymakers have become fixated on the narrow task of improving school performance and efficiency in terms of measurable student gains on cognitive standardized tests. While prison rolls have more than doubled in the last two decades of the twentieth century, high school vocational education enrollments have plummeted as the programs have been dismantled due to their high cost. While the penal system has demanded an increasing portion of local, state, and federal finances, educational budgets have struggled just to keep up with inflation and demographic growth in school age populations. While government officials increasingly threaten to sanction schools for the lack of student progress on cognitive tests, schools as institutions have become legally constrained from applying disciplinary sanctions to maintain peer climates conducive to learning and socialization. How policy reformers reconcile these tensions and contradictions in educational and social policy will determine the character of the education-crime relationship in the future.

RICHARD ARUM

*See also* CLASS AND CRIME; CRIME CAUSATION: SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES; FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND CRIME; INTELLIGENCE AND CRIME; JUVENILE AND YOUTH GANGS; SCHOOLS AND CRIME.

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# EMPLOYEE THEFT: BEHAVIORAL ASPECTS

The term employee theft refers to the unauthorized taking, transfer, or use of property of a work organization by an employee during the course of work activity. Straightforward as it seems, the application of the definition to employees' activity is complicated by two essential problems. The first centers on the issue of what is meant by unauthorized taking. If the activity is prohibited by company policy (formal norms) but sanctioned by the work-group and work-culture (informal norms), is it unauthorized taking? Technically and legally it is; operationally it may or may not be dependent on other elements of the work-group norms that prescribe and proscribe the behavior. The second problem in applying the definition to practice centers on the question of what constitutes company property. Not only are there several types of property in an organization—company, personal, and property of uncertain ownership (e.g., items in a wastebasket, unsolicited samples from vendors)—there are also forms of company property that do not ordinarily enter into the traditional calculus of employee theft. The latter might include the use of facilities and equipment for personal use—personal phone calls, typing personal correspondence on company computers, the use of sick leave for personal days off, or the theft of work time through simply "goofing off." In defining employee theft one needs to consider carefully what is meant by unauthorized taking and what property is included in the activity defined as theft (Greenberg; Hollinger and Clark; Horning).

## Ancient or modern problem

Many regard and treat theft by employees as a relatively new phenomenon that emerged with the development of large bureaucratic organizations with their impersonal relationships between employers and employees. Employee theft is neither a new problem nor one limited to modern work systems. Reference to employee theft is found in one of the earliest bodies of laws, the Code of Hammurabi, carved on diorite columns during the eighteenth century B.C.E. The code's 288 laws contain at least eight specific references to employer-employee, consigner-consignee relations that apply to what is today called employee theft. For example, the 265th law states, "If a shepherd to whom oxen or sheep have been given to pasture become unfaithful, alter the brand or sell them, they shall convict him and he shall restore tenfold to their owner the oxen and sheep he has stolen" (Luckenbill).

What makes the problem of employee theft appear modern or of recent origin are the significant social changes that modern work systems represent: new organizational structures, new relationships between employers and employees, new configurations of material and products, new victims (including new legal constructs such as corporations), new opportunity structures that give workers access to more goods, facilities and services, new configurations of work norms regulating employee behavior, new systems for preventing or coping with employee theft, and the separation of property ownership from property control in the modern organization. Viewed together, these make the problem appear a modern one or at least one of a different order than earlier employee theft.

## Terms used to describe employee theft

A sociolinguistic analysis of the terms used by the employee-perpetrator and the employer-victim to describe acts of employee theft reveal significant differences in the way the act of theft is perceived. All but the high incident/high value perpetrators refer to their acts of taking property in more neutral terms, placing the act within acceptable work-group normative boundaries, by using euphemisms such as *taking, salvaging, evening-up, compensating, borrowing, dipping, scrounging, taking out a loan, doing government work* (especially for use of equipment and facilities), *boss work* (following the boss's example), and *taking stuff for homework.* Employee-perpetrators go