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Margareth Etienne

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Education, Violence, and Re-Wiring Our Schools

Margareth Etienne[†]

I. INTRODUCTION

Is there a relationship between the education system and the criminal justice system? What is the connection between education and criminality? Two theories prevail. Theory I is, simply put, that education (or school programs) can reduce crime. This common perception is supported by a great deal of research among sociologists and criminologists revealing that better and higher education attainment levels correlate with lower criminal behavior. Scholars diverge in their hypotheses to explain why this is the case,¹ but it is fair to say that education provides opportunities that stem from greater substantive knowledge, hard and soft skills, credentials and greater employment prospects, pro-social attitudes, and positive social networks² that advance the life prospects of young people. With these opportunities, students are less likely to resort to crime for money or social advancement and are more likely to be socialized against the acceptability of resorting to crime.³ In addition to robust evidence of correlation, some scholars argue that they have discovered causal links between education and lower crime levels.⁴

[†] Professor of Law and Nancy Snowden Research Scholar, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I would like to thank the conference participants at The University of Chicago Law School for their thoughtful comments on the presentation that formed the basis of this paper. I am also extremely grateful to Nicholas Hopkins and Douglas Malcolm for their capable research assistance.

¹ See Starr J. Solomon et al., *Does Educational Marginalization Mediate the Path from Childhood Cumulative Risk to Criminal Offending?*, 3 J DEV & LIFE-COURSE CRIMINOLOGY 326 (2017) (describing various criminological theories on adolescent educational experiences as a risk factor in criminal propensity, including social bonding theory, strain theory, differential association theory).

² See ROBERT J. SAMPSON & JOHN H. LAUB, *CRIME IN THE MAKING: PATHWAYS AND TURNING POINTS THROUGH LIFE* (1993) (arguing that students who are engaged in social and extra-curricular activities at school are less likely to resort to crime).

³ See generally MARK WARR, *COMPANIONS IN CRIME: THE SOCIAL ASPECTS OF CRIMINAL CONDUCT* (2002).

⁴ See generally Randi Hjalmarsson, Helena Holmlund & Matthew J. Lindquist, *The Effect of Education on Criminal Convictions and Incarceration: Causal Evidence from Micro-data*, 125 ECON. J. 1290 (2015); Stephen Machin, Olivier Marie & Sunčica Vujić, *The Crime Reducing Effect*

Theory I—which we can call “Intervention Theory”—makes broad assumptions about the negative correlation and causation links between education and criminal behavior.

Theory II, broadly referred to as the “School-to-Prison Pipeline,” is growing in popularity. It does not contest that education has the potential to reduce criminal propensity. Instead, it questions the claim that education is *necessarily* an intervention to criminal behavior. Theory II proposes that one relationship between education and crime is that failures in the education system can catapult a student into a life of criminal activity and into the criminal justice system.

Exactly what is meant by the school-to-prison pipeline? The metaphor has become ubiquitous. Is it an umbrella term that encompasses different and unrelated school policies that have a common effect on students? Or rather, does it suggest a degree of intentionality by one state entity (schools) to dump burdensome or otherwise undesirable students onto another entity (prisons)?⁵

Season Four of *The Wire*, arguably the most emotionally fraught season,⁶ explores both theories—school as intervention and school as a pipeline—in depicting the lives of several students as they navigate street rules and school rules. The season is as much about the various authority figures in the lives of these pupils—their teachers, parents, police officers, street dealers, and community leaders—as it is about their own agency and the difficult choices they make. Ultimately, Season Four is about what works and doesn’t work in schools with regard to student success. In poor urban settings for children of color, success has as much to do with remaining out of the criminal justice system as it does with going to college.⁷

With the narratives of *The Wire* as context, this paper explores what works and doesn’t work in schools and the extent to which *The*

of *Education*, 121 *ECON. J.* 463 (2011).

⁵ See Christopher A. Mallett, *The School-to-Prison Pipeline: Disproportionate Impact on Vulnerable Children and Adolescents*, 49 *EDUC. & URB. SOC’Y* 563, 564 (2017) (arguing that the “20-year shift toward strict and controlling school discipline and subsequent establishment of the school-to-prison pipeline were not well-planned policies.”).

⁶ Season Four is also widely (though not unanimously) regarded by fans as the best season of the series. See *The Best Seasons of The Wire*, RANKER, <https://www.ranker.com/list/best-season-of-the-wire/reference> [<http://perma.cc/E2KH-GTDQ>]; Julianne Escobedo Shepherd, *Yes, There Are Bad Seasons of The Wire (Relatively Speaking)*, JEZEBEL (Dec. 26, 2014, 4:50 PM), <https://jezebel.com/yes-there-are-bad-seasons-of-the-wire-relatively-spea-1675377697> [<http://perma.cc/J257-MH33>]; But see Brice Ezell, *All the Pieces Matter: Ranking the Seasons of ‘The Wire’*, POPMATTERS (June 5, 2012), <https://www.popmatters.com/159414-all-the-pieces-matter-the-seasons-of-the-wire-ranked-2495844857.html> [<http://perma.cc/99XS-XZJL>] (recognizing that Season Four is typically regarded as the best season but ranking it in third place).

⁷ See Andrew Kahn & Chris Kirk, *What It’s Like to Be Black in the Criminal Justice System*, SLATE (Aug. 9, 2015, 12:11 PM), http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/crime/2015/08/racial_disparities_in_the_criminal_justice_system_eight_charts_illustrating.html [<http://perma.cc/5EZ5-XYUL>].

Wire's creators got it right. It does this in two ways. First, while examining the lives of the children of *The Wire*, this paper considers the extent to which educational and criminal enforcement policies, many of which remain controverted among experts, would have altered the narrative of their lives. Next, this paper attempts to make sense of the pipeline to prison metaphor by exploring the relationship between school policies and criminal behavior or delinquency. This is one important way in which schools either "work" or "don't work" in large urban areas such as West Baltimore. In addition to providing a lens through which to examine the school-to-prison pipeline, Season Four of *The Wire* showcases a wide range of education policies more generally. Education law scholars and education policy makers continue to debate "what works" in urban schools. At the heart of such debates are issues like school uniforms,⁸ the importance of diversity and role models,⁹ curricular innovations,¹⁰ tracking,¹¹ monetary incentives or rewards,¹²

⁸ See, e.g., Virginia Ann Bendel Draa, *School Uniforms in Urban Public High Schools* (Nov. 2005) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Youngstown State University) <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED497409> [<http://perma.cc/74E4-KJD5>]; Atillah N. Brookshire, *The Impact of School Uniforms on School Climate* (Apr. 2016) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Walden University) <http://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3352&context=dissertations>; Matthew Lynch, *Does Wearing a School Uniform Improve Student Behavior?*, EDVOCATE (Nov. 19, 2016), <http://www.theedadvocate.org/does-wearing-a-school-uniform-improve-student-behavior/> [<http://perma.cc/XG27-85TD>]; Stephanie Grob Plante, *The Impossible Question of Public School Uniforms*, RACKED (May 3, 2017), <https://www.racked.com/2017/5/3/15518542/public-school-uniforms-education-policy> [<http://perma.cc/TNT6-ZETF>].

⁹ See, e.g., Anna J. Egalite & Brian Kisida, *The Many Ways Teacher Diversity May Benefit Students*, BROOKINGS (Aug. 19, 2016), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2016/08/19/the-many-ways-teacher-diversity-may-benefit-students/> [<http://perma.cc/92GM-EDKS>]; Monica Ivankovic, *Students Deserve Diverse Role Models*, TEACHING TOLERANCE (July 1, 2013) <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/students-deserve-diverse-role-models> [<http://perma.cc/SJ5V-PP3M>].

¹⁰ See, e.g., *Curricular Innovation in Higher Education*, AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION, <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Curricular-Innovation-in-Higher-Education.aspx> [<http://perma.cc/9AU4-PA95>].

¹¹ See, e.g., Jill Barshay, *The Upside of Academic Tracking: New Evidence Suggests That Black and Latino Students Thrive in Honors Class*, THE ATLANTIC (Mar. 31, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/03/the-upside-of-tracking/475956/> [<http://perma.cc/75YE-KSZT>]; CAROL CORBETT BURRIS & DELIA T. GARRITY, *DETRACKING FOR EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY* (2008).

¹² See, e.g., Matthew G. Springer, Brooks Rosenquist & Walker A. Swain, *Monetary and Non-Monetary Student Incentives for Tutoring Services: A Randomized Controlled Trial*, 8 J. RES. ON EDUC. EFFECTIVENESS 453 (2015); Bradley M. Allan & Roland G. Fryer, Jr., *The Power and Pitfalls of Education Incentives* (Sept. 2011) (unpublished discussion paper) (on file with the Hamilton Project), http://www.hamiltonproject.org/papers/the_power_and_pitfalls_of_education_incentives [<http://perma.cc/Y5XD-5Q8D>].

school suspensions and discipline,¹³ standardized testing,¹⁴ and safety.¹⁵ More than a decade later, we have an opportunity to assess the efficacy and desirability of some of these measures. *The Wire* provides an opportunity to examine one account, albeit fictional, of how some of these policies were operationalized and the impact, if any, they have had on students, teachers, and school administrators.

Organizationally, this paper considers these various “Intervention” and “Pipeline” policies through the lives of each of the primary children characters in Season Four. After providing a brief synopsis of each child character’s story, I examine the educational practices or initiatives that affected (or could have affected) the character’s life. Although these are fictionalized portrayals, when possible, I inform my analysis of their narratives with scholarly and empirical accounts from social science literature in criminology and education policy as well as from governmental data collection organizations.

II. SEASON FOUR: THE CORNER BOYS AND EDWARD TILGHMAN MIDDLE SCHOOL

The Fourth Season of *The Wire* continues its exploration of Baltimore’s war on drugs and corruption, but it places a special focus on the lives of several neighborhood seventh-grade boys: Namond Brice, Michael Lee, Randy Wagstaff, and Duquan Weems.¹⁶ These middle-school children, caught halfway between childhood and adulthood, are “corner boys.”¹⁷ They are in apprenticeships toward a life on the street as “king-

¹³ See, e.g., Matthew P. Steinberg & Johanna Lacoë, *What Do We Know About School Discipline Reform?*, 17 EDUC. NEXT 44 (Winter 2017); U.S. DEP’T OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVS. & U.S. DEP’T OF EDUC., POLICY STATEMENT ON EXPULSION AND SUSPENSION POLICIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS, <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/policy-statement-eece-expulsions-suspensions.pdf> [<http://perma.cc/D5PV-R5YD>].

¹⁴ Greg Juriles, *Here’s Why We Don’t Need Standardized Tests*, EDUC. WEEK (July 8, 2014), <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/07/09/36jouriles.h33.html> [<https://perma.cc/RC33-QXPQ>]; Erik Robelin, *A Status Update on All Those Testing Opt-Outs*, ATLANTIC (May 21, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/05/opt-out-movement-update/483779/> [<https://perma.cc/9UC2-XL2F>]; Lyndsey Layton, *Study Says Standardized Testing Is Overwhelming Nation’s Public Schools*, WASH. POST (Oct. 24, 2015), https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/study-says-standardized-testing-is-overwhelming-nations-public-schools/2015/10/24/8a22092c-79ae-11e5-a958-d889faf561dc_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4015b6c1f624 [<https://perma.cc/K77P-7E5B>].

¹⁵ See, e.g., MATTHEW P. STEINBERG, ELAINE ALLENSWORTH & DAVID W. JOHNSON, CONSORTIUM ON CHICAGO SCHOOL RESEARCH, STUDENT AND TEACHER SAFETY IN CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS, (May 2011), https://consortium.uchicago.edu/downloads/8499safety_in_cps.pdf [<http://perma.cc/QEJ6-2ZF3>].

¹⁶ *The Wire: Boys of Summer* (HBO television broadcast Sept. 10, 2006) (Season Four, Episode One).

¹⁷ *The Wire: Home Rooms* (HBO television broadcast Sept. 24, 2006) (Season Four, Episode Three).

pins,” but first they have to get through the state’s compulsory education system. These students attend the fictional Edward J. Tilghman Middle School in West Baltimore.¹⁸ Each of the boys has different aspirations and each confronts different challenges. Season Four explores some of the external forces that shape these children’s lives. School personnel and school policies are important factors, but they don’t explain the full story. The brilliance of *The Wire* is demonstrated by its ability to illustrate the full complexity of the interaction of school life, street life, and family life—the primary institutions affecting the lives of middle-school aged children in inner cities.

Each of these institutions, particularly when they fail, can lead vulnerable young people prematurely into the criminal justice system. When schools do this, it is referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline. The pipeline metaphor has been employed broadly to describe decisions and policies by school administrators and teachers that prematurely lead to increased interaction with the criminal justice system. In this article, I will discuss actions and policies that comprise the pipeline, but also the attributes of particular children that make them most vulnerable to the school-to-prison pipeline. After discussing the four main children characters, I also consider what I view as one of the most significant gaps in what is an otherwise a brilliant show. That is the failure of *The Wire* to take seriously the lives of girls and women in inner-city Baltimore’s drug trade and criminal enforcement efforts. This gap is true of every season, and Season Four, the education season, is no exception.

III. SAFETY IN SCHOOL

A. Duquan Weems’s Story

The vast majority of schools are not as violent as we tend to believe. There is a myth of chronic violence in schools when in reality schools are often the safest place for children. In fact it is often assumed that schools in poor, drug-infested or violent-ridden neighborhoods are particularly unsafe. On the contrary, the children in such neighborhoods find far more safety within the schoolhouse doors than out of them. Duquan’s story illustrates in unexpected ways how schools can serve as safe havens for at-risk youth.

For Duquan “Dukie” Weems, school is a safer place than home. Duquan lives with a family of drug addicts who apparently sell his clothes, books, and anything else they can get their hands on to buy drugs.¹⁹ He

¹⁸ *The Wire: Boys of Summer*, *supra* note 16 (Season Four, Episode One).

¹⁹ *The Wire: Alliances* (HBO television broadcast Oct. 8, 2006) (Season Four, Episode Five).

has no security at home. One day he arrives home from school to find that his family has been evicted and all of their belongings (a small pile of virtually worthless items) are on the sidewalk.²⁰ He moves in with a friend and is in many ways better off.²¹ At school, a new teacher, Mr. Pryzbylewski (or Mr. P as the students call him) takes Duquan under his wing.²² He launders Duquan's clothing weekly and offers him his "extra lunch" that Mr. P. can never finish.²³ Duquan develops an aptitude for math and computers under Mr. P's guidance.²⁴ Yet, worse than his family's eviction from their apartment, is Duquan's "eviction" from middle school due to his age based on school policy.

Aged out of middle school, Duquan must transfer to a high school where he has no friends, no support, and no Mr. P. He soon quits school and tries to adapt to a life on the streets.²⁵ He starts by attempting to join his drug-dealing friends. One friend, Michael Lee, has advanced in the illegal drug organization and has earned his own corner to manage.²⁶ He employs Duquan to help distribute drugs, but users and other dealers soon sense Duquan's weakness and easily take advantage of him.²⁷ Rather than kill or injure Duquan to teach him a lesson, Michael "demotes" Duquan to the role of housekeeper and nanny for Michael's young brother.²⁸ Later in the season, when the caregiving arrangement is forced to come to an end, Duquan flounders. Having learned that he is not cut out to be a successful criminal, is unemployable without a high school diploma, and lacks the support or protection of the adults in his life, Duquan becomes a homeless and petty thief, and soon a drug addict.²⁹ Duquan's fate is determined in large measure not by his abilities, or even by his efforts, but by his association with the most reliable institutional force in his life, his school. Duquan's life was safest and most stable when he was in school. He was best fed in school. He had access to more resources, like computers and technology. He was "seen"

²⁰ *The Wire: That's Got His Own* (HBO television broadcast Dec. 3, 2006) (Season Four, Episode Twelve).

²¹ *Id.*

²² *The Wire: Margin of Error* (HBO television broadcast Oct. 15, 2006) (Season Four, Episode Six).

²³ See *The Wire: Alliances*, *supra* note 19 (Season Four, Episode Five); *The Wire: Margin of Error*, *supra* note 22 (Season Four, Episode Six).

²⁴ *The Wire: Unto Others* (HBO television broadcast Oct. 29, 2006) (Season Four, Episode Seven).

²⁵ *The Wire: Final Grades* (HBO television broadcast Dec. 10, 2006) (Season Four, Episode Thirteen).

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *The Wire: More with Less* (HBO television broadcast Jan. 6, 2008) (Season Five, Episode One).

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *The Wire: -30-* (HBO television broadcast Mar. 9, 2008) (Season Five, Episode Ten).

in school. Without the structure and support of the school system, Duquan became quickly vulnerable to a life of criminality and drug abuse. Duquan's story undermines the myth that our schools are perennially dangerous places for students like him. Duquan's school was a safe haven from which he could flee, at least temporarily, the dangers of the streets.

B. The Myth of Chronic Violence in Our Schools

The belief that schools, particularly public schools, suffer from high levels of violent crime and that such crime is on the rise in schools is false. School crime, much like crime elsewhere in the United States, is declining or stable.³⁰ When major acts of school violence occur, they capture public attention and evoke lasting fear of the dangerous school. Consider the three deadliest elementary or secondary school massacres in the United States. In 1927, in the Bath Township of Michigan, a disgruntled school board treasurer killed thirty-eight elementary school children and six adults by detonating timed explosives in the local school.³¹ The 1999 shooting massacre at Columbine High school, in Columbine, Colorado was the second deadliest school massacre at that time. There, two high school seniors killed twelve students and one teacher in an orchestrated attack that involved firearms and—although they were not detonated—car bombs and a hundred other explosive devices that were not detonated.³² More than a decade later in 2012, the mass shooting in Sandy Hook Elementary School, in Newton, Connecticut claimed the lives of twenty children and six staff members.³³ Recently in February of 2018, a lone shooter killed fourteen students and three staff members at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida.³⁴ These fatality figures for students (thirty-eight, twelve, twenty, fourteen) are anomalies that would have significantly increased

³⁰ See LAUREN MUSU-GILLETTE, ANLAN ZHANG, KE WANG, JIZHI ZHANG & BARBARA A. OUDEKERK, U.S. DEPT' EDUCATION, INDICATORS OF SCHOOL CRIME AND SAFETY: 2016 (2017).

³¹ *A Haunted History*, MICHIGAN HISTORY, <http://michiganhistory.leadr.msu.edu/bath/history/> [<http://perma.cc/CWZ5-QKKU>].

³² *Columbine High School Shootings*, HISTORY, <http://www.history.com/topics/columbine-high-school-shootings> [<http://perma.cc/5LBF-J4A7>]; Greg Toppo, *10 Years Later, the Real Story Behind Columbine*, USA TODAY (Apr. 14, 2009, 1:48 PM), http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2009-04-13-columbine-myths_N.htm [<http://perma.cc/S8MA-JJJS>].

³³ *Sandy Hook Shooting: What Happened?*, CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2012/12/us/sandy-hook-timeline/index.html> [<http://perma.cc/39WR-42LT>].

³⁴ Carli Teproff et al., *17 Dead, 15 Wounded After Expelled Student Shoots Up Stoneman Douglas High in Broward*, MIAMI HERALD (Feb., 14 2018), <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/education/article200094039.html> [<https://perma.cc/ZX3W-4P22>]. In May of 2018, A Texas shooter armed with a shot-gun and a revolver killed 9 students and 1 teacher at Santa Fe High School. Manny Fernandez et al., *In Texas School Shooting, 10 Hurt, 10 Dead and Many Unsurprised*, N.Y. TIMES (May 18, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/18/us/school-shooting-santa-fe-texas.html> [<https://perma.cc/S8Z7-AG3V>].

the number of student deaths in the years they occurred. It does not mean that these events were not horrifying. However, these four massacres were as terrifying as they were unusual.³⁵ Schools remain far safer for children, especially younger ones, than the home or community.³⁶ According to the most recently available federal data, less than three percent of homicides of children aged five to eighteen years old occurred at school.³⁷ Yet school homicides instill great fear about the safety of our educational system, even though school-related deaths are not nearly as common as other youth deaths. While some argue that school massacres may be on the rise,³⁸ the reality is that they generate far more publicity and occupy far more space in our collective memories than their numbers would justify.

But what if mass murders and massacres do not capture the quotidian violence of our schools? Rather, what if it is the case that the true dangers in our schools are not captured by major events, as it is assumed, but by day-to-day acts of fatal or serious violence? The data undermines this assumption as well. For nearly twenty years, the National Center for Education Statistics, the primary federal entity for collecting and reporting education related data in the United States, and the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the primary federal entity for collecting and reporting information about crime and criminal justice system in the United States, have joined together to publish an annual report on crimes in school: *Indicators of School Crime and Safety*.³⁹ The annual publications include data on victimization, teacher injury, bullying, fights, weapons, and student perceptions of personal safety in post-secondary public and private schools.⁴⁰

The findings suggest that over time school violence has remained steady. The 2016 report presents the most recent data available, covering a range of surveys and studies of events ranging from 2009 to 2015.⁴¹ The data on violent deaths in schools show that there were forty-eight school-associated violent deaths between July 1, 2013 and June

³⁵ Dana Goldstein, *Why Campus Shootings Are So Shocking: School Is the 'Safest Place' for a Child*, N.Y. TIMES (May 22, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/22/us/safe-school-shootings.html> (last visited Sep. 20, 2018) (“While homicide is among the leading causes of death for young people generally, school is a relative haven compared with the home or the neighborhood.”).

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ See Antonis Katsiyannis, et al., *Historical Examination of United States Intentional Mass School Shootings in the 20th and 21st Centuries: Implications for Students, Schools, and Society*, 27 J. CHILD AND FAMILY STUDS. 2562 (Jul. 2018).

³⁹ *School Crime*, BUREAU JUST. STAT., <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=974> [http://perma.cc/2PKJ-9L5P].

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ MUSU-GILLETTE ET AL., *supra* note 30.

30, 2014, the most current dates for which these figures are available.⁴² Of these forty-eight deaths, twenty involved deaths of school-aged children.⁴³ And among those twenty deaths, twelve were homicides and eight were suicides.⁴⁴ Each death is a tragedy, but these figures do not corroborate a fear of deadly violence in schools.

The 2006 edition of *Indicators of School Crime and Safety*, published in the year in which *The Wire's* Season Four was broadcast, was not much different. That report lists a total of twenty-eight school-associated deaths of school-aged children—twenty-one homicides and seven suicides⁴⁵ between July 1, 2004 and June 30, 2005. The death toll was higher then, but, as the report notes, it still “translates into about 1 homicide or suicide of a school-age youth at school per 2 million students enrolled” that academic year.⁴⁶ The decline in violent school deaths during the decade between the 2006 and 2016 reports mirrors the decline of the crime rate in the United States generally.⁴⁷

Not surprisingly, non-fatal crime figures are much higher than fatal ones. According to the *Indicators of School Crime and Safety Report of 2016*, middle and high school students faced 841,100 non-fatal victimizations such as thefts, simple assaults, and more violent assaults at school in 2015.⁴⁸ This number represents approximately 3.3% of school-aged students twelve-eighteen years old.⁴⁹ Among the 3.3% of students, about 1.2% were victims of theft offenses, 1.7% were victims of simple assault, and less than one-half of 1% (or 0.4%) suffered violent crimes.⁵⁰ Moreover, between 1992 and 2015, the rate of victimization for these non-fatal violent crimes declined both in and out of school.⁵¹

So, what do we know about the deaths of school-aged children? Between July 1, 2013 and June 30, 2014, twelve homicides of school-aged children occurred on school property, on the way to or from school, or a school-sponsored event.⁵² By contrast, 1,041 school-aged children were killed outside of school in places and activities that were not school-

⁴² *Id.* at 32.

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ RACHEL DINKES, EMILY FORREST CATALDI, GRACE KENA, KATRINA BAUM & THOMAS D. SYNDER, U.S. DEPT EDUC. & U.S. DEPT JUST., INDICATORS OF SCHOOL CRIME AND SAFETY: 2006 at iv (2006), <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007003.pdf> [<http://perma.cc/2QEB-ZGS6>].

⁴⁶ *Id.* at iv, 6.

⁴⁷ See John Gramlich, *5 Facts About Crime in the U.S.*, PEW RES. CTR. (Jan. 30, 2018), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/30/5-facts-about-crime-in-the-u-s/> [<http://perma.cc/6MKR-KJ3G>].

⁴⁸ MUSU-GILLETTE ET AL., *supra* note 30, at 36.

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² *Id.* at 32.

related.⁵³ The comparable in-school and out-of-school suicide rates are similarly stark: 8 suicides in school versus 1,637 suicides out-of-school of school-aged kids.⁵⁴ We know it is far safer to be in school than outside of school when it comes to homicide and suicide.

Season Four of *The Wire* aligns with this. While it would be impossible to conduct an actual count of the bodies—deaths and homicides—throughout the series or Season Four, it would be fair to estimate a number in the hundreds. By contrast, there were no deaths and only one serious act of violence (one girl slashed the face of her bully in the classroom)⁵⁵ on school grounds.⁵⁶ Notably, weapons were left *outside* the schoolhouse doors, hidden in the nearby bushes to be retrieved after school for use in the neighborhood.⁵⁷ The school walls provided a haven from weapon violence for many of the students. It is only when the students left school that they invariably faced physical and emotional abuse at home from guardians and parents or on the street corners from drug bosses and law enforcement. School did not always offer the best education, but it provided a respite from violence on *The Wire*. It allowed the children to be children, including sometimes to be childish: to laugh, play and learn.

The reality is that “for almost all children and adolescents, schools remain the safest environment.”⁵⁸ This is true on *The Wire* too. One of the amazing aspects of the show was its ability to keep audiences tensely on the edges of their seats in nearly every scene. Yet this was not usually the case during the scenes when the children were in the school building. In this way, life imitates art. Granted, the notion of safe schools can have multiple meanings. The kind of safety from the streets that Duquan and his friends experience during their school years is different from a school free of violent crime and aggression. Yet they are related. Schools provide an important, although imperfect, barrier from the dangers, abuses, and temptations of daily life for children who live in difficult and impoverished situations. In this respect, schools in poor, crime-ridden neighborhoods are comparatively safer places for their pupils than other schools.

⁵³ *See id.*

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ *The Wire: Home Rooms*, *supra* note 17 (Season Four, Episode Three).

⁵⁶ See Tom Shales, *In Season 4 of 'The Wire,' Cable That Can't Be Touched*, WASH. POST (Sep. 11, 2006), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/10/AR2006091001162.html> [<http://perma.cc/SA4C-7UGZ>].

⁵⁷ *The Wire: Alliances*, *supra* note 19 (Season Four, Episode Five).

⁵⁸ CHRISTOPHER A. MALLETT, *THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE: A COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT* 18 (2016).

IV. JUVENILE CRIME: DELAY IS THE NEXT BEST ALTERNATIVE TO PREVENTION

A. Michael Lee's Story

Policymakers debate the causes of crime in an effort to determine how to deter or prevent juveniles from criminal activity. Criminologists understand that delay from criminal activity may be as important as abstention. For Michael Lee, his experience in middle school provides a bittersweet glimpse of what his life could have been had he been able to delay his entry into the drug trade for a few years.

Michael learned quickly and effortlessly. In one scene, the math teacher is having great difficulty explaining a complex word problem to the class.⁵⁹ It appeared that no students were able to follow along with the lesson. At the conclusion of the day, when the teacher was cleaning up, he found a sheet at Michael's desk where he had easily solved the problem with little fanfare.⁶⁰ His teachers were not alone in discovering that Michael was talented. Local drug dealers watched him and attempted to recruit him as well. Unlike some of his peers (for example, Namond Brice, whose story is addressed later in this article), for whom life as a drug dealer was practically a birthright, Michael Lee rejected all entreaties from neighborhood dealers to join their enterprise.⁶¹

Michael was extremely bright academically, but he also enjoyed a social intelligence that made him a natural leader. However, he seemed to avoid attention and harbored a deep distrust of adults at school or in the community. His commitment to caring for his young brother and to his own self-survival led him to seek protection from the drug lords precisely because the traditional institutions—family, school, church, criminal justice—had failed to protect him from his abusive father. Michael's story shows how irrelevant schools can become in the lives of desperate children. In his case, the educational system and its obsession with uniforms, testing, truancy, and funding were so far outside of Michael's immediate needs that they were inconsequential to his life. That said, life was best for Michael and his brother when they could maintain a tenuous routine, which involved waking up each morning in a dangerous and violence-ridden neighborhood with somewhere relatively safe to go each day. It also meant that the drug dealers for whom Michael eventually worked (and to whom he was indebted for protecting him from his abusive father) did not benefit from his "labor" until after

⁵⁹ *The Wire: Home Rooms*, *supra* note 17 (Season Four, Episode Three).

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ See *The Wire: Soft Eyes* (HBO television broadcast Sept. 17, 2006) (Season Four, Episode Two) (depicting an example where Michael rejects money from the neighborhood dealers).

school hours. Michael and the other corner boys aroused the suspicion of the truancy officers and law enforcement when they were not in school. The institution provided a viable excuse, and in this sense, more protection from street predators than parents and guardians could.

B. Why the Age-Crime Curve Matters for Schools

The Wire showed that “saying no” to drugs or a life of drug dealing is an unrealistic expectation for many of the children in inner-city Baltimore. Instead, each year that a child could delay entry into street life improved the odds of their survival. Schools provided the best and most likely means of doing this.

The Age-Crime Curve, a bell-shaped curve that is universal in Western populations, demonstrates that criminal activity begins around ages nine–ten, peaks between ages fifteen–nineteen, and then begins to decline in the early twenties.⁶² Although the curve varies somewhat by gender, race, and types of crime,⁶³ it makes clear that many adolescents age out of criminal behavior.⁶⁴ A delay in criminal activity for a juvenile may help avert a criminal career altogether. Adolescents who begin to offend before age twelve are more likely to offend later into adulthood.⁶⁵ Approximately half of juvenile offenders stop offending by their early twenties.⁶⁶ As one study found, many of the juveniles who are punished as adults between ages eighteen and twenty would have stopped criminal activity naturally and on their own within a few years.⁶⁷ Instead, their time spent in the adult criminal system makes them more likely to pursue a career in crime. While drug trafficking does tend to have a longer career span than many other juvenile offenses, delaying its inception can be life-changing for a young person.

The Age-Crime Curve shows that criminal behavior typically begins between ages ten and twelve.⁶⁸ Middle school (or sixth grade) begins at age eleven on average and ends at age fourteen. Therefore, if a

⁶² *From Juvenile Delinquency to Young Adult Offending*, NAT'L INST. JUST., <https://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/Pages/delinquency-to-adult-offending.aspx> [http://perma.cc/NVJ3-BHLW] (last updated Mar. 11, 2014).

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ *Id.*; see also Darrell J. Steffensmeier, Emilie Andersen Allan, Miles D. Harer & Cathy Streifel, *Age and the Distribution of Crime*, 94 AM. J. SOCIOLOGY 803 (1989) (attempting to explain variations in the age-crime curve over time and across types of crime).

⁶⁵ See generally ROLF LOEBER & DAVID P. FARRINGTON, *YOUNG HOMICIDE OFFENDERS AND VICTIMS: RISK FACTORS, PREDICTION, AND PREVENTION FROM CHILDHOOD* (2011).

⁶⁶ *From Juvenile Delinquency to Young Adult Offending*, *supra* note 62.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Magda Stouthamer-Loeber, *Persistence and Desistance in Offending* (2010) (unpublished report, LIFE HISTORY RESEARCH PROGRAM, UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH); MARC LE BLANC & MARCEL FRÉCHETTE, *MALE CRIMINAL ACTIVITY FROM CHILDHOOD THROUGH YOUTH: MULTILEVEL AND DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVES* (1989).

⁶⁸ *From Juvenile Delinquency to Young Adult Offending*, *supra* note 62.

student can make it successfully through middle school, without being victimized or becoming immersed in criminal activity, that student has a significantly greater chance of “making it.” As a result, if interventions are to be successful, they should target children in middle school. High school is too often too late.

In “Home Rooms,” the third episode of Season Four, a sociologist from the University of Maryland School of Social Work hires Howard “Bunny” Colvin to assist with a major grant-funded research project.⁶⁹ Their goal is to discover interventions to address criminal and violent behavior among Baltimore’s youth.⁷⁰ Initially they sought to work with a target population of eighteen to twenty-one-year-olds.⁷¹ Colvin argues that such a demographic is too old: “By that age they deep in the game.”⁷² He insists that they work with middle school students instead if they are to have any chance of intervention before the onset of serious criminal behavior.⁷³ The data from the Age-Crime Curve suggests that he is correct. The television show’s focus on middle school aged children, seventh graders in particular, was not merely an attempt to tug on the emotional heartstrings of the audience. The emphasis on this age group was justified because it is a critical juncture in determining whether a juvenile continues on a prosocial or antisocial path.

V. THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE: A BROAD VIEW

A. Randy Wagstaff’s Story

Randy Wagstaff was failed by every public institution he encountered; the schools were ultimately no exception. The difference is that while other institutions failed him because the actors or systems did not function as they were designed; the schools failed Randy when their policies were executed as intended or designed.

Randy was a foster child living with a single foster mother.⁷⁴ She had high expectations of him when it came to school, church, and other behavior. She expected him to be a “stoop” kid and not a “corner” kid. As explained by Bunny Colvin at one point, most young kids are commanded by their parents to stay and play on the front stoop of the typical Baltimore brownstone.⁷⁵ The stoop kids comply whereas the other kids head to the corner and are exposed to the street life at an early age.

⁶⁹ *The Wire: Home Rooms*, *supra* note 17 (Season Four, Episode Three).

⁷⁰ *Id.*

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ *Id.*

⁷⁴ *The Wire: Margin of Error*, *supra* note 22 (Season Four, Episode Six).

⁷⁵ *The Wire: Alliances*, *supra* note 19 (Season Four, Episode Five).

Randy's foster mother, Miss Anna, worked hard to keep Randy, figuratively and literally, as close to the stoop and as far from the corner as possible. She is a strict disciplinarian and worries about whether Randy is a bad kid or merely a corrigible kid with bad judgment.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, Randy lives in fear that Miss Anna will return him to a foster care facility if he became too difficult to handle. Randy loved her and worked hard to please her, but also lived in constant fear that he would be ejected from her home and her life.

One day, Randy is taken into the assistant principal's office at school to discuss an event at school in which she suspected his involvement.⁷⁷ Although Randy played no role, when the administrator threatened to notify his foster mother about her suspicions, he tried to dissuade her.⁷⁸ Eventually he blurted out that he had information about a murder that he could share if she promised not to call his guardian.⁷⁹ The assistant principal's next step was to call the police.⁸⁰ That fated call—and the ensuing contact with the criminal justice system—led to a series of other disastrous events that altered the course of Randy's life and ultimately led to the hospitalization of his mother and his return to the foster system.

B. Minimizing Juvenile Encounters with Law Enforcement

Randy's experience may be an extreme example, but it supports the hypothesis that increased interactions between minors, especially young black men and boys in poor inner cities, and the criminal justice system often occur to the detriment of those minors.⁸¹ Over the last twenty years, schools have embraced strategies that some have described as “criminalization of education.”⁸² This phenomenon is characterized by the proliferation of “security guards, school resource officers, security cameras, inflexible discipline codes, and subsequent school punishment rigidity” as normal aspects of the routine school day.⁸³ Scholars have found that this criminalization trend harms students academically and psychologically. Ironically, this trend also makes schools more dangerous.⁸⁴

⁷⁶ *The Wire: Margin of Error*, *supra* note 22 (Season Four, Episode Six).

⁷⁷ *Id.*

⁷⁸ *Id.*

⁷⁹ *Id.*

⁸⁰ *Id.*

⁸¹ See Rod K. Brunson & Jody Miller, *Young Black Men and Urban Policing in the United States*, 46 *BRIT. J. CRIM.* 613 (2006).

⁸² Mallett, *supra* note 5, at 563–64.

⁸³ *Id.*

⁸⁴ See *Id.* at 564 (citations omitted).

In the past several years, school policies have significantly increased the opportunities for police-citizen encounters with minors.⁸⁵ This occurs sometimes when the minor is involved in a crime as a perpetrator, victim, or witness. It also occurs by virtue of the enhanced presence of police officers on school grounds and at school events—a rising trend in American schools.⁸⁶ Another way in which school policies lead to more interactions between police and students is through policies that prematurely or unjustifiably remove students from the safe-haven that schools provide. Each of these are examples of the pipeline that serves as a conduit between the educational system and the criminal justice system. In Randy's case, it was the school officials who turned him over to the police as a possible witness in a crime. They did so oblivious to the fact that encounters between young black men and law enforcement are too often fraught with danger for young black men. Randy's story, as well as elements of the other boys' stories, provide a window to examine the workings of the pipeline.

What does the pipeline mean? According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), it refers to an educational system in which children are “funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems.”⁸⁷ One of the most notorious policies giving rise to this funnel system is the adoption of zero-tolerance policies throughout school districts in the United States. The policies require zero tolerance, and thus minimal discretion, when school code violations occur.⁸⁸ As a result, the number of students receiving out-of-school suspensions doubled since 1974.⁸⁹ In addition to out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, some of these policies mandate that students be referred to law enforcement for certain school violations.⁹⁰ The zero-tolerance trend toward imposing punitive measures without discretion began in the late eighties and coincided with a similar trend in the criminal justice system toward more punitive mandatory sentencing guidelines.⁹¹

⁸⁵ See Paul J. Hirschfield, *Preparing for Prison? The Criminalization of School Discipline in the USA*, 12 THEORETICAL CRIMINOLOGY 79 (2008).

⁸⁶ *Emerging Models for Police Presence in Schools*, LEADERSHIP FOR EDUC. EQUITY (2017), https://educationalequity.org/sites/default/files/documents/emerging_models_for_school_resource_officers_final.pdf [<http://perma.cc/T4NG-KU28>]; see also Mallett, *supra* note 5, at 564.

⁸⁷ *School-to-Prison Pipeline*, ACLU, <https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/school-prison-pipeline> [<http://perma.cc/K84T-5ZM9>].

⁸⁸ See Johanna Wald & Daniel J. Losen, *Defining and Redirecting a School-to-Prison Pipeline*, 99 NEW DIRECTIONS FOR YOUTH DEV. 9, 10 (Fall 2003).

⁸⁹ *Id.*

⁹⁰ *Id.*

⁹¹ See Stephanie Francis Ward, *Schools Start to Rethink Zero Tolerance Policies*, ABA J. (August 2014), http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/schools_start_to_rethink_zero_tolerance_policies [<http://perma.cc/4JKR-SKVN>].

The school disciplinary policies and the sentencing policies suffer from similar racial disparities. Children of color are heavily overrepresented among discipline cases in schools and receive the most severe sanctions.⁹² Black students are more likely than white students to be suspended, expelled, or arrested for the same school conduct.⁹³ In 2000, African-Americans were 17% of the public-school population nationwide but accounted for 34% of suspensions.⁹⁴ In coining the term “school to prison pipeline,” scholars and observers have noted that the dual trend and the staggering disadvantage to the same target groups is not coincidental.⁹⁵ Juveniles in the school end of the pipeline are more likely to land in prison, becoming the adult inmates at the prison end of the pipeline. The vast majority, approximately 68%, of adult prison inmates have not completed high school.⁹⁶ The link between graduating high school and avoiding the criminal justice system is apparent. Children cannot avoid schooling because education is compulsory. Yet it is paramount that children avoid contact with law enforcement. Accordingly, educational institutions simply ought not to be conduits between children and engagement with law enforcement.⁹⁷ If students must engage with law enforcement, schools should act *in loco parentis* by ensuring that students are legally represented or accompanied by parents.⁹⁸ If Randy had been a student at an elite private school, rather than a local public (i.e. state-run institution) school, it is difficult to imagine that a headmaster would have permitted him to be questioned by law enforcement officers regarding his involvement or knowledge of a sexual assault, as he was in *The Wire*. It is more likely that the student would be represented by a parent if not an attorney. Students like Randy deserve the same protection. However, when public school students meet with state or local law enforcement, public school officials often act as arms of the state. These students, who are there by dint of compulsory edu-

⁹² See *Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, NAACP LEGAL DEF. AND EDUC. FUND (Oct. 10, 2005), <http://www.naacpldf.org/publication/dismantling-school-prison-pipeline> [<http://perma.cc/N5KN-BW24>].

⁹³ *Id.*

⁹⁴ *Id.* (citing U.S. Department of Education statistics).

⁹⁵ Wald & Losen, *supra* note 88, at 11.

⁹⁶ *Id.*

⁹⁷ For more information on the problems with police-citizen encounters in schools, see generally LINNEA NELSON ET AL., *THE RIGHT TO REMAIN A STUDENT: HOW CALIFORNIA SCHOOL POLICIES FAIL TO PROTECT AND SERVE* (2016), https://www.aclunc.org/sites/default/files/20161019-the_right_to_remain_a_student-aclu_california_0.pdf [<https://perma.cc/M6RR-BKMS>]; see also Stephanie A. Wiley & Finn-Aage Esbensen, *The Effect of Police Contact: Does Official Intervention Result in Deviance Amplification?*, 62 *Crime & Delinquency* 283, 298–301 (2016).

⁹⁸ See generally Margareth Etienne, *Managing Parents: Navigating Parental Rights in Juvenile Cases*, 50 *CONN L. REV.* 61 (2018) (discussing the role of parents in their children’s juvenile cases, including in interrogations).

cation laws, often do not feel free to leave or remain silent when questioned by authoritative figures in school. Nor do these minors have the assistance of an adult who has their best interests at heart.

VI. AGENTS OF CHANGE: MENTORING, TRAINING, AND TEACHING

A. Namond Brice's Story

Namond is a fast-talking teenage braggart whose parents are both deeply invested in their son's future career as a drug dealer. He is, more than any of the other corner boys, the heir apparent to a career as a drug dealer. His father, Wee-Bey, is a major captain and hitman for a drug dealer.⁹⁹ But Namond did not inherit his father's toughness. Namond's mother is a force to be reckoned with as well and even instills respect in local drug dealers. Namond also lacks a natural (or learned) street toughness that his mother possesses. He likes to wear his curly locks long, ignoring the fact that it makes him easily identifiable to law enforcement on the corner.¹⁰⁰ He sits on the front stoop reading comic books when he is supposed to be working the corner.¹⁰¹ His mother seeks to toughen up her son who has grown accustomed to the lavish lifestyle so that he can assume his rightful place in the family business. She ensures that her seventh grader starts to earn larger profits for the family by berating one of the more senior dealers into giving Namond his own corner and "package" to manage.¹⁰² Among the corner boys, Namond is most predestined to a life of criminal behavior.

For Namond, school was merely a place to pass the time. He gave short shrift to the school uniform policy in order to display his expensive shoes and clothing. In the very first school scene, on the very first day of school, he is reprimanded by the assistant principal for violating the uniform policy.¹⁰³ He carries a knife to school and plants it in the bushes so as not to get suspended for breaking the rules.¹⁰⁴ He is disrespectful to the new teacher and disruptive in class.¹⁰⁵ Given his foreseeable trajectory and his poor attitude toward learning in the classroom, school officials select Namond to participate in a grant-funded research project targeting "at-risk" youth.¹⁰⁶ This small group of youth are separated or

⁹⁹ *The Wire: Soft Eyes*, *supra* note 61 (Season Four, Episode Two).

¹⁰⁰ *Id.*

¹⁰¹ *Id.*

¹⁰² *The Wire: Margin of Error*, *supra* note 22 (Season Four, Episode Six).

¹⁰³ *The Wire: Home Rooms*, *supra* note 17 (Season Four, Episode Three).

¹⁰⁴ *The Wire: Alliances*, *supra* note 19 (Season Four, Episode Five).

¹⁰⁵ See *The Wire: Home Rooms*, *supra* note 17 (Season Four, Episode Three) (depicting one example of many).

¹⁰⁶ *The Wire: Margin of Error*, *supra* note 22 (Season Four, Episode Six).

“tracked” from their peers. The unaffected children are able to learn in a setting with fewer distractions while the “at-risk” kids are targeted for pro-social interventions. The alternative classroom is run not by teachers but by sociologists from the University of Maryland.¹⁰⁷ It operates more like a group therapy than a traditional classroom. Indeed, there are oddly no traditional educators or instructional staff involved. We learn, as we watch these alternative sessions with the at-risk kids, that the kids do not trust any of the adults in their lives or one another. They don’t know where they fit in within their own social spheres, let alone in society. They are simultaneously angry, afraid, and insecure. Namond’s biggest problem is that he is alone. He has no room to be himself—or define for himself who he wants to be.

Namond Brice is in many ways, the typical teenager with whom we can all identify. His story is a metaphor for teenage angst in the context of a high crime poor urban setting. He is intimidated by his parents, his teachers, law enforcement, neighborhood street kids, and even his friends, but he has learned to deflect his fears with humor and false bravado. In a pivotal scene, Namond and one of his friends get into a fight, and Namond breaks down crying.¹⁰⁸ He runs away only to be picked up by a police officer.¹⁰⁹ On another occasion, Namond is picked up on the corner after a police raid. Upon arrest, the officer tries to contact Namond’s mother to retrieve him but she is on a vacation in Atlantic City and refuses to answer his call. Namond is terrified of spending a night in jail and contacts his teacher and friend, Mr. “Bunny” Colvin, who he came to know as part of the University of Maryland Social Work project. Colvin and his wife eventually raise Namond and, with his father’s blessing, become his guardians.¹¹⁰

By the end of the fifth and final season, Namond is the only one of his “corner boy” friends who seems to be on a path to success, or even normalcy. The School of Social Work’s pilot project was designed to act as an intervention in the lives of these children, but it was not successful. The program ended prematurely when it was determined that the participating students were not being prepared for upcoming standardized tests.¹¹¹ However, even had the program not ended this way, it is unlikely that it could have successfully reversed years of socialization

¹⁰⁷ *Id.*

¹⁰⁸ *The Wire: That’s Got His Own*, *supra* note 20 (Season Four, Episode Twelve).

¹⁰⁹ *Id.*

¹¹⁰ *The Wire: Final Grades*, *supra* note 25 (Season Four, Episode Thirteen).

¹¹¹ *The Wire: A New Day* (HBO television broadcast Nov. 26, 2006) (Season Four, Episode Eleven).

and alienation. What made the difference for Namond was his relationship with the Colvins; otherwise, his opportunities for success in life would surely have degenerated further.

B. Inconclusive Research on Role Models and Mentors

Namond's story lends support to much of the discussion and literature regarding the importance of role models as transformative figures in the lives of young people, especially disadvantaged youth. Namond was fortunate that, among all the kids in the program, the Colvins took a liking to him. When the Colvins became his guardians, Namond won the lottery and became far more likely than his peers—Duquan, Randy, and Michael—to succeed. But what can educators and policymakers learn from Namond's experience? How can it be translated into a possible intervention?

The Colvins were more than guardians; they were role models. And Namond, even though he had involved parents, was in dire need of a mentor. *The Wire* teaches us that role models and mentors matter. The term role model, an individual worthy of imitation, was coined by sociologist Robert Merton.¹¹² At the time that *The Wire* was filmed, mentoring was proliferating as an intervention strategy.¹¹³ Many of us understand intuitively or anecdotally that role models are important for youth. A growing body of research is developing a theoretical approach to what types of mentoring and role modeling are most effective and why.¹¹⁴ A meta-analysis of mentoring programs conducted by sociologists corroborate the anecdotal evidence that mentoring relationships “can promote positive developmental trajectories.”¹¹⁵ Noting that mentoring programs vary widely, however, the authors urge caution and argue for additional research.¹¹⁶ Some programs are geared toward specific target populations,¹¹⁷ much like the at-risk program in which Namond participated. Others focus on a specific context or setting such as

¹¹² See Michael T. Kaufman, *Robert K. Merton, Versatile Sociologist and Father of the Focus Group, Dies at 92*, N.Y. TIMES (Feb. 24, 2003), <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/24/nyregion/robert-k-merton-versatile-sociologist-and-father-of-the-focus-group-dies-at-92.html> (last visited May 10, 2018).

¹¹³ See David L. DuBois, Nelson Portillo, Jean E. Rhodes, Naida Silverthorn & Jeffrey C. Valentine, *How Effective Are Mentoring Programs for Youth? A Systematic Assessment of the Evidence*, 12 PSYCHOL. SCI. PUB. INT. 57 (Aug. 2011).

¹¹⁴ See, e.g., Michael J. Karcher, Gabriel P. Kuperminc, Sharon G. Portwood, Cynthia L. Sipe & Andrea S. Taylor, *Mentoring Programs: A Framework to Inform Program Development, Research, and Evaluation*, 34 J. COMMUNITY PSYCHOL. 709 (2006).

¹¹⁵ DuBois et al., *supra* note 113, at 57.

¹¹⁶ *Id.* at 59.

¹¹⁷ *Id.*

schools¹¹⁸—again like the program in *The Wire*. Still others, like Naimond’s program, seek particular outcomes,¹¹⁹ such as academic achievement or delinquency prevention. Of course, like the program featured in *The Wire*, many programs adopt multiple approaches simultaneously.

The concept of role modeling or mentoring has infiltrated school policy and educational programs at all levels. Schools seek to hire more male teachers in the female-dominated profession to act as role models to boys. Schools present girls with positive images of women in math and science fields to encourage more girls to engage in STEM math and science. Big Brother and Big Sister weekend and after-school programs serve underprivileged communities. The research remains undeveloped regarding what forms of mentoring and role modeling are most successful, but *The Wire* provided numerous examples and settings for how a role model could help to alter the course of a young student’s life. Interestingly, *The Wire*’s examples often went further than this. They also demonstrated how mentoring provided meaning to the lives of the mentors. For example, in Season Three when Dennis “Cutty” Wise was released from prison after a lengthy sentence, his first instinct was to return to dealing drugs. He found that “the game had changed” and he no longer had the same capacity for violence that he did when he was younger.¹²⁰ After trying several law-abiding jobs, he found his passion when he opened a boxing gym for after-school boys in Season Four. This gym helped keep the children “off the streets,” but it also helped Cutty, as the mentor, remain engaged and productive in the community. Mentors can sometimes do for their charges what they cannot do for themselves. That process can be transformative.

C. A New Definition of the Pipeline: Training for Criminality

When a group of researchers from the University of Maryland School of Social Work appear at the middle school, one of the primary investigators who also serves as the classroom instructor is a doctoral student whose dissertation is on the “social alienation” theory among juveniles.¹²¹ As the researchers seek to better understand how the juveniles’ sense of alienation from school and other social institutions might

¹¹⁸ *Id.*

¹¹⁹ *Id.*

¹²⁰ *The Wire: Homecoming* (HBO television broadcast Oct. 31, 2004) (Season Three, Episode Six) (Cutty explains to his boss after failing to shoot Fruit, “The game ain’t in me no more, none of it.”).

¹²¹ See *The Wire: Corner Boys* (HBO television broadcast Nov. 5, 2006) (Season Four, Episode Eight). Social alienation is one of several theories advanced in the seventies and eighties to explain juvenile delinquency. See Madeline G. Aultman & Charles F. Wellford, *Towards an Integrated Model of Delinquency Causation: An Empirical Analysis*, 63 *SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL RESEARCH*

contribute to their misbehavior, Police Chief Colvin serves as a buffer from their aggression and acts as an authority figure in the classroom. Colvin acts as a liaison for the research group by helping to bridge their understanding of the school environment and the criminal activity in the city, and in so doing he uncovers a different type of socialization between the students and the school staff. This socialization provides another pipeline between schools and the criminal justice system.

One critical scene advances the theory of the different sort of pipeline between schools and criminal activity. At one point, the instructor asks Namond to put away a magazine he is shamelessly reading under the table.¹²² Namond's response is immediate: "I ain't reading no magazine."¹²³ When the lecturer pushes further, Namond responds, "What? It ain't even mine. It was laying here when I came in."¹²⁴ The class erupts into laughter.¹²⁵ However, Colvin finds this interaction telling. He notes that these kids are using school as their training grounds for the streets.¹²⁶ He argues that they spend all day "running games" on their teachers and administrators and practice "getting over" on authority figures.¹²⁷ He likens the teachers to street level police officers.¹²⁸ By the time these students graduate or dropout, they have mastered their approaches to arguing their ways out of trouble. They have learned how to circumvent school rules and social norms, either by not being caught or by saving face when they do.

In this version of the pipeline, students get a lot out of their compulsory education years. They gain and hone skills that will be useful to them in their "real lives," unlike much of what they learn in the rest of the curriculum. In addition to the typical middle school content, students learn how to interact with authority figures and how to navigate public institutions that will have significant power over their lives. Schools, as institutions, provide a training ground for engagement with law enforcement, criminal justice actors, housing departments, and government offices. In many instances, students develop adversarial relationships with teachers and administrators and later replicate those relationships in other institutionalized settings. Some students were lost in contexts that were non-adversarial and in which their well-honed

316 (1979).

¹²² *The Wire: Corner Boys*, *supra* note 121 (Season Four, Episode Eight).

¹²³ *Id.*

¹²⁴ *Id.*

¹²⁵ *Id.*

¹²⁶ *Id.*

¹²⁷ *Id.*

¹²⁸ *Id.*

aggression was not required. In one scene, Colvin took a group of students to an upscale Italian restaurant for dinner.¹²⁹ The students were awkward and uncomfortable as they realized just how unprepared they were to engage in the world outside of their neighborhoods. One of the goals of the alternative curriculum developed by the sociologists' program was the resocialization of the students in which they engaged in role play and simulations to practice new skills. One key goal of resocialization is to disrupt the pipeline by changing the adversarial relationship that many students have with school teachers and administrators. Colvin's relationship with the students is a prime example of this. One refreshing feature of *The Wire* is its effort not to make the teachers the villains. Indeed all of the teachers and school personnel we see, from the rookie math teacher, Mr. Pryzbylweski, to the senior matriarch and disciplinarian English teacher, Ms. Sampson, are engaged and care deeply about the students' education.¹³⁰

D. Curriculum and Learning

This pipeline to prison—or at least away from schools—also thrives when the material taught in school is so out of synch with the students' lived experiences that they can no longer justify wasting their time. The schools lose such children. In *The Wire*, Mr. Pryzbylowski, a rookie teacher, figures this out when he begins using the dice and simulation “crap games” to teach children math and probabilities.¹³¹ This is one of the rare instances in which the students become engaged in learning at school.

Student disengagement in the curriculum is an important concern. Yet *The Wire* makes clear that these children can learn under the right circumstances and motivations. Throughout Season Four, the show's writers model several excellent examples of education or learning that occur outside of the classroom. When Marlo Stanfield's henchmen and chief recruiters begin to teach Michael Lee and other street boys how to kill and anticipate danger, they construct an elaborate life-like simulation, devise an effective assessment tool, and then provide detailed feedback. Michael learns his lesson well.¹³²

¹²⁹ *The Wire: Know Your Place* (HBO television broadcast Nov. 12, 2006) (Season Four, Episode Nine).

¹³⁰ See generally, Season Four.

¹³¹ *The Wire: Unto Others*, *supra* note 24 (Season Four, Episode Seven).

¹³² *The Wire: That's Got His Own*, *supra* note 20 (Season Four, Episode Twelve) (The student, Michael, eventually surpasses the teacher when he anticipates his teacher's ambush and kills her first.).

In another example, Sherrod is an older homeless boy who begins to spend time with Bubbles, the local homeless drug addict.¹³³ They spend much time on petty theft and hustling to earn money for the next fix. When Bubbles learns that Sherrod cannot be trusted with cash because he is illiterate and cannot perform simple arithmetic, he forces Sherrod to return to school.¹³⁴ Sherrod drops out of school, believing he is unable to learn.¹³⁵ Bubbles eventually teaches Sherrod how to handle the money, even though Sherrod was unable to learn this in school.¹³⁶ This can also be seen through Cutty, who opens a boxing gym for youth and makes great progress in teaching the boys the art of boxing, self-defense, and discipline.¹³⁷ He also teaches them many of the life skills and socialization that they need to succeed.

VII. MISSING CHARACTERS: CORNER GIRLS?

There are very few central female characters in *The Wire*. Women and girls appear as girlfriends, sisters, mothers (usually bad mothers), and occasionally lower ranked police officers, journalists, or teachers. The women with power on the show owed that power to a connection with a powerful man.¹³⁸ Rarely were the women of *The Wire* given roles that drove the plot, with agency over their lives or situations. This is true for the entire series, and Season Four is no exception. In the small group of ten students tracked for the grant-funded research project, there are two girls: Zenobia and Chandra. They have minor speaking roles and serve predominantly as part of the background. We learn very little about their lives; the school girls in this season are nearly invisible.

This glaring omission is important for several reasons. The reality is that poor girls from underrepresented minority groups also face critical challenges in the educational system that lead them disproportionately into the criminal justice system. Black girls are the fastest growing demographic group in the criminal justice system,¹³⁹ despite

¹³³ *The Wire: Soft Eyes*, *supra* note 61 (Season Four, Episode Two).

¹³⁴ *Id.*

¹³⁵ *The Wire: Refugees* (HBO television broadcast Oct. 1, 2006) (Season Four, Episode Four).

¹³⁶ *The Wire: A New Day*, *supra* note 111 (Season Four, Episode Eleven).

¹³⁷ *The Wire: Soft Eyes*, *supra* note 61 (Season Four, Episode Two).

¹³⁸ Baltimore Detective Shakima “Kima” Greggs is a notable exception—one that became important when she came into conflict with the more senior Detective McNulty.

¹³⁹ See KIMBERLÉ WILLIAMS CRENSHAW, PRISCILLA OCEN & JYOTI NANDA, AFR. AM. POL’Y F., BLACK GIRLS MATTER: PUSHED OUT, OVERPOLICED AND UNDERPROTECTED at 6 (2015), http://www.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/legacy/files/public_affairs/2015/february_2015/black_girls_matter_report_2.4.15.pdf [<http://perma.cc/VU6P-6L2A>].

declining crime rates. Upon entering the criminal justice system, black girls are sentenced more severely than any other group of girls.¹⁴⁰

Of course, girls face many of the same challenges boys face in poor urban settings, but they also encounter challenges specific to being female. The creators of the show missed an important opportunity to showcase some of the challenges and circumstances that occur at the intersectionality of race, class, and gender in our education system. Intersectionality theory, a term coined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, critiques the use of exclusive categories (such as race and gender) to understand and analyze the experiences of individuals whose life experiences are complicated by membership in several categories.¹⁴¹ In other words, the experiences of black girls cannot fully be understood as the experiences of blacks or the experience of girls but rather as a set of experiences that may differ in both kind and degree to that of other blacks and other girls. Individuals who reside demographically at the intersection of multiple groups are therefore typically under-studied and misunderstood.

In recent years, Crenshaw and other scholars have applied intersectionality to the experiences of girls of color—mostly black and Latino girls—in an effort to highlight the specific impact of punitive school policies on black girls and girls of color. They published a report along these lines, entitled *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected*.¹⁴² In *Black Girls Matter*, Crenshaw and her collaborators seek to illuminate the differential treatment black and Latino girls received in school and how this treatment leads them to drop out or be cast out into lives of “low-wage work, unemployment, and incarceration.”¹⁴³ They argue that the existing scholarly literature fails to address the specific risks and vulnerabilities that girls face or the different interventions girls might require.¹⁴⁴

The report listed several noteworthy observations. Although the increased police presence and security measures in schools impacts the environment for all students, girls reported that the increased levels of law enforcement personnel (likely more often adult males) and the routine security measures (metal detectors or routine searches) at school entrances made them feel less safe.¹⁴⁵ Sexual harassment and assault

¹⁴⁰ *Id.*

¹⁴¹ See Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, 1989 U. CHI. LEGAL F. 139 (1989), <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8/> [http://perma.cc/33CB-Y37M].

¹⁴² Crenshaw et al., *supra* note 139.

¹⁴³ *Id.* at 8.

¹⁴⁴ *Id.*

¹⁴⁵ *Id.* at 10.

were particular concerns raised by girls.¹⁴⁶ Black and Latino girls experienced a heightened level of sexualized trauma that interfered with their ability to complete schooling.¹⁴⁷ Also interfering with learning and likely a contribution to the achievement gap was the burden of family obligations disproportionately placed on poor girls of color, as compared to their male or their white counterparts.¹⁴⁸ With lower budgets for many social safety net programs, girls in the family are more likely to bear the burden of caretaking responsibilities when the family is impacted by addiction, deportation, or incarceration.¹⁴⁹

Some of these risk factors, like pregnancy, might be specific to girls, but even those factors that boys and girls share can take on different forms when experienced by girls. School discipline practices provide a worthy example. The Department of Education statistics on out-of-school suspensions reveal part of the story. Black boys are the group most likely to face school suspension for disciplinary reasons.¹⁵⁰ Black boys are suspended at three times the rate of white boys.¹⁵¹ Black girls, on the other hand, are suspended at seven times the rate of white girls.¹⁵² This disparity contributes significantly to the school-to-prison pipeline when it comes to girls. “The single largest predictor of later arrest among adolescent females is having been suspended, expelled, or held back during middle school years.”¹⁵³ As Crenshaw explains, the data “reveal that in some cases, race may be a more significant factor for females than it is for males.”¹⁵⁴

The race versus gender distinction is helpful, but it is only once we start taking the girls’ experiences seriously that we can discover additional issues. For black girls, their fate during school proceedings depends not only on being black and female, but varies based on *the kind* of black female they are. Researchers at Villanova University and the University of Iowa, for example, found that dark skin color was an important variable for black girls.¹⁵⁵ Data from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent

¹⁴⁶ *Id.*

¹⁴⁷ *Id.* at 11.

¹⁴⁸ *Id.*

¹⁴⁹ *Id.* at 38.

¹⁵⁰ Crenshaw et al., *supra* note 139, at 5.

¹⁵¹ *Id.* at 17.

¹⁵² MISHA N. INNISS-THOMPSON, NAT’L BLACK WOMEN’S JUST. INST., SUMMARY OF DISCIPLINE DATA FOR GIRLS IN U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS: AN ANALYSIS FROM THE 2013-14 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS DATA COLLECTION at 11 (Sep. 2017), https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/0c71ee_e008841ccc434f08ac76d59199a0c2dc.pdf [<http://perma.cc/TY9K-XJPY>].

¹⁵³ Wald & Losen, *supra* note 88, at 11.

¹⁵⁴ Crenshaw et al., *supra* note 139, at 17.

¹⁵⁵ Lance Hannon, Robert DeFina & Sarah Bruch, *The Relationship Between Skin Tone and School Suspension for African Americans*, 5 RACE & SOC. PROBS. 281 (2013).

Health revealed that black girls with dark skin were three times more likely to be suspended than black girls with light skin.¹⁵⁶ The color distinction was not as important for black males as it was for black females. The likelihood of suspension for a black male rises from .48 if his complexion is light to .69 if it is dark, a 45% increase.¹⁵⁷ In contrast, for black girls, the likelihood of suspension rises from .28 if her complexion is light to .58 if it is dark, a 107% increase.¹⁵⁸ In an interview, sociologist Lance Hannon explained this discrepancy in part by noting that when black girls with dark skin misbehave, “there’s a certain concern about their boyish aggressiveness” or that “they don’t know their place as a female, as a woman.”¹⁵⁹ Some argue that black girls face higher risks of suspension and expulsion for subjective behavioral infractions,¹⁶⁰ and are arrested or charged with less severe infractions at higher rates.¹⁶¹ This confirms that risk factors for black and Latino girls are often complicated and warrant independent study. Understanding how various expectations and pressures placed on girls—whether it is by virtue of their race, class, color, mental health, sexual orientation, or notions of gender roles—impact their experiences in schools will allow policymakers and educators to better help them succeed.

Although none of the primary child characters are girls, *The Wire* nevertheless exposes the gendered vulnerability of girls in one harrowing scene. Despite the relative safety of schools as compared to the streets and the homes of many disadvantaged students,¹⁶² the only depiction of serious physical violence within the school during the entire season occurs between two girls.¹⁶³ In Episode Three of Season Four, we are introduced to the girls.¹⁶⁴ Chiquan has a light-skinned complexion,

¹⁵⁶ *Id.* at 292.

¹⁵⁷ *Id.* at 288.

¹⁵⁸ *Id.*

¹⁵⁹ Tanzina Vega, *Schools’ Discipline for Girls Differs by Race and Hue*, N.Y. TIMES (Dec. 10, 2014), <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/11/us/school-discipline-to-girls-differs-between-and-with-in-races.html> (last visited May 10, 2018).

¹⁶⁰ *Id.* (quoting Professor Jamilia Blake); see also Jamilia J. Blake, Bettie Ray Butler, Chance W. Lewis & Alicia Darenbourg, *Unmasking the Inequitable Discipline Experiences of Urban Black Girls: Implications for Urban Educational Stakeholders*, 43 URB. REV. 90, 90–94 (2011).

¹⁶¹ *Id.*

¹⁶² Musu-Gillette et al., *supra* note 30.

¹⁶³ *The Wire: Home Rooms*, *supra* note 17 (Season Four, Episode Three); see also *The Wire: Alliances*, *supra* note 19 (Season Four, Episode Five) (containing another scene—also involving a girl—that occurs off camera in which several boys engage in unspecified sexual behavior in the bathroom with an unpopular girl. We aren’t told much about what happens in the bathroom but because the victim is a minor, we must presume the acts to be nonconsensual.).

¹⁶⁴ *The Wire: Home Rooms*, *supra* note 17 (Season Four, Episode Three).

long straight hair pulled back in a ponytail, is well-dressed and seemingly popular.¹⁶⁵ She incessantly teases and bullies another girl, Laetitia. Laetitia is dark-skinned, overweight, and rocks in a chair as if very emotionally disturbed.¹⁶⁶ Among other things, Chiquan openly uses the reflection from the face of her expensive watch to flash sunlight into Laetitia's eyes.¹⁶⁷ When Laetitia has had enough of Chiquan's wisecracks and bullying, she attacks Chiquan with a box cutter by slashing her beautiful face.¹⁶⁸ It is a chaotic and bloody scene that ends with one of the teachers directing a student to "call 911."¹⁶⁹ It provides a brief window into a few of the elements—race, class, gender, social alienation, bullying, and mental health to name just a few—that impact girls in urban schools. *The Wire* lost an important opportunity in its failure to present a richer portrayal of the plight of girls in addition to the plight of boys.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Schools can play a formidable role in the academic and social development of children in both positive and negative ways. The "school to prison pipeline" theory justifiably critiques the negative ways in which the educational system can propel poor and disadvantaged children into the prison system. However, schools continue to do far more good than harm in the lives of most vulnerable students. Season Four of *The Wire*, a show widely regarded as an exposé of the worst that Baltimore corruption and violence have to offer, ironically illustrates through the lives of several characters many of the benefits of schools. Schools provide more safety for students than most other places. Even when a life of crime seems practically inevitable, regular school attendance can delay criminality and should forestall contact with the criminal justice system rather than facilitate it. In addition to a formal education, schools also provide mentoring and role models, which have been shown to enhance student success. *The Wire*, despite its focus on boys to the exclusion of girls, teaches us how schools can and have helped to enhance the lives of vulnerable children.

¹⁶⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶⁶ *Id.*

¹⁶⁷ *Id.*

¹⁶⁸ *Id.*

¹⁶⁹ *Id.*

