
PREFACE

It is only in recent human history that we have acknowledged, through scientific discovery, that children are not simply small adults and that they have unique developmental stages. More importantly, those studying neurology and the brain recently theorized (and rightfully so) that the frontal lobe, the location for decision making, self-monitoring, and self-control, is not fully developed until the age of 25. This means that the arbitrary age of 18, used in the criminal justice system to distinguish between juvenile and adult offenders, is something that no doubt baffles many of us who study juvenile delinquency. However, for the purposes of this book and keeping with legal definitions in the United States, we will be looking primarily at criminal behaviors of those under the age of 18 and their treatment when they are caught by school officials, parental units,¹ law enforcement, and/or juvenile authorities.

This book is somewhat different from other juvenile delinquency books in that it is interdisciplinary, looking at juvenile offending through the scholarly lenses of sociology, criminal justice, and developmental and physiological psychology. It is important to note that whether an individual is treated as a child or as a young adult when they break the law, if they end up in any part of the criminal justice system, including in the juvenile courts, it often has long-term consequences on social and intellectual development, making it difficult, though not entirely impossible, to grow up to be a productive and functioning adult. As Aizer and Doyle's (2015²) research found, approximately 40% of juveniles who have served time in juvenile detention will be incarcerated in adult prison by the time they are 25.

Though some detention centers for children in the United States look more like residential homes and have pleasant decors, others are foreboding and sterile. And like what we see in schools, not all staff working in juvenile corrections are adept at dealing with any range of behavior problems, including those that are a result of psychiatric or neurological disorders. Hence, we spend time in this book looking at several options other than zero-tolerance policies and juvenile detention, including

¹ You will note throughout this book that I refer to the adults who are responsible for the minors in their care as "parental units," as currently we cannot assume that all parents are biological or adoptive. There are any number of children in the United States who are being raised by others, including by extended family members (e.g., grandparents). In some cases, it may be family friends or foster parents who are raising the child or adolescent as court-ordered guardians, depending on the circumstances.

² Aizer, A., and J. J. Doyle (2015). "Juvenile incarceration, human capital and future crime: Evidence from randomly-assigned judges." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. Vol. 130, Issue 2. DOI: 10.1093/qje/qjv003.

preventative measures. However, admittedly, the worst juvenile detention center, for some children, is still the best alternative, if their home lives are in complete shambles or if they have committed seriously violent offenses.

Though the language we use in the juvenile justice system is “softer,” we should not mistake it for being more lenient. In theory, the juvenile justice system is intended to rehabilitate young offenders. In the adult system, as much as lip service is given to rehabilitation, the primary goal is to punish adult offenders. For students reading this book and taking a course in juvenile delinquency who intend to work with this population in their chosen profession, the intent is to offer insight into how to prevent a juvenile from offending in the first place, by addressing the social problems contributing to delinquency, and when they do offend, finding the best alternative possible other than detention.

We also provide a peek behind the curtain of systems of punishment for juveniles in other countries. As students will no doubt discover, in some countries juveniles are provided with several services to rehabilitate them. In other countries, they will be thrown into prison with adult offenders, left to fend for themselves. If students have taken a course in penology or corrections, they will have an opportunity as well to make comparisons between the adult and juvenile justice systems in the United States. It is important to do so, as an unfortunate number of juvenile offenders will age into an adult prison; more alarming, juveniles who have committed the most horrific of crimes may be sent to the adult criminal justice system. If they are found guilty of their crimes, and depending on the jurisdiction, children as young as 12 can be sent to adult prison, before some of them have even reached puberty.

CHAPTER ORGANIZATION

The textbook chapters are designed to offer the richest reading experience for the different styles of learning students have today, including those with various learning disabilities. The organization of the chapters is as follows:

- **Chapter Objectives** guide the reader to the most important goals of the chapter.
- **Key Terms** define vocabulary that is commonly used in juvenile delinquency and juvenile justice. Instructors will note that we have also included definitions to some words that we cannot assume students are familiar with that are not related to juvenile delinquency, but will help them better grasp their relevance in the course.
- **Chapter Summaries** very briefly give a quick overview of the chapter and direct the student to the more important general information contained in them.

- **Discussion Questions** in this section there are a number of questions related to the content of the chapter. These are intended to be used in class discussions, debates, as homework assignments, and/or short answer responses, essays on exams. In some cases, the questions are intended to encourage students to conduct outside research.
- **In the Media** sections provide recent cases of juvenile delinquency or public responses and moral panics centered on extreme types of delinquent behavior.
- **International Perspectives on Juvenile Justice** offer cross-cultural, cross-national views of the treatment of juvenile offenders, as well as a peek behind the walls of juvenile detention centers in other countries around the world.
- **References and Suggested Readings** at the end of each chapter are not only intended to cite the sources used but to encourage students to research topics further, and give them a start for their research papers in class.

You will note that I have included “trigger warnings” in some chapters. Though we expect students in criminal justice, sociology, and social work to be able to handle the harsh realities of juvenile offenders and criminal offending, I do not want to limit this textbook to those students. In the last several years, I have included a statement in my syllabi that there might be some materials discussed in the course (e.g., juvenile delinquency, child abuse, punishment and corrections) that might be more than unpleasant—they might trigger anxiety in students, particularly those who have been victimized. We cannot talk juvenile offending without diving into the unpleasant and disturbing underbelly of society.