Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Criminology and Criminal Justice

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Schools on the Frontlines of Governance: How the Convergence of Criminal Justice and Education Shapes Adolescent Perceptions and Behavior

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Abstract
Theories of legal socialization posit that individuals’ interactions with both nonlegal (e.g., teachers) and legal (e.g., police officers) authorities impact our broader orientation towards governance our compliance with rules and laws. Examining the process of legal socialization in adolescents is critical for understanding individuals’ relationships with major institutions of social control, and further, predicting delinquency. Extant literature tends to consider legal socialization in the school and in interactions with the police as distinct processes related to offending, neglecting the potential influence of school contextual factors; and yet, because the incorporation of carceral features (e.g., exclusionary discipline, restrictive security, and enhanced presence of police) can expose youth to a convergence in criminal justice and education institutions, the school context may have a critical influence on how individuals’ perceptions of authorities as procedurally just or unjust influence their beliefs concerning authorities’ legitimacy, their broader assessments of fairness in American society, and in turn, their behavior.

The dissertation unifies two disparate lines of research considering individuals’ perceptions of procedural justice in policing and criminalizing school environments to develop a novel theoretical model. First, the model outlines two distinct processes of legal socialization regarding the school and the criminal justice system in which youth perceptions of school personnel and police (i.e., the authority figures of each of these domains) affect youth delinquency through two different intervening mechanisms—authority legitimacy and perceptions of fairness in the US. Second, the model considers how youth exposure to a carceral school environment, as an indicator of criminal justice and school authorities’ control, may condition these processes. Third, the model outlines several paths in which youth perceptions of one type of authority may influence their noncompliance or delinquency in another domain. Using individual- and school-level data from the University of Missouri-St. Louis Comprehensive School Safety Initiative, a series of path models are estimated to test the components of the theoretical argument.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
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