Youth & Society
2023, Vol. 55(6) 1136–1154

DOI: 10.1177/0044118X221082980
journals.sagepub.com/home/yas
SAGE

"You Selling?": Snack Sales and the Construction of Deviance in a High School

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Abstract

Youths' affinity for snack foods is well-documented; in various contexts, they sell chips, candy, and other goods. Adults may frame such sales as either entrepreneurial or deviant, which can contribute to positive youth development (on one hand) or cycles of disengagement and criminalization (on the other). Drawing on ethnographic and interview data from Hamilton High School, I show how adults' criminalization of snack sales led the activity to more closely resemble that which they feared: drug sales. Snack sales constitute one way in which youth exercise agency in the face of broad institutional control, leading some to challenge the legitimacy of the school overall. These findings represent a case of how youth experience "criminalized childhoods" in a school context.

Keywords

high school, deviance, school criminalization, qualitative methods, ethnography

Introduction

Doritos, Takis, Cheetos, and Skittles: despite their nutritional shortcomings, these snacks offer captivating tastes, interesting textures, and a sense—no matter how fleeting—of satisfaction. It is unsurprising, then, that they are

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popular among students in the near south suburbs of Chicago who attend Hamilton High School (a pseudonym). Yet Hamilton's administration has prohibited snack sales in the school, penalizing sellers with a range of punishments. Undeterred, some enterprising youth continue to hawk their wares.

Adult responses determine whether these sales are labeled as deviant or entrepreneurial. Such decisions have durable consequences, as youth sanctioned for "deviant" behaviors in school are more likely to become enmeshed in the criminal justice system as adults (Mowen et al., 2020; Sampson & Laub, 1990). In this paper, I use the seemingly-innocuous case of snack sales to demonstrate how Black, Hispanic, and poor white youth experience "criminalized childhoods," contributing to the classed and racialized stratification of childhood wellbeing (Dinsmore & Pugh, 2021, p.13). Detailing how adults' responses to snack sales shape students' perceptions of their schools and themselves, I argue that school authorities "manage" the imagined, potential failures of marginalized youth via concern about youth moving from snack sales to drug sales (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2017; Gardner, 2010). I show how adults' punishment of snack sales make the activity more closely resemble that which they feared—drug dealing—with youth using elaborate strategies to hide sales, build networks of sellers, and develop a verbal shorthand around the market. Ultimately, these findings demonstrate how adult responses to youth behaviors can produce a stigma of deviance around activities that, in other contexts, are permitted or even lauded.

Background

Youth spend a considerable portion of their lives in schools, and inevitably need to eat while there. School-provided meals are an important source of nutrition for many students, yet are infamous for their poor quality (Ruis, 2017). Some students, dissatisfied with the school's offerings, bring outside food—either for sale or their own consumption. For example, in the UK, Fletcher et al. describe the presence of snack "black markets" arising after new restrictions on school food (2014, p. 506). Beyond their obvious appeals, these "black markets" offer "a new source of identity, 'thrills' and opposition to school" (Fletcher et al., 2014: 507). Food constitutes an important social and cultural object for kids, at different times representing a "gift, identity marker, and object of play," as well as a way to differentiate themselves from adults (Best, 2017, p. 3).

Food represents a key domain for moral regulation because its consumption is universal yet highly varied; everybody eats, but norms, patterns, and beliefs about food are wide-ranging. In schools, snacks are a well-documented

site of moralization, ranging from parents' choices about what goes into their children's lunches (Harman & Cappellini, 2015), to teachers' efforts to enforce "healthy" eating (Oncini, 2021), to youths' use of snacks to establish or cement friendships and demarcate group boundaries (Nukaga, 2008; Oncini, 2020; Thorne, 1993). Food's variable meanings present kids with additional challenges, such as potentially facing ridicule over consuming school-provided lunch (Bailey-Davis et al., 2013). Food is thus one of the many domains in which young people must negotiate their relationship to sociocultural institutions. It is unsurprising, then, that snack sales faced significant regulation at Hamilton.

Schools are not alone in their authority to limit what their charges can consume; prisons also restrict the sales and consumption of foods. In prisons, "covert practices aimed at diluting or circumventing prison power structures" are common forms of resistance (Gibson-Light, 2018: 204). One such practice is the use of ramen noodles as informal currency. Attempts to control individuals' consumption habits in these contexts represent efforts to repress their agency; individuals' strategies for subverting these efforts thus constitute important ways of re-asserting their agency and working to change the very systems that criminalize them (Rios, 2011). Prisons and schools both feature "architecture and management. . .which are aimed at reducing hostility and maintaining tentative calm," thus "facilitating subtler forms of resistance" such as the sale of comestibles (Gibson-Light, 2018, p. 207). Defiance of food rules challenges the prevailing power structures of the institution. In other words, while food sales may initially seem trivial, they in fact represent an important strategy of resistance.

Familiarizing students with the norms of prison environments is one aspect of the school-to-prison pipeline, made more salient by the fact that school represents "the predominant institution where stigmatizing labels are likely to be ascribed" (Duxbury & Haynie, 2020, p. 3). Scholars have noted two main pathways through which school punishments contribute to a "cycle of disengagement" (Morris & Perry, 2017, p. 128). First, punishment encourages selection into academically underperforming peer groups that shape future behaviors (Duxbury & Haynie, 2020; Fergusson et al., 2007). Second, being labeled "deviant" leaves youth vulnerable to increased surveillance (and consequently, punishment) within and beyond the school (Ferguson, 2000; Hirschfield, 2008; Kupchik, 2010; Mittleman, 2018; Rios, 2011). Integrating these literatures shows how youth who engage in deviant behaviors tend to bear stigmatized labels that invite special scrutiny from adults *and* are channeled toward "deviant" peers, strengthening their association with deviant networks and norms (Payne & Welch, 2016). Together, these processes contribute to a "downward spiral" (Mittleman, 2018, p.183; see

also Rios, 2011) or a "negative cycle" (Way, 2011, p. 366) shaping youths' trajectories into adulthood. School sanctions are thus not merely a response to deviance; "[t]hey actually help produce it" (Mittleman, 2018, p. 184).

Notably, such cycles or spirals are not inevitable. School authorities make decisions about which behaviors to permit and which to prohibit. They could treat snack sales as an opportunity to learn about money management, business ethics, and goal setting—three of the skills that the Girl Scouts tout in their well-known cookie sales (Girl Scouts, n.d). Instead, at Hamilton, adults choose to reprimand youth-led food sales. Snack sales thus represent one instance of how youth experience "criminalized childhoods" (Dinsmore & Pugh, 2021, p. 13). Non-criminal student behavior can become stigmatized through a process known as "school criminalization," which occurs when adults frame problems and implement solutions oriented around the logic of crime control (Hirschfield, 2008; Simon, 2007, p. 81), thus treating students as potential future criminals (ACLU, 2017). Schools can thus either "cultivate and enhance social and academic skills. . . leading to a greater likelihood of prosocial behavior" (Payne & Welch, 2016, p. 749) on the one hand, or push children toward a "spiral of hypercriminalization and punishment" on the other (Rios, 2011, p. xv).

In this paper, I investigate how Hamilton High School students carried out illicit snack sales and demonstrate how faculty and staff constructed snack sales as deviant under certain conditions. Following labeling theory, I understand deviance as "a characteristic applied to a behavior rather than one inherent to a behavior" (Rocheleau & Chavez, 2015, p. 169). At times, adults permitted snack sales and even celebrated them as legitimate entrepreneurial activities—when they raised funds for extracurricular activities. Apart from these instances, adults' criminalizing responses to snack sales made the activity more closely resemble that which they feared—drug sales—ultimately leading some students to reject the school's legitimacy.

Context, Data, and Methods

Hamilton High School is a public school in the near south suburbs of Chicago. It serves roughly 1,800 students, of whom approximately 60% are Hispanic, 30% are Black, and fewer than 10% are white. Eighty percent of students come from low-income families. Hamilton is a Title I school. Its teaching corps is predominantly comprised of white women, who on average earn close to $100,000 annually. There are thus noticeable differences between teachers and students in terms of race, ethnicity, and social class.

Schools are racialized organizations (Ray 2019), and Hamilton specifically represents an "intensely segregated" school (Orfield & Jarvie, 2020). In

this organizational context, the student position—one associated with Blackness and Latinidad—is devalued relative to white-coded adult roles. While white students reap social rewards from their whiteness, at Hamilton they simultaneously occupy a stigmatized position due to their structural location within the majority-non-white student body. Thus, the "student" role is devalued in the racial hierarchy at Hamilton, even as students' experiences of this racialization differ. White students' generally poor and working-class backgrounds contributed to the devaluation of the student role. Although certain aspects of students' experiences at Hamilton clearly differed across racial/ethnic groups, I did not observe significant differences in students' participation in, or adults' responses to, snack sales by student race/ethnicity. Therefore, the findings presented below are not disaggregated by these features.

I draw primarily on observational and interview data collected from 2019 to 2020. Prior to the school's closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I spent 112 days at Hamilton, observing daily activities throughout the school and at after-school events. I typically visited for full days, taking fieldnotes on my laptop which I expanded in the evenings. These data are part of a larger study of Hamilton including 3 years of observations, interviews, and administrative data. The larger study concerns students' experiences of schooling prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2019 to 2020 school year represents the first year of the study, during which 123 students and 109 adults enrolled. Among these 232 individuals, I closely observed fifty as members of my focal sub-sample. I selected these 30 students and 20 adults from the broader ethnographic sample to help me learn about different groups' experiences in the school. I was interested in whether patterns of interaction differed by gender, race/ethnicity, grade level (for students), and job type (for adults). Thus, the focal sub-sample was purposively constructed to include roughly equal numbers of students across grade level, gender, and race/ethnicity, as well as adults representing different job types. The 30 students consisted of 15 boys, 14 girls, and 1 non-binary student; 10 of these students were Hispanic, 10 were Black, and 10 were white; 9 were freshmen, 6 were sophomores, 6 were juniors, and 9 were seniors. The 20 adults included 10 teachers, 4 administrators, 4 security guards, 1 social worker, and 1 teacher's aide. In addition to close observations, I also interviewed these respondents, with the exception of two students I could not reach after the school's closure. This yielded 48 interviews addressing respondents' perceptions of the school, themselves, and their relationships with others. Interviews typically lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour; half of them (24) took place by phone. Interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. See Tables 1 and 2 for descriptions of the student and adult

interviewees, respectively. While nearly all of the data presented below came from year 1 of the study (2019–2020), some were collected during years 2 and 3 of the study.

I used flexible coding procedures to analyze the data in NVivo 12. Following Timmermans and Tavory's (2012) conception of "abductive analysis," as well as Deterding and Waters' (2021) description of flexible coding procedures, I developed analytic codes via multiple strategies, sometimes drawing on theories from the literature (e.g., "status power" [Milner, 2015]), sometimes identifying patterns I noticed in the field (e.g., "digital disengagement"), and sometimes noting themes of personal interest to me (e.g., "snacks"). I coded interviews and fieldnotes concurrently with data collection, pivoting primarily toward analysis after the school's closure in March 2020. I focused my attention on those "observational surprises or puzzles" that raised questions in light of established patterns and theories in the literature (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, 169). One such surprise arose when Chris, a 10th-grade student, told me about what he called "the brownie incident" (described below). The "brownie incident" helped me understand how adults built a stigma around snack sales, and I then returned to the ethnographic data to identify other instances and mentions of snack sales. Once compiled, I realized that students and adults judged the activity quite differently—as something quotidian versus something risky. Ultimately, this revealed snack sales as one way that youth at Hamilton—like other marginalized youth—experience criminalized childhoods (Dinsmore & Pugh, 2021).

Findings

Adults' prohibitions of, and beliefs about, snack sales shaped how students evaluated the school's legitimacy. I first describe the operations of the snack market at Hamilton in both covert and overt scenarios, then detail how adults responded to snack sales, highlighting ties to criminality. Finally, I address how students evaluated adults' responses to snack sales, showing how adults' criminalization of snack sales led some students to challenge the school's legitimacy in terms of its disciplinary apparatus and its ability to prepare them for the future.

The Operations of the Snack Market

I met Carlos, a ninth grader, when I found him sulking in the deans' office one mid-September afternoon. Security had escorted him there for selling snacks

Table 1. Student Focal Sub-Sample.

Pseudonym	Grade	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Interview Date
Naomi	9	Black	F	03/09/20
TaKiana	9	Black	F	11/08/19
Xavion	9	Black	M	03/09/20
Emma	9	Hispanic	F	05/15/20
Dani	9	Hispanic	NB	04/29/20
Carlos	9	Hispanic	M	11/20/19
May	9	White	F	12/17/19
Alex	9	White	F	03/09/20
Andrew	9	White	M	02/27/20
Kayla	10	Black	F	01/10/20
Chris	10	Black	M	02/06/20
Alejandra	10	Hispanic	F	05/07/20
Miguel	10	Hispanic	M	N/A
Shauna	10	White	F	02/25/20
Simon	10	White	M	02/11/20
Latasia	11	Black	F	03/09/20
Damian	11	Black	M	11/08/19
Sofía	11	Hispanic	F	02/21/20
Gabriel	11	Hispanic	M	05/07/20
Mark	11	White	M	N/A
Aidan	11	White	M	02/21/20
Keandra	12	Black	F	05/21/20
Marquise	12	Black	M	10/22/19
Asaad	12	Black	M	10/25/19
Olivia	12	Hispanic	F	11/12/19
Lucas	12	Hispanic	M	09/06/19
Diego	12	Hispanic	M	05/13/20
Liana	12	White	F	03/10/20
Audrey	12	White	F	11/07/19
Dan	12	White	M	05/13/20
Totals	9th: 9			
	10th: 6	Black: 10	F: 14	
	11th: 6	Hispanic: 10	NB: 1	
	12th: 9	White: 10	M: 15	
	30	30	30	28

in the cafeteria. Surprised and worried about his punishment, he did not know there was a rule barring snack sales. It is buried in the school's handbook in an obscure section about co-curricular activities, reading:

Table 2. Faculty/Staff Focal Sub-Sample.

Pseudonym	Job	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Interview Date
Mr. Rodriguez	Administrator	Hispanic	M	04/30/20
Mr. Evans	Administrator	White	M	05/11/20
Mr. Daniels	Administrator	White	M	05/15/20
Ms. England	Administrator	White	F	05/28/20
Ms. Park	Teacher (English)	Black	F	04/04/20
Ms. Gaines	Teacher (English)	White	F	02/21/20
Mr. Duncan	Teacher (English)	White	M	04/30/20
Ms. Ingram	Teacher (Math)	White	F	05/20/20
Mr. Jones	Teacher (Math)	White	M	02/20/20
Ms. Kelly	Teacher (Music)	White	F	05/27/20
Ms. Manning	Teacher (Foreign Lang.)	White	F	04/30/20
Mr. Griffin	Teacher (Tech. Ed)	White	M	05/01/20
Mr. Greene	Teacher (Music)	White	M	06/01/20
Ms. Walker	Teacher (Special Ed)	White	F	04/27/20
Ms. Shaw	Teacher's Aide	Black	F	04/22/20
Jamie	Security Guard	Black	M	04/07/20
Elijah	Security Guard	Black	M	03/31/20
Charlie	Security Guard	White	M	04/15/20
Luis	Security Guard	Hispanic	M	09/13/19
Ms. Garcia	Social Worker	Hispanic	F	05/18/20
Totals	Admin: 4			
	Teachers: 10			
	Teacher's Aide: 1	Black: 4		
	Security Guards: 4	Hispanic: 3	F: 10	
	Social Worker: 1	White: 13	M: 10	
	20	20	20	20

> Students who attend co-curricular activities are expected to follow district rules and regulations. Students who violate these rules will forfeit the privilege to attend or participate in co-curricular activities for a period of time and/or will be subject to other disciplinary action. . . Sales of any merchandise items in school must be sponsored by [school] organizations and be authorized by the designated [administrator]. Students who violate this policy may have the items confiscated and be subject to disciplinary action.

The "disciplinary action" that students face varies widely. In Carlos' case, the outcome was relatively favorable. As a freshman, administrators understood that he may not know about the rule. They decided that Carlos' mom would remove him from school for the remainder of the day; he was warned against

selling snacks in the future. Although this sanction meant that Carlos would miss important classwork and peer interactions, it was noticeably more lenient than the standard consequence: in-school suspension.

With such high penalties for snack sales, sellers typically took great pains to obscure them, huddling against lockers or passing goods beneath desks. At times, their strategies for avoiding detection demonstrated great sophistication:

> In English class, one girl whispered to another ordering "the hot chips and a candy." They specified the items, then the buyer presented a plan: "Alright, I'mma bring my bag over there." The buyer walked to a third girl's desk and took a single Cheeto. Having established her alibi – she was walking around to take a bite of her friend's snack – the buyer subtly slid two dollars onto the seller's desk, and placed her backpack beside it. She returned to her seat empty-handed, knowing what the next classroom activity would entail. Moments later, the teacher began a game that required students to physically reorganize. The buyer took this opportunity to pick up her backpack – now containing the snacks the buyer had discreetly placed inside it. While doing so, she told the teacher an off-topic story, practicing misdirection like a magician. (Fieldnotes)

As this incident highlights, the *consumption* of snacks was widely permitted (despite being prohibited outside of the cafeteria); thus, the buyer could take a Cheeto from her friend without consequence. The *sale* of snacks, however, had to be disguised. Both the buyer and seller knew how to avoid detection.

The exception to these obscuring strategies occurred in the packed hallways between classes. During these "passing periods," a thriving snack market was visible to all:

> Outside of choir class, a girl called out "I got chips, I got juice!" She shook her backpack to draw attention to the goods. A boy bought a drink, then another boy approached. "Hey, you got hot Doritos?" he asked. She nodded. "Lemme get one of those," the boy said, handing her a dollar. She accepted the dollar and handed him the Doritos. (Fieldnotes)

While aware of it, adults were largely helpless to control sales during the rush, resulting in something of an open-air snack market. Melissa—a senior—described the ubiquity of this market:

> Melissa: It's against the rules to, but some kids sell chips or like snacks for extra cash.
> Researcher: Right.
> Melissa: And they know it's against the rules, too, but they just do it anyways. And everyone buys it from 'em. It's like a rite of passage in Hamilton.

Participating in this "rite of passage" had two clear appeals for buyers: first, there was more variety than the school-provided offerings; and second, they were more readily available, being offered in classrooms and hallways. For sellers, illicit snacks represented an easy way to make money, and, perhaps, to build social status—while also offering a means to earn money during the usually economically-unproductive hours of the school day (Best, 2017; Fletcher et al., 2014). Moreover, the flexibility of sales was an asset to participants in after-school activities. For example, D'Marcus, a senior, sold chips and juice during football season when his practice schedule forced him to temporarily leave his part-time job. In this way, selling snacks actually offered a potential *alternative*—rather than a *gateway*—to drug sales, as snack sellers had a reliable source of income without risking participation in illegal activity.

Snack-related income was significant to sellers like Carlos. Five days after he was sent home early, a boy approached him and asked whether he was selling. He dejectedly shook his head, then turned to me and lamented, "See? I could be making money right now!" His stream of income wasn't entirely cut off, though. He had arrived at school late that morning, drawing the attention of the security guards. "They asked me if I was selling, and I said nah, 'cause I stopped. But they don't know that my two employees are still selling." He smirked. Always inventive, Carlos had found a way to continue making money undetected. His hierarchical organization of snack sellers enabled him to take a cut of the earnings without carrying the risk that came with his new reputation as a "seller." Given its ubiquity and criminalized nature, it is notable that selling snacks became known throughout the school simply as "selling." "You selling?" and "who's selling?" rang out frequently in the hallways. This shorthand avoided directly naming the prohibited activity, but also had the effect of making it sound like the very activity to which adults feared it was a gateway: drug sales.

Adult Responses to the Snack Market

Adult responses to snack sales varied widely. Karen, a security guard, had one of the most punitive orientations toward the market. One morning, she excitedly told me a story: at 8:06AM, she had seen a boy sell a bag of chips. She called after him, but he ran off before she could get there. Undeterred, she watched the security footage to see what classroom he entered; she called the teacher and asked which student had arrived late. After identifying the culprit, she removed him from the classroom. Sighing, she explained "I told him I wish he'd just stopped, cause I wouldda told him no selling. But since he ran off, I had to go get him out of class, send him to the dean, do the whole

thing." Karen's belief that she "had to. . .do the whole thing" is telling; she saw no alternative to engaging the school's disciplinary apparatus.

Few adults responded so harshly. However, adult consensus that snack sales could not be openly tolerated often resulted from their own location within the disciplinary hierarchy. One September morning, for example, Ms. Park told me that she'd written up a student who was selling chips in the hallway. "He was doing it right in front of me, so I told him, 'I don't have any choice. Because if someone sees me seeing you do that, and I don't do anything about it, that's gonna be a problem for me.'" Here, Ms. Park framed her decision to involve the disciplinary apparatus as necessary to protect her own status among her colleagues. Her concern mirrors Fine's finding that "[a]dults are obligated by other adults to respond to deviance; failure may be consequential for one's reputation or position" (2004, p. 14). Had the sale happened less openly, Ms. Park might have turned a blind eye, as she often did in her classroom.

Like Ms. Park's concern about visible tolerance, some aspects of adults' responses to snack sales were highly localized, but others were tied to broader social concerns. For example, Ms. Kelly drew on ideas about poverty and crime when evaluating Carlos' sales. She recognized that sellers in the snack market *could* be viewed as entrepreneurial, but still saw the activity as risky:

> Ms. Kelly: He wanted to sell chips, and I got [like], "No, come on Carlos." Then we totally would go [argue]. . . But he said, his mom, she helps him. I get the impression money is a real issue in the house. You know?
> Researcher: Yeah.
> Ms. Kelly: So, he's going to do what he wants to do, and *can* do, and he doesn't want to be broke. . . I mean, he's pretty much said it like that, like, "This is what I'm doing." So, yeah. I think the chips are the tip of the iceberg.

Although Ms. Kelly recognized that snack sales were an important source of revenue for Carlos,—or perhaps *because* she recognized that the sale of such cheap items represented a significant source of income—she worried that he would turn to selling other illicit goods. Here, Ms. Kelly indicates that she worried that Carlos' snack sales could lead to drug sales, even though he insisted otherwise:

> Ms. Kelly: I don't hate him for it. I actually am pretty impressed. I've said it a couple times. I think he's either going to go one way that's really bad—[*interrupts self*] but he did say, he's like, "I won't sell drugs, but I'll pretty much make anything else work." And he does. And to talk to

> him too, he has a real interest in it. It isn't just like, "I want to sell these chips so I can go buy my shoes." It's not that. He wants to buy tons of shoes so he can sell tons and then do this and do that, and move it to the next one so [he] can buy more [inventory]. He has a vision.

While she "didn't hate him for" selling chips, she still worried that Carlos' snack sales were a gateway to drug sales. Underscoring the moral dimension of adults' perceptions of adolescent behaviors (Fine, 2004), especially those related to snacks (Oncini, 2021), she judged how Carlos would spend his earnings, approving of the idea that he would invest in more lucrative stock rather than simply buying shoes for his own enjoyment. While Ms. Kelly was "pretty impressed" by Carlos' entrepreneurship, she approved of it only once she found his ambitions more morally laudable than buying shoes. Thus, adult fears about students' *potential* failures (ACLU, 2017; Gardner, 2010), like drug sales or profligate spending, shaped how they responded to snack sales.

Students' Beliefs About Adult Responses to the Snack Market

To Carlos, prohibitions on snack sales made little sense. On the same day that he lamented that he "could've been making money," he continued: "There's kids selling drugs at this school, but they [the adults] care about chips." He reiterated the same point two months later:

> They get mad, but there's people selling drugs up in the school. They're getting mad over chips. I get it. You can't sell. But there's people smoking always in the bathrooms. And I don't know how they could catch us [snack sellers], but they can't catch the kids who got drugs on them.

He was dumbfounded that adults would channel resources into criminalizing snack sales when common wisdom held that drugs were available in the school. Chris, a sophomore, agreed. In an interview, he described "the brownie incident":

> Chris: I was selling brownies last year and he [an administrator] thought they were [cannabis] edibles. They called the police on me and shit, but he knew I was a good kid, so he just let me go. . . I lost like $6 worth of brownies, but it is what it is.
>
> Researcher: Were you just selling them to just get some cash?
>
> Chris: Yeah. . . [I was] like, "I'm going to be taking driver's ed next year. I'm going to have my license. I want a car." So I sold brownies for two

dollars, right? They were *this* thick [shows a couple inches], *this* wide. They were big brownies. I had different flavors and stuff. I would make two batches of 15, so I had 30 brownies. I'd make $60 a day. I would sell them every day, 5 days a week. I was making good money. I know I made $1000 in like—fuck. I made $1,000 off of them and then they stopped my hustle!

Researcher: How and who?

Chris: Some teacher thought I was selling edibles. But it's Hamilton. Shit, I don't even blame her, because niggas be putting Xans in pop at lunch.

Although he only lost "like six dollars' worth of brownies," the unfounded suspicions they were cannabis brownies also cost him the potential future earnings. Even though Chris "didn't blame" the teacher who suspected him of selling drugs, he was frustrated at losing his "hustle."

Adults' responses influenced who participated in this underground economy and in what roles. Simon, for example, considered selling chips to "make some money." He ultimately decided that as a self-described "goody-goody" he ought to stay away from selling, but he had no qualms about engaging in the less risky practice of *buying* snacks. Contrast Simon's self-evaluation with Carlos, who prided himself on being a reliable seller. He returned to selling after a pause in the aftermath of his punishment (during which he still oversaw his "employees"). Musing in the hallway one day, he expressed frustration over the rules' inconsistent application. Gesturing to two kids leaning against lockers with their hoods up, a dollar and a bag of chips changing hands between their huddled bodies, he exclaimed, "See?! Everybody sells. But they caught me."

What frustrated Carlos was a sense that the disciplinary system at Hamilton was unfair because of the seemingly-random likelihood that any particular seller would be caught. Another frustration was that certain sales were not only allowed, but even encouraged, exemplified by the Spanish club's chocolate sale to fundraise for a trip to Peru, when members could carry their wares openly and advertise on posters throughout the school. Sellers working for their own gain did not have the luxury of such promotion. When the profits of snack sales benefited organizations that fell under the school's purview, they were lauded; the school retained control over the proceeds, ensuring that the money went to something "worthy." When students individually profited from snack sales the use of money was subject to moral scrutiny, as in Ms. Kelly's judgment that buying shoes would be a poor use of Carlos's funds.

The lesson that Hamilton's disciplinary system was unequally applied was one students learned often; it stood in contrast to many teachers' messaging that the world is fair. Lucas, a senior, pointed out this discrepancy:

Lucas: [They're] basically training us for a false world. I'd rather be prepared for the real world, not this fake world that [they're] trying to prepare me for.

Researcher: What do you think the fake world that they're trying to prepare you for is?

Lucas: That everything's fair and that everything—if we work hard, we'll get good [results]. No. . . Let's be honest. . . I know most of the shit in real life is going to get swept under the rug, not going to be right. There's not really any justice right now.

Adults thus undermined their own disciplinary apparatus by demonstrating its unfairness. Lucas was scornful toward the school, as he knew that its formal teachings did not align with the workings of the real world. Recognizing contradictions in disciplinary systems may make students more likely to engage in deviant behaviors (Way, 2011). Arum & Way note that "in order for discipline to be effective students must also perceive it as fair" (2003, p. 159). This led many students at Hamilton to believe that rules were not worth following. A "so what?" attitude was common. For example, one day I asked Marquise, a senior, where he'd gotten a bag of Skittles. He gestured toward another boy. "Dude—he sell 'em. We're not supposed to, but. . ." he said before shrugging. With consequences so irregularly applied, and the activities they aimed to prohibit so mundane, only "goody-goody" students like Simon cared much about sanctions. For others, it made more sense to disregard the prohibition and enjoy the rewards of buying and selling treats, turning innocuous activities like snack sales into important sites of resistance.

Discussion and Conclusions

School rules regulating what students wear, how they speak, and what, where, and when they eat are some ways that adults exercise power over youth, but students create avenues to "resist and evade schools' control over their lives" (Best, 2013, p. 10). Students' opposition to such regulation constitutes a challenge to this broad institutional control (Rios, 2011). To adults, this rule-breaking can appear worrisome or proto-criminal; for youth, it represents a way to challenge unpleasant features of schools' control. This paper shows how adults' efforts to criminalize "deviant" student behaviors like snack sales push the market underground, giving rise to verbal shorthands and careful choreography that closely resemble the criminal behaviors they fear, thus contributing to a "downward spiral" in youths' development (Mittleman, 2018; Rios, 2011).

Limitations

This research has several important limitations. First, the data presented here come from one school; other contexts may have concerns not relevant at Hamilton, such as the presence of severe food allergies. Second, because of the site-specific nature of the data, I cannot ascertain engagement in snack sales in other contexts. Survey research may help scholars determine the broader landscape of school snack sales, though given the possibility of punishment for participation it is likely to be under-reported. This work represents a first step toward a more widespread understanding of snack selling practices in schools. Lastly, this study does not include a key set of stakeholders in schools: parents. While some parents actively supported their children's snack sales, such as purchasing bulk snacks or driving kids to stores, others may object to these sales. Future research should consider parents' perspectives on snack sales to help guide school-specific policies.

Implications for Practice

Schools assign labels to youth which hold meaning both within and beyond the physical boundaries of the institution (Duxbury & Haynie, 2020). These labels can influence youths' developmental trajectories, whether positively or negatively (Mittleman, 2018; Payne & Welch, 2016). Through their labeling practices, schools shape the narratives that youth hold about themselves and their futures (Kavish, 2017). When addressing activities like snack sales, schools determine whether to frame youths' behaviors as deviant or entrepreneurial. My findings demonstrate that these decisions influence students' perceptions of the school's legitimacy. If schools seek to operate in ways that promote youths' perceptions of their legitimacy, ensuring that their policies are viewed as fair is essential (Arum & Way, 2003). One strategy for promoting such perceptions of fairness could be to ensure consistency in the application of rules governing sales by both organizations and individuals. If members of clubs and activities are allowed to fundraise through snack sales, offering individual students the same opportunity may improve their perceptions of fairness in the school. Schools could also recognize that snack sales represent a way for students to learn about inventory, profit, marketing, problem-solving, and savings. In schools where snack sales are permitted, adults may choose to support and encourage student vendors to develop these skills. For example, math classes could teach students how to calculate profits, observe sales patterns, predict inventory needs, and re-invest their earnings; art classes could offer youth the opportunity to develop advertising campaigns and

branding strategies. Beyond the case of snack sales, this research demonstrates that schools have important opportunities to recognize and respond to youths' creative uses of school time beyond the formal curriculum. Whether students engage in such activities to meet their own needs, benefit from and/or develop their own skill sets, schools' responses to such student behaviors matter because of their impacts on youths' perceptions of the institution in the present and their developmental trajectories into the future.

Conclusion

Through their disciplinary apparatuses, schools not only punish deviance or delinquency—they produce it (Mittleman, 2018; Payne & Welch, 2010). Punitive responses to non-criminal behaviors are one way that Black, Hispanic, and poor white youth experience "criminalized childhoods" (Dinsmore & Pugh, 2021: 13), and Hamilton's students unsurprisingly saw responses to snack sales as excessive and unfair. Students who perceive their school's discipline as unfair are more likely to engage in deviant behaviors in school (Arum & Way, 2003), and being punished for these behaviors predicts deviant behaviors in adulthood (Mowen et al., 2020; Sampson & Laub, 1990). By criminalizing student behaviors, schools may actually increase the likelihood that their students engage in deviant behaviors throughout the lifecourse, whether due to labeling, peer networks, or both (Duxbury & Haynie, 2020; Payne & Welch, 2016; Rios, 2011). Moreover, children experiencing the types of punitive treatments detailed here are also more likely to experience surveillance and criminalization outside of school, perpetuating the classed and racialized stratification of childhood wellbeing (Dinsmore & Pugh, 2021).

Adult responses to youth behaviors can stigmatize activities that are otherwise permitted, or even lauded. Punishing independent snack sales while rewarding those associated with fundraising further alienates students with tenuous relationships to the school. Adults may be aware of the unfairness of their policies (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Nolan, 2011), yet feel obligated by their peers to punish "deviant" behaviors in order to avoid sanctions (Fine, 2004). Such choices about what to penalize and what to reward contribute to persistent inequities in school discipline, both at the individual (Morris & Perry, 2017; Varela et al., 2020) and institutional (Payne & Welch, 2010; Ramey, 2015) levels. As scholars call for research into how youth practice resistance in school contexts (Diamond et al., 2021), this research demonstrates one avenue of resistance via students' engagement in an underground snack market.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant Number: R305B140048 at the University of Chicago. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.

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