

# High-IQ Crime: Another Look at Social Bonds

JC Oleson: The University of Auckland



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**AUCKLAND**  
Te Whare Wananga o Tāmaki Makaurau  
NEW ZEALAND

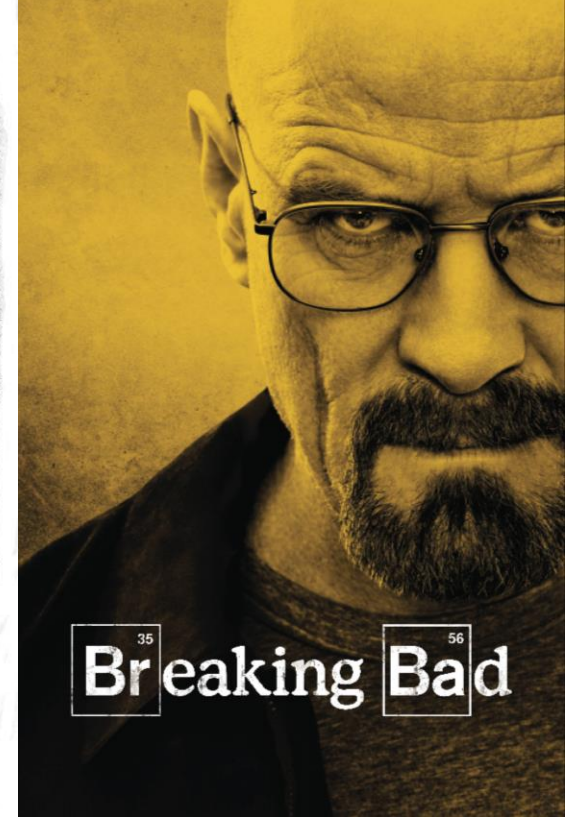
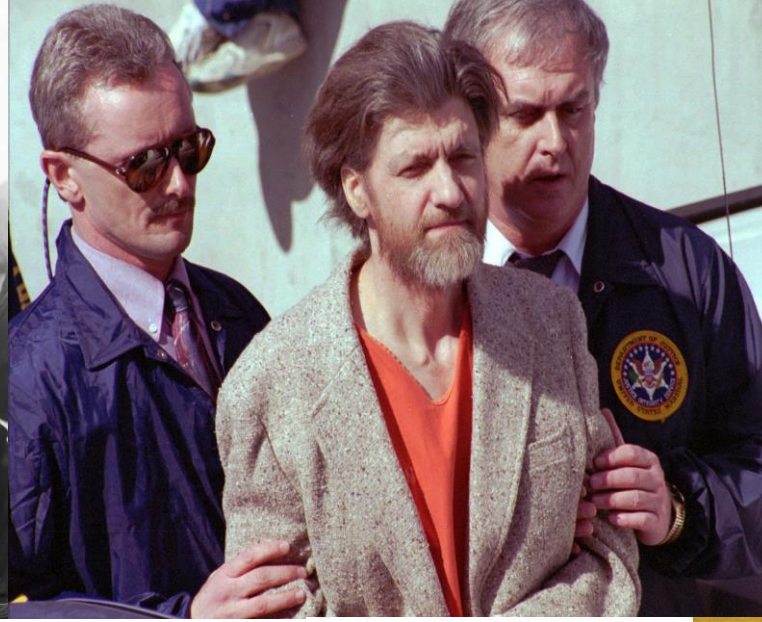
# Abstract



Intelligence is said to be the most studied human faculty, and within criminology, below-average intelligence (operationalized as IQ) is a well-established correlate of delinquency and crime. Nevertheless, even though the association between low IQ and crime has been studied for nearly a century, the causal linkages between them remain uncertain.

One leading explanation relies on Travis Hirschi's theory of social bonds, described in his seminal work, *Causes of Delinquency*. A social bond-based explanation of low-IQ crime is that when young people struggle with academic achievement, social bonds of attachment (closeness to others, like parents and teachers), commitment (dedication to prosocial activities), involvement (investment of time, limiting opportunities for delinquency), and belief (assent to social norms) are attenuated or broken. But how robust *is* social bond theory? Can it explain adult crime—even serious crime—as well as juvenile delinquency? Can it explain high-IQ crime, as well as low-IQ crime?

Although relatively little is known about offenders with high IQ scores, this paper describes the self-reported offending of 465 high-IQ individuals (mean IQ = 148.7) and 756 controls (mean IQ = 115.4). Unexpectedly, high-IQ respondents reported higher prevalence and incidence rates than did controls. Was this because high IQ operates as a solvent upon social bonds? Possibly. Transcripts of follow-up interviews provide preliminary evidence that Hirschi's social bond theory furnishes a theoretical framework for the origins of high-IQ crime.



# A Brief Account of IQ & Crime

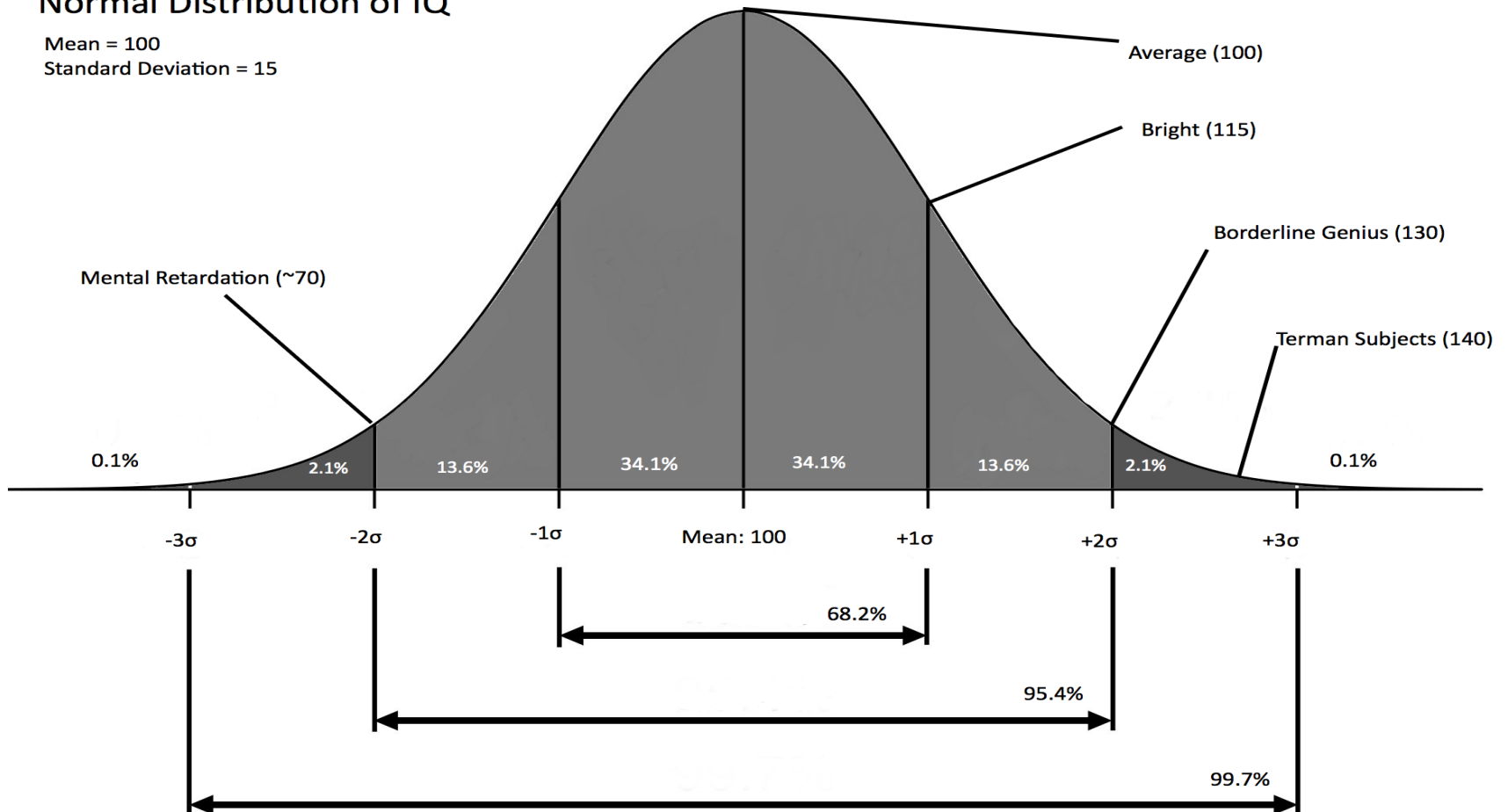


- Cesare Lombroso
  - *L’Uomo Delinquente* (1876)
  - *Genio e follia* (1863)
- Charles Goring
  - *The English Convict* (1913)
- Henry H. Goddard
  - *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-mindedness* (1912)
- Carl Murchison
  - *Criminal Intelligence* (1926)
- Edwin Sutherland
  - “Mental Deficiency and Crime” (1931)
- Travis Hirschi & Michael J. Hindelang
  - “Intelligence and Delinquency: A Revisionist Review” (1977)

# Normal Distribution of IQ Scores

## Normal Distribution of IQ

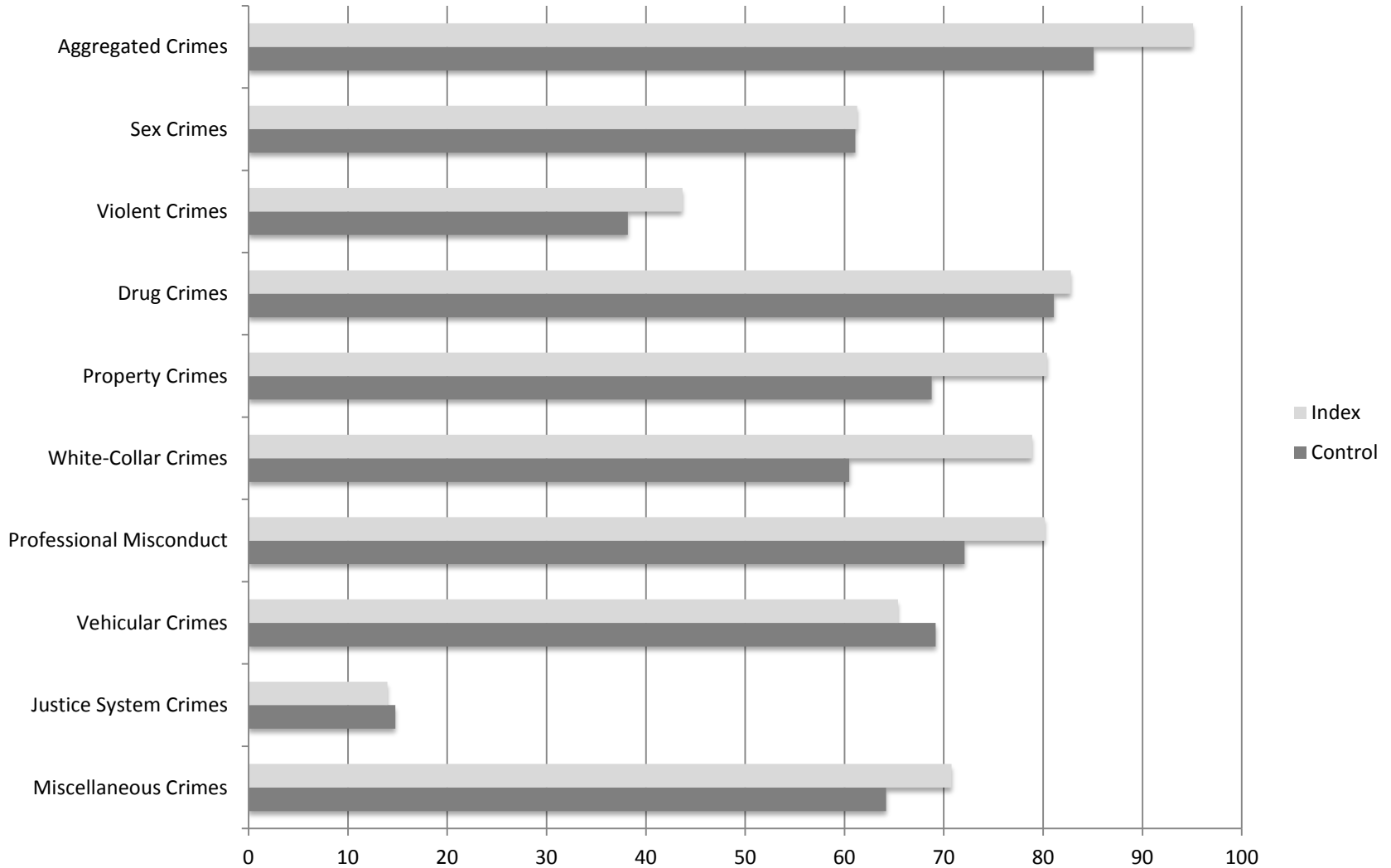
Mean = 100  
Standard Deviation = 15



# Self-Report Questionnaire

- Index Group: 465 (January 1997)
  - Members of 99.9% High-IQ Society
  - University Elites
  - US/UK Prison Sample
  
  - +2  $\sigma$  Threshold: 130+ IQ
  - Mean IQ = 148.7
  - Postal Questionnaire
- 44 Follow-Up Interviews
  - Some in Correctional Facilities
  - Others with Respondents Who Claimed to Not Have Been Caught
- Control Group: 756 (March 2004)
  - Open IQ Range
  - Mean IQ = 115.4
- Demographics
- Books, films, and famous figures
- Self-Reported Prevalence, Incidence, Recency, Arrest, and Conviction Rates for 72 Offences
  - Drug Crimes
  - Property Crimes
  - Miscellaneous Crimes
  - White Collar Crimes
  - Violent Crimes
  - Sex Crimes
  - Professional Misconduct
  - Justice System Crimes
  - Vehicular Crimes

		Nvr.	Lyr.	Evr.	Arr.	Con.
16.	Used violence or the threat of violence to rob someone.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17.	Carried a hidden weapon other than a plain pocket knife.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18.	Made a serious threat that you meant to carry out.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19.	Beaten someone up seriously enough that they required medical attention of any kind.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>





# Aspects of Social Bond

## Attachment

- Family
- Friends
- Community

## Commitment

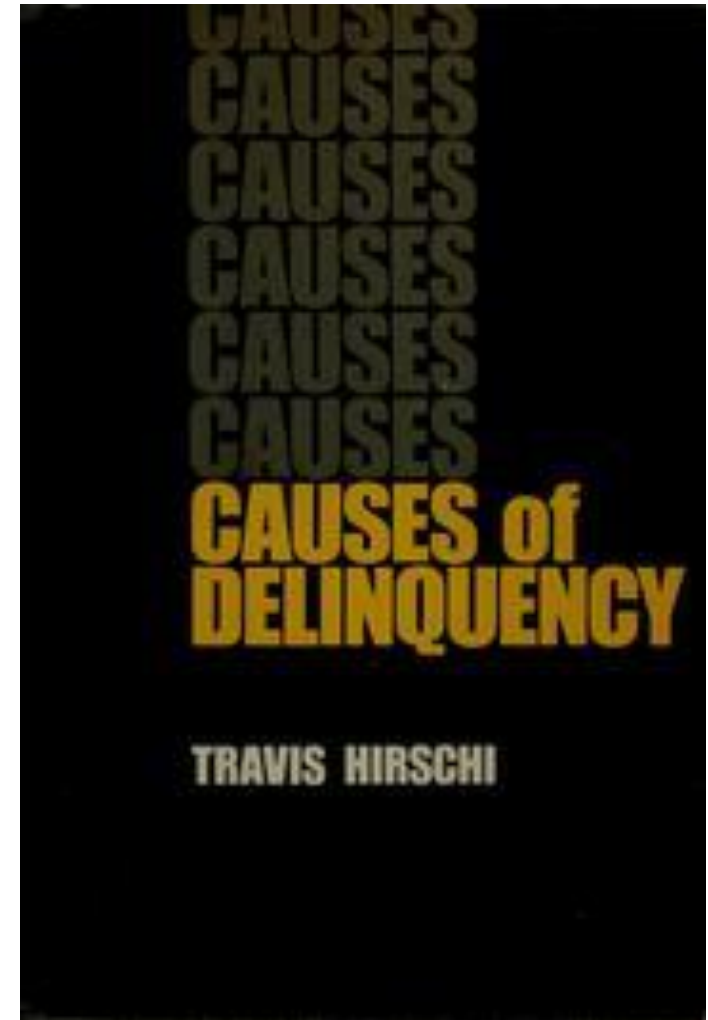
- Future Success
- Career
- Personal Goals

## Involvement

- School Activities/Sports
- Community Organizations
- Religious Groups

## Belief

- Honesty/Fairness
- Morality
- Personal Responsibility





## Attachment

[A]t school (even a school that selected based on intelligence) I felt terribly isolated. No doubt some of this was due to lack of social skills on my part. I have never had any "small talk" – i.e., I like to talk about serious, complex things or else keep silent. I can't keep the party going with a sequence of jokes (in fact, I'd prefer not to be there unless I can get drunk). This feeling of isolation comes back to me at social events, e.g., at local churches or meeting other parents.

—Respondent from High-IQ Society Sample

# Commitment

About my graduate school education... I had seen the hypocrisy of academia, the insanity, the mediocrity, and the personal ego games that even the most highly-touted professional scholars repeatedly demonstrated in their daily actions and their written works.... It was a lie, full of trickery, and I saw it repeatedly, and I lost faith in everything; in mankind, in God, in goodness, in the essential nature of humankind. I (who was already an entrenched agnostic and anti-establishmentarian) simply "turned on, tuned in, and dropped out" of society, taking on only meager jobs, menial jobs, low-echelon public service jobs that were support-struts for my drug abuse lifestyle. In spite of myself, my work was (on merely "automatic" overdrive) always good enough to win me merit promotions, although the upscale movement meant nothing to me.



–Respondent from Incarcerated Sample



## Involvement

Before the first robbery I had never committed a criminal offence. I was 43 years old when I robbed the first bank, whilst unemployed. Prior to that, I had an excellent career with a firm of management consultants, which came to an end through redundancy. I knew no criminals of whom I could ask advice. I carried out some research (a feasibility study) beforehand to establish the return from such an activity based on the method I intended to use. The method I used was simple, clever, depended on accurate timing, and required a strong heart. I was told by the detectives after being caught at the third bank that if I hadn't been caught that day it was unlikely I would ever have been caught and would then have succeeded in getting away with three bank robberies. Which is extremely annoying, as I had already decided that the third one was going to be the last.

—Respondent from Incarcerated Sample

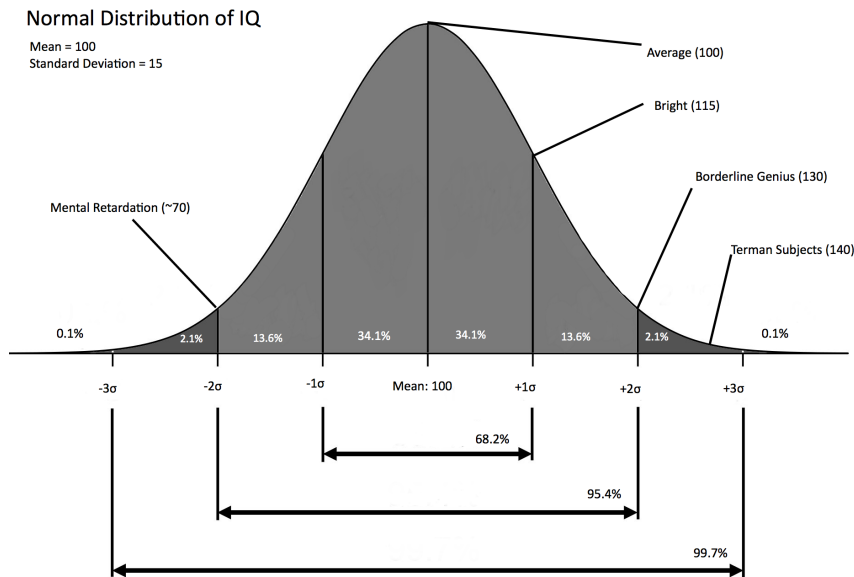
# Belief

I'd say geniuses commit crimes for the same reasons less gifted individuals do. There are at least two exceptions that come to mind. First, sometimes very intelligent people develop a disregard for laws because they all too easily see the hypocrisy of the people who make and enforce those laws. Second, it is common for very intelligent people to feel that their existence is ultimately meaningless. When you feel that there is no point to being, then it is not a very long stretch to the conclusion that man-made laws are also meaningless.

—Respondent from High-IQ Society Sample



# High IQ as a Solvent of Social Bonds?



- “Among individuals at the upper end of the IQ spectrum, there may be a different explanation of offending that is needed” —Mears & Cochran, 2013: 19
- Three possibilities:
  - IQ as protective factor, but overwhelmed
  - IQ as responsivity factor
  - IQ protection as curvilinear: “could not do better than wish the child to be endowed with an IQ not lower than 130 or higher than 150” —Hollingworth, 1942: 265

## Questions or Comments?

JC Oleson

Associate Professor of Criminology

The University of Auckland  
[j.oleson@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:j.oleson@auckland.ac.nz)

# CRIMINAL GENIUS



**A Portrait of High-IQ Offenders**



JAMES C. OLESON