



UNIVERSITY WEST

**Social Criticism, Social Labelling and the Creation of
Juvenile Delinquency in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist***

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Introduction

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was a renowned writer who wrote several novels that feature societal issues such as poverty and class differences. During his childhood, his family struggled with financial problems and his father ended up in prison. This forced Dickens into labour at a young age, in order to provide for himself and his family (Schlicke 163, 606). One might say that Dickens experienced the sufferings of child exploitation first hand. Schlicke actually argues that Dickens' personal experiences might have made him sensitive to child negligence during the Victorian era. Moreover, working in a shoe factory for sometimes more than twelve hours a day as a young boy, it is also safe to say that Dickens endured the hardships of an industrialised society that was made possible by capitalist investors. One might even say that Dickens' personal experiences partly contributed to one of his most eminent literary masterpieces: *Oliver Twist*. Originally, this was called *The Parish Boy's Progress* and was published as a series that continued from 1837-1839, and was later published as a three-volume novel (Schlicke 38).

This captivating story deals with the misfortunate events of an orphan boy who on multiple occasions is treated poorly by his surroundings, and is eventually forced to turn to a criminal gang that roams the streets of London. With that in mind, this novel arguably aims to criticise the societal structures of its time. The critique targets several societal issues of the Victorian era such as poverty, criminality, welfare of orphan children, and also child labour. In other words, the novel portrays the cruel treatment of the weakest individuals that were forced to adjust to the ever-growing industrialised society of the 19th century. As a matter of fact, Dickens was known for on various occasions criticising the order of society.

Dickens was a voice to reckon with, as he always supported the most vulnerable members of society and criticised the governmental system that supposedly should have provided relief to its citizens. Moreover, because of Dickens' critique of societal structures he even brought reform to capital punishment by writing a brief article on the subject back in 1846 where he stated the following: 'The barest Possibility of mistake is sufficient reason against the taking of a life which nothing can restore' (Thackeray et al, 5).

The industrial revolution also brought with it an urbanisation of London, and along with it a multitude of changes to British society. This resulted in a major influx of citizens moving to the larger capitals such as London in pursuit of employment in factories. However, changes are not always something positive for the average person in society, and urbanisation in London affected its inhabitants in numerous ways. The most detrimental factor was undoubtedly poverty. This societal phenomenon in turn led to additional societal issues for citizens that the governmental powers struggled with during the Victorian era, one of these being criminality.

Throughout this essay, I will discuss the topic of criminality and examine how Charles Dickens' literary masterpiece of *Oliver Twist* depicts society's treatment of children and how the governmental powers utterly failed a young generation. This negligence of the youth, ultimately led to an increase of crime, and also pushed children into the clutches of delinquent individuals. Consequently, children at the age of eight to twelve were then taught how to pickpocket, a notorious problem during this age. Therefore, it is my argument that the novel *Oliver Twist* aims to criticise Victorian society for its disastrous failure to protect those most vulnerable, which ultimately led to an increase of juvenile delinquency.

In the first chapter of this essay, a brief historical background of the Victorian era will be provided. The main focus will be limited to those societal issues that victimised children and adolescents, and what the pull and push factors involved were that shaped these children into criminals. Thoroughly highlighting the intertwined social issues will be crucial, in order to fully explain to the reader how I interpret Dickens' social critique of British Victorian society. Additionally, research within modern sociology will be discussed and terms such as 'labelling theory', 'manipulation' as well as 'peer pressure' are essential parts. These will be explained more thoroughly by connecting previous research to specific events in the story, as will be further delved into in chapter two. Finally, the second chapter will be an in-depth analysis that will in detail explain the thesis of this essay through the unfortunate events and mishappenings of the orphan boy Oliver and other characters, and how various parts of the criminal world aspired to corrupt, seduce and deceive not only Oliver but other victims in the novel as well.

Chapter 1 - Previous research, history and modern theories

The novel of *Oliver Twist* has caught the attention of readers for generations. It has also attracted the attention of multiple scholars, who seem to be in agreement that the novel could be considered as a critique towards society that it aims to reflect. Evidently, there are plenty of societal issues in *Oliver Twist* that are alarming, and every single one deserves to be brought to the attention of the reader. However, Dickens' societal critique has been interpreted in a variety of ways. For example, inequality has been analysed from a Marxist perspective and it has also been noted how poverty affects boys and girls in different ways. These examples of previous research will be put forward in this chapter and will be employed to further this essay's argument that society participates in the creation of juvenile delinquency. In particular, I will present previous research that highlights how *Oliver Twist* criticises Victorian society, and leading causes of criminality. Additionally, a brief historical background will be provided, including some facts of the criminal underworld of Victorian society during the 19th century. However, my main contribution will be to connect this historical background to modern research in the fields of social studies, criminology and even psychology, which will be combined in order to better understand how juvenile delinquency is shaped and created, which, in turn, I will lean on in my analysis.

1.1 Previous research about *Oliver Twist*

The depiction of criminals that is distinguishable in *Oliver Twist* has caught the attention of the public for generations, and even scholars have pinpointed the cruel conditions in Victorian London from a Marxist point of view, showing how the poor urban working class suffered from the harsh living conditions that was the case in 19th century urban London. Additionally, historians have identified several social issues that are portrayed in *Oliver Twist*, including child trafficking, criminal environments that encourage juvenile delinquency and even child prostitution.

According to Larry Wolff, a historian and professor at New York University, children of the streets of Victorian London had an even more cruel reality than what Dickens tries to depict. As a matter of fact, Wolff argues that the exploitation of children was not only limited to theft, but child prostitution as well (228, 243). According to Wolff, the character of Fagin is even more devious

than the reader might realize, as he not only teaches young boys how to pickpocket but he also exploits girls and boys for child prostitution (241). Moreover, as this chapter will further elaborate, the 19th century reading public would hastily judge what could be considered as immoral and deviant behaviour. Any form of prostitution was recognized as shameless and was considered to be of ‘social evil’ as phrased by Wolff , and this was also extended to those gentlemen who acquired these services. In other words, prostitution was a social issue that condemned all involved parties which included; the victim, the vicious pimp, and also the customer whose demands made this service possible (237).

Wolff (229, 240, 243) further argues that Oliver’s innocence is of utmost importance to the reader of *Oliver Twist*. Because of the boy’s innocence, the reader chooses to have empathy for whatever happens to him. However, the moment Oliver loses his innocence he is perceived as ‘evil’ in the eyes of the reader. This was one of Dickens’ ambitions with the novel. To appeal to the upper and middle classes’ emotions and in so doing, open society’s eyes to the struggles some are forced to endure in their everyday lives.

Another interpretation of societal critique that is evident in *Oliver Twist* is the observation that is brought forward by Shari Hodges Holt, who specialises in 19th century literature and film adaptation. Holt argues that Dickens discusses the abusing powers of capitalism, and in a sense criticises the “New Poor Law of 1834” (254). Which was a legislated law that ensured protection for the impoverished members of society. Holt emphasises the differences between various classes of Victorian society. Thus, Holt manages to illustrate a struggle that is ongoing between the proletariat and the bourgeois classes (255). Moreover, this Marxist way of reading *Oliver Twist* is highlighting even further that the middle class as well as the upper classes are participating in the process that creates juvenile delinquency, as they appeared to have had a rather condescending attitude towards the working class. As Holt argues, “...poverty produced by capitalism is a leading cause of crime” (255). To further clarify her Marxist point, Holt cites the *Communist Manifesto* to prove her argument; “The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself.” (Engels and Marx 26).

To further elaborate upon the Marxist perspective, Emsley states that criminality was considered to be a sanitation issue, and because of this it was directly related to that of the working

class (56). This so-called sanitation issue was to be dealt with according to the highly esteemed social classes, and it could be achieved by providing aid to those in need or the issues would likely escalate. Holt emphasises that the Poverty Act of 1834 was created in order to provide aid for those in need, but never had the anticipated effect. According to Holt, it is therefore evident that the middle class culture actively participated in its own demise as they themselves would suffer the consequences of criminality (255). The workhouse was also created with the purpose of fostering the people, as the upper classes labelled those different from themselves as idle and aspired to get rid of them by forcing them into the enclosure of the workhouse environment. There were those however, who were left with no other option but to turn to a life of crime, thereby increasing delinquent behaviour in society. With that said, it is safe to say that society is shown to be partially responsible for the creation of unlawful behaviour, as people were out of options.

1.2 Historical background of the 19th century

Back in the 19th century, England had a surge of citizens moving from the countryside into the cities in order to find suitable work in the factories that were in full development because of the now highly industrialised western society. This new influx of people made the cities grow at a rapid pace, by millions each decade, but it also caused overcrowded spaces, and poverty became an immense societal problem. Undoubtedly, to some, the only way to escape poverty was to turn to a life of criminality or prostitution, and according to Wolff and Fraser these two societal issues, crime and prostitution, are closely connected (Wolff 227; Fraser). Furthermore, young boys were constantly kept under close watch by an already under-staffed police force, and the governmental forces took actions against pickpocketing boys that roamed the streets of London, as members of society demanded that the government take urgent actions against the rising wave of lawbreaking, as it was perceived as a sanitation issue of the urban civilization (Emsley 56). Therefore, it was not that uncommon to banish boys between the ages from twelve to sixteen years of age to Van Diemen's Land, now more commonly known as Tasmania.

Citizens struck by poverty could scarcely rely on aid from the government, and it was not uncommon for children to begin employment in factories at a young age. This in turn resulted in their education being quickly neglected. Eventually, this developed into a widespread child

labouring market that mistreated children in various positions of work such as chimney sweepers and coal mine workers with long shifts, some even stretching up to twelve hours. Those unlucky enough ended up in the streets and had to fend for themselves. It was estimated that approximately 30,000 children roamed the streets of London and lived a life of 'lawlessness', according to Schlicke (93). Furthermore, poverty was like a disease, and everyone avoided it as such, therefore if cheap labour was available a child was quickly found to fill the vacancy.

There were some children however, who were forced to fend for themselves in the cold harsh environment of the streets of London and pickpocketing was quickly a favourable trade for the boys who were quick to master the art of sleight of hand. The reason for this was due to the fact that it was easy to go unnoticed as the police force had limited resources (Churchill 92). However, during the 19th century in the streets of London the cruel reality was anything but supportive towards children, especially young boys. Deviant behaviour such as thievery or other lawbreaking offences was considered to be unacceptable behaviour and was thus met with severe punishment. Also, the criminal justice system sought to negatively label young offenders as they were perceived as the root of a social issue, juvenile delinquency (Emsley 26). Juvenile offenders were dealt with harshly, and in some instances their fate was a dreadful one, as is depicted in a newspaper article published in 1829. According to this article, young offenders were a continuous problem and despite being given several chances through employment by means of apprenticeship, some delinquent children never quit their immoral behaviour. In some cases, capital punishment was a solution that Victorian society considered appropriate, in order to state the convicted as an example (*The Dreadful Life and Confession*). According to some historians the people considered offenders of any sort to be of another race that was different from the rest of society (Churchill 87). This will be further elaborated upon in this chapter, as the topic of labelling theory is discussed.

Charles Dickens criticised the governmental powers on multiple occasions for not considering humanitarian efforts and making sure the most feeble and weak citizens were taken care of (Dickens 1834). Dickens was arguably ahead of his time, as he believed that juveniles should be treated fairly and that punitive measures should have been considered instead of harsh punishment. Society should focus on guiding delinquent behaviour and make sure to set the youth

on the righteous path in life. In a newspaper article Dickens discussed how a young boy's fate could have been avoided if only preventative measures had been enforced:

[...] if this poor child had been properly corrected when he first showed the propensity to pilfer, it would have been unnecessary to fasten upon him the opprobrious distinction for his afterlife of having been committed for a robbery to His Majesty's gaol of Newgate.
(Dickens 1834)

In 1816 an investigation was conducted of juvenile delinquency, and a full detailed report of unlawful activities committed by young boys and other adolescents was the result. It was stated that the criminal gangs were highly organized, and the following quote is from that report: "That these boys associate with professed thieves of mature age, and with girls, who subsist by prostitution" (*Report of the Committee* 5). The so-called "professed thieves of mature age" have taken the shape of the character Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, who will be further discussed in chapter two of this essay. Once again it becomes clear that troublesome issues of Victorian society are highlighted throughout the novel, which is perceived as, I would argue, a critique of society that ignores the ever growing child exploitation within criminal gang environments.

1.3 Labelling theory, manipulation and peer pressure

There are numerous aspects to consider when one discusses how an individual is shaped, fostered and nurtured. Especially, when one discusses the creation of juvenile delinquency there are a proliferation of things that are to be considered. In some cases, the individual's own choices are partly decisive in how life is shaped. In this essay however, I would argue that the surrounding environment is also crucial in the creation of an individual who has been the target for manipulation, peer pressure and even ostracism from society. In order for the reader to better understand these sociological aspects and how they might affect a person, I will briefly discuss previous research in these topics.

1.3.1 Labelling theory

As may be familiar to the reader there is a famous scene in the very beginning of *Oliver Twist*. At the orphanage, children have been starving for a long period of time and decide to ask for more food but they are all afraid to ask (15). In the end, this endeavour falls to the young protagonist and the result is a devastating one. Interestingly enough, the adults are astounded and appalled by Oliver's request and are thoroughly convinced that he will one day be hanged. From a sociological point of view, the expectations the adults have on this young boy are endangering his future. For, if one jumps to conclusions, there is an increasing risk that prophecies may trigger unwanted behaviour from an individual. In other words, if society decides to believe something negative about an individual, there is a possibility that the individual ends up believing that there is no other path in life to take than what has been predicted.

Previous research within the field of sociology refers to this mechanism as “labelling theory”. This is when society identifies, describes and excludes an individual as being deviant from what is considered coherent with society's moral values, and the targeted person becomes the very thing that the environment perceives him or her to be (Tannenbaum 20). According to previous studies conducted by Tannenbaum, a major pioneer in the field of labelling theory, this could affect the individual on a psychological level (20). Furthermore, Tannenbaum also emphasises that if a deviant act is given too much attention, such as a violent behaviour or some other deviant attitude that is unwanted by societal standards, it could isolate a child. This in turn will push the child to seek an alternative society where a sense of belonging is fulfilled and they can feel accepted, as they are no longer welcomed into the rest of society (Mankoff 204). One might say that if a child is mistreated and labelled as a troublemaker, he will seek out other individuals with similar experiences of ostracisation. What is interesting and terrifying at the same time is that criminal minds are aware of this. Once a child is cast away or badly mistreated by the greater society, the criminal gangs utilise their methods of manipulation, grooming and indoctrination in order to recruit new members into their criminal organisation, where they are lied to and made to believe empty promises, as discussed by Nyquist (141). This will continue in a perpetual manner unless children are safeguarded and surrounded by an encouraging, safe and

caring environment. Moreover, Bernburg (71) argues that a juvenile that has been targeted by an official label runs a greater risk of being embedded in a new community where his or her labels are seen as the norm. To put it differently, falsely accusing a child of unlawful behaviour might push them into a gathering of people engaged in criminal activities. Eventually in doing so, they will meet the implicit and explicit expectations and labels society imposes on him or her.

According to Murray, this might actually provoke contradictions between adults in society and adolescents, as their attitude towards each other becomes hostile when one group is considered to be evil (19). Consequently, as Murray explains, a youth that has been targeted by a negative label from society might even question their personal identity. Suddenly, delinquent behaviour becomes a part of the identity itself and thus the process of juvenile delinquency has been initiated (19). In addition, Murray also emphasises the fact that a adolescent might also completely integrate into gang related environments where they are provided security and offered an escape from society who wants nothing to do with him or her (19). Evidently, this is harmful to the entire society, because when an individual becomes the target of negative social labelling that could alter several characteristics within the individual. These changes include characteristics such as the individual's personality, identity and even one's social role (20). As these things change, there is an increased risk of repeated deviant behaviour. In other words, the likelihood of future criminal offences has increased, thus creating delinquent behaviour (20).

Another form of social labelling that affected Victorian inhabitants was the fact that society had a condescending point of view to some individuals that were forced into a life of prostitution. Women who were unfortunate enough to be forced to exploit their own bodies in order to attain money were perceived as a "great social evil," as discussed by Fraser. Society was quick to judge, condemn and label individuals as outcasts. Prostitution was deemed an ever greater issue when it became associated with men from the middle classes of the Victorian era. However, it was always considered to be an act of deviant behaviour and not how one should behave as an upstanding member of society. Fraser even argues that there was a "veil of silence" surrounding sexual behaviour during Victorian society.

As society dehumanises those who are in desperate need of help, the individuals who have been identified as delinquent are left with no other choice than to turn to one of the few options

available to them. One could make the choice to live in either a workhouse which was a foul and terrible place with terrible living conditions (Schlicke 465). The other was to embrace deviant behaviour, and turn a life of crime. Thus, the 'labelling' from society is confirmed and the child has become what society believed from the very beginning. Especially for young children, this meant that they were left in the clutches of the criminal gang environment. The criminal environment also utilised specific methods in order to initiate the process that created juvenile delinquency.

1.3.2 Manipulation

A crucial aspect when someone is being manipulated is that the targeted victim is being led astray (Noogle 44). Moreover, there are various ways for a manipulator to charm, misguide and deceive its target. Those include behavioural patterns, such as bullying, intimidation, lying by making false promises and even threats of physical violence, with no remorse or consideration for its targeted victim. All these will ultimately lead to some sort of personal gain for the person that applies any of these manipulative behavioural manners (Nyquist 141). In addition to this, victims' emotions, beliefs and desires are, according to Noogle, the three factors by which manipulators prey on their targeted victim (44). Noogle describes a manipulator as being in control of a victim, as if the targeted person was an object. This is remarkably fitting for the character of Fagin as one could argue that he undoubtedly lacks sympathy for his fellow thieves, and only cares about himself.

It is also not uncommon for a deceptive person to place false information in the mind of a person in order to confuse and make them question their own reality, as argued by Noogle (44). This is a method that aims to complicate a decision that might be otherwise quite easy to make. Therefore, by making someone 'question their beliefs', they become uncertain and hence have been the target of manipulation. In addition to this, throughout *Oliver Twist*, another manipulative method that is frequently employed aims to target the victim's desires. Noogle presents temptation as a manipulative tool that could create a situation where one's motives are not ideal (45). Which is to say, this method could be utilised to make false promises of glory, treasures, money and other prizes that come with the trade of pickpocketing. What the manipulator does is influence the targeted victim, and the result is that the victim will perform a deed that might even be immoral

and unlawful. Thirdly, there is yet another manipulative method that aspires to inflict certain emotions within the targeted victim, which could be positive emotions such as happiness, joy or hope. Interestingly, these are definitely emotions that are present in the mind of Oliver who is offered food and shelter from his newly found friends. However, one could also tend to negative emotions such as fear, sadness, anger and even shame in order to manipulate someone, as Noogle suggests (45-46). As a matter of fact, there are several situations that are noticeable in *Oliver Twist* that center around a victim's emotions being the target through manipulation. This will once again be further explored in the next chapter.

To further complicate the topic of manipulation, there are more characters that become victims of manipulation in *Oliver Twist*. As a matter of fact, the female character Nancy is also victimised by another kind of manipulation. The relationship of Nancy and Sikes could be further inspected as their relationship is most definitely an abusive relationship, where Sikes uses a manipulative method of his own. More specifically, it is a form of behavioural manipulation that is rather frequent in relationships. When an individual uses psychological warfare towards his or her partner in order to control them, it is referred to as "gaslighting". This form of manipulation aims to break down a person psychologically and this manifests itself, among other things, in domestic abusive relationships (Sweet 852). Additionally, this method of manipulation seeks to specifically undermine a woman who is a victim of an abusive relationship, from that of a sociological point of view.

Furthermore, a perpetrator who adopts gaslighting as a form of manipulation also aims to dominate and control its victim by making sure they do not escape the cruel environment. Gaslighting is trying to make the victim appear as "crazy" or at least place a false incentive in the mind of the victim that they start to believe something untrue about themselves (851). To state her theory of gaslighting, Sweet thoroughly explains an example. In a relationship, there is a husband who initiates a manipulative process by isolating his wife, and also insinuating her to believe she is insane. The tactic the husband opted for was to turn on and off the aspects of gaslighting. The reason for this is to make sure his wife is unaware that she is being manipulated and in so doing, she will truly believe that she is crazy. According to Sweet, gaslighting-tactics that aim to manipulate a targeted victim are even more effective if they aim to target specifically social

inequalities that are in some way related to but not necessarily limited to gender, sexuality, race, nationality and even class, and these are exceedingly effective in an intimate relationship (852). Continuously, Sweet highlights that these inequalities could damage the targeted victim's self-esteem such as their sense of what is real, their own ability to take care of themselves, and even support from their surrounding environment (852). As a matter of fact, Sweet's studies showed that gaslighting could actually amplify the dangers that are already present in the immediate environment of the victim (852). Moreover, fear is indeed a powerful tool that is used by manipulators, as it is constantly present in the mind of one who is a victim of gaslighting. Sweet presented a woman who lived in constant fear of her abuser and because of this could not hope to leave the abusive relationship she was in (865).

To incite fear in a targeted victim or any other negative emotion is in itself a form of manipulation as argued by Noggle (46). Moreover, threats are not uncommon as a direct method to manipulate an action from a victim, and this will be further elaborated in chapter two by analysing excerpts from the novel in more explicit detail.

1.3.3 Peer pressure

In addition to manipulation, a victim is further exploited by an environment of equivalent individuals that have similar past experience. Once being accepted in a criminal gang, newly recruited members are given protection and also given a sense of belonging (Klein 80). This might arguably be a crucial part of how an individual is further encouraged to become a juvenile delinquent. One might refer to it as a sort of social contract, "an indentured servitude" where it is expected of the newly recruited to be submissive and listen to those superior to him or her. This is the description of a hierarchical social structure, and most likely the most common sort of this kind of power order is that of a patriarchal structure.

Vargas conducted a study, where he found that feeble individuals of a social group were more likely to fall victim to peer pressure (310). Furthermore, it is evident that each individual has a position in a social group, and that conflicts occur as these positions are challenged and questioned. It could be argued that there are those individuals who have more power over others, as is usually the case in a patriarchal authoritarian structure. Interestingly, this could prove to be

harmful to individuals that find themselves at the bottom of this so-called patriarchal hierarchy ladder. If indeed a juvenile becomes dependent on other individuals in order to attain valuable resources, for example, food or shelter as is the case in the novel of *Oliver Twist*, then there is a higher risk of being compelled to engage in criminal activities (Vargas 311). The weakest members of a delinquent gang are therefore more easily controlled by not only their leader, but also by other members of the group as the hierarchical structure dictates who should listen to whom. Arguably, once an individual has become a member of a delinquent group he or she is then taken care of and nurtured in ways of unlawful activities. As a matter of fact, Aseltine argues that peers could foster an individual's criminal behaviour (103). Further research by Bernburg supports this, as it states that unwanted behaviour from society could be socially acceptable in a group consisting of delinquent individuals (68). Furthermore, Bernburg also states that a criminal organisation might even provide shelter or protection from the rest of society that deems them deviant from what is "socially acceptable behaviour" (68). This becomes especially evident as Fagin plays a game with the boys in his gang. This is to establish a delinquent culture within the group, and teach them the art of pickpocketing.

The game, which intended to teach the boys how to steal a handkerchief unnoticed, was also intended to be fun and enjoyable for the boys. Furthermore, this game enhances the boys' delinquent behaviour further as being a thief is only a game to the boys and they do not realise their actions have consequences in the eyes of the law. Because of this, the criminal environment is supporting negative behaviour. The interesting part of this game is that it not only trains and teaches these boys how to steal, it also creates a bond of trust. One might even call it a creation of a bond of solidarity within the group of juveniles, as also pointed out by Sirabian (39). At the same time, the boys are entertained and the process of juvenile delinquency has taken yet another step in the process. Additionally, what this game ultimately teaches these juveniles is a life of purpose. Because they have become outcasts of society, they desire confirmation of their existence and so by becoming a stealthy pickpocket, they are all collectively united in this shared endeavour of thievery (Sirabian 39).

1.4 Conclusion of chapter one

In this chapter, a brief historical background of the harsh conditions of Victorian society has been presented. More specifically, a brief explanation of how the citizens of London were affected in a negative manner as their way of living drastically changed with the industrialised society. Poverty was a huge societal issue that could stimulate some individuals into criminal behaviour.

Furthermore, a brief summary of previous interpretations of *Oliver Twist* has been put forward, in order to further elaborate them in relation to my own reading of the novel.

Additionally, this chapter has described a culture and environment that was cruel towards children, especially orphan boys who were not favoured by society in any way. Young boys were seen as a nuisance, a burden to society and in the eyes of the public they were even perceived as offenders even though they were not. In modern research, this phenomenon is explained as social labelling. This in turn is the starting point of a chain of events that will ultimately create a juvenile delinquent individual, and set him or her on the path to a life of crime. One might say that a criminal individual is created by society when they are labelled as such (Bernburg 67).

Secondly, when children have been ostracised from society by means of negative social labelling, they are further victimised by means of deception and grooming through manipulation. This is made possible by appealing to and altering the victim's beliefs, emotions and desires (Noogle 44). By doing so, manipulators aim to control the minds of young children and make them do things they otherwise would not.

Thirdly, modern research also suggests that peer pressure and environmental aspects are crucial parts of how unlawful behaviour is encouraged and strengthened. Furthermore, the surrounding peers and other similar individuals can even foster and create a culture within a criminal gang that further develops delinquent behaviour (Vargas 311).

By means of these areas of modern research, the novel of *Oliver Twist* will be further delved into and analysed. Characters' thoughts, emotions and perspectives will be dissected in detail and thoroughly examined, and the creation process of juvenile delinquency, as represented in *Oliver Twist*, will become even more clear for the reader.

Chapter 2 - Criminal behaviour fabricated, as evident in *Oliver Twist*

The protagonist of *Oliver Twist* is an innocent little boy who again and again becomes the victim of the criminal leaders Fagin and Sikes. Although it is important to mention for the sake of argument that not all perceive young Oliver as the epitome of innocence. Throughout this chapter, I will discuss how Dickens' novel points to how deceptive criminal individuals can truly be, and also, the role that society plays in the creation of a juvenile criminal. I will also present an analysis of society's participation in the creation of juvenile delinquency as represented in the novel. This will be followed by an in-depth analysis of how the delinquent individual is further indoctrinated into a life of crime by means of various manipulative methods. Finally, it is of significance that the environment that surrounds Oliver is analysed. The reason for this is to highlight the impact of peer pressure that also could promote unlawful behaviour in a young child.

2.1 Social perspective of juveniles in *Oliver Twist*

As previously mentioned, society had an immense intolerance against theft and other criminal behaviour, and this is clearly portrayed in *Oliver Twist*. For example, there is a scene in which Oliver is mistaken for stealing a gentleman's handkerchief, a fine luxurious item during the Victorian era. However, as Oliver runs away from the crime scene he is pursued by an entire entourage of people who continuously yell: "Stop thief! Stop thief!" The cry is taken up by a hundred voices, and the crowd accumulate at every turning" (77). What is fascinating about this scene is that it is an example of how society treats children in an unfavourable manner. Long before a criminal investigation, police report or even a thought of a juvenile trial court procedure has been taken into consideration, the crowd of people has already decided that Oliver is guilty. This is an appropriate example of social labelling, as previously discussed in chapter one. Moreover, as is evident in the following excerpt, society could even negatively label an individual as a delinquent person for simply being noncompliant. This would especially be the case if the individual was a child, or more specifically a boy such as Oliver. This becomes clear in the following interaction between Oliver and Nancy, a member of the criminal organisation who tries to ensnare Oliver:

”Come home directly, you cruel boy! Come!” “Oh, ma’am,” replied the young woman, “he ran away, near a month ago, from his parents, who are hard-working and respectable people; and went and joined a set of thieves and bad characters; and almost broke his mother’s heart.” “Young wretch!” said one woman. “Go home, do, you little brute,” said the other. “I am not,” replied Oliver, greatly alarmed. “I don’t know her. I haven’t any sister, or father and mother either. I’m an orphan; I live at Pentonville.”(122)

Undoubtedly, passers-by believe Nancy’s lies and have no reasons to question her story as she is quite persuasive. Immediately, the onlookers yet again label Oliver as a ‘social evil’ who has engaged in acquaintance with the most awful creatures of civil society, and even though he did not commit a crime, simply being engaged in the same company as thieves and other vagabonds is a crime in itself according to society. Even when Oliver pleads for help no one comes to his aid as Nancy is portraying herself as a victimised woman who merely tries to help her brother and enacts a rather convincing story of a cruel boy who ran away:

“I don’t belong to them. I don’t know them. Help! help!” cried Oliver, struggling in the man’s powerful grasp. “Help!” repeated the man. “Yes; I’ll help you, you young rascal! What books are these? You’ve been a stealing ’em, have you? Give ’em here.” With these words, the man tore the volumes from his grasp, and struck him on the head. “That’s right!” cried a looker-on, from a garret-window. “That’s the only way of bringing him to his senses!” (122).

Instead of helping Oliver, more passers-by are engaged in the event, and some even accuse the boy of stealing the books he is carrying and is supposed to deliver to a nearby bookstore. This scene depicts a cruel treatment of children that for any reason could be connected with ‘social evil’ in any sense. Supposedly, this is perceived as a critique towards the entire society and how they treated children of the Victorian era. The crowd of onlookers is quick to assume that when a boy is involved he is usually the one to blame. Arguably, this is harmful for any child or even adolescent, as previously argued in chapter one. By labelling an individual as delinquent there is a higher risk of said individual that one day the negative label from society will be proven true,

as argued by Bernburg (71). This form of social exclusion is therefore dangerous, not only to the individual being targeted, but to the entire society as social labelling assists in the creation of delinquent individuals, and further increases the risk of criminal acts as stated by Murray (20).

There are several situations throughout *Oliver Twist* that reveal the public's devastating opinions of those who they suspect are in some way inferior to themselves. One might even argue that the public considered themselves to be at the moral high ground, and therefore did not hesitate to judge someone who acted in a deviant manner from what was considered as 'good' or morally acceptable. Not only was delinquent behaviour deemed immoral, but even poverty was considered unfavourably as previously mentioned.

With that said, social labelling could even occur when the targeted victim did nothing to deserve it. Simply being associated with a lower part of a hierarchical ladder in a continuously growing working class society, could prove to be devastating for an individual who had a weak or non-existent socioeconomic security. Poverty, sickness and unemployment was blamed on the victim, because they were seen as a liability and a burden to the greater society: "Isn't that boy no better?" inquired Mr. Bumble. Mrs. Mann shook her head. "He's a ill-conditioned, wicious, bad-disposed porochial child that," said Mr. Bumble angrily (138).

The excerpt above is an example of additional social labelling, where even a sick innocent child is labelled as a 'wicious' human being who is a burden to the workhouse that is obligated to care for his well being. These adults, despite being in a governmental position that is ordered to nurse this boy back to health, treat him in a horrible manner.

Interestingly, Dickens manages to capture the reader's attention on several occasions throughout *Oliver Twist*, and it soon becomes clear that the story is portraying a vicious and cruel reality that needs to change for the better. Arguably, the critique of society that Dickens is trying to persuade his readers about is that society as a whole needs to become immensely more humane to those in need of assistance and support. In addition to the above excerpt, there is a similar scene portrayed where the narrator of *Oliver Twist* describes the earliest period of Oliver's life, and where the reader is presented with a cruel reality in how orphans were treated by governmental authorities:

For the next eight or ten months, Oliver was the victim of a systematic course of treachery and deception. He was brought up by hand. The hungry and destitute situation of the infant orphan was duly reported by the workhouse authorities to the parish authorities.”[...] he should be dispatched to a branch-workhouse some three miles off, where twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws, rolled about the floor all day, without the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing, under the parental superintendence of an elderly female (6).

Once again social labelling makes an appearance, where in this case a helpless orphan boy is associated with ‘other juvenile offenders’ as if they were deemed to be as troublesome as criminals. Being an orphan child was therefore harmful for a child as society considered them to be of ‘social evil’. As a result, society’s expectations of children were exceedingly low. Interestingly, another passage in the novel speaks of expectations, and what society anticipated would become of children as they grew up. It was anything but a bright future that was predicted:

“Please, sir,” replied Oliver, “I want some more.” The master aimed a blow at Oliver’s head with the ladle; pinioned him in his arm; and shrieked aloud for the beadle. [...]”Do I understand that he asked for more, after he had eaten the supper allotted by the dietary?” “He did, sir,” replied Bumble. “That boy will be hung,” (15).

The novel’s protagonist simply asks for seconds during supper, and the governmental agents are stunned to say the least. This excerpt is also acknowledged by Schlicke who points out that “With inexorable logic, his oppression leads him into the criminal underworld” (440). It is almost as if young Oliver committed a crime, a terrible crime that will set him on an awful path that ultimately will be his undoing. A path that will have him one day facing the gallows, as is customary for unlawful behaviour. The low expectations that have been placed on this child’s shoulders are terrible, and from a psychological point of view it could have devastating effects on a nine-year-old little boy. Eventually, this could lead to him developing negative thoughts of his own future and self worth.

As previously presented in chapter one, social labelling is a critical factor that could be the

commencement of criminal behaviour. Once that path is initiated, there might be no turning point for the affected individual. This is evidently the case for the character of Nancy who is given a chance to leave her despicable and miserable criminal life behind, but she denies the opportunity to do so. The reason for this is because she believes there is no going back from the life she has led, because she is too far gone:

“I wish to go back,” said the girl. “I must go back, because—how can I tell such things to an innocent lady like you?—because among the men I have told you of, there is one: the most desperate among them all; that I can’t leave: no, not even to be saved from the life I am leading now.” (336)

Arguably, leading a life of crime breaks down one’s character to the point where the individual sees no solution to the situation. Instead of making amends for her past maleficent lifestyle, Nancy sees no other option but to continue to live a delinquent life. This is the most devastating end result of social labelling, where the individual lives up to the expectations from society, and also is so far gone that they believe that there is no hope of redemption.

What is also apparent from this moment from *Oliver Twist* is that Nancy has a deep connection to other individuals from her delinquent social group. This social bond runs deep as it has been developing for years. Arguably, Nancy has been the victim of social manipulation and because of this, her immoral lifestyle has managed to get a hold of her, and she is fully aware that she will never fit in anywhere else, as is evident from the above quote. To put it differently, Nancy has been broken down from a psychological point of view and knows that society has forever deemed her to be of ‘social evil’. Because of this, Nancy knows that there is no way of ever leaving her criminal lifestyle and the social group that comes with it.

2.2 Social manipulation present in *Oliver Twist*

Dickens has masterfully depicted the hardships of those in the most vulnerable position of society in his novel of *Oliver Twist*. Moreover, the novel also specifically manages to characterise one of the largest issues of the Victorian era, that of criminality, into characters within a criminal gang. One of these characters named Fagin arguably represents the maleficent aspect of the dangerous

world of delinquency, that seeks to exploit young children for his own devious personal aspirations. One might say that Fagin could act as a symbol of evil elements of a society that could negatively affect a child's life for the worse. In other words, Fagin is corruption personified, whilst Oliver acts as the representation of innocence that is continuously the target for evil's corruption. Moreover, to further emphasise the villainous nature of Fagin, and other colourful characters presented in *Oliver Twist*, the novel presents them with a foul appearance but also a personality that is both threatening and demanding.

However, the character of Fagin could appear to some as a saviour to Oliver. This is because he welcomes him into the den of thieves and gives Oliver food and shelter when nobody else would. This is once again an important social critique that the novel conveys towards the governmental powers of its time. As one might imagine, society cared little for young boys who eventually started to roam the streets of London. Instead, a delinquent such as Fagin appeared to young adolescents and acted in a manipulative manner. Furthermore, Fagin is also revealed as a role model, a protector, a teacher and most importantly, in the eyes of an orphan child, perhaps even a father figure:

“We are very glad to see you, Oliver, very,” said the Jew. “Dodger, take off the sausages; and draw a tub near the fire for Oliver. [...] Oliver ate his share, and the Jew then mixed him a glass of hot gin-and-water: telling him he must drink it off directly, because another gentleman wanted the tumbler. Oliver did as he was desired. Immediately afterwards he felt himself gently lifted on to one of the sacks; and then he sunk into a deep sleep. (66)

There is a common proverb that goes: “A good first impression can work wonders”. Fagin knows this, and in order to lure and attract Oliver into his entourage of thieves, it is crucial to be nurturing and caring of Oliver and make him feel welcomed into the gang. However, Fagin has a different motive than being a caring human being to Oliver. This is just a manipulative method in order to attain trust as the foundation of a new relationship is taking place.

As previously discussed in chapter one, the criminal gang featured in *Oliver Twist* utilise manipulation techniques in order to recruit and trick juveniles to do their bidding. This is clearly

depicted in *Oliver Twist* and Fagin constantly uses manipulation in everything he does or says; it is as if he always has a dark purpose, which is clearly portrayed in this following quote:

“Is my handkerchief hanging out of my pocket, my dear?” said the Jew, stopping short.
“Yes, sir,” said Oliver. “See if you can take it out, without my feeling it; as you saw them do, when we were at play this morning.” [...] “Here it is, sir,” said Oliver, showing it in his hand. “You’re a clever boy, my dear,” said the playful old gentleman, patting Oliver on the head approvingly. “I never saw a sharper lad. Here’s a shilling for you. If you go on, in this way, you’ll be the greatest man of the time.” (72)

The above quote is interesting for several reasons. Firstly, Fagin has treated Oliver with nothing but kindness. Because of this, Oliver wishes to please Fagin in any way possible and does not hesitate to abide by his biddings. Arguably, Fagin is fully aware of this unspoken ‘indentured servitude’ and is not hesitant to teach Oliver a valuable skill that in the end will prove to be beneficial for Fagin. Additionally, Fagin never abandons his mission to further deceive and exploit the mind of a newly recruited novice and quickly compliments Oliver when he performs the game exceptionally well, and even rewards him with money. Thirdly, as if that was not enough, Fagin even promises Oliver that if he continues to learn and listen that he will one day be ‘the greatest man of time’. Clearly, in this later part of the quote, the novel is presenting an immense issue that the society is partly responsible for. For when society fails to see potential in the young generation and even labels them as deviants, they are more likely to find another encouraging environment. Therefore, society is partly responsible for sending young children and adolescents into the embrace of criminal leaders such as Fagin, who will then further corrupt and exploit them.

Arguably, the most efficient tool that Fagin uses in order to recruit, deceive and exploit his criminal gang members is the art of manipulation, and this is utilised in a variety of ways. Criminal masterminds such as Fagin are all scheming and deceptive, and constantly aim to control feeble victims like a puppeteer master. Fagin, being a fraudulent man in a position of power is completely aware that society does not care about the young boys, and uses this to his advantage. Because of this, it is without any notable effort he tricks and charms those around him. It is indeed a game to him, where he plays with his victim’s emotions, beliefs and desires. Also as previously

argued in chapter one, a manipulator acts as if the perceived victim is an object. This is definitely the case as naive little Oliver is being played with and lied to and also led to believe that he is safe with Fagin and his enclave of thieves. As a matter of fact, Oliver's innocence is once again of importance in order to fully understand this perspective. Oliver does not necessarily fit the usual description of a juvenile delinquent individual. Therefore, in the eyes of evil criminals such as Fagin, Oliver could prove to be a prominent investment for his 'business'. One might therefore say that Oliver is perceived as an object. Which is to say, an object that Fagin will corrupt, and use for his own devious and selfish illegal ambitions.

What is also fascinating about the character Fagin is that he constantly tries to convince his victims to believe in their false friendship. One might even refer to it as a bond of trust, although this does not go both ways, as Fagin merely wants to make sure that those around him have placed their entire devotion in his favour. As might be expected from a manipulative mind such as Fagin, he floods the victim's mind with false information. The reason for this is to confuse and misguide the victim and thereby make them more easier to control. This is noticeable in the interaction between Fagin and Nancy as Fagin suspects that he is about to lose Nancy's trust:

“[...] You have a friend in me, Nance; a staunch friend. I have the means at hand, quiet and close. If you want revenge on those that treat you like a dog—like a dog! worse than his dog, for he humours him sometimes—come to me. I say, come to me. He is the mere hound of a day, but you know me of old, Nance.” (374-375)

This is a typical example of a manipulative moment in which Fagin is trying to intimidate Nancy by altering her beliefs about her own safety, as is common for a manipulator according to Noogle (44). Arguably, Fagin is acknowledging to Nancy that she is unsafe, and that her surroundings are unreliable, she can trust no other but Fagin himself. Fagin therefore deceives Nancy into believing that she can safely place her devotion and trust in Fagin, as well as the rest of their crew.

At the same time, alternative social interaction is not to be trusted as society might even treat her badly. Once again it is evident that Fagin is completely aware of how society treats deviant social behaviour, and that an individual such as Nancy, a veteran thief and also a prostitute

has nowhere else to turn to but Fagin. From this excerpt it becomes evident that there definitely is a so-called indentured servitude aspect in their relationship, a debt that will never be repaid, because once an individual has initiated a life of theft, villains such as Fagin will keep manipulating them in order to maintain control of the targeted victim. This is true for all around Fagin, whether it be Nancy, Oliver or other susceptible targets that are easily corrupted.

In contrast to Fagin, however, Sikes has a different approach in order to control those around him, namely to incite fear into the heart of his victims. Arguably, Nancy is a victim of an abusive domestic relationship, as Sikes is not only violent towards her but threatening and manipulative as well. As will be evident in the following excerpt, Sikes applies gaslighting as a manipulative method in order to incite fear and control over Nancy who gains no sympathy from the rest of their crew when Sikes assaults her. In addition, by calling Nancy “crazy” Sikes aims to make Nancy doubt what is truly happening. Therein Nancy might believe things that are untrue which is exceedingly common for a victim of gaslighting, as argued by Sweet (851):

The housebreaker flung the girl from him to the further end of the room, just as the Jew and the two boys returned, dragging Oliver among them. “What’s the matter here!” said Fagin, looking round. “The girl’s gone mad, I think,” replied Sikes, savagely. “No, she hasn’t,” said Nancy, pale and breathless from the scuffle [...] (130)

As previously discussed in chapter one, a manipulator tends to its victim’s beliefs, desires and also emotions, as argued by Noogle (44). Sikes incites fear into those he wishes to attain control of in different ways. In the case of young Oliver, Sikes applies a rather straightforward approach as he forcefully threatens Oliver with a handheld gun to participate in a robbery:

“Now, first: do you know wot this is?” inquired Sikes, taking up a pocket-pistol which lay on the table. Oliver replied in the affirmative. “Well, then, look here,” continued Sikes. “This is powder; that ’ere’s a bullet; and this is a little bit of a old hat for waddin’.” [...] Mr. Sikes proceeded to load the pistol, with great nicety and deliberation. “Now it’s loaded,” said Mr. Sikes, when he had finished. “Yes, I see it is, sir,” replied Oliver. (168)

Sikes and Fagin may have different methods to make their victims obey their commands, but they are equally as dangerous as they both aim to indoctrinate, persuade and promote control of their victims. These devious minds are also a symbol for a hierarchical social order that is similar to that of a patriarchal one. Which in turn, consists of a dominant man having full control of those who lack the same amount of power. This is also depicted in *Oliver Twist*, as all thieves in Fagin's gang exercise their power over little Oliver in different ways.

2.3 Peer pressure in delinquent environments in *Oliver Twist*

The third phase of the creation of juvenile delinquency that is distinguishable in *Oliver Twist* is the influence that comes with peer pressure. Arguably, because young children and other adolescents during the Victorian era were in some instances unwanted, and ostracised by the rest of society, their search for an inclusive social group was exceedingly important. This is evident in young Oliver who desires compassion and inclusiveness more than anything else. As this essay would suggest, children that were in a similar situation such as Oliver's found themselves in a feeble position when introduced into a new deviant social group. The result of this would eventually be that an individual such as Oliver would be considerably more susceptible to the influence of peer pressure.

In concordance with the novel, Oliver devalues himself to his slightly older companions Jack Dawkins and Charley Bates. As a matter of fact, Oliver is advised to mimic or rather learn from their actions as they are his superiors:

“Make 'em your models, my dear. Make 'em your models,” tapping the fire-shovel on the hearth to add force to his words; “do everything they bid you, and take their advice in all matters—especially the Dodger's, my dear. He'll be a great man himself, and will make you one too, if you take pattern by him.” (72)

As a matter of fact, Fagin urges his newly recruited members to learn from their seniors within the criminal organisation as he specifically tells Oliver to learn from his peers. This indicates that

Fagin is taking advantage of the peer pressure aspect within the criminal gang, in order to further indoctrinate not only Oliver but other newcomers to the group as well.

As previously discussed, the criminal environment portrayed in *Oliver Twist* clearly shows signs of a patriarchal hierarchy. As is evident in a power-oriented structure such as this, some individuals have more authority and might even occupy a commanding position over others. This is important to point out for the argument of this essay, for as previously stated, modern research suggests that peers could encourage an individual's deviant and immoral behaviour (Aseltine 103). This is especially crucial in a group where someone in a low position is in any way dependent on the other peers in order to attain a valuable resource as suggested by Vargas (311). Oliver is thus tied to an 'indentured servitude' kind of relationship to Fagin, in addition to this Oliver lacks the proprietary skills needed to fulfil this debt to his benefactor Fagin. This in turn raises the power position of the other members of the group as they possess the necessary skills needed to be a stealthy pickpocket, and thus making sure everyone in the group has access to resources.

Arguably, individuals who lack these abilities are then placed in a lower position of the hierarchical ladder within the group, as they lack the necessary skills that are praised in their gathering of thieves. The following excerpt is an illustration of how Oliver's peers utilise their power over him, and treat him rather condescending as he begins to clean his comrade's boots:

Oliver was but too glad to make himself useful; too happy to have some faces, however bad, to look upon; too desirous to conciliate those about him when he could honestly do so; to throw any objection in the way of this proposal. So he at once expressed his readiness; and, kneeling on the floor, while the Dodger sat upon the table so that he could take his foot in his laps, he applied himself to a process which Mr. Dawkins designated as "japanning his trotter-cases." The phrase, rendered into plain English, signifieth, cleaning his boots. (146)

Despite not engaging in any unlawful activities for a time, Oliver's surrounding delinquent friends continuously try to convince him of the lucrative rewards that come from the trade of thievery. Arguably, one might call it yet another attempt to ensnare and indoctrinate the innocence within Oliver and make him surrender to the covetousness of a life of crime.

Interestingly, as discussed in chapter one, Wolff (229, 240, 243) argues that the innocence of Oliver is important, and this is continuously in peril as Oliver's environment is constantly trying to depict and demonise him as something he is not. Although this is done in different ways, his gathering of unlawful peers is trying to make him embrace delinquency as the benefits that come with it are indeed irresistible. This is especially evident when Oliver is given money from his friend Jack 'The Dodger' Dawkins. This is definitely an example of a peer pressuring moment, in which Dawkins tries to convince Oliver that in order to succeed and become a 'great man' money is a necessity: "Look here!" said the Dodger, drawing forth a handful of shillings and halfpence. "Here's a jolly life! What's the odds where it comes from? Here, catch hold; there's plenty more where they were took from. You won't, won't you? Oh, you precious flat!" (149-150)

In support of my argument, Vargas (313) highlights the fact that in some individuals, status will be essential in how they utilise their power over others. In addition, Oliver is also confirming the hierarchical position he has been given, as he is arguably seeking validation of membership from his comrades. This can be compared with Klein's (80) argument that newly recruited individuals in a criminal organisation seek a sense of belonging and protection. As we have seen, this is a fitting description for Oliver. Furthermore, the theory mentioned by Vargas (210) says that one's social standing in a gathering is partly dependent on respect and hierarchical position.

The loss of innocence is definitely present throughout *Oliver Twist*, and as this essay focuses on the creation of juvenile delinquency it is important to note that the evil forces of criminality continuously try to extinguish the innocence within Oliver. However, there are those in Oliver's acquaintance that try to protect him from that sort of life. Essentially, this is evident in the following excerpt that clearly illustrates the hierarchical social structure:

"Civil words!" cried the girl, whose passion was frightful to see. "Civil words, you villain! Yes, you deserve 'em from me. I thieved for you when I was a child not half as old as this!" pointing to Oliver. "I have been in the same trade, and in the same service, for twelve years since. Don't you know it? Speak out! [...]" "I shall do you a mischief!" interposed the Jew, goaded by these reproaches; "a mischief worse than that, if you say much more!" (133)

Those in power command those without, and the scene also depicts a controlling environment that makes sure that the patriarchal leader is obeyed. In this excerpt there is a heated argument ongoing, where Nancy is expressing sympathy for young Oliver as she is fully aware of the dark path her lawbreaking companions are trying to persuade Oliver to undertake. Arguably, this is a moment where Fagin is silencing Nancy by reminding her of her position in their hierarchical power structure. Subordinates in this unlawful organisation are in no position to raise their voices, especially as that might interfere with the fostering of a new member to the group. Once again it becomes evident that a patriarchal hierarchy is in place, and in some situations there are conflicts that aim to challenge the order of given positions within the delinquent group. Individuals in power however, are not hesitant to exercise their power over others in order to quell mutinous behaviour.

2.4 Conclusion of chapter two

To summarise this chapter, previous modern research theories of ‘social labelling’ have been used to analyse *Oliver Twist*. As I have shown in relation to *Oliver Twist*, society is definitely participating in the process that creates juvenile delinquency. The infamous scene where little Oliver asks for a second serving at the workhouse perfectly portrays an example of negative social labelling. In the novel, through this scene, Oliver is perceived as spoiled, ungrateful and wretched. This is but one example of how Victorian society showed a lack of empathy for children, especially boys. There was a thin line between poverty and criminality, simply being poor was considered to be something undesirable and unwanted. Instead of supporting society you were considered to be a burden, similar to that of criminal behaviour. Arguably, the moral high ground of citizens was the reason for labelling others as less worthy, outcasts and not belonging to the greater society.

The character of Fagin is depicted as a corrupt man who, above all else, desires to satisfy his own selfish needs. *Oliver Twist* clearly illustrates how manipulation is another important aspect in order to further shape and create a delinquent individual. It is evident from the novel that Fagin welcomes and nurtures those who have been cast out by society and gives them an alternative in life, that being to embrace a life of a baleful criminal.

Moreover, the newly acquired friends that Oliver met are also actively persuading him to become a stealthy pickpocket. In addition, on several occasions, Oliver's friends try to convince him of golden opportunities that come with the trade of thievery. This could perhaps to any orphan boy or girl during the 19th century Victorian London be a lucrative and easy choice. As societal structures had robbed them of other options. Therefore *Oliver Twist* is a critique towards a society that caused the corruption of their young.

Conclusion

Oliver Twist manages to expose Victorian society for being careless towards its young generation. The story of *Oliver Twist* magnificently manages to manifest the innocence of childhood in an orphan boy and also depicts a variety of characters who would aspire to alienate, exploit and corrupt this innocence. This essay has argued that in Dickens's novel, 19th century London society indeed participated in the creation of juvenile delinquency through means of social labelling, as portrayed in *Oliver Twist*. This in turn acted as a push factor that made labelled individuals turn to similar labelled individuals. Furthermore, another aspect that played an important role is the fact that children could easily become the target for manipulation, and further exploitation, made possible by villains who cared for and nurtured these neglected children for their own nefarious purposes.

Throughout this essay, modern theories of manipulation have been thoroughly discussed in order to fully comprehend the societal critique that is embedded in *Oliver Twist*. For example how children could be lured and charmed into a gathering of people that sought to exploit them for devious acts such as pickpocketing and even prostitution. Furthermore, what is also evident from the novel is how manipulation could act as a tool to further deprive an individual of their freedom as their lives are being controlled by someone in a dominating position.

As portrayed in *Oliver Twist*, children risk being even further abused and indoctrinated into criminality by means of peer pressure which would further foster juvenile delinquent behaviour. The result being a fully fledged thief with no morals and little understanding of consequences for unlawful behaviour.

The fact that Victorian society cared so little for children and other adolescents who were struck by not only poverty but orphanhood as well is unquestionably deserving of critique. What is also interesting is that *Oliver Twist* depicts the cruel and unfounded accusations that came with social labelling of individuals throughout the Victorian era. Furthermore, the novel illustrates the harmful aspects of negative social labelling that could affect children if ostracised from society, and eventually escaping into the embracing and accepting environment of criminal individuals

where immoral values are considered acceptable. This will ultimately set children on an ominous path in life.

What has further been shown is how in *Oliver Twist*, delinquent individuals are enticing the ostracised children to their collective of deviant individuals. They form a new social order where they feel accepted, encouraged and in a way fostered by their peers. As I have highlighted, many scenes in *Oliver Twist* portray how comradeship could also prove to be a crucial benefactor in the further shaping and creation of juvenile delinquency. This is clearly illustrated in the scene where Fagin specifically tells Oliver to view his newly found friends as role models, and that by following their example he will ultimately become a successful man. This proves that peers have power and influence over each other, thus insinuating that there is a hierarchical power structure similar to that of a patriarchal kind. In other words, the novel seems to also suggest that peer pressure in criminal environments is but one of several aspects that creates juvenile delinquency.

To summarise, *Oliver Twist* ultimately raises awareness of societal issues that have been a recurring humanitarian problem throughout the centuries. Thus, *Oliver Twist* could act as a literary reminder of the major responsibility that society has when it comes to preventing or acting against juvenile delinquency. In addition to dealing with criminal behaviour as it occurs and enforcing punishment as a consequence, society also has a responsibility to treat children and adolescents fairly with the proper attitude and expectations. *Oliver Twist* has thus portrayed what might happen to children if society fails to take responsibility. The devastating effects of society's lack of commitment in a young generation could be the spark that initiates a process that enables the criminal environment to recruit and exploit children for their own diabolical and ominous purposes. Finally, children that are engaged in delinquent gatherings risk becoming targets of manipulation, peer pressure and similar psychological torment that could influence them to become juvenile offenders. In conclusion, in some rare instances there might be no chance of atonement, as was the fate of Nancy in the story of *Oliver Twist*.

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