



THE DISILLUSION OF VICTORIAN YOUTH: OLIVER TWIST'S DESCENT INTO GANG LIFE

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Abstract

With the inability to secure adequate employment to sustain life, individuals in the Victorian Era developed street gangs as a substitution for jobs. During this era, novelists published writings depicting this rise of street gangs in London. As some of these novelists met harsh consequences due to their realistic representation of these events, Charles Dickens masterfully depicted the disillusion of Victorian youth by embedding the issue of street gangs within his works. *Oliver Twist* represents street gang activity prominent in the Victorian Era through the characters of Sikes, Fagin, and their adolescent gang members. As a street gang leader, Fagin substitutes as an authoritarian father-figure for homeless adolescents, using methods of psychological abuse as a means to manipulate, coerce, and control the gang members, leading to Oliver's inclusion in the gang. Oliver's experiences in Fagin's gang depict the events of the street gangs during the era as well as the psychological impacts of gang involvement on youth.

Keywords: Victorian Era, Street Gangs, Psychological Abuse, Psychoanalytic Theory.

INTRODUCTION

During the Victorian time period, a new era of crime developed on London's streets. A primary component of the crime element was the development of street gangs. During these years, street gangs flourished throughout England, particularly in the cities. In Victorian England, street gangs were abundant, "uncontrollable, and had succeeded in turning certain parts of the Capital into no-go zones" (Jones, 2017, 1). Some books, including notorious novels such as *The Wild Boys of London*, were written to depict these gangs. Such novels were banned, to the point of imprisoning those who sold the novel, likely due to the surreal nature of the content (Unknown, 1866). Other novelists, such as Charles Dickens, integrated gang activity into their writing in a more covert manner, possibly as a means to avoid prosecution. *Oliver Twist* represents street gang activity prominent in the Victorian Era through the characters of Sikes, Fagin, and their adolescent gang members. Sikes and Fagin signify the organized crime rampant in Victorian London, while the associated adolescents represent the gang members. Fagin serves as the primary gang leader for the adolescents, establishing a family structure within the gang for these homeless adolescents, with Sikes as his organized crime boss. As a street gang leader, Fagin substitutes as an authoritarian father-figure for homeless adolescents, using methods of psychological abuse as a means to manipulate, coerce, and control the gang members, leading to Oliver's inclusion in the gang.

IMPACT OF INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The development of gangs in Victorian England was the result "of the Industrial Revolution" (Wallace, 1999, 1). During the Industrial Revolution, "the factory system created a new society in Britain" (Mountfield, 1978, 91). The workers or industrial proletariat in these factories "had no economic and no political power" (Mountfield, 1978, 91). Their living conditions were "deplorable" with government taking a "laissez'faire" approach to any solution (Mountfield, 1978, 91-92). As such, these conditions continued with Britain experiencing economic success while the proletariat suffered (Mountfield, 1978). During this time period, "the painful slowness of social improvement makes a striking contrast with the rapidity of industrial progress" (Mountfield, 1978, 92). As a result, numerous individuals found themselves without the means to sustain the most basic life necessities while migration to the city was unparalleled. *Oliver Twist* embodies the proletariat disparity and devastating living conditions through his life at the workhouse. Through Oliver's life at the workhouse, the deplorable living conditions enacted upon those living in poverty by the government was painfully evident. The lamentable conditions included the daily allotment of food allowed to be served to those living in the workhouse which amounted to so little that "Oliver Twist and his companions suffered the tortures of slow starvation" (Dickens, 1941, 16). The unacceptable living conditions and suffering experienced at the workhouse led Oliver to choose a life of homelessness from desperation caused by the circumstances in which he lived. Many individuals during this era found themselves homeless, similar to Oliver, leading to desperation and a need to obtain basic necessities to sustain life. As a

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result of these circumstances, “powerful street gangs began to emerge in cities across the country” (Cox, 2015, 2). The eruption of “the gangs of Victorian London posed a huge problem for the Metropolitan Police, and, for that matter, for many of the citizens of the 19th century Metropolis” (Jones, 2017, 1). The structure of the street gangs varied widely to include all female gangs, all male gangs, adolescent gangs, and those that are a combination of these individuals (Jones, 2017). Despite these differences, most of the gangs had the similar ambition of theft (Jones, 2017). The goal of theft was founded in the living circumstances of these individuals. In the novel *Oliver Twist*, Fagin’s gang of adolescent members led by the crime boss, Sikes, represents a Victorian Era street gang of mixed individuals with the purpose of stealing.

STREET GANG SELECTING AND VETTING

To fulfill this goal of theft, Fagin’s gang has a specific process of selecting and vetting gang members. The recruitment of Oliver to Fagin’s gang is “not a single event, but rather a gradual and lengthy process” (Densley, 2012, 307). In order to be identified as a possible recruit for the gang, Oliver first is placed “in situations where the exchange of signals is possible” (Densley, 2012, 308). Oliver and the Dodger meet because Oliver is essentially lost in the city and his appearance obviously indicates this. The Dodger watches him for a period of time before approaching him when he asks “Hullo, my covey! What’s the row?” (Dickens, 1941, 71). Questioning of this type is a common practice as “gang members typically instigate the information gathering process with a simple question. Gangs use this question to interrogate unfamiliar faces” (Densley, 2012, 308). From this conversation, the Dodger learns that Oliver is homeless, making him a prime candidate for joining the gang. Passing the initial recruitment step results in the Dodger leading Oliver to Fagin’s home to join the gang. The initial entry into Fagin’s gang is through the Dodger as “entry to gangs [is] often restricted to individuals who [have] prior connections to active gang members” (Densley, 2012, 307). Upon arriving at Fagin’s dwelling for the first time with Oliver, the Dodger provides a “watchword or signal that all was right” (Dickens, 1941, 74-75). As such, Oliver’s initial recruitment into Fagin’s gang is through the gang member, the Dodger. The Dodger entices Oliver into the gang, leads him to the dwelling, and provides the signal word to have Oliver allowed into the premises. This process establishes Oliver’s initial recruitment into Fagin’s gang. After Oliver’s initial recruitment, the continued process of recruiting and vetting must take place to determine if he has the ability to contribute to the theft practices of the gang. These theft practices are the primary focus of the gang, as this is the monetary livelihood of the gang in substitution for employment.

With the inability to secure adequate employment to sustain life, individuals in the Victorian Era developed street gangs as a substitution for jobs, using stealing as the means for gaining monetary support. Fagin and Sikes developed their street gang for the purpose of stealing goods as a means of monetary gain and livelihood. Fagin referred to stealing as going to work to demonstrate this substitution of crime for employment by the street gangs of the Victorian Era. Sikes and Fagin refer to the criminal activities of the gang as “business” and the “office” to insinuate theft as employment (Dickens, 1941, 117; 250). With Oliver’s first morning in Fagin’s home, the Dodger and Charley Bates return from stealing to Fagin’s question “I hope you’ve been at work this morning, my dears?” (Dickens, 1941, 81). Dodger replies that he has “a couple of pocket-books” while Charley Bates gives him “four pocket-handkerchiefs” (Dickens, 1941, 81). Further, Fagin teaches the boys the trade of how to pick-pocket by practicing the act numerous times daily. The Dodger and Charley Bates practice their skills of theft “with the most extraordinary rapidity, snuff-box, note-case, watch-guard, chain, shirt-pin, pocket-handkerchief, even the spectacle-case” are lifted from Fagin’s pockets (Dickens, 1941, 83). However, in training them to be skilled, “if the old gentleman felt a hand in any one of his pockets, he cried out where it was; and then the game began all over again” (Dickens, 1941, 83). Through these actions, Fagin is training his youth gang members to skillfully steal items from citizens to ensure more return from their work as thieves. Fagin has an expectation that upon return home each day, the youth gang members must provide stolen goods as their earnings of a day’s work.

To ready the gang members for their job as thieves, Fagin has established a specific process of selecting and vetting gang members. This process of selecting and vetting gang members is used by Fagin to “narrow the field of candidates to those with the basic characteristics required to be trustworthy” (Densley, 2012, 308). To build a false sense of trust among the gang members while maintaining control, Fagin serves as the father-figure for the youth members of the gang. As the role of substitute father, Fagin welcomes Oliver into his home with a seemingly warm approach to simulate a family environment. This is followed by Fagin equating stealing with employment and asking Oliver if he would “like to be able to make pocket-handkerchiefs as easy as Charley Bates” (Dickens, 1941, 82). Upon receiving stolen items, Fagin indicates that the stolen items have not been marked very well, indicating a marking specific to their gang. The stolen items are then marked with a gang symbol to indicate that it now belongs to the gang. The markings



establish the stolen goods as the gang's property. Fagin first teaches Oliver how to mark the stolen items with the gang's symbol distinguishing it as their property which establishes the next step in the vetting process toward gang membership. In addition, Fagin practices the game of theft daily with the Dodger and Charley Bates. While playing the game, Oliver observes the practice of learning to pick-pocket. "For many days, Oliver remained in the Jew's room, picking the marks out of the pocket-handkerchiefs...and sometimes taking part in the game already described: which the two boys and the Jew played, regularly, every morning" (Dickens, 1941, 85). After Oliver has shown he has learned these skills sufficiently well, "gangs must determine whether or not volunteers are capable of performing the basic duties of a gang member" (Densley, 2012, 308). This is the moment when Fagin decides to send Oliver on his first robbery attempt. Upon observing the Dodger and Charley Bates robbing a man, "the whole mystery of the handkerchiefs, and the watches, and the jewels, and the Jew, rushed upon the boy's mind. He stood, for a moment, with the blood so tingling through all his veins from terror, that he felt as if he were in a burning fire; then, confused and frightened, he took to his heels; and, not knowing what he did, made off as fast as he could lay his feet to the ground" (Dickens, 1941, 88). Oliver's realization that the employment taught to him by Fagin and the gang members is actually stealing results in his flight from the situation. As a homeless youth, Oliver had been recruited into Fagin's gang with the promise of obtaining life's basic necessities as well as employment. Further, with Oliver being homeless, Fagin's gang provided him with the security of a home.

IMPACT OF HOMELESSNESS

Equating theft as employment provides gang leaders, such as Fagin, with the ability to attract homeless youth, like Oliver, into the gang. Gang membership and homelessness are closely tied together, particularly during the Victorian Era. In addition to providing a means for monetary support, gangs provide homeless individuals with a substitution for a home. While a stable home environment is not established, a sense of a home is developed, even though the individuals maintained a sense of homelessness. Oliver's inclusion in Fagin's gang is due to his homelessness and the promise of shelter and food. Upon the Dodger's offer to go to Fagin's, Oliver reflects that "this unexpected offer of shelter was too tempting to be resisted..." (Dickens, 1941, 73). The promise of basic necessities was enough for Oliver to ignore the warning signs and enter the gang world. One reason individuals join and maintain membership in a gang is due to a sense of familiarity of homelessness. According to Freud, individuals have "the tendency to gravitate toward the familiar on an unconscious level" (Farrell, 2010, 244). Due to this repetition compulsion, homelessness is the familiar environment for these individuals, such as Oliver. The gang home establishes a home environment amidst homelessness, providing "normalcy in the seemingly chaotic world" (Ferrell, 2010, 244). The gang environment enables Oliver to maintain the familiarity of homelessness while establishing a home which he has been seeking, all while providing for his basic needs.

Because Oliver is homeless, he is coerced into joining Fagin's gang as a substitution for a home. According to Bronfenbrenner, the individual "lives within a microsystem, inside a mesosystem, embedded in an exosystem, all of which are a part of the macrosystem" (Woolfolk, 2010, 66). Each of these levels contain specific social factors which influence the individual. Being homeless, Oliver is seeking social support within the systems that are absent. For Oliver, the microsystem which is "the person's immediate relationships and activities" is lacking, leading to his need to join Fagin's gang as a substitution for a family (Woolfolk, 2010, 66). In the street gang family, there are two groups of people who impact the individual member. The street gang leader, Fagin, is the primary influence on Oliver. The microsystem has the most influence on the individual with Fagin taking the place as parent, thus having the most influence on Oliver. According to collective socialization models, adults have a substantial impact on the individual, particularly for disadvantaged youth, like Oliver (Gephart, 1997). Further, the peers have a considerable impact on each other according to Epidemic models (Gephart, 1997). Based upon the Epidemic model, the behavior of Fagin's gang members develops into "contagion processes [which] result from imitating behavior and peer pressure and are conditioned by differential susceptibility of individuals to conform" (Gephart, 1997, 6). Fagin and the other gang members, particularly the Dodger and Charley Bates, establish Oliver's microsystem. Therefore, upon introduction to the gang, Oliver is most influenced by Fagin and the resulting gang members. Establishing the gang as the microsystem enables the gang to serve as a substitute family for Oliver with Fagin as the father figure.

THE DYSFUNCTIONAL GANG FAMILY

With Fagin serving as a substitute father-figure for the adolescents who join his gang, he implements the authoritarian parental role to maintain control of the gang members. Authoritarian parents "seem cold and controlling" while expecting the children in their care "to be mature and to do what" they say (Woolfolk, 2010, 69). Upon Oliver's arrival to Fagin's home, the youth in his care had "the air of middle-



aged men" instead of adolescents (Dickens, 1941, 76). The children's over-mature behavior was due to Fagin's authoritarian style of caregiving. Authoritarian parents are "insensitive and unresponsive" and "they punish children rather than guiding them" (Hirani, 2017, 2). Upon obtaining Oliver back into the gang after his brief escape with Mr. Brownlow, Fagin "took the opportunity of reading Oliver a long lecture on the crying sin of ingratitude; of which he clearly demonstrated he had been guilty" (Dickens, 1941, 168). In this speech, Fagin shared the story of a similar gang member who had spoken to the police with the outcome of being hanged, all while he "lamented with tears in his eyes [due to] the wrong-headed and treacherous behavior of the young person in question" (Dickens, 1941, 168). Fagin uses authoritarian parental tactics to manipulate Oliver, threatening him with hanging if he were to leave again, all while playing on Oliver's guilt as if Fagin is the victim. Further, Fagin uses this parenting method to maintain control of the adolescent gang members. Parents who use the authoritarian style "do not appreciate negotiation" and "are very strict" (Hirani, 2017, 3). The Dodger expresses to Oliver that "Fagin will make something of you, though, or you'll be the first he ever had that turned out unprofitable" indicating that all adolescents who join his gang eventually succumb to Fagin's tactics in order to provide a profit through stealing (Dickens, 1941, 175). Through Fagin's strict enforcement of the rules he has established for the gang members and punishment when the rules are not followed, the gang members clearly indicate their adherence to these rules. Fagin's role as the authoritarian parent, with the gang members in the role as the children, has developed a dysfunctional family unit.

Due to Fagin's authoritarian style, the members of his gang are unable to have a healthy expression or resolution of feelings. At Oliver's wishing to leave the gang, he contemplated that "thinking it might be dangerous to express his feelings more openly, he only sighed and went on with his boot-cleaning" (Dickens, 1941, 173). An impact of these behaviors is the development of an insecure attachment for the adolescents in which they become "fearful, sad, anxious, clinging, rejecting, or angry" as well as passive and dependent (Hirani, 2017; Woolfolk, 2010, 69). These behaviors can be recognized in the reactions to Fagin by the members of the gang. Oliver often exhibits fear, once indicating that "[his] blood ran cold, as he listened to the Jew's words" (Dickens, 1941, 169). However, Oliver also shows signs of dependency as he "was but too glad to make himself useful; too happy to have some faces, however bad, to look upon" (Dickens, 1941, 171). These represent Oliver's inability to resolve feelings in a healthy manner. In Fagin's dysfunctional gang family, Oliver as well as the other gang members are prevented by Fagin, the authoritarian parent, from healthy emotional expression. As a result, "if you can't feel angry, your anger is split off and numbed by ego defenses" (Bradshaw, 1988, 66). In Fagin's gang, the members are not allowed to express feelings of anger regarding the situation in which they find themselves. When Nancy, a female gang member, becomes outraged and fights for Oliver after his return to the gang, she is threatened by Fagin and physically restrained by Sikes (Dickens, 1941). From these threats and manipulation, she eventually succumbs to the gang mentality again, stating "Keep the game a-going! Never say die! And the like" when Oliver is to be chosen for the house robbery (Dickens, 1941, 185). Fagin's authoritarian parental style punished Nancy for expressing her true emotions, leading her to voice support of the gang activities as expected of her by Fagin. The use of authoritarian parenting style is the foundation of psychological methods of abuse, instituted by Fagin, to manipulate the members of the gang.

Psychological abuse is a cornerstone of Fagin's dysfunctional family gang, established to maintain control of the gang. A primary weapon used as a means of psychological abuse by Fagin is shame as "dysfunctional families are all shame-based and emotionally shut down" (Bradshaw, 1988, 72). Further, because the members of Fagin's family gang are unable to express their emotions, "ultimately they will internalize the shame" (Bradshaw, 1988, 67). Fagin particularly uses this approach when the members of the gang do not return with stolen items, as ordered, which is the primary function of the gang. "Whenever the Dodger or Charley Bates came home at night, empty-handed, he would expatiate with great vehemence on the misery of idle and lazy habits; and would enforce upon them the necessity of an active life, by sending them supperless to bed" (Dickens, 1941, 85). Through equating their failure to steal with laziness, and punishing it with the withholding of food, Fagin is shaming the Dodger and Charley Bates for not stealing. In this way, Fagin is withholding food as a means of payment for not completing the work of stealing. When Oliver is captured after being at Mr. Brownlow's, he is openly shamed in the neighborhood with statements such as "young wretch" and "little brute" (Dickens, 1941, 142). Further, Fagin shames him for running away from his home, stressing Oliver's ungratefulness for all that Fagin has done for him. Through this shaming, Fagin places himself in the victim role, making Oliver feel as though he is the perpetrator. This shames Oliver both for leaving the gang, and emotionally hurting Fagin, due to his ingratitude of providing a home for Oliver. In addition, Oliver is often shamed with Fagin's recurring "Ha! Ha! Ha!" for his naivety



(Dickens, 1941, 76). Shame is also used by the seasoned gang members on Oliver, similar to how Fagin uses shame. The gang members, such as Charley Bates, imitate this behavior frequently by shaming Oliver for his inexperience and innocent behavior. Charley often mimics Fagin's "Ha! Ha! Ha!" and laughs hysterically at Oliver, once to the point that "the noise of Charley's laughter...might have kept many people awake" (Dickens, 1941, 111; 156). The gang member's use of shame is also evident in the menial tasks the members give to Oliver, like cleaning Dawkins boots instead of allowing him to engage in more meaningful tasks. In this way, shame is used by Fagin and the gang members as a means of emotional degradation to Oliver.

RELATIONAL AND SOCIAL AGGRESSION

Fagin also uses relational aggression as an additional form of psychological abuse to control Oliver. Relational aggression, like indirect aggression, can include rejection, or social aggression, as well as manipulation (Voulgaridou, 2015). Fagin uses relational aggression as a method of psychological abuse within the gang environment to maintain control. Indirect aggression is implemented upon Oliver through methods such as "ignoring, avoiding, or excluding others from social interactions" (Voulgaridou, 2015, 88). Fagin particularly excludes Oliver from others, or isolates him, as a form of manipulation. Using isolation as a method of psychological abuse is for the purpose of brainwashing Oliver, the success of which "depends not only on the stress brought to bear on the targeted individuals but also on the extent to which their resistance can be undermined" (Sowell, 1993, 41). Upon Oliver's arrival at Fagin's home, he is completely isolated from the outside world. Being unable to leave the house "for many days, Oliver remained in the Jew's room" (Dickens, 1941, 85). Further, Fagin uses this method by initially excluding Oliver from the jobs the Dodger and Charley Bates are given. Instead, Oliver is not allowed to go outside and is allowed only to work on imprinting the gang's symbol on the items retrieved by the other gang members. During this time, "at length, he began to languish for fresh air, and took many occasions of earnestly entreating the old gentleman to allow him to go out to work with his two companions" (Dickens, 1941, 85). Eventually, due to this isolation, "Oliver was rendered the more anxious to be actively employed" (Dickens, 1941, 85). Through equating theft with employment, coupled with isolation as a form of psychological abuse, this exclusion eventually leads to Oliver's yearning to join them until "at length, one morning, Oliver obtained the permission he had so eagerly sought" (Dickens, 1941, 86). Although Oliver did not know the extent of what he was seeking, the use of isolation and exclusion led him to want it badly. The use of indirect aggression as psychological abuse led to Oliver seeking inclusion in the gang's criminal activities. Fagin used relational aggression, particularly isolation, as a form of psychological abuse to brainwash Oliver into yearning to fulfill the gang's job of stealing.

Social aggression is also implemented to further impact Oliver by including "behaviors that damage or threaten to harm relationships, acceptance and inclusion through manipulation or peer relationships" (Voulgaridou, 2015, 88). Fagin is the primary perpetrator who orchestrates the social aggression as a form of psychological abuse. However, the gang members become the implementors of the abuse on the individual. In this way, relational aggression "involves the direct manipulation of peer relationships" (Voulgaridou, 2015, 88). Fagin uses relational aggression frequently to manipulate the members of the gang. Upon Oliver's arrival at the dwelling, he uses relational aggression almost as a game, often reacting with a "Ha! Ha! Ha!" when the peer manipulation has been carried out (Dickens, 1941, 76). When Oliver first arrives to Fagin's home, "seated round the table were four or five boys...these all crowded about their associate as he whispered a few words to the Jew; and then turned round and grinned at Oliver. Upon this, the young gentlemen with the pipes came round him, and shook both his hands very hard-especially the one in which he held his little bundle...and another was so obliging as to put his hands in his pockets" (Dickens, 1941, 76). Oliver, being "so jolly green," as described by Charley Bates, was unaware of their manipulations (Dickens, 1941, 82). While Oliver was naively seeing these gang members as being welcoming and friendly, they were robbing him of any personal items. This was a form of social aggression implemented by the gang members led by Fagin. Fagin orchestrates social aggression to further demean and emotionally manipulate Oliver.

Fagin has rules or norms of behaviors established for all gang members to maintain control. These specific norms for behavior are established in order to "define which behaviors are expected and accepted among its members" (Carlie, 2002, 18). The gang members learn the expected norms from their gang leader, Fagin, and other members of the gang (Carlie, 2002). Failure to maintain the expected norms, "depending upon their level of importance to members of the gang, may result in punishments which range from minor to severe" (Carlie, 2002, 18). Fagin most often uses psychological abuse as a form of punishment when the gang members fail to maintain the expected norms. One of the most severe failures of an expected norm in Fagin's gang is the failure to steal, as this is the primary job of the gang members. After the Dodger and Charley Bates repeatedly failed to steal items, "he even went so far as to knock them both down a flight of



stairs" (Dickens, 1941, 85). Dickens explains that "this was carrying out his virtuous precepts to an unusual extent," demonstrating the level of importance of not following the expected norm of stealing for multiple occurrences (1941, 85). Based upon the authoritarian structure, an expected norm within Fagin's gang is that gang members will follow instructions without any negotiation. Frequently, Fagin instructs gang members regarding their assigned jobs with the expectation that there will be no discussion or apprehension on the part of the gang members. Oliver is instructed by Fagin to accompany Sikes in the house robbery. However, at one-point Oliver pleads with Sikes to allow him to not participate in the robbery, stating "Oh! For God's sake let me go!" (Dickens, 1941, 213). As this is against the established gang norms, to ensure that Oliver makes no further attempts to retreat or requests for negotiation, Sikes "swore a dreadful oath, and...cocked the pistol" to threaten him to continue on with the robbery attempt signifying the severity of this offense (Dickens, 1941, 213). The use of the authoritarian role is implemented to ensure that gang members carry out the expected jobs. Fagin uses psychological abuse as a means to manipulate and control the gang members into following gang norms to perform the assigned jobs without hesitation.

IMPACT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

When subjected to this level of psychological abuse, "the human will becomes disabled" (Bradshaw, 1988, 76). The systematic psychological abuse implemented by Fagin eventually negatively impacts Oliver's will and ability to make his own decisions. As a result of the conditioning caused by the psychological abuse perpetrated by Fagin and the gang, Oliver's "mind cannot use its perception, judgement, reasoning, and imagination when it is under the impact of heavy emotion" (Bradshaw, 1988, 73). As an authoritarian father-figure, this is purposeful on Fagin's part to ensure that gang members follow his instructions without hesitation. By serving in the authoritarian parental role coupled with psychological abuse, Fagin systematically disables the gang member's ability to make their own decisions. This safe guards his role as gang leader and the business of criminal activities employed by the gang. Fagin specifically chooses individuals who will follow his authoritarian parental role and are susceptible to his systematic psychological abuse. As such, Oliver was specifically recruited and vetted as a member of Fagin's gang.

As an established gang member, the expectation for Oliver is to fulfill the gang norm of stealing and his attempt to leave the gang is met with severe consequences. In running away, Oliver is proving that he is violating the established norms of the gang. When such occurrences happen, "gang members are known to deliberately test the toughness of volunteers" (Densley, 2012, 311). Therefore, instead of helping Oliver, the Dodger and Charley Bates "issued forth with great promptitude; and shouting 'Stop thief!' too, joined in the pursuit like good citizens" (Dickens, 1941, 88). As such, Oliver is detained by the local police. Oliver's violation of gang norms by refusing to steal, leading to his arrest, carries extreme consequences. The approach by the gang members of the Dodger and Charley Bates in handling the situation angers Fagin due to Oliver's novice criminality which was "inefficient or inexpedient...increases the likelihood for casualties, collateral damage, prolonged police attention, and reduced profit margins" (Densley, 2012, 312). As such, Fagin reacts to the news of Oliver's capture by the police by "seizing the Dodger tightly by the collar, and threatening him with horrid imprecations" (Dickens, 1941, 113). The effect of this event is Fagin's determination to recruit Oliver back into the gang and ensure his full vetting upon re-entry. Fagin declares to the gang members that "we must know where he is, my dears; he must be found" (Dickens, 1941, 121). Fagin sets out on his plan to capture Oliver as his top priority to ensure that there are no threats to his gang from Oliver's failed criminal attempt. The consequences to Oliver is that he has no choice in being included into the gang or the events of which he will participate in once he is rejoined with the gang. Fagin's goal is to maintain control of the gang and the gang members. As the authoritarian father figure, Fagin ensures that the members of the gang follow his orders without negotiation and that there is punishment if they fail to do so.

Because Oliver had been a member of Fagin's gang who attempted escape, he is captured and returned to the gang. Upon his return, Fagin "inflected a smart blow on Oliver's shoulders with the club; and was raising it for a second, when the girl, rushing forward, wrested it from his hand" (Dickens, 1941, 152). Although she was instrumental in catching him, Nancy proceeds to protest and threaten Fagin and Sikes to leave Oliver alone, stating that Oliver is now "a thief, a liar, a devil, all that's bad from this night forth" due to his joining back into the gang (Dickens, 1941, 154). This statement indicates that he is now fully vetted into the gang. Sikes and Fagin use psychological and physical abuse to restrain Nancy. After many attempts at various psychological manipulations with no effect, Fagin threatens her stating "I shall do you a mischief...a mischief worse than that, if you say much more" (Dickens, 1941, 155). Fagin's authoritarian role is insensitive to her feelings while focusing on maintaining complete control of the gang family. At that, Sikes restrained her wrists, "upon which, she makes a few ineffectual struggles, and fainted"



(Dickens, 1941, 155). Fagin and Sikes inflict intimidation, extortion, and assault on the members of the gang to ensure that they maintain their place within the gang for the purpose of their job, theft.

In addition to the petty theft of street gangs during the Victorian Era, “the new economic opportunities presented by the urban gave rise to complex new forms of criminal activity” (Wallace, 1999, 5). Sikes serves as a crime boss which represents some of these new forms of criminal activity, which plagued urban Victorian England. While Fagin managed the daily work of the petty pick-pocket theft of the street gang, Sikes managed the organized crime of a house robbery of a wealthy family to occur in another town. This job engaged the coordination of additional individuals such as Toby Crackit, which worked on “hanging about the place for a fortnight” on the hopes of getting “one of the servants in line” (Dickens, 1941, 182). Sikes intention was that this robbery would be an inside heist with the help of a servant. However, when this could not be secured, Fagin and Sikes schemed a new plan which involved Oliver sneaking into the house to open the front door. To ensure Oliver’s participation, he is threatened by Sikes, of which is reiterated by Nancy, stating “if you’re crossed by him in this job you have on hand, you’ll prevent his ever telling tales afterwards, by shooting him through the head, and will take your chance of swinging for it, as you do for a great many other things in the way of business...” (Dickens, 1941, 197-198). Upon this, Sikes and Oliver traveled the distance to the robbery site, with Sikes pretending as though Oliver were his son to others through the journey. The house robbery was a much larger scale criminal theft, as Sikes worked with multiple individuals in London, as well as in another town, to plan the robbery. Despite Oliver’s rejections and pleadings, Sikes carries out the robbery attempt, which is foiled by the individuals in the home, resulting in the shooting of Oliver. Characteristics of gangs include “intimidation and extortion...theft...assault...[and] shootings” (WSFA, 2001, 1). The robbery attempt fails when Oliver is shot by a member of the household. Through this organized criminal robbery attempt, Oliver succumbs to intimidation, extortion, and assault, which leads to his forced attempt of theft, ending with the shooting. During Oliver’s time as a member of Fagin’s gang, he is victim to psychological abuse, criminal activity, and injury.

Despite the obvious impacts of Oliver’s gang membership, like criminal activity, there are numerous additional negative impacts as well. The systematic psychological abuse endured by Oliver has a secondary consequence of emotional degradation. The emotional consequences are evident when Oliver has “intense feelings that are totally inappropriate to what is actually happening” (Bradshaw, 1988, 75). Upon viewing the picture of the woman at Mr. Brownlow’s home, he abruptly fainted due to the lady’s resemblance to him. Further, at the attempted return to Mr. Brownlow’s after his recovery from the shooting, Oliver becomes inconsolable with demands that he has located the house where Sikes had taken him. However, after inspection, this is discovered to be false. Oliver also reacted with extreme emotion upon learning of Rose’s improving health. When he heard the news, Oliver “had scarcely the power of understanding anything that had passed, until, after a long ramble in the quiet evening air, a burst of tears came to his relief” (Dickens, 1941, 324-325). An additional example of Oliver’s emotional degradation occurs at the home in the country. While in his room asleep, Oliver abruptly felt as though “the air became close and confined; and he thought, with a glow of terror, that he was in the Jew’s house again” (Dickens, 1941, 336). Even after awakening, he is certain that he has seen Fagin at his window, letting out horrible cries to alert the household. Believing that Fagin was actually there, Oliver leads the family on a search for him to no result. Oliver frequently reacts with extreme emotion to situations, with the inability to make rational decisions, due to the psychological abuse perpetrated by Fagin. Fagin’s use of psychological abuse on Oliver resulted in the “damage [to] his...emotional system” (Dolan, 1992, 19). Oliver was the victim of systematic psychological abuse which led to these emotional consequences as evidenced throughout the novel.

RESULTS OF GANG MEMBERSHIP

Even after removal from the gang, the trauma caused in Oliver’s life by being a member of Fagin’s gang continues (Youth.gov, n.d.; Farrell, 2010). Although Oliver was adopted by Mr. Brownlow, “much internal, often unconscious, resistance” can still occur upon leaving the gang environment and homelessness (Farrell, 2010, 245). Because “the ‘unconscious’...is a repository of repressed desires, feelings, memories, and instinctual drives,” Oliver is drawn to the gang environment of Fagin’s dwelling (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, 389). When Oliver was initially rescued from Fagin’s gang, he returned to the location of Fagin’s hangout, although supposedly without knowledge. However, evidence indicates an unconscious desire to return to the location of the gang. Oliver is returning the books that were stolen by the Dodger and Charley Bates, of which event he was a witness. Further, having been to Fagin’s home before, Oliver must have recognized his location, even at an unconscious level. While Oliver had been freed, his repressed desires for the familiarity of homelessness returns him to the location, to be captured by Nancy. This unconscious desire arises again



when Oliver is returning to see Mr. Brownlow after staying with Mrs. Maylie and Rose. During the travel, Oliver declares “the thieves – the house they took me to,” only to find that he was mistaken (Dickens, 1941, 305). These unconscious desires or thoughts “are brought about by forces and drives within ourselves over which we exercise very little conscious control because they arise from something or somewhere that is beyond our control – the unconscious” (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, 389). While Oliver is safe and not near the gang, he is still suddenly taken over by feelings of being near their location or wanting to go to that house. The unconscious psychological impacts of homelessness, coupled with the membership in Fagin’s gang, directly impacts Oliver’s behavior. Therefore, “the paradox is that for many...there is the pull to the lifestyle of homelessness despite the conscious wish to end their life of homelessness” (Ferrell, 2010, 249). The unconscious pull to continue as part of Fagin’s gang and return to a life of homelessness appears evident in Oliver's first freedom attempt from the gang by his return to the location of the gang. The same unconscious need to return to the gang, despite or possibly due to the negative consequences, may still plague Oliver upon his permanent adoption by Mr. Brownlow.

In addition to the unconscious desire to return to gang membership, Oliver is likely to “experience long-term health and social consequences” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018, 8). These consequences can be attributed to the disruption in the influences evident in his microsystem during his formative years (Woolfolk, 2010). Oliver suffered extreme psychological and social consequences due to the abuse, as well as physical harm caused by the living conditions and the shooting. These negative impacts caused by those closest to Oliver, like his authoritarian father figure of Fagin, can lead to a lifetime of consequences. The use of three factors “endogenous to gang membership - criminal involvement, cultural orientations, and social isolation...is good reason to believe that the consequences of gang membership will extend years beyond initial gang joining” (Pyrooz, 2012, 22). Oliver’s consequences include psychological and physical results due to the victimization of membership in Fagin’s gang (Pyrooz, 2012). While these consequences are made clearly evident to the reader during Oliver’s membership in Fagin’s gang, the consequences will continue for years after his separation from the gang. Although *Oliver Twist* concludes with Oliver being adopted by Mr. Brownlow, describing the situation as “truly happy,” the lasting impacts of the psychological abuse and manipulation experienced by Oliver will have lasting impacts even though these are not expressly evident in the novel.

The impacts of gang membership will continue throughout Oliver’s lifetime, despite the happy resolution of adoption. The fairy-tale ending to *Oliver Twist* strays from the rest of the novel, which included more reality-based writing that addresses the social issues of Victorian England. Through Oliver’s experiences, the impacts of the Victorian Era street gangs on an innocent youth can be realized. These impacts, both psychologically and physically, do not resolve upon leaving the gang. This is evident when Oliver believes to have seen Fagin even after being in Mrs. Maylie’s care for months. While at their home, which is a great distance from London, Oliver’s fears of Fagin are still so strong that he cries out upon believing to have seen and heard him at the window. Once everyone ran to check on him, “they found him, pale and agitated, pointing in the direction of the meadows behind the house, and scarcely able to articulate the words, ‘The Jew!’ the Jew!’” (Dickens, 1941, 337). After a lengthy search by many members of the home, Fagin cannot be found. This occurrence demonstrates the lasting psychological trauma of Oliver’s membership in the gang. The emotional consequences due to the psychological abuse of the authoritarian father-figure of gang leader, Fagin, will continue for years to come for *Oliver Twist*.

CONCLUSION

However, the ending that Oliver is perfectly happy with no lasting results, leaves the reader to question if this fairy-tale ending was purposeful to diminish the impacts of gang membership. Other authors who wrote more realistically of gang membership, such as the author of *The Wild Boys of London*, met extreme scrutiny. This included the “dozens of newsagents and booksellers across Britain [who] were prosecuted under the Obscene Publication Act just for stocking it” (Unknown, 1866, 1). Perhaps Dickens fairy-tale ending was an approach to avoid this level of persecution. Even though, the lasting impacts of membership in Fagin’s gang goes unrealized for Oliver’s character based on the novel. After his adoption by Mr. Brownlow, the long-term impacts of emotional and social consequences, as well as health problems, caused by gang membership must still influence Oliver throughout his lifetime.

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