Current Youth Culture

Effects on Juvenile Delinquency:

Social Media Trends and Delinquency

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Abstract

Juvenile delinquency is a significant dilemma in our criminal justice system. There are many factors contributing to deviant behavior and delinquency that have remained consistent over time. There are new influences in youth culture that can contribute to a delinquent lifestyle. Factors commonly present in current youth culture are peer influence, common youth activities, and social media. This study emphasizes how juveniles are often susceptible to new trends, such as those on social media. TikTok is a popular app that contains plenty of deviant trends impacting our youth. The results of this study show how peer influence, youth activities, and social media intersect and impact juveniles to commit delinquency. Furthermore, this study also discussed recommendations on quelling these issues amongst our youth.
I. Introduction

Background

Juvenile delinquency is a significant dilemma in our Criminal Justice system. Typically, a youth becomes part of the juvenile justice system after committing or being charged with a delinquent or criminal act. These youth are considered juveniles until they reach the age of eighteen. Oftentimes, depending on the severity of the crime, juveniles can be tried as adults and are sentenced to adult sanctions. In 2020, there were about 508,400 delinquency cases in the United States (OJJDP, 2023). Person and property offenses were the leading offenses within juveniles. The most common crimes being committed by juveniles are vandalism, assault, theft, violence and drug violations (Aazami, 2023). This number is the lowest it has been in years. This may be impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused a worldwide shutdown that actively encouraged people to stay home. As a result, there was a change in policies and procedures that impacted the sanctioning of juveniles and the number of law-violating behaviors amongst youth (OJJDP, 2023). Although this is a low statistic, juvenile delinquency and crime is still present in society.

To deter future criminal behavior, youths and children are targets for prevention and rehabilitation methods. These strategies of prevention and rehabilitation are based on different concepts and approaches. Juvenile systems are aimed to deter criminal behavior or rehabilitate youths who are at-risk. Oftentimes preventive strategies aim to target at-risk children. As we know there are many factors such as family, neglect, abuse, economic status, and much more that can impact delinquency. Family and community-based approaches are most appropriate for limiting and preventing juvenile delinquency. Family-based interventions can include family
therapy and building positive relationships. This technique can create strong bonds and promote problem solving through communication (Aazami, 2023). Community-based interventions located in public areas like parks, schools, and community centers can provide services available to multiple individuals (Aazami, 2023, pg. 14). These interventions can be largely influential when located in certain communities where crime is present due to lack of economic or social resources.

**Factors Contributing to Delinquency**

There are negative behaviors that correlate to the risk of juveniles being involved in crime or delinquency. Juveniles are highly impacted by their surrounding environments and are susceptible to all sorts of negative stimuli. Some negative stimuli that theorists have analyzed as factors of juvenile delinquency are poverty, parenting styles, education, and much more. Although many underlying factors of juvenile delinquency have remained consistent over time, there are new influences that have contributed to a youth’s delinquent lifestyle. Youth culture is constantly shifting, and juveniles are likely to be influenced by these changes. Juveniles are often susceptible to new trends or lifestyles that can impact their livelihood. Peer groups, youth activities, and social media are some of the new influences. These new influences are essential when analyzing crime because they have shown to be popular in youth culture. For example, ninety-two percent of adolescents are active daily on the internet (Yelishala, 2023). Youth are likely to mimic the behaviors of their peers. The behaviors displayed are often portrayed as socially desirable because of the reinforcement provided by the displayed behaviors (Yelishala, 2023). When behaviors are reinforced, they are encouraged by some sort of social rewards. However, youth can display behaviors that should not be reinforced because they lead to criminal patterns.
Delinquency and Theories

In order for criminal behaviors or patterns to be addressed, they must be further studied. There are multiple theories outlining the direct and indirect causes of juvenile delinquency. Many of these theories highlight the significance of outside influences and factors that can play a role in a child’s development and behavior. This study focuses on social variables that impact deviance in a modern perspective. There are a few theories that can further outline and connect social variables to crime and delinquency.

Moffitt’s Developmental Taxonomy (1993) is a theory that labels criminal offenders in two different categories. Moffitt theorizes that there are two types of offenders: 1) life-course persistent (LCP) and 2) adolescent-limited offenders. This theory is significant because it outlines the high risk of juveniles becoming life-course persistent offenders. As a youth, LCP offenders are likely to present antisocial behaviors, impulsivity, hyperactivity, and more negative behaviors (Jolliffe et al., 2017, pg. 22). This is essential because these behaviors can typically begin at adolescence and continue into adulthood. Adolescent-limited offenders are typically able to stray away from deviant behavior after maturing or adulting.

Juvenile delinquency is commonly learned or adapted through various different social experiences. One micro-level theory that outlines this concept is Social Learning Theory (1973) introduced by Robert Akers. This theory is a further analysis of Edwin Sutherland’s Theory of Differential Association (1939). Differential Association, analyzes that criminal and law-abiding behaviors are adapted through social interaction with others. Exposure to large amounts of deviant behavior, creates a risk for engagement in similar deviant behaviors (Cullen and Wilcox, 2010, pg. 6). Aker’s Social Learning Theory (1973), further implies that behaviors are learned
through observations or imitations of those individuals around them. The earlier in age and the longer amount of time a youth associates with deviant peers, the more they will engage in delinquency (Ward and Forney, 2020, pg. 3). Furthermore, the modeling and reinforcement from our social environment can further shape these behaviors in a positive or negative way (Cullen and Wilcox, 2010, pg. 10).

**Current Study**

Oftentimes children and teens idolize or want to exemplify and mimic behavior that they have been exposed to within their culture. These behaviors or trends that children and teens are adapting to may impact their involvement in delinquency. Factors commonly present in current youth culture that are focused on this study are peer groups, common youth activities, and social media. These three variables can significantly influence youth culture and juvenile delinquency in a detrimental way. Through literature review, these variables can be further analyzed and determine what factors play a negative role in juvenile delinquency, as well as what preventative strategies can help against these issues. Social media and tracking deviant trends are the main sources used for data collection. Specifically, TikTok is the social media platform used to analyze youth involvement in delinquency. Furthermore, this data can be connected to Aker’s Social Learning Theory, which again outlines behaviors learned to association (Cullen and Wilcox, 2010, pg. 6)

**II. Literature Review**

*Age and Gender Differences*

When analyzing peer groups and peer influence, juveniles will often deny that they are being influenced by their peer groups. They are often oblivious to the impact their peers have on themselves and their actions. Age and gender can intersect with peer influences and impact the
juvenile delinquency that occurs among youths. When comparing these peer groups and associations, there seems to be gender and age differences. For example, females and males are similar because their neurological development is alike (Defoe et al., 2019, pg. 694). However, although their development is similar, adolescent males are more likely to participate in risk-taking behaviors than adolescent females. These risk-taking acts are often delinquent and can lead to criminal behavior. Another study analyzed that younger males are more impacted by peers than females (Reeta, 2020, pg. 151). As mentioned before, juveniles are likely to be involved in these risk-taking behaviors because of peer pressure or influence. The adolescent male tendency to risk-take in peer groups is high because of their competitive nature and their desire to be seen as strong or tough (Defoe et al., 2019, pg. 694). This image can be socially rewarding to males and can lead to a continuation of these delinquent behaviors that are encouraged by peer influence.

Although males are more influenced by peers, females are still shown to be impacted. For example, one qualitative study highlighted that females were describing instances in which they were influenced by their peers to commit delinquent acts (Azad et al., 2018, pg. 258). Female participants also described instances in which they placed their peer’s needs above their own (Azad et al., 2018, pg. 262). The teen female interviews recall instances in which they have been directly influenced by their deviant peers. One teenage female from the study states that she would have never tried marijuana if she never saw her peer trying it right in front of her (Azad et al., 2018, pg. 264). Gender differences are present when comparing rates of peer influence and delinquency. However, it is essential to point out that both females and males are likely to commit delinquency due to peer influence.

Aside from gender, age may also play a role in peer offending. Older youths were more likely to participate in slightly severe offenses, such as alcohol or drug use (Felson and Richard,
When it comes to comparing ages, juveniles in younger age groups have shown to be more susceptible to risk taking than older youths. Furthermore, youths ages 11-13 are at higher risk of offending than youths ranging from 14-19 years of age (Defoe et al., 2019, pg. 695). This can be caused by their potential unawareness of the possible consequences that result from their deviant acts. On the other hand, older teens have a higher awareness and can stray away from participating in deviant behaviors.

**Peer Influences**

**Sense of Identity**

Adolescents and youths are constantly going through developmental changes. During their adolescence, children and teens are trying to find a sense of identity. This sense of identity is affected by many traits and characteristics in their everyday lives. One large part of this developing identity involves peer or group associations and influence. Typically, youths will develop relationships with peers that they meet in school, neighborhoods, and even online. Peer influence occurs when one person affects or is affected by another single person or persons of a similar age (Laursen and Veenstr, 2021, pg. 889). Within these peer relationships, youth can seek various needs or different opportunities.

To begin, peer groups can provide connection, support, and a sense of intimacy (Azad et al., 2018, pg. 258). Peer connections are essential in providing socialization and can lead youth towards a successful path. Positive peer influences can promote confidence, boost self-esteem, morals, and much more (Reeta, 2020, pg. 149). However, we commonly see peer groups that are highly involved in delinquency and participate in a series of risky behaviors. This occurs because these children and teens are in their developmental stages of adolescence and they are aroused by risk-taking (Defoe et al., 2019, pg. 693). Youths receive pleasure from taking risks within their
peer groups because there is a sense of homophily (Felson and Richard, 2023 pg. 441). This peer influence on risk-taking can push a youth to participate in delinquent activities, as a means of peer socialization. Furthermore, these peer groups are likely to participate in these deviant acts when their activities are unstructured and there is no adult supervision (Felson and Richard, 2023 pg. 429). The activities or offenses committed by peer groups are typically minor because their consequences seem weaker (Felson and Richard, 2023 pg. 443). Some of these minor acts include fighting, shoplifting, vandalism, arson, or other types of petty theft (Azad et al., 2018, pg. 264). Although some juvenile cases or behaviors are minor, their risky behavior may result in criminal charges.

Aside from peer connections and support, youths will search for validation in peer groups because they value their relationships highly. Within these peer relationships youths will seek acceptance and closeness (Reeta, 2020, pg. 149). Individuals seek to become acquainted with “popular peers” of their social status. The sense of popularity provides youths with pleasure. As a result, these adolescents are willing to alter their behaviors in order to become included and receive the benefits of status (Laursen and Veenstr, 2021, pg. 897). Peer groups go through a process of selection, and this creates a more homogenous and alike group of peers (Laursen and Veenstr, 2021, pg. 890). Those that are excluded from peer groups are considered “unpopular” adolescents and are often rejected. These rejected youths will often show signs of hyperactive or aggressive behaviors. Youths may also experience depressive behaviors and loneliness as a result of exclusion (Laursen and Veenstr, 2021, pg. 892). Therefore, these young adults or children experience failure or a pattern of further social rejection (Reeta, 2020, pg. 149). This continuous pattern will negatively affect a youth and their behaviors can become delinquent and criminal.
**Solo Offending vs. Co-Offending**

Juveniles will commit offenses by themselves or within their peer groups, as a result of peer influence. Solo offending occurs when youths commit crimes individually and without peer influence or without a peer present. Co-offending occurs when juveniles commit crimes in groups or with one or more peers present (Ward and Forney, 2020, pg. 5). Delinquent peer relationships can create opportunities for experimentation with delinquent behaviors amongst peers (Laursen and Veenstr, 2021, pg. 892). Co-offending may also result from peer pressure and conformity experienced in these deviant groups (Laursen and Veenstra, 2021, pg. 890).

It is stated that the likelihood of a youth offending alone is lower than if that youth is joined by peers (Felson and Richard, 2023). For example, one sample of female juvenile participants explained how oftentimes their delinquent acts were performed in groups. It was often unclear what specific pressure led to those delinquent behaviors. Meanwhile, other youths mentioned that their peers and friends were a direct influence on their delinquent behavior (Azad et al., 2018, pg. 264). Most juvenile offenses, such as vandalism, drug or alcohol use, and burglary are commonly analyzed to be committed by co-offenders (Felson and Richard, 2023, pg. 442). The company of peers amplifies the willingness and motivation to act on certain curiosities or to follow along with deviant behaviors that their peers are presenting.

**Youth Activities**

**Drugs and Alcohol**

Another factor present in youth culture that impacts juvenile delinquency is youth activities. Relating to peer groups and peer influence, children and teens participate in certain activities that are deviant or lead to future deviance. Social environments highly impact the likelihood of juveniles participating in deviant activities. Youth culture operates by creating its
own rules and norms amongst children and teens (Laursen and Veenstr, 2021, pg. 892). As explained above, teens and children are likely to adjust their behaviors or participate in certain activities to fit those norms and rules.

One common deviant activity that youths participate in is drug and alcohol use. Addressing drug and alcohol use early in adolescent life is essential. Substance use has been issued as a large public health problem in the United States. In the United States, there are 75.6% of youths under the age of 18 that have claimed to use addictive substances such as marijuana, cocaine, alcohol, and tobacco (You et. al., 2020, pg. 1). Alcohol, drugs, and inhalants are seen as a gateway to future substance and alcohol use (Chen et al., 2018, pg. 927). These substances are detrimental to young children and adults and can negatively affect their physical and mental health. Children and teens are susceptible to drug and alcohol use because of the open and easy access to it. Adolescents have the option to reject or accept drug or alcohol use, however when these substances are seen being taken by other youths, individuals will view this activity as acceptable.

As mentioned, these youth are often exposed and presented to drugs or alcohol by their peers. These individuals can be introduced to drugs and alcohol, at schools, at home, at a peer’s home, or other common areas. If alcohol, nicotine, and marijuana are perceived to be common in school, juveniles are more accepting of these drugs (Cappelli et. al, 2021, pg. 547). Furthermore, teens attend parties and events in which they are exposed to these substances and are open to try and use them. These deviant activities are perceived as acceptable in peer groups or environments because of their ubiquity (Chen et al., 2018, pg. 927). If a youth is negatively influenced by their peers to try a new substance, they are likely to fall into that behavior or a pattern of substance use.
It is essential to acknowledge substance use as a common youth activity because of the effects it might have on a youth or juvenile. Youths become dependent on substance use to help quell their own personal issues (Mayo, 2023). Juveniles will often use drugs or alcohol as an escape. For example, one factor that can lead to teen drug use is depression or mental struggles that teens may face. Youths may be experiencing many negative stimuli in their lives leading to drug or alcohol use. There are many common risk factors for the use of drugs like tobacco and cannabis (Jongenelis et al., 2019, pg. 699). Alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis can alter the structure and function of a developing adolescents’ brain (Jongenelis et al., 2019, pg. 695). The detrimental aspect of this is that teens seek drug use to quell their issues and calm their senses, but instead this habit creates more mental health issues. These issues can further appear in forms of depression, anxiety, personality disorders, and even suicide (Green Hill Recovery, 2021). While youths believe that these substances are a sort of escape, the reality is that these substances are harming youths even further.

Other harmful effects presented to youths by substance are other health issues, low academic achievement, depression, social problems, and more (Jongenelis et al., 2019, pg. 696). Alcohol and marijuana use is linked to antisocial behaviors present in youths (Chen et al., 2018, pg. 926). Individuals will lose motivation or alienate themselves from social settings. Juveniles will often appear tired or unwilling to be around large groups. Their academic achievement may also plummet due to poor grades, attendance, and the risk of dropping out. Poor attendance may turn into truancy, which is another form of juvenile delinquency. Those youths who are presenting high rates of absences and truancy are on a path to being involved in delinquent behaviors outside of the school system (Mazerolle et al., 2018). Juveniles will refrain from attending school and will participate in more drug or alcohol use. These youths are losing out on
education and socialization. In general, teens are at risk of disengaging in social life and other social or academic activities (Green Hill Recovery, 2021).

To add on, youths may be consuming more than one of these types of substances willingly, due to their built tolerance. This becomes known as poly-substance use. Poly drug use has become more common and detrimental amongst children and teens. As youths increase in age, the risk of poly substance use becomes higher. Individuals may become dependent on these substances and their substance use may gradually continue into their adulthood. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, gateway drugs, like marijuana, can create a risk factor for the exposure and use of hard drugs (Cappelli et. al, 2021, pg. 546). Juveniles and youths were shown to be more accepting of hard drugs when family, and peers in schools and neighborhoods were aligned with the same type of drugs use (Cappelli et. al, 2021, pg. 550). Furthermore, parents and familiar peers may be engaging in drug use and expose these patterns to others surrounding them.

Exposure to hard drugs creates a concerning health risk among young individuals. There have been many instances in which children and teens have consumed an illicit drug/drugs and have overdosed. Drug overdose occurs when youths are not aware of the substances they are taking or the amount they are using. Teens and children are being provided with substances through other sources and will willingly experiment and consume these unknown substances. Fifty percent of teenagers have misused a drug at least once in their adolescence (Nida, 2023). Teen overdose rates are not high, but can be significantly damaging. There has been a rise in synthetic drug consumption. One significant issue with the rise of these synthetic drugs are their unnatural effects. Some examples of synthetic drugs that are on the rise are ketamine, ecstasy, and methamphetamine (You et. al., 2020, pg. 1). Fentanyl is another synthetic drug that has been recently exploited that is being taken by youths (Nida, 2023). This manufactured opioid is
significantly more harmful than other drugs. This drug is addictive, and the risk of overdose is extremely high. To add on, Fentanyl can be mixed in with other drugs, making it far more dangerous (Children’s Health, 2023). In most overdose instances, youth are not aware that the drug they are ingesting contains doses of fentanyl (Cunnigham, 2023). This is why it is significant to educate youths on the harmfulness of drug use and raise awareness.

**Teen Violence**

Another concerning youth activity presently seen in today’s youth culture is youth violence in schools. This type of violence can be present in multiple forms of physical or emotional violence. Some examples of this violence can be present through bullying, school fights, and even more severe cases of gun violence. To begin, bullying is a common act unfortunately seen in all ages of adolescence. More commonly, bullying is significantly higher in middle school and high school. Bullying and other similar actions play a role in both the victim and the aggressor’s lives. The victim might report mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, or they might even react with aggression. Similarly, those who bully can experience behavioral health issues that can linger over time (Evans et al., 2019, pg. 2416). Children or teens who bully, although disliked by many, can be considered socially popular in school (Evans et al., 2019, pg. 2417). This result can further encourage a cycle of bullying because it produces socially rewarding effects. However, there is a pattern of negative effects seen on both sides of the bullying spectrum. One adolescent may bully because of issues they have in their own lives. In turn, their victim may experience negative mental and emotional effects as a result of bullying.

If a teen or child is displaying signs of aggression or behavioral issues, there is a possibility of a developmental path towards more severe forms of aggressive behaviors. The
effects of bullying behaviors can be detrimental and can create a cycle of negative behaviors that leads teens and children towards juvenile delinquency. Bullying amongst adolescents can create risks of negative social and mental health behaviors. Alongside bullying, juveniles may also engage in more severe forms of aggression. For example, school fights are extremely common, especially in high schools. Males are likely to show higher rates of being in a physical fight as opposed to females (Sattler et al., 2019, pg. 3668). Although school fights can be harmful, there are further violent actions that children and teens may result from bullying. For example, victims of aggression were predicted to be more likely to carry a weapon to help feel safer. Firearm homicide and suicide have been the leading causes of U.S. youth violent deaths (Mattson et al., 2020, pg. 845). This severe and harmful act of violence can have permanent and damaging effects, which is why it is essential to address issues of bullying and create safe spaces for children.

**Vandalism**

Vandalism is another popular type of youth “activity” that many teens will participate in. There are many different forms of vandalism. One minor form of vandalism presents in schools and all around communities is graffiti. Graffiti is significantly more present in low income or minority communities. This may often be a result of poor funding to help and clean up the graffiti in schools and communities. Youths living in disadvantaged neighborhoods were shown to have a higher risk of being involved in acts of vandalism. This may be a result of the significant presence of graffiti and vandalism in their communities. Although some forms of graffiti are represented as art, youths will participate in school graffiti by tagging in restrooms or on school property. Youths will use permanent markers or other items to write or engrave on school property. This is a common activity because most times it is difficult to distinguish which
student caused the graffiti, therefore youths will engage in this action further. These small habits of tagging can create a pattern and youths may slowly want to engage in more severe forms such as destruction of property.

Like many other delinquent acts, juveniles are more likely to commit vandalism crimes with other peers. For children and teens these types of sneaky thrills can result in emotional rewards among youth offenders (Goldsmith, 2022, pg. 100). Adolescents are tempted to participate in vandalism because of triggers like curiosity and boredom (Kruzhkova et al., 2018, pg. 176). Furthermore, vandalism can create a cycle of delinquency because seeing vandalism firsthand can spread impulses among adolescents. (Kruzhkova et al., 2018, pg. 169). If a juvenile sees such actions, it might lead them to participate in similar behaviors. This destructive and impulsive behavior is commonly seen in adolescents. The major concern with this type of juvenile activity is that this behavior can lead to involvement in more dangerous crimes (Kruzhkova et al., 2018, pg. 169). While some children participate in acts of minor vandalism, others may participate in small acts of arson or damage of property. Vandalism is not an accidental crime, it is intentional and depending on its severity, can result in charges and penalties. This behavior may also result in the injury or involvement of innocent bystanders or victims.

**Social Media**

**Online Deviance**

Today’s youth have developed and are continuing to develop in an era of advanced technology. Most kids and teens today are actively present on social media. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic struck, causing a major rise in online presence, forcing many individuals to rely on technology. Kids were forced to transfer from in-person to fully online communication. Students
and individuals were encouraged to use electronic devices such as iPad, computers, or even personal phones to foster their learning experience during these two years. For children and teens, the internet has become a necessity for everyday life. Society heavily relies on the internet and media to foster socialization and communication. On average most adolescents spend more than three hours a day on social media (Khan, 2022, pg. 5). The transition from online, back to in-person has played an effect on individuals. Although students have become tech savvy, there are many detrimental effects to online and electronic usage. For example, now that students are back in person there has been an increase in behavioral and mental health issues. Quarantine and isolation caused an increase in anxiety and stress seen within adolescents and children (Bozzola et al, 2022, pg. 2).

Although technology has contributed plenty to society, and social media is used as a social outlet, children and teens are exposed to various factors that can contribute to juvenile delinquency. Youth are actively present on various platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok. On these platforms, adolescents are often exposed to harmful and inappropriate social media content. Oftentimes a youth does not have to go searching for this content and it may appear in advertisements or outside links. Social media platforms, like those mentioned above, promote negative behaviors such as drug use, gun violence, and other forms of crime and delinquency (Khan, 2022, pg. 4).

Furthermore, antisocial behaviors, harassment, and sexual activities are also common themes presented to young girls and boys online (Khan, 2022, pg. 7). Continuous exposure to this type of violence and behavior can influence youths to participate in similar acts. Teens and children have the tendency to mimic behaviors and those behaviors presented online are often deviant. For example, there are certain trends and behaviors seen on social media that can be
harmful. The smallest trends can become viral quickly and gain further attention and contribution. These small instances and trends contribute to a series of other deviant acts or behaviors and may result in severe consequences for a youth.

**Social Media Idolization**

Youths must be a certain age to access social media, however, it is known that many youths fake their ages to get onto online platforms. Adolescents are able to create an electronic identity using social media (Laursen and Veenstr, 2021, pg. 891). In this current technological era, children and teens have become interested in becoming influencers, such as those seen on social media platforms. Today, kids are focused on the amount of likes or views that they receive on a platform because it makes them feel socially validated (Ehmke, 2023, pg. 3). Teens also idolize influencers, that they see apps such as TikTok and Instagram, because of the amount of likes and followers that they have. The content these influencers produce may sometimes target older audiences, but their content may reach youths. Influencers can promote negative or inappropriate behaviors for children in their content. For example, vaping is a negative and popular behavior that is glamorized by these individuals (Greene, 2022, pg. 682). There are also many images and advertisements that appeal to an audience representing the use of vapes and e-cigarettes for a positive experience. This is a large issue because they are promoting negative behaviors, and their audience may fall into that behavior as well.

**Social Media and Self Image**

The images and content on social media play a role in the way that youths begin to see themselves and their self-image. There can be an emotional toll placed on youth because they are constantly comparing themselves (Wood, 2021). Social media influencers form their profiles, display information, and interact with followers in a strategic way (Greene, 2022, pg. 683). This
gives the perception that influencers are naturally more appealing, and this can spark a sense of
comparison. Youths may have the perception that an influencer naturally looks a certain way,
and that image is gaining them plenty of online attention. This may spark comparison and a
youth may neglect the money or fame that these individuals possess that allows them to alter or
create a certain image. Via social media and other platforms youths are also able to create an
image that may or may not represent them. For example, many youths present a false identity to
these platforms to be liked or socially accepted. Besides being able to alter or create a new
identity online, youths also have access to anonymity, and this can be used to access or watch
people or other sources. Youths can search for and view many issues in an anonymous way
(Goldsmith, 2022, pg. 105).

In addition, youths also use these platforms to connect with friends, create friendships,
and share current events occurring in their lives. Youths have constant access to their friends
because the media is accessible, anonymous, and affordable (Goldsmith, 2022). This presents a
danger because the use of this media can be harmful or can foster illegal activities. For example,
youths will boast and overshare online by inserting pictures of drugs, cash, guns, and more.
There have also been cases in which juveniles post stolen fast vehicles and expensive jewelry or
designer brands on their social media accounts and later face consequences (Wood, 2021).
Juveniles believe that these acts make them more appealing or appear “cool.” These youths will
insert themselves into a lifestyle of crime for temporary acceptance. This exemplifies the lengths
to which juveniles are willing to go in order to become liked or accepted.

**Cyber Bullying**

Social media can also be used as a way to access other people. Social media plays a large
role in the mental health of teens and is a platform for cyberbullying and cybercrime (Guo,
This can become an issue because children and teens are able to virtually threaten or bully one another via social media. These types of internet behaviors occur beyond school grounds and are taken into home environments. Children and teens can indirectly be cruel to one another and state things one would never say in person (Ehmke, 2023, pg. 2). These individuals who bully feel protected and powerful expressing themselves through a screen, but are negligent to the consequences of bullying.

Cyber-bullying can be correlated with several antisocial behaviors that are present in juveniles on both sides of the bullying spectrum. These behaviors can present internal and external forms of delinquency. For example, compared to traditional forms of bullying, cyberbullying has shown higher risks of fear, helplessness, and other psychosocial consequences (Guo, 2022, pg. 8840). These emotions and effects are not just found within the cyber victims, but also in the cyber-bullies themselves. These individuals both express different levels of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress (Guo, 2022, pg. 8840). In more severe cases of cyberbullying, suicide has been a common detrimental result of bullying and bullying continuation. Further effects of cyberbullying are the negative emotions continuously found in youths that create delinquency. This delinquency may be represented in the forms of violence, substance use, stealing, and much more (Guo, 2022, pg. 8840). When it comes to cyber-bully victims, there is a concern that some of these adolescents may want to retaliate in real life. Society often sees cases in which those who are bullied have resulted in using guns or weapon violence, and/or have resulted in the taking of their own lives. It is essential to track bullying that occurs outside of schools because youths can harm each other online and when it comes to seeing each other in school the consequences can be detrimental.
**Cybercrime**

Using social media and the internet, youths are also able to participate in forms of cybercrime. Aside from youths posting about their “dangerous” lifestyles and flaunting their expensive items, there is a significant concern with online access and cyber safety amongst youths. Impulsivity, and lack of self-control is a common trait present in youths (Goldsmith, 2022, pg. 100). Youths often gain a sense of curiosity when accessing the internet and may come across negative content. For example, pornographic imagery is a safety concern that is consistently found on the internet. This content is inappropriate for minors and exposure to this imagery can alter unsafe practices and promote violence amongst the youth (Goldsmith, 2022, pg. 99). These types of images spark physiological and intellectual arousal within young children and teens (Goldsmith, 2022, pg. 106).

Access to pornography can be legal and illegal, focusing on youths this becomes a significant issue. A simple google search can result in many available searches and what makes this more complicated is that these searches can be anonymous. When on a pornographic website there are elevated options that can lead to more harmful exposure, such as the risk of minors being groomed. This access to inappropriate content can further lead to transgressions in a youth’s life. There are also dangerous profiles and accounts on these social media platforms that may be able to scam youth and have them involved in trafficking (Khan, 2022, pg. 8). Exposure to unwanted sexual material is correlated to high-risk behaviors (Bozzola et al, 2022, pg. 22). These high-risk behaviors are consistently correlated to juvenile delinquency. Furthermore, the media can be used as an outlet for adolescents to bully or spread sexual content regarding other adolescent parties (Bozzola et al, 2022, pg. 23). The exposure or spread of this type of content is
deviant and the effects that it might have on a victim of this type of bullying may be severe and lead to different forms of delinquency.

**Online Social Skills**

Social media plays a significant role in a youth’s mental health, aside from the effects of bullying or other harmful activities, youths face a lack of skills due to growing up with the internet and the media. Technology use can negatively affect youth cognitively. For example, communication amongst children and teens becomes affected by social media and internet use. Adolescents are not personally practicing communication skills and are at high risk of becoming anxious adults (Ehmke, 2023, pg. 2). After the COVID-19 pandemic, children who were shown to have increased their screen use time by fifteen to thirty minutes expressed high levels of psychological distress (Bozzola et al, 2022, pg. 21). These adolescents showed signs of risk-taking and rule breaking behaviors. This can be due to the content that children and teens are exposed to online. This content can involve fighting, stealing, death, destruction and more (Bozzola et al, 2022, pg. 24). Those exposed to violent content are at high risk of displaying violent behavior and aggressive behaviors.

III. **The Current Study**

**Social Media Challenges**

This study focuses on how peer influence, youth activities, and social media are factors contributing to today’s youth culture and how it may impact juvenile delinquency. Social media is a large lens and platform that is used in multiple ways and can correlate these factors and exemplify juvenile delinquency. This study focuses on the challenges presented by social media that influence youth behavior and can enable delinquency. To further explain, social media consists of a variety of different apps or platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook,
YouTube, and much more. These platforms are used as a source of sharing, promotion, communication, and connection to many around the world. The minimum age requirement to be present on these apps is thirteen years of age. This requirement allows for teens to be actively present online and on these apps. Teens rely heavily on social media to entertain themselves, as well as connect with others. As mentioned earlier, social media presents many dangers to children and teens. One common concern is participation in dangerous viral trends or challenges. Certain trends and challenges have the ability to become viral and spread deviant behaviors amongst youths online.

There are various trends that have sparked and gained plenty of attention, but due to their dangerous nature have been banned from online platforms. One previous popular trend that also gained plenty of attention is the Tide-Pod challenge. This challenge sparked in January 2018 on YouTube and Facebook platforms. Like trends such as the salt and ice challenge or the cinnamon challenge, the Tide-Pod challenge promoted defiant behaviors. Initially, a comment was made on social media that the stated Tide-Pods looked pleasing to eat. The Tide-Pod challenge consisted of individuals chewing Tide detergent pods. This challenge was followed by many teenagers aged from thirteen to nineteen years of age (MacGuil, 2018). After many videos appeared online, a spokesperson from Proctor and Gamble, the manufacturers of Tide-Pods, stated that these pods need to be safely used due to their concentration of detergent. These pods are highly poisonous and dangerous to consume. There were about thirty-seven cases of intentional consumption of Tide-Pods that occurred (MacGuil, 2018). As a result, the Tide brand changed their packaging of these detergent pods. As far as the internet meme, Google and Facebook removed various videos of this challenge. There are still some videos present on YouTube, but TikTok has guidelines that do not allow for this search.
Data Collection Approach

One social media platform that is significantly relevant today is TikTok. Through this app many can share and create videos and content that can quickly become viral and reach billions of people around the globe. I was able to use this platform to refer to previous trends and evaluate new ones. Evaluating such trends is significant because they promote delinquency amongst our youth. Social media is a factor in youth culture that has contributed to juvenile delinquency. Furthermore, the factors of youth culture explained above all conjoin and form contributions to juvenile delinquency. Analyzing such trends gives an insight as to what behaviors are promoted and exist online amongst young children and teens. There is also insight into why young teens want to become involved in these behaviors and how society reacts to these challenges.

One significantly popular trend that youths were participating in recently was the devious lick trend. This trend became popular on September 6, 2021, after the reopening of school’s shutdown by the COVID-19 pandemic. The trend sparked with a TikTok user “@dtx.2cent,” who posted a video of him pulling a hand sanitizer dispenser out of his backpack. He captioned the TikTok video, “only one month into school and got this absolute devious lick” (Williams, 2021). The term lick is a slang term for stealing something or taking something. This viral video gained over 11 million TikTok views and sparked a viral trend. The viral hashtag itself received around 235 million views (Williams, 2021). Students were seen posting videos of them stealing items from their campuses such as signs, microscopes, projectors, soap dispensers, and much more (Doyne, 2021). Some students went as far as to steal the whole door of a bathroom stall, school mirrors, and many other large items (Goldstein, 2021). The children participating in these trends documented themselves and soon began to inspire other peers around them through the
TikTok algorithm. This trend was delinquent and deviant because students are participating in vandalism and stealing. Many of these stolen items left classrooms or school areas vandalized.

In various states, students from different schools were arrested due to their participation in this trend. For example, one case occurred in Arizona, where the Bullhead Police Department arrested a fifteen-year-old student for stealing a toilet paper dispenser from school. On this same day, eight students in Kentucky were charged with offenses as result of this challenge. Four students were charged with theft and the other four with vandalism (Goldstein, 2021). These are just some of the very few cases of vandalism and theft that occurred because of this TikTok trend. This trend lasted for about two weeks after the first initial post. On September 15, this trend was banned on the app for violating TikTok Community Guidelines due to the popularity and danger of this trend (Marples, 2021). When searching “devious lick” or “hit a lick” on TikTok there are currently TikTok guidelines that do not allow for these searches. The videos and hashtags were removed from the TikTok app, but compilation videos can be found on other platforms such as YouTube.

Currently I have been following up on a TikTok hashtag titled “Guzman from TikTok.” This hashtag began with a TikTok user “Guzmanhimself.” I asked multiple friends if they have seen any trends that can be considered some form of delinquency. One mutual friend sent me a video on TikTok from Guzman, and I began to follow up on his account. This teen began showing up on my for you page on September 7, 2023. The posted date on the video I viewed was August 21, 2023. I was viewing this video three weeks after its original posted date. The video had 61.8 thousand likes and the post that was presented showed this young teen with a group of boys at Target causing a commotion. Initially one young man yells loudly asking, “Are y’all the guys from TikTok?” Two young men, including Guzman begin by yelling a response in
Spanish “Ya tu sabes,” meaning “you already know,” in English. Guzman then proceeds to jump into the air and yell “Si,...Si,...Si” multiple times, meaning yes. As I interacted with this video by liking it to keep it for data, more videos from his account began to linger onto my for you page with similarities in content. In some instances, TikTok user “Guzmanhimself” begins jumping onto counter and on scanners at many different locations. Some videos show him at Target, 7/11, a mall food court, and many other locations. He attracts the attention of many bystanders who seem confused as to why this behavior is occurring. Oftentimes managers and employees from these stores or locations are shown in the video asking the young man and his friends to leave the property. Some employees also seem to get very frustrated with the small group of young boys.

On September 21st, 2023, I noticed his account was banned, and a couple of days later September 25th I noticed he made a new account. Since then, his original account has been unbanned and this teen has continued to post content. The last video on his page with this type of content was last posted on October 29, 2023.

IV. Results

As a result of these videos and deviant content Guzman has gained followers and can be considered a TikTok influencer with 112.6 thousand followers. Pinned on his TikTok page you can find three of his most viral TikTok videos. The first was posted on June 27, 2023, and had a total of 2.1 million views and 296.9 thousand likes. The second was posted on July 21, 2023, with a total of 4.6 million views and 756.9 thousand likes. On September 3, 2023, there was another video displaying the same behaviors as the others on his page with a total of 111.0 thousand likes. When searching “Guzman from TikTok” on the TikTok search bar you will find multiple accounts mimicking Guzman’s content and delinquent behavior. For example, TikTok user “@brandonramirezjr,” is one of the copycat accounts that almost mimics the exact phrases
of Guzman’s TikTok, but instead replaced his name with his own. He can also be seen yelling loudly inside shopping centers such as Walmart. Brandon’s copycat video that I came across while searching “Guzmanhimself” was posted on July 30, 2023, and had a total of 22,7 thousand likes. The hashtags linked in these TikTok posts further lead you to more and more videos mimicking or connecting to “Guzmanhimself’s” TikTok trend. Although this trend is not as severe or viral as the “devious lick” trend presented in 2021, this content contributes to deviant and delinquent behaviors among youth.

His account and his copycat accounts display nuance and dangerous behaviors. These behaviors displayed by these young men on social media are nuances because they are causing disturbances in stores by screaming loudly. Dangerous behaviors are displayed when these young men decide to stand or jump on top of counters or scanners and result in staff and employees to react. Many employees threaten to call the police or often get very upset. It is possible that this silly trend can lead to the detention of these young boys or aggression in employees or bystanders.

This small trend has died as opposed to its popularity in September. Although these creators continue to post some content their relevance has died down. These types of trends have large influences on young teens. Robert Aker’s Social Learning Theory (1973) outlines how youths adapt behaviors by observing and imitating them (Ward and Forney, 2020). As mentioned in multiple occasions, youths seek validation and are influenced by others, especially by those online. Influencers and social media can present behaviors that are risky or deviant and as a result they are famous. Young children or teens want to seek the same temporary social media fame and will perform and participate in similar behaviors that are presented to them online. As a result of their participation, they are also participating in delinquency and in deviance.
Study Limitations

This study highlights how social media can impact juvenile delinquency through the use of social media. Some challenges present in this study are that the trends only last for a few months before they are shut down by social media guidelines or the trend loses popularity. Furthermore, there have been social consequences for the teens who have been displaying deviance online and they are rewarded for their deviance. The social media realm is so large that these teens have used this trend to gain followers and relevance. The deviance present through this study is limited and I was unable to find other uprising trends that could correlate with this focus on delinquency. Future studies should focus on social media influences and small factors within these platforms that can impact delinquency. A collection of these examples can create a larger and more general focus, it is essential to capture these trends before they are no longer relevant.

V. Conclusion

Peer groups and peer influence is a consistent factor that plays a role in the life of adolescents. Peer influences and relationships are considered socially rewarding and children are willing to do plenty to feel accepted. Equally as significant, peer relationships and influences also have the potential to create negative influences. On the other hand, if a child is not accepted into any peer group, this may also create concerning behaviors within that isolated individual that might lead them to a path of delinquency. Some relevant youth activities are drug/alcohol use, teen violence, and vandalism. The effects these activities create opportunities for further deviance. The most essential factor that has impacted our youth is the use of social media. Though there are positive impacts to society’s advancement in technology, there has also been much harm associated with social media and internet use. There is a large exposure to deviance
online and on social media. For example, there are trends on these platforms that are deviant and because of the popularity of these trends, adolescents become involved and participate in these deviant behaviors.

The TikTok study mentioned earlier demonstrates the intersectionality of peer influence, youth activities, and social media. The “devious lick” challenge shows how peers in school and online can learn from one another. After recording and posting this content, youths were receiving views and attention. As a result, many more online peers and students wanted to participate in this trend to receive the same sort of social consequences. To add on, the youth activity being encouraged by these students was vandalism. Students were damaging and stealing property in schools, causing plenty of destruction. This left schools dealing with the repercussions of this viral trend. TikTok was the outlet that students used to upload videos of their actions and share with peers. This created a cycle involving social learning and the imitating of inappropriate behaviors.

Similarly, the trend started by TikTok user “Guzmanhimself,” also involved these variables of youth culture. To begin, Guzman and other similar content creators were amongst other peers in their videos. Their peers are often seen encouraging and laughing at the inappropriate behaviors being presented. Furthermore, these youths were participating in social disruption together by going into public areas and yelling and causing a scene. Once again, these deviant teens recorded their experiences and behaviors and posted them on their TikTok accounts. As a result of these videos going viral and getting attention, other youths and peers online were seen participating and mimicking behaviors presented. Trends, like those in this study, do not tend to last more than a couple of months, so this deviance is not consistent. However, when a trend dies another one is soon on the rise. The importance of addressing these
new factors is concluding that they impact youths to behave deviant or participate in juvenile delinquency.

These TikTok studies exemplify Aker’s Social Learning Theory (1973), and the ability of individuals to learn behavior through observation and imitation. Furthermore, Moffitt's Developmental Taxonomy (1993), describes adolescent-limited and life-course persistent offenders. The trends and deviant behaviors presented in the TikTok study can be identified as adolescent-limited because these analyzed youths are likely to alter their delinquent behaviors as a result of their consequences. There have been many reactions from society that encourage consequences and can limit further participation in delinquency. However, there are cases in which youths will want to continue these behavioral patterns and continue a lifestyle of delinquency.

**Policy Recommendations**

There needs to be a larger emphasis on new factors that influence delinquency. Youths are still adapting and demand guidance that stray away from deviance. There are different methods and recommendations that can be implemented to help address prevention and intervention strategies. Juveniles and children search to be part of peer groups because of the validation and connection they receive from their peers. There are theories that highlight these bonds and mention how essential it is for adolescents to feel connected to their families, peers, communities, and so on. The significance with these connections and influences are that youths can learn a lot and these connections can keep them away from a deviant lifestyle. However, if these influences are negative or if juveniles are missing these connections there can be a detrimental consequence. Youths who lack positive connections are at a high risk of exhibiting negative physiological behaviors. One way to help quell this issue and help prevent youth from
searching for validation from their peers is through social emotional learning. Implementing prevention programs that offer emotional support to juveniles may help reduce this issue (Guo, 2022, pg. 18854).

Social-emotional support programs can offer plenty of support for developing youths (Molleman et al., 2022). Social-emotional learning is a concept in which individuals are taught to manage their emotions, set goals, feel empathy, create positive relationships, and much more. This learning also helps shape social and self-awareness, self-management, and relationship management (Glenn et al., 2020, pg. 1). These are essential skills for youth to practice and become familiar with. These skills will help youths search for or find peers who will positively benefit them and stray away from peers who are displaying or developing deviant behavior.

Another method for preventing youth from falling in with the wrong crowd is involvement and participation. Youth who are involved in clubs, sports, or other extracurriculars have opportunities to meet peers with similar interests and drive. Peers within similar clubs or groups like these can motivate one another and create positive relationships.

Drug and alcohol education is a great prevention strategy for drug and alcohol use. There are drug and alcohol treatment centers for youths who are experiencing addiction already or have been caught with substances. However, it is essential to try and prevent children and teens from reaching the rehabilitative stage and find preventative strategies. Adolescents tend to participate in deviant activities often due to peer pressure or just out of curiosity. One of the most negative youth activities is alcohol or substance use. Alcohol or drug use places youth at high-risk of substance use later in life. It is also significant for schools to acknowledge youth drug use and find solutions and prevention strategies for their sites and students.
Furthermore, there are more and more present dangers with the use of substances. There has been a rise in synthetic drug production, such as fentanyl. Drugs like fentanyl are addicting and can lead to overdose. Due to these dangers, it is significant to provide drug and alcohol education. This strategy may be contradictory, because it may seem as if these substances are being introduced to our youth. However, the rise of these drugs and overdoses continues and youths should be aware of this danger (Mayo, 2023). Teens and adolescents are not aware that drugs can overload the brain activity and can alter behaviors. Education is one of the largest preventative strategies for substance abuse. Parents, guardians, and communities should take part in educating children about substances. First, analyze what students already know and further discuss the detrimental effects of drugs and ways of resisting peer pressure (Mayo, 2023). Aside from peer pressure, students and youth are experiencing stressors that lead them to participate in substance use. Mental health resources in schools can help youths express their stressors and worries in a healthy manner (Fischer, 2022). It is up to schools and communities to alter their policies and programs to fit the current generation of students who are facing plenty of issues relating to juvenile delinquency.

Preventing delinquency stemming from social media is challenging to address. As mentioned, plenty of times this current youth culture relies heavily on social media and technology. The most obvious preventative strategy for this issue is limiting technology use. While limiting technology usage seems like a simple solution, it is essential. COVID-19 and remote learning altered the use of the media and technology. Prior to allowing youths access to technology, it is significant to address the dangers of the internet and social media while at school or at home (Spina et al., 2021, pg. 6). There should also be further restrictions online. Social media platforms need to do a better job at adding restrictions to their apps or platforms.
Children and teens can fake their birthdays and ages to be able to create accounts on these apps. To go on further, there should be restrictions on websites that filter out inappropriate content and advertisements that might come across an adolescent.

Overall, juvenile delinquency is present in societies and communities because there is a lack of resources given to youths. The factors analyzed in this study are relevant to children and teens of today. These factors contribute to poor or negative behaviors that influence delinquency. There needs to be a focus on how to help children and teens with these behaviors. It is difficult to demand children or teens to stray away from delinquency, this is why children need to be provided with the right resources to ensure that they stay as far away from delinquent behavior as possible.
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