

Young people, the internet and pathways into criminality: A study of Australian Adolescents

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To be young in a digital world



- Adolescence as a period of significant and tumultuous
 - Biological change
 - Psychological change
 - Social change
- Experimental and risk-taking behaviour central to the adolescent condition
- Changing environments – technologies such as the Internet, social media

Negotiating the digital landscape

- Much ado about the effects (and affects) of digital technologies adolescent development
- It's true – adolescents are highly connected, and spend an unprecedented amount of time online
- The landscape through which adolescents traverse developmental stages is very different



Features of a criminogenic internet

- The Internet as a set of spaces/places where individuals converge and interact
- A unique social setting that allows social encounters that
 - Transcend space
 - Transcend time (synchronous + asynchronous)
 - Scalability
- Opportunities for experimentation
 - Ready accessibility, entry and exit that create incredible diversity of criminal opportunities made possible through Internet use

- New technological capabilities challenge notions of co-offending
 - Characterized by great distance, mass connectivity, identity concealment, lack of trust/reciprocity
 - Digital “offender convergence settings” (Felson)
- Can shape the ways criminal learning occurs:
 - Development of criminal commitments
 - Acquisition of criminal capabilities
- Internet as a “carnival” of potential criminal opportunities that tempt, seduce, thrill and engross (Katz, *The Seduction of Crime*)

Implications for pathways into crime

- The Internet/technologies makes purposeful adolescent experimentation/exploration/risk-taking 'easy'
- Criminal encounters can be 'accidental' or 'unpredictable'
 - Extension of mainstream pursuits or innovations in technological platforms
- Criminal encounters can be limited/episodic and not necessarily indicative of long-term commitments
- Formation of long-term commitments incremental

Theoretical influences

- “digital drift” [Goldsmith and Brewer 2015]
- Affordances (Gibson, Hutchby)
- Cultural criminology (Katz, Presdee)
- Environmental criminology
 - Routine activities
 - precipitators

The study: 'Becoming Delinquent Online'

- Survey of entire cohort of Grade 8 students at an Australian Secondary School (n=43)
- Measures include:
 - Demographic variables
 - Self control (Grasmick et al 1993)
 - Delinquency (offline)
 - Digital Delinquency (across 7 areas)
 - Access to digital technologies
 - Digital literacy
 - Exposure to with the Internet

Results: Sample description

- Year 8 students (13-14 years of age)
- Gender: 51% male, 49% female
- Overwhelming majority white (93%) and had siblings ($x=1.5$, $sd=1.1$)
- Delinquency (offline) 'any' of four types 18.6%
- Males significantly more likely to score lower on the self-control scale

Results: Access to digital technologies

- 100% of participants access the internet
- 100% use mobile computer (laptop/tablet) to access the Internet; 93% a smartphone; 54% a desktop
- Report spending on average ~5 hours online per day ($x=4.7$. $sd=2.4$)
 - 61% of time spent accessing Internet from laptops, 34% smartphones, 15% desktops
- Most frequently accessed locations: home (54%), school (31%) a friend's house (8%), other locations (4.2%)



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Results: Digital Literacy

- Basic tasks – vast majority comfortable with all tasks
- Advanced tasks – vast majority uncomfortable with all tasks
- Males significantly more likely to be comfortable performing most advanced tasks

Results: Exposure to the internet

- Tasks undertaken by majority of participants at least daily (simple and intermediate)
 - Searches, email, messaging, posting/checking social media, streaming video/music
- Tasks undertaken by majority of users infrequently or never (intermediate and advanced)
 - Video chat, uploading personal photos/videos, banking, buying/selling items, bittorrent, website creation, programming, using VPNs and TOR.
- Average score on variety scale 0.5

Results: Digital Delinquency

- Just under half (49%) of respondents engaged in at least one form of digital delinquency
 - IP infringement (30%)
 - Discrimination & bigotry (26%)
 - Advocating violence (14%)
 - Sexual activity (12%)
 - Hacking 9%
 - Illicit transactions (2%)
- Average score (for above activities) on the variety of digital delinquency scale was 0.1 (i.e. least serious)
- Modal duration for delinquent activities 0-5 minutes per session (lowest score possible)

Results: conceptual relationships

- Those scoring higher on self-control showed less engagement in terms of the variety scale of digital delinquency ($r=-0.37$, $p<0.05$) and particularly sex-related forms ($r=0.32$, $p<0.05$)
- Congruence between online and offline delinquency: strong correlation between engaging in the real world and online scale ($r=0.45$, $p<0.01$) – and especially for piracy ($r=0.47$, $p<0.01$) and discrimination ($r=0.41$, $p<0.01$).
- Digital literacy not related to digital delinquency items (not surprising, as relatively constant amongst cohort)
- Exposure scale was associated with advocating discrimination & bigotry ($r=.039$, $p<0.01$); Number of older siblings associated with discrimination & bigotry ($r=0.31$, $p<0.05$)

Implications

- Exploratory study provides initial insights into the emergence of delinquency in a digital context
- Provides some preliminary support for the digital drift hypothesis and pertinent conceptual links
- Highlights the need for further study – especially longitudinal



Questions?

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