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Timothy Dickinson

University of Missouri-St. Louis, timothydickinson@umsl.edu

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TALK AND DETERRENCE IN DRUG MARKETS

Timothy Dickinson

M.A., Criminology & Criminal Justice, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2011

B.S., Criminology & Criminal Justice, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2006

A Dissertation Submitted to The Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St. Louis
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Criminology & Criminal Justice

June 2015

Advisory Committee

Richard Rosenfeld, Ph.D.
Chairperson

Richard Wright, Ph.D.
Co-chair

Janet Lauritsen, Ph.D.

Kristin Carbone-Lopez, Ph.D.

Scott Jacques, Ph.D.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although I am the sole author of this dissertation, no dissertation is written in the absence of social and financial support. I have been fortunate to receive support from a number of people throughout my graduate education that have all assisted in the development and execution of this work to some degree. First and foremost, I am indebted to the dealers I interviewed. Without their trust and participation I would have had nothing to write about. I am also indebted to the University of Missouri Research Board for funding the project that forms the backbone of this dissertation, the University of Missouri-St. Louis for supporting my graduate education with a graduate school doctoral fellowship, and the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at UMSL for awarding me the Charles F. Huber dissertation fellowship.

I am beholden to Andres Rengifo for being the first person to suggest I pursue a Ph.D.; Jessie Bridges and Amanda Porterfield for taking care of administrative matters too numerous to list; Dave Klinger for assisting me obtain IRB approval; Beth Huebner for helping me through the labyrinthine process of obtaining a Ph.D. and for being generally awesome; Finn Esbensen for his guidance in honing my teaching skills and for providing me with alternative views on academic life; and all my other colleagues at UMSL, both students and professors alike, for their friendship and moral support.

I am also forever grateful to Janet Lauritsen, Kristin Carbone-Lopez, and Scott Jacques for taking the time to consider my work and help improve it with their comments and criticisms; Rick Rosenfeld for stepping in as my advisor in the breach—without his theoretical insights and structural guidance the present study would not have taken the shape it currently holds; and my mentor, Richard Wright, for nurturing my development

from student to scholar, being there at all times to provide sage advice on matters in academia and in life in general, never pulling punches when critiquing my writing, and for being my friend and colleague—and Bob’s your uncle, Richard!

And of course, without the support of my family I would have never started this process, let alone have brought it to fruition. I thank my parents, Ron and Lynn, for their unwavering love and support throughout my life; my two sons, Jack and Henry, for listening to me expound theoretical ideas while playing tag and for teaching me how to wonder again; and most of all, my wife, Samantha, for without whom none of this would have been possible.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Deterrence is perhaps the oldest and most influential doctrine in criminology (see Beccaria, 1963 [1764]; Bentham, 1988 [1789]). A wealth of empirical and conceptual research has examined its three primary components: deterrent sources (i.e., rules or threats), the mediators linking these sources to offender behavior (i.e., perceptions and fear), and its outcomes (i.e., variation in compliance with rules or threats). Nevertheless, key processes within each of these components have not been fully specified. For example, little research has investigated how potential offenders form their perceptions of deterrents (Erickson and Gibbs, 1979; Geerken and Gove, 1975; Nagin, 1998; Pogarsky, Kim, and Paternoster, 2005; Tittle, 1980). Similarly, although prior research has explored a number of factors conditioning the relationship between these perceptions and fear (see, e.g., Bachman, Paternoster, and Ward, 1992; Burkett and Ward, 1993; Exum, 2002; Hochstetler, 2001; Paternoster and Simpson, 1996; Pogarsky, Kim, and Paternoster, 2005; Topalli and Wright, 2014) many potential influences remain unexplored. And while a growing body of literature has examined the ways in which offenders alter their crimes in order to avoid detection (see, e.g., Cherbonneau and Copes, 2006; Jacques and Allen, 2014; Jacques and Reynald, 2011; Jacobs, 1996; Jacobs and Cherbonneau, 2014; Jacobs and Miller, 1998; Johnson and Natarajan, 1995), little attention has been devoted to how violators reshape rule enforcement following apprehension (see, e.g., Everett and Neinstedt, 1999; Haley, 1982; Jacobs, 1998; Litton, 2005; Robinson, Smith-Lovin, and Tsoudis, 1994; Wagatsuma and Rosett, 1986).

The goal of this dissertation is to examine how various forms of talk shape these processes. More specifically, I explore gossip's influence on offenders' perceptions of rules or threats, the impact of humor and threats and promises on the fear stemming from

these perceptions, and how accounts reshape rule enforcement. To do so, I use data drawn from qualitative interviews with, and observations of, 33 active drug dealers operating in and around the St. Louis metropolitan area. This study is important because it refines current conceptualizations of the deterrence process and illuminates potential sources responsible for variation in compliance with formal and informal rules among active drug dealers.

This chapter provides the background and importance of the present study. I begin with a brief overview of deterrence. I then discuss the four forms of talk selected for examination. Following this, I clarify the conceptual framework guiding the dissertation before suggesting its implications for current understanding of decision-making and the deterrence process.

DETERRENCE

At its heart, deterrence rests on the assumption that persons strive to obtain pleasure (Kennedy, 2009: 15) and “seek to avoid unpleasant consequences” (Williams and Hawkins, 1973: 5; see also, Beccaria, 1963 [1764]; Bentham, 1988 [1789]).

Deterrence occurs when individuals contemplating an action refrain from doing so in “response to...perceived risk and fear of punishment” (Gibbs, 1975: 2).¹ Defined as such, deterrence refers not to rules and the like in isolation from behavior but instead to one of the possible relationships between them. Of particular interest to deterrence researchers,

¹ Potential offenders can also be dissuaded from committing crimes with incentives. Incentives are positive rewards for wanted behavior. As opposed to punishment, which deters through fear, incentives operate through want. Formal incentives include the extension of social services, such as job training, educational opportunities, and drug counseling (see, e.g., Kennedy, 2009: 3), and offers of reduced sentences. Although incentives are certainly a key influence on offender decision-making, a full examination of them alongside punishments is beyond the scope of the present study.

and to those drafting crime control policies grounded in deterrence, is how specific rules decrease the probability of an act's occurrence (Meier and Johnson, 1977: 294).

Examinations of deterrence commonly distinguish between two kinds or parts of deterrence: general deterrence and specific deterrence (Williams and Hawkins, 1973). General deterrence refers to the impact of threatened punishments on *potential* offenders (Gibbs, 1985). It occurs when persons contemplating a crime “refrain from offending, offend less frequently, or commit less serious crimes due to...fear” of receiving the same consequences sustained by others for committing similar offenses (Paternoster and Piquero, 1995: 252). Contrarily, specific deterrence takes place when individuals who have been punished for a crime refrain from committing said crime again for fear of receiving a similar punishment (Williams and Hawkins, 1973). While seemingly referring to two disparate populations, both general and specific deterrence can simultaneously affect a single individual (see Stafford and Warr, 1993). This occurs when an individual's decision to commit a contemplated offense is influenced by both personal and vicarious (i.e., others') experiences with punishment or lack of punishment for the same or a similar offense.

Individuals contemplating crimes can be deterred by both formal and informal threats.² Formal threats include fines, arrest, formal supervision, and the revocation of social privileges (e.g., the right to vote or drive). Informal threats include consequences that are triggered by formal punishments, such as shame (see, e.g., Grasmick, Blackwell, and Bursik, 1993; Grasmick and Bursik, 1990; Paternoster and Simpson, 1996),

² Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, and Radosevich, 1979; Bishop, 1984; Burkett and Jensen, 1975; Ekland-Olson, Lieb, and Zurcher, 1984; Geerken and Gove, 1975; Gibbs, 1975; Meier and Johnson, 1977; Nagin, 1998; Nagin and Paternoster, 1991; Nagin and Pogarsky, 2001; Tittle, 1980; Williams and Hawkins, 1986; Zimring and Hawkins, 1973.

embarrassment (Grasmick and Bursik, 1990), physical and material deprivation (Grasmick and Green, 1980), the destruction of past accomplishments and/or future opportunities (Nagin and Paternoster, 1991), and damage to, or the loss of, social relationships (Ekland-Olson, Lieb, and Zurcher, 1984; Kennedy, 2009; Nagin and Paternoster, 1991; Williams and Hawkins, 1986). Informal threats also include consequences unassociated with legal threats, such as victim confrontation (Jacobs and Cherbonneau, 2014), victim retaliation (see, e.g., Jacobs, Topalli, and Wright, 2000), and the intervention of bystanders (Bursik and Grasmick, 1993; Sampson, 1986).

The deterrence process can be separated into three distinct stages. The first of these is the presence of rules or threats. Their presence alone is not enough to deter, however, as an individual who is *unaware* of rules or threats cannot be deterred by them (Henshel and Carey, 1975: 57). Awareness of rules or threats is the first component of the second stage—perception (Andenaes, 1974; Decker, Wright, and Logie, 1993; Gibbs, 1975). But this awareness is seldom gathered directly from the source of these rules or threats. It is instead informed by personal and vicarious experience with punishment and punishment avoidance.³ Although at present the mechanisms by which offenders' gain vicarious experience and the influence of these mechanisms on offenders' behavior are poorly understood (Geerken and Gove, 1975; Erickson and Gibbs, 1979; Nagin, 1998; Pogarsky et al., 2005; Tittle, 1980), criminologists generally agree that the information obtained through both vicarious and personal experience seldom corresponds with the

³ See, e.g., Bridges and Stone, 1986; Geerken and Gove, 1975; Gibbs, 1975; Horney and Marshall, 1992; Lochner, 2003; Meier and Johnson, 1977; Minor and Harry, 1982; Paternoster and Piquero, 1995; Piliavin, Thornton, Gardner, and Matsueda, 1986; Piquero and Paternoster, 1998; Piquero and Pogarsky, 2002; Pogarsky and Piquero, 2003; Saltzman et al., 1982; Stafford and Warr, 1993.

objective properties of rules and threats (see, e.g., Cohen, 1978; Erickson and Gibbs, 1978; Kleck, 2003; Parker and Grasmick, 1979).

The second component of perception involves the weighing of the benefits and costs of a contemplated crime (see Becker, 1968; Clarke and Cornish, 1985). To be deterred from committing the crime, individuals must perceive these potential costs as greater than the potential rewards. Or, in other words, they must fear the negative consequences of the act more so than they desire the potential reward (Gibbs, 1975, 1985). Perceptions of cost and fear thereof can be conditioned by a number of factors. These include moral inhibition⁴, or a belief that crime is wrong (Bachman, Paternoster, and Ward, 1992; Burkett and Ward, 1993; Foglia, 1997; Paternoster and Simpson, 1996; Pogarsky, Kim, and Paternoster, 2005), inebriation (Jacobs, 2000: 88; Shover, 1996; Wright and Decker, 1994, 1997: 120), poor executive functioning (Nagin and Paternoster, 1993), desperation (Hochstetler, 2001; Wright and Decker, 1994, 1997), emotional states (e.g., anger) (Exum, 2002; Topalli and Wright, 2014; see also, Lofland, 1969), interaction with accomplices (Hochstetler, 2001), and the behavior of others thought likely to direct police attention toward the individuals in question (see generally, Rosenfeld, Jacobs, and Wright, 2003; Sampson, 1986; Wright and Decker, 1997).

Criminologists generally agree that experience with punishment avoidance, or more specifically, experience with avoiding detection, apprehension, and/or punishment, has a negative relationship with potential offenders' perceptions of the probability of being detected and apprehended for contemplated crimes (see, e.g., Minor and Harry, 1982; Saltzman et al., 1982; Stafford and Warr, 1993; Tittle, 1980). Put differently, as

⁴ Moral inhibition is separate from the concept of shame because it is not a form of internal 'punishment' (see Paternoster and Simpson, 1996).

potential offenders gain experience with avoiding detection and apprehension for a crime, their assessments of the likelihood of being caught and punished for future crimes decrease. The 'experiential effect' of punishment avoidance, then, impacts offender decision-making by discounting the perceived risks associated with a specific criminal act (Paternoster, 1987).

There is some debate, however, about the degree to which experience with punishment does the same. Traditional models of deterrence presume that experiencing punishment discourages future offending by inflating your assessment of the potential costs of a criminal act. Recent work, however, has suggested that there are several reasons to expect the opposite. Offenders may continue to offend in order to defy the sources of what they perceive to be unjust and unfair punishment (Sherman, 1993). Imprisonment may have a criminogenic effect by putting offenders in situations in which they can learn from other, more incorrigible offenders (Wood, 2007). And offenders may 'reset' their estimates of punishment certainty because they assume that apprehension is a rare event and is unlikely to occur again in the short run (Pogarsky and Piquero, 2003). At present, the degree to which punishment and punishment avoidance deters or promotes offending and the mechanisms by which they do so have not been fully specified. Nevertheless, it is clear that experience with either influences offenders' decision-making calculi; a notion that counters the conception of offenders as utilitarian decision-makers advanced by economic models of rational choice (see Becker, 1968).

The third stage of deterrence follows the growth or attenuation of fear. During this stage, individuals respond to their fear of threatened consequences. When a response is abandonment of a contemplated criminal act or others, this is *absolute deterrence* (Gibbs,

1975: 32). When it involves the alteration or curtailment of a contemplated criminal act, this is *restrictive deterrence* (Gibbs, 1975: 33). Jacobs (2010: 433) has specified four types of restrictive deterrence:

1. The offender reduces the number of crimes s/he commits over a particular period of time;
2. The offender commits crimes of lesser seriousness than the contemplated act, believing that punishment won't be as severe for a 'more minor' infraction...;
3. The offender engages in situational measures to enhance the probability that the contemplated offense will be undertaken without risk of detection...;
4. [or] the offender recognizes a risky situational context, which causes him or her to commit the same crime at a different place or time.

The first of these is *probabilistic*, while the latter three are *particularistic*. In the first, offenders reduce their frequency of offending in the hopes that this will somehow offset the 'law of averages' or the perceived cumulative risk of punishment for criminal behavior (Jacobs and Cherbonneau, 2014). In the latter, offenders undertake specific measures intended to reduce the likelihood of detection and apprehension.⁵ Whether probabilistic or particularistic, these measures reduce offenders' perceptions of the certainty or severity of punishment following contemplated crimes. This reduces their fear, which, in turn, encourages them to continue offending. And, finally, individuals may be unresponsive to rules and threats and follow through with contemplated crimes.

Many questions remain regarding each of these stages. These include: What are the mechanisms by which potential offenders learn about rules or threats? How do they influence perceptions of rules or threats? What other factors influence potential offenders' fear of punishment? How do these moderate or condition this fear? How do offenders responsible for criminal acts alter or manipulate the celerity, certainty, or

⁵ see, e.g., Cherbonneau and Copes, 2006; Cross, 2000; Gallupe, Bouchard, and Caulkins, 2011; Holt, Blevins, and Kuhns, 2014; Jacques and Allen, 2013; Jacobs, 1993, 1996; Jacobs and Cherbonneau, 2014; Jacobs and Miller, 1998; Johnson and Natarajan, 1995; Paternoster, 1989.

severity of formal and informal consequences after being detected or apprehended? How does this contour the deterrence process among them? This dissertation will explore these questions by examining how talk shapes each stage of deterrence.

TALK

This examination is important because verbal communication is the primary mechanism by which individuals represent and negotiate social reality (Bailey, 2007: 341; Tracy, 2002). Individuals organize, define, and manipulate their social worlds and develop and sustain their respective cultures by talking with one another (De Backer, 2005; Frake, 1964; Locke, 1998; Whorf, 1956). Furthermore, it is difficult, and sometimes culturally prohibited, to express complex personal and emotional information without talking (Locke, 1998: 18). Put succinctly, individuals traverse social life by talking. Hence, talk likely plays a significant role in learning about, interpreting, and responding to rules or threats.

Although ideas and information can be transmitted non-verbally or by the mass media, I do not devote explicit attention to these forms of communication. Non-verbal gestures, such as facial expressions and body language, certainly fulfill important roles in communication. The information communicated by these means, however, commonly refers to various aspects of the communicator, such as his or her emotional, physical, and/or physiological state (Locke, 1998). Non-verbal communication can also be used to convey information about others but the complexity of this information can be limited. Messages involving some degree of complexity generally require verbal interchange. For this reason, I only examine non-verbal communication as an accompaniment to talk.

I neglect communication from mass media sources because the information disseminated by them seldom reaches all persons in its original form. Instead, it is delivered through interpersonal communication. Moreover, individuals responding to information obtained personally or vicariously from the mass media typically converse about this information with others before taking action (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; Robinson and Levy, 1986). Prior research has also demonstrated that offenders rarely base their perceptions of rules and threats on information from the mass media (Geerken and Gove, 1975: 506; see generally, Parker and Grasmick, 1979).

I focus on four types of talk: gossip, humor, threats and promises, and accounts. These forms of talk are important to examine in relation to deterrence because they are fundamental elements of human interaction. Unlike many other types of talk, such as small talk, or chit-chat, complaining, and love talk (see Goldsmith and Baxter, 1996), these forms of talk play important roles in the relay of information and management of conflict during everyday interactions (see, e.g., Goffman, 1971; Merry, 1984; Sanders, 2004; Scott and Lyman, 1968; Shibutani, 1966; Tedeschi and Bonoma, 1972). Hence, it is likely that they fulfill important roles during the deterrence process.

Gossip is defined as verbal communication between two or more individuals about absent persons, events, or personal experiences that have occurred outside the presence of one another. Although gossip is sometimes conceptualized as talk solely referring to absent others (see, e.g., Foster, 2004; Hannerz, 1967; Wert and Salovey, 2004), I broaden this definition to include rumor, or gossip about events (see, e.g., Foster, 2004; Gelles, 1989; Rosnow and Georgoudi, 1985), and self-disclosure, or gossip about oneself (see, e.g., Arno, 1980; Ayim, 1994; Bergmann, 1993; Eder and Enke, 1991;

Hannerz, 1967; Merry, 1984; Spacks, 1985; Wert and Salovey, 2004). I consider the three to be conceptually similar because each involves the transmission of information from *alter* to *ego* that is difficult, if not impossible, to verify. This definition is informed by conceptualizations previously presented in the literature that conflate rumor (Gilmore, 1978; Merry, 1984; Post, 1994) and self-disclosure (Dunbar, 1998; Fox, 2001; Gilmore, 1978; Medini and Rosenberg, 1976; Rosnow and Fine, 1976) with gossip. Gossip is one of the primary ways that individuals learn about and interpret their social environment;⁶ therefore, it may play a significant role in how drug dealers learn about and interpret rules or threats.

Humor is defined as verbal statements intended to be amusing to the giver and/or the receiver (see Cooper, 2005; Long and Graesser, 1988; Wyer and Collins, 1992) as well as any physiological manifestations indicating a humorous or amused psychological state (see Billig, 2005; Chapman, 1983; Martin, 2003: 315; Meyer, 2000; Stephenson, 1951). Thus, as used here, humor includes jokes, wisecracks, witticisms, sarcasm, and irony, as well as physical expressions such as quick exhalations of breath, the raising of eyebrows, laughing, and smiling. Persons use humor to redefine or reframe their perceptions of stressful or risk-filled circumstances (Lefcourt, 2001; Moran and Massam, 1997; Obrdlik, 1942). This provides them with a different perspective of these circumstances and thereby discounts their perceptions of risk and ameliorates their fear and other negative affect and emotions (Dixon, 1980; Martin and Lefcourt, 1983; Morreall, 1983; Parkhill et al., 2011). Thus, humor may condition the relationship

⁶ see, e.g., Ayim, 1994; De Backer, 2005; Dunbar, 1998; Foster, 2004; Gilmore, 1978; Hannerz, 1967; Merry, 1984; Paine, 1967; Rosnow and Fine, 1976; Rosnow, 1977; Rosnow and Georgoudi, 1985; Shibutani, 1966

between drug dealers' perceptions of rules or threats and the fear stemming from these perceptions.

Threats and promises are verbal statements intended to coerce or persuade others to commit or avoid committing a specified act. Threats coerce through implications of punishment, whereas promises persuade through implications of reward (Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Lindskold, 1972: 293; see also, Goffman, 1969: 103). These differ from other types of verbal statements intended to influence the behavior of others, such as warnings and mendations, in that those giving them control the implied outcomes (Tedeschi and Bonoma, 1972). If the targets of threats and promises wish to avoid the punishments or obtain the rewards implied within these threats and promises, they will be more likely to comply with their directives. Because threats and promises are used to prevent or otherwise control unwanted behavior in others, drug dealers may use them to prevent their associates from committing acts that may increase the dealers' odds of being arrested.

Accounts are verbal statements that explain untoward or unanticipated conduct (Scott and Lyman, 1968: 46). Individuals disassociate themselves from their inappropriate behavior with these statements and thereby avoid the negative connotations of their actions (Goffman, 1971; Lyman, 2000; see also, Sykes and Matza, 1957). When offering an account, an individual can excuse or justify their offensive behavior or offer a concession or apology for it (see Goffman, 1971; Schonbach, 1990; Scott and Lyman, 1968). These statements camouflage or alter the symbolic nature of an individual's offensive actions such that offended parties no longer view these actions as indicative of the individual's intentions, motivations, or identity (Fritzsche, 2002; Goffman, 1971;

Schonbach, 1990; see also, Goffman, 1959, 1967). This then alters how offended parties feel they should respond to the offense. What was once seen as an offensive action deserving of punishment is thus transformed into an acceptable or, at the very least, forgivable offense. Because accounts come at little cost and allow persons to ‘get out of trouble’ (see Goffman, 1971; Scott and Lyman, 1968) drug dealers are likely to use them to avoid negative consequences after violating rules.⁷

To summarize, illicit drug dealers may learn about rules and threats by gossiping with others. They may then base their estimations of the costs and benefits of dealing on the information drawn from this gossip. While performing this calculus, however, they may alter their initial estimations of risk with humor or by making threats and promises to their associates. If the risks of dealing are perceived as less serious than the rewards, dealers may then proceed with selling. If, in the course of their offending, they are apprehended for untoward actions, dealers may then offer accounts to offended parties and thereby reduce the severity of the punishments imposed for these actions.

Insert figure one about here

Figure one graphically represents the conceptual framework guiding the dissertation. The presence of rules or threats (box 1) influences an individual’s awareness of them (box 2a) in two ways: directly, through personal experience, or indirectly, by creating gossip. Humor and threats and promises then condition the relationship between this awareness (box 2a) and the individual’s estimations of risk and reward (box 2b). This

⁷ These forms of talk are not always mutually exclusive. For example, gossip can be humorous, and accounts may contain gossip. Nevertheless, within this dissertation, each is treated as analytically distinct from the others.

risk, and the individual's fear of it, impacts the level of compliance he or she will have with rules or threats in one of three ways. He or she may be wholly compliant, or absolutely deterred (box 3a), and not offend (box 4a). The individual may be partially compliant, or restrictively deterred (box 3b), and alter his or her offending (box 4b). Or the individual may be noncompliant (box 3c) and offend (box 4c). When an individual is undeterred, he or she may attempt to reshape the punishment for the act by offering an account.

As noted previously, I investigate this framework with data gathered from active drug dealers. This is an appropriate study design for two reasons. First, as Gibbs argued (1985: 90), "the only systematic way to gather data on perceptual properties is to solicit answers from potential offenders to questions about punishments." The design does just this. Second, information about the manipulation of informal threats is logically best drawn from the individuals posing these threats or from those responding to them. The sample includes offenders who fulfill one or both of these roles. Furthermore, because these are active offenders, their responses may more accurately reflect the underlying phenomena affecting this process than responses from offenders who have been punished and are retrospectively reporting on their experiences (see Copes et al., 2015; Wright and Decker, 1994, 1997).

IMPLICATIONS

This examination addresses one of the four major gaps in current understanding of deterrence identified by Nagin (1998: 36)—the relative uncertainty among criminologists regarding the relationship between rules and threats and offenders' perceptions of them

and how this relationship impacts their behavioral outcomes. It does so by providing insight into the relationship between formal and informal rules or threats and drug dealers' perceptions of them. Furthermore, by exploring these processes among active drug dealers, the study illustrates how variations in perceptions and compliance occur in real-life settings and circumstances. The findings provide policy-makers with important information on how to increase fear of formal punishment among potential offenders and thereby make rules or threats more effective at deterring unwanted behavior.

OVERVIEW

As described, this dissertation examines the influence of gossip, humor, threats and promises, and accounts on the three stages of the deterrence process. In the next chapter, I describe the study design, data collection, and analytic methods, and consider potential issues with the sample and measurement. In chapter 3, I examine the role gossip plays in shaping drug dealers' perceptions of formal rules and threats. In chapter 4, I explore whether and how dealers use humor to moderate fear of the risks of dealing. In chapter 5, I investigate if and in what ways they use threats and promises to discourage their associates from committing actions that might direct police attention toward them. In chapter 6, I consider how drug dealers and their customers use accounts to eliminate or reduce the certainty and/or severity of consequences after violating informal rules and threats. Finally, in chapter 7, I conclude by discussing the implications of the study for understanding of deterrence, researching drug dealers, and crime control policies.

CHAPTER 2: DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This dissertation is based on data gathered using qualitative field methods. In particular, the methods used in collecting these data were conducted with an eye to study drug dealing from the perspective of drug dealers themselves. To gain such a perspective, or “insider’s view” (Spradley, 1977: 13), researchers must attempt to immerse themselves in the worlds of the persons they are studying and learn how they view and define the world (Spradley, 1980). This is typically achieved by systematically interviewing and observing these persons (Feldman and Aldrich, 1990). The rich, detailed descriptions obtained through these methods are important for the advancement of scientific understanding in two primary ways.

First, they allow researchers to explore, develop, and illustrate the differences between and among conceptual categories. This provides quantitative researchers with distinct, observable, and ultimately quantifiable concepts that are required for accurate testing of theoretical explanations of phenomena and behavior (see Bailey, 1994; Cooney and Phillips, 2002; Wright, Jacques, and Stein, 2014). Second, unlike many quantitative research methods that must incorporate restrictions on answers (as in some surveys) and behaviors (as in experiments), qualitative data collection is not constrained by researchers’ current state of knowledge. This allows for the discovery and exploration of unexpected and original findings, which, in turn, facilitates the development of new theories.

Qualitative methods are particularly suited to the study of ‘hidden populations,’ or “subset[s] of the general population whose membership[s are] not readily distinguished or enumerated based on existing knowledge and/or sampling capabilities” (Wiebel, 1990: 6). Unlike traditional methods, such as surveys, qualitative field methods allow

researchers to develop personal relationships with subjects and thereby gain their trust (Lambert and Wiebel, 1990). This is important because many of the members of hidden populations are reluctant to speak of their deviant or illicit activities to untrusted outsiders because of potential legal and/or social ramifications (Heckathorn, 1997). Moreover, although traditional methods may be successful at locating hidden populations once they have entered institutions such as hospitals, treatment centers, jails, prisons, or criminal courts, they are demonstrably less successful at locating these populations ‘in the wild’ (Watters and Biernacki, 1989). This is due to the relatively rare presence of these individuals in the general population (Heckathorn, 1997) and their often “secretive, deceitful, mistrustful, and paranoid” nature (Adler, 1993: 11). For these reasons, qualitative research methods are particularly useful when studying active drug offenders.⁸

THE PRESENT STUDY

As already noted, the present study is based on data obtained during in-depth, semi-structured interviews with, and observations of, 33 unincarcerated individuals involved in illicit drug distribution in St. Louis, Missouri.⁹ At the time of the interview, all of these individuals were actively selling drugs or had desisted from doing so within the preceding year. Most were retail-level dealers, or persons selling end-users small quantities of illicit drugs for personal use. Approximately one-third of them (n = 10) were low-level suppliers, or persons selling larger quantities of drugs intended to be repackaged and redistributed by retail-level dealers. The sample also includes one

⁸ see, e.g., Adler, 1993; Bourgois, 2003; Dunlap, Johnson, and Manwar, 1994; Hoffer, 2006; Jacobs, 1999; Jacques and Wright, 2008; Johnson et al., 1985; Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010; Preble and Casey, 1969; Mieczkowski, 1986, 1988; Sandberg, 2009; Sutter, 1966; Taylor, 2007; Williams, 1990.

⁹ These data collection efforts were undertaken with the approval of the IRB at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

manufacturer of crystal methamphetamine and one grower of hallucinogenic mushrooms. While a single informant had been selling for less than a year, the remainder had been doing so for much longer. All of the dealers interviewed operated within closed markets, or markets wherein access is “limited to known and trusted participants” (May and Hough, 2001: 139). Some (n = 8) also sold in semi-open markets, or markets wherein sellers will conduct transactions without any prior introduction, provided a potential customer looks the part, such as drug markets at music festivals, raves, and clubs (May and Hough, 2004: 553).

The dealers ranged in age from 19 to 41, with a mean age of 28.6. Twenty-nine of the informants were male. A majority of them (n = 27) were white, but three were African-American, two were Latino, and one was Asian-American. Four of the dealers held a Bachelor’s degree and sixteen others had attended some college or were currently enrolled at the time of the interview. Of the remainder, six had graduated from high school, four had obtained General Educational Development (GED) degrees, and three were high school dropouts. All but four of the informants were employed at the time of the interview. Eight of the dealers had one or more dependent children and two were married. Drugs sold by these dealers include cocaine, crack, crystal methamphetamine, DMT, ecstasy (MDMA), hallucinogenic mushrooms, heroin, ketamine, LSD, marijuana, nitrous oxide, sassafras (MDA), and various pharmaceuticals. All of the dealers reported using the substances they sold.

Approximately one-third of the offenders (n = 10) claimed never to have been arrested for any offense, while slightly less than half (n = 15) claimed to have been arrested and convicted for drug-related charges, or other minor offenses, but never to

have been incarcerated. Of the eight offenders who did report prior incarceration in jail or prison, three served time for nondrug-related offenses such as burglary or assault. Put differently, 28 members, or 85%, of the sample, would not have been included in this study had informants been located within prisons using the charge of drug distribution as a screen when selecting potential interviewees.

As noted above, all of the dealers were unincarcerated at the time they were interviewed and most were still actively involved in drug selling. Some researchers have suggested that interviewing incarcerated offenders may reduce the danger and difficulties associated with conducting research in the field (Agar, 1973; Jacobs, 1999); this argument, however, is counterbalanced by questions regarding the reliability and validity of data collected from offenders in institutional settings (Polsky, 1969: 123; cf., Copes and Hochstetler, 2010). Institutionalized offenders may provide different information about their criminal activities than their unincarcerated counterparts because the experience of being apprehended and imprisoned has separated them from the “pressures and temptations of life” outside of prison walls (Wright and Decker, 1997: 4). Actions and behaviors guided by the socio-cultural pressures of life outside may be viewed and reported as rational by those still under the sway of these pressures, but they may be viewed and reported as *irrational* once offenders have been separated from these pressures by incarceration (Wright and Decker, 1994; see also, Topalli, 2005: 8-9). Therefore, incarcerated offenders may recount their experiences to researchers differently than they would if still free.

The responses of incarcerated offenders may also differ significantly from the responses of their free-roaming counterparts because those who are locked up are

demonstrably unsuccessful at avoiding apprehension and incarceration. This suggests that they may be systematically or fundamentally different than their unimprisoned counterparts (McCall, 1978: 27; Wright et al., 1992). Finally, data obtained from incarcerated offenders may suffer from issues with validity because of time's corrosive impact on memory. Offenders are no different than the general public in that they can more accurately recall the events of yesterday than the events of yesteryear (Copes et al., 2014). Furthermore, time spent incarcerated may also prevent offenders from learning and practicing the latest strategies and techniques for committing crime and avoiding formal and informal punishment. This may inhibit their ability to provide accurate information on these strategies and techniques (Jacobs, 2000; Wright and Decker, 1994, 1997).

Informants were located through a mixture of straightforward purposive sampling and snowball sampling (cf., Jacques and Wright, 2008). Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling whereby a researcher recruits individuals known to possess specific social, psychological, or biological characteristics relevant to a research study (Marshall and Rossman, 1989). Snowball, or chain referral, sampling is a variant of purposive sampling whereby a study sample is built by first recruiting an initial contact who is then asked to refer potential participants known to possess attributes of research interest (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). These sampling strategies are particularly well suited for studies of hidden populations (van Meter, 1990) and have been used

successfully by numerous researchers over the past twenty years to locate and interview various types of active offenders.¹⁰

In order to be eligible for participation, potential interviewees had to meet a single inclusion criterion: they had to have sold illicit drugs for profit (whether in drugs for personal consumption or in monetary form) within one year prior to being interviewed. Though verifying this may seem simple enough, it was sometimes difficult to do in the real world of drug selling (see also, Jacobs, 1999; Jacobs and Miller, 1998). The eligibility of initial contacts could be ascertained through knowledge garnered over years of personal acquaintance. But as the chain of referrals branched out from these first informants, targeted questions had to be used to filter out strangers who for one reason or another were ineligible for the study.¹¹ In addition, unobtrusive observational measures were employed during interviews whenever possible to dispel any doubt that the interviewee met the eligibility criteria (see Jacobs, 1999: 22).

Interviews and observation took place over a ten month period beginning in winter 2012. Initial informants were recruited through social networks related to school and employment. These initial interviewees were then asked to refer other individuals they knew to be involved in drug distribution. In addition, three other individuals were enlisted to help to locate potential informants. While these individuals did not sell drugs themselves, they were affiliated with drug sellers in various ways. The contacts and the informants were instructed to stress to potential referrals that their participation would be

¹⁰ (see, e.g., Dunlap et al., 1994; Hagedorn, 1994; Jacobs and Cherbonneau, 2012; Jacobs and Wright, 2006; Jacques and Wright, 2008; Maher, 1997; Miller, 1998; Sandberg, 2009; Wright and Decker, 1994, 1997).

¹¹ In several instances, informants belonging to the same dealing or social networks provided unsolicited information regarding the dealing activities of other members of the sample, thereby indirectly confirming the eligibility of these others.

confidential, that law enforcement was not involved in any manner, and that they would receive fifty dollars for their participation.

Insert figure two about here

Figure two graphically illustrates the networks through which the informants were located and the pace at which the referral chains developed. Perhaps the best way to elucidate this convoluted process is to choose a single subject, say, informant 1, who is located in the upper left-hand corner of the figure, and follow the chains of referrals extending downward from him. This individual was located through a social network related to prior employment. He provided an introduction to two potential informants, informants A and B, who refused to participate in the study. Despite numerous promises to provide more introductions, three months passed before he put me in touch with informant 28. This informant then introduced me to her cousin, informant O, and her ex-boyfriend, informant 30. Unfortunately, the introduction to informant O failed to bear fruit, but informant 30 provided introductions to two additional contacts, informants 31 and 33. Informant 31 then recommended two more potential contacts, one successful, informant 32, and one unsuccessful, informant T.

Hidden within the sterile representation of the recruitment process presented by figure 1 are indicators of the problems I encountered when assembling the sample. First and foremost, the study faced problems common among virtually all studies involving hidden or deviant populations (see, e.g., Jacobs, 1999; Wright and Decker, 1994, 1997). Initially promising contacts evaporated and had to be discarded. Once fertile chains

atrophied. Beyond inability to generate further referrals, the primary reason behind failed recruitment was outright refusal to participate (n = 13). Those refusing to participate were not dissimilar to participants, at least on their face. This assumption, however, is based on relatively scant information obtained in the course of locating and attempting to recruit them. Therefore, it is possible that these failed recruits are somehow different from the participants.

Aside from these problems, recruitment was also shaped by interactions between the informants themselves. For instance, informant O reneged on her promise to participate in the study due to an altercation with her cousin, informant 28. According to 28, the two took a substantial amount of LSD the night before both were scheduled to work at their mutual place of employment. But only O arrived for work the following day. Incensed, she notified their manager that 28 did not go out of town for an emergency, as 28 had told the manager when calling in that morning, but was instead sleeping off the prior night's revelry. As a result, 28 was fired. The two got into a heated argument over the matter and vowed to never speak to each other again, effectively severing my connection with informant O and ending her agreement to participate in the study.

Perhaps the biggest difficulty encountered during data collection stemmed from informant 1. On the morning of November 19th, I went to his residence for a pre-arranged introduction to a possible referral. During this visit he told me that sometime in the weeks prior law enforcement agents raided his home, apprehended him, and confiscated large amounts of marijuana, DMT, ecstasy, various pharmaceuticals, and thirty thousand

dollars in small bills. To safeguard the other informants I shut the project down immediately. As a result, I had to cut loose four potential informants, S, T, U, and V.

Interviews were conducted in locations that permitted some degree of privacy and were considered safe by myself and the respective interviewee (see Williams et al., 1992). These locations included a private office and a conference room at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, several public parks, the residences of four informants, a mall food-court, and a number of restaurants scattered throughout the greater St. Louis metropolitan area. I met each of the informants at one of these locations after prearranging a time by telephone. Before beginning the interview, I discussed the informed consent protocol with them and answered any remaining questions they had. This ensured that the participants knew the focus of the research, what their participation entailed, what they would receive for participating, and their rights as research subjects. I then offered the informants the fifty dollar remuneration before posing any questions to them in order to avoid potential coercion.

The interviews were supplemented with over 43 hours of systematic observations of several informants ($n = 7$) and their interactions with associates and customers. These observational periods were conducted with the permission of the each respective informant. My role as a researcher, however, was intentionally hidden from any others who were present. Observations generally took place while establishing rapport and trust with potential informants during the recruitment phase of the project. In addition, systematic observations of the remainder of the informants ($n = 26$) were conducted directly before and after their respective interviews. Fieldnotes were surreptitiously recorded during each of the observation periods and were expanded on directly afterward.

Interviews varied in length from 33 to 104 minutes, although they typically lasted about an hour and fifteen minutes. Each was digitally recorded with the permission of the informant. Following transcription, each interview was proofread against its audio file to ensure as near a verbatim account as possible. This also reduced potential error associated with transcriptionist effects (see Maclean, Meyer, and Estable, 2004). The interviews were semi-structured and conducted in a casual, conversational manner, allowing the informants to speak freely using their own terminology. The open-ended nature of the interviews permitted the dealers to introduce their own concepts and categories and allowed them to elucidate their answers with examples and narratives.

Although the trajectories of individual interviews varied, each addressed informants' experiences with gossip, accounts, and humor. Gossip was explored with questions such as: "When is the last time you heard about someone getting 'busted?"; "How did you react to it?"; and "Do you react differently when you hear that someone has gotten busted from a close friend or relative?" Information on the use of accounts was gathered with questions such as: "What do you do if someone doesn't pay you back for a front?"; "What kind of things do they say to you?"; and "Has this ever changed your reaction?" Indirect mentions of gossip and accounts were followed up on by probing for details.

Little information on humor was successfully obtained by direct questioning. For example, direct questions such as "How much of a role do you think humor plays in what you do?" were met with confused responses, responses lacking in depth, or no responses at all. The forms and functions of humor were instead explored by observing the dealers' interactions with others and noting their verbal and nonverbal displays of humor during

the interviews. The relationship between deterrence and threats and promises was not a predetermined goal directly explored during data collection. This instead emerged as a theme during analysis. To explore this theme I carefully analyzed the transcripts and fieldnotes for direct and indirect mentions of threats and promises.

Limitations

The present study has some limitations regarding its representativeness, reliability, and validity. The inclusion of various networks within the sample enhances the likelihood that it is not comprised of atypical offenders or offenders with similar outlooks (Heckathorn, 1997; see also, Jacobs and Miller, 1998; Wright and Decker, 1994); however, the representativeness of the sample cannot be determined conclusively because the parameters of the population of drug dealers at large is unknown (see Glassner and Carpenter, 1985; Watters and Biernacki, 1989).

The qualitative nature of the study may also raise issues related to reliability. When gathering data using semi-structured interviews, researchers may mistakenly pose questions in dissimilar ways to different informants. This can lead to disparate interpretations of the questions by the informants, which, in turn, can lead to variations in their responses. This can be mistakenly attributed to actual variability in their behavior, opinions, or perceptions, when it is instead an artifact of irregular operationalization. To safeguard against this possibility, I carefully worded questions regarding specific matters in the same manner to all informants and made certain each fully understood the questions before responding. Furthermore, I also compared the phrasing and delivery of these questions across the interviews during the initial stages of analysis to ensure their

concordance. The subjective nature of qualitative data analysis may also impact reliability within the study. Because of this subjectivity, one researcher's interpretation of a narrative or observed events may be inconsistent with that of another. Although the character of the analytic strategy (i.e., it was conducted by a single researcher) made it difficult, if not impossible, to prevent this likelihood, I took deliberate effort to not introduce personal biases and viewpoints into data interpretation. Nonetheless, it is possible my interpretation of the data may have been colored by unconscious or implicit biases.

Data obtained from qualitative interviews and observations may also be subject to threats to internal validity. Offenders may misrepresent their actions or outright lie in order to impress the researcher or to protect themselves from legal difficulties. I took several steps to reduce this possibility. First, informants were assured that their participation and responses would be held in strict confidence. Vague or contradictory comments were followed up on to detect and, whenever possible, resolve inconsistencies. And finally, I guarded against the possibility of an informant omitting details or events portraying him or her in a negative light by reconfirming the promise of confidentiality throughout the interview and by requesting that he or she simply decline to discuss certain matters instead of providing insincere answers. Despite these measures, it is possible that some informants may have lied or inflated their accounts.

Analytic Strategy

Data analysis began with manual examination of the interview transcripts and fieldnotes for passages referring to instances of each of the forms of talk (see Charmaz,

2006). I then applied initial codes to these passages summarizing their content. This initial coding scheme focused on the content of each individual instance of gossip, humor, threats and promises, and accounts, the dealers' and their associates' reactions to each, and, if applicable, their intended effect. After comparing these incidents within and across interviews and fieldnotes, similar incidents were grouped together into broad, general categories (e.g., gossip about 'getting busted,' humor about police, threats regarding uncircumspect behavior, and accounts for underweight drugs, etc.). The individual cases forming each of the broad categories were then sorted into smaller, more narrowly defined categories on the basis of their similar or dissimilar characteristics (see Spradley, 1979: 173-184). These narrow categories were based on what the offenders themselves regarded as pertinent distinctions. Following this, patterns of these categories were recorded. Throughout each of these stages emergent hypotheses were generated concerning the forms and functions of each of the forms of talk; hypotheses which were then assessed, refined, or discarded through examination of the data and the patterns therein (see Charmaz, 2006). To bolster reliability, the data were revisited a second time and the analysis was repeated. Following completion of the coding, the first and second coding schemes were analyzed for similarities and dissimilarities using the test-retest method (see Lewis, 2009; Maxfield and Babbie, 2012). After ensuring concurrence between the two waves of coding, the most common patterns within the accounts of the informants and the emergent hypotheses that were not rejected were selected to form the basis of the four empirical chapters. It should be noted that many comments from the informants pertained to one or more of the forms of talk; therefore, some quotes are used more than once to illustrate different forms of talk and their functions.

CHAPTER 3: GOSSIP

From the late 1960's onward, a growing body of empirical and conceptual research has been devoted to exploring the link between offenders' perceptions of the properties of formal rules and their resultant crime decisions.¹² This research has recognized that communication about formal rules is a necessary precursor to the formation of perceptions (see, e.g., Cook, 1980: 222; Geerken and Gove, 1975; Parker and Grasmick, 1979; Zimring and Hawkins, 1973). Yet, few studies have examined the forms of this communication and how they shape perceptions (Gibbs, 1985; Kennedy, 2009; Nagin, 1998). This is a noteworthy omission because understanding of this relationship may illuminate why some offenders perceive risk differently than others (Geerken and Gove, 1975: 511); and this, in turn, may shed light on why offenders' responses to rules and threats vary (Kennedy, 2009). In the present chapter, I examine the influence of one form of communication, gossip, on drug dealers' perceptions of formal punishments and their subsequent behavior.

Gossip, defined here as verbal communication between two or more individuals about absent persons, events, or personal experiences that have occurred outside the presence of one another,¹³ is not always "mere...idle chatter" but at times serves a "social purpose" (Rosnow, 1977:158). Whether it begins as playful and irrelevant talk or as serious discussion, gossip provides individuals key information about others and unclear events (see, e.g., Dunbar, 2004; Foster, 2004; Gilmore, 1978; Hannerz, 1967; Merry,

¹² (see, e.g., Bachman, Paternoster, and Ward, 1992; Claster, 1967; Cook, 1980; Decker, Wright, and Logie, 1993; Doob and Webster, 2003; Ekland-Olson, Lieb, and Zurcher, 1984; Erickson and Gibbs, 1978; Gibbs, 1975, 1985; Grasmick and Bursik, 1990; Grasmick and Bryjak, 1980; Jensen, 1969; Kennedy, 2009; Klepper and Nagin, 1989a, 1989b; Meier and Johnson, 1977; Minor, 1977; Paternoster et al., 1982; Paternoster and Simpson, 1997; Tittle, 1977, 1980; Waldo and Chiricos, 1972)

¹³ As noted in the introduction, this definition includes talk sometimes referred to as rumor, or gossip about events, and talk that is sometimes referred to as self-disclosure, or gossip about oneself (cf., Dunbar, 2004, Fox, 2001; Gilmore, 1978; Merry, 1984; Post, 1994; Rosnow and Fine, 1976). To reiterate, these forms of talk are conceptualized as gossip because each involves the passing of information between individuals that is difficult, if not impossible, to verify.

1984; Paine, 1967; Rosnow and Fine, 1976; Shibutani, 1966). Through gossiping, individuals learn details about their social surroundings that might otherwise be inaccessible to them via personal experience (Hannerz, 1967: 57). This provides them with a greater understanding of social dangers, which, in turn, improves their ability to survive (De Backer, 2005). Because of this, individuals in risky circumstances sometimes seek out or elicit gossip to acquire facts and information about these circumstances (Ayim, 1994).

These aspects of gossip have not been lost on criminologists. Nearly 80 years ago, for example, Sutherland (1965[1937]: 8, 16) noted that, among professional thieves, “[s]hould one mob find some bad features in any spot, they will always advise other mobs of it,” and later, “communication involving the law is free [among thieves].” These statements indicate that offenders may freely gossip about potential risks. Ethnographies of drug dealers and drug markets are replete with examples of risk-related gossip. In his study of a heroin-dealing network in Denver, Colorado, Hoffer (2006: 24) notes how gossip about the arrests of associates or the location of police spread amongst street-based users with “remarkable speed and accuracy” (see also, Johnson and Natarajan, 1995: 54). And several of Adler’s (1993) Californian cocaine traffickers reported gossiping about potential police informants (see also, Jacques and Wright, 2008: 242; Sutter, 1966: 215). These studies and others demonstrate that offenders assess the likelihood of being detected and apprehended by gossiping. The present study furthers this line of inquiry by examining the use of gossip among active drug dealers. To this end, I explore two questions. First, what are the forms of gossip used by these drug

dealers? And second, how does gossip shape decision-making and the deterrence process among them?

FINDINGS

Gossip plays an important part in shaping decision-making among active drug dealers. They rely on gossip to learn about associates coming into contact with the police, potentially drawing police attention to themselves and others, or successfully avoiding detection. Dealers base their understanding of the likelihood of detection and subsequent punishment for their crimes on this gossip and then alter their behavior accordingly. The following sections describe what dealers gossip about, how this shapes perceptions of detection and apprehension among them, and how these perceptions influence their responses to the threat of punishment.

What Drug Dealers Gossip About

Unlike many other types of offenders, such as burglars and armed robbers (see, e.g., Bennett and Wright, 1984; Cromwell, Olson, and Avary, 1991; Doob and Webster, 2003; Wright and Decker, 1994, 1997), the dealers in my sample did *not* report actively pushing thoughts about getting caught by police and the potential legal consequences that may follow out of their minds. Instead, they considered this possibility “all the damn time” (B)¹⁴. With little perceived access to formal channels of information, the dealers based assessments of their likelihood of being detected and apprehended largely on

¹⁴ Informant names are pseudonyms randomly selected by the researcher or are ‘street’ names provided by the informants themselves.

gossip. This gossip fell into three broad categories: ‘getting busted,’ ‘acting sketchy,’ and ‘avoiding detection.’

Getting Busted. The dealers were most concerned with gossip about customers, employees, and suppliers having had some sort of recent contact with the police. This gossip was particularly important to the dealers because these individuals knew the details of their illicit operations. The dealers understood that it is common practice for law enforcement to offer leniency to offenders in exchange for information about the crimes of others, commonly referred to as “snitching” or “grassing.” They assumed that those who were arrested would “look out for their own ass” (Justin) because “it’s human nature, [to] protect yourself” (Allen) by snitching to avoid “spend[ing] a little time in jail” (Justin). As snitches were generally thought to be most the common “reason why [dealers] get busted” (B), the dealers constantly fretted over others “getting caught” (Jarod) as this could lead to the dealers “get[ing] burned” (V) as well. “You might sell a bag to somebody,” Gregory explained, “they might roll down the street, get pulled over. ‘Where’d you get it from?’ Bam, that’s my name.”

Owing to this, there was an unwritten rule among the dealers to share this gossip with others whenever possible. On learning of a customer getting busted, James “made sure that other people that knew him knew what was up, so they knew ‘Hey, this guy’s a liability. If you don’t want to get caught, don’t deal with this guy.’” This norm was common among the dealers because, as Justin explained, “Nobody wants to get fucked and you want to help other people from getting fucked too.” In fact, this practice was so ingrained and prevalent among the dealers that many of them *expected* their associates to

share this gossip with them. “I expect if anybody has any information as far as that goes,” Mud emphasized, “if anybody has any information about anyone [being apprehended] at all...I definitely expect them to tell me that.”¹⁵ Allen concurred, claiming that he “would definitely expect [his associates] to tell [him] about [others being busted].” But the dealers could not always rely on this norm to push pertinent gossip their way. To make certain they received any and all information about others getting busted, at times the dealers initiated gossip to elicit this information from others. One of the dealers, V, even went as far as “pay[ing] for information like that” to ensure that he heard it as soon as possible following the arrest of an associate.

The dealers logically assume that when information about their crimes is provided to law enforcement agents, as might occur when associates are arrested, their chances of being detected by police, and thus their chances of getting busted, increase. Here we see how vicarious experience can have a two-fold impact on offenders’ perceptions of the likelihood of getting busted. It raises offenders’ perceptions of risk by demonstrating that others have been punished for behaving similarly (Stafford and Warr, 1993; see also Zimring and Hawkins, 1973: 72-73) *and* by informing them of looming proximal threats. In the first way, offenders’ perceptions are influenced by considering such thoughts as ‘If my associate got arrested for selling crack, I may get arrested for selling it too.’ In the second, they are influenced by such thoughts as ‘If my associate got arrested, he or she may snitch on me.’ When offenders’ assessments of risk are raised in these ways, they are more likely to respond to deterrents by reducing or altering their offending to some degree.

¹⁵ Throughout the remainder of the dissertation ellipses represent words or phrases that have been omitted for the sake of clarity.

Acting Sketchy. Beyond gossip concerning an individual's alleged association with the police, the dealers also gossiped about others 'acting sketchy.' To be considered sketchy, all one had to do was perform actions that could draw police attention:

As far as a sketchy person goes, I would think they're more of a person like...that might draw a lot of police attention or something like that, you know...like [someone who is] unpredictable, maybe, or [someone who] makes dumb decisions. (Mud, white, 30 year-old, heroin dealer)

These included being careless during drug transactions, or acting "obvious that you're dealing drugs or whatever" (Mitch), openly advertising, or "put[ting] it out there like they're the guy...the dope guy" (Wyatt), and using hard drugs. Being obvious during transactions raised the chances that you may be noticed by police during a deal, while open advertisement increased the odds that word of your illicit operation may find its way to the police. Similarly, using hard drugs was associated with "losing control" and "being more worried about...drugs than...safety [from apprehension]" (Dean). Or, as Freddie, a Chinese-American, 30 year-old, cocaine, ecstasy, heroin, and OxyContin dealer, put it:

[Someone that uses hard drugs] is desperate...they'll put themselves in situations that they normally wouldn't put themselves in, [they will]...deal with somebody [they] don't know, [they] don't trust...that's what...[those] people do. They're trying to make that extra bit...they're taking on clients they have no idea who the fuck they are just to make a little extra and is it really worth it in the long run when [they] get busted? No.

As Freddie's quote illustrates, the dealers assumed that individuals on hard drugs were apt to commit actions that would draw police scrutiny.

Other types of sketchy behavior indicated that an individual was working with the police. Examples included asking "questions [that were] too specific" such as "'can I buy some weed?'" (B) or "going from person to person and changing [the type of drugs one

was]...looking for” (Bugs) when arranging potential drug sales, “showing signs of paranoia...by looking around a lot” (James) or “ask[ing] too many questions” (B) during sales, or “disappear[ing] and then [coming] back around...[without] an explanation or proof of where [one had] been” (G).

Whether gossip about others acting sketchy suggested to the dealers that those responsible were going to inadvertently draw police attention or were intentionally acting on behalf of the authorities, the result was the same—it heightened dealers’ perceptions of risk. Much like gossip about getting busted, gossip about others potentially drawing police scrutiny increased these perceptions by indicating to dealers that these others may be apprehended and, as a result, may inform on them to avoid punishment. Gossip about others working with the police, on the other hand, increased these perceptions by indicating to dealers that their own actions (i.e., selling to the targets of the gossip) may draw heat.

Avoiding Detection. Unlike getting busted, none of the dealers reported gossiping about distinct incidents where others successfully avoided detection. Instead, the dealers shared information about general techniques and strategies for avoiding detection and arrest. By and large, these strategies echoed those previously presented in extant drug literature (see, e.g., Jacques and Reynald 2012; Johnson and Natarajan 1995). Examples included “[not] talking on the phone” (John), “[not] smok[ing] weed when you’ve got weight on you..., wear[ing] your seatbelt, [not] hav[ing] a bunch of people in your car” (Mitch), “not smoking cigarettes [while driving]” (Gregory), and generally abiding by traffic laws or, in the words of several of the informants, “driving like Grandma” (Gregory, Snap,

Wyatt). In addition, the dealers discussed methods for thwarting police searches after “getting flagged [getting pulled over by police]” (Dirty), such as “stashing [hiding the drugs on one’s person or in one’s vehicle]” (Dre) or swallowing the drugs.

The original sources of such information were lost on the dealers. When asked if they recalled learning these strategies and techniques by gossiping with others, the dealers commonly replied with answers like “yeah, but I mean really you learn it by just being around” (Dirty), “talking to people” (G), and “being in the scene” (Snap). Jarod, a white, 30 year-old, crystal methamphetamine ‘cook’ and small-time heroin dealer, put it this way:

It’s something that has been passed down and taught and nobody knows exactly where they learned it from, you know what I’m saying? It’s like it came from somewhere, the knowledge came from somewhere, and it’s just passed around between friends and I mean, it’s one of those things.

Although Jarod and the other dealers were unclear if they learned about these techniques by gossiping, their comments indicated that, at the very least, this information was passed among them in a manner analogous to gossiping. The sharing of this information demonstrates one of the many ways that vicarious experience influences decision-making among offenders and their behavioral outcomes. Without vicarious experience with punishment avoidance, offenders would certainly still attempt to evade detection or, in other words, manipulate the certainty of punishment by altering their behavior; however, the shape of these manipulations—the shape of restrictive deterrence—would likely differ absent the input of others.

How Dealers Respond to Gossip

Gossip guides drug dealers' responses to the threat of detection and punishment in two primary ways. They alter their dealing or severely curtail it in response to gossip about others getting busted or acting sketchy. These reactions demonstrate how vicarious experience with punishment and punishment avoidance influences dealers' decisions and thereby creates and shapes restrictive deterrence among them.

Avoidance. The dealers typically responded to gossip about others getting busted by avoiding any further contact with them. "Anybody that [you hear about] get[ting] busted," B emphasized, "you don't talk to 'em anymore...if you're still in the game it's kind of a general rule." "[When you hear] that someone just got picked up last week," John explained, "well, that's probably a red flag that...I'm not going to fucking deal with...pretty much if you've had any association with the cops in recent time." Jack, a white, 22 year-old, marijuana supplier and small time pharmaceutical dealer, described avoiding a customer who recently had been busted as a result of a hit-and-run car accident:

He [a customer] used to pick up a half-pound every week from me...one night he hit a car and just drove off cuz I think he didn't have insurance or something... He's sitting at his house at one in the morning, smoking a bowl, got an ounce [of marijuana] in this Swisher Sweet box on the table. Knock-knock on the door...It's cops...because of the hit and run [and]... he got popped...He got all of his stuff confiscated so then he's out all of that money...a week later he calls me like, 'Hey man, you think you can front [consign] me something?' And at this time I think like only me and two other people knew that he'd gotten busted...cuz he had a buddy with him...[who] was also a friend of mine, and he said 'Dude, just to let you know man'...[giving] me a little tip off [about the customer's arrest]...I said 'Aw, man' [to the customer requesting the front]... 'I'm not doing that anymore... I'm not doing that right now. Man, it's all bad.' And I actually just told him that something happened with my dude [supplier], cuz I didn't want to be like 'Yeah, I heard you got busted, I don't want to sell to you.'

The dealers also avoided anyone whom they heard had been acting sketchy:

Interviewer: Now if someone was to tell you that somebody else was acting sketchy, how would you react?

Freddie: I wouldn't even have anything to do with em. You know, most of the people that would tell me that, most people that I run with, they tell me somebody's bad news, I'm not gonna fuck around with it... I just don't really feel like fucking dealing with it, if somebody's gonna be a hindrance to my life.

Avoidance is not unlike other more readily identifiable forms of restrictive deterrence such as stashing drugs or not explicitly talking about them on the phone. Like these other strategies, avoidance limits the abilities of law enforcement officials and their agents to detect and apprehend offenders. It does so by robbing them of a key element often needed to locate and capture dealers—interpersonal contact. This contact is necessary to catch dealers in the act of making an illicit transaction, which, much of the time, is needed to successfully bring a case against dealers for distribution. By avoiding the targets of gossip, dealers may reduce the *actual* likelihood of detection and subsequent punishment, because this limits their contact with law enforcement officials or agents thereof; but what is perhaps more important is that regardless of whether those avoided actually pose a threat, it reduces dealers' *perceptions* of this likelihood. When this occurs, the costs associated with continuing to deal are reduced as well, and this encourages further offending.

Quitting. Avoidance was by far the most common response reported by the dealers; however, sometimes they 'quit,' or ceased sales altogether. This occurred in situations where a dealer heard gossip that "his [or her] name was given out [reported to the

police]” (Allen). Bugs, a white, male, 33 year-old, DMT, ecstasy, and marijuana supplier, did just that:

Interviewer: How did you hear that somebody dropped your name?

Bugs: The person that dropped my name went to a party a few days later after he'd done it and was running his mouth and somebody else at that same party knows me and they came to me the next day and told me.

Interviewer: Who was the person that you found out from?

Bugs: [A] common acquaintance that the other person didn't know I knew.

Interviewer: So what did you do?

Bugs: I shut down pretty much my entire operation...for all intents and purposes I cleaned out my house, I got rid of everything that wasn't considered to be personal use and shut down my phone and quit.

V, a white, male, 28 year-old, cocaine, crystal methamphetamine, ecstasy, and heroin supplier, shared a similar story:

I...got a call that my right hand man got busted...the guy right under him informed you know, I mean fuck...it's a scary time, like real fucking scared.... I'll get that call and I'll usually freak out at first and throw everything...in somebody's car and get it the fuck out of wherever it is...clean everything out, probably close shop for a couple weeks...just shut down everything...all the numbers get turned off.

None of the dealers who reported stopping sales because of gossip did so permanently. Instead, after the passing of several uneventful days or weeks ameliorated their initial alarm and made them “feel safe” (Allen), they slowly began to deal again until reaching or surpassing their previous offending frequency. Here we see how the deterrent capacity of a perceived threat can be undermined by offenders' subsequent experiences with avoiding detection and punishment. As these experiences build, offenders slowly reassess

their initial estimations of the certainty of detection as exaggerated or overblown and alter their behavior accordingly (see also, Sherman 1990, on ‘initial deterrence decay’).

The dealers were aware that the veracity of gossip about others getting busted or acting sketchy was uncertain:

You don’t want to trust too much what somebody else has to say about somebody because everybody’s got...opinions or everybody’s got a reason for doing something. You can go ask somebody about somebody [and] they’ve got a reason for telling you whatever you want to know and it comes down to somebody may not like the person and will tell you some shit about ‘em. (Jarod)

But they were hesitant to ignore it owing to the gravity of what *could* befall them were they to do so. This led them to interpret any gossip about others getting busted or acting sketchy as “the worst case scenario” (Bugs) and to respond accordingly:

In this line of work you’re guilty until proven innocent, hell, if somebody is saying something that drastic there is probably some truth to it somewhere. So yeah, I would probably limit my dealings with them for sure. You can never be too careful. (John, white, 34 year-old, psychedelic mushroom grower and supplier)

You never know if [gossip’s] true or not...typically it is, I mean, if someone’s telling you something then typically they’re not lying. ‘So-and-so got popped or kicked in’ or whatever, so you don’t deal with them anymore or whatever...but typically it’s the truth. (Jacob, white, 29 year-old, heroin dealer)

By acting on gossip without verifying its truthfulness, the dealers inevitably avoided many whom were not threats. This impacted the dealers’ behavior such that it reduced the frequency of their sales, at least for a short time.

Contingencies. Although the dealers emphasized that they avoided anyone they heard had gotten busted or was acting sketchy, their responses were found to be contingent on several factors. First, the dealers were concerned with the content of the gossip. Their

reactions to gossip about getting busted were dependent on precisely how persons were caught. Getting busted as the result of traffic stops did not overly trouble them because they had learned from personal and vicarious experience that this was typically a matter of happenstance and that those apprehended in this way were rarely caught with substantial amounts of drugs, providing little reason for them to snitch in order to avoid a lengthy sentence. As Snap put it, “that kind of shit happens.” Brian, a white, 31 year-old, ecstasy and marijuana dealer provided more explanation:

Shit happens...[getting busted] with a personal sack [small amount of marijuana meant for personal consumption], usually people that get busted with a little eighth [3.5 grams], well, I've never heard of anyone ratting someone out for that kind of sack.

Put differently, because persons caught in this way were thought to have less incentive to cooperate with police, the dealers felt they need not be avoided.

Conversely, the dealers treated gossip about individuals ‘having their door kicked in’ (having their homes raided by law enforcement officials) with the utmost seriousness. They understood from experience that “you...have to have a lot of drugs for them to... get a search warrant for your...house” (Mitch), and that the stiffer penalties associated with larger drug quantities were more likely to encourage arrestees to snitch or otherwise cooperate with police:

If somebody [gets] caught with a gram [of] weed, they're getting charged with a misdemeanor. You know that person's gonna take that charge. They'll probably hire an attorney and get it pleaded out to littering or a noise violation...and business continues as usual. But if somebody gets caught with more than an ounce, then that's now a felony charge, so...you're...now hot. (Bugs)

Because of this, the dealers emphasized that anyone who had their door kicked in was “a for sure *boop*” (Snap) or, in other words, someone to be avoided without question.

A second factor affecting the dealers' reactions to gossip was their relationship with the target of the gossip. As social distance between a dealer and a supposed arrestee decreased (see Black 1976, 1998; Horwitz 1990, for a discussion of social distance), it became less likely that the dealer would avoid him or her:

What I always told myself was even if I hear [that someone's been apprehended] one time, no matter who it's from or anything, that I run with it. And I try to follow that as much as I can but...every situation's different...I'll be honest there have been a couple times where I didn't follow that, cuz it's hard, somebody's your friend, [and] your helping 'em live and survive and shit. (V)

Or it became more likely that the dealer would stop selling drugs to the individual but still retain a social relationship:

Interviewer: Would you stop dealing with [someone if you hear he or she got busted]?

Gregory: Oh yeah, for sure, done. But if it was my friend, I'd deal with em. 'Hey what's up, you wanna meet at a bar, let's get a drink, let's go holler at some girls, let's meet at the club,'...but on a business, sell you some weed, sell you whatever? Never again.

Interviewer: Would you say they get cut off...from just drugs or do they get cut off socially?

Bugs: I mean, I can only speak from what I've seen...they don't necessarily get cut off...socially...their friends are still gonna talk to them and their friends are still gonna hang out with them.

The dealers also emphasized that regardless of social distance, it was unlikely they would avoid a suspected arrestee if he or she supplied them:

Interviewer: If you hear about [your supplier] getting busted, do you stop dealing with them too?

Freddie: You know, if it's your guy that's hooking you up, no I can't say that. I used to get herb and coke from a guy, he got busted, he got out, if he's selling

again, he's selling again. You know, nine times out of ten, if they bust him, they're going up, they're not going down.

The relationship between the dealers and the *source* of the gossip also influenced their reactions. As this distance closed, they were more likely to take the gossip at face value:

Interviewer: Have you ever stopped dealing with somebody because of something somebody else told you about them?

Wyatt: Not typically, I try to use my own judgment, I mean I'll definitely... listen to ...people...but...if I don't see it for myself or feel the same way about it then I'll continue to [deal with that person]...but if it's *a close friend of mine* and they're like 'Look, this motherfucker might be getting watched' or 'He's been doin' this or that' or whatever, then okay, yeah, I'm not gonna call [that] person for a while.

But as it increased, they were more likely to “check [the gossip] out” by “asking around” until “it [was] confirmed a couple times” (Jacob) before acting on it.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The goal of this chapter was to examine gossip's role in shaping decision-making and deterrence among a group of active drug dealers. The findings indicate that drug dealers actively seek out and act on gossip about associates getting busted, acting sketchy, and, to a lesser extent, avoiding detection. They react to gossip about associates getting busted or acting sketchy by avoiding them. This is contingent, however, on the social distance between the dealers and the subjects and sources of gossip. When dealers are close to the *source* of the gossip, they are *more* likely to avoid its subject. When close to the *subject* of the gossip, they are *less* likely to avoid him or her. When hearing gossip about potential snitches, dealers commonly avoid all or many of their associates, at least

for a short time. In the following sections I discuss the implications of these findings for deterrence and rational choice.

The importance of talk in the deterrence process was demonstrated by gossip's role as a key intermediary mechanism linking the presence of threats to drug dealers' understanding of these threats. Were it not for gossip, the dealers would not have identified specific individuals as potential threats, perceived an increase in risk as a result, and then taken measures to inoculate themselves. This finding supports prior research suggesting that the deterrent capacity of rules and threats relies on whether information about them is communicated to their intended targets (see Cook, 1980: 222; Geerken and Gove, 1975; Parker and Grasmick, 1979; Zimring and Hawkins, 1973). It also illustrates that the channels of communication delivering information about rules and threats can amplify or attenuate offenders' perceptions of these rules and threats and thus their cost/benefit calculi. The character of gossip (i.e., its source and subject) can raise or lower dealers' perceptions of risk and thereby indirectly influence their response to it. These are important insights because they suggest that deterrence hinges on informal communication and not on the objective properties of rules and threats. Thus, changes or additions to crime control policies may have little impact on offenders' perceptions and resultant behavior unless and until these alterations permeate informal channels of communication.

Traditional models of deterrence have assumed that offenders' decision-making takes place in a vacuum (see, e.g., Becker, 1968; Clarke and Cornish, 1985; Reynolds, 1985). Criminologists have made significant inroads into understanding offender decision-making by demonstrating that offenders' individualistic assessments of risk and

reward are shaped, or bounded, by the social and personal context in which they are embedded (Shover and Honaker, 1992: 21; see also, Ekland-Olson, Lieb, and Zurcher, 1984). Put differently, offenders' lifestyles place them in situations in which their estimations of risk and reward may be radically lowered or raised (Piliavin, Gartner, and Matsueda, 1986: 115). The present study demonstrates how decision-making among drug dealers is also impacted by how and from whom they learn about potential threats.

Drug dealers discuss information about the perceived costs and benefits of contemplated crimes with others before making crime decisions. And moreover, they also consider the characteristics of the providers of this information and, perhaps more importantly, the nature of their relationship with them. Persons and situations that may or may not be otherwise regarded as threats may come to be considered as such given the relationship an offender has with the source of gossip about them, thus raising the cost dealers associate with specific actions. This counters the somewhat abstracted view of offenders as utilitarian decision-makers advanced by those favoring traditional models of rational choice (e.g., Becker, 1968). It instead suggests that offender decision-making, at least among drug dealers, is a socially situated phenomena embedded in the milieu in which it takes place. Hence, in addition to gathering knowledge about offenders' lifestyles, we must consider how and by whom information about threats is communicated to them if we are to gain a better understanding of criminal decision-making.

The present study also has implications for current understanding of the relationship between offenders' personal experiences with avoiding punishment and their perceptions of the likelihood of arrest. Consistent with prior considerations of the

‘experiential effect,’ these findings indicate that drug dealers’ experiences with punishment avoidance have a negative relationship with their assessments of potential risk (see, e.g., Minor and Harry, 1982; Saltzman et al., 1982). This was demonstrated by the dealers being less concerned about associates getting busted in the course of traffic stops because of their personal experience with avoiding punishment in similar circumstances.

The dealers’ vicarious experiences with punishment, here in the form of gossip, also influenced their decision-making calculi and the shape of deterrence among them in a second way. Gossip about potential threats raises dealers’ assessments of the costs associated with continuing to deal, which, in turn, they tried to combat by altering their offending. Among these dealers, this alteration most commonly took the shape of avoiding those targeted by the gossip. This type of avoidance is a form of what Jacobs (1996) refers to as *particularistic* restrictive deterrence. Recall that this refers to the tactics offenders use to reduce the likelihood of detection and apprehension. Also recall that this is counterposed against *probabilistic* restrictive deterrence, which refers to the notion that after offending for some time, offenders may believe that they are pushing their luck and, as a result, may limit their crimes to delay the inevitability of detection, apprehension, and eventual punishment (see also, Gibbs, 1975). While particularistic restrictive deterrence certainly reduced discrete instances of offending among the dealers, its impact on their overall offending patterns and its relationship to their probabilistic assessments of risk is less clear.

It is likely that, at least in the short run, dealers’ use of these particularistic measures emboldened their offending by undermining these probabilistic assessments. By

avoiding those identified by gossip as potential threats, dealers may feel as if they have successfully sidestepped situations that would have otherwise brought about their downfall. This may encourage future offending at a similar or greater rate in the same way that personal experience with punishment may lead to a 'resetting effect' (Pogarsky and Piquero, 2003; see also, Jacobs and Cherbonneau, 2014). This is not to say that particularistic measures eliminate probabilistic risk assessments; rather, they slow their growth and thereby encourage offending. As understanding of the interplay between probabilistic and particularistic restrictive deterrence is still in its infancy, it remains unclear at what point probabilistic assessments of risk overwhelm particularistic measures of risk reduction.

The above findings support prior research suggesting that the stability of risk perceptions has a reciprocal relationship with behavior and, furthermore, that this relationship can be transformed by an actor's experiences with punishment and punishment avoidance (Horney and Marshall, 1992; Paternoster et al., 1983; Piliavin et al., 1986; Richards and Tittle, 1981, 1982; Saltzman et al., 1982). Deterrence hinges on whether perceptions of the certainty, severity, and celerity of threatened consequences influence the decisions of potential offenders. Recent scholarship has suggested that of these three elements, the certainty of punishment is the most influential (Pogarsky, 2002). Successfully deterring potential offenders, then, relies in large part on manipulating their perceptions of certainty. Just as law enforcement agents can manipulate these perceptions through various tactics, such as increasing their visible presence, offenders can do so as well by engaging in techniques and strategies informed by personal and vicarious experience with punishment. Therefore, the manipulation of rules and threats is not the

sole province of those advancing or enforcing them (see also, Jacobs and Cherbonneau, 2014).

The present chapter illustrates the duplicitous nature of gossip. By promoting avoidance, it reduces the prevalence of drug market activity. But it also supports drug markets by cutting through the unpredictability, disorder, and chaos inherent within them (Hobbs, 2013; see generally, Allport and Postman, 1947; Shibutani, 1966). By gossiping with others, drug dealers and users learn and share information about each other and law enforcement agents. This tells them who is safe to buy from or sell to, or perhaps more importantly, who is not safe. This informs their decisions and provides them with a sense of control over their environment, which, in turn, encourages them to sell drugs in the face of potential consequences.

CHAPTER 4: HUMOR

The past 25 years of deterrence research has demonstrated that potential offenders and offenders do not uniformly respond to rules and threats (Piquero et al., 2011; for extensive reviews of this research, see Nagin, 1998; Kennedy, 2009). A number of scholars examining decision-making have suggested that this variation can be partially explained by individual differences among offenders and the social, cultural, and situational contexts in which they make crime decisions (see Clarke and Cornish, 1985; Cornish and Clarke, 1986; Gallupe and Baron, 2010; Pogarsky, 2007; Shover and Honaker, 1992; Simon, 1979; Topalli and Wright, 2014; Wikström, 2007). This research posits that these individual differences and contextual influences moderate or condition offenders' perceptual responses to rules and threats. When they increase offenders' fear of consequences, offenders are said to be *less* likely to commit contemplated crimes as originally intended; when they decrease it, offenders are said to be *more* likely to do so (see generally, Bentham, 1988[1789]; Gibbs, 1975; Zimring and Hawkins, 1973).

Extant literature has suggested a number of variables that may condition or moderate offenders' responses to threats. For instance, moral inhibition, or a belief that crime is wrong, increases the likelihood one will not offend (Bachman, Paternoster, and Ward, 1992; Burkett and Ward, 1993; Paternoster and Simpson, 1996; Pogarsky, Kim, and Paternoster, 2005; Svensson, 2015). While low self-control and impulsivity (Nagin and Paternoster, 1993, 1994), intoxication (Zimring and Hawkins, 1973: 137), heightened negative emotional states (e.g., anger) (Brookman, 2015; Exum, 2002; Topalli and Wright, 2014), desperation (Wright and Decker, 1994), and interaction with accomplices (Erikson and Jensen, 1977; Hochstetler, 2001; Shover and Henderson, 1995) decrease fear of punishment and encourage offending. In this chapter, I examine whether and how

one potentially moderating variable, humor, influences drug dealers' cognitive, affective, and emotional responses to rules and threats and their resulting behavioral outcomes.

Humor as used here refers to any physiological manifestations indicating a humorous or amused psychological state (see Billig, 2005; Chapman, 1983; Martin, 2003: 315; Meyer, 2000; Stephenson, 1951) and any verbal statements intended to be amusing to the giver and/or the receiver (see Cooper, 2005; Long and Graesser, 1988; Wyer and Collins, 1992). This includes physical expressions such as quick exhalations of breath, raising eyebrows, and smiling. It also includes verbal devices such as joking, wisecracks, sarcasm, and irony. Humor's moderating influence on stress and anxiety has long been recognized (see, e.g., Freud, 1960[1905]; Martin and Lefcourt, 1983; Morreall, 1983; Spencer, 1939). Individuals in threatening circumstances often use humor when redefining or reframing their understanding of these circumstances and their roles within them (Lefcourt, 2001; Moran and Massam, 1997; Obrdlik, 1942). By doing so, these individuals view their situations and roles from a different perspective, which, in turn, attenuates their perceptions of risk and alleviates their stress and negative emotions (Dixon, 1980; Martin and Lefcourt, 1983; Morreall, 1983; Parkhill et al., 2011).

Criminological examinations of humor, and in particular, this function of humor, are scant at best. One notable study conducted by Pogrebin and Poole (1988), found that humor allowed a group of active police officers to safely retain their identities while expressing fear to one another. This diffused their apprehension and strengthened their sense of group unity. More recently, Sanders (2004) examined humor among a group of active sex workers through a sociological lens. These offenders used humor to distance themselves from their roles as prostitutes and thereby inoculated themselves from

emotional fallout. In the present study, I add to criminological understanding of humor by exploring two questions: 1) When do drug dealers use humor?; and 2) How does humor influence the deterrence process among them?

FINDINGS

Humor influences the deterrence process among active drug dealers in two primary ways. By humorously discussing experiences with threatened and actual detection, apprehension, and punishment by police, drug dealers reinterpret or reframe their situational definitions of these experiences and their roles within and in relation to them. Dealers also use humor when establishing and maintaining group unity with other dealers. In the following sections I describe when drug dealers use humor and how it influences perceptions of deterrence among them. Each of the functions of humor below are presented as distinct for conceptual clarity; however, in practice, every instance of humor can serve multiple functions, both individually and socially (Clare, 1984; Glasgow, 1997).

When Drug Dealers Use Humor

Potential Police Contact. Like most individuals, drug dealers use humor when undergoing stressful and uncertain circumstances (Lefcourt, 2001; Morreall, 1983; Obrdlik, 1942). Unlike most individuals, however, one of the most prevalent forms of stress and uncertainty among drug dealers is the omnipresent threat of being detected by police and subsequently punished. Many of the dealers in the present study reported worrying about this likelihood “on a daily basis, [an] hourly basis (while chuckling), hell,

sometimes even more than that” (Jack). Thus, it was common among them, like Jack, a white, 22 year-old, marijuana supplier and small time pharmaceutical dealer, to use humor when discussing it. Often these humorous discussions centered on the techniques and strategies used by the dealers to avoid detection. Jack suggested traveling light and preparing a ‘backstory’:

I don’t...take everything with me...I...take just what I need and that’s it, [to] lessen the risk basically (smiles and deeply exhales)...[And] I always have a backstory. When they [police] ask, ‘What you doin’ out so late?’ I love to say... ‘I [am] heading home from my girlfriend’s. I fell asleep there.’ Great answer (smiles and chuckles). You don’t want to say ‘Aw, I was out with my buddies and...’ ‘Well, you been drinking tonight?’ That’s the first thing you get. ‘I was at my girlfriend’s just watching a movie and I passed out, I was just headed home,’ if it’s late at night. Late night is automatic suspicion to em. Between two and three a.m. there’s you and cops on the road (laughs). At least that’s what they always say, there’s you and cops between those hours (continues laughing). So when you do it, like I said, just have a little game plan, something like that.

In addition to these strategies, the dealers also joked around about “[not] saying shit over the phone” (Mitch), obeying traffic laws while transporting drugs, “keep[ing] up on paying court fees and fines” (John), and, of course, not selling to untrusted others.

While all of the dealers understood the need to be cautious, at times many of them failed to do so. For those recognizing their own “retarded” (V), or uncircumspect, moves, it was common to humorously reflect on this imprudence. Dean scoffed at a memory of himself “driving down the highway ripping a bong,” describing this behavior as “dumb shit.” Allen, a Latino, 28 year-old, marijuana supplier, blithely described a time in which he brazenly sold marijuana to a stranger while bartending:

They were just sitting at the bar drinking and I was high at work. The guy just looked at me and was like, ‘Where’s the good at man?’ (laughs). I was like, ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about sir...How much are you looking for?’ (laughs heartily)

The dealers also used humor when discussing the possibility of others snitching. On hearing of a customer being apprehended with individually portioned bags of marijuana intended for resale, Natalie “went to a place where [she] was in an utter state of panic” at the prospect of being identified to the police “and really just kept saying that it’s (pitch rises) not fun to be a gangster...(laughs) [and that] this is not a good time at all!” While Jacob and John gravely laughed about their “hopes” that arrested associates “would not (pitch rises, laughs) talk” (Jacob) and “fucking turn [them] in (laughs)” (John).

It was also common for the dealers to use humor when discussing the potential punishment that may follow police detection. Joe thought that he “wouldn’t go to jail for very long” but still laughed uncomfortably when divulging his fear that it would not “be good” for “a white boy who weighs a hundred and seventy pounds.” Julie giggled when asked what would happen to her if she got busted, stating that she “never had enough [drugs in her possession] to get in trouble, so it would be them [the police] giving [her] a ticket” which she could then easily take care of by “get[ting] a lawyer.” Natalie, a white, 24 year-old, marijuana dealer, was more pessimistic:

I think I’d get kicked out of school essentially cuz I’d lose my financial aid. I mean there’s a huge, huge risk there and I’m already almost done so that would be my whole education thus far down the drain (deeply exhales, raises eyebrows). Financially speaking, it would break me. We don’t have a ton of extra income laying around, so that would not be good. And then obviously I wouldn’t be able to smoke anymore cuz I’m sure they put you on probation or something like that so it’s just not something that I (humorously exhales, pitch rises) hope ever happens! It would just be horrible, I don’t know what I would do if that ever, if it came to that (laughs).

Close Calls and Actual Police Contact. Beyond the general *possibility* of coming into contact with police, the dealers also used humor when discussing situations in which they

actually did so. This contact need not involve direct interaction with a police officer to elicit concern. Mere copresence with an officer, even if in the thick of traffic, was a stressful and anxiety-ridden experience for them. The dealers took every precaution to appear “normal” (B) while driving but they understood that getting pulled over, or “flagged” (Dirty), was sometimes as easy as “being in the wrong place at the wrong time” (Julie), and therefore out of their control. This lack of control was especially disconcerting for dealers transporting what they perceived as ‘large’ quantities of illicit drugs. Allen described his responses to seeing police cruisers in traffic while transporting large amounts of marijuana:

That moment you see that cop car coming the opposite way or...you see him on the opposite side of the road it's like sssssssssss and your heart starts pounding boom-boom, boom-boom, and you're like c'mon c'mon c'mon and you see him pass...and you're good again (laughs).

Even more harrowing for the dealers was being pulled over or otherwise accosted by police. When this occurred, dealers were forced to swallow their anxiety and avoid “stutter[ing]...or...shaking at all” (V) lest they failed to appear as “ideal citizen(s)” (Natalie). This can be quite difficult for dealers, as they are aware that their interaction with officers is similar to “flipping a coin” (V) on whether officers will get ‘wise’ (Goffman, 1963) and identify them. Dean, a white, 32 year-old, marijuana dealer, recounted a time in which he was pulled over while driving with several pounds of marijuana and a pound of psychedelic mushrooms:

It was one of the scariest moments of my life (chuckles)...I had...a pound of mushrooms...[in a] duffle bag...and if they opened my trunk, fucking there it is! (laughs) I was looking in my side view mirror as this cop's walking up to my car [and] just like every terrible thing you've ever seen about jail on TV just like (pitch rises) flashed through my head in an instant...it was very scary...I don't want to go to jail, little white boy, I'd get (chuckles) fucked up in there...it was

fucking terrible! (laughs)...It was scary. It sucked. I never did anything that large again.

Although Dean feared that detection by the police officer would lead to imprisonment, it was not uncommon for drug dealers to avoid apprehension following detection. Those who managed to do so also experienced anxiety and fear during the event and later used humor when relating these experiences. James, a white, 28 year-old, marijuana supplier, mentioned “three to four...instances where cops...found pot or paraphernalia in [his] car...[and gave him] a ticket for what they pulled [him] over for but not the pot.” When asked whether the police confiscated the marijuana, James laughed while replying “they always made me dump it out...and kick it around....One time the cop had me put the bag back in my pocket so I wasn’t littering.” Bugs shared a similar story about being discovered by two police officers while smoking a joint in an alley on his lunch break:

They asked him what kind of job he had that he thought it was alright to get high on his lunch break. He told them that he took phone calls and answered questions about DJ gear. While we are all laughing he says that the cops laughed and said that was a job you could definitely do while stoned. He then tells us that when he went to pay the ticket on his court date, the judge told him that the police officers had never submitted the ticket and he therefore did not have to pay the fine. He asked if he could please pay the fine and showed them his copy of the ticket. They refused. We continue laughing. (Fieldnotes, Bugs, 9-25-12)

The tenor of James and Bugs’ stories was echoed by other dealers who *were* apprehended and punished following detection:

I was sitting there chatting and I passed through a construction zone, normally 55 [miles per hour], which is what I was doing, [but the] construction zone brought it down to 45 and there was a cop sitting there. So I fuckin didn’t look and see [the police officer]....I’m doin like 55 and I look up [and] see the construction,... As I let go of my gas...I go like this (gestures putting the pipe to his mouth),... rip the bowl...I’m like yeere-ohhm [mimics driving noise] (pantomimes one hand on

the steering wheel, the other holding the pipe to his mouth, turning his head to look out an imaginary driver's side window) 'Ohhh shiiit (drags syllables out as if in slow motion) a cop' (laughs)...I'm like, 'Fuck....' I tap the brakes just hard enough to go down to like 50. Anyway dude, he pulled me over, smelled the weed, [and] I went to jail for...actually, fuck, I think I went to jail that night for that. (Gus, white, 29 year-old, marijuana supplier)

I just got off work and I had eight individual eighths [3.5 grams of marijuana]...all individually wrapped cuz I was getting ready to sell....And I was an idiot...I was smoking weed (laughs) [and] ...I went through a sobriety check....As soon as the [police officer] walks up to the truck he's like 'You having a good night?' and I'm like 'Well, not now.' (laughs).... They didn't actually keep me in jail, I guess cuz I cooperated with em. Originally when they saw [that]...I had...eight eighths individually wrapped, which is an ounce, the guy's like 'Aw, it's a dealer.' Fortunately I didn't have my scale with me. I was like, 'Naw, you don't understand, I...buy in quantity so I don't hafta keep buying so I literally bought an ounce from a guy to keep it and he had it individually wrapped' and fortunately the guy that booked me was cool....As far as trouble, I didn't go to jail [but] I had to go to court [and] had a fee. (Brian, white, 31 year-old, ecstasy, and marijuana dealer)

It was common for these dealers to humorously discuss their experiences with being detected and apprehended, but like Gus and Brian above they seldom used humor when talking about the resulting punishment. When they did joke or laugh about their punishment, this was usually limited to a consequence it triggered—avoidance by their suppliers and customers. For example, when asked if he told anyone of his arrest, Brian laughed while saying "I didn't tell anyone...when I got busted...because [my supplier] would have freaked out (laughs). I didn't want to scare anybody. Cuz it was controlled...it wasn't worth the panic (chuckles)." Jack also avoided sharing this information with anyone following his arrest because "[after] getting arrested...(laughs) nobody wants to mess with you...cuz nobody wants to sit there and hit up a guy who just got busted for narcotics (smiles and laughs)."

How Drug Dealers Use Humor

Among these dealers, humor functioned as a tool easing their redefinitions of risky situations. When actors define risky situations, or any situation for that matter, they determine how others in the situation will likely act, and then base their line of action on this (Goffman, 1959, 1967). How offenders define situations involving the risk of detection, apprehension, and punishment, then, determines how they believe police and other law enforcement agents will behave. More specifically, this shapes their perceptions of the capacities of police to detect them and of the severity of the punishment that other formal agents may enforce. These perceptions then drive offenders' estimations of risk and their responses to it.

These dealers commonly responded to situations involving significant risk by using humor to cognitively shift their perceptions of dealing such that risks involved no longer outweighed reward. To explain, humor allows individuals to distance themselves from the immediacy of the threats in risky situations (Martin and Lefcourt, 1983: 1314; see also, O'Connell, 1976). This provides them different perspectives of these situations. And this, in turn, alters how they perceive of their role positions and the potential risks and rewards attached to specific lines of action. The dealers interviewed used humor in this manner. More specifically, they used humor to redefine situations involving dealing and their role positions within them. In the following sections I describe these functions of humor and their impact on the deterrence process among this group of dealers.¹⁶

¹⁶ It should be noted that I do not intend to imply that dealers consciously use humor to the ends presented in the findings. It is unlikely that this is ever the case. Instead, it is more likely that humor subconsciously assists dealers' in cognitively shifting their understanding of risks, rewards, and their own identities, much like it does among the general public.

Redefining Situations

These dealers first used humor when altering their definitions of the risks and rewards of dealing. They did so in three key ways. In the first, the dealers reinterpreted their prior reactions to risk. In the second, humor ameliorated the dealers' vexation at taking risks despite their reservations against doing so. In the final way, the dealers humorously lauded their own dealing successes.

Looking out the Window for No Reason. The most common way the dealers used humor to redefine situations was to poke fun or laugh at their own cognitive and emotional reactions during prior experiences with the risks of dealing. Like Natalie above, who laughed at herself for going into an "utter state of panic" when assuming the police were preparing to raid her home as a result of her associate snitching, Bobby also framed the paranoia he experienced from selling large amounts of marijuana as overblown and comical: "Back then I was paranoid as all get out (laughs)," he exclaimed, "Every time a car would drive by (gestures as if looking out of a phantom window) [I'm] looking out the window (laughs heavily) *for no reason!*"

The dealers used humor similarly when discussing brushes with police. John laughed when speaking about a time in which he responded to a suspected undercover police officer's request for drugs by saying "Fuck off! I ain't got anything for you dude!" Julie expressed similar levity when discussing a failed police raid: "We had our door kicked in before (giggles)...I had to sit down on the couch and I couldn't move (laughs uproariously). They didn't find anything...all they found was...paraphernalia, like pipes and that's it...so they couldn't do anything." And Mitch did the same when talking about

a time where he “was on ecstasy...[and] the cops came and searched us. I thought I was fine [but] my dumbass forgot I had a one-hitter [small marijuana pipe] in my pocket (laughs) *yeahhhh* (draws out syllables, laughs).”

The above comments illustrate how drug dealers use humor to reframe the cognitive and emotional states they experience during risky situations (see generally, Martin and Lefcourt, 1983; Moran and Massam, 1997; Vivona, 2014). In these situations, dealers “freak out” (Natalie) to some degree at what is perceived as a very real possibility *at the time*—being identified, apprehended, and/or formally punished. But when later relating these experiences they dismiss this anxiety as irrational or as less distressing than initially thought by laughing about it (see generally, Parkhill et al., 2011). Situations once perceived by the dealers as close-calls were thus transformed into ones in which they easily evaded police. Reactions they once perceived as proportional were thus considered overblown or unnecessary. Humor thus hindered these experiences from inflating dealers’ subsequent assessments of risks.

Gotta Pay the Bills. The dealers also used humor to ease their acceptance of taking what they perceived as necessary risks. This occurred when they were driven to risk apprehension and possible punishment by financial desperation. V, a white, male, 28 year-old, cocaine, crystal methamphetamine, ecstasy, and heroin supplier described why he continued to deal after each of his bits in prison:

Every time it happened, I was like I'm fucking done, I'm never gonna do it ever again...But fucking, minimum wage, you know, I don't have a college degree (pitch rises), I don't have any fucking skill (contorts face), I mean I do, but...when you've known being able to make fucking...retarded amounts of money at night it's like fuck, you know! (laughs) You're over here making minimum wage, it's hard.

John, a white, 34 year-old, psychedelic mushroom grower and supplier, echoed V's comments:

No one wants to live like that, you know? I've always done it to support myself... I don't really feel like it's a choice sometimes. It's like, well fuck, I gotta pay a bill or make the house payment or I gotta do this or I gotta do that (raises eyebrows, increases rate of delivery, pitch rises), so I mean I need some *money* and that's just a...way to [get] it (laughs).

These dealers and others returned to or continued selling drugs despite their reservations because they perceived it as one of the few available ways to support their lifestyles. The need for cash increased the range of what they viewed to be acceptable crime opportunities, or those wherein perceived reward outweighs perceived risk (see generally, Carroll, 1978; Nagin and Paternoster, 1993; Piliavin et al., 1986). Humor, and more specifically, gallows humor, played a critical role in this process. Gallows humor allows individuals trapped in unfortunate or terrible circumstances to address these circumstances with "terrifying candor" (Janoff, 1974: 303) and thereby transform their negative feelings into positive acceptance (Maier, Berstein, and Musholt, 1989; Obrdlik, 1942). These dealers used this humor to face their fears of the risks involved in dealing and were thus able to accept their need to tackle these risks. This acceptance desensitized the dealers to formal threats, which made them less deterrable (see Pogarsky, 2002) and more likely to continue offending.

So Much Shit it is Ridiculous. The final way the dealers reinterpreted their perceptions of the risks and rewards associated with dealing was to applaud or celebrate their past successes. "I used to have so much shit in my house it was ridiculous," Jarod boasted,

“TVs, I had a fucking thousand dollars’ worth of gift cards to Foot Locker.” Snap beamed when discussing her profit margin from moving large amounts of sassafras (MDA) and ice (high quality crystal methamphetamine), “[I was making] thousands a week, not tens of thousands a week...maybe a month, tens of thousands a month (laughs).” And Burt laughed heartily when describing the “stupid, stupid profit” he made from buying Ketamine vials wholesale, “cooking” the liquid into a powder, and then “breaking it down into twenty [dollar] bags.”

In celebrating the rewards of their crimes, these drug dealers are also celebrating their successful navigation of the risks involved. These comments thus refer to the dealers’ experiences with punishment avoidance. In repeatedly entertaining others with depictions of these experiences, the dealers also repeatedly associate avoiding punishment and gaining reward with selling drugs. When later recalling their experiences with risk while contemplating similar crimes in the future, these instances of success may overshadow any of the risks experienced by the dealers. This may then discount the risk they attach to contemplated crimes and increase the likelihood of further offending among them (see generally, Paternoster, 1987).

Redefining Situational Roles

The dealers also used humor when redefining their own situational identities or roles. They did so in two ways. First, and most commonly, the dealers used humor to position themselves as wiler than those trying to catch them or those who had been or were likely to get caught. Second, and significantly less commonly, the dealers also used it to paint their level of offending as beneath the interest of police.

It's Obvious that They're a Cop. It was most common among the dealers to redefine their roles or identities as superior to police. The first way the dealers did so was to humorously denigrate or mock police attempts to identify them. This ridicule typically centered on the inappropriate dress, comportment, and speech of presumed 'undercover cops':

The typical undercover cop that you get at a festival is not like a[n]...undercover cop you...see...in a movie or something that's busting coke dealers, you know, somebody who looks the part and who's actually part of the culture and shit (chuckles)...It's very obvious that they're...a cop with a fucking disguise on, you know what I mean?...[It's] not only their appearance but the way they carry themselves and the way they talk and shit. For instance, one time I had this guy come up to me...and for a minute he looked like maybe kind of like an emo-type dude, he's got...some tight black jeans on, black tee-shirt, fuckin like little army hat on or whatever...he approached me and was like, "Hey man, are you holding?" (laughs) Nobody says that. This is not nineteen-fucking-sixty nine! We're not Cheech and Chong here...First off, nobody says that! (laughs heartily)...Just for the curiosity, I turned around and I was like, "Hey man, holding what?" And...he got...all happy and he fucking [came] over and he was like, ""What you got man?" and I was like, "What are you looking for, man?" And he goes, "Oh, LSD, mushrooms, methamphetamines, uppers, downers" and I was like, "You're alright dude!" (laughs). Nobody talks like that. Like, dude, nobody talks like that!...It [was] hilarious...[he'd] ...obviously never seen or done any of those drugs ever. (John)

In the hippy music scene...if somebody looked like they didn't have a shower yesterday...they probably weren't a hippy (laughs). [If] somebody [came] up to me and [said], "Hey, I've been on tour six months," and they don't have dirt under their fingernails...that person probably hasn't been on tour six months (raises eyebrows, smiles)...In the club scene, if somebody looked out of place, they probably were....One time we were in a nightclub and everybody there was dressed like they just left the rave and there was a guy in the corner dressed like a cross between a biker and...a Grateful Dead hippy....I mean, he stuck out like a sore thumb, (pitch lowers, chuckles) which is hard to do with people dressed like they just left the rave (laughs)...You gotta guy over here with Tiki mask on, you got a girl over here in lingerie and...this guy's in a blue-jean jacket and tight nut-hugger jeans with a Steal-Your-Face bandana tied around his head (pitch rises, snorts, smiles) [he] just looked completely outta place....and...at that same party, there was a guy going from person to person...changing what he was

looking for, and that is not normal. He'd go to one person, "Do you have any LSD?" to the next person, "Do you have any heroin?" (snickers) I mean, c'mon man...really? (laughs) (Bugs)

Beyond mocking undercover officers, the dealers also ridiculed the actual and imagined attempts of officers to find 'stashed' or hidden drugs in the dealers' vehicles or on their persons. B, a white, 20 year-old, marijuana dealer, did so when discussing his experiences with stashing drugs:

Oh yeah (chuckles), I actually got a story about that one. One of the times that happened...I have a jacket...[with a] pot pocket in [it]...that's a hidden pocket in the lining...You would have to where it is to feel it...it's surrounded by padding...so [if] you pat it down...it feels like the rest of the jacket; you can't feel it. I've gotten patted down with a half-ounce [of marijuana] on me and the cop's hand was right on it and he didn't feel it (smiles). [In] cars...you can...pop [the cover to the dome] light [off]...and you can...hide your shit up there and he [the officer] won't find it...a lazy cop's not gonna look up there...[The] trunk's also a great spot...I've got all kinds of shit in my trunk...if a cop opens it, they're gonna be like, "Man, I do not want to this," (laughs), "that is nasty!"

Wyatt, a white, 32 year-old, marijuana dealer agreed that a messy trunk could outfox police:

I usually use the trunk...I feel like it's a lot more to go through...and it's not like I have it just sitting in my trunk. I've got it...stashed in like...I've got a couple golf bags, gym bag,...covers,...shoes, you know, I've got all kinds of shit in there. So it's like a scavenger hunt, pick a pocket, any pocket, fuckin good luck! (chuckles)

By ridiculing police in these ways, these dealers altered their self-perspectives such that they began to view themselves as more adroit and cunning persons than police. Scholars have long observed that it is common among most persons to express their perceived superiority over others through humor (see, e.g., Hobbes, 1968[1651]). When used this way, humor diminishes the potential threat posed by these others (see Dixon,

1980: 283). In positioning their situational identities as superior to police, then, these dealers viewed themselves as likely able to evade their best efforts to identify and apprehend them. This then discounted their perceptions of the likelihood of apprehension, which, in turn, influenced their decisions whether to continue dealing.

Idiots. The dealers also aggressively ridiculed those who had gotten busted or who behaved in ways thought to increase this likelihood. They derided others who made “slips” (Snap) or who got “caught with [their] pants down” (Dirty), referring to them as “dummies” (Perry) or “fucking idiot[s]” (John). Associates who were uncircumspect while setting up deals were commonly referred to in this manner. “Don’t text me,” John replied when asked what he did not want customers to do when arranging transactions, “I’ve had people do that before, they’ll text me (in a deep mocking tone) ‘Hey man, can I get a fucking half-pound?’ (laughs) You got the wrong number!” Natalie provided a similar response: “Every once and a while people say ‘Hey, do you have a bag?’ (pitch rises, laughs) What the fuck are you doing? Don’t say that!” Perry paralleled these comments, emphasizing that he didn’t want customers to ask him “Hey, can you find this?” while on the phone or say “Hey man, I would like to hook up with you on doop-de-doop-de-doo” when in public because “that’s stupid.”

The dealers also ridiculed those who were “stupid” (Ted) while transporting drugs:

[People that get busted] don’t use their fucking brain....Most of the time [they] ride around (in a high-pitched mocking tone) ‘Oh, I’m gonna go sell this bag, I’m gonna smoke a blunt on the way there....(volume rises, exaggerates inflection) Why would you do that!? You get pulled over then the cops are gonna want to search the car!’ (Ted, white, 30 year-old, marijuana dealer)

This kid was stupid (snorts, shakes head). He was keeping... a quarter-pound of fucking weed and a scale in his truck... was driving around with it... cuz he didn't want to keep it in his parent's house. He got pulled over [and got busted].... I told his friend to make sure that he lost my number (laughs).... Just driving around with a quarter-pound and a scale (shakes head and laughs). (James)

Those who were “dumb-ass[es]” (Dirty) during distinct transactions or when selling drugs in general were also referred to in this way. Mud, a white, 30 year-old, heroin dealer, described one of his former suppliers in such a way:

There was this dude that was selling me heroin... I stopped going to him... because he was a dumb-ass. I mean completely dim-witted and... just not smart whatsoever. He'd have me coming into... neighborhoods... that were all black..., and he was... black... too. The cops in [that neighborhood] are relentless and... they pay attention to this shit. If they see a white person leaving and they don't look like they have any business there, they're getting pulled over and they're gonna get searched (raises eyebrows, shakes head).... [He]... would have me come over to his apartment... he'd come out and... give me the shit and he would just sit there and ramble on and on and on about stupid nonsense and stuff.... [I]t should've been I come in, I get it, I get out,... that's best for me and him..., to... do [it] as quickly as... possible.... I mean he's just stupid (chuckles). He would have people come up to a gas station to meet him and he would have everybody pull up to the pumps to the point where... each one of the pumps would be taken up... and he's... (volume and pitch rises) inside chatting away with the employees!

Perry, a white, 35 year-old, marijuana supplier, similarly described drug dealers who were busted because they did not hold conventional jobs and sold out of their homes:

[People that get busted] are dumb... [and] lazy. They get to the point where they just sit there and everybody comes to them and eventually you have a house full of nice stuff but you're never leaving the house on a regular basis and people are constantly coming by here. It doesn't matter where you live, (condescending intonation) someone's gonna take notice of that shit.... In my experience those are the folks that just sign themselves up, man. They get their door kicked in [and] they're sitting there playing fucking PlayStation, smoking bong hits, and just selling weed man (laughs).

Drug dealers distance their self-identities from ‘idiots’ with this ridicule and mockery. This permits dealers to identify themselves as better or smarter than idiots and thus not likely to make the same mistakes. Recall that traditional models of deterrence assume that vicarious punishment experience increases offenders’ assessments of the likelihood of punishment through thoughts such as “If my friend got arrested for selling crack, then I might get arrested for selling crack too” (Gibbs, 1975). Here we see how humor disrupts these thoughts among dealers, and thus inhibits their fear, by redefining their situational identities as different from persons who get caught. This bolsters dealers’ audacity through thoughts such as “He got arrested for selling crack because he is an idiot. I will not make the same mistakes and get arrested for selling crack because I am smarter than him.”

Acting like Dipshits. The dealers also mocked and ridiculed themselves. This occurred most often when reflecting on past experiences in which they had “act[ed] like fucking dipshit[s]” (Perry) by making mistakes leading to their own arrests. Recall Mitch’s comment from above, wherein he referred to himself as a “dumbass” for getting arrested because he forgot his “one-hitter in his pocket.” Snap shared a similar experience wherein she forgot that she had a small amount of hash and molly (MDMA) in her vehicle until a police officer discovered them. When asked later if any of her employees had been pulled over and busted like this, she replied that none had, before emphasizing “besides me, this girl...that fucking happened!” She then laughed uproariously at the incongruity of this image; workers were ‘supposed’ to make these kind of mistakes, *not* persons in her role.

Gregory discussed a like situation but, unlike Mitch and Snap, he *purposively* put himself in the hands of police:

I had a warrant for a speeding ticket... I wanted to go pay. I stopped by [local headshop], bought a little ten dollar piece [pipe], smoked...a little bit of weed...I walk in, 'Hey I'm here to pay...a ticket. I have a warrant.' 'Oh, you have a warrant? What's your name?' Gave em my name. 'Okay, yeah, just wait right here.' Cop comes out, 'Gregory _____, you have a warrant, you're arrested.' Click-click (pantomimes putting handcuffs on). Had the pipe in my pocket the whole time, I had no clue. He takes me downstairs, searches me, 'Oh, what's this?' 'It's a weed pipe, sorry, charge me with it.' Sat in jail for like two days...I felt pretty embarrassed. Who walks into the police station with...a glass pipe in their pocket?

V similarly ridiculed himself for getting himself busted on two separate occasions by doing "stupid shit" while intoxicated:

I started doing [meth],...so I started selling...cuz I'm a fucking idiot. I caught a case for it. I was high (chuckles) and did some stupid shit. I was at a Wal-Mart...this guy I was with stole some shit [and] I had a fucking half-ounce in my car. I always told myself I would never catch a fucking meth case for selling it but goddamn it I fucking did....It was retarded, man.

I was one of the main guys in St. Louis and...I was kind of out of my mind at the time...Before I would put somebody on...I would...give them a bunch of ecstasy and pull like an AK or an assault rifle on em (pantomimes holding a rifle) and be like, (pitch lowers, volume rises) "Are you ever gonna snitch on me!?" (pauses, then shakes head while softly laughing) You know, and kinda just scare the shit out of em...and then after that I'd put em on big time,...give em whatever the fuck they wanted...on the front...I did that with everybody. Except for this fucking kid, he got spooked and (humorous intonation, indicating disbelief)...after he left my fucking house he drove...to the DEA building and fucking told on me.

This derision of past behavior was not exclusive to that which resulted in formal punishment. The dealers spoke similarly of times in which they were uncircumspect yet evaded apprehension. Recall the comment from Dean provided above wherein he recounted doing "dumb shit" like "ripping a bong" while driving when younger.

Following this comment, he decried his lack of regard for consequence at that age and expressed surprise that he had not been busted as a result being “ballsy” and not “intelligent about the situation.” Brian also marveled at his imprudence while selling ecstasy at raves:

If they had an undercover (slaps fist into palm), I would [have] been busted quicker than shit if he was good [or] at least looked the part. I would’ve definitely got busted....I was young and dumb and not really worried about the consequences, you know what I mean?...I was a risk-taker, I guess.

When ridiculing their past behavior, the dealers further distanced themselves from the identities implied by this behavior by emphasizing that they were not “stupid about it” (Brian) any longer. They then inflated their self-presentations as “smart” (John, Ted) by caustically speaking of virtual selves behaving in ways likely to draw police attention. Jack mocked himself when envisioning a customer’s request that he “hook up” a friend of the customer: “I’m sorry, I don’t mess with faces I don’t know. I’m not gonna meet up with your buddy, (sarcastic tone and delivery) ‘Aw yeah, give me a call, I’ll meet up with him.’” Burt did likewise when speaking of selling to strangers, “I’m not gonna go stand on the bus line and be like (in a high-pitched mocking tone) ‘Hey, do you need this? Do you need that?’ That’s...an easier way to get caught up.” And Jared did so when talking about selling to the recently arrested:

If you call me on the same day after you just got caught with two pounds of fucking weed, and I don’t think twice about it and go meet up with you and sell you five more...and the cops are waiting on me when I get there? That’s my own stupidity. That’s my own dumb-ass... fault.

By derisively speaking of their former and imagined behavior these dealers disassociated themselves from the identities this behavior implied. This allowed them to

regard their past and virtual selves as identities completely unrelated to their current self-conceptions (see Morreall, 1983: 8; Rapp, 1951; Ungar, 1984: 130). Because dealers feel they are “smarter” (Dean) than they once were or could be, they feel they can better outwit the efforts of police. This lowers their perceptions of the certainty of detection, which then encourages further offending among them.

Not Rolling Hard Enough for the Cops to Even Give a Fuck. Many of the same dealers that used humor to paint themselves as smarter than police also used it to identify themselves as unworthy of police interest:

It's not like I'm out here making thousands of dollars a day or nothing like that. I make, on a good day, might make fifty dollars (laughs, volume rises), you know what I mean!? And that's money to go buy something to eat, take the kids out to McDonalds or something, that's pretty much it....Cops ain't gonna waste their time on no ten sacks and twenty sacks....They're not gonna waste their time, and the... government's not gonna waste their time paying em to do that for twenty dollars' worth of weed...That's nothing. That's like eating, er, picking candy off the ground. They don't give a fuck about that. They want somebody that's gonna sell them pounds and quarter-pounds. That's what they want. (Ted)

Like Ted, it was common among the dealers who used humor in this way to support their self-deprecation by contrasting the ‘small amount’ they were selling against the ‘larger’ amounts sold by other dealers. What defined a ‘larger’ dealer, however, was a matter of perspective. What was a “big guy” to one seller was merely a “low-end...drug dealer” (Gregory) to another. For instance, Perry reportedly sold a “half-pound [of marijuana] a week,” more than enough to fit Ted’s definition of a dealer who police would “give a fuck about.” Yet Perry viewed himself as “not even rolling hard enough for a cop to even give a fuck” as well.

Here the dealers discount the threat of possible detection by reinterpreting their dealing status as beneath that which would draw the attention of police. Whether the dealers were actually distributing enough drugs to warrant the attention of police is beside the point. What is important is that the dealers no longer *perceived* that they were. This decreased their perceptions of the likelihood of arrest and emboldened them to continue offending.

Group Unification

Beyond using humor to redefine risky situations, these drug dealers also used humor as a means to establish, maintain, and bolster their connections with other dealers. Drug dealers, like other persons in stressful and risky professions (see, e.g., Moran and Massam, 1997; Pogrebin and Poole, 1988; Sanders, 2004; Vivona, 2014), joke around and laugh with others about shared experiences with risk or trauma. Consider the following exchange:

Interviewer: What would you not want people to do while you're doing the transactions?

Snap: Say the drug by its correct name, offer me more money...something, those are the main things....be high, I don't want them to be high while their getting my drugs (laughs)...coming with the correct cash (laughs)

Interviewer: What about at a party [a rave or a club]?

Snap: Oh, everybody's high at those.

Interviewer: Okay, so standards are a bit lower.

Snap: (nods)

Bugs: Or a little less...as long as the high person comes to you not with like a fistful of dollars, you know (begins laughing)

Snap: (laughs) Right!

Bugs: (mimicking an inebriated person's tone, delivery, and comportment) Can I have some more?

Snap: (laughs)

Bugs: Um, no! (laughs)

Interviewer: Are there any other things that would sketch you out?

Snap: Yeah, like what they're drinking on, how they're standing, how they're looking, if they're alone or not, who's talking to them, who has talked to them since I've been here, things like that. You can feel it with some of em, you know? Most of em actually.

Bugs: The old guy in the Grateful Dead bandana with the jean jacket standing very stiffly with very, very broad shoulders

Snap: With a cup in his hands

Bugs: He's probably

Snap: The cop

Bugs: The cop (both laugh raucously)

These humorous interchanges also took a more aggressive shape. For example, Bugs had been 'fronting' up to a half-pound of marijuana every week for a number of years to a second informant, Gus. Gus also regularly assisted Bugs in producing 'ear-wax hash' (Butane hash oil). After one such run, Gus returned to Bugs' home later in the day to purchase some of this hash at a discounted rate. Believing that Bugs attempted to trick him into buying an inferior grade hash, Gus shouted "You fucking bait and switched me!" This initiated a heated verbal exchange between the two amidst a number of Bugs' friends and customers that culminated with Gus threatening to snitch on Bugs. Over the weeks following it became common among those that were present and eventually others

to make stabs at Gus by exclaiming “You bait and switched me!” to Bugs when purchasing drugs from him (fieldnotes, 9-25-12).

In sharing humor this way, these dealers affirm that those they are laughing with share a similar viewpoint (see generally, Pogrebin and Poole, 1988). This makes them less fearful of threats (see Fine, 1983) in the same way that group participation can decrease fear of consequences among offenders more generally (see Hochstetler, 2001). When participating in groups, individuals make predictions about the trajectory of the group and model their behavior accordingly. Individuals otherwise reluctant to commit crime may be pushed into doing so by their need to follow a predicted group trajectory that includes criminal acts. Hence, drug dealers may become desensitized to formal threats because they are following the examples of other dealers whom they perceive as continuing to offend in spite of these threats.

In addition, humor may also reduce dealers’ assessments of the probability of apprehension by bolstering their understanding that there are many other dealers facing the same risks. To explain, recall that over time offenders may come to hold a law of averages mentality and believe that the likelihood of getting busted increases with each additional offense (see Gibbs, 1975; Jacobs, 2010). This is promoted by thoughts such as “I’ve been selling for some time now, my number must be coming up.” Awareness of others who are braving the same risks, however, may counter these thoughts by informing dealers that they are not the only targets of interest to police. With more potential targets, dealers may feel that police attention is spread thin and is therefore less likely to center on them. These thoughts may be further reinforced when these other

targets are 'idiots' and are thus likely committing actions thought to attract police attention.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The goal of this chapter was to explore how humor influences deterrence among active drug dealers. The findings demonstrate that drug dealers use humor when discussing potential and actual encounters with police. This counteracts the stress and anxiety stemming from these encounters by enabling dealers' reinterpretations of the costs and benefits of dealing and their own situational roles. These reinterpretations come in a variety of forms. Dealers use humor to view the risk of police involvement as necessary, their prior reactions to this risk as irrational, and to celebrate the rewards of taking these risks on. Dealers also use humor to reidentify themselves as beneath the concern of police or as smarter than them and the dealers and users they catch. And finally, humor helps dealers establish and maintain group unity with one another.

These functions of humor shaped deterrence among the dealers in two key ways. First, they altered the dealers' understanding of former experiences with threatened and actual police contact such that these experiences did not unduly inflate the dealers' assessments of potential risks when contemplating future crimes. Second, they altered the dealers' understanding of their own situational roles in relation to these risks such that they no longer need worry about them. In both cases, the dealers became less responsive to threatened punishments and were more likely to offend. In the following sections, I discuss the implications of these findings for deterrence and offender decision-making.

These findings are important first because they add to current understanding of restrictive and absolute deterrence. Recall that restrictive deterrence refers to the ways in which offenders sometimes reduce the frequency of their offending or otherwise alter it as a means to limit the perceived certainty of detection and severity of punishment (see Gibbs, 1975; Jacobs, 1996, 2010). Considerations of restrictive deterrence among offenders have largely focused on how offenders manipulate these dimensions of deterrents by adapting their behavior (see, e.g., Jacobs, 1996, 1999; Jacobs and Cherbonneau, 2014; Johnson and Natarajan, 1995; Paternoster, 1987). The present findings demonstrate that offenders also do so by making cognitive adaptations (see also, Hochstetler and Copes, 2003 on ‘cognitive tricks’).

To explain, when offenders alter their behavior by wearing masks, stashing drugs, or discontinuing the sale of harder drugs, they make it more difficult for police to detect them or, in the case of the latter, they reduce the penalty that may befall them if apprehended. Although these behavioral adaptations do not always decrease the actual certainty and severity of punishment, what is important is that offenders *perceive* that they will. This, in turn, encourages them to offend despite prohibitions against doing so. This process is guided by thoughts such as “Why should I stop dealing if I can avoid getting caught by hiding my drugs?” Humor has a similar impact on drug dealers’ perceptions of risky situations by altering the way they *think* about these situations and their roles within them. This process is guided by thoughts such as “Why should I stop dealing if the risks are not as bad as I thought?” or “Why should I stop dealing if I am smarter than cops and people that get busted?” Humor then, may partially explain how some offenders can push thoughts of risk to the back of their minds and undertake

contemplated crimes without altering their behavior (see generally, Bennett and Wright, 1984; Wright and Decker, 1994, 1997).

The notion that offenders undertake mental exercises in order to commit crimes they otherwise might avoid is not new to criminology. For some time criminologists have highlighted that some offenders intentionally or unintentionally blunt their fear of incurring formal consequences by using drugs or alcohol before committing offenses (see, e.g., Jacobs, 2000: 88; Wright and Decker, 1997: 120). As with humor, this impacts offenders' perceptions by altering their cognition of risk. Criminologists have also recognized for almost half a century that offenders sometimes mentally justify future crimes in order to counteract, or neutralize, moral inhibitions that may otherwise prevent them from carrying out these crimes (see, e.g., Agnew, 1994; Stadler and Benson, 2012; Sykes and Matza, 1957).¹⁷ Drug dealers' use of humor, however, differs from these techniques of neutralization in that it does not influence a variable moderating the relationship between perceptions of deterrents and subsequent behavior, i.e. moral inhibition, but rather directly moderates this relationship instead. This suggests that future examinations of deterrence and decision-making should include consideration of how offenders may undertake cognitive adaptations as well as behavioral adaptations when responding to deterrents.

These findings also speak to current understanding of how experiences with punishment avoidance influence offenders' crime decisions. Recall that criminologists generally assume that offenders' experiences with avoiding punishment encourage further offending by discounting their perceptions of the risks associated with future

¹⁷ Of course, there is much debate on whether these techniques are employed before an offense is committed (Sykes and Matza, 1957; Topalli, 2005) or after (Maruna and Copes, 2004). A discussion of this matter, however, is outside the scope of this discussion.

crimes (see Minor and Harry, 1982; Paternoster, 1987; Saltzman et al., 1982; Stafford and Warr, 1993; Tittle, 1980). The present study suggests that this relationship is more complicated than traditionally considered. It first indicates that the concept of punishment avoidance as typically characterized in extant literature (see, e.g., Stafford and Warr, 1993) conflates three inter-related yet distinct concepts: detection, apprehension, and punishment. This was demonstrated by the dealers using humor most frequently when speaking of threatened and actual experiences with detection, less so when speaking of apprehension, and rarely when speaking of punishment. This variation indicates that each of these experiences provoked different levels of fear or, at the very least, different responses from the dealers. This supports the arguments of prior investigators (see, e.g., Nagin, 2013; Pogarsky, 2002) suggesting that the certainty of potential apprehension plays a more influential role in offenders' decision-making calculi than the severity of potential punishment.

The need for this conceptual distinction was further demonstrated by instances in which the dealers interviewed successfully avoided detection and apprehension but were still deterred to some degree. Recall the comment from Dean wherein he discussed being pulled over by police while transporting large amounts of marijuana and mushrooms. Although the officer did not discover the drugs and Dean evaded detection, the experience inculcated such fear and anxiety within him that he "never did anything that large again." This indicates that Dean's subsequent offending was restrictively deterred by this experience. Hence, not all experiences with punishment avoidance encourage further offending. Although offenders may evade detection, apprehension, or punishment by police, these experiences may bring potential consequences into relief and thereby

discourage further offending among them. Furthermore, it is possible that narrowly avoiding detection, apprehension, and punishment may have a greater deterrent effect than punishment if punishment indeed leads to defiance (Sherman, 1993), criminogenic influence (Wood, 2007), or resetting effects (Pogarsky and Piquero, 2003).

While not all the dealers used humor equally during the interviews or in regards to the same topical matters, it is possible that the dealers who used less humor than others simply relied on other techniques and strategies to reduce the stress and anxiety from their dealing. For instance, it is possible that these dealers followed suit with other types of offenders, such as armed robbers and residential burglars (see Jacobs, 2000; Wright and Decker, 1994, 1997), and used drugs or alcohol to alter their perceptions of risk. It is also possible that the dealers used some other method to control these perceptions that was not illuminated during the interviews. Without further research, however, the range of cognitive tricks used by offenders to alter their considerations of risk remains unclear.

It should be noted again that these findings are based primarily on the dealers' use of humor while being interviewed. This reliance on the dealers' retrospective interpretations of their own behavior poses questions regarding validity and temporal ordering. Namely, it was difficult to determine if the information gathered from dealers that were not observed using humor outside of the interview setting reflected how humor functioned among them during their everyday lives or if it was an artifact of their reconstructions of past events. It is certainly possible that the dealers' experiences were only found to be humorous on reflection or that their use of humor was a function of the personal interaction occurring during the interview process. Nevertheless, it bears repeating that these dealers were *actively* offending at the time of the interview. When

providing retrospective accounts of past behavior, individuals not only describe their past concepts of self and self-identity but also their current and future concepts as well. In constructing these accounts, or narratives, individuals organize their past experiences and develop a plot for their lives. Through these plots, individuals come to understand what they have done, *what they are going to do*, and why they have or are going to do these things (see Presser, 2004, 2009). As none of the dealers indicated that he or she intended on ceasing sales any time soon following the interview, it is likely that each continued to do so for at least some time. Hence, it is likely that the cognitive adaptations made by the dealers during the interview, as indicated by their use of humor, also followed them and influenced their future crime decisions.

CHAPTER 5: THREATS AND PROMISES

Extant criminological literature has long demonstrated that prohibitions, or directives forbidding certain actions, have variable impact on offenders' crime decisions (see e.g., Clarke and Cornish, 1985; Piquero et al., 2011; Shover and Honaker, 1992; Simon, 1979; see also chapters 3 and 4). This literature has demonstrated that a wide range of factors influence offenders' assessments of the risks of violating prohibitions and their resulting responses. One of the foremost influences on these assessments is fear that others—be they victims, bystanders, or co-offenders— will direct police attention toward offenders by snitching or committing other actions (see generally, Rosenfeld, Jacobs, and Wright, 2003; Sampson, 1986; Wright and Decker, 1997). Just as offenders take actions such as stashing drugs while transporting them (see, e.g., Jacques and Reynald, 2012; see also chapter 3) and maintaining 'normal' driving habits when piloting stolen automobiles (see, e.g., Jacobs and Cherbonneau, 2014), they also take actions to prevent others from snitching or behaving in other ways that might draw police attention. Many offenders attempt to do this by intimidating others with the use or threat of violence (see, e.g., Copes, Hochstetler, and Cherbonneau, 2012; Goldstein, 1985; Jacobs, Topalli, and Wright, 2000; Rosenfeld, Jacobs, and Wright, 2003; Wright and Decker, 1997); but not all offenders are accustomed to or comfortable with being aggressive (see, e.g., Jacques and Wright, 2008, 2015; Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010). These offenders must find other ways to prevent this behavior. In the present chapter, I explore how some offenders attempt to do so by using other forms of talk aside from threats of violence. More specifically, I examine how drug dealers use threats of nonviolence and promises of reward to prevent their customers from being uncircumspect or from providing information to police.

Talk is a key way in which individuals attempt to control the behavior of others when social conflict threatens their interests (Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Lindskold, 1972). Although individuals certainly attempt to control the behavior of others in a variety of non-verbal ways (see Black, 1998; Horwitz, 1990), talk is particularly suited to this purpose because of the dynamic nature of the control process and its need for mutual involvement (Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Lindskold, 1972: 328). Individuals subjected to control do not remain static. They instead respond with behavior intended to thwart the efforts of those attempting to control them (see Gibbs, 1975, 1981). Control agents then must amend their initial efforts if they wish to counter these responses. Talking facilitates this dance of control because it provides a vehicle by which the parties involved can provide and gain information about the control efforts and responses of one another.

Talk also permits control agents to explain their grievances and desired outcomes, unlike other forms of control, such as avoidance. This makes it more likely that their targets will not misunderstand the intent behind these control efforts and fail to alter their behavior as a result. Furthermore, talk, at least by its nature, does not outright destroy social relationships. To be sure, the actions inspired by or following talk may certainly do so, but the mere act of talking does not. Violent conflict management, on the other hand, can lead to the death or serious injury of other parties and thereby remove their ability to socially interact. And avoidance, by definition, necessitates disengagement from others (see Baumgartner, 1988). Thus, individuals who wish to maintain their relationships with the individuals they are trying to control rely heavily on using various forms of talk. Chief among the forms of talk used to control the unwanted behavior of others are threats and promises (Tedeschi, 1972)

As used here, threats and promises are verbal statements made by a source to a target that are intended to coerce or persuade the target to commit or avoid a specific act or range of acts. Threats coerce through implications of punishment; whereas promises persuade through implications of reward (Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Lindskold, 1972: 293; see also, Goffman, 1969: 103; see also, Parson, 1963 on ‘deterrence’ and ‘inducement’; Skinner, 1953 on ‘punishment’ and ‘reinforcement’). Threats and promises are often conflated with warnings and mendations because both types of verbal statements are intended to direct the behavior of others through assurances of positive or negative outcomes for compliance. Threats and promises differ, however, because their sources control the outcomes pledged within them (Tedeschi and Bonoma, 1972).

When considering threats and promises, one can view the two as mirrored reflections of each other (Fisher, 1969; Simons, 1974; Tedeschi and Bonoma, 1972; Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Lindskold, 1972). Threats offer rewards by providing escape from punishment to those that follow their directives. Promises, on the other hand, impose punishment by withholding potential rewards from those who fail to follow their directives (Foster, 1988: 8). Every threat therefore has elements of a promise and every promise has elements of a threat. Threats and promises can also be communicated explicitly or implicitly. When explicit, sources directly state what they want targets to do or not do and the outcome for complying. Contrarily, when implicit, sources do not directly state how they want targets to behave or the outcomes for compliance. They instead use verbal and nonverbal means to *imply* their wishes and these outcomes (Tedeschi, Bonoma, and Schlenker, 1972: 348; Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Lindskold, 1972: 293).

Scholarly attention to threats and promises outside of criminology has focused predominantly on how targets respond to threats and promises (Marwell and Schmitt, 1967; Tedeschi, Bonoma, and Schlenker, 1972). This research has demonstrated that the characteristics of the source of a threat or a promise, at least as perceived by their target, influence whether and how a target will respond. For instance, threats and promises are more influential when sources are perceived as credible or trustworthy (Hovland, Janis, and Kelley, 1953; see also, McLeod and Chaffee, 1972: 50; Tedeschi and Bonoma, 1972: 23). Furthermore, targets are more likely to comply when they fear threatened consequences or desire promised rewards. This is particularly so when targets perceive that their behavior is monitored (Foster, 1988).

A smaller body of work has also devoted attention to the range of factors influencing whether and how individuals use threats and promises. This work has highlighted that individuals are more likely to use threats or promises when their role positions have greater status than those they are attempting to control (Evan and Zelditch, 1961; Tedeschi, Bonoma, and Schlenker, 1972) and when they have the resources necessary to cover the costs of making good on them (Tedeschi et al., 1970). Moreover, individuals who have either coercive power (i.e., the ability to exert punishments) or coercive power *and* reward power are more likely to use threats and promises to control others (Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Lindskold, 1972).

Criminological attention to threats and promises has also centered primarily on how potential offenders and offenders respond to threats (see, e.g., Andenaes, 1974; Cook, 1980; Gibbs, 1975; Kennedy, 2009; Nagin, 1998, 2013; Zimring and Hawkins, 1973). This research has highlighted that actors often alter their behavior in ways to

counteract threatened outcomes (see, e.g., Gibbs, 1975; Jacobs, 1996; 2010; Paternoster, 1989). Beyond this, criminologists have also long noted how offenders use threats to facilitate crimes. For instance, robbers and carjackers use threats of violence to ensure compliance from their victims (see, e.g., Jacobs, 2000; Miller, 1998; Topalli and Wright, 2004; Wright and Decker, 1997) and drug dealers rely on similar threats to collect drug debts and prevent their own victimization (Adler, 1993: 106; Mieczkowski, 1986: 659; Pearson and Hobbs, 2001: 43; see also, chapter 6). This work has also demonstrated that offenders use threats of violent retribution as a means to discourage associates, victims, and witnesses from mobilizing the police or other informal sources of punishment (see, e.g., Jacobs, 2000; Jacobs, Topalli, and Wright, 2000; Wright and Decker, 1997).

Promises have received significantly less criminological attention. Extant criminological and economics literature has demonstrated that rewards and incentives are sometimes effective at encouraging offenders to pursue actions other than crime (see, e.g., Freeman, 1999; Kennedy, 2009; Machin and Meghir, 2000). Rewards or incentives found to have this impact include increasing job and educational opportunities and improving access to mental health and drug treatment (Kennedy, 2009). At present, offenders' use of promises and threats of nonviolent outcomes remains understudied. This is an important omission because understanding of offenders' use of these forms of verbal coercion and persuasion may explain why many conflicts among them do not result in violence. Moreover, an examination of these verbal directives is important because it may further explicate how and why offenders respond differently to threats of formal punishment. In the present chapter I address this omission by examining how a group of active drug dealers use threats of non-violence *and* promises to reduce the

likelihood of customers mobilizing formal prohibition agents. To inform this examination I investigate two questions. First, when do these drug dealers use threats and promises to influence the behavior of their customers? And second, how do threats and promises influence decision-making and the deterrence process among them? I begin by first situating these dealers' use of nonviolent threats and promises in the contexts in which they are used. This is important because it illustrates the behaviors these dealers feel are suitable to address with these types of control as opposed to the types of behavior that are best controlled with other forms.

FINDINGS

The use of threats and promises by these dealers played an important role in forming their responses to formal deterrents. They threatened customers who acted in ways thought likely to direct police attention toward the dealers with the possibility of cutting them off from drug supplies if they did not alter their behavior accordingly. They also made implicit promises to continue to 'take care' of other customers in order to dissuade them from snitching. The dealers' use of these threats and promises influenced their responses to the threat of formal punishment by discounting their assessments of whether customers would inadvertently or purposively direct the attention of police toward them. This reduced their perceptions of the likelihood of detection and apprehension, which then encouraged them to continue offending. In the following sections I detail when drug dealers use threats of non-violence and implicit promises of reward and discuss how these verbal mechanisms influence their perceptions of

deterrents. I begin by providing examples of the types of customer behavior motivating the dealers' use of these threats and promises.

Risky Customer Behavior

According to these dealers, when selling illicit drugs regularly, worry about getting busted “crosses your mind everyday” (Burt). This worry is compounded by the social nature of selling illicit drugs. Unlike other types of offenses that can be committed without the assistance of other offenders, such as robbery, the very nature of drug dealing necessitates the involvement of at least two offenders: a dealer and a customer. To be successful, however, a dealer must often sell to numerous customers. Because of this social nature, dealers must not only be aware of how their own actions may increase the likelihood of attracting police attention, but also how the actions of those they sell to and buy from may as well. The drug dealers interviewed for the present study were first concerned about their customers having ‘bad etiquette,’ or committing actions that may attract police attention when arranging or conducting transactions. Following this, they were also concerned with the possibility of customers ‘snitching,’ or providing police with information about the dealers’ crimes in exchange for leniency.

Bad Etiquette. The dealers reported monitoring their customers’ behavior for a range of actions thought likely to direct the attention of police towards them. Paramount among these were customers explicitly “talking” or “texting” (John) “on the phone” (G) or, in other words, not having “phone etiquette” (V). When asked what types of customer behavior made her feel uncomfortable, Natalie emphatically stated, “I’m really weird

about texting and phone calls and stuff like that.” Gus responded similarly, “I don’t want you to text me weed, marijuana, anything like that in a text. I don’t even want you to text me ‘can you get me a bag’...nothing bag related.” Perry concurred, “I don’t want someone to text me some bullshit like ‘I want a bag of marijuana.’” Jack, a white, 22 year-old, marijuana supplier and small time pharmaceutical dealer, also responded likewise:

I don’t really like dealing with text... I don’t like anyone to text me about...specific words like ‘Do you have any marijuana?’ Do you have any, you know, you don’t even hafta ask me what you’re looking for. I know what you’re talking about. I know who you are. Just say ‘Are you good man?’ or ‘Hey man how ya doin...?’ I already know what you’re hitting me up for....Like I said, don’t text me saying ‘Do you have any green? Do you have any bud? Do you have any grass?’ Things like that.

The dealers were concerned about customers using “bad etiquette” (Gus) on the phone because they feared that record of the verbal or written conversation would find its way to police. “All that’s just recorded,” John explained. “They can pull that shit up legally and charge you with that shit.” G, an African-American, 30 year-old, heroin dealer, felt similarly:

If you on the phone talking reckless...let’s say you’re on the phone like whatever drugs you’re talking about, you’re basically spelling it out like ‘Yeah, I got an ounce of weed and...I got five dimes [of heroin]’ you know, giving em a step-by-step....Let’s say if a motherfucker listened to you and recorded you, you’re basically fucked.

They knew that this was a slim possibility, but a possibility nonetheless. “I don’t know how often they actually use the records and stuff,” Natalie commented, “but I’ve always been really paranoid that if it’s in your phone they can trace it and find it down the line.”

G agreed:

I really don't think there's a chance that a motherfucker would be recording me cuz you know I'm not really no big time motherfucker. But then, you know, I always gotta think about Uncle Sam and shit that they probably are listening to a certain degree cuz, you know, GPS, they know where you at all the damn time, so I wouldn't put it past them. Maybe they can be listening or something like that or maybe a motherfucker's gotta say a key word for your shit to get recorded, you know, I don't know, that seems like a fifty-fifty thing.

The dealers were also concerned with customers who would “bounce in and bounce out” (Natalie) or, put differently, those who would not linger at a dealer's residence any longer than needed to make an exchange. These types of customers alarmed the dealers because they feared neighbors and other potential onlookers would notice the traffic and assume that they were selling drugs out of their homes:

Just for the fact of like the neighbors sake, you know? It's kind of common courtesy to me...you just hang out for a minute just so you don't have people coming in and out of your house so frequently that it looks like you're a drug dealer. (Dean, white, 32 year-old, marijuana dealer)

There are people that just want to come in and out but...I don't feel comfortable with that, you never know who's paying attention. I have two very close neighbors so they will notice if there's cars coming down the street every day at all hours of the night. (Natalie, white, 24 year-old, marijuana dealer)

The amount of time considered sufficient to allay neighbors' suspicions generally fell between 20 minutes to just under an hour. “If you come over to my house [to buy drugs],” Bobby stressed, “be prepared to be there for about forty-five minutes.” This was also a good time frame for James, “If they [are] coming over to my place I'd like them to hang out for at least forty-five minutes or so.” Once this time was met or breached, the dealers assumed that neighbors would perceive the visit as a social call instead of a drug deal and therefore not feel the need to contact police or to informally intervene.

As opposed to their views on ‘hanging out’ and ‘talking or texting,’ the dealers were divided on their opinions regarding customers bringing strangers to deals. Most of the dealers, like Wyatt, a white, 32 year-old, marijuana dealer, were concerned with ‘new people’:

I really wouldn't want them to be bringing any new people into the mix, you know?...For instance...one of my buddies'...brother-in-law, he's about 21 and he's a little bit reckless...he might come up to my house and he might bring two people with him and he didn't tell me that he was bringing anybody with him...I'm...not quite comfortable with them being there especially with him not telling me...Every random now and then he'll have just some new person I have never met...and it's not that I don't trust the person cuz...I typically trust him, but I just don't know, you know what I mean?...Whenever someone does that, I don't really appreciate it.

This concern sprang from a fear that these strangers may be undercover officers or might be otherwise working with police. These dealers naturally assumed that this would increase the likelihood of them getting busted. A smaller group of the dealers, however, particularly those moving heroin, were nonchalant about strangers accompanying their regular customers to deals:

Sometimes you just gotta go with the flow like that but, depending on the situation if they look scandalous or shady, you know...but I ain't too much worried about it. I mean most of my people I know, so if they had somebody with em most of the time I can trust em enough [I] just don't have to worry about it...As far as them being the police I don't too much trip but as far as them being scandalous or something I don't really care. (Dre, male, African-American, 34 year-old, crack, heroin, and marijuana dealer)

Here the heroin dealers' fear of new people was counterbalanced by a combination of their faith in the ability of their regulars to discern untoward intentions in others and their drive to make enough sales to support their own habits.

Beyond these sources of concern, the dealers also noted several other actions thought to increase the likelihood of being detected by police. These included “throwing” a dealer’s “name around” (Mitch), or freely sharing information about their dealing with others. The dealers assumed this would lead to word of their dealing finding its way to police. These actions also included customers showing up unannounced at dealers’ residences or places of employment. This was worrisome because it indicated that the customer responsible may be “stupid” (Wyatt) in other ways. Being stupid involved committing any actions during or immediately after a deal that were thought likely direct the attention of police or bystanders to the illicit nature of the meeting. Wyatt and Justin provided several examples of such actions:

If I was meeting someone out I wouldn’t want them just be like holding it up in the air... I’d want them to be very, you know, make it as concealed as possible and...don’t start breaking up a bowl and expect me to pack, smoke a bowl with you in the middle of a fucking parking lot! (Wyatt, marijuana dealer)

You don’t want them to start yelling at you ‘Hey man, wassup?’ Don’t draw attention, unneeded attention. Don’t ever say what you’re doing, ‘Hey man I brought the weed or whatever’ ‘Hey, do you have the money for the weed?’... You just don’t want to rock any boats or draw any attention. (Justin, white, 25 year-old, marijuana dealer)

Being stupid and the other forms of bad etiquette increased the dealers’ perceptions of the risk of being detected by police. To counter this, they often attempted to prevent bad etiquette among their customers by threatening them.

Snitching. The dealers were also wary of their more circumspect customers’ behavior. These customers were considered risks simply because they knew about the dealers’ illicit activity. The dealers feared that these customers would snitch, or provide

information to the police, in exchange for leniency from punishment if arrested. “If they get pulled over and a cop makes it worth their while, they’re gonna say something,” Terrence explained. Ted agreed, emphasizing that snitching to avoid punishment was part of the natural order. “One day they get into trouble and snitch you out to get their self out of trouble that’s just how the world works.” Bugs concurred with Ted, stating that “people are ready to do whatever they have to to get out of trouble.”

The dealers generally assumed that snitching was behind the arrest of most drug dealers. “The...reason everybody gets busted,” B declared, is that “somebody snitched on em.” Moreover, the dealers’ also assumed that snitches were not rarity. “Snitches are everywhere,” Bugs stressed. Burt felt similarly, exclaiming that “there’s always people snitching.” While Ted emphasized that “you can’t trust nobody.” These viewpoints led many of the dealers to regard the possibility of being snitched as inevitable. V, a white, male, 28 year-old, cocaine, crystal methamphetamine, ecstasy, and heroin supplier, explained:

Either you’re gonna get burned by somebody snitching on you, which is more than likely what’s gonna happen. Or...something bad’s gonna happen but, you know, nine times out of ten, you’re never gonna become rich doing it...because you’re always gonna get told on.

For these reasons, snitching was of great concern to the dealers. “Somebody ratting you out to save their ass is always a concern,” Gus emphasized, “that’s the only time I really get worried.” They did not stand idly by waiting for this concern to materialize. When asked what he did in response to the threat of others snitching, B exclaimed, “I’m not getting busted by the cops! I’ve got too much to lose,” implying that

he could not remain passive. Instead, like the other dealers, B attempted to prevent his customers from snitching by making them implicit promises.

Controlling Customers' Risky Behavior

These dealers' attempts to prevent their customers from inadvertently or purposely directing police attention toward them fell into two broad categories: telling them their behavior was unacceptable and taking care of them.

Telling Them that's Not Acceptable. While the dealers could have certainly used violence or threats of violence in order to prevent their customers from using bad etiquette, none of them reported doing so. For many of the dealers, this attitude was an extension of their general aversion to using or threatening violence when addressing conflict. For these dealers, confrontation was to be avoided whenever possible. When asked why he never used or threatened violence against others, John replied, "Cuz, I just don't want any confrontation." Natalie responded similarly, declaring, "I try not to do the confrontation thing at all."

All of the dealers, including those who sometimes aggressively addressed other forms of conflict (see chapter 6), were hesitant to use or threaten violence against customers with bad etiquette for two primary reasons. First, they feared this may incite a violent conflict and draw heat from police. Referring to this, Justin exclaimed, "That could get the police involved over something that's illegal." Second, the dealers understood that their customers were largely averse to violence as well and might be frightened away by these threats. "Once you go to the confrontation place, there's no

going back,” Natalie explained, “if you piss them off too bad then you’re not going to get your money.” This latter attitude was particularly prevalent among the lower-class and working-class dealers. For example, Dre sold heroin to a large number of customers from “the county” or, in other words, the suburbs surrounding St. Louis. He and the other lower-class dealers from the city considered anyone from the county as soft and as uncomfortable with aggression. When asked why he handled conflict with these customers differently, he stated simply, “people in the county are a lot different than the people in the city...the people are a lot different,” implying that these customers were not accustomed to displays of aggression like his other ‘city’ customers.

The dealers understood that the best way to eliminate the increase in the likelihood of detection and apprehension that may follow bad etiquette was to cut off the customers responsible. This understanding, however, was countered by their need to maintain a large enough customer base to continue making profit. To find a middle-ground between maintaining safety and profit, the dealers resorted to threatening customers with cutting them off if they did not curb bad etiquette. For instance, when asked how he responded to customers bouncing in and out, Bugs replied, “I...gave them warnings and told them that’s not acceptable, you can’t do that. They then did it again and I then stopped answering the phone for them.” He also responded similarly to customers using bad phone etiquette. “I would give verbal warnings to people when they would get to my place and tell them that you can’t talk like that on my phone and if it happened again I would...not answer the phone again.” James, a white, 28 year-old, marijuana supplier, gave a similar ‘warning’ to such a customer:

The guy I was distributing to in quantity...would try and coax information outta me on the phone...to see if it was worth comin over.... There was one time

where, I can't remember exactly what he said, and it wasn't super obvious, but to me it was still not ok...When he came over I was, I was like, 'Listen if you ever say shit like that again on the phone don't ever call me again.'

Threatening to not answer the phone again, of course, implied to customers that they would be cut off if the behavior continued.

Unlike Bugs and James, the other dealers did not make statements within their threats regarding the outcome—i.e., cutting the customer off—were customers noncompliant. Instead, these dealers' threats were contained within simple imperative statements. When asked how he responded to customers talking explicitly on the phone, Bobby exclaimed "I'd just be like 'Dude, don't say that.'" While Snap "would...first talk to them [and] be like, 'Okay, nothing on the phones.'" Regarding customers "having a brain fart" and texting him "something dumb," John stated that he would just "call them and be like, 'What!? You know better not to text me you dumb shit!...Don't text me, I fucking hate that.'" While Natalie reported reacting to bad phone or texting etiquette by exclaiming, "What the fuck are you doing? Don't say that!...Can you just talk to me when you get here?" She also responded similarly to a customer who bounced in and out:

My husband's sister's friend, the one I was just saying is kinda a little bit older, she will bounce in and bounce out, she doesn't want to stay, she doesn't want to talk, she just wants to get her stuff and go. And I had to tell her like 'You really just need to hang out for a minute, even if you just want to smoke and go...you can't just come in and come out' and she's been fine with that ever since.

Allen's response to a customer arriving unannounced to his apartment was more vehement:

I've had a...buddy show up, it was like one o'clock in the morning... I hear him knock on my door, like one o'clock in the morning. All three dogs started barking. 'Dude, don't ever fucking show up to my apartment again.' I let him

know right off the bat. I didn't even sell to him, I opened the door, brought him in, 'Don't ever do this again, get the fuck out.' And that was it.

John did not report informing his customers they would be cut off for bad etiquette, or 'dumb shit,' but instead implied that this was generally understood:

I do it all the time with people because they'll do dumb shit,...and it's like you're just fucking it for yourself....I don't care, I'm not desperate to give it to you, so you got to play by my rules. So it's like, 'Yeah man, I'll just cut you off. I'll fucking make it all dry up, you know?'

Like John, most of the dealers assumed that their customers and associates understood that they must abide by the dealers' 'rules' if they wanted to avoid being cut off. The dealers also assumed that their customers understood these imperative statements as communications of the dealers' rules. They therefore felt it unnecessary to explicitly state the outcome of noncompliance.

These threats were grounded on the presumption that customers' reluctance to lose a plug, or drug connection, would motivate them to be more mindful of their risky behavior. This, in turn, then discounted dealers' assessments of the likelihood they would be detected and apprehended by police. To explain, when assessing risk, drug dealers consider the likelihood that police will somehow detect their illicit activity. These considerations are based on dealers' assumptions of how their own behavior, that of police, *and* the behavior of others will increase this likelihood. Dealers prevent these others' from committing behavior that will increase this likelihood by threatening them. This allows dealers to eliminate considerations of the risk posed by others from their cost/benefit calculi. If, as a result, the dealers' assessments of the potential rewards of an act then outweigh their assessments of the potential costs, they may be more likely to

commit an offense. It is important to note here that whether dealers' threats *actually* alter their customers' behavior has little impact on this process. Instead, these threats impact dealers' *perceptions* that their customers will avoid committing bad etiquette. Thus, although a threat may be largely ineffective at coercing a customer to cease bad etiquette, it may still encourage offending among dealers because they *perceive* that it has been effective.

Taking Care of People. Whereas the dealers sometimes had to teach their customers or remind them about bad etiquette and its consequences, this was not the case with snitching. It was universally assumed within the drug markets of these dealers that snitches were immediately cut off. "If somebody gets caught and then people find out that they snitched," Bugs stated, "they're gonna be isolated immediately." The dealers therefore rarely needed to explicitly threaten their customers with cutting them off for snitching. They instead let the possibility of this outcome simply hang in the air. Although all the dealers unconsciously or consciously used this threat as a deterrent, they were seldom satisfied with its effectiveness alone. The dealers understood that they could potentially use or threaten violence to bolster this effectiveness, but they were reluctant to do so for the same reasons they were hesitant to use threats of violence to curb bad etiquette. One of the dealers, V, was reluctant to use threats of violence to prevent his customers from snitching because this had led to his arrest in the past:

I was one of the main guys in St. Louis and...I was kind of out of my mind at the time....Before I would put somebody on...I would...give them a bunch of ecstasy and pull like an AK or an assault rifle on em (pantomimes holding a rifle) and be like, (pitch lowers, volume rises) "Are you ever gonna snitch on me!?" (pauses, then shakes head while softly laughing) You know, and kinda just scare the shit out of em...and then after that I'd put em on big time,...give em whatever the

fuck they wanted...on the front...I did that with everybody. Except for this fucking kid, he got spooked and (humorous intonation, indicating disbelief)...after he left my fucking house he drove...to the DEA building and fucking told on me.

Following this experience, and the bit in prison he served as a result of it, V took a different approach when attempting to prevent his customers from snitching. Like the other dealers hesitant to use or threaten violence, V instead relied on making his customers promises of preferential treatment to dissuade them from snitching.

Known as “taking care of...people” (John) or “treating them good” (V), the dealers implicitly communicated these promises within a constellation of other statements and behaviors (see also Jacobs, 1999: 56-61 on ‘cultivation’). These primarily involved “hook[ing] people up” (John), or giving customers drugs free of charge, selling them drugs at a discounted rate, fronting them drugs, or giving them larger amounts than paid for. “I hook em up proper,” Gregory claimed. “If it’s three point five grams...I’ll give em three point seven, three point eight...it’s always a fat hookup.” Mitch reported similarly, stating, “I would hook em up. If a dude bought an eighth [3.5 grams], I’d give em like three eight instead of three five or something, sometimes better.” Freddie also reported a similar philosophy on the matter: “if you’ve got a person who comes to you like every day, if they need something every once and a while, you need to give em something every once and a while.”

In addition to hooking people up, taking care of people also included being “quicker to drop it off” (Mitch), or not dallying when arranging and traveling to meet with customers, and giving bonuses to workers. V described his viewpoint on taking care of workers:

If I see the motherfucker's like busting his ass and really trying to get my money... I'll break bread with him... If he owes me, call it like four grand, I'll, you know, maybe give him an extra five hundred out of it.... That kind of shit. People appreciate that kind of shit.

It is unsurprising that none of the dealers reported making explicit statements to their customers such as 'If you do not rat me out to the cops, I will continue hooking you up with extra weed.' In their worlds, and those of illicit drug dealers in general, to speak explicitly of illegal activity is to smack of police (see, e.g., Adler, 1993; Jacobs, 1999; Jacques and Reynald, 2012; Johnson and Natarajan, 1995; for examples among offenders more generally, see Gambetta, 2009; Sutherland, 1965[1937]). To avoid resembling police, and thus the treatment given to suspected police by suppliers and customers (i.e., avoidance), these dealers had to mask the underlying intent and meaning of most of their communication with their associates in innocuous utterances and/or nonverbal actions. For instance, because it was inappropriate to directly ask dealers 'Do you have enough drugs to sell me some?' customers would instead ask "Are you good?" (B). This question, when combined with the act of calling or texting a dealer, was enough to indicate to him or her that a customer wished to make a purchase.

Consider the following example. John, a white, 34 year-old, psychedelic mushroom grower and supplier, would respond to a customer's request to be fronted a large amount of mushrooms by saying "How about you take a couple of these and we see how you do?" while handing him or her several ounces. Here there is an assumption shared between the two that John will continue fronting the customer provided the customer follow his "rules." Chief among these rules being the maxim 'do not snitch on me.' Here we also see how John simultaneously uses his coercive power—his ability to

cut the customer off completely—and his persuasive power—his ability to front the customer drugs—to control the customer’s future behavior. Of course, this influence process can also be reversed and viewed as a promise from the customer to not snitch on John provided he continue to front him or her. No matter how it is viewed, what is important is that here each of the parties have entered into an implicit contract with the other, at least from John’s perspective.

This notion is supported by John’s response when asked why he took care of his customers:

You always want to hook people up...These people, they fucking pick up on that pretty quick. They know ‘Hey, this guy’s got a fucking fat sack and he’s taking care of me.’ It works...because if they were to get busted and they got to drop somebody’s name then whose name are they going to drop, the guy that’s been hooking you up and taking care of you or the guy that’s been fucking you over or not necessarily hooking you up? You know what I mean?...You want to take care of people in the hopes that they are good natured enough to realize that and not fucking turn you in! (laughs).

The other dealers’ responses to this question closely echoed John’s. Joe claimed that he “always gave [customers] good deals because [he] never wanted anybody to be like ‘Oh, this dude’s a douchebag, I’m gonna fucking rat on him.’...I definitely did not want to get ratted.” Mud declared that he took care of customers because “I don’t hafta worry about them rolling over on me basically if they ever get caught, I know that they’re not going to drop my name to save themselves.” Mitch stated that he did likewise because he did not “hafta worry about them rolling over me...if they ever got caught. I know that they’re not going to drop my name to save themselves.” V’s response also followed suit:

I usually keep my prices pretty good. You...get a more...loyal customers and they stand by you...So I take care of them and they take care of me...after doing time and shit for getting snitched on...you learn like loyalty and shit is like way, way, way more important than making money. I’ll...not make as much money off

of somebody, if I'm sure that I can go to sleep better at night without fucking guessing if they're gonna tell on me or not.

As did Bobby's:

I was always fair to people because I figured early that the people that got busted were the people that were an asshole to somebody and that's how they would end up getting busted...they'd be like 'Oh, this person's a dick, I get in trouble and I'm gonna narc you off.' (White, 41 year-old, LSD and marijuana dealer)

Freddie's response closely matched these other dealers as well but was grounded in vicarious experience, "I know other guys that have gotten busted and they didn't rat out their good dealer, they ratted out their fucking dealer that fucked em over enough times."

Whether these dealers' customers understood or were consciously aware that they were entering an arrangement with the dealers to not snitch in exchange for the dealers continuing to take care of them is beside the point. It is also unimportant whether these customers actually altered their behavior following arrest in response to this treatment. What is important is that the *dealers* believed that their customers understood these implied contracts and were thus less likely to snitch as a result. This discounted their assessments of the risks posed by customers, which, in turn, lowered their perceptions of the overall risks of continuing to sell. When and if these perceived risks were outweighed by the dealers' perceptions of the rewards from dealing, the dealers were more likely to continue offending.

Although these dealers' threats and promises were seldom explicitly voiced, it is still appropriate to consider these forms of coercion and persuasion alongside the other forms of talk examined in this dissertation because they could not function apart from talk. Of course, it is certainly possible to convey the complex ideas and directives

contained in these threats and promises through written communication. These offenders, like most offenders, however, were loath to put down anything in writing about their offenses for fear it be used against them by police. Moreover, the dealers' abilities to communicate these threats and promises by nonverbal means were constrained by the limited amount of information that can be expressed, and more importantly, understood via these methods. Without talking with one another then, these dealers would have had much difficulty explicitly communicating these threats and promises, let alone delicately implying them.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The goal of this chapter was to explore how a group of active drug dealers shape the deterrence process with threats and promises. The findings highlight that these dealers threaten co-offenders with cutting them off from access to drug supplies when their actions are thought likely to direct police attention toward the dealers. These nonviolent threats permit dealers to prevent unwanted behavior among their customers yet still retain their business. The findings also demonstrate that these dealers implicitly promise customers continued positive treatment in order to dissuade them from providing information to the police. These functions of threats and promises influenced the dealers' responses to prohibitions by discounting their perceptions of the risks associated with their offending. The following sections describe the implications of these findings for current understanding of deterrence, drug market violence, and the use of threats and promises by the criminal justice system.

These dealers' use of threats and promises first speaks to current understanding of the active role offenders play in the deterrence process. Recall that offenders are not passive in the face of prohibitions but instead alter their behavior in an attempt to subvert the certainty and severity of punishment (Gibbs, 1975; Horney and Marshall, 1992; Paternoster et al., 1983; Piliavin et al., 1986; Richards and Tittle, 1981, 1982; Saltzman et al., 1982; see also, chapters 3 and 4). Prior research on restrictive deterrence, as this phenomena has been termed, has focused primarily on the measures by which offenders alter their behavior in order to stymie the efforts of prohibition agents. These measures are typically aimed at reducing the *capacity* of these agents to identify offenders, as when crack dealers assume mundane appearances to belie their illicit occupation from patrolmen (see, e.g., Jacobs and Miller, 1998: 556-557). This research has also focused on the ways in which offenders can alter their behavior to prevent others from identifying them and then providing this information to prohibition agents. Consider an armed robber who wears a mask in an effort to reduce the ability of a victim or bystanders to identify him or her to the police or other informal prohibition agents (see, e.g., Wright and Decker, 1997). Here again measures like this are aimed at reducing the *capacity* of others to identify offenders.

The present findings build on this research in two ways. First, they demonstrate that beyond attempting to prevent others from snitching, offenders also make efforts to limit the capacity of others to mobilize police through their uncircumspect behavior. This was demonstrated by the dealers threatening their customers with cutting them off for having bad etiquette. Second, these findings also demonstrate that offenders sometimes take measures to reduce the *willingness* of others to mobilize prohibition agents as well.

To explain, implicitly promising continued positive treatment to customers does not reduce the capacity of these customers to mobilize police or other sanction agents. After all, customers that are treated well can still easily snitch. Instead, these promises are intended to proactively influence how customers may weigh the costs and rewards of snitching following arrest. More specifically, dealers intend on influencing these calculations such that customers view the rewards of not snitching on the dealers as greater than the costs they may incur by snitching on others or by not snitching at all. This is not an entirely new finding, as prior research has demonstrated that offenders use threats of violent retribution to influence others' willingness to snitch (Jacobs, 2000; Jacobs et al., 2000; Rosenfeld et al., 2003; Wright and Decker, 1997). Nonetheless, it adds to this research by demonstrating that offenders can also influence others' willingness to snitch without inciting conflict or destroying their relationships with them.

It is important to note that the impact of these threats and promises on the dealers' assessments of the likelihood of detection and apprehension were not contingent on whether they *actually* influenced the behavior of others. Aside from behavior that the dealers personally witnessed or learned about through gossip (see chapter 3), the dealers were in the dark as to whether their threats and promises had any impact. Instead, the dealers' assessments were based on their *perceptions* of whether these threats and promises were effective. This highlights that perceptions guide the behavior of both the targets of prohibitions and their sources.

These findings also speak to current understanding of the relationship between probabilistic and particularistic restrictive deterrence. Recall that probabilistic restrictive deterrence refers to offenders reducing the frequency of their offending due to a fear that

they will be pushing their luck if they continue to offend at the same rate. Particularistic restrictive deterrence, on the other hand, refers to offenders using tactics intended to reduce the likelihood of detection and apprehension and the severity of punishment (Jacobs, 1996). The present findings indicate that the use of particularistic measures among these offenders, here in the shape of threats and promises, are intended to counter their probabilistic assessments of risk. This suggests that in this instance, probabilistic assessments of risk temporally precede particularistic restrictive deterrence (see also, Jacobs, 1996). This also indicates that, at least in the short run, particularistic restrictive deterrence encourages offending by discounting probabilistic assessments of risk (see also, Jacobs and Cherbonneau, 2014). As the relationship between probabilistic and particularistic restrictive deterrence has yet to be fully specified, it remains uncertain at what point and under what conditions these particularistic measures lose traction and are overcome by probabilistic assessments of risk (see also, chapter 3).

The present study joins a growing body of work demonstrating that many drug markets, unlike the urban, open-air drug markets that have been the focus of the lion's share drug market research (see, e.g., Goldstein et al., 1997; Jacobs, 2000; Mieczkowski, 1986), are characterized by a relative lack of violence (see, e.g., Jacques and Wright, 2008, 2015; Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010; see also, Reuter, 2009). The aversion to violence in the present sample, as indicated by their reluctance to use threats of violence to control bad etiquette and snitching, most likely stems from two sources: the dealers' cultural backgrounds and stakes in conventional roles.

The majority of the dealers in the present sample had middle-class backgrounds. Prior research has suggested that middle-class individuals as a whole are generally averse

to conflict. This is especially so when this conflict involves or may lead to violence (Baumgartner, 1988). Raised in families and communities featuring personal relationships characterized by a general independence from one another, these dealers were socialized with an understanding that it is easier to simply exit conflictual relationships than to pursue conflict. As adults, this understanding extended to all realms of their lives, including their roles as drug dealers. In addition to this, these dealers also had conventional occupational, educational, and familial roles that could suffer if they were ensnared by the criminal justice system. Because of this, they were reluctant to behave in any ways, such as threatening others with violence, that could escalate a conflict into a violent situation and thus draw heat from police (see also, Jacques and Wright, 2015).

The dealers stemming from working-class or lower-class backgrounds approached the handling of conflict in a similar way because they were either in the process of attaining or had attained college educations or because they sold primarily to middle-class customers. Those with college educations resembled the dealers from middle-class backgrounds in that they also had numerous stakes in conformity that could be damaged by involvement with police. For this reason, these dealers were also reluctant to act in ways that might invite violence and attract police attention. Those who merely sold to middle-class customers also largely avoided threatening or using violence against them but for reasons other than fear of damaging their prosocial roles. Rather, these dealers were aware of their customers' aversion to violence and did not want to frighten them away with open displays of aggression.

These findings also contribute to prior research examining the factors influencing actors' choices to use threats and promises (see, e.g., Evan and Zelditch, 1961; McLeod and Chaffee, 1972; Tedeschi, Bonoma, and Schlenker, 1972; Tedeschi et al., 1970; Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Lindskold, 1972). Recall that this research has highlighted that these choices are influenced by actors' abilities to carry out pledged outcomes, their role positions, and whether they hold coercive power, persuasive power, or both. The present chapter adds to this understanding by highlighting that actors' choices to use threats and promises are also impacted by their perceptions of the consequences that may follow these influence attempts. More specifically, these choices are influenced by considerations of the possibility that threats and promises will elicit secondary responses from their targets and/or responses from outside parties. This was illustrated by the dealers being wary of threatening their customers with violence for fear customers would respond violently and potentially attract the attention of the police while doing so.

Recent scholarship and law enforcement efforts have demonstrated that potential offenders can be discouraged from criminal acts by promises of rewards for prosocial behavior (see, e.g., Braga et al., 2001; Kennedy, 2009). The present study suggests that this function of promised rewards is also utilized by offenders when attempting to control the behavior of other offenders. This begs the question of why promises of reward are not used more frequently by the criminal justice system or offenders when attempting to prevent individuals from committing unwanted behavior. The answer is simple: promises are more costly. The consequences of a threat need only be imposed when an individual fails to comply with its demands. Threats can therefore effectively gain compliance from numerous individuals at the cost of only enforcing consequences against a select few.

Contrarily, the rewards of promises must be given to all individuals that comply (Fisher, 1969; Tedeschi et al., 1970). Of course one could avoid these costs by not following through on a promise and neglecting to reward those that comply. This is unwise, however, as it damages the credibility of future influence attempts. Maintaining one's credibility for following through with pledged consequences is crucial if prohibition sources are to effectively influence the behavior of their targets (Goffman, 1969; Milburn and Watman, 1981; Pogarsky, 2002; Tedeschi, Bonoma, Schlenker, 1972; Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Lindskold, 1972). After all, why bother following a directive if its source seldom enforces the outcome for not doing so? While the costs of following through with promises could certainly be offset by the criminal justice system's current expenditures on locating, adjudicating, and housing criminals, it is unlikely that there will be paradigm shift toward the use of promises as a control mechanism any time in the foreseeable future.

CHAPTER 6: ACCOUNTS AND DRUG MARKET CONFLICT

It has long been recognized that offenders weigh formal *and* informal threats when contemplating criminal actions (Burkett and Jensen, 1975; Geerken and Gove, 1975; Gibbs, 1975; Meier and Johnson, 1977; Tittle, 1980). Formal threats include negative reactions to an offense by authorized agents of the state, such as police or courts. These include the imposition of fines, arrest, community supervision, incarceration, and the revocation of social privileges (Zimring and Hawkins, 1973). Informal threats, on the other hand, include any negative reactions to an offense by actors unassociated with, or unauthorized by, the state. These include reactions precipitated by formal punishment, such as the imposition of shame and embarrassment by one's self (see, e.g., Grasmick, Blackwell, and Bursik, 1993; Grasmick and Bursik, 1990; Paternoster and Simpson, 1996) and the destruction of future opportunities and social relationships by others (see, e.g., Ekland-Olson, Lieb, and Zurcher, 1984; Kennedy, 2009; Nagin and Paternoster, 1991; Williams and Hawkins, 1986). They also include consequences unrelated to formal punishments, such as confrontation, resistance and/or retaliation from victims (see, e.g., Jacobs and Cherbonneau, 2014; Jacobs, Topalli, and Wright, 2000), and the intervention of bystanders (see, e.g., Bursik and Grasmick, 1993; Sampson, 1986). Both formal and informal threats raise offenders' perceptions of the costs associated with a particular act and, as such, each can deter potential offenders from committing contemplated crimes.

A wealth of extant literature has documented the various techniques and strategies by which offenders attempt to evade or counter these threats. These include strategies such as 'stashing' illicit materials (Jacques and Reynald, 2012), verbally filtering for law enforcement agents (Jacobs, 1996; Johnson and Natarajan, 1995), undertaking measures to conceal one's identity (Jacobs, 2000), and intimidating victims and witnesses (Jacobs,

Topalli, and Wright, 2003). These actions lower offenders' perceptions of the certainty of punishment. If the perceived rewards of a crime remain static, this then encourages offending among them (see generally, Gibbs 1975). Prior research on offenders' use of remorseful statements during capital trials has also demonstrated that offenders can manipulate the severity of formal punishments as well (see, e.g., Everett and Neinstedt, 1999; Haley, 1982; Robinson, Smith-Lovin, and Tsoudis, 1994; Wagatsuma and Rosett, 1986). In the present chapter I build on this work by exploring how active drug dealers and their associates use talk, in the form of accounts, to shape the certainty and severity of informal punishments.

Accounts are retrospective statements used by actors to explain their unanticipated or untoward actions (Scott and Lyman, 1968: 46). When honored, accounts disguise or alter the symbolic nature of these actions such that offended parties no longer view the actions as reflective of the actors' intentions, motivations, or identities (Fritsche, 2002; Goffman, 1971; Schonbach, 1990; see also, Goffman, 1959, 1967). In other words, accounts separate offended parties' perceptions of an offensive action from the actors responsible. This separation encourages offended parties to base their reactions to the offense(s) on their pre-conflict impressions of the actor responsible rather than the action itself or the identity it implies. If these impressions are favorable, offended parties may "act blind to the discrepancy" (Goffman, 1967: 26), forgive the actor, and neglect to devalue, stigmatize, or punish him or her (Pogrebin, Poole, and Martinez, 1992: 233). If offended parties do not forgive an actor for an offense entirely, they may, at the very least, view an offense as acceptable and minimize the severity of their reactions (Felson, 1982).

Excuses, justifications, apologies, and concessions are all types of accounts (see Goffman, 1971; Schonbach, 1990; Scott and Lyman, 1968). Actors providing excuses for their behavior admit the wrongfulness of offensive actions but deny responsibility for them. Contrarily, those justifying their offensive behavior accept responsibility for this behavior but deny its negative connotations (Scott and Lyman, 1968; see also, Lyman, 2000; Sykes and Matza, 1957). With both concessions and apologies actors express guilt *and* take full or partial responsibility for their actions; apologies differ, however, in that they always imply support for a violated norm (Goffman, 1971; Schlenker and Darby, 1981; Schonbach, 1990: 78; Wagatsuma and Rosett, 1986). Actors can also refuse to provide accounts by outright denying or failing to offer one or by offering an explanation for this failure (Schonbach, 1990).

Whether an account is considered plausible and accepted, or honored, is contingent on several factors (Scott and Lyman, 1970). First and foremost, an account must be recognized as an appropriate way to address a disruptive action by the social group in which it is given (Goffman, 1971; Scott and Lyman, 1968). In other words, the account must be recognized by the group as an *account* for a norm violation and not some other type of utterance. This is determined by the group's 'background expectancies,' or their collective understanding of the ways disruptive actions *should* be addressed (Blumstein et al., 1974; Goffman, 1967: 9; Scott and Lyman, 1968; see also, Mills, 1940). These background expectancies also determine the types of accounts that are routinely honored within the group (Lofland, 1969: 179; Scott and Lyman, 1968).

Once a statement has been interpreted as an account, the content of the account next governs whether it will be honored. If this content does not correspond with the

gravity of the offense or with what the offended party expects to receive from the specific actor or the type of actor for such an offense, then the account may be considered illegitimate and will not be accepted (Scott and Lyman, 1968). Similarly, the appearance of the actor offering the account must correspond with its content in order for the account to be honored (Goffman, 1959; Scott and Lyman, 1968). Finally, the amount of deference an actor demonstrates to an offended party when offering an account also influences if it is honored. If this does not correspond with what the offended party views as appropriate given his or her status in relation to that of the actor offering the account, the account is less likely to restore a conflict to concord (Blumstein et al., 1974; Scott and Lyman, 1968).

Criminologists have focused largely on two aspects of accounts: how actors use them to neutralize feelings of guilt or shame following deviant acts (see, e.g., Agnew, 1994; Benson, 1985; Copes, 2003; Minor, 1981; Sykes and Matza, 1957; Topalli, 2005, 2006) and how they thereby contribute to the etiology of criminal behavior (see, e.g., Matza, 1964; Presser, 2008, 2009; Sandberg, 2009, 2010; Sykes and Matza, 1957). A relatively scant body of criminological work, however, has examined how actors use accounts to reduce or eliminate external forms of punishment. Focusing primarily on the role of accounts in capital trials, this work has demonstrated that offenders use these verbal devices to reduce the severity of formal punishments for their offenses (see, e.g., Everett and Nienstedt, 1999; Felson and Ribner, 1981; Litton, 2005; Rothman and Gandossy, 1982; Steinke, 1992). One notable study by Jacobs (1998), has also explored how offenders may use accounts to alter *informal* punishments as well. Through interviews with active heroin dealers, Jacobs found that dealers peddling low-quality

heroin rely on accounts to dissuade unhappy buyers from taking retaliatory actions. This demonstrates that offenders use accounts to influence external forms of punishment. In the present chapter I continue this line of inquiry by investigating how active drug dealers and their associates use accounts to shape informal punishments.

Although the present chapter focuses exclusively on the impact of accounts during informal processes, I have limited information suggesting that offenders also use accounts during formal processes as well. For instance, recall Jack's comment from chapter 4, wherein he stated that he "always" had a "backstory" when traveling with drugs late at night. Aware that traveling alone late at night may raise the suspicions of patrolling police officers, Jack preemptively prepared an account intended to allay the suspicions of police if flagged while transporting illicit drugs. In preparing to tell officers that he had "passed out" at his "girlfriend's" while "watching a movie," Jack presumed that the background expectancies of police officers regarding legitimate reasons to be traveling at that time included romantic engagements. Here he trusted that police officers would likely accept and honor this account and therefore not identify him as a possible criminal and thus worthy of being searched. This indicates that the presence of offenders in the same cultural context as law enforcement agents provides them with a working knowledge of the background expectancies of these agents. With these background expectancies in mind, then, offenders may prepare an account intended to prevent their identification and apprehension by these agents prior to committing an offense (see, e.g., Jacobs, 1999: 90; Jacobs and Cherbonneau, 2012: 3; Jacobs and Miller, 1998: 556). Of course, offenders cannot be certain of the actual effectiveness of these accounts ahead of

time. But they may perceive that they will be effective and thus discount their assessments of risks accordingly.

Offenders' use of accounts and knowledge of background expectancies may also impact their perceived *and* actual chances of being formally punished following identification by law enforcement. Consider a female crack seller discussed by Jacobs and Miller (1998: 556-557) who recounted an occasion during which she shouted "What the fuck you lookin at me fo? I just goin to the store!" to police officers preparing to stop and search her. In giving this account to the officers, she indicated her awareness of police officers' expectations concerning how average street citizens account for their actions when accosted by police. Although unsuccessful, this 'backstory' was an attempt on the part of the seller to clothe herself in the identity of a non-offender in order to prevent the officers from getting 'wise' (Goffman, 1963). Once the officers discovered her crack paraphernalia, the seller changed tactics by relaying her description of the pipes and drugs in the same insolent style used by crack users when speaking to police. This again capitalized on the seller's knowledge of the officers' background expectancies. In this instance, however, the seller matched her account to that which the officers expected from a crack *user* instead of a crack *dealer*. And this, in turn, facilitated her escape from punishment.

Finally, offenders' use of accounts and knowledge of background expectancies may also influence the actual and perceived certainty and severity of punishment following apprehension. Recall that it is common practice for law enforcement to offer leniency to criminals for 'snitching,' or for providing information regarding other offenders (see chapters 3 and 5; see also, Rosenfeld, Jacobs, and Wright, 2003). Snitching

can involve sharing information about the crimes of others in exchange for leniency for one's own or it can involve displacing blame for one's own crimes onto others. This latter form of snitching can be considered a type of account. If these accounts are honored by arresting officers, snitches can lessen the severity of their punishment or escape it altogether. Offenders may also preemptively count on this when weighing the costs and benefits of a contemplated crime and, as a result, may be more likely to follow through with it.

As stated earlier, the present chapter focuses exclusively on offenders' use of accounts during informal deterrence processes. Nevertheless, the findings may also speak to the influence of accounts during the formal deterrence process as well because the deterrence process operates similarly no matter the source of a deterrent—be it a formal agent or an informal agent (Meier and Johnson, 1977). The way in which offenders use accounts to manipulate informal threats may therefore reflect the way in which they use accounts to manipulate formal threats as well.

To explore the function of accounts in the informal deterrence process among active drug dealers I examine two questions: 1) When do drug dealers give and receive accounts?; and 2) How do accounts influence decision-making and the deterrence process among them? To answer these questions I first place accounts in the context of the conflicts that commonly give rise to them. As described above, accounts are intended to alter the responses of offended parties. Therefore, to gain a full understanding of how accounts function, it is first necessary to explicate how offended parties respond to conflicts before discussing how accounts alter these responses. Following this, I consider how these verbal devices influence the deterrence process among drug dealers.

FINDINGS

Accounts were particularly influential among the dealers interviewed and their associates when given for two key offenses: the sale of underweight, fake, or poor quality drugs and failure to repay outstanding drug debts. If not offered an account, victims of these offenses would use violence, verbal confrontation, and avoidance to punish those responsible. But if offered an account, the dealers would typically reduce the severity of this punishment or neglect to impose it altogether. The following sections describe when drug dealers and their associates give accounts, how they respond without them, and how accounts alter these responses.

When Drug Dealers Give Accounts

Skeeting

Much like numerous other drug markets that have received scholarly attention (see, e.g., Goldstein, 1985; Jacques and Wright, 2008), defrauding customers was a common occurrence in these dealers' respective drug markets. Referred to as 'skeeting,' this can involve selling a customer a quantity of drugs that is "skimpy" (Freddie), "light" (Perry), "short" (Mud), or, in other words, less than was promised in exchange for a particular price (see also, Jacques, Allen, and Wright, 2014). It can also involve selling fake or "weak" (Jacob) drugs under the pretense that they are of a higher quality. Dealers and users also use the term to describe dealers that purposively take these actions. "Somebody that skeet[s]," Gregory stated, "isn't legit on their sales or their dealing tactics and they're trying to make more profit than what they should off their product."

Dealers and users that continue to purchase drugs from skeet individuals or fail to address their victimization risk being repeatedly victimized; thus, it was common among these dealers and their associates to retaliate against those who had skeeted them. This retaliation took two primary forms: ‘not dealing with them’ and ‘gossiping.’

Not Dealing with Them. Although skeeting benefits drug dealers by increasing their profits, this hinges on whether they can avoid being caught and punished. The primary punishment imposed on skeet dealers in these markets was for victims to simply stop buying drugs from them. As John succinctly stated, “You just don’t deal with them anymore.” James, a white, 28 year-old, marijuana supplier echoed this statement:

I have been shorted but usually I would call them [the dealer] and meet back up with them and be like, “Hey, this was, you know, this was five grams short,” and if they didn’t compensate me then, then I wouldn’t deal with em.

Derrick, a white, 35 year-old, marijuana dealer, reacted this way after being conned into buying marijuana misidentified as “a cross-strain of weed and blueberry plants” by one of his suppliers:

Derrick: We started smoking it and it tasted just like blueberry and you smelled the blueberries and it was crazy and he was like, ‘It’s super expensive but I’ll sell it to you a little bit cheaper.’ And I bought it and took it home and...over the next two weeks the [flavor] went away....I found out it was a spray later...[I went] into a head shop a couple months later and they had like a blueberry spray and a bubblegum spray and a cherry spray and a vanilla spray.

Interviewer: So what did you do about the guy?

Derrick: I never dealt with him again.

Many of the dealers reported confronting skeet dealers, but like James and Derrick, they seldom did so in person and rarely did more than talk. For instance, John,

after being shorted “4 grams” of marijuana, called his supplier and said “What the fuck dude? Why are you doing me like this?” but took it no further. Instead he followed suit with the other dealers and simply avoided buying from the supplier again. It was uncommon among the dealers to aggressively confront skeet dealers because it was generally thought that these confrontations could turn violent and draw police attention. As John put it, “I don’t want any confrontation because I don’t want to bring any heat on me.”

Gossiping. It was also common among these dealers and their associates to gossip about skeet dealers in order to persuade others to not deal with them as well. This gossip was guided by two primary motivations: to inoculate others from being victimized and retaliation. Gregory, a white, 32 year-old, marijuana dealer, described his understanding of how gossip about skeeting one customer may lead to numerous others not dealing with him anymore:

If you’re selling bad dope or you’re skeeting people out, if you’re giving them short bags, the word’s gonna get around and you’re gonna have no clientele. Let’s say I sell a bag to this girl who is hooked up through one of my guys...She’s gonna call my guy and be like ‘Your guy just skeeted me out.’ Word’s gonna get around and people are gonna start saying don’t buy it from G. He’s on some skeet business and he isn’t gonna hook it up.

B, a white, 20 year-old, marijuana dealer, provided a similar description:

If you do skeet...a bag,...[and] they notice it, for some reason even if it’s just like point one or point two [grams] off they flip shit. They will flip shit and make you their worst enemy. People’ll just start talking shit like don’t buy from this person cuz they skeet you.

Because gossip has a tendency to be broadly disseminated throughout social networks, skeet dealers risked losing a large number of potential and regular customers by failing to offer accounts to their victims.

Flaking

A second source of conflict among the dealers interviewed and their associates stemmed from outstanding drug debts. As in many other drug markets, it was common among these offenders to sell or receive drugs on the ‘front,’ or on consignment (see, e.g., Adler, 1993: 106; Hoffer, 2006: 76; May and Hough, 2001; Mieczkowski, 1986: 658). Fronting is beneficial for drug sellers and customers because it allows sellers to move more product and provides customers an avenue by which they can sell drugs without investing start-up capital. But it is also common for those receiving fronted drugs to “flake” (John) or ‘mess up the money’ (Johnson et al., 1985) and fail to pay back their debts (see, e.g., Goldstein, 1985). “[It’s] human nature.” V commented, “If...they’re moving your product and they don’t have any money in their pocket, of course they’re gonna spend some of your money.” When this occurs, dealers must respond in some way lest they risk losing their investments and chance being marked as easy targets by other predators. “If you rob me and I don’t do anything about it,” Jarod stressed, “that’s gonna tell everybody else that they can come rob from me.” Burt waxed similarly, stating that if a dealer lets a debt go unpaid “somebody else...is gonna try and pull the same fucking shit...You’re an easy target then.” The dealers’ responses to unpaid drug debts fell into three broad categories: getting aggressive, annoying the shit out of them, and cutting them off.

Getting Aggressive. Unlike the drug dealers studied by many other researchers (see, e.g., Goldstein et al., 1997; Jacobs, 2000; Topalli, Wright, and Fornango, 2002), it was uncommon for these dealers to resort to violence when attempting to collect debts. This aversion to violence was motivated by the same fear preventing the dealers from responding violently to being skeeted—that of drawing police attention. “It’s not worth fighting or...getting aggressive,” Justin explained, “that could get the police involved.” Ted, a white, 30 year-old, marijuana dealer responded similarly:

I’m not gonna fight nobody over some ten, twenty, thirty dollars, not even a hundred. That’s stupid....You get into a fight with em, the police come over and [ask] ‘What are you fighting about?’ ‘Oh, he owes me some money for weed.’ That’s nonsense.

The dealers were also hesitant to use violence because they understood that having a violent reputation, or a reputation for ‘drama,’ could dissuade potential customers from buying drugs from them, and this, in turn, could reduce future profits. Concern for profit also contributed to a third reason the dealers avoided violent reprisals—the time and effort taken to retaliate could be otherwise spent making money (see Jacobs, Topalli, and Wright, 2000). Referring to these latter two reasons, Jarod noted that “Drama in this business is bad for business, and bad business costs you money.” Finally, many of the dealers were reluctant to use violence because they had had strong stakes in middle-class culture and generally avoided violence and confrontation in all realms of their lives (see also, Jacques and Wright, 2015; see generally, Baumgartner, 1998). Natalie, a white, 24 year-old, marijuana dealer, did not even consider violence to be a viable option:

The last thing that I want is problems and violence and just drama at all....It's not like I'm gonna shoot the guy over something. You can be pissed off but then you just don't go back, you learn your lesson, that's all you can really do.

For some of the dealers, particularly those selling larger quantities or those selling drugs carrying more severe penalties, such as cocaine, crystal methamphetamine, and heroin, this aversion to violence dissipated once a debt reached a specific ceiling. Burt, a 28 year-old, Latino, cocaine, ecstasy, ketamine, and LSD supplier, described his view on this:

If it's a small amount, something you can write off,...you can walk off and not deal with a motherfucker anymore....Fifty bucks, a hundred bucks, it's a lot easier to make it than to deal with...[but] with bigger shit I've gotta make my people I...answer to happy, so if they [customers] fuck me up, I'm gonna go and make sure it's handled correctly.

Freddie, a Chinese-American, 30 year-old, cocaine, ecstasy, heroin, and OxyContin dealer concurred:

If it's under five hundred bucks, it wasn't worth it, you know, a lot of times when you get into this shit, I've watched it go back and forth, you know, people getting in fights back and forth, people getting shot over stupid shit....Most of the time...if it's not gonna put me in the poor house,...you could laugh that shit off and chalk it up to the game....But I would definitely try to get over a thousand back. That's a lot of money to let go and I gotta pay my guys.

As Burt and Freddie indicate, losing money on a front for these dealers often meant they would be unable to repay their own debts and may be punished by their suppliers as a result. Because of this, they were more likely to use violence in an effort to persuade others to repay them.

This subgroup of dealers also got aggressive with debtors who “ducked” (V) them or who outright refused to repay their debts:

If you just stole twenty dollars' worth of shit from me...[and] you...want to be an asshole and...tell me 'I jacked you,' okay, well I'm usually gonna try to hurt you...If you duck me or if I've tried to get ahold of you for two, three weeks now and I can't get ahold of you, I'm coming to find you...[because] you are spitting in my face. (Jarod, white, 30 year-old, crystal methamphetamine 'cook' and small time heroin dealer)

By not offering accounts to dealers, flaking customers challenged their superordinate roles. This then transformed how they viewed the conflict—what was a matter regarding money became instead a “respect thing” (Burt). This increased the cost of letting flaking go unaddressed because it challenged the dealers' conceptions of their own situational identities. This also increased the likelihood dealers would get aggressive in order to collect.

Annoying the Shit Out of Them. Rather than threatening or using violence to collect debts, many of the dealers verbally confronted their debtors. This consisted of reminding debtors of a debt at frequent intervals, either in person or by telephone. “Most people, if they are taking a little long,” John stated, “you might confront them and say, ‘What’s the fucking deal?’ or ‘Why [are] you avoiding me?’ or whatever.... just start calling them, like a fucking nuisance until you get...[your] money.” Dirty also reported annoying his debtors, but stressed that he did not use violence, “Try to get at em, you know, call em and shit...tell em what’s up,...[but] never resort...to nothing bad.” Mitch and Wyatt also responded similarly, but like Dirty, were careful to mention that they did not or would not become violent when attempting to collect:

I would be like, ‘What are you doing man?’ I’d be like, ‘Look, I need my money.’ I never got aggressive or anything but...I would let them hear about it until they paid me, so...Basically, yeah, just annoy the shit out of em. (Mitch, white, 21 year-old, marijuana dealer)

I would never destroy someone's personal property or...threaten anyone. I...might call em several times and be like, 'What's up?' You know? Just be straight up, like, 'Listen...I gave you this thinking you'd pay me back, you said that you would...now you're not. I don't really care what your situation is, what you told me is what you told me and this is what's going on so...You're still paying me back, like don't think that I'm forgetting so next time you see me I'm gonna ask you about it again.' I might not call you the next day but the next time I'm gonna see you, I'm still gonna remember that you still owe me money... I will definitely make [you] aware, you know, I'll bring it to your attention. (Wyatt, white, 32 year-old, marijuana dealer)

When annoying the shit out of their debtors, the dealers would sometimes try to “make [them] feel guilty” (B), or, in the words of Natalie, they would “appeal more to the emotional side.” The dealers used these “guilt trips” (B) most often against debtors with whom they had close social relationships. These individuals were good targets for this because they were reluctant to damage the dealers' valuations of them and/or empathized with the dealers' financial plight. This was unlike more socially removed debtors, who were not expected to express care about dealers beyond that required to continue buying.

Cutting Them Off. For all of the dealers, the above responses were typically coupled with discontinuing sales to the debtor. “The people that [don't] pay me,” Bugs explained, “I basically cut them off.” Snap concurred, stating that “If they came up short the first time or anything like that it was just bam, you're done.” John, a white, 34 year-old, psychedelic mushroom grower and supplier, described why the threat of being cut off from drug supplies could persuade debtors to repay their debts:

A lot of people survive on this shit, they can't without it. So like you cut them off, well man, you're taking food off their fucking table, you know?... I hate to be like that but fuck, how else do people fucking learn? I could talk to these people fucking till I'm blue in the face, it don't mean that they understand what I'm

saying. What they understand is fucking money....Take a fucking couple of hundred bucks out of some poor motherfucker's pocket, well he's going to straighten up the next time he comes around. I mean you don't have to be physically violent with anybody, you don't even have to be rude, you don't even have to raise your voice, you fucking take their money away and people fall into place really easy, you know, passive aggressive—I call it that!

As John indicated, in addition to its function as punishment, cutting debtors off also allowed the dealers to avoid violent confrontation. These qualities, along with the ease at which dealers could cut off debtors, made it an attractive option for dealers seeking to punish flaking customers. To cut debtors off, all dealers had to do was to “stop answering their phones” (Bugs) when they called. Although some flaking customers eventually made good on their debts, this did not always guarantee that their relationship with a dealer would return to normal. A number of the dealers, primarily those moving larger quantities, took flaking as a sign that a customer may be uncircumspect in other ways and could either draw police attention or put the dealer in further financial jeopardy. Because of this, they would continue refusing to conduct business with former debtors despite repayment. This had to be handled with care, however, lest they risk offending the debtor. Offended customers were considered a risk because it was generally assumed that they would be more likely to provide information to the police on arrest (see also, chapter 5). Anxious to avoid this likelihood and eager to sidestep confrontation for the same reasons, the dealers would often lie to the former debtors instead of outright informing them that they were being cut off. These lies were simple. If asked for drugs, dealers would say they were out of stock and needed to ‘re-up,’ or resupply, or that they had “stopped doing it” (Allen). This deflected blame away from the dealers, at least from their perspectives, and thereby diffused potential conflict.

A similar tactic was also used by some of the dealers to motivate regular customers that were consistently late on their repayments to make good on fronts in a timelier manner. Rather than permanently avoiding these customers, these dealers would withhold access to drugs for a time after receiving late payment. This treatment was typically used by suppliers against “workers” (Snap) that regularly ‘flipped’ large quantities for them. This allowed the suppliers to punish profitable workers without losing them. James a white, 28 year-old, marijuana supplier, had this problem with one of his more profitable workers:

This one guy that I was givin... about a quarter-pound at a time to on the front sometimes it was hard to get ahold a him to pay me so I could pay my guy.... I fronted out to this guy because... I paid a thousand bucks for that quarter pound, he'd pay me twelve-fifty, but I didn't hafta do anything for it. He'd just bring me the cash and there, boom there's two hundred and fifty bucks plus I paid for the weed... A lot of times I... wouldn't pick up as much next time and wouldn't include him on the next transaction just to kinda, be, you know, and I wouldn't necessarily clue em into that fact. I would just tell him I couldn't find anything... basically just tryin to get him to wanna be able to pay me on time... I'd tell him, 'Oh, well, if you had gotten to me on time I coulda gotten that but I didn't have the money to go pay the dude. Now he doesn't have any. So it was kinda one of those. I was tryin to manipulate him into paying me on time.

In addition to personally cutting debtors off from sales or fronts, the dealers would also gossip about them with other dealers. This gossip was intended to motivate these dealers to cut the debtors off as well. It was spread for the same two purposes underlying skeet gossip. First, dealers gossiped to prevent others from being victimized or, in the words of Terrence, to stop flaking customers from “do[ing] the same shit to other people.” Jack, a white, 22 year-old, marijuana supplier and small time pharmaceutical dealer, reported gossiping for this reason:

I have another buddy who kinda does the same thing I do... He was like, 'So-and-So was asking me to front him a sack,' and I was like, 'Dude, I wouldn't do it.'

And he's like, 'Yeah, I don't know.' I'm like, 'He never even paid me from that last one from like months ago.' He's like 'Really?' 'Yeah, I wouldn't do it dude, bad investment.'

The dealers also reported gossiping in order to punish flaking customers. Snap, a white, female, 28 year-old, ice (high quality crystal methamphetamine), LSD, marijuana, molly (MDMA), nitrous oxide, and sassafras (MDA) supplier, was so intent on doing so that she threatened to cut off her other customers if they did not avoid her debtors as well:

Interviewer: Did you ever tell your friends that these people were not paying you back?

Snap: Yeah

Interviewer: Did anyone stop dealing with them because of that?

Snap: Well *yeah*,...I was bringing most of the molly here for a while, so if they...were into molly [and] wanted that [or] all the speed...Anybody that I fucked with would stop dealing with them for sure...I can't say for other people outside my little realm but they didn't want to get cut off.

The dealers were aware that they would do little more than annoy or cut off customers defaulting on fronts and thereby lose their financial investments. Because of this, some attempted to soften this financial blow by limiting the amount they would front any given customer:

The way I buffer myself on that is if I am going to loan you something out, to help you out, then it ain't gonna to be what you want. I've had people ask me for a considerable amount and I'm like, 'Are you fucking crazy?' It's like fucking mortgage payments! 'How about you take a couple of these and we see how you do?' (John, mushroom grower and supplier)

I mean first off it would be something small and they would hafta guarantee that the money would be back either that same day or the very next morning. Like guarantee that they call me, I wouldn't hafta call them, I don't have to chase them. And that's why I usually start with something small so if they do any of those things they can just keep it and I wouldn't have to fuck with em anymore.... I'd

let people keep fucking probably up to five hundred dollars of shit before and not given it a second thought. (V, white, male, 28 year-old, cocaine, crystal methamphetamine, ecstasy, and heroin supplier).

This strategy also eased the dealers' cognitive dissonance at essentially letting debtors abscond with their drugs. To explain, although the dealers withheld themselves from getting aggressive with debtors or, much of the time, from confronting them at all, they were cognizant that in doing so they were permitting others to take advantage of them. To manage this dissonance, the dealers would presume prior to fronting someone that they would not see financial return. This removed responsibility for the loss from the debtor and placed it onto the dealers instead. Wyatt, a marijuana dealer, described this process:

When I front somebody, ... sometimes I'll go against my better [judgment]. I will kinda take a risk on someone... and then if I do that and it doesn't come back then I blame it on myself, not necessarily the person. Because... when I made the deal and handed them over the stuff, in my head I'm telling myself 'Well, if I get this back then I'll give them more, if I don't I'm a moron.' ... But... unless it was a large quantity of money I'd be, it'd be different. But a couple hundred bucks... I'm not gonna go wreck someone's car, you know, harass their family or... it's just not worth it to me, especially when it's partially my fault for letting someone that I didn't trust fully do something.

Natalie, also a marijuana dealer, expressed a similar sentiment:

I feel like, it's kind of my fault, I took the risk, I gave it to her. I can't really be upset if something happened. If anybody has to take a hit it's me, I guess, if she's not willing to do it... It's kinda part of it, you know, it sucks but what else are you gonna do?

Here Wyatt and Natalie absolved themselves of the need to aggressively punish flaking debtors by reidentifying them as not responsible for the loss and thus unworthy of punishment.

How Accounts Impact Informal Threats¹⁸

Skeeting

When accounts for skeeting were honored, or accepted, in these dealers' respective drug markets, they prevented victims from avoiding skeet dealers and/or gossiping about them. Skeeted customers given acceptable accounts simply tolerated the offense and moved on from it. Bugs, a white, male, 33 year-old, DMT, ecstasy, and marijuana supplier, recounted such a situation after skeeting one of his customers:

Interviewer: Have you ever sold somebody something that was fake or wasn't so good?

Bugs: Once, a hit of acid, it was nothin but a piece of paper. I sold it to this dude for seven bucks when I was 16 years old. He told me it was bunk. I told him that I didn't know what he was talking about, which was a bold face lie....I kept the dude's seven bucks. I told him everybody else that ate it got off on it and I don't know what he was talking about.

Interviewer: Did you ever sell him anything else?

Bugs: Yeah, but never anything bunk again.

Interviewer: Was he weird with you at all after that?

Bugs: No.

Here Bugs sidestepped blame for skeeting his customer by shifting the blame onto the customer. Because the customer no longer viewed Bugs as responsible for the offense, he did not avoid him or spread gossip.

It was more common for victims of skeeting in these markets to demand redress before they would tolerate their victimization (see also, Jacques and Wright, 2015 on

¹⁸ Herein I do not provide a typology of the accounts used by drug dealers. I instead focus on how the various accounts offered within the respective drug markets of the dealers interviewed impact decision-making and deterrence among them. I do so because the range of potential accounts is almost infinite (Tedeschi and Reiss, 1981) and an examination of the minute variation among the accounts in these drug markets would draw the focus of the present chapter far beyond its intended scope.

‘negotiation’). James summed the general attitude among the dealers in his comment above, wherein he claimed that he “wouldn’t deal with” skeet dealers if they did not “compensate” him. Mitch, a marijuana dealer, provided a similar example but from his perspective as a skeet dealer:

Mitch: Actually one time (laughs uproariously) this kid, he was like ‘Hey man, you know I got a fucking scale...I just got in my car and it was like point four [grams] short.’ I was like ‘Hmm.’ I just kind of played it off. I was like, ‘Well maybe my scale is fucked up.’ He came back and I gave him like an extra point five.

Interviewer: Did he continue dealing with you after that?

Mitch: A couple times.

Among the dealers and users who traded in heroin, however, compensation was not needed to elicit toleration. Mud, a white, 30 year-old, heroin dealer, recounted a time in which he tolerated being skeeted despite a lack of compensation:

Mud: Nine times out of ten I go deal with this one guy that I’ve been dealing with forever....We...got into an argument one time...cuz it was light, it was really light, and he didn’t think it. We got into it pretty bad cuz it was...almost three hundred dollars’ worth of shit....It was one of those times where I wouldn’t let it go, cuz it was a decent amount of money...and he would not acknowledge that something was wrong. He was like ‘I know that I did not screw you over, I know for a fact that you got this’ and blah-blah-blah. It ended up being that he made a mistake cuz he met up with somebody at the same time he was meeting up with me....I came up to his driver side window and this other person came up to his passenger side window and instead of going like this (pantomimes holding dope in each hand and holding them out to their respective sides) he went like that (does the same but crosses his arms) on accident.

Interviewer: Did he give you more dope?

Mud: No, finally he ended up saying something to me the next day because that person came to him the next day and was like ‘Hey, thanks for hooking it up’...Then he finally figured it out.

Interviewer: So he never gave you any money or dope though?

Mud: No...but...at the end of the day...my relationship with him is way more important to me.

As Mud indicates, heroin dealers and users are less likely to avoid individuals that have skeeted them because a decent heroin plug, or one that consistently has good dope, is hard to come by. While retail-level plugs are often receptive to taking on new customers, locating them can be difficult because the harsh penalties for heroin distribution prevents them from openly advertising their wares and makes them wary of new faces. Moreover, individuals that have good plugs are reluctant to share them because they can make additional profit by ‘middling,’ or picking up drugs for others in exchange for a small fee. Thus, heroin dealers and users consider the small losses they may take from tolerating skeeting less costly than losing a plug altogether.

Flaking

When honored, accounts for flaking also reduced the severity and/or the certainty of a dealer’s response to being “ripped off” (John). Dealers that would otherwise get aggressive with debtors would instead cut them off if given acceptable accounts for flaking. Like accounts for skeeting, however, this reduction in the severity of punishment was contingent on whether these accounts were accompanied by repayment. The dealers would not alter how they responded without repayment but at times they would give debtors more time to make good:

The one...person...that doesn’t call, yeah I’m gonna go make it correct. The other person that calls, you know, I might give em a little bit of sympathy, yeah, for a short period of time...[If] they make it correct,...alright, it’s your last time, kick rocks, ain’t fucking with you no more. Thank you for making it right...but it ain’t gonna happen again. But the other that doesn’t call or whatnot, he runs...I know people in a lot of states. I mean it’s a small world, you run into people all the time

and if it's somebody within the circle, somebody's gonna say something. (Burt, cocaine, ecstasy, ketamine, and LSD supplier)

Here Burt implies that no matter where debtors run to, he will eventually track them down and violently retaliate. But if given an account, he will give debtors more time to make repayment and then cut them off rather than get aggressive.

The dealers that relied on cutting flaking customers off were also more likely to give them more time to make repayment if given an account. Dirty would be "a little more sympathetic" instead of just telling debtors "straight up [he] needed that money." If the debtors then followed these accounts by making good on their debt, the dealers would sometimes just cease fronting them instead of cutting them off completely. "If they've flaked on you once," John stressed, "they're going to flake on you again....After that you've gotta have money up front, I don't care about your problems at all." Mud responded similarly, "If...they pay their debt and all that stuff, I'll still deal with em and everything, but I will not be fronting them anything anymore."

It was more common, however, for the dealers to forgive flaking completely and continue conducting business as usual with a debtor:

Jacob: One time I [fronted] a quarter-ounce [of heroin] to a dude...I sold to quite a bit, usually a quarter-ounce every few days, and he told me that as soon as he left my house he went to, uh, was going down [Interstate] 70, was gonna cross the bridge to Illinois...and...before he crossed the bridge he went to this gas station on...North Grand, or one of those shitty-ass gas stations where he shouldn't be at, and bought Dormin [a sleep-aid used to cut heroin]....As soon as he came out with the Dormin...like five black dudes just jumped him and took all his dope and his money....It took a while but he eventually paid me.

Interviewer: So you just let him...off?

Jacob: Yeah, what are you gonna do? You have to.

Natalie, a marijuana dealer, expressed a similar sense of futility in regards to pursuing options other than toleration after receiving an account:

I've...had one person that I fronted an ounce to that currently still owes me money and I haven't dealt with it yet....It was a friend of mine and she ended up getting busted...There's now two hundred and ninety dollars outstanding....When they pulled her over they had eight baggies all rolled up into eighths...so she got busted for selling....She sent me a text message that night...saying 'So yeah,...I just got out of Franklin County jail'...I'm giving her the benefit of the doubt...there's not much you can really do about it....It's been about five weeks now....I texted her...and she was like...'I'm gonna pay you half this Friday, half next Friday.' Okay that's fine....Friday rolls around, she said, 'Oh can I come Saturday? I'm gonna be out that way, it would be easier for me'...Sure. I just told her 'That's fine. I understand, take your time.'...There's not much you can do about it.

Gus, a white, 29 year-old, marijuana supplier, described two situations in which he honored accounts and restored his relationship with debtors. In the first, Gus lost two ounces of marijuana after leaving them with his friend for safekeeping. Shortly thereafter the friend phoned to inform Gus that he had just been busted with the marijuana. Gus described the phone call and his reaction:

My friend was so perfect about it saying 'I left it out, I fucked up,...I'm going to pay back you money. That's my priority.'...The fact that he gave a shit enough...to be like 'Look, I owe you money and I'm going to pay you back'...is important because he never paid me back and he never will pay me back...but I'm okay with that, I feel good...because I...still have my good friend....So I was like, 'Well fuck it dude, you're good, you're my buddy, you've done all the right things in my book.'

In the second, a regular female customer flaked on him:

A girl owed me money and her excuse to me was 'I'm so sorry, I gave it to this dude and he said that he would have the money later that night and he's been skeetin me, so I hafta skeet you.'...[She] didn't do anything wrong. She said, 'I'm so sorry for this, this is so frustrating, I don't like to do business this way.' I love hearing that because that's my biggest key. I don't do it that way, I don't do business that way....Anyway it all worked out good. I was calm and cool...because...I didn't have a good reason to...get too mad...because she's in

good communication with me, she's saying the right things, which are: Why it's not there,...how it's wrong. That's easy, it's good, awesome. So that worked out great, she got the money and I'm still doing business with her....Other people...I say 'Alright, I'm done dealing with you cuz you didn't handle it the right way.'

If these customers had failed to call Gus with an account, he would have, at the very least, cut them off from drug supplies. Their accounts, however, manipulated his response such that he forgave them for flaking and returned their relationship to concord.

Underlying all outcomes of skeeting or flaking, regardless of whether accounts are offered and honored, is that substantive issues have transformed into issues concerning the identities of the dealers and their associates (see Hewitt and Stokes, 1975: 9). When dealers skeet or customers flake, they are reidentified as deviants by the individuals they have offended. In the words of John, "You never look at them the same if they've flaked on you once." These offended parties then punish them because they view deviants as individuals worthy of negative treatment (see generally, Goffman, 1959; Toby, 1952). Moreover, skeeting and flaking also threaten the situational identities, or face, of offended parties because these persons have become invested in maintaining the rules mandating that it is unacceptable to be skeeted or to be flaked on. This also encourages them impose punishment for skeeting or flaking because it reinforces their commitment to the rule and their pre-conflict identities (see generally, Goffman, 1967: 23, 50).

By offering an account for their actions, skeet dealers and flaking customers attempt to alter their deviant identities in the eyes of those they have offended. More specifically, they are attempting to manipulate these offended parties into viewing them as they had prior to the offense (see generally, Goffman, 1971; Orbuch, 1997).

Furthermore, in offering an account for skeeting or flaking, dealers and customers also seek to preserve the impression offended parties have of how these dealers and customers view them (see generally, Goffman, 1967). Put another way, accounts eliminate or alter punishment for skeeting or flaking by disassociating these actions from the individuals responsible and by demonstrating that these individuals respect the roles of those they have offended.

Contingencies

As mentioned earlier, skeeted customers would honor, or accept, any account from a skeet dealer provided that he or she “make things right” (Burt). In regards to flaking, however, several factors were found that influenced whether a dealer would honor an account and alter his or her response to an unpaid debt.

Content and Style. Many of the dealers specified accounts that they considered to be more ‘believable’ for flaking. “There’s some circumstances where you’ve just gotta take somebody at their word,” Jarod stressed, “either they got busted...[or] they got robbed or jacked.” Jack also added the excuse that “So-and-So hasn’t paid me back yet, so I can’t pay you back,” and more rarely used excuses such as, “Dude, I totally just lost that sack you just sold me,” or “I washed it my jeans last night.” Jack considered these latter two believable because they were “so stupid” no one would consider using them as an account unless they actually transpired. Finally, the dealers also believed debtors who were “straight honest” (Dirty) and admitted that they had “fucked up” (Freddie, Gus) and

“did all the dope” (Jarod). If these dealers considered an account to be truthful, they were less likely to punish a debtor.

A small number of dealers, however, had become so jaded that they refused to entertain the veracity of any account. “I pretty much don’t believe anything that anybody says to me,” Mud declared. Perry, a white, 35 year-old, marijuana supplier, held the same viewpoint but was more vitriolic:

Motherfuckers do come up with some bullshit and I don’t even want to hear it. I don’t even give a fuck. Bottom line is, dude, no I don’t want to hear this bullshit. I don’t give a fuck how your day went.

For these jaded dealers, the truthfulness of an account was unimportant and, as such, did not influence their responses to flaking.

What was important to these dealers, as well as those who were concerned with the veracity of an account, was the style in which the account was offered. As used here, style refers to whether the delivery of the account is appropriate given the relationship between the parties involved (Scott and Lyman, 1968). If this style demonstrated deference for the dealer, or an appreciation of and respect for the identity the dealer claimed in the interaction (see generally, Goffman, 1967: 19, 56-57), the dealer was more likely to be “sympathetic” (Dirty) and reduce the severity of his or her response. In the words of Burt, “It [all] comes down to a respect thing.” The first step to displaying respect, according to Gus, was “communication, communication, communication.” By communicating an account in the first place, whether believable or fantastical, debtors demonstrated that they viewed dealers as worthy of receiving an account. If this account was delivered in a manner befitting the debtor’s subordinate role in the interaction it further reinforced the dealer’s perception that the debtor viewed him or her with respect

(see generally, Goffman, 1967). If not shown what he or she perceived as the proper level of respect from a debtor, a dealer was less likely to honor an account, and thus more likely to punish the debtor as if he or she had not been given an account (see generally, Scott and Lyman, 1968).

This appreciation of deference only went so far. The dealers seldom accepted accounts from flaking debtors a second time, no matter the content or style. “Anybody’s gonna get one shot,” Jacob noted, “[but] you fuck up a couple times, you ruin your reputation.” Perry put it similarly, “It’s like, what’s that saying, if it happens once, shame on you, if it happens twice, shame on me.” This was also echoed by Dirty, a heroin dealer, “If someone would bullshit me on paying me more than twice then I’d end up just saying, “Well, I can’t front you no more.”

Relationships. Aside from the content and style of an account, the relationship between a dealer and a flaking customer also impacted whether an account was honored. The dealers commonly gave regular customers or close friends and family more leeway when they flaked. “I’m totally okay with my friends being slow with giving me my money because they’re my friends,” Gus claimed, “whereas the other guys, I give like two minutes.” Perry waxed likewise, “I’m still a softy sometimes, I don’t give a fuck, if it’s one of my buddies.” Allen also followed suit, “I’m not gonna ruin a friendship...over a nug [a bud of marijuana] it’s not worth it to me. I’d rather, like I said, ‘You don’t have the money? Do what you can do.’” Freddie concurred as well:

I got like...two friends...[I’ve] known em for so long I can’t cut em out. I know if I lend them twenty, fifty bucks I’m never gonna see it again. It’s like one guy is like my brother...I just can’t not help him when I can. (Freddie)

Even Snap, one of the more heavily involved suppliers, admitted to making exceptions for flaking workers she was close to:

Snap: Right, like if they came up short the first time or if anything like that it was just bam, you're done.

Interviewer: What if they came up short but they'd been working with you a while and they were good?

Snap: Well...it just depends, you know what I mean, depending on the situation. If they were short but there was still work, okay, [a] couple of times I did give more work and he...the one guy [a regular worker] made it up but then the second time he got more in debt with me so he was cut off after that.

Although the dealers were more forgiving of their regular customers and their friends and relatives, they still expected to receive accounts from them. A lack of an account from these debtors was viewed as even more disrespectful because it spoke of the debtors' view of the dealers' roles as dealers *and* as friends or family members. The dealers were aware that being more lenient to friends, family, and regulars could ultimately hurt their profits, but they did so despite of this because of their emotional attachment to these persons. "Your emotional tie outweighs your business need at that moment," Justin explained, "later on you're like 'Fuck!' kicking yourself."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The goal of the present chapter was to investigate how accounts influence deterrence among a group of active drug dealers. The findings reveal that drug dealers give and receive accounts for skeeting and flaking. When dealers and users do not receive accounts from skeet dealers they commonly react by not dealing with them anymore and by gossiping with others. When dealers are not offered accounts from flaking debtors it is

uncommon for them to get aggressive unless the dealers move large quantities or traffic in drugs carrying severe legal penalties, such as cocaine, crystal methamphetamine, or heroin. But even these dealers are reluctant to use violence unless a debt reaches a specific amount. It is far more common for dealers to annoy the shit out of flaking debtors and then cut them off. When dealers and users receive accounts for being skeeted or flaked on, these verbal statements influence the severity, and oftentimes the certainty, of these punishments. This influence, however, is contingent on whether those offering accounts demonstrate respect for those they have offended and their relationship with them prior to the offense. These functions of accounts impacted the deterrence process and decision-making among these dealers and their associates in several ways.

Although skeeting and flaking seldom, if ever, directly result in formal punishment, they are crimes nonetheless. Each involve an actor intentionally perverting the truth in order to persuade others to part with something of value and as such are considered fraud under federal law (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010). Thus, offenders committing these crimes *can* be deterred by the threat of direct formal apprehension in addition to being deterred by informal threats and the formal threats triggered by these. Therefore, the manner in which drug dealers and their associates manage the potential costs of these crimes speaks to understanding of the deterrence process.

Accounts, and more specifically, dealers' knowledge of the background expectancies of fellow drug market participants, shape this process by discounting dealers' perceptions of the likelihood of being informally punished. To explain, recall that the background expectancies of a social group define what types of statements can be

considered accounts, the way in which they should be delivered, and what accounts are routinely honored within the group (Scott and Lyman, 1968). Background expectancies, then, are part of what every member of a social group ‘knows.’ Skeeting dealers and flaking customers are commonly members of the same social circles as their victims; therefore, they may be aware of the types of accounts likely to influence the responses of these victims. Put another way, because drug dealers and users typically rip off their own ilk, they may “share in the universe of understanding and cultural ideology of” these victims and may therefore be “aware of what kinds of reasons or explanations [they] will buy” (Lofland, 1969: 179). Because they are armed with this knowledge prior to contemplating an offense, dealers and customers contemplating skeeting or flaking prospectively rely on using a specific account or range of accounts thought likely get them ‘off the hook’ if discovered or caught. This, in turn, lowers their assessments of the costs associated with skeeting or flaking, which then increases the probability that they will undertake these crimes.

The regular giving and receiving of accounts for skeeting and flaking among drug dealers also shapes their responses to formal threats. Despite their reluctance to become aggressive, many dealers recognize that at times it is appropriate to use violence or the threat thereof as a means to collect outstanding debts. Failing to do so may engender feelings of shame and embarrassment within them. To evade these internal punishments, dealers may purposively avoid situations that are likely to impel them to commit violence. But if dealers are confident that customers will offer them accounts for flaking, and thus absolve them of the need for violence, they may be less likely to avoid these situations because their self-identities will no longer be threatened. This reduces the cost

associated with criminal acts otherwise deemed too risky, which, in turn, increases the range of viable criminal opportunities open to the dealers. And with an increase in opportunity may come an increase in offending as well.

A second way accounts shape dealers' responses to formal threats bears similarity to the impact of 'taking care' of customers on these responses (see chapter 5). Through honoring accounts, dealers permit customers who have offended them to escape with lesser or no punishment. As a result, customers may identify dealers as 'cool' and may be less likely to snitch on them or to spread negative gossip about them. Whether this is actually the case is beside the point. What is important is that dealers presume that this is so. This lowers their probabilistic assessments of risk, or in other words, their estimations of the odds of being caught and punished. And this, of course, may embolden them to continue offending at the same or a greater rate.

These direct and indirect influences of accounts on dealers' assessments of risk and their resulting behavior contribute to understanding of how deterrence is a fluid, reciprocal process. Dealers are not static recipients of deterrents. They instead dynamically react to these deterrents in an effort to shape their influence. This is not a revelatory finding. The active role offenders play in the deterrence process has been recognized for some time (see, e.g., Clarke and Cornish, 1985; Horney and Marshall, 1992; Jacobs and Cherbonneau, 2014; Saltzman et al., 1982). What the present chapter contributes to current understanding of the deterrence process is that offenders can use both behavioral *and* verbal mechanisms to manipulate the properties of threatened consequences. Moreover, the present chapter also demonstrates that offenders can use these mechanisms throughout each of the stages of punishment—detection, apprehension,

and the actual imposition of punishment. This function of accounts further emphasizes the need to conceptually distinguish the stages of punishment when examining how offenders respond to threats and how experiences with punishment and punishment avoidance impact the deterrence process among them.

The present chapter also adds to criminological understanding of accounts more broadly. Prior criminological explorations of accounts have been largely limited to how these devices are used by individuals to assuage guilt following their failure to live up to internalized norms (see, e.g., Bohner et al., 1998; Cressey, 1953; Garot, 2010; Jacobs and Copes, 2015; Matza, 1964). Building on a sizable body of work outside of criminology (see, e.g., Harvey, Weber, and Orbuch, 1997; Goffman, 1971; Scott and Lyman, 1968; McLaughlin, Cody, and O’Hair, 1983; Orbuch, 1997), these findings demonstrate that offenders also use accounts to avoid getting into trouble with others, or in different words, to manipulate external threats. This is not to say that accounts do not impact offenders’ self-concepts following crimes. Rather, it is meant to highlight that accounts can also serve as a mechanism by which offenders can influence the behavior of others—especially when this behavior threatens them with undesired outcomes.

By reducing the certainty and severity of punishment among the dealers interviewed, accounts likely have an inhibitive effect on the overall levels of violence in these dealers’ respective markets. Whether accounts have this same effect in other types of drug markets has yet to be examined. It is likely that in drug markets populated largely by strangers, such as urban, open-air crack and heroin markets, accounts will have less impact because this widespread anonymity may truncate participants’ knowledge of the universe of acceptable accounts within the markets. In addition to this, the discounting

influence of accounts on violence in these types of markets may be overshadowed by powerful cultural norms dictating violent redress for even the most minor of offenses (see, e.g., Goldstein et al., 1997; Jacobs, 1999; Ousey and Lee, 2007; Reuter, 2009).

Without further study, however, the variable degree to which accounts impact aggregate levels of violence in other types of illicit drug markets remains uncertain.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The goal of this dissertation was to examine how various forms of talk shape three key components of the deterrence process: offenders' perceptions of rules and threats, the factors conditioning the relationship between these perceptions and offenders' fear, and offenders' responses to rule enforcement following detection and apprehension. More specifically, the dissertation was an investigation of the role gossip plays in molding offenders' perceptions of deterrents, the function of humor and threats and promises in shaping the fear stemming from these perceptions, and the manner in which accounts guide rule enforcement. To inform this investigation, data was gathered from 33 active drug dealers using semi-structured interviews and systematic observations. These data were then examined for recurrent themes regarding the dealers' use of gossip, humor, threats and promises, and accounts using qualitative data analysis methods (see Charmaz, 2006; Spradley, 1979, 1980). In the following sections I first summarize the major findings of each of the chapters. I then explicate the key theoretical implications suggested by these findings, describe the limitations of the study, and conclude by discussing policy implications.

In chapter 3 it was demonstrated that gossip, acting as vicarious experience with punishment and punishment avoidance, plays a significant role in shaping drug dealers' responses to the threat of police detection. Drug dealers actively hunt for gossip about their associates getting busted, acting sketchy, and avoiding detection. They then act on this gossip by avoiding individuals it has identified as potential threats. These findings highlighted that the deterrent capabilities of rules and threats are partially dependent on the communication channels by which potential offenders learn of them. And, moreover,

that the characteristics of these channels (i.e., the relationship between the source and subject) can amplify or attenuate the impact of rules and threats on offenders' responses.

Chapter 4 illustrated that humor plays a critical role moderating drug dealers' perceptions of rules and threats and their internal responses to these perceptions. Drug dealers rely on humor to reinterpret their understanding of the costs and benefits of dealing and their own situational roles when introduced to potential deterrents. This illustrated that offenders alter both their behavior *and* their cognition when responding to rules and threats. In doing so, they reduce their fear of the potential consequences of their crimes, which, in turn, encourages continued offending among them.

The findings presented in chapter 5 revealed that drug dealers also moderate their fear of incurring formal consequences by using threats and promises to prevent customers from either purposively or inadvertently mobilizing police. They use threats of nonviolence to prevent customers from using bad etiquette or, in other words, from behaving in uncircumspect ways thought likely to point police attention toward them. They also implicitly promise customers that they will continue to take care of them, or provide them with preferential treatment, in exchange for the customers not snitching. These findings suggest that not only do offenders make efforts to manipulate the certainty of punishment by altering their own behavior but they also attempt to do so by making efforts to alter the behavior of others as well. These efforts lower offenders' perceptions of the likelihood of detection by decreasing their perceptions that others will commit or continue to commit these types of actions. Provided that perceived rewards remain stable, the reduction in risk attributed to these efforts then increases the likelihood the offense will be carried out.

In chapter 6 it was found that drug dealers and their associates also make efforts to reshape threatened punishments following detection and apprehension. When drug dealers and their associates give or receive accounts for skeeting and flaking these accounts lessen the severity and the certainty of the punishments typically given for these offenses. The degree of this impact, however, is dependent on the deference those offering accounts display to offended parties and the relationship between the two prior to the offense. Many offenders are aware of this function of accounts. Because of this, they may approach potentially conflictual situations, including crimes, armed with prepared accounts. Their knowledge that these accounts may get them off the hook if caught may then reduce their assessments of risk; and this may increase the likelihood they will undertake the act in question.

When taken together, the findings presented in each of these chapters suggest several theoretical implications. First and foremost, these findings indicate that criminologists should pay more attention to examining talk. This is, of course, not to say that criminology has completely ignored it. For instance, it has long been recognized that offenders rely on talk to communicate with one another without exposing their criminal identities to bystanders (see, e.g., Gambetta, 2009; Sutherland, 1965[1937]: 16-18), to locate potential targets (see, e.g., Shaw, 1930: 70; Wright and Decker, 1994, 1997), to facilitate the progression of a crime (see, e.g., Katz, 1988: ch. 5; Sutherland, 1965[1937]: 53; Wright and Decker, 1997: 102-108), and to prevent victims from mobilizing police (see, e.g., Sutherland, 1965[1937]: 60; Wright and Decker, 1997: 117; see also, Goffman, 1952). Although criminologists have noted the various functions of talk in the prologue, execution, and aftermath of crime, there are far broader theoretical implications that

should be explored. For instance, the functions of talk have significant implications for learning theory, social disorganization, and, especially, the deterrence paradigm.

The present study has examined talk within the context of the deterrence framework. It has demonstrated that talk plays key mediating and moderating functions in the process extending from the introduction of rules or threats to offenders' behavioral responses. Without talk it would be difficult, and oftentimes impossible, to learn about the experiences of others with threatened sanctions. Moreover, the character of talk, that is, the characteristics of the individuals speaking and the relationship between them, shapes this vicarious experience. Prior research has demonstrated that vicarious experience with punishment and punishment avoidance have significant influence on an individual's assessments of risk (see, e.g., Minor and Harry, 1982; Saltzman et al., 1982; Stafford and Warr, 1993; Tittle 1980). Hence, studies of perceptual deterrence, and general deterrence more broadly, that fail to consider avenues of talk and their impact on individuals' perceptions of deterrents may suffer from misspecification. More specifically, these studies may fail to capture the impact of offenders' vicarious experiences with punishment and the vehicles carrying this experience and instead attribute it to the objective properties of the deterrents themselves.

Talk is also one of the key ways by which offenders condition their cognition of deterrents and their subsequent assessments of risk. Offenders perceive that they can shape or control the anticipated behavior of others, including that which may put them at risk of being punished and that which involves the imposition of punishment, through talk. Talking also allows offenders to reimagine threats and their relationships with them. These functions of talk inhibit offenders' assessments of risk and thereby influence their

responses to formal and informal prohibitions. Again, studies examining perceptual deterrence, and in particular those exploring restrictive deterrence, may be misspecified lest they account for these functions of talk.

Talk also likely plays significant functions in other theoretical explanations of crime and criminal decision-making. For instance, consider talk from a social learning perspective. In brief, social learning posits that normative and deviant behaviors alike are learned through the modeling of others' behavior, the degree to which one associates with others who support or denigrate specific behaviors (i.e., differential association), and the experienced or anticipated rewards and punishments that follow behavior (i.e., differential reinforcement). The theory also suggests that individuals primarily learn definitions favorable to criminal and deviant behavior through social interaction (see Akers, 1977; Akers and Jensen, 2006; Akers et al., 1979; Sutherland, 1947). Of particular relevance to the present discussion is the perspective's emphasis on the influence of "words [and] responses" in this learning process (Akers and Jensen, 2006: 41).

It is largely through talking with associates or witnessing them converse with others that one learns their orientations or attitudes concerning deviant acts (i.e., their definitions), receives reinforcement for his or her behavior, or is given or offered other social rewards (Akers and Jensen, 2006). Furthermore, social learning theory proposes that associations characterized by greater intensity, or less relational distance (see Black, 1976, 1998), will have greater impact on one's behavior. It can be argued that the frequency and length of one's verbal conversations with others play a key role in the development of relational intensity. The persons you are closest to are likely those that you talk to the most and spend the most time talking with. Because of the key roles talk

plays in each of the components of this theory, future considerations of social learning should closely examine whether and how different forms of talk have variable influence in the learning process. Questions that warrant investigation include: What are the different forms of verbal approval and disapproval? What impact does each of these different forms of talk have on the learning process? Do different forms of talk have variable influence on the learning of criminal and deviant behavior? In addition to these questions, future research on social learning theory should also investigate the extent of the influence the frequency, duration, and different forms of talk have on the intensity of the relationships between individuals.

Also consider the role of talk in theories centered on the importance and influence of social networks and social ties in the control of crime at the community level. These include the recent systemic reformulations of the social disorganization framework suggesting that the breadth and quality of private, parochial, and public social ties held by community members partially determine the prevalence of crime within their communities (see, e.g., Bursik, 1999; Bursik and Grasmick, 1993; Sampson and Groves, 1989). They also include more recent refinements of these systemic reformulations positing that social ties are necessary, but not sufficient, to control crime at the community level. These recent refinements instead propose that communities must also be characterized by high degrees of collective efficacy, or social cohesion and shared expectations for control, to effectively control crime at the community level (see, e.g., Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush, 2001; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997; Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls, 1999).

Although one's perceptions of social cohesion and trust that others will intervene for the common good can certainly develop through repeated nonverbal interactions with neighbors and other community members, it is likely that repeated *verbal* interactions have a stronger impact on the development of these perceptions and this trust. Consider the difference between merely waving to your neighbor every day when collecting the mail and having a conversation with him or her instead. Because it is relatively difficult to express complex information nonverbally, it is likely that the latter scenario would provide you with a better idea regarding your neighbor's normative views and willingness to intervene in unwanted behavior. Talking with your neighbor then would likely have greater impact on your sense of collective efficacy. Moreover, the forms of talk exchanged between community members may also have varying impact on how these members develop and engender collective efficacy. Surely gossiping has a greater impact on one's sense of his or her neighbors' views on crime and deviance than humor. Humorous interchanges, however, may be more effective at building a sense of cohesion. Without further exploration, this remains unknown. Thus, future examinations of collective efficacy should collect information on talk at the community level, as this may be partially responsible for variations in collective efficacy, and thus crime, across communities. Community efficacy may not require that your neighbor or local police officer be your friend (see Sampson, 2008: 153), but it may benefit if you talked to them every once and a while.

The present study also has theoretical implications regarding the prevalence of drug-related violence across drug markets. Until recently, drug market research has focused disproportionately on drug markets situated in disadvantaged, urban contexts

(see, e.g., Bourgois, 2003; Goldstein, 1985; Goldstein et al., 1997; Jacobs, 1999; Mieczkowski, 1986; Williams, 1990). This research has offered a cogent argument for why these types of drug markets are characterized by relatively high rates of drug-related violence. In brief, it suggests that the participants in these markets are prone to address conflict with violence because they subscribe to a code of the street—a set of informal rules dictating that interpersonal conflict is best handled aggressively if one is to save face and prevent future victimization—that has arisen from social disadvantage, participation in streetlife, and intense law enforcement scrutiny (Anderson, 1999). The present study joins a growing body of work attempting to further illuminate the reasons underlying the high rates of violence in these drug markets by exploring how the offenders in other types of drug markets resolve conflict nonviolently (see, e.g., Jacques and Wright, 2008, 2015).

The relative lack of violence in the drug markets of the dealers interviewed was largely due to a general aversion to violence among the dealers and their associates. This aversion stemmed from several factors. First and foremost, the dealers and their associates were fearful that violence may attract undue police attention. They were wary of attracting police attention first because they wanted to avoid the direct costs of formal punishment—potential financial loss and restriction of freedom. But many of the dealers were also keen to avoid police contact because they were aware that involvement with the criminal justice system may impinge on their occupational, educational, and familial roles as well (see also, Jacques and Wright, 2015). This is unlike the dealers in urban, disadvantaged markets who, because of structural disadvantage and cultural mandates, are more concerned with status achieved in their roles as drug dealers. To achieve and

maintain this status, these dealers must exhibit aggressive behavior. This, along with a perceived lack of access to law, promotes violent redress among them (Anderson, 1999; Jacobs, 2000; Jacobs and Wright, 2006). The dealers in the present study were also reluctant to use violence for fear word of it might spread and sour their business relationships with their trade partners. This stemmed from an understanding that their customers were unaccustomed to and uncomfortable with displays of aggression and as such were likely to avoid individuals whom they assumed were violent. Again, this differs from what we know about urban, disadvantaged markets in that many of the participants in those markets do not shy away from aggressive dealers because cultural mandates have taught them that aggression is normative.

Another explanation behind the aversion to violence among dealers like those included in the present study lay in the cultural milieu they are raised in and the social structure giving rise to it. The majority of the dealers had middle-class backgrounds. And those that did not had adopted middle-class approaches to conflict management because they were either attempting to scale the social ladder or were reluctant to frighten away customers. The middle-class, particularly middle-class individuals residing in suburban areas, is characterized by social advantage (i.e., access to educational and occupational opportunities, and relatively stable family lives), a lack of streetlife, independence between social units, and relative freedom from undue police attention (see generally, Baumgartner, 1988; see also, Jacques and Wright, 2015). These structural characteristics promote a cultural ideology that regards conflict as something best avoided. The dealers were guided by this ethos in each of their social roles, including their roles as drug dealers.

In addition to this, because middle-class individuals typically suffer from little negative interaction with police, they often develop an understanding that the law is accessible, and better yet, an acceptable way to solve grievances (see generally, Baumgartner, 1988; Black, 1976) Urban, disadvantaged drug sellers, on the other hand, often have an adversarial relationship with the law. This reduces their perceptions of the accessibility of law and promotes cultural mandates among them dictating that grievances should be personally handled if one does not want to be viewed as weak or as easy prey (Anderson, 1999; Jacobs and Wright, 2006). Dealers from middle-class backgrounds, then, learn to reach out to the law or others for assistance when in conflictual situations whereas their urban, disadvantaged counterparts do not.

Reaching out to others for assistance, including representatives of the law, typically requires verbal communication. Socializing middle-class persons to personally avoid conflict and to instead rely on others to manage it then concomitantly socializes them to use talk when addressing all problems—including those that arise in the course of illicit activity. Although drug dealers from these backgrounds may perceive that they cannot call on outside help because of the illicit nature of their activities, this does not impact their understanding of talk as a primary way to address conflict. Evidence of this was demonstrated by the dealers in the present sample eschewing aggression and violence in favor of various forms of talk when punishing others, attempting to control their behavior, and settling conflict with them. Therefore, in addition to the possible reasons outlined above, drug dealers' variable use of talk is another key mechanism driving levels of drug market violence

The present study also has theoretical implications regarding the complex nature of the deterrence process. Contrary to traditional considerations of deterrence (see Beccaria, 1963[1764]; Bentham, 1988[1789]), the deterrence process is not a unidirectional process flowing from the presence of rules or threats to individuals' behavioral responses (see also, Erickson and Gibbs, 1979; Geerken and Gove, 1975; Gibbs, 1975; Meier and Johnson, 1977; Williams and Hawkins, 1973). It is instead a process in which offenders' assessments of these rules and threats are influenced by the personal and social context in which they make crime decisions and their own behavioral responses to these rules and threats (see also, Andenaes, 1974; Clarke and Cornish, 1985; Decker, Wright, and Logie, 1993; Gibbs, 1975; Henshel and Carey, 1975; Shover and Honaker, 1992).

When assessing the risks of violating a rule or opposing a threat, offenders recall their personal and vicarious experiences with punishment and punishment avoidance. If they have had more experience with successfully avoiding punishment for a contemplated act, it is more likely that they will proceed with the act (see Minor and Harry, 1982; Saltzman et al., 1982; Stafford and Warr, 1993; Tittle 1980). This was demonstrated by the dealers in present study discounting their assessments of the risks posed by associates who had been recently been flagged because of their own experiences at avoiding punishment during similar circumstances (see chapter 3). Beyond supporting prior literature with this finding, the present study also added to understanding of the experiential effect by suggesting that offenders' experiences with avoiding detection, apprehension, and punishment may have disparate influence on their future assessments of risk. This was indicated by the dealers using more or less humor when

recounting their experiences with each these stages of police involvement. Moreover, it also suggests that experiences with avoiding detection and apprehension may sometimes amplify offenders' perceptions of risk and inhibit their offending (see chapter 4). This was signified by some of the dealers limiting their sales in response to brushes with the police that did not end in formal punishment. This expands an important line of inquiry exploring the effects of punishment avoidance.

Offenders' assessments of risk are also influenced by the social milieu in which they are situated (see, e.g., Ekland-Olson, Lieb, and Zurcher, 1984; Shover and Honaker, 1992; Wright and Decker, 1997). For instance, offenders' relationships with others and the anticipated behavior of these others both condition these assessments. When offenders share information about threats, their relationships with both the source and the subject of this information condition their assessments of the risks posed by these threats. This was demonstrated by the dealers' altering their responses to gossip about potential threats because of their relationships with the individuals they were gossiping with and about. Offenders' estimates of risk are also influenced by their fears that others will somehow direct police attention toward them. This was demonstrated by the dealers' concern about others acting sketchy, being idiots, using bad etiquette, and snitching. Offenders certainly base their assessments of risk on other sources as well, such as their own experiences or information they have received from mass media or law enforcement agents, but it is likely that the estimations of risk derived from these sources may differ wildly if considered apart from the influence of other individuals. This suggests that investigations examining deterrence ignoring social context may wrongly attribute its

influence to other factors and thereby make inaccurate assumptions about the deterrence process.

It is also important to note that offenders' assessments of risk are not stable. They are instead volatile constructs subject to fluctuating in time with offenders' behavioral and cognitive adaptations to rules and threats (see also, Gibbs, 1975; Jacobs, 1996, 2010; Jacobs and Cherbonneau, 2012; Richards and Tittle, 1981, 1982). Whether consciously or unconsciously performed, these adaptations alter offenders' initial perceptions of the certainty and severity of the potential consequences of violating rules and threats (see also Gibbs, 1975; Jacobs, 1996). This can then lead to further adaptations or to the commission of a crime as contemplated *at that stage in the process*.

Insert figure three about here

A simplified version of the active role offenders play in the deterrence process is graphically represented in figure 3. Here the reciprocal influence of offenders' perceived risk and their adaptive actions is presented as a feedback loop. Offenders' perceptions of risk are first input into their decision-making calculi. The 'output' of these calculi, that is, their behavioral and cognitive adaptations, are then fed back into the deterrence 'circuit' as input. This then alters the next round of 'input,' or estimations of risk; which, in turn, influences the next round of output. This second round of output, however, can take one of two shapes. It can either be further adaptations, in which case the loop perpetuates, or, if offenders are comfortable with the level of risk achieved with the prior round of adaptations, they commit the crime without further ado.

Insert figure four about here

Figure 4 graphically represents the role talk plays in the restrictive deterrence process among drug dealers. Without consideration of talk, the process works quite simply. The presence of rules or threats (box 1) promotes dealers' awareness of them (box 2a). These rules and threats include both direct prohibitions of behavior by deterrent sources (e.g., laws forbidding drug sales; informal rules dictating that fronts must be paid back) or threats that can indirectly increase the odds of incurring punishment for violating direct prohibitions (e.g., the risky behavior of others). Once aware of a rule or threat, dealers contemplating a forbidden act then estimate its potential risk and reward (box 2b). From here dealers determine if the level of risk is acceptable. If it is, they will carry the act out without altering it or their behavior in any way (box 3).

When talk is added to the model the process becomes a bit more complicated. Here the presence of rules or threats (box 1) either promotes dealers' awareness of them directly, through personal experience, or vicariously, through gossip (box a). Gossip's functions in this process do not end there. Drug dealers learning of rules or threats through gossip also base their understanding of these rules or threats on the character of the gossip (i.e., its source and subject). This character can amplify or attenuate the effect of gossip on their assessments of risk. Therefore, gossip (box a) not only leads to awareness of rules and threats (box 2a), but also conditions the relationship between this awareness (box 2a) and dealers' estimations of risk and reward (box 2b). As mentioned above, gossip about threats sometimes involves information about the risky behavior of

others. This information can inflate dealers' estimates of risk (box 2b). When this occurs, dealers may choose to not proceed with an act but instead may alter their behavior by avoiding the individual(s) committing the risky behavior (box b). By removing the increase in risk posed by these others, dealers moderate the relationship between the dealers' awareness of the threat (box 2a) and their estimations of risk and reward (box 2b).

When dealers' estimates of risk (box 2b) are perceived as too great, they may also take other measures to reduce these estimates. Humor (box c) is one such measure. By joking around or laughing about a rule or a threat, dealers can alter their thinking about it such that the risk it poses no longer seems as intimidating. Hence, humor (box c) also conditions the relationship between dealers' awareness of threats (box 2a) and their estimates of risk and reward (box 2b). Threats and promises (box d) are another mechanism by which dealers alter their assessments of risk (box 2b). When dealers' awareness that others have been committing risky behavior (box 2a) increases their estimates of the risks of committing an act (box 2b), they may alter their behavior by threatening or making promises to these others (box d) in an effort to prevent or curb their risky behavior. As with gossip inspired avoidance (box b), this conditions the relationship between dealers' awareness of threats (box 2a) and their estimates of risk (box 2b) by removing the risk posed by others. If any of these measures (boxes a, b, c, and d) decrease dealers' estimations of risk (box 2b) to a degree they are comfortable with, they are more likely to commit the crime without altering their behavior any further (box 3).

Accounts (box e) have two important functions in this process. First, unlike gossip (box a), humor (box c), and threats and promises (box d), dealers can use accounts *after* violating a rule or ignoring a threat (box 3). By offering an account (box e) to the source of a rule or threat (box 1) after committing a prohibited act (box 3), dealers can convince these sources to reshape the punishment that would otherwise be imposed for the act. This effect is directly related to the second function of accounts. Dealers may be aware that certain accounts (box e) may lessen punishment. Thus, when their awareness of rules or threats (box 2a) leads them to estimate high levels of risk for an act (box 2b), they may preemptively prepare an account (box e) before committing the act (box 3). This then moderates the relationship between their awareness of rules and threats (box 2a) and their estimations of the risks of the act (box 2b), which, if it lowers these estimations, may then encourage them to commit the act without further alterations (box 3).

Although the impact of each of these forms of talk on drug dealers' assessments of risk are described separately here for the sake of clarity, each can be used in conjunction with one another. For instance, consider an illicit drug dealer who has learned by gossiping with a close friend (box a) that a customer has recently been busted after getting flagged (box 2a). This knowledge may strike fear in the dealer that the customer may snitch. This fear may then inflate the dealer's estimates of the risks of dealing (box 2b) beyond that which he or she is comfortable with. To combat this increase in risk, the dealer may first aggressively ridicule this customer as an idiot (box c) and thereby distinguish him-or-herself as superior and less likely to get busted. The dealer may also decide to avoid the customer (box b) as a means to reduce this risk. Finally, the dealer may also preemptively prepare an account (box e) intended to foil

detection on the chances that he or she gets flagged as well. Each of these adaptive responses (boxes, b, c, and e) to the dealer's estimations of risk (box 2b) then feed back into the process and incrementally condition the dealer's perceptions of risk—or the relationship between his or her awareness of the threat of formal punishment (box 2a) and his or her assessments of the risks of noncompliance with this threat (box 2b)—and alter it accordingly. If this assessment of risk does not outweigh perceived reward, it is more likely that the dealer will continue dealing without making further alterations to his or her behavior (box 3). For the sake of discussion these functions of talk have been presented sequentially, but in all likelihood some or all of them may occur simultaneously.

Like all research, the present study has opened some doors but has also added more questions. One useful way to address the limitations of any study is to ask the researcher what he or she would have done differently. If conducting the present study again, I would have made several alterations during data collection and analysis. First, I would have attempted to locate and recruit additional informants from lower-class backgrounds and more who sold 'hard' drugs, such as cocaine, crack, crystal methamphetamine, and heroin. Informants with these characteristics are certainly not absent from the sample. Nevertheless, the inclusion of these additional informants would have increased the likelihood I did not miss any systematic differences between them and the other types of informants in the sample. This would have also enhanced the odds that the sample was not populated by offenders with similar outlooks.

Second, I would have also attempted to locate and recruit former drug sellers for inclusion in the study as well. It is possible that drug dealers who desist in the face of deterrents or other forces may systematically differ from those who persist with their

offending. For instance, it is possible that talk functions similarly for these dealers in reducing their perceptions of risk but is ineffective at preventing their apprehension because it does not reduce the *actual* risks of dealing among them. In other words, perhaps the dealers in the present sample have simply gotten lucky when relying on talk to condition risk. It is also possible that talk functions similarly among former dealers but some other, unidentified factor not present in the active dealers' reports leads to their apprehension or otherwise discourages them from dealing. Or it is possible that these dealers use talk differently than active dealers and are not as successful at using it to mitigate risk. Finally, it may be the case that these drug dealers become discouraged from dealing by different forms of talk. For instance, it is possible that on being flooded with gossip about others getting busted and snitching some dealers greatly inflate their probabilistic assessments of the risk and simply give up. Hence, by including these types of informants in the sample I may have been able to determine the differences between these types of dealers and those who persist in the face of deterrents.

Beyond changes to sampling, I would have also made several alterations to my data collection procedures. First and foremost, it would have been beneficial to conduct additional hours of observations of the informants. These added observational periods would have provided more information on their use of the various forms of talk in the field. This additional information could have then been compared and contrasted with that gathered during the interviews. This may have strengthened the validity of the findings by uncovering systematic differences between the dealers' actual use of these forms of talk and their reports thereof not noted in the present findings. It would have also been useful to gather further information about the informants' use of cognitive

tricks aside from humor. Although each of the informants was asked how he or she dealt with worry about getting busted, this question often only elicited pithy replies such as ‘I try not to think about it.’ To gain further information I would have followed up informants’ direct mentions and implications of stress and anxiety with probes about their behavior following these feelings and the impact of this behavior on their cognition of rules and threats.

Furthermore, I would have also included more direct questions in the interview protocol about the informants’ use of accounts when in contact with police or when involved in other formal processes. Any experiences the informants reported having with police or other formal authorities would have also been followed up on by encouraging them to provide detail about the verbal interactions that occurred during these experiences. Finally, given that my interest in exploring threats and promises arose after data collection during data analysis, it would have been beneficial to include questions about threats and promises in the interview instrument. Moreover, as with accounts, it would have also been beneficial to gather information from the informants regarding their experiences giving and receiving threats and promises to and from police. The present findings would have also been bolstered by information regarding whether the recipients of threats and promises actually understood these as threats and promises. Another potentially useful avenue of questioning would have sought to uncover how the dealers and associates responded when promised or threatened with outcomes, their responses when these outcomes did not transpire following compliance, and how those making threats and promises counter-responded to these responses.

A final way in which I would have conducted the present study differently is by enlisting the aid of one or more other researchers to analyze the data following my initial analysis. This would have further ensured that my findings were not colored by my own personal biases or skewed interpretations of the data. Some of these researchers would have received the interviews in their entirety, while others would have only received small portions of the interviews to ensure that they were not influenced by their broader context (see, e.g., Maruna, 2001). These interrater checks would have bolstered the reliability of the analysis beyond my capabilities to do so alone.

Despite these limitations, the present study has many strengths. For instance, the sample is comprised of dealers selling almost every type of popular illicit drug in various types of market structures (i.e. closed and semi-open). It also includes both retail-level dealers and suppliers. Furthermore, these dealers stemmed from a number of drug selling networks that were not interconnected. Demographically speaking, the sample contains both men and women and a mixture of races and ethnicities. It is also important to remind the reader that these are active drug dealers. As such, the information gathered from them is less likely to be colored by gulfs of time between their offending and their responses. It is also less likely to be influenced by separation from the offending life and friends and family. It should also be noted again that the data informing the findings herein were collected from both qualitative interviews and systematic observations. This allowed me to compare and contrast the dealers' use of talk in the field with their reports of it during the interviews. For these reasons and those discussed in further detail in chapter 2, the present discussion provides a reliable, valid, and important glimpse into the world of

active drug dealers as they go about their offending in real-life settings and circumstances.

This dissertation has several policy implications. First, policy makers who are strongly committed to enforcing policy should expect people to take an active role in the deterrence process. They should recognize that the mere presence of crime control policies or the introduction of new policies is simply not enough to deter individuals contemplating crimes. Policies will have no impact on these individuals' crime decisions if they are unaware of them. Moreover, if these individuals' only knowledge about these policies is drawn from information gathered from third parties, their perceptions of the risks of violating the policies may be attenuated. For these reasons, policy makers would do well to continue attempting to bring information about crime control policies and their enforcement directly to potential offenders. Additionally, they should also continue attempting to infiltrate the informal channels of information potential offenders rely on to learn about potential risks (see Braga et al., 2001; Kennedy, 2009).

Second, policy makers who wish to enforce the full consequences entailed in a policy must find a way to exert deterrents so that individuals violating them cannot account for their actions. One way that policy makers have attempted to do this is the just desserts model of punishment. Here fixed sentences are applied to individuals regardless of the accounts they offer or could offer for their crimes. If policy makers wish to exert fair punishment, however, they must find a way to ensure that accounts are credible instead of suppressing them entirely.

Finally, this dissertation addresses one of the primary concerns of policy makers and the criminal justice system as a whole: the secondary impact of the law. Here I refer

to those crimes that are committed as the result of current crime control policies.

Consider the impact of current drug prohibition policies on drug market violence.

Because illicit drug markets are not subject to formal regulation, many drug dealers use violence to respond to conflict and victimization (see Goldstein, 1985). Because of this, policy makers should be interested in the measures some offenders use to minimize such violence. Talk is one way they do so. Therefore, policy-makers and scholars alike should devote more attention to the different forms of talk and their functions in the deterrence process. Although policies may be largely ineffective when it comes to controlling or promoting talk, they may be able to address some of the underlying structural conditions and cultural imperatives stemming from these conditions that encourage individuals to rely more heavily on talk as opposed to other actions such as violence when addressing conflict.

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Figure 1
Influence of Talk on Deterrence

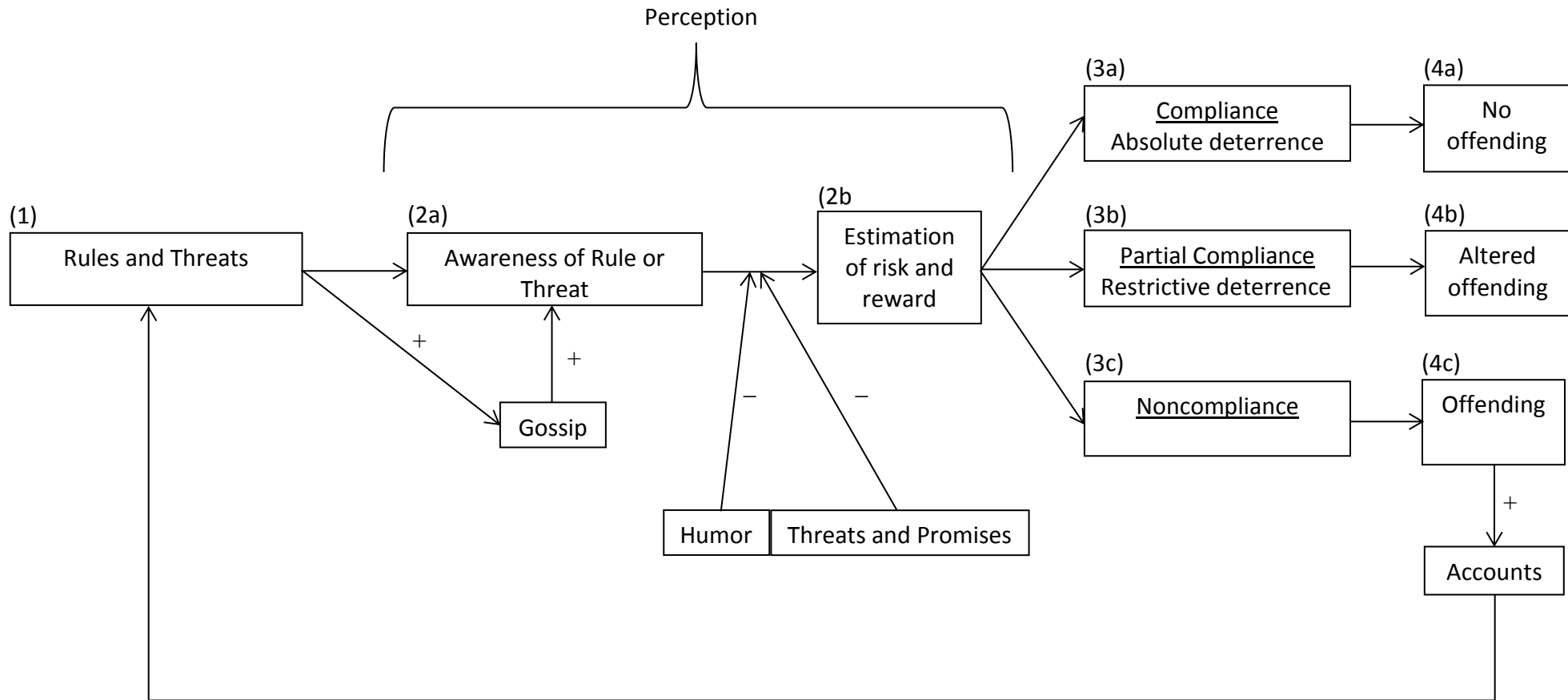


Figure 2
Evolution of Snowball Sample

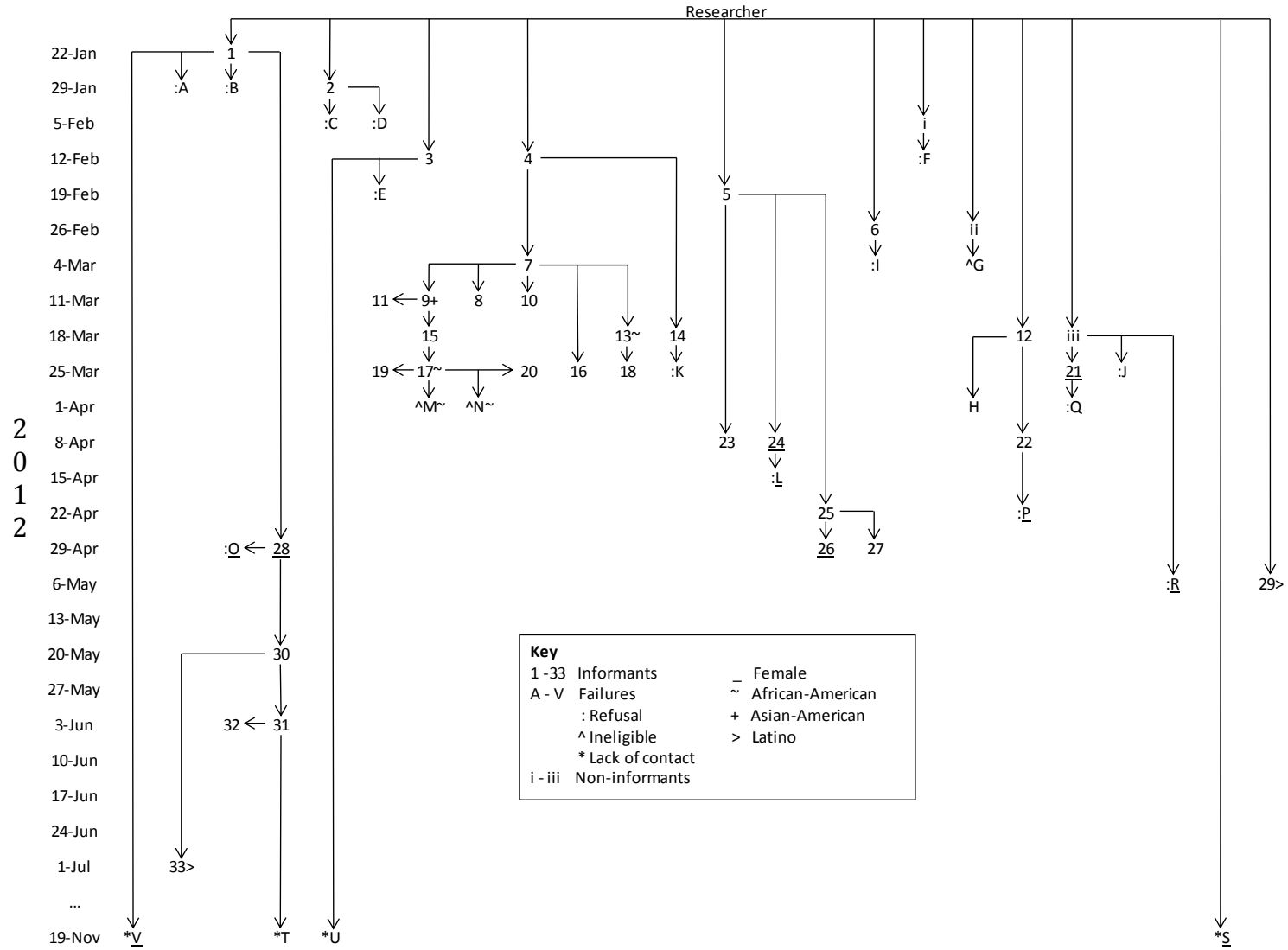


Figure 3
Restrictive Deterrence 'Feedback Loop'

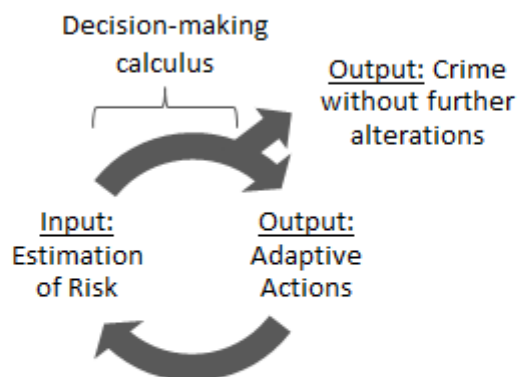


Figure 4
Functions of Talk in Restrictive Deterrence

