DECEPTION, DETECTION, AND EVASION: A TRADE CRAFT ANALYSIS OF HONOLULU, HAWAII’S STREET CRACK-COCAINE TRAFFICKERS

GORDON J. KNOWLES

Department of Sociology
University of Hawaii
Honolulu, Hawaii 96822

ABSTRACT

The intent of this research was to uncover specific techniques employed by drug dealers to counter law enforcement efforts or evade the criminal justice system by studying a community of street crack-cocaine traffickers in a major capital city. The study used twenty-two open-ended questions interviewing five drug runners concerning how they sold narcotics, specifically the sale of crack-cocaine in Honolulu, Hawaii’s Chinatown district. Some subjects noted trafficking additional commodities such as heroin, marijuana, women, and sex, although all indicated that they spent the majority of their time dealing crack-cocaine. The subjects reported that they were crack-cocaine users and claimed that being “runners” was the only way to support their habits since the substance is so expensive.

Legitimate businesses are shown to have capitalized on crack addiction by marketing and distributing drug paraphernalia related to crack-cocaine consumption. Pornographic video theaters in the research setting are noted as contributing to the crack epidemic by providing privacy and convenience for the users and dealers to consume and traffic narcotics like crack-cocaine. Analyses of pornographic theaters in the research setting are compared with other studies and are considered the Hawaiian version of mainland crack houses. Legalization of this type of drug was not supported from the sample’s perspective since all the subjects considered crack-cocaine a dangerous and addictive drug. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

The Rise of Crack-Cocaine in America

In the latter part of the 1980s, due to the combustible and flammable hazards of mixing ethyl ether with cocaine hydrochloride, a newer and safer form of smokable cocaine was developed called “crack” (Rouse, 1991 U.S. Department of Justice, 1992). Crack was defined as a mixture consisting usually of cocaine and baking soda, but often contained other unknown chemicals. Williams (1992) noted “comeback,” as one of the unknown street chemicals used in making crack-cocaine. This term has been defined as a form of cocaine analog, such as
lidocaine, which binds with cocaine during the cooking phase and substantially increases the overall end product volume. This increase makes the manufacturing preference among drug dealers for crack-cocaine over other drugs most obvious (Inciardi, Lockwood, and Pottieger, 1993).

Inciardi, Lockwood, and Pottieger (1993) noted that crack-cocaine became popular among users for a variety of reasons. First, it could be smoked, producing an almost instantaneous high. Second, it was cheap. Some individual “crack rocks” could be bought for as little as $2, $5, or $10 compared to a gram of powdered cocaine that went for as much as $60 a gram. Third, it was easily hidden, transportable, and could be displayed in small glass vials or common plastic sandwich bags that could be easily scrutinized by potential buyers (Inciardi, Lockwood, and Pottieger, 1993). The ease and benefits of marketing this type of ready-to-smoke cocaine led to the rapid distribution of crack-cocaine throughout the United States (Rouse, 1991; Rinfret, 1991).

Pettiway (1995) observed that as crack-cocaine emerged on the streets, media attention remarked that crack instigated users to commit violent crimes to support their habits. Documentaries presented how urban gang warfare among crack dealers had turned inner cities into dead zones. Other reports noted that drug-related homicide rates were so high in some neighborhoods seized by the crack epidemic, that law enforcement officials had written them off as lost causes (Inciardi, Lockwood, and Pottieger, 1993). The ease and benefits of marketing this type of ready-to-smoke cocaine led to the rapid distribution of crack-cocaine throughout the United States (Rouse, 1991; Rinfret, 1991).

Crack-Cocaine in Hawaii

On the island of Oahu, opinions about cocaine use differed between certain ethnic groups, specific drug subcultures, and the geographic regions of Waikiki, Waianae, and Honolulu (Chaiken, 1993a). In the Waikiki area, powdered cocaine was popular, especially among the Caucasians. Some gamblers and prostitutes were known to inject cocaine, though snorting powdered cocaine seemed to be preferred by street people, hotel service workers, and staff patrons in bars (Chaiken, 1993a).

In Waianae and other impoverished areas of Oahu, Hawaiian and part-Hawaiian residents preferred alcohol, marijuana, and powdered cocaine (Chaiken, 1993a). Overall, the popularity of cocaine began to increase and even surpass the use of crystal methamphetamine on Oahu throughout the 1980s (Chaiken, 1993a).

In the later part of 1992, crack-cocaine usage was noted among some of the prostitutes in the Chinatown area of Honolulu (Knowles, 1992). Crack-cocaine seemed to have pushed out heroin, marijuana, and powdered cocaine as the drug of choice. Initial conclusions were that AIDS and HIV education by social service agencies and outreach workers in Chinatown may have dampened the use of intravenous drugs like heroin or injected cocaine among drug users. This may have encouraged users to switch from forms of high-risk intravenous drug use (mainly, heroin and cocaine) to smoking crack-cocaine.

THE RESEARCH

Researchers who conduct ethnographic or anthropological studies in a given community appear to have the earliest and most detailed information about the specific types of substances used by particular groups (Chaiken, 1993b). They can show shifts in use and describe common lore about specific drugs. The information is not only fruitful for identifying drug use patterns, but also for understanding the motivations and attitudes of groups using specific substances (Chaiken, 1993b).

There is a large body of literature today concerning the usage of crack-cocaine, though there is little insight into the structure or network pertaining to the sale and distribution of street crack-cocaine. Specific research on current techniques employed by crack traffickers to counter law enforcement efforts or evade the criminal justice system are still lacking (Jacobs, 1993; Pettiway, 1995). Current drug ethnographic studies usually focus on the background, lifestyle, or consumption rate of the crack user (Ratner, 1993). In spite of these lofty contemporary research efforts, little information is known regarding the drug dealers’ trade
Trade Craft Analysis of Crack-Cocaine Traffickers

Craft—specifically the artistic skill, cunning, and ingenuity employed by the street crack-cocaine trafficker (Jacobs, 1996a, 1996b).

Intervention efforts targeted to restrict the drug traffickers’ travel patterns, restrain their countermeasure techniques, or strategies to determine the location of their drug cache sites are rarely discussed. The intent of this study was to elicit information in order to: (1) examine the relationship between illegal drug trafficking and addiction, (2) develop a structural model of the street drug network, and (3) advance drug trafficking intervention efforts by studying a community of crack-cocaine traffickers in a major capital city.

Research Setting and Sampling Methodology

The State of Hawaii is well known as a hub of international travel and tourism. Honolulu, the state’s capital, is located on the island of Oahu and is the largest city in the state, as well as the focus of government and commerce. The research site was located in the heart of Honolulu’s Chinatown, which has been a popular target for the mainstream media and previous research projects focusing on illegal behavior (Knowles, 1992; Lubliner et al., 1973; Waite, 1995; Yoshimoto, 1983). Chinatown has been plagued with other vice crimes, such as gambling and prostitution, from 1880 to the present day (Krauss, 1995; Knowles, 1999).

Historically, Honolulu’s vice district sat in the center of Chinatown, tightly bound by River, Beretania, Nuuanu, Smith, and Hotel streets (Bailey and Farber 1992). By the 1990s, a considerable amount of gentrification of shops, boutiques, and art galleries on adjacent streets had occurred. In essence though, Chinatown after dark still remains an area of rough bars, illegal gambling houses, pornographic theaters, prostitutes, and the focus of the present study—drug trafficking (Knowles, 1992, 1995, 1997).

This study utilized twenty-two open-ended questions asking street drug traffickers how they sold and distributed drugs, specifically the sale of crack-cocaine. Each subject was compensated in the range of $10 to $20 dollars for their time, which was similar to what they would make for a single drug transaction. Due to the financial cost, the research sample was limited to five subjects. The research also involved the observation of drug traffickers conducting transactions on the street, in vehicles, and in video theaters that specialized in hardcore pornography. Most subjects, at the time of observation, were either using or under the influence of crack-cocaine, as were also some of the members of the surrounding populace.

All subjects were selected using a “snowball” sampling method. Snowballing works by first identifying some members of the rare population, asking these members to identify others, who in turn, identify even more members, and so on (Maxfield and Babbie, 1995, p. 208). The strategy of the snowball sampling technique is that members of some rare populations know each other (Ostrow and Kessler, 1993; Van Meter, 1990).

Demographics and Criminal Background

The sample was composed of five crack-cocaine traffickers who operated in the Chinatown area of Honolulu: two African American males, one Caucasian male, one Caucasian female, and one Filipino female. None of the subjects interviewed were originally from Hawaii and their ages ranged from twenty-seven to forty-four, with a mean age of thirty-three. The subjects also reported having an overall education completion rate average of up to 1.3 years of college.

In reference to criminal background, the first subject reported only one prior arrest for dealing crack-cocaine in Hawaii. The second reported two prior arrests for trafficking cocaine on the mainland, but had not been arrested in the last eight years since residing in Hawaii. The third reported frequent arrests directly related to drug usage, such as petty theft and shoplifting, but was never arrested strictly for usage or possession of drugs. The fourth reported a conviction and a completed sentence of six years in a federal prison for embezzlement and money laundering. The final subject reported a history of several arrests for the related crime of prostitution, though not for drug trafficking in particular.
Promoters, Buyers, Runners, and Dealers

Some of the current research subjects reported trafficking additional commodities, such as heroin, marijuana, women, and sex, though they all said they spent the majority of their time dealing and generating revenue from crack-cocaine sales. A clearly defined structure of trafficking crack-cocaine in Chinatown was noted. Roles of the participants were identified as: (1) promoters—who seek to “hook” or locate new prospective buyers, (2) runners—who solicit on the corners to habitual buyers, and (3) the dealer—who supplies crack-cocaine to the runners and promoters (Knowles, 1995, p. 15).

All roles faced similar criminal penalties, though the runners appeared to be the most vulnerable to arrest, physical injury, mental illness, and malnutrition. For these reasons, the runners were the type of crack-cocaine trafficker selected for analysis. In reference to this study, all the research subjects defined themselves as runners. When asked what it was like to be a runner, a forty-four-year-old male crack runner replied:

Fred: When I was younger . . . I used to love it . . . there was a sense of honor in it . . . kinda like providing a service . . . but now . . . I hate it . . . I see myself retiring from this in two years . . . hopefully. (Interview with author, 9 February 1995)

A runner is defined as an individual who “runs” to purchase crack-cocaine for a buyer. The procedure involves standing on a corner in Chinatown and seeking out the daily crack buyers by approaching people walking, or driving by and asking, “What you need?” or just merely glancing at people and waiting for nonverbal cues.

One scenario described how a potential buyer will drive by in a car and hold up two fingers to a runner. Such a signal means that the subject is a potential buyer who wants to purchase a “$20 rock” of crack-cocaine. The runner then approaches the buyer and receives the $20. The runner quickly moves to one of the local bars located on North Hotel Street where the dealers are set up in a makeshift safehouse (Knowles, 1995, 1996). The runner then gives the money to the dealer in exchange for the crack-cocaine. The runner will either take a “quick hit” of the crack-cocaine obtained or pinch off for themselves a small amount while on the way back to the buyer. The runner will then carry the remaining amount in his/her hand, back to the location where the initial money transaction occurred and turn over the drug by placing it directly into the hand of the buyer. If the runner encounters law enforcement officials on the return to the buyer, he or she will quickly drop the small amount onto the ground. It was explained that this small amount of crack-cocaine would quickly and easily become lost within in the context of a busy street corner in a major city (Knowles, 1995).

This type of trafficking technique appears to make it extremely difficult for law enforcement personnel to get a conviction or even make an arrest in the first place. In addition, it appears the runners merely serve as a buffer used by the dealers to avoid detection or prevent arrest. All the male runners described similar methods in trafficking crack-cocaine, although the two female runners said they exclusively conducted all their drug transactions in the coin-operated pornographic video theaters located on Smith Street in Chinatown.

The issue of running crack in Chinatown was addressed because that was where the dealers were, and buyers exclusively came to Chinatown to purchase drugs. A term for this type of location was not given by the subjects, though this phenomenon has been referred to in other studies as “copping areas.” These zones are defined as open areas, such as street corners or back alleys, where small amounts of drugs are exchanged for cash and multiple transactions typically occur in a short time span (U.S. Department of Justice, 1992).

Crack Addiction and Crime

Another issue noted was that the runners all claimed to be addicts and felt the majority of their customers were also addicts. The word dependence has replaced the word addiction in most general descriptions of chronic drug use (Grinspoon and Bakalar, 1985), although the subjects all referred to themselves as addicts. One subject reported that he used crack-cocaine
simply because ‘I’m addicted,’” and further added that the people he sold crack-cocaine to used it because “they’re addicted.” All the subjects claimed that being runners enabled them to support their very expensive habits. The subjects argued that this addiction encouraged them to engage in the criminal behavior of operating as a drug runner, since it presented the opportunity to gain “free smoke.”

Free smoke is defined as pinching off a small portion of the crack purchased for a buyer. The runners stated the issue of taking free smoke was not discussed with their clients. The subjects rationalized that since being a runner involved the greatest risk of arrest, the issue of taking free smoke was justified. The buyers, therefore, are always at a disadvantage, since they are required to pay in advance for an unseen product. The runners also felt there was basically no retaliatory action a buyer could take when they did get ripped off.

Many runners referred to themselves as being on a mission, rather than as just some type of street pharmaceutical retailer. In order to overcome the general fear or fatigue required to run drugs, many subjects said they needed to be under the influence of crack-cocaine in order to accomplish these missions. The subjects interviewed related that they suffered from paranoia, delusion, malnutrition, and exhaustion. They did not necessarily attribute these problems to crack-cocaine use alone, but to the sleep deprivation required for keeping up with the unpredictability and fluctuations within the street drug market. This type of prolonged sleep deprivation was described by this twenty-nine-year-old female crack runner as:

Michelle: Well . . . I try to stay up as long as I can . . . I mean you don’t know when the dealers are going to get their load [resupply] again . . . so I just . . . sell, smoke . . . sell, smoke . . . until it’s all gone. Most of the time, I don’t even get a chance to eat or sleep . . . but, sometimes when I get up . . . and there is no dope in town, I just go back to sleep and have somebody wake me up its back again. There are always buy- ers, although it might be slow . . . but when there is no dope in town . . . there is nothing I can do but wait. (Interview with author, 25 March 1995)

When asked why the runners did not become dealers since it would involve more access to crack-cocaine, one subject responded that the fear of “hard prison time” deterred her. Another added that there were only four main dealers who controlled a monopoly over the crack-cocaine distribution in Chinatown and it would be difficult, if not impossible, to break into the current market. The remainder presented similar reasons as to why the prospect of becoming a dealer was unattractive.

The issue of who takes the greatest risks in regard to trafficking crack-cocaine is somewhat debatable. From the perspective of hard prison time, it appears the dealers would face the heaviest punishment if they were convicted since they are required to hold and move much larger quantities of crack-cocaine than the runner. The dealers exposure to law enforcement, however, is very limited and infrequent in comparison to the runner. The probability of an arrest for a dealer appears to be low or nonexistent. In contrast, the runner is required to make frequent and almost repetitive drug sales that greatly increase the potential exposure to law enforcement and eventual arrest.

One subject noted that some runners who tried to become dealers ended up “smoking their load” before it could be sold since they were first and foremost, crack addicts. A final subject added that the “big-time dealers” in Chinatown were not crack-cocaine users and were only in the crack business to make money for other illegal activities. In turn, the money made from dealing crack-cocaine would be directly used to support either a compulsive gambling or crystal methamphetamine habit.

Drug Preference and Availability

The researcher became interested in why crack-cocaine was so prevalent in Chinatown, while other drugs, such as heroin, crystal methamphetamine, and marijuana were not—especially since widespread media reports noted crystal methamphetamine as the drug of choice on the island (Lerner, 1989; Ray, 1993). One subject felt that heroin has lost its popularity because of the AIDS and HIV prevalence among intravenous drug users, but did argue that her-
oin was making a comeback since addicts were becoming more educated about not sharing needles. Two subjects also related that marijuana was basically considered a “kiddie” or “nutty professor” drug and was too inexpensive to be worth the sales risk. Marijuana would have to be sold in very large quantities to actually generate a profit, which in turn would increase the possibility of detection and arrest by law enforcement officials.

The subjects related that crystal methamphetamine was twice as inexpensive as cocaine and that it created a high ten times better. Initial conclusions were that law enforcement efforts to curb “ice” distribution on the island of Oahu was the main reason crystal methamphetamine was unavailable in the Chinatown area. This premise was dismissed by one subject who felt law enforcement had little or nothing to do with it. It was argued that drug dealers specifically control what drugs are sold on the streets. When asked why crack-cocaine was more prevalent than any other drug, one thirty-one-year-old male crack runner provided this explanation for such market control:

Carl: I’ve never experienced crystal methamphetamine . . . that’s a whole new world and it is probably a much better high than crack . . . and from what I hear it is. But the problem here is that it’s twenty times cheaper than crack. If all the major drug dealers on this island let crystal methamphetamine get out, it would put them out of business. In other words, if I was to buy a $10 bag of crystal methamphetamine and smoke it, I’d be . . . wrecked for ten or eleven hours . . . now a cocaine dealer doesn’t want that . . . he doesn’t want me spending $10 or $15 a day . . . he wants me spending $150 day . . . that’s why they don’t want that stuff [crystal methamphetamine] on the streets. (Interview with author, 28 March 1995)

Crack, Paraphernalia, and the Law

The “crack pipe” is a small cylindrical glass tube roughly four inches in length and three-fourths of an inch in diameter. The crack pipe along with the screen (copper mesh) is sold on the street by the “pipe man.” In order to judge the accessibility and document the methods utilized to acquire drug paraphernalia, a “crack kit” or “junkie kit” (the glass pipe and copper mesh screen) was obtained from a local convenience store located on North Pauahi Street for $8.50 (which is estimated to be seven times the actual value of the items). The procedure involves entering certain types of convenient stores known to sell drug-related paraphernalia and asking to purchase a “glass straw” or “air freshener.” The clerk will usually reach under the counter and hand over a small bag containing the drug paraphernalia and name the required amount for purchase. The sale of these items is not specifically illegal, though their intention when purchased is obvious.

At the onset, the question arose regarding the possible incentive a legitimate business would have for indirectly contributing to illegal drug usage. Upon analysis of frequent observations and follow-up interviews, it was estimated that the establishments in question sold anywhere from forty to fifty pipes a day resulting in revenue of $340 to $425 daily. From this information the economic interest in marketing crack pipes became quite clear. One subject added that the pipes were of poor quality and usually cracked after only a few uses, due to the prolonged exposure to the lighter flame heat necessary for smoking. She argued that the poor quality was intentional so that crack-cocaine users would have to frequently purchase new pipes.

The runners appeared to be extremely well educated and knowledgeable concerning the current laws related to crack-cocaine and related paraphernalia. One subject reported that possession of the crack pipe and screen alone was not an offense, but when the screen was positioned in the cylinder, it became an offense. The crack pipe, as described by the runners, was listed under the Hawaii Revised Statues Uniformed Controlled Substances Act as drug paraphernalia—which was defined as any equipment used or for the intended use of introducing a controlled substance into the human body (Hawaii Criminal and Traffic Law Manual, 1994, p. 270).

Use, or possession with intent to use the crack pipe is a class C felony and upon conviction one can be imprisoned up to five years and fined up to $10,000 (Hawaii Criminal and Traffic Law Manual, 1994, p. 286). During the
The subjects reported that they sold crack-cocaine to people from all walks of life including doctors, lawyers, and police. The runners expressed that they did not have a preference for whom they sold to as long as the buyer had money. One female subject did state that she only sold to “dates,” since this assured her that they were not police officers because they had already engaged in acts of prostitution with her.

All of the subjects felt that legalizing crack-cocaine would be absurd. Note the response of this twenty-seven-year-old female crack runner in a conversation concerning the legalization of crack-cocaine:

Toni: Hell no, it shouldn’t be legal . . . it’s dangerous and ruins people’s lives. Look at what it has done to me . . . I am not out here because I want to be . . . I am out here because I have to be. (Interview with author, 28 March 1995)

Other subjects also related that crack was dangerous and addictive and they currently hated the drug themselves. The two females in the sample related that they hoped whoever invented crack was dead. Only one subject stated that he would like to increase his sales. The others said they wanted to stop, but could not because of their addictions.

Language, Deception, and Countermeasures

The use of a foreign language by drug dealers within the research setting was the most striking aspect of an effective law enforcement countermeasure. Crack-cocaine was often referred to as rock more than crack among the runners and buyers in the research setting, but very rarely did drug dealers use the word cocaine, crack, or rock within a drug trafficking context. Instead, drug dealers referred to crack-cocaine as ma’a. Linguistic analysis indicated that ma’a was the Samoan word for rock or stone (Milner, 1993).

In addition, when uniformed or potential undercover law enforcement personnel neared locations that drug transactions were taking place, a short series of loud yells voicing the term leoleo could be heard echoing down the block. The term leoleo is defined as being the Samoan...
word for police (Milner, 1993). Finally, those involved in drug dealing commonly referred to each other as *sole*, which is an indigenous Samoan term used in addressing or calling a boy or a man (Milner, 1993).

This analysis may also serve as a primary indicator of a predominantly Samoan involvement in street level crack-cocaine distribution. It is also important to realize that drug traffickers are effectively using a foreign language to converse covertly regarding drug transactions, alert others of a law enforcement presence, and serve as a screening tactic to separate real drug buyers from potential undercover law enforcement threats. The culmination of these techniques greatly enhances the drug dealers ability to avoid detection and arrest. It was also ascertained that dealers and runners key in on the types of clothing to determine or undermine law enforcement threats. This was most evident when this thirty-one-year-old male crack runner was asked to explain how he detected and avoided possible undercover law enforcement agents:

Carl: Well in the daytime . . . you can see those uniform guy’s hats from a mile away . . . it’s kinda like a beacon with that badge shining in the sun . . . undercover’s aren’t that hard either . . . I mean if the guy is wearing black tennis shoes . . . he’s a cop . . . I mean the police uniforms are black . . . so if he is off duty or working undercover . . . he is still using the same shoes . . . so I avoid him. (Interview with author, 28 March 1995)

The crack runners did not appear to have a set type of clothing or overall style of dress, however, almost all the drug dealers clothing appeared to have the brand name FILA, which is an Italian-based sportswear clothing line. Observations noted drug dealers selected this brand name for their shirts, pants, shorts, and even the type of shoes they wore. No specific information could be obtained as to why this type of clothing preference occurred among drug dealers, although one female subject made the following comment:

Michelle: Well . . . you see FILA is a runners type of clothing, you know meaning athletic . . . so if you are wearing FILA down here [meaning Chinatown] it means . . . you are running something . . . like crack. At least that’s the way it’s been explained to me. (Interview with author, 18 March 1995)

It was also noted that drug dealers would try not to carry money and crack-cocaine at the same time. Instead, they would have a runner pay a neutral party standing in close proximity who was not holding any crack, but only the money related to the crack-cocaine sales. The dealer would then hand over the amount of crack-cocaine to the runner that was equivalent to the amount paid to the third party. Some drug dealers would also require the drug buyers or runners to place the money on the ground first before they handed over the associated amount of crack-cocaine. These techniques appear to be a type of streetwise criminal prosecution countermeasure enabling dealers to plausibly deny that they ever directly received money during a drug transaction. The absence of the dealer possessing crack-cocaine and money simultaneously at the time of arrest, by law enforcement, consequently weakens later criminal prosecution efforts.

Another unique finding was that the type of packaging—such as a glass vial or aluminum foil—used with the crack-cocaine trafficked in Hawaii differed from that noted in mainland studies (Williams, 1992). Subjects would just carry it in their hands or mouth if needed. It was explained that this method gave the runner the option of quickly discarding the drug by dropping it on the ground or swallowing it to prevent an arrest. The lack of any packaging remains also removed a potential *signature* that could be traced to particular drug dealers, user locations, or trafficking areas.

The absence of packaging could also be used to exploit the buyer with regard to deceptive tactics. Some runners resorted to selling substances such as sugar, pineapple candy, or macadamia nuts—that visually mimic the appearance of street crack-cocaine—in order to trick unsuspecting drug buyers out of their money. This type of deception, referred to as “bunking,” was described by this twenty-nine-year-old female crack runner as follows:

Michelle: When there is no crack in town and most of the dealers are gone . . . I head to the store and buy some macadamia nuts . . . break
them up and . . . I mean they look just like rocks [meaning crack-cocaine] . . . so people drive up, give me the twenty and I give them the nuts . . . by the time they figure out they just got bunted [slang for deceived] . . . I’m gone . . . but, the word is out on the street about people getting ripped-off . . . so now the store [pointing to a corner store] will only sell the chocolate-covered macadamia nuts, so now I have to scrape the chocolate off before I break it up . . . it still works . . . just takes a little more time. (Interview with author, 18 March 1995)

Observations of these bunking incidents ranged from minor verbal arguments to major physical confrontations. These engagements were instigated by the buyer in an attempt to regain their money after realizing they had just purchased fake drugs from the runner. Many dealers began to realize that bunking potential crack buyers resulted in a loss of income by directly effecting their own crack sales. Dealers would sometimes approach runners and demand they provide the name of their dealer. If they could not prove they were indeed a legitimate crack runner, the dealer would retaliate with physical violence and remove them from a street corner. Note this recently observed interrogation of an unknown Black crack runner by a Samoan drug dealer regarding the issue of legitimacy:

Unknown dealer: Who are you working for? I told you not to come down here messing around [physically placing the runner against up against a store front wall] . . . I find out your messing around . . . your gonna get hurt . . . you understand what I mean . . . you better not be bunking nobody. (Personal observation, 24 February 1999)

This practice was not developed to protect the buyer, but rather as a way for dealers to preserve their profits by eliminating those who bunked their potential clients.

Illegal Income and Personal Drug Usage

The subjects had difficulty reporting the exact amount of money they made from dealing crack-cocaine. They reported average revenue of $300 a day from crack sales, but explained that they also received $150 to $200 each day in free smoke, which they valued just as much as the money, if not more. Estimating the amount of crack-cocaine the subjects smoked daily also proved difficult. Note the response from this twenty-nine-year-old female crack runner as she attempts to estimate her daily crack-cocaine consumption rate:

Michelle: Well, I was thinking about that the other day. For instance, let’s say an eighthball [$300 hundred dollars worth of crack-cocaine] or three bullets [one bullet equals $100 dollars worth of crack-cocaine], I can easily smoke that in a day, no problem. I mean, I’ve had the pipe up to my mouth every fifteen minutes, every five minutes, every one minute . . . How much I smoke depends on a number of things, the amount of dope I have, the availability of dope in town, it just depends . . . and when supplies are low my usage is low and I have to hook to make the difference. (Interview with author, 18 March 1995)

Despite their earnings from selling crack-cocaine or sex, all the subjects reported that they were homeless. The men lived on the streets, but the women tried to find a date to sleep with, either at his house or by requiring him to let a hotel room for them in exchange for sex. The women would resort, however, to sleeping on the street when necessary. The women had the option of bartering sex for money to survive when Chinatown’s crack-cocaine supplies became scarce, whereas the men did not. The issue of just merely attempting to survive on the streets may also foster an initiation into low-level drug dealing. This premise was supported by a twenty-seven-year-old female crack runner when questioned about why she trafficked street crack-cocaine:

Toni: You see it’s like this . . . if you don’t sell dope . . . you don’t have any money . . . if you don’t have money . . . you don’t have a place to stay, food to eat, or even clothes to wear . . . so you tell me what am I supposed to do. (Interview with author, 28 March 1995)

Even though the subjects gained a substantial amount of free smoke from running crack, that alone did not satisfy their addictions. They reported that a substantial amount of their monetary earnings still went to purchasing crack-
cocaine in order to get high, not leaving much for food or housing. They also explained that going back and forth from a residence or shelter to Chinatown ten to twenty times a day to purchase crack-cocaine was impractical, which is why it was actually easier to live on the streets in Chinatown.

In addition, all the subjects reported running crack all day and night (meaning there was no best time), which made living on the streets advantageous. They handled the need for a place to get high by using several of the local 24-hour pornographic video theaters in Chinatown.

**Video Theater or Crack House**

Crack houses emerged with the crack-cocaine epidemic in the 1980s (U.S. Department of Justice, 1992). Williams (1992) noted in his study that the doors of the crack houses are open “24-7”—twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week—to a steady stream of people, some high, some not, some men, some women (Williams, 1992). One type of crack house identified in a Detroit study described it as a “buy, get high, and party” atmosphere with the drug consumption and other activities, often sexual, taking place on the premises (U.S. Department of Justice, 1992). From these definitions and the observations of the activities occurring in the pornographic theaters, it is arguably suggested that the pornographic video theater is the Hawaiian version of the mainland crack house.

This conclusion was further supported by analysis of data collected from the sample. All subjects reported having conducted drug transactions in the pornographic video theaters and estimated that 70 percent of their business exclusively occurred in such places. They also reported that 50 percent of the time, they got high in the theaters. Finally, they claimed that 80 percent of the people who entered the theaters, did so to get high. The remainder frequented these establishments to purchase sexual favors from addicts who engaged in acts of prostitution. The runners added that they used the pornographic video theaters because they provided: convenience; security; and privacy to sell, buy, or use crack-cocaine.

**A trip to the crack house.** In order to cross-check the validity of the respondents, a field trip was made to one of the pornographic video theaters on Hotel Street to conduct internal observations. Upon entry to a particular pornographic video theater, similar activities noted in other research studies and those reported by the research subjects were present.

The video theater was comprised of a small entry area with a middle-aged man located at the counter. To his right was a dark and dismal hallway with a long row of doors, each with a small red light at the top of the door jam. Some were on, meaning the room was occupied, some were not. Recorded sounds of men and women engaged in passion emitted from the occupied theater rooms.

Upon entering one of the rooms—the dimensions similar to that of a small closet—one saw an average-sized video monitor placed in the rear wall of the room. The screen flashed titles of available movies for viewing catering to individual tastes, hard pornography involving Black men and White women, White men and Black men, etc. A small box of tissues as well as a dingy small waste basket were available for use by viewers who desired to masturbate or fantasize while watching the films.

A few minutes after entry there was a knock at the door and upon opening a rough looking woman asked, “Can I come in?” A quick reply of “No, that’s okay” was given and just as the door was being shut she replied, “Do you want a date or what?” At this time it was determined that the ability to remain unobtrusive was not possible, therefore a hasty decision to leave was made.

Upon exiting the door and attempting to move back down the hall, a long gauntlet of men and women from every ethnic background—Samoan to Hawaiian, Black to White—could be heard mumbling, “I got what you need,” “Need smoke?” “Ice, ice.” Underweight and malnourished crack-addicted women peered from behind the gauntlet, looking and smiling in an attempt to solicit money in exchange for sexual favors. This entire episode can be summed up as a sobering display of the end result of drug use, prostitution, poverty, and wasted lives caused by addiction (personal observation, 6 April 1995).
After the observations made in the theater, research concerns were now focused on what aspects of smoking crack-cocaine could induce someone to live the life of an addict.

The “High” and the “Hook” of Crack-Cocaine

The reported significance of crack-cocaine is that it produces a more rapid high than cocaine, but one that lasts for a much shorter duration. Noting the duration of the high (one to two hours for powder cocaine versus five minutes for crack-cocaine) it would appear that a user would prefer powder to crack (U.S. Department of Justice, 1992). The runners argued that initial shipments of cocaine were delivered to Hawaii in the powdered form, but the drug dealers preferred to cook and sell it in the crack form due to its greater economic and addiction potential. The shorter, but more intense high of crack-cocaine, quickly entices the user to return again and again. The addictive nature of the crack high was supported by this tape-recorded statement of a thirty-one-year-old male crack runner:

Carl: Well, whoever is hearing this, naturally you’re an adult and probably experienced an orgasm, magnify that ten thousand times throughout your whole body, and I do mean ten thousand. That’s why most of the people who get into crack lose their sex life, they lose their sex drive, because crack is your whole new woman. That might sound weird or stupid, but that’s the way it is. It’s a feeling, it’s a state of euphoria like you wouldn’t believe, it’s unreal, but if you’ve never done it whoever I’m talking too, don’t ever try it. (Interview with author, 28 March 1995)

Overall, the subjects felt that they as well as their clients used crack-cocaine to forget about life or mask their personal problems until they could deal with them at a later time. This premise was supported by a statement from this thirty-one-year-old crack runner who was under the influence of crack-cocaine at the time of the conversation:

Carl: I feel high like you wouldn’t believe . . . it’s hard to explain how you feel . . . it’s a feeling. I feel like I’m floating on air . . . on one hand . . . I feel like an idiot for doing what I’m doing and that is absolutely nothing except getting high, but on the other hand, I love it because I’m getting high as much as I want, when I want . . . and that makes up for everything else. You see people who live on the streets, 99 percent of them smoke crack because it’s a way for them to forget about life . . . forget about the things you wanted in life . . . this is like a replacement. (Interview with author, 29 March 1995)

In closing, this same subject added the following advice for anyone considering trying crack-cocaine (providing further support of the addictive nature of the drug):

Carl: Don’t ever do it, don’t even try it once. You do it once, I don’t [care] who you are, you will be hooked for the rest of your life. (Interview with author, 29 March 1995)

Crack-cocaine appears to provide an escape for the addict in exchange for a lifetime commitment of usage. This appeal also makes treatment intervention difficult. When asked how crack-cocaine addiction could be stopped this subject simply stated the following:

Carl: You can’t . . . period. As long as there are people on this earth, there will be people smoking crack . . . so I guess and there will always be people like. (Interview with author, 29 March 1995)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Analysis of the structural model embedded within the street drug network suggests that the use of a runner greatly empowers the dealers to insulate themselves from possible detection or arrest by law enforcement, which consequently enables them to evade the criminal justice system entirely. The use of runners also greatly enhances the dealers’ projection radius of crack-cocaine distribution to target buyers. Removal of runners due to arrest or incarceration substantially reduces the dealers ability to: recruit new drug buyers, project drug distribution, and shield themselves from law enforcement infiltration or arrest.

The relationship between illegal drug trafficking and addiction, ensures that the runners’
addictions will subject them to exploitation and manipulation by dealers who require them to take the greater risks of possible detection and arrest when trafficking crack-cocaine. This manipulative relationship exploits the opportunity of the runners’ informant potential by law enforcement against the dealers. As informants, runners can provide specific and timely drug intelligence data that discloses: the countermeasure techniques employed by drug dealers, the identities or locations of major drug suppliers, and the locations of drug cache sites or clandestine drug laboratories.

In reference to drug trafficking intervention, it is important to note that all the runners in this study considered themselves addicts, and disliked their present lifestyle. Based on this premise, some type of treatment model coupled with the standard incarceration model is suggested in attempting to rehabilitate this type of chronic offender. The main factor of drug addiction was overtly present, although other noted factors were: poor mental health due to sleep deprivation; physical injury related to violence from clients, drug dealers, or police; constant exposure to the environmental elements; and malnutrition. All of which, makes treatment prospects for this type of population extremely problematic and difficult.

Many of these subjects desire to improve their situations and have often contemplated voluntary treatment at one time or another, but the addiction to crack-cocaine is extremely compelling and difficult to overcome. It would seem that the only intervention method that would effectively interrupt these chronic usage patterns would be some type confinement. Forced hospitalization for drug treatment is legally questionable, although forced detoxification by incarceration related to a drug conviction is not.

Conventional treatment facilities outside of prison lack the ability in a legal or security sense to contain or restrict these types of hard-core addicts from obtaining their drug of choice, crack-cocaine. Voluntary types of drug treatment facilities outside of prison are still ethically preferred, although drug treatment programs in prison show that even if the subjects refuse or drop out of treatment—they will still detoxify in prison. The ideology of prisons used as drug treatment facilities is arguably the only rational option for these types of addicts, however the problem of reaching those addicts who continue to elude the criminal justice system still remains.

In closing, this study was intended to provide criminal justice professionals with a deeper understanding of the complexity of the drug trafficking subculture so they may effectively enhance and improve intervention efforts. Understanding of the key participants’ roles, motivations, and methods assists police officers, prosecutors, and judges in disarming the illicit drug trade that has seized many of our citizens, neighborhoods, and cities.

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