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FAMILY AND HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FEMALE CRACK-SELLER CAREER:

CASE STUDY OF A HIDDEN POPULATION

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Abstract

This paper is primarily concerned with resources which family and kin network bring to drug careers. The general thesis is that specific human resources available during childhood influence both the nature and extent of participation in crack use and sales. The availability of family and human resources are critical in determining the extent to which drug abusers could develop and maintain a “conventional” identity while engaging in a drug-distribution career. Although females are becoming more evident in crack-distribution roles, they remain a minority among crack sellers and usually perform the lowest roles. This case study of Rachel represents a truly hidden population, a minority female who has been a successful crack seller for several years. The paper provides insight about persons that rarely come to attention when studying drug distribution and participation. Such persons acquire skills and resources during their lives that enable them to function in two diverse worlds. Such crack sellers are “truly hidden” because they do not have criminal records, almost never come to the attention of police, and function adequately in conventional roles. By analyzing a detailed case study of a female drug seller, this paper delineates some of the human resources and skills which may account for her differential outcome in a career of drug use and sales in inner-city settings.

Introduction

This paper examines the importance of specific resources during childhood that influence both the nature and extent of participation in crack use and sales. It highlights the availability of family resources as a critical element in determining the extent to which drug abusers can develop their human resources so they can maintain a “normal” identity and a “stake in conventional life”—even while engaged in a deviant career. The popular image of a crack seller/distributor as a young black male, high-school dropout, with a criminal record, and weapons carrier is changing. Recent research indicates that females are becoming more evident in crack-distribution roles (Dunlap et al. 1994; Mieczkowski 1994; Williams 1989; Inciardi 1989; Fagan 1989; Johnson et al. 1990; Baskin et al. 1993). Females remain a minority among crack sellers and usually perform the lowest roles (Dunlap et al. n.d.). The case study of Rachel below represents a truly hidden population, a minority female who has been a “successful”

crack seller for several years (Dunlap et al. 1994) and documents Rachel's drug use and how her crack business operated.

Background

The family of orientation is a main socialization agent and the principal force in the acquisition of cultural capital; this consists of the particular resources acquired through the family which provide individuals with tools for success or failure (Kohn 1977; Kohn et al. 1986; Dunlap 1992; Szalay et al. 1993; Buchanan 1993; Lindblad-Goldberg and Dukes 1985; Parcel and Menaghan 1994; Dunlap and Johnson n.d.-b; Johnson and Dunlap 1994).

Typically, upper-class persons acquire more cultural competence, and generally have more cultural capital valued by society (Coleman 1988; Baydar and Brooks-Gunn 1991; Belsky 1990; Belsky and Eggebeen 1991; Dunn and Tucker 1993). Cultural capital may be conceptually distinguished by social class and race (Wilson 1978, 1989, 1987; Dunlap 1992; Dunlap and Johnson n.d.-b; Johnson and Dunlap 1994; Parcel and Menaghan 1994; Thomas 1993; Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993). Such capital is eventually retranslated back into economic wealth and a connectedness to conventional society (Coleman 1988; Wilson 1987).

Class and the cultural resources derived through class membership may be critical variables at influencing drug careers, regarding both use and sales (Dembo et al. 1986; Carpenter et al. 1988; Waldorf et al. 1991; Buchanan 1993; Dunlap and Johnson n.d.-b). To the extent that the nature and type of resources available to specific individuals are structured by macrolevel social forces (Dunlap and Johnson 1992), the specific impact on a drug-use/abuse career will be mediated by an individual's class, race, and gender positioning.

Recent studies indicate that the cultural resources which parents provide facilitate positive child outcomes (Parcel and Menaghan 1994; Coleman 1988, 1990; Baydar and Brooks-Gunn 1991; Belsky 1990; Belsky and Eggebeen 1991) and to people's success and or failure in the drug-distribution/use careers (Waldorf et al. 1991; Dunlap 1992; Dunlap et al. 1994; Boyd and Mieczkowski 1990). Numerous studies have unveiled family factors—socioeconomic status, number of parents in home, parent-child relations, parental supervision—which influence drug participation and other deviant careers (Dunlap et al. 1994; Dunlap 1992; Hoffman 1993; Brook et al. 1990; Laub and Sampson 1988; Coombs and Landsverk 1988; Flewelling and Bauman 1990).

Much research has shown that the types and extent of resources provided by or skills developed through family-kin networks may directly influence the individual's success or failure in efforts to become a self-sufficient adult (cf. Dunlap 1992, 1995; Dunlap and Johnson n.d.-b). Children growing up in homes with few stable adult resources and having limited exposure to prosocial resources do not develop strong bonds to conventional society (Dunlap 1992). In many drug-abusing families, a child's relationship to conventional society is often structured by social control agents, social services, and state institutions. If and when adult kin provide resources in the form of "assistance," an adolescent may be introduced to involvement with drugs, street life, and criminal lifestyles (Dunlap and Johnson n.d.-b; Johnson and Dunlap 1994; Dunlap 1992).

Extended Family As a Resource

In the black community, the extended family has prevailed for successive generations as a dominant cultural norm (Wilson 1986; Nobles 1974; Nobles and Goddard 1977; Billingsly 1968; Farley 1971; Fischer et al. 1968; Hays and Mindel 1973; Hofferth 1984; Ruggles 1994). Many black families have survived numerous economic hardships imposed by macrolevel social forces specifically because of the resources made available through the

extended family (Gibson 1972; Stack 1974; Foster 1983; Wilson 1984, 1986, 1989; Dunlap 1992; Hale 1982; Martin and Martin 1978). Resources provided by the extended family not only take the form of economic aid and material support but also encompass emotional support and counseling. Studies have shown that the extended kin network assists children's long-term achievement and social adjustments (Wilson 1984, 1986); extended families both increase the quality of child care and mitigate the potentially negative effects of single parenting (Wilson 1984, 1986).

Within the extended family, grandmothers provide a model for effective caregiving, in that they are generally responsive during their interactions with their grandchildren (Wilson 1986). Infant attachment changes from anxiously attached at 12 months to securely attached at 18 months if the infant lives in a three-generation household composed of maternal grandmother, mother, and/or mother's siblings (Egeland and Sroufe 1981). The presence of a responsive grandmother was also found to buffer the child against the deleterious influence of an insensitive or ineffective mother (Crockenberg 1981).

Research has shown that the vast majority of crack users and sellers are reared in family-kin systems and households with very limited exposure to conventional cultural resources. That is, among crack-selling women (and men), few have fathers present, often their mothers are absent, no or few household adults hold legal jobs, alcohol and drug abuse is common, education is little valued, and other criminal and drug-selling adults are often role models (Dunlap and Johnson n.d.-b, Dunlap 1992, Johnson and Dunlap 1994, Maher et al. n.d.-a). Even limited involvement in legal activities (such as helping the primary caregiver hold "parties" or street vending), is associated with somewhat greater success in crack sales than when such experiences are absent (Maher et al. n.d.-b). Thus, the family of orientation is significant in the fundamental processes of providing (or not) the resources and skills needed for both legal and illegal careers. Persons who obtain the skills and cultural capital necessary for legal jobs are also likely to be relatively more successful in drug selling than persons with less familial resources.

Rachel

Rachel, a 40-year-old African-American woman, provides evidence of the importance of a stable family environment even in a setting where crack use and sales are generally regarded as uncontrolled and accompanied by a wide range of problematic social consequences for most persons involved. As the case study below reveals, Rachel had both a stable and unstable family environment. Whereas her grandmother had strong ties to conventional society, her mother was an alcoholic with many sexual partners. Many crack abusers are reared in family-kin networks with limited resources and that model illegal behaviors (Dunlap 1992). Those raised in families from which they receive more extensive cultural capital are more likely to have tools for success—cultural competence which retranslate back into economic wealth and a connectedness to conventional society. Such resources enabled persons to better maintain a normal identity most of the time—even when they use or sell crack or other drugs (Waldorf et al. 1991:10; Carpenter et al. 1988; Adler 1994; Dunlap 1992; Dunlap et al. 1994; Dunlap et al. n.d.). Jobs, families, friends, and other such resources available during childhood and young adulthood may be critical variables in determining the degree to which cocaine and crack users are able to control or curb their use and sales activities and/or return from heavy use to no drug consumption and a conventional lifestyle. (Dunlap 1992; Dunlap and Johnson n.d.-b; Johnson and Dunlap 1994; Waldorf et al. 1991:10).

Rachel had a 20-year career as a marijuana seller and was a crack seller at the beginning of this research in 1989. She lived in the same low-income, inner-city neighborhood as the more numerous crack-abusing/selling women who have limited relationships with conventional

society. Although she has dealt drugs for many years, she has never sold drugs at street level and has never been arrested. Nor does she carry a weapon, use violence, or exert a strong street presence. Likewise, Rachel does not resemble the caricature of a female crack user with profligate sexuality, prostitution, pathological nurturing, homelessness, and drug-driven desperation (Ratner 1993; Bourgois and Dunlap 1993; Inciardi et al 1993; Maher et al. n.d.-b). With the exception of her crack use/sales, Rachel—like the Bay Area cocaine users studied by Waldorf et al. (1991)—is an ordinary, middleaged member of her community. Rachel strives to maintain this image of a normal ordinary citizen. She is very concerned about her neighbors and the way they perceive her and her business. She is very careful not to permit rowdy, loud, and boisterous behavior by her customers. In general, she conforms to what is expected in ordinary day-to-day activities. She dresses as a working woman, chooses friends and associates who hold jobs, limits her interaction with street-level dealers and users, and maintains a low profile (Dunlap et al. 1994).

While atypical insofar as she is both a woman and a crack seller (Maher and Curtis 1992; Dunlap et al. n.d.), Rachel's story reveals a number of factors which appear to have facilitated her relative success in a male dominated and highly volatile profession. Rachel is quite unusual among inner-city, crack-smoking populations in that she has had significant cultural, emotional, and material resources available to her at critical points in her life. These resources facilitated her (relative to other crack users) strong bonds to conventional social norms and gave her a stake in maintaining the appearances of conventional life. As this paper suggests, Rachel has utilized the many resources and skills learned earlier in life. These enabled her to attain a degree of "success" in her chosen "deviant career" even when she could have chosen a legal career.

The present paper documents how Rachel developed the skills that allow her to be relatively successful as a crack seller. The key theme involves her exposure and training by a middle-class and ambitious grandmother (Joyce) from whom she learned many of the skills she now routinely employs in her career as a crack seller. Rachel's situation is not totally unique but shows that some people have done fairly well in the crack use/sale business. Generally such persons are raised in a (relatively) stable family environment and gain resources and skills that are vaguely middle-class. These resources and skills enable them to organize their lives and business in such a manner that they do not get pulled into downward spirals. Rachel is unique because she is a woman, living in Harlem, existing outside the mainstream drug business community, yet deriving her income entirely from crack sales. In short, she is a "hidden" middle-class crack seller living in Harlem and caters to the working and middle-class crack consumers who attempt to keep their crack use "hidden" from their spouses and employers.

Methodology

The information in this paper is derived from an ongoing National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) funded study, Natural History of Crack Distribution/Abuse. This research specifically examines the structure, functioning, and economic aspects of cocaine and crack distribution in New York City (primarily in low-income, minority communities). Beginning in 1989, dealers were recruited: they represent a wide range of economic statuses, from street corner crack sellers to cocaine/crack weight distributors (Johnson 1991). For over 2 years, ethnographers developed close relations with dealers, and in some cases, their families. In-depth interviews and observations were conducted with several dealers (Williams et al. 1992; Dunlap and Johnson n.d.-a). Males were overrepresented as they are in local drug markets. Female dealers generally participated at the lower levels of crack selling (Fagan 1994; Dunlap et al. n.d.; Maher and Curtis 1992). In most cases, women acquired their cocaine supplies from male distributors and/or work for males (Dunlap et al. n.d.). Since females are not abundant in crack distribution roles, especially at the higher levels, Rachel's case is atypical.

The volume of data collected for this research is extensive, providing a repository of thousands of pages of transcribed tape-recorded material and field notes which can now be easily accessed by a hypertext program (Manwar et al. 1994). In many cases, interviews are dramatic and full of intensity and passion. For many crack sellers, the interview was clearly the only time in their lives when they had talked openly and fully about their personal histories, their dealing behaviors, their hopes and dreams.

Through direct observations and extensive interviews, Dunlap collected information that not only addressed the nature and extent of Rachel's involvement in drug use and sales, but which permitted the construction of Rachel's detailed life history. This life history information, combined with first-hand knowledge and observations of Rachel's kin network and family life, permits identification of particular resources and skills which have impacted on her drug-use/sales career.

Context of Experiences

Rachel was raised in an extended black family. Her household consisted of her grandmother (Joyce), aunt (Rita), mother (Lolita), brother (John), and herself. Her grandmother was a crucial figure and the primary caregiver during her adolescence. As head of the household, Joyce was also a major figure in Rachel's early life. Joyce ensured that Rachel's family life instilled important values, attitudes, beliefs, and practices. Rachel's commitment and attachment to conventional norms can be traced to Joyce's training. Joyce set a foundation of discipline and consistency that Rachel drew upon at critical points in later adult life.

Grandmother

The daughter of a Baptist minister who was also an ex-slave, Joyce was ambitious at a time when even middle-class blacks had few opportunities open to them in American Society. She was aware of and adhered to social behaviors evaluated according to conventional standards. She had a commitment to the betterment of herself and her community. She strove to keep herself and her family at a particular "class" level. Growing up in the Deep South (Mississippi), she acquired a degree from a state teaching college and taught school until she married and had her first child. Before the birth of Lolita (Rachel's mother and Joyce's second child), Joyce went back to school and acquired a degree in nursing. While Lolita was still a baby and feeling that her husband was "holding her back," Joyce and George (her husband) separated and later divorced. In talking about her grandmother Rachel relates:

My grandmother was like one of those society type matrons. 'Cause like down South, if you a teacher or something, you know, you were important. ... She was extraordinary ... I mean, she opened the first USO [social club for those in the United States armed services] for blacks in the South you know, during World War II. She was radiant. She graduated from Mississippi State Teachers College. She was heavy. She was ahead of her time.

Joyce was a catalyst for the family. When blacks began the famous bus boycott in the South, Joyce was there. She and other blacks had much to offer and strove to break down the barriers of segregation that held her and other minorities from full participation in American society. She stimulated Rachel's social consciousness in many ways. In addition to political/social activities, Joyce served as a role model for Rachel to take pride in herself and her race, and to have respect for all people. Compassion for the less fortunate was a significant theme in Rachel's family. Joyce was clearly responsible for instilling important values in Rachel. Among them were respect for others, compassion, and the need to provide assistance to those less fortunate—all values and practices which Rachel later drew on while constructing her crack-selling business (Dunlap et al. 1994).

Joyce was also very active in community affairs and spent considerable time and effort raising money for various social and political events. Joyce routinely involved her granddaughter in these community activities, thus providing Rachel with a positive environment, training in household management, a constant set of activities for “organizing” people, and exposure to the influence of those striving to achieve. Thus, Rachel interacted with peers whose parents had similar aspirations for their children as Joyce did for Rachel.

... I go to the club, you know I always had nice friends and things and they had mothers and fathers. We had the club meetings and all that kind of stuff. They wanted to play those little things with the racquets you know all that kind of stuff in the yard. I'd go along with it because it's what you supposed to do but it just seemed to me that it was such a silly thing to be doing but you do it because whatever. I'd rather be around the adults, just moving and shaking, you know what I'm saying. I remember Ralph Abernathy was in the court house, right after this during the bus boycott and “Motherdear” took me to the court house with her. It seemed like that was the better place to be.

Joyce strongly disapproved of antisocial behavior. The use of profane language was highly disagreeable, and she effectively limited Rachel's association with people using such language. Joyce placed Rachel among prosocial peers who strove to bond with conventionally accepted norms. Not only was Joyce influential in steering Rachel in a positive direction through economic, educational, social, and political participation but she also provided Rachel with a unique perspective on religion. Joyce accepted various religions based on a combination of spirituality and pragmatic considerations. She chose religious organizations that would be of benefit to both her family's spiritual and material/social well being. Joyce illustrates how people seek to maximize their benefits (Boissevian 1973; Bott 1957; Stack 1974).

Joyce and her family belonged to and attended both the Catholic and Baptist churches. Joyce had her grandchildren baptized as Catholics so that they could go to Catholic schools which she believed would provide a better education. She also subscribed to Catholicism because hospital and medical care was provided through this institution. Since Joyce could not hold offices within the Catholic church, however, her participation in church services was limited. Her desire for greater participation and a more influential role occurred through the Baptist church where she held positions such as secretary, treasurer, and in outreach programs. Rachel learned from her grandmother that aspirations could be realized in more than one way and that institutions were to be used to benefit the individual. In other words, religion was beneficial, not just morally and spiritually but also for concrete material and social advantages.

While growing up, Rachel was also assigned certain chores. Joyce's rules and regulations taught her personal care, hygiene, and household management. The influence of her grandmother is evident as Rachel speaks about what her weekends were like:

... 'Cuz I used to spend my Saturdays getting all my clothes ready for school for the week. You know ironing 'em all up and hanging them on the hangers. ... So I'd iron them all up and have five sets of clothes ready, get them ready on Saturday, you know.

Growing up in an extended family household allowed Rachel to enjoy a strong relationship with, and benefit from, the purposive role model her grandmother provided. The quality of support available to her was demonstrated by a high level of care, concern, meaningful interaction, emotional and verbal responsiveness, and a demonstrated routine involvement in social, political, and religious activities. Rachel was taught organization and household maintenance through routine completion of tasks and meeting the expectations that they would be done. Joyce strove to ensure that Rachel's environment created favorable conditions for her to develop social skills. She provided social interaction, supervision, and discipline in a systematic manner. In this sense, Joyce's support of her grandchildren within the extended

family setting remedied the major deficiencies often associated with single-parent families and an ineffective mother (see below).

Joyce encouraged Rachel to explore and expand her boundaries. She demonstrated viable ways of interacting with the world around her. Through her social/political activities, she instilled in Rachel a sense of duty and responsibility. Rachel learned at an early age to analyze the world around her, partake in activities to make changes, be involved in various kinds of community activities, manipulate ways to make money, and “utilize what resources were available to her.” Rachel also learned not to let her emotions and feelings dictate her actions. Joyce placed a high value on strict adherence to correct etiquette and socially accepted standards of behavior. These values were very important to Rachel in her later years as a marijuana and crack dealer.

Mother

Joyce’s meticulous adherence to socially prescribed behaviors was a source of constant conflict in her relationship with her youngest daughter, Lolita (Rachel’s mother). Joyce maintained a better relationship with the oldest daughter (Rita)—a college dropout who operated her own beauty shop. Lolita presented Joyce with many problems from an early age. Considered a “sickly” baby, Lolita was regarded as “slow” and never completed high school. At 14, Lolita was pregnant. She was the only family member (her mother and sister went to college) who did not attend college or participate in social/political activities. In particular, Joyce was irked by Lolita’s romanticized notions of male-female relations and her desire to be “taken care of,” according to Rachel:

... my mother always wanted to be in love and have a mate and stuff and she [Joyce] would tell her how stupid that was because they (the men in her life] don’t really care about you. And my mother always wanted to have that relationship type thing and she [grandmother] used to tell her how stupid that was and it used to make my grandmother mad, you know.

Lolita became an alcoholic and had a series of relationships with various men which usually ended up with Lolita pregnant and the boyfriend’s disappearance. These relationships produced further friction in the mother-daughter relationship. Rachel grew up in what often seemed like a tug of war between her mother and her grandmother. As a child, Rachel both admired and hated her grandmother and tried to help her mother by shielding her from Joyce. Rachel also attempted to shield Lolita from the people she drank with, and from her many lovers.

When Rachel was about 12 years old, the extended family moved to New York and settled in Harlem. Joyce and Lolita’s relationship deteriorated (due to her multiple pregnancies and alcoholism). Lolita needed Rachel’s constant help and care. By the time the family arrived in New York, the mother and child roles had largely been reversed. Rachel enabled Lolita to consume alcohol, work, and was her supporter in her struggle with Joyce. Although Joyce supervised Rachel’s education, Rachel spent the summers working with her mother. Here she acquired valuable knowledge and insights about the world of work. Rachel learned to be on time, respect lines of authority, to perform specific functions, and other work habits. Rachel’s obligation to her mother gave her a profound sense of responsibility at an early age. Nurturing, understanding, and dependability were all skills she developed and refined by caring for Lolita.

The alcohol literature labels this relationship as one of codependency (Clemmons 1979; Fox 1972). Lolita’s dependence on her daughter reinforced the sense of discipline and responsibility Joyce had instilled in Rachel. The values which her grandmother had inculcated were increasingly utilized as Rachel took it upon herself to be her mother’s keeper.

Somebody had to stand by her and that was my job. I ... it just seemed to me that I was the one that had to be there for my mother. I was the one and that was that ... I

used to not like my mother for a long time. I knew I had to take care of her but I didn't like her. I didn't call her mama till I was 21.

Although she disliked her role as "protector," Rachel took on this role because she felt that no one else would assume the responsibility. Rachel also had to learn to overlook and adjust to continual pain and disappointment throughout her life.

Rachel's nurturing behavior began early in life. She assumed Lolita's employment responsibilities during her many pregnancies, tended to her when she was on one of her drinking sprees, and acted as a buffer between her mother and her grandmother. These skills were directly carried to her adult career in managing customers in her drug-dealing business. Just as she went everywhere with her mother and made sure that she did not spend or give away all her money, Rachel does similar things (shown later) for her crack customers. Rachel's relationship with and management of an alcoholic mother became a resource in managing crack users. Lolita's dependence on Rachel encouraged the acquisition and development of many complex skills and abilities.

As a child, Rachel witnessed the negative effects of her mother's alcohol consumption and its effects on Lolita's relationship with her own mother and sister. These experiences familiarized her with illness and drug and alcohol consumption. She learned what to do to make her mother "feel better" and more "comfortable" when she had been drinking. She went to "juice joints" with Lolita many times in order to watch and protect her. Rachel clearly carried these insights into her crack business. Her relationships with her customers were structured by relations of codependency. Rachel served as a source of control and a force for moderation by ensuring that, despite her own short-term financial interests, her customers did not spend all their money on crack (Dunlap et al. 1994).

Male Influences

Rachel had few male influences while growing up. Her grandmother and grandfather separated before she was born and although she knew her grandfather casually, they failed to develop a "significant other" relationship. Rachel's formative years were almost totally devoid of resources in terms of male input and influence. Although her biological father, Lester (a well-respected businessman in the local community) paid stipends to the grandmother, he did not want it known that he had children outside his legal marriage. Lolita had her first child by Lester when she was 14 years old. A couple of years later and pregnant again, Lolita married Henry (who is listed as the father on Rachel's birth certificate) in an attempt to hide another pregnancy by Lester. This turned out to be disastrous.

Henry's uncertainty that Rachel was his child led to much confusion in the household and during one of his heavy drinking sprees, Henry shot at Rachel. Being shot at was a traumatic experience. At the time, Rachel was about 9 or 10 years old and her mother was pregnant with her sister. Rachel lived with Joyce for most of Lolita's marriage to Henry due to Henry's constant abuse of Lolita and her frequent trips back home to live with her mother. Neither Rachel's biological father nor the man mentioned as father on her birth certificate provided her with significant resources.

Rachel's husband, however, and his male kin network provided important resources. Although her marriage was brief, it acted as a major resource in facilitating her subsequent career as a relatively successful drug dealer:

Dunlap: Tell me about your relationship with your husband.

Rachel: ... He lived life in the fast lane too but he had a style about him, you know. Finesse. He was smart, and we used to talk a lot ... But when I say he lived in the fast

lane, he went to school and all that stuff, but he was dealing, you know. But he had a style about it.

Dunlap: What was he dealing?

Rachel: Herb, heroin, you know. His family you know, he had people in his family that had been doing that anyway, you know. Uncles and things, you know ... But he worked every day but he still was dealing, you know. But he carried himself in a certain way. And he loved his child. He took good care of us. Very good care of us. And I was very happy with him ... I was still young, you think what you supposed to do as the wife, as the mother, you know. And I wanted to work, you know. So I worked too, you know. I didn't have to but I wanted to ... 'Cuz whatever he might have been doing out there, none of that ever came close to home. He wouldn't allow that. But he was very close with his family and I'm close with my in-laws even now.

Rachel's marriage acted as a resource insofar as it provided her with material and emotional support, contacts, and a particular set of skills. Rachel and her husband derived their income from multiple sources—in addition to an apartment which they inherited from his grandmother, they received income from his legitimate job, her legitimate job, and his drug dealing. Rachel's husband developed and cultivated a dealing style which necessitated a strict demarcation between business and family life. Rachel's husband died of a kidney disease when her daughter was 5 years old. Rachel would later adopt this style of dealing and used the proceeds to put her daughter through college. Her husband's family was well established in the drug business and provided Rachel with the necessary connections to acquire supplies. All these worked together to constitute her brief marriage as an important resource in differentiating her drug use and dealing career. This influence can be seen as Rachel talks about raising her daughter and the way in which her role and responsibilities as a parent structured her role as a drug dealer:

Dunlap: How long did it take you to turn that [drugs] over?

Rachel: Payday. One day, in one day ... Shoot maybe, see cuz see like I do it like this. You make appointment, I know when your pay day is and everything, just like that.

Dunlap: So it didn't take long?

Rachel: No, cuz I always had an image to maintain ... You see I had a child and everything so I gotta keep things on the up and up, you know ... You can't be out there lollygagging just like that. You gotta know when who get paid ... You know everybody's pay day. You work around pay cycles and you don't deal with people that ain't working.

Although male influences during her formative years were negligible, Rachel acquired important resources through her relationship with her husband and her marriage. Her husband provided a strong role model for successful drug dealing. Rachel learned from him to put her family before her dealing activities, separate her personal/social/family life from dealing activities; his male kin network provided her with connections and entry into the world of drug distribution.

Education and Employment

While growing up, Rachel attended private religious schools which provided her with a firm grounding in basic educational skills. At the age of 15, she became pregnant but was able to take advantage of work programs established by the "War on Poverty" programs. She told of being able to go to school at night while pregnant and eventually acquiring a GED diploma. Once she had her daughter, she undertook skills training and subsequently found employment:

And 'cuz I ain't know welfare existed, and they got me job training and what have you and I started working for um, IBM ... And the only stipulation was, they had a

program for underprivileged, at that time we in the sixties now with all those poverty programs, right. The only criteria was that I go to school at night and work in the day and that's what I did. I got a GED. I got my GED on February 8. I got married February 9.

Both Rachel's early formal education and later, social programs (most are no longer available) were resources which she was able to mobilize. The strong emphasis placed on education and work by her grandmother, coupled with the "Great Society" programs of the 1960s and 1970s, can be viewed as further resources which helped prepare Rachel for a variety of occupations. These experiences also helped her drug use and sales in a different manner from that generally encountered among low-income, inner-city drug abusers. Rachel's family work history, her formative education, early exposure to the world of paid employment through her mother, skills training, and own work experience provided her with connections to and an interest in conventionality that she probably would not have gotten if she and her family had a history of public assistance. Research suggests that the inadequacy of helping agencies and state institutions and social control agents may contribute to a kind of "learned helplessness" (Bowker 1983; Fishman 1988a, 1988b, 1990).

At critical points in her life Rachel was able to take advantage of particular opportunities. She utilized these resources situationally in much the same way her grandmother sought to obtain the nonspiritual benefits offered by religious institutions. Throughout her early life and despite the prolonged impact of her mother's drinking behavior, Rachel continued to take advantage of opportunities opened to her that improved her situation. She later went to graduate school to study for a master's degree in psychology. Although she did not complete the master's requirements, she has advanced schooling beyond 4-year undergraduate work.

Contexts for Crack Consumption and Sales

Rachel's crack-dealing business is different from most crack-dealing businesses in Harlem. It is similar to everyday businesses to the extent that businesses are operated by and depend much upon the skills and experiences the owner has acquired. In many crack spots,¹ people consume crack for a price, which can take the form of either money or crack. They cannot purchase the crack at the apartment in which they consume it as dealers do not usually allow buyers to smoke crack where they are dealing. While this is the case for some places in Harlem, other evidence suggests that this is not the case in other neighborhoods—e.g., Spanish Harlem (Bourgois 1995); Washington Heights (Williams 1989); Flatbush (Hamid 1992); and Williamsburg and Bushwick (Maher and Curtis 1992).

Rachel's place provides a sociophysical setting similar to those described as belonging to the "tea-pad" era of marijuana consumption during the 1960s (Grinspoon 1971). Tea pads took on the atmosphere of a social club. They were generally located in comfortably furnished apartments which offered soft lighting, music, and burning incense. The owner was the dealer and marijuana was generally bought and consumed on the premises although some tea pads permitted consumption of the product obtained elsewhere. Consumer intent was focused on smoking with a view to relaxation and freedom from everyday cares and anxieties. People readily engaged in conversation, discussing reactions to marijuana and philosophizing, and most were willing to share the marijuana cigarette. Boisterous behavior was not permitted and rowdy persons were usually asked to leave (Grinspoon 1971). The introduction of crack cocaine and the rapid proliferation of street-level drug markets not only radically altered economic considerations of drug use/sales but also had a profound influence on consumption patterns

¹Williams (1992:101-2) argues that since the late 1980s most crack houses have been unable to charge entry fees because crack attracted users who could not afford to pay for both the drug and entry—even when prices of crack dropped.

and social behaviors (e.g., Hamid 1992a, 1992b; Johnson et al. 1990; Johnson 1991; Maher and Curtis 1992). The negative physical and social effects of crack were so pervasive that ex-heroin users, who consumed crack, often evoked a romanticized notion of the “good old days.” Heroin users who subsequently added crack to their consumption repertoire often felt that they had more control over their behavior precrack and indeed many managed to hold down legitimate employment while using only heroin (Rosenbaum 1981; Dunlap field notes).

Perceptions of irrational behavior by consumers and crack binges (“missions”) render traditional consumption settings such as the tea pad inappropriate. Afterhour clubs where marijuana and cocaine are discreetly used could not generally be adapted for the cocaine smoker or crack consumer due to their erratic, sometimes irrational, and often paranoid behavior patterns. Most important, crack consumers quickly spend their funds but have great compulsion to use more. Norms of sharing quickly disappeared (Hamid 1992b, 1995).

Many drug sellers tried to make the transition from marijuana to crack sales but were unsuccessful. Some tea pads become “crack houses,” often when the apartment owner becomes “hooked” on crack. As the apartment owner becomes enmeshed in consumption, the upkeep of the apartment deteriorates (Williams 1992; Hamid n.d.). The typical crack house² is generally bereft of furniture and appliances. Users sit on cartons or on the floor. Often electricity is disconnected, so candles are used for light. Crack vials, wine bottles, candy wrappers and other trash are strewn on the floor. Eventually, the owner is evicted. In some crack houses, consumers have to pay to enter the apartment, and also have to share their drugs with the owner. Sometimes, they are not allowed to bring their own works but are compelled to rent them from the owner (cf. Williams 1992). The fear of being robbed or cheated is paramount in such establishments, as numerous ways have been invented to swindle users out of their crack. Relationships are typically instrumental and the owner of the apartment is friendly only until all one’s money and/or drug is consumed (cf. Williams 1992).

Rachel’s Place

Rachel commenced her drug-dealing career by selling marijuana to supplement her income from her employment (Dunlap et al. 1994). Research on women who are not street-level sellers (Waldorf et al. 1991) suggests that motives for selling cocaine are complex and extend beyond economic considerations. Often women are more likely than men to have specific short-term monetary goals for selling cocaine whereas men sell cocaine as a way of achieving status and prestige (Waldorf et al. 1991:95-96; Dunlap and Johnson n.d.). Revenue generated from marijuana sales enabled Rachel to put her daughter through college and pay for an elaborate wedding (Dunlap et al. 1994). Rachel also supported her mother until her death, suggesting that Rachel generated substantial income from her marijuana-dealing business. At the time of observation and interview (1989), Rachel conducted her crack business from her apartment. Unlike most crack houses, intensive observations indicated that Rachel managed to maintain many of the social aspects of the tea pad era. Her apartment was always clean, even though most furnishings were old and worn; maintaining “atmosphere” was of prime importance.

Dunlap: ... you have a nice place here ... and you always keep it clean ...

Rachel: Atmosphere is important ... [you can get high] without having to worry about people like busting down your doors and things ... I’ve been here 20 years. My neighbors they may think about what I do and what have you but I give everybody respect. I try to deliver, you know, keep myself decent you know. A lot of them, they like me because they remember me from when I had a whole lot, you know what I’m

²At some locales in the study site, crack users knocked out bricks from the sides of buildings in order to make a hole; they preferred to consume their crack alone in the hole.

saying ... They remember that I raised a beautiful child and they saw my daughter raised here, go to school of science, go to college ... seeing the white limousines and the \$7,000 wedding, you know. And they give me a certain amount of respect. So I feel relatively safe here ... and I have a lot of people who will never go buy [anywhere else], who will come to me when they get paid, put it here.

Among the factors which distinguished Rachel's business was the fact that she had lived in and paid rent for her current apartment for many years. Rachel's business was further distinguished from both curbside and other indoor crack-dealing locations in that she offered a setting for both purchase and consumption. Most crack dealers in Harlem run their businesses as a strictly "take-out" operation. Rachel offered the chemical equivalent of a home-cooked meal. Crack was bought and consumed in a safe, relaxed, and convivial environment. Rachel ran her business in two basic ways:

... See I do it like that because you getting paid all along that way. Usually these people don't club suit [participate in night life, partying], you know, you getting paid for going, you getting paid for purchasing, you getting paid for cooking it up, then you going to vial it up, then you gonna smoke it with 'em, you know what I'm saying? Like that you know, so you turn it a sort of social situation at the same time you know. You not about gouging your eyes out and stuff like that you know. But, uh you have turn it toward you benefit 'cause you still the one that out there, you know? And then if they are gonna be here in this house doing it you know, you get crazy all along the way, like that, Okay. ... Then you know the other way is that, you know you got your own money and you gonna go buy some weight then you just bottle some up and have it right, cause you know they comin' anyway, and then sell it right to them point blank, period dot, like that and then smoke it with 'em too you know what I'm saying? Either way it works, you know, and it's easy, it's subtle, it's quiet. Ain't a whole lot of noise, a whole lot of traffic, and you still getting paid, you know.

However, Rachel's dealing business changed in accordance with shifts in household composition precipitated by changes in her personal and family life such as the death of her mother and the marriage of her daughter (cf. Dunlap et al. 1994). Once she was free of dependents and living alone, Rachel's dealing business became part of her household and intruded further on her everyday life. Rachel also began to consume more of her product. "Controlled users generally had a multiplicity of meaningful roles which gave them a positive identity and a stake in conventional daily life (e.g., secure employment, homes, families). Both of these factors anchored them against drifting toward a drug-centered life" (Waldorf et al. 1991:267).

Although living alone in 1992, Rachel still conducted her crack business within the boundaries of conventional norms and values. She was not as interested in making money as during earlier periods of dealing. Her attention was focused on keeping a crack supply for herself and earning enough money to support her basic needs, i.e., food, clothing, and shelter. She maintained a steady flow of reliable customers and continued to be known for her high-quality crack. An important factor distinguished Rachel's business; it was not a "free for all." Indeed Rachel maintained fairly strict criteria for admission. As she described her customers:

They tend to be more educated. They tend to be older. They tend to have no children in the home. Most of them, all of them except for a few, all the children are grown and gone. They tend to have been going through some of the same things I've gone through. Flipping out when you lost your children or your mother and stuff and just didn't give a damn, you know. But a lot of them like have husbands or wives. They have some kind of significant person there in their life. You know, most of them are married too, I'll tell you that. And most of them, don't [let] their partners [know they smoke crack]. They don't do it [smoke crack] with their partners.

But Rachel was aware that “there are just some real tacky people out there.” Such less-than-desirable customers might seek admission because they heard Rachel had good crack. Although Rachel would occasionally sell to them, she did not seek their repeat business because she believed that this “type” of clientele would draw too much attention to her business. Having customers that look as “normal” as possible was part of Rachel’s precautionary strategy against detection and possible arrest. By “normal” she referred to those who held jobs. Regular workers cared about their appearance and the way they conducted themselves. Because they had a stake in conventional society, they were concerned about their behavior and the behavior of others. Robbery and violence were not part of their repertoire, either in relation to daily life or to drug consumption.

Rachel’s customers depended on her to take care of and not exploit them at their most vulnerable moments—while they were consuming crack. Rachel clearly cultivated a codependency relationship with her customers. She treated them in much the same way she treated her mother while growing up. She not only provided (sold) them crack and a place to consume it, but she made sure they ate and did not spend their entire paycheck on crack. She took a portion of the money given to her by customers and set it aside when they informed her that they needed money for other purposes. She made sure that her customers were comfortable, looked out for their health, insisted that they eat her home-cooked meals, and provided a safe, relatively stress-free environment for crack consumption. Customers were never robbed in her apartment and in general, were spared the experience of the “dog-eat-dog” world (cf. Dunlap and Johnson 1991; Dunlap n.d.) confronting the average street-level crack consumer.

Rachel carved out a safe and lucrative environment for herself in the drug economy. In a world where uncertainty abounded, her crack dealing “spot” was relatively unique. Utilizing the many and varied resources acquired during her life, and drawing on her knowledge, skills, and experiences from the marijuana era, Rachel brought to the inner-city crack experience a form of controlled use. In a world of violence, disease, death, arrest, and incarceration, Rachel struggled to create and maintain “order.” She labored hard trying at keeping herself sane, sociable, and healthy. She managed not only to maintain her own crack habit, but also created a social environment which prevented and protected customers from the violent and irrational persons and behaviors typically associated with crack sales and consumption (Fagan 1991; Johnson et al. 1995). Rachel successfully managed the transition from selling marijuana to crack house. By maintaining a tea-pad like atmosphere, she attracted middle-class working customers. She avoided incarceration and insulated herself and customers from serious violence or personal injury.

People come here because they know I have patience to deal with them, with the looking under the bed, and looking in the closet. They feel safe here ... you see the people that I’m dealing with, they gonna come here anyway, you know. Whatever I say is [the price of crack] that’s what it’s gonna be anyway, you know. ‘Cause they, its about the fringe benefits of being here, you see. So they don’t really run, but they don’t really worry about stuff like that [price of crack or cocaine changing].

Rachel drew on a wide variety of resources in her cultural background to keep her crack business relatively aligned with conventional social norms. Selling and consuming crack was safer in her apartment than on the streets or in other local crack houses. Unlike most sellers, she genuinely cared about her customers. Many times while smoking, they talked about what had happened to them and how drugs and become a major focus in their lives (also see Hamid 1992a). This verbal sharing itself was atypical as crack smokers often become very paranoid. Her customers, who were usually older, more educated, and more experienced than younger consumers, did not feel comfortable around the “average” street crack user. They generally lacked the “street smarts” essential for effective negotiation in street drug markets. So, they

sought out Rachel to provide what was needed. They felt safe in her “hands” and did not think of looking for cheaper or better quality crack elsewhere.

Conclusion

Families, friends, education, marriage, employment and social programs were all resources for Rachel. Rachel received relatively extensive cultural capital from her grandmother in her early formative years. Her extended family situation clearly displayed its role as main socialization agent. The cultural capital provided her with the particular resources and tools for success (Kohn 1977; Kohn et al. 1986). Striving for middle/upper-class status, Joyce made sure Rachel acquired cultural competence. This case study suggested that the availability of such resources impacted on her drug use/sales career. The presence or absence of specific resources in an individual's life—combined with the ability and opportunity to utilize them—mediated both the nature, extent, and form of individual participation in drug use/sales. The availability of significant resources provided by her grandmother during childhood and caregiving for an alcoholic mother as teenager enabled Rachel to avoid the downward spiral of drug abuse into compulsive consumption, arrest, and the general deprivation that characterizes the majority of crack users and sellers in low income, inner-city settings.

When crack and cocaine users have strong stakes in conventional society and important resources at risk, they tend to constrain their behavior and consumption (Waldorf et al. 1991). Such restraint was evident in an examination of shifts in Rachel's dealing style and consumption patterns over time. While her mother and daughter were resident in her household, Rachel kept her dealing business separate from the household. Once her mother died and her daughter married and left home, this separation between business and personal/family life collapsed and Rachel's dealing activities were integrated into the household. “If cocaine is only one element in a life that is balanced by conventional roles and pursuits, then controlled use and competent dealing are likely” (Waldorf et al. 1991:102). The performance of her roles as daughter, mother, and economic provider clearly impacted Rachel's consumption patterns and dealing style.

Even though selling from her apartment, Rachel attempted to conduct business in accordance with generally accepted societal norms. Her crack consumption, although increased, was still a long way from uncontrolled use; she remained competent in her role as a manager. Her self-interests were tied to broader needs of her clientele who had a stake in conventional social activities. Self-interest and commitment to conventional society, however, did not prevent people from consuming or selling drugs. Rachel's story revealed that family, education, employment, and social programs may function as important resources encouraging and sustaining an interest in and commitment to conventional society. These resources played a substantial role in Rachel's relative success as a crack user and seller. The resources which Rachel drew upon, however, are not widely available in the inner-city black community. The lack of such resources has been determined in part by macrolevel social forces (Dunlap and Johnson 1992). Other inner-city households with drug using/selling adults face significant obstacles and recurrent crises. Choices, such as the decision to engage in drug sales, are often made in the midst of a crisis (such as prolonged unemployment and homelessness) and in turn are propelled by further crises (such as arrest and imprisonment) (Dunlap 1992; Bourgois 1995).

Certain conditions of life in inner-city neighborhoods generate inordinate levels of stress on individuals. These conditions and the absence of resources within families and communities to deal with them, shape the consequences of cocaine and crack use (Waldorf et al. 1991:268). Scarce and substandard housing, underachieving schools and overcrowded classrooms, poverty, unemployment, crime, violence, abuse, neglect, substance abuse, negligible health

care, and inadequate diet are all macrolevel conditions that inner-city residents encounter on a daily basis (Dunlap and Johnson 1992). Within such settings and the absence of any meaningful opportunities for productive lives, persons have few reasons to learn and abide by conventional norms and identities (Dunlap 1992; Dunlap and Johnson n.d.-b; Waldorf et al. 1991).

Thus, resources and cultural capital act as important variables in structuring the ways in which drug abusers enter into, develop, and maintain careers in drug use and sales. “The personal and social resources of users matter. The value placed on productive daily lives matters. And of course the social distribution of opportunities for productive lives matters...” (Waldorf et al. 1991:280). Within the inner-city context, Rachel’s background (from a relatively middle-class black household) and competence in obtaining resources may account for her different patterns of conduct and behavior with drug use and sales. Rachel’s grandmother, mother, husband, marriage, education, and prior legitimate employment all provided her with substantive resources which combined to give her a significant stake in conventional society and a strong commitment to its norms and values—relative to other crack sellers/users. The personal and social resources at her disposal had a profound influence on her particular patterns of use, style of dealing, and clientele which Rachel subsequently developed and which enabled her to avoid contact with the criminal justice system for many years.

Since 1992, three other female crack sellers have been recruited who sell primarily and successfully from their apartments for extended periods of time. Like Rachel, these women have generally had relatively stable childhoods with a mother/grandmother who was a relatively effective caregiver and manager; they also have gained several other resources which prevent their business activities from being “taken over” by male sellers, and serve the more stable, working crack users. Thus, Rachel’s case history reveals how family and other resources provide understandings about persons who rarely come to attention (and who systematically remain hidden) when studying drug use/sales, especially those engaged in crack use and sales.

Many more female crack sellers, however, lack such modestly stable family backgrounds and resources, they regularly function as low-level distributors (Dunlap et al. n.d.; Johnson et al. 1991) and are often without a primary residence (Maher et al. n.d.-b). Such women are generally on the demand side of the drug market. Much has been written about crack prostitutes and the sex-for-crack phenomenon. Rachel, however, gives a different view of female consumption and sales. She is more in control of her consumption behavior and her life. Additionally, females are a minority among crack sellers and usually perform in the lowest roles. Rachel also constitutes a truly hidden population in that she is unique not just among crack consumers, but also the supply side of the crack market.

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