

**MEN AT WORK: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF DRUG MARKETS AND
YOUTH TRANSITIONS IN TIMES OF AUSTERITY**

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MICHAEL SALINAS EDWARDS

**SCHOOL OF LAW
Centre for Criminology and Criminal Justice**

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Abstract

The University of Manchester, Michael Antonio Salinas Edwards,

Doctor of Philosophy

*Men at Work: An Ethnography of Drug Markets and
Youth Transitions in Times of Austerity*

Based on six-years ethnographic research, this thesis provides an in-depth account of a contemporary British drug market. The study follows a group of twenty-five friends, termed *The Lads*, during their transition from late-adolescence (16-22) through to early adulthood (22-28). This was a critical stage in their life course; it was a time when many had begun advancing into the world of work and business entrepreneurship, in search of their chosen career. Yet it was during this time that two key developments occurred: bulk volumes of illicit drugs became available to The Lads through credit *and* the UK experienced several years of economic recession and stagnation. The economic constraints The Lads encountered during this time prompted many to become involved the trafficking of illegal drugs. Though their entry into the markets was not necessarily motivated out of absolute need or poverty, the experience of low-paying salaries, the loss of work and income, and the inability to secure legitimate investment capital, *all* made drug dealing an alluring source of untaxed revenue, available as and when needed.

This study assesses the practices of this cohort of closed-market drug dealers, who capitalised on their expansive social networks as a means of trafficking a variety of illegal substances at the time of these two developments. During the course of the research their involvement came to span several stages of the supply chain, including: mid-level wholesale brokerage, import/export, wholesale, and retail (i.e. to the end-users). The study addresses various structural elements of their trade, including drug purchasing and selling, the assessment and mitigation of risks in relation to law enforcement, and the use of informal credit (i.e. 'fronting') as one of the principle facilitating factors of The Lads' various trade networks.

A variety of data collection methods were employed over many years to garner a depth of understanding and appreciation difficult to achieve in the study of active offenders. The data comprises of life narratives, observations, interview data and economic data. The findings offer some new insight into: the kinds of people who deal drugs; what characteristics they share; how they function as traders; what motivates them to either enter or exit the trade, and what social structures influence their offending careers?

These young men were not the archetypal drug dealer: they were neither predatory nor territorial. They were ambitious and hard working. Drug dealing was simply a shortcut to the lifestyle they aspired to; it was a source of capital; a means of funding their studies; a 'means to an end'. To these young men, drug dealing was just another form of work: a bad job that paid good commission.

DECLARATION

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DEDICATION

For grandad.

Chapter 1.

Introduction: The research & the research journey

*The void created by post-industrialism has
“promoted a culture of intense personal competition,
and spur[ed] its citizens to a level of material consumption
many could not lawfully sustain” (Currie 1985: 278),
and as the drug trade became normalized (Coomber 2006: 156),
“the lifestyles of British youth became inextricably
bound up with criminal activity” (Collin 1997: 131).*

Hobbs, 2013:123

*[I]t is high time that the [economic] profession
acknowledges how little we really know
about underground economies
and their causes and consequences.*

Feige and Urban, 2008: 287

Two features of contemporary Western culture have, in recent decades, rarely strayed far from the public’s consciousness: the often-mythologised drug dealer and the illegal drug markets themselves. Issues that surround the illegal drug trade have historically been muddled, with the public, media and politicians perpetually overlooking markets that do not fit into the more popularised imagery in favour of the more violent, more conspicuous trades (e.g. gang-operated markets or open street markets in inner-cities). The research I have undertaken was prompted out of a desire to answer some of the most fundamental questions regarding the illegal drug trade: who is it that deals drugs; what characteristics do they share (if any); how do they conduct such trade; and what motivates these individuals to either enter or exit the trade? The findings that are presented in the subsequent chapters will contribute to the criminological knowledge regarding ‘closed-market’ drug dealing (May and Hough,

2004), among non-gang affiliated dealers¹, operating at various levels of the trade (retail, wholesale, mid-market, and import/export), both inside and out of UK borders.

This thesis provides an in-depth and longitudinal ethnographic account of a small cohort of males (n=25) for whom dealing was an operationally viable, economically rational, and ultimately alluring form of work. The research was undertaken during a key stage in their life-course – at a time when many were transitioning into adulthood and the world of work (from late-teens (Salinas, 2007) through to their mid-twenties). Participants of the study were not hardened criminals: they came from hard-working low-income households, most having educational or vocational qualifications (many at degree level), and their chosen occupational careers lay firmly within the legitimate economy. For them, drug dealing was simply another way of making money, a means of supplementing their otherwise legitimate lifestyles through a relatively straightforward set of transactions; it was seen as an entrepreneurial activity that provided almost immediate economic gains – the uses of which were far broader than simply funding drug habits or consumerist indulgences (although this latter usage also played a role). This thesis situates individual narratives and economic motivations within broader macro elements, namely the structural constraints that were experienced following the 2008 global/national recession; it assesses how individuals negotiated the obstacles of the legitimate economy via the use of the illegal drug trade, and how it came to be that so few were still active at the conclusion of fieldwork. This is a study of *Men at Work*.

1.1 Drug dealers and drug markets: Challenging popular (mis)perceptions

*[M]uch that is thought about the workings of the
drug dealer and the drug market and the way
that they are commonly characterised is misconceived,
based upon assumption, ignorance, prejudice,
and overly homogenised stereotype
that ignores the complexities of each.*

Coomber, 2006: iv

¹ Chapter 2: Methods, assesses the group in relation to gang definitions.

*Young, poorly educated, violence prone males
are indeed just the ones most often arrested
for selling in cocaine and heroin markets.*

Caulkins and Reuter, 1998: 561

When terms such as ‘drug dealer’ or ‘drug market’ are used, there is a good chance a pop-cultural image will be evoked – both in the minds of the public and the politicians alike. Some might imagine an organised street gang of new migrants: hierarchically structured, violent and territorial; others may picture inner-city youths operating on a council estate: jobless, delinquent, dressed in hooded tops, riding BMXs, concealing drugs in their designer satchels; some might imagine a Mafioso-type crime cartel involved in importation, founded on ethnic or familial ties and run on well-established codes of practice; and still others may simply picture a ‘black man in a BMW’ couriering kilos of cocaine across the country.²³ As Coomber notes, ‘these images are the same ones that the news media, politicians and enforcement agencies tend to replicate’ (2006: 123).

From the late 1970s political discourse, particularly within the UK and US, became increasingly concerned with the illegal drug trade, its enforcement and the effects these markets/drugs had on society at large (South, 2002). Such discourse was often highly politicised and morally charged (Reinarman, 1994), prone to racial and class prejudice (Provine, 2008; Reinarman and Levine, 1997; Ruggiero and South, 1995), and at times founded on methodologically flawed studies (such as the early medical studies that fed into to a ‘moral panic’ around ‘crack babies’ in America during the 1980s, see Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994) or exaggerated/inaccurate media reports (such as the coverage of deaths in the UK linked to the psycho-stimulant Mephadrone, see Silverman, 2010). As Caulkins, Reuter and Coulson neatly surmise, ‘moral panic, racial prejudice, and sheer ignorance [have] fouled deliberations over the last century’ in the debate about drug markets (2011: 1886).

² Such was the commonly held perception of this racial stereotype that in 1999 The Police Federation ran a campaign designed to encourage greater numbers of recruits from Black and Minority Ethnic groups with a ironic poster that read: ‘*What do you call a black man in a BMW? A police sergeant on patrol*’.

³ Coomber notes: ‘Reference to the BMW is significant for BMWs are, as the stereotype goes – melding with other stereotypes about black men being poor – likely to be too expensive for most young black men and as such, in circular fashion, a black man driving a BMW is a dealer, how else would he get such a car’ (Coomber, 2006: 168, footnote 2).

Additionally, the criminal justice system has itself operated in such a way as to present a distorted picture of the illicit drug economy – particularly in regards to race. As Paoli and Reuter argue: '[European] [l]aw enforcement agencies are usually able to substantiate [claims regarding the role of ethnic minorities in drug markets] with criminal justice statistics and/or intelligence analyses, albeit that these reflect political and professional priorities' (2008: 15). Government figures show that black people are several times more likely to be stopped and searched in the UK on suspicion of possessing drugs than their white counterparts (Home Office, 2000; Eastwood et al., 2013). The disproportionate use of stop and search is not only evidence of racial discrimination (Bowling and Phillips, 2007); a consequence of such bias practices is that a far greater proportion of the black population are caught and subsequently arrested on drug charges (Phillips and Bowling, 2002). To compound issues, recent findings from a UK study also suggest that black people are more likely to receive harsher punishments for drug possession (Eastwood et al., 2013) – outcomes that may partly reflect the subjective assessments of 'decision makers' (i.e. judges) within the court system (Steen et al., 2005). In any case, it appears as though the criminal justice system has itself adhered to, and indeed perpetuated, several of the stereotypes regarding drug markets/traders.

The 'fouled' political discourse and discriminatory criminal justice practices notwithstanding, it is likely that the most prominent institution to have influenced/skewed wider perceptions of drug dealers/drug markets has been the mass media. As Jock Young (1974) argued, the news media – particularly the newspapers – 'select events which are *atypical*, present them in a *stereotypical* fashion and contrast them against a backcloth of normality which is *overtypical* (1974: 241). As such, those who operate within the illegal drug trade are frequently portrayed 'as pushers and predators, living the 'champagne lifestyle'' (May et al., 2005: 5), with tabloid headlines such as: "Crackdown on evil drug dealers" (Sunday Mirror, 2005) [...] "BMW 'drug dealer', 15 [years old]" (May et al., 2005: 5); and 'The "death drug" we can't police' (Daily Mail, 2010). By reporting only the most sensationalist stories linked to the illegal drug trade, and by wording them in such a way as to shock, enthrall and entertain, the written press 'create a public awareness that is substantially different from any "reality"' (Muncie, 2001: 44).

Public appetite for stories set within the ‘shady’ world of drug dealing is likely to have ingrained such imagery further into popular opinion; with American TV dramas – such as *The Wire* (aired 2004-2008) and *Breaking Bad* (aired 2008-2013) – gaining critical and public acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as a host of industry awards. Britain has also ventured into the world of drug markets with programmes such as Chanel 4’s, *Top Boy* (aired 2011; 2013): a two-series drama set within a deprived inner-city housing estate in East London. As with many feature films⁴ these dramas depict brutally violent industries in which gangs and gang-members are central to the trade.⁵

Documentary films⁶, fictional literature (e.g. Goins, 2007; McBain, 2003; Johnson, 2008) and true-crime exposés (e.g. Thompson, 2005; O’Mahoney, 1997; Johnson, 2005, 2007; Glenny, 2008; Knight, 2012) have done little to challenge such portrayals, providing portraits of drug economies that are once again situated within socially and economically deprived neighbourhoods, operated by brutally violent gangs, and very often composed of ethnic groups. As Reinerman asserts, ‘the mass media has engaged in what I call the *rountinization of caricature [with regards to drug dealers]* – rhetorically recrafting worst cases into typical cases and the episodic into the endemic’ (1994: 159).

Criminology has, to some extent, supported viewpoints traditionally focused on markets in which violence is systemic, and that are either gang-controlled or at the very least operated independently by gang affiliates (e.g. Bourgois, 1995; Venkatesh, 2006; Topalli, et al., 2002; Williams, 1990; Paoli and Planck, 2000; Jacobs, 1999; 2000; Decker and VanWinkle, 1994; Morselli, 2009; Klein et al., 1991; Sandberg, 2008; Skolnick et al., 1990; Fagan and Chin, 1990; Sullivan, 1989; Hagedorn, 1994; Mieczowski, 1990; Sanchez-Jankowski, 2003; Moore, 1990; Hamid, 1990; Taylor,

⁴ E.g. *Kiduthood* (2006); *Layer Cake* (2004); *End of Watch* (2012); *Training Day*; (2001); *Blow* (2001); *Traffic* (2000); *Narc* (2002).

⁵ Even the BBC’s satirical series *Ideal* (aired in UK 2005-2013) – a series focusing on the life of a reclusive cannabis dealer- depicts a trade in which a key character is murdered as a result of his criminal activities.

⁶ For instance, the BAFTA award-winning *Sky One* series *Ross Kemp on Gangs* in which two episodes focused solely on the violence connected to the drugs trade in both Liverpool and London (aired 2006; 2008); and the BBC’s ‘*Law and Order*’ series (aired 2008) by documentary maker Louis Theroux, which looked at the Methamphetamine markets in the American mid-states, as well as the gang controlled drug markets of Philadelphia

1990; Dunlap et al., 1996; Johnson et al., 1998; Bennett and Holloway, 2004; Mares, 2001; Wilson et al., 2002; Stelfox, 1998; Coomber and Maher, 2006; Matrix Knowledge Group, 2007; Densley, 2012; Lupton et al., 2002; Din and Cullingford, 2006; Hallsworth and Silverstone, 2009).

Criminological research has also provided a breadth of work that clearly advocates a more nuanced understanding of drug markets outside of popularised imagery. As Dorn et al.'s (1992) UK study on drug trafficking made clear more than twenty-years ago, 'At the end [of the study] it no longer seemed remarkable: no cartels; no mafia; no drug barons; and correspondingly, relatively little corruption' (1992: x). Studies demonstrate a range of market-types composed of individuals from countless subsections of society, including (but certainly not limited to): the post-industrial working-classes (Hobbs, 2013, 1995; Winlow 2001; Hall et al., 2008; Collison, 1996); middle-class suburbanites (e.g. Hobbs, 1995; Ward, 2010; Waldrof, 1991; Adler, 1993), legitimate business entrepreneurs (e.g. Morselli, 2001; Morselli and Giguere, 2006; Adler 1993; Lyman and Potter, 2000; Desroches, 2005; Decker and Chapman, 2008), university students/graduates (Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010; Jacinto, et al., 2008; Murphy et al., 2004; Blum, 1972; Morselli, 2001), as well as those from socially marginalised and economically deprived communities (e.g. Hoffer, 2006; Anderson, 2000; Venkatesh, 2009; Ruggiero and Khan, 2006).

Studies have also shown that many drug users source their supplies, not from 'real' drug dealers (see Jacinto et al., 2008; Parker, 2001), but rather friends or friends-of-friends through what is known as 'social supply dealing' (e.g. Aldridge et al, 2011; Parker et al., 2002; Parker, 2001; Parker and Measham, 1994; Home Office, 2012; Taylor and Potter, 2013; Potter, 2009; Ward, 2010; Duffy et al., 2008; Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010; Waldorf et al., 1991; Joe-Laidler and Hunt, 2008; Murphy et al., 2004).

A growing body of research has therefore shown how popular perceptions of drug markets/dealers are a clear distortion of the drugs economy at large, and that such economies cannot simply be characterised by 'turf wars, guns, and a market driven by large sums of money and managed by increasingly unrestrained violence (Coomber,

2006: 117). Thus far, political and public debate continues to overlook what has been termed ‘the silent majority’ (Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010): ‘an off-the-radar collection of [drug dealers] whose deviant behaviors are largely unknown beyond the limits of their social networks; whose dealings are typically not directly associated with violence; and whose often flagrant illegal activities are generally carried out without the hindrance of police scrutiny and without the stigma of being labelled a criminal’ (Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010: 2). This study will attempt to broaden our understanding of this ‘silent’ majority, by focusing exclusively on individuals who were far removed from the world of inner-city deprivation, gang territories, criminal rivalries and gangsterdom. In doing so, this work provides further evidence of thriving drug economies that perpetually go unnoticed by police agencies, the public, the media and the politicians.

1.2 Research Journey

All ethnographers should bring their biographies to the research table.

Hobbs, 2013: 9

The reasons *why* and *how* such research was conducted are by no means unique. As with many social scientists (particularly those employing ethnography) I chose to research a culture with which I had prior affiliation, knowledge and understanding e.g. Hobbs; 1995; Winlow, 2001; Polsky, 1969; Parker 1974; Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010; Armstrong, 1993; Ward; 2010; Akhtar and South, 2000; Taylor and Potter, 2013; Hodgkinson, 2005 (to name but a few). In each of those examples ‘insider researchers’ were able to garner unique and insightful accounts of ‘deviant’ groups and hidden populations. As Winlow candidly states in his book *Badfellas: Crime, Tradition and New Masculinities*: ‘I am a product of the very culture I attempt to describe in this thesis’ (2001: 5). In this section I aim to provide the reader with an appreciation of what led me towards undertaking ethnographic research on a closed network of drug dealers, and how it was that I gained such privileged access to a hidden population of offenders.

1.2.1. Early years: Embedded within a delinquent peer group

My interests within the field of deviancy and criminality, and consequently the journey that led me towards researching illicit drug markets, began as a youth. I was raised in a non-affluent single-parent household. Despite my early academic successes (due largely to the support my mother provided) my behaviour in and out of school was often less than socially acceptable. I often found myself in detention and was summoned to the head master's office on numerous occasions due to my associations with some of the more mischievous elements in and out of school. I wasn't a bad lad, but nor was I an angel. During adolescence (and to an extent even before then) the occasional 'ruck' had been an accepted – indeed exciting – component of life in my hometown. During our mid-to-late teens my peers and I engaged in countless physical confrontations with other groups of lads from the local area. Despite my inability to fight, group brawls either in the streets or in bars/clubs were a largely normalised feature of our nights. Recreational drug use had also featured prominently among my teenage peer group. Cannabis (hash) was smoked almost daily (before and after classes/work); while ecstasy, amphetamines and cocaine were also used, but with far lesser regularity. In short, deviancy and criminality were part and parcel of my early years – an accepted feature of life whilst growing up. Yet despite the normality of our conduct, I was fully aware of how 'others' – including my mother and teachers – viewed such behaviour: it was immoral, plain and simple. As a psychology and sociology student at college (aged 16) I often found myself attempting to apply the theories being taught to the deviant behaviours I witnessed within my peer group (e.g. subcultural theories). As my interest in these subjects developed I decided to pursue such topics further at bachelor's level.

1.2.2. Becoming a 'researcher': Embedded within delinquent peer groups

As a criminology and sociology undergraduate at Manchester Metropolitan University, I had the fortune of studying under the ethnographer, Dr Dave Calvey. As our rapport developed I began to speak candidly to him about my past experiences of offending and victimization. He directed me towards various ethnographic studies he believed would interest me. These studies (namely Winlow, 2001; Hobbs, 1995; Patrick, 1973; Willis, 1973, and Pryce, 1986) galvanised my fascination into in-depth qualitative criminological research. Each of these studies documented crime and delinquency amongst economically marginalised groups – in particular the working

classes. Their accounts humanised their ‘subjects’. Rather than portraying the offenders as ‘others’ who were somehow inherently nihilistic, these researchers wrote about the cultures and social context of their participants’ lives; they described the way in which people responded to broader economic and social changes, and how people rationalised and justified their deviant behaviours. Such was the allure of these accounts that I decided I would conduct participant observation for my final-year dissertation. It was at this point I began to consider broadly *what* and *whom* I hoped to study.

During my first two years in university I had befriended a wide range of people from various backgrounds and cultures. Many of those I had come to consider close friends had deviant histories of their own, or else were still actively offending (for the most part this involved small-scale drug distribution and selling ‘knock off’ designer clothing). I had a range of avenues with which to pursue empirical research into crime and deviancy (though it is likely some would not have participated). One particular cohort of friends (*The Lads*) seemed to provide the best opportunity for a study (see Riemer, 1977). I had spent a great deal of time socialising with them (more than other groups of friends during these two years) and was well aware that several individuals were actively engaged in income-generating crimes such as scams⁷, drug sales, and thefts from the workplace, while a handful were active members of a local football hooligan firm (see section 2.5.2). I approached those with whom I had developed the closest friendships and asked if they would participate in an empirical study (see section 2.4.2). I told them this would involve my hanging out with them and making notes as to our (their) activities, as well as a small number of recorded interviews. They agreed, and for the following six months I spent whatever days I had outside of university observing and interviewing a broad selection of The Lads (as well as some of their older, more criminal affiliates) under the guidance and supervision of Dr Calvey.

1.2.3. Undergraduate fieldwork: Embedded within ‘The Lads’ network

I approached my undergraduate fieldwork as something of a blank canvas: unsure exactly what it was I was to be researching other than the extent of The Lads’ criminal activities. As more and more time was spent observing and interviewing the

⁷ One of The Lads was even involved in high-end VAT fraud (‘Carrousel’ fraud).

participants, and as I began reassessing much of my ethnographic literature with a more critical perspective (in particular Winlow, 2001; Hobbs, 1995; Patrick, 1973), the focus of my research progressively became clearer. The completed dissertation – *The Roses that Grew from Concrete* (Salinas, 2007) - documented The Lads' dual commitments to legitimate goals (education, work and economic prosperity) and delinquent behaviour (such as violent behaviour, drug taking or petty crimes). Not only had I found the process of participant observation wholly gratifying, my data collection had yielded what I thought were interesting findings – such as their justifications for engaging in income-generating crimes (excitement, strained goals, greed, and entrepreneurialism). As the write-up of my dissertation concluded, I felt as though I had only begun to scratch the surface of the group's characteristics and behaviour. I realised that the subsequent years would be a critical time for The Lads, and I was curious as to how they and their network would develop as they progressed into adulthood. Even at this early stage of my (yet unplanned) career, I held hopes of once again formally studying the group in order to document how their offending trajectories would develop.

The following passage is taken from the final paragraph of the conclusion chapter of that dissertation. Though it is rife with bad grammar, it nevertheless demonstrates my eagerness to pursue The Lads with the aim of documenting key changes and turning points in their young adult lives.

Continuing the research in a year or two would be valuable in depicting the life-course of The Lads: whether or not criminal acts increase or decrease, whether the constant use of cannabis is stopped or decreases [...] and if any of The Lads become completely law-abiding. The 'buzz' [attained from their delinquent and criminal behaviours] will still need to be satisfied, so by what means will The Lads fulfil their need for adrenaline filled entertainment. Will the group become more organised in their criminal acts, will they denounce violence completely; all of these questions can only be answered further down their life [...] Further research in The Lads future will aid in explaining either a breakdown, shift, or reaffirmation of the values they hold. Only time will tell. "...one day, mark my words. It'll happen, you'll see. People will look at our lot and say, "Look at those posh bastard!" We'll have the money, we'll have the cars, we'll have the house. But they won't know where we came from and they won't know what the fuck we went through..." (Tee).

Salinas, 2007: 59

I was awarded a ‘first’ for the dissertation, and graduated university a month later. Soon after I secured work within a university careers centre, but immediately felt drawn back into academia with the aim of continuing my research.

1.2.4. Postgraduate fieldwork

Before applying for a place on Manchester University’s doctoral programme⁸ I had asked my former participants if they would be willing to participate in yet a *further* study, similar to that of my undergraduate dissertation. Again, they all agreed (see section 2.4.2). Under the proviso of their continued support I applied for, and secured, a 1+3 ESRC scholarship (one year’s Masters of Research and three years PhD). Although fieldwork was not due to begin for several years The Lads were keen for me to begin documenting their advancement into the ‘criminal underworld’ (in the words of one participant): more and more individuals were supplying friends and affiliates with various illicit drugs, one individual had begun wholesaling cocaine, and two individuals had ventured into cross-border smuggling. Having now become almost fully embedded within this social network I was unable to ignore such developments and felt it wise to recommence the maintenance of notes prior to the official fieldwork date; I also decided to conduct several preliminary interviews with participants. The Lads were eager to once again be interviewed, and I was eager to hone my data collection techniques whilst at the same time collecting valuable data that would provide a longitudinal dimension to the research.

I maintained regular contact with the participants during the first two years of my postgraduate studies (i.e. during my Masters degree and the first year of the PhD). Despite wanting some degree of distance from The Lads and their activities (for reasons of objectivity) I felt it only right to sustain these friendships during this interlude period rather than returning to spend time with them some years later simply to ‘use’ them for the purposes of research. Though our contact was primarily social, I kept abreast of their social, economic and illicit on-goings.

⁸ My former supervisor Dr. Calvey had recommended the institute. I did not enquire about a PhD at any other institute. In hindsight, had I not secured in a place in Manchester this research would not have been conducted.

I was of course concerned about the ethics of having maintained contact and fieldnotes outside of the approved research period – particularly as I still had to undergo ethical approval from the university. I ensured to adhere to the same protocols that were eventually approved via the university (e.g. participant consent; anonymising data in any notes; the encryption of any digital files). My continued contact with The Lads was necessary for a number of reasons – aside from a desire to document their offending over a prolonged period. The network's composition had altered since the completion of my undergraduate study, and it was important I remained aware of how sub-cliques had changed from previous years in order to avoid any unintended within-group changes as a result of my presence (e.g. potentially being a catalyst for socialisation for two individuals whose peer interaction had decreased). I was also acutely aware that their willingness to participate in this follow-up study had been secured in the spring of 2008, but that the intensive fieldwork was not to due to recommence until September 2010. Several individuals wanted me simply to hurry up and get on with it, and did not readily appreciate the delay with my data collection – ‘Are you ever gonna do your fuckin’ study or what?’ (Sol). I was also concerned that I might drift *too far* from this social clique, thereby making my re-engagement problematic.

For ethnographic projects such as this, the current structure of ethic committees poses significant challenges. Such committee's are intended for a world of discrete projects in which researcher and researched are disconnected from one another. The current study was founded and facilitated through my intimate knowledge of the group (as are so many ethnographies) – thus to have temporarily severed contact solely on the grounds of not wishing to know about their activities would have undermined our rapport. To have refrained from including any data obtained prior to fieldwork would, in my mind, be both irrational and to the severe detriment of the findings. I recognise fully the importance of ethics, but I do not feel that in this instance such mechanical bureaucracies were able to appreciate my position as an embedded member of the group. Conundrums of ethics versus practicalities are nothing new in the intimate study of deviant groups (e.g. Venkatesh, 2008; Rodgers, 2007; Bourgois, 1995; Blackman, 2007).

When the time came for me to enter the field for the one-year intensive fieldwork, I felt as though I had attained a sufficient level of distance whilst having maintained my friendships, access and, just as importantly, knowledge of their levels of offending.

The current study and the topics I address are the result of countless, unforeseen events that have occurred in my and my participants' lifetimes. Perhaps the single greatest element that could not have been anticipated prior to commencing this research was the recession of 2008 and the subsequent economic stagnation that ensued. This sudden change in national (and indeed global) fortune was to have a profound affect on those who had been indoctrinated into the aspirational culture of upward social mobility

1.3 Research objectives and thesis structure

The principal objectives of this doctoral thesis are to systematically recount the operational features of an informal, non-gang affiliated, group of dealers, and to outline the motivations and structural conditions that pre-empted market entry/exit by these individuals. Using a multi-faceted approach that incorporates both individual motivations and broader macro influences this study attempts to address two questions that 'are central to any society [...] [:] "*Why do people commit crime?*" and "*What can be done about it?*"' (Wilkström, 2006: 61).

The key outcomes from the current study are presented in three central findings chapters. Each chapter provides a thematic introduction to the topic, a review of the relevant literatures, the data itself, as well as a summary of the findings and a concluding section (note: it was deemed inappropriate to present the three thematic literature reviews into a single chapter).

The thesis is structured accordingly:

Chapter 2 provides the methodology discussion for this study. It begins by describing the methods of data collection, as well as providing justifications for the methods employed, including: overt/covert observations; unstructured interviews; life-history narratives; financial earnings; and social network analysis. The means by which data

was analysed are then discussed. Next, I provide a comprehensive discussion of the numerous ethical dilemmas encountered during the course of the study. Finally, the chapter provides a contextual overview of the participants' characteristics and of the research sites (paying particular attention to the economic features of both).

Chapter 3 is the first of the three findings chapters. It attempts to explain what factors contributed to the group's 'silent majority' status. It looks at the perceived risks of the drug trade and outlines the risk mitigation (or arrest avoidance) procedures that were employed to guard these men from state reprisals. The chapter assesses the use of these techniques at various stages of the distribution trade: retail, wholesale, import/export. Attention is also given to the success of these techniques in deflecting knowledge of their trades and attempts at prosecution.

Chapter 4 deals with the use of informal credit within the group's various trade networks (in this study termed 'black credit'). It describes the process by which cascades of stock, fronted on credit, filtered across various linkages in the markets. It outlines the conditions under which such credit was issued and describes the advantages of credit at both the individual and market levels. The chapter ends by discussing the conditions under which trade agreements were enforced.

Chapter 5 is the final findings chapter; it is split into two thematic parts: part one – *Drug dealing as work*, and part two – *The happiness of pursuit*. Part one provides much of the participants' narrative data as it attempts to describe the process by which the illegal drug economy became an attractive alternative/supplement to work in the legitimate economy. Using two in-depth case studies I document three distinct forms of economic motivation that led to market entry and apply (where appropriate) each of these motivations to the remaining participants. The chapter focuses greatly on the structural conditions that pre-empted their move into the drug markets as well as the individuals' rationales. Part one also evaluates drug dealing using seven distinct criteria (brining together a range of features that past studies used as indicators of job quality) in order to appraise the quality of drug dealing as a form of work. Part two describes the development of stakes within the regular economy over several years. It discusses the conditions under which people exited the markets, paying particular

attention to the influence of stakes within the legitimate economy. The jobs that were held at the conclusion of fieldwork are then evaluated (using the seven conditions of job quality) in order to understand whether job quality had any bearing upon participant's offending/desistence.

Chapter 6 provides the concluding comments on this research. It brings together the key findings of each chapter and suggests how such findings might be applied to policy. Recommendations of additional avenues of inquiry are also outlined.

There remains a great body of data not presented in this thesis, but from which I have already identified numerous additional topics of further interest that include: the normalisation of drug distribution (similar to the concept of normalised drug use, see Aldridge et al, 2011), concepts of masculinity, the variable profitability of the trade on a month-by-month basis, as well as the process through which their social/trade networks rapidly developed.

Chapter 2.

Studying a closed-market social-network of drug dealers: Methods and methodological reflections

This chapter describes the range of methods used for the purpose of this empirical study. I will provide a reflexive analysis of the various methodological issues associated with such an in-depth ethnographic study. In addition to outlining the instruments of data collection I provide an overview of The Lads characteristics and brief history of participants, as well as a description of the research sites and of the broader economic conditions of The Lads' lives. I also offer a reflection as to the main ethical concerns/dilemmas encountered during this research.

An extensive amount of data comprising six-years of observations is utilized throughout this thesis. This includes data that was gathered from intensive fieldwork between 2006 and 2007 for my undergraduate dissertation – *The Roses that Grew from Concrete* (Salinas, 2007), informal observations that were made in the three years separating my undergraduate and doctoral fieldwork (2007-2010), one-year intensive fieldwork conducted between 2010 and 2011 (amounting to approximately 1,500 hours), and follow-up interviews and observations that were conducted after leaving the field (during 2012 and 2013). In Section 2.2 I provide detail of these different stages. As I will make clear, this study was a piece of 'opportunistic research' (Riemer, 1977) conducted on a group of individuals with whom I had close connections:-

2.1 Ethnography as the method

Ethnographic research has a long and illustrious history within the social sciences. Its ability to penetrate deep into a particular social setting has made it an effective tool in studying 'hidden populations' – those groups and cultures that are difficult to identify or access. As van Gemert argues, 'It is not so much the obstacles in recruitment of respondents that have urged researchers to lean over to ethnography, rather it is the

scope of the research' (2010: 131). The combination of direct observation, semi-structured interviews, life-course history narratives, oral histories (as well as questionnaires and visual ethnography) make ethnographies an ideal method of gaining a broad spectrum of information and understanding regarding complex social groups. As Adler and Adler acknowledge:

‘Ethnography’s great power lies in its depth penetration of a topic or area: it yields explanatory insights into the reasons that people, groups and organizations act as they do and how conflicting social forces are resolved’ (1987:17).

Recent decades have witnessed an influx of studies employing ethnography as a means of documenting the use and trading of illicit drugs. These in-depth studies have allowed for a nuanced understanding of personal agency, cultural and structural conditions in relation to these offenses. Such accounts of drug dealers (as either a central or ancillary focus of the research) have taken place in the UK (e.g. May et al., 2005; Ward, 2010; Hobbs, 1995, 2013; Winlow, 2001, Akhtar and South, 2000, Burr, 1983, Taylor and Potter, 2013) continental Europe (e.g. Sandberg, 2008; Zaitch, 2002; van Gemert, 1998; Paoli, 2000) Australia (Fitzgerald, 2009; Maycock and Howat, 2007; Denton, 2001; Maher and Dixon, 1999) and the US (e.g. Adler, 1993; Jacobs, 1999; Sullivan, 1989; Padilla, 1992; Caulkins et al., 1998; Bourgois, 1995; Hagedorn, 1994 Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010; Williams, 1990; Anderson, 2000; Venkatesh, 2006; Hoffer, 2006; Waldorf, et al. 1977; Reinerman, 1979; Furst et al., 1999; Decker and Van Winkle, 1994 Maher and Daly, 1996; Taylor, 1990; Vigil, 1988; Jacinto et al., 2008; Preble and Casey, 1969; Curtis and Wendel, 2000; Fields, 1984; Mieczkowski, 1986, 1990; Hamid, 1990; Waldorf et al., 1977; Reinerman, 1979; Goffman, 2009; Chin, 1990, Jankowski, 1991, Valdez and Sifaneck, 2004).⁹

Debates surround the extent in which ethnographies with active offenders may benefit criminological understanding over other forms of data-collection, such as prisoner inmate interviews (see Copes and Hochstetler, 2010). Some argue vehemently that active offenders must be studied in their natural surroundings rather than in the confines of an institution in order to fully understand their motivations and means of

⁹ This is not an exhaustive list, nor does it include studies from other countries, such as Latin America – where ethnography has been employed.

operating (e.g. Wright and Decker, 1994; Jacobs, 2000). Indeed, Polsky states: ‘We can no longer afford the convenient fiction that in studying criminals in their natural habitat, we would discover nothing really important that could not be discovered from criminals behind bars. What is true for studying the gorilla in zoology is likely to be even truer for studying the gorilla in criminology’ (1998: 116). A commonly cited reason why research on active offenders is important is that the prisoner population is not representative of the general offending population, but instead constitutes a population of failed offenders (i.e. individuals who have been successfully apprehended and prosecuted). One ‘rebuttal’ to this criticism comes from Copes and Hochstetler (2010) who claim that ‘it is rare for persistent offenders to avoid ensnarement in the criminal justice system over the course of their careers’ (2010:51) and that ‘it makes much more sense to view a stint in prison or jail as temporary downtime from the streets as it does a marker for criminal failure’ (2010:52). I would counter such a claim with respect to my sample (and indeed others, e.g. Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010) by noting that my sample of dealers operated with apparent impunity over several years. Thus, the data garnered through this study is likely to differ markedly from those undertaken with convicted dealers, because the means of operation, the context in which they dealt and their socioeconomic and occupational status, all assisted in ensuring these men remained a hidden population.

My interest in ethnographic accounts, the complex and varied nature of the research group, and my general epistemological stance all directed me towards this method of data collection. The social complexities of The Lads’ social network; its consistently altering structure as a result of individuals’ movements into and out of criminal and legitimate roles and their changing relations with one another, their evolving ambitions, their personal and social investments and their desired/expected returns from both legitimate and criminal endeavours; *all* required an analysis which is best derived from a rich body of data, constructed from participants’ own words and actions: a product of ethnographic research.

2.2 Data Collection

Table 1 **Data Collection**

Year of Study	Primary Method of Data Collection
2006/7	Intensive participant-observation
2007/8	Intermittent observations
2008/9	Intermittent observations
2009/10	Intermittent observations and interviews
2011/12	Intensive participant-observation
2012/13	Follow-up interviews

2.2.1 Incorporating previous data (from 2006-2010)

As discussed in the introduction chapter, a proportion of data used within this study was collected prior to the official start date of the PhD fieldwork. This includes: informal observations made prior to undergraduate fieldwork (the time I spent hanging out with The Lads during university); formal observations that were conducted specifically for my undergraduate dissertation (on which fieldnotes had been maintained); transcribed interviews from the undergraduate fieldwork (Salinas, 2007); informal observations made in the years separating undergraduate and PhD fieldwork; and semi-structured interviews conducted the year prior to PhD fieldwork. These notes were stored in chronological order, but had also been coded into general categories (e.g. the individual, the drug, the level, the locale etc.). Certain elements of this data were written-up as thematic papers, which included the evolution of the peer network as individuals simultaneously progressed into their early-twenties and the local cocaine markets (Salinas, 2010), as well as the operations of those who imported, wholesaled, and retailed drugs on *The Med* resort. These documents were used as a source of data and are what gave this study its longitudinal dimension. Fortunately, because I had produced these documents I held no concerns regarding the authenticity or credibility (see Bryman, 2004). The content of these documents were analysed during the course of data analysis to see whether categories or concepts that were of new interest had been documented.

2.2.2 Participant observation (overt/semi-covert)

During the one-year's intensive fieldwork (2010-2011) I decided to approach the field in one-week bursts, spending every other week in the company of The Lads. Fieldwork was undertaken in this manner because of my desire to maintain a level of objectivity and critical perspective (i.e. to limit the likelihood of going native). Those weeks that were spent outside of the field were used to arrange and analyse my field notes, to transcribe any interviews, as well to perform my teaching duties at the university. The P.O. involved me hanging around The Lads and their affiliates. I spent upwards of 8 hours a day observing individuals whilst in the field; the duration of time depended on the sorts of activities individuals were involved with. This meant spending much of my time observing and engaging in their leisure activities, observing their illicit dealings and, whenever possible, spending time with them at their place of work (usually at one of their businesses). My time in the field was *not* distributed evenly among all the participants. Indeed, an unequal proportion of time was spent in the company of certain individuals (namely: Bear, Sol, Cliff, Blaine, Nani, Sledge, Gordon, Marshall, Khalid, Pig, Harvey, Tee, Rushy, Miller, Thomas, and Abu). Consequently, greater volumes of observational data were maintained on these individuals. The main reason for this was simply that my relationship was closer to these individuals (this links to issues of subjectivity that I discuss shortly, see section 2.4.2),¹⁰ which made the process of prolonged (arguably more intrusive) data collection easier. Nevertheless, during my time in the field I spent considerable time with all who feature in this study, as well as a large number of affiliates who do not.

Extensive fieldnotes were maintained during my time with them (the equivalent of 1,500 hours in the field), with the write-up of the notes occurring over the following morning. I described the situations, events and conversations in as much detail as could be recalled so as to allow for the greatest quantity of data (Burgess 1984). I would occasionally make discreet fieldnotes on my mobile phone if I felt this would be useful; this meant recording what a participant had said to me, a conversation between two parties, or else briefly describing a particular event. The use of my mobile phone as a recording tool was an ideal means of making notes in an unobtrusive manner, particularly as those I observed were *continually* using this

¹⁰ As with Adler's (1990) experience, some participants seemed to trust me more than others, while I had the distinct impression some affiliates (not included in the study) did not like me.

device for both leisure and ‘business’ purposes.¹¹ All notes were erased once they had been incorporated into that day’s write-up. Names, drugs and places were anonymised in all fieldnotes (see section 2.4.4).

My role as a researcher was not always overt and it was left to the discretion of my participants as to whether my role was made known to their affiliates (see Williams et al., 1992). Indeed, only *once* was I introduced formally as a researcher to an affiliate, though at times some Lads would allude to my work – with comments such as ‘This lads writing a book, fuckin’ smarter than he looks’ (Bear). For me to have divulged my presence as a researcher to *all* those who I came into contact with during fieldwork (such as the dealers’ customers or suppliers) could have ramifications for both my participants and me (e.g. placing us at risk of violent reprisal). Other ethnographers felt it prudent to conduct their research in a similar manner when studying such deviant populations (e.g. Ward, 2008, Adler, 1993). As with Winlow’s experience ‘I did not generally enter social situations with a preconceived idea of which role I would cast myself in; adaptability was necessary throughout the research period, and I would choose whichever role would seem most likely to benefit my research’ (2001: 13). I nevertheless felt guilty about documenting the interactions/behaviours of individuals who were unaware of my role and who had not agreed to be observed. Yet to have solely document The Lads interactions in a social vacuum (i.e. record solely their interactions with other participants) would have provided an inaccurate and limited portrayal of their lives and activities. The Economic Social and Social Research Council’s latest ethical guideless (‘The Framework for Research Ethics’) stipulate that ‘covert methods may be undertaken when it may provide unique forms of evidence or where overt observation might alter the phenomenon being studied’ (ESRC, 2012: 30). As such, I feel that my conduct in the field was justifiable.

2.2.3 Interviews

Before, during and after my time in the field I was able to conduct interviews as a means of complementing the observations. Conversations between research participants and myself were the most common form of interview adopted in this

¹¹ Jotting something down in a notebook would potentially have underscored the salience of what they had just said or done and this would have potentially influenced participants’ behaviour.

study. These were unstructured, informal, and (more often than not) were not recorded via Dictaphone. These interviews were often brief, and always opportunistic. If a question suddenly came to mind, I would ask it (either face-to-face when in the field or via telephone). If a dealer had just made a delivery or sourced product from a new supplier, I would enquire about the customer and the dealer's affiliation to them, and if a Lad told me they were applying for a job, I would ask about the nature of the role, of its career opportunities, and so forth. Such interviews were not unidirectional and I would give my opinion when elicited or inclined. These interviews helped me to understand the opinions, motives and rationales from individuals' own perspectives. Additionally, I often relied on such conversational interviews to fill my gaps in knowledge regarding any individual/group on-goings. Clearly, I could not be present at all events all of the time and so was heavily relied upon the accounts given by participants. I would often attempt to validate such accounts by eliciting the views from others who were 'in the know' (see also, section 2.3.2).

In addition to these conversational forms of interviews I conducted a large number of more formalised interviews whereby interviews were recorded via a Dictaphone or through hand-written notes (approximately 100,000 words in total). Such interviews were undertaken at the participant's home, in their vehicle (parked up), or in their place of work (if they owned/managed a business). I conducted 'oral histories' and in-depth life narratives with the majority of participants; these proved hugely beneficial – particularly with regards to understanding their early life-course of those individuals and the development of their aspirations. I was aware that such accounts could be overly sentimentalised, exaggerated and inherently subjective, thus these accounts were not treated as objective truths, but rather as an indication of their own perceived historical personal turning points (Silverman, 2005; Denzin 1997; Neuman 2000). Selection depended upon a participant's willingness to be formally interviewed about their life, the comfort of the researcher in conducting these interviews and the perceived usefulness of such a method. Willing participants were interviewed on multiple occasions during the research period in order to document patterns of change over time, or because I wanted to elicit additional information that I had previously failed to collect (see Hammersley and Atkinson, 1993: 136). These interviews required individuals to reflect upon certain events (such as their entry in the illicit

drug trade, the way in which their networks developed, or the means by which they had entered into a particular occupation). In one instance during the fieldwork, what had begun (and was intended) as an oral history turned into a focus group discussion. The individual in question had asked that I conduct an interview at his house at a pre-determined time, yet when I arrived five of his close peers (two which do not feature in this study) were sat smoking cannabis with him in his front room. When I asked if he wanted to conduct the interview in another room he declined. This group discussion was unplanned but nevertheless garnered some valuable insights into their views of drug use, drug sales, the law and the development of their local drug markets.

I failed to conduct formalised interviews with six of the twenty-five individuals featured in this study. Those individuals who were not formally interviewed were inaccessible to me for two main reasons: a lack of rapport between myself and the affiliate (i.e. I felt awkward about asking to conduct such a formalised discussion), or because of the affiliate had 'cut ties' with others (including myself) in the network.

I transcribed all recorded interviews myself, ensuring to anonymise their responses (e.g. names and locations), before deleting the audio files.

2.2.4 Financial data

One element of the research that had not been planned prior to fieldwork was the recording of financial earnings from four key participants: Sol, Bear, Cliff and Blaine. Their earnings were plotted over several years (between three and five years) and provided a visualisation of the relationship between their legitimate and criminal earnings. For their legitimate earnings I was provided access to their personal bank statements, business records, or payslips (or a combination of these) over the required time period. For their criminal earnings (i.e. the profits from drug dealing) I was provided with weekly updates as to the amount of stock they had sourced that week; this covered the time spent in the field the following year. These figures provided an approximation of the profits they would have achieved (e.g. an ounce of cocaine generated around £700 depending on the amount of discounted bulk-purchases customers had made). In order to plot past earnings we retrospectively assessed earnings month-by-month. This task (though open to issues of validity) proved to be

fairly straightforward. Individuals tended to secure the same volume of stock each week (e.g. an ounce of cocaine, or nine ounces of cannabis), which in turn generated a similar amount of profit week-on-week (subject to customer debts/repayments). We used life-events as a means of assisting their recollection (e.g. where they were working, whether they were in university or college and what year they were in, Christmas time or prolonged bank holidays etc.). For Sol's earning I had the additional assistance of two former grafters: myself and the three men systematically went through the volumes of stock these men had couriered back to Tanners Town (again, these volumes rarely changed week to week). Similarly, Bear and Cliff (who had operated a delivery service in partnership) were able to assist one another with regards to peaks and trough of sales.

2.2.5 Social network analysis

From the outset of the study it had been my intention to employ social network analysis (SNA) as a means of documenting the evolution of the network over the one-year fieldwork period. Morselli (2009) used this form of analysis to great success in his analysis of criminal networks. I constructed a form that contained a list of all 25 Lads and a large number of the group's affiliates (those I was aware of) and provided them with sufficient room to add to this list of names. I solicited help from Professor Nick Crossley whose speciality is SNA and he suggested some minor alterations. Participants were asked to indicate four separate responses: 'who *don't* you know in this list'; 'who have you socialised with in the last month', 'who have you had a transaction with in the past month (i.e. bought or sold a 'product') and 'who do you consider to be one of the lads?'. I administered these forms opportunistically (one of the primary failures of my approach) as I did not have access to the entire group during the relevant weeks. I conducted three rounds of SNA data collection at two-month intervals before ending these attempts.

There were several issues with gathering this sort of data that became apparent during the fieldwork. First, the nature of their social lives made it difficult to recall who they had seen in the previous month (e.g. 'I cant remember if that was this month or not, I'll just say yeah'), so many seemed to tick their answers with little certainty. A second issue, was their varying views as to what qualified as 'socialising' (e.g. 'I seen Jack in town the other day; we spoke for quite a while- does that count?' or 'Ricky

came stopped over a few weeks back, but it was mainly just to drop off a set of alloy wheels') – I let the individuals decide whether they would constitute such encounters as socialising. Third, because a different set of individuals completed these forms at each round I was unable to assess the elements of change I was hoping for. The data that was collected has not been used in any part of this thesis, although I have discussed patterns emerging from this data elsewhere (Salinas, 2010).

2.3 Data Analysis

2.3.1 Sampling

Due to the nature of this project I felt it prudent to adopt grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin define this as:

'[T]heory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another' (1998: 12).

The primary tool I adopted was theoretical sampling, which Glaser and Strauss (1967) defined as:

'[T]he process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses this data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop theory as it emerges. The process of data collection is *controlled* by the emerging theory, whether substantive or informal' (1967: 45).

During the process of data collection certain issues and concepts arose that proved to be of particular interest to me. Once a possible category or concept had been identified, fieldnotes were analysed then re-analysed with particular attention given to data ostensibly pertinent to such 'sensitizing concepts'¹² (Blumer, 1954). I would then undertake a new line of inquiry: participants would be interviewed (in a semi-structured manner) on issues relating to this new topic of interest and purposeful efforts were made to observe and document relevant data while in the field. During

¹² These are concepts that provide focus for further data collection, but which lack specificity.

this process the research focus would shift markedly. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1993) point out:

‘One looks to see whether any interesting patterns can be identified; whether anything stands out as surprising or puzzling; how the data relate to what one might have expected on the basis of common sense knowledge, official accounts, or previous theory; and whether there are any apparent inconsistencies or contradictions among the views of different groups or individuals, or between people’s expressed beliefs or attitudes and what they do’
(1993: 210).

I conducted ‘constant comparisons’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) between the phenomena being documented. I conducted interviews/observations on individuals engaged in a range of markets and at varying ‘levels’ to ascertain whether concepts were confined to one or two individuals, or were in fact applicable to the network more generally. For instance, regarding the use of credit as a means of facilitating trade; I was aware that many of the retail dealers sourced their stock on credit. Following initial observations and preliminary interviews with a cocaine grafter and cocaine retailer I began a new line of inquiry that looked specifically at the prevalence of credit, the criteria needed for it to facilitate a transaction, as well as the methods by which creditors ‘regulated’ debtors. I engaged with the relevant literatures (studies on drug markets, on conflict among drug dealers, and behavioural economics). Gradually, new sub categories emerged as data and fieldnotes were collected. Once I reached a point where no additional information or new data was being garnered that related to these categories I decided I had reached ‘theoretical saturation’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and was able to shift my focus to another central theme/topic.

2.3.2 Ethnographic Validity

When studying criminals one must be aware of various factors that could impede validity. In particular, some argue that interviews may provide a distorted, if illuminating, source of data for researchers (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1993) due to a participant’s ‘[p]oor memory, wishful thinking, and misinterpretation of the questions’ (Duneier, 1999: 346). For instance when questioned, active offenders may be unable to recall accurately certain details of what is being asked, they may also wish to conceal certain behaviours out of guilt, shame or fear this could jeopardise

their freedom, or alternatively they may exaggerate in order to impress (van Germert, 2010). Fortunately, ethnography enables the researcher to utilise a variety of tools in order to validate what a person says via the triangulation of various methods, sources and contexts (see Lindegaard, 2010). During this study I used direct observations, payslips, business records, newspaper articles, interviews with the participants, conversations with their peers and customers, and consulted with an anonymous police source who worked within the local constabulary. Such a spectrum of data allowed for triangulation that assisted in corroborating or refuting certain findings. For instance, a dealer could tell me that he earns an average of £700 each week. Rather than simply relying on this one statement I was able to observe for myself the amounts of stock they were being fronted, or else find out such information from their supplier (or the supplier's grafter). I was then able to work out the approximate net return for a week's selling-cycle and thus could confirm/refute the sum given to me by the dealer. I am happy to report, however, that participants rarely embellished stories or told half-truths (as confirmed by additional sources). When exaggerations were made or issues downplayed, the use of triangulation helped to rectify such issues. In addition, the study was able to secure a level of 'respondent validity' (Bryman, 2004) by presenting findings and seeking the opinions/criticisms of participants (see section 2.4.2). Participants were able to corroborate or refute observations, interpretations and overall arguments that helped to validate the findings.

2.3.3 Generalizability

A common weakness directed towards ethnographic studies is the lack of generalizability. As Hammersley and Atkinson note, 'because only a single case, or at any rate a small number of cases, is studied, the representativeness of the findings is always in doubt' (1993: 42). I am unconcerned with generalizability in the current study, because the aim of this project is to garner new insights into a hidden population principally engaged in clandestine criminal activities, namely, the engagement within closed-market drug markets by individuals who were otherwise 'ordinary' citizens employed in a variety of occupations or in full-time education. I cannot claim that this sample is representative of other cohorts of young males straddling the line between good work and profitable drug markets because it is impossible to map the population of closed-market dealers operating within Tanners

Town or nationally. Nevertheless, my knowledge of The Lads' broader networks (those on The Med or in other towns/cities across the UK) suggests that group composition (i.e. mixed-ethnicity, educated, lower/middle-class), their means of operation (via black credit and relying on social networks rather than open markets) and their customer base (employed, non-problematic users) is, broadly speaking, almost identical to many other groups engaged in closed-markets across the UK.

2.4 Ethical Concerns

There are no absolutes when attempting to negotiate the precarious ethical issues of studying active offenders, and during the course of this study I was privy to many offenses, but as Winlow et al. note, 'if the ethnographer can comply with the normative behaviour and moral code of the researched culture, and if these forms of behaviour do not contrast too sharply with one's own ethical code, then so be it' (2001: 547). But aside from the obvious ethical issues of bearing witness to offenses on a daily basis I encountered an array of other ethical dilemmas during this study. These include the use of pre-existing friendships to gain access to the sample (i.e. potential exploitation), the use of covert methods when in the company of group affiliates (i.e. breach of privacy and lack of consent), issues of privacy, and the dangers inherent within such a study. I will now outline these issues of ethics regarding my study.

2.4.1 Witnessing criminal acts

Throughout this chapter I have referred to studies in which participant observation was undertaken with active drug dealers (e.g. Adler, 1993; Jacobs, 1999; Venkatesh 2008; Hoffer, 2006; Bourgois, 1995; Akhtar and South, 2000; Taylor and Potter, 2012; Mohamend and Fritzvold, 2010; Ward, 2010; 2000 among many others). Arguments regarding the importance of such work relate to the inherent benefits of studying 'successful' criminals '*au naturel*' (Polsky, 1998) and outside of criminal justice institutions. As Adler concisely surmised:

'Studying criminals in their natural habitat shows them in the complexity of their surrounding subculture, rather than within the artificial environment of a prison. Otherwise inaccessible dimensions of their lives can be observed and analysed firsthand, including the nature of their social organization, social stratification, lifestyle, and motivation'

(1990: 109).

The nature of my research was to document firsthand the process by which individuals operated in a closed drug market, and to understand what factors influenced their decision to deal or 'go straight'. I was therefore privy to a host of criminal activities that centred on the trading of illegal drugs. This included being present when individuals used, sourced, processed and supplied illicit drugs (namely cannabis, cocaine, ketamine, MDMA, valiums, and anabolic steroids). I was also present when dealers collected payments from customers and issued bellicose threats.

There are instances in which researchers have found themselves not only bearing witness to criminal groups and their activities in order to gain valuable data, but also actively engaging in the group's criminality (e.g. Rodgers, 2007; Pearson, 2009; Venkatesh, 2008; Armstrong, 1993). Dennis Rodgers (2007), for instance, became initiated into a Nicaraguan gang during the course of his doctoral thesis fieldwork. His status as a gang member was a 'personal survival strategy' (2007: 455) rather than a premeditated means of entry and data collection. Rodgers participated in a host of illegal activities, such as 'gang wars, thefts, fights, beatings, fencing and conflicts with the police' (2007: 457). Yet his willingness to engage in 'brutal' conflicts and engage in a broad range of illegal activities was, he argues, situational.

While in principle I find some of my actions in Nicaragua to be somewhat dubious according to my current personal index of values, when I consider them in the context of the actual circumstances in which I found myself when acting them out, I can quite happily live with myself. I did not kill anybody, even if I did engage in violence'
(2007: 458)

In the context of The Lads social networks drug dealing was not seen as deviant act, but rather a service for which customers were almost always grateful. And although I did not participate in the trading of illicit drugs, I was hard pressed to find many of their activities unacceptable when immersed within their culture. Indeed, situationally speaking, The Lads often came across as intuitive and entrepreneurial, if at times unflinching in their capitalist pursuits.

Moore (1993) argues that '[t]he ultimate responsibility has always got to be to one's research subjects, unless in extremely serious circumstances in which one would probably feel compelled to act as a citizen rather than as a researcher' (1993: 18). At no point did I feel 'compelled' to report these crimes to the police, for various reasons. First, the salience and distinctiveness of the data added a new element complementary to understanding offending across the life-course. Second, the harm posed by their products was arguably no greater than that posed by alcohol (Nutt et al., 2007). Third, within the context of their trade it was difficult to identify 'victims' in the traditional sense: the trade operated on 'social supply' (Taylor and Potter, 2013) to customers who were wholly complicit in the trade, and who were by and large 'normal' recreational drug users (see Pearson, 2001). Dealers within this study were by no means 'drug pushers' (an often mythologised view of dealers, see Coomber, 2006) and those who sourced their supplies were all of the legal drinking age (most in their twenties). Forth, there was no legal obligation within the UK to report a crime when/if one was witnessed. Fifth, enactments of violence were rare (I witnessed a single incident of violence during my time in the field, see Vignette 1, section 4.9.2), and used solely as a means of restitution from large unpaid debts incurred by other suppliers. Although indebted suppliers were clearly victims in the traditional sense, injuries incurred were often minor and suppliers generally seized goods (such as a mobile phone or laptop) for payment in-kind (Chapter 4, 'Black Credit', section 4.9.7). Thus, although I witnessed many aspects of their extensive drug trade, I do not feel as though this compromised the ethical standards of ethnographic research developed during previous decades.

2.4.2 Access via friendship: The benefits and ethical dilemmas

As previously discussed access to The Lads' network was secured several years prior to the doctoral fieldwork; a consequence of my pre-existing relations to the group. As with many other studies on active offenders, my prior affiliation to the research participants afforded me 'privileged access' to a 'hidden population' of active offenders (e.g. Hobbs; 1995; Winlow, 2001; Adler, 1990; Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010; Ward; 2010; Waldorf, et al., 1991; Akhtar and South, 2000; Taylor and Potter, 2013; Giulianotti, 1995).

Without my pre-existing links or rapport to individuals in this group, it is highly unlikely that a study could have been undertaken on their illicit trade or their lives more generally. As Adler notes, ‘The highly illegal nature of the occupation make drug dealers and smugglers secretive, deceitful, mistrustful, and paranoid’ (1990: 99). In line with Winlow’s assertion: ‘[n]one of the academics it has been my pleasure to meet could have successfully gained access to the culture I describe’ (2001:12). Indeed, the fact that The Lads operated in ‘closed markets’ (May, 2004) would have made the identification of their illegal trade challenging to most ‘outsiders’. Contact phone numbers were given solely to friends or vouched affiliates; without any such verification there was no way individuals would even have admitted to their trade, as Sol (a cocaine wholesaler) stated, ‘If Johnny-off-the-street came up to me and was like, “Any chance of a half [ounce] of Charlie [cocaine]?” I’d tell them, “I dunno what you’re talking about pal’. In addition, transactions were conducted in discreet locations (such as a supplier’s or customer’s home) and sales from strangers were never elicited (as they are in open drug markets).

Crucially, because their clandestine activities were not confined to any public geographical zone – such as a street corner, pub or residential area – the likelihood of a hopeful researcher simply approaching these men with the aim of developing access is remote (as was the mode of access for Jacobs, 2006 Venkatesh, 2008, and Bourgois, 1995). Jacobs’ following statement demonstrates the ease with which he accessed a population of crack dealers who plied their trade within publicly open-markets: ‘I am now delighted to convey how easy it is to identify serious offenders in one’s midst and even more delighted to relate how open they can be in talking to you about their lives’ (2006: 159). My participants would *not* have talked openly about their criminal careers to unknown strangers, and it is equally unlikely that most criminological researchers would have readily identified The Lads as being ‘criminals’ whilst in their ‘midst’. Indeed, the majority of these men functioned in regular activities and with law-abiding individuals on a daily basis without work-colleagues, classmates or family members ever developing any knowledge or suspicion to their criminal roles.

Aside from the practical benefits of my prior relations to these men, this rapport was beneficial in other ways. Feminist methodology has argued that researchers should attempt to have meaningful relations with those being studied in order to lessen the extent to which the researcher-participant relationship is exploitative (Kirsch, 2005). Tillmann-Healy promotes what she calls ‘friendship as method’, whereby friendships are used to ‘undermine and disrupt’ the power imbalance that exists between the researcher and his/her participants (2003: 774). Indeed, Tillmann-Healy proposes that ‘[f]riendship as method all but demands that writings be taken back to the community for examination, critique, and further dialogue’.

Accordingly, my closeness to this group gave me the confidence to actively encourage criticisms and debate regarding my work, and in turn they had the confidence to challenge the assumptions that were being made. Two individuals read through my findings chapter and provided critical feedback (one far more critical than the other). Before presenting any preliminary findings at international conferences I presented my work (including powerpoint slides) to a selection of participants. This process gave my participants (though admittedly only a selection) the power to challenge or reaffirm my assertions. Although they would, at times, cringe at some of the quotations I had used from their interviews, they did not ask to have such comments amended. Fortunately, (to my intense relief) they generally commented that, ‘Yeah, it all sounds fine. I mean, you’re just saying what I already know about us all’ (Bear) or ‘It’s mad to think how long it takes you to put all that together, coz all your doing is just stating the facts’ (Cliff). I hope, that in the years to come, those who participate do not come to feel manipulated or unfairly represented, and I hope that having redressed the power imbalance to some extent will limit any such feelings in later life.¹³

I was of course aware of several ethical concerns regarding my friendships to these participants. *First*, their willingness to participate in this study may have been motivated out of a perceived obligation to simply ‘help out a mate’ or ‘do a favour’ rather than a willingness to constitute a foci of my work (or to become ‘objectified’ for reasons of study, see Davidson, 2008). In no way did I want The Lads to feel

¹³ However, despite these attempts it has been argued that issues of power imbalance, bias and manipulation will always remain, regardless of the level of intimacy shared with participants (Funder, 2005).

pressured into participating, nor did I want to feel as though their consent was the product of manipulation. Throughout the project I made it clear that they were under no obligation to participate and that I would have no issue with them pulling-out of the research (and being removed from all findings) up until the point of submission. I made it apparent that their withdrawal would in no way damage our friendship. Though for some, their willingness may have been to gratify their ego in some way (e.g. ‘He’s writing a book! And I’m gonna be in it la! It’s buzzin’ – Sol), I believe that much of their support for my research was guided by a desire to assist me (a friend) in my chosen career. There is no way of knowing their precise motives, but given that their network was one of mutual support and favours, there is every likelihood consent was the sole product of our rapport.

Second I was mindful of criticisms that have been made regarding a decrease in objectivity that stems from using friends as research participants (Glesne, 1989). This includes a bias selection process (i.e. talking to persons with whom the researcher likes, over-identifies or feels politically aligned to); an inability to engage with others in the sample due to an association with a particular individual; or distorting the data via the participant’s own over-identification with the researcher that may make them behave in a particular manner in order to impress. Though my intention throughout this research has been to maintain a critical and objective view of The Lads’ motivates and behaviours, I must concede that certain elements of the fieldwork *may* have been shaped by my close affiliations to certain individuals and as I have noted, I spent unequal time in the company of participants and felt it easier to conduct interviews with those I had the greatest rapport. As a result of me being something of a ‘native ethnographer’ (Wolcott, 1999) with prior links, I made deliberate attempts to sharpen my objectivity by engaging in fieldwork with a cohort of previously unknown participants during my master’s degree as a means of developing my objectivity. Finally, it is my distinct opinion that my presence *did not* alter the way in which individuals naturally behave in these settings, primarily because they saw me as more of a ‘pal’ than an academic attempting to critically examine the group and its trade.

Third, my rapport with these men placed me under certain amounts of strain regarding what details to disclose in my findings and what details to leave out (see also Polsky,

1969; Adler, 1990 for similar concerns) – I certainly did not want these individuals to fall under police scrutiny. Yet I was also mindful of past ethnographies that have resulted in participants feeling mistreated and manipulated by the researcher (e.g. Ellis' (2007) account of a small fishing community), and I was thus mindful not to divulge information that could have had serious consequences for the participants (such as within-group reaction to what one individual might have said, feelings of manipulation, or being presented in way they feel uneasy with). Though I have refrained from including certain elements of behaviour in my write-up, information is nevertheless included that potentially places these men in an unfavourable light (such as their use of threats and violence as a means of enforcing debts) and which may provide some reaction from affiliates if their identities were to become known. The inclusion of such data was pertinent to the examination of their operations and not to have disclosed such detail would have portrayed their trade dishonestly. Ellis concisely sums up the dilemmas of conducting research on those with whom we have established relations: 'As friends, we long to have trusting relationships that care for others. As researchers, we long to do ethical research that makes a difference. To come close to these goals, we constantly have to consider which questions to ask, which secrets to keep, and which truths are worth telling' (2007 :26).

2.4.3 Researcher role

In order to attain a broad and in-depth understanding of The Lads' network I participated in almost all of the group's activities outside of their regular jobs. As Whyte notes: 'If [...] the researcher is living for an extended period in the community he is studying, his personal life is inexorably mixed with his research' (Whyte, 1993: 279). I went to their homes, their family's homes, I went out drinking and clubbing with them, I attended stag parties (and in one instance even helped to arrange it), I went on holidays with them, and I was there to support them in times of crisis (such as theirs or a family-member's ill-health), as such my role within the network was more than marginal. Yet I must make it explicit that I *did not* participate in the trading of illicit drugs at any point during the research and so cannot claim to have been a 'complete participant' within the network (Gold, 1958). I was, however, present during many of the activities relating to their criminal trades (see section 2.4.1). I partook in certain minor offenses, some unintentionally (see also Sandberg and Copes, 2012, p.190). For the most part this simply involved sharing a spliff with

participants, but my participation also extended to my assisting in a ‘meet and greet’ with an unknown supplier (i.e. I was there to observe but also there to make the participant feel more at ease whilst conducting the initial transaction). My role within this group was similar to those of other ethnographers who were privy to the offenses of those they studied, such as Adler’s study on upper level drug traffickers (1993), Hobbs’ work on ‘entrepreneurial’ East Londoners criminals (1988), Winlow’s analysis of crime and violence in the North East (2001), Ward’s description of the London rave culture of the 1990s (2010), Wright and Decker’s work on active burglars (1994) and Venkatesh’s study on a notorious Chicago drug gang (2006, 2008). Although I witnessed a wide range of criminal activities, and ‘was willing to skirt the boundaries of criminality on several occasions’ (Hobbs, 1988: 7), I was fortunate enough to have witnessed only one incident of minor assault, unlike other researchers in similar fields that have witnessed or even become involved in more serious acts of violence (e.g. Bourgois, 1995; Armstrong, 1998; Patrick, 1973; Winlow, 2001; Venkatesh, 1998). There were times when I felt ill at ease with the behaviour of my participants (e.g. the sale of drugs to individuals at risk of defaulting, the use of threats to coerce repayments from customers, and the knowledge that force had been used to enforce debts), but I attempted to the best of my abilities to remain value-free, or to at least withhold my judgments (see Ward, 2008) because, as Armstrong (1993) said, ‘I never saw it as my job to be a missionary against types of behaviour or to act as a moral example to others (1993: 29). Nonetheless, it was not always possible, nor even desirable to remain ‘stone faced’.¹⁴

2.4.4 Privacy and confidentiality

Great effort has been made in limiting the potential exposure of The Lads’ identities, although in the context of ethnographic research it is impossible to eradicate every identifying feature of the group and its members. Though the majority of participants were no longer active in the drugs trade at the time of submission it is crucial their anonymity remains in tact in the years following this study. Disclosure of their identities has the potential of inciting harmful reprisals from the police and potentially others with whom they were associated (see Ferdinand et al., 2007), and could also

¹⁴ At times I was unable to remain completely neutral when participants described distressing scenarios and would have communicated some level of disapproval either verbally or non-verbally, but to have acted as though such behavior was ‘all good in my opinion’, would have been wholly deceitful (see Gans, 1982), and potentially shown myself in a bad light to others in their group who were present.

have adverse affects upon their current/future employment prospects and family relations. As a means of limiting these risks I have undertaken several precautions (using the guidance set out by Aldridge et al., 2010 and Israel, 2004). All audio data from interviews was deleted immediately after transcription, whilst the hard drive on which data was stored was encrypted using 'FileVault'. All network members were given pseudonyms at the start of the study to protect their identity. These pseudonyms were used during the writing of fieldnotes as well as in the current write-up, and will continue to be used in any subsequent publications or presentations. Likewise, all place names and locations were anonymised in fieldnotes and the write-up. Other overly identifying features and traits, such as the kinds of businesses individuals owned, have been omitted in the write-up, as have the dates of events. Case studies that are included in the findings *may* contain information recognisable to affiliates of the network; in an effort to mitigate such risks I have removed certain details or altered particular features. Despite these efforts, there remain subtle identifying features that cannot be removed from this study without distorting key findings (such as their specific work skills, or type of employment).

2.4.5 Risk to the researcher

Fortunately, I was not exposed to the hazards encountered by many other ethnographers who conducted fieldwork on gangs or drug dealers, such as threats, assaults and thefts (Jacobs, 2006; Williams et al., 1992; Sanchez-Jankoski, 1991; Sandberg and Copes, 2012). I did, however, experience many of the concerns/risks identified by Adler (1990) throughout my research (prior to, during and after fieldwork).

The first set of risks came from the participants themselves – several of whom had no qualms about being aggressive or violent. Misunderstandings regarding my line of questioning or my probing of a particular topic could result in anger e.g. at times they felt as though I was being critical of their behaviour when I was merely attempting to understand their justifications and neutralizations. Fortunately, any such misunderstandings were quickly resolved before any serious offense/retaliation was taken. There was also the risk that these individuals could become suspicious of my work and potential affiliation to the police. I became particularly paranoid following police efforts to seize evidence from two participants (though this my paranoia proved

to be unfounded); after all, I had been documenting much of their illegal activities, I asked questions, and I conducted interviews regarding the intricacies of their trade. I had made my intentions explicit from the outset of my work (both verbally and in the consent forms) that I would not assist in their prosecution should such an instance arise and that my intention was to understand the means by which they operated, as well as their motivations to offend. I made it clear that my role was as a sociologist, and not a police informer. By making my intentions clear I was able to legitimise my questioning of their behaviour, the documentation of their activities and the recording of interviews.

The second set of risks I faced were those relating to the police. Clearly my proximity to a criminal trade may have put me at risk of arrest and possible prosecution through ‘guilty knowledge’ (Adler, 1990: 106) and ‘guilty observations’ (Carey, 1972). As Adler pointed out: ‘We knew it was possible to get caught when others were arrested, yet dealing behavior was so pervasive that to leave every time it occurred would have been unnatural and highly suspicious’ (1990: 106). Winlow’ provides an alternative viewpoint ‘I found it necessary to become almost fully immersed in the culture in order to see the structural organizations of a wide range of delinquent activities’ (2001: 17). I accepted the risk of arrest and believed it to be a statically slim likelihood, based on the group’s earlier experiences. Because I had no involvement in the drug trade myself, I deemed the likelihood of me facing any prosecution to again be slim. However my primary concerns lay with the police confiscating my fieldnotes if they became aware of my research. There are researchers who have encountered the police during the course of their criminological fieldwork (e.g. Polsky, 1967; Jacobs, 2006; Brajuha and Hallowell, 1986), and there are also examples of researchers serving a custodial sentence for withholding evidence (e.g. Scarce, 2002). As with my earlier point regarding privacy, I would have done all that I could to have ensured the anonymity and safety of my participants. Had I been required to hand over fieldnotes, the police would have been privy to hundreds of pages of anonymised notes that may have risked exposing The Lads. The British Society of Criminology’s code of ethics makes it clear that that researchers ‘have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of an individual participating in research is not adversely affected by participation in the research’ (s.4 (i)), whilst ensuring to ‘work

within the confines of current legislation [...] [as] offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden by law (s.4 (iv)). As such, it appears as though I would be afforded no legal protection regarding such scenarios. Nonetheless, my commitment and duties to both the safety of my participants and the defence of ethnographic criminological research as an important feature of the social sciences would likely have dictated how I would have proceeded in such a scenario.

2.4.6 Problematic drug use

As a result of my background, I did not see the habitual use of cannabis, or recreational use of other ‘harder drugs’ as particularly worrying or disagreeable. Yet throughout my research I did become seriously concerned about the use of *certain* illicit drugs by a few participants. Some began using crack-cocaine, a highly addictive smokable form of cocaine, and I became concerned that their use of the drug could spiral out of control (perhaps out of unfounded myths that surround this drug). Others began to use ketamine (a horse tranquiliser) with increasing regularity (at times daily). I was aware that prolonged and excessive use of the latter drug could have serious detrimental effects on the user’s health (such as serious damage to the bladder). I was present on numerous occasions when participants ‘k-holed’ (the colloquial term to describe the resultant effects from a particularly large dosage of ketamine). I ~~was~~ witnessed various participants falling into states of confusion and temporary psychosis after having consumed large amounts of the drug. I refrained from making judgments on these individuals and as they were well aware of the risks of such substances I felt somewhat limited in terms of the appropriate response.

At times I felt guilty about my ‘neutral’ stance on these issues (see Ward, 2008, who admitted to verbalising her concerns to participants). Despite my non-intervention the use of these drugs declined in the years following fieldwork (to my relief). With regards to how drug use by participants may have influenced the validity of my observations/interviews I believe their drug use (even their habitual use of cannabis) did not impede my data collection, though there were occasions when interviews had to be postponed for an hour or so because an individual had taken a large dosage of ketamine. Interestingly, Sandberg and Copes (2012) interviewed fifteen ethnographers who had studied drug dealers/users. As with my own study, these ethnographers often studied participants who were under the influence of drugs,

however none of the fifteen ethnographers believed this to be a threat to the research's validity. Similarly, Aldridge and Charles (2008) have discussed the issues of obtaining informed consent from individuals that are likely to be under the influence of alcohol or other psychoactive drugs. Consequently, I administered the information sheets and consent forms at times of the day when participants had not yet smoked cannabis, so as to ensure full sobriety and competence at this critical point.

2.5 The Lads: A Brief Background

2.5.1 The Lads

This study looks at the offending careers of 25 individuals, known collectively as 'The Lads'. The Lads' network, as I observed it, was the composite of several well-defined friendship cliques whose interactions and bonds with one another regularly overlapped. The Lads would occasionally socialise as a single group (such as large events like house parties, birthday outings or barbeques), but more often than not individuals would spend time in one of these smaller friendship cliques. The Lads network was embedded within a range of looser social networks that spanned across the UK and abroad (including the Mediterranean, South Central Asia and Ireland). At its heart, this network was a friendship group with shared styles, interests and behaviours. At no point did they see themselves as a 'gang', an 'outfit' or organized criminal group despite the widespread, often cooperative, involvement in the illicit drug trade. Using the current definitions provided by criminological theory it is questionable as to whether The Lads would even constitute a 'gang'. The observed network closely resembled the 'Eurogang' definition of a 'gang', in which they are described as 'any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of group identity' (Esbensen and Maxson, 2012: 5). However, as The Lads rarely hung out in public places, such as on street corners or outside shopping precincts and preferred instead to 'chill' at each others residence, the criteria of 'street-oriented' group is somewhat lacking (an issue that has been observed elsewhere, see Aldridge et al., 2012). Though, if one *were* to apply gang typology to The Lads' network they would most closely resemble a 'speciality gang' (Maxson and Klein, 1995) because 'crime in this type of group is narrowly focused on a few

offences' (Klein, 1996: 70), however, The Lads' key focus was *not* criminal but social and thus falls short of the 'specialty gang' criteria.

2.5.2 Participant Characteristics

The Lads were composed of 21 white-British and 4 British-Pakistani individuals. The vast majority of this sample had grown up in a traditionally working-class town situated in the North of England, termed anonymously as *Tanners Town* (see section 2.6.1). Most of my participants had working-class upbringings¹⁵ (n=21), though a small number had more affluent backgrounds (n=4). Households tended to be stable, both in terms of family structure and employment. 18 of The Lads grew up with both parents present (72% of the sample), while 7 had come from single parent households¹⁶ (28% of the sample). The vast majority of their parents had worked continually throughout their lives in a range of occupations, including: secretarial and administrative work, bar work, as caregivers in care homes, manual work, in retail, education, factory work, factory management and civil engineering, while four participants came from families who managed small independent businesses. *Most* of my sample had attained some form of qualification following high school: 5 individuals had attained industry-specific credentials (e.g. NVQs, BTEC, etc.), 17 had qualified from a technical or academic college, 10 had graduated from university with a bachelor's degree, and 5 had proceeded to attain postgraduate qualifications (see section 5.10, for full analysis of their educational and occupational pursuits).

During their mid-to-late teens The Lads had engaged in a range of deviant and criminal activities. Such activities were written about extensively in my undergraduate dissertation (Salinas, 2007); they included the habitual use of cannabis, as well as the intermittent use of other harder drugs such as cocaine, ketamine, ecstasy, magic mushrooms and amphetamines. Violent confrontations had become a normalised occurrence during the group's weekly nights out in town, and some were members of their local football hooligan firm (1 as part of the 'junior outfit' while 4 participated in the older firm). A small number of individuals had minor involvements in the sale of illicit drugs at this time, primarily cannabis sales (n=6), while one individual retailed small amounts of cocaine. A few Lads stole merchandise from

¹⁵ By which I mean individuals grew up in low-socioeconomic households, and whose parents worked mainly in lower-paid jobs in the service sector or manufacturing industries.

¹⁶ 5 of these households were female-headed, 2 were male-headed.

their workplace (part-time jobs) and sold the goods to others in the groups. One individual was involved in VAT-fraud (working for a family friend) while another occasionally ran minor scams involving Xbox gaming consoles. 14 (56% of the sample) had minor criminal records resulting from offences committed in their early-to-late teens (e.g. breaking and entering, common assault, possession of cannabis, drunk and disorderly).

Their offending patterns changed noticeably as they progressed into their early-to-mid twenties. Violent confrontations became less common - a consequence of a reduction in nights out, but also a result of their developing social networks (i.e. becoming friendly with many other groups who regularly went out on Friday or Saturday nights). Crucially, the kinds of offenses that were motivated by economic returns altered and drug dealing soon became the primary means of earning money illegally. Over a short period of time dealing was seen as an ideal revenue source that could be used to supplement full-time work, while unemployed, or as a primary income whilst studying.

In all, 23 out of the 25 Lads had engaged in the sale of illicit drugs during their mid-to-late teens or early-to-mid twenties, with the most commonly sold drugs being cocaine and cannabis. Only 1 individual was ever prosecuted for his involvement in the supply of illegal drugs. The Lads dealt at a variety of levels, including retail, wholesale, and importation/exportation. Most had operated at the retail-level (i.e. to the end-user), however seven individuals had been involved in the wholesale, importation or exportation of the following drugs over the observation period (see Table 2).

By the time data collection had concluded (January, 2013) only four individuals were still active in the illicit drugs trade (at any level). Despite the vast majority of participants having been raised in lower-income households (i.e. less than £30,000 a year), most had been able to attain decent jobs or established small businesses. For many, their progression up the social scale was the result of their educational or vocational achievements and the progressive accrual of social investments (see section 5.10.1). At the conclusion of fieldwork, when most individuals were in their

mid-to-late twenties, average legitimate earnings ranged between £20,000-£40,000. General offending had tapered off (such as violence, threatening behaviour, etc.), although drug consumption was still prevalent between this cohort and their affiliates.

Table 2: An overview of individual characteristics

	Featured in UG study (2006)	Age range during observation	SES Upbringing	Crim. record	Drugs dealt	Roles held in market*
Cliff	yes	19-25	middle	yes	cocaine & ketamine	retailer, 'grafter', & exp.
Groggy	yes	20-26	lower	no	-	-
Strutt	yes	19-25	lower	no	cannabis	Retailer
Marshall	yes	20-26	lower	no	cocaine	Retailer & 'grafter'
Sledge	yes	20-26	lower	yes	cocaine, cannabis, ketamine	Retailer
Sol	yes	23-29	lower	yes	cocaine	wholesaler
Tee	yes	20-26	lower	yes	cannabis	retailer
Big Jim	no	20-26	lower	yes	cocaine	retailer
Abu	no	20-25	lower	no	cannabis	retailer
Bear	yes	20-26	lower	yes	cocaine, cannabis, ketamine	retailer, 'grafter', wholesaler & imp./exp.
Khalid	yes	20-26	lower	yes	cocaine	retailer
Depp	yes	20-26	middle	yes	cannabis	retailer
Chico	no	26-28	middle	no	cannabis	cultivation & retailer
Imran	yes	18-24	lower	yes	-	-
Turok	yes	19-25	lower	yes	cocaine	retailer
Harvey	yes	19-25	lower	yes	cannabis	retailer
Gordon	yes	20-26	lower	yes	cannabis	retailer
Blaine	no	20-25	lower	no	cocaine & cannabis	retailer, 'grafter' & wholesale
Thomas	yes	21-27	lower	no	cocaine	'grafter'
Harm	no	22-26	middle	no	cannabis	retailer
Pig	no	24-30	lower	no	cannabis	cultivation & retailer
Nani	no	17-22	lower	no	cocaine & cannabis	Retailer & 'grafter'
Henry	no	23-28	lower	yes	cocaine & ketamine	wholesaler, broker & exp.
Miller	yes	22-28	lower	yes	cocaine, cannabis, ketamine	Retailer, 'grafter', wholesaler & imp./exp.
Rushy*	no	23-26	lower	yes	cocaine, cannabis, ketamine	wholesaler & imp.

* 'grafter' refers to the role of a drug courier who transports bulk consignments for a wholesaler

'imp.' = importation

'exp.' = exportation

2.5.3 Justifying the study's empirical focus: 'A man's world'?

Empirical criminological research has traditionally focused on male offending; consequently, women's roles within the illegal drugs trade (and within criminology more broadly) have generally been overlooked. This is surely one of criminology's greatest shortcomings, and may also be viewed as a potential caveat of the present study. Despite Adler's assertion that 'drug selling "is a man's world"' (1993: 199) numerous studies have since recognised the various roles adopted by women within illegal drug trades e.g. Murphy et al., 2004; Denton and O'Malley, 1999; Dunlap et al., 1994; Dunlap et al., 1997; Hobbs, 1995; Maher and Hudson, 2007; Waldorf et al., 1991; Jacobs and Miller, 1998; Hutton, 2005; Mieczkowski, 1994.

Women played important roles within the observed social network – as girlfriends, friends, customers or intermediaries – however none of the women I met via the research participants acted as traders. Despite female dealers having been present in The Lads' networks on The Mediterranean resort (see section 2.6.2), their involvement in The Lads' UK trade networks was ostensibly absent. As such, this thesis deals *solely* with the experiences of a male cohort of offenders. The focus on male dealers was unintentional, and was a product of the context in which the fieldwork was undertaken.

2.6. Research Sites

The majority of the fieldwork was undertaken in The Lads' hometown, *Tanners Town* and it was here that the majority of fieldwork was undertaken. However, observations were also made abroad on *The Mediterranean* resort where several of The Lads had imported, wholesaled and retailed ketamine and cocaine, and *Top City* based in the north of England, where many affiliates lived and where much of the cocaine was sourced.

2.6.1 Tanners Town

Tanners Town is a mid-sized town in the north of England with a traditional heritage rooted in working class industries. Its pre-war industries centred on mining, leather production/processing, and brewing (beer), as well as hosting a range of market trades. During the last century Tanners Town had all but lost its traditional industries.

In their place has come an influx of modern high-tech industries and commercial firms. The town has a population of approximately 60,000 of which over 90% are white-British (ONS, 2011). Inhabitants are fragmented across one of the many residential areas or ancillary villages that constitute the town's borough. As with any UK town there are disparities in terms of wealth and social composition and by simply walking/driving around the neighbourhoods one can't fail to notice the clear differences in demographics and social wealth between these geographic locales. Several of its housing estates are classified as being in the top 10% most deprived areas in the UK in terms of economic, educational and health indicators (government figures), yet dotted across the borough are several affluent neighbourhoods.

The town hosts a thriving night-time economy with a large number of bars, pubs and clubs dotted around the town centre. Swathes of people from all ages go out on the town during the weekends, starting in the bars and pubs before ending up in one of the town's nightclubs. The town's nightlife has something of a reputation for drunkenness and violence in and out of the venues, but no more of a reputation than countless town centres across the UK.

The most common offenses in the district (as indicated by police figures) relate to violent crimes, anti-social behaviour, shoplifting, and theft. Between May 2012 and April 2013 violent crimes in Tanners Town represented a mean average of 13.1% of all recorded crimes; compared to the UK's average (for the same period) of 10.2% and a neighbouring town (of equivalent population size) of 5.2%. Drug crimes, however, constituted a lower proportion of total recorded crimes compared to the UK average. Between May 2012 and April 2013 drug crimes in Tanners Town represented a mean average of 1.8% of all recorded crimes, while the UK's average for this period was 3.3% and the same neighbouring town was 2.9%

Those of my participants who grew up in the town have mixed feelings towards it. Generally, those who have moved away from the town speak of it in disparaging terms, while the majority of those who have remained as residents see it a nice place in which to live with a few drawbacks.

Khalid (current resident): It's a quiet town, same as any other little town: you get your knobheads and you get your nice people, your nice areas and not so nice areas. Town centre's full of scallys [in the week] but that's because a lot of decent people are at work.

Imran (current resident): It's a nice little town, but there's a few little scallys and scrotts. But its okay, [there are] some nice people there. Areas are nice but the town centres not looking so well with all the vacant units. There's some nice countryside to chill in. But we get a lot of young people [coming into my shop], 17-18, who are pissed or on Mkat [the former legal high mephadrone]. I'd say its an alright little town, not a lot to do though.

Cliff (former resident): In terms of location it's good coz although it's a small town it's not too far from a lot of cities. But everyone knows everyone there [in Tanners Town] so there's like a small-town syndrome, you know, a small-town mentality, people stuck in their ways. I'd say most of the population is pretty stupid. Just a lot of idiots who wanna get fucked [intoxicated] and get into fights [...] I didn't notice how bad it was until I left. It was good for [drug] business because we knew loads of people from [names a range of residential neighbourhoods] through college, and then just met their mates. Word travelled coz our mates had mates who lived in their area or who they went to school with. Just from growing up there, and then through Facebook, you just end up getting to know loads of people, so it was easy to build up [drug] customers [...] Sol loves Tanners Town though, reckons it's a good place, but that coz he's a big fish in a small pond. I keep telling him to come here [and work abroad], but he's not up for moving away, he'd be a small fish in a big pond over here.

Bear: (former resident): It's just scummy. Loads of little scummy scroats. Say you go out for a few drinks its just full of knobheads all looking for a fight, or guys off their heads. It used to be alright, could have a laugh, but now its just full of little roided-up fuckers [people on steroids]. I'm not saying everyone. It's just an average small town. I bet if you looked in [names other northern towns] you'd find the same mix of people. We had a range of people we sold to coz it was easy to network in a small town.

2.6.2 The Mediterranean resort

The Mediterranean Resort, known in this thesis simply as *The Med*, was a popular holiday destination frequented by many of The Lads. For decades young Brits have been travelling to The Med for purposes of leisure or work. During the summer months The Med witnesses an influx of seasonal workers from the UK, many of who go to work in one of its many bars, restaurants or clubs. The Med has become synonymous with partying, hedonism and drug use, primarily by the British holiday goers. Over the course of many years several of The Lads had developed networks

with residents and other seasonal workers after having worked there during summer seasons. Contacts were quickly developed with many individuals involved in the illegal drug trade.

2.6.3 Top City

Top City was a large city located close to Tanners Town. Many of The Lads had strong links to the city, either as a result of family, friendships that had developed at work, or because some of The Lads had gone there to study for their undergraduate degrees. Two of The Lads had grown up in Top City, while five of The Lads had lived there (either as a result of their studies or work). Their association to Top City had provided many crucial links to the drug markets, including wholesale sources for cocaine, cannabis, ecstasy, and ketamine.

2.6.4 Economic context

In order to fully understand the lives of my participants we must consider the broader social and economic developments that had occurred during their lifetime. This section focuses on the economic and social shifts that had occurred during The Lads' formative years (from their early-teens to early-adulthood). From the late nineties onwards the UK and its citizens had witnessed sustained levels of economic growth (Corry et al., 2011; Office of National Statistics). Though this expansion of wealth was not distributed evenly across the UK, The Lads had nevertheless seen a great many developments in and around their communities.

As with so many towns in the north of England the town's industries previously centred on traditional forms of manufacturing. From the late-1990s up until the recession of 2008, the town experienced a decade of rapid expansion in its commercial and manufacturing industries. High-tech manufacturing and technology firms began to locate themselves within the local area and developers began constructing new commercial and residential sites on former 'green field' and 'brown field' sites. In a relatively short period of time the town had ostensibly become 'cosmopolitanised' (though at the expense of many independent businesses and its once-active market trade).

At the last census, economic activity among the town's inhabitants was higher than the UK average. During this decade of growth average weekly earnings among the town's inhabitants increased more than 40%, while disposable household income grew by an impressive 45%.¹⁷ Crucially, this rapid economic growth began as the majority of participant's had entered their first year of high school, and continued up to their early twenties. Yet, despite such improvements within their economic conditions these men witnessed one of the most significant economic downturns in recent decades. Just as The Lads were entering/progressing into their twenties - a critical time in their occupational lives - the recession of 2008 began to take effect. This study will discuss exactly what affects the recession had upon participants' employment and offending careers in a later chapter (see section 5.6.2).

In short, my participants had bore witness to unprecedented growth within their local environment. Their social and economic desires and expectations were the product of this era. The belief that one *should* and *could* improve their economic position was, for many, ingrained into them. The recession of 2008 was an unexpected event that had the potential to shatter these expectations.

2.7 Conclusion

The illicit drugs trade is a largely clandestine affair, comprising of buyers and sellers whose mutual interests are to limit the risks of arrest or imprisonment by limiting their exposure. By their vary nature, drug dealers and dealing networks who operate in 'closed markets' are 'hidden populations'. Referrals are not only needed for potential customers to simply source their supply, but often to become aware of the market's very existence. Without my prior links to this group there is little conceivable chance of a study having been conducted with these individuals. This study utilises insider-knowledge and a wide range of data collection tools to penetrate deep into the mechanics and motivations of these offenders. Ethnography has allowed for a nuanced understanding of this group that would have been unachievable through other methods such as questionnaires or structured interviews.

¹⁷ Although these are official government statistics, the exact source cannot be referenced for reasons of anonymity.

Because of the absence of random sampling within my study, my findings are not generalizable to either dealers operating across the UK or even those operating in Tanners Town. Yet there is increasing evidence of similar closed-drug markets operating within other towns and cities across the UK (e.g. Taylor and Potter, 2013; Parker, 2001; May et al., 2000; May et al., 2005). There is nothing ‘extraordinary’ about my participants: they are working-class lads from stable working households. Their ambitions, hard work, education, entrepreneurial spirit, supportive nature, are traits likely to be found among many other cohorts of young adults. As van Duyne notes (regarding this sample of dealers), ‘what was remarkable about these criminals as acting traders? As a matter of fact, very little’ (2013: 8). Yet, to date, few studies have managed to systematically document the development of such groups, the offending trajectories of individuals operating within such networks, the move in and out of retail wholesale and import/export markets. Thus, this is a unique study on what are very ‘regular’ individuals.

I hope that the knowledge garnered through in-depth longitudinal research complements the existing literature by providing useful findings that might have otherwise been neglected or overlooked. Nevertheless, this study has required ongoing reflections regarding its ethnicity, and despite my best efforts the wide-ranging ethical concerns and dilemmas I encountered can never be fully resolved.

Chapter 3.

Staying ‘silent’: Mitigating the risks of detection and prosecution in illegal drug markets

It's not like Sainsbury's! We don't keep stock of anything.

-Sol, cocaine wholesaler

3.1 Introduction: Risk reduction within drug markets

Studies demonstrate how various kinds of offenders attempt to limit the risk of capture and punishment. Whether these offenders are car thieves (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2005), sexual predators (Beauregard & Bouchard, 2010), individuals trying to elicit sex from prostitutes (Holt et al., 2009) or drug dealers, the evidence by these studies suggests that once potential hazards have been identified (i.e. points of exposure), risk-mitigation strategies are developed and employed. Understanding what these self-protective strategies are and how offenders develop their appreciation of risk is an ever-constant concern for criminologists, policy makers and law enforcement officers, alike. This chapter outlines the protective strategies that were employed by my participants. In doing so, it is hoped that we might appreciate how and why The Lads remained (for the most part) hidden – a part of the ‘silent majority’ of drug traffickers who are able to ply their trade without legal reproach (Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010).

Reports of inter-gang conflict, intensive police surveillance operations and police raids on seemingly unsuspecting drug traffickers have been well publicised within the mass media. Judging by these reports it would appear as though drug dealing is an inherently *risky* business. Why then, would individuals who are intelligent, who are in the process of attaining qualifications and work experience (or who have already attained these things) (see section 2.5.2) and who hold legitimate occupational ambitions (see section 5.9) choose to become active within a trade that is seemingly rife with dangers – particularly when such dangers could undermine their efforts for

legitimate prosperity? This chapter aims to answer this question by looking at the market structure, the perceived risks of The Lads' involvement in the drug trade, and the various methods that The Lads implemented as a means of insulating themselves from potential state evidence. Cross (2000) identified four potential risks that can affect any businessperson: market risks, transactional risks, liability risks and enforcement risks. This paper focuses on the latter, 'the possibility that the business will be sanctioned due to the violation of a regulation or law' (2000:70).

I begin with a brief look at the relevant literature. I then present my findings under the umbrella of the following thematic sections:

- Risks for all involved in the drugs trade
- Risks at the retail-level of the trade (i.e. used at the dealer/consumer-level)
- Risks at the wholesale-level of the trade (i.e. those who supplied dealers)
- Risks with cross-border trafficking (import/export)
- Evaluating the possible successes of these various strategies

Unlike studies that rely on samples of offenders taken from institutional settings through prisons, court programmes, probation etc. (e.g. Reuter and Haaga, 1989; Pearson and Hobbs, 2001; Decker and Chapman, 2008), this study's participants were active offenders who could mostly be described as 'successful' in their crimes and who could not have been accessed via the methods cited above. Due to the unobtrusive nature of closed market trading and the participants' 'success' at avoiding punishment, such a group may fall short of much criminological scrutiny. The ethnographic approach offered privileged access to a group whose illicit trade would have otherwise remained unknown and offers an understanding of how successful drug dealers avoid the state's legal enforcement.

3.2 Literature

Many of the key studies addressing the risks of retail drug distribution derive from the *open market* context (e.g. Jacobs, 1996a, 1996b; Jacobs and Miller, 1998; Aitken et al., 2002; Hutton, 2005; Johnson and Natarajan, 1995; VanNostrad and Tewksbury, 1999; May et al., 2004). Such markets tend to be geographically bound to particular public settings (e.g. a certain street corner, outside a grocery shop, or public housing

estate, etc.) very often within marginalised inner-city urban communities; and are frequently linked to street gangs (e.g. Fagan, 1989; Klein *et al.*, 1991; Esbensen and Huizinga, 1993). As its name implies open markets are equally accessible to all (Edmunds *et al.* 1996), with few restrictions in terms of who can procure drugs from the dealers (May & Hough, 2004). Consequently, the risk mitigation techniques dealers employ while operating in such markets often centre on the ability to vet unknown customers (e.g. using personal characteristics, such as their appearance) and the division of labour at the consumer level (e.g. having a spotter who looks out for police, a tout who approaches potential customers and directs them to the sellers, having someone who takes the customers money at one location and other who supplies the drugs at another, etc.).

The application of findings from open market contexts to the modern day UK context is questionable. Although open markets have been documented in the UK (e.g Kings Cross in London during the mid-1990s, see May *et al.*, 2001; 1980s/90s Manchester, see Walsh, 2003), their presence has most readily been identified within large US and European inner cities such as Philadelphia (Anderson, 2000), Chicago (Venkatesh, 2008), Oslo (Sandberg, 2008), Rotterdam (Van DeMheen *et al.*, 2004), Frankfurt and Milan (Paoli *et al.*, 2000). Findings and conclusions drawn from such a context cannot be readily transferred to the ‘closed’, friendship networks that appear to predominate in the UK today (e.g. Home Office, 2012; Coomber and Turnbull, 2007; Parker *et al.*, 2002; May *et al.*, 1999, 2001; Ward and Pearson, 1997). This applies in particular to the ways and methods of risk mitigation, as Edmund *et al.* note, ‘Open retail drug markets are amendable to situational prevention, but closed ones are less so’ (1996: vii). After all, operating in a closed market of ‘assured’ persons implies working in an environment far less dangerous and hostile than those encountered by more overt urban street dealers.

Closed markets offer their participants far greater protection from law-enforcement than the open markets. They are less visible (i.e. detectable) and are thus less susceptible to ‘control’ from law-enforcement agencies (Kleinman and Smith, 1990:85). Customers have to be acquainted with a dealer in order to be supplied (often achieved via a referral). Consequently, closed market dealers do not openly

tout their product or elicit stranger sales. However, studies detailing closed market drug dealing are far more rare (e.g. Waldorf and Murphy, 2004; Waldorf et al. 1991; Dunlap, Johnson and Manwar, 1994; Ward, 2010; Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010), with markets facilitated by ‘the silent majority’ (Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010:2) particularly under-researched – ‘[those] whose deviant behaviours are largely unknown beyond the limits of their social networks’ (2010:2). Indeed, research has tended to focus on dealers operating within the low-socioeconomic groups (exceptions to this trend are Adler’s 1993 ethnography on upper-level markets; Waldorf et al., 1991; Waldorf and Murphy, 2004; and Mohamed et al’s 2010 study on university campus dealers). In their study of middle-class cocaine dealers, Waldorf and Murphy (2004) note how the wholesale dealers they interviewed often worked in closed markets due to their inherent secrecy: (quoting a participant of theirs) “‘ I think the major thing is to keep your network closed. If you’ve got a network you only expand it to the people that you know and the people that they know’” (2004: 239). Yet the authors stipulate:

‘The rule about restricting sales only to persons known by the seller generally works for wholesalers, but is rather difficult to maintain for street and bar dealers. Street and bar dealers contact customers in public places and are more likely to take on new customers that they do not know; therefore, they are anxious to develop new customers and expand their business.’
(2004: 239)

One major factor may have lessened the usefulness of many earlier studies: the growth in digital communication. The mobile phone (‘smartphones’ in particular) has potentially revolutionised drug markets and its instrumental use is only now being studied (e.g. Aldridge and Yar, 2012). Natarajan and Clarke (1995) identified the use of telecommunications in arranging deals within open markets of the 1990s (specifically via payphones). Yet more recently McEwen (2011) described the use of pre-credited phones among dealers. Despite studies (such as Moore, 2006) suggesting a significant number of drug users use of mobile phones to procure their drugs, the research documenting how these forms of digital communication are facilitating criminal trades is inadequate. To-date, no published research has addressed the use of

contemporary digital mediums (e.g. social network media) to which many mobile phone users (including drug dealers) have access (see Aldridge and Yar, 2012).

Thus it can be argued that there is a lack of knowledge relating to contemporary dealing. It may also be argued that criminological knowledge regarding distribution is predominantly skewed towards the study of lower-end distribution, committed largely by marginalised communities, in a society that functioned prior to the sharp rise in mobile phone ownership. Since the advent of this device the need for open markets has decreased (May *et al.*, 2004) and shifts from *open* to *closed* markets have been observed in the U.S., aided by this device (Aitken *et al.* 2002). New research is needed in order to resituate previously identified risk-mitigation techniques and to identify the new methods being employed. An understanding of these measures' success is also needed if law-enforcements are to better appreciate or develop their own efforts at combating the trades.

3.3 Findings

3.4 Off limits, off radar: The protection inherent in closed-markets.

Whether at the wholesale or retail level, The Lads operated under the conditions of a closed market. Two features of such markets helped to shield their activities from detection and subsequent arrest. The first of these was the need for a referral or vouch by a trusted third-party. Before participants would even talk business (let alone supply their stock) a referral from intermediaries was obligatory. Unknown individuals who approached a seller (either in person or by phone) in the hopes of being supplied were automatically treated with caution and mistrust. Participants preferred to play it safe and would contact the reference provided prior to any agreement. This most basic of precautions limited the possibility that the person being supplied was a police officer, a police informer or potential aggressor.

Sol – *cocaine wholesaler*: If 'Johnny' off the street came up to me and was like, 'Any chance you'd be able to sort us a half [ounce] of Charlie [cocaine]?' I'd tell them, 'I dunno what you're talking about pal'.

Marshall – *cocaine dealer*: There’s no chance of somebody I didn’t know getting coke off me. It just wouldn’t happen. If you want me to deliver to you I’ve got to know you. If I don’t know you then one of my mates has got to know you and they’ll have to give me a heads up to tell me that I should expect a call from so-and-so, and that he’s alright to do business with, *then* I’ll drop off for them, but not before I know they’re safe.

Khalid – *cocaine dealer*: Unless there’s some kind of assurance from a mate saying they know him [the potential customer], there’s no way of knowing if they’re gonna try have you over [steal the product or money] or if they’re a cop. You just don’t know. They could be anyone for all you know. It’s not worth risking it at the end of the day. That’s why I’d never just go drop off to someone who called me up out of the blue, coz you could end up getting fucked over like what happened to Bear and Cliff that time¹⁸.

Bear – *cocaine/cannabis/ketamine dealer*: The other week I had someone call up saying that they knew Trawler. They were wanting to know if I’d drop off two g’s [grams] in [a local housing estate]. I said “I’ll have to call you back mate, I’m a bit busy and can’t really hear you too well”. That was just some bullshit line I gave him. I called up Trawler and just checked the lad out. He was like, “Oh yeah sorry la, he was bothering me earlier about where to get some coke so I gave him you number”. He knew him, said he was an alright lad, so I called him back and was just like, “Yeah mate, I can hear you now – how many you after?”.

An informal ‘vouch’ for a new customer served as a character reference, allowing dealers to expand customer base safe in the knowledge that their customers had undergone this vetting procedure (see section 4.8.2). My observations confirmed that trading would commence only after this introduction had been made.

¹⁸ The incident to which Khalid is referring relates to a man who held a gun to Bear and Cliff and demanded the stock they were carrying.

The second feature of the market that helped keep their trade covert were the discrete points of sale used for customer transactions. The signs of a prevalent trade that often accompany open markets – such as social disorder, higher rates of crime, touts, high volumes of customers to a dealer’s home address – were absent from the observed network. Transactions were discreetly arranged over the phone (either verbally or via coded text messages) and conducted privately (generally in the customer’s home). Because dealers were not stood on street corners advertising their wares, the police were unlikely to become aware of such a trade unless they inadvertently stumbled upon a dealer and his drugs (see section 3.5.1) or if a suspicious/disgruntled neighbour (either that of the customer or the dealer) decided to report suspicious behaviour.

Cliff – *cocaine dealer*: For the most part you’re just going into other people’s houses.

Who’s to say that you’re not just going poppin’ in to see a mate? Coz really, most of them are mates, or mates of mates. And fuckin’ hell, how many times a week do I go see me *actual* mates –popping in for five/ten minutes. So yeah, it’s well less dodgy than if I was gonna be meeting somebody in a park or whatever [...] Even if I was going to drop off in town [to customers out in the bars/clubs]: you just pick them up from whatever bar they’re in, do a little lap in the car, give them Charlie, and then just drop ’em off a few streets away. That’s probably the most risky kind of delivery I do, but it’s no way as risky as selling it out your house or trying to shift it to strangers on street corners.

The fact that participants only ever dealt to vouched individuals, and that deliveries were made to customers’ houses straight away added a level of insulation and protection.

3.5 Risks for all involved in drug distribution

Many of the fundamental risks associated with drug distribution were present for *all* the individuals involved in the illegal drugs trade, regardless of drug type or the level at which they operated. Many of the dealers identified similar probable points-of-exposure regarding their illegal operations. Likewise, the group's perceptions of the evidential requirements needed for a successful prosecution were much the same; such risks related to the physical evidence intrinsic to their trade; communication records, financial records (e.g. lists of debtors), and of course, the drugs themselves. Consequently, many methods employed to mitigate these perceived risks were the same for all participants. The following five sections outline the risks that participants identified at each stage in the distribution chain.

3.5.1 The risks of drug transit

As noted above, the observed markets were 'closed'. Passing trade was not elicited and transactions were generally conducted in the privacy of customers' homes. One of the perceived main risks was a chance encounter with the police whilst drugs were being transported. As the drugs were stored in 'stash' during times of inactive trading (see, section 3.6.1), it was predominantly during its transportation that these individuals were in direct proximity with their illegal commodity for a prolonged time. Being pulled over by the police was an infrequent but ever-present risk as retail deliveries were made on an almost nightly basis. Units were separately bagged (indicative of distribution), ready for orders placed previously. Wholesalers and their grafters (those who undertook logistical tasks on behalf of wholesalers¹⁹) risked far tougher penalties if caught mid-transport due to the sheer quantities of drugs being moved, but a single weekly journey (necessary for the weekly resupply of retailers) limited the likelihood of a chance encounter with the police.

3.5.2 Vehicle stashes

As with the transportation of most other contraband such as cigarettes or alcohol, resourceful means of hiding the drugs during transit were developed (von Lampe, 2011). These were often unobtrusive design shortcomings that permitted access to a small area of the car by removing panels or forcing a gap between two panels. These stash compartments were used as storage both for the larger consignments (e.g. the

¹⁹ The 'grafter' was essentially the wholesaler's 'right-hand man', see 3.7.3.

‘pucks’ of cocaine weighing 4.5 ounce) and were also employed for single units *en route* to end-users. Indeed, these dealers rarely drove their vehicles without having stashed their own personal supply so as to lessen the likelihood of being caught in possession of even a small amount of drugs. Even before embarking upon a dealing career many had used stash compartment to hide their drugs. Several participants had learned first hand the risks of being pulled over during their teens, having been caught and cautioned for possessing small quantities of cannabis and had developed this simple method of concealment in response to such incidence.

3.5.3 Personal stash

When retailers made the short walk from their car to the customer’s home they very often concealed the drugs using the elastic of their underwear or often simply down the front of their pants (as unhygienic as this is). This small act provided a small, but potentially vital layer of security. Those Lads who had been searched in the past (often during their adolescence) had only ever had their trouser and jacket pockets thoroughly searched, as well as a brief ‘pat down’ of the clothing. It was their understanding that police would rarely (if ever) inspect a person’s underwear without sufficient justification. Blaine once commented: ‘Miller got pulled over that one night when me and Cliff were [visiting him on The Med] and they had us on the side of the road with our pants down, legs apart [searching for drugs] [...] I’ve don’t know anyone who’s had that done to them here [in the UK]. It’s just not done. When are the cops ever gonna make you stand on the side of the road and have you do that’?

3.5.4 Communication interception and retrieval

Studies have long shown the instrumental importance of telecommunications in drug markets. Natarajan et al. (1995) observed how public payphones once helped to connect customers with dealers. In the latter years of the twentieth century, pagers and mobile phones emerged as another ‘tool’ of the dealers’ trade (for an early example of its prevalence see Hobbs, 1995:24). For those who traded within the observed networks digital form of communication was indispensable. As McEwen (2011:140) states, ‘mobile phones facilitate [drug dealers’] interactions by making the social organization of the transaction more efficient and less predictable’. Mobile phones ensured a direct link to suppliers or customers whenever communications were needed to coordinate logistics, payments or threaten debt enforcement.

Participants believed information communicated via mobile phones could be retrieved following the seizure of the handset or alternatively, via its interception (if the authorities had been made aware of a phone number facilitating criminal trading). If the police confiscated a suspect's phone, a device's SIM card (a removable chip which contains an internationally unique number) they had the potential of granting access to the user's calls and call history, as well as mobile phone 'text' (SMS) messages. Although discussions during the calls would remain unknown, the messages could be read in their original form. However, if a phone number was linked to criminal activity then the police could intercept any subsequent calls and text messages. In addition, by triangulating the signal of an active phone, police could determine the location of the phone's user allowing them to track the movements of suspected criminals (Mellers, 2004). Though participants viewed the likelihood of the police employing interception surveillance methods as fairly small, they were well aware that messages could be easily retrieved (the one participant who was successfully prosecuted had his conviction for distribution secured on the basis of text messages the police had been able to retrieve from his handset).

One technique guarded against both the risk of telecommunication interception and data retrieval: the frequent changing of mobile phone numbers, specifically of the 'SIM card'. The replacement of the SIM was seen by many of the dealers as a basic 'principle' of protection against prosecution. SIMs were incredibly cheap (as little as 99 pence) and could be purchased at various informal outlets (e.g. newsagents and markets) and simply inserted into any phone for immediate use. This made the use of such a method both effortless and affordable. Other studies (May *et al.*, 2001, 2004) similarly showed dealers regularly changing their handset as a means of altering their phone number. Indeed, the use of 'burners' (cheap phones with a pre-paid call-time allowance) allowed dealers to dispose of the handset once credit was exhausted (McEwan, 2011). Though the exchanging of phones is a seemingly common phenomenon, the use of replacement SIMs has not as yet been documented. Such a straightforward method undermined law enforcement's ability to identify and track numbers by continually altering the identifying feature (i.e. the unique phone number).

During the research period telephone network providers began incentivising the registration of SIMs. Once registered, crediting the number with (for instance) £15, gave the user a set amount of free call time or monthly bundles of text messages.

Sol: The thing is, it adds up. Having to phone around all day, sending texts all days, chasing people up, sorting things, arranging things, what else . . . just everything. You're always having to get in touch with people. You're spending a tenner [£10] a day just on that; might as well put 15-20 quid's worth of credit on as soon as you get it and [the provider] gives you a load of free calls and texts. That way, you're only spending a fraction of what you would otherwise.

Individuals who regularly changed their number and wanted the 'free' call times and messages would ask a friend, often a female, to call the registration-line and give false details. Once activated, the SIM would be used in a dealer's mobile phone, with all phone calls relating to business being made via this bogus person's telephone number. This observation confirms that false personal information is being provided to mobile phone operators as a means of protection (a question posed by McEwan, 2011).

Very often their new numbers would by-pass individuals where no recent 'business' transactions had occurred, selectively updating those who were actively sourcing their product from them. These individuals would send out a generic message to all those they believed would require contact regarding their trade. Active dealers and customers would regularly receive a message from their supplier reading: 'New number, Miller', or 'Its Blaine, got some pucker ['good'] stuff'. Individuals in the network were *au fait* with the meaning of such a text: this is the number to use if you require the specific drug. These selective updates removed either former or stray 'players' from the communication network, helping to maintain a level of insulation. All of the participants perceived telecommunication as a potential evidential source for the police, yet the rigour with which SIMs were changed varied. The wholesalers appeared most fearful of their telecommunications being intercepted by the police due to the amount of data stored on the device. Generally, retailers who had been operating within one of the markets for any prolonged period (more than a few

months) were more alert to this perceived risk than those who had just started trading. At times, some ‘novice’ dealers would use a registered SIM as their point of contact for customers before a fellow dealer raised this ‘error’ of practice.

3.5.5 Coded language

As has been observed elsewhere, the use of codes in telecommunications was a means of ‘insulating [offenders’] activities [. . .] from law enforcement’ (McEwan, 2011:141). Basic methods of encryption or coding were used during most telecommunications between individuals in the group, particularly in text messages. In addition, more seasoned dealers maintained a physical record of debts (known as a ‘tick list’) using a simple code. The use of code words in place of widely known criminal lingo or names of others in the network was another attempt at limiting an indisputable evidential link between the wholesalers, the retailers and the end-users. Street terminology such as ‘charlie’, ‘coke’, ‘sniff’, ‘dope’, ‘green’, ‘smoke’, ‘bag’, ‘gram’ or ‘eighth’ (etc.) were not permitted within any written communication. There was an unwritten rule (but one vehemently enforced through threats): *refrain from using drug names or specific volumes/sums from digital messaging*. The following quotation illustrates the development and dissemination of these codes.

Rushy – *multi-drug broker*: [Talking to Bear face-to-face] Listen mate, I don’t want any message with anything even remotely dodgy. If you’re after an oz [ounce of ketamine] ask to borrow a book. If you want a key [kilogram] then ask to borrow a box-set. And when you’ve got money for me say that you’ve done with me book or watched the DVDs [boxset] and ask when can you give it me back. None of this asking for ‘a half’ malarkey [...] I’m not trying to patronise you Bear, but some fuckin’ dick head called me up the other day asking for a fucking half key of ket[amine] – as plain as that! ‘Can I get a half key of ket at the weekend’? I fuckin’ told him straight, and now I’m reminding everyone, okay? So if you want anything, that’s how I want you to ask: books are ounces, box-sets are kilos, and returning them means you got my money.

Mobile phone calls were the preferred means of communication because they, unlike text messages, were not retrievable by the police/criminal justice agencies: all that existed once the call ended was a log of the two phone numbers, the time of the call

and its duration. The likelihood of a falsely registered SIM, less than a month old, being intercepted by police was viewed as slim; thus most of the participants appeared reassured and 'safe' when conversing on their mobile. Yet there were daily instances when communication over the phone was not possible: either because the dealer was at work (a legitimate job), because of commitments and/or because it was not suitable to discuss a potentially suspicious transaction in the company of someone unaware of their trade (e.g. a work colleague, parent, or friend). Thus, text messages were vital in delivering pieces of information when verbal communication was not appropriate for either party. In these instances coded communication was essential.

Sol: I text me mate saying, 'Pick up that paperwork and drop [*codeword*] off'. He knows what it means, but there's nothing wrong with that, is there? If somebody looked at your phone and you've got 30 texts saying, 'I want 300 pound', 'I want 300 pound', then they're gonna ask you about that. But if you say, 'Have you got that paperwork?'... The [Business A]... [Business A] is a life-saver with stuff like that.

Because Sol's wholesaling operation ran on continual flows of credit (I've termed this 'black credit', see 'Chapter 4', section 4.4.2) and because of the large number of individuals indebted to him each week, it was essential he maintained up-to-date records of which retailers owed him, together with the amount. The other wholesalers in this study (except one - a cocaine and ketamine wholesaler) relied on memory because the number of debtors was far fewer. Sol's concern with maintaining wholesale tick lists was the dubiousness of having a list of names (all of whom were drug dealers, possibly known to the authorities) adjacent to a list of figures. Lists needed to be physically accessible and readily decipherable to Sol and his 'grafter' (Sol's assistant), whilst simultaneously appearing both innocuous (to avoid arousing anyone's suspicion) and justifiable for legitimate purposes (if needed, to a jury).

Sol: [It is a physical list,] it's a shopping list. For example [...] 'Persil Washing Powder £1,50' - would be a lad called Percy owes £150. There's loads of things it could be, mate. Coz people have got daft names [nicknames], haven't they? [.

. .] There's lots of variations. And then just put it in a good place. For [a time] that was stuck to the fridge with a fridge magnet, plain sight.

Sol and the grafter created a simple means of storing important financial information by using terms commonly seen around people's kitchens, but which also carried word-associations with debtors' nick-names. These names proved useful for establishing private word-associated encryption. Others, whose custom-base was far smaller in size, relied on memory rather than records: this carried the obvious risk of being forgotten or inaccuracies. Financial losses through inaccurate recollection could be factored in by retailers and some simply did not mind losing out on small sums from debtors because 'they give you that much money... I'm happy whatever' (Cliff). Debts to wholesalers were much greater but were often spread to just a handful of retailers. I was aware of two cocaine retailers who had devised a means of coding on their mobile phones, creating for each contact a second phone number to store the sum (in between two 'marker' numbers). Several of the retailers physically recorded financial debts without coding, but were careful to store such lists in obscure locations in or around their residence. Any retailer who avoided physical lists relied on memory. One evening, while hanging out at one of The Lad's houses, Miller (a cocaine wholesaler) admitted storing his list of debtors as a note on his mobile phone without the use of codes; his peers immediately criticised his unguarded technique and began lecturing him on the necessity of such protective practises.

The intention of those employing codes was to make it difficult or impossible for police and prosecutors to demonstrate an unquestionable link to criminality through their communiqués or their financial records.

3.6 Risks with retail distribution

In this section I outline the issues that were experienced principally by retail dealers (those who supplied the end-user). Two main aspects of retail dealing carried the greatest risks. As one participant concisely surmised:

Cliff: One, is your stash [primary stock] being found; two, is being caught with it on you. Basically it's them [physically] linking the drugs to you. There's not much chance of them finding your stash or getting you with anything on you if you do basic things [. . .]. As I never have it in me house, that's me number one rule, and never carry it on me, other than hidden in that car, I can't see how they'll actually link me to me coke (5 years into his dealing career).

The biggest risks faced by the retailers came from their requirement to store a week's worth of stock – something that each of the wholesalers (Sol, Rushy, Miller and Bear) were not required to do. Retailers had to ensure that the product with which they had daily contact with was kept away from their residence and securely hidden while in transit (see section 3.5.2). At the onset of their dealing careers, drugs were often stored at home. As their enterprises expanded, drugs gradually began to be stored at friends' houses (for a small fee, typically one or two saleable units of stock). As my fieldwork progressed, a more convenient means of storing cocaine stock (the most in-demand drug) became apparent – something I shall now discuss.

3.6.1 Storage & the 'Dead Letterbox' stash

A sufficient supply of stock was required to fulfil orders throughout the week until new stock came in. Having a ready supply not only maximized profits but helped retain customers. If a retailer ran out of stock they risked losing not only immediate sales, but future ones too as customers were forced to find an alternative source for the drug. Therefore as the availability of drugs was essential for retailers, so too was its storage; but where should one keep an abundance of an illegal substance? For individuals involved in the sale of cannabis, its sheer bulk and pungent smell limited storage options to either their own residence or (for the larger 'operations' s) a trusted other's house/garage. Yet for cocaine and ketamine retailers whose stock was small the answer was simple: a 'stash'. The following quote illustrates how pivotal having a stash site could be regarding a person's willingness to trade.

Khalid: For me, it had to be kept in the stash [...] I wouldn't have done it if I'd had to keep it in my mum and dad's house. What if they found it? I'd be fucked. God knows what it would have done to them if they had found me little tub full of coke. It would have broken me mum's heart [...] We'd had our house

raided by the police [on an unrelated matter] a few years before then hadn't we? And for all I knew they [the police] could quite easily come to the house and search it again for whatever bullshit they wanted to do us for. Can you imagine if they found that in the house? I don't even want to think about it. That sort of shit would be in the [local newspaper]. The whole family would cut their links with us. So no way would I have dealt if I didn't have somewhere to store it [outside of the home].

In espionage practices used throughout the globe a 'Dead Letterbox' was a technique employed, in which two parties were able to pass items between each other discreetly and without having to meet, thereby facilitating the concealment of their operation (Maddrell, 2006). The primary stash worked in a similar way: a discreet location known to the relevant parties (i.e. a dealer or dealing partnership) in which a container storing the week's stock was hidden, and which each party could visit separately. This kind of primary stash functioned to maintain a distance between the stock and a dealer's residence, stored in a location deemed unlikely to be found. The stash permitted access to the drugs as and when needed, and meant individuals within a partnership could pass drugs to one another without the need of a hand-to-hand transaction.

The choice of location for a primary stash was unique to each dealer/dealing partnership. Sites were mainly located off country lanes, in lay-bys away from residential or agricultural buildings, ideally 'a back lane where you wouldn't even think there was a road' (Cliff). The location of the stash needed to tick multiple boxes in order to be seen as providing a discreet and accessible site:

- Proximity to residence (roughly five minutes driving distance)
- A location where few they were unlikely to encounter members of the public (few houses (if any), minimal traffic, no pavement)
- Provide some physical cover (e.g. shrubbery, trees, stone walls) to conceal them when accessing or hiding the drugs
- Situated on a lengthy straight road (to give an early indication if traffic is coming)

Dead Letterbox locations changed frequently. For a time Bear's and Cliff's cocaine was stored in a sealed, plastic 'butty box' buried in a shallow patch of soil, just off a quiet lane. A few seconds frantic digging was required to retrieve the box, take however many units (roughly) of stock was needed, and replace it – a task which neither enjoyed:

Bear: Going to the stash point in *Tanners Town*, diggin' it up, that was always a sketchy fuckin' thing. Used to hate it, going down some little dark lanes . . . fuckin' hell!

Cliff: [It] scares me when I think back [. . .] Just took too long and looked too dodgy.

As a solo retailer, Cliff decided that the time spent in the vicinity of his primary-stash could be greatly reduced by keeping the stock above ground. By packaging the single units (grams) into 'new' and tiny plastic bags Cliff was able to fit 20 'grams' (almost half of his entire week's stock) into a container the size of a small egg. These unobtrusive containers were then hidden in a bramble bush or patch of nettles next to a 'marker'. Because of the container's modest size and durability it no longer needed to be buried and was still unlikely to be discovered. By placing his stash directly on the side of the country lane, Cliff could park-up, leave the vehicle with the engine still running, retrieve the necessary number of units from the stash (approximately a metre from the car), replace the container in the stash point and be back in the car within ninety seconds. The container was small enough to store in the car's 'stash' when in transit (see section 3.5.2).

Time spent in the vicinity of the stash was clearly the tensest aspect of their job as most other parts of the role were undertaken in closed settings (e.g. separate units would have been weighed out, usually in a trusted customer's home, while transaction were generally undertaken in private). Individuals were at their most exposed during these times and dealers risked being linked to their entire consignments. But these stash sites were vital as they, above all other precautions, offered individuals a necessary 'peace of mind' at home:

Cliff: Early mornings are primetime for getting raided. That's when they like to do it.

If you've got stuff on you or at the house you get paranoid and worrying about what happens if they do decide to kick the door in [. . .] Going to bed you can get sketchy [anxious]. But if [it's] stashed, you've got nothing to worry about. Even if they do come knocking [. . .] Say they come and you've got stuff hidden in the house then you'll be shitting yourself and, you know, you'd probably make it obvious that you've got something to hide, but if you know they've got no chance of finding anything you can relax.

3.7 Risks with wholesale distribution

This section focuses on the risks experienced at the wholesale level. I have decided to focus on the procedures of one of the group's wholesalers – Sol – as my level of access to this participant was far greater than that of the others (namely Miller and Rushy). His trade was the most profitable in the network and at its peak, weekly sales generated him net profits above £3,000. Yet two key characteristics of this market presented Sol with a unique set of risks.

Firstly, the weekly consignment of cocaine being transported from the source city (Top City), processed (weighed, and at times adulterated with benzocaine) and delivered to retailers could equate to half a kilogram. Such amounts were enough to ensure a custodial sentence. Being caught with such quantities of drugs would prompt penalties far tougher than those faced by the retailers because the drugs could not be so easily justified (e.g. claiming it for one's personal consumption). From the outset of his wholesale endeavours Sol worried about the logistical necessities of his trade, rightly fearing the police would soon be aware of his illicit business and attempt to arrest him and seize his drugs.

Secondly, *all* retail-level dealers acquired their weekly drug consignments on loan (see Chapter 4: 'Black Credit'). With no legal forms of redressing unsettled contracts (a 'transactional risk', Cross, 2000) Sol relied on violence as a means of 'resolving disputes' (Reuter, 1985:25) and ensuring 'contract compliance' (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001:41). Violence (or more typically, its threat) was indispensable: it helped

maintain a steady, weekly equilibrium of credit and cash flow that was essential to this market yet it used risked drawing attention to his trade either by possible onlookers (e.g. a debtor's neighbour) or by the police – should the debtor feel as though they had no other options.

3.7.1 Clearing stock

The amount of cocaine couriered by Sol's grafter from '*Top City*' only ever equalled the sum of the orders placed by Sol that week. No surplus of stock was ever brought back to the town because all weekly orders from retailers would be fulfilled in one night. Overnight storage was rare; usually the 'grafter' (Sol's assistant) collected the bulk consignment and had it 'bashed' (i.e. adulterated), weighed and passed to the retailers within a four-hour time period. Though cocaine residue would, of course, be detectable on the associated paraphernalia (scales, work-surfaces where the drugs were weighed and bagged, knives for cutting, etc.), the cocaine itself was almost never stored, making it difficult for a potential prosecution to judge the exact quantities that were being distributed. When required, the cocaine could be stored overnight at a predetermined 'stash' point (see section 3.6.1). Sol was more concerned with cocaine being in his or his grafter's possession, than giving it on loan to retailers.

Sol: I'd rather get it all out, rather it be on people's heads than in [my grafter's] possession [. . .] As soon as I've got anything I just want it all out the same day-everything's out! It's not like Sainsbury's! We don't keep stock of anything.

Sol's reference to the British retail supermarket, Sainsbury's, indicates how distinct his operation was from those retailing the cocaine who needed to maintain sufficient stock to supply customers over a seven-day period. The size of the weekly orders remained at the retailer's discretion. Sol hoped that the necessary evidence needed to prosecute either him or his grafter was weakened without actually seizing this substantial consignment of cocaine stock.

3.7.2 Sourcing out the labour

Despite not coming into contact with the police, Sol felt it prudent to distance himself from the two main aspects of his trade: the physical logistics and the enforcement of debts. Sol employed individuals to conduct business on his behalf; these have

previously been referred to in the literature as ‘runners’ (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001) but were referred to by this group as ‘grafters’. Indeed, when the police came in numbers to search his properties Sol had little to directly link him to his trade. Such a technique was justifiable only when turnover and profits were substantial due to the expense of having someone on a more formalised payroll, thus only one other participant (a cannabis broker) used grafters to undertake such tasks. In the following two sections I provide further detail of the two roles Sol sourced out to other individuals as a means of insulating himself from the physical aspects of his trade.

3.7.3 Sourcing out the labour: ‘the grafter’

By employing the services of ‘grafters’ Sol immediately lessened both his direct and indirect involvement in the trade. Sol took managerial accountability and was responsible for compiling weekly orders from the retailers and forwarding an appropriate wholesale order to the Top City contact (via his mobile phone). Yet it was the grafter who undertook all logistical duties. It was Sol’s ‘name’ attached to the product, and it was his reputation that backed the black credit agreements and for over two years it was Sol who would ‘break [your] fuckin’ legs’ (*former grafter*, Bear, figuratively speaking) if the debt was not repaid. Yet Sol’s physical involvement was so detached that the police raids on his properties proved fruitless (see section 3.9.1).

Knowing who held the grafting role was essential (no grafter, no drugs!). Yet the person occupying the ‘grafting’ role changed several times each year, sometimes switching hands as often as once a month. Thus another layer of insulation between Sol and the cocaine was created (Dorn *et al.*, 1998) with a continued avoidance of any physical proximity to the drug, the bags, the weighing equipment, the hydraulic press (which compacts the cocaine and diluting substance into one ‘puck’) or – through the grafter – the customers. This attitude is apparent in these two quotes from Sol, taken from interviews conducted a year apart. They show how even during the period of only a year Sol becomes more cautious in relation to separating himself from the drug he sells:

Sol: The last year and a half, two years, I never seen it. I would purposefully avoid where it was. It wouldn’t be in the house. I wouldn’t even like a gram near me really – unless I was having a sniff (Sept, 2010).

Sol: I don't even let the grafter or any of my mates bring it [cocaine] in the house . . . Years ago we'd have the odd party where we'd have it out and we'd all be on it, but that's coz we were daft . . . Wiser now, no fucker's allowed it near me (Aug, 2011).

Prosecuting Sol by attempting to link him to any physical evidence would have been almost impossible. This simple strategy ensured that the most common means of prosecuting him – raiding his home and seizing his stock – were undermined. Unless the police knew who held the grafting role at a given time (which was unlikely because their names were not associated with the product being sold) the likelihood of ever seizing the drugs (the best source of evidence for a prosecution) was slim.

3.7.4 Sourcing out the labour: 'the muscle'

To those who failed to adhere to rescheduled payment dates Sol's ultimate debt collection methods could be self-admittedly 'ruthless'. During the early phases of his career various overt tactics had been used to intimidate heavily indebted retailers in order to force their repayment: threats being made outside debtors' homes, the threatening of family members or spouses, their front doors being 'kicked in', physical assaults, and, in the most extreme of cases, kidnapping.²⁰ Such methods were – in hindsight – deemed to be exceptionally risky. Had any of the victims gone to the police with information as means of reprisal, Sol would surely have found himself coming under questioning from the authorities. Yet at the start of his dealing career, Sol had absolutely no qualms (from either a moral or risk management perspective) of using his violent prowess as the ultimate debt collection tool.

Sol: We're very forceful in the way that we do it [. . .] I've had people's mum and dad have to pay me, you know what I mean! [. . .] I had to meet [a debtor's mother] in a car park. She was crying and begging me not to give him anything again, etcetera, etcetera.

²⁰ In one such incident an individual well known to many of The Lads was taken to the top of a hill, out in the countryside, and far from the town. After a few 'slaps' (the lad was not badly assaulted) and some harshly worded threats Sol and his grafter seized the lads phone and drove off, leaving him to make his way back home on foot.

Debt collection proved just as intrinsic and vital as the logistical side of his operation. Sol was certainly successful at forcing repayments, or recouping the debt by alternative methods (e.g. ‘working-off’ their remaining balance by engaging in manual labour for him). Yet 18 months into the course of his career, as the police began openly scrutinising him and his businesses (see section 5.5), Sol had no other option but to out-source this essential role.

Sol turned to a friend – Neander – who had served a prison sentence for past violent conduct. Neander was paid a weekly wage (a relatively meagre £100) to ensure the continuation of Sol’s insurance policy; ‘If you haven’t got the money, you fuckin’ get your head bashed in’ (Marshall, *former grafter*). His reputation superseded that of Sol’s in terms of his aggression and fighting ability, a point that even Sol acknowledged. Neander’s elevated reputation made the ‘chasing-up’ of debts easier. With two ‘big guys’ (Marshall) now demanding repayments, all but a minority ensured the money was paid upon demand. However, even with the added physical kudos, there were still ‘tough’ individuals who needed to be coerced into repaying the debt:

Sol: I got two lads who are on the thing [debtors’ list] at the moment. One’s called [Mr. X], [local football hooligan], couple of rum brothers, thinks he’s something- he owes me money. He was testing his luck last week but I got hold of him and he’s made a good payment. It could of come to a big fuckin’ ruck there [violent confrontation], but he ended up paying me. Another Lad [Mr Y], [local football hooligan], still does a bit [of cocaine retailing] and thinks he’s hard [. . .] He’s been a fuckin’ pain in the arse, but I heard off him yesterday [. . .] I am gonna be seeing that money this weekend.

The addition of ‘The Muscle’ meant that any such ‘rucks’ between wholesaler and retailer were avoided, thereby reducing the number of overt, violent acts needed for operations to continue. When physical intimidation was still required, Sol resigned himself to staying at home while Neander was sent on his behalf.

3.8 The tentacles of trade: Risks with cross-border trading

While the vast majority of drugs distributed by this group remained within the UK, a small number of participants had intermittently trafficked drugs across international borders. The network that facilitated their international trafficking developed over several years and was based exclusively on friendships that had formed in their young adult lives. Their customers/suppliers shared many of the characteristics of my participants: they were all male, approximately the same age, employed in regular jobs or in education, and from low to mid income households. Ketamine was the most commonly trafficked drug – with Bear, Cliff, Henry, Miller and Rushy each having been involved in its import/export. Miller had also smuggled high-purity cocaine, while Henry had also smuggled large amounts of Methadone.

At the peak of this cross-border trade, several kilograms of ketamine were being trafficked from South-Central Asia to the UK on a monthly basis, at times being forwarded to Ireland and *The Med*. These international operations were comparatively small-scale (usually no more than a kilogram consignment of ketamine per shipment) and, for the most part, largely unsophisticated. This international, yet intimate trade ended as quickly as it had developed (primarily a consequence of soured relations between players). Nevertheless, those who had used it to their advantage were able to walk away having earned some modest returns. The following sections focus on these operations.

3.8.1 ‘The Med’

Having spent consecutive summers doing seasonal work (working as bar ‘reps’ a job that had, for them and many of their newfound friends and colleagues, included drug dealing) Bear and Cliff both understood *The Med*’s demand for illicit drugs as well as the market’s high-profitability. The bar where they worked (and for whom they dealt) was popular with tourists and operated as a discreet (yet open) party drug outlet. Bear and Cliff had entered into a seasonal ‘workers’ culture populated by like-minded hedonistic young men and women who were employed within the bars and clubs of *The Med* resort. This culture was categorised by nightly partying and almost daily recreational drug use. The pair had earned modest wages, thanks to the commission paid by their bar manager for the drugs they sold (the official role itself paid a far

smaller salary). Their time as seasonal workers over this two-year period had taught them some valuable lessons regarding the extent and openness of The Med's drug market. It had also embedded them with a broader network of drug users, dealers, DJs and doormen, which was to later prove critical in their own independent operations.

3.8.2 Cutting out the middlemen: Transporting drugs abroad

Aware of the high worker demand for drugs on The Med, Bear, Cliff and another friend, Miller, returned the following year, this time as semi-partnered, autonomous traders (i.e. not working for a bar or club). The three Lads rented an apartment in the centre of the resort, close to the main strip of bars and restaurants. Rather than sourcing their drugs on The Med itself (where wholesale prices were comparably high) they couriered their own bulk stock. By taking their own supply these Lads were able to by-pass the resort's middlemen and thus achieve far higher profit margins. Miller's personal penchant for cocaine steered him in his decision to courier packages of 'pure' cocaine, to 'process' it on the resort (diluted at a 3:1 ration of benzocaine:cocaine) and to retail it to workers and tourists. During the course of the holiday season Miller made multiple trips in order to resupply himself with stock. Acting as his own 'drugs mule', Miller would return back to The Med with an ounce of high-purity cocaine sealed and stored within his person (i.e. in his rectum); this technique has been documented in various other markets, see Zaitch, 2002; Pearson and Hobbs, 2001.

Bear and Cliff believed their best avenue for high turnover in drugs sales came from helping feed the ketamine habits of the seasonal worker population. Ketamine had proved to be *the* drug of choice among this sub-cultural cohort during the summer seasons of 2006 to 2010. The drug was comparatively inexpensive to buy – €20 a gram – and its effects were often short-lived (a heavy dose lasted approximately an hour) meaning many users would take at various times throughout the day. As Bear commented: 'I reckon that at *least* 50% of the workers used it on a daily basis. That was just what everyone did – well – not *everyone*. But that was defiantly the most popular drug, then [ecstasy] pills, then coke probably'. Ketamine proved to be a logical choice of product. They were able to source a kilogram consignment from friends who lived several hours drive from Tanners Town. Each unit (gram) had ended up costing the pair approximately €5.80, and although they granted customers

discounts on bulk purchases each unit sold earned them a minimum of €10. The high customer demand ensured large volumes of sales on a near daily basis.

In order to avoid more stringent airport controls and checks Bear and Cliff felt it prudent to travel by vehicle across mainland Europe. This allowed them to take all the luxuries they wanted for their 5-month extended vacation (air-conditioning unit, games consoles, etc.) and allowed them to surreptitiously transport the drugs. Transporting kilograms of ketamine across several national borders required a different approach to their usual method. The consignment had to be ‘hidden in plain sight’ (Cliff), in areas or in containers that would not necessarily look suspicious under x-ray or from a physical search. Their transportation method involved dissolving the ketamine in water, transferring the solution into empty bottles of spring water and driving across borders (and on ferries) with it packed among countless other items. Once they had moved into their apartment on The Med, the solution was cooked until the water had evaporated and what remained was the ketamine.

Once Miller’s cocaine had been diluted with benzocaine, and Bear and Cliff’s ketamine ‘cooked’, both drugs were divided into smaller saleable units. It was not uncommon for apartments to be searched by the police – particularly if there were continual flows of human traffic (indicative of a dealer’s residence). Thus, it was deemed too great a risk to store their products in their apartment. The three dealers stored all but a small amount of their stock at a discreet location: a secluded part of one of The Med’s rural areas, hidden by trees and bushes. For the duration of the season this became their primary ‘stash’. Despite offering a level of security they believed to be essential, they often bemoaned the daily runs to the stash site that were necessary for resupply.

The following year Miller returned, and using similar techniques to those employed the previous year he again transported consignments of stock to The Med and distributed this to seasonal workers and dealers. A year later, Miller and Bear returned a final time and the two recommenced their trade – this time selling bulk consignments (ounce multiples) primarily to seasonal worker/dealers. The method of cross-border transportation that was used during this final year was rudimentary:

storing a kilo of stock within a toiletry container and packing this amongst the suitcase luggage. Due to the risks of carrying such amounts of stock on the plane the two Lads avoided flying from major airports where security was far tighter and where the likelihood of having their bags searched was perceived to be far greater. Not only had their method of transportation changed, so too had their source – as I shall now explain.

3.8.3 An alternative mode of cross-border transportation

Whilst living in South-Central Asia one of The Lads – Henry – befriended a local who had access to bulk loads of ketamine direct from its manufacturing plant. Henry was aware of the growing demand for ketamine among The Lads’ affiliates, and thus began sourcing kilogram consignments of the drug and posting these packages to three of his friends back in the UK – Bear, Miller and Rushy. The consignments were packed amongst a range of consumables (spices, protein supplements etc.); the ketamine itself was vacuum-sealed and stored within one of these packaged items (e.g. in a sealed tub of protein supplement). These packages were then posted to the UK to a bogus name. The addresses belonged to paid associates of the group. If ‘caught’ these individuals agreed to ‘play dumb’ (though whether they would indeed remain close-mouthed or pass information regarding the *intended* recipient is not known). This method of transportation was cheap, straightforward, and offered some elements of protection.

Over half a million pounds worth of stock (retail value) was sent to the UK in this manner, without a single package being intercepted by law enforcement. Bear, Miller and Rushy traded independently from one another. They would each split their kilo consignments into ounces and would sell these on to retailers across the UK. Bear and Miller both utilised a shared contact in Ireland (a friend from The Med resort) to whom they each forwarded monthly shipments of ketamine worth thousands of pounds. This arrangement ended suddenly after the man defaulted on his debt and severed contact with the two Lads.

3.9 Evaluating the success of risk-mitigation techniques

There was no way of identifying unequivocally whether the various risk-mitigation strategies employed by the group had any effect on their ability to evade capture and punishment, as their operations may not have attracted attention. Due to the manner in which they operated, very few of The Lads ever came into direct contact with police (i.e. they did not operate in public settings, selling drugs to unknown customers). Consequently I was able to identify only a handful of instances in which these protective strategies were put to the test through law enforcement efforts. I documented three confrontations with the authorities in which protective measures *had* been undertaken with effective outcomes (i.e. participants protected themselves from legal reproach). Two other confrontations were documented and demonstrated how the failure to implement certain strategies led to the identification of their crimes and their subsequent imprisonment. Below I explore those cases in greater depth and discuss how such strategies were implemented or neglected.

3.9.1 Success stories

Several years into Sol's profitable wholesaling career the police conducted multiple searches of his house and business properties over several months with the aid of sniffer dogs. Searches were exhaustive. Had stock or other related paraphernalia been stored in any of these properties it is likely that these raids would have succeeded. Yet because Sol's operation did not require the storage of stock (see section 3.7.1) and because he hired others to process the drugs and undertake all logistical tasks (see section 3.7.3/4) the police were unable to seize such evidence. Stored in his kitchen was the list of individuals who were currently indebted to him. The list consisted of codes rather than names (see section 3.5.5) and it appears as though the police overlooked this ambiguous source of evidence. They had, however, confiscated a mobile phone that contained text messages sent and received, as well as call logs. Once again, Sol's insulating strategies (coded language, the regular changing of his SIM) ensured that the police 'had nothing!' (Sol). It is not known how Sol fell under the scrutiny of the authorities. There were certainly individuals who held grievances with him – particularly those who had experienced his heavy-handed debt collection methods – and it is possible somebody gave the police information. Irrespective of their intelligence, the police had been unable to charge Sol for lack of evidence

because he had adhered to a few basic principals: there was no drugs, no money that could not be accounted for, no scales, no drug bags, no press machine, no list of debtors and no explicitly incriminating data on his mobile phone.

In the second example of successful risk-mitigation measures we see how Cliff was able to walk away ‘clean’ after having been pulled over and thoroughly searched by the police. At the time Cliff was in possession of nearly 20 units of cocaine, all ready for Friday night distribution (usually the peak trading day). Yet having stashed these in his vehicle’s hidden compartment (one of the most widely adopted risk-mitigation strategies at that time, see section 3.5.2) he was able to ‘play it cool’. He even managed to ‘act disbelievingly’ towards their allegations/suspensions of selling a Class A substance; as an honest man would (managing his image via a ‘front stage’ performance similar to that documented by Jacobs and Miller, 1998). Following a thorough search and some roadside questioning, the officers explained the vehicle’s registration had been suspected as being associated with the delivery of drugs in a local housing estate. For Cliff, the storage of drugs within the vehicle’s makeshift concealed compartment whilst *en route* to his customers was standard practice. Had the drugs been carried on his person (e.g. his pocket) or behind/underneath the driver’s seat, it is almost certain the drugs would have been found, and Cliff would likely have been charged with an intent to supply a Class A drug. Simply having hidden his drugs in a less obvious storage compartment proved to provide sufficient cover.

I documented one further example of how these protective strategies had likely thwarted the efforts of law enforcement – this example regards the importation of ketamine via airmail. Henry had concealed two vacuum-sealed 0.5kg consignments within sealed food packages and placed these two items amongst a range of dried foods. He then mailed it from South-Central Asia to an address used by Bear for these deliveries. The box in which these items were transported had been opened and resealed. On it was a sticker that read ‘something like “This has been opened and searched by HMRC [customs]”’ (Bear). Whoever had undertaken the search had failed to find either package. It is impossible to determine why this box was searched by customs, or why the drugs were not discovered (there is no way of knowing what

the authorities knew!). Yet we might assume some level of success with regards to their protective strategy (see section 3.8.3), given that the box had arrived containing the drugs and that no action was taken against the property owner to which the package was addressed.

These three examples suggest that at least some of the efforts made to guard themselves from legal repercussions were, from the point of view of the dealer, a success.

3.9.2 Cautionary tales

I will now provide vignettes of two individuals whose failures to adhere to some of those strategies outlined in this chapter led to their identification and prosecution. The first of these cases is that of Big Jim, a cocaine retailer. Big Jim had been operating a cocaine ‘drop off’ service for several months outside of his regular nine-to-five job. One evening whilst making deliveries he had parked his car a short distance from a customer’s home. Stashed within a small compartment, hidden underneath the dashboard were several grams of cocaine. He retrieved two grams from the stash and placed them in his trouser pocket. He got out of the vehicle and turned to walk the few meters to the customer’s house. In his periphery he noticed a police officer meters down the pavement walking towards him – ‘a bobby on the beat’ (Big Jim). He instinctively jerked his hands into his pocket where the two small bags of cocaine were kept (he had *not* stashed them down his pants, see section 3.5.3). He then moved his hand back away in an attempt to gain his composure. His unnerving behaviour caught the attention of the officer and Big Jim was immediately stopped and searched. The two grams of cocaine were found (the ones hidden in his car were not) and he was taken to the police station. Whilst at the station his mobile phone was confiscated and searched. The phone held explicit messages from customers asking if Big Jim could drop of x-amounts of coke, as well as his replies agreeing and arranging times to make the deliveries. At this point in The Lads’ dealing careers few bothered to use coding in their SMS transactions – indeed, Big Jim’s arrest contributed to the development of the group’s ‘forensic awareness’ of digital communications. Despite being caught with only two grams of cocaine (an amount he could otherwise have attempted to justify as being for personal use) he was unable to defend the uncensored content of his messages. Big Jim offered a plea bargain admitting his intent to supply

and was given a custodial sentence. Had Big Jim have implemented either of the protective strategies – personal stash (see section 3.5.3) or coded language (see section 3.5.5) – it is possible he would have avoided such a sentence: had the cocaine been stored down his pants it is questionable whether he would have reacted with such unnerve (and thus not have been searched) and it is likely that the drugs would not have been discovered; similarly, had the messages on his phone been coded the police would not have been in possession of such direct evidence linking him to the trade.

The second example relates to an affiliate of The Lads, and *not* one of the Lads directly. It comes from a widely shared ‘war story’: a cautionary tale of a mid-level trafficker who failed to adequately protect himself. For several years Henry had been The Lads’ only cocaine broker. Each week he would source consignments of cocaine weighing as much as half a kilogram (see section, 4.4.2) and forward these to Sol via Sol’s grafter. Henry used hire cars to transport the stock from the source to his house (for processing) before going to meet the grafter. One week, while Henry was on holiday, a friend who was using his hire car was pulled over by the police. Stored simply in the boot of the car was half a kilogram of cocaine the man was transporting. The car was searched (I do not know what justification the police had pulled over the car and search it) and the consignment was found. I can only speculate as to whether this was a chance encounter with the police or whether the police had targeted the car purposefully. In either case, having made no attempt to conceal the drugs (see section 3.5.2) the man had left himself exposed. The man was given a custodial sentence. His actions impacted heavily upon Henry, who was unable to return back to the country, as it was he who had hired the vehicle.

These two cases were stark reminders of the consequences of drug dealing. The Lads used such anecdotes instructively as a means of highlighting the importance of risk-mitigation techniques and discussed the methods by which such outcomes could have been avoided.

3.9.3 A police officer’s perspective

I was curious to gain the perspective from a person whose job it was to detect and arrest drug dealers who operated in Tanners Town and the surrounding area. I

therefore approached an individual with whom I have a solid rapport and who had worked as a police officer in the area for several years. They agreed to a recorded interview under the provision of anonymity. The officer was aware that I was researching drug markets for a doctoral thesis but asked no specific questions regarding the precise focus of my study. At no point (i.e. during, or any time before/after the interview) did the officer make any reference to The Lads or their broader trade networks (such as their customers or suppliers).

The officer's comments – shown in the following quotation – indicate an awareness of the protective measures used by dealers (including those in this study). Yet, at the same time, the officer makes clear that the use of such methods makes the task of proving a person's involvement far more problematic. It may appear therefore, that the strategies employed by The Lads were indeed effective.

Police source: Ultimately, if there's somebody in the area who's believed to be [a dealer]... [if] there's good evidence to suggest that they're selling drugs out of their house – which is all you can look at for a warrant – [...] then their house will be searched. But how many people are known to be selling drugs *actually* out of their house? I think, personally, it's a low number [. . .] you can rest assured that if everybody in [the area] knows so and so's dealing drugs, then it's not a surprise to the police [. . .] What I would say to people is: "You might say Steve down the road's selling cocaine" – right, well, fantastic! We *know* Steve down the road's selling cocaine, but the problem is proving that Steve down the road is selling cocaine. That's the issue. Unless he actually has it in his house, which he'd have to be an absolute numpty [idiot], unless he has it sitting in his living room sitting in little separate bags with people's names on, next to a wad of cash – you know, proving it, that's the problem [. . .] I think it's only the small-time people who are gonna keep anything in their house [. . .] You don't need solid evidence to get a warrant, but you've *got* to find something when you're there, it's got to be justified hasn't it [. . .] A lot of intelligence is saying "That person is selling drugs and they keep it somewhere in a field, in [a nearby village]" [. . .] You need somebody who has the time and it's their job to

[inaudible] that person, and hopefully find them going to [nearby village], it's just difficult [to prove] isn't it"

This front-line officer was resigned to the fact that many dealers could implement basic procedures (such as those documented in this chapter) as a means of preventing the efforts of law enforcement. His constabulary had priorities and resources that differed significantly from larger cities and their efforts targeted overt crimes or acts of deviancy with obvious victims (e.g. anti-social behaviour and burglaries). Drug dealing was a criminal activity with 'no victim' (police source). Thus, it appears that the standardised protective strategies employed by the vast number of dealers *would* limit the risk of being successfully prosecuted.

3.10 Conclusion: Not so risky business?

The ability to sense and avoid harmful environmental conditions is necessary for the survival of all living organisms.

Slovic, 1987:236

This chapter has outlined various risk mitigation strategies that had been implemented during the course of The Lads' dealing careers. Participants believed that using such methods insulated them from evidence most likely to expose their criminal trades or to be used by the authorities in their prosecution. Because the observed markets were 'closed' (meaning customers came via their own social network or through vouched affiliates), operations were far less exposed than in open markets. Dealers also functioned without intruding upon the local environment; they were not geographically bound to a public territory, nor were they required to elicit sales from existing customers or find new ones. The discreet nature of their businesses guarded them from the police, whose priorities tended to be victim-orientated (i.e. robberies, thefts and anti-social behaviour) – and thus it appears as though their unobtrusive modes of operation were what helped to keep these individuals part of the 'silent majority' of dealers (Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010). Of course such markets were not infallible and a chance encounter with police risked exposing the dealer and his trade.

Several of the strategies I have outlined were intended to protect these participants should such chance encounters occur (such as vehicle stashes and personal stashes), other strategies were implemented as a means of thwarting police attempts at securing evidence (such as coded language in their digital communications or the storage of stock away from their residence). Larger-scale dealers who operated for several years could often develop a reputation, either for being ‘flash’ or for being ‘tough’ (a consequence of having to enforce debt recovery). Maintaining ‘low profiles’ was difficult when reputations continued to develop. Thus, the majority of the risk-mitigation strategies identified in this paper focused on limiting the amounts of evidence that *could* be used in a prosecution.

‘Knowing’ what the police *could* and *had* used to secure successful prosecutions was essential in the development and implementation of risk-mitigation techniques. The group’s ‘forensic awareness’ (Beauregard and Bouchard, 2010) progressed during the course of their involvement within these markets. Their own experiences and those of their affiliates formed the foundation of their ‘knowledge’ regarding police techniques. Observations indicate that the majority of the participants employed the ‘standard methods’ of protection (changing phone numbers, stashing the drugs, etc.). Without individually calculating the potential risks (or even considering if such strategies were necessary) many of the participants simply imitated their peers’ protective behaviours. The rigour of their strategies varied significantly from the wholesalers to retailers and also between individual retailers. The wholesale traders were far more stringent in the application of their protective techniques, acutely aware of the tougher penalties they faced if caught.

It is worth noting that by engaging solely in closed-markets and by employing the strategies discussed in this paper, these participants limited the profitability and scope of their illicit-enterprises. Firstly, the implementation of these techniques made their trade less efficient and more time consuming (particularly the need to stash one’s primary stock). Secondly, dealers were unable to elicit passing trade, nor sell to individuals without an intermediary vouch. They were unable to promote or ‘market’ their product to a wider market, regardless of its product. Their customer bases were dependent solely upon the social networks they had each developed over their lifetime

and the snowballing of 'trusted' custom. They relied on the clandestine nature of the market to protect them from the law yet at the same time this secrecy limited turnover and profit. Any potential gain in profits that could be achieved through operating in an open-market was outweighed by the perceived risks of such blatant offending.

Lastly, the use of contemporary digital media to facilitate aspects of the trade demonstrates that criminals, as with the broader population (in particular teens and young adults), are adapting to modern forms of communication. Such an observation supports Eck and Gersh's (2000:245) observation of 'common, everyday, off-the shelf technology that is easy to learn and not particularly expensive' being employed by dealers. Though the progression towards the adoption of these new medias by participants was not intended to undermine enforcement efforts, the utilisation of alternative communicative links potentially limited the use of more common police efforts (e.g. SMS text retrieval). With such an increase in digital formats, the interception of criminal communiqués may prove ever more problematic. If we are to fully appreciate how criminal markets develop and evolve further research is needed on the use of modern social medias that help to facilitate the ever-increasing 'Glocal' economy (Hobbs, 1998).

Chapter 4.

Black Credit: Informality and efficiency in an underground economy

'It's all on credit!'

Thomas, cocaine dealer/grafter

4.1 Black Credit: Introduction

This chapter details the informal widespread use of credit within The Lads' network. Almost all stock distributed by suppliers and roughly a third of all stock purchased by drug users were acquired through what I call *black credit*. The term was devised by one of The Lads (Thomas), applied to the method of fronting drugs²¹ to 'trusted', creditworthy individuals.

The proliferation of black credit within the networks fuelled the rapid expansion of various drug markets documented in the research (cocaine, cannabis and ketamine). It permitted the acquisition of stock (for both resale or for personal consumption) for those lacking the up-front capital. Hopeful dealers were therefore unconstrained by any financial limitation: anyone situated within a suitable network capable of providing steady demand for supply could prosper. Indeed, the fronting of stock was absolutely critical in the observed markets because so many of the suppliers lacked the initial investment capital. Without credit, drug dealing would have been far more restricted and only those who had accrued sufficient savings would have been able to become dealers. The system proved hugely successful in increasing turnover and profits for all involved in its supply (i.e. retail dealers, wholesalers, brokers).

Just as prevalent as the fronting of supplies was the sharing of credit-relevant information within and across various networks. Within these markets workable credit

²¹ Black credit was not restricted to drugs. In one instance, a dealer was able to secure a second-hand luxury SUV using this informal method because the private car dealership had been made aware of this person's successes as a drug dealer via an intermediary.

systems were observed whereby trust between individuals and networks could be ‘mediated’ via intermediaries (von Lampe and Ole Johansen, 2004: 169). This system proved an effective method for expanding trade as it permitted customers with only a weak supplier relationship to be fronted hundreds or even thousands of pounds’ worth of drugs thanks to an intermediary’s reference.

Yet despite the success of black credit in facilitating transactions, threats were commonly made against users and suppliers. Violence was far less common than threats, but it did occur; as Gambetta noted ‘parties must know that in the case of “misbehavior”, punishment is feasible and, for the [enforcer], a not too costly option’ (1998: 40). In fact, violence was one of the few ways these markets could be ‘regulated’. The use of violence tended to be restricted solely to those customers who had defaulted on non-trivial sums (several hundred pounds or more) and who had purposefully avoided or severed contact, making no effort to arrange a ‘payment plan’. On the whole, the parties involved in the trade or its consumption benefited (to some extent) from the use of credit – meaning the majority of credit transactions proceeded without incident.

Credit is an essential economic tool in the mainstream economy: it enables entrepreneurs to start up businesses and expand, it frees up capital and it encourages consumption by the consumer. Yet we know very little about its uses, benefits and drawbacks within the illegal drugs trade. This chapter redresses this knowledge gap. Similar financial processes have been identified by other researchers (often only in passing), but never to the extent documented here. Several studies on drug markets allude to the use of credit within various contexts such as the dance club scene (Ward, 2010), street crack and heroin markets (Hoffer, 2006), retail cocaine markets (Williams, 1990), as well as the mid-to-upper levels of drug distribution chains (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001), yet none of these studies provide us with detailed information regarding the prevalence of credit within these markets. This study suggests that credit was the most crucial factor in making these markets accessible to potential dealers. The results in this chapter partially fills a gap in knowledge regarding ‘cascades’ (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001) of stock across multiple linkages of a

distribution chain: supplier-to-broker; broker-to-wholesaler; wholesaler-to-dealer; dealer-to-customer.

Because so few studies have directly approached the issue of credit, I have gathered literature into key themes: prominence, procedure and enforcement, alongside a brief review of the relevant economic and psychological literature. The chapter then presents an overview of how credit facilitated trade within various markets. Next, I analyse the benefits of black credit: how it increased the scale and scope of the markets, and how it encouraged and amplified further sales by consumers. Then I discuss the way in which trust facilitated trade via credit, before finally outlining the methods by which these markets were regulated (threats and violence) as well as discussing the actual rates of enforcement at the wholesale and retail levels.

The observed trade networks had no use of external credit markets (Reuter 1985), as the successive issuing of stock via credit adequately facilitated trade among suppliers and underpinned its success. The advantages (and seemingly acceptable disadvantages) from its use were clear. The use and functioning of credit was an unwritten doctrine. There were no formal rules governing these transactions, only individual intuition, trust and the bond and understanding of mutual interests. Were it not for the extensive use of credit, the scale and profitability of these markets would have been far smaller, and may even have failed to exist. The process I will describe was not limited to operations in Tanners Town. Black credit was used extensively across their ‘glocal’ network (Hobbs, 1998): from Bedford to Barnsley, Ireland to Ibiza, its use was the bedrock of trade in these markets.

4.2 The literature

The issuing of illegal drugs without immediate payment has been documented in a variety of settings, under a range of terms. Some have referred to this process as drugs being ‘loaned’ or ‘fronted’, others refer to drugs being issued on ‘consignment’, while many others refer to drugs having been issued ‘on credit’. These processes appear to be a near-constant phenomenon within illegal drug markets. Issues relating to credit in drug markets have generally been addressed only tangentially to research with related aims, though some (notably Coomber, 2006; Murphy et al., 1990; and Desroches,

2005) have addressed the issue in some detail. This literature suggests that despite its presence in almost every kind of market, the issuing of drugs on credit is confined to a minority of individuals – those with whom a strong rapport and level of trust had been established, and only rarely to drug users, who are deemed to be high risk and likely to default. Finally, having reviewed the use of credit in illicit drug markets, I review studies and findings from the fields of economics, behavioural economics and psychology to improve our understanding of the function of credit.

4.2.1 Prevalence

The process by which drugs are obtained on credit has been documented over many decades in drug markets in the UK (e.g. Ward, 2010; Pearson and Hobbs, 2001, 2004; Coomber, 2006; May and Hough, 2001; Taylor and Potter, 2013), the US (e.g. Williams, 1990; Taylor, 2007; Reuter and Haaga, 1989; Sullivan, 1989; Waldorf et al., 1991; Hoffer, 2006; Jacobs, 1999, Jacques, 2010) Canada (Desroches, 2005) and Australia (e.g. Coomber, 2006). The markets in which credit has been documented include:

- Street-level crack-cocaine, cocaine, cannabis and heroin markets,
- Middle-class suburban cocaine markets,
- Markets accompanying the night-time economy (e.g. the clubbing and rave scene),
- Mid-level to upper-level distribution markets.

The literature overwhelmingly suggests that most suppliers' preferred means of operating was on an up-front cash basis: acquiring drugs through credit was generally *not* the norm. On the whole, it was only suppliers and distributors in the supply chain who could be extended credit: end-users were far less likely to be given drugs without having paid for them up-front.

In their analysis of middle-market drug distribution, Pearson and Hobbs state that there 'appear to be no hard-and-fast rules in the UK drug economy. Supplies will certainly sometimes be "laid on" to a trusted customer, either cash free or at a substantial discount, with the requirement to complete payment at a later point.

However, other suppliers always seem to require cash up front.²² It depends on the circumstances, or the precise nature of the operation' (2001: 33). This assertion is mirrored in their later work on middle-market ecstasy markets (Pearson and Hobbs, 2004) where for some, both cash and credit could be an accepted form of payment 'according to their [customer's] established status' (2004: 572), while for others, 'the usual procedure was cash on delivery' (2004: 569) with credit only 'occasionally' being extended. In contrast, Reuter and Haaga's (1989) work with higher-level cocaine and cannabis traffickers suggests that credit was the *primary* means of by which stock was traded: 'Everyone "fronted" their customers i.e., the customer only paid for the last delivery when he received the next. Longer credit terms were occasionally provided, but revolving credit was the standard mode of transaction, at least after the initial deal between a particular buyer and seller' (1989: xii). Finally, Desroches' (2005) account of upper-level distributors in Canada indicates just how commonplace the use of credit was at this level. Nonetheless, many of the suppliers he spoke to refrained from accepting drugs on credit: some wanted to maintain their autonomy and not have to work to a deadline imposed by another person, others did not want to pay the additional interest premiums. 'A number of dealers refuse to front drugs to their customers [...] [citing an interviewee] "Nowadays in the drug business you need the money up front. That avoids a lot of problem. The exchange [of money and drugs] is done at the same time"' (Desroches, 2005: 145).

Providing us with evidence of credit at the consumer end of the supply chain, Coomber's (2006) analysis of various Australian and UK dealing operations demonstrates how 'the provision of credit [to users] was relatively widespread [but its use] was fairly tightly circumscribed and not encouraged' (2006: 53). Similarly, May and Hough's (2001) study of two anonymous British communities suggests that credit transactions between heroin and crack dealers and their customers (users) were actually commonplace. They found that almost three-quarters of their sample (n=24) received credit from their dealer. Taylor and Potter's (2013) findings also indicate how drugs could often be issued on credit within UK drug markets. Jennifer Ward's (2010) description of the various forms of dealing that accompanied the London rave scene during the 1990s suggests that fronting drugs was uncommon but did occur.

²² Indeed, in his earlier work Hobbs cites a successful drug dealer, Jason, as saying, 'we never dealt with nobody who we knew couldn't come up with the dough [...] it was money up front or fuck off' (1995: 82).

When drugs were fronted this was to suppliers within a person's peer network where there were strong pre-existing relationships.

The use of credit also appears in many US studies. According to Skolnick and colleagues (1990), the distributional methods used by 'entrepreneurial' gangs operating in California during the 1980s often relied on drugs being fronted to dealers in the lower rungs of these distribution chains as 'homeboys' (superiors in 'crews') loaned younger workers small consignments for resale. Yet Skolnick et al. note that the fronting of drugs was not the standard method of payment at the wholesale levels. Indeed, they point to only two instances whereby consignments were fronted at the wholesale level. In both instances these arrangements were dependent upon strong relationships between the parties involved. These authors also note that drugs were rarely extended to the end-users because of the perceived risk of customers defaulting; one presumes that the enforcement of debts in these open markets would have been unworkable. Williams's (1990) ethnographic account of a 1980s New York distribution crew shows how they operated on a 'consignment system'. He describes two stages of the distribution chain in which credit facilitated the trade: having been fronted several kilos of cocaine, a supplier then in turn fronted his 'kids' [dealers] a proportion of this supply. There was an agreed date by which the payment or remaining stock would be given to initial supplier. It is made explicit that this network used a top-down approach and that these dealers lacked autonomy: '[t]he quality, variety and amount of cocaine each crew member receives [...] is determined by [the wholesaler] and his supplier' (1990: 34). Similar studies, such as Sullivan's (1989) account of three New York working-class neighbourhoods, mention how small consignments of reefer (cannabis) could be fronted by 'reefer stores' to local youths, who in turn would go to Central Park to sell on this supply. Taylor (2007) also identifies the use of credit among New York dealers during the late 1990s, as does Waldorf et al. (1991) in their study of cocaine distributors in the 1970s – but again, fronting was not the standard procedure. In addition, case studies provided by Jacques (2010) and Jacques and Wright (2011) also reveal the use credit by middle-class drug dealers in Atlanta.

4.2.2 Procedure

These studies suggest a general ‘rule’ as to how credit was issued: either a person was fronted a supply of drugs without *any* immediate charge (Williams, 1990 or Skolnick et al., 1990), or else borrowers could be expected to pay a proportion of the total cost (i.e. a down payment) leaving the rest outstanding. For instance, Desroches (2005) notes how it was ‘a common business practice to request half of the purchase price’ (2005: 141) an observation also made in Waldorf et al.’s study (1991); while Hoffer notes how customers could ‘buy a \$20 pill for \$16, or a \$40 piece of heroin for \$35, or even a \$130 dollar gram for \$100 ... [under the agreement] that the debt could be paid at a later date when the customer had the extra money’ (2006: 75).

Some of these studies indicate that the use of credit could add costs for the borrower. A premium might be included or else interest could be added onto a debt (Taylor, 2007; Desroches, 2005; Matrix Knowledge Group, 2007; Waldorf et al., 1991:90). However the majority of the studies reviewed made no explicit reference to interest being used as a standard practice. Markets that charged for this service were likely to encourage up-front investment or re-investment of profits so as to reduce the costs and increase profits, as one of Desroches’ interviewees comments: ‘I started on a front and as soon as I got enough money, I paid cash’ (2005: 140).

In order for either a full or partial extension of credit to occur some form of pre-existing relationship with a level of rapport had to exist between the relevant parties. Having some level of intimate knowledge regarding the customers’ behaviour, their dispositions and characteristics (Misztal, 1996: 76) allowed suppliers to vet potential borrowers and was the most common way of determining their creditworthiness. Skolnick et al. (1990) note that ‘the trust needed to make street-level consignment [credit] purchases generally evolved in one of two ways: either the street seller is kin or a close personal friend of the supplier, or the street seller has shown through past business transactions with the supplier that he or she is dependable and can be trusted’ (1990: 19). Interestingly, Williams (1990) showed how the young men’s street reputations could also serve as an appropriate marker and could indicate they were ‘a good credit risk’ (1990: 32) or ‘bad credit risks’ (p. 33), affecting their ability to source stock without the up-front capital. Williams refers to trustworthy teenagers

who could ‘assess a user/dealer’s behavior over an extended period to find those who can be “loaned” a certain amount of cocaine and return the correct dollar amount on time’.

Actual consumers of the drugs within these markets would rarely be trusted; this was because their habitual use of either crack or crack-cocaine made them unreliable. However much of the success of Hoffer’s two heroin dealers was based on their ability to vet consumers; he notes, ‘[t]he key to [the pair’s] business was establishing a system in which customers could be evaluated, and resulting rewards and punishments could be justified’ (2006: 76); yet this system of evaluation required sufficient time to establish such judgements.

Lenders and borrows agreed on a date for repayment, but many of the studies showed a level of flexibility regarding timescales for repayment. As one of Desroches’ upper-level traffickers commented, ‘[d]elays in getting paid are common. I don’t lose any sleep over it’ (2005: 144). Indeed, there appear to be few markets in which the timescale for repayment was tightly adhered to. Taylor’s dealers gave customers leeway ranging ‘from a few days to over a year in one case’ (2007: 117). Williams notes that ‘even reliable individuals can lapse into overindulgence now and then, or may be robbed, and these circumstances must be tolerated to some degree’ (1990: 33).

4.2.3 Enforcement

The most obvious risk of credit within these underground markets was the risk of non-payment by debtors. Hoffer’s study (2006) on heroin markets demonstrates how common underpayments and short payments could be by end-users. Winlow (2001) provides an interesting example of non-payment; it exemplifies how debtors could be influenced by the likelihood of debts being enforced. He describes how a successful ecstasy dealer, ‘Arnie’, rebuffed requests by his supplier to repay the £2,000 debt for the ecstasy tablets he had been fronted. Artie the dealer explains, ‘I knew right away I wasn’t going to pay him [...] I wouldn’t like to fight him, but I just got the feeling he didn’t know what he was doing [...] but what does he think, I’m gonna walk up to him and say, oh, here’s that two grand I owe you? Not in this life’ (2001: 92). As Winlow comments, ‘It appears that the supplier failed to impact enough fear into Artie’ (2006: 92). This resonates directly with Williams’s proposition that ‘[a]

persuasive enforcement mechanism is the threat or actual imposition of violence upon those who breach trust and abuse the privileges accorded dealers' (1990: 33). Yet enforcement did not necessarily have to come from physical reprisals. Hoffer's heroin dealers did not engage in violent reprisals because 'the ultimate punishment was not violence, but cutting off the customer so that they would no longer be able to buy heroin [from them]' (2006: 76). Similarly, Desroches (2005), Taylor and Potter's (2013), Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010 and Pearson and Hobbs, 2001, 2003 findings suggest that retail and wholesale dealers were far more likely to coerce payments via threats or simply write-off the debt than to enact any form of violent resolution.

Nonetheless, violence was a common factor cited in these studies. Force was used to redress the issues of non-payment when a person's intent *not* to pay had become clear. Angela Taylor's account of how drug dealers settle disputes demonstrates how one of the greatest sources of conflict within these markets was often a result of unpaid debts, 'simply, one party owed either money or drugs and had not provided recompense' (2007: 57). Others noted how enactments of violence were used against other suppliers as a means 'to get appropriate returns' (Williams, 1990: 33).

Interestingly, Taylor's study (2007) seems to suggest that the enforcement of debts (both violent and non-violent) was more a means of assuaging and responding to serious personal insults than a tool to enforce the unwritten rule of law or of securing debts. A masculine street culture prevailed in the markets Taylor studied, within which being disrespected through non-payment was equally offensive, regardless of the money owed. Consequently, many street dealers seemed less willing to forgive minor debts and more willing to enter into conflict: 'by not paying your debt, you are casting the creditor in a bad light, making him look like "a fool"... it's not just business, it's personal' (2007: 118). As 'Jackal', one of Taylor's respondents, stated: 'I don't care if they owe me \$10 or \$5, if they owe me money, I'm going to get my money' (2007: 117).

4.2.4 Use as a reward

Taylor's data suggests that lending drugs was not based solely on business grounds, but also personal grounds – a 'personal favour' (2007: 115). Lending drugs showed a level of respect bestowed on the customer by the dealer, hence why so many disputes followed the personal insult of non-payment. Jacobs (1999) noted how the issuing of drugs on credit could be one way of instilling loyalty from the customer. While Coomber's (2006) participants provide *some* support for this notion, he states that 'although the provision of credit does help to cement relationships and clearly it does tie the buyer to the dealers to a point, credit only tends to be given to those already considered trustworthy where a relationship (considered reliable) has already been established' (2006: 56). Later he states the 'provision of credit is normatively not used as a means to cultivate [business] in quite the same way [as 'freebies'] but is more a means to cement and acknowledge a relationship already cultivated' (2006: 59). In his ethnographic account of a small-scale 'junkie' network Hoffer (2006: 75) found evidence that credit was extended as a reward to customers who followed the rules. By issuing customers drugs on credit, dealers could build on their customer–supplier relationship and thus develop loyalty.

4.2.5 A behavioural economics perspective

Of course there are reasons, other than rewarding consumer loyalty, which make credit so practical in these markets. At the supplier level, credit allowed individuals to start dealing regardless of finances. As the Matrix Working Group state in their Home Office report: 'The availability of credit meant that individuals did not require any capital to establish their enterprise' (2007: 40). Similarly, Desroches (2005) notes how credit allowed individuals to enter into the market following their release from prison, at a time when they were broke.

At the consumer level Hoffer notes how credit 'made it possible for customers to afford their heroin habits during their greatest times of need' (2006: 75). He notes that users who were desperate for their next hit of heroin or crack could be supplied without the full cost to hand. Although the majority of their supply would be paid for (e.g. \$35 instead of \$40) the remaining balance could be paid off later.

Adopting terminology from the field of economics we would say that credit allowed individuals to overcome 'liquidity constraints'. It also had the potential for encouraging sales at the consumer end by increasing people's 'willingness-to-pay'. Below is a short review of relevant economic literature that discusses the significance of credit with regard to such issues.

4.2.6 The effects of 'liquidity-constraints'

A wide range of research (both econometric analyses and interview data) suggests that one of the greatest obstructions facing hopeful entrepreneurs in the legitimate economy is a lack of capital with which to invest (Meyer, 1990; Evans and Jovanovic, 1989; Blanchflower and Osgood, 1998). Having capital is essential if you wish to establish and grow a business. Entrepreneurs need capital to acquire stock or to cover the logistical needs of a trade such as renting business premises and equipment. Studies have indicated that the greater a person's capital, the greater their ability and desire to branch out as entrepreneurs. For instance, Meyer (1990) demonstrated how the probability of becoming self-employed increased with a person's net worth, while Holtz-Eakin et al. (1994) showed that individuals who received 'a lump sum of capital' were more likely to become entrepreneurs; as the lump sum of capital they received increased, so to did the likelihood of them establishing a business.

Economists David Blanchflower and Andrew Oswald's (1998) analysis of the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) and the National Survey of Self-Employed (NSS) demonstrated the importance of capital in people's decisions to become self-employed. Their analysis of the NSS data showed that the greatest concern of those 'seriously intending' to become self-employed was that 'individuals were worried about how to raise the necessary finance' (1998: 44). In addition, the pair also found that 'the most common reason' why individuals had not set up their own businesses was that they 'could not obtain the necessary capital' (1998: 44.). Evans and Jovanovic (1989) drew more direct conclusions from their econometric analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey of Young Males (NLS), stating: 'liquidity constraints tend to exclude those with insufficient funds at their disposal' (1989: 808). Felix Padilla's (1992) account of Puerto Rican dealers operating in Chicago demonstrates how a lack of capital hindered people's ability to become independent drug dealers. These young street level dealers were effectively 'employed' by the gang's principle

distributors but their goal was to amass enough capital during their time in the gang to invest in establishing their own distribution service, where far higher returns could be realised.

4.2.7 Greater consumption?

The use of credit by the end-users in the distribution chain (i.e. consumers) is another crucial element of these markets, though one not addressed in the literatures I have reviewed. Although there is no direct research on the effects of credit availability on consumer habits in drug markets, research looking at legitimate credit provides a useful proxy. Economic research has shown a strong relationship between credit and consumption (Maki, 2000; Antzoulatos, 1996; Ludvigson, 1999). Bacchetta and Gerlach (1997) determined that the positive relationship between the two resulted from changes in the availability of credit. In short, as credit became more widely available, consumer habits increased.

One reason spending increases with credit availability is the psychological effects credit has on the consumer's psyche. Recent psychological studies have shown that a person's 'willingness-to-pay' for a consumer good is directly affected by the availability and use of credit; consumers are more willing to buy items and to pay higher amounts when payment can be made through credit (see Feinberg, 1986; Somon, 1999). A psychological experiment conducted by Prelec and Simster (2001) clearly showed that a person's 'willingness-to-pay' could be *substantially* higher when credit was available. In their experiment, two random test groups were given the chance to bid for tickets to a highly sought-after sports event (this was a real transaction and participants were indeed bidding for these prizes). The amounts people were willing to pay were approximately 100% greater among participants in the credit-only group compared to the cash-only group. One explanation for people's increased willingness to pay using credit is a phenomenon known to economists as 'decoupling' (Wilkinson and Klaes, 2012). The proposed theory suggests that the salience of the cost for any item is lessened when it is consumed/attained prior to payment. In short, the perceived cost of a good is decoupled from the good itself when payment is deferred.

A drug market in which consumer transactions can be facilitated by credit may have effects similar to those witnessed in the legal economies. For instance, a person may be less willing to buy three grams of cocaine for £100 up-front because this sum appears high. But by deferring payments (say £40 up-front, then two subsequent payments of £30) the salience of the cost is diminished and people are more willing to spend the £100. In the markets I analysed the availability of credit increased the amount and volumes of drugs consumers bought as well as their overall spending (see section 4.6).

4.2.8 Summary of Literature

I have documented the occurrence of credit among drug dealers and their suppliers in numerous market settings. Although the overall proportion of transactions seems to require up-front payments, credit was still present in each of the markets we have reviewed. When transactions were facilitated via credit there had often been a pre-existing relationship between the two parties; having knowledge of a person was the only way of trusting their intention to repay. Fronting drugs was often seen as a form of reward: a way for the lender to show the borrower that their business relations were good and solid, and as reinforcement for future business transactions/relations. Consequently the enforcement of debts was often as much about ‘getting even’ after being disrespected (abusing the goodwill of the supplier) as it was about collecting payments. Enforcement of debts and lessening the personal insult represented by non-payment appears to have been one of the most common bases of disputes in street markets but appears less frequently in many of the mid and upper-level markets. Studies from the field of behavioural economics suggest that credit is likely also to increase the number of potential ‘entrepreneurs’ and clients by allowing liquidity constraints to be negotiated. In addition, behavioural economics has also suggests that the consumer’s willingness-to-pay increases as items become available through credit.

4.3 Black Credit: Findings

This section begins with a brief overview of how black credit functioned within the observed trade networks, particularly in relation to cocaine distribution. This is followed by a discussion of the benefits of black credit to individual suppliers and from a broader network perspective. I then describe the use and exchange of trust

between participating suppliers, and finally, how the suppliers in these networks regulated debtors and enforced debts.

4.4 How black credit functioned within The Lads' networks

4.4.1 An overview of black credit at the individual and systematic level

A black credit transaction occurs when a supplier (retail dealers, wholesalers and brokers) fronts a customer a quantity of drugs (e.g. a single unit, multiple units or a large consignment) with an agreed date for payment. There would be no additional charges for customers acquiring stock on credit in this market, and debts would rarely incur interest payments – except in the most extreme of cases, in contrast some of those described in the literature (Desroches, 2005; Taylor, 2007 and Matrix Working Group, 2007). Borrowers were simply expected to pay the face value of the stock. For dealers this meant that stock retained its high mark-ups in value while not demanding any of their own capital for investment. For consumers, buying multiple units often warranted a reduction in price per unit and this held true even if stock was acquired through credit, thereby earning them 'savings'.

Initially, my appreciation of black credit was limited. Upon entering into the field I was aware that many dealers (both retail and wholesale) sourced their supplies on loan, and were themselves willing to grant stock to selected customers without the need for immediate payment. It appeared as though fronting drugs to trusted individuals was a useful strategy that allowed suppliers to rapidly distribute stock (and from a risk-mitigation perspective: the faster stock was out of their hands the better). It gradually became clear that black credit had in fact become a defining procedure for The Lads. Indeed, credit was not simply a useful apparatus used between two trusted individuals, it was *critical* for the functioning of many of the observed trade networks; without it, the breadth and scale of these distribution networks would have been far smaller.

Without the recourse of legal agencies or sanctions, and without any external credit agency (even a criminal one such as the Mafia, see Gambetta, 1998), creditors were themselves responsible for the regulation of black credit. Any loss of revenues as a result of customer default was theirs to bear, thus it was the creditors too who

assumed responsibility of debt enforcement. As a means of minimising personal losses and to enforce debts through threats or force (an unpleasant course of action) creditors had to limit the risks by assessing whether a customer was likely to default. Thus, suppliers issued consignments on credit to those deemed ‘trustworthy’ and therefore ‘creditworthy’. Yet it was the judgment on individuals that defined such attributes. As Gambetta notes:

‘When we say that we trust someone or that someone is trustworthy, we implicitly mean that he will perform an action that is beneficial or at least not detrimental to us is high enough for us to consider engaging in some form of cooperation with him. Correspondingly, when we say someone is untrustworthy, we imply that the probability is low enough for us to refrain from doing so’

Gambetta, 2000: 217-18

Trust was a crucial element of trade within the observed trade networks (see, section 4.8).

4.4.2 An illustration of a one-week credit cycle:

A cocaine case study

*It's all on credit! You have the coke on a Friday
and you all pay on Wednesday.
Simple as that!*

Thomas, former grafter

Credit was used to facilitate transactions within nearly all of distribution networks I studied, particularly the cocaine, cannabis and ketamine markets, however the prominence and sheer importance of black credit in one of these observed cocaine markets – Sol’s - was most pronounced. I was privy to a far broader range of data within Sol’s network than any other, and so have used his as the basis for an illustration of a single week’s ‘selling cycle’ (Caulkins et al., 1998). My understanding of Sol’s cocaine market spanned four linkages of the distribution chain: drugs fronted to the broker, drugs fronted to the wholesaler, drugs fronted to the retail dealers, and the drugs fronted to consumers. Researchers have acknowledged the use of credit at various points of the trade (consumer, middle and upper levels) but the documentation of a broader ‘selling-cycle’ is lacking. This section documents the weekly ‘cascade of credit’ (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001: 34): from a wholesale-broker right the way down to the consumer.

Each week Sol compiled a list of orders from dealers who wanted supply that weekend. On the Thursday Sol would contact his broker (*Henry*²³) and give him an approximate figure regarding the required volume of stock for the following day. By midday Friday, Sol would either amend or confirm the order.

Once the order had been placed, Henry would source an appropriate volume of ‘pure cocaine’ from his supplier in Top City and mix this with a diluting agent (benzocaine). Both the cocaine and the benzocaine were acquired on credit. The ratio between the two products varied between 2:1 and 3:1 benzocaine:cocaine mix. Adapting the ratio to the changeable wholesale cost of ‘pure cocaine’ was the only means by which costs could be stabilised over time. This diluted mix was then compacted in a ‘press machine’ into small hockey-puck shaped units, each weighing 4.5 ounces.

Henry would contact Sol’s grafter, and tell him at what time and where the exchange would take place. He would then drive to a midway point, somewhere between Top City (where Henry resided) and Tanners Town. The cars would park up in an inconspicuous setting, such as a McDonalds ‘drive-thru’ located off a motorway junction. Sol’s grafter would either be waiting for him, or en route and only a short distance away. The two would exchange pleasantries and Henry would hand the ‘pucks’ of cocaine to the grafter (concealed in cartons), who would, in turn, hand him cash for Sol’s previous week’s ‘bill’. Having completed the exchange the two would drive back home.

Once back in Tanners Town, the grafter would divide the pucks into the relevant sizes (half-ounces, full-ounces, etc). By early evening he would begin to make the necessary deliveries. Dealers *did not pay up-front for these consignments*, but the dealer could collect any outstanding payments from previous batches.

Having received their stock, the dealer would begin weighing out single units (between 0.7 and 0.8 grams). For those dealers who ordered a half-ounce of cocaine approximately seventeen or eighteen units would need to be weighed. This could take as little as ten minutes. If customers had already placed orders earlier that evening dealers could prioritise these deliveries before weighing out the remaining stock.

²³ Henry brokered consignments only for Sol. The two had a long-standing friendship.

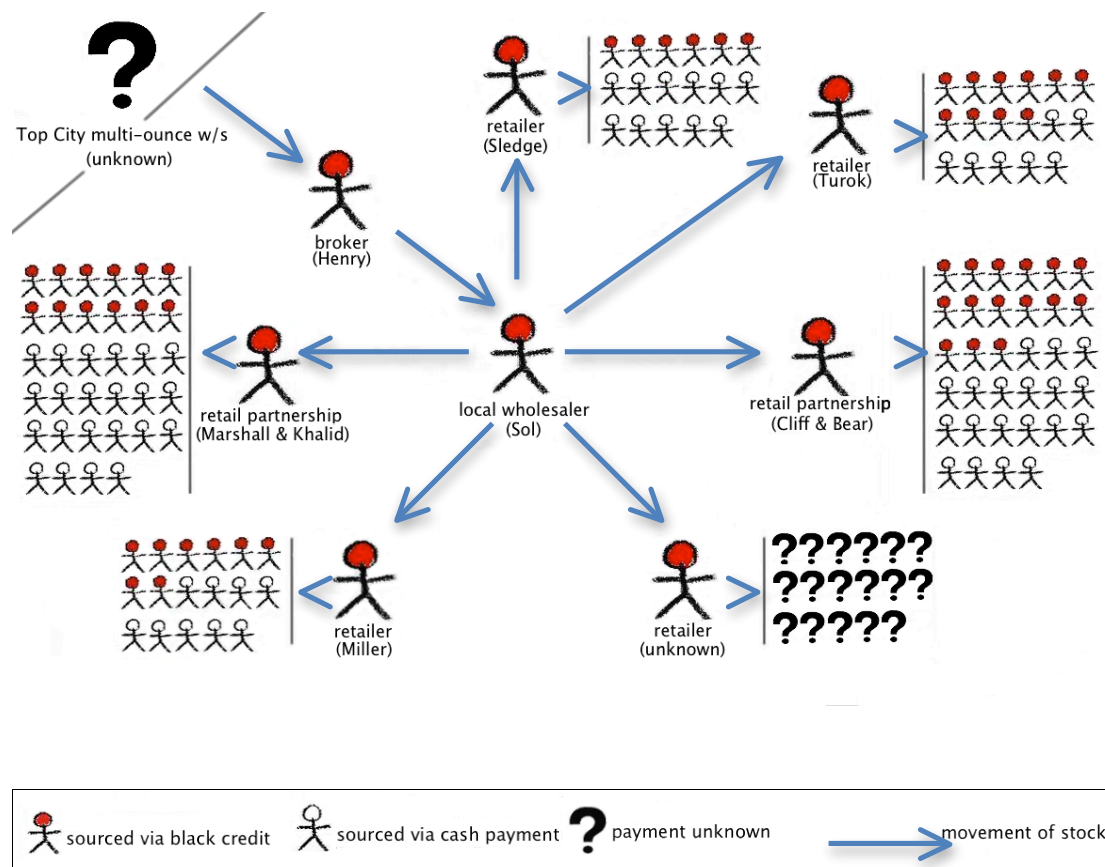
Many of the customers would pay up-front for their initial order, some could ask for credit. However (as discussed in ‘The benefits from the dealers’ perspective’ section), many customers would buy one or two units for cash, but as the night progressed would often order an additional unit or two on credit. Approximately 30%-40% of all units were acquired on tick [on credit], though this figure would fluctuate week to week.

For the most part, dealers would make sufficient cash sales by the end of the weekend to cover their own bill by the payment day, but over the next five days additional payments would trickle in as customers cleared their debts. On Wednesday, the grafter would begin collecting the payments from dealers. This money would be couriered back and given to Henry on the Friday – whereupon the cycle would start over again.

Below is a visualisation of the four lower linkages of this cocaine distribution chain in which several of The Lads had operated (including retail, wholesale and as a broker). Chart 1 aims to show the prevalence of black credit within a single week’s selling-cycle. This analysis begins with The Lads’ Top City broker – Henry – and follows the stock and the credit as it filtered towards the Tanners Town end-users. The data provided in this graphic is a composite of several interviews conducted at varying times over the fieldwork year. These individuals all operated in the same trade network (i.e. all these retailers sourced their stock from the same wholesaler, Sol, who was himself supplied by a single mid-market broker) however despite this representing a sale-for-sale illustration of these traders, it does *not* represent trade in the *same* seven-day selling cycle.

The shaded stickmen represent individuals whose consignments were fronted on credit, while those left unshaded represent individuals who paid for their supply up-front.

Chart 1. The prevalence of black credit within a single week's selling-cycle



The graphic demonstrates how each of the suppliers were given stock via black credit: the broker, the wholesaler and the retail dealers *all* used black credit to facilitate their trade. Of those retail dealers featured in this illustration, the following percentage of end-user customers were fronted supplies during the previous selling cycle: 59% of Turok's customers, 35% of Sledge's customers, 44% of Cliff/Bear's customers, 48% of Miller's customers, and 35% of Marshall/Khalid's customers. I have included an 'unknown' retailer simply to represent those individuals who Sol supplied on a weekly basis who do not feature in this study, but who nevertheless sourced their supply on credit.

Payments from end-users who used credit would, on average, be made 1-7 days after the sale; payments from dealers were made 5 days after being supplied, while the wholesaler and broker's payments were made 7 days after their supply. It is once

again worth noting that the percentages I have included represent different weeks of operations. It is also worth noting that the proportion of stock fronted to the end-user varied week-to-week. And finally, we must bear in mind this illustration is a simplified depiction of the actual prevalence of black credit: at his peak, Sol was fronting supplies to 18 retail dealers each week, the *majority* of whom do not feature in this study/illustration.

4.5 Black credit: The benefits from the dealer's perspective

4.5.1 Liquidity-constraints: Once a problem... Not any more.

*That's the beauty of the business,
you can just start it from nothing.*

Cliff, cocaine dealer/ cocaine grafter

Earlier in this chapter (see section 4.2.6) I presented a range of studies (Blachflower and Oswald, 1998; Meyer, 1990; Holtz-Easkin et al, 1994; and Evans and Jovanovic, 1989) that showed how people's motivations and abilities to establish small businesses were greatly influenced by their access to capital. What these studies show us is that if a person wishes to become an entrepreneur, having sufficient capital matters. The limitations of capital constraints are likely to be mirrored in any market that requires hopeful participants to make up-front investments of capital – and this includes illicit drug markets.

My data suggests that liquidity-constraints had and would continue to pose severe limitations with regards to market entry in the absence of black credit. Credit had enabled participants (as well as other dealers in their networks) to override the restrictions of limited capital and enter into a profitable marketplace. Nevertheless, the ability to access drugs via credit did not become apparent until participants were in their early-to-mid twenties.

4.5.2 Market entry as teenagers: Capital accumulation

During their teenage years The Lads had been required to pay up-front for *all* transactions: from bulk volumes of stock down to the minimum unit (e.g. £20 worth

of cannabis). Consequently, those who dealt were reliant upon the accumulation of capital - from either part-time/full-time jobs or government student loans - to fund their ventures into the illicit drug trade (Salinas, 2007). The size of the financial investment needed to establish oneself as a retail dealer were far smaller than those needed to establish a legitimate business (see, section 5.5), nevertheless an individual's lack of capital was just as exclusionary and incapacitating as it appears to be in the legitimate economy. Put simply, if a person did not have the cash to buy a bulk-consignment then they were effectively excluded from the drugs trade. During their teenage years the wholesale price for the most popular drugs (hashish and skunk cannabis) had exceeded many of The Lads' monthly earnings.²⁴ The minimum price for a 'half-bar' of hashish (4.5 ounces) was £225 (in 2003) while the minimum price for a 'half bar' of skunk-cannabis was even higher, at £600 (in 2005). Because earnings derived primarily from part-time hours in low paying jobs (see, section 5.6.1) such sums of cash were not immediately accessible at this point in their lives. Few participants had the willingness-to-pay for stock up-front (see Prelec and Simester, 2001) or *even* the ability to accrue several hundreds of pounds for consignments of stock.

Tee (cannabis dealer): I was working in [a retail shop] at minimum wage when I was in college, so what's that... £3.50 an hour or something like that—Dunno what I got paid a month, but it *just* about let me go out once or twice a week to one of the student nights [...] I didn't even think about dealing then though [...] there was no point. I just couldn't afford it. It weren't until uni that I was able to start selling [skunk], coz I was getting those lump-sums from the student loans company and then the grants from the government on top of that. Was close to two-grand I'd get each time [instalment] so it was easy then to buy big amounts of skunk from those Asian lads in Top City – cash– then sell it in Tanners Town [...] If it wasn't for the money I was getting as a student I couldn't have dealt.

Marshall (cocaine dealer/grafter): [Dealing] didn't even cross my mind then. Others like Sledge and them had sold bits here and there, but they had money from [student] loans and could buy a load of stuff when they had that [...] I wasn't really earning all that much to be honest. I wasn't gonna put aside money each month just to start dealing – I was managing to save a little bit of me paycheck most months, so probably could've afforded to have got some eventually, but I just didn't bother.

²⁴ For instance, a Lad who worked sixteen hours a week in retail, at a wage rate of £3.70 an hour, would earn less than £240 a month. Generally this would only just cover nights out and other expenses – primarily owning and running a car.

Turok (cocaine dealer): I was glass collecting in [a local club] weren't I? Fuckin' hell, it would've taken fuckin *years* using me wages! [...] Even on the doors [as a bouncer] I wasn't saving any coz you spend it night's wages on beer and Charlie [cocaine].

The Lads were, for the most part, liquidity-constrained. As with Murphy et al.'s observation, 'Having to pay "up front" for one's inventory sometimes slowed sales by tying up capital, or even deterred some potential dealers from entering the business [...] new dealers' personal finances, i.e., available capital [...] influenced how much they could buy at one time' (1990: 337). Certainly, the requirement of up-front payment and the absence of black credit during The Lads' formative years was both a deterrent and an obstacle with regards to market entry (both at the wholesale and retail level) and partly accounts for why so few engaged in drug sales during their mid-to-late teens despite having engaged in other economically motivated crimes (see section 2.5).²⁵

4.5.3 Market entry as young adults

It was not until The Lads early twenties that black credit became an accessible means of sourcing drug supplies. Indeed, many of the suppliers who provided stock during the group's twenties issued the drugs on credit as a standard means of procedure (at least to those they deemed trustworthy). Some (such as Sol) preferred not to accept payments before a particular day, others (such as Rushy) simply had no preference as to whether the dealer paid for their stock up-front or at a later point (no additional cost was incurred either way). Consequently, many of the retailers, regardless of their economic circumstances, chose to accept consignments of stock on credit. A growing proportion of individuals whose wages had begun to rise had the means of paying for stock up-front, yet many of my participants' continued to encounter liquidity-constraints during this early stage of their occupational development (see section 5.6.1). These financial constraints resulted from low pay or limited hours of work (particularly for those in full-time education), redundancies or other factors such as illness or failing enterprises. Had it not been for the availability of credit many individuals would have been unable to secure consignments of stock for resale, at a point in their lives where such revenue would have been most beneficial/valuable.

²⁵ Other factors' that explain lower levels of engagement include less developed social networks from which a ready custom could be sought, as well as a mythology regarding what constituted being 'a drug dealer', particularly a coke dealer.

Borrowing money from friends, family or the banks would have been practically impossible for most of my participants: many of their friends either did not have the sums of cash ready to invest or else were reluctant to loan such large sums of money; parents (*if* they had funds to hand) would have asked questions; and banks would have required some form of good credit history for a loan of several hundred pounds. As such, black credit proved to be a critical economic tool whose availability enabled a far greater number of participants to partake in the drugs trade who otherwise would have been excluded. Yet, in addition to overcoming liquidity-constraints, credit also made the trade itself more appealing and ostensibly encouraged market entry from those embedded within these networks.

4.5.4 Unforeseen drop in earnings

There were various instances during the research in which individuals had turned to the drug markets in times of absolute financial need. In the absence of a legitimate income the local drug markets had proven itself to be an attractive alternative to joblessness (see section, 5.6.2). A principle attraction of drug dealing was that net-profits were often realised within the first 7-day selling cycle – a relatively short timescale that could compensate any sudden drop in legitimate earnings. However, *even* more critical than the relative speed of financial return was the fact consignments of drugs could be sourced on credit – an obvious benefit in the absence of any income or savings. Credit facilitated entry for participants who encountered unexpected changes to their economic circumstance. For instance: Sol's earnings declined dramatically following his hospitalisation and recuperation over several months; the closure of Blaine's father's family business and, later, the suspension of production at the manufacturing plant where he worked; Sledges' dismissal from a graduate programme following a large reduction of staff numbers; Bear's reduction in work contracts following the contraction of the construction industries; and the sudden yet sustained loss of earnings for Cliff as his struggling business haemorrhaged money on a weekly basis. The accessibility of drugs through credit made this trade an attractive and even rational means of generating an income during these times of economic hardship.

The interview extracts below illustrate effective use of black credit to facilitate market entry in times of financial need.

Sledge (cannabis/cocaine dealer): I only started to sell green [cannabis] again as I had no work. But it wasn't an issue financially. Me mate just gave us a load of skunk and I was out doing deliveries later on the very same evening. Thank fuck for drugs [...] that's all I can say, otherwise I might have been screwed [...] Thank fuck for credit! Or else I'd have been *properly* screwed. [*he laughs*] Nah, to be fair, if I'd have needed to I could've got the cash together, but I didn't *need* to did I. [*He impersonates himself in mock fashion, with a 'posh' accent*] "Can I have some drugs please. Yes that'll do nicely. I'll see you Friday with a *shit load* of cash for you. Cheerio! [*he laughs again*].

Sol (cocaine wholesaler): Dunno what I would've done if it weren't for dealing [during the recovery] [...] I was fucked. Was a proper bad fuckin' time in my life. I came close to losing me life then after that I was close to losing me house and [the two businesses] [...] The coke basically covered all me [expenses] and then give me money to start spending on *Business A* getting her looking *fuckin' mint* [...] The Charlie [cocaine] was on tick [credit]; [the supplier] knew I'd be good for the money coz of me links, so no questions asked. None. He's was happy I was back doing me thing coz it meant a nice extra earner for him [...] I gave it out on tick, same as I've always done.

In sum, credit proved to be critical for those struggling financially during their early-to-mid twenties. It is doubtful that many of these individuals would have been able to secure the capital for up-front payments of stock. Had it not been for the availability of drugs on credit, these individuals would almost certainly have been prevented from entering the trade due to their lack of capital.

4.5.5 Overcoming liquidity-constraints: Summary and discussion

During their teenage years market entry had been reliant upon the ability to secure the necessary start-up capital, yet the emerging availability of black credit had fundamentally altered the requirements for market. This development opened up the markets to a greater number of prospective dealers who would otherwise have been excluded. No longer were individuals barred from participating in the markets due to a lack of money: those deemed to be creditworthy could source bulk supplies if they believed they had a potential customer base to whom they could sell the stock. Only a small proportion of the research group had become active drug traders when up-front payments for stock had been mandatory. Those few individuals who had dealt during this time had needed to accumulate the necessary capital to purchase consignments of stock. Had more individuals been able to access to the necessary capital, it is probable that many more would have dealt during their teenage years (particularly as many were already involved in economically motivated crimes). During their early twenties,

as drugs became accessible through closed-markets, individuals found themselves able to secure consignments of stock worth several hundreds (in some cases thousands) of pounds without *any* up-front payment necessary. It is logical to conclude, based on the number of Lads who rapidly entered into the cocaine markets in early 2008 and from interviews and conversations with participants that the availability of credit played a crucial role in their decisions to deal. It appears as though individuals ‘willingness-to-pay’ (Prelec and Semester, 2001) and indeed their willingness-to-deal increased as stock became more available through credit.

4.6 Promoting consumption and amplifying custom

[M]arketplace structures both increase the level of temptation and remove resistance barriers – for example the availability of credit...

Rook and Fisher, 1995: 312

By allowing creditworthy consumers to purchase drugs on credit the volumes of sales retailers could attain increased. As the previous section demonstrated, credit removed capital-constraints and made the purchase of drugs far less restrictive. It permitted consumers the freedom to acquire what drugs they wanted, when they wanted, meaning consumption habits were not restricted to periods of disposable capital. As Wilkinson and Klaes (2012) noted in their summary of mainstream consumer credit: ‘[t]he most obvious effects of credit [...] use [is that] it enables liquidity-constrained individuals [those, lacking sufficient capital] to buy goods they would otherwise be unable to purchase’ (p. 235). This effect was certainly present within these drug markets. Large proportions of customers in every type of market – cannabis, cocaine, ketamine (and anabolic steroids) – all used credit when money was in short supply. Often credit was used simply out of ease and convenience (e.g. ‘I couldn’t be arsed driving home just to get twenty-quid’ – Khalid talking about having got a bag of cannabis), other times it was more crucial (e.g. ‘I don’t have the money until next Friday’ – Imran talking about wanting a bag of cannabis). In either case, credit facilitated sales that would otherwise have not been made.

This example shows how credit facilitated additional sales for Cliff, one of the cocaine dealers.

Emily was an occasional cocaine customer who generally paid up-front for her supply (she was considered ‘creditworthy’). An outing with friends had been planned for the upcoming weekend, but her monthly payday was just over a week away and she had failed to budget fully for such an event. If need be, Emily could have limited herself to a bottle or so of sparkling wine, but her dealer Cliff was happy to give her three grams of cocaine on ‘tick’. Upon its delivery she thanked Cliff and gave him a friendly hug: ‘Aw, you’re a star – cheers hun. You know what I’m like at [these events]. I can be falling asleep by five [o’clock] if I’m drinking all day.’ When Emily was paid the following week she kept to her word and repaid the debt. Cliff exceeded the number of units he would have otherwise sold to her that week. Both parties benefited from this arrangement. Emily could be supplied for a big social event, and at the discounted price of ‘3 for £100’ without actually having the funds to hand, while her dealer earned himself an extra £40 net profit that would otherwise not have been made.

Dealers were certainly aware of the functionality of credit, as Bear commented, ‘Yeah you can encourage someone: say “look, you can pay me it back once you get paid [...] blah, blah, blah”.’ Indeed, cocaine users would at times ostensibly try to limit their consumption by declining any such offers of credit. Seemingly aware of their low will-power (or the allure of the drug) several customers would buy a single gram even if the dealer was certain they would ask for more later on tick, based on past experiences.

Bear: Cokeheads are short-sighted though, and we’d try to get them to buy more. We’d be like ‘do you want 3 for 110?’, but they’d say ‘nah, you’re alright’. Half of ‘em are fuckin’ pissed don’t forget, off their heads [at home or at a bar] [...] Then about an hour later you’d get another call asking for another gram... Fuckin’ annoying, but we’d charge them full-whack [full-price] anyway.

‘Spur of the moment’, impulsive purchases (using credit) were routine among cocaine customers – as the last quote demonstrated. Yet cocaine seemed highly irresistible to some drug users, who could easily request more shortly after its consumption. In some instances a single gram delivery could quite easily result in a

successive chain of orders (often via credit). Indeed, ‘good customers’ were often offered a discounted price for buying three additional grams on credit as a way of encouraging further follow-up orders. What would start as a £40 sale could often end as a £40 sale, plus £100/£110 of debt to be paid the following week.

Cliff: For most of them, you might want one, and pay for it in cash, but as soon as they got the taste for it they might ask for 3 on tick, if you know what I mean. If you can [cover the debt] and don’t need the cash then it’s worth it. Then they might want *another* 3 on tick to carry it on. They might not have the money there and then, but if they can get it... [Mike: If it wasn’t for tick you reckon you wouldn’t sell as many as you do?] Nah not really. Like Petal is constantly ticking off us. That’s just how she does it. She’ll let it build up and build up and give 500 quid all the time, just to get her bill down [...] Highest tick goes with buying the most. The Sisters and [he names several other good customers] buy the most by far.

Marshall: Like Richie, he’ll always just get one ordered to his flat, then call us up an hour later asking for another one on tick. I keep saying to him, ‘Just have three now, give us that forty [pounds] and then you just owe us sixty’. But he never does. He always gets one, then orders another on tick and is like, ‘Yeah, sorry about blagging you again mate...’ He’s a nice lad and all, but just a bit daft. I don’t know why he just doesn’t order a few at a time.

Dealers were not only willing to extend drugs on credit to creditworthy consumers but clearly encouraged use. This in itself suggests that credit increased sales. As Wilkinson and Klaes noted, ‘[department stores] would not be willing to pay 3% or more of their revenues to card companies unless credit cards were effective in increasing spending’ (2012: 235). Likewise, these dealers would not have been so vehement in the promotion of credit were it not for its success in generating greater volumes of sales and thus higher profits.

The scenarios I have just mentioned emerged in interviews and observations across a variety of settings but were particularly notable within the distribution chains on ‘The Med’ resort. Here, a large proportion of the clientele came from the seasonal British workforce who worked in the local bars and clubs. The issuing of credit to these seasonal workers was vital in securing custom during the 4-month period in which several of The Lads had operated there, particularly as many of the workers would source supplies for co-workers or flatmates without having the funds to cover it.

Bear: My [and Cliff's] tick on The Med was pretty fuckin' large yeah. If it wasn't for tick on The Med we wouldn't have survived. Workers don't generally pay upfront... well half and half really. Or some people might give you some of the money and pay the rest the day after or whatever.

In the literature review I referred to the idea that credit increased consumption (see Feinberg, 1986; Somon, 1999) and peoples' 'willingness-to-pay' (Prelec and Simster, 2001), in part, by lessening the salience of the actual financial cost ('decoupling'). Several of the 'good customers' spent disproportionate amounts of their income sustaining their habits. Past research suggests that the true cost of their habits may not have been clear to them, because of the delays between consumption and payment. The work by Prelec and Simster (2001) could also imply that customers were more likely to consume or, indeed, over-consume *if* their supply could be met through credit. Further research on this topic would be useful if we are to better understand to what extent credit influences their usage and whether this exacerbates the drug habits. Research would best be conducted among user populations; particularly those who would be, in the eyes of dealers, considered good and creditworthy customers.

4.7 The benefits from the network's perspective

The previous section outlined the benefits of black credit as experienced by individuals within the trade – this included the ability to overcome financial constraints and the capacity to promote custom. However, the systematic use of black credit within the various trade networks also benefited the broader 'systems' of drug distribution.

4.7.1 Function and growth

It is evident that black credit aided hopeful/potential traders in becoming dealers, but by assessing its use across various linkages it becomes evident that black credit was in fact central to the very existence of the many observed distribution chains. If we consider the cocaine case study – the illustration of a 'cascade' of stock facilitated through credit – this point becomes apparent. Had it not been for black credit the majority of those trading in this network would have been unable to trade due to liquidity-constraints. This includes the wholesale-broker (Henry), the local wholesaler (Sol), and a majority of retailers who were featured in the graphic (Miller, Turok, Khalid and Miller, Sledge). Indeed, had Sol been excluded from ever entering the

wholesale trade because of his limited finances at that time (before Henry became one of The Lads) the majority of those who retailed cocaine (in my sample) would never have become active traders because, at that stage, they had no other connections to the wholesale cocaine market. This observation could be replicated among many of the trade networks in which black credit was integral to movement of stock. From a social network perspective such pivotal individuals were 'key nodes'. These individuals were crucial links with which many individuals were connected, they had wide connections to suppliers and prospective dealers; had they been 'barred' from ever having entered the markets, the networks (as I observed them) would not have existed.

Secondly, and related to this point, the markets were able to expand at a rapid rate thanks to black credit. Reuter asserts that the 'constraints on external credit markets are possibly the most significant influence on the organization of illegal markets, for they severely limit the ability of the enterprise to grow' (1985: 14). Yet, as we have observed, these markets were not restricted by individuals' capital or on the funds provided by an external body. Instead, growth was funded internally without the need for any investment of capital. Thus, the primary constraint within these trade networks concerned the numbers of prospective customers for each supplier, rather than the constraints imposed by individuals' capital. These supply chains could respond almost immediately to any surge in demand (e.g. Christmas time or bank holidays), so if a supplier decided they required twice the volume of stock than they had in previous weeks, there was nothing stopping them. This *modus operandi* overcame some of the drawbacks cited in past research observations, such as Murphy et al., who noted that 'Having to pay "up front" for one's inventory sometimes slowed sales by tying up capital'.

In sum, black credit was vital to the very existence of the networks I observed. Without it, it is questionable whether these sprawling networks would ever have been utilised to successfully distribute thousands of pounds of stock each week.

4.7.2 Removing the need for external agencies

The way in which markets were internally funded meant that third parties for the provision of credit were (for the most part) unnecessary. In legitimate markets specialised auditing firms provide opinions (based on a host of characteristics) regarding the creditworthiness of individuals or firms, allowing third parties to lend capital (with interest) based on these opinions. Such agencies do not become involved in the operations of a firm/individual. Yet, because they assume the risk of payment defaults, and have to be able to cover overhead costs (and incur losses from defaults without impairing their ability to function), and operate for profit, these external agencies generate additional costs for those *actually* engaged in the firms or markets. Reuter (1985) notes how third party creditors are unable to exist in illegal markets for various reasons, the primary one being that: ‘the enterprise cannot present audited books’ (1985: 13), however my data indicates that the absence of external credit bodies was no real detriment to the markets. Indeed, the absence of such bodies kept the costs down across the trade by removing fees or interest, and allowed a greater share of the profits to be kept by those who operated. Traders were willing to accept the risk of non-payment themselves or to enforce non-payments. They were also willing to rely on their own judgments and the recommendations of trusted intermediaries and so had no use of an external body such as the Mafia (see Gambetta, 1998). In short, the absence of third parties meant prices were kept down for all those involved, though responsibility and accountability resided with individual traders.

4.8 Trust: ‘Individualised’ or ‘mediated’

Consistent with research identifying the use of credit in drug markets, black credit relied on trust.²⁶ Lenders had to believe that the person being fronted stock would keep their word and adhere to the agreement. The issue of trust was particularly salient because illegal markets contain no legal recourse for non-payment, and where the items traded are of high value and demand. Generally, some level of trust was implicit between traders (less so between traders and their drug using customers) because, in the long-term, a cooperative relationship was mutually beneficial. The

²⁶ The word ‘credit’ comes from the Latin *credo*, meaning ‘I believe’.

short-term gains one could achieve from ripping off a supplier were trivial compared to the prospective gains from just a few successive transactions. However, the belief that a person would pay their bill, in full, by the agreed date could not simply be based on the rationale of mutual gain.

For a person to be extended credit the supplier needed to trust the customer and this trust *had* to be based on some objective criteria.²⁷ The data obtained via observations and interviews suggests that black credit was extended on one of the following premises:

1. A relationship between the supplier and customer already existed and was strong enough for the supplier to trust the borrower's intentions and abilities to repay their debt²⁸ – von Lampe and Johansen called this 'individualised trust' (2004)
2. An intermediary would offer a reference for a potential customer that, in effect, 'mediated' this 'individualised trust'. If the lender trusted the intermediary he would be likely to place trust in the customer.
3. Those suppliers willing to resort to violence could enforce payment of debts through the forceful seizure of assets, where the borrower's address (or that of family member) was known.

4.8.1 Individualised trust

Data from interviews and observations suggest that credit was most commonly 'issued' to customers as a result of individualised trust, with approximately 70-90% of all trade relations stemming from pre-established relations between two parties. Many creditors already knew their customers, with varying levels of familiarity. These pre-existing social relations allowed creditors to judge a person's creditworthiness: Were they honest? Hard working? Have a serious drug problem? Prone to taking advantage of situations at others' expense? As the following responses illustrate:

²⁷ Von Lampe and Ole Johansen typologise four forms of trust apparent in criminal markets: individualised trust, trust based on reputation, trust based on generalisations, and abstract trust (2004: 169-171). I observed only 'individualized trust' within these markets that relied on 'previous observations of the trustee's behavior, characteristics and their dispositions [...] [or] the result of affections the trustor feels for the trustee' (2004: 169).

²⁸ Even 'irrelevant trust' (as Von Lampe and Ole Johansen (2004) called it) based on affection would be grounded in the knowledge attained through their personal histories.

Bear: You just know, don't you? For instance, I know you or Sledge, or Gorggy, or any of my mates really, wouldn't fuck me over. Some you'll trust more than others, but you're still able to trust them enough, coz you know 'em. You know how they've behaved in the past and you know they're unlikely just to sniff it all themselves or do a runner without paying. You don't even need to know anything specific about how they manage their money, or whether they're good at repaying debts, just that they're honest decent lads.

Sledge: None of me customers would screw me over. It's nothing to do with me being bigger then them all, it's coz I know what they're like. If they were the sorts of people who'd try have me off they wouldn't be getting it from me, simple as.

Cliff: I wouldn't give it to some little scrotty [grotty] 17-year old on tick. Not unless, he'd been buying off me for a good few months. Coz at that age they're prone to behaving like dicks. So they'd have to show that they're alright to have it on tick.

Long established connections were not needed for affable relations (or 'privileged bonds' as Gambetta (1998) termed it) to develop. Within a few weeks of the trade relationship having formed, and with customers having paid for stock up-front for some weeks, most suppliers were willing to extend stock on credit without concern.

4.8.2 Mediated trust

The exchange of pertinent information within and between the observed network participants was critical to the success of the operations. Were it not for this system many of the cocaine dealers (in particular) would never have been fronted such consignments and thus never have been able to deal (simply because of a lack of start-up capital), and as Desroches notes, '[network] connections not only facilitate entry, they allow participants to evaluate one another's reputation [...] and make easier the flow of information, knowledge, and illicit commodities' (2005: 50). Thus, in addition to drugs, these social networks also supplied/exchanged information integral to the success of these illicit trades. The exchange of information between individuals or social circles formed a rudimentary but workable informal credit system that enabled lenders to judge the risks of lending to those with whom they had no prior contact.

In the legitimate financial world, banks and the shadow banking system exchange a wide range of personal information regarding their customers.²⁹ The purpose of this

²⁹ This can include whether a person has any outstanding debts, what liquid assets they may have declared, whether or not their outgoing direct debits or standing orders have been paid on time, whether there are outstanding bills, or if they have been bankrupt – the list is endless. Borrowers are classified based on such information; those classified as low risk (i.e. creditworthy) are often extended credit at a low rate of interest while high risk borrowers

sharing process is to provide potential lenders with enough information for them to judge the likelihood of a borrower complying with the contract and repaying a loan. It allows lenders to systematically and mathematically gauge the creditworthiness and risk of potential borrowers. Though less exact and far more subjective than the legitimate financial sector, the sharing of personal information regarding traders/customers within these drug networks was similar. Information could include whether the borrower has repaid past debts to other dealers, whether he or she is a hard worker (e.g. if a person has a job) or simply that this person is trustworthy and likely to keep their word. In addition to eliciting information regarding the creditworthiness of an individual, retail dealers and dealing partnerships often exchanged information regarding current arrangements with customers. At the time when the Bear–Cliff and Miller–Trawler partnerships were retailing cocaine, the partnerships regularly informed one another if indebted customers had placed an order with them. The lenders could then contact the customer, saying for example:

I just got your number off Miller... yeah, he said you were after a few grams... yeah well fuck that, you pay *us* what you fucking owe first. Why you being such a fuckin' prick about it... Right well, where are you, coz I'm coming to get it.

Bear, speaking on the phone to a debtor.

Desroches (2005) documented similar 'information networks' among Canadian drug traffickers: 'Information networks are informally structured and consist of people who are connected to one another in the drug chain. Typically, observations, hearsay, and other information [are exchanged]. Suppliers will also proactively seek specific information and will ask crew members and distributors to research the background of people and topics of interest' (2005: 128), '[These] [n]etworks can help to gain introductions and verify the identity, reputation, and trustworthiness of all parties' (2005: 130). The passing of information between suppliers in the observed networks was principally 'used to predict the probability that a loan applicant or existing borrower will default or become delinquent' (Mester, 1997: 3), but other information such as a person's drug habit, arrests, raids in the local area, and other forms of hearsay were also exchanged.

must pay a premium interest rate, if they are lucky enough to still be fronted credit (Jaffee and Stiglitz, 1990: 842–3).

Creditworthiness was not a permanent attribute; for many this fluctuated over time.. In addition, ‘good customers’ (regular and high volume consumers) often funded lifestyles that were already over-stretching their resources; it was therefore all too easy for them to become heavily indebted to their suppliers. Consequently, the more aware suppliers were of any customer issues, the less likely they were to be ‘stung’ by a large default on payment.

In summary, a level of trust needed to exist before goods could be handed over to customers on credit. Privileged bonds often existed between two parties because trust had developed over time, yet there were many instances in which a third party was needed to make the introduction and to provide the creditor with information regarding the credibility of the potential borrower. Such information was subjective, and non-binding: if an intermediary got it wrong, and the borrower failed to repay a debt, they were not held accountable. The sharing of information between suppliers helped to minimize the risks of loaning drugs.

4.9 Enforcing debt in a black credit system

The intimidatory threat of violence in order to enforce contracts will always be there in an illicit economy without recourse to the law. Ultimately violence is a resource that ensures contract compliance, and is regarded principally as a means of ensuring that creditors do not default on debt.

Pearson and Hobbs, 2003: 341

A persuasive enforcement mechanism is the threat or actual imposition of violence upon those who breach trust and abuse the privileges accorded dealers

Williams, 1990: 33

In the legitimate economy the laws governing contractual agreements date back hundreds of years. In medieval England, before the time of a formalised police authority, bailiffs helped to protect the rule of law and were sanctioned by the lords of manorial villages to enforce compliance of agricultural workers by collecting or seizing revenues or assets (Jones, 2008).

To this day, civil and county court bailiffs continue to redress non-compliance with contracts within the legitimate economy. In much the same way, the dealers I observed regulated the unwritten rules of the underground market in which they operated by enforcing contracts. When a borrower accepted a supply of stock on black credit they agreed to repay their supplier a particular sum by an agreed date – that was the contract. The borrower was accountable for their sales practices, their consumption habits, and accepted responsibility for their debt, but it was the responsibility of individual lenders to enforce these contracts and to ensure repayments by the methods at their disposal. As the opening quotations indicate, intimidation and the use of violence will always be present in markets that lack formal regulation: it is the only means by which non-compliance can be remedied. Indeed, Reuter (1985), Pearson and Hobbs (2003), Fagan and Chin (1990) (among others) have all noted how contracts within the criminal economy, such as those between drug sellers and their customers, cannot be enforced through legal recourse for any grievance or non-compliance. Consequently the threat and use of violence as a means of debt enforcement or as punishment for non-payments is a well-documented phenomenon within a range of contexts (e.g. Goldstein et al., 1989; Taylor, 2007; Desroches, 2005; Pearson and Hobbs, 2001, 2003; Anderson, 2000; Venkatesh, 2008; Williams, 1990; Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010; Bean, 2002). As one might expect, threats and occasional acts of violence by suppliers were also documented in this study.

Bear: Fuckin' hell! We were *always* chasing people. There were a few people [on] The Med [when importing and wholesaling ketamine with Miller], wasn't there... we slapped a couple [...] you have to let them know that they can't fuck about... *have* to go hard-line with them.

Many of the more serious debts (those that might eventually justify enforcement) were nearly always paid after or coercion (e.g. a threat of kidnap).

Small losses incurred by retailers were often just written-off without serious financial detriment (e.g. section 4.9.6). However, wholesalers were far less inclined to write-off debts without serious efforts to recoup the debt. Many of the larger debts incurred at the wholesale level would eventually be cleared after assistance from the creditor (e.g. a payment plan or the fronting of further consignments under an agreement that the *gross* return will be paid back with no profits to be taken by the retailer). On other

occasions threats of violence were often enough to coerce payments from indebted individuals. Failing these methods, however, a few ‘slaps’ could help the debtor take their responsibility more seriously and encourage them to redouble their efforts in clearing their debt. When stronger forms of force were deemed to be appropriate the debtor was often restrained (with minimal force) while assets were seized as recompense. Marshall, the high-street bank employee and cocaine grafter, and Bear speaking of a cocaine users debt, each describe such an incident:

Marshall: [Sol] kicked in this lad’s door the other day and took his bike. It was worth a few hundred quid so Sol took it and sold it for 180 rather than waiting for the cash. The lad only owed him £150 so Sol made a bit [extra] on it [...] For the most part people were good at paying though.

Bear: Took this lad’s golf clubs coz of a debt he hadn’t bothered clearing. Well, they were his dads, but I weren’t to know, and he’d just kept fuckin’ me off when I was trying to be reasonable with him [...] I’d only gone round to [the debtor’s house] to see if he was in. But there weren’t anyone there. So it was just by chance really, I just tried the side door of the garage, and I was like ‘Oh, hello’, door just opened. I saw these golf clubs; knew they were worth a bit, so took them. Just drove off with them. I phoned the lad and said I had them. Said he could have them back, he just had to pay what he owed. And he did.

In *exceptionally* rare occasions, harsher, more brutal forms of violence were documented (e.g. assault, threats against family, kidnap), as I shall illustrate by relaying two incidents in detail.³⁰ On the whole, the networks within which The Lads’ operated could be ‘characterised by cooperation and harmony, run on strict business principles’ (Pearson and Hobbs, 2003: 341). The relative absence of violence within these trade networks may come as a surprise to many, particularly as others have pointed out that ‘the practice of offering credit increases the potential for conflict in drug-selling settings’ (Taylor, 2007: 115). The findings that violence was seldom used is, however, not wholly unexpected. Other researchers have demonstrated in a range of markets (from the lower to upper echelons of the drug trade) how violence is only rarely employed as a means of financial restitution or revenge (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001, 2003; Adler, 1990; Morselli, 2001; Desroches; Reuter and Haaga, 1989; Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010; Taylor and Potter, 2013).

When The Lads did resort to violence, its use against those who had ‘ripped off’ lenders served several purposes. First, physically beating a person who had taken

³⁰ Out of 23 individuals who dealt, over a 6-year period of study, I was aware of only a handful of more extreme uses of violence by them.

advantage of trust helped to maintain ‘face’ and discourage non-compliance by other customers. Second, debts could be enforced through payment in kind by forcefully seizing items, approximately equal in value to the debt (e.g. bikes, mobile phones, laptops, game consoles, etc.). ‘War stories’ relating to extreme cases of violence were commonly shared (e.g. beatings, kicking a door through, being forced into a car) and became potent warnings against the abuse of trust. Without consequences or reprimands for dishonesty, manipulation or theft, the likelihood of suppliers being ‘ripped off’ through non-payment would have been far greater. The reason threats and violence were more common at this level was because the value of stock being fronted was considerable (relative to that selling-cycle’s net drug revenues). A customer’s debt to a wholesaler ranged between £350-£1,400 for cocaine (for 0.5oz–2oz) and £600-£2,000 for cannabis (for 3oz-10oz). Debtors’ potential for non-payment and the reduction in net-profits this would have, meant these markets *had* to be regulated by the methods at their disposal, and violence constituted the ultimate method.

As with the mainstream economy, no amount of threat or reprisal could ever eliminate non-payment, but the existence of serious consequences helped to improve conditions under which suppliers extended credit. Most credit transactions were completed without dispute or the need for enforced recoveries of monies or assets.

4.9.1 Regulating the dealers

The majority of dealers who sourced supplies from one of the study’s wholesalers (Sol, Bear, Marshall or Miller) used credit to their full advantage. They received consignments of stock as and when needed, selling much of the stock, possibly using some of it themselves, and paid their bills on time. The amounts to be earned from ripping off a wholesaler were minor when compared to the potential profits from several weeks of effective distribution and with retailers fully appreciative of the mutual gains, most maintained good relations with their suppliers.

Despite the predominance of ‘good customers’ within these networks, threatening behaviour and violence was more common among suppliers and dealers than it was between dealers and their consumers. A number of dealers would sometimes ‘slip up’, incapable of paying their suppliers in full, or by the agreed date. There were three main reasons dealers could fall short on payment:

1. The dealer (and possibly their friends) had consumed too great a quantity of stock.
2. The dealer had spent customer payments as and when they were made, without setting enough money aside to pay their supplier.
3. The dealer had extended too much stock to customers on credit and failed to collect many of the debts.³¹

Debtors would never cite reckless behaviour (such as over-indulging in stock or simply spending their returns too hastily) as reasons for non-payment, ‘most just come up with absurd, elaborate bullshit stories about their mum or their girlfriend having to borrow money off them when all they’re trying to do is buy themselves an extra week’ (Bear). Descriptions provided by Sol’s former grafters suggest that a steady proportion of dealers either over-consumed stock or spent too much of the returns, thus eliminating much of their potential takings. Sol was himself aware of such behaviour.

Sol: I’m not daft, I know what my customers are like, but as long as they pay up and don’t take the piss or whatever I couldn’t really give a fuck what they do with it. At the end of the day, if I’ve got to wait an extra two days or whatever, I’m still making me profit, you know, I’m still making 700 [pounds] off ’em.

Cliff (Sol’s grafter): None of the others [dealers] make money. They just sniff it all... they get their free sniff but they can fuck it up.

Marshall (Sol’s grafter): Even people who had been good customers who were getting a grand’s worth a week off Sol could fuck up. There was this one guy, [...] He started sniffing too much himself. So he wasn’t selling it any more, or selling as much [...] Couldn’t afford then to pay us back. He thought he was the big man, you know ‘the big man’ - a dealer who has all this sniff and who thinks he’s something [...] Me and Sol went round to his house and we kicked the door in...

At some point each of these wholesalers in the research had enforced the recovery of debts from dealers – although some had done so more often than others. Generally, the sums owed were manageable (i.e. they did not affect the wholesaler’s abilities to clear their own bills) with amounts in the range of a few hundred pounds, but I was

³¹ One reason that was never cited was lack of demand by consumers.

aware of dozens of dealers who had defaulted on debts far larger. On the whole, retailers' debts were eventually paid (after assistance, serious coercion or enforcement) but a handful of bills were left unpaid, to the suppliers' obvious frustration. To my knowledge, the greatest default on a debt that failed to be cleared was a £3,000 bill for ketamine, and one of the cocaine wholesalers made a loss of around £1,000 on at least one occasion. As noted, dealers often over-extended stock to customers on credit and failed to collect the necessary amounts to clear their own bills by the agreed date. In these instances, suppliers tended to be more sympathetic towards the debtor, particularly if the remaining balance was minimal. I was even aware of wholesalers assisting their customers (dealers) in chasing up larger debts from users by contacting the debtor and telling them that the money was effectively his or by assisting dealers in the seizing of debtor's assets. Such behaviour was rare and certainly not altruistic: it was simply a means of enforcing the unwritten rule of law on which the flow of credit depended.

Two wholesalers (Sol and Rushy) hired third parties to enforce agreements; in both cases the men who were hired were well known 'tough guys': physically intimidating and proficiently violent men. All other suppliers enforced debts themselves. Whether they enforced in person or through an associate, serious threats, intimidation and violence were only ever used as a last resort. Suppliers wanted to sustain the number of their retail dealing customers (if not increase it) and had no interest in getting into violent disputes unnecessarily. As Gambetta notes, violence is 'risky, costly, and generates instability and conflict' (2000: 170). Because of this, suppliers very often showed their customers some leeway with repayments. Where debtors maintained contact with suppliers, keeping them informed of changes to their situation and circumstances, suppliers were typically willing to negotiate new timescales. At times suppliers would even often offer individuals a 'payment plan' that would allow them to spread repayments over several weeks. If either the payment plan or these rescheduled dates were adhered to, there would be no further escalation of problems between the supplier and debtor.

Consistent with the literature (e.g. Taylor, 2007; Coomber, 2006), it was only when the borrower's intentions suggested avoidance or non-compliance that serious threats or violence were used. Depending on the relationship between the debtor and the

supplier, as well as the amount owed, debtors could be forced to clear these bills by whatever means were at their disposal. This could include borrowing or stealing the sum from family members or girlfriends, or offering items as part-payment or insurance. Many suppliers had seized sought-after goods from debtors such as smartphones, laptops, and even professional golf clubs, which suppliers could sell or keep. Alternatively, a lucky minority might be asked to ‘work off’ debts either by being resupplied and handing the supplier the gross return, or by carrying out some skilled service work for the supplier (e.g. painting or decorating).

Some retail dealers, particularly Sol’s cocaine customers, found the task of clearing their debts particularly difficult once they had ‘slipped up’, especially without further fronting of drugs. Revenues from drug sales could often be the dealer’s sole income (aside from government benefit payments or parental support) and many lacked a regular income that could otherwise have assisted in the clearing of the debt. Paying debt on time was seen simply as good business:

Bear (grafter): Most other people who were shit at paying [Sol] would’ve enjoyed the profits or sniffed it all. For them, getting the money in would be an after-thought. The risk is if you don’t manage to sell it or something goes wrong, if people don’t pay up then you don’t have the money to pay your man. But that’s part and parcel of being a good businessman isn’t it, being able to pay your bills.

For the most part, those featured in this study maintained good relationships with their suppliers as the costs for their consignments were generally met in full, by the agreed date. The Lads tended to use their legitimate earnings to meet day-to-day expenses so that drug customer payments could accumulate, untouched, during the course of the week until the cost of the consignment could be paid in full. For instance Khalid and Marshall worked together in a local bank. Neither was particularly well paid but their legal earnings covered their outgoings, allowing customer payments to go untouched.

Khalid: Whatever we had coming in [through drug sales during the week] was Sol’s [the supplier]. We’d put all the cash together, and Marshall would take it and store it at his mum and dad’s [...] When we had enough to pay Sol, everything that came in then, we just split. Same with the tick, whenever that came in we would just split there and then or in the evening. But we’d only start splitting the money once the whole lot was there, ready for Sol.

It took an effective manager to control the range of dealers who sourced their supplies, not all of whom were as creditworthy as had been originally believed. Yet the effective management of debtors was not a straightforward process and wholesalers could occasionally encounter scenarios in which an appropriate course of action was seemingly absent. Vignette 1 and 2 provide two accounts that expand upon issues directly linked to debt enforcement at the wholesaler-dealer level; demonstrating some of the dilemmas associated with being a wholesaler issuing stock on credit.

4.9.2 Vignette 1 – A creditor’s frustration

Miller was a well-liked individual. He had been wholesaling cocaine for several months, as well as importing and wholesaling ketamine. He had been made redundant earlier that year following misconduct at work but continued to fund his lifestyle with limited hassle: he lived in a nice apartment close to the town centre and supported himself and his partner through drug sales. Since having started cocaine wholesaling, Miller had made some truly extravagant purchases, of which several photos had been boastfully uploaded onto a social networking site. At this point my fieldwork contact with Miller had become increasingly limited, but after a chance encounter I learnt that all was not well:

It was Christmas time and one of the busiest shopping days of the year. I had accompanied one of The Lads, Harvey, into the town centre. As we walked down the busy High Street we brushed passed Miller (cocaine wholesaler) and his girlfriend. As soon as we saw him we stepped to the side of the pavement so as to avoid the flow of human traffic and started chatting. Miller didn’t seem particularly jovial. I went to shake his hand but stopped as I saw a tatty bandage wrapped crudely around it. The hand was clearly swollen and discoloured (it appeared broken). Never one to shy away from a fight Miller had obviously been involved in a physical altercation. Seeing my expression Miller gestured towards the hand, ‘This fuckin’ lad – seen him out at the weekend with his missis. He’s been avoiding me for fuckin’ weeks he has coz he owes me money. I seen the fucker out in [a local bar] enjoying himself. I thought “I’m not haven’t this” and fuckin’ went for him’. Miller’s partner looked at him disapprovingly. I decided not to pursue this incident further and

asked Miller (rather foolishly in hindsight) ‘So – are you guys out doing a bit of last minute shopping?’ Miller shook his head, ‘Fuckin’ skint at the minute’. Harvey interjected, ‘...have you still got that stuff in at the moment?’ He was referring to cannabis; Harvey hadn’t touched cocaine in years. Miller nodded, ‘Yeah. You wanna come round after, la? Just the one?’ Harvey began complimenting Miller about the quality of his current cannabis strain. We had barely been speaking two minutes before something caught Miller’s eye. His head leant to the side as he looked behind Harvey and me. Miller shouted ‘AYE!’ We turned around attempting to see who he had yelled at. A group of around five people were walking straight past us (four men and a woman), all carrying a variety of high-street shopping bags. Miller immediately sidestepped us, powered his way past the first three people and punched the fourth man in the face. Miller’s girlfriend advanced into the group and yanked him back. The man’s friends pulled him back out of harm’s way. The shoppers in our immediate vicinity moved away, but very few people stopped to stare. It was a clean punch, but Miller had used his injured hand. Pain was clearly searing through Miller’s hand and arm as he instinctively grasped it close to his body and let out an audible hiss. Even if he had wanted to, Miller couldn’t have continued attacking the man. Harvey and myself stood there, somewhat bemused. Miller’s sudden appearance and wild burst of anger had clearly taken the group by surprise (although I suspected the man had tried to sneak past – judging by his position in the group). The woman in the group was the only one to pass comment – ‘What the fuck is all that about!’ The man held the side of his head while the group ushered him away from Miller, ‘I said I’d have that money to you by the end of next week!’ the debtor said. Miller, still being held back by his girlfriend and still clutching his hand shouted back, ‘You fuckin’ prick. You’re the one out of order! Fuckin’ shopping and whatever. Pay me my fuckin’ money you little fuckin’ cunt!’ People on the street could clearly hear what Miller was shouting. The man yelled back ‘Next week, for fuck’s sake!’ ‘FUCKIN’ PAY ME!’ Miller shouted once more. He held his right hand up to inspect it. It was still clenched although now more swollen than before. He turned to Harvey and me, still enraged and shook his head. ‘That fuckin’ lad’s been bumping me [avoiding payment] for fuckin’

weeks!’ He was breathing heavily. ‘I’m fuckin’ skint! Fuckin’ Christmas time and I’m fuckin’ broke. It’s taking the piss all these fuckin’ pricks who say they don’t have the money, and they’re there out drinking and shopping, fuckin’ off out enjoying themselves.’ His girlfriend attempted to calm him down by rubbing his back. He continued to stare at his misshapen hand while shaking his head. We all stood there for a moment not speaking, Harvey and I somewhat in shock. I can’t recall precisely what we said. Harvey made some offhand remark about buying a bag of cannabis later, and we left. As Harvey and I headed into town, we turned and looked at each other in complete bewilderment, ‘What the fuck? I need a joint after all that.’

Prior to this incident my impression had been that Miller was making good money and, at least for a time, this would have been true (the apartment and the expensive items he had been paying for). However, this incident suggested that Miller’s profits had declined, with at least part of this fall in revenue attributable to customers falling behind on their payments. Christmas usually marked a good time of year for The Lads: sales of all drugs tended to increase markedly, which allowed them to spend even greater sums of money on clothes, meals and nights out during the festive period. Yet Miller’s decline in revenues had clearly placed him under some financial constraints. The dealer who’d been attacked in the street seemed to (in Miller’s view) have prioritised Christmas shopping above his obligation to pay his bill, while another dealer Miller had attacked earlier that month was caught out enjoying festive drinks while his debt went unpaid. Seeing two of his debtors out enjoying themselves, in effect spending “*his*” money, had elicited an immediate and emotional reaction from Miller. His response had been impulsive and unrestrained. Similar to one of Bourgois’ observations ‘he [had] attempted to recoup his personal sense of male respect by the only means immediately at his disposal: public physical violence’ (1995: 416). It was not apparent what measures Miller had undertaken before these two assaults, whether he had given them warnings or revised timescales. Nevertheless, it appeared as though Miller’s response stemmed from his current financial woes and a loss of face at having been avoided by these two customers.

In addition to these two incidents of late or non-payments, I was later informed that Miller’s other venture – the wholesale of ketamine – had been meeting similar

challenges. A customer who sourced multiple-kilo consignments from both Bear and Miller had defaulted on his payment. The man lived outside the UK; this made the enforcement of these debts impossible. Bear had been ‘bumped’ only a few hundred pounds and was able to ‘take the loss on the chin’ (Bear), however Miller had been ‘bumped’ £3,000 – almost enough to eliminate a month’s good trading. This loss also helps to explain why Miller was under such financial strain during our brief encounter.

Miller was broke but still able to trade thanks to the availability of credit. The trading of cocaine and ketamine would probably have provided substantial returns had a handful of customers not defaulted. Miller was clearly under great stress and very angry (punching someone with a broken hand implies a high level of frustration), thus I never felt it wise to ever probe Miller about his troubles and frustrations regarding debtors and the use of credit. Throughout the rest of my fieldwork my contact with him was only ever brief and occasional.

4.9.3 Vignette 2 – Violence, to what end?

Payees who defaulted always offered excuses to the lender. Wholesalers had little to assist them, other than gut instinct, in believing the customer’s explanation. On very rare occasions, wholesalers had to accept that there was no way to recoup the debt from customers. However, there were no straightforward solutions as to how such customers should be treated. If these customers were allowed to ignore their contractual obligation then others might be inclined to behave in a similar way. But what possible effect could violence have in redressing the immediate loss?

The following incident exemplifies the uncertainty of using such recourse as well as the worthlessness of its use at times.

Rushy wholesaled a variety of products that included cannabis, ketamine and ecstasy, as well as an array of other, less profitable drugs. Because of the amount of work required to distribute this stock Rushy had the hired help of a grafter. As part of the grafter role this man was also expected to enforce debts: he was a physically threatening individual and had a violent reputation.

A customer (I did not ask for which stock) had defaulted on debt of several thousand pounds. Before any of the debt could be paid the police raided the

dealer's property. He was prosecuted for the supply of illicit drugs and was given a custodial sentence. The stock was seized, along with whatever cash he couldn't legitimately account for. Following his release from prison he struggled to find employment, in particular because his company refused to take him back. Because of his financial predicament he hadn't bothered contacting Rushy in the weeks after his release. Before being 'sent down' the man had assured Rushy he would make good on his debt, but after the customer failed to get in touch in the weeks that followed his release Rushy was not wholly convinced of the man's intentions. He decided that the man needed to take his debt to him more seriously and felt that after his lack of communication he needed threatening.

Rushy had contacted the debtor and told him to go to his local pub so the two could talk. The meeting place was public and he was assured this was simply to talk (as the two men hadn't seen or spoken to each other since his imprisonment). Rushy was intending to take the grafter along, but because of the size of the debt the grafter suggested the addition of a third man – a locally infamous man 'to really put the fear of god into him' (Rushy). In theory, the more frightened the debtor was, the more effort he would put into repaying his debt. This third man had served multiple prison sentences for serious violent offences; the grafter had some vague connection to him and thought his presence would be a useful addition. Rushy accompanied his right-hand man and the additional hired help as they confronted the debtor in the pub.

Rushy became uncomfortable as he described how the four had sat together in a quiet corner of the pub. The hired third-man immediately broke one of the man's hands by forcefully twisting apart his fingers. Such extreme violence was wholly unexpected. The hired help then began to dominate proceedings: he told the man how he was going to tie him up in his basement and torture him unless he paid. Straightaway the man began making assurances and promises about repaying the money. Rushy quickly agreed on a payment plan simply to stop the hired help from going any further and the debtor was told to leave.

For his ‘assistance’ the man charged Rushy an up-front fee of £250. As the violent man was about to leave he asked if the grafter could ‘lend’ £100 until the following week. The grafter didn’t have the money to hand and so the man turned to Rushy; there was little he could do but hand over an additional £100.

‘[The debtor] won’t be able to get the money together. So not only am I *not* going to get my money back, but I’ve had to pay £250 to have this nutter turn up and be all psychotic, and then another £100 coz he felt like it. I just wanted him to go so we could get out of there. So £350 all-in for somebody’s hand to be fuckin’ broken. The thing is, the lad’s got to keep his nose clean which means he can’t go down the narcotics route – so no money that way. And with the fuckin’ recession he ain’t gonna get a job, not now he’s just out the nick. Honestly! *What a palaver* [...] And now I’m feeling really fuckin’ guilty about this dude’s poor fuckin’ hand.’

As this event shows, the problem with violence is that the act itself does not necessarily reap any benefits. In this instance, the debtor owed several thousand pounds, a sum that could not have been recouped through the seizure of his assets (e.g. TV, laptop, etc.). The fact that this debtor’s hand was broken *might* have serve as a warning to others, but in order for that to be the case other dealers would have needed to know the debtor,³² or rely on Rushy or his grafter to inform them. Whether this act of violence served any purpose whatsoever is unclear. Judging by Rushy’s reaction during the telling of this story this was rather a fruitless endeavour. The problem was that no matter how scared this debtor was he couldn’t simply produce money that he didn’t have.

³² Rushy operated in a network far looser than that described in this thesis. Although he was friends with several of The Lads, and had traded with various individuals, he operated in a large city, mostly to people who were not directly connected to one another.

4.9.4 Regulating users

Violence as a means of debt enforcement was exceptionally rare at the consumer level. Late-payments or even non-payments were less common than at the wholesale level. In addition, the debts incurred by consumers were far smaller than those documented in the wholesale markets and thus did not warrant the use of potentially risky violent behaviour. Most indebted cannabis users might have one or two bags ‘on tick’ and owe either £20 or £40, while most cocaine debtors might have three grams on tick with £100 or £110 owed to the dealer. Consequently, debts were not chased up with the same level of ferocity as they were in the wholesale markets.

Around 70% of The Lads’ consumer base paid for their stock up-front, and of the 30% who asked for it ‘on tick’ most cleared their debt by the agreed time. But, unlike the wholesale market, not all customers had the ability to source their supply on credit.

Marshall (cocaine dealer): There were the regulars who used to pay with their family allowance on a Friday... or their child benefit or whatever it is. This one lady would call up every Friday 'coz that was when her kids' money would come through. She'd get like a 110 quid from the benefits and she'd spend it all on coke. You wouldn't give someone like her any on tick 'coz she'd have no way of paying it, she'd pay for it upfront.

During the course of these retailers’ dealing careers all had experienced late payments, underpayments or no payments whatsoever from customers. Yet the prevalence and number of individuals who defaulted on payments was extremely low. In no way did late or short payments diminish the overall efficiency of credit and the profitability of the trade. The use of intimidation and threats were acknowledged at the retail level, but again to far lesser degree than the wholesale markets.

In this section I show how debts could be forgotten but not ‘forgiven’ (Hoffer, 2006) and I provide a brief case study that illustrates how removing a debtor from a supply network could be a form of punishment in itself. I will then discuss how dealers tended to focus their debt collection efforts on the ‘good customers’ – those with moderately well paid jobs, who ordered supplies regularly and who had proven themselves to be highly profitable customers. Very often it was these ‘good customers’ who posed the greatest risks to a dealer’s profits because they could

accrue tabs of debt greater than a dealers' weekly net return. I shall describe how the amounts of credit extended to 'good customers' could easily become unmanageable.

4.9.5 Limited debts, limited repercussions

Individuals could expect to receive only perfunctory threats for debts of £20, £40 or even £100. During the six-year period of study I was unaware of a single retailer actually using violence to coerce payments or to assist in the seizure of customer assets. It was simply not worth enforcing payments through physical force for small sums, particularly as cannabis dealers earned between £200 and £900 a week while cocaine dealers earned between £300 and £1,200 a week. Unlike studies that have focused on dealers embedded within street cultures (e.g. Taylor, 2007; Anderson, 1998) The Lads were far less likely to take an unpaid customer debt as a serious personal insult. The Lads were concerned with maximizing profits, but within this calculation one had to consider whether chasing down a small debt (of say £50) was worth the effort that would need to be expended. The answer was no. Few retailers experienced 'material and psychic harms' (Taylor, 2007: 120) that would have made debt enforcement through violence necessary or justifiable.

Tee (cannabis dealer): What's the point in kicking off over a forty-quid debt: there isn't any. But to be honest, I've got absolutely no intention of getting in a fight over a bit of money, not when you've got a steady income anyway. T'hell with that. If they really have got no intention of paying, just let them keep it, but just never sell to them again.

Chasing up debts could be fairly time-consuming, and there were only so many times a dealer could leave a debtor's home empty-handed before the debt collection process was no longer worthwhile. Thus, the occasional non-payment of small debts could be factored.

Cliff (cocaine dealer): I've had a couple of people in the past who've fucked me off. Not major amounts. Like *Mrs X* owed me a hundred quid, *Mr Y* like eighty quid, but that's the most I've ever been stung with.

Blaine (cannabis dealer): Maybe the odd one or two never bothered to pay up [...] I couldn't be arsed driving round to their house bothering him with his missis and kid there, just to try and get twenty quid or whatever. No point is there. And you can spend a few quid just on petty [fuel] so I never saw the point.

Khalid (cocaine dealer): Marshall gave his mate tick, and his mate screwed him over – about four-hundred quid each [£800 in total]. This was at the end of the

game [of their six-month dealing career]. I'd made more than enough [profit] so I wasn't bothered about it.

In our final quotation, Khalid and Marshall's loss of £800 was left unchallenged. To my knowledge, this was the largest debt not to have been paid at the retail-consumer level. He and Marshall had ceased their sales and were collecting all other remaining debts. With cash savings of several thousand pounds each, this last unpaid debt was simply not worth the trouble. Were this default to have occurred during their active careers the debt would probably have been enforced, but once the 'game' (as Khalid called it) was over neither man had the desire to enforce a drug debt.

When customers defaulted on their payments dealers had to decide whether to 'chase up' the payment or simply inform others in the network of the customer's behaviour and let the issue rest.

It appeared as though debts for £100 or less would not be chased up, though this didn't mean debtors were forgiven.³³ Such losses were seen as acceptable in markets that generally provided decent weekly returns. Forgiving debts (in this study) refers to dealers no longer bothering to enforce the payment. It does not mean debtors at the consumer end faced no consequences for their actions. And in many instances, simply being unable to acquire drugs from a reliable dealer or their associates could be a minor form of punishment in itself, as the following incident demonstrates.

Ahab and Tee both worked full time: Ahab in his uncle's business, Tee at a local college. During the evenings the pair sold 'twenty bags' (£20 bags) of skunk cannabis in partnership. In addition to their regular wages these cannabis sales earned them approximately £200–£300 each a week. Generally, their customers were employed and paid up-front for their supply and were mostly friends or friends-of-friends. One evening several of The Lads were hanging out at Gordon's playing the PlayStation and having a few spliffs. Tee received a phone call and left the room. After the call ended he re-entered the room and addressed Ahab as well as the others that were in the room,

³³ In one example, a regular customer and close friend to Khalid owed £60 for three grams of ketamine. To Khalid, such a sum was not a major issue, but each time he spoke his friend he would ask for the money. The friend made continued assurances that it would be repaid 'next week'. In the end the friend ended up avoiding Khalid and many of Khalid's closer friends. Their friendship effectively ended; 'It's as if he's just wanting me to say "No, don't worry about the dough now, keep it". I'd just text him saying have you got the money or not. And that was it. We didn't bother with each other after that.'

Tee: Fuck me. That was *Phatty* [an old friend of The Lads] on the phone asking for bud [cannabis]. Did you ever meet him?

Ahab: Nah, I've heard you guys mention him though.

Tee: He was getting it off me for a while [two years ago], him and his mates [...] They were buying a half-ounce [of cannabis] [each] week over the summer... He'd tick it for a week then pay when his money came in. It was good, made a decent bit of money off 'em [...] One week I call him up asking for the money -£100 [...] He says he doesn't but will in a few days [...] In the end he fucks me off. He wasn't picking up my calls and was hanging up when I called from a blocked [withheld] number and started speaking. I even went with Harvey to his... [Harvey enters the conversation 'Oh yeah. I remember.'] He stuck his head out the window and was saying, 'Tee – I feel like a prick, but it wasn't me who had the weed.' He was saying it was a lad called *Jacky* or something. Said he'd give me his number. I said, 'Fuck that like. *You* phoned me, you didn't say it was for anyone else.' You know, and he was only just telling me that then – that it was someone else. So then this other mate of his sticks his head out the flat, and he goes 'Yeah, you wanna chase up Jacky. If he's taken that off you without paying you should batter him. That's what I'd do.' I just thought 'fuck 'em', couldn't be doing with them, and to be honest I'd made more than I'd lost off them so I didn't bother chasing it up. [...] It was worth £100 to know that Phatty [a former friend of Tee's] would thief off me.

Anyway, [Phatty] was saying that he heard we had good stuff in and was after a half-ounce for cash. Said he'd pay up-front. I just said, 'Nope, sorry mate, haven't got any.' Then he started going on, 'Listen la, it weren't me who fucked you off, it was that Jacky lad.' Anyway, I just told him we didn't have any. He obviously knows we have coz otherwise there's no way he would have called me. Sledge must have given him me number. They mustn't be able to get any if he's calling me.

Ahab: Nah, fuck him Tee. We don't need to sell to mans like that. Got 'nough guys that are loving this [strain of cannabis] at the minute. We don't need to be shifting any more [...] To be honest it serves him right... In fact, you know what, tell him that if he pays that money he owes he can start getting it off us but then we can just fuck him off.

Tee: Nah. Can't be arsed.

A fortnight later, Tee tells me that an unknown lad had phoned him a few days earlier, asking for a half-ounce for cash.

Tee: I thought 'this has gotta be Phatty's mate' and he's going on that he got me number from a mate. So I asked him which mate, and he just tells me straight that it was Phatty. [Tee laughs]. So then I just said 'Nah, mate. Sorry.' I didn't bother coming up with a reason. I just said no. Then he's like 'Go on la. I got the cash here.'

In this example, Tee had shown no interest in taking the dispute further with Phatty. Yet two years later all was clearly not forgotten. Tee didn't wish to supply Phatty or his friends, even for cash. This could be seen as 'cutting off your nose to spite your face', because Tee and Ahab could have rekindled a profitable link using up-front payments from Phatty and his peers. But in many ways there was some clear satisfaction to be gained from punishing an old friend who had ended their friendship over a small debt.

Non-payments, such as the one I have just described, had no real impact on the dealer's finances or the debtor's health (there were *never* any serious repercussions for such a small sum). Users rarely defaulted on such trivial sums, particularly because many of the customers were friends of friends. Nonetheless, as I shall now describe, certain debtors could prove far more detrimental and difficult to control. These individuals would accumulate large debts over prolonged periods of time before ending all communication with the supplier; these were often what had been deemed the 'good customers'.

4.9.6 Rolling tabs: How 'good customers' pose the greatest risks

Most of the customers who acquired drugs on credit would receive just one or two units before having to clear their bill; only 'good customers' could accrue on-going tabs with their suppliers.

These individuals were *only* documented in the cocaine markets. They were considered 'good customers' because they placed orders regularly for stock and tended to buy multiple units at a time. For some of the cocaine dealers these customers provided the majority of sales in a given week. Good customers tended to have regular sources of income that enabled them to repay debts with some certainty (e.g. being part of a wealthy family, owning a modestly successful business or having a well-paid salaried job). However, not all good customers had well-paying jobs; some would steal money from their parents or else be engaged in some minor scams.³⁴ The habits of these most creditworthy individuals could often be extreme: when Nani helped to supply Cliff's customers for a week while Cliff holidayed abroad, he was shocked to realise he had delivered seventeen grams of cocaine (a

³⁴ For example, one individual would set up new mobile phone contracts and sell on the handset and cancel the direct debit; another sold stock that he would steal from his father's company.

third of the weekly stock) to a single customer. All but the final few grams were paid for up-front and these sales had a potential gross of nearly £680. Waldorf et al.'s (1991) study on middle-class cocaine users shows how easy it was for unsustainable habits to develop, costing them thousands of dollars a month and depleting much of their income as a consequence.

Some dealers whittled down their customer base to a small handful of good customers, refusing to make deliveries for single grams. For the most part, this approach proved itself to be both practical and economically wise. Dealers did not have to risk over-exposure by selling to an over-extended customer base, and they could consolidate a person's debts rather than having to remember or discreetly document several individuals' debts; this also made the chasing-up or possible enforcement of debts easier. This 'special relationship' with its continued and on-going tab also helped retain the consumer loyalties of these more affluent customers.

Cliff (cocaine dealer): To be honest with you, my customers are high-tick, like *Sister B* owes me like 800 quid at the moment, fuckin' *Chuffed-boy* owes me 350, *Liver* owes me 350. So it's all big chunks of money. So a lot of me profit is tidied-up in the float [debt], if you know what I mean. Every week I'll dish it all out [i.e. distribute all the stock], get enough money to pay me bill and then whatever [payments] comes from them is all profit. Sometimes it just all accumulates: it builds up, and up, and up, then payday comes and that's it then, you get like four grand [profit] just from like five [or] six of them getting paid in the space of one or two days – it's fuckin' mad.

The following description provided by Bear (speaking about his time as a cocaine retailer) shows how they would only front stock if they were able to cover any non-payments:

Bear (cocaine dealer): There were people when I was selling to with Cliff who took ages to pay, but were good customers. Fuck... [he laughs] *Sisters* and *Petal!* They'd pay up in the end, but not to the timescale and I always had enough float to cover them. It's all about calculating the risk really, and how much you can afford. If they can't pay, can you pay your man?³⁵

Dealers' primary concerns were whether payments were assured and whether the customer would at some point clear their debt. Despite having to be pushy at times, enforced debt collection from good customers was documented only twice during data collection (this was via the seizure of assets and in both instances violence was not

³⁵ This 'professional' approach to minimising risks of non-payment can also be seen among Desroches' (2005) upper-level traffickers: 'I would never front any more than I could afford to lose' (2005: 142).

needed³⁶). Dealers tended to be especially lenient with their good customers, particularly if the rapport between the two had developed over some time. Khalid had become good friends with one of his and Marshall's best customers – his remarks show just how 'sympathetic' dealers could be:

Khalid (cocaine dealer): She owes me 11 [£1,100] at the minute coz she wasn't able to give me any money last week. She had her rent to pay and a few other things which needed paying out [of] that week's wages [...] But she's able to pay bits off through the week – a hundred quid here, or a few hundred there, depending on if she's able to skim [take a proportion of the takings] from her work. Not that I'm supposed to know! It's not like she's told me she does but she's blatantly doing it, coz like I say she gives money in the week even though I know for a fact she gets paid on a Friday.

Although good customers never relied on credit to fund their habit, they would certainly use the rolling tab to their advantage e.g. often ordering a third gram of cocaine on credit so as to be granted the bulk discount or asking for credit over a weekend before a monthly payday. Ironically it was these good customers who posed the greatest risks regarding unmanageable debts.³⁷ Many good customers had on-going tabs with their respective suppliers. Below is an example of how debts developed over a relatively short period of time.

A good customer with a small but successful business orders cocaine with a value of up to £500 over a bank holiday weekend. £250 is paid up-front and further payments are made throughout the week. By the Friday the customer has paid off the majority of the debt, with perhaps £50 or £100 left on the remaining tab. That weekend, more stock is ordered, the customer doesn't have more than £100 on him so once again makes payments throughout the week. And this cycle continues. Some weeks this customer's overall tab increases only marginally, or may even be reduced by £50 or more. The dealers were wise to accommodate minor weekly shortfalls because the profits made from these customers were substantial (also the dealer would have expected the remaining balance to be paid at some point). However, left unchecked this tab could quickly amass to more substantial sum.

³⁶ In the first of these instances the dealing partnership broke into the debtors garage and stole items of value, in the second the debtor simply handed over goods to clear the debt in order to avoid a possible assault.

³⁷ Possibly because cocaine habits (unlike cannabis habits) could, at times, escalate out of control. Even habitual cannabis smoker were unlikely to smoke more than £40 worth of cannabis in a day. But the amounts of cocaine a person could sniff (or smoke if it is pure enough to turn into crack-cocaine) could *easily* exceed over £100 a night.

Mike: What's the most you've had on loan?

Cliff: Over a grand [£1,000] per person. I've had three people owe us over a grand, at the same time. So about a grand is *the* maximum you can do... but I know how much [these good customers] earn...

Securing these amassed debts could be an unpleasant and drawn-out affair. It involved the continued harassment of the debtor over many months, both via phone and in person. Whenever good customers began repaying larger tabs (either willingly or through some minor coercion) many had to scale back their drug consumption, others simply stopped using altogether. This would no doubt have been difficult considering the excessive habits they had been able to develop. During the years in which The Lads dealt, threats were only occasionally directed at good customers to coerce repayments (usually through instalments); however violence was *never* used. Despite the benefits of allowing good customers the facility to gradually amass larger debts the risk remained that one day a customer would, for whatever reason, be unable to clear this debt.

4.9.7 Enforcing debts: Summary

Dealers featured in this study were responsible for whatever losses they sustained through the non-payment of customer debts. As creditors they had total discretion as to how, or even whether to enforce a debt. Yet despite bellicose threats and pushy behaviour being commonplace within these markets, physical acts of violence were in fact something of a rarity. A non-payment by an end-user roughly equated to a tenth of that week's net profits for retailers, however non-payments by a dealer could equate to a quarter of the week's net profits for wholesalers. Due to this variation in the proportion and amounts owed, wholesalers were far more concerned with debt enforcement and thus more inclined to use force or serious violence. Retailers were far more inclined to write-off debts (though not 'forgiving' the debtor) rather than enforce the payment. In all of the observed trade networks debtors were given some significant leeway regarding repayment and creditors often provided repayment plans or, in the case of dealers, fronted them further stock to help clear the bill. Violence predominated at the wholesale level, but was almost wholly absent at the consumer level because minor infringements (i.e. not repaying £50) could be factored in to their overall profits and, crucially, were not taken as personal insults that needed rectifying. This finding is not so surprising, as many past studies have shown an unwillingness to

use violence for purposes of restitution or resolution (e.g. Desroches, 2005; Taylor and Potter, 2013; Pearson and Hobbs, 2001, 2003). This finding does, however, contrast to many of the US studies in which a prevailing street culture (Anderson, 2000) may demand that even minor infringement be punished. As one US drug ethnographer notes, ‘To let a transgression “slide,” even one that is trivial, more often than not signals weakness. It demonstrates that you are soft, that you can be exploited with impunity’ (Jacobs, 2004: 296). Due to the nature of the closed-markets in which The Lads operated the risk of exploitation was slim, and forgoing confrontation to focus on making more sales (i.e. more money) was not seen as being ‘weak’ but rather ‘business minded’.

4.10 Conclusion: Widespread, effective but under-researched

My observations suggest that black credit was far more prevalent within these various markets than those of other studies that have also researched the retail end of the distribution chain. The various markets I observed (cocaine, cannabis and ketamine) were almost wholly dependent upon its use. One reason for its abundance was the ‘mediation’ of ‘individualised trust’ that I described earlier (von Lampe and Ole Johansen, 2004). Within these arrangements intermediaries helped to set up successful trade relations between unknown parties by offering references to their character, by providing details of prior trade transactions that would be relevant, or even information on their employment history that itself could be indicative of a person’s abilities. This was certainly a unique feature of these markets. As our review in the earlier section suggested, credit tended only to be used when there was a pre-existing relationship and where the supplier had got to know the person well enough to judge them as creditworthy. In the networks The Lads occupied, a person could be deemed creditworthy purely on a generalised assessment made by a trusted third-party.³⁸ This opened up credit to a whole swathe of potential dealers.

Black credit enhanced the size and scope of these drug markets by enabling them to grow at a speed and on a scale that would otherwise have been impossible to achieve.

³⁸ It should once again be noted that intermediaries were not held accountable for their references. They were never required to cover any debts. On occasion, however, they were to help secure payment (not through threat or force) by simply speaking to their friend or else to send word to them via other friends.

Black credit's principle value was that it enabled liquidity-constrained individuals (i.e. those lacking sufficient capital) to become active in the distribution chain. In short, greater numbers of suppliers were able to distribute larger quantities of stock thanks to the method of fronting drugs. Had the network relied upon the accumulation and reinvestment of capital for its functioning and growth, the markets would probably have been a fraction of their actual size and value.

To be sure, black credit allowed market growth in a multi-faceted capacity. First, credit increased the number of young men who were able to deal drugs, as Thomas noted, 'You don't need a penny to your name if someone can vouch for you'. The majority of those who dealt did not come from privileged backgrounds; most earned just enough money to get by while others found themselves in worse economic situations. The ability to source an ever in-demand stock with no financial investment made the drug markets both an appealing and practical source of revenue during times of economic hardship. Second, black credit enabled and even encouraged the consumer habits of end-users, thereby increasing sales at the consumer end of the chain, which in turn increased sales higher up the chain. Regardless of whether or not customers had the immediate funds to hand, a supply of drugs could be purchased whenever they desired. This enabled suppliers to unload greater proportions of their stock to willing and trusted consumers rather than limiting sales to those with the immediate funds.

Black credit was mutually beneficial, particularly for those involved in its supply (i.e. brokers, wholesalers and retailers), and generally, common sense prevailed. Economically speaking, the short-term gains from 'bumping' one's debts were minor when compared to the longer-term gains of a successful relationship. However, the black credit system was not infallible and despite efforts to vet borrowers prior to giving them stock there remained those who fell behind on their payments or defaulted altogether. Fortunately for suppliers, non-payments, short payments or late payments were generally confined to a small but ever-present minority of borrowers. Rarely did any non-payments result in a domino effect of non-payment (e.g. end-users fail to pay their dealer, who in turn is unable to pay his wholesaler, who is then unable to pay the broker, who would then be unable to pay his supplier). This was because profit margins were high enough to ensure that suppliers only needed approximately

60% of the total sales to have been made to cover their bills. But as other studies have shown, threats and occasional violence were used by suppliers as the only real way of ensuring that these unwritten contractual agreements were adhered to. On the whole credit worked to facilitate sales and aid suppliers in maximising profits; whatever losses were incurred through writing-off debts were often marginal (approximately 10% of a supplier's weekly net profit *if* a customer defaulted), however there were a small number of occasions where the unpaid debt was substantial (e.g. the £3,000 debt to Miller, that equated to two/three weeks net profits). Violence was so rare because, in large part, debts were not taken to be a personal insult - at least not one worth assaulting someone over. This contrasts sharply with other studies that have looked at the violence that arises through customers defaulting, such as Angela Taylor, who notes 'it's not just business, its personal' (2007: 118). For The Lads, the opposite was true: it's nothing personal, its business.

Chapter 5.

Men at Work (part one): Dealing as Work

[A]ll of the new studies of British gangs acknowledge, although to different degrees, that the drugs trade offers an accessible alternative sphere of enterprise to declining opportunities in traditional male employment.

(Hobbs, 2013: 116)

5.1 Introduction

In recent decades a wide body of research has identified a relationship between legitimate work (i.e. employment rates, job quality) and offending. Though the field of criminology has yet to reach a consensus regarding the strength or even the actual existence of the relationship, many believe that crime, particularly those offences that are economically motivated, are a direct consequence of poor quality or non-existent jobs experienced in the legitimate economy. Indeed, some of the most prominent research published in recent years has viewed good work and job stability as one of the most crucial elements in the desistance process for offenders (for example, Laub and Sampson (2006) acclaimed life-course analysis of a delinquent cohort of males from Boston). Following on from such discourse, this chapter provides further evidence of a work-crime relationship. It discusses the link between the participants' activities in the legitimate economy and their engagement in the illegal drugs economy – a relationship that became increasingly evident during the course of data collection. In particular, the chapter documents the versatility concept of 'work' among my twenty-five participants, and their oscillation between the criminal and legitimate economies. I will show how drug markets were seen and treated as alternatives or supplements to legitimate employment (what Fagan and Freeman (1999) termed 'doubling-up'). This research is not the first to identify a cohort of young males who treat drug dealing as 'just another form of work'. However, I aim to complement these observations by offering a framework that enables us to systematically evaluate drug dealing by the standards used to evaluate the quality of

regular work – what I refer to as the PASSSCI criteria. The criteria encompass several key attributes/elements that were identified in a range of literatures from the study of workplace satisfaction/productivity to the psychological literature on fundamental human needs; these seven attributes include: pay, autonomy, status, satisfaction, security, career-commitment, and associated irritations. Although I apply this criteria to drug dealing, I believe such an evaluative framework could readily be applied to any form of income-generating crime to understand its monetary and non-monetary returns (from lower-level ‘street crimes’ such as bike theft and burglary, to more complex corporate crimes, such as ‘ponzi schemes’ and ‘carousel fraud’). By examining the economic and non-economic returns from regular employment *and* drug dealing I aim to advance our understanding of why certain forms of work promote desistance from the illicit drug markets while others may not.

Unlike many other ethnographic studies on offending groups (particularly drug dealers), individuals within my sample were not raised in disaffected households without promise of legitimate work and had not survived on the fringes of society (see for instance, Winlow, 2001; Anderson, 2000; Bourgois, 1995; Sullivan, 1989). The communities in which they were raised were not blighted by high crime rates, high unemployment rates, or high numbers of ‘broken homes’. At the same time, however, these men were not privileged enough to have grown up within the ‘contented classes’ (see, Galbraith, 1992) in which work is inherently ‘enjoyable, socially reputable and economically rewarding’ (Galbraith, 1992: 33). Most of my participants had been raised in economically stable, lower and lower-middle socioeconomic families (see section 2.5.2). Nevertheless, the era in which they had grown up (year-on-year economic growth both nationally and locally) coupled with the work ethos of their parents had bonded many of them to the aspirational culture of upward mobility. Most had pursued academic or technical qualifications in a bid to develop the occupational skills favourable to the labour markets. Others wanted to manage their own businesses and to be their own bosses. As this chapter will show, these young men invested time, effort, and money in an attempt to realise their legitimate goals. Their participation in the illicit drug economy stemmed from perceived or actual shortcomings they experienced in the legitimate economy. Individuals entered into the drug trade because the incomes earned in the legitimate sphere were inadequate to their tastes,

because they were unemployed, or because they were unable to secure legitimate capital for use within the legitimate economy (e.g. securing a bank loan to invest in establishing a business). Drug sales provided a provisional short cut to high economic success by generating revenues largely unsurpassed by immediately available legitimate alternatives. But when individuals secured the kinds of work that satisfied them (i.e. ‘good’ jobs) their involvement in the drugs trade soon terminated.

Past studies have tended to see drug dealing as an ailment of the disenfranchised poor. Few studies have looked at drug sales among the ‘silent majority’ of drug dealers (Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010: 2), those dealers ‘whose deviant behaviours are largely unknown beyond the limits of their social network; whose dealings [...] are generally carried out without hindrance of police scrutiny and without the stigma of being labelled a criminal’ (Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010). As such, my findings broaden our knowledge of ‘silent’ drug markets by demonstrating the instrumental use of drug sales among groups not usually associated with the drugs trade – educated, occupationally skilled and experienced young men who do not reside in run-down inner-city settings.

This chapter is divided into two parts: the first half – *Dealing as Work* – identifies the motivations behind market entry and assesses the drug dealing as an occupation using the PASSSCI criteria; the second half – *The Happiness of Pursuit* – looks at the development of legitimate work careers from the young men’s late-teens to mid-twenties and the relationship this had with their offending trajectories.

Part one of this chapter begins with a review of the relevant literatures that aide our understanding of the work-crime relationship (including criminological, occupational and psychological studies). I then present two case studies that exemplify the three forms of economic motivation evident among The Lads’ network: ‘pocket money’, ‘financial safety net’ and ‘investment capital’. These case studies document in detail the varying structural factors (i.e. ‘local life circumstances’ such as loss of employment, see Horney et al., 1995) and decisions/choices that led these men to engage, exit, re-engage or sustain their activities in the drug markets. Finally, I assess ‘dealing as work’ using seven criteria indicative of work quality (pay, autonomy,

satisfaction, status, security, career-commitment, and irritations). Part two, provides the life-narratives of The Lads with specific attention given to the development of their occupational ambitions, investments, skills and commitments. Finally I assess The Lads' latest occupations (those held at the end of my research) using the PASSSCI criteria, and describe the relationship between the quality of their jobs and their desistance from the drug sales.

This chapter makes several observations:

1. Dealing can be seen as a profitable, accessible and alluring occupation even among individuals who do *not* live in disenfranchised households or high-crime ghettoized communities.
2. Dealing can be seen as a good supplement or replacement to menial and low-paid jobs in the legitimate jobs sector.
3. Despite being considered a form of work, the viability of dealing as a long-term occupation can be negligible because of the few substantive returns it generated coupled with the 'irritations' and strains it generates.
4. Once 'good work' had been secured, dealing was seen as an unjustifiable burden and hazard.
5. Simply being employed in a full-time job limited the opportunities to deal by constraining the times one would devote to the trade, to their partners or peers, and to their leisure time.
6. 'Good work' didn't necessarily have to pay high wages; what seemed most salient was whether these jobs met a range of psychological needs, particularly job satisfaction.
7. Finally, simply securing 'good work' was no guarantee of permanent desistance, and any significant loss in earnings could once again prompt re-entry into the markets.

5.2 Literature Review

An ever-growing body of literature within the social sciences suggests a relationship between work and crime. A range of studies, generated from state-level econometric data, from life-course studies and from ethnographic research suggests that unemployment and underemployment (i.e. lack of hours or limited wages) are

intrinsically linked to various forms of crime – in particular, financially motivated crimes (e.g. property crimes, vehicle theft, larceny/robbery, etc.).³⁹ Yet, despite a general belief among criminologists that work can ‘encourage or hasten the desistance process’ (Wright and Cullen, 2004: 198), the exact nature by which this process occurs still remains substantially under-researched (Fagan and Freeman, 1999).

This literature section will outline various studies that have attempted to document and understand the relationship between legitimate and illegitimate work. First, I provide an overview of studies that have indicated a clear association between levels of employment/unemployment and crime. Second, I assess a range of prison-to-work programmes (initiatives that place ex-offenders in jobs towards the end of their release or upon their release) that have empirically tested what effects work experience can have on offenders. Third, I look at a range of literature that examines the salience of work quality - good or bad – to see whether job quality is a better predictor of offending and desistance than simply having/not having a job. Finally, I provide a summary of studies that shows drug markets to be a common alternative or supplement to limited work prospects. Crucially, much of the literature suggests that it is not jobs *per se* that assist the process of desistance, but rather the engagement with rewarding work that facilitates this process.

5.2.1 Labour conditions and crime

Wolfgang et al. (1972), Reilly and Witt (1996), Raphael and Winter-Ebmer (2001), Freeman (2000; 2001), Freeman and Rodgers (1999), Edmark (2005), Fougère et al. (2009) and Gould et al. (2002) have all analysed large-scale data sets (at the state and national levels) and concluded that changes in labour market conditions were closely related to crime levels i.e. crime levels decreased as employment levels rose and *visa versa*. Raphael and Winter-Ebmer’s findings suggest that slightly more than forty percent of the decline in overall property crime within the US between 1992 and 1997 was attributable to the decline in unemployment (2001: 281), while Freeman (2000) estimated ‘that about one-third of the 1990s drop in crime in the US [was] attributable to the booming job market’ (2001: 24).

³⁹ Some studies have also demonstrated a link between work and other non-monetary motivated offences such as assault and rape.

Not only have studies identified a link between offending with the presence/absence of work, others have linked underemployment/low wages with offending and arrest (see Grogger, 1998; Allan and Steffensmeier, 1989; Shover, 1996, Hansen and Machin, 2002). Machin and Meghir (2004) and Gould et al. (2002) present evidence suggesting that low wages are likely a better predictor of crime than simply looking at unemployment rates. Gould et al.'s findings suggest that 'wage trends explain more than 50% of the increase in both property crime and violent crime indices over the sample period [1979-1997]' (2002: 57). Despite a broad range of studies having indicated a link between labour markets and crime, there are almost as many studies (pre-1990s) that have failed to find a positive relationship between these two trends (see Chiricos, 1987) – as such there exists no absolute consensus as to whether there exists a causal link between crime rates and employment rates.

Longitudinal survey studies provide evidence of a link between crime and work at the individual level. Farrington, et al.'s (1986) analysis of 411 boys over 48 years (the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development) found participants committed greater numbers of financially motivated crimes during bouts of unemployment and also that getting fired from legitimate employment increased the odds of offending (Farrington, 1992)⁴⁰. Additionally, Sampson and Laub's (1993) life course analysis of 1000 males found those who were employed in stable jobs were far more likely to desist from criminal activities; indeed job stability was one of the strongest predictors of desistance (alongside stable marriage) for this cohort.

The combination of these findings suggest that there are some crucial elements associated with employment that somehow prevent or dissuade individuals from engaging in criminal activities and, conversely, that a lack of work or proper wages may encourage individuals to engage in certain forms of crime.

⁴⁰ It is worth noting that Farrington found unemployment had no effect on other crimes 'such as violence, vandalism and drug use, suggesting the boys committed more offences while they were unemployed because they lacked money at these times' (2003: 170)

5.2.2 Work programme evaluations

A number of programmes place offenders within temporary low-skilled jobs towards the end of their sentence or following their release from prison. The intention is that this employment will reduce recidivism rates among participants by giving them occupational experience and contacts. Prison-to-work programmes are seen as critical to offenders' reintegration into conventional society as the stigma attached to criminal records often inhibits ex-offenders' abilities to secure work following their release (Hagan, 1993; Sullivan, 1989; Boshier and Johnson, 1974, Holzer et al., 2003). Unfortunately, evaluations of work programmes for ex-offenders have generated conflicting findings, as we shall now see.

There is some evidence that suggests recidivism by *some* offenders can be lessened by engaging in these programmes. However, the majority of work programme evaluations I have reviewed showed either no reduction in recidivism or statistically insignificant reductions in recidivism. Table 3 summarises several offender work programmes.

Table 3. Offender work programmes in the UK and US.

Authors	Programme & Design	Results
Saylor & Gaes (1997)	Post Release Employment Program (PREP). Quasi-experimental design (n=7,000).	Offenders who participated in 'PREP' were 33% less likely to reoffend than the control group
Uggen (2000)	The National Supported Work Demonstration Program. Experimental jobs programme. 3000 ex-offenders split into control group and treatment groups.	Individuals aged 27 and above were less likely to report having committed a crime and were less likely to have been arrested
Aos et al. (2000)	Meta-analysis of several hundred offender-programme evaluations.	Four prison-to-work programmes. A combined reduction in re-offending of 9% compared to control groups.
Wilson et al. (2000)	Analysed 33 experimental and quasi-experimental work programmes.	Four prison-to-work programmes. A combined reduction in re-offending of 20% compared to control groups.
Soothill (1974)	UK prison-to-work programme. 450 ex-offenders	Marginal differences in recidivism rates compared to control group.
Soothill and Holmes (1981)	10-year follow-up study of Soothill's sample (1974).	6% of the 450 men benefited from the intervention.
Borus et al. (1976)	Comprehensive Offender Manpower Program (COMP). 266 ex-offenders (125 experiment group).	No statistically significant reduction in offending compared to the two control groups.

Rossi et al. (1980)	Transnational Aid Research Project (TARP). 4,000 ex-offenders (4 treatment groups, 2 control groups).	The programme failed to reduce recidivism rates among the participants.
Berk et al. (1980)	Transnational Aid Research Project (TARP). 4,000 ex-offenders (4 treatment groups, 2 control groups)	The programme failed to reduce recidivism rates among the participants.
Piliavin and Gartner (1981)	National Support Demonstration program. 2276 participants: control and experimental groups.	Effects on recidivism were statistically insignificant.
Van Stelle et al. (1995)	Specialized Training and Employment Program (STEP). 131 ex-offenders	Those who completed the STEP programme had a significantly higher level of parole violations
Turner and Petersila (1996)	Washington State's prison release program - 1st study (n=2,452), 2nd study (n=218)	No statistically significant reduction in offending compared to the control group.
Bohmert and Duwe (2011)	Affordable Homes Project. 350 participants.	No statistically significant reduction in offending compared to the control group.
Visher et al. (2005)	Meta-analysis of eight randomly assigned intervention work programmes - targeted non-custodial offenders.	No statistically significant reduction in offending compared to the control group.

The inconsistencies regarding the success or failure of these work programmes may be the consequence of the methodological variations or deficiencies used in the evaluations. Several failed to account for self-selection bias, others used non-randomised samples or failed to distinguish between forms of employment and most did not use strong experimental designs (see Wilson et al., 2000).

However, there are some crucial limitations regarding these work programmes that would likely have limited their ability to facilitate or aide desistance, regardless of what methodology was used. First, the programmes did not guarantee the continuance of employment following the conclusion of these programmes and many participants found themselves without work in the years following release from prison. Second the work provided in most programmes was poor: these jobs required limited investments of time, effort or skill from the individual and paid little more than the minimum wage as a result. As Morselli and Tremblay note, '[a]lthough such programs are designed to provide inmates with the human capital (for example, prison training classes in a multitude of trades) and social capital (for example, link with a legitimate work employer) that enables them to reinvest and start building a conventional "career," the financial capital that is also required to provide the security necessary to ensure confidence and satisfaction in such programs and in conventional paths of earning is often lacking. Investment in crime, once again, becomes a reasonable

option for many' (Morselli and Tremblay, 2004: 796). In addition, Uggen and Wakefield state that: 'it is [...] likely that the null effects of employment on crime in some experimental and quasi-experimental research are related to the types of employment opportunities offered by participants. These jobs are generally low quality and training programs may not do enough to overcome pre-existing deficits in education, job skills and work experience to reduce crime to any great extent' (2008: 205). In short, the findings from all these studies suggest that simply gaining experience in low-skilled work environments does little to aide the process of desistance for those already criminally active.

5.2.3 “Good” and “bad” jobs

Assessing the utility of employment in desistance simply by evaluating its presence or absence is unlikely to unravel the multifaceted association between work and crime. There exists a complex relationship between workers and their occupations that must be taken into account if we are to understand how work can impede offending and promote desistance.

Occupational research has shown that the *types* of work in which people engage have pivotal bearings on their psyche and overall well-being.⁴¹ Unpleasant working conditions can make people feel undervalued, frustrated and depressed (Danna and Griffin, 1999; Kasl, 1974, Tennant, 2001), meaning that even stable employment is not an inherently positive force in a person's life. However, given the right circumstances and work environment, a person's job *can* have positive effects by lessening feelings of depression and frustration (Shanahan et al., 1991: 302) and benefiting the motivations, satisfactions and well-being of the workers (Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2008; Esser and Olsen, 2012; Parker, et al. 2001; Drobnič, et al., 2010).

It is these attributes that are likely to influence how bonded and committed individuals are to both their jobs and 'conventional' society. As Uggen and Wakefield noted, 'employment quality may be more important for crime reduction than the simple presence or absence of a job, as many of those at high risk for crime are likely

⁴¹ Indeed, a wide body of research has shown that workplace stress can also lead to physiological ill health, such as cardio-heart disease (Marmot et al., 1997) and high blood pressure (Schwartz et al., 1996).

to also have substantial opportunities in the illegal labour market' (2008: 206). For this reason, many criminologists have attempted to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' forms of work to appreciate whether levels of job quality can explain the work-crime relationship more effectively than simply the presence of work.

Although there has been no single measure used to categorise 'good' or 'bad' jobs⁴², the evidence from a wide array of literature suggests that stable and meaningful work, which rewards individuals materially (i.e. sufficient hours and pay) *and* non-materially, is more likely to have 'incremental' (Laub and Sampson, 1993) or 'deep' (Caspi and Moffitt, 1993) effects upon reducing offending than other work lacking such rewards. Wadsworth (2006) notes how '[i]ndividuals who have emotionally, psychologically, or financially rewarding employment are more likely to feel some sense of investment in their jobs or careers and thus be less willing to participate in crime' (2006: 346). Not only are individuals more likely to develop attachments to conventional norms if they are employed in 'good jobs', such jobs also raise the 'stakes' of offending (e.g. the loss of stable, purposeful and satisfying work).

Assessing the effects of job quality upon released offenders, Uggen (1999) found 'a strong and robust job quality effect on economic and non-economic criminal behaviour' (p144). Securing higher quality jobs, such as 'skilled craft workers' or 'professional and technical workers' decreased the likelihood of offending, while securing lower-quality jobs, such as 'food service work' or 'manufacturing operative in nondurable goods' increased the likelihood of offending. Similarly, Crutchfield (1989) found that high concentrations of secondary labour jobs (such as those lower-quality jobs with low pay and irregular work identified by Uggen, 1999) were associated with higher crime rates than those employed in the primary sector of the labour market.

Sampson and Laub's (1990, 1993) life course analysis of the Glueck's (1950) sample of delinquent boys found that the combination of job stability, job commitment and

⁴² While some, such as Uggen (1999) and Crutchfield and Pitchford (1997) used their sample's occupational sector as a proxy for job quality, others have looked at particular indicators of the work to ascertain job quality, such as occupational aspiration and job stability (Sampson and Laub, 1990, 1993), a worker's investment in the job (Huiras et al., 2000), their autonomy and status at work or their pay (Staff and Uggen, 2003).

work ties had a positive effect upon offending rates by increasing the informal social controls encountered via the workplace.⁴³ Similarly, job stability and marital attachment emerged as the most significant predictors of criminal desistance in later life.

More recently, Wright and Cullen's (2004) analysis of the National Youth Survey also showed that stable employment helped to 'encourage or hasten the desistance process' (2004: 198). However, contrary to Sampson and Laub's findings, this later study found that job role commitment was unrelated to offending.⁴⁴ In their analysis of workplace misconduct, Huiras, Uggen and McMorris (2000) concluded that 'career stakes' (a similar concept to Sampson and Laub's (1993) commitment to work) and job satisfaction had independent effects on workplace misconduct. Individuals whose current employment fitted into their long-term occupational goals, and who thus had more vested interest in their jobs, committed significantly fewer acts of deviancy in the workplace than their counterparts, while individuals without a stake in their job and who held no authority showed the highest levels of deviancy at work (see also Simons et al., 2002).

An analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth conducted by Wadsworth (2006) assessed various rewards employees gained through work. The research looked at various attributes of work including the promotional opportunities of jobs, the extent to which individuals utilise their abilities, the satisfaction of income, the sense of purpose relating to the job, and job security. He found that the more rewarding jobs decreased both property crime and violent crime among the sample. Interestingly, the subjective experience of a good job was more effective at predicting criminal desistance than high wages and job stability (which failed to influence offending among his sample). This suggests that elements of employment that provide satisfaction, other than simply financial remuneration, may be more significant reward than pay alone.⁴⁵

⁴³ Job stability comprised measures of employment status (whether currently employed), a measure of stability of most recent employment and work habits, while job commitment related to participant's educational and occupational goals (Sampson and Laub, 1993).

⁴⁴ It is worth noting that the survey that Wright and Cullen analysed failed to provide measures relating to *the nature of work*, which may have had an effect upon this null finding.

⁴⁵ The associated 'benefits' of work were also found to lessen violent and property offences; these included health insurance and paid vacation.

Research outside of the criminological field may help us to identify which kinds of jobs are more likely to engender levels of personal satisfaction and fulfil basic human psychological needs. Such studies provide a range of elements we may want to consider when attempting to differentiate between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ quality work (indeed the above study, Wadsworth (2006), incorporated several of these factors in his analysis). A common postulation within the field of psychology is that humans have innate psychological needs that go beyond basic survival, and once attained can improve the individual’s well being. Ryff (1989) proposed six such psychological needs: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Similarly, Ryan and Deci’s Self Determination Theory (2000) outlined three basic psychological needs: the need for competence (when people feel ‘efficacious with respect to those activities’, 2000: 73), social relatedness (when people feel attached or related to significant others), and autonomy (‘a sense of choice, volition, and freedom from excessive external pressure’, 2000: 74). Diener et al., (2010) believed that the most important psychological needs were: learning, autonomy, using one’s skills, respect, and the ability to count on others.

It is possible to readily appreciate how a person’s occupation has the ability to fulfil none, some, or all of these psychological needs. For instance, a job may require that a person *learn* and develop new skills after entering into a particular role, and require that the individual *use these skills* effectively. As the individual progresses into their career, they may be given greater responsibility (demonstrating *competence* and *personal growth*). As their skill-set develops and as occupational responsibilities increase the individual is given greater discretion as to how tasks are undertaken and which are to be prioritised (i.e. *autonomy* and *environmental mastery*). By attaining such a role, the individual earns *respect* from their face-to-face groups (partners, co-workers and peers). The individual may also develop good working relations with those around them (i.e. *positive relations with others*) and find *purpose* in their work and *self-acceptance* with their life in general.

One can equally imagine an occupation that offers *none* of these psychological returns. Indeed, Winlow and Hall's study of service sector workers demonstrates how occupational roles can at times be alienating, exploitative and unrewarding: 'Very few invested work identities with any particular significance, regarding work as something to be done and forgotten, or in some cases blocked from the mind. For many, relationships forged at work were regarded as unavoidable but ephemeral and completely unimportant' (2009: 100).

Although criminological research has not neglected psychological elements entirely, I believe these psychological returns from work are a crucial dimension of job quality that has been largely overlooked by criminologists who seek to understand how employment functions in desistance. Consequently, I have incorporated several of these basic psychological needs into my assessment of work framework (see section 5.7 and 5.11).

Employment can have clear psychological effects on workers, both positive and negative. Poor quality work can devalue individuals, making them feel frustrated and bored - two of the factors that Farrington argued were 'the main short-term energising factors that lead to within-individual variations in anti-social behaviour' (1993: 233). The evidence seems to suggest that low-quality, marginal employment does 'little to create a sense of investment or satisfaction that can deter crime' (Wadsworth, 2006: 363), while higher-quality work raises the risks/stakes of criminal behaviour, provides an array of desirable returns such as autonomy, status and job satisfaction, and bonds individuals to pro-social norms and attitudes. Wadsworth's study (2006) suggests that high earnings may be less important a return than the subjective experience of work, while Diener and Biswas-Diener note in their analysis of work and happiness: 'even with average pay and benefits, workers may be very happy with their jobs if the other [psychological] factors are in place' (2008: 80). If criminologists hope to better understand the effects of good and bad quality work on offending trajectories, it is important that both economic *and* psychological returns from work are taken into account so that a fuller spectrum of rewards can be identified.

The studies I have reviewed suggest that securing ‘good work’ not only lessens an individual’s participation in economic crimes, such as property crime or theft, but can also reduce non-economic crimes such as violence or domestic violence – evidence that offending is not based purely on economic rationality. In short, ‘good work’ (for adults):

- Provides ‘good’ and steady wages
- Provides a level of worker autonomy by requiring task-specific skills that the worker must master and employ affectively
- Provide a level of satisfaction (i.e. engagement, fulfilment, gratification, or enjoyment)
- Earns status and respect from face-to-face groups such as partners, peers and co-workers.
- Fits into occupational goals
- Offers stability and security

5.2.4 Age appropriate quality of work

It is important, in any case, to highlight that what may be considered to be ‘good’ work varies according to age. For instance, job autonomy has been found to affect worker motivation and satisfaction in adulthood (Parker et al., 2001). However, for younger people, autonomy in the labour setting may be a negative trait in adolescence and early adulthood, leading to depression (Shanahan, et al., 1991) and higher levels of delinquency (Staff and Uggen, 2003). Uggen and Wakefield (2008) note how ‘[p]otentially problematic jobs [during adolescence] are characterized by autonomy, high wages, and status among peers. Better jobs from a delinquency-reduction perspective, are those most comparable with educational obligations, those offering numerous opportunities to learn new skills which could be used in other jobs, and those unlikely to include substantial contact with delinquent peers’ (2008: 201).

As people age the maturation process alters their purpose of work. Whereas many adolescents may work primarily for immediate consumption and luxury commodities (Greenberger and Steinberg, 1986; Warnaar and Van Praag, 1997), adults rely on work to provide a sustainable and liveable income as well as to provide them with more substantive rewards. As Wright, Cullen and Williams note: ‘it can be argued that working as a juvenile does not build human or social capital or expose youths to

the informal controls inherent in quality work experiences of adults' (2002: 12). These findings underline the importance of age when assessing the effects of employment upon offending.

5.2.5 Drug dealers and un/employment

Drug markets are regularly described in the literature as one of the most profitable forms of economic crimes (e.g. Wilson and Abrahamse, 1992, Reuter et al., 1990) and studies have shown that financial returns from dealing often surpass legitimate alternatives (e.g. Caulkins et al., 1998; Hagedorn, 1994; Decker and VanWinkle, 1996; Freeman, 1992; Hoffer, 2006; May et al. 2005); for instance, Reuter et al. (1990) estimated hourly wages from drug markets to be \$30 compared to a medium average legitimate wage of \$7 an hour. Indeed, with illegal drug markets having 'become a booming business throughout the latter part of the twentieth century' (VanNostrand and Tewksbury, 1999: 58) this form of entrepreneurialism can be viewed in many contexts as an 'unremarkable' feature of contemporary urban life (Hobbs, 2013). In many social settings (particularly in areas of high unemployment and high substance use), drug dealing is treated as a clear alternative to regular labour markets (e.g. Padilla, 1992; Hagedorn, 1988; Venkatesh, 2006; Sullivan, 1989; Whitehead et al., 1994) with the drugs trade '[offering] an accessible alternative sphere of enterprise to declining opportunities in traditional male employment' (Hobbs, 2013: 116). Several studies have also shown that drug dealers often use their trade as a supplement to low-paying legitimate 'McJobs' (Fagan and Freeman, 1999; MacCoun and Reuter, 1992; Reuter, et al., 1990; VanNostrand and Tewksbury, 1999).

To be sure, individuals and communities that are separated from decent labour markets are often the ones who are reliant upon the drug economy for their income.⁴⁶ Myers's (1992) analysis of the 1978 and 1970 RAND inmate survey found that *unattractive* legitimate market opportunities (i.e. low paid and menial jobs) were the dominant factors contributing to drug market entry.⁴⁷ In an analysis of crack cocaine markets in two distressed New York neighbourhoods, Fagan (1992) noted that '[f]or

⁴⁶ There are a handful of studies documenting dealing careers among the middle classes (e.g. Mohamed and Fritzvold, 2010; Adler, 1993; Waldorf et al., 1991), but these individuals are rarely forced into the markets though economic necessities.

⁴⁷ However, Myers was unable to attribute his finding to either the 'pull' factors of drug dealing (such as its entrepreneurial nature) or the 'push' factors of unappealing or unavailable jobs.

most residents, the realistic legal choices outside of the drug world appear to be a haphazard set of informal and illicit activities, occasional low-paying formal sector jobs, public transfers, and barter exchange' (p133). The crack-cocaine markets he studied offered a range of roles and opportunities to advance within drug markets, as well as a rate of pay that far-exceeded legitimate alternatives. In comparison the neighbourhoods' formal labour markets could provide only unstable, poorly paid, marginal work. Much of the residents' human and social capital was tailored towards the drug markets yet the skills needed to succeed in the formal labour market as well as access to such work was severely lacking. Similarly, among their sample of dealers VanNostrand and Tewksbury (1999) noted the following: '[c]ommonly reported was an absolute financial need and perceptions of blocked opportunities for substantial, gainful employment [...] These dealers saw drug dealing as the quickest, and often only, method of gaining financial survival and stability [...] After seeking financial independence and security through conventional means, failure and obstacles pushed many to seek alternative illicit opportunities' (p63-64). Similar findings have been reported by Anderson in Philadelphia (2000), Bucerius in Frankfurt (2007), Sandberg in Norway (2008), May et al. in four English communities (2005), to name but a few.

In short, the informal drug economy now provides 'an entry-level job and a fleeting, but alluring, promise of fabulous wealth' (Hagedorn, 2007: 303) for many living in communities isolated from decent job prospects. Yet despite the promise of 'quick and easy' money – the role of a drug dealer is not necessarily a rewarding one. In his description and analysis of various criminal occupations, Dick Hobbs (1995) noted how drug dealing lacked the craftsmanship and skill associated with other more traditional forms of criminality (e.g. safe cracking).

If many individuals have come to see drug dealing as an alternative to legitimate work then it is surely worth assessing dealing under the same criteria as legitimate work, in terms of its economic and non-economic returns. In doing so, we may better understand what prompts some people to enter or leave the markets.

5.2.6 Literature Summary

This literature review, though not exhaustive, highlights the importance of employment with regard to offending and recidivism. Though prison-to-work evaluations have shown that gaining experience and work contacts within the labour markets reduces re-offending only marginally, studies that look at the quality of work have shown far more promising effects of work on desistance. A large body of research suggests that ‘good’ quality jobs do far more to instil feelings of purpose and well-being than less desirable occupations, whilst at the same time providing a sufficient level of income. Poor work, on the other hand, not only offers bare or sub-subsistence-levels of pay, it can increase feelings of depression and boredom. The psychological effects of good and bad quality work affect how bonded workers are to their jobs, and subsequently, to regular ‘mainstream’ society. Individuals who use drug markets as either a primary or supplementary form of work do so because legitimate alternatives are often ‘bad’ quality jobs. The literature would seem to suggest that improving working conditions (e.g. increasing wages) might be one way of reducing individuals’ reliance or usage of crime (e.g. drug markets). However, the literature also indicates that monetary returns are just one element of what constitutes ‘good’ work. Other factors may be even more critical to the overall job satisfaction, and to the utility of understanding the role of work in desistance from crime.

5.3 Economic motivation for market entry and re-entry: Drug markets as an alternative to the legitimate economy

The following section describes the motivations that led my participants to enter, re-enter or sustain their involvement within the illicit drug trade. The data demonstrates how drug markets were used either as an alternative or a supplement to legitimate work in response to inadequacies and perceived financial shortcomings experienced in the legitimate economy. Individuals actively shifted between legal and criminal occupations depending on the overall net returns from either occupation. As with earlier studies, this data supports the idea that individuals who perceived their wages as somehow limited could ‘double up’ on their income using drug sales (Fagan and

Freeman, 1999). This section supports the theoretical propositions of economic and rational choice theories, however, as I shall point out in the second half of this chapter (see section, 5.9) the returns from work were not calculated solely on monetary gains and these choices are made within cultural and structural constraints.

Identified below are three distinct economic motivations that explain The Lads' participation within the drug markets. These three motivations were not necessarily mutually exclusive and they could evolve over time, depending upon structural factors and personal preferences or incentives. Nonetheless, particular motivational elements tended to predominate for particular individuals, at particular points in time.

- a) Drug dealing used to generate a form of *pocket money*. Drug sales provided a surplus income that heightened participants' abilities to engage with the material and experiential consumer culture, and helped fund hedonistic lifestyles. Many of these "pocket money" dealers worked full-time in low-paid occupations and thus supplemented their regular wage with drug sales; however several participants when they were full-time students also used drug dealing for similar purposes either in conjunction with, or instead of, menial part-time work. Pocket money earnings were not used as a means of covering the more basic economic necessities, but rather as a means of providing greater disposable income for personal indulgences. The duration of pocket money careers was partly dependent upon how accustomed individuals had become to this additional income and whether legitimate earnings grew to meet their wants and needs. Pocket money careers lasted an average of 1.7 years (mean), although a handful of careers were protracted over many years.
- b) Drug dealing used as a *financial safety-net* during times of economic hardship and instability. "Financial safety-net" dealers were not prompted to engage with drug markets as a means of boosting their disposable income, but participated in them instead to prop up shortfalls in legitimate earnings during unexpected bouts of underemployment or unemployment. In these cases, profits covered the more basic living expenses from rent and council tax, to utility and food bills. Dealing careers would last as long as was necessary,

until legitimate earnings could once again provide a suitable income; such careers spanned anywhere between three weeks and one year.

- c) Drug dealing used to provide *investment capital* for legitimate ventures. This investment capital proved vital in establishing businesses, as a cash injection for a business already in operation, and as means of funding a participant's relocation abroad in order to exploit their economy's booming labour market. In each of these cases legitimate sources of capital were blocked; hopeful participants had too few legitimate savings of their own to invest and neither their family nor bank could provide a loan. These dealers had strict goals and ceased dealing once certain objectives had been met (e.g. in one instance, amassing £10,000).

I begin by presenting two in-depth case studies. These case studies provide economic and narrative data on two dealers: Bear, a full-time student-turned-graduate who sold cocaine and imported ketamine over three years, and Sol, a cocaine wholesaler-turned-entrepreneur who was active over four years. These two men were chosen to form my primary case studies because their careers developed over several years in response to a broad range of external structural factors and personal decisions, but also because both individuals had granted me access to in-depth financial data over several years. I maintained such data on only two other individuals (Cliff and Blaine).

These case studies demonstrate the shifts in motivations and allow an appreciation of the three economic motivations. Their economic data is presented in graph form and allows us to visualise their variable incomes from both legal and criminal (drug) revenue streams during these years. Legitimate earnings combine money earned from part-time or full-time employment and any business interests, while drug money comprises the net profits from retail, wholesale or importation. The visualisation of earnings over several years demonstrates the volatility of their incomes and enables us to better understand the relationship and/or trading-off between legitimate and criminal earnings.

Both case studies provide us with an understanding of how motivations to offend developed over time. They show an initial hunger for material wealth followed by a progressive determination to prosper in the legitimate economy. For these men, the merits of work stemmed from a complex mix of elements, the ‘returns’ they expected to realise from their investments were far more than simply financial.

5.4 Case Study 1 – Bear

Graph 1. Bear’s quarterly averages earnings

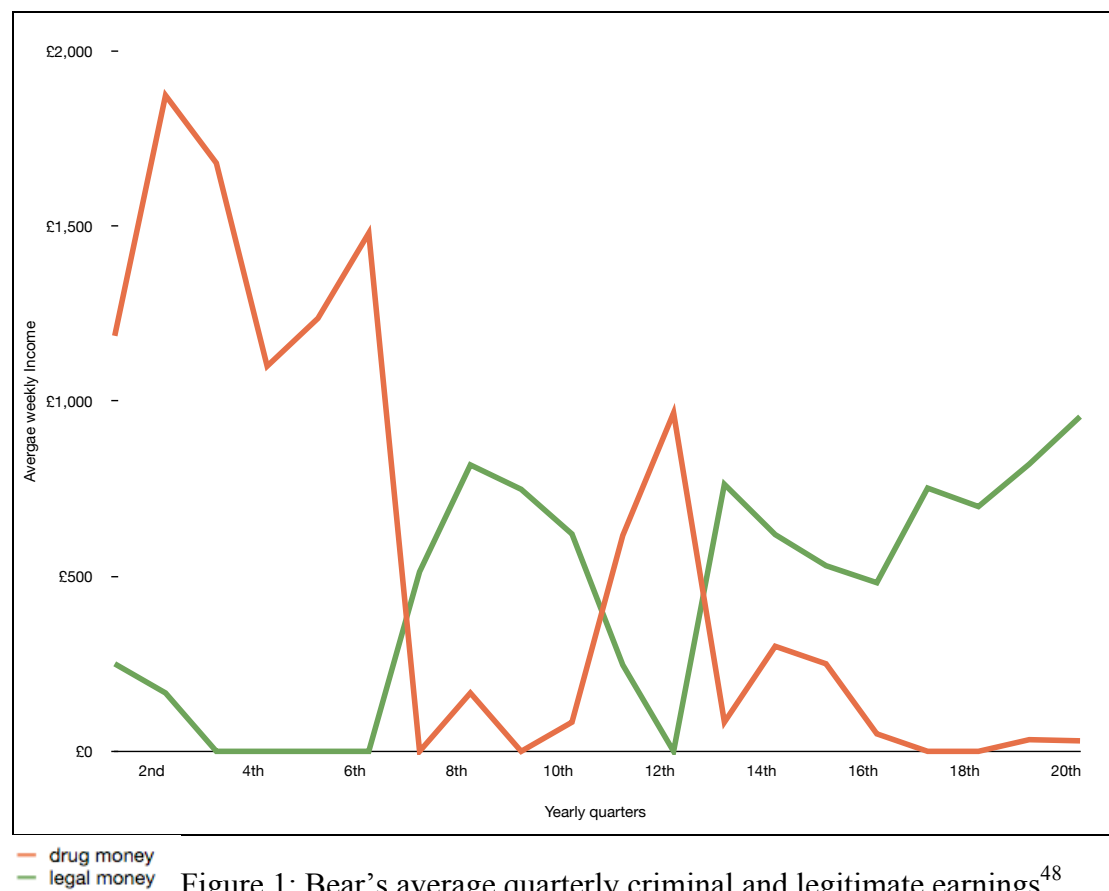


Figure 1: Bear’s average quarterly criminal and legitimate earnings⁴⁸

‘Figure 1’ shows a clear negative relationship between Bear’s legitimate and criminal incomes. It appears as though criminal and legal money (and thus the associated occupation) largely displaced one another, therefore shows evidence of a trade-off between these two sources of income. This also demonstrates Bear’s relative proximity to both the legal and criminal economies, and suggests that both dealing

⁴⁸ I deemed it appropriate to present earnings on an average quarterly basis despite having maintained earnings on a monthly basis in order to subvert any potential identification of the participant because earnings fluctuated so substantially based on periods of employment/unemployment.

and work were interchangeable alternatives. There are four distinct economic periods within his narrative whereby a particular income predominates:

1. Drug money (ending in the 7th quarter)
2. Legal money (ending in the 11th quarter)
3. Drug money (ending in the 13th quarter)
4. Legal money (ending in the 20th quarter)

It is worth noting that during the two periods of high dealing activity, Bear's drug earnings far exceeded even his most profitable months in legitimate employment – evidence of the superior profitability of the drug markets.

5.4.1 Pocket money at university (1st to 5th quarter)

Before becoming active in the drug markets (beginning in the 1st economic quarter) Bear had relied on a string of part-time jobs to help support himself during his college and university years. He had been employed in his latest part-time position for almost a year. His wage – a steady £250 a week – had sufficiently covered his weekly expenses (rent, bills, food, etc.) but had only provided him with a small amount of spending money each week (used primarily to pay for cannabis). Bear was sincerely committed to this work: his employer paid well while the job offered some level of autonomy compared to his previous jobs in retail. Nonetheless, the nature of the work was time consuming (requiring three days a week in addition to study time) and was not particularly engaging. As he progressed into his final year at university the amount of time his job required of him became increasingly impractical. Bear's part-time job was undoubtedly 'survival work' (Hurias et al., 2000): although it paid the bills and gave him a little spending money, it failed to benefit his chosen career in anyway and lacked the stimulation of a 'career job' (Hurias et al., 2000).

Bear had no intention of quitting this job; he simply planned to qualify with his degree and secure graduate-level work within the construction industries. However, in his final year at university he encountered an opportunity to earn several hundred pounds for a few hours' work in the cocaine trade. His close friend Sol, who had been

wholesaling cocaine for several months, offered Bear a permanent ‘grafting’ role⁴⁹ after Bear had successfully ran a few casual errands for payment on Sol’s behalf. With the appeal of earning a ‘quick and easy buck’ (Bear), Bear willingly accepted (1st quarter). Bear was paid £400 for approximately five-hours of work, almost twice the amount he had been earning for twenty-hours work in his part-time job. His legitimate part-time job had an hourly rate of £12.50; in comparison the grafting role had an hourly rate that equated to £80. He was able to increase his overall cash flow considerably by dedicating these few additional hours each week to the work. A week after accepting responsibility for the grafting role, he decided to trial his own retail delivery service. Bear partnered up with a close friend, Cliff, and the two sourced their first cocaine consignment from Sol. For both men this was the start of what was to become protracted and varied careers within the illicit drugs market.

Bear: [Cliff and I] started off, we got a half-ounce between us in the first week and then that went straight away. So we were like, “*sweet!*”. Got an ounce. Then it went up half-ounce increments [over the following weeks] until we were selling two-and-a-half, three ounces between us.

It was a buzzing feeling, every time you make a delivery – boom – straight away you’ve made yourself a minimum of twenty quid profit [each gram], a tenner each. You could bang out a few deliveries in an hour and earn two hundred quid profit [...] I wouldn’t even earn that from two good days work for [his employer].

The market’s profitability was realised immediately and within weeks their delivery service alone was earning them an average of £800 each a week. In addition to this delivery service Bear continued to graft for Sol, whose expanding customer base now required Bear to courier up to a half kilogram of cocaine each week – with an increase in payment for each additional ounce he carried back. Bear was still employed in his part-time job so that the bulk of his ill-gotten gains were treated simply as ‘pocket money’. His consumer spending habits rose sharply to accompany this newfound wealth. As with nearly all of The Lads, Bear’s pocket money was spent frivolously, and very little was set aside. He bought a car, a high-end performance motorbike, designer clothing, and other luxury items.

⁴⁹ As we showed in ‘Black Credit’ (see Chapter 4, section 4.4.2) the grafting role’s main duties were carried out within a four-hour time period on a Friday afternoon. This was ideal for him as a full-time student.

It wasn't long until Bear re-evaluated his part-time job. To continue working three days a week was perceived to be irrational – a clear distraction from other priorities. Drug money was clearly capable of covering any conceivable expense, thus the addition of part-time work did little but divert time away from his study or leisure activities (time spent at the gym or getting stoned on cannabis). Other than having an income he could legitimately account for, there was little reason for his continued legitimate employment. At no point had he needed to justify his high spending lifestyle to anyone: his friends knew what he did and had no qualms about it, and although his mother and sister had suspicions about the legitimacy of his income to fund his purchases, they did not confront the issue directly. At this point neither Bear nor his peers had had any dealings with the police, and he felt such an encounter was unlikely. His motivation to continue working waned and Bear terminated his work contract (3rd financial quarter) against Sol's protestations that he remain legitimately employed to provide a form of legitimate cover. By the end of the 3rd quarter his days were spent in college classes, in the library studying or at home smoking weed. His evenings were far busier, taken up with weight training and cocaine deliveries, as well as any grafting duties for Sol. Despite the clear profitability of his and Cliff's operation, Bear's ambitions still lay in attaining the skilled legitimate work for which he had studied over the past three years (see section 5.10).

Bear submitted his final year's coursework and dissertation in completion of his degree course. He decided to treat himself to one final 'blow out' before he embarked upon his chosen career. Bear, along with friends Miller and Cliff, moved abroad to 'The Med' (4th economic quarter) where they spent a season importing and dealing ketamine to the seasonal British workforce, as well as selling smaller volumes of cocaine and ecstasy. Though net profits were considerably less than what he and Cliff had earned in the UK, the chic lifestyle that accompanied dealing on this Mediterranean resort was unparalleled. With free access to clubs, free drinks in bars, an apartment with sea views and all the drugs they could consume, there could have been no better way to mark the end of his degree studies. Bear and Cliff had immersed themselves in the sub-cultural world of the seasonal British workforce previously over several years and were thus granted many of the perks generally bestowed on current seasonal workers. The privileges and status of being a dealer

were never as evident as during their time on The Med. Once again dealing gave Bear unprecedented spending money that he gladly spent on fuelling his own drug use.

Bear: That whole period [on The Med] was simply a rest... Indulgence. Hedonism mate!

To summarise this period, Bear had entered into the markets out of a desire to better his cash flow whilst studying. Dealing generated Bear unprecedented sums of cash that funded an opulent lifestyle during his final year at university. Despite the allure of its quick and easy profits Bear had seen dealing as a temporary source of income, one that could ease his student/employment workload and support an extravagant lifestyle. His part-time job had merely been ‘survival work’: it failed to stimulate him and did not advance his skill-set within the construction industry and thus had no bearing upon his chosen occupation; there was simply no need to sustain it. Bear eventually quit his part-time job and used his earnings from the drugs trade to fund both necessary and non-necessary expenses. Although his entry into the markets occurred at a critical point of his studies, Bear was still able to achieve an honours degree in a year that would best be categorised as materially lavish and hedonistic.

5.4.2 Drug dealing as a financial safety net (6th – 17th financial quarter)

Despite what appeared to be a promising start within his chosen (legitimate) occupation, Bear was forced into resuming drug sales on a number of occasions following the completion of his degree. Instead of being used as a means of improving his overall income simply for extra ‘pocket money’, drug sales were now an absolute *financial necessity*, used strategically to cover basic living costs during the weeks he was without work or pay. In short, the drug market became a financial safety net that stopped him from defaulting on his regular outgoings during extended periods of underemployment.

Thus, in the 8th quarter Bear used the profits from a single stint of ketamine sales to optimise his overall earnings and pay off the debts he had incurred during the weeks with limited or no pay. The economic boost provided by the sale of a single kilogram of ketamine was enough to redress his financial problems at that time; without it he would have fallen behind on rent or bills and his debt would have grown far larger. As

legitimate work contracts picked up, his ‘legal money’ was once again able to provide him with his required income. This pattern of instability was to continue. Bear’s average weekly legal income dropped from £818 (8th quarter) to £621 (10th quarter) and then to £247 (11th quarter). It was at the latter end of the 10th quarter that Bear became heavily reliant on drug sales to cover his main expenses whilst waiting for further contracts to commence.

Bear: Whenever I was in a [financial] corner, so to speak, or if there was an opportunity and I wasn’t doing anything [working] I’d do the ket thing. Sometimes I’d get a call from Henry saying his pal had a load and needed rid. So if [...] I wasn’t working at that time I’d agree to it. Other times I’d sort out a load from Henry directly; get him to send it over [...] if I was getting dangerously skint. Basically, if I didn’t need to I wouldn’t have bothered [dealing].

So that [period]] I remember I was off [work] for five weeks [...] then I got sent up to [location] for [two months]. Then I was off [work] again. Then I got a big job in Big City [pseudonym] over the winter. [My wage was] just fuckin’ up and down all the time [...] I’d lost a bit of work but [my boss] said, “There’s *another* firm that’s got a job up in Scotland; so do you want it?” [...] I *had* been told there was a Top City job coming so I was like “Oh fuckin’ hell” [Bear shakes his head and exhales loudly – clearly disappointed]. So the Top City job wasn’t happening!

With work contracts becoming even shorter in duration and less predictable Bear decided to suspend his legitimate employment temporarily. He once again travelled to The Med, this time with his girlfriend and Miller, where the three holidayed and sold drugs to the seasonal workers (11th quarter). Bear attempted to use drug sales in order to redress his deficit and build up his savings. In contrast to previous years, this escapade was used solely as a means of accumulating the profits, not partying:

Bear: My plan here wasn’t just to go and have fun like we did [previously]. I mean, yeah, obviously I thought we’d have fun, but my plan was to go there and earn ten-grand to pay off me debts and put some cash in the bank.

He and Miller imported kilograms of ketamine and wholesaled them to dealers among the seasonal British cohort of workers/dealers. Some weeks into their venture, logistical issues hampered their ability to continue sourcing ketamine, and after two months Bear and his companions returned to the UK.

Despite his two-month long ‘holiday’ Bear was able to continue working for his old firm, but once again struggled to cover his most basic expenses due to a lack of work. He continued importing kilos of ketamine from South East Asia and wholesaling it to dealers across the UK. Once again he used these profits to make up for the intermittent shortfalls in legitimate earnings (starting at the end of the 13th quarter and carrying on until the start of the 16th quarter): ‘I needed all the fuckin’ money I could get because my ‘Med’ expedition didn’t work out the way it should have’. After several months his work contracts began to increase and his reliance on drug income decreased. Bear then secured a new job within a different firm with a regular yearly contract: ‘As soon as I got my regular wage with [a different firm] I fucked [dealing] off entirely’.

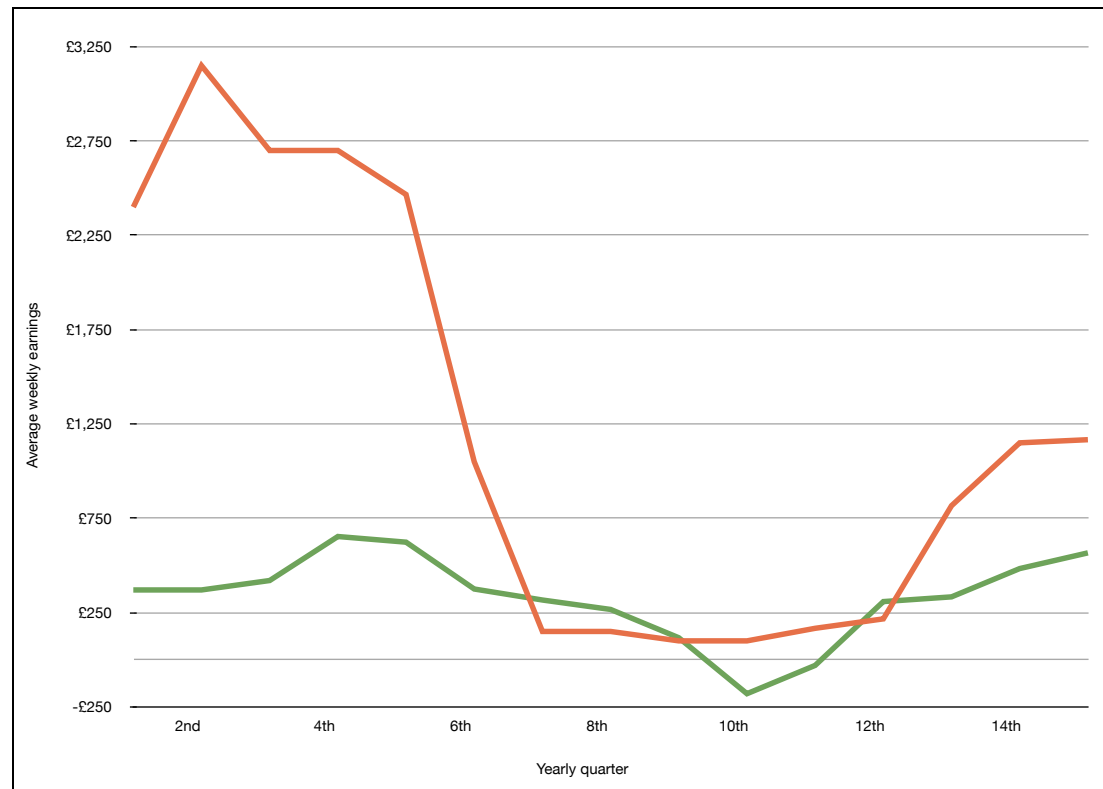
By the 17th financial quarter Bear’s ‘legal money’ averaged £752 a week while he earned no drug sales income whatsoever. By the 20th financial quarter Bear’s weekly legal money was £956. Work conditions had improved greatly and Bear’s new wage (a basic salary with commission) was covering his needs comfortably. Although his drug money continued to show slight profits these represented a few small dealings in which he had ‘sorted out’ a close friend or two with an ounce of ketamine. Although Bear’s legal earnings continued to rise (beyond the timeframe of his graph) he did not discount the possibility that drug sales may once again be relied upon.

Bear: Who knows though, never say never and if *this* job goes tits up I might have to!

In summary, despite supposedly securing a job within his chosen career Bear had faced many weeks with reduced hours and limited pay or without any contracted work whatsoever. Following the 5th financial quarter, *every* drug consignment he sourced and *every* sale he made was a direct result of having failed to earn enough from the legal economy to cover the lifestyle in which he was heavily invested. Drug dealing was used tactically during periods of economic need. Without these sales, Bear would have been unable to manage his regular week-to-week expenditures and would have defaulted on everything from rent and utility bills to car insurance and mobile phone bills. Indeed, without such income to steady his overall earnings, Bear would have fallen into serious debt simply as a means of covering even his food bills.

5.5 Case study 2 – Sol

Graph 2 – Sol's quarterly average earnings⁵⁰



The inverse relationship between Sol's two incomes (criminal and legal money) is far less apparent in Sol's graph than that of Bear's. What is clear, however, is the sheer profitability of his ventures into the underground markets, when compared to his efforts in the legal economy. For instance, in the 4th financial quarter Sol earned an average of £650 a week from a combination of legitimate endeavours, whilst wholesaling cocaine earned him approximately £2,700 each week. The incomes provided by a full-time job, a part-time job and revenues from a small but profitable business, were less than a quarter of that generated by the supply of cocaine. As with Bear's case study, the graph once again demonstrates the instabilities of his legitimate earnings.

⁵⁰ As with Bear's data, I deemed it appropriate to present these earnings on an average quarterly basis despite having maintained earnings on a monthly basis in order to subvert any potential identification of the participant because Sol's earnings fluctuated so substantially based on net revenues/establishing of his various businesses.

5.5.1 The pleasures of pocket money: “‘Money can’t buy you happiness” is fuckin’ bollocks’

Sol’s initial entry into the drug market had been motivated purely out of the desire to improve his lifestyle by increasing his cash flow and disposable income. Following many years of service, Sol was honourably discharged from the army. In addition to having served in Iraq and Afghanistan he had earned himself an array of vocational qualifications during that time. The army had provided Sol with a broad skill set as well as an adequate wage. He lived on base with few outgoings and his income was spent almost entirely on nights out and ‘boozing’. In many ways Sol was well suited to life in the armed forces: he had a solid work ethic and was a skilled delegator. Consequently, he had received rapid promotion. Nonetheless, the prospect of a career and life served in the army did not attract him.

Upon leaving the forces he was able to secure a ‘nine-to-five’ job within a local logistics firm near Tanners Town. Take-home earnings were around £300 a week and he supplemented this by working one evening a week as a bouncer (additional £70 a week). But Sol was not satisfied; these were not the careers he had in mind when he left the army (they were merely forms of ‘survival work’), nor did he earn money that would allow him to live anything more than a subsistence lifestyle. The opportunity to wholesale cocaine presented itself and Sol seized this opportunity with both hands.

Sol: I went back [to Tanners Town] after having money [in the army] to a nine-to-five job and paying rent and all the rest of it, and was left with something like fifty-quid a week to spend. So I thought, “You only get one chance in life and I’m gonna have a good one” [...] I fucking seen the fuckin’ window [of opportunity after a local wholesaler’s exit] to get into it and *smaaashed* it!

Sol’s social network was broad and varied: he was able to source consignments of cocaine from a friend in Top City (Henry) and had enough friends who were willing to source supplies from him. The profits from wholesaling grew rapidly as more and more dealers began using Sol for their supply. As Sol’s profits rose he approached his friend Bear and offered him a ‘grafting’ role (Sol’s 1st financial quarter⁵¹). Yet despite earning so much money (an average of £2,400 a week in the 1st financial

⁵¹ I failed to collect data regarding his trade prior to Bear’s involvement. This was because my interactions and relationship were largely limited up to this point.

quarter) he continued to work in both his full-time job and as a doorman - a testament to his work ethic and evidence of his economic drive. An interview I conducted some years later demonstrates his perception of his wealth at this time; the interview took place toward the latter end of 12th financial quarter, prior to his re-engagement with the trade.

Sol: When I was selling cocaine on a big scale [...] I was making big money! I was driving around in a [sports car], hiring Ferrari's, shouting to everybody that I was a drug dealer [...] I loved the complete package. I loved... fuckin'... everything! I loved having money. I loved having birds [women] after me. I loved having fuckin'... *friends*! Drugs bring you friends, everybody wanted to be your fuckin' friend when you got money.

I do miss the money. The money's good inn'eh. "Money can't buy you happiness" is fuckin' bollocks - money can buy you everything mate [...] You gotta sum up in life whether... dunno... the life I would have led if I hadn't have got into drugs - I wouldn't have this nice house that I own and I probably wouldn't have done half the things that I've done, and my average fuckin' days would have been going to work, getting home from work, having me tea, staying in with me missis watching telly. But now I've done fuckin' loads of different things and had the best of everything, travelled the world, and all sorts of shit.

The profits from wholesaling funded luxury holidays, shopping sprees, nights out, pedigree dogs, quad bikes, superbikes and allowed him to buy an array of sports cars that he had idolised for many years.⁵² His legitimate wages were left largely untouched and were allowed to accumulate, providing him with sufficient capital to secure a deposit for a mortgage. But such frivolous consumption failed to sustain his interest (see section 5.11) and he began looking for other avenues in which he could invest his money and his time.

In summary, Sol entered into the markets as a means to better his lifestyle, which had, up until then been largely restrictive. Much of this money went on disposable luxuries such as his penchant for expensive cars, which had largely been the aim of his entry into drug sales. Despite fulfilling his consumer desires and 'buying' him 'happiness'

⁵² Cars were one of Sol's greatest indulgences; he would change the model of his car within two months (often after a fortnight or two of having just bought one). He made huge losses on each vehicle, but this failed to dissuade him from continuing with these practices.

(in retrospect), Sol's later actions suggest these rewards/returns were somewhat limited.

5.5.2 Drug money as investment capital

During his criminal career Sol's largest expenses came from investments made within the legitimate economy. These investments were funded by the profits he had earned wholesaling cocaine. Unable to fund these endeavours via sources of legitimate capital (such as bank loans), drug money was the only means by which Sol could establish and sustain these business undertakings. His eventual re-entry into the drug markets was motivated purely out of a desperate need for sustained investment capital that proved critical in his pursuit of legitimate success.

In the 3rd financial quarter Sol invested the bulk of his cash savings at that time (all drug profits) into acquiring a small business – 'Business A'. Using his ill-gotten gains in such a manner proved to be unproblematic, despite being unable to legitimately account for this payment of £20,000 (a potential hindrance in the legitimate economy).

Sol: I bought ['Business A'] - that was twenty thousand pound. I bought that with drug money, cash. [...] I bought it off another guy who was more dodgy than me! [...] He just wanted to see pound-notes.

Sol therefore had no need to account legitimately for his initial investment into the business. Business A already had a manager and a small but steady customer base; Sol was simply its new owner. Sol extended its opening hours considerably and over the next six months the revenues grew (peaking at £350 a week) before starting to decline at the end of the 5th financial quarter. The 'blame' for the initial drop in earnings lay with its manager, whose ill health had stopped him from effectively running the business. To make matters worse Sol was forced to relocate his business premises costing him money and a proportion of its customers. He'd hoped that the revenue from this legal enterprise would generate enough profits to continue funding his desired lifestyle without the reliance on drug money. As Sol commented during an interview: 'I was trying to stop [dealing] at that point. I was trying to have a legitimate business to stop'. As rumours abounded of the police's interest in Sol it

appeared as though the drug market was increasingly ‘unsafe’.⁵³ A fellow doorman had advised Sol that the police were aware of his dealings and had even set up a special operation to prosecute him. In addition, several instances occurred in which Sol’s name had been linked to being a dealer. Thus, with thousands of pounds in savings, a full-time job⁵⁴, and in ownership of a business – he left the drug market (6th financial quarter). His exit from the drug market although forced, to an extent by the increasing risk he perceived, was something he had long been planning. Even as his cocaine trade peaked he’d planned to ‘go straight’.

In the 7th financial quarter Sol made his second large-scale investment using most of what remained from his criminal savings. He co-invested in establishing ‘Business B’ alongside his friend and fellow dealer, Cliff.⁵⁵ The bulk of this investment came from Sol whose initial outlay for the business was £15,000, but the premises required development resulting in further. Business B was in an industry sector that had been under threat for years. Similar businesses were closing on a daily basis across the country, but Sol believed with the right management and investment there was still good money to be made from this business. Although some days the business made modest profits, its overall weekly revenues were paltry. With the continued expense of staff and stock the business sustained losses over consecutive months. Sol and his co-investor, Cliff, covered the shortfalls in company revenues using their own savings (and in Sol’s case, his regular wages).

From the 8th financial quarter Business A’s revenues had continued to diminish, and it too was beginning to make weekly losses. To compound his bad fortunes Sol had to be hospitalised for a significant period of time following a serious accident. Several weeks after the incident his employer reduced his sick pay to only a fraction of his usual weekly pay (now just £70 a week) as per contract, and Sol’s personal and business life were effectively in tatters. Yet his hospitalisation proved to be a significant ‘life event’, a time for him to reflect and reassess his ambitions. He fired

⁵³ In one bizarre incident, three young men were queuing up to go into the bar where Sol worked, when they spotted his car parked up. One of the lads told his friends that a ‘big time’ drug dealer owned the vehicle that was parked-up outside (a distinctive model with personalised registration plate); they were not aware Sol was standing in front of them, but they knew his name, his car and his illicit occupation.

⁵⁴ He had however lost his doorman licence following a heavy-handed altercation.

⁵⁵ Cliff had also used the capital he had accumulated via the drug markets to make this investment (see section, 5.6).

Business A's long-standing manager, and replaced him with a hardworking and trusted associate. He endorsed the sale of a banned substance⁵⁶ from Business A's premises; the profits from which were used exclusively to cover its overhead costs (including the payment of his new manager). Next, Sol and his co-investor, Cliff, took the executive decision to shut Business B and to sell off what assets they could from it and to cancel all their standing orders (10th financial quarter). Within months, Sol was back on his feet and in work again.

Sol: There was always profit to be made from [Business A]. I just fucked around, didn't give her the attention it needed [he lets out a short, barely audible laugh]. You think you can just pay some fucker else to run it for ya, and then expect that it'll make more and more money. That's not how its works [...] But I knew then [during hospitalisation] that I was gonna focus on [its management] I had all these ideas for it, loads! [...] [Business B] was a cock-up, but you got to make mistakes in life haven't you, otherwise how else d'you learn? Shouldn't really have gotten into it, but I did, and we gave it our best shot like⁵⁷.

I was 'umming and arring' about what to do, and then just thought "fuck it!", you know? The business [A] was gonna go under, I'd already lost a business [Business B], I nearly lost me fuckin' life! "Fuck it, go for it"! So I got me business-brain on and planned that shit.

It was at this point (the 13th financial quarter) that Sol elected to re-enter the cocaine wholesale market, but this time to a much lesser extent. As expected, his wholesaling once again generated substantial revenues, the profits from which were invested directly and entirely into Business A (no drug profits were kept for personal expenses). Thanks to Sol's weekly investment of £1,000 from his drug sales the business underwent a complete renovation; these additional expenditures totalled in excess of £20,000. The following passage comes immediately after Sol re-entered the drugs markets, prior to the business's overhaul.

Sol: If I do this right, spending a bit now will give me a lot later – if you get what I'm saying. Having [special] offers that will cost me at first [...] will get more and more people coming in [...] Spending on [the premises] will make it look proper respectable and professional and everyone's gonna think it looks the

⁵⁶ Naming the product is too great an identifying feature, thus it will remain unnamed.

⁵⁷ Indeed, in the weeks following the opening of the business Sol implemented a wide range of 'customer grabbing' ideas; all of which may have helped revenues had it not been for the rapid shifts in consumer spending that had helped see the decline of the industry nationwide.

best in Tanners Town by a mile. It's gonna look "the dogs", pal. Having competitions so people will tell their mates about us, I dunno, there's loads of things we're gonna do pal. Then when that's paying for itself, bringing in money, that's when I'm thinking of opening [another] one up in [a nearby town].

As Figure 2 shows, the moment Sol began making these investments net returns from Business A began to grow. It should be noted however, that these huge investments of cash had only a subtle positive affect on the business's profits. He used drug money as a badly needed source of investment capital; he was certainly not 'cleaning' his drug money as other 'professional' or 'organised' criminals may have done. He sustained his presence in the underground economy in order to operate effectively in the mainstream economy, not visa versa. Over the following financial quarters the business developed a strong and loyal customer base; it advertised itself locally, and even supported local charities.⁵⁸ Sol was proud of his business's association with these charities and encouraged many of his customers to help raise funds.

After I completed collecting his economic data (i.e. after the final income plot on his graph) Sol opened his third business. Although originally proposing to establish a business similar to that of Business A in a nearby town (see last quotation), Sol instead branched out into a different business venture. Its start-up capital came entirely from his wholesaling profits, which had been sustained after I ceased collecting his economic data. Shortly after 'Business C's' opening Sol retired from the drug markets – though, as with Bear, Sol did not discount the possibility of once again being active in the markets if necessity dictated. At the time of writing Business A and C were generating Sol a combined salary of between £300 and £700 each week and he had no intention of returning to the illicit markets.

In summary, the fundamental motivation behind his activities in the drug markets had shifted: where once drug profits had been used for little more than unconstrained consumption, now they had a wholly distinct purpose – to help him succeed as a legitimate entrepreneur. Were it not for the comparatively sizable profits generated in these markets Sol would have been unable to have established three separate

⁵⁸ The support of these charities may have been partly altruistic, but I suspect it was at least partly driven by the promotion the business received from various local media outlets.

businesses at a time when many small and medium-sized enterprises were closing across the town (and the UK). Although Business B was an outright failure, his other two businesses became financial successes despite emerging at a time of economic and consumer stagnation. From humble beginnings Sol had established himself as a savvy businessman, with the *savoir-faire* to direct others and to take control of situations in order to meet an objective.

5.6 Network-wide trends?

The two case studies provide us with an in-depth understanding as to what factors could shape decisions to enter or re-enter the drug markets. They demonstrate the linkage between financial structural constraints and the two men's involvement in the underground drug markets. But which of these economic motivations were most salient among the other twenty-one in the network who engaged in drug sales? Which motivations were most common? And indeed, are there any similarities between the two case studies and those in their broader network? In this section I demonstrate how participants' motivations fitted into these economic motivation categories. I also provide insight into the circumstances that preceded decisions to deal or remain active.

5.6.1 Motivation 1: Consumerism, hedonism and a better quality of life

*Aw man, it was all pocket money.
I spent that shit too easy*

Nani, cannabis and cocaine dealer

*It's just a comfortable lifestyle [...]
If I want to spend fifty quid, I'll spend fifty quid
and not have to worry about it*

Blaine, cocaine and cannabis dealer

Both Bear and Sol were initially drawn into the drug markets through a desire to increase their spending capabilities. Strictly speaking, neither man had *needed* to enter the markets – Bear's part-time job adequately covered his student expenses, while Sol's full-time wage covered his bills and left him with a small amount of disposable income each week. Prior to their market entry their lifestyles had been fairly circumscribed with neither man earning much more than a subsistence-level salary.

The allure of earning hundreds or even thousands of pounds each week proved irresistible, particularly as the limited number of working hours needed to operate could be tailored to fit around their legitimate undertakings (i.e. work or studies). Drug dealing provided a form of pocket money that enabled both to lead comparatively opulent lifestyles, filled with hedonistic pursuits and laden with consumer goods. This drive to improve one's lifestyle (both material and experiential) by increasing disposable income was the most common motivational factor that explained entry into the illegal drug economy – 18 (of 23) of The Lads could be, in this sense, classified as 'pocket money' dealers.⁵⁹

During their mid-to-late teens The Lads' lack of occupational experience or qualifications beyond those attained in high school, as well as the limited time they could devote to work (if in full-time education), restricted them to low-skilled menial forms of employment. From the ages of eighteen, many had left education and entered into the labour force (n=13); others progressed to university but continued to work part-time (n=10). Average wages remained low up until their mid-twenties (for both part-time and full-time workers) and were unable to keep pace with the participants' ever-expanding set of aspirations and desires e.g. the ability to participate in more leisure activities with peers or to buy a particular item such as a car or flat.

It was during this period in their lives (particularly their early-twenties) that the majority of participants began exploiting the new opportunities that could facilitate entry into the local drug markets – namely the availability of bulk consignments of drugs on credit and the development of larger social networks i.e. the accumulation of social contacts (see, section 4.5.3). Ten of these eighteen pocket money dealers used their trade as a supplementary source of income, in conjunction with regular full-time work; while nine of them dealt drugs alongside their full-time studies⁶⁰ in addition to, or in replacement of, part-time work (note: one participant features in both

⁵⁹ Bear (aged 21-22), Sol (aged 24-26) Cliff (aged 21-23), Blaine (aged 22), Nani (aged 18-21), Sledge (aged 16-21), Depp (aged 16-18), Gordon (aged 18), Marshall (aged 22), Khalid (aged 22), Big Jim (aged 22), Pig (aged 28-29), Harvey (aged 19-20), Tee (aged 19-21), Rushy (aged 19-22) Turok (aged 21) and Miller (aged 22-27), Harm (aged 20-22).

⁶⁰ Mohamed and Fritzvold (2010) noted similar behaviour among their sample of university campus dealers. Many of their participants used drug profits 'to underwrite [...] the incidental and entertainment expenses typically associated with the college lifestyle [including alcohol, clothes, holidays, strip clubs and gambling]' (2010: 45-6).

categories).⁶¹ Gross annual legitimate wages for ‘pocket money’ dealers working full-time ranged between £11,500 and £17,000 (with no tax contributions or national insurance deduction)⁶², while gross annual part-time wages ranged between £3,500 and £7,500 per annum. These earnings fell well short of the UK average wages: for UK males aged 22-29, the Office for National Statistics (2012) reported gross median wages at just under £22,000 annually, while the gross median wage for males living in their part of the country was reported at approximately £26,000. This signifies that the ‘pocket money’ dealers who worked full-time earned 23%-48% less than the average man in their age category (the lower of these two earning averages).

Despite their low legitimate earnings ‘pocket money’ dealers were not ‘forced’ to engage with the markets in order to provide food or shelter, or other ‘basic living necessities’ (VanNostrand and Tewksbury, 1999: 65) nor were they prompted to enter these markets out of any desire to experience the ‘sneaky thrills [of] being a gangsta’ (Mohamed and Fritzvold, 2010: 53). Market entry was instead driven by a desire to remove the restrictions of subsistence wages and enhance their range of freedoms; as Sennett and Cobb argued: ‘[f]reedom is no longer simply the freedom to eat. Now it is a matter of how much choice a person has, and the development of human resources’ (1972: 74).

Sledge: Thing is, you don’t very far on what I was earning [part-time while in higher education]: £100 a week at most, sometimes £60 – that’s barely enough for the bus fare into town every day and a few ales one night a week. You know me Mike, I wanna be able to do go out and do things with [my girlfriend] *and* me pals, I don’t wanna have just one night in the week where I have to choose between doing things with me mates or doing things with me missis [...] Take [for instance] someone who didn’t do anything [work or drug sales]. Compare that to what I’ve been able to do. I’ve been able to eat out more, party more, do more shopping, go on holidays [...] It’s just entertainment I suppose, a better standard of living. I’ve got a big circle of friends all doing different things and, you know, I wanted to be able to do stuff with them – have fun, enjoy meself [...] Money’s not the be-all and end-all in life, people who say that are chatting shit, I should know! You’re still able to enjoy yourself without having a load of money, but it [money] defiantly changes how you can live your life, but only up to a point.

⁶¹ The 10 full-time workers consisted of Sol (the two main case studies), Cliff, Blaine, Khalid, Marshall, Big Jim, Pig, Harvey, Turok, and Miller; the 9 part-time workers included Bear, Cliff, Nani, Sledge, Rushy, Depp, Gordon, Harm and Tee.

⁶² These figures represent their earnings during the time in which they dealt. These wages tended to increase in the year/s that followed as individuals were promoted or found better employment.

Marshall: The thought I could earn extra money from doing something so simple [as dealing] made sense. And it wasn't as if I was gonna have to join a gang or deal to smack-heads – it was just selling to mates of mine, people I already knew. Same with Sol [my supplier] – he was a mate of mine too. So really it was a bit of extra spending money just from driving and dropping stuff [cocaine] off to mates. That's all it was really, a bit of extra cash, well, a big bit of extra cash. It was great while we were doing it.

Khalid: If I wanted to start a future, a family - £900 a month [the wage received while working in a high street bank] – how could I support a kid, a family, mortgage, bills? I couldn't do it. I want to treat myself, treat my missus. I don't want to be sat at home bored [...] Money makes the world go round. What can you do with out money? Fuck all.

Regardless of their role or product their participation in the drug market increased overall cash flow for those individuals. The combined earnings from drug sales and legitimate work offered The Lads a level of economic freedom to which they had not previously been afforded. A large proportion of this illegitimate income was spent on designer clothes, fast cars, motorbikes, luxury holidays, and drug consumption. Yet many also used their newfound wealth in a variety of other, less-materialistic ways: some used it to attend live music events with friends or partners, or to fund their travels to a variety of culturally diverse destinations, while others used it to fund new hobbies such as skydiving and skiing. Similar to Hobbs' (2013) observations: 'the range of consumption options is clearly more important than the adoption of a clichéd 'criminal lifestyle' (2013: 157).

However scholars may wish to label such motivations for seeking criminal income – be it greed (VanNostrand and Tewksbury, 1999; Desroches, 2005), consumer fetishism (Stratton, 2001), narcissistic extremism (Hall et al., 2008) – the fact is *these individuals engaged with the drug markets simply in response to the limited and unsatisfactory wages they were earning during that period of their lives*. There certainly were perceptive elements of greed among these young men, but as Bear commented: 'There is a fine line between greed and ambition'. These individuals sought the kinds of objects/experiences consumed and flouted by the middle-classes but which had remained off limits to them; as such elements of strain theory are clearly evident in their offending behaviour (see Merton, 1968; Agnew, 1992; Akers,

1998). Drug dealing proved an ideal means of overcoming structural constraints and the revenues it generated helped improve the living standards of those I observed. Dealing enabled these men to experience a range of new hobbies and interests, and permitting the regular indulgence of clothes or gadget shopping. Studies have shown how people's life evaluations tend to increase as one's income increases (Diener et al., 2012; Khaneman and Deaton, 2010), while experiential purchases (e.g. holidaying, eating out, etc.) increase individuals' subjective well-being (Van Boven and Gilovich, 2003; Howell et al. 2012). As such, their rationale for dealing as teenagers and young adults was wholly logical: a better quality of life. As Carter and Gilovich (2010) have pointed out 'there are tangible benefits to experiential purchases, both in the short and long term, that make their pursuit anything but frivolous' (2010: 158). Were it not for the profits earned via the drug markets, these individuals would have been unable to pursue such an array of activities at this point in their lives and thus would have been unable to enjoy the associated life-affirming benefits of such experiences.

The duration of these dealing careers tended to be short-lived (a mean average of 1.7 years): two of these individuals dealt for periods longer than three years, while most 'pocket money' careers lasted less than two years. The increase in disposable income was certainly appreciated by these individuals; however the work itself was rarely compatible with their daily/weekly routines over protracted periods of time. In the following section (see section 5.7) I will document the frustrations and deficiencies of drug dealing among my participants; it was these frustrations that made lengthy 'pocket money careers' untenable (e.g. having to make deliveries during the times that was usually devoted to leisure pursuits or to romantic partners).

After having purchased smart phones, a high-definition TV, new furniture, a laptop, a new car, and a sizable collection of new clothing, many of these young men found themselves unable to justify the continuation of this supplementary criminal income. As with many of Adler's participants, 'the novelty [of dealing] gradually faded' (1983: 201). In addition, the majority of these dealers eventually secured better forms of legitimate work (eg. a new job or a promotion) that negated the requirement to bolster their income and increased the stakes of dealing. After completing their

studies each of the student-dealers (except Rushy, Harm and Nani) had found work in the relevant industries that paid a sufficient salary, five dealers found alternative employment or were promoted within their current place of work, Khalid and Sol opened up small businesses, Turok curtailed his excessive drugs habit and thus no longer needed to deal, while one outlier who remained dealing cannot be readily explained.

5.6.2 Motivation 2: A financial safety net

If I didn't need to I wouldn't have bothered

Bear, speaking about his ketamine wholesale

I only started to sell green [cannabis] again as I had no work

Sledge, having lost his first graduate-level job

In addition to showing how drug sales could be used to fund improved standards of living, the two case studies also demonstrated how drug money could be used to help manage key expenditures during periods of economic instability. In both cases, the practical application of drug profits proved essential to the stability of their financial and personal livelihoods. It was economic necessities that led these men to engage once again with this criminal economy. The drug profits they earned during these economically volatile times were not used to advance material or experiential spending, but rather to ensure 'basic living necessities' (VanNostrand and Tewksbury, 1999: 65).

Nine of the twenty three dealers used the drug markets as a financial safety net (i.e. stabilising their income) during periods of economic instability or hardship.⁶³ In all but one case (Thomas⁶⁴), market entry had been a response to a change in legitimate employment conditions. Indeed, many of these changes resulted from the recession of 2008, the effects of which were being experienced across the UK and overseas. Bear's

⁶³ Bear (aged 23-26), Sol (aged 28) Blaine (aged 23-25), Cliff (aged 24-25), Abu (aged 22-24), Chico (aged 32), Thomas (aged 27), Sledge (aged 23 and 26) and Scrutt (aged 26).

⁶⁴ Thomas had incurred debts whilst financially supporting close relatives. He grafted for Sol and used his payments to repay the debts. Thomas relinquished the role once the debt was cleared.

first graduate employer was listed on the FTSE-250 share index, a leading firm in the UK with a long and illustrious history, yet the economic slump had severe negative effects upon the construction industries that in turn affected his employer. Many large-scale private and public contracts were cancelled following budget reassessments and financial projections. This resulted in the sporadic, short-term contracts Bear experienced. Similarly, Sledge had secured a graduate work placement within a large industrial manufacturing firm soon after finishing university. As the 2008 recession took hold the firm experienced a reduction in orders and the firm's manufacturing output declined. The company was forced to make significant cuts in staff numbers and using a 'last one in, first one out' policy Sledge soon found himself being made redundant. Blaine had twice used the markets following the loss of work: the first came after the closure of his father's small business where he'd worked for several years, the second when his skilled-employment suddenly ended following the suspension of production at his employer's primary manufacturing plant. Others entered into the market following a loss of earnings that were unrelated to the recession: Sol's extended absence from regular work (and the associated reduction in earnings) following his hospitalisation meant he was unable to cover his regular living expenses, let alone bolster Business A. Chico (a business consultant) cultivated cannabis following an extended period of unemployment. Scrutt used a single instance of cannabis sales to provide temporary economic relief after leaving the armed forces, but almost immediately secured prestigious employment. Cliff used cocaine sales to first stabilise his income while he managed Business B (that failed to turn a profit), and afterwards while he worked as a taxi driver (a highly unstable occupation). Abu had used cannabis sales some months after starting work for his uncle, after his earnings dropped to an unliveable standard.⁶⁵

Abu: It took the piss you know. I was like "you got to give me *something*", but that's how it is when you're working for family between paki's – honest, they're all at it – you get what they give you. So I just thought "right, if you're not gonna pay I'm just gonna go do my own thing on the side". It took the piss. Fair enough they gave me a job, a room [in their house to stay in], food, but what about fuel, or insurance – I got to have me car just to go back and see my mum and dad and sister – what about me phone bill, or money to do things

⁶⁵ Part of Abu's 'payment' was the accommodation provided by his uncle at this time. Abu was not from Tanners Town and so his uncle provided Abu with a room and food in exchange for Abu's services in the business.

with me mates. I could't pay for shit. That's why dealing was such a good... it just meant I could cover the basics.

Chico: Honestly, I had no other option available to me other than to start growing [cannabis]. I'd set a fair amount of money aside from the job [at his previous employer] and was using that to cover all my expenses [...] Rather foolishly I thought I'd get another contract straight after [the previous one]. I'd sent my CV out to [numerous employers] and I was getting telephone interviews and making it to the next stages but unfortunately I wasn't successful in any of them [...] [After] twelve months of struggling to find work, I had the water and electricity companies chasing me up [for non-payment] so I was desperate to get some kind of cash flow coming in. I was getting letter threatening to cut me off [...] The first crop [of cannabis] produced a much lower yield than we'd anticipated, but at least it helped keep the bastards [the water/electricity suppliers] off my back for a few more months.

Six of The Lads had previously been active in the markets prior to their re-engagement, while for three of these young men this was their first time dealing.

Similar motivations stemming from deficient legitimate work opportunities and financial need has been documented extensively within the criminological literatures (e.g. VanNostrand and Tewksbury, 1999; Hagedorn, 1994; Anderson, 2000; Williams, 1990; Venkatesh, 2006; Hoffer, 2006; Fagan, 1992; Myers, 1992; Bourgois, 1995; Padilla, 1992; Sandberg, 2008, May et al., 2005 – to name but a few). Yet unlike such studies, my participants had not derived from disenfranchised, alienated or distressed neighbourhoods. They were not poorly educated⁶⁶, nor were they raised in economically deprived households. Indeed, each of these men held various occupational skills that made them employable in a range of occupations; they had solid work ethics, work histories and were not disadvantaged by having any serious criminal convictions⁶⁷. These 'safety net' dealers had been employed in jobs that provided a comfortable standard of living that allowed for material and experiential purchases. And yet, they too faced periods of economic hardship or a loss of work. For some, this was a result of the deteriorating labour markets that followed the recession. For others, this was simply the result of bad fortune.

⁶⁶Fairlie's (2002) analysis of The Longitudinal Survey of Youth is particularly noteworthy, as it reports that drug dealers were more likely to be high school dropouts and not enrolled in further education or university than non-drug dealers.

⁶⁷ Their records contained merely minor criminal convictions or cautions for which they had been apprehended as adolescents. Crucially, none of these men had been imprisoned for any such offence – a trait that has been proven to have long-term negative effects on future employment.

These men used the drug economy to optimise their finances during unstable periods of employment. Dealing enabled them to sustain their lifestyles without incurring unwanted levels of debt. As with VanNostrand and Tewksbury participants: ‘After seeking financial independence and security through conventional means, failure and obstacles pushed many to seek alternative illicit opportunities’ (1999: 64). The drug markets provided many of my participants with a temporary source of alternative income when the conventional economy was unable to provide for them.

5.6.3 Motivation 3: Investment Capital

I never had no legit savings

Abu, cannabis dealer and small business entrepreneur

*I suppose I could've saved the money [legitimately],
but it would've taken years*

Cliff, cocaine dealer and graduate engineer

Sol's case study showed how continued participation in the drugs economy could be motivated by the seemingly paradoxical desire to fund legitimate pursuits. Although Sol's narrative is a complex one, it demonstrates the versatility of drug money, in particular its instrumental application to underwrite legitimate enterprises. Crucially, the three businesses he established using drug profits were not founded as a means of laundering his illegal income or aiding the logistical movement/storage of drugs; rather, they constituted part of an entrepreneurial portfolio that Sol hoped would generate sufficient profits to meet his materialist and experiential spending objectives. As Business A and C began generating modest net profits, the perceived need to continue dealing ceased and Sol relinquished his highly lucrative role as a cocaine wholesaler.

Sol was not the only individual to use the drug markets as a means of bankrolling legitimate undertakings; three other dealers used drug profits for similar purposes. Rushy (a wholesaler dealer and broker), Abu (a cannabis retailer) and Cliff invested substantial amounts of drug money into businesses. In addition, Cliff (a cocaine

retailer) amassed sufficient savings to fund his relocation abroad in order to exploit the country's booming labour market. 'Investment capital' was the least common form of economic motivation displayed in these markets. Nonetheless it demonstrates how drug dealing could be used to overcome financial liquidity constraints. All four men were blocked from regular sources of investment capital. Their subsistence-level wages meant the necessary capital could not have been accumulated via personal savings, nor could the capital have been secured through family or friends (a common source for many first-time entrepreneurs, see Blanchflower and Oswald, 1998) or bank loans (due to inadequate credit scores). Their social proximity and willingness to engage with the local drug markets allowed them to surmount these obstacles.

What makes this form of economic motivation distinct from the two motivations outlined above was that the desire for investment capital was not the catalyst for market entry for any of the participants. The four individuals were *already active* when they made the decision to accumulate the bulk of their illicit capital for legitimate investment. They each opted to sustain dealing activities until a specific target had been reached, whereupon they planned to terminate their criminal careers. These targets included monetary figures (e.g. £20,000) or business goals (e.g. a business able to cover its overheads whilst providing weekly net-returns). Their investments met with largely positive outcomes. Cliff stopped dealing after effectively using his £20,000 capital to fund his move abroad. These illicit savings covered his expenses while he sought and applied for graduate-level employment in the engineering industries. After several months he secured a four-year contract with an equivalent yearly salary of £70,000. Abu amassed £7,000, ceased dealing cannabis, and invested these savings in their entirety into a small ailing business owned by his father (buying new machinery and so forth).⁶⁸ He assumed responsibility of this small business: devoting his time to its running and developing strategies for its growth. Over the following year, Abu's investment of time, skills and money turned around the business fortunes. At the time of writing the company paid him, his mother and father a modest wage as well as the wages of nine other staff members. Rushy failed to realise his entrepreneurial goals: his first business investment, in which he was a silent investor, was plagued by organisational

⁶⁸ His father also ran a small shop that provided the bulk of their household income. The business Abu invested his savings in had been a side-venture of his father's that had as yet failed to return any net-profits.

discrepancies, in-house underhanded behaviour, and eventually a legal dispute; his other two investments had failed to provide returns by the time of writing. Consequently, Rushy had shown no evidence of abandoning his role as a mid-level dealer.

Drug dealers owning or investing in legitimate businesses is not uncommon; there are numerous examples of criminal-entrepreneurs operating small and medium sized enterprises within criminological literature. Indeed, these companies (e.g. import and/or export companies, bars, money exchange, etc.) often serve as a means of entry into the drug market (e.g. Desroches, 2005; Decker and Chapman, 2008). Studies depict these businesses either as legitimate fronts (e.g. a means of laundering money or a premises from which to retail) or as logistical aides to drug trafficking operations (e.g. storing/importing drug consignments); they have been documented within street-level operations (Bourgois, 1995; Hales and Hobbs, 2010) as well as the mid-to-upper-levels (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001; Hobbs, 2012; Adler and Adler, 1983; Desroches, 2005; Decker and Chapman, 2008). Yet there is little evidence to suggest dealers' actively engage in the drug markets *exclusively* to fund legitimate pursuits. Indeed, decisions to use drug profits solely to fund legitimate endeavours seems largely absent within the literature. Fairlie analysed the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and found that drug dealing had a large, positive and significant effect on the future likelihood of becoming self-employed but his 'results suggest that the large positive coefficient on drug dealing is not due to drug dealers accumulating assets to start businesses' (2002: 561). Adler noted how retiring dealers would at times turn their occupational attentions to their 'front companies', but often to nil effect: 'those who turned to their legitimate front business often found that these businesses were unable to support them. Designed to launder rather than earn money' (1983: 203). Consequently, my sample (though small) provides us with new understanding regarding motivational drive of certain of those engaging in the drugs trade.

In summary, four of my participants used the bulk of their drug profits strategically to invest in legitimate pursuits. Legitimate means of investment were blocked to these men, thus their decision to remain dealing was motivated solely by an enigmatic desire to fund and to succeed in various legitimate endeavours. Those who met their

targets (n=3) exited the markets, despite legitimate earnings rarely matching their former dealing revenues.

5.6.4 Summary

The Lads were embedded within sprawling social networks where recreational drug use was largely ‘normalized’ (see Aldridge et al., 2011). Consequently, these individuals were privy to an ever-accessible underground economy. Individuals could drift in and out of dealing as financial needs or desires dictated – and many of these young men displayed the ‘oscillation’ between the criminal and legal economics apparent in Adler’s study of higher-level drug traffickers (Adler and Adler, 1983). In this section I have identified three economic motivations that explain why individuals engaged in drug sales. All but one of The Lads fell into one or more of these motivational categories.⁶⁹ Broadly speaking, the participants in this study dealt drugs because either legitimate incomes were non-existent (i.e. during periods of unemployment) or insufficient (i.e. workers wanted greater disposable income, they faced a reduction in hours and salary, or they required greater capital for investment). These motivations provide support for rational choice, strain and economic theories of crime, which stipulate that economically motivated crimes are a calculated response to perceived shortcomings in the legitimate economy. Crucially, this demonstrates that both unemployment (see Raphael and Winter-Ebmer, 2001) and low-wages (see Machin and Meghir, 2004; Gould et al., 2002) had clear bearings on their decisions to offend.

The most common explanation as to why individuals *first* became active in the drug markets resulted from the experience of low-wages and a desire to improve their standard of living by generating a form of pocket money (n=18); only a minority of participants first entered out of economic necessity (n=3), while none of my participants had first entered as a means of providing investment capital. After individuals had experienced the drugs trade and realised the profitability and ease of entry of the markets, several had returned during times of economic need. For others

⁶⁹ Henry is the outlier in this analysis. Dealing profits were his sole income source while he resided both in the UK and in South East Asia, but this was not used as a financial safety net (he was not out of work due to instabilities of the market but through choice). Nor was he motivated out of a desire to improve his lifestyle. For Henry, dealing appeared to be *his* occupation.

the purpose of dealing shifted from funding materialist endeavours to providing capital investment in legitimate pursuits.

In this section, I have provided evidence of the interchangeability between criminal and legal incomes based on subjective calculations of costs and returns. Because the legitimate economy was often unable to satisfy the financial needs of these men, the drug markets were treated as simply another source of work – one that could generate comparatively large returns for modest levels of effort. Why then was drug dealing used only as a supplementary or reserve form of income? Given the drug market's profitability why weren't dealing careers prioritised over legal forms of employment, or at the very least, maintained in conjunction with regular work? In the next section I outline many of the attributes of drug dealing that made it an undesirable career within this context; this will partly aid our understanding of the temporality of drug market participation among my sample.

5.7 Drug dealing *as* work

*Because most people spend so much of their adult lives working,
it becomes imperative for psychological wealth
to enjoy our work and be enriched by it.*

Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2008: 87

Many of the studies identified in the literature review showed that it was not simply the presence or absence of work that influenced rates of offending and desistance, but rather the *quality of work* that helped to affect/predict future behaviour. Good quality work, many argued, increased the likelihood that individuals would lessen or end their levels of offending; poor quality work was generally believed to have little impact upon offending trajectories.⁷⁰ A clear argument emerged: if we are to understand the relationship between work and crime, researchers need to take into account the various attributes of 'good' and 'bad' work that act to push or pull individuals towards or away from crime. In light of such evidence it seems wise to understand

⁷⁰ Horney et al.'s study (1995) was the one exception. Their results showed that even marginal employment positively affected those aged 27 and older. This finding offered evidence that quality of work was age-graded.

how criminal occupations fare in comparison. If drug dealing is indeed treated as just another form of work by certain groups in society, if drug markets provide an alternate source of labour (e.g. Sullivan, 1989; Taylor, 1990; Padilla, 1992) and if drug gangs are often seen as an ‘employment agency for youth’ (Hagedorn, 2007: 23) then it is surely worth assessing drug roles in their various contexts by the same standards to which we hold legitimate work. Knowing what material/non-material rewards are achieved through such illicit work, as well as its associated shortcomings, will help us to better understand the motivations and assessments made by those who engage, persist or desist from these criminal economies.

I have assembled a framework of the elements identified within the employment, criminological and psychological literatures (see section 5.2.3) as a means of constructing a list of quality-assessment conditions (the PASSSCI criteria). By systematically applying these conditions to income-generating behaviour (economic crime or work) it is possible to assess the overall job quality ‘returns’ garnered from such activity, and thus distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ forms of work based on the number of attributes that are successfully met. These conditions include:

- **Pay** – was the pay satisfactory to the needs/desires of the individual? (e.g. Wadsworth, 2006).
- **Autonomy** – did the worker employ job-specific skills with some independence? (e.g. Wadsworth, 2006; Ryff, 1989; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Diener et al., 2010)
- **Status** – did the job itself elicit respect from face-to-face groups e.g. peers, partners, customers, and family? (e.g. Staff and Uggen, 2003; Anderson, et al., 2012; Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2008).
- **Satisfaction** – did the job provide a sense of purpose or gratification? (e.g. Huias, et al., 2000, Wadsworth, 2006; Drobnič, et al., 2010; Ryff, 1989).
- **Security** – how stable and predictable was the work? (e.g. Sampson and Laub 1990, 1993; Wadsworth, 2006).
- **Career-commitment** – how did the job fit into the worker’s long-term occupational goals? (e.g. Huias et al., 2000; Sampson and Laub (1990, 1993).

- **Irritations** – did the work elicit any signification strain for the worker? (Simons et al., 2002).

How would drug dealing fare when assessed under such criteria? Below I assess the fundamental elements of work in relation to drug dealing in this non-gang affiliated, ‘freelance’, and closed drug market.

5.7.1 Pay

The income generated by drug dealing was more than satisfactory to this group of dealers (see Wadsworth, 2006). The more prolific dealers were those for whom the market provided their primary source of income, or who were amassing large sums of capital for investment. For these individuals the drug markets exceeded nearly every legitimate alternative they could hope to achieve by some considerable margin. For instance, Sol’s most successful legitimate financial quarter netted him an average of £650 per week (the sum of his regular wage, his doorman wage and Business A), while over the same period his net revenue from cocaine wholesaling was £2,700 per week – four times more profitable than his most successful weeks in the regular economy. Similarly, the profits from Blaine’s cannabis trade (during a one-year employment lull) netted him an average of £900 each week, three-times greater than his most profitable job. Bear’s involvement in the drug markets (whilst studying full-time) had generated average weekly profits of £1,500 per week (over six consecutive quarters), while weekly earnings from his most profitable legitimate financial quarter was £900. The pattern by which prolific dealer earnings greatly exceeded legitimate alternatives was apparent for other prolific dealers. These individuals sold far larger quantities of stock than individuals for whom the drug market simply provided a supplementary income to their regular job. Yet even for dealers whose careers were far more constrained and who dealt to supplement legal wages (the ‘pocket money dealers’), dealing *still* provided earnings that competed well against their legitimate wages, at times considerably out-competing such salaries. For instance, Pig’s average weekly earnings from taxi driving for approximately 40 hours (variable) was around £300, but supplementary cannabis sales requiring about 10 hours each week netted him £250-£300. Khalid’s monthly wage while employed in high street retail full time was £900 per month (net earnings), while his cocaine delivery service, requiring about 8 hours each week, netted him profits of £450-£600 *per week*. Similarly,

Marshall earned £1,100 per month (net earnings) from his full time job as a financial advisor, but earned between £1,000-£1,200 *per week* as a cocaine dealer and cocaine grafter requiring 12 hours (combined) each week. Tee's job in a local college paid £1,100 a month (net earnings) while his involvement in the cannabis trade earned him approximately £300 *per week*, requiring approximately 8-10 hours work.

Generally, my data showed that cocaine dealers tended to earn more from their trade than from their regular employment, while cannabis dealers earned sums roughly equivalent to their legitimate wages. As the previous section made clear, financial gain was the sole motivation behind The Lads' entry into the drugs trade. Some used it to cover shortfalls in legitimate earnings, while for others it provided investment capital for use in the legitimate economy; many simply used it as a source of pocket money. Dealers did not worry about day-to-day financial concerns which could be covered comfortably, allowing what money remained (in addition to any legitimate earnings) to be spent indulging in material and experiential spending. Yet there was a critical weakness with illicit earnings: The Lads were unable to transfer several thousand pounds directly into their bank accounts in the hope of using it as a mortgage deposit; nor could they have bought brand new cars or obtained any sort of finance that relied on proof of legitimate earnings. For such purchases, legal earnings and proof of these earnings was needed.

In summary, the earnings from the drug economy were undoubtedly high and often out-competed earnings from the legitimate economy. Regardless of the market's profitability dealing could not have provided a suitable liveable income over the course of their lives without a means of laundering the money; yet none of the lads had succeeded or even attempted to clean their illicit earnings via such methods.

5.7.2 Autonomy

Autonomy has been identified as one of the few basic universal psychological needs among humans (Ryff, 1989; Ryan and Deci, 2000), one that can have a direct bearing on a person's sense of well-being (Diener et al., 2010). Esser and Olsen saw job autonomy as a key feature of job quality stating that 'job autonomy reflects the degree of control and influence employees have over their jobs' (2012: 443). One of the ways they evaluated autonomy was by looking at the level of 'firm-specific skills' – i.e. the

amount of industry-specific training was required and the time taken to be able to do the job well.

Drug dealing gave individuals some level of autonomy: they could choose at what time and for how long they worked, what drug to sell, how much to charge per unit (or per units), what weight to measure each unit, and they could judge for themselves how creditworthy customers were and whether to extend the person a line of black credit (see section 4.8). But was their trade really that autonomous? Dealers operated at times most appropriate to their customers, they answered their phones, replied to messages and made deliveries as promptly as possible so as not to disgruntle customers: dealer activities were thus largely dictated by others. The less responsive to customers a dealer was (for instance, making deliveries at times unsuitable for their customers, but preferable to themselves) the greater the likelihood of losing customers. Similarly, if a dealer charged too much for a saleable drug unit or underweighed these units (compared to their competitors), they ran the risk of customers sourcing their supply elsewhere.

Using Esser and Olsen's concept of industry-specific skill training, I would argue the level of skill or training required to deal drugs was negligible. The tasks associated with the drug trade were straightforward: the individual sourced a product, processed it, delivered it, chased up payments, and repaid their supplier. There were few barriers to market entry aside from having a willing supplier, a source of custom and 'a willingness to break the law' (Hobbs, 2013: 157). The skills best suited to their trade included an ability to drive as a means of making the deliveries (though even this skill was not absolutely necessary as others could, for payment, make deliveries on their behalf), an ability to lessen one's own consumption, an ability to judge someone's creditworthiness (though often this judgment was based on an intermediary's assurance), and the ability to implement basic risk-mitigation strategies.

Consequently, very few firm-specific skills had to be developed and individuals soon 'learnt the ropes' needed to become a dealer. For example, before partnering-up with Marshall in the cocaine trade Khalid had accompanied Bear and Cliff over the course

of a few evenings.⁷¹ His brief insider's view into the industry simply demonstrated just how straightforward the dealer role was. Khalid did not learn any new skills; if anything, the time spent with these two dealers simply provided Khalid with useful neutralization techniques.

For the majority of The Lads no such 'on-the-job training' was even needed: paranoia ensured a level of risk-mitigation (see Chapter 3), common sense often dictated how best to operate, and simply associating with peers who were active in the markets was enough for further skills (such as more 'advanced' risk mitigation techniques) to be transferred. As Hobbs noted: '[the] drug culture has penetrated British society so thoroughly that few barriers exist to acquiring strategic knowledge, rendering a criminal apprenticeship or reputation for stoicism in the face of law enforcement, if not irrelevant, then certainly not essential' (2013: 158-9).

There appeared to be a similar lack of industry-specific skills required among the network's wholesalers whose attributes came largely from large social networks in which they could trade. Indeed, others have documented the importance of contacts over any specific skills among mid-to-high-level traffickers (e.g. Decker and Chapman's assessment of a smuggling transportation manager (2008: 105).⁷² Deroches noted how drug market 'recruiters' at the higher-levels of trade simply provided new recruits with 'detailed information on safe methods for dealing drugs [and also constructed] rationalizations for the crime, and give reassurances that the risks are low' (2005: 54) – hardly the sorts of transferable skills one would have to spend months developing.

In summary, dealers did indeed have *some* 'control and influence' over how they operated, but this was largely dictated by the requirements (or even demands) of the customer. In addition, roles within the drug trade lacked any significant level of skill development by the individual, with minimal or no industry training needed to operate effectively. In short, dealers had some autonomy within the role, but not to the degree

⁷¹ Marshall and Khalid were to manage Bear and Cliff's customer base while the two dealers relocated to The Med for the seasons, in addition to dealing to their network of users.

⁷² Certain roles do require a high level skill-specificity in order to smuggle large consignments cross-border, such as being a qualified airplane pilot or boat captain.

that would have made it a ‘good’ quality job in terms of the inherent autonomy within the role.

5.7.3 Status

Job status is a non-monetary reward that makes individuals feel competent and proud about their work and raises worker’s self esteem (Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2008); it stems from the attitudes and behaviours of co-workers, peers, family members and, in this context, customers (see for instance, Anderson et al.’s (2012) work on sociometric status among face-to-face groups). Here I will discuss participants’ work status separately in relation to their peers, their family, their partners and their customers.

Peers: The majority of The Lads had been engaged in the drugs market at some point during 2007 and 2012. Indeed, peers outside of the research cohort appeared to be equally as likely to have dabbled in the drugs trade at some point during their late-teens or early twenties (though my knowledge of their affiliates was far more restricted). As such, there was little exclusivity among this cohort to the roles of retail dealing and thus negligible kudos associated with it, ‘Any idiot can do it; (Khalid), ‘A monkey could do it’ (Bear). Dealers (as with non-dealers) could be praised by their peers for their conspicuous consumption and ‘ornamentation’ (Faludi, 1999; Winlow and Hall, 2008), but gained no acclaim for having merely engaged in the role of a dealer.

Bear: Drug dealing’s just easy money, you don’t have to work hard for it.

Groggy: Think about Miller. He came back from The Med [during his third venture there] with thirty-grand.⁷³ Yeah, fair-enough he’s made some decent money, but so what. He’d blown it all in six-months and was having to work some shitty job.

Those who refrained from dealing practices were not deferential to those who dealt; they were certainly not held in any lesser regard because of their legitimate lifestyle. Indeed, it appeared as though some of the friendships that formed as a result of holding a more ‘exclusive’ role (such as Sol or Rushy wholesale roles) were

⁷³ The sum Miller brought back was actually £20,000.

somewhat distrusted and thus lacked the quality of true camaraderie.⁷⁴ What status was bestowed upon such individuals could even be viewed as artificial: ‘You get people clinging to ya because you’ve got things: you’ve got money and you’ve got drugs [...] Everybody wanted to be your fuckin’ friend when you got money. Like *Ricky*, one of my mates, ‘boom!’, up my arse when I had a nice car, drugs money, blah-blah-blah. Now fuckin’ things aren’t like that I don’t see the lad. Loads of people like that’ (Sol). In summary therefore, at least amongst The Lads and their immediate affiliates, roles in the drug market appeared to attract limited status.

Family: Dealing was not the kind of work The Lads would boast about to their parents, siblings or extended family network e.g. cousins, uncles, aunts, etc. fifteen Lads had kept their involvement in the drugs trade a secret from their parents, while of those with siblings eleven participants kept their trades hidden. In all, the parents of seven of The Lads became aware of their trade (either at the dealers wishes or by accident)⁷⁵, while only four siblings knew of their brother’s trade. Those who attempted to shield the trade from parents and other family members did so because they felt the knowledge of their involvement would seriously undermine their relationship; as Nani commented ‘They [parents] just think it’s all gangsters and rude boys peddling *hard* drugs to druggies’. Parents that had inadvertently become aware of their son’s involvement expressed disappointment and at times, even despair (particularly if the son sold cocaine or heroin, in comparison to the more socially acceptable cannabis). Parents who had become aware of their son’s activities would either have to legitimatise such behaviour by acknowledging the temporality of the work as well as its financial necessity⁷⁶, or present a form of ultimatum.⁷⁷ Parents could accept their son’s trade, yet such behaviour was rarely supported and certainly not something of which they were ever proud. To my knowledge, only one of the siblings – Marshall’s younger brother – was impressed with his brother’s status as a

⁷⁴ In another example, Sol had pulled-up outside one of his businesses, with me in the passenger’s seat. A small group of lads came up to the window and engaged him in bravado-laden ‘small talk’. As we drove off Sol talked about how certain people were ‘out to kiss my arse’ and how ‘I’d sooner people didn’t put on this sort of front’.

⁷⁵ There was one participant from whom I was unable to collect this data.

⁷⁶ Similar observations were made in Bucerius’ ethnography of Frankfurt dealers, in which young male migrants attempted to make their parents see dealing as ‘an acceptable form of meeting their financial needs’ (2007: 685).

⁷⁷ For example, one Lad was told by his mother he would either have to cease dealing cocaine or move out – her son chose to move out, while another mother told her son he would have to end his cannabis sales once he had secured full-time employment - which he did.

cocaine dealer, commenting to Marshall how ‘I can’t wait until I’m old enough to do what all you guys do’. For the other siblings, their brothers were seen as simply sorting out friends or acting recklessly and were therefore not held in any higher regard because of their association to the trade. The fact that so many of The Lads had kept their involvement hidden from family members through fear of it damaging their relationship suggests that dealing would not only fail to garner respect but would in fact be to their detriment. In addition, those family members who became aware did not disclose feelings of pride or respect at their son’s/brother’s role.

Partners: None of The Lads attempted to keep their trade hidden from their girlfriends; to do so would have been almost impossible due to the time and effort required for drug distribution during evening hours. Drug dealing did little to earn the respect or pride of those individuals closest to them, but instead caused friction within their personal relationships. Most girlfriends with whom I had contact felt ill at ease with their partner’s activities due to the illegal nature of the market and the perceived risks of legal reprimand. For instance, after becoming pregnant Blaine’s partner gave him the ultimatum that he would either cease his activities or accept that she would inform the police of his cannabis cultivation; they separated sooner after partly due to arguments that stemmed from this disagreement and threat (though she did not inform the police). Similarly, Chico’s partner understood his economic need to grow cannabis in their flat, yet the risks associated with it caused great strain within their relationship. Others felt uneasy with the persona adopted by their partner when actively behaving like a ‘drug dealer’. One of The Lad’s partners had disliked the persona adopted when dealing.

Bear’s Partner: Slipped into this fake dealer role on The Med. He was being all cocksure and cocky, calling women “babe”, even though he would never talk to women like that when we were in the UK. I didn’t like it, it wasn’t him. It was all a front. He was acting like a big time drug dealer [...] Same when I first saw him threatening someone who kept fucking him off [failing to pay], it was a side to him I’d hadn’t seen up till that point.

Others resented the time their boyfriend devoted to the trade, particularly during the weekends when the volume of orders often meant it was impossible to spend time together. Several months into their relationship Tee’s partner began making

insinuations that he stop dealing in order that they could spend greater time together at weekends (the only time they saw each other). However, not all partners were so uncomfortable with their boyfriends' trade. At least one of The Lad's girlfriends was, according to several of his close peers, attracted to him largely because he was a dealer and she was a heavy drug user. Another of The Lad's partners (a former customer of his) had found the attitude and confidence he displayed as a dealer to be partially what attracted her at the onset of their relationship. Many other individuals seemed largely indifferent to their partner's illegal activities. In summary, it appears that dealing rarely placed The Lads in any favourable light in the eyes of their partners, and was in fact a source of strain within many of their relationships that could often lead to partner's experiencing of frustration and even disdain for the trade. As such, partners tended not to respect their boyfriend's chosen trade but instead saw it as a liability.

Customers: There was certainly a high level of social kudos attributable to the dealing ventures undertaken on The Med. On this resort, the subcultural milieu of young British seasonal workers were bound closely to following hedonistic pursuits, high levels of intoxication and attending the more exclusive bars/clubs and boat parties that The Med boasted. Dealing within this context was an exclusive role and to be a 'mover and shaker' in these markets was seen almost as the pinnacle of fashion; the social privileges it bestowed were desirable (e.g. queue-jumping, free entry to select bars/clubs, free drinks in bars/clubs). The Lads who operated on The Med were well respected; in part a result of their access to a range of good quality drugs and thus enjoyed the social honours just mentioned. Consequently, dealing in this particular environment heightened 'feelings of power' and 'social acceptance' that increased their social status within their peer group (see Anderson et al., 2012). However, back in the UK dealing operations were far removed from the hyper-hedonistic culture that prevailed on The Med, and the prestige I had witnessed on this resort proved to be largely absent.

The majority of the retail customers were 'ordinary' people: they worked, enjoyed going out, they had friends and families - drug use formed only a small part of their lives (unlike on The Med). Pearson made similar observations in his ethnographic

study of recreational drug users: ‘these were people for whom drug use was a peripheral but “normal” aspect of life’ (2001: 173). When The Lads sold drugs in the UK they were certainly treated to a level of gratitude and respect from customers, but little more than would be bestowed another service provider, such as deliveryman or plumber. During my observations I was aware that many of the cocaine customers would often engage in minor small talk before thanking their dealer and closing the door. Some customers would barely utter more than a few words before handing over the cash in exchange for drugs. As such, customers offered no noticeable level of status or respect towards their dealers. For instance, on one typical occasion when I accompanied Cliff on his delivery rounds, the second exchange went as follows:

Cliff: Aright.

Customer: Aright la.

Cliff: What you been up to?

Customer: Fuck all. You?

Cliff: Fuck all.

Customer: Shit innit.

Cliff: Yeah.

The exchange of drugs and cash take place

Customer: Right. Catch you later

Cannabis customers were far more likely to invite the dealer in for a ‘cuppa tea’ and a spliff (even if the dealer and the customer were not particularly close friends). Some customers (cocaine or cannabis) who had a pre-existing friendship with their dealer would gossip with their dealers about mutual friends, about work, etc.

Nevertheless, in the vast majority of drug/cash exchanges there was little indication of customers being overly reverent or grateful for the service, compared to the blatant kudos and social honours bestowed by customers when Lads had operated on The Med. In addition, customers tended to have various suppliers for whichever drugs that they purchased regularly thereby diminishing the specialism and salience of individual dealing roles. These were consumer-focused markets for which customer satisfaction was often paramount to a dealer’s economic success (e.g. delivering stock promptly, offering bulk-buy discounts, etc.). In these markets ‘the client is king’

(Bucerius, 2007: 681).⁷⁸ There was certainly no gangsterdom associated with operating a retail delivery service and customers tended to treat dealers more as friends than as ‘professional’ or ‘organised’ criminals. Consequently, retail dealing in the Tanners Town failed to advance The Lads’ social status by furthering any ‘feelings of power’ or ‘social acceptance’ (Anderson, 2012).

Among my sample it seemed the only enduring status gained from dealing came from the items and lifestyles funded by its profits, but these all stemmed from profits, not the occupation *per se*. It was only on The Med resort that I witnessed these occupations conferring forms of social privileges. Anderson et al. (2012) demonstrated how higher social status (the relative standing among others) was linked to higher feelings of subjective well-being. As the trade failed to position dealers higher-up in relation to peers, family and customers it can be argued that drug dealing carried with it limited work status.

5.7.4 Satisfaction

As I argued in the literature review (see section 5.2.3) job satisfaction will almost certainly have a clear bearing on whether such work can be classified as ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Past research has tended to assess individual’s work and life satisfaction by asking respondents to grade their level of satisfaction on a scale (e.g. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1979; Hurias et al., 2000). Instead of applying this quantitative approach I have utilised fieldwork observations and comments made during interviews to ascertain participants’ job satisfaction within the drug trade – although two individuals scored dealing 2/10 when asked to rate the work.

Drug dealing was often seen as an ideal income or income supplement during the onset of their careers. For some, the hectic spur-of-the-moment work was fun, for a time. As adolescents or as students, dealing was seen as easy and flexible work that provided more than enough money to cover expenses and go out drinking, clubbing or shopping with little concern for their finances. However, not long into their careers the associated tasks became increasingly tedious and the ‘buzz’ many had experienced during the ‘honeymoon period’ of their criminal careers soon diminished.

⁷⁸ Similarly, Hales and Hobbs’ ethnographic analysis of a London borough found dealing groups operating close to ‘saturation point’ competed ‘on the basis of speed of delivery’ (2010: 14) as well as price and availability.

The 'job' of a drug dealer was, in the long-term, unsatisfactory and lacked any real sense of purpose.

Cliff: There's fuck all difference between what I was doing when I was doing me taxiing and what it was I was doing when I was doing drop-offs [cocaine]. At the end of the day it's just driving around Tanners Town going from one person's house to the next. The only skill you really need for either of them is just to be available [to customers' demands]. Except at least with the taxis you work during the day and you can chill at night. With coke it's the other way round: you're having to keep yourself busy all day, and it's your night that's taken up doing drop-offs. It's unsociable hours coz everyone else [peers] is in work when you're not working, and when they're out of work you're having to work [...] It's shit, coz you just end up smoking [cannabis] during the day, feeling knackered, then having to go out when everyone else is out and about.

Bear: It soon gets shit, just no sense of achievement. I just wanted a job. Fuckin... [he pauses] I just got in a horrible... [he pauses again] Mate, I was just fuckin getting up at twelve o'clock everyday: getting up, waiting for the phone to ring, doing a few deals, smoking weed, sniffing drugs. It was shit. I couldn't wait to get out of Tanners Town.

Khalid: I couldn't be arsed with it towards the end [of my career] to be honest with you. I was glad when we gave it back [the customer base/ SIM card] to them [Bear and Cliff]. I'd had me fun. It gets to the point where it's a hassle and every time the phone goes you think to yourself, "should I just not bother answering it". If you take the money [element] away it's a pizza delivery boy job.

Thomas: When I've done enough [couriering jobs for Sol] to pay back [the money owed to a friend], that's it, I'm done. Driving up to Top City every week after work, then driving back with a fucking load of cocaine – fuck that like. Does it sound like fun to you, coz it aint!

When participants relied on the drugs trade as their sole income, it was common to observe a gradual deterioration of their moods. Without the structure and satisfaction of a regular job, and with little else to do other than drive around making deliveries, individuals quickly became bored and dissatisfied and drug habits could often spiral to excess. I noted how the behaviour and attitude of many of my participants became noticeably muted as dealing became central to their daily routines. One particular interview with one of The Lad's girlfriends neatly demonstrates the difference in satisfaction between legitimate work and drug dealing.

Bear's partner: He's more satisfied when he's earning money legally, coz he knows he's working hard for it. There was nothing hard about dealing for Bear, it was

just easy fast money; it didn't require anything, any kind of effort really [...] When he dealt [wholesaled ketamine] we would sniff most nights. At first we enjoyed it, but then we were doing it just to pass the time coz we were bored. But even then he'd say, "we need to stop doing this". But it's hard when you've got nothing to do for most of the day [...] I'd never say he was depressed [because] he was dealing, but when [legitimate] work was shit that's when you'd see this change in mood. He'd never get depressed when dealing went shit *if* he had work. He just wanted something else – needed something else – that was through work though. You can have *all* this money from drugs but if you're ambitious, like Bear, there's no satisfaction to be had from it.

It appeared as though The Lads' preferred routines lay in the application of their individual occupational or entrepreneurial skill set within the legitimate economy, not in operating a trade akin to a fast-food delivery service. For those whose dealing activities were used to supplement legitimate work, dealing would often be seen as an unnecessary burden to their day, and as such, these careers often spanned two years or less. Dealing failed to instil a sense of purpose or provide any real satisfaction. Despite the drug trade's profitability, The Lads persisted in their efforts to secure legitimate forms of career work (see section 5.10.1). Such work was far more demanding than dealing, nonetheless legitimate career work satisfied participants' substantive needs in a way dealing was unable to do. Legitimate 'career work' demonstrated a clear sense of achievement, pride and responsibility (see section 5.11.4) – three attributes that were not evident among workers in the drug markets. Similar to the psychological theories outlined in the literature, my findings suggest that using one's skills (Diener et al., 2010) and having a sense of purpose (Ryan and Deci, 2000) were elemental in influencing the level of personal satisfaction: dealing was unable to provide these basic psychological needs.

5.7.5 Security

Sampson and Laub's (1990, 1993) life-course analysis of the Glueck's (1950) delinquent sample reported that stable employment lessened the chances of persistent offending in adulthood. Their analysis posited that the men's desistance from crime was a result of pro-social ties that had developed from sustained employment. In addition, Wadsworth (2006) looked at a similar concept - job security - as well as promotional opportunities as an indicator of job security. From an economic perspective, job stability would remove the need to look for alternative income sources during economic lulls.

In terms of stability, my findings (a chapter that addresses market profitability that has not been included in this thesis) demonstrated that although average earnings from the drug market exceeded legitimate alternatives, actual weekly earnings fluctuated from month-to-month. One could never predict the following month's income, making long-term earning projections futile. Such fluctuations resulted from changing quality of stock, variable demand from customers changing perceptions of risk (of arrest or prosecution) and a perceived need to lessen one's involvement. In terms of job security and 'promotional opportunities', there was absolutely no guarantee that dealers would be able to maintain customer demand in the long-term (users often stop using, the quality of their stock could diminish or competitors could source better quality stock) or maintain their supply (suppliers stopped supplying). Of course dealers could find new customers and new suppliers which they often did. But as participants aged, as peer-group compositions changed and as drug habits developed (often becoming less regular), it would become increasingly likely that many of their current contacts would be lost or redundant. In addition, there was no guarantee dealers would be able to develop their trade networks (in order to increase their customer base and turnover) or to move towards wholesaling: these were the only ways one could be 'promoted' in these markets. In addition, the illegitimacy of their trade meant that the risk of arrest and prosecution was ever-possible (though statistically unlikely); there were simply no assurances that a dealer's trade was stable and secure. The lack of stability (short and long-term) as well as the inability to predict growth in their trade, meant that drug dealing was, judged by the criteria of job security, work with poor prospects.

5.7.6 Career-commitment

An indication of job quality stems from how strongly a person's job relates to their long-term occupational goals (Sampson and Laub, 1993; Huiras et al., 2000): the more committed someone is to their work and the more beneficial such work is to one's ambitions, the higher the subjective quality of the job. The Youth Development Study, which Huiras et al. (2000) had analysed, asked participants to rate how their present job related to their long-term career goals. Responses were as follows: a) current jobs matched their long-term goals or were linked to their career goals and would probably continue as a long-term career; b) current jobs provide skills or

knowledge that will prepare them for future work; c) the current job wasn't linked to their long-term career objectives.⁷⁹ Drug dealing provided no discernable labour skills that could be transferred to legitimate 'career work' (and certainly nothing that could be included on an employment résumé). Thus, the only career stake one could hope to hold with regards to the drug markets (using Huiras et al.'s three responses) would come only from a desire to sustain or expand their trade. How did dealing fit into the long-term career plans of The Lads? The answer appears to be: not at all.

Although the study's participants embraced the high revenues from the drugs trade, their occupational goals related squarely to legitimate jobs or enterprises – 'career work', as Huiras et al' (2000) termed it. Dealing was not something any of these Lads alluded to when they discussed long-term ambitions; it was purely an interim occupation. As will be demonstrated in the following chapter, The Lads were committed to legitimate occupational endeavours. Several individuals exited the drugs markets in order to pursue their career goals; in these instances the demands of such jobs made the physical nature of the drugs trade unworkable – either through geographical or time constraints. However, the majority of dealers simply ceased their illicit trades due to the frustrations of the 'job' (see section 5.7.7) but continued in their legitimate jobs. To be sure, The Lads were *not* committed to their dealing occupations: none of my participants viewed dealing as a life-long career or as an occupation that would benefit them in any way. Indeed, at no point did I witness dealers declaring plans to go 'big time' in the drug markets. In short, long-term career goals did not reside in the illicit drugs trade.

5.7.7 Irritations

This section has so far described the presence/lack of material and non-material returns that serve as key indicators of *job quality*. Many of the studies included in the literature review differentiated between 'good' and 'bad' work based on these returns. Yet it is also important that we understand the frustrations associated with drug dealing, as such features further indicate the undesirability of work (e.g. Simons et al., 2002), which in turn helps us further to differentiate drug dealing (in this context) as essentially good or bad work.

⁷⁹ The authors assumed 'that the intermediate category, "providing skills and knowledge" reflects a partial career stake' (2000: 251), while answer a) was a clear indication of a 'career stake'

First, the illegality of their commodities was itself a major source of strain that often led to dealers becoming anxious and fearful of arrest and prosecution. Lads were ever mindful of their position as ‘serious criminals’ or drug ‘pushers’ in the eyes of the law and thus operated in a ‘cloak and dagger’ manner, adhering to the various risk-mitigation strategies out of fear. The longer individuals remained in the trade, the more these feelings tended to amplify, with several participants having even experienced severe paranoid episodes⁸⁰. Similarly, Desroches (2005) noted in his sample of high-level drug traffickers: ‘[t]he need to be secretive, suspicious, and distrustful of others creates stress, anxiety and paranoia’ (2005: 103). These negative emotional responses to dealing were not indicative of good quality, career work and their devaluing effects upon the trade were one of the main factors that ensured careers were often short in duration, despite its profitability.

Second, dealing comprised unpredictable and intermittent work. During their hours of operation, dealers were effectively ‘on call’ and deliveries were often made sporadically during the course of a night, rather than in any systematic and logical order⁸¹. Dealers would often return home after a delivery and shortly thereafter receive an order from another customer or even from their previous customer. Indeed, the very same customer would often decide to place further orders later in the evening. Such inefficiency proved very frustrating for dealers who often wanted to minimize their workload whilst maintaining customer satisfaction (i.e. minimal waiting times for customers). The trade’s erratic and protracted workloads could prove demanding on the dealer’s time. Yet the hours and erratic nature of operation generated another, more significant, source of frustration. The peak trading hours were evenings (when customers were home from work) and were particularly intensive on Friday and Saturday nights. Such working hours proved to be an acute source of tension for dealers in committed relationships – whose job commitments already placed limitations on their time together during evenings and weekends. But even for those not in relationships, social outings and peer interaction (the foundations

⁸⁰ Hobbs noted how ‘emotional burnouts’ partly explained the fluidity of group structures among ‘Dogtown’s’ dealers (2013: 128).

⁸¹ A handful of dealers who dealt high volumes of drugs would often bundle deliveries into a logical geographic order. This not only reduced their time on the road (a risk mitigation technique designed to lessen the odds of being pulled over by the police), it also lessened their overall workload.

of The Lads' relationships) were also disrupted. Unsociable working hours and the strain this had on social and personal relationships proved to be another key source of frustration, made all the more potent the longer their careers continued: 'It just takes over your life' (Cliff).

Though there could be an element of sociability with some of their customers, the tasks associated with dealing were themselves repetitive and unfulfilling. As I noted earlier (see section 5.7.2) much of the work involved simply driving to an address and driving back, going to the primary stash site (see section 3.6.1), weighing out and bagging units and maintaining 'tick lists' (list of debtors), all monotonous tasks. Arranging customer orders, conducting deliveries or couriering stock demanded the same level of skill as a fast-food delivery service – or a 'pizza boy job' as Khalid called it. Yet there were other aspects of the job that proved even less desirable than these menial tasks; those connected to the chasing up of debts. Debt collection proved to take up a sizable portion of the dealer's workload and proved to be yet another source of frustration (see section 4.9) as even 'good customers' could fall behind on payments. Dealers would often have to issue bellicose threats and occasionally use force in order to secure payment. Those who cultivated cannabis often found such work to be far more rewarding than those involved in simply drug deliveries. Growers took great pride and care over their plants and their cultivation required a far more complex series of undertakings that demanded a level of horticultural acumen. Yet cannabis cultivation had its own unique source of frustrations that could make it as equally undesirable eg low yields or poor quality crops.

The roles of drug dealers and wholesalers carried an array of frustrations. The work was often a source of strain that made the work unappealing. The work was monotonous and boring, it interfered with their usual routines and could generate tension between dealers and their significant others. Crucially, the illegality of their commodities proved to be a source of anxiety and paranoia that, over any prolonged period of time, made the trade increasingly less desirable.

5.7.8 Summary: Drug dealing – ‘good’ or ‘bad’ work?

Adopting the same criteria used to assess the quality of legitimate employment (see section 5.2.3) I have assessed drug dealing at the retail and wholesale levels. Drug sales provided levels of income that generally surpassed legitimate alternatives and satisfied their material and experiential spending desires (see Howell, et al., 2012). There was certainly a level of pleasure and enjoyment to be had from these luxury items and life experiences, and it was this fact that prompted market entry by most of this study’s participants. Yet the lack of any substantive rewards outside of its economic returns and the frustrations associated with these drug markets made dealing nothing more than low-quality ‘survival work’ (Hurias, et al., 2000). The monotony of the work, the simplicity of the tasks, its erratic and unstable nature and the limited satisfaction, all lessened its desirability as an occupational career. There were certainly no great feelings of achievement to be gained from working within these markets; neither sense of purpose, nor skills to master - it was ‘bad’ work that generated good profit: ‘Money, money, money; that’s the only reason people get into drugs’ (Sol).

5.8 Men at Work (part one): Dealing as Work Summary

*Animals live naturally from day to day
without worrying about why they ought to live;
men have that worry because of all the actions they take together
[...] their enjoyment of living in more complicated ways
than simple survival would demand.*

Sennett and Cobb, 1972: 53

This chapter has so far defined and described the motivations behind The Lads’ entry/re-entry and continuation within the illicit drugs trade. Using two in-depth case studies (Bear and Sol) demonstrated how the desire for economic gain was the principle factor that attracted them to this marketplace. Three distinct categories of economic motivation were identified. The first was the desire to increase disposable income (i.e. pocket money); the second, use as a financial safety-net during periods of legitimate economic instability; and finally, use as investment capital for legitimate endeavours.

The two case studies showed how motivations evolved over time depending on a range of personal and structural factors (e.g. whether they were in education, employment, became ill, had ambitions of owning a businesses, etc.). The chapter then proceeded to provide a broader description of others in the network in order to determine whether they too shared similar motivations to those outlined in the two case studies. In all but one instance, the impetus to deal drugs came under one of these three economic motivational categories. As with the two case studies, motivations were not static features and the reasons that individuals entered/re-entered or sustained their involvement could shift over time depending on a range of factors. Yet in the vast majority of these cases motivations to deal were grounded in the financial rewards it offered. Each of these individuals had viewed their legitimate earnings as inadequate to their various needs at that time and had used drug sales as a means of redressing this imbalance. The most common of the three motivations was the desire to fund a better standard of living (i.e. to generate pocket money). By using both the legitimate and criminal economies to optimise their overall earnings, The Lads helped to free themselves from the constraints of subsistence wages during their young adult lives. The revenues generated via drug sales more than adequately met their financial needs and allowed a range of new hobbies and interests to be pursued and permitted regular indulgences. By becoming active players within the drug economy The Lads experienced the kind of lifestyles their low-paying legitimate wages could not deliver.

Both the allure and rationale of drug market participation lay with its monetary returns. As such, my data clearly supports economic theories of crime that stipulate that economic crimes are a rational response to perceived economic shortfalls. The financial returns were almost immediate (net profits were usually realised in less than a week, see section 4.5) and comparatively large in relation to the legitimate alternatives at that time. As such, few in this sample had refrained from trading during the years in which I had contact with them.

Yet the profits notwithstanding, dealing was viewed as menial ‘survival work’ (Hurias, et al., 2000) and was treated principally as a *temporary* means of meeting this

economic end. Dealing was a shortcut to consumerist and experiential indulgences, but the work itself failed to meet many of the criteria of ‘good work’ (using the PASSSCI criteria). For these men, ‘good work’ required more than simply reasonable pay; it required investment and the application of skills. Such work could be found only in the legitimate economy, either through employment or entrepreneurship.

As Part Two of this chapter will now demonstrate, good legitimate work did not only generate satisfactory economic returns, it also provided a range of meaningful (non-economic) returns such as a sense of satisfaction and self-worth, autonomy, professional status and pride that was largely unobtainable through dealing. In the second half of this chapter I shall discuss the merits of legitimate work and outline why it was work and success in the legitimate economy that took priority over drug dealing.

5.9 Men at Work (part two): The happiness of pursuit⁸²

This section documents The Lads' efforts towards realising an overarching life goal: economic prosperity through rewarding work. Despite the surge in material *and* experiential possibilities that accompanied dealing, there were limits to how much pleasure one could gain from an abundance of drug money. As Ryan and Deci argued, 'even highly efficacious people may experience less than optimal well-being if they pursue and successfully attain goals that do not fulfil basic psychological needs' (2000: 75). Though earning a 'decent wage' was certainly something to which many had aspired, the pursuit of wealth was not the overriding objective within these young men's working lives. Had wealth been the principle motivator we might have expected individuals to resign from their full-time occupations or to drop out of education in order to fully capitalise on the profitable drug markets; at the very least, we would have expected long and protracted 'pocket money' (i.e. supplementary) dealing careers in order to sustain this economic boost. My findings have shown this was not the case: only two of my participants willingly substituted their full-time work with dealing: Henry had ceased working in the UK and used drug sales – specifically the exportation of various drugs from South East Asia, while Miller replaced regular full-time earnings with the sale and wholesale of various drugs. In addition, the average dealing career used to supplement legitimate work spanned just 1.7 years (mean average).

My data indicates that these individuals wanted more than just a good income; they sought a good job that rewarded them in ways other than financial. Many years of personal investment and skill development were a prerequisite if one hoped to secure well-paid legitimate work. However, once secured, 'good jobs' displaced individuals comment to the illegal drug markets and imposed structural constraints that made market activity an unnecessary burden within their lives.

In this section 'good' and 'bad' work has been quantified using a quality-assessment criteria (the PASSSCI conditions). I have also sought to describe the development of The Lads' attitudes and perceptions regarding legitimate work and drug dealing, so

⁸² The title of this section is taken from Jeffrey Kluger's article in 'TIME' magazine (08.07.13)

that we may better appreciate shifts in behaviour over time. Indeed, as Laub and Sampson advised: ‘we need to capture changes in decision making, shifts in the perceptions of the risks and rewards of crime, and fluctuations in the meanings of “doing crime” versus “going straight”’. A creative integration of quantitative and qualitative research methods in this area could lead to a major contribution to our understanding desistance’ (2001: 55). As I hope to demonstrate, goals and objective evolved, so too did peoples’ risk perceptions. Most crucially of all, I hope to show that as The Lads aged, *how* they made their money became just as important as amassing/spending it – which is why this section is called ‘The Happiness of Pursuit’.

5.10 The pursuit of ‘good work’

More than money is needed for quality of life.

Diener et al., 2000: 61

The code of respect running through all these people’s lives demands that a man “make something for himself”, that he justify his material gains by personal effort.

Sennett and Cobb, 1972: 36

This section will describe the process by which individuals recognised, pursued and (for many) attained ‘good work’, before discussing how securing such work seemingly altered calculations to ‘deal’. The pursuit and eventual attainment of ‘good work’ was perhaps the most crucial dimension I observed regarding desistance from these illicit markets. Good jobs not only provided ample financial remuneration (making the addition of an illicit revenue largely superfluous), it also garnered many of the basic psychological needs identified within the field of psychology, such as learning, mastery, using one’s skills, competency, growth, autonomy and self acceptance (Diener et al. 2010; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Ryff, 1989).⁸³ In other words ‘good work’ offered combined levels of financial and psychological prosperity (i.e. they fulfilled many of the PASSSCI criteria) otherwise unobtainable through lesser forms of work (either legal or criminal). In addition, the risks of actually engaging in

⁸³ Indeed, the only psychological needs that were not intrinsically linked to good work among my sample was ‘the ability to count on others’ (Diener et al. 2010), ‘positive relations with others’ (Ryff, 1989) or ‘relatedness with others’ (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

illicit drug markets increased exponentially once good work had been secured (e.g. the risk of the loss of a steady income and satisfying work). Few would risk a job that had taken years of investment (of both human and economic capital) simply to earn ‘pocket money’ - regardless of the statistically small likelihood of arrest or imprisonment experienced among their peer groups. In short, ‘good work’ proved to be far more salient a deterrent to dealing than the menial forms of work experienced during adolescence/early-twenties because the returns from good work were so much more valued.

5.10.1 Accruing the capital

Before I expand on what constituted ‘good work’ within this sample, it is important that we understand the (sometimes lengthy) process by which ‘good work’ came to be recognised. A retrospective assessment of the group’s development could easily lead one to conclude that a deliberate route or investment had been made in order to attain a particular objective i.e. a specific ‘good job’. This was *not* the case. For most of my sample, recognising their occupational ambitions was itself a developmental process that relied on the gradual accrual of human investments. Indeed, their commitment to ‘good work’ was often non-deliberate, and a consequence of the investments made into developing their human capital. As I shall now argue, throughout much of their young adult lives the idea of what constituted ‘good’ ‘career work’ was tenuous at best, and progressively came into focus as these men matured.

5.10.2 Ages 16-18

Following high school, three of The Lads entered full-time employment⁸⁴; both Sol and Henry entered the armed forces, while Pig secured work in a local manufacturing plant. The remaining twenty-two enrolled in a technical or academic sixth-form college. Three signed up to a technical course with the intention of securing a specific occupational outcome (vehicle electrical systems, car mechanics, and catering)⁸⁵; the remainder (n=19) had simply perused the college prospectus and signed up to courses/modules that sounded interesting or exotic, giving little consideration as to how this could shape their future careers.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Sol and Henry went into the armed forces, and Pig started working in a local manufacturing plant.

⁸⁵ Of the three individuals: Blaine, Miller and Depp, Depp was the only one to remain in this line of work.

⁸⁶

Throughout their lives, much emphasis had been afforded to the ideals of social mobility via education. Of course, gaining qualifications did not necessarily result in better job prospects for The Lads, as Winlow and Hall argue: ‘The promised land of extravagantly remunerated graduate employment is increasingly competitive, and this faux-meritocracy continues to subtly discriminate on the basis of cultural capital rather than transferable skills and abilities (2009: 101). Nonetheless, many of my participants felt strongly that obtaining a college qualification would inexorably lead to better job opportunities though few had any idea of ultimate career destinations. Acquiring these qualifications was thus ‘extrinsically motivated’: they attended classes ‘in order to attain some separable outcome [rather than] for the inherent satisfaction... itself’ (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 71).

The satisfaction and pleasure that resulted from college came from the extended leisure time and development of friendship networks (i.e. ‘The Lads’ network), which was far more stimulating than the classes attended. Those who remained in college took on legitimate part-time work in order to support their extended adolescent lifestyles. For many, these low wage environments, the tedium and the general lack of satisfaction actually helped motivate them towards sustaining and finishing their college courses, and for some, it even encouraged them to refine their occupational goals. At the end of their two-year studies, a small number of these students had a clearer sense of what occupational field they hoped to pursue – though any clear notion of what a ‘good’ job would be was still largely absent.⁸⁷

Five of The Lads dropped out of college before attaining a qualification. Both Imran and Khalid began working in their parent’s business, Turok obtained full-time well-paid manual work together with weekend doorman work, Thomas began working full-time in a local manufacturing plant, while Harvey left in the hope of joining the armed forces but being unsuccessful, began working full-time for a national credit card provider. None of these jobs had required any prerequisite job skills, nor did they provide anything more than minimal job training.

⁸⁷ The one criteria individuals had identified was a job that paid well.

5.10.3. Ages 18-22

All but two of the eight individuals who had entered the workplace between the ages of sixteen and eighteen had remained in their jobs (n=6).⁸⁸ Khalid had changed jobs, and now worked with his friend Marshall in the bank, while Pig began working as a taxi driver. Despite staying in their current workplaces, several had advanced into better occupational roles. Harvey had been promoted, having proven his ability within his earlier role, while Sol and Henry had specialised within the armed forces. Imran, Turok, and Thomas all remained working in the same jobs and did not pursue any specialist work skills. Of the Lads who had completed sixth-form college (n=17), seven began working fulltime (Blaine, Strutt, Depp, Miller, Marshall, Big Jim, and Abu). In all but two of these cases, jobs were secured as a direct result of their college qualifications. Eight college graduates enrolled immediately onto university courses (Cliff, Sledge, Rushy, Tee, Gordon, Nani, Harm, and Chico), while two deferred a year and worked full-time before proceeding to university (Bear and Groggy).⁸⁹ As before, these students (n=10) enrolled on courses and selected specific modules that sounded the most interesting.

By this time, however, individuals were becoming more mindful of what occupational field they would likely enter following the successful attainment of this qualification, but again the specifics of ‘good work’ remained undefined.⁹⁰ Although extrinsic motivations dominated their drive (i.e. their main motivation was still to gain a qualification to improve their job prospects), these students were increasingly finding satisfaction from specialising and developing their human capital: many of the course units were seen as novel, the work as challenging, and the subjects themselves evermore enjoyable. By the end of their courses, all who had enrolled in university graduated with bachelor degrees and began looking for work in a relevant field.

5.10.4 Ages 23-27

Of those who had been working full-time (n=15), five had pursued specific careers after gaining relevant occupational qualifications (Blaine, Strutt, Marshall, Harvey,

⁸⁸ Sol, Henry, Imran, Turok, Thoman and Harvey.

⁸⁹ University courses included: fashion, mechanical engineering, business, design, sociology, audio technology, chemistry and construction.

⁹⁰ Much of their initial satisfaction came from the student lifestyle rather than the topics they were studying, but as their studies progressed (particularly towards the end of the second year) their attendance and efforts improved markedly.

Pig).⁹¹ After finding their experience in their previous jobs interesting and gratifying, two of these Lads had decided to advance their roles within their current sectors (engineering and finance); two had gained qualifications in their hobbies (skydiving and mountaineering⁹²) in order to change employment sectors; while two others had to re-train after becoming unemployed due to declining demand (Blaine and Big Jim). At the same time, four individuals had become small business entrepreneurs; Khalid and Imran had followed in the footsteps of their parents and opened up similar businesses in neighbouring towns (using bank credit), Abu had assumed his father's struggling business and invested his own capital (drug money) into its development and expansion, while Sol bought a business with the sole intent of supplanting his reliance on his drug income (see section 5.5.2). Of the ten Lads who had attended university, seven had secured work within an area directly associated with their qualification (Cliff, Bear, Sledge, Tee, Groggy, Gordon, Chico⁹³) - although the recession of 2008 had either delayed or interrupted their progression into their chosen careers (see section 5.6.2). Five of these had also proceeded into post-graduate study (mainly part-time) as a means of improving their employability and chances of progression into a specific 'good job'. Of the three students who had not secured work relevant to their degrees by the conclusion of this fieldwork, one had taken an office job but invested money and his spare time in three small legitimate enterprises (Rushy) another was still at university at the time of writing (Nani) while the final person was working as an office administrator (Harm). Of the remaining Lads, two persisted in their occupations, Turok (heavy-manual labourer) and Depp (chef) while one moved from manufacturing into the service sector (Thomas). Only two Lads showed no interest in pursuing or securing work in the legitimate economy (Henry and Miller). Henry had been honourably discharged from the armed forces and after having worked as a heavy goods driver, decided to go travelling, and then relocated permanently to South Central Asia and began exporting ketamine (see section 3.9.2). Miller left his job as a mechanic and was employed in a string of short-term menial jobs before focusing his efforts solely on drug sales.

⁹¹ These included NVQs, HNCs, HNDs, a BTEC, a foundation degree, or else some other industry-specific credential. These courses were all done part-time. With one individual, in particular, securing multiple qualifications.

⁹² 'Single Pitch Award' mountain training.

⁹³ Nani had not completed his degree by the time of writing, thus there were only two individuals that had not secured 'career work' after having graduated.

In summary, individuals tended to drift into occupations having simply pursued courses or jobs that had in some non-specific way ‘interested’ them. Despite so many of The Lads investing considerable time and effort into developing their human capital, few had given any significant consideration early on in their working lives as to the specific nature of their desired careers. As Laub and Sampson noted in the life-history narratives of their sample: ‘These commitments were not necessarily made consciously or deliberately, but rather were “by default” – the result of “side bets”’ (2001: 51). Specific occupational goals tended to form once individuals had accrued a level of employment capital or experience. Once specific goals had been established (e.g. the pursuit a particular job role, opening a certain business) many went “all in” (using the same analogy as Laub and Sampson) by strategically developing and investing their human or economic capital.

5.11 Merits of ‘good work’

*Work does more than just pay the bills,
put food on the table, and facilitate recreation – it can
...impart a sense of accomplishment, offer goals and rewards,
and provide a sense of stability and security.*

Wadsworth, 2006: 346

*To suggest that any work is better than no work
and that work has [an] essential redeeming quality
is bizarre in the extreme.*

Young, 2007: 65

This section will refer to three distinct categories of work quality: ‘bad work’, ‘moderately good work’, and ‘career work’.⁹⁴ As the figure below demonstrates, these categories of work quality are based on the number of PASSSCI criteria that were successfully met (pay, autonomy, status, satisfaction, security, career-commitment, and irritations). The failure to meet these criteria would signify ‘bad work’. This assumption is similar to that proposed by Agnew who states: “bad” jobs [...] have low pay, little prestige, few benefits, little opportunity for advancement, coercive

⁹⁴ I use the terms ‘work’ and ‘jobs’ interchangeably throughout this section.

control (e.g., threats of being fired), and unpleasant working conditions (e.g., simple, repetitive tasks; little autonomy; physically taxing work)’ (Agnew, 2008: 333).

It is worth bearing in mind that the qualities of The Lads’ jobs are reflective of individual preferences and their subjective assessment of each role, thus what may be considered ‘moderately good work’ for one, another may view as ‘bad work’.⁹⁵ The data derives from a variety of sources: much of it comes from self-reports by participants themselves however fieldnotes and my own assessment were also used to infer whether a criterion was met (note: Table 4 denotes which individuals evaluated their own jobs and which did not). Each of the criteria briefly outlines the methodology used. Roles that met three or more of the criteria were favourable to the individual and are thus considered, in general terms, to be ‘good work’.

Figure 1.

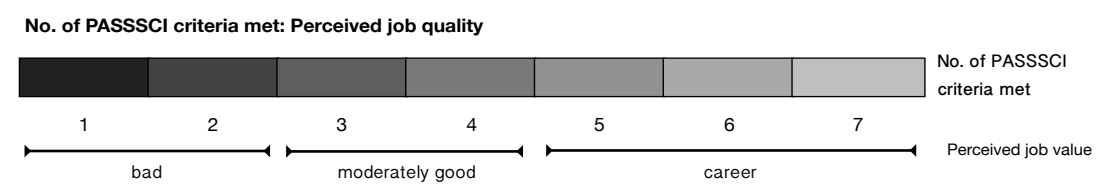


Table 4 provides an overview of quality-assessment criteria for each individual. It reflects the occupations most recently engaged in at the conclusion of fieldwork.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Indeed, there is such an occurrence in my data. Both Harvey and Rushy were employed in broadly similar roles, but whereas Rushy viewed the pay as unsatisfactory, the work as unsatisfying and the irritations a plenty, Harvey saw his income as more than ample (allowing him to support a mortgage alongside his partner whilst regularly permitting him to indulge his hobbies), he saw the work as satisfying and purposeful, while the work elicited no major irritations.

⁹⁶ Three individuals (Chico, Henry and Miller) were not employed at the time my data collection ended. Thus their entries represent the criteria of their last permanent occupations.

Table 4. Evaluating The Lads' jobs using the PASSSCI criteria

	Pay	Autonomy	Status	Satisfaction	Security	Career	Irritations (-ve value)	PASSSCI (out of 7)
Cliff*	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	7
Groggy*+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	7
Strutt*	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	7
Marshall*	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	7
Sledge*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	6
Sol*	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	6
Tee*	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	6
Big Jim**	+	+	-	+	+	+	-	6
Abu*	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	6
Bear*	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	5
Khalid*	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	5
Depp**	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	5
Chico*	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	5
Imran*+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	5
Turok**	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	5
Harvey*	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	4
Gordon*	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	4
Blaine*	-	-	-	+	+	+	-	4
Thomas**	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	4
Harm**	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	4
Pig*	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	3
Nani*	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	2
Henry**	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	2
Miller*	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	1
Rushy*	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	1

*Individuals who had evaluated their own jobs (n=19)

**Individuals whose jobs were evaluated by proxy, using information provided by their peers and through field observations (n=6)

+Individuals who had not been involved in the drugs trade

By the time the fieldwork had drawn to an end, most individuals were employed in occupations defined as 'career work' (n=15); a handful of the men were employed in 'moderately good jobs' (n=6), and a minority were employed in 'bad jobs' (n=4). It is at this point that an interesting finding emerges. Of the twenty-three Lads who had sold drugs during the research period, the only ones who were *still* active in the markets at the conclusion of fieldwork were the four individuals whose jobs were

classified as ‘bad work’: Nani, Henry, Miller and Rushy. Both Miller and Henry were heavily involved in the drugs trade and had ceased working in the legitimate economy altogether. Rushy was also heavily involved in the drug markets; having failed to secure any form of work relating to his degree he was instead forced to work in a job wholly devoid of interest to him. The last individual still dealing was Nani who was in his final year of university and working part-time in a supermarket; his involvement in the drugs trade was less prolific than the other three and it was treated solely as pocket money.

The remaining 19 Lads who had sold drugs during the research period had all ceased trading by this point. Yet we must bear in mind that any discontinuance of illicit trading could prove to be conditional upon economic stability (see section 5.6.2). Thus, their apparent desistance from these markets is not necessarily a permanent state, but could in fact be just one feature of more long-term behavioural change. I will shortly assess how and why ‘good jobs’ helped facilitate cessation from the drug market. But first I will provide an in-depth description of the jobs classified as ‘moderately good work’ and ‘career work’ (using the seven PASSSCI criteria). Only by knowing what rewards (or returns) these work roles provided can we begin to appreciate fully the kinds of decisions/calculations that were made regarding their engagement or disengagement with the drug markets.

5.11.1 Pay

I was not privy to all details of The Lads’ earnings during the latter stages of fieldwork, yet I am able to provide a broad selection of job salaries/business net-profits from among the sample (note: these figures are annual and do not include tax or national insurance contributions). Two of the Lads employed in ‘moderately good jobs’ had earnings that were inadequate for their stated needs: Blaine’s latest job as an apprentice paid slightly under £9,000 a year and was almost half his previous wage, while Gordon’s job as a sound engineer failed to provide any form of regular income. Yet among the remaining individuals employed in ‘moderately good work’ salaries met the Lads’ basic living needs and also provided a level of disposable income adequate to their tastes: Pig’s weekly earnings from taxiing rarely fell below £300 (depending the number of hours worked), Harvey’s job working for a multinational credit card company paid a basic salary of £18,500 a year (plus

overtime), while Turok's heavy manual work in the railway industry paid a basic annual salary of nearly £18,500 with additional shift allowances. It is worth noting that these individuals' earnings fell short of the UK national average (£420.20 per week / £21,850 per annum) for their age range (22-29)⁹⁷.

Those designated to have jobs in the 'career work' category (i.e. those whose jobs met five or more of the PASSSCI criteria) tended to have incomes (either business revenues or salaries) that were considerably greater than those in the 'moderately good work' category. Sledges' second graduate position – as a human resources manager – had a salary of £38,000; Marshall's role as a deputy branch manager was £33,000; Bear's annual income for his second and more stable graduate role averaged £40,000 (salary including commission); Cliff's graduate engineering role paid over £70,000 (converted into UK currency; this wage does not take into account the high cost of living in his new country of residence); Scrutt's engineering role paid £27,500; Groggy's annual salary within a graduate engineering scheme was £29,500 with a prospective salary of £50,000 following the completion of his training; Chico's last wage as a business consultant (prior to being unemployed) was £200 a day (£50,000 per annum); Khalid and Imran's businesses each generated average net profits of approximately £30,000; Sol's regular salary, combined with net revenues from Business A and C generated annual earnings of approximately £39,000; and Abu's business generated a wage of XX;. These salaries were considerably higher than the UK national average for males in their age range (22-29). Such earnings more than adequately met the basic needs of these workers and provided a substantial level of disposable income.

These findings suggest that jobs that scored higher on the PASSSCI criteria paid far higher salaries than jobs that scored lower. In either case, both 'moderately good jobs' and 'career jobs' paid wages that covered basic living costs, however career jobs provided far greater levels of disposable income.

5.11.2 Autonomy

In order to ascertain worker autonomy, participants were asked to describe the level of discretion regarding tasks within their jobs (see Diner and Biswas-Diener, 2008: 77).

⁹⁷ ONS, 2012

In addition, individuals were asked the amount of time taken to develop the appropriate skills – either via education or in-house training (see Esser and Olsen, 2012). Those employed in ‘moderately good jobs’ often had little autonomy as to how occupational tasks were undertaken. Jobs and responsibilities were often straightforward, menial and highly regimented (e.g. relying largely on a script within a call centre). Little time was spent developing the job-specific skills needed for these roles, which ranged from one week’s basic training, to six weeks on-the-job training. Gordon was the only real exception to this trend; his role as a sound engineer had required several years of experience in the field and had benefited from a bachelor’s degree within the field, while the job itself offered ‘free rein’ regarding how he implemented his skills.⁹⁸ By contrast, many (though not all) of those in the ‘career work’ category had some considerable discretion in how their work tasks were performed, for example, deciding what process to follow, independently evaluating a particular item or procedure, advising management on how best to proceed, choosing what time they started and finished work, deciding what days to work, choosing which commodity to sell or how best to develop and market their products/businesses etc. ‘Career work’ generally required a considerable amount of human investment, which could often take years to develop. Four of the ‘career jobs’ had not required formal qualifications for entry: Turok’s role as a heavy-labourer had required just two weeks on-the-job training, Khalid and Imran’s businesses followed several years experience within similar roles in their parents’ business, while Sol only began developing his entrepreneurial skills upon opening his first business. Of the remaining eleven ‘career jobs’, an average of 4.8 years had been spent attaining the necessary qualifications (post high school), with a range of between two and seven years, depending on the nature of the role. The data suggests that those jobs that scored higher on the PASSSCI criteria tended to have a greater degree of autonomy within the workplace than jobs that overall scored lower. In addition, the jobs that met five or more of the criteria tended to require a greater level of investment in terms of the time taken to acquire the necessary skill set.

⁹⁸ Pig regarded his job as a taxi driver as having considerable autonomy. The ability to drive a mini-bus was the role’s primary job-specific skill, yet Pig had great influence over the hours he worked and even where he worked (he eventually relocated away from Tanners Town and was able to continue working for another taxi firm). He also had the ‘freedom’ to ‘have a few spliff’ during his working day.

5.11.3 Status

Jobs that afford workers a level of social status and respect from co-workers, customers, superiors (Warr, 2007) peers (Staff and Uggen, 2003) and other face-to-face groups such as family (Anderson et al., 2012) can help to engender feelings of competence and pride (see Warr, 2007) and can help boost the worker's self esteem (Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2008). In order to ascertain whether participants' jobs garnered such social returns I analysed fieldnotes and conducted interviews to see how Lads viewed and spoke about their peers' jobs.

Those who were categorised as being in 'moderately good jobs' were bestowed little kudos or admiration from peers during our conversations. This is not to say peers or family members did not respect work ethics or occupational aspirations, only that the role was not perceived by others as a personal accomplishment of the individual. The one exception within this category was Gordon, whose work in the music industry had provided him with a plethora of unique experiences, such as touring across Europe and Asia that few others would ever likely encounter through their employment. The following comments demonstrate the nonchalant manner in which others spoke about such work (I do not include the names of those being mentioned).

Tee: Fair enough [he's] working, but he wasn't ever a hard worker. He fucked around in college too much... well, just didn't bother attending. It's not as though he's got the job because he's qualified to do it. It was just something an agency gave him.

Bear: It's a job at the end of the day. Nothing much more to say on the matter. I know I couldn't be fucked [bothered] doing it, but good on him. At least he's doing something. Not like a lot of guys he grew up with.

Sledge: The job's a load of shit. A fuckin' monkey could do – no offence there. But he should have worked harder if he wanted to be doing something other than [his current role].

Within the 'career work' category, kudos and respect were often bestowed to individuals whose efforts and investments had successfully garnered the intended result – such as a professional job, a small business, or a promotion. Very often, these jobs and businesses were the accomplishment of several years' determined effort. Peers, intimate partners and family members were thus universal in their praise of

such undertakings/successes. Below is a selection of quotations from interviews and field notes that illustrate this point.

Cliff: Me mum still can't believe it [a year on from gaining the graduate job abroad]. She's chuffed for me like; same with me dad – he was chuffed for me too. I reckon they thought I was going nowhere when I was doing me taxiing [...] Me mum was telling all her mates about me when I got it [the graduate job].

Abu: Sol's a proper businessman, you know. The stuff he's doing in [Business A], the way he's promoting it and getting it known around Tanners Town and all that. He's sharp, you know. Knows what he's doing. But you know what, I say fair do's to the guy, he deserves it [success].

Sledge: [Bear's] landed a right cushy number [job]. Working for [the firm], earning mega bucks [when employed]. I'm chuffed for the lad, he's living the high life. His apartment's mint [...] He's lovin' it.

Bear's Partner: I was so proud of how hard he [Bear] worked. He'd be away working all week then come home and be sat at his desk getting on with [his post graduate qualification] work all weekend. And what's more, I knew he hated it, not having time to chill and just working all the time, but he's disciplined. He worked so hard that he deserves to get a decent job and to live a nice life.

Tee: I know Abu had worked hard for it [the business], but I didn't realise how professional it was 'till I saw it the other day. It's well impressive! [...] He grafted [i.e. worked hard], fuckin' right... so I think it's right it's paid off: the [products] are top quality, well-better than other [similar products] out there, and that's why all them [businesses] around Top City are sourcing it from him. It's just his hard work at the end of the day, like I said. He could have spent his money on stupid shit if he wanted. But he knew what he wanted, and did what he had to do [by saving money] – good on him.

Sol: [Cliff's] a jammy sod [...] Lying [on his CV] to get the job and then them not even checking his references [...] But he's got to be able to blag what he's doing... must be good [at his job], otherwise there's no way they'd have given him the [extended] contract, they'd have just fucked him off [...] With that [job] on his CV though, he'll be able to get anything he wants here [in the UK]. I reckon the lad should come back here though! He's had his fun [...] I couldn't do what he's doing – fuckin' off [overseas] to get work. He's gonna be missing it here without his mates and family.

Bear: Sol's determined and ambitious - if there's just two things you can say about him that'd be it. He's come back from [his hospitalisation] and just got his head on the [business]. Fair enough - he's had his down moments where he's struggled [financially], but he's just persistent, and kept on at it. There's a few of them that have just got their heads on it... Groggy! Definitely, he works

well long hours, did all his studying part-time and worked some grim-ass jobs, then he moved to Spain to get work, he did his degree part-time whilst he was working, and now he's doing sweet [...] Sledge, he's another one – I dunno how he does it, he's a wild man with all of us lot. He must just be a totally different guy at work, but I can't really imagine him in a position of seniority. Nah, I'm sure he's good. [...]

These comments demonstrate the appreciation individuals had for peers who had secured 'career work'. Because so many of The Lads had been friends since their mid-teens (or even younger) many were mindful of what investments had been made and of the time taken to develop their skill sets or businesses. Of course, the kudos that came with being able to buy status cars or rent/buy nice apartments or houses was still present (as it had been when they were drug dealers). However, my observations suggest that, over time, individuals were far more likely to be proud of their own occupational achievements than any material purchases, and also more likely to show admiration for their peers' 'career jobs' over their consumer habits.

5.11.4 Satisfaction

Rather than asking individuals to grade their job satisfaction on a scale, such as the four-point scale used to ascertain general job satisfaction in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979)⁹⁹ or the six-point scale used by Hurias et al (2000)¹⁰⁰, I simply ascertained whether Lads were, on the whole, satisfied or dissatisfied with their current occupations. Fieldnotes, interviews and informal conversations provided further depth to their responses.

All but one of The Lads employed in 'moderately good jobs' were satisfied with their occupations. Though these jobs may not have fitted into their idealised view of a long-term career (see section 5.11.6) the work environments themselves were often sociable and enjoyable. Diener and Biswas-Diener (2008) noted how positive workplace relations had a direct bearing on individuals satisfaction with their role (p76), a finding I found with several of the participants: four of The Lads were able to work alongside individuals who were *already* close friends, while another became

⁹⁹<https://www.nlsinfo.org/content/cohorts/nlsy79/topical-guide/employment/job-satisfaction>

¹⁰⁰ Given that these scales provide responses such as 'like it very much' 'like it' 'dislike it' and 'dislike it very much' I am confident my field notes and interviews yielded data of equal validity.

good friends with several of his co-workers outside the workplace. Several of these individuals willingly took advantage of opportunities to work overtime: ‘I’m happy to stay an extra hour after work... work’s a laugh a lot of the time anyway’ (Harvey); ‘I’ll put in all the hours I can, it’s such good experience for what I want to be doing’ (Gordon).

Participants that had secured ‘career work’ were almost universal in their overall satisfaction with work. Indeed, the majority had demonstrated clear feelings of achievement and pride upon securing their jobs or upon witnessing business growth/success and although the initial feelings of elation wore off gradually, daily duties and their continued development within these occupations continued to be gratifying. Individuals boasted about how many hours of overtime they worked (some with paid with overtime, others without¹⁰¹), with comments to the effect that they ‘don’t mind putting in the hours’ not uncommon. Many spoke proudly about the responsibilities of their role – these varied greatly and could include the kinds of tasks they were required to perform as well as the task’s significance, the kinds of people they worked with or the kinds of meetings they were expected to attend or present at. Others talked with pride about the reputation of either their employers or the businesses they owned. Several participants made comments such as ‘I fuckin’ love my job to be fair’ (Scrutt), ‘It’s a hard work but I enjoy it and the people are a laugh’ (Sledge), ‘I’ve done some crap jobs, so to find work I actually like doing is mint’ (Groggy), ‘I enjoy it when it’s busy. I come home tired but think “I’ve done well today”’ (Khalid), ‘Mine [the business] is the best for miles! We got some of the best [customers] coming to [us]’ (Sol). The following quote neatly demonstrates the pleasure and gratification one could gain from their role.

Cliff: ‘I’d give it nine out of ten, or ten out of ten, if I was giving it a score. It’s mint! Most people clock watch all day waiting to go home, but for me I’m looking at me watch and think “Fuck, as if that’s the time”, there’s not enough hours in the day. I go to work, next thing I know it’s lunch time. Then I’m back to work, getting on with things, and then I realise it’s 3.30 [pm]. I’m happy to stay later, put in the hours. It’s just well interesting, just all the skills and technical knowledge that I’ve developed just in the last year and a half,

¹⁰¹ E.g. Cliff would often stay late to finish tasks and would take administrative work home with him. Groggy would often have to work occasional weekends, and would work an additional ten hours extra during the week. Sledge could work seventy hours in a week, despite only being paid for his contracted thirty-eight hours.

and then having to apply that. My degree taught me *nothing* that I needed for this job. It's all been on the job training, you know, having to teach myself new things as problems come up. It's something I'm passionate about and it's developing my career. I'd say it's the most desirable job here.

Despite such sentiments, a level of stress was still a reality of working life for many of these young men (see section 5.11.7). Nonetheless, their boastful conversations and their general attitudes towards their jobs were clear indications of the satisfaction gained from their work and their belief that their jobs had purpose, both to them and to others.

5.11.5 Security

Those in 'moderately good jobs' often held secure and stable roles. Gordon and Pig were the only ones whose occupations were unpredictable. For Gordon, this was due to the nature of his sound engineering job (e.g. not knowing when or where the next tour may be, nor if the band he is currently working for are going to stay together); for Pig, this was simply a result of the unpredictable demand for the taxiing trade. Surprisingly, nearly half of those in 'career work' had found their roles to be insecure – particularly at the onset of their careers when the effects of the recession began to be more widely felt. Two individuals had been made redundant from their career jobs, another had suffered reduced hours, two had been unable to enter into their chosen line of work for some significant period¹⁰² and four of the business entrepreneurs had witnessed gradual declines in business revenues. Nevertheless, there were many others for whom their career work had been secured without problem, and had remained stable and secure throughout the research period (n=8). These findings suggest that 'career work' was less stable than lesser quality work; one reason for this (based on the data provided earlier, see section 5.6.2) might be these higher quality jobs were seemingly more susceptible to the effects of the 2008 recession; those who established small independent businesses witnessed slow periods of trade at this time, while those who were employed in graduate roles were often at the lower rungs of the occupational ladder.

¹⁰² Both individuals had spent over eighteen months attempting to enter their industry before finally succeeding.

5.11.6 Career-commitment

In order to appreciate whether someone was committed to their job, individuals needed, at some level, to have aspirations or ambitions that related to their current jobs (see Sampson and Laub, 1993). Occupations needed to relate directly to their long-term occupational goals, or had to benefit their goals by providing relevant experience or skill training (see Hurias et al., 2000). Half of those in ‘moderately good jobs’ were employed in occupational fields in which they had no desire to remain. Harvey wanted to work as a mountaineering instructor - not in the service sector; Pig wanted his main income to come from filming skydives - not taxiing; Harm wanted to work in the fashion industry - not in the industrial office in which he was employed, while Thomas wanted to be developing more manual skills rather than sitting at a desk. Three of these individuals had attained qualifications relevant to their chosen trade but had been unable to secure full-time work within those fields. However, both Gordon and Blaine worked within industries in which they hoped to pursue a career, and their roles provided them with the necessary experience and skills needed to advance towards their occupational ambitions. This suggests that ‘moderately good work’ was rarely aligned to the individual’s long-term career goals.

On the whole, the long-term aspirations of the men who held ‘career jobs’ were evident in the jobs they held (n=14), or else were a stepping-stone that helped to develop their skills and enhance their occupational knowledge (n=1). Many of the ‘career workers’ had been required to make some significant investments in order to have secured their jobs. Nonetheless, these roles also provided the skills and experience needed to progress their careers in later life. Both the workers and the entrepreneurs had invested much time, effort, and (often) money into attaining their position of work and as noted these roles tended to be directly linked to their long-term occupational aspirations. This suggests that ‘career jobs’ tended to be aligned to the individual’s long-term career goals.

5.11.7 Irritations

Irritations were reverse coded, so a positive score on Table XX tells us that the individual had experienced significant irritations in their role (a negative attribute). To ascertain whether jobs garnered any significant irritations, participants were asked: “on the whole, do you experience any stresses, frustrations or irritations that would make you want to change your job role tomorrow, even if such a change in role failed to advance any specific career goals?”. As with Agnew’s (2001) assertion, individuals experienced frustrations (or strains) in two broad forms: the first were the strains associated with more professional roles (e.g. working long hours, difficult tasks, or substantial responsibility), the second were related to less skilful jobs (e.g. engaging in simple and repetitive tasks, limited autonomy, etc.).

Only one of the ‘moderately good work’ employees experienced significant irritations with their workplace. Despite finding the work hugely rewarding, Gordon’s latest job as a sound engineer involved working with a group who often squabbled and fought amongst themselves and who had cancelled gigs moments before critical performances. As much as he enjoyed the work, the persistent fall-outs that eventually broke up the band with whom he worked proved to be a significant feature of the job. By contrast, five of the fifteen individuals employed in ‘career work’ experienced significant frustrations with their jobs or businesses. The demanding nature of some of these jobs could disrupt their ability to socialise during the week with either their partners or friends. For Bear, his long hours working away from home severely restricted the time spent with his partner, and stopped him from seeing many of his old friends. Similarly, Sledge’s latest role had required him to travel the breadth of the country; weeks went by whereby he saw his partner for only a few hours. Both men had thus sought similar jobs with far less demanding hours but that failed to advance their long-term career goals. In addition, Bear and Chico had witnessed a significant lack of professionalism within the workplace, making the jobs increasingly frustrating. Finally, towards the latter stages of research Imran and Khalid had begun experiencing significant levels of stress relating to their businesses (ranging from a decline in consumer spending to legal disputes), both brothers began looking for alternative business avenues.

These findings may seem counter-intuitive to the PASSSCI criteria as it appears that ‘better jobs’ were far more likely to elicit significant strains than ‘moderately good jobs’. The reason for this seeming discrepancy is that the more professional and better paid the job, the more demanding the tasks and the greater the responsibilities. Those jobs that scored lower on the PASSSCI criteria tended to place fewer responsibilities on the individual and required less of their time outside regular working hours. However, Agnew (2001) asserted that individuals in more autonomous professional roles are likely to experience qualitatively different irritations (‘strains’ or ‘frustrations’ as Agnew terms them) to those in more regimented, less-skilful roles and that these irritations ‘are less likely to result in crime because the high social control associated with them increases the costs of crime’ (2001: 335).

5.12 Men at Work: Summary and Discussion

Having assessed the occupational roles present at the concluding point of fieldwork, it is now possible to define in general terms what constituted ‘good work’ within this social network. Using the PASSSCI attributes that were common within *both* the ‘moderately good’ and ‘career’ work roles (i.e. those jobs that met at least three of the conditions, n=21) I found that ‘good work’ sufficiently met workers’ economic needs (90% of the ‘good work’ roles) by providing a wage that not only covered the basic essentials (e.g. rent and utility bills), but which also afforded them a level of disposable income thereby allowing them to practice their interests or hobbies. ‘Good work’ also proved to be satisfying, (95% of the ‘good work’ roles) providing workers with occupational responsibilities, engaging tasks or sociable environment. In addition, ‘good work’ tended to elicit few significant irritations with regards to their work role or their work environment (71% of the ‘good work’ roles).¹⁰³ In contrast, ‘bad work’ met almost none of the seven PASSSCI criteria. All but one of these job failed to meet the economic needs of the worker (25%); workers had minimal control over the tasks they were required to perform (0%); the jobs garnered no significant respect from face-to-face groups; the tasks or work environments were hugely unsatisfying (0%); the roles in no way lay within the long-term career goals (0%); and

¹⁰³ These percentages equate to the following number of individuals: 19 out the 21 for satisfactory pay, 20 out of the 21 for job satisfaction, and 15 out of the 21 for significant irritations.

workers found their jobs to be a significant source of irritation (75%). It is noteworthy that the only condition met within this sample was the stability and security of the role (100%).

The highest category of work quality - 'career work' - can be defined as having the following *additional* qualities to those categorised as 'moderately good work'. 'Career work' provided workers with a high degree of autonomy (87%) whereby individuals had discretion as to how their skills were utilised when undertaking tasks. Such work also attracted a level of status (80%) from significant others in the lives of the Lads (e.g. peers, co-workers or family members). And finally, 'career work' related to individuals' long term career goals (100%) by being linked directly to their occupational ambitions, or else providing skills and knowledge that would assist in realising their future ambitions. It is worth noting that only 67% experienced no significant irritations in their roles (i.e. a third of this group experienced significant irritations). As the 'Irritations' section highlighted, such strains are a consequence of the demanding nature of more professional and autonomous roles.

As already noted, the four who were still active in the drug markets at the conclusion of fieldwork were notably the only ones whose latest occupations were deemed to be 'bad work'. Thus the findings I have presented in this section leave us with one crucial question: did the attainment of 'good work' influence decisions and abilities to sell drugs? The short answer to this question is *yes* – I shall now discuss the reasons legitimate work was so influential in taking these decisions.

5.12.1 Economic and rational motivations

Using the perspectives of economic theory (see Becker, 1968) and rational choice theory (see Clarke and Cornish, 1985; Cornish and Clarke, 1986), work and crime are seen as alternatives to one another. I agree. The Lads treated work and dealing as interchangeable routes to the same end - earning money (see Becker, 1968). Based on their subjective evaluations of the costs and returns of both dealing and work, Lads chose to engage in whichever working environment (or combination of environments) generated the highest and most stable net returns, but what the analysis here demonstrates is that 'returns' should not only be understood as financial. 'Good work'

in the legitimate economy often provided stable and satisfactory incomes that met The Lads' basic needs as well as their experiential and material desires.

Indeed, legitimate wages from 'career work' were often equal to profits earned in the drug markets (and in one instance exceeded drug profits). Thus, from a purely economic perspective, a satisfactory legitimate income made the addition of criminal revenue largely superfluous. Nonetheless, there were those employed in 'good work' whose legitimate earnings did not compete well against the profits from drug sales, and whose legitimate earnings did not adequately meet their basic needs, but who *still* desisted from the drug markets. This demonstrates that economic considerations were not the only ones to influence remaining active in the drug markets. Indeed, one criticism of the economic theories of crime is that they largely overlook 'rewards of crime that cannot easily be translated into cash equivalents' (Clarke, 1997: 9). As I have argued throughout this chapter, financial earnings constituted just one aspect of the perceived net returns from work: the psychological rewards yielded via one's occupation proved to be of paramount importance. Accordingly, whereas 'good work' garnered both economic and non-economic rewards, dealing could provide only economic returns (see section 5.7). Individuals thus prioritised 'good work' in the legitimate economy over dealing because such work was, on the whole, more rewarding and elicited fewer frustrations. Hobbs alluded to similar 'calculations' among some of his participants: 'As [a participant] explained when asked if he would give up the drug trade for a legitimate occupation offering the same financial reward: "The same money? Half the money would do it. Half the money and no ag(rivation). Be ideal, regular hours, no hassle."' (2013: 166-7). My findings thus offer some support to the rational choice perspectives of crime, where net returns are seen as encompassing more than simple economics (see Clarke and Cornish, 1985; Cornish and Clarke, 1986).

In addition, the perceived consequences of remaining in the drugs market changed whenever individuals secured 'good work'. To continue dealing without essential economic justification jeopardised a secure and reliable legal income. Not only would arrest or imprisonment impact upon current employment, it would also detrimentally affect all future employment opportunities, thereby reducing the prospect of

sustaining ‘good work’ across the life-course. Consequently, only one of my participants sold drugs after having secured ‘good work’.¹⁰⁴ Of the remaining Lads employed in ‘good jobs’, risking those jobs by regularly engaging in the trading of illicit drugs proved to be too great – particularly when many of the job roles that could potentially be forfeited had required years of human capital or economic investment. In short, there was simply no justification to continue dealing when the stakes had risen so dramatically. As with Laub and Sampson’s findings: ‘The men made a commitment to go straight without even realizing it. Before they knew it, they had invested so much in [...] a job that they did not want to risk losing their investment’ (2001: 51). My data showed that ‘good jobs’ incentivised The Lads’ desistance from the markets because of their altered perception of risks and the increase of ‘conventional’ stakes. As such, the majority of individuals refrained from drug sales after having secured ‘good jobs’ *except* in the case of substantial financial need (see section 5.6.2). In contrast to Leibrich (1996) who identified shame as the most commonly identified cost of offending, and saw it as the main dissuading factor for criminal activities, ‘shame’ did not appear to be a perceived cost of crime; this was because most of the Lads’ significant others (peers, partners, and often even co-workers) did not see the drugs trade as inherently immoral.

The same, however, was not true for ‘bad’ work: jobs that provided minimal financial and non-economic returns offered few incentives to refrain from drug sales. This largely explains why so many of The Lads were willing to deal during their late-teen and early-twenties, when occupations were menial and poorly paid. Prior to securing ‘good work’, drug dealing was viewed as more appealing and economically practical in the face of ‘bad jobs’ (see Cantor and Land, 1985; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960). This also explains why four individuals were still active in the markets at the end of fieldwork: their jobs had failed to provide economic and non-economic prosperity, which in turn made the drug markets a rational alternative/supplement to the regular employment. For those employed in ‘bad jobs’, ‘drug dealing [served] as an alternative method of realising socially valued goals (VanNostrand and Tewksbury, 1999: 59) – namely, the ability to fund material and experiential spending.

¹⁰⁴ Though even this individual, Sledge, ceased dealing some months after securing his graduate occupation (see ‘Routine activity and opportunity, Section 5.12.2).

5.12.2 Routine activity and opportunity

The daily parameters of working life often restructured The Lads' lives in ways that disrupted their opportunities to sell drugs. By committing themselves to regular full-time jobs these men willingly imposed structural constraints that limited the time they could spend operating a drugs delivery service. Let us recall the number of tasks that had to be undertaken in order to operate successfully: acquiring the stock, processing it (i.e. weighing it and bagging it), stashing and retrieving their supplies (see section 3.6.1), conducting customer deliveries and chasing up debts. Some occupations disrupted daily routines and opportunities so profoundly that 'abrupt' changes to Lads' offending behaviour were observed (see Laub and Sampson, 1993). Individuals such as Sledge, Cliff, Bear, Blaine, Abu and Tee left Tanners Town in order to pursue legitimate work ambitions (notably 'career work'), and in doing so had removed themselves from the environments conducive to their former dealing trades. Crucially, their relocation out of Tanners Town did not displace their trades to their new localities; instead the exclusion from both their supply and their customer base brought about an immediate end to their drug trading activities (see Felson and Clarke, 1998: 27). Blaine's relocation away from his customers' catchment area explains why he ceased dealing despite earning a legitimate wage unsatisfactory to his needs (see section 5.12.1). Their exits from the markets were not necessarily permanent features of behavioural change, and as recounted earlier (see section 5.6.2). Sledge, Blaine and Bear had each re-engaged with the markets after experiencing deficiencies in their legitimate jobs.¹⁰⁵ Yet despite this 'blip' in their desistance trajectories, similar roles to those previously held were eventually secured that once again imposed these geographical obstructions. These findings demonstrate how securing or losing these types of employment are a critical 'local life circumstance' that can impede or promote offending, even in the short-term (see Horney et al., 1995). This assessment suggests that the pursuit of 'career work' would more likely bring about immediate exits from the market through imposed structural constraints because such jobs often required the individual to relocate out of Tanners Town.

Individuals did not have to relocate miles away from their trade environments for the daily routines of work to sufficiently disrupt their opportunities to deal. Several

¹⁰⁵ Though Bear altered the product and level at which he dealt, while Blaine had changed the product.

individuals had operated a drug delivery service in conjunction with a regular job as a means of optimising their income (i.e. pocket money). Yet the dual-commitment needed to succeed in both work environments often faltered. Lads quickly grew tired of working eight-hour days before being on-call to make drug deliveries. Most wanted the freedom to relax. Additionally, as individuals entered into committed relationships (particularly cohabiting relationships), a significant proportion of time spent out of work was spent in the company of their partners – further restricting their times of operation.¹⁰⁶ This finding was similar to that of Warr's (1998), who found that marriage significantly altered routine activities to the extent that time spent in the company of peers was greatly reduced. Although female partners were not morally averse to their boyfriends being dealers, few accepted the nightly outings needed to facilitate the trade for any extended period of time (see section 1.7.7). Thus, as individuals committed themselves to regular full-time work they progressively reprioritised their activities outside the workplace, giving less weight to the additional burden of drug deliveries, and more to their own leisure time. This finding partly explains why pocket money careers lasted, on average, less than two years.

5.12.3 Age graded

The changes that were observed regarding personal agency (calculations and choices) and structure are closely related to the general process of maturation (see Laub and Sampson, 2006: 145) – yet such actions and situational context altered markedly as these men left their formative years behind. Glueck and Glueck noted that maturation 'embraces the development of a stage of physical, intellectual, and affective capacity and stability, and a sufficient degree of integration of all major constituents of temperament, personality and intelligence to be adequate to the demands and restrictions of life in organised society' (1974: 17). My findings, as with the Gluecks', suggest that 'age and maturation were not one and the same' (Laub and Sampson, 2006: 27). It was not simply the passage of time that made dealing a less attractive or less credible means of earning money, but rather the gradual accrual of skills, responsibilities and commitments, which collectively culminated in altering their perceptions of risk, enjoyment and abilities to offend.

¹⁰⁶ It should be noted, however, that such time constraints were far more salient to those engaged in retail deliveries than those operating at the wholesale level who had the hired help of a grafter.

One critical element of the maturation process was the shift in perception of work: from a purely economic endeavour, to being something more substantive. Similar to past studies, The Lads worked during their adolescence simply to fund non-essential expenses (see Greenberger and Steinberg, 1986; Warnaar and Van Praag, 1997). These ‘survival jobs’ offered few returns other than the monthly paycheck. Yet as The Lads progressed into their mid-twenties, work became far less grounded in such ‘hard-edged instrumentalism’ (Winlow and Hall, 2009: 101). As better quality jobs were secured, work became a means of satisfying other (psychological) needs such as satisfaction, autonomy and status (see Ryff, 1989; Diener et al., 2010). *What* one did and *how* this made individuals feel began to take precedence over *what one earned*. As with Wadsworth’s findings (2006), the subjective quality of work was more salient than simply having a high wage. Perhaps one of the clearest examples of this shift comes from Sol, who had experienced considerable economic success in the cocaine market. During his mid-twenties he invested savings and weekly revenues into the development of a legitimate business portfolio. After having invested substantial time and money into these companies, he ceased selling cocaine. These businesses generated a fraction of the revenues earned through drug sales, but the satisfaction, status, and autonomy that these businesses provided made the drop in overall earnings a worthwhile trade-off.

Other changes were apparent with maturation, such as a lowering of economic aspirations and a change in how money was spent. Diener and Biswas-Diener note that ‘it doesn’t matter so much if you make \$20,000 a year or \$100,000 [...] what matters more is that your income is sufficient for your desires’ (2008: 100). Even Sol, who had earned a steady £2,000 each week from the drugs trade, had curbed his spending habits remarkably prior to exiting the drugs market. Indeed, the majority of The Lads were able to live comfortably within their legitimate means: the result of increasing legitimate income and a decline in their excessive material consumption. Without a continued need for large amounts of disposable income, dealing became an unnecessary commitment. As noted above (see 5.12.2), The Lads progressively prioritised the time spent with partners, peers, or devoted to leisure activities over the additional revenue that could be earned from drug sales. Thus, it may even be said

that these individuals became less concerned with material endeavours: ‘materialism, simply put, is wanting money and material goods more than you want other things, such as love or leisure time (Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2008: 102). In short, earning money became of lesser importance than how one spent free time.

One final factor worth noting, purely because of its apparent absence, was that as individuals grew older, the perceived morality of the drug dealer didn’t change. Individuals still used the services of dealers for their own supply of recreational drugs, who ‘at the end of the day just provide a service’ (Cliff). But most significantly, as my findings have shown (see section 5.6.2) when faced with sudden declines in income after losing ‘good work’, individuals were willing to re-engage in market activity as a means of stabilising their earnings and covering basic necessities.

5.13 Men at Work: Chapter Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was first to demonstrate how The Lads saw dealing as ‘just another form of work’ – one that could be used in supplement to, or instead of legitimate work; second, to show how the development of structural environments and perceptions of work led to critical changes in their offending careers.

Part one of the chapter began by outlining the three basic economic motivations that resulted in Lads entering or sustaining their involvement in the illicit drugs trade. Regardless of the drug being sold or the level at which Lads operated, sales were used instrumentally in order to satisfy one or more of these three motives.

1. ‘Pocket money’: using drug sales to boost earnings to fund non-essential expenses, such as buying consumer goods or funding leisure pursuits with peers.
2. ‘Financial safety net’: to provide an income capable of covering essential expenses (and to some extent) non-essential expenses during periods of severe shortfalls in legitimate earnings.
3. ‘Investment capital’: to provide economic capital that could be used to fund legitimate endeavours.

With the use of two in-depth case studies and a broader analysis of individual characteristics and behaviours, I illustrated how motivations were not necessarily exclusive or indeed fixed. Motivations to deal drugs often changed over time depending on structural changes (e.g. the loss/securement of legitimate work) or personal agency (e.g. the desire to pursue a specific end goal). These sections demonstrated that The Lads were, for the most part, rational individuals who participated in the criminal economy according to their calculations of net returns. Indeed, I have argued that their instrumental use of the drug markets was a reaction to failings/shortcomings in the legitimate economy. The majority dealt as a way of improving their quality of life by bolstering their disposable income at time when they were employed in low-skilled, low wage jobs (n=18), nine of the participants dealt out of absolute financial necessity during periods of unemployment or severe underemployment, while a small number used it as a means of capital investment because legitimate funds were unobtainable (n=4). The use of drug markets in response to deficient labour alternatives has been widely documented (see section 5.2.5) and appears to be a seemingly common occurrence among these individuals who were embedded within communities/social networks within which drug use is a routinized and normalized feature of 'daily' life. These findings therefore add further support to economic, rational choice, opportunity and strain theories

Under whichever motive individuals operated, drug dealing had proven itself to be an ideal means of generating immediate and significant financial returns. Market entry required no up-front investment of cash, meaning that entry into these roles was largely unrestricted (see section 4.5.1). Most customer deliveries could be facilitated outside of regular obligations (e.g. educational or employment roles), making it an ideal supplementary income that was, in fact, as profitable as their full-time jobs. The work itself was straight-forward and unchallenging. Why then, were dealing careers so limited in duration? Why did careers taper off as The Lads progressed into their twenties? Why didn't they continue to deal as a means boosting overall earnings? Part one and two of the chapter dealt with these issues. The answer was two-fold and pertained to their progression within legitimate job careers.

First, dealing was an unsatisfactory form of occupation. Though the profits one could earn from market activity tended to out-compete legitimate alternatives, the work itself failed to engender any significant attachment from the dealer. In order to understand the various attributes associated with these roles I systematically evaluated drug dealing using seven job-quality criteria – *pay*, *autonomy*, *satisfaction*, *status*, *security*, *career-commitment*, and *irritations* (the PASSSCI criteria). The basis for these seven elements came from past criminological studies that looked at whether varying qualities of employment could promote criminal desistance, yet the criteria also incorporated elements regarding occupational and psychological well-being. (e.g. autonomy and status). Using these seven elements I was able to demonstrate clearly and concisely how drug dealing, in the context of The Lads, was undesirable work that could in no way be seen as a prospective long-term career. The sole reason one dealt was as an instrumental means of boosting earnings. When an instrumental outcome, such as money, becomes the primary or even sole motivation to work, individuals are far less likely to gain any real psychological reward than if such work held some intrinsic motivations such as interest or satisfaction (Ryan and Deci, 2000). The tasks that had to be undertaken were unfulfilling, unengaging and reaped few if any, feelings of accomplishment or pride, and whatever kudos one earned from their peers came from conspicuous consumption, and not the job itself. Dealing was, by these standards, ‘bad work’. Such findings were not altogether unsurprising, though they did contrast starkly with observations from other drug markets (e.g. Mohamed and Fritzvold, 2010; Sandberg, 2008). For instance, Desroches noted how ‘[t]he scope of criminal rewards [from *mid-to-upper level* drug trafficking] included a variety of personal satisfactions, such as social status, peer and family approval, recognition of one’s accomplishments, self-satisfaction with or confidence about one’s performance or abilities, and demonstrations of success through conspicuous consumption... [the] sense of accomplishment from pulling off a deal, and the feeling of power and importance and control that comes with being a mover and shaker in the drug world’ (2005: 59). Indeed, my observations were more akin to those of Dick Hobbs, who has documented similar lackluster feelings among drug dealers operating in similar markets to those of The Lads: ‘No adrenaline, no camaraderie, no craft. Just buyers and sellers’ (Hobbs. 1995: 28); “‘I can’t see [what] the difference is between what I do and what somebody doing like a dispatch job’” (Hobbs, 2013: 166-7). Because

dealing failed to elicit positive feelings, and yet elicited significant irritations, The Lads grew ever-more disdainful of their criminal occupations as they progressed into their mid-twenties. Drug-dealing careers were an interim occupation due partly to the poor quality of the work.

A second notable reason for careers within the illicit drugs trade being transitory and confined to late-adolescence and early-twenties was The Lads' increasing ability to secure 'good work' within the legitimate economy. At the onset of their legitimate working lives The Lads faced low-paid menial roles; with no prior job skills or qualifications beyond those gained in high school, participants were resigned to basic occupations in the service industries (e.g. as a retail shop assistant or bar staff). Because these jobs provided low economic and psychological returns they failed to incentivise either The Lads' exclusion or removal from the drug markets. The weekly sums of illegal cash that flowed in from customers enabled dealers to live well outside their legitimate means, and allowed them to fund a previously unaffordable lifestyle. Yet as The Lads progressed into adulthood they gradually accrued occupational experience and skills that allowed them to enter into more specialized and ultimately more fulfilling roles (i.e. 'good jobs'). Occupational roles at the end of fieldwork were assessed using the same conditions that had been applied to drug dealing (the PASSSCI criteria). Jobs that met three or more of these criteria were considered to be 'good work'. For the majority of individuals employed in 'good' jobs, wages were sufficient to the worker's essential and non-essential economic needs, which in turn, eliminated the need to sustain a supplementary (criminal) income. However, legitimate occupations did not have to compete against drug revenues in order for them to be considered 'good work' (using the PASSSCI criteria). Indeed, I have provided evidence that suggests the psychological returns from work could at times be more influential than its economic returns. In fact, far greater levels of satisfaction were associated with 'good' jobs than any of the drug market roles: the occupational tasks were often far more complex than those undertaken in the drug markets, while 'good work' environments were often more sociable than the drugs trade. Whereas a drugs delivery service often consisted of short exchanges of small, 'good' jobs allowed meaningful working relations to develop and be sustained.

Though I identified two forms of good work – ‘moderately good’ (n=15) and ‘career work’ (n=6) – both kinds of quality employment assisted in the desistance process. From a rational choice perspective it appeared as though these individuals simply opted to engage in whichever role offered the greatest net returns (including economic and psychological returns) and posed the least risks. Once ‘good work’ had been secured their perceptions of risk tended to shift as the stakes of continuing to deal increased. Though the statistical likelihood of being caught and prosecuted remained minimal, few would risk forfeiting roles or businesses that had required years of investment, simply to engage in ‘bad work’ (regardless of its profitability). ‘Good work’ formed a valued element of their lives that few would risk losing. An additional component of work and its affects upon desistance were similar to those noted by Laub and Sampson, namely that ‘[e]mployment lead to ‘meaningful change in routine activities’ (Laub and Sampson, 2006: 47). Work imposed time constraints on the workers that greatly reduced their ability to socialise. Individuals seldom wished to spend the entirety of their day in one form of work on another, and progressively exited the markets as these demands on time began to be more strongly felt. Opportunities to deal could also be tempered through the engagement in work. Many work roles also required the individuals to reallocate away from their hometowns, thereby separating these individuals from their former supply and customer base.

My findings have illustrated that quality of work *does* indeed matter with regards to the desistance process. Good quality jobs facilitated the removal and sustained exit from the drug markets by my participants, while bad quality job failed to promote desistance during their late-adolescence and early-to-mid twenties. These findings are in line with Wadsworth’s assessment that ‘[i]ndividuals who have emotionally, psychologically, or financially rewarding employment are more likely to feel some sense of investment in their jobs or careers, and thus be less willing to participate in crime’ (2006: 346). Drug dealing was ‘desire-dependent’ (see Searle, 2001); individuals were not committed to the drugs trade any more than they were committed to other forms of menial work – the only difference being that the financial returns were so great. Thus, it could be argued that the most critical turning point within their young-adult lives was having achieved upward mobility by entering into the

‘contended classes’ – whereby work was categorised as ‘enjoyable, socially reputable and economically rewarding’ (Galbraith, 1992: 33).

Chapter 6.

Conclusion: Drug dealing: Assured income during uncertain times

The underground economy [is not] inhabited by a single, distinct class of citizen. Anyone can be an entrepreneur, client, or broker in this world [...] [Anyone] may turn to hustling as a temporary means [of income].

Venkatesh, 2008: 7

“Hell, nobody wants to be a drug dealer all their life”

Adler and Adler, 1983: 201

The previous three chapters are, in many ways, stand-alone pieces: they provide not only the central findings of the study, but also the relevant literature reviews, discussions and conclusions. Thus, the aim of this final chapter is to reflect on the key arguments from this research before considering what implications these findings may have – both in terms of theory and practice.

6.1 What have we learned about the illegal drug trade and what are the possible implications?

6.1.1 The *unusual* suspects

[M]ost illegal drugs are sold peacefully and privately among middle-class suburbanites.

Moskos, 2008: 76

Drug use in suburban areas goes unchecked and underreported, while people of color are profiled in urban areas

as potential drug users and dealers.

Moore and Elkavich, 2008: 783

The overarching goal of *Men at Work* has been to extend our knowledge of illicit drug markets and of the people who operate within this underground economy. In the first chapter I argued that the illegal drug trade has been greatly misrepresented within mainstream culture, and that the mass media's focus on the most sensationalist aspects of the trade has provided little more than an exaggerated image of 'turf wars, guns, and a market [...] managed by increasingly unrestrained violence' (Coomber, 2006: 117). I also noted that the majority of criminological studies addressing drug markets (most of which are from the US) focus on the lives/practices of those situated in the most marginalized and economically deprived urban communities, where predatory violence and gang associations are commonplace. Such individuals may be seen as the 'usual suspects' – the “low hanging fruit” who [are] routinely harvested by the criminal justice system'¹⁰⁷ (Hobbs, 2013: 2). Yet as this and several other studies suggest, 'the cast [of dealers] is far more varied than prevailing images would lead one to believe' (Waldorf et al., 1991: 74).

The Lads were very much the *unusual suspects* of drug trafficking. They had grown up in relatively stable working-class households and had not experienced the occupational insecurities and economic struggles encountered by certain sections of Britain's former industrial working classes (e.g. Winlow, 2001; McDowell, 2003; Hall, et al., 2003; Walkerdine, 2009; Nayak, 2003; Lash and Urry, 1994). In many respects, The Lads were similar to the 'Real Geordies' described by Anoop Nayak insofar as they were (at least in their own eyes) 'aspiring, upwardly mobile carriers of a "respectable" [...] working-class lineage' (2003: 10). They gained skills, qualifications (ranging from apprenticeships to master's degrees) and work experience; they worked long hours, earned promotions, opened businesses, and networked – all in the hopes of realising their ambitions. Drug dealing was used purely as interim occupation, a shortcut to affluence and privilege, something to sweeten their transition into adulthood and into their chosen occupations.

¹⁰⁷ I.e. those from socially marginalised and economically deprived communities.

My data complements a small body of work (e.g. Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010; Adler, 1993; Hobbs, 1995; Jacques and Allen, 2013; Ward, 2010; Taylor and Potter, 2013; Pearson and Hobbs, 2003; Desroches, 2006; Waldorf et al., 1991; Moreselli, 2001) by suggesting that the ‘drug dealer’ is not some ‘other’ kind of citizen; that their behaviour is not pathological; and drug sales are not simply the forte of poor, inner-city male urbanites. Just as anyone may be an illegal drug user – from unemployed homeless ‘junkies’ (Hoffer, 2006) to students, professors, attorneys/lawyers, dentists (e.g. Waldorf et al., 1991; Ward, 2010), and even city mayors¹⁰⁸ – so too can anyone become involved in the supply of these drugs, from gang members (e.g. Venkatesh, 2006; Jacobs, 1996) fast-food workers and shop assistants (e.g. Anderson, 2000), to economists (Waldorf et al., 1991: 89), college students studying in prestigious universities (Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010; Morselli, 2001; Ward, 2010), and legitimate-business entrepreneurs (Desroches, 2005; Pearson and Hobbs, 2001; Hobbs, 2013).

In light of the evidence provided here, and elsewhere, we might argue that in order to redress the stark racial and class biases within the criminal justice system (Roberts, 2004; Cavadino and Dignan, 2002; Clear et al., 2003; Phillips and Bowling, 2002, Sarre, 1994: 204; Chin, 2002; Miller et al., 2001; Measham, 2005), attention should be shifted away from the “‘low hanging fruit” [of offenders]’ (Hobbs, 2013: 2), and onto the ‘silent majority’ of drug traffickers (Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010) – those ‘whose deviant behaviors are largely unknown beyond the limits of their social networks; whose dealings are typically not directly associated with violence; and whose often flagrant illegal activities are generally carried out without the hindrance of police scrutiny and without the stigma of being labeled a criminal’ (Mohamed and Fritsvold, 2010: 2). Yet given the inherent safety of the markets I studied, it is questionable whether any such ideological shift in focus would lead to more effective targeting of groups similar to The Lads.

¹⁰⁸ The Mayor of Toronto, Rob Henry, admitted in November 2013 that he had smoked crack cocaine while in office (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-24824651>)

6.1.2 The trade next door

Opportunities to deal drugs manifested themselves to those embedded within The Lads' social networks. These networks provided both a supply as well as an insatiable demand for numerous illegal drugs. As such, my participants did not have to seek out opportunities to trade; they simply had to capitalise on their expansive pre-existing 'glocal' networks (see Hobbs, 1998). As Chapter 5 made clear, once individuals removed themselves from these networks (often by relocating away from their trade networks because of job commitments), opportunities to supply their customer network were often blocked and their involvement in the trade ceased. When we consider that the majority of drug users in the UK source supplies directly from their social networks – friends or friends-of-friends (in what is known as 'social supply') – we may question the ability of law-enforcement to detect or disrupt such inconspicuous networks.

6.1.3 Safety in closed-markets

The kinds of markets I have documented – closed markets facilitated by modern forms of technology (i.e. smartphones, social media) – are likely to become the standard model of practice given the prevailing trend of cheapening digital technologies. Indeed, there is already evidence of open-markets transforming into closed-markets in response to intensified police sanctions (e.g. Aitken et al., 2002; May and Hough, 2001) or simply as a natural development in light of these new technologies (e.g. Barendregt et al., 2006; Curtis and Wendel, 2000). Closed markets are far tougher to detect and police than open-street markets because traders do not openly sell their wares in public settings to unknown customers. When we consider that an adherence to a few risk-mitigation strategies can provide sufficient protection from prosecution in closed-market settings (Chapter 3 – Risk), it is possible that law enforcement agencies will become increasingly toothless in the 'war on drugs' *if* the trend towards closed-markets continues. Some may argue that if the police were granted greater powers, such as access to people's digital communications, we might be able to disrupt these markets more effectively. However people must consider whether giving up their liberties in order to tackle closed-drug markets is a worthwhile compromise they are willing to make.

6.1.4 Liquidity-constraints

Even for those embedded within the right social networks (i.e. with potential supplier/customers) people still had to be able to acquire bulk quantities of stock in order to begin trading. In Chapter 4, I noted that as teenagers, The Lads were required to accumulate the necessary capital in order to pay for these larger volumes of stock. This requirement limited market entry to a small handful of dealers (those with the available funds). However, as The Lads progressed into their twenties stock increasingly became available through 'black credit'. Credit effectively removed the liquidity-constraints that had previously restricted market entry and allowed people to start trading regardless of their immediate funds. These developments led to an increase in the numbers of people both willing and able to participate in these trades. Future research may wish to consider the effects of credit from the perspective of the consumer as a means of ascertaining whether behavioural economic practices mirror that of the legitimate economy.

6.1.5 Aging out of the drug markets

Regardless of whatever opportunities there were to deal, the relative safety of the trade, and the potential revenues from their sale, *most individuals matured out of dealing*. For many, dealing would never be seen as a 'career job': it was a 'temporary income', 'a means to an end'. There were few other rewards one could hope to realise other than the economic. And it was this fact that meant it fared badly against many types of legitimate employment, those able to offer greater pay, autonomy, satisfaction, status, security, or fewer irritations. As dealing careers progressed their allure diminished. Over time, dealing became seen as a hassle and an infringement on their leisure time. As individuals entered into good quality jobs and secure relationships the time that could be devoted to the logistics lessened, while the financial requirement tapered, and people resigned from the markets.

When we consider the motivations of these offenders (i.e. 'pocket money', 'a financial safety-net', or 'investment capital') and the slim likelihood of them having become entrenched into criminal lifestyles, we should be cautious as to how punitively dealers such as these should be punished. The potential collateral consequences of individuals such as The Lads being convicted/imprisoned (see Chin, 2002) are stark: the delayed onset of stable economic activity (Western, 2000; Nagin

and Waldfogel, 1998); diminished future job and economic prospects (Hagan and Dinovitzer, 1999; Western et al., 2001); the severing of ties to legitimate peers/activities (Lynch and Sabol, 2001); and the development and strengthening of ties to other criminals (Moore et al., 1978; Moore, 1996). As such, there is greater statistical likelihood of individuals finishing their sentences with greater inclination, opportunity, and indeed, requirement to continue offending, than had they been allowed to desist ‘naturally’.

Using a utilitarian approach, we may question whether their elimination from the illegal drugs trade would have significant detrimental impacts upon the availability of drugs among their clientele, whether the profits of the larger ‘players’ higher up in the supply chain would be impaired, and whether their detection and subsequent imprisonment would deter others from engaging in drug sales. For each of these questions posed, my assessment (based on my observations in the field) would be *no*. As such, the economic and societal costs of individuals such as The Lads being convicted for these offences may outweigh whatever positive outcomes were achieved.

6.2 What have we learned about the motivations of drug dealers and what are the implications?

6.2.1 Social identity, disidentification and respect

A partial rationalisation as to The Lads’ seemingly insatiable drive towards realising economic prosperity (via either legitimate and criminal means, or both) was a desire to reposition themselves away from those deemed unrespectable (see Skeggs, 2001) i.e. the undeserving poor (or ‘scum bags’ or ‘scroats’ as many of The Lads termed them). Though The Lads may have come from the same social strata as these individuals they differed from them in terms of their long-term aspirations, their work ethic and the lengths they were prepared to go in order to attain their goals. The profits they earned early on in their adult lives from dealing allowed The Lads to distance themselves from the ‘scum bags’ (those working in ‘dead-end jobs’, the unemployed, or drug dealers whose heavy drug use impeded their profits). The luxury cars they

drove, the up-to-date fashion they wore, the extravagant holidays they went on, and their regular outings to restaurants were all social signifiers of success and prestige that ostensibly garnered the respect of others (see Hobbs, 2013: 228).

6.2.2 Economic necessity

Finally, the findings presented in Chapter 5 (part 1) provide clear evidence of a direct association between broader economic forces – namely the 2008 recession and the change in consumer spending – and drug market participation. I documented instances in which drug sales were used to provide a temporary income for individuals who were experiencing a decline in contracted hours (and thus salary), a complete termination of their work contract, or a decline in consumer sales (for those who owned businesses); I termed such usage the ‘financial safety-net’. There were several instances in which individuals who were blocked from regular sources of economic capital (e.g. a bank loan or a loan/investment from their parents) used revenues from the drug markets to provide the necessary ‘investment capital’. Individuals ceased trading once they had secured a ‘good quality’ job or a net return from their legitimate investment. These findings are a stark warning of the potential effects of economic instabilities within the regular economy and demonstrate the rationality of certain offenders when facing a reduction in legitimate income.

6.2.3 Greater income, greater freedoms

*Our needs may be absolute, but our wants are relative.
We compare our fortune to others and find it wanting.*

Skidelsky, 2013

During their late-teens and early-twenties most of the sample were earning wages well below the UK national average (both for their age-range and regional earnings). Their limited earnings at this time, coupled with the fact they came from non-affluent families, imposed economic constraints in terms of what they could afford to do and buy. Motivations to deal drugs during this time were largely a response to perceived material deprivation (see section 5.6.1). The profits from drug sales effectively removed such constraints and permitted levels of consumer freedom to which many

had aspired. As The Lads progressed into their mid-to-late twenties, most secured ‘good’ quality jobs in their chosen industry. These jobs, more often than not, provided incomes more than satisfactory to their consumer needs (see Chapter 5, section 5.11.1) which in turn made the addition of ‘pocket money’ from drug sales largely superfluous. In many respects, this relationship is suggestive of rational economic calculations, insofar as legitimate and illegitimate incomes displaced one another depending on the net returns and the assessment of risk. However these findings also underline the importance of good-quality work in deterring people’s willingness to offend. Such findings also highlight the potential effects of poor-paying jobs on people’s willingness to engage with the underground economy.

In view of these findings we should be mindful of the growing inequality in wealth currently being experienced in the UK (Hills et al., 2010). A continued increase in this gap will likely heighten the perceived deprivation of greater sections of the population, and has the potential of encouraging greater engagement with the underground economy. From a policy perspective then, what my findings advocate is an increase in basic living wages as a means of enabling people to live ‘in more complicated ways than simple survival would demand’ (Sennett and Cobb, 1972: 53), with greater freedoms ‘to do a specific thing or live a specific way’ (Sennett and Cobb, 1972: 220), or else a redistribution in resources (via tax) as a means of reducing or stabilising the inequality gap. Of course, a further argument may be that we should place less emphasis on consumerist principles – though the means through which policy could address this is far more problematic.

6.3 Final thoughts

The Lads grafted hard because they wanted the freedom to consume – both materially *and* experientially. They had bought into the meritocratic ideology of contemporary British society and wanted to reap the rewards on offer. Their continued efforts within the legitimate economy suggests that these were neither youths disaffected with empty promises of work, nor nihilistic criminals bound to some kind of criminal underworld. They were capitalists, willing to use whatever methods they had to improve the quality of their lives.

Much of this study has attempted to document the myriad of factors most salient in understanding The Lads' offending trajectories. As with most major turning points experienced during the life-course, their modifications in behaviour (i.e. their entry/exit to the markets) were the result of both structure and agency – that is, independent choice within the confines of their social, cultural, economic and environmental surroundings. There was no all-encompassing explanation as to why The Lads entered or exited these markets. Market entry or cessation was dependant upon the presence/absence and relative strength/weakness of numerous factors. If we hope to deter others from following paths similar to that of The Lads then greater emphasis should be placed on the causes of crime (income inequality, unrewarding menial jobs/workplaces, consumerism), rather than simply being tough on the crimes.

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