



Research Paper

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ABSTRACT

Background: Illicit drug sellers have limited access to formal mediation and therefore are rational targets to predators. As such, dealers are especially reliant on retaliation to deter victimization. Prior scholarship on dealers, retaliation, and deterrence has focused largely on general deterrence, or the effect of punishing one person on others. Research is yet to shed much light on other types of deterrence that dealers engage in.

Methods: This paper addresses that gap by drawing on qualitative data obtained in interviews with 25 unincarcerated drug sellers from disadvantaged neighborhoods in St. Louis, Missouri.

Results: We find that dealers' use of retaliation is linked to four kinds of deterrence—general, specific, situational, and permeating—and that these are combined into three forms: namely, specific-situational; specific-permeating; and comprehensive (i.e., all four kinds simultaneously).

Conclusion: Implications for research, theory, and “criminal justice” are discussed. Specifically, we call for future scholarship to examine how each type of deterrence affects the others, and suggest that both predation against and retaliation by drug dealers might be reduced by granting them greater access to formal means of dispute resolution.

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Introduction

Prior work on drug dealers' use of retaliation as a deterrent focuses largely on its *general* intent (Anderson, 1999; Bourgois, 2003; Topalli, Wright, & Fornango, 2002). That is, by retaliating against their victimizers, dealers seek to scare *other* predators out of attempting an affront. Yet as we show in the pages to come, not all deterrence-based retaliation is anchored in general deterrence. What other types of deterrence do dealers seek to exert through violent means? No study, to our knowledge, has focused on this question. To address it, we begin by briefly summarizing prior work on drug dealers and retaliation. This is followed by a description of our method and data: namely, qualitative information obtained via interviews with 25 unincarcerated drug sellers. Then we draw on our data to specify and illustrate the various types of deterrence-based retaliation, including how they interact with one another. Finally, we discuss the implications of our findings for theory, research, and “criminal justice.”

Drug dealers' retaliation

Part of the reason illicit drug dealers engage in violent retaliation is they are unlikely to invoke or receive formal mediation (Jacobs, 2000; Jacques & Wright, 2010, 2013a; Reuter, 2009). Dealers lack access to law because blackmarket disputes cannot be mediated in court. When they are defrauded, therefore, dealers are unable to file a civil claim and seek arbitration. However, there are situations where illicit drug sellers could turn to the government for help, as not all crimes against criminals are beyond the law; for instance, assaulting a person is illegal regardless of the victim's criminal involvement. Despite the legal ability to seek formal redress, dealers often choose not to make a police report. Doing so could expose their illegal business. Plus, many dealers perceive police and prosecutors as unlikely to take such complaints seriously (Copes, Brunson, Forsyth, & White, 2011; Klinger, 1997; Moskos, 2008).

One consequence of dealers' limited access to law is it increases their rate of victimization. Predators—including defrauders, robbers, and burglars—target drug sellers for the very reason that they are unlikely to seek formal redress (Wright & Decker, 1994, 1997). This is because predation becomes more rational to the extent it is less likely to result in apprehension, prosecution, or punishment. In other words, predators perceive that the

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certainty or severity of formal punishment is reduced by targeting dealers.

With an increased risk of victimization and an inability to invoke formal mediation, dealers are heavily reliant on informal control, one form of which is retaliation (Black, 1983; Goldstein, 1985; Jacques & Wright, 2008, 2011; Taylor, 2007). Otherwise known as vigilantism, retaliation is broadly defined as threatening or using physical force against a wrongdoer (Black, 2004). Examples include intimidating a debtor, beating a burglar, or killing a robber.

Potential benefits of—and thus potential motives for—vigilantism include vengeance, loss recovery, incapacitation, and deterrence (see Topalli et al., 2002; cf. Wilson & Hernstein, 1985). Vengeance amounts to feeling better by making the wrongdoer feel worse; as one retaliator said, “I love to see the motherfuckers down like they did me” (Jacobs & Wright, 2006: p. 35). Loss recovery involves “stealing back” or otherwise obtaining what was stolen or something else belonging to the wrongdoer. Incapacitation is achieved when a retaliator seriously injures or kills a victimizer and thereby renders that person unable to reoffend. The fourth benefit is deterrence.

Deterrence is the process whereby a person opts not to act in a particular way due to fearing the risk(s) associated with that action (Gibbs, 1975; Jacobs, 2010). Risk refers to the potential for punishment, i.e. pain. According to deterrence theory (and, more broadly, rational choice theory), a person is less likely to engage in a behavior perceived as having a higher certainty of being quickly or severely punished (Beccaria, 1995 [1764]; Bentham, 1988 [1789]). The flip-side of this is that a behavior is more likely to occur if its potential risks are perceived as being less certain, taking longer to execute, or involving relatively little pain (Stafford & Warr, 1993).

Like governments, drug dealers punish wrongdoing in order to reduce the likelihood of it occurring again. Dealers across many different locales have been found to covet the deterrent power of retaliation and the violent identity it earns. Referring to Columbian dealers, for instance, Zaitch (2005) writes “actual or potential violence . . . prevent[s] being cheated” (p. 204). Pearson and Hobbs (2001) recounted a retaliatory episode that occurred in England: “[a] man who had defaulted on a drug debt was kidnapped, humiliated and tortured . . . Photographs were taken . . . and then shown around to local people with a clear message: ‘This is what happens if you mess with us’” (p. 45). A Vancouver-based seller explained why she used violence against someone who stole from her: “[I]f I let one person get away from that, then everybody . . . is going to try to get away with that. [. . .] So I used her as an example” (Small et al., 2013: p. 484). And a dealer operating in New York City spoke about the consequence of *not* retaliating: “You can’t be allowing people to push you around, then people think that you’re a punk and shit like that. . . [and then] they want to do the same thing too. You get that reputation, like, ‘That nigga soft’” (Bourgeois, 2003: p. 25).

The excerpts above focus on the use of retaliation by dealers in pursuit of *general* deterrence: the effect of (not) punishing one person on others (Gibbs, 1975). This is important for dealers because they “conduct their trade outside the limits of legal protection” and thus “a reputation for formidability represents one of the only mechanisms available to them for deterring victimization. Individuals who do not retaliate against attackers risk being labeled as ‘soft’, thereby opening themselves up to future [victimization]” (Topalli et al., 2002: p. 341). Put more plainly, the theory is that dealers employ retaliation to earn a violent identity that protects them from future attacks, fraud, theft, and other affronts; the protection is achieved by instilling fear in the minds of would-be victimizers (see Anderson, 1999; Bourgeois, 2003; Jacobs & Wright, 2006). When a dealer retaliates against a victimizer and this becomes public information, the victim reduces the odds of being targeted by others in the future; when the dealer does not retaliate or otherwise

punish the wrongdoer, the consequence is an increased probability of being targeted again (Jacobs, 2000).

The present study

Whereas previous studies that theorize drug dealers’ use of retaliation as a deterrent have focused almost entirely on general deterrence, the purpose of the present study is to outline the other ways in which deterrence relates to dealers’ vigilante acts. We do so by analyzing qualitative data obtained in 2006 during interviews with 25 unincarcerated drug dealers. These individuals reside and sell in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods in St. Louis, Missouri, which at the time of our study was ranked as the most dangerous city in the United States (Morgan & Morgan, 2007; but see Rosenfeld & Lauritsen, 2008). The neighborhoods from which our dealers were recruited are not only plagued by violence but also by widespread substance use, poverty, and a general distrust of government officials. Thus, members of our sample are especially prone to handle victimizations with violence.

The dealers were recruited through the efforts of a former offender turned specially trained project fieldworker. This individual worked through chains of street referrals to obtain introductions to drug dealers, and then used these introductions to make further contacts. Because recruitment is the most dangerous and difficult aspect of this sort of research, the fieldworker was paid \$75 per successful recruit. Participants received \$50 for an interview.

All participants were actively selling drugs at the time of our study or had done so within the previous two years. Though race was not part of our selection criteria, all participants were African-American. Nineteen were male. Sample members’ ages clustered around 30 years old. Thirteen had graduated from high school; none had graduated from college. Police and court involvement was the norm for this group, as almost every participant reported having an arrest record. Many of these dealers sold crack cocaine or heroin, and a few traded only in cannabis; other drugs were also mentioned by some, including ecstasy and PCP. The sample is made up largely of retail dealers (e.g., persons selling a few grams at a time), with some low-level suppliers also being interviewed (e.g., persons selling a few ounces or pounds at a time).

The interviews typically lasted about an hour and were semi-structured to provide consistency in terms of the topics discussed while still allowing for unanticipated matters to arise. Questions asked of the participants included, among others, “When was the last time someone robbed you? Burgled you? Defrauded you? What did you do when this happened?” For all answers, participants were probed for details, including exactly how events unfolded and the motives underpinning their actions. As with any interview-based study, some participants may have resorted to lying or distortion. To keep this possibility to a minimum, interviewees were promised confidentiality and informed of their rights as a research participant through a consent form read to them at the beginning of the interview. Additionally, inconsistent comments were probed in an attempt to reconcile the inconsistencies.

Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The resulting transcripts were coded with identification tags corresponding to relevant research issues. These tags allowed us to retrieve information about various predetermined research interests. The initial tags that we developed were quite broad and focused on the variables of primary interest. Then we sifted through the data categories and engaged in detailed analysis of variance across cases; we read through the broader categories and, for each issue, created narrower categories in order to capture subtler distinctions recognized by the dealers themselves as being relevant (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Needless to say, all names in the quotes below are pseudonyms; to specify participants’ gender,

each pseudonym is accompanied with an ‘m’ if male or ‘f’ if female.

Drug dealers’ deterrence-based retaliation

As discussed above, prior research on drug dealers, retaliation, and deterrence has focused heavily on general deterrence: the effect of (not) punishing one person on others who learn about it. This orientation targets the role of identity, or reputation, in facilitating or inhibiting victimization. The incident below exemplifies this sort of deterrence; a victimized dealer known as Stub explains why he killed a robber who shot him:

See, you have to realize if I didn’t get back at him, you and him could say [Stub’s] a punk. Everybody can go take [Stub’s] shit. . . . you would be out of business . . . cause you would have people . . . coming up trying to rob you [thinking] he ain’t gonna do nothing . . . So if [my victimizer gets] hurt, . . . that gonna give them the fear right there not to fuck with you . . . People just know don’t fuck with me [because of my] reputation—don’t fuck with me. (Topalli et al., 2002: pp. 342–343)

In short, Stub claims to have killed—and thereby incapacitated (i.e., not deterred)—his victimizer. However, this also served as a general deterrent; it signaled to others that there was a price to pay for targeting him.

The dealers we interviewed spoke of retaliation as a general deterrent, but they also referred to other kinds of deterrence. Consider the following example in which a dealer’s supplier retaliated against a defrauder on her behalf:

Diamond (f): This motherfucker I know named Pole Cat, she was a motherfucking crackhead . . . that . . . shortchanged [me]. . . . [I had a meeting with Pimp E, who supplies me on credit.] I let him know that the motherfucking bitch who was fucking me was fucking us both. We invited all the motherfucking crackheads around [and then . . .] Pimp E made an example out of her so now [other] motherfuckers know. Pimp E roughed her up a little bit and let the bitch know, “You can’t be doing this shit, ‘cause you’re fucking us up and shorting the shit. Next time it be worse.” It’s kind of like letting the motherfuckers see that this is what you get when you . . . fuck over our money, put it like that. . . . He let motherfuckers know . . . they not gonna fuck him over [by ripping me off]. Other motherfuckers be putting word out, “Nobody fucks with Pimp E.”

Clearly, Diamond and Pimp E saw vigilantism as useful for warding off problems. Before “roughing up” the defrauder, they convened the “crackheads” on the street to witness the violence. The public punishment served as an implicit threat to others: wrongdoing will be avenged. Yet deterring others was not the sellers’ only goal; the violence also was intended to send a message to the miscreant herself, as Pimp E let Pole Cat know “[y]ou can’t be doing this shit . . . Next time it be worse.”

The example above demonstrates there can be more to retaliation than the pursuit of general deterrence. What other types of deterrence are relevant? In the following subsections, we show that dealers’ retaliation exhibits at least three more types, namely specific deterrence, situational deterrence, and permeating deterrence. General deterrence and specific deterrence are a matter of *who* is punished versus *who* is frightened so as not to offend. Situational deterrence and permeating deterrence are a matter of *where* fear deters.

Also, we show that single retaliatory acts do not always involve just one type of deterrence. In addition to general deterrence

Table 1
Forms of deterrence-based retaliation.

	Who deterred		Where deterred	
	Others	Punishee	In proximity	While apart
General	+	–	+	+
Specific-situational	–	+	+	–
Specific-permeating	–	+	–	+
Comprehensive	+	+	+	+

Abbreviations: +, presence of characteristic; –, absence of characteristic.

(reviewed and illustrated above), three combinations—or “forms of deterrence”—were enacted by members of our sample: (1) specific-situational deterrence; (2) specific-permeating deterrence; and, (3) all four types pursued simultaneously, which we refer to as comprehensive deterrence. See Table 1.

Before illustrating these findings, it is important to make several conceptual points. First, deterrence is typically thought of as something that precedes the non-occurrence of an offence. For example, a burglar or robber may refrain from an offence for fear of retaliation. However, deterrence can also occur once an offence is in-progress (Cusson, 1993; Wright & Decker, 1994). A burglar or robber, for instance, may initiate an offence only to abort it when the police show up unexpectedly or the victim pulls a firearm.

The second point flows directly from the first: retaliation can occur as an offence unfolds or some time afterwards (Jacobs & Wright, 2006). “Reflexive retaliation” is the label given to vigilantism that happens instantaneously in response to a victimization attempt. In contrast, “delayed retaliation” involves situations in which retaliation occurs sometime after the instigating affront; this includes instances in which a dealer punishes a debtor because payment is late, or a robbery victim who tracks down and shoots the person responsible.

Third, and as mentioned in the background section, we employ a broad definition of retaliation (Black, 2004). In this paper, vigilantism refers not only to actual acts of physical violence (e.g., hitting, stabbing, shooting), but also to violent threats such as “I will hit, stab, or shoot you.” Of course, this sort of intimidation is less serious than physical force and the injury it can cause (Sellin & Wolfgang, 1964). Nonetheless, violent threats are illegal (in the U.S., at least) and have real-world implications for understanding social control, including its deterrent functions, by drug sellers. As Hobbs (2013) reminds us, “the threat of violence is the foundation of many lucrative illicit businesses” (p. 172).

The paper now turns to examples of specific-situational, specific-permeating, and comprehensive deterrence; we do not further illustrate general deterrence because it has been described above and elsewhere in the literature (e.g., Bourgois, 2003; Jacobs & Wright, 2006). Though every case of deterrence-motivated retaliation described to us by our participants fits one of these four categories, for brevity’s sake we do not include every instance below. Instead, we present and discuss two detailed examples of each emergent category.

Specific-situational deterrence

Whereas general deterrence refers to the effect of punishing one person on others, specific deterrence is the effect on the “punishee’s” subsequent behavior (Gibbs, 1975). When, for example, a victim retaliates against a victimizer in an attempt to ward off further affronts by *that individual*, the goal is specific deterrence.

Situational deterrence refers to instances in which a motivated offender does not initiate or complete an offence due to the supervision or intervention of a control agent, such as a police officer,

neighbour, or drug dealer (Cusson, 1993; see also Cohen & Felson, 1979; Reynald, 2010). For example, if a businessperson's supervision of merchandise is meant to intimidate would-be thieves out of stealing, the goal is situational deterrence.

Given the above, retaliation motivated by a desire to achieve *specific-situational deterrence* is defined as that in which a dealer uses threats or physical force to persuade a particular victimizer not to attempt or persist with an affront while they are in close proximity (e.g., face-to-face). The following dealer provides an illustrative account:

OG (m): I hid something in a chip bag right by a fence in the corner by the gangway. And I came out and I seen a couple of guys that see me coming by every day, and you got to suspect that they know that's a stash. So the day went on and I made my little money, and I go back to get my stash and I find that it is not there anymore, about \$50 worth . . . So you really got to do some detective work to find out who hit you. . . . I found out that it was one of the associates that I mix with. . . . [W]e had a little chat . . . "I know what you did. Some motherfucker told me that it was you so don't even lie or try to get away with it, 'cause motherfucker told me. So either give me my money back or you take an ass whipping." He basically nutted up and said, "Hey man, here man," and he gave me my money back. He knew what was coming to him if he didn't.

Game responded to a defrauder in similar fashion:

Game (m): I've had a problem with one of these guys [who sells for me]. I gave him say 5 rocks [of crack]. [Later, I went to collect my money and] he's like, "Uh, uh, I smoked your dope." I'm like, "You smoked my what?! Hold up man, you telling me you smoked 5 [rocks]?" . . . He gave me 10 dollars. "Man, so you're telling me that you got nothing but ten dollars out of 100 [you owe me]?" . . . I looked at him and I said, "You acting like a bitch. . . . You know what, you better go. You'd better give me my motherfucking money. You better go try put in an application right now." . . . I nagged him. I stayed around close. [Then] I saw him go cash his pay check. . . . I said, "You'd better give me my motherfucking money man, 'cause your ass whooping is way overdue."

In both of the conflicts described above, the victimizer was caught red-handed. These incidents then turned violent, but only insofar as they involved a violent threat of physical force. OG persuaded the thief to return what was stolen by saying "either give me my money back or you take an ass whipping." And Game said to the person who swindled him, "You'd better give me my motherfucking money man, 'cause your ass whooping is way overdue." These threats proved to be successful, as the thief and defrauder did what was required to avoid a physical attack. As such, these are instances of *specific-situational deterrence* in that the intent of the threats was to impel offenders to rectify a transgression while face-to-face, which in practice meant returning stolen property and paying a debt.

Specific-permeating deterrence

Permeating deterrence and situational deterrence both are a matter of where fear happens. Situational deterrence involves a motivated offender and guardian in close proximity, but permeating deterrence occurs while they are apart from one another. If, for instance, a dealer punishes a runner for purloining drugs or money while delivering them in an effort to dissuade him or her from doing so again, the goal is permeating deterrence.

Thus, vigilantism intended to create *specific-permeating deterrence* involves the use of threats or physical force by a dealer to dissuade a particular victimizer from attempting or continuing an affront while they are *apart*. Put simply, specific-situational deterrence occurs when a dealer and victimizer are in contact, whereas specific-permeating deterrence happens in the absence of contact. Big Mike recounted an example of this phenomenon:

Big Mike (m): I gave [a customer] two ounces and I told him to bring me back like \$250. He come back and he only had like 100 and he told me he got robbed, but I know he smoked weed though, and he had money in his pocket so there was no way he did. I told him, "I need my money, I want my money or there's gonna be some problems." He told me he was gonna give me my money. . . . I didn't do too much threatening because he knew who he was dealing with and he needed to give me it. . . . It took him like a month or something to pay me back, and he came with the money and he still didn't have all of it. . . . We just got to fighting [because I couldn't take it anymore]. It was a bad fight. Bad fight. Bad shit. After we got to fighting I told him I needed my money or next time I saw him it would be the same thing. I'd say it was about two weeks later he came back with the rest of the money.

A similar incident was reported by Pusher:

Pusher (m): One of my customers . . . the first day out he spent \$500 with me in cash. But then he started slacking up with the money so I had to get him hurt to get the money. . . . I credited him \$800. . . . He didn't want to pay . . . I had to threaten him twice to let him know that I wanted my money . . . Tell him that if I didn't get my money by end of this month or the next two weeks he was going to get some agro [i.e., aggression]. . . . He was like, "No, don't do that please." . . . The next two weeks he called me, he had my money.

While the upside to credit is that it helps move business forward in circumstances where financial capital is lacking (Jacobs, 1999), the risk is that the investment will not be repaid in full or on time; the failure to do is a broken promise and thus fraud (Jacques, Allen, & Wright, 2014). That was the situation that Big Mike and Pusher faced. Both dealers used threats to frighten the debtors into returning with the money they owed them.

Unlike OG and Game (see prior subsection) who forced their victimizers to pay up on the spot (i.e., exerted situational deterrence), Big Mike and Pusher allowed their victimizers to leave on the understanding that failure to pay would result in violence (i.e., exerted permeating deterrence). Creditors take a risk when they allow late payers to leave before settling the account, as debtors could choose to flee the area altogether or simply avoid future contact with them. Yet in the above cases, Big Mike's debtor returned with the rest of the money, and Pusher's defrauder called him once the money was in hand. In effect, then, these dealers' retaliatory threats served their intended purpose: scaring the customers into paying their debt and thereby transforming wrong into right.

Comprehensive deterrence

Some dealers referred to all four kinds of deterrence when explaining their vigilantism; this is referred to as comprehensive deterrence. To be clear, retaliation motivated by specific, general, situational, and permeating deterrence involves a dealer who uses verbal threats or physical force to persuade a victimizer and other potential victimizers not to attempt or persist with an offence while they are in proximity or apart.

An illustrative account is provided by a dealer who saw her home being broken into and decided that the best course of action was retaliation on the spot:

Baby Girl (f): [T]hey had one motherfucker looking out and the other two broke into my motherfucking house . . . [W]e kind of . . . stayed back and watched and got to know who it motherfucking was . . . We snuck up and [my friend] gave me like a .32 [revolver]. . . . We got [the lookout's] ass outside, took his car, threw him in the motherfucker trunk of the car and tied him up. [Next we] snuck in on them two motherfuckers [inside] . . . shot [at] the motherfuckers [and they fled] . . . The motherfucker in the trunk, we kept him and made an example out of him for the next motherfucker: "You try this shit, this is what the fuck you'll get." . . . [We] beat his motherfucking ass . . . and told the motherfucker to go back and see his other motherfucking people and tell them not to fuck with us cause if they do this is what the fuck they gonna get.

Another dealer, Lil Homie, also responded forcefully to an attack. His story is recounted below:

Lil Homie (m): Dude had come up to rob me . . . The way the situation went down is, the way he was trying to rob me was [he came up and asked to make a purchase and we] . . . walk to your car and then before you get to your car he has his coat and he's saying, "Let me get it off." I mean why is he gonna try to get it off? . . . What went down was he opened fire on me [but missed] so . . . it led to a shootout. [My partner and I] fired back. He fired so we fired. I fired up on him, he fired on me. We had a shootout, four or five times of shoot-offs [and he eventually ran off]. Thing is, you're protecting yourself, you're protecting your set. You're protecting your workers because you let one person get one thing off on you man, then everybody else will think that they can get off on you. Way I look at it man, I'm not gonna stoke down for nobody man when I got this set already working for myself. I'm not gonna let you come in here and take nothing out of my set. That's just a fact.

As described above, both the burglars and robber were frightened out of continuing their offences. After Baby Girl and her associate incapacitated the lookout, they shot at and fought with the burglars to scare them away, i.e. abort the theft. Lil Homie and his associate fired back at a robber who first fired on them; the goal was to protect themselves by putting fear into the robber's mind. In the near-term, then, Baby Girl and Lil Homie were motivated to achieve specific-situational deterrence, as the goal of their violent retaliation was to stop specific wrongdoers at that moment.

Yet the dealers had other goals as well. Baby Girl and her associate explicitly told the lookout to inform his associates that violence would ensue from another victimization attempt. And although Lil Homie did not explicitly say anything to the robber once the shooting was underway, his explanation for firing back transcends situational self-defense; as he said, "you let one person get one thing off on you man, then everybody else will think that they can get off on you." Thus the second goal of these dealers' retaliation was general and permeating deterrence: to ward off victimization attempts by other predators in the future.

Implications for theory, research, and "criminal justice"

Drug sellers are known to be heavily involved in retaliation because they lack access to formal means of dispute resolution. Retaliation has several benefits, the foremost of which arguably is deterrence. The extant literature has portrayed this largely as

a matter of general deterrence tied to generating and maintaining an identity as someone not to be crossed. Yet there are other aspects of deterrence. Our analysis of sellers' accounts of their vigilantism led us to conclude that in addition to general deterrence, at least three other forms occur: specific-situational deterrence, which involves the use of violence to scare a particular victimizer in the proximity; specific-permeating deterrence, which involves scaring a victimizer into compliance despite being apart; and comprehensive deterrence, which is the name given to instances in which a dealer's retaliation is tied to specific, general, situational, and permeating deterrence.

Our major finding is that drug dealers do not use retaliation only to generally deter future victimization, but also to dissuade specific offenders from continuing, not correcting for, or attempting another offence. Though this may seem obvious in hindsight, it has been largely ignored in the theoretical literature on dealers' use of retaliation as a deterrent. To be clear, prior research does provide some examples similar to our own, but those instances are not analyzed with respect to particular aspects of deterrence *per se*, instead being discussed in the course of making other points (e.g., Brownstein, Spunt, Crimmins, & Langley, 1995: p. 488; Denton & O'Malley, 1999: p. 524; Jacobs & Wright, 2006: p. 51; Lupton, Wilson, May, Warburton, & Turnbull, 2002: p. 25). Yet explicitly recognizing and analyzing the diversity of deterrence-based retaliation is crucial to understanding dealers' use of violence and drug-market conflict as a whole; the reasons for this assertion are briefly described below alongside their implications for future theoretically-oriented research.

The next logical step in this line of inquiry is to figure out how each type of deterrence affects the others. There are at least two connections to explore. One is that a dealer may be less involved in specific deterrence to the extent they have earned a violent identity. As Big Mike explained, "I didn't do too much threatening because he knew who he was dealing with and he needed to give me it." Also, recall that OG told us that he did not need to use physical force against a thief because "[h]e knew what was coming to him if he didn't" hand over the money. These statements suggest, respectively, that sellers make fewer threats and use less physical force as their reputation for violence increases (which is a matter of general deterrence). Uncovering these sorts of relationships may prove fruitful in understanding the rate and seriousness of drug market retaliation.

The second connection relates to the dynamic interplay between situational and permeating deterrence. Consider the following as an example: Because robbery always involves interpersonal contact, situational deterrence—or the lack thereof—is always a facet of whether such an offence is prevented from being attempted and, should it begin, inhibiting its completion. However, permeating deterrence may also serve to prevent robbers from planning to attack a particular victim, as they may decide targeting that individual is too risky owing to his or her reputation for violent retaliation. But the opposite could also happen: robbers may set-up an attack on a supposed "soft" dealer (i.e., one who has failed to achieve permeating deterrence), but that individual may then fight back and thereby thwart the offence in-progress (i.e., accomplish situational deterrence). These possibilities are not limited to robbery, as burglary, fraud, and others sorts of victimization may be affected by similar processes. All of this goes to show that the interconnections between the various aspects of deterrence are potentially complex.

Another line of inquiry is whether, when, and, if so, why deterrence-based retaliation actually succeeds in deterring victimization. This paper examined dealers' motives for retaliation, but these motives are distinct from the actual deterrent effect of retaliation. A proper analogy is that the death penalty is meant to generally deter crime but may not actually do so (Peterson & Bailey, 1991). Though our participants claimed that their goals were achieved

through violence—and we believe them—it is always possible that they were somehow exaggerating or otherwise distorting the truth. Plus, it is practically certain that deterrence measures fail in at least some cases. Moving forward, the best way to examine the actual deterrent effect of retaliation may be to interview *predators*, as they are in a better position to explain what guides their choice to target—or not to target—particular sellers (e.g., Jacobs, 2000). But to be clear, such studies should consider the full spectrum of deterrence types by asking about the effect of situational and permeating influences as well as by distinguishing between specific and general matters. This could be accomplished by inquiring not only about who to target and who not to target, but also about any victimization attempts that were aborted in-progress.

Before concluding, it is important to make clear that not all illicit drug markets—or all illicit drug traders—are notably violent (Coomber, 2006; Zimring & Hawkins, 1997). While our findings are based on a sample of dealers from notoriously violent American neighborhoods, some illicit drug markets are located in peaceful communities and maintained by individuals who are genuinely averse to aggression (e.g., Jacques & Wright, 2013b). Such “peaceful” blackmarket participants also lack access to formal mediation when victimized, but rather than resort to retaliation rely more on non-violent forms of conflict managements, such as avoidance, negotiation (Jacques & Wright, 2008, 2011), and gossip (Dickinson & Wright, 2013; Hobbs, 2013). Indeed, even the most violent blackmarket participants also use these peaceful means of dispute resolution on occasion (Jacques & Wright, 2008, 2011). Though non-violent approaches to informal control may not have as large a deterrent effect as vigilantism, at least some individuals may be dissuaded from wrongdoing by the prospect of being “cut off”, hassled or haggled with, or publicly accused of wrongdoing. Future research should explore this possibility and related topics.

We close by noting that retaliation by drug dealers is a double-edged sword when it comes to rates of violence and other sorts of victimization. On the one hand, their vigilante acts are criminal (with the exception of legitimate self-defense), as they involve victimizing someone else. This sort of “criminal justice” causes serious havoc and irrevocable suffering (Anderson, 1999; Bourgois, 2003; Jacobs & Wright, 2006). And yet, it is underpinned by a somewhat ironic purpose: to reduce victimization. In the absence of a retaliatory risk, predators such as robbers, burglars, and defrauders would be able to target drug sellers with little fear of repercussions. If deterrence theory is valid, the result of such a retaliation-free context would almost surely be more predatory behaviour. Whether the net result would be less or more total victimization is unknown. In either case, perhaps the most promising way to reduce drug market victimization is to increase traditional criminal justice by providing blackmarket participants with greater access to law (Rosenfeld, Jacobs, & Wright, 2003; Werb et al., 2011). Doing so does not require decriminalizing or legalizing drug markets, though that would surely do the trick. Rather, all that has to be done is for police and prosecutors to treat the victimization of illicit drug traders as a serious matter worthy of formal intervention (e.g., Copes et al., 2011; Jacques & Wright, 2013a). Doing so could potentially have the effect of reducing harms that result both from predation against and from retaliation by illicit drug traders.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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